

Environmental Awareness, Green Consumerism and Environmentally Conscious Consumer Behaviour of Polish Seniors. Research Report¹

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Tomasz Zalega*

This article is a research exercise. The discussion presented in this study focuses on consumer behaviour of people aged 65+ in Poland that may be classified as green consumerism. The main aim of the article is to provide some insight into environmental awareness and environmentally conscious consumer behaviour of Polish seniors. The basis for the conclusions is provided by direct research conducted in the form of a survey questionnaire on a sample of 1786 people aged 65+ from March to September 2017 in ten Polish cities of various populations and sizes.

Keywords: seniors, environmentally conscious consumer behaviour, environmental awareness, green consumerism, fair trade.

Świadomość ekologiczna i ekologizacja konsumpcji a proekologiczne zachowania konsumenckie polskich seniorów w świetle wyników badań własnych

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Artykuł ma charakter badawczy. Prezentowane w opracowaniu rozważania koncentrują się na zachowaniach konsumenckich osób w wieku 65+ w Polsce wpisujących się w ekologizację konsumpcji. Głównym celem artykułu jest uchwycenie świadomości ekologicznej i proekologicznych zachowań konsumenckich polskich seniorów. Podstawę wnioskowania stanowią informacje pochodzące z badań bezpośrednich przeprowadzonych w okresie od marca do września 2017 roku w formie wywiadu kwestionariuszowego na próbie 1786 osób w wieku 65+ w dziesięciu miastach Polski o zróżnicowanej liczbie ludności oraz wielkości.

Słowa kluczowe: seniorzy, proekologiczne zachowania konsumenckie, świadomość ekologiczna, ekologizacja konsumpcji, fair trade.

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* **Tomasz Zalega** – dr hab., prof. UW, National Economy Department, Faculty of Management, University of Warsaw.

Correspondence address: Faculty of Management, University of Warsaw, Szturmowa 1/3, 02-678 Warsaw; e-mail: tomasz.zalega@wp.pl.

1. Introduction

Consumer behaviour is one of the most important forms of human behaviour. It may be defined as all activities related to the acquisition and use of products and services and their disposal, together with decisions preceding and determining these actions. The behaviour of today's consumers ever more often comprises environmentally conscious behaviours that are closely correlated with their environmental awareness.

In order to counteract the degradation of the natural environment, more and more consumers are enthusiastic and convinced about the introduction of radical changes in their everyday life to reduce ecological footprint. Therefore, they make decisions taking into account the principles of sustainable development and being aware of the consequences of their choices for their health and the natural environment. Consumers today, above all, realise the effects of their decisions, chiefly due to broad access to information and active participation in social life. In addition, consumers know the quality of products and the price-quality relationship. They more responsibly shape the structure of their consumption and are able to assert their consumer rights (Bostrom & Klintman, 2011, pp. 3–7).

Environmentally conscious consumer behaviour refers to the extent to which consumers undertake deliberate, rational and reasonable actions to protect the natural environment (Zabkar & Host, 2013, pp. 257–264). The environmentally conscious attitude can therefore be regarded as an effect of knowledge and environmental sensitivity developed by a conscious human. The development of such attitudes and healthy lifestyles in society through affecting awareness is one of the main goals of education for sustainable development (Unece Strategy, 2014).

The current state of research on the relationship between environmentally conscious attitudes and behaviours and research methodology require a modern approach. Although the literature on such attitudes combines attitudes with consumer behaviours, the results of empirical studies are ambiguous in referring to the nature, strength and direction of mutual relations.

The aim of the article is to provide some insight into environmental awareness and environmentally conscious consumer behaviour of Polish seniors. The study consists of three fundamental parts: theoretical, methodological and empirical. The first part synthetically discusses what environmental awareness essentially involves when it comes to green consumerism and related environmentally conscious consumer behaviour. The methodological part outlines the conceptualisation of research and selection of the research sample. The empirical part examines environmental awareness and environmentally conscious behaviour of the seniors surveyed. A conclusion of the analysis and major findings end this article.

2. Environmental Awareness of Consumers – Essence and Concept

The concept of environmental awareness is defined ambiguously in both Polish and foreign literature. It can be analysed in a broad and narrow sense. More broadly, environmental awareness means all the ideas, values and opinions about the environment as the place where humans (societies) live and develop, which is shared by specific social groups in a given historical period. In the narrower, more axiological sense, environmental awareness is construed “as the state of knowledge, views, ideas of people about the role of the environment in human life, anthropogenic burden imposed on it, the degree of exploitation, threat and protection, including knowledge about methods and tools for managing, protecting and shaping the environment” (Poskrobko, 2007, p. 61).

Although there are many definitions of environmental awareness, what they have in common is that they define it as knowledge about the environment and mutual relations between nature and humans.

It should be mentioned that the report “Man and His Environment” published in 1969 by UN Secretary General Maha Thray Sithu U’Thant is considered a breakthrough in developing environmental awareness. That report made the international community realise the limitation of natural resources, progressive degradation of the Earth’s environment and the existence of barriers to economic development in the world.

Environmental awareness is developed during a complex process under the influence of various factors: generally accepted social norms, both formal and informal government activities (legislative norms, access to information about the environment), environmental education, information in mass media, and place of living. As underlined by A. Papuziński (2006, pp. 35–36), environmental awareness “is not a simple set of views, knowledge and perceptions about the environment; it is not even a group of ideas, values and opinions conveying humans’ relation to the environment”; moreover, the birth of environmental awareness, followed by its defining notion, is closely linked with the emergence of environmental social groups, accompanied by radical criticism of industrial society voiced by countercultural movements in the 1960s. Environmental awareness can thus be said to relate to social awareness as it forms its part, and can be understood as knowledge about methods and instruments for managing the use and protection of the environment. Environmental awareness is also the man’s attitude to the natural environment, a set of information and beliefs about it, and a system of values that drive a given person’s acts (Małachowski, 2007, pp. 37–38).

As viewed by Z. Hull (1984, pp. 24–25), environmental awareness is present in two basic spheres: descriptive and technical as well as axiological and normative. The first one refers strictly to environmental knowledge and imagination, whereas the second one takes into account the value systems

that normalise relations between man and the environment, which relations, in their mature form, lead to the formulation of environmental ethics.

Without going into definitional arguments, it can be noted that environmental awareness is:

- subjective and should be assessed from the point of view of individuals;
- a complex process that unfolds depending on how far society accepts moral ideas and norms and deepens its knowledge about the environmental implications of exploiting and dealing with the environment.

It should be highlighted that moral norms derive from the traditional attitude of people to the environment, while knowledge stems from education and direct observation. Therefore, the views that it is necessary to educate all entities exploiting the environment can be upheld.

The development of environmental awareness aims to form behaviours oriented towards environmental protection both in the individual and general dimension, the latter referring to the society and its various groups (Möller, 2004, p. 133; Morrison & Beer, 2017, pp. 86–87).

The problems faced by environmentally conscious consumers are that (Kramer, Strebler, & Buzek, 2005, pp. 542–543):

- the natural surroundings are very complex, and statements about environmental problems and interactions are often unclear and difficult to understand;
- eco-friendly properties of products are often invisible and undetectable when products are being used or consumed;
- relevant information is partially non-existent and difficult to obtain or contradictory;
- there are significant reservations about the credibility of and confidence in eco-friendly products;
- for the negative externalities to be reduced, time and effort must usually be invested;
- eco-friendly products are generally more expensive and more difficult to buy.

Undoubtedly, strong environmental awareness directly affects environmentally conscious behaviours of society, thereby reducing the negative impact on the environment resulting from excessive consumption. People respect nature and protect the environment more when they understand the processes occurring in it and possible effects of its degradation. Such information can be communicated through extensive education since although contemporary problems increasingly unfold globally, they are rooted in the attitudes of inhabitants of our planet.

Environmental awareness is associated with sustainable consumption expressed by the logic of the decision-making process regarding the purchase and use of products. When it is based on the so-called technological optimism, this is weak sustainable consumption. It is based on trust in future technological solutions as a means of eradicating the problems of resource

shortage and social inequalities (Lorek & Fusch 2013, pp. 37–40). Strong sustainable consumption, on the other hand, refers to social responsibility, innovation in life and consumption patterns, pointing that consumer decisions have deep cultural roots. Thus, the strength/weakness of sustainable consumption might be associated with the level of environmental maturity of society (Seyfang, 2011, p. 59).

As mentioned above, consumers' environmental awareness directly affects their behaviours and lifestyles. When buying products, in particular food, more aware consumers pay attention to eco-labels that can indicate both positive and negative impact of the product on the natural environment. The latter inform about the risks posed by production or use of the product (Koenig-Lewis et al., 2014, pp. 96–98). There are also neutral symbols that are designed to inform consumers about environmental issues as such. They all raise environmental awareness of buyers (and also teach them how to read and distinguish such symbols) and help them choose the best products or services in this respect.

Constantly increasing environmental awareness of consumers contributes to the development of an alternative consumer trend termed green consumerism.

3. Green Consumerism and Environmentally Conscious Consumer Behaviour – Theoretical Perspective

Green consumerism is relatively often associated with the concept of eco-consumption meaning the use of goods and services that satisfy basic needs and improve the quality of life, while minimising the consumption of natural resources, toxic materials and the amount of waste and pollution generated throughout the life cycle, without endangering future generations. It is reflected in consumer knowledge about environmental protection and social responsibility as well as attitudes towards environmental protection² (Bohlen, Schlegelmilch, & Diamantopoulos, 1993, pp. 416–417). It also entails the wish to be personally involved in solving social problems, where it is necessary to have information about what an individual can do to reduce the negative impact of excessive consumption on the environment and society (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). This trend relies on rational consumption and encompasses meaningful dimensions of consumer behaviour such as (Joshi & Rahman, 2015, pp. 133–134; Bywalec, 2017, p. 257):

- a) efficient use of consumer goods;
- b) limited consumption of goods absorbing high amounts of rare and non-renewable resources, while generating hazardous post-consumption waste;
- c) purchase and consumption of goods that generate little post-consumption waste;
- d) production and purchase of goods with a longer life cycle, reducing the need for their frequent replacement;

- e) consumption of eco-friendly goods (mainly food), that is goods not supplemented with surrogates (imitations), for example artificial protein, artificial leather, imitations of wood or glass;
- f) consumption of goods that do not come from inhumane animal husbandry (e.g. fattening of poultry, fur animal farming) or slave or low-paid labour;
- g) reduction of marketing pressure on consumers to make them replace used goods with new ones more quickly, i.e. accelerated obsolescence of products;
- h) environmental education from an early age.

These phenomena have underpinned a new type of social awareness based on compliance with the laws of nature and on consumption perceived from the perspective of the consumer as a part of the ecosystem. A fashion for eco-friendly consumption patterns has appeared, for example non-smoking, avoiding stimulants, active lifestyle, a shift from car to bicycle, reduced time spent watching TV, no excessive clothing purchases, housing development in suburban areas, etc. In addition, consumers are increasingly revealing their environmental awareness, which makes them more sensitive to environmental damage caused by the use of products. They realise that their actions may bring about external side effects not only locally but also globally, because mass consumption results in huge amounts of post-consumption waste that is as harmful as post-production waste. Obviously, consumers do not give up their usual habits regarding the purchase of goods but they adjust them accordingly. For example, they no longer buy products in plastic packaging, choosing glass or paper packaging; moreover, they actively segregate waste that can thus be reused. Eco-consumers not only promote eco-friendly consumption but also force producers to apply eco-friendly production methods through their conscious choices. In practice, this means investing in machinery that reduces environmental pollution and using technologies that allow for the re-use of secondary raw materials. Furthermore, consumers following the trend of green consumerism are also interested in environmental campaigns that make people sensitive to these issues and increase their knowledge in this respect, leading to eco-friendly actions (Zalega, 2015a, p. 81).

An increasing number of consumers prefer the so-called healthy lifestyle. They prefer natural products and avoid those that contain preservatives, eat an appropriate diet with diverse nutritional values, do sports, live in harmony with nature. This tendency explains the growing interest in organic food.

What is indirectly connected with green consumerism is the idea of Fair Trade. In practice, products with the Fair Trade logo are bought by the so-called competent (socially responsible) consumers who make informed purchasing decisions (I know what I am buying and I know who I am buying it for). Through their lifestyles and consumer choices, such consumers primarily prefer eco-friendly forms of consumption and engage in

activities falling within the scope of sustainable consumerism, which draws attention to such issues as global consequences of consumption growth, correlations between lifestyle and consumption style, clean production, etc. It is socially responsible consumers who are and may be not only initiators of future positive systemic changes towards sustainable development and sustainable consumption but also promoters of Fair Trade. Moreover, it should be noted that sufficiently strong and effective associations of socially responsible consumers may ultimately contribute to the rise of sustainable society through their actions for sustainable consumption and Fair Trade (Zalega, 2016, p. 249).

Consumers' interest in certified products largely ensues from the fact that many Fairtrade-certified products are manufactured organically, without the use of pesticides and other chemical fertilisers or pest control substances. More environmentally conscious consumers also deem ethical aspects to be important such as (Zalega, 2015b, pp. 91–92):

- guaranteeing producers a minimum sale price of their products enabling them to run viable business in the long term;
- ensuring high labour standards and equal pay for women and men;
- complying with the principle of protecting children against forced labour.

It should be noted that more environmentally conscious consumers choosing fair trade receive not only high quality products but also improve the fortune of producers in developing countries.

Green consumerism is also stimulated by the ever more frequent decline in the importance of consumption in the human value system where it is treated as a means rather than a key goal of life. However, such behaviours may be caused, in some cases, by the current fashion for eco-friendliness, not by strong ecological awareness.

4. Conceptualisation of Research

The empirical material contained in this article comes from the second stage of my research conducted in the form of a survey questionnaire from March to September 2017 in ten Polish cities of various populations and sizes. The survey covered 1786 consumers. In accordance with the research assumptions, the sample included only persons over 65 years of age who took independent purchasing decisions in the market. In order to select the sample, the selective quota sampling procedure was used. The characteristics (quotas) covered by the research were: sex and age.

Direct research in the form of a survey questionnaire was chosen in view of the older age of respondents whose openness to new media (Internet, smartphone, iPod) often used in research is limited.

The survey was conducted among participants of the University of the Third Age at state universities in: Warsaw, Kraków, Łódź, Poznań, Gdańsk, Katowice, Lublin, Białystok, Toruń and Wrocław, as well as among mem-

bers of parochial clubs in parishes located in the Archdioceses of Warsaw, Kraków, Łódź, Białystok, Gdańsk, Katowice, Lublin, Poznań, Wrocław and the Dioceses of Warsaw-Praga and Toruń.

The seniors surveyed were assessed in order to measure their environmental awareness and determine the scope and frequency of their environmentally conscious behaviour. The survey results concerning their activity as regards such behaviour were based on their declarations only.

5. Selection and Characteristics of the Research Sample

Studying consumer behaviours is an extremely intricate process. This is due to the complexity of consumption and consumer purchasing behaviours in the field of consumer decision-making. Such research encompasses an important step to explain the phenomenon examined, namely adoption of specific indicators. This is essential because an indicator is used to define a certain characteristic of an object or phenomenon which is in such a relation with another characteristic that indicates the occurrence of the latter when it occurs itself. An indicator is a measurable, i.e. empirically available, variable. When consumer behaviours are investigated, indicators explaining the complexity of this phenomenon include demographic (sex, age, place of residence, household size) and socio-economic indicators (education, disposable income).

The survey covered 72% of women, with only every third respondent being male. There were definitely more women than men, and people aged 65–74 formed the largest age group in the sample. Place of residence was also an important variable in the research. In line with the research assumptions, the sample comprised respondents who lived in the largest Polish cities.

Respondents were also asked about their level of education. The questionnaire included four categories of education: primary, basic vocational, secondary and higher education. Seniors with secondary education formed the largest group. Nearly 2/5 of those surveyed declared this level. Every third respondent had completed basic vocational education, and every fifth was a university graduate. In the sample surveyed, seniors with primary education constituted the smallest proportion (10.8%).

Nearly half of those surveyed were members of households consisting of two persons, while less than 2/5 represented single-person households. Every ninth respondent was a member of a three-person household.

The largest group of respondents included people whose monthly per capita income ranged from PLN 2001.00 to PLN 3000.00. For every third respondent, the income did not exceed PLN 2000.00. In turn, every sixth senior had a monthly disposable income of between PLN 3001.00 and 4000.00 per capita. The smallest group of respondents included households where the income was above PLN 4000.00 per capita a month.

6. Environmental Awareness of the Seniors Surveyed

An increasing number of people, including seniors, realise the connection between their own actions and other spheres of social and economic life. They are also becoming aware that by choosing specific eco-friendly products, they affect not only the nature and level of domestic production but also the economic condition of enterprises and the state of the natural environment. Undoubtedly, strong environmental awareness influences the purchasing decisions of society. At some stage of the development of this awareness, there occur eagerness to undertake actions supporting environmental protection in everyday life, public involvement in this protection and readiness to support or counteract certain processes (Yadav & Pathak, 2017, pp. 116–117).

Despite the growing interest of the Polish society in the problems of ecology and health, environmental awareness is still assessed as very low and insufficient. Very similar conclusions can be drawn from the survey carried out among the elderly. It shows that the environmental awareness of seniors is unsatisfactory, and their responses were often inconsistent. On the one hand, senior respondents believed in individual responsibility for the condition of the environment, while on the other, the popularity of their consumer behaviour supporting environmental protection was limited. It should be noted that almost every second respondent does not feel the need to look for information about the natural environment and its protection on their own. More than 70% of respondents are satisfied with what they hear about environmental protection in public media. Only every fifth senior gains information about the environment and its protection from magazines, scholarly studies, thematic lectures organised at Universities of the Third Age and from their own observations.

Items	Satisfactory	Moderate	Bad	Very bad
Condition of the natural environment	2.6	60.6	32.2	4.6
Assessment of the problem associated with the condition of the natural environment	16.5	62.8	16.9	3.8
Self-assessed knowledge about the condition of the natural environment	5.3	45.1	45.4	4.2
Knowledge about threats to the natural environment	2.8	39.9	52.0	5.3

Tab. 1. Environmental awareness of the seniors surveyed (%). Source: The author's research.

The survey shows that less than 2/5 of senior respondents assessed the condition of the natural environment as “bad” or “very bad”. A positive opinion in this respect was expressed by 63.2% of them. Female seniors

were more critical in their ratings. Over half of them assessed the condition of the natural environment negatively. Every third senior held such a view. What motivates seniors to protect the natural environment is mainly care for their own health (67.3%) and concern about future generations (49.4%).

The condition of the natural environment is an important problem for 4/5 of respondents. Every fourth senior respondent thought that the condition of the natural environment was a relatively small problem. In contrast, every sixth considered environmental problems to be very serious. Women indicated this answer more often than men.

The knowledge about the condition of the natural environment was assessed by half of the seniors surveyed as “satisfactory” or “moderate”, and slightly fewer of them admitted having little knowledge in this respect. The knowledge about the natural environment was slightly better assessed by men (65.8%). Every tenth senior and only fifteen female seniors stated that the knowledge they possessed about the natural environment was very good.

Over 2/5 of senior respondents assessed their knowledge of the major threats to the natural environment as “satisfactory” or “moderate”. They most often pointed to air, water and soil pollution (78.4%), waste management (70.1%), global warming (63.2%), excessive consumerism (41.3%) and deforestation (31.9%). What they consider equally important is the disappearance of ecosystems (21.6%), over-exploitation of mineral resources (15.4%), increased noise (11.3%) and man-made disasters (10.9%). The results of my research are largely consistent with the results of surveys by the Institute for Sustainable Development and TNS OBOP. In *Understanding the eco-friendly energy. A survey of environmental awareness of Poles 2010*, answering the question about human economic activity that made the greatest contribution to climate change, as many as 61% of respondents pointed to the dynamic industrial development, 55% indicated large-scale deforestation, and every third pointed to transport development and energy (*Z energetyką ...*, 2011, p. 10). According to the TNS OBOP report *Survey of environmental awareness and behaviours of Polish residents of 2011*, when asked to indicate three biggest environmental problems in Poland, over 54% of respondents pointed to air pollution, 53% to excess waste, 53% to water pollution, 29% to natural disasters, 28% to man-made disasters, 27% to depletion of natural resources, 22% to increased noise, and 16% to loss of biodiversity (TNS OBOP, 2011, p. 80).

It can thus be concluded that older survey participants exhibit moderate environmental awareness, which can be explained by relatively poor interest in environmental protection.

7. Green Consumerism and Environmentally Conscious Behaviour of the Seniors Surveyed

In order for eco-friendly consumption to become more widespread, it is necessary to change the functioning of individuals as consumers and create an environmentally friendly consumer. This is a precondition for the emergence of a market for eco-friendly products. As environmental awareness grows, environmentally friendly consumers are increasingly beginning to see the relationship between their behaviour and environmental degradation. In addition, they are willing to pay more for eco-friendly products, that is to cover increased production costs, and to change their consumption model to a more environmentally friendly one.

Environmentally conscious behaviours are reflected in various areas of their activity. A good example is provided by economical use of consumer goods or the purchase and consumption of eco-friendly products (Table 2).

Items	Number of respondents	Percentage share
A shift from car use to public transport or bicycle	653	36.6
Reduced TV watching time	507	28.4
Reduced purchases of clothing and footwear	796	44.6
Refraining from purchasing products in plastic packaging	345	19.3
Purchase of low-processed products	437	24.5
Active lifestyle	907	50.1
Avoidance of stimulants	754	42.2

Tab. 2. Eco-friendly consumption patterns of the seniors surveyed as part of green consumerism. Source: The author's research.

The survey results indicate that eco-friendly patterns fitting in green consumerism that are mostly displayed by senior respondents include a more active lifestyle, reduced purchases of clothing and footwear, avoidance of stimulants, and more common use of public transport meaning less frequent driving. All these behaviours are part of a more rational, sustainable consumption, while promoting eco-friendly consumer behaviour.

Statements	Whenever possible	Rarely	Never
I buy carefully, only as much as needed at the moment	49.3	32.5	18.2
Before I buy a product, I gather product information confirmed by other consumers	19.5	44.9	35.6
Before I buy a product, I always check its expiry date	62.3	29.6	8.1
Before I buy a product, I check if it is biodegradable (recyclable)	11.2	58.2	30.6
I use reusable bags	66.8	26.2	7.0
I choose products in green, minimised packaging	10.6	40.2	49.2
I avoid purchasing disposable items (plates, cups, cutlery, plastic bags)	41.5	23.4	35.1
I regularly sort waste	63.4	29.6	7.0
I use water sparingly	66.2	27.2	6.6
I throw out used batteries into special containers	45.2	34.1	20.7
I replace light bulbs with energy-saving ones	55.5	32.5	12.0
I limit gas consumption	58.2	31.6	10.2
I buy energy-efficient equipment	35.2	47.0	17.8
I use electricity sparingly	67.1	27.1	5.8
I throw out expired drugs into special containers	17.6	20.1	62.3
I collect waste separately	28.2	29.1	42.7
I return glass bottles to collection points	21.8	19.9	58.3
I buy drinks in recyclable packaging	24.0	18.2	57.8
I pay attention to eco-labels	14.4	34.9	50.7

Tab. 3. Environmentally conscious behaviours of the seniors surveyed. Source: The author's research.

The percentage of consumers, including people aged 65+, exhibiting various environmentally conscious behaviours taking into account the need to protect the environment is gradually increasing, although the results obtained are not satisfactory in many respects and additionally dependent upon sex, age, disposable income and place of residence (*Raport z analizy badań świadomości...*, 2015).

In the context of the presented results, the largest group of senior respondents claimed to use reusable bags (93%), and more than 2/3 of them did so whenever possible. A similar percentage of those aged 65+ admitted that they used water (93.4%), electricity (94.2%) and gas (89.8%) sparingly. In the three cases, those who did so whenever possible were the dominant group. Concerning electricity saving, senior respondents most frequently switched off the light in unused rooms, used energy-saving light sources and other energy-saving devices. In turn, gas saving refers to simple everyday activities such as cooking meals and boiling water for tea and coffee – respondents stated that they did not boil more water than they actually needed, used covers on pots when preparing meals and made sure that the gas stove fire did not go beyond the edge of the pot. As regards water saving, seniors' behaviours involve simple solutions such as refraining from using running water if not necessary (closing taps during everyday activities) or making sure that the water and sewerage system at home is leaktight. Respondents also tried to use water rationally during everyday bathing (shower instead of bath, shorter showers) and cleaning (they did not use the washing machine if they had not prepared the optimal amounts of clothes).

Nearly 93% of seniors sorted waste, of which 63.4% admitted doing so always. The responses show that those surveyed most often segregate plastic packages, metal and paper. These actions are relatively often taken up by senior respondents mainly for financial reasons (they save water and electricity due to their low income and use their own bags to avoid additional spending on disposable bags at the point of sale, etc.). The survey results confirm that money saving is, indeed, the key motive for seniors' eco-friendly behaviours, but the resultant environmental protection is an additional, secondary advantage. Where eco-friendly solutions involve certain charges, the number of reluctant people grows.

The findings indicate changes in seniors' attitudes. Before making any decision, in particular before buying products, senior respondents assess whether their purchase is actually necessary or whether it is solely intended to raise their own material status. Over 82% of them declare that they buy carefully – just as much as they need at a given moment, which reduces the risk of wastage. In the decision-making process, over 3/5 of them gather product information confirmed by other consumers. Such behaviours should probably be assessed positively since they reduce the risk of buying a wrong product that is not in line with expectations. Less than half of people aged 65+ say that they are more likely to buy an eco-friendly product that has eco-labelling. Nonetheless, research into Fair Trade (Radziukiewicz, 2015) clearly confirms that this result should be regarded as a wish to present oneself as a more modern and responsible consumer whose consumer decisions are consistent with sustainable consumption rather than actual behaviour.

The described consumer behaviours of people aged 65+ result in tangible economic benefits not only for respondents but also for their households. In addition, these environmentally conscious behaviours of seniors largely overlap with a Poland-wide survey on such behaviours of Polish residents carried out in 2011 by CBOS on a representative sample of 1002 respondents. That survey reveals that environmentally conscious behaviours declared by Poles, including seniors, that aim to protect the environment translate into everyday behaviours such as reduced energy (90%), water (83%) and gas (79%) consumption in households. Respondents think that eco-friendly habits also include: avoidance of buying products harmful to society (72%), segregation of household waste (71%) and recycling, that is collection of recyclable materials (waste paper, glass, cans) (41%) (*Zachowania proekologiczne ...* 2011, pp. 8–9). In turn, the survey on environmental awareness and eco-friendly behaviour of Polish residents carried out in 2013 at the request of the Ministry of the Environment by PBS Spółka z o.o. reveals that respondents most often support environmental protection by using reusable bags (65%), buying fewer perishable and disposable products (51%), buying products in eco-friendly packaging (37%), reducing energy (32%) and water (31%) consumption, sorting waste (28%), and buying less food to prevent food wastage (25%) (*Badanie świadomości ...* 2013, pp. 110–119).

As mentioned above, what is indirectly connected with green consumerism is the idea of Fair Trade. The survey shows that only one in three senior respondents heard about this idea. These were mostly female young old respondents with higher education, earning PLN 3001.00–4000.00 and above PLN 4000.00 per capita, primarily living in Warsaw (26.3%), Poznań (21.7%) and Wrocław (18.9%), and actively attending UTA courses. On the other hand, the fewest respondents exhibiting consumer behaviour in line with conscious consumption and the so-called ecological intelligence lived in Toruń (6.5%) and Białystok (5.2%). It was also noted that senior members of parochial communities were less aware of environmental issues and less frequently displayed consumer behaviours consistent with green consumerism (6.8%).

Only every fourth respondent aged 65+ said that they had attended an event promoting conscious consumption or Fair Trade at least once in their life. They were mostly women aged 65–74 who had completed secondary and higher education, earned a monthly income of more than PLN 3000.00 per capita, lived in Warsaw (26.2%), Poznań³ (24.3%) and Wrocław (21.1%), and were UTA students (26.9%). It should be noted here that the conscious consumption movement is developing dynamically in Poland, in particular in large cities. Yet, in smaller towns such as Toruń or Białystok, this trend is still negligible.

Senior consumers most commonly buy Fairtrade-certified food products: coffee (beans and instant), tea, cocoa, yerba mate, chocolate, nuts (cashews, groundnuts and Brazil), dried fruit (mango, pineapple, dates), bananas,

spices (sea salt, vanilla sticks, peppercorns) and sweets (spelt biscuits, crispy bars). As regards non-food products, the most frequently purchased products with the FairTrade logo include craft products: textiles (tablecloths, tapestries), carpets, clothing and home furnishings.

The survey also reveals that a small percentage of seniors, when shopping for clothes and footwear or electronics, pay attention to information about compliance with employee/human rights in factories of clothing, footwear and electronics manufacturers and to eco and/or social labels (e.g. Fairtrade certificate, Ecolabel) that inform that the product is organic and/or comes from Fair Trade. Slightly greater importance is attached to eco-friendliness and responsible production in the case of food, although it is nutritional values and composition of the product that primarily matter. Over 1/4 of the surveyed people aged 65+ who buy clothing and footwear, electronics, and food would be willing to pay more if they were certain that these products were manufactured in a more responsible manner. In the case of seniors buying clothing and footwear, this proportion was 28.2%, and 27.3% for electronics. This percentage was 29.1% for those buying food. Women aged 65–74 with higher education, earning a monthly per capita income of above PLN 3000.00, living in Warsaw (27.6%), Poznań (26.6%) and Wrocław (26.1%) and attending UTA courses (29.1%) declared eagerness to pay more for products manufactured in a responsible manner generally more often than their male counterparts.

An eco-label on the product increased the confidence in the product in the case of more than half of the seniors surveyed. Even if not known to them, an eco-label on product packaging affects their sense of security and increases their confidence, indicates that the product has been checked and assessed, hence it may be perceived more positively than a product that does not have a label. More than 2/5 of senior respondents claimed that when they saw various symbols and certificates placed on products, especially food, even if they did not have enough knowledge about their meaning, the mere presence of any label – including eco-labels – evoked their positive feelings.

In the context of the survey, it can be concluded that only one in four seniors pays attention to labels referring to ecology, the environment and fair trade. Every third respondent aged 65+ admitted that they did not pay any attention to eco-labels on packaging while shopping. Among ten labels that

can be found on different products (Recycling , “Eko” , Organic farming , Ozone-friendly , Blue Angel , Energy star , FSC , Daisy , Fairtrade  and MSC , respondents aged 65+ mostly recognise the following logos: “Recycling” (52.8%), “Ozone-friendly” (50.2%), “Organic farming” (31.4%), “Blue Angel” (26.4%), “Eko”

(25.2%) and “Fairtrade” (23.1%). The least recognisable certificates are: “FSC” (5.4%), or Forest Stewardship Council, guaranteeing responsible management of forest resources, and “MSC” (4.2%), or Marine Stewardship Council, confirming that a given fish product comes from sustainable fisheries.

Women aged 65–74 with higher education, earning a monthly per capita income of above PLN 3000.00, living in Poznań (26.9%), Warsaw (25.7%) and Białystok (25.1%) pay more attention to eco-labels than their male counterparts. In contrast, eco-certificates on various types of packaging are least often recognised by seniors aged 85 and more, mostly male graduates of secondary or basic vocational schools, from the PLN 2001.00–3000.00 income group, living in Lublin (7.4%) and Toruń (6.9%), and being parochial community members.

8. Conclusion

Environmental awareness is an issue arousing ever greater interest. The reasons should be sought both in the development of knowledge about environmental threats and in a wider scope of real actions for the protection of nature. As a result, the growing popularity of the issue of environmental awareness can be noticed in Polish society, including among older people.

The development of environmental awareness of consumers as well as positive and eco-friendly attitudes, behaviours and actions requires well-planned and consistent education covering various fields of environmental protection. Education must be complemented by a well-organised information policy on the natural environment and its status. Only comprehensive measures can foster the development and dissemination of sustainable, eco-friendly behavioural patterns and attitudes of the general public.

The greatest environmental concerns voiced by senior respondents lie in the threats that are a direct result of civilisation development: pollution of waters, soils and air, waste management, climate warming and deforestation. The disappearance of natural habitats of organisms, depletion of natural resources and increased noise levels are no less important.

Environmentally conscious consumer behaviours of the surveyed seniors primarily include: sorting waste, saving water and electricity, throwing out used batteries and expired drugs into special containers, purchasing products in recyclable packaging, using reusable or biodegradable bags and avoiding products tested on animals.

The survey shows that the proportion of seniors who declared that they acted in line with the idea of green consumerism was much higher among women than men as well as among university graduates and those earning a monthly per capita income of more than PLN 3000.00, mostly inhabitants of Warsaw, Poznań and Wrocław, and those actively attending UTA courses.

Endnotes

- ¹ The publication is the result of research conducted at the Faculty of Management of the University of Warsaw, financed by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education from subsidies for the maintenance of research potential.
- ² In a broader sense, green consumerism is closely linked not only with eco-consumption but also with freeganism, prosumption, consumer ethnocentrism, anti-consumerism, and a lifestyle based on care for physical and mental health.
- ³ Poznań is the first Polish city to be awarded the status of “Fair Trade Town”. This campaign was started in 2000 by the inhabitants of Garstang, a town in Great Britain. It should be added that the actions undertaken with a view to obtaining that status are in line with the goals of *Agenda 21*, the document adopted at the Earth Summit held in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, which is an action plan to be implemented in the 21st century as regards protection and efficient use of natural resources in order to ensure sustainable development.

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