

Green Under Fire: Psychological Responses and Eco-Behavior in Ukraine Amidst Climate Threats and War

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This article explores the unique intersection of climate threats and the psychological impact of eco-behavior in the Ukrainian context during the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war. As Ukraine faces the dual challenges of environmental threats and the exigencies of war, this study delves into how these overlapping crises influence public attitudes and behaviors towards the environment. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews across various Ukrainian regions to capture a comprehensive picture of the current eco-psychological landscape.

The findings reveal a complex picture of resilience, adaptability, and changing priorities. Amidst the immediacy of war-related threats, environmental concerns remain significant for many Ukrainians, but manifest in different ways compared to peacetime. The study highlights an increased focus on local and immediate environmental issues, such as air quality and waste management, over global concerns like climate change. This shift reflects a survival-centric approach where immediate environmental quality directly impacts daily life and health in war conditions.

The article further examines how war amplifies psychological phenomena like eco-anxiety and solastalgia (nostalgia for a lost environment), particularly in regions most affected by the conflict. Despite these challenges, there is a notable rise in community-led environmental initiatives, suggesting a form of eco-resilience. These initiatives are not only coping mechanisms but also form part of a broader narrative of national identity and resistance.

The study contributes to the broader field of environmental psychology by providing insights into how extreme socio-political circumstances can reshape environmental attitudes and behaviors. It also offers practical implications for policymakers and environmental organizations working in conflict zones, emphasizing the need for context-sensitive approaches to environmental advocacy and support.

Key words: Environmental Psychology, Climate Threats, Eco-Behavior, Ukrainian Resilience, War Impact, Eco-Anxiety, Solastalgia, Community Initiatives, Environmental Attitudes, Conflict Zones.

Current Situation in Ukraine: War and Climate Threats

As of 2024, Ukraine finds itself at the epicenter of a multifaceted crisis characterized by the ongoing war with Russia and escalating climate threats. The war, initiated by Russia's invasion in 2014 and escalating significantly since February 2022, has led to widespread destruction, loss of life, and displacement of millions. This conflict has not only been a humanitarian disaster but also had profound environmental repercussions. Areas of intense combat have experienced ecological degradation, with damage to infrastructure leading to increased pollution, disruption of land and water resources, and substantial risks to biodiversity.

Concurrently, Ukraine faces significant climate-related challenges. The country is experiencing increased temperatures, more frequent and severe weather events, and changes in precipitation patterns. These climatic changes pose threats to agriculture, water supply, and public health, compounding the challenges already faced due to the war.

War, Climate Change, and Psychological Impact on Eco-Behavior

The interplay between war, climate change, and psychological responses is a relatively underexplored area in environmental psychology. Existing literature indicates that war

exacerbates environmental issues — pollution, destruction of ecosystems, and strain on resources. Climate change further intensifies these problems, creating a feedback loop of environmental and socio-political stressors.

Psychologically, the dual impact of war and climate change can lead to a range of responses. Previous studies have shown increased incidence of eco-anxiety, a chronic fear of environmental doom, in regions facing severe climate threats. In war-torn areas, this anxiety can blend with the trauma and stress of conflict, leading to complex emotional responses. However, there is also evidence of increased environmental stewardship in such settings, driven by a heightened sense of urgency and a need for control and resilience in the face of chaos.

Research Aims and Hypotheses

This study aims to explore how the concurrent crises of war and climate change in Ukraine affect the psychological well-being of its citizens and their attitudes and behaviors towards the environment. The primary hypotheses are:

1. The ongoing war in Ukraine has led to a shift in environmental concerns, with a greater focus on immediate, local environmental issues rather than global environmental problems.
2. War-related stress and trauma, combined with eco-anxiety due to

climate change, result in unique patterns of eco-behavior among Ukrainians, potentially leading to increased eco-resilience and community-led environmental initiatives.

3. The interplay of war and climate threats uniquely shapes the Ukrainian public's perception of environmental issues, potentially leading to a redefinition of environmental priorities and strategies in the face of overlapping crises.

The study seeks to contribute to the understanding of how extreme socio-political and environmental conditions influence environmental psychology and behavior, offering insights that could inform policy and practice in similar contexts globally.

The Shift in Environmental Concerns Due to the War in Ukraine

The ongoing war in Ukraine has precipitated a significant shift in the nation's environmental concerns. Traditionally, global environmental problems such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution were central to environmental discourse. However, the war has redirected attention towards more immediate, localized environmental issues. This shift is understandable, given the immediate impact of these local issues on the lives and well-being of the Ukrainian people. For instance, concerns about air and water quality, soil contamination, and the

management of waste from destroyed infrastructures have become more pressing. This reorientation reflects a survival-centric approach, where the immediate environment plays a critical role in daily life, especially in conflict zones.

Unique Eco-Behavior Patterns Stemming from War and Eco-Anxiety

The combination of war-related stress and trauma, along with eco-anxiety due to climate change, has led to unique patterns of eco-behavior among Ukrainians. These behaviors are characterized by an increased focus on adaptability, resilience, and community action. For example, there is a growing trend of community-led initiatives aimed at addressing local environmental issues, such as community gardening, local clean-up efforts, and recycling programs. These initiatives are not only responses to environmental challenges but also act as coping mechanisms for the psychological impact of war and environmental worries. They provide a sense of control, community cohesion, and purpose, contributing to what can be described as "eco-resilience" – the capacity to adapt and thrive in the face of environmental stressors and uncertainties.

Redefining Environmental Priorities and Strategies

The intersection of war and climate threats in Ukraine is leading to a potential redefinition of

environmental priorities and strategies. The unique context of overlapping crises has prompted a reevaluation of what constitutes critical environmental issues and how they should be addressed. There is a growing recognition of the need for strategies that are not only environmentally effective but also socially and politically feasible in a war context. This involves a balancing act between addressing immediate environmental challenges posed by the war and the longer-term issues of climate change and global environmental degradation.

In conclusion, the war in Ukraine, coupled with the ongoing climate crisis, is reshaping the environmental landscape in terms of concerns, behaviors, and strategies. This situation presents a unique case study for understanding how extreme conditions can alter environmental perceptions and actions, offering valuable lessons for other regions facing similar overlapping crises.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide a nuanced understanding of how the Russo-Ukrainian war, coupled with the pervasive threat of climate change, shapes the environmental consciousness and behavior of the Ukrainian people. This discussion aims to contextualize these findings within the broader frameworks of environmental psychology, resilience theory, and social responses to crises.

War as a Catalyst for Environmental Re-prioritization

The shift in environmental concerns from global to local and immediate issues in Ukraine can be seen as a survival response. In the face of war, long-term environmental threats such as climate change seem intangible compared to the immediate dangers posed by local environmental degradation. This observation aligns with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, where physiological and safety needs take precedence over longer-term and less tangible goals. However, it's important to recognize that this does not diminish the importance of global environmental issues but rather repositions them in a hierarchy of immediate concerns.

Eco-Resilience and Community Initiatives

The emergence of eco-resilience and community-led environmental initiatives in response to the combined stress of war and environmental anxiety is particularly noteworthy. This phenomenon can be explained through the lens of resilience theory, which posits that adversity can lead to the development of coping mechanisms and adaptive strategies. The community initiatives not only address environmental issues but also foster a sense of agency and communal solidarity, crucial for psychological well-being in crisis situations. These findings contribute to

the growing body of literature on community resilience and social capital in times of crisis.

Redefining Environmental Strategy in Crisis Contexts

The potential redefinition of environmental priorities and strategies in the face of overlapping crises suggests a need for more flexible and context-sensitive approaches to environmental policymaking and advocacy. This aligns with the calls within environmental psychology for approaches that consider the socio-political context. The Ukrainian case demonstrates the importance of integrating environmental policies with broader socio-political objectives, including conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

Limitations and Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights, it has limitations. The dynamic nature of the war and the ongoing climate crisis means that the situation is constantly evolving. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies to understand how these patterns of eco-behavior and perceptions change over time. Additionally, comparative studies with other regions experiencing similar crises could provide a more global understanding of these phenomena.

Conclusion

The research on the environmental attitudes and behaviors in Ukraine amidst the Russo-Ukrainian War and climate threats presents several key takeaways with implications for environmental psychology, policy-making, and resilience strategies in crisis situations.

Firstly, the study underscores the dynamic nature of environmental concerns in times of crisis. The shift from global to local and immediate environmental issues in the context of war highlights the adaptability of human concerns in response to immediate survival needs. This observation is critical for environmental policy and advocacy, emphasizing the need for flexible and context-sensitive approaches that address both immediate and long-term environmental challenges.

Secondly, the emergence of eco-resilience and community-led initiatives in Ukraine, despite the compounded stressors of war and climate anxiety, is a testament to human adaptability and the power of community. These grassroots movements not only address local environmental issues but also foster community cohesion and psychological resilience, serving as a model for other regions facing similar crises. It illustrates the potential of community action in building resilience and contributing to both

environmental sustainability and social well-being.

Thirdly, the unique interplay of war and climate change in shaping environmental perceptions and strategies in Ukraine provides a valuable case study. It highlights the importance of integrating environmental policy with broader socio-political objectives and the need for interdisciplinary approaches in addressing complex global challenges.

In conclusion, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how extreme socio-political and environmental conditions influence human attitudes and behaviors towards the environment. The insights gained from the Ukrainian context during the war and climate crisis offer valuable lessons for other regions facing overlapping environmental and socio-political challenges. They call for a reevaluation of traditional environmental strategies, advocating for more inclusive, adaptive, and resilient approaches in the face of global uncertainties.

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