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## The opinion of young people in megacities about environmental management and green consumption

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**JEL Classification:** Q56, Q58, Q59

**Abstract.** The article discusses the features of the formation of environmental awareness of educated youth and their active life position regarding constructive participation in the implementation of the sustainable development strategy of our country. Particular attention is paid to the study of the possibilities of developing the ecological culture of Russian educated youth as the most active and receptive to environmental values. The theoretical basis of the research was composed by the work of environmentalism researchers. The empirical base of the study was the results of a questionnaire survey of representatives of educated youth in Moscow and St.-Petersburg. The focus of the study is a system of norms, values, patterns of behavior that set the vector for the development of environmental awareness of educated young people in the existing socio-economic and political conditions. Particular attention is paid to the practices of young people, environmental activities, consumption reduction, information sources and assessment of measures to solve environmental problems. Separate waste collection and avoidance of environmentally hazardous products lead among activities, but do not cover the majority of respondents. The results of the study showed that a stable social group has emerged, among the educated youth of both capitals over the past decade, in which values and patterns have been formed, in which ecological consciousness is already quite clearly manifested. For representatives of this social group, the most acceptable actions are environmental volunteering, introduction to the practices of "green" consumption, separate collection of waste, social support for ethical business, an active political position on the

effectiveness of measures of state environmental regulation. All this becomes the basis for the formation and sustainable reproduction of the structure of the ecological culture of educated youth. The results of the issue can be used in government policy in the ecology and government and local waste programs.

**Keywords:** environmental ethics, environmental policy, waste policy, environmental management, green consumption

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on youth's relations towards the ecology, problems of conserving natural environment and the possibilities of implementing the concept of sustainable socio-economic development. It is a topic of current interest in today's sociology. Educated youth is chosen for this case, because this group of people is considered to be the most proactive and receptive to changes to part of the society. Deterioration of the ecological situation and, closely related to that fall in quality of life in Russian megacities is leading to rise in protests among youth as well as to the rise in social expectations related to the need to find effective solutions to environmental problems. In this regard, research aimed at studying the expectations and attitudes of socially active youth associated with the possibility and necessity of preserving the natural environment is acquiring particular relevance. The article examines the problems of the formation of the ecological consciousness of the Moscow and St. Petersburg educated youth and their active life position regarding constructive participation in the implementation of the sustainable development strategy for our country. Particular attention is paid to the study of the possibilities of developing the ecological culture among Russian youth.

## 2. THEORY AND METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

The empirical foundation of this study was based on the results of the survey of the representatives of educated youth from Moscow and Saint-Petersburg. It consisted of students from various universities in these megacities. The study focuses on system of norms, values, behavioural patterns that set the vector for the development of the ecological consciousness of young people in the existing socio-economic and political conditions. In this study, environmental consciousness is considered as an integral part of social consciousness, a set of collective ideas, which reflect the opinions of various social groups (in this case, educated youth) about nature, acceptable forms and boundaries of its social exploitation, the place of man and society in it, economical the conditions of the reproduction of the natural environment and the effectiveness of the state's environmental policy (Baynova, Petrov, Vetrova 2019). The study focuses on researching the influence of such social characteristics as the level of education, income, place of residence on the features of formation of the ecological culture of educated youth. The same questions were asked in Moscow and St. Petersburg, but the results were different, which, once again emphasizes the distinction of social characteristics of each metropolis.

The theoretical basis of the research are the works of Russian and foreign experts in social ecology. In particular, the theoretical basis of the research was composed by the work of researchers who pay attention to the development and dissemination of ideas of environmentalism (Sideris, 2003; Traer, 2009; Keller, 2010; Rolston, 2012; Attfeld, 2014 McShane, 2014; Hourdequin, 2015; Gardiner, 2017). However, investigators still do not pay much attention to the research of factors that hinder or, on the contrary, contribute to the global spread of the ideology of environmentalism (Smith, 2001). Despite a

significant increase in the popularity of discussions about the problems and possibilities of preserving the environment in the last third of the XX - first decades of the XXI centuries, manifested, for example, in the expansion of environmental movements or the spread of symbols of "green" consumption, global consumerism is still the dominant ideology and, at the same time, a significant obstacle to the spread of ideas of environmentalism. It is considered as a specific vision of the possibilities of getting rid of threats and risks caused by increased human intervention in nature in the course of scientific and technological progress, the escalation of extensive (having low resource efficiency) production and economic activities, and fostering in humanity the perception of the planet as interconnected and interdependent ecosystem. Current sociological research makes it possible to assess how young people understand the need to change their lives and are ready to change their consciousness.

Despite the adherence to the principles of the well-known doctrine of sustainable development, declared by international political and economic organizations (as well as by individual socio-political movements), environmental consciousness has not yet become the basis for a new and positive perception of nature (the natural environment is a single house for all) by most people on the planet. That is why studies of the most socially active groups of the population in different countries, which could be (and are already in fact) carriers and propagandists of the ideas of environmentalism, are becoming especially relevant, turning it into the basis of their ecological culture. (Baynova, Palehova, Petrov, Petrova, 2019) In Russia, undoubtedly, such a social group is the educated youth living in megalopolises, since, on the one hand, it is in megalopolises that the most difficult situation is developing with the preservation of the natural environment, and on the other, the larger the city, the more opportunities for active, solidarity and large-scale actions aimed at protecting nature.

### **3. RESEARCH RESULTS**

#### **Features of the organization, conduct and results of the study in St. Petersburg.**

The study was conducted over two years. In St. Petersburg, a separate survey of SPbSU students was conducted in 2018 (hereinafter referred to as the 2018 survey). A quota sampling method was used, there were 341 students interviewed in total between the age of 18-28 years old, with an average age of 21 years old. Of these people there were 226 women and 115 men, 63% of the respondents are obtaining degrees in social and humanitarian areas of education, 37% - in the natural sciences.

The survey in 2019 was conducted among the main universities in St. Petersburg. The sample consisted of 86 people, most of whom (43%) at the time of the research were students of Saint-Petersburg State University (SPbU), there were also students from other universities participating in a survey undertaken. The age of the respondents varied between 17 to 27 years old with an average age of 20 years. Out of 86 participants, 32 were male and 54 were female. Most of the respondents obtain degrees in natural and technical sciences, 62.8% in accounting, and 37.2% were obtaining degrees in social and humanitarian. Out of the total number of respondents 77.9% of the respondents are undergraduate students.

During the survey, the majority of students stated Nevsky, Moskovsky, Vyborg and Kalininsky as areas of their residence. The smallest number of the respondents stated that they, at the moment of the survey, lived in Admiralteyskiy, Frunzenskiy and Petrodwitz districts. Since only SPbU students were interviewed in the 2018 survey, the areas of residence was likely to correspond with districts of the University's dormitories, located in Petrodvortsovy and Vasileostrovsky districts, which was why the

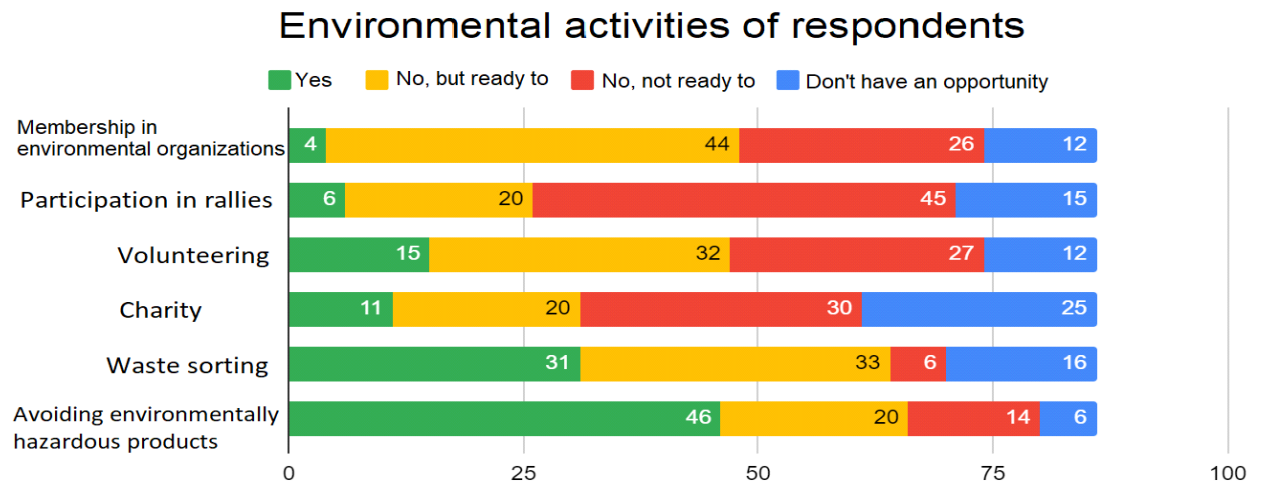
findings regarding the student's areas of residence significantly differed from the once presented in the 2019 survey. Since only SPbU students were interviewed in the 2018 survey, the areas of residence most often named by respondents differ somewhat from those presented in the 2019 survey, mainly coinciding with the university dormitories (Petrodvortsovy and Vasileostrovsky districts).

The majority of students (59,3%) stated their parent's financial help as their main source of income both, in 2019 and 2018, 24.4% of respondents chose a scholarship and 14% answered that they rely on their own wages. About half of the respondents believe that they have enough money for food and basic necessities, but they have to save money to buy household appliances, 25 people answered that they only have to save only for large purchases and 12 answered that they only have enough money for groceries and essential items. Payments were similar to the 2018 survey where 198 out of 341 people said they had enough money to buy food and clothing but had to save for larger purchases. Such distributions indicate a relatively low material security of the respondents. Such results, in our opinion, are only a consequence of their intermediate financial situation, since the majority of students, according to the data, do not have a personal source of income and relies on the help of their parents.

When the respondents were asked the following question: "Did you think about the environmental situation in St. Petersburg?" the overwhelming majority (90.7%) answered positively, which is slightly higher than the 2018 survey data in which 83.8% of respondents were concerned about this problem. This becomes equally evident that both a real concern about the state of the natural environment and a consequence of the impact of a large flow of information about the ecological situation. The respondents name internet resources as the main channel for obtaining such information, as well as friends, relatives and the university. Television and print media, as the main sources of information about the environmental situation, are not relevant for educated youth, which is confirmed by the survey data.

An important aspect of the impact on the change in the degree of society's impact on the environment is the actions of individuals in relation to social institutions. In the survey, a question was asked about the degree of participation of respondents in environmental rallies. Most men and women are not ready to carry out these practices (62.5% and 46.3%, respectively). At the same time, a slightly larger number of women (9.3%) take part in rallies compared to men (3.1%). A similar number of representatives of the social-humanitarian and natural-technical directions do not take part in volunteer environmental activities, but are ready to start doing this (40.6% and 35.2%, respectively). A significantly larger number of students in the natural and technical field, 22.2%, are already engaged in volunteering. A similar picture is observed when analyzing the data on the membership of students of the two directions in environmental organizations. Half of the respondents are ready to join organizations of this type (53.1% and 50.0%, respectively), but only representatives of the natural-technical direction (7.4%) are members of them.

Almost an equal number of men and women take part in charity-related activities (12.5% and 13%, respectively). The situation is similar among those who do not take part in charity and are not ready to do so in the future (37.5% and 33.3%), respectively. The data obtained shows that there are more students of social and humanitarian degrees who are engaged in charity work or are ready to start doing it (15.6% and 31.3%, respectively). Almost the majority of students in the natural sciences are not ready to take part in charity, 40.7% (Fig. 1).



*Fig. 1. Activities of respondents that aim to protect the environment, St.Petersburg*

#### Avoiding environmentally hazardous products.

A significant number of goods that ensure human life, in the process of production and usage, cause irreparable harm to the environment. The data obtained in the course of the study show that the overwhelming majority of students in the social and humanitarian direction (62.5%) avoid purchases of goods that damage nature, which is slightly lower than among the representatives of the natural and technical areas (48.1%). Approximately, an equal number of respondents declared their readiness to implement this nature protection practice in the future - 21.9% and 24.1%, respectively.

A separate block of questions in the questionnaire was devoted to the willingness of respondents to reduce the consumption of specific types of resources, that is, to "green" consumption. In this regard, the data for each of the specific types of resources are interesting.

#### Saving electricity and fuel.

While there is no definite point of view among men on the issue of saving electricity, women more often speak in favor of reducing the consumption of electricity and fuel (53.8%). In the future, 23.1% of female respondents are ready to reduce their electricity consumption.

Such results may be related to the fact that there are more opportunities in reducing electricity. The use of energy-saving light bulbs and the introduction of household appliances with less electricity consumption would be an example.

#### Reducing food consumption.

The research shows that the respondents are less prepared to limit food consumption. On average, there are only 24.4% of the total number of respondents who are ready to do this. Opinion were almost equally divided among women about their willingness or unwillingness to reduce food consumption. More than half of men (56.7%) do not reduce their food consumption and are not ready for such consumer behavior in the near future. A significant number of students in both directions do not reduce and are not ready to reduce food consumption (37.5% - social and humanitarian and 46% - natural and technical). Nevertheless, the number of respondents willing to reduce food consumption is higher among the social and humanitarian direction (43.8%), compared to 26% in the natural and technical direction.

#### Reducing consumption of clothing and footwear.

Among women, the distribution is as follows: 42.3% of women are already reducing their consumption of clothing and footwear, 26.9% of respondents are in the category “ready to reduce, but not reducing” and 30.8% do not reduce resource consumption and are not ready to give up in the future from him. As for men, the largest share of respondents (41.9%) belongs to the category of those who are not ready, in principle, to reduce their consumption of clothes. Thus, women, in comparison with men, show a greater readiness in this category for resource-saving savings in consumption.

#### Reducing consumption of cosmetics and personal care products.

There are 32.7% of women who are not ready to reduce the consumption of these consumer goods, while among men, there are only 20%. Almost half of the male respondents, 43.3% are already reducing the consumption of goods in this category, and 40.4% of the female respondents expressed their readiness to do so in the future. Almost half of the respondents in the social and humanitarian direction do not reduce and are not ready to reduce the consumption of cosmetics and personal hygiene products (45.2%), and only 19.4% of the respondents are reducing the consumption of these goods at the moment. An equal number of students of the natural-technical direction are ready to reduce or are already reducing the consumption of personal hygiene products (41.2%).

It can be noted that despite the active educational activities of eco-activists on the harm of the production and the consumption of this type of goods for the environment, the respondents are not ready to limit themselves in their consumption. This indicates a lack of awareness of the respondents about the dangers of this category of goods.

#### Reducing consumption of electronics.

Today there are more and more gadgets designed to simplify our life, making it more comfortable and safer. But the production and consumption of many goods in this category cause irreparable damage to the environment. The question of the willingness to reduce the consumption of this resource was also asked to the respondents in this study. According to the results, 38.7% of men were more unprepared to reduce the consumption of goods in this category than 28.8% of women. However, at the moment, a significant number of women - 40.4% - are already focused on reducing the consumption of electronics.

More than half of men (53.1%) and only 42.6% of women cite excess as a reason for the reduction in consumption of goods in this category. As a possible option, it was also given the opportunity to select “care for the environment” as the reason for the reduction in resource consumption. In this case, the majority of both men (68.8%) and women (83.3%) define this option for themselves as the basis for becoming familiar with the practices of “green” consumption (Fig. 2).

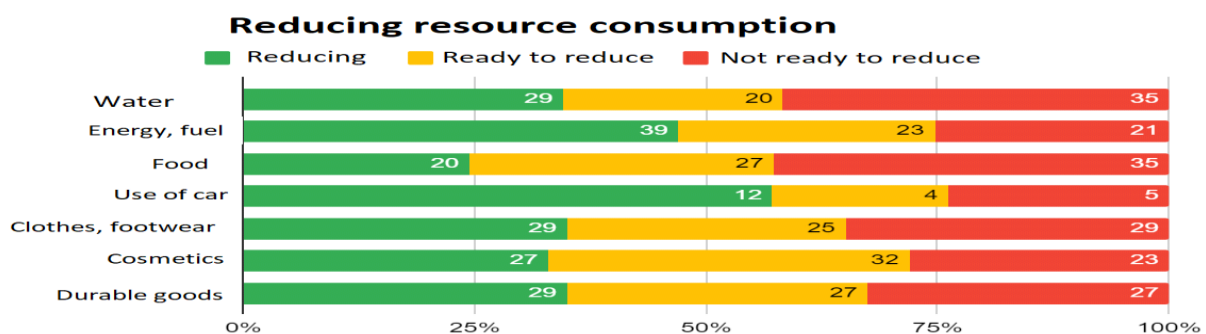


Fig. 2. Reducing resource consumption, St.Petersburg

The environmental situation in St. Petersburg over the past 5 years, according to the majority of respondents, has worsened. When asked about the environmental situation in the area of residence, many answered that it has not changed. It is noteworthy that the opinion of the majority about the environmental situation in the world is similar with almost half believing that it has also deteriorated over the past five years. With those who thought about the environmental situation in the area of the city, a significantly larger number (35.9%) assess the situation as being worse than with those who did not think about it at all (12.5%). The overwhelming majority of those who have not thought about the environmental situation in the area of the city believe that the situation remains unchanged. A similar situation is among those who thought about the environmental situation over the past 5 years in general in St. Petersburg. Almost half of them, 42.3%, believe that the situation is getting worse. Only 26.9% think it is getting better. The opposite picture is those who do not think about the ecological situation. The majority of these respondents assessed the situation as improving (50%)

(Fig. 3).

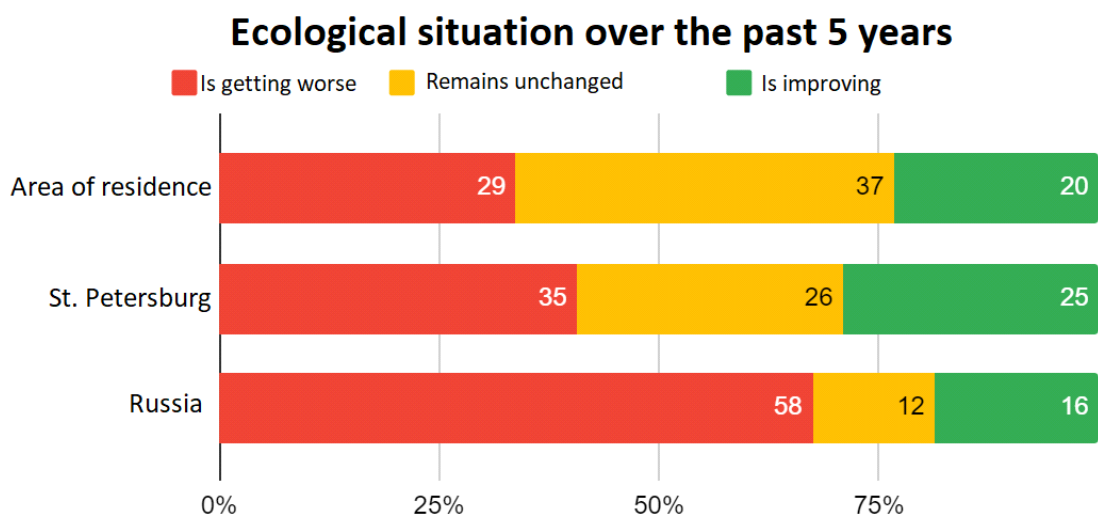


Fig. 3. **Ecological situation, St.Petersburg**

The majority of respondents (96.5%) are also confident in the need for Russia to sign various international agreements aimed at improving the environmental situation. The respondents noted the existing environmental problems of the city in the following order: the first on the list is air pollution (77 people), the next on the list are landfills (72), insufficient landscaping (69) and the last one is water pollution (65). On the whole, 85% of respondents confirm the fact that the environmental situation in St. Petersburg is far from being at the highest level (Fig.4).

## Everyday environmental problems faced by the respondents

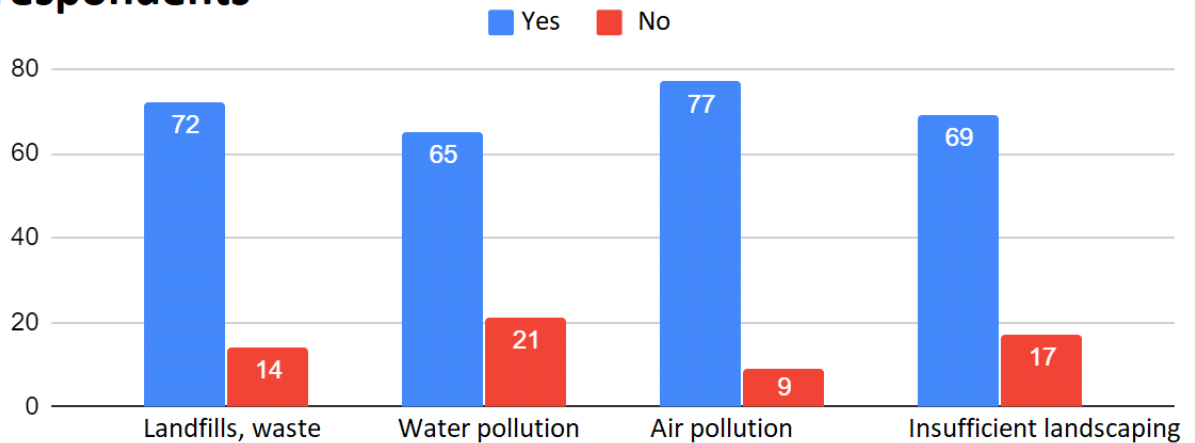


Fig. 4. Everyday problems, St.Petersburg

To the question: "Have you made any attempts to solve every day environmental problems?" only 41.8% answered positively - this is 36 people from the total number of respondents. And to the question: "Did the measures taken lead to solving the problems?" only 12 out of 36 people answered positively. Considering the most effective measures to solve environmental problems, the following were singled out: community service days (32 people - the majority), publications in social networks - in second place (this option was chosen by 18 respondents) and media involvement - 15 people (Fig. 5).

## The most effective measures to solve environmental problems

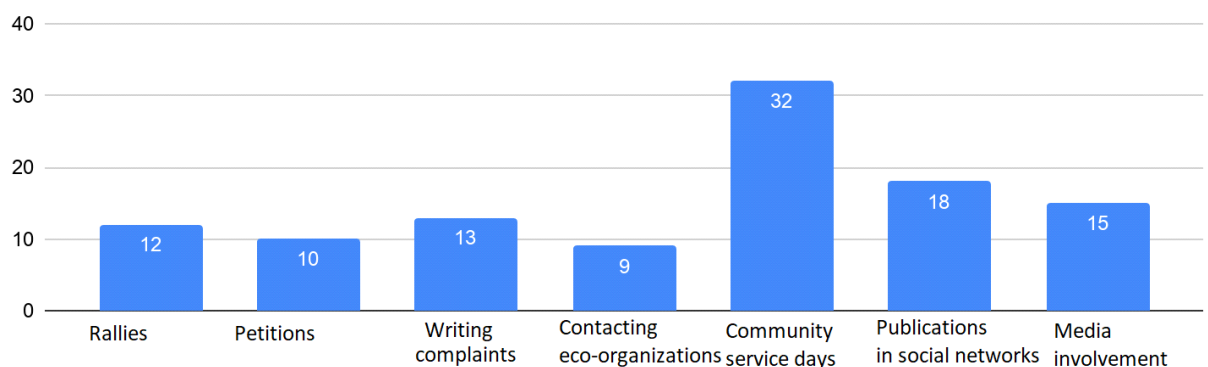


Fig. 5. The most effective measures, St.Petersburg

When considering the least effective measures, survey participants chose signing petitions, participating in rallies and drafting complaints to various authorities.

In addition, in 2019, respondents were asked an open-ended question, the purpose of which was to find out the attitude towards the environmental situation in different countries. The countries with the worst indicators include Russia, India, China, and African countries while the countries considered to be



environmentally friendly countries would be identified by the respondents as Norway, Finland, Sweden and Switzerland. These data confirmed the results of the answer to a similar question in 2018.

### Features of the organization, conduct and results of research in Moscow.

The survey involved 347 respondents. The selection of respondents was carried out through the participants of the scientific student circle of the RSSU, who attracted students from their universities as participants.

Among the respondents 43.5% were male, 56.5% were female. 26.2% of respondents obtain degrees in natural and technical areas, 73.8% - in social and humanitarian. Age structure of respondents: 17-29 years old, with an average age of 19 years.

The distribution of respondents by place of residence in Moscow was as follows – a significant number of the respondents lives in the North-Eastern Administrative District where the RSSU is located. The respondents also live in the Eastern District, where one of the buildings of the RSSU is located, in the Western, South-Western, where other large universities in Moscow are located, in the South-Eastern - residential area. Fewer respondents live in the Central District and Troitsky and Novomoskovsky Districts, where the population is small.

Among the respondents, undergraduate students prevail (62.5%). According to the main source of income, the respondents were distributed as follows: parental assistance - 63.4%, wages - 23.6%, scholarships - 8.9%. The main source of income is the help of parents. The role of the scholarship is small. Currently, most of the students study on a paid basis and do not receive a scholarship. Salary is a source of income for undergraduates mainly (54.5% of those who chose salary are undergraduates).

Assessing their property status, 49.3% of respondents said that “There is enough money for food and basic necessities, they have to save money to buy household appliances”, and 32.3% believe that “There is enough money for almost everything, but for large purchases (car, real estate) have to save money. ”

You should also pay attention to the difference in the answers about religious preferences: "atheism" and "I do not consider myself to be a religion." Perhaps some of the respondents consider atheism to be a system of views and, noting “I do not belong to any one,” thus want to show that they are not interested in issues of religion as a worldview. But this topic requires a separate study, which is no longer included in the sphere of interests of social ecology.

75.8% of respondents think about the environmental situation in Moscow while 24.2% do not. The main source of information is the Internet, but the role of television is quite significant (respondents could choose several answers) (Fig. 6).

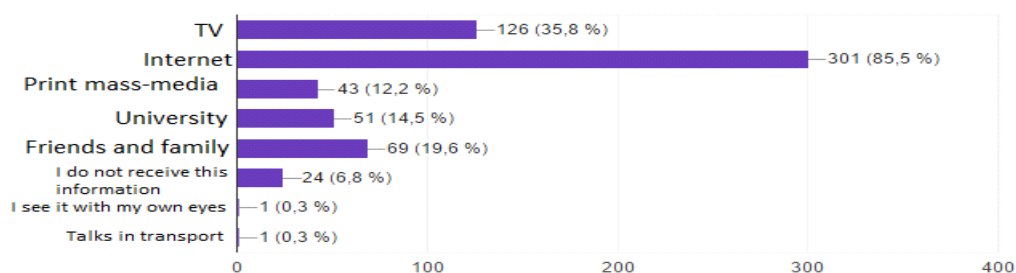


Fig. 6. The sources of the information, Moscow.

Another interesting point is that the role of universities in obtaining information about the environmental situation in Moscow is small.

The majority of the respondents disagree with the statement that an ordinary citizen cannot do anything to protect the environment. And, conversely, we agree that a person can have a qualitative impact on the environment. With regard to the state's exceptional ability to influence the environment, opinions were divided similarly, but more "disagree" or "rather agree" prevail. Nevertheless, almost two-thirds of the respondents mostly agree that the state can improve the environmental situation only with the assistance of citizens.

Most of the respondents disagree with the fact that statements about environmental threats are often exaggerated and that it is necessary to listen to statements about environmental threats. 80% of respondents agree to one degree or another and this is not at all alarmist sentiments imposed by the media, but a quite stable conviction of the majority of educated young people in Moscow and St. Petersburg.

Most of the respondents are not yet active participants in environmental projects. The exception is sorting garbage, which is still the most attractive environmental activity. Garbage is sorted (and generally support this idea) by 45.2% of respondents. Also, an interest is shown in participation in the development of "green" consumption, which is reflected in the reduction of purchases that can harm the environment - 20.5%. About a quarter of the respondents do not sort garbage and do not choose to buy, but they are quite disposed to such behavior. Actually, the manifestation of such "green" sentiments has already begun to manifest itself from the beginning of 2020, when, according to media reports, young people stepped up their participation in the separate collection of waste, primarily as dangerous as plastic and batteries, both in Moscow and St. Petersburg.

The respondents are least involved in public activities in the field of environmental protection: participation in public organizations or participation in rallies to protect the environment. Nevertheless, 34.9% and 29.7% of respondents, respectively, are ready for such activities and, if necessary, can take a very active part in it. At the same time, 37.2% are ready to be volunteers, and only 21.3% are ready to donate their own funds for environmental protection (and this despite the fact that the income level of educated youth in Moscow, and especially in St. Petersburg is not great) (Fig. . 7). Although, of course, such figures to a greater extent indicate so far the passivity of educated youth in the implementation of the principles of sustainable development.

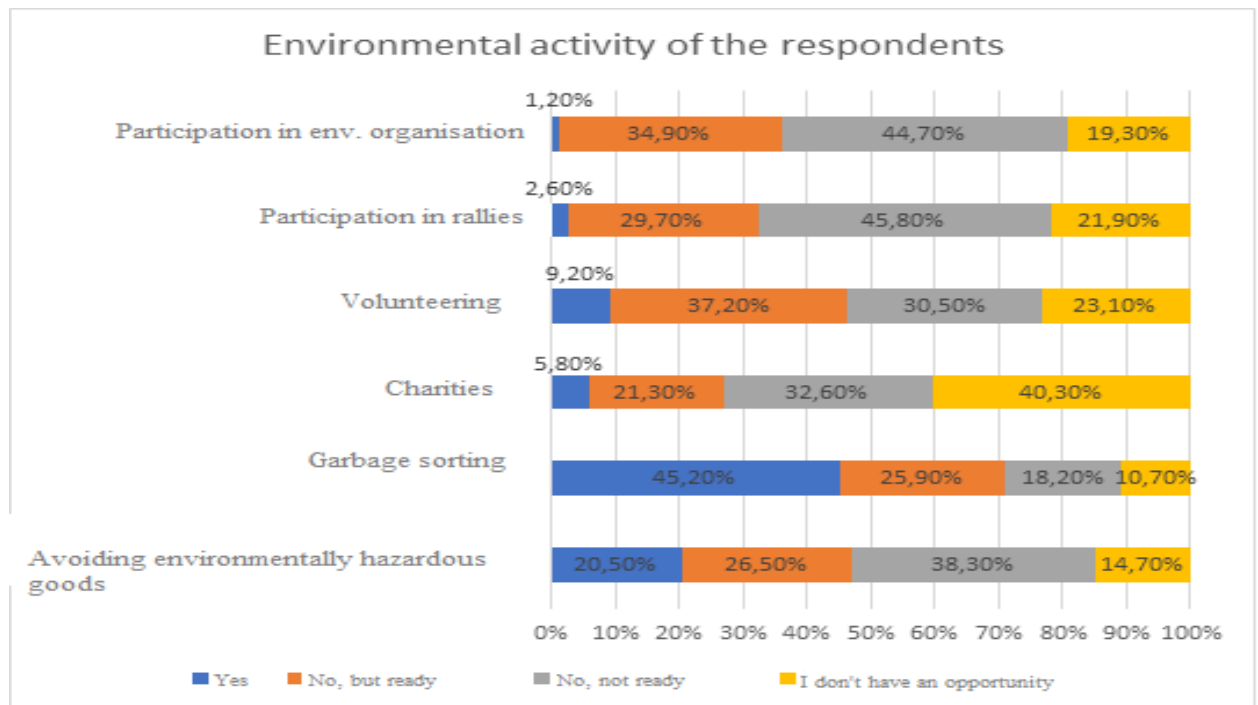


Fig. 7. Activities of respondents that aim to protect the environment, Moscow

To the question “Please indicate the name of the environmental organization of which you are a member”, it was answered by only 2 people who indicated Greenpeace.

12 people answered the question “Specify which environmental projects you donate money to”, and they indicated the fight against forest fires, an action in the FSC on planting trees, projects for sorting and recycling of waste, projects against global warming, projects against air pollution, measures to clean up natural areas, the "Planting trees" project, Private Moscow projects, WWF.

To the question about the reduction in consumption in Moscow, the answers were distributed as follows (Fig. 8.).

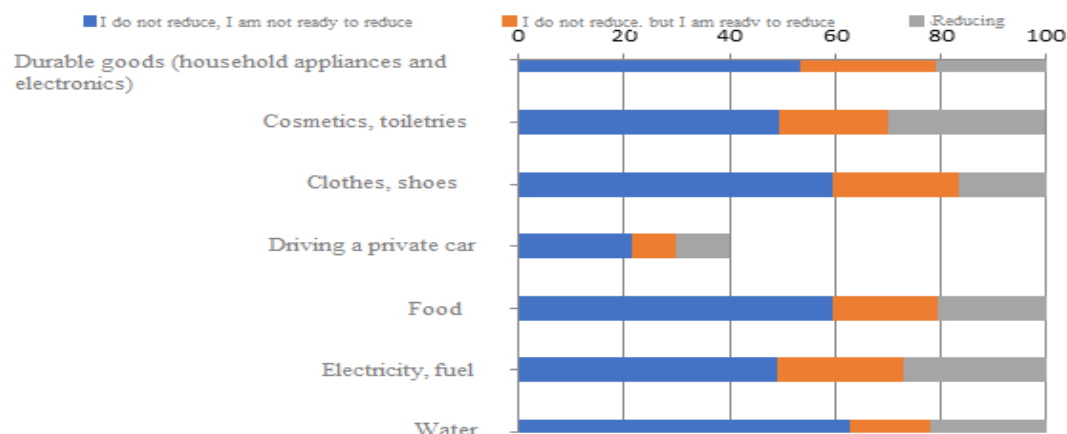


Fig. 8. Reducing resource consumption, Moscow

In general, they reduce the consumption for environmental reasons from 20% to 30% of respondents. Including for such resources, the saving of which has been called for for quite a long time - these are water and electricity. In general, more than half of the respondents with more than half of them being car owners, do not reduce consumption and are not ready to reduce for environmental reasons.

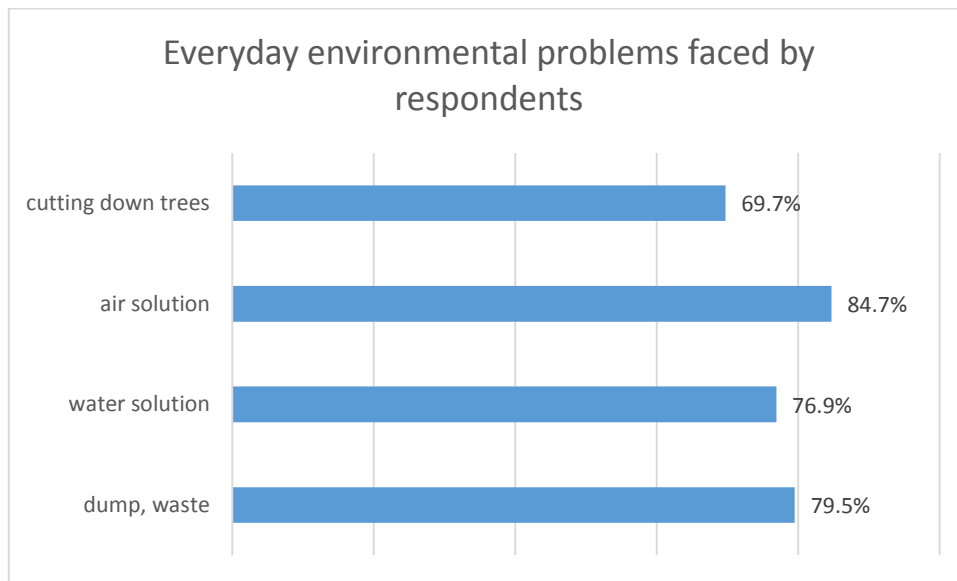
What factors can contribute to reducing the consumption of natural resources? Most of the respondents point to a possible reason for the reduction in consumption - it is money savings. In addition, and most importantly, concern for the environment and personal beliefs can be an incentive to reduce consumption for 39.5% and 36.6%, respectively. Redundancy of resources - for 12.5%. For the approval of others - 4.5%. Following fashion trends - 4%. In protest - 3.1%. 17.5% do not know or are not ready to reduce consumption under any circumstances.

When it comes to countries with the worst environmental situation having been considered by respondents, Moscow, India, China, and Russia are leading. In regards to the best ecology: Austria, Switzerland, Sweden, Finland, Norway. Assessing the environmental situation in the world for the next 5 years, 34.3% of respondents are sure that it will improve, but 49.6% believe that it will only get worse. At the same time, 74.1% are convinced that in order to solve the problems of preserving the environment, Russia should sign appropriate international agreements.

More than two thirds of the respondents have faced some kind of environmental problem with the most common being air pollution (84.7%) and garbage dumps (79.5%). Water pollution is not far behind (76.9%). To a lesser extent, the respondents are concerned about the felling of green areas (69.7%) (Fig. 9).

Of the 53 respondents who answered that they had not encountered air pollution problems, 9 live in the Western Administrative District of Moscow, where the problem of waste incineration in the Ochakovo industrial zone was extremely urgent in 2019. The smell of burning on summer nights prevented residents of neighboring areas from sleeping with open windows. "Ochakovo" was on the 1st place in Moscow in terms of the content of harmful substances in the air. However, not all respondents noticed this problem near their home.

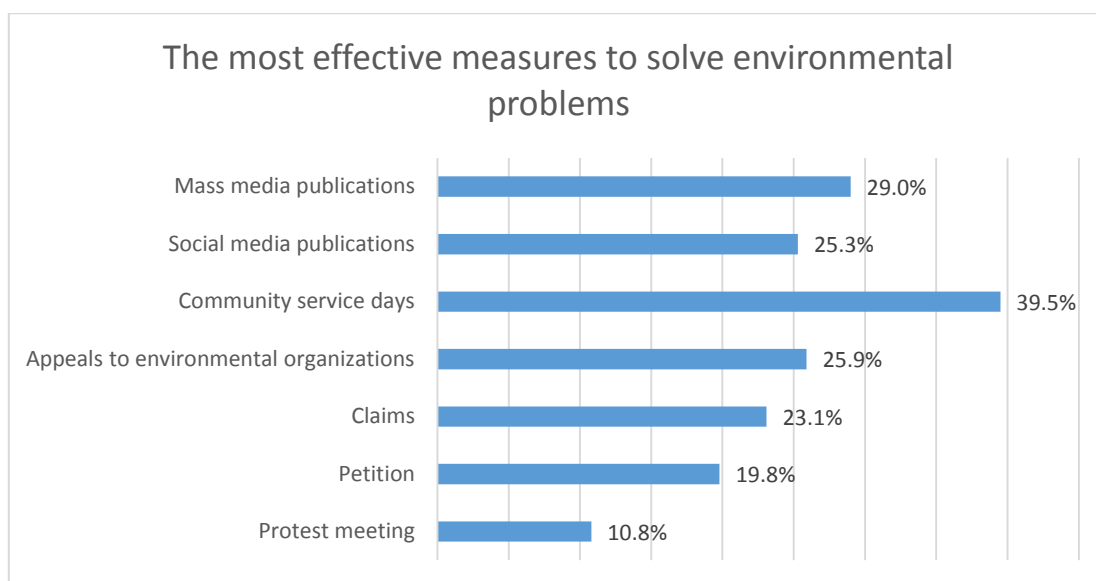
Also on green spaces: felling is a fairly common reason for residents' complaints to the authorities, a topic of constant discussion on social networks. Trees are cut down in all neighborhoods where the demolition of five-story buildings under the renovation program begins, but this problem is less noticed by respondents than others.



**Fig. 9. Everyday problems, Moscow**

Not all respondents answered the question about the effectiveness of methods of struggle for the preservation of the environment, but only those who took part in any nature protection actions or projects. At the same time, 22.8% of respondents indicate that their attempts to deal with environmental problems have led to success, and 38.6% - that did not.

The respondents consider the organization of community service days and garbage collection the most effective methods (39.5%). 29% consider involvement various types of media in solving environmental problems, and contacting environmental public organizations - 25.9% to be effective. Publication of information materials on environmental problems in social networks - 25.3%. Only 10.8% of respondents consider rallies to be an effective means towards solving environmental problems (Fig. 10).



**Fig. 10. The most effective measures, Moscow**

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The results of the study allow us to conclude that the possibilities for the formation of environmental awareness in Russian megacities, such as Moscow and St. Petersburg, are still only diminishing under the influence of traditional and in connection with the emergence of new factors, of which the main are, of course, economic - global the spread of the values of a "consumer society", an increase in income differentiation, the persistence of stagnant poverty, and social - the spread of social apathy and disbelief, including and primarily among educated youth, in the ability of society and the state to solve environmental problems in the foreseeable future. However, the results of the study also showed that a stable social group has emerged, among the educated youth of both capitals over the past decade, in which values and patterns have been formed, in which ecological consciousness is already quite clearly manifested. For representatives of this social group, the most acceptable actions are environmental volunteering, introduction to the practices of "green" consumption, social support for ethical business, an active political position on the effectiveness of measures of state environmental regulation. All this becomes the basis for the formation and sustainable reproduction of the structure of the ecological culture of educated youth. The formation of such a stable group among representatives of educated young people in Russian megacities and a sustainably reproducing ecological culture can both contribute to the creation of effective systems of environmental compliance control in domestic government and business structures, and contribute to the development and effective implementation of social programs for environmental risk management. After all, representatives of a new generation of educated youth, who are gradually replacing the existing environmentally non-oriented management, and not only in the largest megacities of Russia, will play an increasingly significant role in government organizations and in business structures.

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