

# THE INFLUENCE OF ECOLOGICAL TRENDS ON THE SHAPING OF LIFE IN THE XXI CENTURY

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Man, as a natural being, modifies the ecosystems of which he is an integral part, but this does not diminish his obligation to leave the environment to his descendants, at least in the state in which he "got it for use" from his ancestors. The growth trend observed in the field of extraction of natural resources, global population, gross domestic product and waste disposal is the basis for the development of the global environmental crisis, which is caused by unreasonable and irresponsible human behavior towards nature and its resources. The ecological crisis, as a disturbance and threat to the balance of the natural and social components of the environment and consequently human existence, is a trend that is intensively influencing the shaping of life in the 21st century. Unsustainable use of natural resources in combination with continuous increase in waste causes concern for human survival and requires immediate transformation and transition from dominant economic models based on linear patterns of production, consumption and disposal, to closed-loop models - circular models. The process of harmonization of technological progress and economic growth and development, with the goals of preserving the quality of the environment, has developed the need to build the innovative potential of the economy and apply the principles of sustainable development, as a strategic commitment of almost all countries in the 21st century. In this regard, a change in worldview - the development of environmental knowledge is necessary and is the primary goal in establishing the optimal, interaction of man and nature. The aim of the work is to point out the negative consequences of irresponsible behavior towards the environment and natural resources.*

**Keywords:** environmental problems, environment, ecological culture, 21st century, circular economy

**JEL classification:** Q20, I15, P18, Q01, 051

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The world in which modern man lives is full of challenges and changes that are constantly happening, and in this regard, we are forced to adapt to them in a timely manner. Life in the XXI century is characterized by increasingly intensive processes of globalization, industrialization and technical revolution, which leave strong consequences for the environment and, therefore, the quality of life. The aforementioned consequences for the ecosystem are dominantly negative and it is fully justified why there is a global awareness of the threat of every form of life on Earth today (Bekavac and Podgorelec, 2014).

The degradation of the quality of the human environment and the quality of life is becoming a visible part of the global crisis marked as the ecological crisis, which marks the modern era. In general, an ecological crisis indicates the presence of a disturbance and/or imbalance of one or more types of organisms in relation to their living environment or in relation to mutual interaction (Franić, 2020). The dominant presence of the above-mentioned crisis at the world level is confirmed by: global warming, reduction of the ozone layer, increased greenhouse effect, irrational use of non-renewable natural resources, conversion of fertile land into deserts, occurrence of acid rain, extinction of plant and animal species, increase in the amount of waste that at the end of life century ends up in landfills, as does the dominantly linear economy in most countries around the world. Although the main cause of the global environmental crisis is the rapid and strong development of industry, technique and technology, neither social nor individual influences - the influence of "ordinary" people on the fate of all humanity - must be ignored. Namely, it is necessary to recognize the fact that man is a natural being and as such, a part of the ecosystem that changes through his actions. As living beings, people have taken upon themselves the responsibility of preserving the environment for their successors, at least in the state in which they "received" it for use from their ancestors. However, the danger of the consequences of the global ecological crisis, which is evident, indicates that modern man treats nature in such a way that, not only endangers the survival of future generations, but also calls into question the existence of life in general. There are authors, such as Leakey Richard, who believe that environmental uncertainty is greater than even the biggest pessimists imagine and that we have already passed the "point of no return" - the point where we can no longer prevent ecological degradation, we can slow it down, but we can't stop it anymore (Pečjak, 2009). That is why in the 21st century, a qualitative change in the relationship between society and nature is necessary, which will cause the emergence of a completely new social context in which man will get closer to nature, from which he has obviously been separated. Circular economy appears as a concept of exceptional importance for reducing the risk of damaging the environment, the implementation of which is a way to achieve the goals of sustainable development, primarily aimed at preserving the environment.

The paper uses the method of descriptive research, which is in line with its basic goals to indicate the actuality of environmental problems and the negative consequences of irresponsible behavior towards the environment and natural resources.

*„ We need to renew our contract with nature. Ecology is a unifying force that can reduce intolerance and expand our empathy for others – both human and animal.” –*

Gregory Colbert

## **2. THE EMERGENCE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS AS A CONSEQUENCE OF THE DISRUPTED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIETY AND NATURE**

The environment, as the starting point of the life of all living beings, is subject to changes that occur as a result of human action. Given that modern society is often labeled as a "civilization of risk" (Marković, 2002), it is high time to ask ourselves what kind of relationship we have with nature? From the Stone Age, when only stone tools were used for work, until the latest scientific and technical achievements, man conquered nature and influenced it with his actions, however, it seems that today's influence is primarily negative and that the big problem is how we deal with the consequences arising from that influence. Instead of man, as a conscious being, measuring his progress by the diversity and richness of nature, he impoverishes it more and more, thus making himself poorer for many goods that once seemed unlimited and free, but today, because of such a relationship, have become rare and received a relatively high price, like clean air, forest, water (Damjanović et. al., 2020). Man is now in such a situation that what he took from nature for free for centuries, he is now paying with his health (Tasić, 2018). That is why it is completely justified why the causes of the disturbance of the ecological balance and thus the occurrence of the ecological crisis are found in human action. However, it is worrisome that today the average educated person has little knowledge of environmental problems, tendencies and consequences of environmental crises (Stajić, 2013).

Due to the complexity and seriousness of the problems it causes, the ecological crisis is the subject of analysis by experts of various profiles, economists, sociologists, biologists, doctors, psychologists, and it is written and talked about more than ever. Marković et al. (2012), state that man, appropriating nature with his work, did not, or did not sufficiently, take into account the need to respect the laws that rule in the biosphere, and with his activity ordered the balance of conditions and influences in the natural environment and thus caused the emergence of an ecological crisis. An "official" definition of an ecological crisis does not exist, but is based on ecological laws and a common cultural approach to the word "crisis" (Hume and Barry, 2015). In the simplest way, an ecological crisis can be defined as a violation of the balance of conditions and influences in the human environment, in the unity of its natural and social components, and is expressed in the threat to the stable functioning of both the biosphere and society, calling into question human existence (Marković et al., 2012). It manifests itself in the intense depletion of natural resources, which threatens the survival of future generations, but also in environmental pollution that leads to the extinction of plant and animal species, water and air pollution, the appearance of deadly radiation, and a decrease in soil fertility. That is why the appropriation of nature by man, which is done contrary to the basic laws of nature, is extremely worrying and not at all encouraging.

Although there are still disagreements about how the crisis arose, what its true dimensions are, what causes led to it and how to overcome it, there is no doubt that man, as a part of nature, influenced its destruction and thus called into question the survival of its species (Pizzi, et. al., 2020). Environmental problems are issues of an older date, however, the analysis of the causes that led to their occurrence began relatively late. Namely, after the industrial revolution, man increasingly satisfied his needs through scientific and industrial mastery of nature. Therefore, in the analysis of the causes of the ecological crisis, special attention is paid to industrialization. Stanojević (2018) states that the pollution of the natural environment is closely related to the industrial way of production, a production system whose main motive is profit, which encouraged man to have a hostile attitude towards nature. This led to the "collision" of man and

nature - through his productive activity, man "reworked" the ecosystem, thereby disrupting its balance and, through the accumulation of capital, led to the accumulation of ecological problems. So today, two centuries later, we have a polluted environment, a disturbed natural balance, a large number of extinct plant and animal species and the appearance of various diseases.

The development of science, technique and technology is also on the side of the cause of the ecological crisis. At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, no one asked what the technology was for, although with it man rose above nature as its "ruler" and thus gained the power to significantly change the nature he encountered and thereby destroy himself and threaten life on earth (Đorđević, 2002). ). However, the development of techniques and technology takes place faster than man can adapt to them, control them and learn to use them wisely, that is why technology is often used to satisfy human needs in an unsustainable and irrational way. The use of technology requires the consumption of raw materials, which affects the quality of the environment in the long term.

In addition to the above, in the research and consideration of the causes of environmental degradation, the following are also mentioned:

1. accelerated economic growth;
2. world population growth;
3. irrational use of non-renewable resources;
4. pollution of the environment (water, air, soil) as a consequence of human action on nature (Marković et al., 2012).

All the listed causes of the emergence of the ecological crisis are basically the irresponsible behavior of man towards nature. Although he is not the only one, man is certainly the biggest polluter of his environment and thus becomes a "time bomb" - his own enemy. It's high time for man to realize that the tools that have been perfected over time for the most comprehensive mastery of nature have reached the end point and that if he continues to use them and thereby prolong his "conflict" with nature, it will lead to the self-extinction of humanity. "Man can save himself on this planet only if he takes care of everything other than his life and all living things, respecting his life as much as the life around him" (Đorđević, 2002, pp. 236).

### **3. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AS AN INDISPENSABLE PART OF THE STRATEGIES AND POLICY OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION**

Due to the concern at the world level for environmental problems whose impacts are becoming more intense, the goals of sustainable development are high on the list of goals of most countries around the world. Sustainable development represents a complex and continuous social process of harmonizing and searching for adequate ecological, economic, technological and political solutions for the improvement of environmental protection standards (Todorović et. al., 2021). By defining the normative - legal and institutional framework for environmental policies, the European Union has become a leader in the field of environmental protection. The adoption and adoption of the European Green Deal strategy in 2019 continues the European Union's commitment to environmental protection, placing a healthy natural environment, climate change control and the use of clean energy at the center of all economic activities of the member states

(Vasilkov et al., 2021). The general goal of the Green Deal is the transformation of the European Union into a just and prosperous society with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy in which there will be no net emissions of greenhouse gases in 2050 and in which economic growth will not be linked to and conditioned by the use of environmental resources. (Vasilkov et al., 2021). It is the latest strategy that was adopted and in which environmental protection takes a significant place, but it is not the only one, the issue of preserving the ecosystem was also represented in the previously adopted strategies for the sustainable development of this community. The following shows the most important action plans and directives of sustainable development at the EU level.

*Table 1. More important action plans and Directives of sustainable development at the level of the European Union*

<b><i>Year of adoption</i></b>	<b><i>Document title</i></b>	<b><i>Description</i></b>
<b><i>1958.</i></b>	<b><i>Roman Treaty</i></b>	Each member state of the European Economic Community regulated the area of environmental policy at the national level.
<b><i>1972.</i></b>	<b><i>The first environmental protection action program</i></b>	The goals of improving the quality of life, environment and living conditions necessary for the population of the community were defined.
<b><i>1992.</i></b>	<b><i>Treaty of Maastricht</i></b>	Strengthening the role of environmental policy.
<b><i>2001.</i></b>	<b><i>The sixth action plan of the European Union</i></b>	Four areas of European environmental policy have been identified: climate change, protection of nature and biodiversity, health and quality of life, disposal of natural resources and the issue of waste.
<b><i>2003.</i></b>	<b><i>Directive 2002/95/EC Restriction of Hazardous Substances Directive – RoHS 1</i></b>	Directive on the restriction of the use of hazardous substances in electrical and electronic equipment, with the aim of harmonizing regulations on the use of hazardous substances in the territory of the European Union.
<b><i>2005.</i></b>	<b><i>Directive 2005/32/EC on the Eco-Design of Energy-using Products – EuP</i></b>	Directive providing pan-European coherent rules regarding the application of eco-design principles.
<b><i>2009.</i></b>	<b><i>Directive 2009/125/EC Energyrelated Products Directive</i></b>	The most significant modification compared to the previous Directive was made by the inclusion of "products related to energy consumption".
<b><i>2009.</i></b>	<b><i>Directive 2009/28/EC</i></b>	The goal of increasing the share of renewable energy sources to 20% by 2020 has been set.
<b><i>2013.</i></b>	<b><i>Directive 2011/65/EU (RoHS 2)</i></b>	This Directive prescribes periodic re-evaluations that facilitate the gradual inclusion of additional electronic equipment, cables and spare parts.
<b><i>2015.</i></b>	<b><i>Directive (EU) 2015/863</i></b>	The directive defines substances that can have a negative impact on recycling, human health and the environment during the treatment of electronic waste.
<b><i>2019.</i></b>	<b><i>Zeleni dogovor Evropske</i></b>	Defined five pillars related to the areas of

	<i>unije</i>	environmental protection.
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(Source: Dinić et. al., 2021, pp. 17-18; Glišović, 2016, pp. 129-132 – Illustration by the author).

New security challenges that affect the environment in the member states of the European Union, but also in other countries around the world, require the need for continuous monitoring and analysis of the results achieved in several areas: air pollution, resource utilization, soil protection, waste recycling, environmental protection of water, soil, share of energy from renewable sources. In this regard, Table 2 shows the indicators of the realization of the goals of sustainable development at the level of the European Union in the period from 2016 to 2020.

*Table 2. Indicators of the level of realization of sustainable development goals at the level of the European Union (2016-2020)*

	<b>2016.</b>	<b>2017.</b>	<b>2018.</b>	<b>2019.</b>	<b>2020.</b>
<b>Domestic material consumption per capita (t)</b>	13.59	13.94	14.18	14.18	13.58
<b>Amount of municipal waste generated per capita (kg)</b>	490	496	496	501	505
<b>Amount of municipal waste treated per capita (kg)</b>	481	487	487	494	495
<b>Emission of greenhouse gases (million tons)</b>	3 935 280	3 969 529	3 890 132	3 734 541	3 354 115
<b>Share of energy from renewable sources (%)</b>	17.98	18.41	19.10	19.88	22.09

(Source: Eurostat, 2022, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>, accessed on: 07/25/2022 - Illustration by the author)

The indicators presented in Table 2 show that the European Union is moving in the direction of realizing the goals in the field of environmental protection. It is an encouraging fact that the greenhouse gas emission indicator recorded a downward trend in the past five-year period, so that in 2020 a decrease of 581,165 tons was recorded compared to 2016. In accordance with the new energy policy, the European Union in its Action Plan for Energy Efficiency (2007-2012) set itself the goal of increasing the share of renewable energy sources to 20% by 2020 (Đorđević and Veselinović, 2015). In this regard, the European Union, having achieved the share of energy from renewable sources in the total energy consumption in the amount of 22.09%, realized its goals (22.00%) set in the mentioned area for the year 2020. On the other hand, the increase in the amount of municipal waste generated per capita, at the same time follows the trend of growth in the amount of treated municipal waste per capita, which is encouraging because it indicates that most of the waste that is disposed of is recycled, thereby avoiding its disposal in landfills and, therefore, environmental pollution. In support of the statement that the European Union is realizing its goals in the field of environmental protection, it is stated that in 2020 there was a decrease in the domestic consumption of materials per capita by 0.6 tons. When it comes to the domestic consumption of certain categories of materials per capita, expressed in tons in 2020, the structure is as follows: in first place are non-metals (7.13), followed by biomass (3.27), fossil fuels (2.45) and metal ores (0.71). (Eurostat, 2022).

The commitment of the European Union to the protection of the environment has led to the environmental awareness of the member states, on the one hand, and the expansion of its field of

action, on the other hand. The achieved results in the field of achieving goals in the field of environmental protection fully justify the epithet of leader attributed to the European Union in the mentioned field and make it an example of good practice for businesses in the world.

#### **4. ECOLOGICAL EDUCATION AND EDUCATION AS A DETERMINANT OF THE (NEW) CULTURE OF THE XXI CENTURY**

Given that environmental problems have acquired a global character, it is completely justified why the issue of environmental protection permeates all areas, both production and service, profit and non-profit, political and non-political. The gap that exists between civilization and the natural environment, as a contemporary reality, has led to the redefinition of existing and the emergence of new cultural patterns. Culture represents value-based behaviors of individuals who live within the community - communicate, learn, work and create, accept and change norms, rituals and laws (Kundačina and Visković, 2016). People influence the environment through their activities, which consequently requires a review of existing patterns of behavior and their adaptation to ecological laws. As a result of the aforementioned adjustment, as well as living and working in the conditions of the ecological crisis, a new culture emerged - ecological culture. The most important intentions of the culture of the XXI century are ecological upbringing and education.

Although the starting point of the upbringing and education of young people for the protection of the environment is in the family, the school today represents an irreplaceable link of upbringing and eco-education, which with its program content provides wide opportunities for building environmental awareness among young people (Minić and Jovanović, 2019). The question arises whether school and education can respond to the requirements of preservation and care for the environment? The idea of environmental education is not new and has gone through several stages: the first line of development (from 1960 to 1980), the second line of development (until the nineties of the last century), the third period (from the mid-nineties of the last century to the present) (Andevski, 2016).

The first phase of the development of environmental education included dealing with environmental issues in school and non-school education institutions and had to meet several criteria: to be relevant for the future, to be an expression of new science, to be oriented towards the attitudes and behavior of the individual (Andevski, 2016). The second phase of development was marked by progress and the aspiration to acquire new knowledge about the environment, with special reference to the development of desirable attitudes, abilities and skills of the individual. However, the goals set by the first and second development lines were not fully realized, which caused criticism of environmental education. Namely, the criticism was aimed at the fact that ecological topics found an entrance, but the teaching was still insufficiently focused on the project, the development of ecological principles was aimed at as an extended subject teaching and nothing more than that, the contents of environmental education were often implemented without a clear defined plan and structure, in random situations of teaching and learning, without organization, the ecological topics that were studied were not complete and there were very few of them - knowledge of nature and society, water, air, flora, fauna (Andevski, 2016). In the mid-nineties of the last century, the first two stages of development were replaced by a new stage of development designated as the third, which replaced environmental education with a new dimension - education for sustainable development. On the foundations of the responsibility that man has towards the Earth and the need to establish a dialogue between nature and society, the task of environmental education rests as a process of

transformation in several directions: from a one-way communication relationship and poor interaction to cooperative relationships, rich social interaction and two-way communication; from a uniform formal system to diverse educational institutions, alternative programs and models (Marić - Jurišin, 2018).

Overcoming the ecological crisis cannot be achieved only by familiarizing society and individuals with ecological problems, but exclusively by behaving in accordance with ecological principles and laws. That is why programs to raise awareness and responsibility of the individual and, in general, society are extremely important. Namely, ecological upbringing and education, which are needed by modern society, do not only imply the study of natural and social sciences, but also assume the construction of moral principles and the formation of such a value system that will lead to ecologically desirable behavior (Stanišić, 2021).

Protecting the environment of modern man must be a priority, that is why the goal of environmental education and education is aimed at preserving and improving the environment, as well as raising critical awareness of the necessity of preserving a healthy, i.e. ecologically clean environment, which is worthy of man (Minić and Jovanović, 2019 ). However, although the basis of environmental education and environmental education is the protection of the environment, it is necessary to distinguish between the essence of these two processes. In this regard, environmental education is reduced to acquiring knowledge and creating a critical attitude towards environmental degradation, while environmental education refers to changing behavior and developing a proper attitude towards the environment. The mentioned processes complement each other and together represent an "instrument" of education for sustainable development.

The issue of environmental education and ecological views of the world has been the subject of research by many authors in recent years. The findings of the authors Petrović and Škrbić (2016) confirm earlier research that young people in Serbia have a moderately positive attitude towards environmental protection. Namely, the research examined the ecological value orientations of students of three groups of faculties: mining-geology, geography and the faculty of social orientations. The results of the mentioned research show that the respondents have solidly developed ecological values, which are a prerequisite for pro-ecological behaviors and involvement in environmental protection (Petrović and Škrbić, 2016). Also, the research found that students least agree with the statement: The natural balance is strong enough to cope with the influences of modern industrial countries. In a survey conducted in 2020, in which 402 high school students participated, the following results were obtained:

1. respondents show a slight tendency towards a pro-ecological view of the world;
2. three factors were obtained by factor analysis: ecological crisis, man is not above nature and man's (un)exceptionality from nature. The difference between boys and girls was shown on the third factor;
3. girls are more inclined to believe that man, regardless of his ability and the development of science and technology, cannot be excluded from the natural environment and cannot influence natural processes (Stanišić, 2021).



The results of previous research undoubtedly prove that a lot has been done in the educational system in the field of environmental education and upbringing and that it is extremely important in modern life conditions. However, what keeps man still in this world is not scientific theories and abstract knowledge, but the feelings that arise in us when we encounter elementary natural forces and life laws (Bonnet, 2016). That is why the task of the school is to develop a healthy, complete and responsible relationship between man and nature.

## **5. CIRCULAR ECONOMY AS THE ONLY ACCEPTABLE CONCEPT UNDER THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS**

The production process, which is based on the transformation of resources into finished products that are (discarded) at the end of their life, is environmentally unacceptable (Radivojević, 2018). The mentioned model, which is natively called linear and still dominates in most countries around the world, is based on the paradigm: take-produce-sell-consume-throw away (Mitrović and Manić, 2020). This practically means that resources are taken from nature and together with energy are transformed into a certain product, which is then traded on the market, used and then thrown away - disposed of in a landfill. Such a model in the conditions of the global ecological crisis leads to a decrease in the availability of natural resources, pollution of the planet, an increase in the amount of waste and the endangerment of plant and animal species, therefore the transformation of the linear into a circular model is no longer a question of our will but a question of human survival.

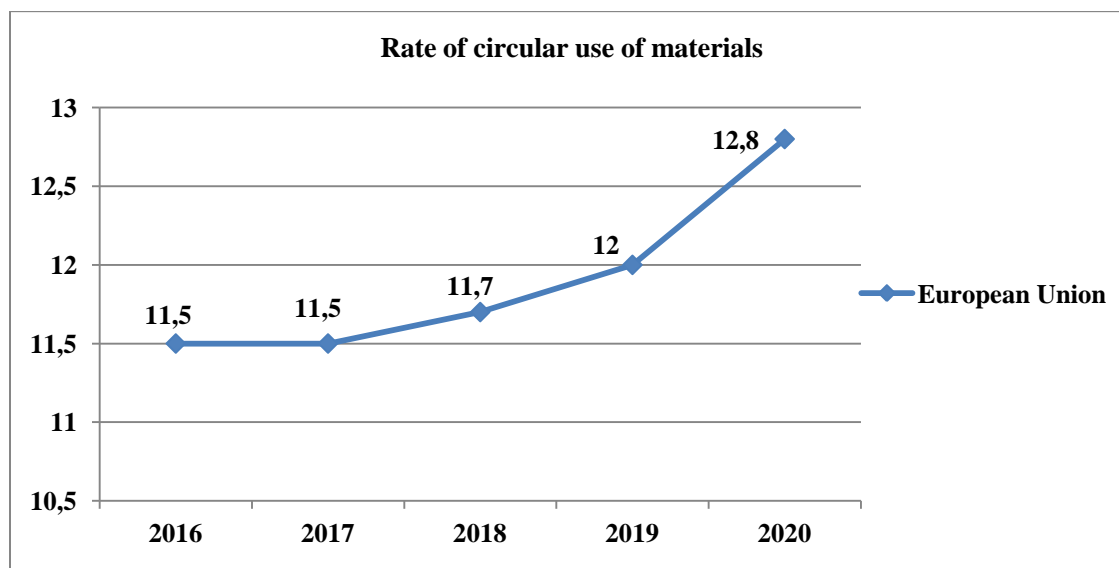
Although the concept of circular economy existed in the last century, since the 70s of the 20th century special attention has been paid to its implementation through concrete solutions, as well as to the positive effects achieved by it. The basic paradigm on which the circular economy rests is production that supports sustainable economic development without harming the environment (Krysovaty et. al., 2018). The essence of the newly promoted model boils down to the process of taking resources from nature, turning them into products, which are then traded on the market, after which they are used and at the end of the life cycle they are not thrown away but processed - recycled and thus transformed into raw materials that serve as inputs for the production process of the same or another product. For this reason, its greatest connection with the concept of sustainable development stands out, because it promotes the responsible use of material and other resources (Marković et. al., 2020).

Although there is still no single definition of the circular economy, there is an opinion that a comprehensive definition must contain certain components, namely: minimization of the use of resources, recycling - returning the value of waste, a multidimensional approach, the importance of achieving sustainable development and a close connection with the way society accepts innovations (Prieta-Sandoval et. al., 2017). The goals to be achieved through the implementation of the circular economy concept are grouped into five main areas of application of the concept: goals related to resource efficiency (water, energy, materials), recycling goals, goals to reduce waste and harmful gas emissions, recovery goals - reuse of waste, water and energy and the goals of ecodesign (Morseletto, 2020). All of the stated goals come down to environmental protection, that's why the concept of circular economy is the only sustainable solution to environmental problems.

Reduction of carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere, use of renewable energy sources, rational use of natural resources and recycling are the "guiding stars" of the circular economy implementation process. In this regard, the mentioned areas represent highly positioned goals in

the strategies and plans of many governments. The European Commission established a framework consisting of ten indicators classified into four thematic areas: production and consumption, waste management, secondary raw materials and innovation competitiveness (Eurostat, 2022). However, there is still no single collective indicator of circularity at the macroeconomic level, but Eurostat has developed an indicator, the rate of circular - circular use of materials, on the basis of which the level of circularity of the economy is monitored and which is shown in Chart 1.

*Chart 1. Rate of circular - circular use of materials in the European Union (2016-2020)*



*(Source: Eurostat, 2020, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>, accessed on: 07/27/2022 – Illustration by the author).*

Compared to the first year (2004) when data is available, the rate of circular use of materials in the European Union increased by 4.5% in 2020. The fact that the growth of the mentioned rate was recorded in the past five-year period is extremely encouraging because it shows that the European Union is well on its way to greening the European economy, which fully justifies the epithet of a leader in the field of environmental protection attributed to it.

The world today in the 21st century faces the need for global responsibility for development in accordance with the needs of people and nature, which can only be met by sustainable behavior. The circular economy has been identified at the world level as a mechanism of key importance for separating economic growth and increasing people's well-being from irresponsible behavior towards nature. Bressanelli et. al. (2018), believe that this concept represents a great business opportunity that can lead to the realization of benefits worth 1.8 trillion euros by the year 030 in Europe.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

It is evident that the world today is facing serious environmental problems and that living conditions in the 21st century are characterized by: global warming, reduction of the ozone layer,

extinction of plant and animal species, reduction of soil fertility, environmental pollution, occurrence of acid rain, increase in the amount of generated waste, depletion of natural resources and unsustainable behavior towards nature. The threat to the ecosystem has reached a level that requires an urgent solution to the aforementioned problems and poses the question to each of us: what kind of environment are we leaving for our descendants to use?

As shown in this paper, environmental problems are far-reaching and there is almost no sector and/or aspect of life that they do not reach and leave consequences. That is why countries around the world, realizing the seriousness of the situation, have implemented the goal of environmental protection in their development strategies and action plans. Sustainable behavior towards the environment, i.e. environmental protection as an indispensable part of strategies is no longer a matter of choice but a condition for the survival of humanity. Also, the paper presents two sectors that are still intensively affected by the environmental crisis: education and production. In this case, the mentioned sectors are two sides of the same coin and seem to play a crucial role in overcoming the environmental crisis:

1. education - the potential is in the development of awareness and responsibility of the individual towards nature at the very beginning of his educational journey (primary and secondary school). Environmental upbringing and education of individuals through educational content can prevent negative actions towards nature, which is certainly more effective than "treatment" of the consequences that will be created if such actions occur;
2. production - the potential is in the implementation of the circular concept - a model that basically has a sustainable behavior. The most promising tool for ecological production, which achieves the protection and preservation of natural resources, the valuation of ecosystems, products and services, the creation of new jobs and the reduction of poverty, is the circular economy.

Today, humanity is in the fourth scientific and technical revolution and there is no more time to think. It is high time to take a step forward and bring society and nature into balance, because otherwise, our survival is put into question.

*“Wasting and destroying our natural assets, stripping and depleting the earth instead of increasing its use - this will already significantly reduce the possibilities of progress that we enjoy for our children, which we owe to them - greater and more developed” –*  
Theodore Roosevelt

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