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Social responsibility of the modern family towards climate threats in the Anthropocene era

Spoleczna odpowiedzialność rodziny wobec zagrożeń klimatycznych w epoce antropocenu

Abstract

Introduction. The Anthropocene epoch is struggling with the climate crisis, which is one of the greatest challenges for the modern world. The family, as the basic living environment, is largely responsible for the nature of human functioning in everyday life, which is ultimately important in shaping social attitudes towards current threats. The awareness of individuals builds the awareness of societies.

Aim. The aim of the article is to indicate the social responsibility of the family towards climate threats in the Anthropocene era and to draw attention to the assumptions of the current European climate policy. Raising awareness of the important role of the family in shaping attitudes towards climate threats by its adult members gives hope for increasing conscious pro-ecological attitudes. Pro-ecological behaviours, which constitute a model and refer-

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ence in the complex process of raising children and adolescents, constitute the foundation for shaping awareness of responsibility for the planet and, therefore, for the quality of life in the future.

Materials and methods. The article presents an analysis of existing materials in the area of climate policy, based on which postulates for shaping family social responsibility in the era of the Anthropocene are indicated. From a very extensive collection, selected materials relating to the topic in question were selected and described. Indicated: Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, European Green Deal, issued in Brussels on 11/12/2019; Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions Building a climate-resilient Europe – a new Strategy for adaptation to climate change of February 24, 2021, strategy National Environmental Policy 2030 – development strategy in the area of environment and water management, National Energy and Climate Plan for 2021–2030.

Results. European climate policy has very precise content that sets the course of action for entire societies in order to reduce the dimension of the crisis related to climate threats. The family, as the basic social unit, can counteract this crisis in various ways. The text indicates specific solutions in this area.

Conclusion. Due to the state of awareness of contemporary Polish society about climate threats in the Anthropocene era, it is necessary to carry out activities to raise awareness of the actual state of affairs. The family, by setting a role model, should be the primary source of responsibility formation, right after institutions responsible for providing knowledge. The article indicates proposed actions, the implementation of which will activate individuals, and thus society, towards the climate crisis in the Anthropocene era.

Keywords: family, Anthropocene, climate crisis, transformation, social attitudes.

Abstrakt

Wprowadzenie. Epoka antropocenu zmaga się z kryzysem klimatycznym, który stanowi jedno z największych wyzwań dla współczesnego świata. Rodzina, jako podstawowe środowisko życia, w dużej mierze ponosi odpowiedzialność za charakter funkcjonowania człowieka w codzienności, co ostatecznie ma duże znaczenie w kształtowaniu społecznych postaw wobec obecnych zagrożeń. Świadomość jednostek buduje świadomość społeczeństw.

Cel. Celem artykułu jest wskazanie społecznej odpowiedzialności rodziny wobec zagrożeń klimatycznych w epoce antropocenu oraz zwrócenie uwagi na założenia aktualnej europejskiej polityki klimatycznej. Uświadomienie doniosłej roli rodziny w kształtowaniu postaw wobec zagrożeń klimatycznych przez dorosłych jej członków daje nadzieję na zwiększenie świadomych proekologicznych postaw. Proekologiczne zachowania, stanowiące wzór i od-

niesienie w złożonym procesie wychowania dzieci i młodzieży, stanowią fundament kształtowania świadomości odpowiedzialnej za planetę, a tym samym – za jakość życia w przyszłości.

Materiały i metody. W artykule zaprezentowano analizę zastanych materiałów w obszarze polityki klimatycznej, na podstawie których wskazano postulaty dla kształtowania społecznej odpowiedzialności rodziny w dobie antropocenu. Spośród bardzo obszernego zbioru dokonano selekcji i opisu wybranych materiałów dotyczących tematu. Wskazano na: Komunikat Komisji do Parlamentu Europejskiego, Rady Europejskiej, Rady, Komitetu Ekonomiczno-Społecznego i Komitetu Regionów *Europejski Zielony Ład* wydany w Brukseli 11.12.2019 r., Komunikat Komisji do Parlamentu Europejskiego, Rady, Europejskiego Komitetu Ekonomiczno-Społecznego i Komitetu Regionów *Budując Europę odporną na zmianę klimatu – nowa Strategia w zakresie przystosowania do zmiany klimatu* z 24.02.2021 roku, strategię *Polityka ekologiczna państwa 2030 – strategia rozwoju w obszarze środowiska i gospodarki wodnej, Krajowy plan na rzecz energii i klimatu na lata 2021–2030*.

Wyniki. Europejska polityka klimatyczna prezentuje bardzo dokładne treści wyznaczające kierunek postępowania dla całych społeczeństw w celu zmniejszenia wymiaru kryzysu związanego z zagrożeniami klimatycznymi. Rodzina, jako podstawowa jednostka społeczna, w różny sposób może przeciwdziałać temu kryzysowi. W tekście wskazano na konkretne rozwiązania w tym zakresie.

Wnioski. Ze względu na stan świadomości współczesnego polskiego społeczeństwa na temat zagrożeń klimatycznych w epoce antropocenu konieczne jest prowadzenie działań uświadamiających stan faktyczny. Rodzina, poprzez dawanie wzorca, powinna być podstawowym źródłem formowania odpowiedzialności, zaraz po instytucjach mających za zadanie wyposażenie w wiedzę. W artykule wskazano proponowane działania, których wdrożenie zaktywizuje jednostki, a przez to także społeczeństwo, wobec kryzysu klimatycznego w epoce antropocenu.

Słowa kluczowe: rodzina, antropocen, kryzys klimatyczny, transformacja, postawy społeczne.

Introduction

The contemporary family, due to the conditions of the dynamically developing reality of the Anthropocene epoch, is subject to transformations of a different nature. The perspective of its development can be seen in various aspects, including, above all, the course of life (Ziemska, 2001), as well as the ways and forms of functioning of the very society in which it lives and with which it identifies.

The Anthropocene is a new epoch in time. Due to the nature and incalculability of the events occurring, it is the subject of reference in discussions in almost all ar-

eas of science. It is not only biologists, geologists, ecologists, economists, but also educators, linguists and lawyers who point to the significant threats, while focusing on the possible opportunities and potential of the time in which we live. The category of anthropocentrism is at the centre of the discussion and, according to Ewa Bińczyk, has a strong philosophical and discursive potential, as it refers to the pervading tensions of the 21st century. The themes of key categories related to human life and functioning, notions relating to nature, anthropocentrism, the field of causality in current and historical terms, and the sense of responsibility, are taken up and constitute the nature of the discussions (Bińczyk, 2018). The human era (Bińczyk, 2018; Crutzen, Stoermer, 2000) is characterised by significant human impacts on the planetary condition. According to Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer, it is man, as a representative of the species, who is impacting the environment with a geological force that has not been so devastatingly intense in the past. According to an analysis of research carried out for the European Parliament by Eurobarometer:

More than three quarters (77%) of EU citizens believe that climate change is now a very serious problem. A majority of Europeans believe that the European Union (56%), national governments (56%), business and industry (53%) are responsible for tackling climate change. 35% are personally responsible. More than eight in ten respondents think it is important that their national government (86%) and the European Union (85%) take action to improve energy efficiency by 2030 (e.g. encouraging people to insulate their homes, install solar panels or buy electric cars). 58% of EU citizens believe that the use of renewable energy sources should be accelerated, energy efficiency improved (Michalak, 2023).

European Union policy towards climate risks in the light of selected documents

The European Union (EU) has very strict environmental standards. The Union, in consultation with the governments of the individual member states, has set specific targets through which the tasks shaping European environmental policy up to 2050 have been identified. These targets include:

- protecting, conserving and enhancing the EU's natural capital,
- transforming the EU economy into a resource-efficient, green and competitive low-carbon economy,
- Protect Europeans from environmentally related pressures and risks to health and well-being (*Climate Goals...*, 2023).

The Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Euro-

pean Council, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions *European Green Deal* (2019), issued in Brussels on 11.12.2019, made it clear that the stated goal of the strategy is to transform the EU “into a fair and prosperous society living in a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy that achieves zero net greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 and in which economic growth is decoupled from the use of natural resources” (Communication, 2019).

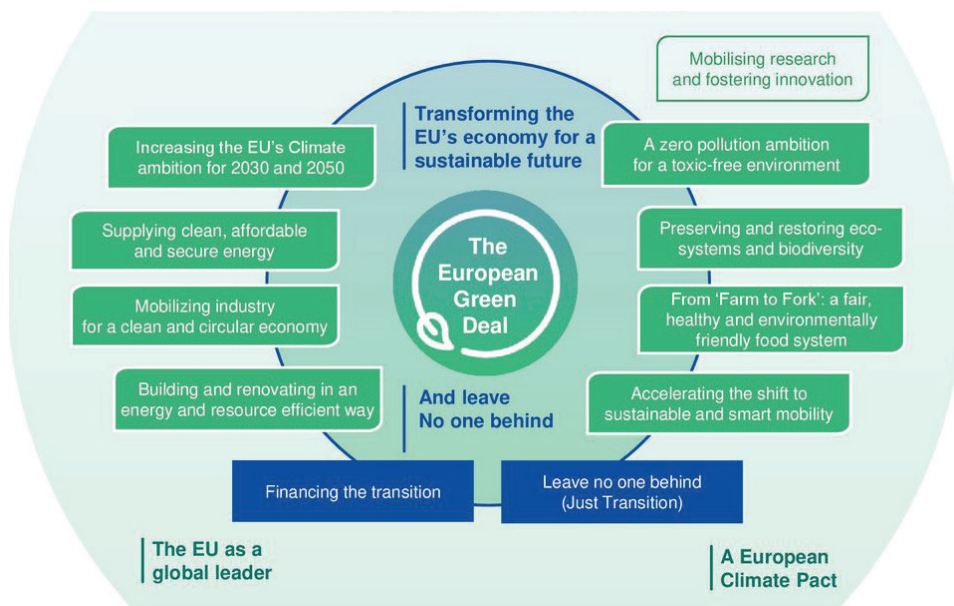


Figure 1: The European Green Deal.

Source: Communication, 2019.

The strategy refers to initiatives on ambitious EU climate goals for 2030–2050 (achieving climate neutrality), clean, affordable energy (decarbonising the energy system is important in achieving climate goals), transforming the industrial sector towards a clean, closed-loop economy, performing construction and renovation work in a way that saves energy and resources (enforcing building energy performance regulations), achieving zero emissions for a non-toxic environment, preserving and protecting biodiversity, a food system based on healthy, fair and environmentally friendly values, sustainable and intelligent mobility (it is necessary, inter alia, that emissions from means of transport should be reduced).

The Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions *Building a climate-resilient Europe – A new Climate Change Adaptation Strategy* of 24.02.2021 covers areas where climate change needs to be taken into account.

It clearly indicates that:

We [...] need to act NOW. Climate change is a problem we need to tackle now to make us future-proof. The past decade has recorded the highest global temperatures on record, and the record for the hottest year has been beaten every year for the next eight years. Our lives, our planet and our wellbeing are being affected by climate change, so we need to avoid the conditions we cannot adapt to and adapt to the conditions we cannot avoid. We need to start acting as soon as possible in a more deliberate and systematic way (Communication, 2021).

The objective of the next document, i.e. the *National Environmental Policy 2030 – the Development Strategy in the Area of Environment and Water Management* (2019), is to ensure the environmental security of the country. In turn, the specific objectives include: improvement of environmental quality and ecological safety, sustainable management of environmental resources, climate change mitigation and adaptation, disaster risk management. The stated objectives are to be achieved through climate change mitigation, climate change adaptation and disaster risk management.

The National Energy and Climate Plan 2021–2030 (2019) refers to the five dimensions of the energy union. These include decarbonisation, energy security, energy efficiency, the internal energy market, research, innovation and competitiveness. The document also points to climate and energy targets for 2021–2030. These are primarily focused on reducing greenhouse gas emissions, increasing the share of RES and increasing energy efficiency. The document draws attention to low emissions that arise from transport or individual heat sources. The need to implement measures to ensure adaptation to climate change is clearly stated in the content.

The content of the selected documents indicates a horizontal approach to the complex process of preventing the climate crisis. Tasks are primarily assigned to public entities in individual EU countries; nevertheless, it is the family, as the first human upbringing environment, that is the nucleus in shaping the responsible attitudes of future adult citizens.

Family social responsibility in the face of climate risks

Awareness of the climate risks of the Anthropocene era alone fills us with hope; however, the latest opinion polls show that Poland ranked 26th (out of 28) in a survey illustrating actions taken to protect the climate in the last six months. By this it should be emphasised that awareness alone is an insufficient element of the necessary changes. Awareness is a link in the whole construct that should be constantly present in the lives

of all societies. It is the beginning of the pursuit of excellence, and its source is the family. As Ewa Kochanowska (2022, p. 199) observes, “the family, whether considered as an institution, a social group, an educational environment, a community of persons or a system, has a number of functions to perform that relate both to the individual and to society.” Of the many functions ascribed to it, the educational one has a very broad frame of reference. At the same time, it should be remembered that within the family the world of values has been modified under the influence of social transformations. Zbigniew Tyszka notes:

[...] education that creates income prospects and ensures social prestige is increasingly valued. Activities designed to guarantee the material status of the family are rising above other types of family activity. [...] difficulties in family life give rise to the thought of the need to develop in our country a rational, scientifically based long-term social policy that would facilitate the resolution of social problems (Tyszka, 2001, p. 29).

Tyszka also emphasises that the family, as the basic unit, influences society in a way that modifies the behaviour and attitudes of the general public towards new living conditions. At the same time, modern families are clearly opening up to a new reality, which makes them all the more in need of systemic support as a reference for action. Responsibility for the quality of the environment in which we live, for the life of our planet, is and should be one of the priorities. Maria de Barbaro emphasises that the family creates its own identity and at the same time responds with internal adaptation and transformation to new and changing circumstances from outside. The family cares for, nurtures and protects its members. At the same time, while providing the right conditions for psychological development, it must be able to adapt to changes in the community and culture.

[...] changes occurring outside the family always affect it in some way and make it have to react to these sociocultural changes. This task is all the more difficult the more rapid and drastic the changes in the environment in which the family lives (de Barbaro, 1999, pp. 45–46).

Beata Krzesińska-Żach rightly emphasises that:

The family is the natural educational and cultural environment, forming the first cultural community, sustaining and shaping indigenous cultural values and opening up to other cultures. In a family understood in this way, the first field of the individual’s life activity will be the relationship between the family’s cultural activity

and the individual's development, his/her participation in generational transmission and his/her acquisition of cultural experiences (Krzesińska-Żach, 2007, p. 30).

Given the subjective nature of the modern family, we see that the assumption of its social responsibility is significant. This assumption is the basis of scientific reflection of many researchers (Mac, 2010; Kwak, 1994; Krzysteczko, 2010; Kocik, 2006; Adamski, 2002). The internalisation of value content, understood as internalisation, is combined with the acquisition of skills with a high level of morality, as the recognised value becomes a source of responsibility. Katarzyna Łukaszewska notes that

[...] the internalisation of the axiological demands emanating from eco-values is the most effective kind of commitment because it is prescriptive: a promise made to oneself cannot be reneged upon without feeling the loss of the word given. In this context, internalised eco-value prescriptively affects a person, whose responsibility is all the more profound the more strongly the value itself is internalised (Łukaszewska, 2019, p. 19).

As Joanna Szczepaniak argues, undertaking voluntary initiatives or forms of activity aimed at meeting the needs of immediate members, as well as the needs of the local community, is the basis for recognising pro-social outcomes (Szczepaniak, 2011, p. 140). She also emphasises that

[...] the family acts socially responsibly when it performs its institutional social functions (with important implications for its members and the further environment) – procreative, socialising and educational, integrative, economic, legitimising, caring – in accordance with normative expectations (Szczepaniak, 2011, p. 140).

The caregiving function is particularly related to the care of the child's proper development, including his or her health and well-being. Providing the right conditions is the primary task of adult family members, and the health of children and young people closely determines the quality of this process. A particular risk

[...] can be a number of pathogenic pathogens, environmental and climatic factors, inadequate health care, as well as the consequences of physical and psychological violence. Societies all over the world, with the broadly understood interests of the child in mind, are taking steps to ensure an adequate standard of neonatal and paediatric care, as well as extending a protective umbrella over the youngest in the form of educating parents and caregivers, material and social support in-

stitutions for families and, in extreme cases, providing alternative developmental environments in the form of family children's homes or foster families (Karaczun, Michalak, Łuszczki, Okulus, Patalong, 2021, p. 6).

When referring to legal considerations, it is important to remember that it is the duty and responsibility of adults to provide appropriate living conditions for children and young people. According to Bogusław Śliwerski, the relationship that takes place between adults and children is the result of constant work to improve laws that categorically oppose the overstepping of boundaries considered safe and comfortable by adults. At the same time, Śliwerski emphasises that

However, while human rights are the central concern of any constitution, the issue of children's rights is relegated to subordinate matters, not even requiring such a resolution. Not surprisingly, non-governmental movements and associations for children's rights are becoming more and more active to ensure that children's dignity is respected and that they have a free space for personal development. One can speak here of the birth of a fifth generation in the evolution of human rights (Śliwerski, 2017, pp. 39–40).

The juxtaposition of successive generations of emerging rights is presented by B. Śliwerski as follows:

- first, the generation of political and civil rights in the form of the American *Bill of Rights* (of 1776) and the French *Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen* (of 1789);
- second – the generation of economic, social and cultural rights – in the constitution of the Weimar Republic and the Austrian constitution of 1920;
- third – generation of peace, disarmament and environmental rights (anonymisation) under: 1941 Atlantic Charter, 1945 United Nations Charter, 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;
- fourth – a generation of human rights aimed at protecting tribal, racial, national, religious or cultural minorities;
- fifth – the generation of children's rights, oriented initially towards their protection (Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child enacted by the U.I.S.E in 1923, Declaration of the Rights of the Child adopted by the U.N. General Assembly on 20.11.1959, and the International Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989), and since the 1970s the anti- or post-pedagogy movement aiming at the radical equation of all adult rights with those of children (Balcerek, 1988; Szkudlarek, Śliwerski, 1992).

The 1940s formally brought the concern for respecting ecological rights. Almost another century has passed since then. Polish society needs extensive pro-environmental measures so that scientific reports and media messages do not remain “white noise.” It is in language that the individual expresses his or her feelings, and its social contextualisation is determined by the need to exist in a group and is responsible for establishing and maintaining interpersonal relations. Language is a source of knowledge about the culture of societies, as well as the history of its people, and is therefore an essential tool in the process of attitude formation. It indicates the categorisation of phenomena and events, while classifying them into a chosen rank. Depending on the circumstances, the appropriate use of language is necessary. The determinants of its use are determined by a number of relationships. The community of the linguistic code and its understanding are responsible for the function of effective communication (Markowski, Puzynina, 2001). Language, as a basic tool of communication, is an image containing the interpretation of the surrounding reality. Thanks to this, it has a significant influence on the shape of social behaviour. Stanislaw Grabias (1994) rightly notes that the behaviour of individuals and societies is a collection of information about themselves. Language, fundamental to interaction understood sociologically in terms of modes of action in specific situations, conditions the course and continuity of relative arrangements between its participants. Such a conviction is the basis for pointing out the momentous role of communication as a foundation for building relationships within the family and shaping attitudes, including ecological ones. Stuart Capstick and Lorraine Whitmarsh (2023) show that there is a very large disconnect between the scale of climate change and the responses of individuals. The researchers note that the climate crisis threatens human existence. The focus on the individual and society also points to the space that exists between the two, as the individual and society lie at two poles and it is only their interaction that builds the social group. This space includes

[...] our relationships with other people and all that we can do to shape social expectations and to create a common language. Acting in this area and making an impact means much more than isolated consumer choices. We are also doing something for the climate when we play out our social roles, constantly maintaining the connections between them. We act and can act in local communities, families (anonymisation) among friends, within organisations and in the workplace (Capstick, Whitmarsh, 2023, p. 433).

The preceding description of the found material in the field of climate policy forms the basis for the formulation of demands for shaping the social responsibility of the family in the age of the Anthropocene. The modern family bears social responsi-

bility in the face of current threats. The actions of individuals translate into the actions of societies, so the family should be the first space providing a source of ecological inspiration. Adults' attitudes towards problems on a European and global scale, noticing them and not being indifferent to the climatic threats facing the whole world, is the beginning of the education of an ecologically aware human being. S. Capstick and L. Whitmarsh (2023) emphasise that individual response and attitudes towards the climate crisis are fundamental to the process of building social change.

It should be borne in mind that statements about the lack of action taken by average citizens of societies contribute nothing to the expected changes in the face of the challenges of the modern world. It can be argued that they do not even have the effect of transforming the consciousness desired to raise the quality of life from the perspective of responsibility for the climate crisis. What, then, can the modern family do in view of its social role in the Anthropocene era? It is important to emphasise its importance in the process of internalising patterns and to point out that it is a key actor in building attitudes. Since role models are specific tools for the transmission of upbringing influences (Juszczak-Rygałło, 2021), the contemporary family should show conscious concern for maintaining the so-called ecological balance (Gondek, 2002). With these requirements in mind, a selection of guidelines for the modern family was made. It should:

- recognise the importance of the nature of the climate crisis and talk about it, thereby building the conviction that every individual is important and responsible in the complex action to counter the threats; engage in dialogue that is comprehensible, transparent to all participants in the act of communication, referring to examples. It is the language of the individual and of society that carries a picture of reality appropriate to both;
- create conditions for awe and spontaneous fascination with a new, unknown place, unique in nature (Monbiot, Wrigley, 2023);
- open up to self-education and educate others, “[...] use your voice and all available spaces for conversation” (Thunberg, 2023, p. 432);
- become part of a community aware of the need for change in the face of climate risks, because
- [...] our private, personal choices are part of an ongoing transformation, we convince and support others, we change ourselves and get others to do so, and this transforms culture and social rules. Thanks to the complexity of this process, there is an opportunity for a domino effect: many isolated decisions can lead to changes in social habits, which will occur after unexpected and irreversible tipping points have been passed. History shows that similar transformations can be as sudden as they are radical, with changes in people's attitudes and behaviour being a key component (Capstick, Whitmarsh, 2023, pp. 433–436);

- adopt or propose the so-called one-and-a-half-step lifestyle, i.e.: rest locally, consciously choose your diet, consciously buy new clothes – at most three per year, travel healthily, act to encourage others and approximate system change, consciously use (at least for seven years) electronic equipment (Raworth, 2023);
- point to authority figures, to small and great heroes who have consciously chosen to overcome the climate crisis (Stoknes, 2023).

The above indications are formulated on the basis of the tenets of ecological ethics, which seeks the right ways for man to act morally towards nature. Ecological ethics recognises the limitedness of the earth's natural resources and treats humans as one element of nature, as it rejects anthropocentrism, strives to pass on an undestroyed natural environment to future generations, recommends optimal human intervention in the natural environment and postulates the development of ecological awareness (Gromkowska-Melosik, 2019).

Summary

It should be emphasised that the basic and most pertinent solution by which we can minimise the negative consequences of climate risks is, first and foremost, to strive for climate neutrality. This aspiration should be born in the family, as taking action by each of us will create prototypical attitudes among adults that, if reinforced and sustained, will ensure the greatest effectiveness in action. Considering the analysis of climate policy documents, as well as the family's responsibility towards the quality of life of children and young people, we see that it is important for each individual to strengthen their environmental awareness and adopt attitudes aimed at:

- reducing one's own carbon footprint – choosing a low-carbon energy source (where there is a choice of heating the house/apartment) and low-carbon sources of transport (walking, cycling, public transport instead of driving);
- not succumbing to consumerism, thereby reducing the unnecessary buying and throwing away of all products, especially non-biodegradable products;
- reducing meat consumption in favour of introducing more plant-based products based on locally and sustainably produced ingredients into the diet;
- to engage in climate education by raising their own and others' awareness of the impact of individual behaviour on the climate and of climate and environmentally beneficial solutions;
- strengthening civic activism through participation in climate and environmental NGO activities, participation in marches and demonstrations (Karaczun, Michalak, Łuszczki, Okulus, Patalong, 2021).

The expected changes in human attitudes towards the climate crisis should be both individual and systemic. Responsibility cannot be left to individuals alone – that much is obvious, so here it is important to emphasise that the topic addressed is a slice from a vast narrative space creating a shared responsibility towards climate risks. A modern family that is aware of and indifferent to climate risks is capable of social change. As Erica Chenoweth (2023) argues, recent research shows that once the 20% engagement threshold is crossed, far-reaching changes occur in society and large-scale transformation takes place. 25% is the tipping point that conditions widespread transformation. Because “[...] change seems most difficult just before we decide to make it. We focus too easily on what we are supposedly losing. It is much harder to imagine what we might gain” (Raworth, 2023, p. 444). Given that “theory is the practice of intervention” (Domanska, 2012, p. 150), the necessity of social change in the face of climate risks needs to be talked and written about so that it does not remain merely “white noise” in the contemporary, interpersonal narrative.

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