ECOLOGICAL AWARENESS AND ECOLOGICAL SECURITY IN THE FUNCTION OF ENSURING ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Darko M. MARKOVIĆ[1], **Željko BJELAJAC[2]**, **Boro MERDOVIĆ[3]**

[1]Associate Professor, University Business Academy in Novi Sad, Faculty of Law, Novi Sad (Serbia), E-mail: darko.bg.ns@gmail.com
[2]Full Professor, University Business Academy in Novi Sad, Faculty of Law, Novi Sad (Serbia), E-mail: zdjbjelajac@gmail.com
[3]Research Fellow, Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, Police Department for the City of Belgrade (Serbia), E-mail: boro.merdovic@gmail.com

Abstract: *Ecological security is a fundamental concept in the field of sustainable development, which plays a vital role in ensuring the welfare of biodiversity, balance of ecosystems and natural resources. Significance of the ecological security lies in its ability to maintain the delicate balance of ecosystems and mitigate the impact of climate change. Without ecological security measures, long-term health of our planet and its inhabitants is endangered. Ecological awareness is equally important in promoting sustainable conduct and practice among individuals and communities. We can encourage the feeling of responsibility towards nature by increasing the understanding of environmental issues and their effects on society. Ecological conscience is a term referring to an individual's awareness and concern for the health of the environment and all its living beings. It is about understanding our place in the ecosystem and recognising the effects our actions have on the planet. This is a key concept because it supports motivation for sustainable life and preservation efforts. By analysing past studies about human awareness and experiences in the field of ecological security, we notice key elements of ecological awareness, its importance to individuals, communities and the planet, and how it can lead to positive ecological results. By analysing ecological consciousness as a form of social responsibility, we come to the conclusion that ecological conscience and ecological security are two interrelated concepts that play a key role in ensuring the environmental sustainability and long-term sustainable wellbeing. By implementing ecological security measures and strengthening global ecological awareness we can address environmental issues on a broader level and strive towards long-term sustainability.*

Keywords: security, biodiversity, ecology, ecological conscience, environmental protection

1. Securitization of environment
1.1. Ecological security in light of two approaches to conceptual determination of security

Due to the fact that it is in very wide use in everyday speech, security is one of those concepts whose explanation seems to be the simplest. And indeed, this concept does not need to be explained separately in the public discourse, because practically all interlocutors will understand that it is a state of harmlessness, that is, the absence of danger or a serious threat that a stable state will be violently disturbed. For a human being, such a stable state is natural, and security is an innate quality, based on the fact that the period before birth is spent in the mother's womb. the case, that even in that period there is exposure to threatening dangers, but science has not yet confirmed to us that during the development of the embryo there is an awareness of the outside world as well. At least not to such a large extent. However, even in the general meaning, and especially not in the scientific sense, safety does not mean only a state, but also a process, as well as the organization of a system that is established in order to unify the process and state of safety. To make things more complicated, a significant feature of the concept of security is its ambiguity, because this concept does not contain only those elements that we have already experienced. Therefore, we cannot always be sure about which experiential elements we are talking about, which, not only in this case, imposes the need to develop a scientific opinion about a certain concept, that is, to determine its term and the subject of research. Going into the methodological foundations of security sciences would take us away

from the goal of this work, but we cannot fail to emphasize the necessity of determining the unambiguous meaning of terms in order to give the same meaning to words in mutual communication, i.e. to assign the same experiential meanings to the same terms. In scientific research, it is a prerequisite for observing the structure of the problem being studied.

Regardless of whether security exists as a state, process or organization (system), it is a response to the existence of challenges, risks and threats to such a state, and their existence, including the processes it produces, is conceptually defined as endangering security. Taking into account the ambiguity of the term security, it is completely clear that there are different and diverse forms and subjects of endangerment. They are not universal, because in one case they can be treated as a threat to some entity, and in another they can have a completely neutral status and even have a positive influence on another entity. At the same time, one must not lose sight of the fact that there are hidden dangers.

Guided by this negativist approach, which views security as the absence of a source of endangerment, due to the impossibility of unifying all forms of threat, it is practically impossible to come up with a single definition of security. With this in mind, Barry Buzan (1991:18) gave a simple definition of security, as "the pursuit of freedom from threats". Taking into account the variety of forms of endangerment, he divided security into five sectors: military, social, political, economic and environmental. In this way, Buzan made a big step forward in relation to the narrow militaristic views of security studies characteristic especially of the Cold War period (Bjelajac, 2017: 93).

On the other hand, the positivist approach to defining the concept of security focuses on the content of this concept, that is, on the phenomena and cause-and-effect relationships that build it in a totality that tends towards integrality. When performing the functional determination of the security term, this approach takes into account the common values of the living world, viewed as *the state of any subject or object that exists and operates normally or relatively undisturbed* (Ilić, 2012: 125). This relativity constitutes the subjective side of the interpretation of the security term, and the factual situation, which can be independent of human influence, constitutes the objective side. Taking both sides into consideration, subjective and objective, the term of security can be defined in a <u>narrower sense</u> as *the state of protected, free, quality and certain existence and action of individuals, human groups, organizations, institutions and communities*, and in a <u>broader sense</u> as *the totality of factors of an objective and subjective nature that affect the survival and other essential values of people and their groups, organizations, institution and community* (Ilić, 2012: 127).

Any sector of security can be expressed with a negativist definition, including the environmental sector. However, the meaning of securitization of the environment is confirmed by a positivist approach, so Buzan himself was guided by it when forming the ecological security sector as a separate security sector, with reference objects of species and habitats.

1.2. Is securitization of environment justified?

If we simply understand securitization as giving security attributes to various phenomena and objects, then we can rightly say that it has been present in human life throughout whole history, even before Ole Wæver introduced it to science. He gave us a model of how to view a problem in the full security sense, not as a simple speech act, but as a problem that is securitized, that is, brought into the area of security.

Bringing it into the area of security does not imply the automatic existence of a real existential threat but it is enough that some problem is presented as a threat (Buzan, Wæver & Wilde, 1998: 24). This brings us to the question of who is authorized to securitize a problem. In the public discourse, it can be anyone, but "anyone" does not have enough authority to raise such a form of securitization to a level of significance large enough for official institutions to deal with it. Therefore, the answer to this question is simply imposed – the securitization of any issue, including the environment, has a deep political nature. It goes without saying that the mere statement of the assumption of a security threat is not enough for the complete securitization

of the problem, but it must be supported and matched by facts. Due to the deep political nature of such a statement, which is depicted in the political authority of the subject who announces it, those supporting facts do not always have to have a scientific and/or professional background. The larger the goals of securitization, regardless of whether they are motivated by real concern or misuse to achieve hidden intentions, the more serious the threat must be, as close as possible to the level of existential threat. This increases the success of securitization, especially its consequences, which are also one of the main questions that need to be answered. We have the most recent example in the area of environmental protection, where global warming and climate change stand out as an existential threat to humanity, but not to a much lesser extent environmental pollution.

Although the securitization of the environment is most often associated with the last few decades, it is known that the security importance of the environment was written about in the 19th century as well. Thus, George Perkins Marsh in his book Man and Nature points to the destruction of nature by man as a danger to civilization. He built awareness of this on the realization of the importance of natural resources for the state's economy as the cause of human actions that cause great damage to nature, pointing out that natural resources are not inexhaustible (McFadden, 2019). However, this book did not reach the subjects of political power, neither the American society to which it was intended, nor anywhere else in the world, so the issue of securitization of the environment was not of great importance, which confirms the position on the importance of the political nature of securitization.

A significant shift in this regard occurred in the second half of the 20th century, especially since the publication of Rachel Carson's book, *Silent spring* (1962). She, writing about the damage to insects and plant life due to the use of pesticides during World War II, provoked a condemning reaction from chemical companies, which further attracted the attention of the American public and initiated the establishment of environmental movements, as well as the US Environmental Protection Agency (Paull, 2013). Among the most famous movements of that period is Greenpeace, founded in 1971, which later expanded its initial advocacy against American nuclear testing in Alaska to concern for nature, its flora and fauna, including the fight against pollution and climate change. Since the second half of the 20th century, meteorological measurements and monitoring of changes in nature have provided indicators of unfavorable climate changes under the influence of human activities, which increased the interest of the international community in this problem. Environmental protection is legally formalized through numerous international conventions and other legal documents, but "there are still numerous challenges to its effective judicial protection" (Mladenov, Stefanović & Marković, 2023).

The fact that environmental problems also affect the realization of some basic human rights (Marković & Barjaktarović, 2021), made an additional contribution to the securitization of the environment, which has a constant tendency to increase since then. In addition to climate change, the securitization of the environment has also led to other problems that give rise not only to assumptions of threats but also to real threats, which in some cases are not only existential for certain entities or regions, but also for humanity as a whole. Environmental pollution is at the very peak of seriousness, contributing to the aforementioned securitization, which is further the basis for demanding urgent action by the international community to eliminate the causes of these security threats (Foster, 2013: 39). In addition, a series of devastating natural disasters that hit different regions of the world, especially during the eighties of the 20th century, including the industrial disaster in Bhopal in India (1984) and the nuclear disaster in Chernobyl in the USSR (1986), also triggered the scientific community in the field security, as well as official institutions. In 1987, the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) published a report entitled "Our Common Future", in which it warned of threats to world peace due to ecological degradation and resource scarcity (Ejdus, 2011: 187). The war in Vietnam, and then the wars and military interventionism that mark the recent era, caused and are causing enormous damage to the ecosystem, leaving lasting

consequences on the health of people living in those areas (see Bjelajac, Pocuca & Mijatovic, 2013).

Bearing all this in mind, the answer to the question of whether the securitization of the environment is justified can be found in the factual situation, i.e. the changes in nature brought about by the way of life after the industrial revolution and accelerated technological development, especially characteristic of the last few decades. Numerous studies indicate that the threat to the environment has reached a level of danger that calls into question not only the balance of ecosystems but also the basis of the survival of the planet (Bjelajac, 2021: 9; Bjelajac, Dukić Mijatović, Zirojević Fatić et al., 2014: 201; Bjelajac, Dašić & Spasović, 2011: 568). In an era in which video technologies are at a very high level of development, with the enormous potential of spreading information available to almost everyone on the Internet, negative changes in nature are more than visible - pollution of land, water and air, as well as the extermination of millions of animal and plant species. It is no secret that numerous non-renewable energy sources are in advanced stages of depletion, and the exploitation of some of them causes existential threats to the local population and biodiversity (see Marković, 2022). The availability of energy sources is of strategic importance for states, and in modern conditions it is one of the main parameters of their power, at the regional and global level. Threats to the environment threaten not only human health and biodiversity, but also other existential parameters of humanity, such as the economy and material conditions for survival. All that, both individually and together, makes the securitization of the environment more than justified. This justification is also reflected in the association and mobilization at the local, regional and global level of practically all subjects of the human community – from individuals, groups, associations and other organizations, through states to the international community as a whole, whose action is manifested primarily through international organizations, in the first instance of the United Nations. The ecological environment cannot be isolated within national borders, and it is precisely for these reasons that international agreements in this area impose an obligation of cooperation between states (Šogorov Vučković & Marković, 2020: 150, 159).

Securitization of the environment does not mean only giving security attributes to the problem of its sustainability, but also seeking solutions, which require social consensus and commitment of the international community as a whole. In order to really establish such a social consensus, it is necessary to overcome the urge of states to put their own priorities before the interests of global society. Therefore, we can ask ourselves how each of us individually can contribute to the improvement of environemental safety culture, that is, environmental protection (Bjelajac, 2017: 610). This brings us to the question of ecological awareness.

2. Ecological awareness
2.1. Awareness, consciousness, conscience

Awareness, consciousness, and conscience are very important psychological phenomena for the shaping of human behavior in all phases - from the thought formation of decisions, through their adoption, to the way of acting. It is important to understand the differences between these concepts and how they interact.

Although each of us believes that we are the knower of our own awareness, no one has a definitive explanation of what it is. Since it is a phenomenon, the subject of research of which penetrates into various areas of scientific interest, the answer to the question of what awareness is, how it arises and functions, different scientific disciplines are trying to give. Awareness is one of those scientific terms that requires a scientific synthesis, i.e. connecting the basic scientific terms of certain sciences, in this case, natural with humanistic and social.

Natural sciences investigate the organic basis of awareness, so the Nobel laureate biologist George Eldeman connects the phenomenon of awareness, and the mind itself, with physical and chemical changes in the cortex of the cerebrum. He believes that these are biological phenomena, which are the product of complex cellular processes in the brain, and he claims that awareness itself "consists of a stream of unified mental constructs that arise

spontaneously from a material structure, the Dynamic Core in the brain" (Edelman, Gally & Baars, 2011: 5). When it comes to mathematics and physics, mathematician Roger Penrose emphasizes the quantum-mechanical nature of consciousness (Brooks, 2022), while some other scientists view consciousness as "a global manifestation of individual calculations by the brain's billions of neurons" (Derakhshani, Diósi, Laubenstein et al., 2022). And while researchers in the field of natural sciences express their theoretical hypotheses precisely and quantitatively and verify them in laboratories, they do not clarify how the impulses produced in neural networks are transformed into a subjective feeling of something, from the physical features of the world to the manifestation of personality characteristics and gaining awareness of oneself and that what makes.

Social sciences and humanities try to give answers to these questions, above all psychology, philosophy and sociology. The main difficulty they face in these attempts is that they are trying to come to an explanation of a completely subjective experience in an objective way. It is not easy to find a scientifically valid answer to the question of how something that intuitively seems immaterial to us arises in physical systems. An even greater difficulty is the unverifiability of research in scientific disciplines such as, for example cognitive psychology, that is, the inability to access subjective content and thus confirm the conclusions derived from appropriate scientific research. Even if it were possible, the problem of individuality remains unsolved, i.e. the fact that awareness is unique to an individual, which further opens the question of how the sum of individual awareness is shaped into a collective awareness. This is especially important for issues of forming awareness of a common objective reality, such as, in our case, the relationship to the environment. In order not to deviate from the topic of our work, we will not go into the details of the really numerous researches of this problem, but we will point out the basic facts that scientific thought has arrived at, which are important for the explanation of ecological awareness.

For psychology, awareness is the totality of an individual's experiences that he reaches through the perception of external stimuli through his senses. It is individual, because it manifests itself as a psycho-physiological ability of an individual to perceive, think, feel and strive to achieve some goal. But awareness is not only individual but also social, because it arises and develops in society as a product of mutual social activities of people and their behavior. Under the influence of sociocultural factors, a system of beliefs, ideas, values, knowledge and attitudes about a phenomenon, which belong to the human community, i.e. society, develop. From the point of view of philosophy, awareness is the knowledge of oneself, an ontological view of the relationships that man develops through being in the objective world. When we talk about awareness as the totality of experiencing, we are talking about a state that refers to a longer period of time. Therefore, built awareeness is important for us, because it determines our path through different life situations. On that road, we have to react to the unfolding of different situations every day.

The function of the mind that allows us to understand what is happening in and around us at all times, and to react correctly in different life situations in accordance with that experience, is consciousness. We can be conscious of the existence of something without understanding it, that is, without being aware of it. The level of consciousness depends on the depth of knowledge about the inner nature of the phenomenon or thing, which penetrates below the surface image of reality and refers to the basic laws and nature of objects and phenomena. We cannot gain knowledge without cognitive intelligence, which is closely related to the ability of moral reasoning (see Kawamoto, Mieda & Oshio, 2018).

Conscience refers to our moral compass and guides ethical decision making. It is closely related to obligations arising from common life, including solidarity in maintaining social relations (Yildiz, 2018: 1).

The interactions between awareness, consciousness, and conscience are complex and profound. For example, increased awareness can lead to increased consciousness of one's own thoughts and emotions. This heightened consciousness can then influence moral decision-

making processes guided by one's conscience. Studies have shown that individuals exhibiting high levels of self-awareness are more likely to act in accordance with their moral values due to a heightened sense of responsibility (see Xu, Li, Kwan et al., 2023).

2.2. Ecological awareness

In modern conditions, solving the challenges caused by climate change and environmental degradation depends to a significant extent on the ecological awareness of each subject of the social community. Ecological awareness means seeing life on the planet as a community with all living beings and understanding their role in the life of the planet. It also includes the knowledge of the effects of human activities, which bring not only positive, but also harmful changes to the environment. The higher the level of this understanding, the greater the chances of stimulating a sense of responsibility towards nature. Among the elements of environmental awareness, education, public advocacy campaigns and policy change play a key role. These are key tools for raising environmental awareness and empowering people to align their behavior and decisions with the needs of improving environmental protection.

As usual in the formation of safety culture among individuals, education plays a central role in developing and nurturing environmental awareness. It provides knowledge on a number of environmental issues, thereby empowering people to make decisions that benefit the environment. At the same time, education contributes to the development of critical thinking skills that are necessary to analyze complex environmental problems.

Environmental awareness at all levels, from local to global, is promoted through advocacy and activism. Individuals and organizations do this by advocating for policy change in the direction of environmental protection. By launching initiatives, they raise awareness of critical environmental issues and mobilize communities to take positive action.

Sustainable practices that contribute to a healthier environment contribute to the daily strengthening of awareness - recycling, waste reduction, energy conservation, support for environmentally friendly products, etc. Besides encouraging the environmental responsibility of all members of the community, these actions directly affect the improvement of environmental safety (eg, the reduction of carbon emissions as a consequence of these actions).

Combining these elements creates the basis for building a more environmentally conscious society, preserving biodiversity and natural resources, as a guarantee of a safe future for future generations.

Ecological awareness encompasses a deep understanding of ecosystems, recognizing the intricate connections between living organisms and their environment. For example, research has shown that coral reefs are not only beautiful marine ecosystems, but also provide vital services such as protecting coastlines from storms and supporting fisheries. Recognizing human impact on the environment is another key aspect of ecological awareness; one striking example is the decline in the bee population due to the use of pesticides, which threatens food safety around the world (Bjelajac, Stošić & Filipović, 2023); Bjelajac, Filipović & Banović, 2021). By promoting sustainable practices such as recycling and reducing carbon emissions, we can influence the mitigation of environmental damage caused by human activities.

Developing and nurturing ecological awareness is a necessary condition for solving crucial environmental challenges and ensuring a healthy planet for all forms of life. At the individual level, ecological awareness empowers people to make preventive decisions that reduce their impact on the environment. At the community level, fostering ecological awareness can lead to collective action toward conservation efforts and sustainable resource management. Increased ecological awareness on a global level is necessary to achieve long-term sustainability goals and preserve biodiversity for future generations. Spreading ecological awareness on a global scale is essential to involve the population in efforts to preserve the environment. Educational programs, media campaigns and advocacy work are instrumental in raising public awareness of pressing environmental issues. However, challenges such as different priorities

among regions and communities need to be addressed through tailored communication strategies and inclusive dialogues.

2.3. Ecological conscience as part of social and cultural fabric

According to Maslow's theory of motivation, human needs are hierarchically organized on five levels: physiological needs, security needs, belonging needs, esteem needs and self-actualization needs. Higher level needs arise only by satisfying lower level needs. At the lowest (basic) level are physiological needs, which include the need for food, water, air, homeostasis (relative constancy of the composition of the internal environment of the organism), sleep and sex. Although, according to this theory, the need for security arises after the satisfaction of physiological needs, it is quite obvious, in the category of axioms, that the need for food, water and air is also the need for security. These needs are simply inseparable, and we satisfy them thanks to nature. Their quality and safety of use are most directly related to ecological (environmental) security.

Therefore, being in a healthy and safe environment is at the very top of human needs. That is why the importance of awareness about it is huge, but at least equally important is the consciousness of the necessity of proper behavior in order to preserve a healthy environment as a source of satisfaction of basic human needs. Degradation of the environment at every step, as a factor in awakening ecological awareness (Lunić, 2020: 537), is also an alarmist for ecological conscience.

The basis of ecological conscience lies in the understanding that people are not separate from nature, but part of it. Every action we take, from the water we use to the products we buy, has a ripple effect on the environment. This interconnectedness means that the health of the environment directly affects the health and well-being of people. Understanding ecological conscience also includes recognizing the ethical implications of our interaction with the environment. It's about making choices that don't harm other species and ecosystems. This ethical stance is rooted in the belief that all life has intrinsic value and deserves respect and protection.

Ecological conscience is the first step towards creating a sustainable future. Without a collective change in the way we perceive and interact with the natural world, efforts to combat environmental problems such as climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss will not be successful. Ecological conscience fosters a sense of responsibility and empowerment. It encourages individuals to take steps, no matter how small, to subordinate their bad habits to the interests of a healthy environment. From reducing waste to supporting renewable energy, every action contributes to a larger movement towards sustainability. Initiatives such as conservation projects, sustainable resource management practices and international agreements play a key role in keeping our planet healthy. Successful initiatives such as the Paris Agreement (United Nations, 2015) have demonstrated international cooperation in the fight against climate change and ecosystem protection.

3. Conclusions

Ecological security, ecological conscience and ecological awareness are key concepts in the field of environmental sustainability. Ecological security refers to the protection of ecosystems, biodiversity and natural resources from damage or degradation. On the other hand, ecological conscience refers to the ethical responsibility of the individual towards the preservation of the environment for current and future generations. Ecological awareness means understanding the interconnectedness of all living things and recognizing the impact of human activities on the environment.

The relationship between ecological security and ecological conscience is complex, but also vital. Individuals with a strong ecological conscience are more likely to prioritize environmental protection in their actions and decisions. This ethical responsibility plays a significant role in ensuring ecological security by driving sustainable practices and policies at both the individual and collective levels. When individuals and communities develop an ecological conscience, they become more aware of the impact of their actions on the environment. Increased awareness often leads to the adoption of sustainable behaviors such as reducing waste production, conserving energy and supporting green initiatives. These positive changes not only

contribute to the immediate environment, but also contribute to an increase in overall environmental safety.

Ecological awareness serves as a catalyst to promote ecological security by fostering a deeper understanding of environmental issues and threats. When individuals are well informed about the consequences of their actions on nature, they are more inclined to adopt environmentally friendly behavior and support initiatives aimed at preserving the ecosystem. Increased ecological awareness can lead to the development of responsible behaviors and policies that are necessary to maintain long-term ecological security.

Spreading ecological awareness on a global scale is essential to involve the population in efforts to preserve the environment. Educational programs, media campaigns and advocacy work are instrumental in raising public awareness of pressing environmental issues. However, challenges such as different priorities among regions and communities need to be addressed through tailored communication strategies and inclusive dialogues.

Collective action at the local, national and international levels is key to mitigating environmental degradation and building resilience to the impacts of climate change. It is imperative that we continue to prioritize ecological awareness and take proactive steps towards creating a more balanced coexistence with nature. Strengthening ecological security measures requires the cooperation of governments, organizations and individuals. Policies such as promoting renewable energy sources, reducing carbon emissions and conserving natural resources play a significant role in environmental protection.

Further research and action should focus precisely on strengthening ecological security measures and spreading ecological awareness globally to create a healthier planet for all living beings.

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