

POLISH ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS DURING THE POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION (1980-1989)

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to present the unique nature of the Polish environmental movements during the political transformation. The presentation of the beginnings of a civil society in the context of sprouting ecological awareness. The following issues have been focused on herein: the history of the Polish environmental movements in the 1980s, their relationship with "Solidarność", forms of activity; the formation of ecological awareness amongst the Poles; the attitude towards the environmental politics of the policymakers; the evolution of the political system in the face of environmental protection issues; the relationship between the forming of ecological awareness and Christianity has been presented as well. The following conclusions have been drawn based on the recreated history: the results of limiting the freedom of speech and expression are different than expected by the authorities – taking the form of increased civil activity, including within social environmental movements; the actions of social environmental movements contributed to the forming of a civil society in Poland.

Key words: Polish environmental movements, political transformation, 1989 in Poland, social movement, protest movement, ecological awareness, Poland, Solidarność, communism, socialism, Catholicism, Christianity, catholic social science

Primary and secondary goals

The primary goal of this article is to present the unique nature of the Polish environmental movements during the political transformation. The secondary goal is to answer the question: are environmental activists always aware of their goals when taking a given course of action? Or maybe they promote change, but not always realize what the change should look like, exactly? Or maybe there is another possible scenario: that the initial ambition is minimal, but the results of the actions exceed the expectations of environmental activists? The history of Polish environmental movements may also allow us to analyze one other issue: whether the suppression of civil liberties, such as the freedom of speech or freedom of assembly, yields outcomes contrary to the initial goals of the authorities, i.e. to the consolidation and activation of the citizens? Another goal is to depict that despite their lack of sovereignty, Polish environmental movements before the transformation of 1989 were vigorous if we consider the conditions created by the system. The last, equally important goal of this analysis is to present two more facts. First of all, that the discussion regarding ecological issues is, in fact, a cover for a discussion revolving around important political issues such as democratic liberties (access to information, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, etc.). Secondly, that the actions of Polish environmental movements, despite their modest extent, contributed to the dynamics of the political transformation in Poland. The final goal is to bring out the relationship between the formation of Polish ecological awareness with the Catholic faith which is dominant in Poland, and cannot be overestimated when it comes to the process of political transformation.

Timeframe

It is important to define the timeframe this discussion concerns itself with. The beginning date is the years 1980 – 1981. These years mark a breakthrough not only in the political system¹, but also in the history of Polish environmental movements. It was then that democracy was introduced in Poland, which simultaneously made it possible to draw attention to the issues of ecology, i.e. the significant

¹ Cf. A. Antoszewski, *Erozja systemu politycznego PRL w latach 80. Studium procesu*, Wrocław 1992.

deterioration of the environment and the lack of tools to protect it. In July and August of 1980, in light of the deepening economic crisis, mass strikes were held in Poland (primarily on the Coast and in Silesia), leading to the signing of social agreements. In the same year the Independent and Self-governing Trade Union "Solidarność" was created to protect workers' rights (it had 10 million members and was led by Lech Wałęsa). On 13 December 1981 the authorities proclaimed martial law throughout the country, fearing the radicalization of the public mood and losing their monopoly on power. The actions of Polish social movements were related to the Independent and Self-governing Trade Union "Solidarność". Naturally, initially not many ecology-related issues were raised within the boundaries of the "Solidarność" movement. No specific environmental protection programme was created. The issue was dealt with by committees, but not on a regular basis, and basically only when the need for an intervention arose. This was due to the significant economic and political problems which dominated the debates of the time.

The ending date is the year 1989, when the Round Table agreements were negotiated between February and April. They were concluded as a result of earlier events: the strikes in May and August 1988, the founding of the Citizens' Committee "Solidarność" (the Independent and Self-governing Trade Union "Solidarność" had been declared illegal in October 1982). The authorities conducted talks with a part of the opposition, mainly belonging to "Solidarność", regarding the democratization of the political and social system, and the improvement of the Polish economy. In April 1989 the Independent and Self-governing Trade Union "Solidarność" was registered. As a result of the Round Table Talks, partially democratic parliamentary elections were held on 4 and 18 June 1989. "Solidarność" was victorious, Tadeusz Mazowiecki became the prime minister, and the government included, amongst others, representatives of the previous opposition.

Theses for the 1st General Congress of "Solidarność". Protests

In 1980, the government of the Polish People's Republic and the strike committees concluded four "August agreements", none of which mentioned environmental issues. This subject emerged as late as mid-1981, in the prepared programme goals of the 1st General Congress of "Solidarność". The notion of environmental protection appeared within the area of social politics. So-called theses were formulated. Thesis sixteen of the Trade Union's programme stated that "The Union fights for the effective protection of man's environment".² It was emphasized that social goals should take precedence over production goals. The programme mentioned the condition of the natural environment, and the effects of negligence and bad economic politics in view of environmental problems. With regard to two regions – Silesia and the Bay of Gdańsk – the term "ecological catastrophe" was used. The theses addressed the entire Union, urging its members to attach importance to the need for a diagnosis of the state of the Polish natural environment. A concept of rational spatial development and – notably – of protecting the so-called strategic elements of the natural environment was put forward. What was considered was the water, air, earth, and other natural resources. An initiative to restore what had already been destroyed was implemented as well. The theses also included recommendations to specific institutions regarding protecting the environment by themselves. The aim was primarily for employees to display interest in environmental protection, to look out for breaches of environmental policies, and to shape pro-environmental attitudes. The most important task formulated by "Solidarność" was an appeal to the government for it to formulate an environmental protection programme, and to subject it to a public discussion. It was also postulated that the natural environment rescue plan should become a part of the economic reform.

Unfortunately, the theses prepared for the "Solidarność" Congress by environmentalists and politicians interested in the subject were not absorbed by anyone. They did not become a topic for discussion neither at workplaces, or at the governmental level. Their effect was minor. These events depict a certain significant characteristic of that period of political transformation: people striving for socio-political change did not treat the ideas of the environmentalists seriously, their demands were being sidetracked.

² H. Lisicka, *Organizacje ekologiczne w polskich systemach politycznych*, Wrocław 1997, p. 113.

"It was the environmentalists who wanted the NSZZ "Solidarność" banner, and not "Solidarność" who wanted to incite the social environmental movement"³. This is naturally understandable – at the time of fundamental political and social changes the issues of environmental protection had to be put in the background. Key reforms begin with elementary issues, which does not include rescuing the devastated nature – even, if it's destruction is recognized.

Ecological awareness in Poland in the 1980s

An opinion poll was conducted in 1980 which revealed that Poles were dissatisfied, especially with the government's role with regard to healthcare, fight against crime, and the implemented accommodation policies. 43% of respondents were also displeased with the level of pollution. The studies demonstrated unquestionably that there was a growing awareness of the negative effects of the deterioration of natural environment in the society. This was aided by the everyday, tangible results of such deterioration. Including: noise, dust, respiratory system diseases, low quality of drinking water. Statistical data shows that at the beginning of the 1980s 34% of Poles inhabited regions classified as presenting an "environmental threat". This was caused by the fact that people were the most numerous in urbanized and industrialized areas.

Studies conducted in 1985 amongst the employees of companies whose operations were detrimental to the environment showed that a certain type of ecological awareness had developed. First of all, the respondents perceived their own problems related to their harmful working conditions, and secondly, they were seeing the effects of their company's operations on the environment. Citizens started wishing to live amongst pleasant, i.e. clean nature.

The increase in Polish ecological awareness is tied to the improvement of information politics – people were able to learn more about environmental problems which had previously been kept secret. This was a result of the reduction of the role of censorship, and the propagation of freedom of speech and of the press throughout the political transformation process. Scientific analyses of the condition of the environment began appearing. For example, there was the report of the "Man and the environment" Scientific Committee of the Polish Academy of Sciences from 1981 entitled *Ocena aktualnego stanu środowiska w Polsce (synteza ekspertyzy)* (An evaluation of the current condition of the environment in Poland (a synthesis), or the League of Nature Conservation's report from the same year entitled *O stanie środowiska przyrodniczego w Polsce i zagrożenia zdrowia ludzkiego* (Regarding the state of the environment in Poland and the threat to human health).

The opposition's role focused on criticising the actions of the government within the area of environmental protection, which yielded positive results, activating those citizens who had been blindly trusting the government's propaganda.

A visible increase in social ecological awareness was displayed by people interested in environmental issues during the National Council elections (1984, 1988) and the Sejm elections in 1985. This could be seen in the proposals and demands put forward by the voters⁴.

Political system transformation and ecological issues

The 1980s were an important period of political transformation. The socialist political system model was being extinguished, and the political scene was being taken over by a new, no longer socialist, but still not fully democratic system. The beginning of the transformation could be seen in the formation of various advisory and consulting boards which could potentially affect the official decision-making

³ J. Hryniewicz, *Zieloni. Studia nad ruchem ekologicznym w Polsce 1980-1989*, p. 10.

⁴ Out of 50 thousand proposals, 3% pertained to environmental protection. Cf.: P. Gliński, A. Siciński, *Presje społeczne w dziedzinie ochrony i kształtowania środowiska w Polsce i ich skuteczność*, in: *Ekonomiczno-społeczne mechanizmy efektywnego zagospodarowania zasobami środowiska przyrodniczego*, Warszawa 1989, p. 82.

process. Such bodies included: the Socio-Economic Council to the Sejm, the Consulting Council to the Chair of the Council of State, or the Patriotic Movement for National Rebirth. However, this was not a measure of their strength with regard to influencing the government, as these were mostly shell institutions. That is because efforts to meet the public demands were simultaneously hindered. The most important institutions included the Citizens' Committees of National Rescue, but they had no opposition members within their midst.

The best known official movement from that period was PRON (the Patriotic Movement for National Rebirth), founded based on a declaration from 1982. Its statute was passed in 1983. PRON was supposed to be an open social movement. Participation would be voluntary, and it would collaborate with government bodies. PRON's primary goal was to activate that part of the society which did not involve itself in politics and was distrustful towards the authorities. PRON was supposed to become the "socialist Solidarność". It did not fulfil its role, however, and was dissolved pursuant to a change of the Constitution introduced in December 1989. PRON's existence resulted in the hindering of the creation of new environmental organisations. Paradoxically, attempts at blocking initiatives are conducive to their implementation. This was also true in the case of the attempts to destroy the seeds of civil society in Poland, which could slowly begin to form thanks to environmental organisations.

The subject of environmental protection was peripheral to the programme of the 10th Congress of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) (July 1986), it did not constitute an integral part of the economic plan. It was only mentioned in the last section entitled "Improvement of living conditions", along with problems related to housing, education, and supply. It is clear then that environmental politics was closely connected to social politics.

The low level of governmental involvement in environmental issues is attributed by researchers to other characteristics of the doctrine (the difficulty of reconciling environmental protection with the Marxist vision of social development), and is considered a consequence of the socialist state⁵.

Forms of social environmental movement in Poland in the 1980s

Researchers of Polish environmental movements point out that the social environmental movement which existed in Poland during this period cannot be classified in a simple manner. This is due to their changing character. We can only speak of tendencies within the movements. Thus, the following forms of the Polish environmental movement in the 1980s are listed: political parties, trade unions, organisations founded by the authorities (to limit the impact of independent initiatives), independent organisations (operating illegally, however), religious organisations, local organisations, scientific and social associations⁶.

The aforementioned list of organisational forms depicts the dual character of the emerging environmentally-oriented social movements. On the one hand, there were actions initiated by the government – official in nature, and dependent on said government. On the other hand, independent organisations were being founded as well. Unfortunately, there were conflicts between them. Naturally, one could draw many different demarcation lines between the forms of social movements: for example with regard to age (young-old), range (local-nationwide), or elitist-pluralist.

Although environmental protection issues were absent from the economic reforms projects proposed by "Solidarność", some protests were organised under its banner. One such pro-ecological initiative took the form of an appeal issued by the National Coordinating Committee of the NSZZ "Solidarność" Health Inspectorate, asking parents, school and trade union authorities not to send children to regions of environmental devastation, i.e. the Copper District and the Bay of Gdańsk, during the summer holidays. In June 1981, local organisations on the Coast protested against environmental destruction. The protesters marched with banners listing the goals of the manifestation. Amongst others, the following

⁵ H. Lisicka, *Organizacje...*, p. 119.

⁶ J. Hryniewicz, *Zieloni...*, p. 11.

took part: the Maritime League, the Marine Fishermen's Association, the Kashubian-Pomeranian Association, and other local associations.

Communist authorities in the face of social environmental movements

The policy of the communist authorities with regard to social environmental movements was aimed at reducing their importance and their influence on the citizens. In order to take control of Polish grass-roots social environmental initiatives, the authorities decided to unite and centralise the ecological movement in Poland. It would allow them to control it. Data was falsified for that purpose, and it was claimed that there were approximately two thousand pro-ecological organisations active in Poland, associating about 5 million people⁷. These numbers were significantly inflated, of course. It was all about preventing the citizens' environmental actions from transforming into anti-government initiatives. That is why independent organisations had to be subjected to the official authorities.

The first attempts at taking control of social environmental movements were made already at the turn of 1983 and 1984, and slowly became stronger up until 1986. Such actions took the form of, amongst others, refusals to register local organisations, associations, or divisions of nationwide pro-ecological initiatives. Members of such organisations were also encouraged to join the ranks of existing organisations (official ones, connected to the central authorities). Institutions were also urgently set up to compete with those proposed by the citizens. Strict financial audits were introduced as well, despite the fact that apart from membership fees such organisations did not possess any significant assets. The movements were harassed and closed down under any pretence or forced to state their political views. There were also instances of accusations of movements exceeding their statutory competencies, which allowed the authorities to intervene in an existing movement and force its statute to be changed. The Security Service and various other special forces used varied tactics to keep the social environmental movement community under surveillance. This was detrimental to both the spontaneity of their creation, and the freedom of action.

Naturally, all of these procedures were being justified as conducted out of care for nature. Communist propaganda claimed that in view of the poor condition of the natural environment the scattered nature of environmental movements is not conducive to the common goal, i.e. the healing of the natural environment. Most of all, the authorities were afraid of social environmental movements transforming into a party (a so-called Green party), which could pose a serious threat to the existing socio-political order. The highest ranking members of pro-ecological associations claimed, of course, that they were not interested in politics. For instance, the first president of the Polish Ecological Club Stanisław Juchnowicz said he wanted the Club to remain "white and red", and not become green⁸. The members of independent social movements tried to continuously emphasise their social, and not political dimension. It has to be noted, though, that the activists did not shy away from engaging in unequivocal political actions, if such actions were undertaken by any of the movements. However, any interventions were always related to ecological threats⁹.

The most significant obstacle in the way of social environmental movements in Poland in the 1980s was the introduction of the subject of environmental protection to, amongst others, the programme of the Polish United Workers' Party, political parties, youth associations, or national councils.

⁷ The data is questioned by Piotr Gliński – the official records claimed the existence of approximately 2,000 organisations and social environmental movements, but according to his calculations there were around 200. Cf. P. Gliński, *Ruch ekologiczny w Polsce*, in: *Ruchy i organizacje ekologiczne w Polsce*, Warsaw 1990.

⁸ More about the history of the Polish Ecological Club may be found, for example, at: <http://lustrastronadruka.cal.pl/pke/o-klubie/> (accessed: 29.04.2016).

⁹ As seen in the case of a threat to the natural environment in Zakopane in 1987, described in "Gazeta Krakowska" no. 223 of the same year.

The activity of social environmental movements in Poland

None of the forms of social environmental movement activity can be classified in a simple manner, primarily due to the varied nature of their operations which evades straightforward labels. Activists reacted to the changing situation by employing suitably chosen forms of action. Some dominant tendencies may be described, however.

The first one pertains to the goals set by the activists. These are primarily about enacting change in the nation's social, political, and economic reality. This is related to the development of people's awareness, and with a change of the vision of social and political reforms to include the issues of environmental protection.

The second one is connected to the values promoted by environmental activists. What is important, these values are related not only to the philosophy of ecology, but also strictly to morality, politics, culture, and the society. It is the movements' duty to guard these values, which in turn serve to eliminate threats to the environment or make it possible to fight the consequences of environmental damage. Ecological activists in Poland at the time did not differ much from their counterparts in the West. Their actions were, however delayed (the Iron Curtain). They promoted similar systems of values, strived for the use of new (environmentally friendly) methods of production, propagated a different approach towards the world of living things, and were inspired by various religions. Limited access to literature on the subject of the newest ecological trends was most definitely a significant obstacle. This could be summed up as follows: on the face of it, Poles promoted values similar to the Western ones, but because of the lack of access to reliable sources of knowledge they formulated their own worldview foundations.

The new movements created in the 1980s took advantage of the intellectual heritage of already existing associations or organisations (most often the Polish Ecological Movement). This limited the list of promoted ideas related to environmental protection. These ideas basically boil down to three demands.

The first one, shared by everybody, is education. The goal was to propagate the ideals of ecology amongst all the social strata and people of all ages. Moreover, it was claimed that any problems related to environmental damage should be communicated both to the authorities, and to the citizens. Raising awareness regarding what instruments were available to people in the event of a potential threat, whom to notify, and where to go was an important function. Educational actions were also conducted amongst farmers, doctors, engineers, freelancers, and even decision makers. A new lifestyle was being promoted amongst Poles, involving e.g. resting in the bosom of nature¹⁰. These goals are holistic in nature – including both the members of social environmental movements, and their surroundings.

The second goal shared by all ecology-related programmes is action. It is a natural form of shaping the reality, typical of all social movements¹¹. The aim is to change the existing order of things, if its effects on the natural environment are destructive. A dilemma was hinted at in the introduction – how much are social movements aware of the ultimate goal they strive towards after their actions are initiated? It seems that the actual results are not always a consciously set goal¹². The forms of such actions are also worth mentioning. They were written, or practical in nature – efforts were made to affect matters physically. These forms are very well known to us today, as demonstrated by spectacular actions such as environmentalists chaining themselves to trees, sitting on roads, climbing on roofs, etc. When it comes to the written form, various petitions, manifests, requests, complaints, and letters were formulated.

¹⁰ Although the issues discussed herein pertain to the 1980s, it is worth mentioning that they have not become outdated. The development of agrotourism in Poland proves that these ideas infiltrated a wide range of social strata.

¹¹ Cf. P. Sztompka, *Ruchy społeczne – struktury w procesie stawania się*, in: *Między historią a teorią. Refleksje nad problematyką dziejów i wiedzy historycznej*, ed. M. Drozdowski, Warsaw 1988, p. 416.

¹² This thesis has been confirmed by the recently founded Committee for the Defence of Democracy. In the original vision of the movement Krzysztof Łoziński spoke of a group of approximately 20 people, whereas the protests on the streets of Warsaw involved – depending on the source – approximately 60 thousand people. A completely unplanned number of people had been activated. The goals were modest, but the scale of the results was surprising.

Books on the subject of environmental protection were published as well. The "physical" activity of the movements involved organising marches, protests, assemblies, meetings, discussions, visual arts or theatre workshops related to the ideals of ecology.

The third idea present in the programmes is the creation of new visions for the development of environmental protection. This is connected to water conservation, sustainable use of natural resources, avoiding polluting the air, use of alternative materials or means. Interestingly in the context of such limited contact with the foreign world, already in the 1980s there were voices recognizing the need for international cooperation in matters related to environmental problems¹³.

It is worth emphasizing that despite the variety of environmental initiatives in Poland in the 1980s there were no flagrant contradictions between the goals formulated by the members of these movements, the forms of action taken to achieve these goals, or the creation of new ecological visions. The environmental movements discussed herein acted as an example of the unifying force of a common enemy. Thus, in 1986 all independent social environmental initiatives came together in the face of a common threat, i.e. the perceived danger of the development of nuclear power industry in Poland.

The stages of development of social environmental movements

The initial development phase of social environmental movements in Poland in the 1980s falls between the years 1980 and 1981, when the first organisations of this type are founded. It is of course also related to the founding of NSZZ "Solidarność" and the initiation of the political transformation process in Poland. Successes within the area of ecology include the initiation of the environmental threat awareness raising process in the Polish society, the distribution of information on the subject, the formation of all types of organisations connected to ecology, and the initiation of the typical operations of environmental movements. Already at this early stage an important characteristic of environmental movements in Poland comes to light – i.e. the visible effects they have on political events. The part they played in the political transformation could be seen in subjects such as the monopoly of power, and the lack of control thereof, being raised alongside issues pertaining to health or environmental pollution. Environmental issues were clearly becoming a pretext for discussing the lack of civil liberties. Thus, an important process of raising the citizens' awareness of their rights (or limitations thereto) was initiated. With regard to the size of the environmental movements, there were still few of them at the time.

The second stage recognized by researchers lasted from 1982 to 1986, the end date being the Chernobyl disaster. The number of pro-ecological organisations and associations grew over that period. Subjects related to ecology accompanied various professional, religious, social, and scientific organisations. During this phase it was clear that environmental issues were in fact used to discuss the political transformation. Hence the decisive actions taken by the communist authorities in an effort to create their own environmental organisations competing with independent initiatives. The authorities meant to depict the lack of justification for the existence of independent organisations in view of their government counterparts.

The explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear plant in 1986 acted as the tipping point in the history of Polish environmental movements. It demonstrated the inertia of the ruling propaganda, the ineffectiveness of the state and its politics, and the failure of the economy – not only with regard to the industry and science, but most of all to healthcare. Numerous independent ecology-related organisations were founded in Poland after that. The events in Chernobyl also activated the environmental organisations run by the government, which unfortunately had an inflammatory effect, leading to conflicts between them. At that moment some public officials started displaying disloyalty towards the authorities, leaking information regarding the actual state of events in relation to the Chernobyl disaster and the actions of the communist government. As a result, the Polish people learned that there was industrial waste being brought into Poland. This information led to a social upheaval. People took to the streets, overcoming

¹³ This problem has been thoroughly discussed and documented by Józefina Hryniewicz in the work cited above.

their fear, and protested. The authorities reacted brutally, pacifying the demonstrations. Which is why the members of social environmental movements claimed that their actions were not political in nature.

The period related to 1988 is considered to be the next stage of the development of environmental movements in Poland. It was then that many new ecological societies were founded. The society's influence on the government increased. On the other hand, the surveillance the society had been kept under was weakened, there was a certain liberalisation of political life, the citizens had more access to facts. As a result of the deepening economic and political crisis the government was no longer able to focus on strictly controlling social environmental movements. Attempts at controlling them were made, however, e.g. through the appointment of trusted officials, but that did not yield the expected results. Thanks to an easier access to information, awareness of environmental protection issues was able to develop. Researchers point out that this contributed to the formation of civil society in Poland. The large number of clubs, federations, seminars, committees, etc. confirms that. Ideals of ecology definitely activated the citizens, drawing them towards social initiatives¹⁴.

The role of the Church in the shaping of ecological awareness in Poland

The deeply rooted religiousness of the Polish nation played a significant role in the shaping of ecological awareness in Poland. Religious beliefs generally strongly affect the formation of awareness, as they reflect the principles inherent in one's faith. Religion also affects the formation of ecological awareness, determines values, attitudes, opinions, etc. "In the Christian tradition the value of nature may be perceived in the fact that it is a reflection of the wisdom and benevolence of the Maker, it contains its own, internal good resulting from having been brought into existence by an infinitely good Being. This Christian substantiation of the value of nature forces one to respect it and to assume responsibility for it in front of the Maker himself."¹⁵. The quoted fragment indicates unequivocally that within the Polish system of values all elements related to respect for Earth are bolstered by religious reasons.

The official position of the Church on ecology-related issues was formulated in the 20th century in the Second Vatican Council documents. Over time popes dedicated more and more of their encyclicals, proclamations, and pastoral letters to the matter of environmental protection¹⁶. In the 1980s in Poland as well there were voices calling for an official statement regarding the subject of ecology. This was a result of a sense of responsibility for nature which should not only belong to the government, but to the entire society. And if society, then also the Church has the right to take a stance, as it is responsible for the shaping of moral attitudes within itself. Two types of actions taken by the Church in relation to environmental protection during the era of the Polish People's Republic may be discerned. On the one hand, it was the ministerial practice, i.e. an attempt to affect the local authorities, administration, government, etc. On the other hand, it involved addressing members of the community in special documents. Two documents from the 1980s are worth mentioning here: the first one is the *List pasterski biskupa katowickiego z okazji wspomnienia św. Franciszka z Asyżu* (The bishop of Katowice's pastoral letter celebrating St. Francis of Assisi) (1986). It refers in detail to the environmental devastation of Silesia and the Coal District (Zagłębie) which directly threatens the health of the region's inhabitants. Drawing on the Bible, the bishop emphasises that man is supposed to rule the world, but cannot neglect its rights, and definitely cannot destroy it. The letter ends with an appeal to teachers, people of science and technology, farmers, and decision-makers, urging them to responsibly watch over the natural environmental balance. The second document is the *List pasterski Episkopatu Polski na temat ochrony środowiska* (The Polish Episcopate's pastoral letter on environmental protection) (1989). The Church officials started the letter by describing the difficult environmental situation of Poland, drawing attention

¹⁴ Cf. J. Hryniewicz, *Zieloni...*, p. 20-21.

¹⁵ P. Kędzierski, *Rola chrześcijańskiej nauki w kształtowaniu świadomości ekologicznej współczesnych Polaków*, in: *Świadomość ekologiczna i społeczne ruchy „Zielonych” w Polsce*, ed. W. Mirowski, Warsaw 1999, p. 134.

¹⁶ Pope Benedict XVI, as well as the current pope Francis, have paid a lot of attention to matters related to ecology, particularly to the issue of climate change.

to high levels of pollution in the air, water, soil, as well as the amount of waste in the countryside. The moral aspect of ecology was then analysed, with the conclusion that there is such a thing as sins against the natural environment. Pursuing profit at all costs leads to environmental degradation. Whilst revealing the causes of pollution, the authors of the letter simultaneously suggest a way to resolve the problem. It is the need for a change in thinking about ecology, and for acting in solidarity with nature. There are numerous ways for pro-ecological action to take place – from a change of economic policies to so-called minor activities such as the collection of garbage by children which helps to teach them respect for nature.

Conclusions

The description of nearly one decade of Polish environmental politics clearly shows that the national borders, although closed shut, did not present an obstacle for the idea of respecting our natural habitat. Environmental protection constitutes a part of human existence and it does not matter whether we consider a democratic, communist, or any other regime.

Another conclusion which may be drawn from the history of Polish environmental movement is that environmental protection issues tend to get marginalised at the time of important socio-political changes. During a political transformation nobody devotes their attention and energy to restoring what has been destroyed. It is all about conducting a revolution, and goals not directly related to political changes can be pursued only after relative political stabilisation has been achieved. Such was also the situation in Poland at the beginning of the 1980s.

A certain ideological inconsistency is also worth mentioning when it comes to the social environmental movements of the Polish People's Republic era. As is widely known, the actions of environmentalists are tied to the left side of the political spectrum. Thus, in theory they should have had the favour of the government for ideological reasons. Of course, that was not the case. The communist regime feared the consolidation of its citizens against the authorities, and the political agenda did not matter at all, although – paradoxically – the two sides were close to each other with regards to their beliefs. As mentioned above, however, it was indeed difficult to reconcile the issue of ecology with the Marxist doctrine.

The history of Polish environmental movements is characterised by certain visible landmarks. During the 1960s and 1970s the government treated their members as idealists who did not pose a threat to the communist regime. Over time, however, and particularly at the beginning of the 1980s, they started to be perceived as a threat which, in a way, tried to control the authorities. Hence the timeframe for the discussion herein appears completely justified. The starting point marks a visible tightening of the communist policies against social environmental movements. The end date, on the other hand, denotes a symbolic end of those policies, i.e. the fall of communism in Poland.

It is important to these conclusions that the ideas of environmentalism only managed to find their way into communist Poland in a general manner. What was known were the general notions of the emerging new lifestyle, new methods of production, but because of a lack of reliable sources these served as the basis for own, local ideas. The need to take care of Earth is universal in nature, and the methods used to achieve this goal depend on the capabilities available at a given moment in history.

A significant difference between Polish environmental movements in the 1980s and similar movements active in democratic countries may be seen in the visible connection of the Polish movements to politics. The political context, the resulting political struggles, and the existence of various unions and factions played an important role before 1989. After the fall of communism in Poland the social environmental movement could clearly focus on universal ecological problems, dissociating itself from the ongoing political game. It could, similarly to other democracies, focus on values which are important to all cultures and civilisations when it comes to preserving Earth and its resources.

There is one more fact that is worth mentioning at this point: social environmental movements in Poland contributed not only to the political transformation, but also the formation of civil society. Wojciech Lamentowicz, analysing the process of the formation of civil society in non-democratic regime conditions, proposes a three-degree scale of social independence from the state: self-defence, self-

articulation, and self-organisation. The actions of the opposition in Poland in the 1980s confirms this observation.

The analysis conducted herein draws attention to an important correlation: ecological awareness increases proportionally to civil liberties, and easier access to information. This means that people are capable of translating acquired knowledge into their own experience, and realise that the worse the environmental politics, the worse the condition of their health and surroundings. This, in turn, affects their activeness and leads to specific forms of protest.

Poland, as a typical socialist country, showed in the 1980s that social activism in the realm of environmental protection was not instigated by the official politics of the state, but by social organisations. Most importantly, social movements and organisations were not actually aiming to influence the decision-makers, but to help achieve the goals set by them.

To conclude, we should examine the effectiveness of the actions taken throughout the 1980s by the members of Polish environmental movements. Considering the circumstances in which they were forced to operate, their small number counts not as a defeat, but as a success. In the difficult conditions of the communist regime they were able to take on a pollution-generating factory, and even win a court case. Unfortunately, immediately after 1989 the public eye could not be drawn to the issues of environmental protection. There was no legislative initiative which would concern ecology. This allowed anti-environmental trends in the agriculture, construction, energy, or industry sectors to develop. After the elections, the opposition and "Solidarność" left the matters of environmental protection in the hands of the authorities, and no legislative efforts were made to protect the natural environment from degradation. A characteristic example could be seen in the importation of old cars into Poland or the use of technologies which had been made obsolete in the West. The new, solidarity-based government did not cater to the needs of the environment. It is no wonder that after so many years of the communist regime other matters were deemed to be more important.