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**POLISH AND UKRAINIAN ATTITUDES TOWARDS  
CLIMATE CHANGE. A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS**

POLISH AND UKRAINIAN ATTITUDES TOWARDS CLIMATE CHANGE. A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

**Keywords:** climate policy, social attitudes, surveys, comparative studies, the Anthropocene.

The article discusses the chosen aspects of Poles' and Ukrainians' attitudes towards climate change. For this purpose, the authors refer to the existing data, i.e., nation-wide studies conducted in Poland and Ukraine regarding the level of knowledge about climate change and the behaviour declared in

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relation to this change. The discussed issue was set within the spectrum of geopolitical processes and scientific forecasts concerning it. When it comes to the theoretical sphere, the issue was set within the concepts of attitudes and arguments concerning the new geological epoch, i.e., the Anthropocene. The overview of the existing data allows for coming to the conclusion that there are no comparative data from international studies in which both countries participated. One of the most frequently used tools for forming opinions on environmental change is Eurobarometer, in which Ukraine does not participate. The shortage of comparative data results in difficulties with equivalence of the conducted analysis. The presented results meet the temporal and topical rigor, and are one of the first attempts at recreating social attitudes towards climate change in both countries.

#### POSTAWY WOBEC ZMIAN KLIMATU W POLSCE I UKRAINIE. ANALIZA PORÓWNAWCZA

**Słowa kluczowe:** polityka klimatyczna, postawy społeczne, sondaże opinii, badania porównawcze, antropocen.

W artykule ukazano wybrane aspekty postaw Polaków i Ukraińców wobec zmian klimatycznych odwołując się do danych zastanych – badań ogólnopolskich i ogólnoukraińskich dotyczących poziomu wiedzy o kwestiach zmian klimatu i deklaracyjnych zachowań dotyczących tych zmian. Omawiana problematyka została ulokowana w spektrum procesów geopolitycznych i prognoz naukowych w tym zakresie. W wymiarze teoretycznym zaś – w obrębie koncepcji postaw i sporów związanych z nową epoką geologiczną – antropocenem. Przegląd danych zastanych pozwala sformułować wniosek, iż nie mamy do dyspozycji danych porównawczych, pochodzących z badań międzykrajowych, w których uczestniczyłyby oba kraje. Jednym z najczęściej wykorzystywanych narzędzi do budowania klimatu opinii w obszarze środowiska jest Eurobarometr, w którym to badaniu nie uczestniczy Ukraina. Brak badań porównawczych powoduje trudności z ekwiwalencją dokonywanych analiz. Prezentowane wyniki spełniając rygor temporalny i tematyczny stanowią jedną z pierwszych prób odtworzenia postaw społecznych odnośnie spraw klimatycznych w obydwu krajach.

The aim of the article is to review selected aspects of the attitudes of Polish and Ukrainian citizens towards climate change. The authors refer to existing data – nationwide Polish and Ukrainian research on both the level of knowledge about climate issues as well as declarative assessments and behaviors related to climate issues, placing the issue of climate care in the context of geopolitical processes, European Union policy, scientific forecasts regarding socio-economic development and theoretical findings in the Anthropocene. The main emphasis in the text was placed on making comparisons between the results of social surveys conducted in Poland and in Ukraine, regarding the subject of climate. The highlighting of climate issues in the cross-country section has a great importance in the context of indicating the social impact of the development priorities raised today in the whole world.

Analyses of social attitudes concern the description of human functioning in the modern world and the mechanisms of human behavior (Bohner, Wanke 2004; Marody 1976; McGuire 1985; Mądrzycki 1977). A social attitude can be defined as a person's tendency to behave in a certain way towards specific problems, resulting both from the knowledge about this issue, an affective attitude towards it, and influencing the behavior towards it. The cognitive and behavioral elements are very important, but an attitude without an emotional component is *ex definitione* impossible. Attitudes towards socio-economic development issues (this is the area where we locate climate policy issues) are strongly dependent on the current social, economic, political and emotional situation in societies. In this type of attitude, the cognitive component can be highly shaped and modified by popular opinions and beliefs that are widespread in social space, often using many stereotypes (see Zimbardo, Leippe 2004). Media content and their persuasive elements play a crucial role in this aspect. One of the key persuasive instruments are public opinion polls. Social surveys, being a tool of social communication, based on the opinions and assessments of society, become in various areas of life one of the important premises for making decisions. To find out what opinion society has on important issues, it is necessary to learn about its attitudes (relatively persistent attitude towards someone or something), motivations (tendencies towards specific behaviors) and social needs (conscious or unconscious aspirations).

Conducting comparative analyses helps grasp the domestic context for the processes of shaping attitudes, often reflected in public opinion surveys. It can be assumed that attitudes depend on the location – social attitudes at various points in space (Domański 1989b, pp. 423-439). In this paper, social attitudes towards climate change are set in the contexts of the region, they

are based on two selected countries of Central and Eastern Europe, namely Poland and Ukraine.

### **Poland and Ukraine: mutual relations, differences and similarities**

At the beginning of the 1990s, the communist camp collapsed. Regaining freedom, however, was associated with the need to build a new order. Internal conditions and the impact of socio-economic connections create the situation where (after almost a quarter of a century) Poland and Ukraine have found themselves at different ends of the development axis (ed. Jędraszyk 2016, p. 8). All the countries undergoing the transformation of the 90s have been given two fundamental tasks: (1) building a civil society and (2) building a pluralistic political system.

It can be concluded that these priority tasks for new democracies have their positive finale only in the case of Poland - in the process of joining the European Union or NATO. Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004 is also the beginning of new Polish-Ukrainian relations. Poland, as Ukraine's neighbor, has become a linkage bringing Ukraine closer to European structures, however, Ukraine has not even obtained the status of candidate for EU membership. Poland as a member of NATO and the EU, a country with a better economic position than Ukraine, with a faster developing economy, has today much stronger institutions and sets out slightly different directions of socio-economic development (cf. Kawalko 2011). Strengthening new democracies, caring for economic and political stability release new priorities and tasks, which are also part of EU activities. One of such issues is environmental protection and climate change questions. Therefore, we have two countries located within various structures. In Poland, they result from the prerogatives generated by the European Union. In Ukraine, they arise from the desire to meet European expectations, but also from the level of knowledge of citizens and perhaps past experience, in particular, the consequences of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant disaster in April 1986.

### **Climate change or a new era?**

The issue of climate change, which has been present in the social narrative recently, has now adopted (at the level of setting new paradigms not only in earth sciences) the logic of placing phenomena in the Anthropocene epoch. The discussion around this new geological era (see Bińczyk 2018), in which we observe active human interference in the processes that drive the geological evolution of the planet, is primarily associated with climate change and its extensive effects: environmental, economic, political, and social.

The collection of various data prompts majority of researchers to the conclusion that climate change has been caused by human activity since the industrial revolution: anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases, cutting down forests, animal husbandry and burning fossil fuels in transport, energy and industry. The fundamental international documents describing the extent and causes of climate change include the reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which associates representatives of 195 countries, including Poland and Ukraine. In 1990, the first report on this matter was published. The IPCC does not conduct research, but only evaluates and estimates the state of knowledge regarding the climate. The latest IPCC Report was published on October 8, 2018. Then, the first global compromise regarding the need to limit climate change was made, i.e. the Paris Agreement (Bińczyk 2018, p. 82).

Issues of the Anthropocene are also associated with elements of the concept of sustainable development. This concept has been developed for years, indicating the need to find a balance between the economy of the environment and society, especially in the context of the consequences of saving natural resources for future generations (Rokicka, Woźniak 2016).

### **Climate as a political issue**

The first EU climate and energy package was adopted in 2008 and it set targets for 2020 (cf. [https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/strategies/2020\\_en#tab-0-0](https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/strategies/2020_en#tab-0-0)). Poland, as a member of the European Union, was obliged to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20% compared with 1990 by 2020, reduce energy consumption by 20%, and increase the share of renewable energy sources in energy production by 15%. Additionally, by 2030 – in accordance with the Framework of the European Union policy on climate and energy adopted by the Member States – the entire Community should achieve, compared to the 1990 level, at least: a decrease in greenhouse gas emissions by 40%, an increase in energy efficiency by 32.5%, and an increase in the share of renewable energy sources by 32%. In 2014, the climate and energy framework made by IPCC with even more ambitious goals for the 2021–2030 was adopted. They oblige EU members to reduce emissions by at least 40% compared to 1990 by 2030. However, the specification of final conclusions reached at the summit (June 2019) was blocked by Poland and several other EU countries.

Ukraine is currently reviewing its commitments under the 2015 Paris Agreement. Earlier, the country committed to reducing emissions by 2030 by at least 40% compared with 1990 levels. In January, the Ministry of Energy and Environmental Protection presented a new green strategy,



which outlines Ukraine's transition to a carbon neutral economy by 2070. It seems, however, that the main motivation for this plan is the EU's green deal, not the climate crisis itself. The EU proposal is based on a tariff for imported goods based on their carbon footprint. This means that if Ukraine wants to continue cooperation with its largest trading partner, it will also have to reduce emissions.

### **Review of existing data: Poles and Ukrainians towards climate change**

Technological development has contributed to the collection and archiving of a huge amount of research material, which is easily accessible for research, including secondary analysis (Johnston 2014). Secondary analysis (desk research) in social sciences is a way of conducting research activities that consist in re-analyzing processes, existing and previously archived data and data collected by other authors as part of their primary research projects. Desk research uses both content analyses and, to a large extent, the existing statistical and survey data, as well as cross-sectional analyses and comparisons of historical data. In this case, the desk research analysis has the features of a traditional, narrative review of the available survey data on the issues of social perception of climate issues. It is a summary of the current state of knowledge, which was created thanks to the procedure of identification and synthesis of the previous achievements of researchers and practitioners (Fink, 2013). The authors are fully aware of the limitations of comparing and combining data from different studies, especially when a specific review of the results of international projects is carried out. Despite many advantages of the desk research approach, it is important to remember about the fragmentation of data, their original research goals and discrepancies in the methodology itself. In this study, such an approach is to be a starting point for further discussions in this area and perhaps an incentive for researchers to undertake international projects based on common methodological assumptions.

Climate policy, implementation of new regulations, and even the so-called green revolution require the support of public opinion. The results of various social studies on the environmental awareness of EU citizens confirm the broad public support for environmental legislation at EU level and for EU funding. How are elements of social attitudes towards these issues shaped in two different countries: Ukraine, aspiring to join the EU structures, and Poland, contesting European climate policy?

Comparative studies essentially identify similarities and/or differences in relation to at least two objects representing a particular class of phe-

nomena. In this case, we have made a comparison of selected elements of social attitudes towards climate issues, obtained from nationwide opinion polls in Poland and Ukraine. Bearing in mind the disproportions in many aspects of the functioning of both countries (politics, economy, international connections) and the functioning of the sphere of social research, we assume that climate issues are not as strongly stressed in Ukrainian surveys as in Polish ones. Primarily, many projects of this type are not implemented in Ukraine. It can be concluded that the issues of climate change and related issues are present in the Ukrainian consciousness, but to a lesser extent than on the Polish side of the borderland. The current socio-political-economic situation in Ukraine, which evokes the need to satisfy, above all, issues related to military and economic security, is a factor affecting this state of affairs. However, in time, changes can be expected in this area. In Poland, the subject of climate change has been researched for several years, which is particularly reflected in international commitments and the activities of social organizations operating in the field of climate change. There are many studies on climate issues in Poland. They are thematic and are conducted by academic researchers as well as by nationwide research institutions, usually as trend studies. The study presented in this paper focuses on analyzing the results of CBOS surveys and Eurobarometer. Just before COP24 - the annual conference of the parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Katowice, in November 2018, CBOS conducted a survey on climate and environmental issues to see if Poles are aware of the risks associated with them. The authors of the CBOS study focused particularly on the perception of global threats related to climate change<sup>1</sup>.

In Ukraine, the situation is similar. Opinion polls regarding attitudes towards climate change in Ukraine are successively conducted by both research institutions and academic representatives. In desk research, we used the results of studies carried out by the Ukrainian Center for Economic and Political Research Razumkov in 2016 and 2020. Both studies were conducted in all the regions of Ukraine except Crimea and the occupied Donetsk and Lugansk territories (in 2016, on the population aged 18 years and over). Although the data come mainly from mid-2016, the situation in Ukraine of that time was analogous to the current one. Mid-2016 was the time of armed operations lasting several years, the economic conditions of Ukrainians were

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<sup>1</sup>This topic was already raised in previous articles, see 'Opinions and Diagnoses' No. 34: Poles on energy sources, energy policy and the state of the environment (May 2016) and CBOS communiqué "How do Poles deal with smog?" (April 2018, edited by M. Feliksiak, B. Roguska).

low, and the quality and living conditions of the respondents were similar to those in 2020. Another project used in the analysis is the study on ecology, climate and environment conducted in May 2018 by the sociological research agency Fama. The face-to-face method was used to examine citizens in various parts of the country, except for the territories of Donbass and Crimea. The research used the Eurobarometer methodology and the results can be compared to analogous interviews that are conducted in EU countries (data for <https://day.kyiv.ua>). Climate issues were also raised in a survey conducted in November 2019 by the Research & Branding Group. The survey involved 1805 respondents aged 18 years and older. The study was carried out with the use of direct interview method (data from <http://razumkov.org.ua>).

### **Elements of attitudes towards climate change in surveys of public opinion in Poland and Ukraine**

To make international comparisons, it is worth starting with establishing the place of climate-related issues in the hierarchy of how important particular problems are for societies. According to the Eurobarometer survey, climate change is perceived as an important problem on the list of global problems by 15% of the surveyed Poles. At the same time, 70% of them are of the opinion that this is a very serious problem (answers 7-10 on the scale of 1-10, where 1 means that this is not a problem and 10 means a very serious problem).

According to the Research & Branding Group survey, 84% of Ukrainians indicate that climate change is a problem for societies, and 60% of the surveyed Ukrainians indicate that climate change is a serious problem for them. On the other hand, in a survey conducted by the Razumkov Center, climate issues are indicated as an important challenge for Ukraine by the total of 20.9% of respondents, whereby 11.8% of indications concern climate change. At the same time, 86.1% of respondents indicate that the climate has changed over the past ten years.

Table 1

The most important global problems in Poles' opinions (%)

<b>Polish challenges</b>	<b>%</b>
Poverty, hunger and lack of water	18
Climate change	15
International terrorism	23
Economic situation	7
Military conflicts	16
World's population growth	4
Nuclear proliferation	9
Spread of infectious diseases	6

*Source:* own elaboration based on Eurobarometer.

Table 2

Challenges facing Ukraine (%)

<b>Ukrainian challenges</b>	<b>%</b>
Unemployment and low average salary	84.5
Government work	56.2
Retaining the territorial integrity	45.3
Critical condition of infrastructure	40.2
Instability in the public finance system	38.0
Environmental pollution	11.1
Terrorism	8.0
Climate change	1.8
Other	2.8

*Source:* own elaboration based on the study conducted by the Razumkov Centre.

Embedding considerations on the attitudes towards climate issues in the context of Anthropocene development, one of the most important axes of analysis is for us to determine how Polish and Ukrainian societies perceive the causes of climate change. According to the data from the CBOS survey carried out in 2016, 73% of Poles (in 2019 - 75%) saw the causes to lie in human activity. Analogous findings resulting from the Razumkov Center

survey show that 77.8% of Ukrainians see the causes to lie in human activity (in this, 48.4% indicated combined human activity and natural causes). Natural causes as a source determining climate change were indicated by 16.6% of the surveyed Ukrainians and 20% of the Poles.

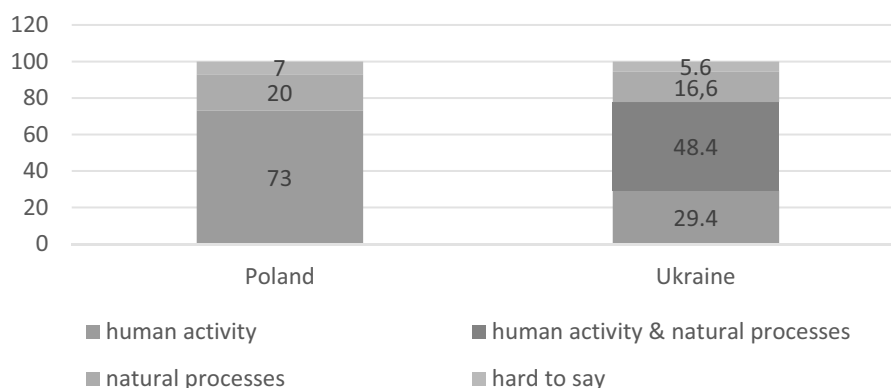


Figure 1. Causes of climate change in survey opinions of Polish and Ukrainian citizens (%).

*Source:* own elaboration based on analyzed surveys (Razumkov Center & CBOS).

Climate change, especially global warming, is probably the result of the observed increase in the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, which are responsible for emissions related to human activities cf. Kundzewicz 2011). Over 83% of the surveyed residents of Ukraine agree with the argument that reducing greenhouse gas emissions can lead to climate change. In Poland, in the CBOS research, 97% of the respondents have such an opinion (whereby, 68% consider such action to be very important).

An important issue is also the identification of entities responsible for preventing climate change. In both Poland (50.0%) and Ukraine (56.9%), the respondents consider this to be the task of national governments of particular countries. The opinion that the costs of counteracting climate problems should be charged on more developed countries, the European Community, or other entities is not popular. A sense of solidarity regarding participation in the expenses related to global problems can be read from this distribution of opinions. A survey carried out in Ukraine also shows that Ukraine's role in bearing such costs is negligible or nonexistent (49%). One third of the respondents expressed the opinion that the costs of activities related to environmental protection and to combating climate change should be incurred by international organizations. According to the Fama survey,

87% of the surveyed Ukrainians are convinced that they can personally engage in environmental protection and counteract climate change, and 67% of the Polish respondents (CBOS 2016) have a similar opinion regarding changes in their immediate environment.

Table 3

Indications regarding entities that should be responsible for combating climate change in Poles' opinions (%)

<b>Entities responsible for combating climate change</b>	<b>%</b>
National government	50.0
Business and industry	32.0
European Union	37.0
You personally	17.0
Regional and local government	32.0
Ecological organizations	27.0
All	11.0
Nobody	1.0

*Source:* own elaboration based on Eurostat.

Table 4

Indications regarding entities that should be made responsible for combating climate change in Ukrainians' opinions (%)

<b>Indications regarding those responsible for counteracting climate</b>	<b>%</b>
All countries should undertake such activities	56.9
Highly developed countries because their development has contributed to global climate change	22.8
Developing countries, because today they produce the most waste	10.1
No countries need to take action in this area	2.0
Hard to say	8.2

*Source:* own elaboration based on the Razumkov Centre study.

Emerging reports raising the issue of the environmental situation and climate change may provoke social anxiety associated with the end of the world as we know it, loss of a place to live or of a sense of security. It can be

said that depression associated with climate change (climate depression) is a real phenomenon. Psychological effects of climate change can have a significant impact on people's mental health and quality of life. In the analyzed surveys in Poland (CBOS) and in Ukraine (Razumkov), there appeared questions regarding the perception of climate change in terms of threats and concerns. Anxiety about the state of the environment and the climate is declared by a significant proportion of Poles (68%) and Ukrainians (56.4%).

Table 5

Perception of climate change as a reason for concern in Poland (%)

To what extent is climate change a reason for concern	%
To a very large extend	10.0
To a large extend	58.0
To a small extend	25.0
Basically, no	3.0
Hard to say	4.0

Source: own elaboration based on CBOS

survey <https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2018/K\158\18.PDF>.

Table 6

Perception of the consequences of climate change in Ukraine (%)

Consequences of climate change	%
Significantly negative consequences	40.2
Rather negative consequences	16.2
Negligible negative consequences	15.3
Rather positive consequences	9.3
Significantly positive consequences	1.9
Hard to say	17.1

Source: own elaboration based on The Razumkov Center survey.

From the perspective of shaping attitudes towards climate change, the influence of information sources on these opinions is important. According to the data from the Razumkov survey, mass media play a leading role in the process of providing climate information (over 31% of the responses).

Table 7

Sources of knowledge, information, opinions on climate change

Source	%
Mass media	31.5
Social organizations	19.5
Friends	12.9
Social media	9.4
Politics	4.7
Hard to say	22.1

Source: own elaboration based on the Razumkov Centre survey.

In the search for sources of knowledge, the ones that use scientific or public authorities are extremely important. However, such sources express also views that negate climate change. Negations of climate change come mainly from the media. Polish analyses regarding sources that shape Poles' knowledge about climate change revealed particular importance of international comparative studies aimed at examining the coverage of IPCC reports in the press, conducted in 22 countries and covering the content of two mass circulation newspapers (representing right and left views). The analysis of articles published between September 2013 and February 2014 showed that half of these articles were skeptical. This allowed for the final conclusion that the low level of concern about climate change and the greater presence of skeptics is visible among the general population in Poland. It may partly reflect the influence of some politicians, political parties, and skeptical scientists present in the media (see <https://naukaoklimacie.pl>).

### Summary

The turn of the 60s and 70s of the 20th century changed the ways of thinking about the natural environment and its relationships with social and economic development. Ideas have emerged and gained popularity indicating the collapse of the concept of development leading only to an increase in production, consumption and exploitation of natural resources. The idea of a new "quality of life" in greater harmony with nature became more and more popular. The emphasis of thinking and action has been directed at sustainable development, in which satisfying the needs of the present does not limit the ability to meet the needs of future generations.

Climate issues and environmental hazards have directed attention of researchers and politicians to the role of human beings in designing environmental change. Public discussion, on the one hand, brought to light the



negative consequences of industrial development and human activity, and, on the other, emphasized a change in these behaviors, which resulted from the interest in the Anthropocene. In this era, discussions about social attitudes and values, risk costs and economic priorities are increasingly becoming implicated in purely natural factors. In this aspect, it also seems important to monitor public opinion.

In the context of presenting various survey data considering social attitudes towards climate issues, it is worth noting that we do not have equivalent comparative data from inter-country surveys from Poland and Ukraine. For now, Eurobarometer is one of the opinions most commonly used to build the climate in the area of the environment, however, Ukraine does not participate in it. The shortage of comparative data results in difficulties with equivalence of the conducted analysis. The results presented in this article, meeting at least the temporal and thematic rigor of those studies, are one of the first attempts to recreate social attitudes regarding climate issues in both countries.

International surveys show Poland to be a rather unusual country on the European Union scale due to the lower level of concerns related to climate change. Poles are more similar to Ukrainians when it comes to social attitudes towards the examined issues than to the inhabitants of EU member states. However, this similarity is superficial, it applies to some tendencies which, however, show differences within. The level of knowledge and interest in climate issues can be characterized as congruous. However, both nations perceive the causes of climate change differently and have a different attitude to the possibility of personal influence (involvement) in improving the situation. This can be explained with the popularity of content in public (especially media) messages. In Poland, climate issues are addressed primarily as part of the implementation of the European Union's climate policy, the results of the third sector activities, and the need to integrate climate content into school curricula. In Ukraine, climate issues appear to be a side topic, arising on the occasion of global meetings or events devoted to this topic. Climate issues are giving way to economic, development and political problems.

Finally, in the context of the issues discussed, it is worth paying attention to young people as the largest beneficiary of possible climate and environmental changes. One such initiative is the Youth Climate Strike. The initiator of this event was a young Swedish girl Greta Thunberg. In Poland, youth protests took place on March and November 9, 2019. Young people protested under the slogan "Enough words, now deeds!". Like the youth in many regions of the world, the idea of climate strikes has also found

a response in Ukraine. Till now, three strikes have been organized in main Ukrainian cities. Young people postulated promoting the idea of “Green City” (see: <https://rubryka.com>). Undeniably, there is a growing generation aware of threats, a generation that will feel the effects of climate change and make political choices. Time will tell whether they are eco-friendly.

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