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#### ECOLOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS OF MODERN YOUNG PEOPLE: CURRENT TRENDS

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#### *Abstract*

The article is devoted to research of actual tendencies of ecological consciousness formation among modern young people in the context of ecologization of the main social spheres. The theoretical basis for this study is the contrast between the ideas of anthropocentrism and bioecocentrism. Anthropocentrism as a mindset reflects the orientation of a person to the conquest of nature. Bioecocentrism as a mindset emphasizes the value of life itself and contributes to the greening of consciousness. Representatives of scientific and ecological schools believe that the development of ecological consciousness will help to overcome the ecological crisis. Bioecocentrism can become the basis of life practices aimed at harmonizing the relationship between man and nature. These attitudes turn out to be expressed in the form of images of human attitude to nature and life strategies in the environmental sphere. The empirical basis of the study is the results of a questionnaire survey conducted among student young people. The article analyzes the selection of statements reflecting anthropocentric and bioecocentric mindset of modern young people. The study explores the selection of particular practices of the ecological way of life of modern young people, household attitudes that are ecologically important and indicate a certain ecological consciousness. The conducted research confirms the tendency of transition to the position of bioecocentrism, reveals the contradictions and emerging nature of ecological consciousness of modern youth. The article provides the prospects of studying the ecological consciousness of young people in the conditions of determining the further strategy of human development.

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**Keywords:** Ecological consciousness, contemporary life, myth, young.



## 1. Introduction

Ecologization of the main spheres of public life leads to a change in the consciousness of modern man. Fostering environmental attitudes contributes to changing lifestyles, everyday habits and increasing social activity in the field of ecological movements. Mindsets exist not only in a rational form, but also in a figurative form. The basic anthropological characteristic is that a person needs to believe in something. A man needs a world view to build a life strategy, to define the rules of everyday life. The pursuit of these rules is an incentive for modern myth-making, which creates vivid images to be guided by. The myth is a universal symbolical complex which reflects models of the world structure and influences a choice of vital strategy of the person. "Modern myths are created in relation to the present tasks from the market, politics, economics and show-business and might exist for a short time, replacing each other" (Davletshina, Ivanova, Kudriavtseva, Tsiplakova, & Cherepanova, 2016, p. 1569). Myth-making is also relevant for the ecological sphere.

## 2. Problem Statement

The aggravation of the environmental crisis is developing the search for effective strategies for the survival of mankind. The ideas about the need for the co-evolution of mankind and nature become actualized in the 21st century (Jernakova, 2008; Ramazanova, 2009). In addition to the scientific approach to environmental problems, this search is often associated with vague, syncretistic, subconscious attitudes. These may be attitudes that reflect the inexhaustibility of natural resources, the possibility of further conquest of nature. Along with these, there are images showing the fatal consequences of human impact on the environment. Such images motivate the transition from nature-conquest practices to ecological behaviour.

The ecological consciousness of young people as an object of research is of great interest to philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists, teachers, and psychologists (Gulko, 2017). The ecological consciousness of young people can be studied through the presence of anthropocentric and bioecocentric mindsets, expressed in a figurative form. These mindsets reflect modern ecological myths.

## 3. Research Questions

Ideas, values and attitudes of bioecocentrism have been developed in detail since the 1970s in "deep ecology" (Naess, 1973; Fox, 1984; Devall, Sessions, & Buczacki, 1985), which developed in opposition to anthropocentrism. "Deep ecology has contributed both theoretically and practically to the struggle against the human domination of nature through its critique of anthropocentrism, by its affirmation of the value of every living being, and by inspiring many to defend that value" (Clark, 2014, p. 58).

There are two main differences between anthropocentrism and bioecocentrism as mindsets. 1) The highest value of life in general in bioecocentrism and human life is recognized in anthropocentrism. 2) The focus of environmental activity on changing people's consciousness in bioecocentrism. Focus of environmental activity on changing the environment for the benefit of human beings in anthropocentrism.

Guattari (1999) emphasizes the need to translate the ideas of bio-centrism into personal, existential practices: "Ecological praxes strive to scout out the potential vectors of subjectification and singularisation at each partial existential locus" (para. 9).

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

We have conducted a study of the environmental consciousness of young people, which reveals the type of attitudes and life strategies in the environmental sphere. The main objective was to study the principles that guide today's young people and the environmental rules that they follow in their daily existence.

#### **5. Research Methods**

This study uses a questionnaire survey method. We used the surveys of the 1st year students of URFU, studying in different areas of training in 2018-2019 academic year, as an empirical material. At the time of the survey, students were not mastering environmental disciplines and filled in questionnaires only on the basis of their school knowledge and household environmental attitudes and habits.

Questionnaire No. 1 contains statements concerning the main environmental aspects of mindset. It's got a couple of opposite words in it. One set of statements expresses ideas and attitudes of the bioecocentric type (code A). Other statements reflect ideas and attitudes of anthropocentric type (code B).

The questionnaire also includes statements that are still controversial in science. Statements 9A and 9B are in opposition, but there is no definite answer accepted in modern environmental science. Many researchers believe that humans can cause a global environmental crisis on the planet. This position is the foundation of alarmism (Moiseyev, 1999). A different view is that "human economic activity forms a negligible part of the metabolism of the biosphere and cannot influence its structure other than to act as a catalyst for metabolism" (Kokin, Ignatov, Sidorenko, & Buczacki, 2013, p. 10). This corresponds to the doctrine of the noosphere of Vernadsky (2012).

The questionnaire contains statements that, while sounding like contradictions, are essentially complementary. Often, the technical and humanitarian spheres are in opposition to each other in the ordinary consciousness. For example, progress is perceived as either improving the technical and technological aspect of life or as human development (code 6). Antagonism of science and morality in the ordinary sphere is observed when making decisions based on objective knowledge or morality (code 7). Polarization in the issues of responsibility of the state and citizen is manifested in delegating the initiative either to the authorities or to the individual (code 8).

Questionnaire No. 2 contains statements concerning the way of life, household installations of ecological importance and testifying to a certain ecological consciousness. Among the statements, one part is the statement about the ecological way of life, in which the understanding of environmental laws and environmental ideas is embodied in a personal life of particular people (A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, M, N). The other part of the statements of the questionnaire No. 2 indicates the organization of private life on the principles of nature-conquest (A1, B1, B1, C1, E1, D1, F1, G1, H1, I1, J1, K1, L1, M1, N1).

Participants in the study were offered questionnaires in which they had to choose the statements that they agreed with. We interviewed 53 people. Interviews were conducted in the presence of the interviewer by self-filling the questionnaire on the conditions of anonymity and confidentiality of information.

When processing the questionnaires No. 1, we calculated the number of made elections for each of the statements and determined the percentage of selection of each statement in the total number of made elections. At the same time, we selected and counted separately the percentage of those situations of choice where interviewees chose both opposing statements or did not choose either.

When processing the questionnaires No. 2, we calculated the number of made elections for each of the statements and determined the percentage of selection of each statement in the total number of made elections.

## 6. Findings

Processing of questionnaires No. 1 showed that statements A were chosen 410 times, which is 64.47% of the number of selected statements. Statements B were chosen 176 times, which is 27.67% of the number of selected statements. Some statements caused difficulties in students' choice. Opposite statements were chosen 26 times, which is 4.09% of the number of selected statements (codes 5 to 10). Some of the interviewees were unable to choose one statement from the opposite pairs, e.g. statements (codes 3 to 12) were not selected 24 times, which is 3.77% of the number of selected statements (Table 01).

**Table 01.** Results of processing the questionnaire No. 1

<i>Code</i>	<i>Statement</i>	<i>Number of choices</i>	<i>Percentage of selected statements</i>
1. A	A man cannot develop outside the biosphere	30	4,72
1. B	A man can develop outside the biosphere	21	3,30
1.A and 1.B	None of the statements has been chosen	2	0,31
2. A	The natural resources of the biosphere can be depleted	48	7,55
2. B	The natural resources of the biosphere cannot be depleted	5	0,79
3. A	Humanity's natural transformations have limits and can destroy the existing biosphere	49	7,70
3. B	Nature's transformations have no limits, the biosphere has possibilities for self-recovery	2	0,31
3.A and 3.B	None of the statements has been chosen	2	0,31
4. A	The waste (and/or side effects) of the production process is irreversible. There's no waste-free technology	39	6,13
4. B	Wastes (and/or side effects) from production can be eliminated by using waste-free technologies	11	1,73
4.A and 4.B	None of the statements has been chosen	3	0,47
5. A	Environmental crises - a natural stage in the development of human-biosphere interaction, they are inevitable. The struggle for existence is the reality of life	31	4,87

5. B	<i>The environmental crisis is a preventable misunderstanding in the human-biosphere interaction process</i>	19	2,99
5.A and 5.B	<i>None of the statements has been chosen</i>	1	0,16
5.A and 5.B	<i>Both statements have been chosen</i>	2	0,31
6. A	Techno-humanitarian balance - the only way out of the environmental crisis	33	5,19
6. B	<i>Technical and technological progress is the only way out of the environmental crisis</i>	15	2,36
6.A and 6.B	<i>None of the statements has been chosen</i>	2	0,31
6.A and 6.B	<i>Both statements have been chosen</i>	3	0,47
7. A	Morality and responsibility are the only way out of the environmental crisis	16	2,52
7. B	<i>Science is the only way out of the environmental crisis</i>	24	3,77
7.A and 7.B	<i>None of the statements has been chosen</i>	1	0,16
7.A and 7.B	<i>Both statements have been chosen</i>	12	1,89
8. A	The environmental crisis can only be resolved through the participation of everyone in the process	35	5,50
8. B	<i>Solving environmental problems is a matter for the authorities, the government and the state</i>	8	1,26
8.A and 8.B	<i>None of the statements has been chosen</i>	3	0,47
8.A and 8.B	<i>Both statements have been chosen</i>	7	1,10
9. A	Humanity's impact on the biosphere is negligible, no disaster will occur	6	0,94
9. B	<i>Humanity affects the biosphere in a devastating way, which can lead to an ecological disaster</i>	40	6,29
9.A and 9.B	<i>None of the statements has been chosen</i>	6	0,94
9.A and 9.B	<i>Both statements have been chosen</i>	1	0,16
10. A	Environmental disaster could kill all life on Earth	33	5,19
10. B	<i>A man cannot destroy life on the planet, he can only change the conditions of its existence</i>	17	2,67
10.A and 10.B	<i>None of the statements has been chosen</i>	2	0,31
10.A and 10.B	<i>Both statements have been chosen</i>	1	0,16
11. A	Planning should be long-term	46	7,23
11. B	<i>No matter how long the planning is carried out, it should define the economic and social benefits</i>	6	0,94
11.A and 11.B	<i>None of the statements has been chosen</i>	1	0,16
12. A	<i>Nature can't recycle all the products of human activity</i>	44	6,92
12. B	<i>Nature is capable of processing all the products of human activity</i>	8	1,26
12.A and 12.B	<i>None of the statements has been chosen</i>	1	0,16

Processing of questionnaires No. 2 showed that statements about ecological way of life (A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, M, N) were chosen 386 times, which is 60% of the total number of selected statements. The statements based on anthropocentrism related to the organization of private life on the principles of nature-coordination (A1, B1, C1, D1, E1, F1, G1, H1, I1, J1, K1, L1, M1, N1) were chosen 257 times, which is 40% of the total number of selected statements (Table 02).

**Table 02.** Results of processing the questionnaire No. 2

<i>Code</i>	<i>Statement</i>	<i>Number of choices</i>	<i>Percentage of selected statements</i>
A	I try to save water, energy and other resources	35	5,44
A1	I'm not wasting my time and energy on saving money	11	1,71
B	I carry a cloth bag with me so I don't have to buy a plastic bag	20	3,11
B1	every time I go to the store, I buy a plastic shopping bag	10	1,56
C	I'm separating the garbage (I'm putting plastic in a special container)	12	1,87
C1	I don't share garbage, that's what special services should do.	23	3,58
D	I don't like using disposable dishes	40	6,22
D1	I use disposable dishes whenever I can	3	0,47
E	I love wearing my <i>second hand</i> clothes.	18	2,80
E1	I only buy new clothes	28	4,35
F	I like to walk or ride a bike	39	6,07
F1	I dream of a prestigious car, I love gadgets	52	8,08
G	Cleaning up the space where I live (keeping the entrance and yard clean and tidy. in the neighborhood, cleaning up excrement after my dog, etc.)	24	3,73
G1	Cleanliness and order in the space around me is the responsibility of special services	13	2,02
H	I'm trying to wear things for as long as I can.	41	6,38
H1	I try to change things often according to fashion and prestige	5	0,78
I	I always participate in environmental events and clean-ups	7	1,09
I1	I try to avoid participating in environmental events and clean-ups	21	3,27
J	I prefer to be outdoors, in the woods, at sea	27	4,20
J1	I prefer to spend my free time outside nature, in a rich cultural environment	25	3,89
K	I keep a close eye on the ingredients of the products I buy, I try to buy natural food	29	4,51
K1	When buying products, I'm only interested in the price and appearance, I don't waste time on finding out the composition	18	2,80
L	I prefer to take a quick shower	26	4,04
L1	I like to take a bath, and I'm in the shower for a long time	28	4,35

M	I like the spaces filled with plants and animals, I like indoor plants, pets, etc.	35	5,44
M1	I prefer sterile spaces from different animals and plants	6	0,93
N	It seems natural to me that apart from us (people) our apartments are full of animals - ticks, spiders, and many of our favorite foodstuffs - the result of microorganisms (cheese, bread, sauerkraut, wine, etc.)	33	5,13
N1	I am horrified at the fact that there are ticks in the carpets and fungi in the cracks of the tiles, and even in our intestines, there are a huge number of microorganisms	14	2,18

## 7. Conclusion

The conducted research allows to draw conclusions about the current state of ecological consciousness of young people, who receive higher education. In our previous study of the environmental consciousness of young people in the period from 2014 to 2017, we identified the prevalence of anthropocentric attitudes (73.3%). At the same time, it was noted that the trend of transition to a bio-centric facility was formed (Kudriavtseva, Melnik, Tsiplakova, Yazovskaya, & Buczacki, 2017). Our current research confirms that this trend has increased. According to the results of the survey, statements that testify to bioecocentric ecological consciousness (code A) were chosen 2.3 times more often than statements that testify to anthropocentric ecological consciousness (code B). At the same time, the results of the study revealed difficulties in choosing between opposite statements. Of the 50 cases of difficult choices, about half are the choices of two opposing statements, the other half are the lack of choice in favor of any of the statements. This demonstrates the contradictory and emerging nature of the environmental consciousness of young people.

There is a dissonance between the mindset of young people and their environmental behaviour in everyday life. On the one hand, it is obvious that there is an advantage in favor of the bio-centric position from the number of selected statements based on the results of the survey. However, the analysis of specific questionnaires reveals an internal contradiction in the choice between statements describing worldview environmental ideas and statements related to everyday everyday life.

In the conducted research the results of processing of the questionnaire No. 1 allow to draw a conclusion about dominating images in ecological consciousness of modern youth. These are images of the "exhaustibility of natural resources", the "limits of transforming human activity", "long-term planning" and the "inability of nature to absorb the products of human activity". The consistently high percentage of these images (83% to 92.5%) shows the concern of today's youth about environmental issues and their involvement in the current environmental discourse, which motivates young people to use environmental practices in everyday life.

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