

Social Awareness, the Main Dare for Environmental Health

AUTHORS DETAIL

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INTRODUCTION

One of the biggest problems that is caused by human beings on this planet is undoubtedly the damage to nature, damage that affects them, but they do not seem to be aware of it because their predatory behavior continues to damage their environment, and it seems that there are no mechanisms to stop such behavior. The current situation of damage to the environment originates from the predatory attitude of human beings and their ambition for money, factors that are fully linked (Graham and White 2016).

However, at other times there was a very different behavior. A very special conscience about the care of the environment could be seen in the actions of Nezahualcoyotl, king of Texcoco, Mexico. He implemented in his time a series of measures to protect the environment, such as the development of forests, dams to prevent salt and fresh water from mixing, botanical gardens, and an aqueduct to provide water to the great Tenochtitlan.

Likewise, in the Middle East, since the Middle Ages, activities were carried out that aimed to make people environmentally conscious, and treaties were written about air, water, and soil pollution, inadequate management of solid waste, and environmental evolutions of localities (Gibson and Farah 2012; Yeatts et al. 2012).

However, over time this has been left aside. Human beings seem immersed in a state of unconsciousness that does not allow them to realize the damage they are causing to the environment and the consequences for their environment and themselves. Human beings have lost themselves in such a state of unconsciousness that they are only interested in possessing and possessing more and more, regardless of what this may mean. They damage forests, rivers, air, water, and

food and even when we are already suffering the consequences, as evidenced by droughts in some parts of the world or floods in others, the human being is still not fully aware of this and continues to be a voracious predator. The environmental deterioration we are currently experiencing increases the demands that the world's population recovers its state of consciousness. It is necessary to analyze that relating to nature and oneself is not the correct one, and a change in people's compartments is essential; otherwise, there will be adverse consequences on people's health (Zinsstag et al. 2018; Rodríguez-Cruz and Niles 2021).

Factors Affecting Climate Change

Climate change is currently the main environmental problem and one of the most significant challenges of our time, where no country is immune to its effects, which are already having repercussions in various areas such as the economy, health, security, politics, and food production (Butler 2018).

Climate change refers to long-term changes in temperatures and weather patterns. These changes can be natural, for example, through variations in the solar cycle. But since the 19th century, human activities have been the main driver of climate change, mainly due to burning fossil fuels such as coal, oil, and gas. Burning fossil fuels generates greenhouse gas emissions that act as a blanket around the Earth, trapping the sun's heat and raising temperatures. From the so-called Industrial Revolution to today, industrial processes have been developed by burning fossil fuels (oil, gas and their derivatives, such as gasoline) and taking undue advantage of natural resources. (Oreskes 2004).

Carbon dioxide and methane are examples of greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change. These gasses come from using gasoline to drive a car or coal to heat a building. Land and forest clearing can also release carbon dioxide. Landfills are a significant source of methane emissions. Energy, industry, transportation, buildings, agriculture, and land use are among the main emitters (Gavurova 2021; Li et al. 2022). Current evidence attributes the global warming observed since the mid-20th century to the action of several greenhouse gases produced by anthropogenic activities (Warrach 2001). Increasingly, human activities significantly influence changes in the natural greenhouse effect because burning coal and oil combines carbon with oxygen in the air to form CO₂. To a lesser extent, deforestation for agricultural purposes, industry, and other human activities has increased the concentration of greenhouse gases (Oreskes 2004; Alam and Starr 2009; Galford et al. 2010).

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (Solomon et al. 2007), a group of 1,300 independent scientific experts from around the world under the auspices of the United Nations concluded that there is a greater than 95% probability that in the last 50 years, human activities have warmed our planet. About 150 years since the Industrial Revolution, our civilization has been increasingly dependent on this activity, which has significantly increased carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere from 280 to 400 parts per million (Solomon et al. 2007).

It is often thought that climate change means an increase in temperature. However, this is not that simple, as the Earth is a system where everything is connected, and changes in one area can influence others. The consequences of climate change now include various situations we are already experiencing, particularly in European and Asian countries, such as intense droughts, water shortages, severe fires, rising sea levels, floods, melting of the poles, catastrophic storms, and declining biodiversity.

Together, the consumption style of the current political-economic model, a scheme based on "having" as a synonym for "being successful in life," does not have in mind the overcoming of hunger and the needs of the low-income population but rather the accumulation of capital and its apparent benefits, tends to ignore the increase in the number of poor people, the pollution and degradation of resources and habitat, as well as the effects of its actions on climate change. This model's observable consequences openly question the current development scheme's production and consumption style as we move towards horizons that endanger life on our planet. This situation has highlighted the urgent need to undertake further development, a development based on the rational use of natural and social resources, which promotes sustainable production, equitable consumption, and the use of technologies that limit human effects on nature and climate. It is necessary to change the state of consciousness of human beings, allowing them to perform actions that reflect their rational capacity (Anderson 2011).

In an increasingly complex and interconnected world, with a genuine and existential threat such as climate change, there is a growing call to conscience to allow individuals, as agents of change, to recover, mainly the values and attitudes that make us human (Raducu 2020).

Climate Change and Poverty

Climate change can affect our health, ability to grow food, housing, security, and work. Several studies have shown that more and more people are vulnerable to climate impacts, particularly the poor (Levy and Patz 2015; Butler 2018; Jessel et al. 2019; Fahad and Wang 2020; Raducu 2020). For more than a decade, there has been a consensus that development is influenced by climate change (Anderson 2011). Climate change and economic, social, and health crises are closely

linked and lead to rethinking how we analyze and face these crises. Initially, we must avoid human-nature dualism and rethink ourselves as complementary (Molina-Vargas 2021). Climate change negatively affects living conditions and health, both mentally and physically. It also affects gender disparities, the standard of living, education, inequality, and poverty. The adverse and disproportionate effects of climate events and natural disasters originate or exacerbate inequality in vulnerable populations, pushing them into poverty or extreme poverty, so it is essential to lessen the negative effect among them (Busso and Messina 2020).

The impact of natural disasters and climate change (floods, droughts, heat waves) on vulnerable populations is invisible to the global economy. The link between climate vulnerability and poverty goes both ways; firstly, the environment and climate can push people directly or indirectly into poverty, which would affect the environment (Hallegatte et al. 2018) and secondly, a link to consider global climate change mitigation policies. Various authors (Yohe and Tol 2002, Nicholls and Tol 2009; Hope 2006; Mendelsohn et al., 2006; Hallegatte et al. 2018) expose that the distribution of climate impacts is heterogeneous, where the use of the world Gross Domestic Product GDP to measure the climate cost can disproportionately hide the significant impacts between countries and specifically in developing countries and regions.

Climate Change and Social Awareness

Although concern for the environment is not a new issue, there has been a long-standing debate on the economic, socio-cultural, and political models prevailing worldwide, and various forums have been held with the participation of almost all countries, which are so-called Environmental Summits, with meager results (Flandoli and Romero-Riaño 2020). In recent years, the "environmental conscience" has increased. It is a philosophy of life concerned about the environment and protecting it to preserve it and ensure its present and future balance, recognizing the impact of human behavior on natural resources, and rethinking ourselves as the most devastating species for the planet since without it we could not exist and much less evolved. In contrast, Earth's planet can exist and resurface without the human species; this implies recognizing the impact of human behavior on natural resources and rethinking ourselves as the most devastating species for the planet. At this point, it is essential to recognize that humans would not be able to exist without planet earth, but conversely, the planet can persist without human presence.

The planet earth is a space shared by millions of diverse species that inhabit the different ecosystems of our planet, such as seas, rivers, forests, and jungles. However, little consideration is given to the existence of all these forms of life, both animal and plant, and if it is considered, a form of economic exploitation is sought without maintaining a

scheme of sustainability. Environmental awareness must be an integral part of human beings. It must be a conscience that allows him to enjoy well-being, where self-care and care for others and the environment can be carried out, and various ethical aspects are involved. Since values are increasingly scarce, human beings have been devalued and still devaluing their lives and lives in general (Laso et al. 2017).

Modern systems have generated an imbalance in the human-environment balance, causing negative impacts not only on physical and mental health but also on spiritual health (García 2013; Jones et al. 2018; Matar and Ortiz 2021). Therefore, it is valid to consider elements, not only of biological character but even of a spiritual type, in environmental awareness. There is a need to recover the consciousness of human being that allows it to understand the processes of nature and respect them, to live and coexist with its fellows and with the entire environment that surrounds it, and live in harmony and peace (Koehrsen 2018; Ramli 2022).

Indigenous wisdom has a cosmovision, wisdom, and practices where respect and harmonious coexistence with mother earth prevail. Indigenous worldviews are transmissible and shape the relationship between these peoples, the environment, and the people who inhabit it. In this sense, the relationship with the environment is not superficial but profound in providing resources, protection, and health (Rai and Khawas 2019). For thousands of years, native cultures have extracted from nature everything they need to live in a wise relationship of balance that has kept them aware that they are not owners but members of their environment. Their cultural diversity has merged and enriched with biological diversity to form their biocultural heritage in this worldview. However, the projects of state building and modernization, through a Western worldview, have discredited this knowledge, reconfiguring the relationship with nature as a force to be subdued. Recognizing and being aware of our close links with nature would facilitate changes in cultural perspective in favor of the environment. It is necessary to merge scientific knowledge with ancestral knowledge to promote the reconciliation of this link (Rai and Khawas 2019; Ali et al. 2021).

Indigenous peoples and megadiversity are two elements that have made possible the appropriation of the biological diversity in Mexico, which represents 10% of the species that exist in the world and generated a bio-culture that enriched the food source, the world can enjoy today. However, the vision that during the last 30 years only sought to increase food production at an industrial level, at the expense of nature and ecosystems. The result is the wear and tear of the land by forcing the change of land use to move from a forest or vegetable system to a monoculture agricultural system or extensive cattle ranching and the natural exchange between animal and vegetable species that for centuries was used by indigenous cultures was interrupted (Mendelsohn 2009).

Undeniably, the oblivion of traditional practices developed in harmony with the times of nature that have been broken with their due consequences. Hence, it is necessary to preserve and

disseminate our wisdom from our ancestors, which is based on the deep knowledge of nature and its cycles, and therefore have a deep respect for it and love it. This action will create awareness about the urgent need to protect and conserve the environment. It will strengthen the actions that will allow us to recover the human conscience that we are a whole, fully linked to our environment, so it is necessary to recover the absolute respect for Mother Earth in a relationship that allows us to understand that we are not the "owners" of nature, but that "we are part of it" (Paneque-Gálvez 2018; Molnár and Babai 2021).

Environmental awareness, therefore, must go beyond the mere teaching of a few classes in school. Teaching how to recycle requires environmental literacy strategies for all ages and contexts and allowing people to have knowledge of the environmental reality and identify its problems, understanding social, historical, and ecological processes. The development of environmental sensitivity and the search for solutions and available means of action, with which a culture of environmental values can be developed since environmental care is not only the task of ministries and international institutions designed for this purpose. It is necessary to think, act sustainably, and work intersectionally with all the people who make up societies (Turaga et al. 2010; Jena 2018).

Environmental awareness is the certainty that natural resources must be cared for, protected, and used responsibly and rationally to provide well-being to the planet we inhabit. It is also considered a philosophy of life that cares about the environment and protects it to conserve it and thus guarantee its balance in the present and future (Rodríguez-Ibeas 2007). It is urgent to recover social cohesion because of an economic-political system that has favored individualism and has fragmented us as a human society. Obvious evidence has been how the Covid-19 pandemic has shown us the attitudes of selfishness and lack of equity for its control to such an extent that we have been more than two years, and despite the support with vaccines, it has not been possible to control this pandemic. Therefore, it is necessary to recover the solidarity among people that leads us to understand that we only have this planet and that most resources, besides being limited, are not renewable (Uzzel et al. 2002).

The global environmental crisis with anthropogenic roots is a current threat that must be faced. It concerns governments, companies, and society in general, so an economic, social, and environmental transformation is imperative for an integral development not only of society but of the planet itself. In that sense, environmental awareness must promote a change that generates social, emotional, and economic welfare (Kaufmann et al., 2017).

Significant challenges require developing and potentiating environmental awareness since it is complex to find shared values to mobilize consciences and guide individual and collective actions in a globalized and open world. That is why they suggest that to address environmental problems; it is required to address them as a moral problem, to penetrate values to build a universal and inclusive identity in the face

of structural and existentialist crises and, thus, achieve environmental peace in countries and between countries (Moyano 2018).

On June 5, 2022, the theme of World Environment Day, considered a motto of "One Earth," aims to establish sustainable actions that allow human beings to safeguard natural resources and promote social responsibility. So far, the social sensitivity facing the course of the socio-environmental eventualities has been minimal in reversing the crisis of values that we have socially embraced for more than 50 years. There has been a notorious lack of commitment and respect for environmental conservation and overcoming social resistance to build a sustainable and harmonious model between nature and human beings (Kovel 2021).

Conclusion

The current times, shaken by a pandemic, growing poverty, and climate change, demand the recovery of conscience among individuals, societies, and governments. The generation of an environmental conscience as the basis of all human behavior cannot be postponed. It is necessary learning regardless of our age or our knowledge, a philosophy of life that cares about the environment and protects it to preserve it and ensure its present and future balance, that cares about life itself and takes care of it. It is a moment that demands that people react and move from a submissive attitude to a critical attitude that leads to a "liberating conscience." It requires a conscience based on values that allow us to have a conviction that determines conduct or behavior of respect and understanding between human beings and their environment and allows us to understand that we are part of this nature.

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