

Article

Environmental Behavior of Youth and Sustainable Development

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Abstract: The relationship between people and nature is one of the most important current issues of human survival. This circumstance makes it necessary to educate young people who are receptive to global challenges and ready to solve the urgent problems of our time. The purpose of the article is to analyze the experience of the environmental behavior of young people in the metropolis. The authors studied articles and monographs that contain Russian and international experience in the environmental behavior of citizens. The following factors determine people’s behavior: the cognitive capabilities of people who determine the understanding and perception of nature and the value-affective component that determines the attitude towards nature. The next task of the study is surveying young people through an online survey and its analysis. The research was realized in Ekaterinburg, the administrative center of the Sverdlovsk region (Russia). The study of the current ecological situation in Ekaterinburg made it possible to conclude that the environmental problem arises not only and not simply as a problem of environmental pollution and other negative influences of human economic activity. This problem grows into transforming the spontaneous impact of society on nature into a consciously, purposefully, systematically developing harmonious interaction with it. The study results showed that, from the point of view of the youth of Ekaterinburg, the city’s ecological situation is one of the most pressing problems. Despite minor improvements over the past 3–5 years, this problem has not lost relevance, and regional authorities and city residents should be responsible for its solution. Young people know environmental practices, but they often do not apply them systematically. Ecological behavior is encouraged and discussed among friends/acquaintances. The key factors influencing the formation of environmental behavior practices are the mass media and social networks. The most popular social network for obtaining information on ecological practices among young people is Instagram, and the key persons are bloggers. This study did not reveal the influence of the socio-demographic characteristics of young people on the application of eco-behavior practices, which may indicate the need for a survey of a larger sample.

Keywords: environmental behavior; sustainability; youth; public awareness; ecology



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1. Introduction

Humanity is faced with an exacerbation of systemic ecological, social, economic, and political crises. Today, the relationship between people and nature is one of the

most important issues of human survival. The development of technology, the alienated attitude of people to nature [1], and the colonization of new habitats [2] have led to the overwhelming impact of people on the environment on a global scale. At the same time, modern people are more alienated from nature and have less knowledge about nature than their ancestors. Pyle (1978) calls this situation “the disappearance of experience” [3]. Especially in Western societies, collective attitudes are characterized by a detachment from nature [1] and a utilitarian attitude towards nature [4]. Environmental problems, global climate change, social and gender inequality, and other global problems require a rethinking of the global view of the world and awareness of the importance of sustainable development.

The principle of caring for nature is necessary for the formation of a harmonious relationship between people and the environment [5–7]. In this regard, the principle of the primacy of individual responsibility concerning any forms and cases of collective responsibility is significant [8]. Human consciousness is embodied in actions and is born in action. E.V. Bakeeva interprets the action of “I” as an act of taking responsibility in the face of absolute authority. Therefore, the phenomenon of “I” becomes a fundamental condition for collective responsibility, and collective responsibility can be recognized only in the “inner” dimension of a personal act [8]. This circumstance makes it necessary to educate young people who are receptive to global challenges and ready to solve the urgent problems of our time [9–11].

The value attitude towards nature cannot be established in an authoritarian way. People’s attitude to nature evolves along with the development of personality, changes in the socio-cultural environment, and the transformation of communities. Therefore, the “value-belief-norm” theory is particularly important for forming citizens’ ecological behavior [12–14]. P. Stern divides values into biospheric, altruistic, and egoistic values, which form personal attitudes and beliefs of the subject. An individual’s attitudes include the following components: ecological worldview, adverse consequences for valued objects, and perceived ability to reduce the threat. Based on the personal attitudes of the individual, a complex of personal environmental norms is formed which are implemented in four models of behavior:

- (1) environmental activism, manifested, for example, in the fact that an individual is a member of an environmental organization, an environmental protest organization;
- (2) non-activist, public sphere behaviors manifested in an indirect impact on social policy in the field of ecology: passive forms of participation (for example, signing environmental petitions), support for existing environmental policy (willingness to pay additional fees to ensure environmental safety);
- (3) environmentalism in the private sphere, manifested in a direct impact on social policy in the field of ecology (for example, buying “organic” food, sorting household waste);
- (4) behaviors in an organization, manifested in the impact on the environment through organizational behavioral practices (for example, production of ecological goods).

People build value systems depending on their experience and focus of consciousness. Necessarily, the education system must be aimed at forming a value system focused on preserving the natural and socio-cultural environment. Humanistic values are of particular importance as criteria for practice or as a measure of correlation with activity goals. Therefore, humanitarian values and soft skills are relevant today in the model of formed competencies of a modern graduate of schools and universities [15–17]. People’s perception of nature determines their relationship to nature and their emotional connection with nature. Therefore, to develop conservation strategies, educational programs are needed to raise people’s environmental awareness. Sustainable development requires the development of various forms of environmental practices to overcome the division between nature and society.

This article is devoted to the study of environmental practices. Social environmental practices are a new direction for the environmental transformation of society. Environmental practices change society’s social and cultural reality and the behavior patterns of

individuals concerning nature and other people. Social-ecological practices depend on the environmental behavior of individuals, their ecological consciousness, and culture. Therefore, the role of environmental education today is both a strategy for harmonizing the relationship between people and nature and a way for the survival of humanity in the future.

Social-environmental practices are a set of interacting elements that personify the interaction processes between people and the natural environment around them. Elements of social-environmental practices are built into a system of interrelated components:

- (1) Cognitive component (human ideas about nature and their interaction, about the basics of risks and safe behavior in the environment);
- (2) Value-motivational component (stable motivational attitude towards positive social practices);
- (3) Behavioral component (application in practice in their activities the experience, skills, and knowledge gained).

Social-environmental practices aim to use natural resources and preserve the environment rationally. Environmental education contributes to the continuous reproduction of environmental practices in human activities. Sustainable development of society requires the education of individuals responsible for their eco-friendly behavior and have positive attitudes towards the future of the natural environment.

An important factor for the sustainable development of society is an environmentally oriented lifestyle [18,19]. An environmentally oriented lifestyle is based on environmental education, which consists of raising the population's awareness about the environment and related problems [20,21]. The concept of "environmentally responsible behavior" refers to a system of knowledge and skills that have formed responsible behavior of people in environmental management, environmental protection, and commitment to sustainable development goals. An environmentally oriented lifestyle is embodied in a person's presence of environmentally friendly values, corresponding attitudes oriented towards the natural environment. Environmental models of behavior are focused on preserving and improving the natural environment. Therefore, the practical activity of people is aimed at preserving nature and complies with the following principles:

- the reduce principle—reducing consumption, that is, avoiding unnecessary actions and purchases, for example, printing a receipt at an ATM, using both sides for printing;
- the principle of reuse—reuse, donate, or alter unnecessary things that can have a "second life";
- the principle of recycling—recycling of waste, as 80% of what is in the bin can be returned for recycling;
- the principle of refuse—refusal of the unnecessary, as refusing unnecessary purchases reduces the amount of garbage.

Environmental behavior includes the following activities: saving water and electricity, using energy-saving household appliances, participating in cleaning areas, sorting waste, collecting waste paper and metal and handing it over to particular collection points, buying goods from recycled materials, refusing disposable goods to have long-term benefits, the use of vehicles without harmful emissions, participation in actions and rallies dedicated to the environment, and other types of environmental behavior. However, these activities are impossible without people's ecological education and knowledge of the regional ecological situation they live in.

In the mid-1970s, UNESCO and UNEP jointly began implementing a long-term International Program on Environmental Education. We refer to the Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, made by International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century [22]. This Report highlights essential ideas that make it necessary to introduce environmental practices into people's daily lives. Such ideas are the continuity of environmental education throughout the life of people, various forms of environmental education, interdisciplinarity, informational

openness. Environmental education helps to find a balance between society's need to meet the needs of the present moment and the possible future consequences of decisions made.

In June 1992, the UN Conference on Environment and Development was held in Rio de Janeiro, which was dedicated to developing a strategy for civilization's sustainable, environmentally acceptable economic development.

The conference adopted a declaration [23], revealing the essence and goals of the movement towards sustainable development. This document shows the apparent need for forming such a model for the development of civilization. The satisfaction of the vital needs of the current generation is achieved without depriving future generations of such an opportunity.

The general idea of the strategy for the transition to sustainable development is to reduce the anthropogenic pressure on the biosphere in all possible ways. The following problems are among the acute problems of today: anthropogenic pollution of the atmosphere, water, soil, and space; climate change on the planet, leading to enormous economic damage due to continuous natural disasters; high rates of economic growth, requiring an ever more significant involvement of non-renewable natural resources; and waste disposal problems. The solution of these problems presupposes that environmental safety and stability should become more priority criteria for progress than economic growth and economic efficiency.

The focus of the sustainable development model is the greening of all the main activities of humanity. Thus, an obligatory direction of education for a citizen of each country is education for sustainable development is [24–26]. The actions of each individual and corporation play an essential role in sustainable development. Sustainable development is impossible without achieving a balance of economic growth, social responsibility, and environmental balance [27].

Public awareness in ecology is a key element in shaping the environmental behavior of citizens. Public awareness assumes that people know the state of the environment [28–30]. Public awareness refers to the social consciousness of individuals, which includes people's ability to empathize with nature [31,32]; a sense of belonging [33–35], and norms, that determines the environmental behavior of individuals [36–38].

People's environmental behavior is directly dependent on their rational knowledge and intuition about multidimensional nature [30]. A person's involvement in one or another type of environmental practice depends on whether a person has formed a value attitude towards nature. Value is an idea of what is desired, which can be external and explicit or hidden and internal, purely individual, or characterize an entire group. This idea is the concept of the desired influences the choice of the available methods, means, and ultimate goals of action [39]. The conscious inclusion of the individual in environmental practices can only be if people recognize nature as a value. Sustainable development is possible if caring for nature becomes a social norm [40]. The value-based attitude to nature is the "foundation" of the emergence and improvement of an environmentally oriented personality. In ecological behavior, people can show such feelings as love for nature [41], emotional perception of changes in the external environment [40,42], a sense of "socio-territorial belonging" [43], connectedness with nature [44–46]. People's connection to nature is expressed in their sense of physical and/or emotional connection with biotic and abiotic elements [47]. However, the modern world is the world of the spread of media culture [48,49], which directly affects people's relationship with nature. Internet technologies and communications shape the human environment [50–52]. Therefore, the sustainable development of society needs media education [53,54] and modern information technologies to improve the level of education of citizens [18,55,56].

The purpose of the article is to analyze the experience of the environmental behavior of young people in the metropolis. There are questions about whether the Russian people are ready to take on environmental responsibility as more than half of Russians already have the habit of going shopping with their bags and dispensing with plastic bags. A representative all-Russian poll by National Agency for Financial Research was conducted in October 2018.

One thousand six hundred people aged 18 or over were interviewed in 140 settlements in 42 regions of Russia. The statistical error does not exceed 3.4%. The sum of the answers exceeds 100% as the respondents could choose several answers. The results of this study also showed that, from 2015 to 2018, Russians' level of environmental responsibility almost doubled, as the number of those who competently disposed of garbage and household waste increased from 13% (2015) to 23% (2018). In 2018, a study [57] showed that Russians are ready to become more environmentally responsible.

According to the consumer panel GfK Plastic Study [58], for the period from August 2018 to July 2019, the majority of consumers in Russia consider the dominant role in the responsibility for the control of plastic waste should be assumed by the Government. This idea is related to the development of infrastructure for the control of waste.

Knowledge and information are the basis for changing attitudes towards ecology. At the same time, the optimal model of interaction between people and the environment presupposes a critical attitude to the effects of the information and communication environment [59–61]. People should have a sufficient level of public awareness about environmental issues. However, modern society is characterized by a focus on sustainable development, which presupposes close ties between people and nature [40,62,63]. People are included in nature through the physical experience of interaction with natural objects, which forms their subjective assessment of themselves concerning nature [35,37]. Empirically healthy natural spaces are favorable for enhancing social well-being and are particularly likely to enhance mood [64]. The value attitude to nature forms people's connection with nature and determines their ecological attitudes and behavior [65].

The study was realized in Ekaterinburg, the administrative center of the Sverdlovsk region (Russia). The Sverdlovsk Region is the largest in the Urals. In the Sverdlovsk region, the socio-economic situation is determined by a high share of production concentration. All-Russian public organization "Green Patrol" forms the environmental rating of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation [66]. The environmental rating of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation shows that the Sverdlovsk Region has shown positive dynamics in recent years, and the summer of 2021 it ranked 83rd. In the spring of 2019, the Sverdlovsk Region ranked 85th and closed the ecological rating. However, for the constituent entities of the Russian Federation, more stable dynamics are also characteristic, indicating an improvement in the environmental situation and, therefore, an increase in positions in the environmental rating. In the summer of 2020, the Nizhny Novgorod region was ranked 58. Since 2021, the Nizhny Novgorod region has been ranked 51st in the environmental rating. In the summer of 2021, the capital of Russia, Moscow, took sixth place, and in 2020, Moscow ranked fifth. The top five include the following constituent entities of the Russian Federation: Tambov Region, Belgorod Region, Altai Republic, Kursk Region, and Altai Territory.

State bodies in the Sverdlovsk region are aimed at developing environmental protection [67,68], which correspondent to "Action plan for the implementation of the Fundamentals of State Policy in the field of environmental development of the Russian Federation" [69] and development of the National project "Ecology" [70,71]. The authorities' activities to solve the most important issues related to overcoming environmental problems are impossible without a constructive dialogue with the population. The possibility of dialogue between the authorities and the population is one of the essential tasks for all subjects of interaction, which is also embodied in the Internet space [72–74].

The administration of the city of Ekaterinburg is carrying out many measures aimed at improving the ecological state of the environment. For example, in 2016, the Ural Environmental Initiative began its activities with the support of the administration of Ekaterinburg [71]. All Ural Ecological Initiative projects aim to create an eco-system of the Ural region based on the concept and principles of sustainable development. The Ural Environmental Initiative is based on partnerships, the scientific and expert community, and the youth movement. In 2018, a youth committee was created at the Ural Environmental Initiative.

However, the environmental rating leads to a critical assessment of their activities to normalize the environmental situation in the region. The technogenic load determines the state of the environment in the Sverdlovsk region due to the high concentration of production. More than 40% of all industry in the country is located in the Sverdlovsk region. In connection with this circumstance, environmental safety issues for sustainable development are among the most relevant for this region.

For studying the environmental behavior of Ekaterinburg youth, the following research questions were posed:

- (1) How do young people relate to the ecological situation in the city of Ekaterinburg?
- (2) What are the sources used by young people to obtain information about existing environmental problems and current practices of environmental behavior?
- (3) What is the attitude of the youth of Ekaterinburg to the practice of environmental behavior?
- (4) What are the key factors influencing the formation of the practice of environmental behavior of young people?
- (5) What is the influence of the socio-demographic characteristics of young people (gender, age, educational level, income, and marital status) on the application of environmental behavior practices?

2. Materials and Methods

The authors studied articles and monographs that contain Russian and international experience in the environmental behavior of citizens [75–77]. In the study of the ecological behavior of megalopolis residents, we proceed from the compatibility of such concepts as the theory of norm activation [78,79], the theory of self-perception [35,37], the concept of “values—beliefs—norms” [12–14].

Environmental knowledge is transformed into environmental behavior if people have a sense of concern about an environmental problem, a sense of personal involvement in its occurrence, and awareness of their ability to change the situation [78]. Therefore, we studied such practices of ecological behavior that residents themselves can implement in their daily life. Everyday practices reflect the degree to which people are aware of the environmental problem and the ability to influence the situation.

We proceed from the assumption that the following factors determine the behavior of people:

- the cognitive capabilities of people who determine the understanding and perception of nature [80,81];
- the value-affective component that determines the attitude towards nature [82,83].

The study of international and Russian experience of environmental behavior made it possible to identify the factors influencing citizens' behavior and draw up a questionnaire that helps reveal the features of the environmental behavior of citizens of the megalopolis.

When conducting empirical research, we formulated the following hypotheses:

- (1) Founding hypothesis: The key environmental behavior practices of the youth of the city of Ekaterinburg are saving in the consumption of energy resources (water, gas, and electricity), handing over unnecessary things to stores for recycling, and purchasing energy-saving household appliances.
- (2) Consequence hypotheses:
 - From the youth point of view, the ecological situation in Ekaterinburg is worse than in other Russian cities.
 - The youth of the city of Ekaterinburg consider it necessary to generalize the practices of environmental behavior among the city's population.
 - The key factor influencing the formation of environmental behavior practices of young people is the practice of environmental behavior of the parental family.

- Most young people receive information about environmental behavior and environmental issues from news communities in the social networks VKontakte, Instagram, and city news portals E1, Typical Ekaterinburg.
- The level of young people's education in the city of Ekaterinburg has the most significant impact on the experience and the breadth of application of environmental practices.

To define the founding hypothesis, we turned to the conceptualization of ecological behavior through its definition through the impact on the environment [12]. Determination of the ecological behavior of citizens through the impact on the environment in the historical perspective was associated with the satisfaction of human needs in safety, movement, power, status [84]. However, for modern interpretations, the impact on the environment has received the following meaning: the impact on the environment is an action performed to change the habitat [85]. We follow the point that there is a correlation between environmental beliefs and behavior [75,86]. The role of motivation in the basis of ecological behavior presupposes an appeal to sociocultural factors that determine socialization and the life of an individual [75,76]. The hypothesis that the level of education of people determines their ecological behavior is based on research [36,87], which notes that a higher level of education and well-being of society implies a higher level of consumption and a more conscious approach to changing environmental habits.

The next task of the study is surveying young people through an online survey and its analysis. The survey of young people was considered in an online survey, entering answers to an electronic questionnaire in Google Forms. This study method limited the number of participants to those who had access to a computer, tablet, or smartphone with Internet access.

Research instruments: an electronic questionnaire consisting of open and closed questions, including a screening question. We used an online survey created in Google Forms using the questionnaire posting method. The survey used a random sample, and age indication was used as a screening question. As the environmental behavior of young people was studied, questionnaires from individuals were accepted for analysis, indicating the age from 14 to 34 years.

The information processing of this study was realized using the Vortex program, version 10.0, and a general statistical calculation was performed. For each question, tables of linear distribution were built and calculated as two-dimensional and multidimensional tables. An analysis was also implemented with the calculation of the correlation coefficients of Cramer, Eta, Student, Pearson, Gamma, coefficient F; the values of the coefficients were checked for the level of significance. The following types of graphs were built: circular, bar, strip, and polar profiles.

The toolkit consisted of two blocks, a total of 32 questions in the interview form. The developed toolkit was used for both men and women. This study includes questions to identify the perceptions of Ekaterinburg youth about the environmental situation, the respondents' level of knowledge about environmental practices and their implementation in life, and their positioning of young people regarding environmental behavior. We did not use self-report questionnaires for respondents to assess personality. Self-report tests are popular with professional psychologists; however, they are limited by the influence of social desirability standards and attitudinal behavior [88]. This circumstance requires a deep psychological study of the respondents, which goes beyond the tasks set for the study.

Two filter questions were included in the interview form: the locality of permanent residence and the respondent's age.

The questionnaire was aimed at identifying the attitude of young people to two groups of questions:

The questionnaire was aimed at identifying the attitude of young people to two groups of issues:

- (1) Actual problems in the city of Ekaterinburg, in the opinion of young people living on its territory.

Indicators:

- Attitude to socio-economic problems;
- Assessment of the ecological situation in Ekaterinburg.

(2) Environmental practices of the youth of the city of Ekaterinburg.

Indicators:

- Public awareness of the types of environmental practices;
- Application of environmental practices on an ongoing basis;
- Information sources for updating knowledge in the framework of environmental practices.

The questionnaire was sent from 1 April 2021 until 22 April 2021.

Collected data on 400 respondents; women made up 51.5% and men 48.5% of the respondents.

In total, 57.5% of the respondents are not in any relationship; 42.5% (85 people) are in a registered marriage.

Further, 52% have higher education, 18.5% have incomplete higher education, 10.5% have two or more higher educations or a scientific degree, 10% have secondary education, and 4% have a specialized secondary education.

The question of the material security of the respondents gave the following results:

- 59% of the respondents have enough money to buy food and clothing, but larger purchases have to be postponed;
- 30% find it difficult only to buy expensive things;
- for 8% of the respondents at present, the family practically cannot deny itself anything;
- 3% experience financial difficulties in providing essential goods.

Age of respondents:

- 13% of respondents aged 14–17 years old;
- 25.5% of respondents aged 18–24 years old;
- 26.0% of respondents aged 25–29 years old;
- 35.5% of respondents aged 30–34 years old.

The need to identify the relationship between individuals' ecological behavior and socio-demographic characteristics is based on the study of simple models of ecological behavior [37,89,90].

Limitations: The authors of the article limited themselves to studying the opinions of young people in Ekaterinburg. The choice was due to the choice of the study of the opinion of young people in the metropolis, namely, the center of concentration of industrial, personnel, and innovation potential. More than 40% of all industry in Russia is located in the Sverdlovsk region, the administrative center of which is Ekaterinburg.

3. Results

The article aimed to investigate the attitude of Ekaterinburg youth to the practice of ecological behavior. The first question to the respondents was: How much is the problem of ecology expressed at present from their point of view? When answering this question, a significant majority of survey participants noted that environmental problems are most acute in modern society (80%). Understanding the importance and globality of environmental problems, the development of the environmental education system creates opportunities for the formation of environmental culture.

Thus, the youth of Ekaterinburg has developed environmental culture. However, there are contradictions as although the majority notes that environmental problems are acutely before society, many are not ready to take responsibility for the reproduction of eco-practitioners.

The results were obtained to assess the severity of environmental problems (Figure 1). Note that the answer "Difficult to answer" is the answer of 1% of respondents, and those

who deny environmental problems—0.5% of respondents. Thus, environmental issues are the subject of their attention for the overwhelming majority.

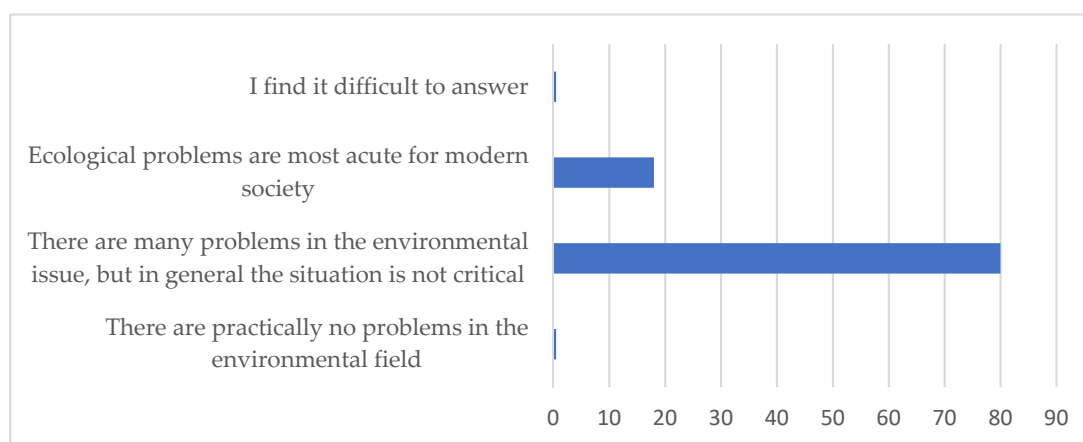


Figure 1. Assessment of the severity of the respondents to environmental issues.

To study the attitude of young people to the environmental situation in the city of Ekaterinburg, we considered the assessment of the current situation and the splintering tendency, the differences between Ekaterinburg and other Russian cities, the specification of the existing problems, and those responsible for regulating environmental issues. We assumed that from the view of the Ekaterinburg youth, the ecological situation in Ekaterinburg is worse than in other cities of Russia.

Based on the data obtained through the survey, almost every second respondent (56%) noted that the ecological situation in Ekaterinburg is currently unsatisfactory.

It is important to note that only 3% of the respondents answered unequivocally that the ecological situation in Ekaterinburg is good. Despite a rather negative assessment of the environmental situation at present, almost a third of the respondents (31.5%) noted that the current situation has improved over the past 3–5 years (Figure 2). At the same time, a third of the respondents (35.5%) noted that the situation remains unchanged.

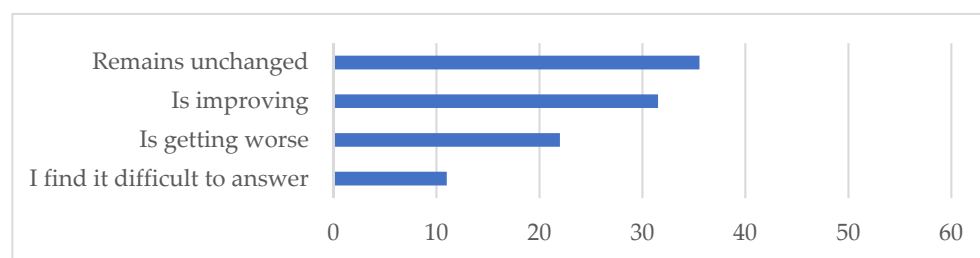


Figure 2. Assessment of changes in the ecological situation in Ekaterinburg over the past 3–5 years, %.

There were three groups responsible for solving existing environmental problems, from the point of view of the respondents (Figure 3):

- regional authorities and the townspeople have greater responsibility;
- federal authorities and heads of enterprises have the less responsibility;
- plant managers and environmental organizations have the least responsibility.

However, even though most of the respondents believe that the citizens and the regional authorities should be responsible, the least significant ones were actively chosen and made up 40%. Accordingly, the solution to the problem is really seen as a comprehensive, joint effort of all actors.

Thus, citizens' environmental behavior should be formal, enshrined in regulatory enactments, responsibility, and personal morals.

Figure 3 shows a significant majority (89%) of the survey participants noted that regional authorities' actions to improve the city's environmental situation are not noticeable to them. The respondents could give several answers. On average, respondents chose 3.7 answer options. Accordingly, we can conclude that the political environment in ecology remains undeveloped. This circumstance may contribute to the insufficient formation of public awareness among the population, which we examined in the theoretical part of the work. Environmental consciousness affects the reproduction of environmental practices in society. An unformed consciousness may indicate the reasons for not reproducing these practices, or reproducing only a tiny part of them.

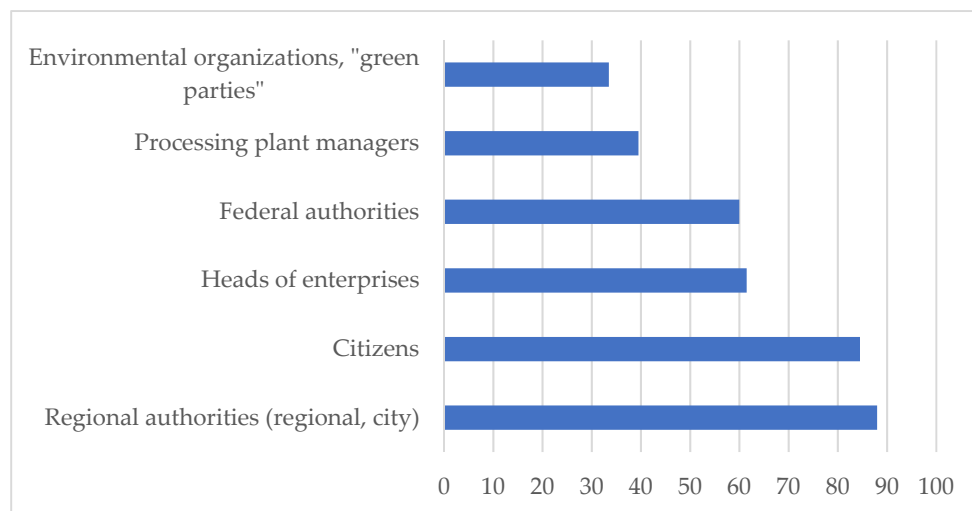


Figure 3. Responsible for solving environmental problems.

The next question asked to the respondents: Is the state of ecology in Ekaterinburg different from other cities in Russia? (Figure 4).

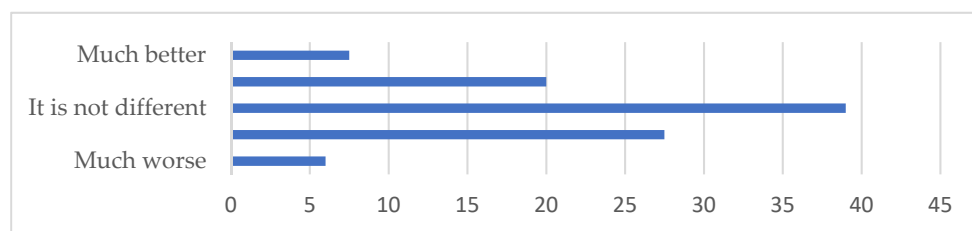


Figure 4. Opinion of respondents about the difference in the state of ecology in the city of Ekaterinburg from other cities of Russia.

Based on the data obtained, we can see that from the point of view of the respondents, the ecological situation does not have any pronounced differences (39%) or is slightly worse: 33.5% is the sum of the ratings "A little worse" and "Much worse."

The respondents pointed to the existence of differences in the situation in Ekaterinburg and other cities. The respondents identified both positive and negative differences, with some advantages of the latter. Therefore, among the characteristics that complicate the ecological situation in Ekaterinburg, 48% attributed many industrial enterprises with hazardous industries, 15.7%—an abundance of garbage on the streets of the city. However, some indicators have positive differences—many green zones were noted (14.7%), an initiative society (4.9%), and the presence of the All-Russian eco-cultural project in Ekaterinburg—#NEMUZEIMUSOR (5.9%).

The questions were asked to the respondents in an open forum, the options presented were suggested by the participants, and we enlarged them into logical categories (Table 1).

Table 1. Differences of ecology in Ekaterinburg from other cities of Russia according respondents, %.

No.	Differences	Respondents, %
1.	Negative differences	
2.	Many enterprises with harmful emissions	48.0
3.	Abundance of garbage on city streets	15.7
4.	No tangible fines for environmental pollution	2.9
5.	Positive differences:	
6.	Lots of “green spaces”	14.7
7.	Initiative society	4.9
8.	“Nemuseum of garbage”	5.9
9.	Difficult to answer	7.8

From the point of view of the research participants, the most pressing problems in the ecological situation of Russian cities are garbage, dirt, landfills, unsanitary conditions (82%), deforestation (73.5%), water pollution, poor drinking water (73%), the state of air (71%) (Table 2). The sum of responses exceeds 100% as the respondents could give several answers. On average, respondents chose 6.4 options.

On the one hand, respondents choose garbage, dirt, landfills, and unsanitary conditions as the most pressing problem. This choice is “part” of the personal moral responsibility of each individual. However, despite this, the respondents believe that the authorities should be the main ones in solving environmental problems. That is, the respondents shift responsibility for the environmental situation to formal legal regulation. Accordingly, the following conclusion arises: the ecological consciousness of society is not sufficiently formed for personal moral responsibility.

Table 2. Fundamental problems of the ecological situation in Russia.

No.	Problems	Respondents, %
1.	Garbage, dirt, landfills, unsanitary conditions	82.0
2.	Deforestation	73.5
3.	Pollution of water bodies, poor drinking water	73.0
4.	Condition of air, its pollution	71.0
5.	Large number of cars, proximity to motorways, exhaust fumes	68.5
6.	Impact of enterprises on the environment, lack of treatment facilities	67.5
7.	Utilization of household waste	65.5
8.	Depletion of natural resources	47.0
9.	Nuclear waste	35.0
10.	Climate change, fires, floods	29.5
11.	Genetically modified foods	18.0
12.	Lack of water	9.0

Based on the data obtained from of the survey, we can draw some conclusions:

- (1) Every second participant in the study assesses the ecological situation in the city of Ekaterinburg as “bad.”
- (2) Only a third of the respondents noted that the ecological situation has improved over the past 3–5 years.

- (3) Representatives of regional authorities and citizens should be responsible for improving the environmental situation in the city.
- (4) A significant majority of the research participants did not notice the regional authorities' actions in improving the city's environmental situation.
- (5) The ecological situation is one of the most acute problems for the youth of the city of Ekaterinburg.
- (6) The ecological situation in Ekaterinburg is worse than in other cities in Russia. This point is due to the location of many enterprises with harmful emissions into the atmosphere within the city.
- (7) The most pressing problems in the ecological situation of Russian cities are garbage, dirt, landfills, unsanitary conditions (82%), deforestation (73.5%), water pollution, poor drinking water (73%), and air-condition (71%).

We assumed that, from the Ekaterinburg youth point of view, the ecological situation in their city is worse than in other cities of Russia. This hypothesis was confirmed.

The participants in the study answered the question of the need for a clear implementation of environmental practices by people. Some respondents noted that all people should use eco-behavior practices without exception (54%). However, many also indicated that eco-behavior practices should be carried out independently (45%).

Environmental behavior is an element of public awareness. Environmental behavior is manifested in constantly reproduced actions shared by society to preserve and improve the environment and nature. The youth of Ekaterinburg does not have a stable formed system of reproducible environmental practices (Figure 5). However, there is a basis for their development due to their interest in environmental problems.

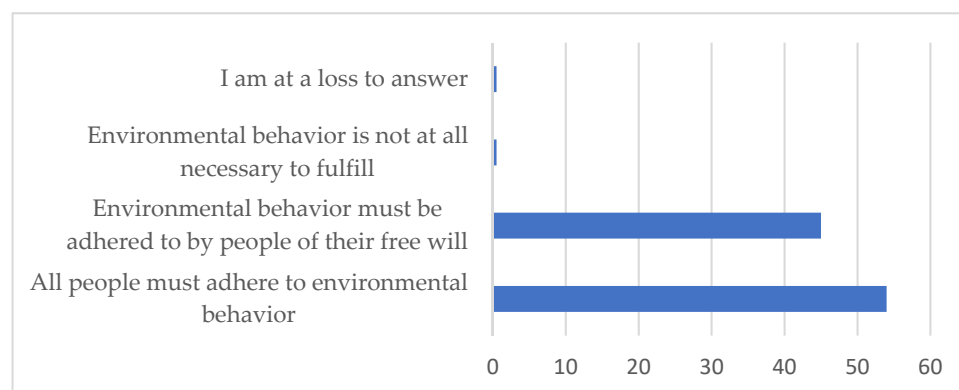


Figure 5. Attitude towards environmental practices, %.

Figure 5 shows the following data. Regarding positioning, half of the respondents (54%) noted that all people must adhere to environmental behavior, and 0.5% found it difficult to answer this question. More than half of the respondents position themselves as environmentally responsible citizens, i.e., a person who leads an eco-friendly lifestyle. Environmentalists take responsibility for their actions and daily habits in an effort to minimize the negative impact on the environment. Ecologists improve their behavior and act in the interests of all living beings and nature in general (Figure 6).

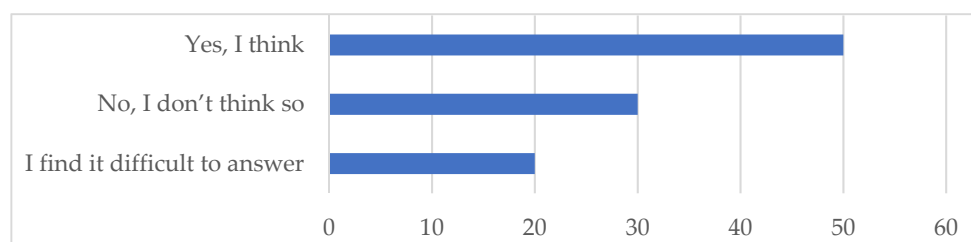


Figure 6. Positioning of respondents as an “Environmentalist,” %.

We have identified the types of eco-activists based on the reproduction of ecological behavior, attitude to ecology, and public awareness in environmental issues (Figure 7):

- (1) “Not indifferent”—residents with a civic stance who are not indifferent to the topic of ecology. People who want to be well-informed in sustainable living for the purpose of personal use in everyday life.
- (2) “Eco activists”—public figures and active citizens who show themselves as environmentalists.
- (3) “Eco-speakers”—people who have the necessary competencies in the field of ecology are introduced into the educational process in the context of environmental protection, conduct master classes, pieces of training in online and offline formats.

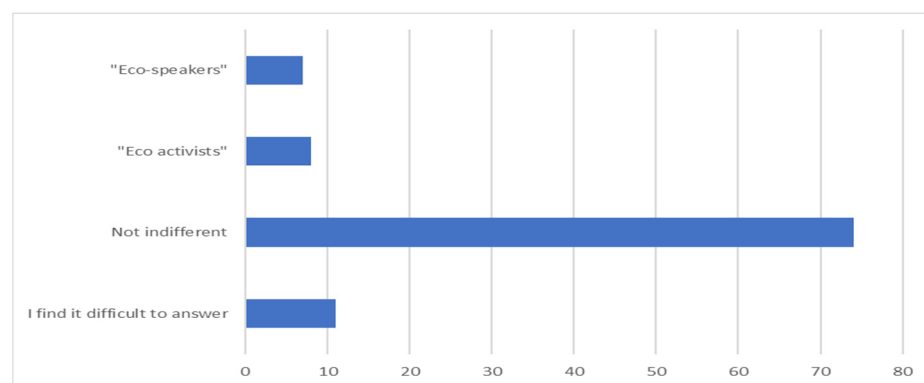


Figure 7. Positioning of respondents as an “Ecologist”.

We considered the practices of environmental behavior known to the respondents (Table 3). The sum of responses exceeds 100% as the respondents could give several answers. On average, respondents chose 12.9 options. Most of the study participants noted that they knew about the following ways of ecological behavior:

- the use of cloth bags (shoppers) instead of plastic bags (99%);
- delivery to points of reception of recyclable materials (e.g., plastic, waste paper) and waste or disposal in specially designated containers (98%);
- using reusable bottles and cups (95%);
- delivery to reception points of heavier recyclable materials (e.g. batteries, electrical appliances) and waste or disposal in specially designated containers (94.5%).

Table 3. Types of environmental behavior are known to the respondents.

No.	Types of Environmental Behavior	Respondents, %
1.	Use of cloth bags (fruit, shoppers, shopping bags) instead of plastic bags	99.0
2.	Delivery to points of reception of recyclable materials and waste or disposal in specially designated containers: plastic, waste paper	98.0
3.	Using refillable bottles and cups	95.0
4.	Delivery to points of reception of recyclable materials and waste or disposal in specially designated containers: batteries, electrical appliances	94.5
5.	Handing over rags (unwearable things) for recycling	84.0
6.	Use of vehicles without harmful emissions (bicycle, scooter)	82.0
7.	Refusal of fur coats/products from natural fur and leather	81.0
8.	Use of cosmetics and medicines that have not been tested on animals	81.0
9.	Economic use of energy resources (water, gas, electricity)	80.0
10.	Repair/creative recycling of unnecessary or old things	74.5
11.	Using public transport instead of personal (car)	73.5
12.	Vegetarian food	69.0
13.	Participation in activities aimed at landscaping, cleaning the city, “Subotnick”	59.5
14.	Purchase of energy-saving household appliances	52.0
15.	Acquisition of local brands (avoiding the consumption of mass-produced products)	50.0
16.	Delivery of unnecessary things to shops	44.5
17.	Using a train as an alternative to an airplane to reduce the carbon footprint (CO ₂ emissions)	39.5

The presented data may indicate that the respondents are familiar with most of the existing environmental practices. Least often, the respondents noted using a train as an alternative to an aircraft to reduce the carbon footprint (CO₂ emissions) (39.5%), handing over unnecessary items to stores (44.5%), and purchasing local brands—avoiding the consumption of mass-produced products (50%).

Research into this issue led to the following statements:

- (1) The participants of the research note that the problem of the ecological situation is the most acute one facing modern society.
- (2) The respondents’ positions on the general implementation of eco-behavior practices were divided: some of the respondents believed that all people should perform eco-practices, and others believed that the practices should be applied at will.
- (3) Half of the respondents noted that they consider themselves as “Environmentalist.”
- (4) Among the respondents positioning themselves as an “Environmentalist,” most consider themselves to be of the “Not indifferent” type.
- (5) Participants in the study are aware of most of the possible environmental practices.

Our hypothesis that the youth of the city of Ekaterinburg considers the general dissemination of environmental practices among the population of the city necessary has been partially confirmed.

When studying the factors influencing the formation of youth eco-behavior practices, we hypothesize that the key factor is the parental family’s eco-behavior practices. Ver-

ification of this statement led to the study of how respondents learned about possible environmental practices (Figure 8).

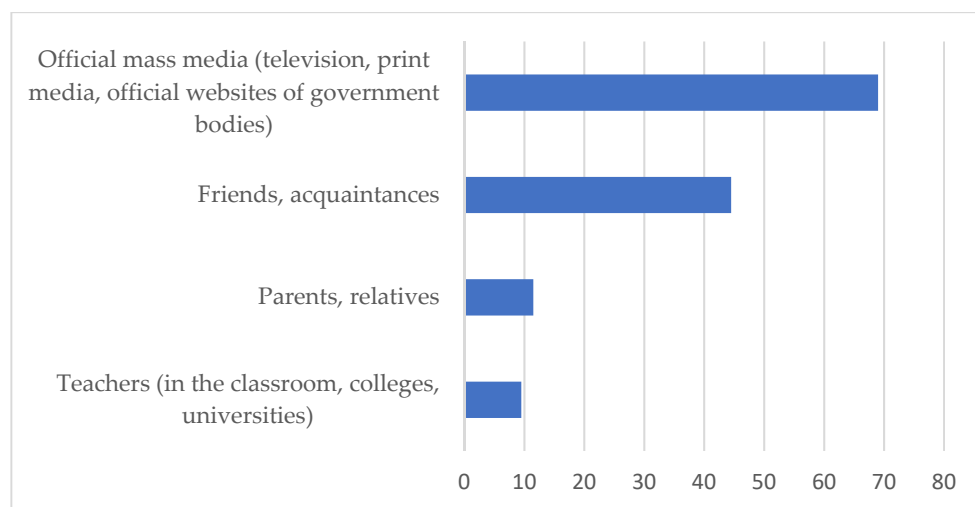


Figure 8. Sources from which respondents learned about environmental practices, %.

Figure 8 shows that the key sources for obtaining information on environmental practices for young people are the media (69%) and friends/acquaintances (44.5%); when compiling the list of alternatives for this issue, we assumed the inclusion of social networks and the Internet in the media, but some of the respondents have highlighted them additionally. The respondents could give several answers. On average, respondents chose 1.4 answer options.

At the same time, respondents noted that they most often discuss environmental problems with friends/acquaintances (85.5%) or parents/relatives (64%) (Figure 9). The respondents could give several answers. On average, respondents chose 1.9 options.

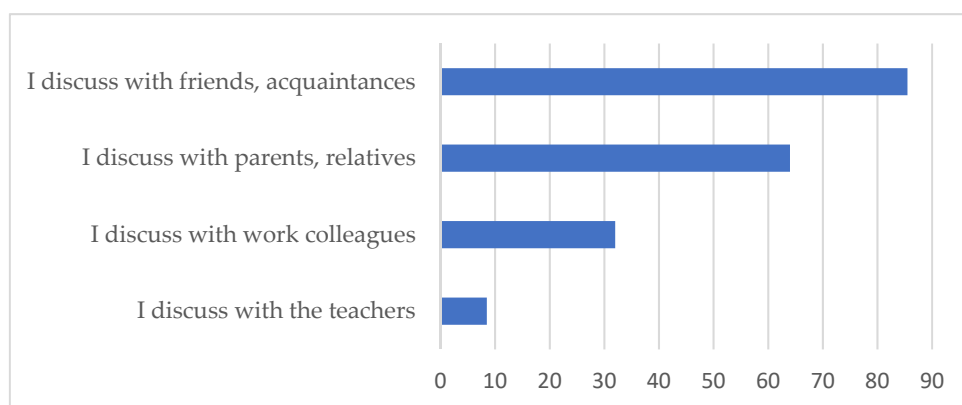


Figure 9. Practices of discussing environmental problems in the environment of respondents, %.

To manifestation the influence of these factors, we asked the respondents what prompted them to use the practice of environmental behavior (Table 4).

Table 4. Reasons for applying environmental practices.

No.	Reason	Respondents, %
1.	Saw information on the Internet/in the media	54.5
2.	Example of friends/relatives	24.8
3.	Deterioration of ecology in the city	13.3
4.	Difficult to answer	2.4
5.	Example from other countries	2.4
6.	I have an education related to ecology	2.4

Table 4 shows that every second respondents (54.5%) noted that the information presented on the Internet prompted them to use environmental behavior. For every fifth respondent, examples of friends/relatives (24.8%) acted as an incentive.

The main reasons for not applying environmental practices, from the point of view of the respondents, are the positions (Table 5):

- the behavior of citizens does not in any way affect the current environmental situation (85%);
- there are too few supporters of environmental behavior to influence the current situation (65.5%).

Table 5. Reasons for not applying environmental practices.

No.	Reasons	Respondents, %
1.	Respondents believe that their behavior does not influence the current ecological situation in any way	85.0
2.	Respondents believe that there are too few supporters of environmental behavior to influence the current situation	65.5
3.	Respondents consider environmental practices costly	52.5
4.	Respondents unaware of existing practices	50.5
5.	Respondents consider eco-practitioners as ineffective	50.5
6.	Respondents do not use environmental practices because it is not accepted in their environment	44.0
7.	Respondents do not consider it necessary to use environmental practices	42.5
8.	Other (no time, laziness)	6.5

The respondents could give several answers. On average, the respondents chose 3.9 answer options.

The specific experiences of the respondents based on the following application of environmental practices (Table 6):

- Regularly applied practices of environmental behavior are handing over to points of reception of recyclable materials and waste or disposed of in specially designated containers: plastic, wastepaper, batteries, electrical appliances.
- The practice of environmental behavior applied periodically is the purchase of things and goods from local brands and savings in the use of energy resources (water, gas, and electricity).
- Rarely practiced environmental practices are vegetarian eating and choosing a train as an alternative to an airplane to reduce our carbon footprint (CO₂ emissions).

Table 6. Environmental practices used by respondents.

No.	Practice	Regularly	From Time to Time	Not Used
1.	I use cloth bags (fruit, shoppers, shopping bags) instead of plastic bags	56.5	34.0	9.5
2.	I use refillable bottles and cups	45.0	41.5	13.5
3.	I choose ethical cosmetics and medicines (which are not tested on animals)	14.0	41.0	45.0
4.	I refuse fur coats/products from natural fur and leather	49.0	30.0	21.0
5.	I adhere to a vegetarian diet	14.0	22.0	64.0
6.	I hand over to points of reception of recyclable materials and waste or dispose of in specially designated containers: plastic, waste paper	62.5	20.5	17.0
7.	I hand over to collection points for recyclable materials and waste or dispose of in specially designated containers: batteries, electrical appliances	62.5	18.5	19.0
8.	I hand over rags (things unsuitable for wearing) for recycling	52.5	22.0	25.5
9.	I donate unnecessary things to shops/donate to charity	44.0	29.0	27.0
10.	I purchase local brands—avoiding mass-produced products	14.0	47.0	39.0
11.	I give my things a new life: I repair/make/sew from unnecessary or old things	26.5	43.5	30.0
12.	I use energy resources economically (water, gas, electricity)	43.0	47.0	10.0
13.	I use public transport instead of my personal car to reduce the emission of harmful substances	57.0	31.5	11.5
14.	I use vehicles without harmful emissions (bicycle, scooter) to reduce the emission of harmful substances	22.0	44.0	34.0
15.	I choose trains as an alternative to aircraft to reduce my carbon footprint (CO ₂ emissions)	8.5	34.5	57.0
16.	I participate in activities aimed at landscaping, cleaning the city, “Subbotniks”	7.0	42.5	50.5
17.	I purchase energy-saving household appliances	31.5	23.5	45.0

The estimates of the frequency of application of eco-behavior practices by the environment of the respondents is notable. During the survey, it was revealed that the least common practice of environmental behavior is used by relatives and teachers/managers of the respondents and most often by close friends (Table 7).

Table 7. The environment of the respondents, resorting to the practices of ecological behavior.

No.	Surroundings of Respondents	Regularly	Used from Time to Time	Not Used
1.	Parents	9.5	46.5	44.0
2.	Relatives	1.5	37.0	61.5
3.	Close friends	21.5	65.0	13.5
4.	Acquaintances/classmates/work colleagues	15.0	61.0	24.0
5.	Teachers/supervisors	1.5	43.0	55.5

Our hypothesis that the key factor influencing the formation of eco-behavior practices of young people is the practice of environmental behavior of the parental family has not been confirmed.

It is important to note that:

- (1) The key sources for obtaining information on environmental practices for young people are the mass media presented on the Internet and social networks.
- (2) Young people discuss environmental issues with friends/relatives.
- (3) Publications on the Internet act as an incentive for the application of environmental practices.
- (4) The following positions stand as barriers to the application of environmental practices:
 - the respondents believe that their behavior does not influence the current ecological situation in any way;
 - respondents believe that too few supporters of environmental behavior influence the current situation.
- (5) The most common practices of environmental behavior among young people are handing over to points of reception of recyclable materials and waste or disposal of in specially designated containers: plastic, wastepaper, batteries, electrical appliances.
- (6) Less often, among young people, environmental behavior is used by relatives and teachers/managers.

Analyzing the influence of socio-demographic characteristics on the application of environmental behavior practices shows that no significant statistical dependencies were revealed in our study. At the same time, we recorded the influence of the gender of the respondents on the attitude towards the obligatory use of environmental practices. Table 8 shows that women are more likely than men to believe that all people should follow environmental practices.

Table 8. Influence of gender on attitudes towards the use of eco-behavior practices, %.

No.	Which of the Following Statements Most Accurately Describes Your Point of View?	Gender	
		Female	Male
1.	People should perform Eco practices of behavior at their request	51.1	48.9
2.	Eco-friendly behavioral practices must be observed by absolutely all people	52.8	47.2

Cramer V coefficient [0, 1]: 0.105, Probability of error (significance): 0.532.

Table 9 shows the influence of the income level of the respondents on the attitude towards the application of environmental practices. We cannot approve a clear correlation of indicators as, in our study, there were significantly fewer respondents with a low-income level. However, the data show that, as income levels increase, respondents are more likely to believe that all people should apply environmental practices. One of the hypotheses

of this study is the assumption that the level of education of young people in the city of Ekaterinburg has the most significant impact on the experience and the breadth of application of environmental practices. The data obtained do not provide any statistical confirmation of this hypothesis.

Table 9. Influence of the income level of respondents on the attitude to the application of environmental practices, %.

No.	Which of the Following Statements Most Accurately Describes Your Point of View?	Income				
		There Is Enough Money to Purchase Food and Clothing, and Larger Purchases Must Be Postponed	Buying the Most Durable Goods Is Straightforward, but We Cannot Buy an Apartment or a Car	There Is Enough Money So That You Do Not Deny Yourself Anything	There Is Not Enough Money Even to Buy Food	There Is Enough Money for the Purchase of Food Only
1.	People should perform eco-practices of behavior at their own request	57.8	33.3	7.8	0.0	1.1
2.	Eco-friendly behavioral practices must be observed by absolutely all people	59.3	27.8	8.3	3.7	0.9

Cramer V coefficient [0, 1]: 0.094, Probability of error (significance): 0.946.

One of the research questions was the question of the sources of information and the relevance of information that respondents receive from the media (Figure 10). To reveal this question, the respondents answered the following question: Did the respondents come across information about problems in the field of ecology and modern practices of environmental behavior during the last three months?

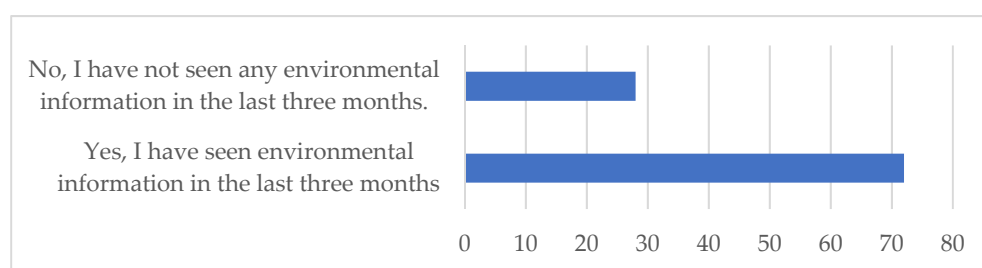


Figure 10. Informing respondents about environmental practices in the media during the last three months, %.

Less than a third of the study participants (28%) noted that they had not seen any environmental information in the last three months. At the same time, only 21.5% of respondents indicated that they regularly monitor environmental information (Figure 11).

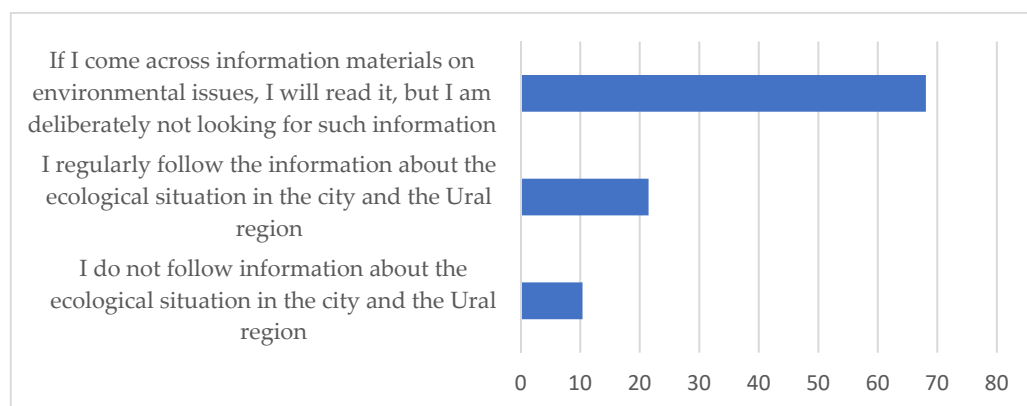


Figure 11. Search by respondents for information on environmental practices, %.

The information sources most often used by young people to obtain information about environmental problems are social networks, specialized sites, podcasts, and interviews of specialists and information portals (Table 10). The respondents could give several answers. On average, respondents chose 1.8 answer options.

Table 10. Sources of information on environmental practices used by respondents during the last 3 months.

No.	Sources of Information	Respondents, %
1.	Social networks	95.8
2.	Profile sites on ecology and environmental preservation	38.2
3.	Podcasts, interviews with experts	38.2
4.	Information portals ("E1", "Typical Ekaterinburg")	36.1
5.	Outdoor advertising (stands, billboards, posters on city streets)	26.4
6.	Television	14.6
7.	Other (shops)	10.4
8.	Radio	2.8

It is noteworthy that the revealed fact that the study participants actively noted the desire to obtain more information about the existing practices of environmental behavior (Figure 12).

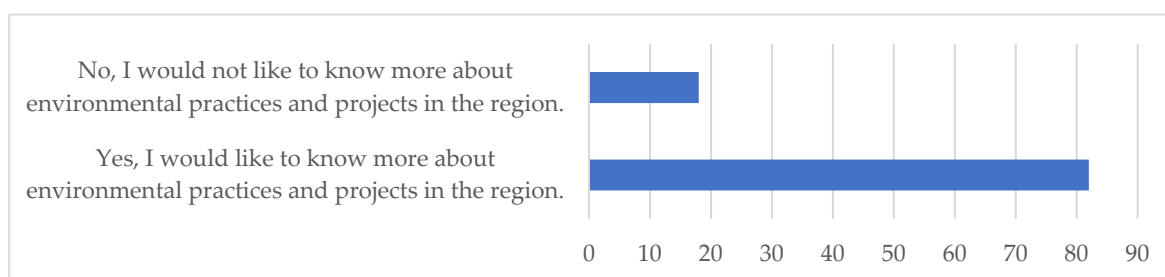


Figure 12. The need of respondents to learn more about existing environmental practices, %.

The most preferred source for obtaining information on eco-behavior practices for young people is social networks (Figure 13). The respondents could give several answers. On average, respondents chose 2.7 options.

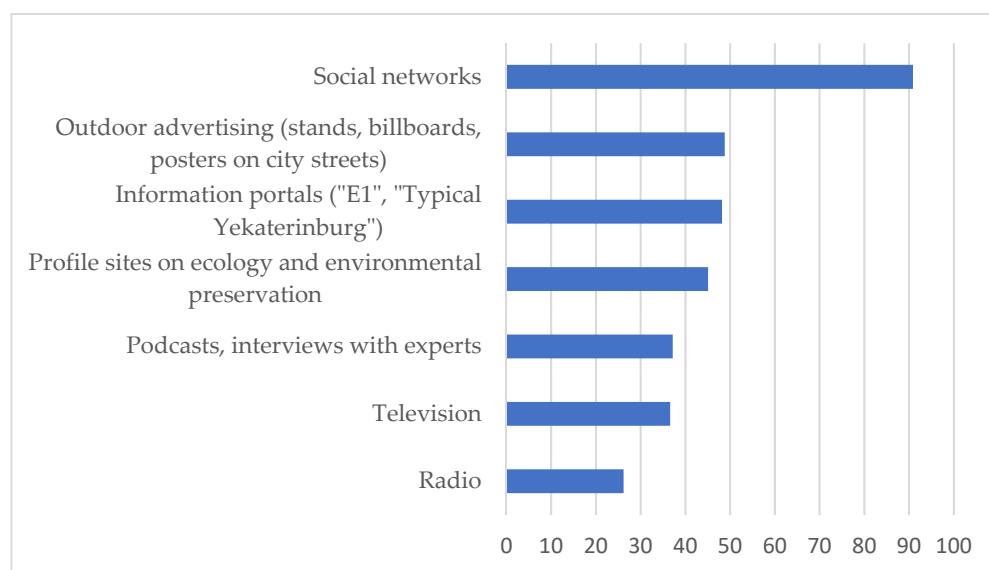


Figure 13. Sources preferred by respondents when receiving information on environmental practices, %.

Specifying the most popular social networks among young people, the research participants noted:

- (1) Instagram (94.5%);
- (2) V Kontakte (56.7%);
- (3) Telegram (54.9%);
- (4) YouTube (43.9%).

Among the people who could help attract young people to eco-behavior practices, the research participants most often noted bloggers, film actors, musicians, athletes, and eco-activists (Table 11). The respondents could give several answers. On average, respondents chose 4.7 options.

Table 11. Persons attracting young people to environmental behavior.

No.	Person	Respondents, %
1.	Bloggers	89.5
2.	Actors	62.5
3.	Musicians	59.5
4.	Athletes	55.5
5.	Eco-activists/ecological organizations	53.0
6.	TV presenters	40.5
7.	Journalists	40.0
8.	Scientists	37.5
9.	Deputies	28.5

Research data suggests the following:

- (1) The mass media actively covers the topic of environmental behavior practices.
- (2) Most young people pay attention to environmental issues and environmental practices but deliberately do not follow it.
- (3) Social networks are a key and preferred source of information on environmental practices for young people.

- (4) Most of the respondents would like to receive additional information about existing environmental practices.
- (5) The most popular social network for obtaining information on environmental practices among young people is Instagram, and the key persons are bloggers.

The research data confirmed the following hypothesis: most young people receive information about environmental behavior and environmental issues from news communities in social networks VKontakte and Instagram, and city news portals E1 and Typical Ekaterinburg.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

Summing up the empirical research, we can draw several analytical conclusions.

From the point of view of the youth of Ekaterinburg, the city's ecological situation is one of the most pressing problems. Despite minor improvements over the past 3–5 years, this problem does not lose relevance, and regional authorities and city residents should be responsible for its solution.

In general, the respondents showed themselves to be not indifferent to environmental issues and knowledgeable about most of the possible environmental practices. Most environmental practices are familiar to young people, but they are applied from time to time. Eco-behavior is encouraged and discussed among friends/acquaintances.

Our hypothesis that the youth of Ekaterinburg considers it necessary to spread environmental practices among the city's population has been partially confirmed. At the same time, the influence of the respondents' gender on the attitude towards the obligatory use of environmental practices was noted. The results show that women are more likely to believe that all people must comply with environmental standards.

When identifying factors in the formation of the ecological behavior of young people, we put forward a hypothesis that the key factor is the practice of ecological behavior of the parental family. This hypothesis was not confirmed.

We analyzed the influence of socio-demographic characteristics on environmental behavior practices. The results show that no significant statistical relationships were found.

The study of the influence of the respondents' income level on attitudes towards environmental practices did not lead to a clear correlation between the indicators as there were significantly fewer respondents with a low-income level in our study. However, the findings show that as income levels increase, respondents are more likely to believe that everyone should be environmentally friendly.

One of the hypotheses of this study was the assumption that the level of education of young people in Ekaterinburg has the most significant impact on the experience and breadth of application of environmental practices. The data obtained do not provide statistical confirmation of this hypothesis.

The key factors influencing the formation of environmental behavior practices are the mass media and social networks. The most popular social network for obtaining information on environmental practices among young people is Instagram, and the key persons are bloggers.

The key practices of the environmental behavior of the youth of the city of Ekaterinburg are the following:

- Regularly applied practices: handing over to reception points of recyclable materials and waste or disposal of in specially designated containers: plastic, waste paper, batteries, electrical appliances.
- Practices applied periodically: the acquisition of local brands and savings in the use of energy resources (water, gas, electricity).

The study of the current ecological situation in Ekaterinburg made it possible to conclude that the ecological problem arises not only and not simply as a problem of environmental pollution and other negative influences of human economic activity. This problem grows into transforming society's spontaneous impact on nature into a consciously, purposefully, systematically developing harmonious interaction. Analysis of scientific

sources and modern social processes shows that an active search for a new paradigm is underway in the sociological study of multifaceted environmental problems.

The study results showed that the key sources for obtaining information about environmental behavior practices for young people are the media, namely social networks, and messengers and friends/acquaintances. The reason is that other alternatives in the form of environmental education are not expected. Media for youth is one of the most important institutional factors of the country's formation of the ecological situation. This situation is evidenced by the study results that every second respondent noted that the information presented on the Internet prompted ecological behavior. For every fifth respondent, examples of friends acted as an incentive. Remarkably, the study participants actively noted the desire to obtain more information about the existing practices of environmental behavior.

Specifying the most popular social networks among young people, the research participants noted: Instagram, Vkontakte, Telegram, and YouTube. Additionally, among the people who could help attract young people to ecological behavior practices, the research participants most often noted bloggers, film actors, musicians, athletes, and eco-activists.

Media makes a significant contribution to the realization that the personal contribution of each person to the greening of the environment is possible through, for example, separate waste collection or participation in "subbotniks." Media enhances the environmental motivation of young people. Thus, we can conclude that social networks, messengers, and friends/acquaintances influence the formation and implementation of the ecological behavior of Ekaterinburg youth. This conclusion correlates with the idea that the more a positive result is encouraged by society, the better the chosen eco-oriented model of behavior is fixed [91–93].

The research materials allow the conclusion that there is no community as such in the city, which can affect the change in the environmental situation, which is the main reason for not applying environmental practices. The all-Russian eco-cultural project #NEMUZEIMUSORA is the primary and most ambitious regional project for uniting the ecological community. The assessments of the frequency of the practice of environmental behavior by the respondent's environment are notable. During the survey, it was revealed that the least common practice of eco-behavior is used by relatives and teachers/leaders of the respondents and the most common by close friends.

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