

SOURCES OF INFORMATION ON PRO-ECOLOGICAL BEHAVIOUR OF STUDENTS OF THE FACULTY OF ECONOMICS OF THE WULS-SGGW

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ABSTRACT

The research aimed to verify the sources of information used by students of the Faculty of Economics of the Warsaw University of Life Sciences – SGGW (WULS-SGGW) in shaping their ecological attitudes. The research issues have been reduced to answering the following questions: 'which sources of information on the desired pro-ecological behaviour were most often indicated by the respondents?' and 'is there too much information on appropriate behaviour towards nature in the public space?'. The survey technique was used in empirical research. The sample consisted of 119 students of all fields, levels, and forms of study at the Faculty of Economics of the WULS-SGGW. The research shows that this information was rather easily accessible to the respondents, and the main source was social media and Internet portals. In the opinion of the respondents, the analysed issues are not excessively exposed in the media, as evidenced by the limited traceability of pro-environmental campaigns.

Key words: pro-ecological behaviour, students, media, information sources

JEL codes: D83, Q56, Q57

INTRODUCTION

The terms 'ecology', 'ecological' and even 'eco' are very often used in public space, everyday language, market messages, and scientific publications. The subject of scientific research is most often ecological awareness, pro-environmental behaviour, and the relationship between these areas. One cannot forget what is also emphasized by Śmiechowska, Newerli-Guz and Kąkol (2009) that the necessary condition for the existence of social consciousness is knowledge, without which it is impossible to talk about the

other components of this consciousness. It can take the form of information, scientific judgments, and views and opinions from various sources. The knowledge of the society is based on stereotypes related to the views, value systems, and beliefs of individual social groups and categories. Knowledge comes from both formal (school and academic education) and informal sources. Information sources supplement formal education and sometimes even replace it. The research of Escher and Petrykowska (2015) shows that it is not possible to improve the quality of the natural environment without proper environmental education. Often,

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research on environmental awareness emphasizes the role of reliable information (Patrzalek, 2017). Moreover, research conducted among students also shows insufficient ecological awareness resulting from the lack of knowledge (Bednarek-Gejo et al., 2012).

The premise for the implementation of this research was primarily the importance of the analysed problem and, unfortunately, a large discrepancy between knowledge and behaviour in the field of protection, care, and respect for the natural environment. In the literature, one can come across the view that cosmopolitan units, being more open to the world's problems, are more sensitive to nature and seek information on the possibility of its protection (Kenichi, Leungb and Huang, 2020). Young people, especially those who study, often exhibit cosmopolitan attitudes, which is particularly important in the case of concern for the environment, which is, or at least should be, global in nature. It might seem that in the era of universal access to the media and the high popularity of pro-environmental issues due to, *inter alia*, 'School strike for climate' or Greta Thunberg, there is more than enough information on the proper use of nature. However, various scientific studies emphasize that the demand for knowledge about human-nature interactions at the level of individuals and entire populations is still growing (Gaston et al., 2018). Ellen (1994) emphasizes that 'objective knowledge is only significantly related to committed recycling behaviours, whereas perceived knowledge is positively associated with committed recycling, source reduction, and political action behaviours'. Therefore, this article is devoted to verifying the sources of information on pro-ecological behaviour used by students of the Faculty of Economics of the Warsaw University of Life Sciences (WULS-SGGW) – a university with over 200 years of experience and traditions in the field of natural environment education.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research aimed to verify the sources of information used by students of the Faculty of Economic Sciences of the WULS-SGGW in shaping their environmental attitudes.

The following research problems were adopted in the research:

1. Which sources of information on the desired pro-ecological behaviour were most often indicated by the respondents?
2. Is there, in the opinion of the respondents, too much information on appropriate behaviour towards nature in the public space?

In the research, the diagnostic survey method was used, including participant observation and the survey technique. The questionnaire was prepared on the webankieta.pl platform and the link to it was shared during classes with students of the Faculty of Economics (formerly Economic Sciences) of the Warsaw University of Life Sciences – SGGW. The questionnaire was completed by students, who expressed such a desire, in their free time. The survey used closed-ended, scale, and open-ended questions. The group of respondents consisted of people from all fields of study at the faculty (economics, finance, and accounting, logistics, tourism and recreation, management), both forms and levels. The sheet was quite extensive and also included the issues of tourist and ecological behaviour, but these were the subject of analyses presented in other studies (Balińska, Gabryjończyk and Zawadka, 2019a, b). This study focuses on (yet unpublished) sources of information about environmental behaviour used by respondents. The research was conducted in 2019. 119 correctly completed questionnaires were obtained out of a total of approx. 3 thousand students, therefore the sampling error was 9% for the confidence level of 95%. Thus, due to the overall number of forms and students of all fields' different participation rates, research cannot be considered fully representative.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The majority of the respondents were women (72.3% of the sample). Most of the respondents were residents of Warsaw (68.1%) or the surrounding area, i.e. the area up to 30 km from the capital (21.9%).

According to the respondents, information on pro-ecological behaviour is rather easily available (indicated by 52.1% of respondents) and easily accessible (21.0%). Individuals believe that such information

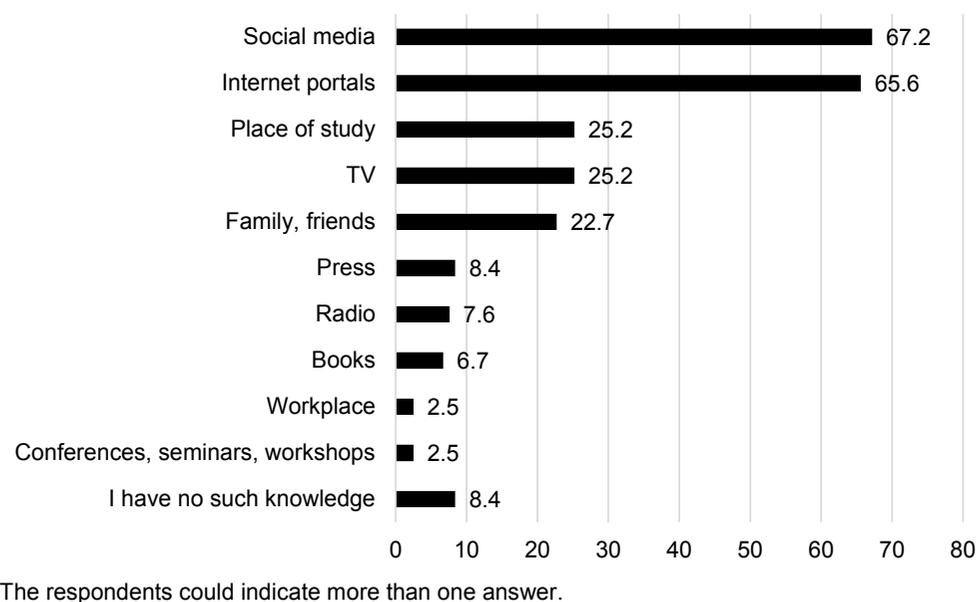


Figure 1. Sources of information on pro-ecological behaviour (%)

Source: own empirical research.

is difficult or very difficult to find (9.2%). The main research issues concern the sources of information used by respondents in this area (Fig. 1).

For the vast majority of respondents, the main source of information on pro-ecological behaviour were social media and Internet portals, and for every fourth respondent television and educational institutions. These results are partially confirmed in the report prepared by PBS Ltd. and BR Ltd. for the Ministry of Climate and Environment (Ministerstwo Klimatu i Środowiska, 2020). They show that the main source of information for people aged 19–24 in 2020 was the Internet (for 90% of respondents), followed by: radio (38%), television (29%), press (23%), school/university (11%) family and friends (10%), books (3%) and general media (2%). Also, in the opinion of students from Olsztyn, it appears that the mass media (53.8%) had the greatest impact on shaping their attitude towards the natural environment, followed by the school (41.3%) and family (31.4%) (Szulborski, 2001).

In research conducted among young people from Bełchatów and its vicinity, one of the most polluted places in Poland, the broadly understood Internet

was the most frequently indicated source of information (indicated by 74% of respondents), followed by: social media (58%), own observations (56%), educational institutions (44%), mass media (38%), parents (28%), books (21%), influencers and eco-bloggers (18%), environmental organizations (18%), acquaintances and friends (17%) (Ośrodek Działań Ekologicznych 'Źródła', 2019). The research by Śmiechowska, Newerli-Guz and Kąkol (2009) also shows that the Internet is very popular as a source of information. However, according to consumers, the information posted on the Internet has different credibility, and such perception depends on the age of the respondents. Younger people (i.e. aged 19–30) perceive them as more reliable than people over 30. The research by Kucińska (2009) also shows that the sources of pro-ecological information among young people are to a lesser extent educational institutions, and to a greater extent television, radio, the Internet, and the press.

The subject of environmental burdens and the need to care for the natural environment is very popular in the media. Therefore, it was verified whether this topic is too exploited. In the opinion of only 11.8% of

the surveyed students of the WULS-SGGW, this subject is excessively present in the media, and 13.5% of the respondents indicated that it may be so. The majority (52.9%) believed that it was not an over-exploited subject. Unfortunately, the knowledge of the campaigns promoting pro-ecological behaviour among the respondents from the Faculty of Economics the WULS-SGGW was low. Only 25.2% indicated that they had contact with such campaigns and WWF was most often mentioned in the open question (cited by 5.9%). The others were mentioned only by individuals and were, among others: 'earth hour', 'cleaning the world', 'Warsaw tap water', 'car-free day', 'park and drive', 'drink here without a straw', 'be a veg for 30 days'.

CONCLUSIONS

Shaping proper pro-ecological attitudes is possible thanks to access to information. In the case of young people, the main source of information, not only in the field of ecology, is the broadly understood Internet, including thematic portals and social media. The respondents do not feel overwhelmed by the excess of information on appropriate pro-ecological behaviour. The vast majority of them use the Internet, which is typical behaviour, confirmed in the results of other authors' research. However, it is worth noting that for every fourth respondent the university is one of the sources of information. In the opinion of the authors of this study, this indicator is distinctly too low, especially in a university with a leading agricultural profile, and the WULS-SGGW is, after all, such a university. Due to the importance of the analysed issues and the unfavourable environmental changes, it seems justified to strengthen the topics related to the possibilities of environmental protection in the study programs. However, it should be a systemic action. The analysis of the available literature also showed that this research topic was more popular at the beginning of this century. Currently, there is too little research on this subject, which is a pity, because due to the changing socio-economic situation, entering the market of new generations and the development of technology, research of this types should be carried out periodically.

The problem in the implementation of this research was a small research sample, which makes it impossible to formulate generalizations on all students in Poland. The research also allowed to obtain feedback on the research tool itself, which should be improved in case of repeating or expanding further studies.

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