

UDC 355.021.2

DOI: 10.61727/ssspj/2.2023.36

Influence of community identification on pro-ecological behaviour of Ukrainians in war conditions

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Abstract. The study examines changes in the environmental behaviour of Ukrainians under the influence of military operations. One of the key predictors of such changes is the specific features of community identification of Ukrainians in the face of threat. The critical criterion of pro-ecological behaviour is considered to be the environmental responsibility of Ukrainians. The study involves several stages of qualitative and quantitative data collection. In the process of data analysis, such qualitative methods as content and thematic analysis of narratives are also used. Quantitative data analysis is performed using regression analysis, multivariate analysis of variance, and correlation analysis. Some components of environmental responsibility, such as activity, emotion, and value, were identified. During the quantitative data collection stage, the role of civil, territorial, and professional identity as predictors of increasing environmental responsibility of Ukrainians is recorded. In general, the growing role of civil identity as a consolidating factor for the formation of an integrated identity that can withstand threats, including environmental ones, is interpreted. Strengthening the emotional component affects the sense of environmental threat at the subjective level and contributes to the awareness of the need to preserve the environmental well-being of the state. Strengthening the manifestation of European identity has a positive impact on the integration of pro-ecological European values. Identifying the interaction of professional and civil identities can serve as an indicator of the strategic importance of Ukraine as an environment for work and personal realisation

Keywords: military operations; community identification; environmental responsibility; environmental behaviour; civil identity

INTRODUCTION

Ukraine is a country that has a substantial biodiversity of natural resources, and this diversity, in turn, determines the economic vector of development and social structure of Ukrainians. Identification with land and nature was crucial for Ukrainians and acted as a factor in preserving Ukrainian identity (Zemliuk, 2007; Kulchytskyi, 1949). However, with the independence of the environmental sector, reverse processes have occurred, characterised by overexploitation of resources,

their pollution, and commercialisation. Accordingly, the environmental situation in Ukraine, even before the full-scale invasion, required urgent actions to improve it, but military aggression caused irreparable damage. Notably, the specific feature of managing natural resources (for example, forest resources) in Ukraine is that management decisions are made not to prevent threats and risky situations, but after they have already occurred, which leads to the use of excessive potential

Article's History: Received: 28.08.2023 Revised: 14.11.2023 Accepted: 26.12.2023

Suggested Citation:

Strilchuk, O. (2023). Influence of community identification on pro-ecological behaviour of Ukrainians in war conditions. *Scientific Studios on Social and Political Psychology*, 29(2), 36-43. doi: 10.61727/ssspj/2.2023.36.



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for solving the problem and violating the principles of sustainable development (Kovalchuk, 2023).

However, when outlining this problem, it is important to note not only the results of studies on the destruction of Ukrainian resources but also to refer to the documented and widely presented facts of damage caused by the Russian Federation as unprecedented in modern European history. To date, military operations are being conducted on the territory of more than nine hundred objects of the nature reserve fund with an area of more than 12,406 square kilometres, equaling about a third of the nature reserve fund of Ukraine. About 200 territories of the Emerald network with an area of 2.9 million hectares are under threat of destruction. Constant fires are recorded in forests in the North and East of Ukraine. Ecological biodiversity is being lost in the East, North, and South of Ukraine – the protected areas of the Kinburn Spit and Dzharylhach island are being affected. There is pollution of the soil and sea with petroleum products. Fires often occur at industrial facilities due to military operations (Baleha & Doktor, 2023). As a result of constant rocket attacks, the environment and water bodies are polluted with chemicals – during the detonation of rockets and artillery shells, a number of dangerous chemical compounds are formed: carbon monoxide (CO), carbon dioxide (CO₂), water vapour (H₂O), nitric oxide (NO), nitrous oxide (N₂O), nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), formaldehyde (CH₂O), cyanide vapours (HCN), nitrogen (N₂), and a large amount of toxic organic matter, oxidise the surrounding soils, wood, sod (Perha, n.d.).

Further deterioration of the environmental situation poses an additional threat to the country's national security, which has already been disrupted by military operations, and further destruction of its political, social, and economic structure. According to the government's forecasts, war, migration, and the consequences of the pandemic will negatively affect Ukraine's adaptation to climate change, and mass relocation of the population increases the burden on natural objects of the environment (Popyk, 2022). Deterioration of environmental conditions can affect not only the economic development of the state but also the physical and mental health of the nation.

Ukrainians have faced the current severe environmental consequences complicated by previous environmental negligence, which was caused by the low level of environmental responsibility of Ukrainians, which is based on several reasons. Ukrainian researcher O. Rudomino-Dusyatska (2009) recorded a contradiction between the declaration of ecocentric manifestation of ecological consciousness and the actual ecological activity among young people. High indicators of environmental responsibility were not manifested in specific actions. This behaviour was associated with a low level of development of strong-willed qualities of young people. It can be assumed that these trends were also

associated with the low level of motivation of Ukrainians to save their own resources due to the lack of actualisation of civil identity. The constant alienation of Ukrainian territories prevented the formation of final attachment and responsibility for them (Strilchuk, 2022). A full-scale invasion by the Russian Federation shows that despite the establishment of sovereign borders, this alienation continues, once again forcing Ukrainians to cut ties with territorial communities. Another reason is economic poverty, which causes either excessive exploitation of resources or migration – both labour and general. According to the social comparison theory, group members are psychologically motivated to see their groups as more positive compared to other groups (Suls & Wills, 1991). However, in 2018, according to a sociological survey, a third of Ukrainians, for economic, social, and political reasons, wanted to leave the state and move to states with a better, in their opinion, not only economic but also social way of life.

Environmentally responsible behaviour has practical forms of expression – sorting, conservation (of natural resources), utilisation. However, it is based on a socio-psychological basis founded on personal and social values, personal qualities, and identity features. Environmental degradation is a subject of study in the natural sciences, but its causes lie in the humanities and social sciences (Anderson, 1992).

Researchers point to five aspects of assessing environmentally responsible behaviour: environmental management, or physical actions, beliefs, consumer or economic, political, and legal actions (Hsu & Roth, 1998). People are more likely to exhibit proecological behaviour if they feel in harmony with nature or understand the practical benefits of such behaviour (Paswan *et al.*, 2017).

The study of environmentally responsible behaviour outlines a large field of research that can be based on a large number of predictors of individual and social order. In particular, values, attitudes, socio-demographic factors, and the impact of interpersonal relationships on the formation of an environmentally oriented "green identity". The main objective of this study is to assess the role of community identification of Ukrainians of different levels of manifestation as a possible prerequisite for changing environmental responsibility. Community identity is characterised by various forms of community affiliation beyond existing social contacts (Vasiutynskyi, 2010). The scientific context of the examination of the influence of identity on proecology constantly proves the existence of links between its various types and environmentally oriented behaviour. V. Pong & K.-P. Tam (2023) explore the psychological basis of global identity as associated with proecological behaviour and highlight duty, responsibility, and relevance as the main mechanisms that form this connection. Global identity is characterised by negative correlations with traits such as ethnocentrism, authoritarianism, social

dominance orientation, and egocentrism, and is positively linked to the values of universalism, care, and justice. Therewith, it is impossible to avoid the fact of attachment to the place as a motivational factor for the ecological preservation of territories. Thus, the values of more global forms of identity can determine behaviour at the local level.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The investigation procedure included several steps. In the first stage, qualitative and quantitative research methods were applied. The stage involved identifying the basic socio-psychological constructs that underlie the ecological behaviour of Ukrainians and the most substantial forms of community identification of Ukrainians. The interview method was used to collect detailed responses of respondents and, identifying the main indicators of the behaviour of Ukrainians in the environmental sphere in the context of military operations based on them. The interview was conducted online and included two questions about the environmental situation in the context of military operations: 1) have your views and general attitude to environmental problems changed in Ukraine or in your region in particular? 2) are you concerned about environmental pollution, the problem of destroying or preserving certain natural areas, etc. A total of 91 respondents aged 18 to 72 years were surveyed, 63% female and 37% male. The survey was conducted in October 2022. Using the methods of content analysis and thematic data analysis, groups of respondents who differ in their attitude to environmental problems were identified and certain forms of environmental behaviour of Ukrainians were recorded. From the proposed set of identities, respondents chose the most meaningful ones for them, as a result of which, the seven most prominent community identities were recorded: civil, local, religious, professional, east slavic, European, ethnic. An additional quantitative survey of 115 respondents aged 17 to 70 years was conducted to clarify the specifics of a positive or negative change in the importance of environmental problems and possible reasons for such a change, where 47% of respondents were men and 53% – women, 24% of respondents were in Europe with refugee status at the time of the survey.

The second, main stage of the study, involved assessing the impact of a certain type of community identification on the environmental behaviour of Ukrainians. Thematic units obtained at the stage of qualitative data analysis were used to design the questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The proposed indicator statements had the form of a semantic differential. The first questionnaire was aimed at the internal personal sphere of the respondent, the second – interpersonal, which provided for their hypothetical assessment of the immediate environment in the manifestation of environmental behaviour in the

context of community affiliation. In the second part of the questionnaire, these same indicators were highlighted. The survey was conducted in February 2023. Multiple regression analysis, multivariate variance analysis, and Pearson correlation analysis were used to analyse the data. The total sample of respondents was 397 people, including 69% of women and 31% of men. The sample was divided into the following age groups – 18-29 years – 55.4%, 30-44 years – 24.9%, 45-59 years – 16.9%, over 60 years – 2.9% (over 45 years – 19.8%). According to the status of location in war conditions, the following distribution was obtained: they are located in the same place as before – 61%. Internally displaced persons – 29.2%. Refugees (outside Ukraine) – 8.3%. Participants in military operations – 1.5%.

The examination of manifestations of community identification of the individual was conducted within the framework of the joint research of the Department of Mass and Communities Psychology. The novelty of investigating the environmental responsibility of Ukrainians under the influence of military operations provided for the search for empirical concepts and methodological tools. The main purpose of the study was to examine the relationships between certain types of personality identities that can influence changes in the environmental behaviour of Ukrainians or record their separate impact.

RESULTS

Thematic analysis of the obtained data allowed identifying such forms of environmental behaviour of Ukrainians in the conditions of military conflict as environmental action, environmental anxiety, and environmental indifference. According to the results of the obtained narratives, it was established that 49% of respondents have not changed their attitude to environmental problems, 12% have changed, 18% indicated that environmental problems are important for them, and 12% stated that environmental problems are not relevant. An additional quantitative survey of 115 respondents on the importance of environmental problems showed that for 7% of respondents, environmental problems still did not matter, for 14% of respondents, the importance of environmental problems decreased, but for almost 52% of respondents, the importance of environmental problems increased.

The identified manifestations of environmental behaviour at the quantitative examination stage were systematised and designated as activity, emotional, and value (indifference-importance) components of environmental behaviour. These components are expressed in the corresponding indicator statements. The analysis of a quantitative examination with the participation of 397 respondents based on the selected conceptual constructs established a statistically substantial influence of identity types on these forms of environmental behaviour of Ukrainians.

Analysis of the data of the first part of the questionnaire aimed at assessing interpersonal interaction using multiple regression analysis identified such substantial predictors of the growth of environmental action ("I began to care more about the cleanliness of the environment") as the impact of civil society ($p \leq 0.001$) and territorial identity ($p \leq 0.001$). Two-factor analysis of variance identified no substantial interaction between these identities. Regarding the second part of the questionnaire aimed at interpersonal interaction of respondents, such substantial predictors as territorial and European identity were identified. An interesting fact is that it was these types of identities that respondents gave diametrically opposite assessments of importance. In the case of the greatest manifestation of European identity, the territorial one was the smallest and vice versa. However, a two-factor analysis of variance identified substantial individual influences at the importance level ($p \leq 0.000$) of these two independent variables per dependent, but no interaction was detected between them. Therewith, there was a negative correlation between religious identity and environmental action. Additional correlation analysis showed the presence of a weak correlation relationship ($p \leq 0.537$) between religious and East Slavic identities.

Analysis of the emotional indicator ("it hurts me because of the environmental consequences caused by war") on the first part of the questionnaire using multiple regression analysis determined such substantial predictors of the growth of environmental grief as civil and professional identity. Two-factor analysis of variance established substantial separate effects of these two independent variables on the dependent one (both at the level of $p \leq 0.000$), and a substantial interaction between them was detected (at the importance level $p \leq 0.015$). According to the second part of the questionnaire ("they are hurt because of the environmental consequences caused by the war"), multiple regression analysis identified such substantial predictors of the growth of environmental grief as territorial, professional, and European identity. A three-factor analysis of variance did not identify any substantial interactions between independent variables in their effect on the dependent one.

The examination of environmental value using multiple regression analysis has shown that the growing importance of environmental problems is determined by such predictors as civil and professional identity. Two-factor analysis of variance established substantial separate effects of these two independent variables on the dependent one but no interaction between them. According to the second part of the questionnaire "the importance of environmental problems has increased for them", multiple regression analysis determined such substantial predictors as professional, civil, and territorial identity. A three-factor analysis of variance did not identify any substantial interactions between independent variables in their effect on the dependent one.

DISCUSSION

Environmental behaviour is a manifestation of human goodwill. Benevolence and conscientiousness are very important for shaping actions in the direction of environmental management (Meitiyani *et al.*, 2022). Critical situations influence the relevance of environmental problems by shifting the focus of attention to other circumstances. D. Domalewska (2021) states that even crisis situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated consequences have not led to a decrease in public interest in environmental issues. Military operations are characterised by substantially greater human losses, which primarily actualise the value of life and security, along with which the importance of environmental problems could potentially decrease. This is partially confirmed by this study, where about 11-12% of respondents emphasise the inappropriateness of showing environmental concern. On the other hand, military actions have caused substantial damage to the Ukrainian environment and highlighted its importance in the eyes of Ukrainians, but it is possible to assess their impact on changing the environmental behaviour of Ukrainians in the activity component only at the predictive level.

The process of community identification of Ukrainians, namely territorial identification, has undergone constant changes, considering the historical context of Ukraine's development and its recent belonging to a major interstate entity – the Soviet Union. According to empirical data, in the first decade of independence, the hierarchy of territorial identities of Ukrainians was dominated by local identity at the local level (about 40%), the value of civil identity occupied the following position (about 28% of respondents), while European identity occupied the last place with an indicator of 4-5% of Ukrainians who marked themselves as Europeans (Korzhev, 2010). The pronounced regional identification of Ukrainians is due to the distinctive historical circumstances of the formation of the regional national composition of the population of Ukraine (Shekhovtsova-Burianova, 2021). Transition societies are those, where a new identity is formed in the context of a new social and ideological paradigm. Proceeding from the position of identity activation against the background of the threat of its destruction, the role of regional identity can be explained as a support for the individual and community in a period of identification uncertainty at the national level. This fact can explain the diverse attitude of Ukrainians to local natural resources from conservation to destruction, considering the dominance of the type of attachment – the identity of a place or dependence on a place (Vaske & Kobrin, 2001). In addition, in Ukraine, trends of contrasting the identity of some regions with others actively developed, exacerbating social conflict (Pahomenko, 2015). Such a conflict of identities may have increased their importance in the eyes of authentic communities, but it hindered the possibility of resource integration of the

region into the system of national natural values to further protect them. The resource component of Donbas, having a predominantly utilitarian meaning ("Donbas feeds Ukraine"), was used more as a resource than a valued identity with the subsequent right to exhaustion.

Military events led to an increase in the importance of civil identity. This can be traced by the total number of respondents who indicated its primary importance in a number of surveys (from 60 to 70% of respondents). Its activation as a predictor of proecological behaviour indicates an increase in the value of resources at the national rather than territorial level, and substantial environmental losses have further activated their role in the eyes of Ukrainians. Among the number of respondents for whom the importance of environmental problems has increased, 35% indicated that this was due to military operations. Despite the fact that so far, the number of those who have become more concerned about the environment in the activity component of environmental behaviour is only 10-15% (according to the results of all studies), the share of young people who are already taking certain steps to preserve the environment at the age of 18-25 years is 70%. The fact that Ukrainians, unlike previous studies, can list specific steps of proecological behaviour in contrast to general phrases like "I try not to litter" is notable.

However, territorial identification is expected to manifest itself as a predictor of such a component of proecological behaviour as environmental action. Local identity is often interpreted as substantial in the ecological preservation of territories (Mistry *et al.*, 2016). J.A. Fresque-Baxter & D. Armitage (2012) emphasise the environmental responsibility of local identity due to intangible assets such as location binding, rooting, and aesthetic/experimental value. In addition, the results of a study of the impact of communication with society and socially responsible behaviour and environmental responsibility confirmed the existence of such a link (Nasr *et al.*, 2022). However, now, due to substantial migration processes in Ukraine, internally displaced persons from the East and South are being integrated into new communities that carry other local identities, particularly, with a pronounced resource type of motivation. Their impact on natural resources requires further examination and observation.

I. Andel (2013) notes that there is a link between migration and the deterioration of the ecological situation in the region. This relationship is usually caused by the effects of environmental degradation in the area of residence. However, in this case, external migration can have a positive impact on the Ukrainian environment. In the assessment of interpersonal interaction, the activation of European identity in the activity and emotional components of environmental behaviour is observed. The mass departure of Ukrainians abroad and the military support of the West contributed to the strengthening of European identity. This is confirmed

by a large percentage of Ukrainians who have become more active in the manifestation of European identity (41% of respondents). The imitation of pro-ecological European values is confirmed by the data of a qualitative study, where respondents describe their own impressions of environmental responsibility in European countries. In addition, the results of a quantitative survey showed that 12% (half of the refugees displaced to Europe), observing the environmental behaviour of Europeans, changed their environmental behaviour.

The manifestation of professional identity as a predictor of the growth of environmental behaviour of respondents indicates the importance of the professional community as a value cell. Professional affiliation directly affects the formation of environmental views, considering the policy of the organisation itself in the direction of preserving the environment (Fielding & Hornsey, 2016). The identified manifestation of professional identity in the growth of such components as emotional and value for both types of interaction indicates the role of professional community identification as an environment for producing values of preservation and care, including for the environment. Recording statistically substantial interaction between professional and civil identity may indicate that Ukraine and its resources are potentially in the zone of strategic interests of the individual and are related to work for the future of the state. Education, as a direct component of professional identity, requires additional examination in the sense of attachment to the territorial community and place (place attachment). In a study of the impact of tourism on environmental behaviour in one of the regions of Italy, it was found that visitors with a lower level of Education have a stronger sense of belonging to a historical site than people with a higher level of education (De Cicco *et al.*, 2023). In the study, no statistically substantial relationships were recorded between the level of education and the type of community identification.

Integrated identity helps an individual resist transformations without constantly changing self-esteem because a clear identity structure is resistant to internal changes and changes in the social environment in crisis circumstances (Domalewska, 2021). The results obtained indicate an increasing role of civic identity both in general importance for respondents and as a predictor of proecological behaviour. Military aggression has led to the activation of the civil form of identification in the face of a threat to the national integrity of Ukraine. This trend may indicate a dominant function of civil identity, which consolidates other manifestations of community identities of the individual.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the study showed a substantial increase in the role of civil identity as a prerequisite for the growth of the environmental responsibility of Ukrainians. Therewith, territorial identity has a leading role

in the manifestation of components of environmental responsibility. The importance of European identity as a predictor of environmentally responsible behaviour, which can have a positive impact on environmental responsibility, was identified. It can be assumed that the strengthening of the role of civil identity, together with the strengthening of the role of European identity, activates the manifestation of local identity in the direction of increasing environmental responsibility. That is, in other words, people take care of their own area, not only because they live there but also because it is a part of their country that needs to be taken care of.

The configuration of the manifested identities with the dominance of citizenship can lead in the future to potentially positive changes in the growth of environmental responsibility of Ukrainians, namely:

- ◆ strengthening the trend and strengthening the link to one's land not only as a resource but also as a value through awareness of the threat of illegal destruction of its biodiversity and alienation of territories;
- ◆ expanding the importance of one's region of residence beyond local borders and perceiving it as an integrated rather than autonomous component of Ukraine;
- ◆ assimilation of European environmental values through mass and direct interaction with the European community;
- ◆ activation of the experience of an environmental disaster.

The aggravation of the emotional component in the experience of environmental loss and environmental threat increases the perception of the environment as a subject category that poses a threat directly to the individual themselves and not the certain external objects. The environment is perceived as part of the individual's life world. Emotional anxiety contributes to the

integration of natural resources into the system of personal and social values. Their perception as substantial can have a positive impact on the development of environmental consciousness and the formation of environmentally responsible behaviour of Ukrainians. The activation of professional identity demonstrates the importance of the country's environmental well-being for the professional community of Ukrainians and enhances understanding of the value of resources through awareness of their role for the state and its future.

The prospects for further research are to examine other factors in the development of environmental responsibility and its components, and specific actions of Ukrainians that they use to preserve and improve the environmental situation both in the region and in the country in general. It is important to analyse the influence of such variables as demographic characteristics, the level of material well-being and education on the formation of proecological behaviour. In the context of the permanent territorial transformation of Ukraine and the long-term dominance of authoritarian power, examining the features of the locus of control of Ukrainians in the problem of resource conservation and assessing environmental consequences before and after the military invasion is promising.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The implementation of this study was possible with the technical and ideological cooperation of employees of the Department of Mass and Community Psychology at the Institute of Social and Political Psychology of the National Academy of Educational Sciences of Ukraine.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author of this study declares no conflict of interest.

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Вплив спільнотної ідентифікації на проекологічну поведінку українців в умовах війни

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Анотація. В статті розглядається зміни екологічної поведінки українців під впливом воєнних дій. Одним з ключових предикторів таких змін виступають особливості спільнотної ідентифікації українців в умовах загрози. Ключовим критерієм проекологічної поведінки розглядалася екологічна відповідальність українців. Дослідження передбачало кілька етапів якісного та кількісного збору даних. В процесі аналізу даних було застосовано також такі якісні методи, як контент та тематичний аналіз нарративів. Кількісний аналіз даних здійснювався із використанням регресійного аналізу, багатофакторного дисперсійного аналізу, кореляційного аналізу. Було виділено такі компоненти екологічної відповідальності як діяльнісний, емоційний та ціннісний. На етапі кількісного збору даних було зафіксовано роль громадянської, територіальної та професійної ідентичності як предикторів до зростання екологічної відповідальності українців. Загалом було інтерпретовано зростання ролі громадянської ідентичності як консолідуючого чинника для становлення інтегрованої ідентичності, що здатна протистояти загрозам в тому числі екологічним. Посилення емоційного компоненту впливає на відчуття екологічної загрози на суб'єктному рівні та сприяє усвідомленню необхідності збереження екологічного добробуту держави. Посилення прояву європейської ідентичності позитивно впливає на інтеграцію проекологічних європейських цінностей. Виявлення взаємодії професійної та громадянської ідентичностей може виступати індикатором стратегічної значимості України як середовища для роботи та особистої реалізації

Ключові слова: воєнні дії; спільнотна ідентифікація; екологічна відповідальність; екологічна поведінка; громадянська ідентичність