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Construction of Public Opinion on Environmental Issues in the Media

(Visuomenės nuomonės apie aplinkosaugos problemas konstravimas žiniasklaidoje)

Santrauka

Ekologinių problemų atsiradimą dažniausiai nulemia žmogaus nesugebėjimas suvokti tikrųjų savo veiklos padarinių ir ne tik nesąmoningas, bet ir sąmoningas aplinkos teršimas ar gamtos žalojimas. Taigi aplinkos problemos yra socialinio elgesio padarinys ir suvokimo rezultatas. Šiuo atžvilgiu ekologinės problemos yra socialinės problemos. Tačiau tam, kad aplinkos užterštumas taptų visuomenės pripažinta socialine problema, būtinas viešumas (Luhmann 1988; Beck 1992) ir adekvati informacija, kurią operatyviausiai perduoda visuomenės informavimo priemonės.

Žiniasklaida yra vienas iš svarbiausių visuomenės informatorių ekologijos ir aplinkosaugos temomis. Kita vertus, moderniajame socialiniame gyvenime tai vienintelis šaltinis, leidžiantis pažinti toli už mūsų kasdieninės patirties ribų egzistuojantį socialinės veiklos pasaulį. Taigi, kad žmonės susirūpintų ekologine situacija, žiniasklaidos priemonių pakankamas dėmesys šiai sričiai yra būtina sąlyga.

Straipsnyje nagrinėjama, kaip aplinkosaugos problemos yra vertinamos visuomenėje bei kaip Lietuvos visuomenės informavimo priemonės, konkrečiai kalbant, spauda, skleidžia aplinkosauginę informaciją ir šitaip konstruoja aplinkosauginių problemų suvokimą visuomenėje.

Key words: *social constructionism, public opinion, environmental concern, mass communication, mass media.*

Without sociology the ecological issue remains socially blind; with ecology the social issue becomes blind to history. However, a sociology that applies its experience of the structurability of society, which it gained in the social issue, can go beyond an ideological critique in opposing the politically dangerous confusion of society and nature. The welfare state is the first consequence of these experiences. Sociology could bring out these experiences through research on the ecological issues and argue them publicly.

(Ulrich Beck 1995; 129)

Introduction

Environmental problems became a focus of social science together with the environmental movement in the West. Before that they were regarded as random processes studied by natural science disciplines. In Lithuania, as a

postcommunist country, public discourse on environmental issues started after *glasnost* and *perestroika* reforms were launched by the former leader of the Soviet Union Michail Gorbachev. Therefore, when Western societ-

ies were “attacked” by the media on such issues as acid rains, global warming and ozone layer depletion, Soviet ideology ignored environmental problems. Open and critical discussion on the issues in the postcommunist societies was not possible until the end of 1980’s. German sociologist Ulrich Beck (1995) emphasizes that existing cultural norms rather than objective facts of pollution determine the level of public environmental concern. According to cultural symbols and media information individuals are selecting priorities. Thus the media is one of the key sources of environmental information that enables us to be aware of distant events that are behind our direct experience. Environmental sociologists (Beck 1992, 1995; Dunlap and Mertig 1992; Hannigan 1995; Eder 1996) addressed a key role of the mass media role in the stimulation of public awareness about the environment.

Many contemporary social scientists have emphasized the role of mass communication as one of the key features of ‘high modernity’ (Giddens 1991). American sociologist C. Wright Mills (1951; 333) argued that “between consciousness and existence stand communications which influence such consciousness as men have of their existence”. Today’s mass media is influential social power and a forum for public debate where ‘various social groups, institutions, and ideologies struggle over the definition and construction of social reality’ (Gurevitch & Levy 1985; 19). In order society becomes concerned about a certain issue and considers it as a social problem, information, most effectively delivered by the mass media is needed. And in order individuals were concerned about environment, sufficient attention of the mass media to this issue is necessary. Thus, publicity is playing the key role in the environmental concern (Luhmann 1988; Beck 1992).

After more than a decade of political independence it is interesting to study relationship between relatively free mass media and people’s thinking and saying about the environment in the postcommunist society. In the following sections, social constructionist perspective is

analyzed, research methods applied in the study are presented, and the results of public environmental perceptions and the data of environmental coverage in the main dailies in Lithuania are examined. At the end, the discussion of theoretical assumptions and empirical results follows.

Media Representations from Social Constructionist Perspective

Environmental deterioration becomes a social problem only if society or its group recognizes the environment as a problem. The main argument of *social constructionism* is that subjective factors rather than putative conditions and objective facts are decisive in defining social problems. Social problems are collective constructions constituted of “claims-making, complaints and demands for the relief and amelioration of offensive conditions.” (Spector & Kitsuse 1977; 96) However, public perceptions do not necessarily reflect the reality of actual problems.

The mass media together with other social agents play a particular role in constructing social reality and providing the audience with these constructs. The mass media are the technological devices that “disseminate symbolic content to large, heterogeneous and widely dispersed audiences” (Janowitz 1968 quoted in McQuail 1994; 10) making mass communication possible. Sociologist Gaye Tuchman (1978) argues that the news reconstruct social world and are a window to the world, determining, what we want to know, what we have to know and what we should know.

Most of the modern environmental problems, for instance global warming, ozone layer depletion, toxic contamination, acid rains or nuclear radiation are usually invisible to the naked eye. Studying construction of environmental problems in the mass media is of particular importance in terms of global environmental issues. Time constrain, location, sources of information, media frames, “gatekeeping” are important factors in shaping media coverage. Several characteristics of environmental

reporting (Hannigan 1995):

1. Environmental problems are often presented in economic terms, since they are directly related to economic and political structures and policies.
2. Environmental issues are inseparable from health issues.
3. The environment is regarded as a policy area like health care, education and social services.

Social tasks of the mass media include informing, interpreting, continuity of dominant culture, entertaining, mobilization. People are selectively choosing one or another mass media depending on their social needs. The role of information in the public environmental concern is of great importance, too. Studies have shown that those who are better informed about different aspects of environmental issues, more frequently express pro or contra-attitudes than those who are undecided. On the other hand, media exposure negatively correlate with environmental concern (De Haan 1995).

Data and methods

Our research was based on two steps of data collection, i.e. public opinion survey and content analysis of newspapers. *Quantitative research* was carried out in order to reveal public environmental perceptions, attitudes, proenvironmental behavior and environmental knowledge. The survey using structured interviews was conducted with 1092 randomly selected people over 18 in Kaunas city in August and September 1998. The sample size was 1500. The survey had response rate of 73% and was answered by 43% men and 57% women. All age groups over 18 are equally well captured and give a good representation of the general population. The findings are very likely (at the 95 percent confidence level) to be representative of the total population within an error range of plus or minus 3 percent. Because the sample was drawn only from Kaunas city, the results cannot be generalized directly to the entire country. However, earlier surveys that asked similar questions and that drew samples from

the entire population provided with similar results. Therefore, it is assumed that the Kaunas survey provides with significant findings on the perception of environmental problems of urban population in Lithuania.

The questionnaire included 67 questions concerning people's opinion on the importance of such social issues as alcoholism, drug abuse, criminality, AIDS, cancer disease, environmental pollution, terrorism, accidents of the nuclear power plants, car accidents; perceptions of the environment and environmental risks; attitudes towards policy measures; behavioral intentions; public activism; environmental knowledge; and the role of the mass media. The questionnaire was composed mainly of the closed questions with a few exceptions when open-ended and forced-choice questions were asked.

In order to reveal how environmental problems are articulated in the media, *content analysis* method was applied. The main questions were as follows:

- How is the environment as a social problem being framed? What about the context and place of the stories?
- What are the quantitative characteristics of newspaper articles covering environmental issues both by type of newspaper and across all newspapers?
- What types of environmental issues are reported?
- How is the coverage of environmental issues in two newspapers similar or different?

All newspaper issues during the two month period of June and July 1998 were included. The time for content analysis was chosen in order to compare the newspaper coverage of environmental issues with public environmental perceptions collected during the survey. The total number of articles analyzed was 592 or 291 articles in *Lietuvos rytas* and 301 articles in *Kauno diena*.

The unit of sampling was an individual article that was dealing with environmental problems or environment related information. Each article was coded in accordance with the fol-

lowing variables and categories: name of the newspaper; date of the issue; title of the article; size; place; number of illustrations; character (news article, problematizing an issue, educative or reader reaction); topic; environmental problem type; problem scale (local through global); overall tone of the story; sources of information; attributed causes of the problem; and the proposed solutions. The coding procedure was a mixture of quantitative and qualitative content analysis. Data of both survey and content analysis was analyzed applying SPSS software package.

Public Environmental Concern: Attitudes, Behavior, Knowledge

According to quantitative research findings, the environment ranks well below crime and alcoholism as a public concern, but is well ahead of drugs, AIDS, cancer etc. Less than one tenth of the respondents pointed environmental pollution as the most important social problem in Lithuania, while crime and alcoholism was mentioned by more than two third of the respondents (respectively 9%, 38% and 30%). However, when asked to choose between protecting the environment and economic growth, 62% of survey respondents chose environmental protection and 38% chose economic growth.

When people were asked to evaluate importance of environmental issues on the time scale, one fifth (21%) of the interviewed people considered environmental problems very important ten years ago. Majority of people said that they were very important today and would be in the future (respectively 54% and 65%). Every fifth respondent (22%) pointed that he/she was afraid of ecological catastrophe. Majority of respondents (52%) was afraid of severe illness in his/her life, every seventh (15%) – of an accident and every twelfth (8%) – of a natural calamity. When asked about their interest in environmental questions, only one tenth (11%) answered that they were not interested in those issues. Majority of people indicated at they were slightly interested in envi-

ronmental issues and one fifth of the interviewed were very interested in them (respectively 68% and 21%).

Environmental issues, like water and air pollution (79% and 68% respectively) were at the top of the most serious environmental problems in Lithuania. In addition, half of the respondents (50%) indicated that Ignalina nuclear power station was also one of the most important environmental problems in the country. Nevertheless, the greenhouse effect, overfertilisation and building of Butinge oil terminal on the Baltic Sea coast were considered as the least serious environmental problems (6%, 7% and 8% respectively). The most serious environmental problems in people's living environment were as follows: polluted air, noise and bad quality of drinking water (respectively 51%, 50% and 48%).

In order to measure environmental concern, an aggregated index analysis was employed. Ten criteria were selected to describe public environmental concern (see Table 1). According to the index values one fourth of the respondents (25%) were not interested in environmental issues, majority of people (64%) composed potential or latent group and only one tenth of interviewed (11%) belonged to the group of environmentally concerned and conscious people.

Factor analysis was applied to examine the same set of variables in order to identify a number of factors that were conceptually distinct in the minds of the respondents. As illustrated in Table 1, four relatively orthogonal factors that explained 64% of the total variance were extracted:

F1: Antropocentric view to the environment (superiority of humanity over nature)

F2: Individual motivation (awareness of personal responsibility)

F3: Importance of material well being (priority of economic versus environmental problems)

F4: Mixture of ecocentric, antropocentric, individualist and materialist values

Table 1.

Factor analysis of environmental attitudes*

	Factors			
	F1	F2	F3	F4
<i>In spite of our particular abilities, we humans are still subjects to the laws of nature</i>				0,69
<i>Protecting the environment and fighting pollution is less urgent than often suggested</i>				0,59
<i>Humans are supposed to rule over the rest of nature</i>	0,83			
<i>Humans will ultimately find out enough about how nature works to control it</i>	0,90			
<i>In environmental questions, we should wait and not implement measures until we are certain of the gravity of the situation</i>	0,40			0,46
<i>I would give part of my income if I were certain that the money would be used to prevent environmental pollution</i>		0,78		
<i>I would agree to an increase in taxes if the money is used to prevent environmental pollution</i>		0,89		
<i>The government has to reduce environmental pollution but it should not cost me any money</i>		-0,57	0,35	-0,37
<i>All the talk about pollution makes people too anxious</i>			0,80	
<i>If we want to combat unemployment in Lithuania, we shall just have to accept environmental problems</i>			0,79	
Percentage of the total variance explained	24	19	11	10

* Factor structure after varimax rotation
 All variables presented in the table were dichotomized
 *** Only factor loadings over ±0,30 are presented

Environmental Behavior

During the interviews respondents were asked about their free time activities related to the nature. The most popular activities among others were as follows: care of pets and domestic plants (52%), work in the garden (46%), travel by car or motocar (46%), rest in non-urban areas (45%) and picking mushrooms and berries (41%).

People’s readiness to contribute to the improvement of environmental situation is a significant factor of their environmental consciousness. Research findings showed that people were more inclined to contribute to their living environment (52%), to avoid using hazardous products (38%), to interfere when others were harming the environment (55%) rather than inform the mass media on the cases of environmental abuse (2%), contact the authorities (4%) or discuss with them on environmental issues (5%). When asked about household waste recycling, majority of respondents replied that they were recycling glass (61%), every fifth person was recycling paper, plastic and metal waste (respectively 24%, 25% and 22%). The

vast majority (72%) indicated that they threw away hazardous waste together with the rest household waste.

When asked to assess the importance of different solutions of environmental problems, change of people’s life-styles ranked above the role of local and national authorities, as well as international cooperation. When asked about their political involvement, only one fifth of respondents stated that they were very interested in political issues (19%). Majority of people only slightly were interested (64%) and less that one fifth (17%) were not interested in politics. The largest number of respondents identified themselves with the centristic political views (47%), one third of the interviewed people were rightists (35%) and less than one fifth (18%) were leftists. When asked about their participation in non-governmental organizations (NGOs), only 3% of the respondents told that they were members of such an organization. Similarly, very few (6%) were taking part in environmental events, like protests or demonstrations.

Environmental Knowledge

Public environmental knowledge was assessed on the basis of respondents' answers to the questions on their knowledge of different environmental NGOs, reasons of environmental problems, self-assessment of one's knowledge and the use of different sources of environmental information. Following the research findings, the vast majority of respondents indicated that they knew about *Sveikuoliai* Club (86%) and Lithuanian Green Movement (84%). Other environmental organizations also were well known among the respondents, except for *Wild Worldlife Fund* and *Atgaja* Club (respectively 22% and 36%). Respondents were also questioned about the reasons of such environmental problems as radiation, air pollution, global warming and chemical fertilizers. It appeared that people did not have enough knowledge on the particular causes of environmental problems, for instance radiation. Majority of people (73%) thought that radiation was caused by humans, although it also might be a natural phenomenon. Less than a half of respondents (46%) considered cars as the main cause of air pollution in Lithuania, while following scientific experts, pollution from mobile sources was composing $\frac{3}{4}$ of the air pollution (Pakalnis 1998). The questions on the causes of global warming were even more confusing and every fifth respondent (25%) did not know the answer.

Table 2

Sources of information on environmental issues*

Source of information	Actual source	Ranking	Preferable source	Ranking
Television	87%	1	84%	1
Daily newspapers	65	2	61	2
Radio	55	3	54	3
Other newspapers, magazines, periodicals	31	4	30	4
Family, friends, colleagues	28	5	11	7
Books	8	6	8	9
Flyers, brochures, leaflets, posters	8	7	19	5
Lectures, meetings, seminars	7	8	13	6
School	4	9	9	8
Other electronic media and data bases	1	10	4	10

* Respondents were asked to select three sources of information

As presented in Table 2, the mass media institutions, such as television, radio and newspapers were the most preferable sources of

When asked to evaluate their own environmental knowledge, almost two thirds of people (63%) indicated that their knowledge was the same as others had. However, majority of people (51%) said that people were not provided with enough environmental information.

Trust in the source of information is playing a crucial role in the stimulation of environmental concern. In the research on public environmental consciousness, public trust in a number of social institutions was tested. It appeared that majority of people trusted the president of the country (79%), mass media (63%) and church (53%). Institutions such as political parties, banks, the laws and parliament appeared on the bottom of the institutional trust scale. When asked about institutions which have the highest influence on environmental concern, people indicated the mass media (55%), family (50%), Lithuanian environmental authorities (39%), the president (37%) and education system (30%) as top five institutions in promotion of environmental awareness in the public. However, political parties, parliament and NGO's appeared among the institutions which had the least influence (respectively 3%, 5% and 7%).

In order to have knowledge of environmental issues one needs information. Apparently, traditional mass media institutions, such as television, newspapers and radio were the most important and popular sources of environmental information and knowledge (see Table 2).

environmental information and knowledge used and preferred. Respondents also were asked to indicate what kind of the mass media they

used and how often they did that. Research findings showed that *Kauno diena* daily was the most popular among the people interviewed. Majority of them (75%) were reading it at least once a week. *Lietuvos rytas* was read by half of the respondents (51%) once a week. Social and demographic factors including age, education, social status, income etc., as well as interest in environmental issues differentiated respondents' answers on the questions related to environmental attitudes, behavior and knowledge.

In this chapter, characteristics of environmental discourse in the mass media are analyzed. Qualitative and quantitative content analysis was applied with two mainly read dailies among the survey respondents in 1998, i.e. *Kauno diena* and *Lietuvos rytas*. In all, 592 articles on environmental issues or environment related information were selected from the period of June and July 1998.

Environmental Coverage in the Printed Media

Content analysis revealed that very few (7%) articles on environmental issues were

placed on the first page of the papers. It appeared that there were more publications on the environment in particular weekdays. For instance, every third article in *Lietuvos rytas* appeared in Friday issues. In *Kauno diena*, there was no particular day that strongly increased number of texts related to the environment. Nevertheless, both dailies had special pages for the topics related to nature, garden and pets. These special pages contained almost every fifth article (22%) analyzed. The size of the articles was also measured in the analysis, too. Half of the publications contained no illustrations and every third article had one illustration (33%).

Of the 592 articles analyzed, more than one third (39%) was classified as informational or news articles, one third (33%) - as educative text, every fifth – as problem oriented and the least group was of readers' reactions (6%). No significant differences were noticed between the papers. The most frequent topics portrayed in the articles were on the natural disasters, nature resources, stories on the nature, biodiversity and environmental damage (see Table 3).

Table 3 The main topics related to the environment

	N	%
Natural disasters	113	19
Natural resources	63	11
Nature life	49	8
Biodiversity / conservationism	39	7
Environmental damage (trash, devastating trees)	33	6
Pet treatment	32	5
Public environmental contribution	29	5
Care of urban and living environment	27	5
Health, hygiene	26	4
Healthy food	21	4
Rest in the nature	19	3
Government environmental politics	19	3
Animal exploitation	17	3
Būtingė oil terminal	12	2
Water pollution	12	2
Nuclear energy, radiation	11	2
Forest management and exploitation	10	2
Ecologically clean production and energy	9	2
Noise	9	2
Ignalina nuclear power plant	8	1
Other	8	1
Waste and waste management	7	1
Genetic engineering	6	1
Air pollution	6	1
Global warming	4	1
Kruonis hydro power plant	3	1
Total	592	102*

* Total exceeds 100% because of rounding

When comparing two papers, it appeared that stories on natural disasters were dominating in *Lietuvos rytas*, but not in *Kauno diena* (respectively 28% and 10%). Moreover, *Lietuvos rytas* more often than *Kauno diena* reported on natural resources and nature life. On the other hand, texts on environmental damage, pet treatment and urban environment, as well as public environmental contribution were more frequent in *Kauno diena*. In the analysis, articles were distinguished into local, regional, national, foreign national, international and global stories. If an article reported a pollution leak from a local factory, it was considered as a localized environmental problem. If a story reported a major incident of river pollution, it was a regional or national problem. Environmental stories that concerned with a foreign country, for instance foreign environmental disaster, was regarded as foreign national problems. Stories about international agreements on different aspects of environmental protection were classified as international problems. Finally, articles that reported on growing concern over world impacts of global warming and other concerns which effect the planet were called global environmental problems (Cottle 1993).

Table 4

Environmental texts by problem localization

	N	%
Local	156	31
Regional	39	8
National	126	24
Foreign national	145	28
International	43	8
Global	7	1
Total	519	100

As indicated in Table 4, local, as well as national and foreign national stories dominated in the papers. Differences between *Lietuvos rytas* and *Kauno diena* were statistically significant. *Kauno diena* was dominated by locally oriented stories, whereas *Lietuvos rytas* was dominated by problems of foreign and national importance.

Environmental stories tended to reveal a neutral tone: slightly more than a half of the articles were written in a neutral tone (53%),

almost every third article (30%) was positive and every sixth (17%) was negative about certain aspect of the environment. The only difference between the two papers was that environmental articles in *Lietuvos rytas* were written in a neutral tone more often than in *Kauno diena*.

Information provided in the articles usually was factual (50%) or based on personal experience (35%). Every seventh story was written on the basis of professional knowledge and in a few cases on the scientific knowledge (2%). In *Lietuvos rytas*, more articles with factual information were identified (57%), while in *Kauno diena* more texts were based on personal experience and professional knowledge (respectively 37% and 18%). As showed in Table 5, official sources of information were dominating in both papers, eg. experts, local authorities, foreign government representatives and scientists. However, differences between the two dailies were also observed.

Table 5

Sources of environmental information in *Lietuvos rytas* and *Kauno diena*

	Lietuvos rytas	Kauno diena
Experts	23	17
Individuals	17	12
Local authority representatives	6	18
Foreign government representative	15	8
Scientists, representatives of scientific institutions	10	10
Private sector representatives	6	10
National authorities	6	6
Public organization representatives	3	6
Members of environmental organizations	5	4
Journalists, mass media	6	2
International organization members	2	2
Army representatives	2	2
Police	1	2
Other	0	2
Total	127	126

A qualitative look at the environmental stories in the papers revealed a strong dominance of standardized frames, which raised the need for alternative views, and explanatory material. The lack of background or contextual explanatory material also should be mentioned. The

study did not deal systematically with the importance of environmental issues in relation to other topics. However, a quick look at the newspaper issues analyzed revealed that environmental issues had not been given priority during the period of study. There were other topics like political, economic and social ones, which seemed to receive more attention than the environment.

Discussion

At the beginning of the research, it was presupposed that the mass media generally raise, select and define issues to be presented as social problems in public debate and decision-making. The media also serve as a forum for various claims-makers who seek support for their views on social issues. Therefore, the more environment related information people received from the mass media, the more they considered it as an important social problem. However, empirical data indicated that environmental issues were not of primary interest to the public, as well as the press.

Apparently, people were more concerned with the local or national issues rather than international and global ones. People were more concerned with the problems that might directly affect their lives; i.e. polluted water and air, pollution and danger from Ignalina nuclear power station, as well as hazardous household waste. On the other hand, such global environmental issues as the greenhouse effect and ozone layer depletion are not on the public agenda.

Public passiveness with regard to the environmental issues must also be emphasized. Despite new democratic traditions and increasing pluralism in the mass media, the public tended not to interfere into authority decision making process. Public participation in the third sector organizations, as well as their actions with regard to the environment was also insignificant. Such a situation could be explained by the lack of traditions of public participation in decision-making process, as well as lack of trust and knowledge about non-governmental organizations. This kind of passivity was also detected by other research carried out in Lithuania (see Matulionis *et als.* 2001). Moreover, people

tended to focus on the passive activities of leisure time rather than more active ones.

As quantitative research illustrated, people's exposure and trust in the mass media was relatively high. However, it would be too far to make conclusions that the mass media was playing an educative role in public agenda formation. According to the survey data, people ranked the mass media as top one institution contributing to public environmental awareness. The main sources of environmental information were also the mass media (television, radio and newspapers). On the other hand, media information is decisive with regard to global issues that are not visible and experienced in individuals' day-to-day life.

Content analysis of the two dailies showed the relative attention given to the environment, but a lack of active interest, analytical and critical view to the relationship between society and environment. Analysis of the front-page stories that are essential in the reality construction process showed that the environment was not a priority issue for the papers. Most of stories reported were about natural disasters, i.e. dramatic events likely to become sensational stories. Articles on the environmental issues tended to focus mostly on local or national problems like natural resources, nature life, environmental devastation, conservation issues etc. rather than international and global issues like global warming or ozone layer depletion. One of the explanations could be that usually global environmental issues are difficult to conceptualize and make a good story of. Moreover, most journalists do not have environmental knowledge enough in order to explain the complicated issues and provide with background information. Thus, the environment is a marginal subject in both, media coverage and public concern.

Observing the lack of correspondence between the public and media agendas, several conclusions follow. First, people are lacking information on those environmental issues that they consider being the most important. Second, people are provided with more information on local matters rather than global ones.

The main difference between local and global environmental issues in the overall nature of public environmental concern in Lithuania is that global environmental issues tend to be less salient, might be due to their complexity and scientific uncertainty but this can better be attributed to the lower level of visibility of these issues in the mass media (Einsiedel 1993).

Mass media have a powerful role in influencing public environmental concern, but their contents cannot be equated with what people actually have in their mind when thinking about specific environmental problems. When decid-

Conclusion

Degradation of environment is the consequence of a focusing on other long-term problems, such as economic growth, progress in technologies, material well being, ensuring of comfortable life. In order that environmental problems can be solved, simply acquiring environmental consciousness is not sufficient. Restructurization of our present goals, habits and lifestyle is indispensable. One of the roles of mass media is to educate society, creating its environmental consciousness. However, the decisive factor in this process is not the quantity, but the quality of the news.

High public trust in the mass media is an important factor influencing effectiveness of the mass media in public opinion formation. The mass media play a

significant role in selecting, transforming and transmitting environmental constructions in modern society, although environmental problems are not structured as priority issues in both public and media agendas. The study indicates the lack of understandable and accurate environmental information in the mass media.

Local issues are dominating over global issues in public and media environmental discourses. Mass media should improve reporting on urgent global environmental issues disseminating updated scientific information and sustaining public discourse on global environmental situation.

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