



Narratives in the Anthropocene era

Charles Travis, Vittorio Valentino (Eds.)

COVID-19 as a wake-up call. Potential for more sustainable attitudes and behaviors in Poland

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Abstract

Poland has been quite hesitant to adopt changes (both systematic and on the individual level) necessary to mitigate climate change. The country's economy is heavily dependent on coal mining, which is supported by a very powerful Silesian (main coal region in Poland) culture, with the miner being the most respected profession in society. In addition, there being a rather "young" European democracy, paradigms of economic growth and consumerism are still dominant development drivers. In this context, introducing a societal change to support the necessary energy transitions and drastically cutting fossil fuels emissions seem extremely challenging. However, COVID-19 pandemic has forced certain, at least temporary, changes to people and the economy. In our study, we have investigated what potential comes from redefining people's everyday rituals for fighting climate change. We have focused on different behaviors with high-carbon footprints, such as daily transport, travel, consumption, and food waste. It turned out that some of these changes could be introduced in the future. What is more, the health crisis and the lockdown inspired sort of national reckoning on "what is really important" and, to some extent, reconnection with nature. If appropriately supported, it gives a great potential for societal change towards sustainable living. The study was conducted in April and May 2020, during the so called 'first national quarantine'. It was based on the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. For purposes of this paper, we focus on the results of the former method only, which provides much better insights into the narratives of the Anthropocene in the Silesian region. The survey was based on 150 in-depth interviews conducted via online communication tools. Although such a sample is not representative by definition, it aims to display diverse strategies and changing habits of various subjects in different regions of Poland, as well as various life situations in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (families with kids, pensioners, young adults, etc.).

Keywords: social change, sustainable living, carbon footprint, environmental crisis

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Geographies
of the
Anthropocene



PEER-REVIEWED
SERIES

ISSN 2611-3171

IL Sileno
Edizioni

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