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FROM PASSIVE ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS TO GENERATION Z ENGAGEMENT: IMPLICATIONS FOR GREEN HRM

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Purpose: The purpose of this article is to assess the environmental awareness of Generation Z and to determine its relationship with career decisions and pro-environmental expectations of employers.
Design/methodology/approach: The study employed a quantitative approach, with a sample size of 859 individuals.
Findings: Generation Z is characterized by a high level of awareness of the impact of the environment on life and health. This is related to a moderate belief in the effectiveness of individual actions, but translates to a limited extent into declarations regarding employer selection. The results indicate that, in the perception of young adults, green HRM should primarily have a practical and cultural (community) dimension.
Research limitations/implications: The research sample consisted of representatives of a single generation; comparative cross-generational research could deepen our understanding of any differences in the perception of pro-environmental activities of organizations. Furthermore, the study was cross-sectional in nature. Future research could be longitudinal, allowing for the observation of changes in attitudes toward green HRM over time.
Practical implications: The study results indicate that Generation Z's high declared environmental awareness fosters a positive reception of pro-environmental initiatives in organizations, but it is not a sole factor determining the selection of employers. For business, this means that green HRM should serve as a reinforcement rather than a replacement for key employment factors such as employment conditions or employee development.
Social implications: Research has shown that young adults' high awareness of the impact of the environment on their lives and health, as well as their belief in the effectiveness of individual actions, create favorable conditions for strengthening pro-environmental attitudes in society.
Originality/value: The study makes an original contribution by combining the perspective of environmental awareness with the analysis of career decisions in the context of green HRM. Furthermore, it integrates quantitative results with a qualitative analysis of expectations for employers.
Keywords: Green Human Resource Management, green management, Gen Z, sustainability, attitude-behavior gap.
Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

In the last decades of the 20th century, attention began to be drawn increasingly to sustainable development, and this trend also extended to the sphere of organization and management (Dursun et al., 2025, p. 183). While in the past, a company's success depended primarily on promoting economic value, today organizations must attach importance to social and environmental factors, along with financial and technological ones (Vayyavur, 2024, pp. 25-29; Porter, Kramer, 2011, pp. 62-77; Eccles et al., 2014, pp. 2835-2857; Dimitrova, 2018, p. 86). This has contributed to the emergence of a new strategic phenomenon called green management (Oladele et al., 2023, pp. 277-279). Green management is only possible through the implementation of green human resource management to realize green values. This ensures the feasibility of green industry, green economy, green investment, and green society (Cherian, Jacob, 2012, pp. 25-31; Govindarajulu, Daily, 2004, pp. 364-372; Dutta, 2012, pp. 143-147).

The term "green HRM" has had a strong presence in recent research and academic publications (Grześ-Bukłaho, Kłoczko, 2024, pp. 97-117). This is, on the one hand, a result of increasingly broad legal regulations regarding environmental management and sustainable development, and, on the other, a result of growing public awareness of environmental protection and the need to preserve biodiversity (Devi, Kuldeep, 2024, pp. 1754-1755; Yue et al., 2020, pp. 1-16).

The growing awareness of threats related to climate change and environmental pollution is contributing to changes in human behavior. Naturally, this shift occurs with varying intensity in different societies and among representatives of different generations (Lisowski et al., 2022, p. 58). Currently, there is some debate and uncertainty about how to effectively implement green management principles among the youngest employees of organizations representing Generation Z, whose share in the labor market is constantly growing (Mishra, Awasthi, 2025, p. 73).

The aim of this article is to analyze the environmental awareness of Generation Z and to determine its relationship with career decisions and pro-environmental expectations of employers.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Role of Environmental Awareness in Actions

Pro-environmental behavior should be considered any behavior that not only causes minimal environmental harm but can also bring benefits (Purnama et al., 2025, pp. 819-838). Shutaleva et al. (2022, p. 3) define responsible environmental behavior as "a system of

knowledge and skills that have formed responsible behavior of people in environmental management, environmental protection, and commitment to sustainable development goals". This applies to all spheres of human functioning: private, public, the natural and built environment, etc. (Stern, 2000, pp. 407-424). Therefore, it applies not only to personal behaviors, but also to those related to, for example, an individual's professional life. Research shows that individual environmental awareness and environmental practices at work are very helpful in shaping "corporate greenery" (Lu et al., 2017, pp. 166-175).

Starting from the definition of attitude, environmental awareness can be defined as a tendency to respond to environmental problems in a specific way (Culiberg, Rojšek, 2008, p. 132). Ham et al. (2016, p. 160) point out that it is an element of an individual's system of values and beliefs, but also a part of social awareness. High environmental awareness encourages individuals to adopt positive behaviors, thus supporting environmental sustainability (Munawara et al., 2019, pp. 22-29).

Research shows that Generation Z has a high level of environmental awareness (Divinagracia et al., 2024, p. 768; Luqman, Widagdo, 2025, p. 88). According to Hatalska (2022), young adults are aware of pro-environmental behaviors and, at a declarative level, are ready to lead such a life. On the other hand, an intention-action gap is becoming apparent as, despite their high awareness, Gen Z often fails to translate it into consistent actions to care for the environment (Jegorow, 2025, pp. 141-175). Therefore, organizational solutions are needed; otherwise, behaviors are much weaker (Widyanty et al., 2025). As Purnama et al. (2025, p. 819) point out, pro-environmental behaviors must be easy to implement and convenient, and their effects must be quickly beneficial, in order to be effective. Therefore, an awareness of environmental concern alone is not enough; specific behaviors are also important (Liobikienė, Poškus, 2019).

2.2. The Essence of Green HRM – Theoretical Foundations

Organizations are increasingly integrating economic and social goals with environmental objectives (Nogueira et al., 2023). Sustainability has become an ethical and strategic element of corporate responsibilities (Ansari et al., 2021, pp. 229-238; Zacher et al., 2023, pp. 465-494).

Green HRM is a concept that integrates human resource management and the environment (Shafaei, Nejati, 2024, pp. 266-287). It assumes that employees play a key role in the success or failure of pro-environmental initiatives, as their engagement is crucial for effective environmental management (Abd Rahman et al., 2025, p. 316). Green HRM expands the role of organizations in achieving sustainable goals by engaging all employees in implementing pro-environmental practices and raising awareness of green lifestyles in the workplace. Solutions adopted by companies are aimed at strengthening employees' environmental awareness (Kar, Praharaj, 2020, pp. 46-56).

The literature presents the components of the green HRM concept, with the most frequently mentioned as follows (Różańska-Bińczyk et al., 2020, pp. 80-82; Faisal, 2023):

- design and analysis of green jobs,
- green recruitment and selection,
- green training and employee development,
- green employee motivation,
- green employee performance management,
- commitment to green workplaces,
- green organizational culture.

Green HRM is therefore a complex process integrated with human resources management at all stages. Such comprehensive implementation enables the achievement of multidimensional organizational effects (Chowdhury, 2023, p. 160). The main benefits of applying the concept include, among others, increased efficiency, reduced costs, and greater employee engagement (Yasin et al., 2023, pp. 369-383). Furthermore, in line with its assumptions, it supports the protection of the environment and natural resources (Islam et al., 2022, pp. 17-29) and helps in the sustainable development of the organization and increase its competitiveness (Muisyo et al., 2022, pp. 22-40).

3. Research Methodology

The aim of the study was to assess environmental awareness and determine its relationship with career decisions among Generation Z individuals.

Based on a literature review, the following research hypotheses were formulated:

H1: Generation Z strongly agrees with the opinion that the environment influences daily life and health.

H2: Individuals who perceive the impact of the environment on health and life more strongly are more likely to believe in the effectiveness of individual actions.

H3: Individuals with higher self-assessed environmental awareness are more likely to consider an employer's pro-environmental stance when choosing a job.

Research Tool Characteristics

The study utilized a quantitative method, which focuses on collecting and analyzing data using statistical procedures. This method provides objective, measurable, and rational measurement, and aims to identify relationships or trends that allow for generalization of findings to a larger population (Barella et al., 2024, pp. 281-287).

Data regarding the study population were obtained using a standardized research questionnaire consisting of closed-ended and open-ended questions. A mixed-mode method (Górniak) was used, combining an online survey (CAWI) and a paper-based survey (PAPI) to increase sample representativeness. This study utilizes descriptive, tabular, and graphical methods to analyze and present the collected materials. Furthermore, the analysis of quantitative data (N = 859) was supported by qualitative data (open-ended questions) to provide a multidimensional perspective on the phenomenon under study.

Sample Characteristics

The research was conducted from May to December 2025 at selected universities in Poland. 859 individuals participated in the study. The inclusion criterion was Generation Z membership, defined as being born between 1995 and 2012. The sample included 445 women (51.8%), 402 men (46.8%), and 12 individuals indicated a different gender or declined to answer (1.4%). The detailed demographic data for the study group are presented in Table 1. The participants were purposefully recruited at the universities in Poland.

Table 1.
Demographic data of the survey participants

		N	%
Education	Higher	221	25,7
	Secondary	638	74,3
	Vocational	0	0
	Elementary	0	0
Place of residence	City with more than 500,000 inhabitants	7	0,8
	City with 200,000 to 500,000 inhabitants	148	17,2
	City with 50,000 to 200,000 inhabitants	138	16,1
	City with up to 50,000 inhabitants	235	27,4
	Rural area	331	38,5
Professional status	Pupil	2	0,2
	Student	858	99,9
	Employed	167	19,4
	Business owner	14	1,6
	Unemployed	0	0
	Retired/pensioner	4	0,5

Source: Source: author's own elaboration.

4. Research Results

Statistical analyses were conducted using the IBM SPSS package. Descriptive statistics and inferential statistical tests were used in the analyses, including the one-sample t-test, Spearman's rank correlation coefficient, and the Kruskal-Wallis test. The level of statistical significance was set at $\alpha = 0.05$.

Verification of Hypothesis 1

For the statement that the environment influences daily life and health, the distribution of responses was strongly skewed toward agreement. Over half of the respondents (52.3%) strongly agreed, and 40.5% somewhat agreed with the statement. The variable under study was rated highly (M = 4.42; Me = 5). The standard deviation (SD = 0.72) indicates moderate variability in responses and a relatively high level of agreement in opinions, with a small percentage of ratings below the maximum. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.
Descriptive statistics for the statement that the environment influences daily life and health

N	Minimum	Maximum	M	Me	SD
859	1	5	4,42	5	0,72

Note: N – study sample; M – mean; Me – median; SD – standard deviation.

Source: author's own elaboration.

The distribution of responses is characterized by a clear asymmetry and a concentration of responses in the upper categories of the scale (4-5). This indicates a strong shift in the distribution towards a high level of agreement, as visualized in Figure 1.

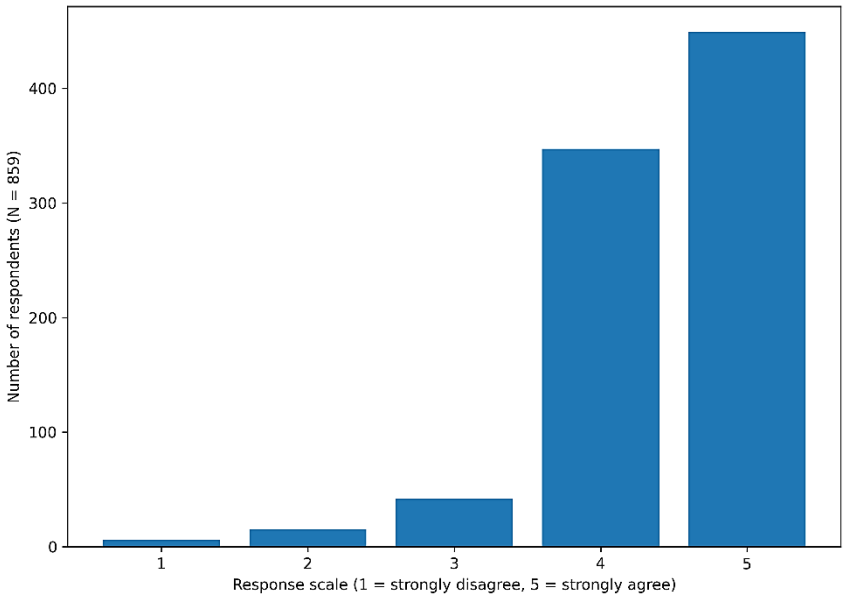


Figure 1. Distribution of responses with respect to the mean – the impact of the environment on life and health.

Source: author's own elaboration.

To test Hypothesis 1, a one-sample t-test was used, comparing the mean score with the neutral value (3). The statistical hypotheses were therefore:

$H_0 : \mu = 3.$

$H_1 : \mu > 3.$

The obtained results indicate that the mean assessment of the impact of the environment on daily life and health (M = 4.42; SD = 0.72) is significantly higher than the test value, t(858) = 57.95, p < .001. The difference in mean values was 1.42, and the 95% confidence interval for this difference ranged from 1.37 to 1.47. The obtained results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3.
One-sample t-test

t	df	Sig. (1-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
57,95	858	< .001	1,42	1,37	1,47

Note: t – value of the t-statistic (Student's t-statistic); df – degrees of freedom; Sig. (1-tailed) – statistical significance (one-sided test); Mean Difference – difference in means; 95% CI Lower – lower bound of the 95% confidence interval for the difference in means; 95% CI Upper – upper bound of the 95% confidence interval for the difference in means.

Source: author's own elaboration.

The size of the effect (Cohen's d) was also calculated, which allows for assessing the practical significance of the difference. The effect size was very large (d = 1.98), confirming Generation Z's strong belief in the impact of the environment on life and health. Hypothesis 1 was therefore clearly confirmed. Generation Z demonstrates a very high level of awareness of the relationship between the environment, health, and daily functioning.

Verification of Hypothesis 2

To verify this hypothesis, an analysis of Spearman's rank correlation and the Kruskal-Wallis test were conducted. The analysis of Spearman's rank correlation coefficient revealed a statistically significant, weak positive relationship between the perception of the impact of the environment on life and health (P1) and the belief in the effectiveness of individual actions (P2), $\rho = .18$, $p < .001$ (N = 859). The obtained results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4.
Spearman's Correlation

	P1	P2
Spearman's rho		
P1	1,000	,181**
P2	,181**	1,000
Sig. (1-tailed)		< .001
N	859	859

Note: Spearman's rho – Spearman's rank correlation coefficient; P1 – question regarding the impact of the environment on life and health (scale 1-5); P2 – question regarding the belief in the effectiveness of individual actions (scale 1-3); Sig. (1-tailed) – one-sided significance level; N – sample size.

** The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (one-sided).

Source: author's own elaboration.

The Kruskal-Wallis test was used to compare the level of perceived environmental influence between the three groups. The results indicated statistically significant differences between the groups, $\chi^2(2) = 35.15$, $p < .001$ (Table 5). The highest mean rank was achieved by the group of individuals declaring their belief in the effectiveness of individual actions (Mean Rank = 475.38), as presented in Table 6.

Table 5.
Kruskal-Wallis Non-parametric Test

	P1
Chi-Square	35,15
df	2
Asymp. Sig.	< .001

Note: Chi-Square – value of the H statistic (approximated by the chi-square distribution); df – degrees of freedom; Asymp. Sig. – asymptotic level of significance (p-value).

Source: author's own elaboration.

Table 6.
Mean Ranks and Descriptive Statistics of Perceived Environmental Impact (P1) Depending on Belief in the Effectiveness of Individual Actions (P2)

P2	**N**	**Mean Rank**	**M**	**SD**
1 – No	261	389,12	4,26	0,82
2 – Hard to say	97	368,47	4,18	0,83
3 – Yes	501	475,38	4,55	0,60
Total	859			

Note: N – sample size; Mean Rank – mean rank in a given group; M – arithmetic mean; SD – standard deviation.

Source: author's own elaboration.

Figure 2 presents the mean values of perceived environmental impact (P1) depending on the belief in the effectiveness of individual actions (P2). The highest level of agreement was observed among respondents declaring their belief in the effectiveness of individual actions. The 95% confidence intervals indicate significant differences between the "yes" group and the other categories.

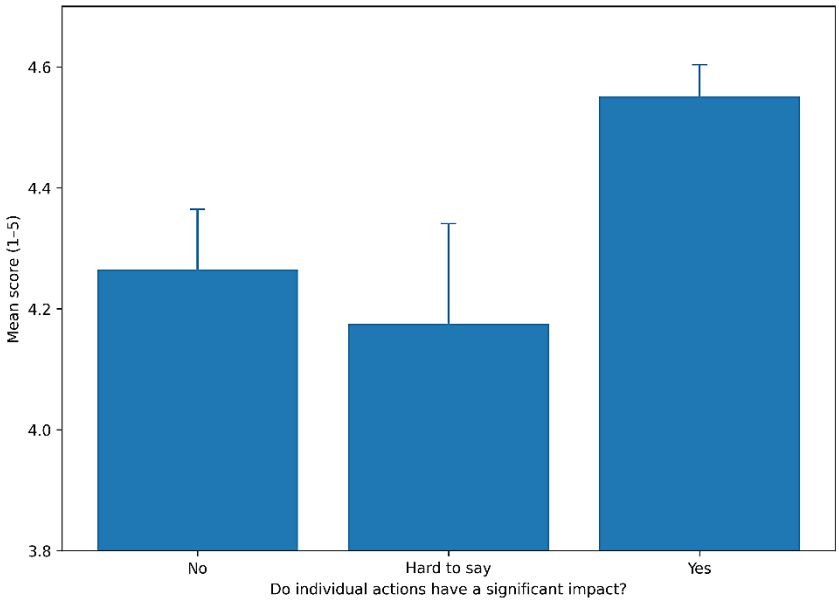


Figure 2. Mean values of perceived environmental impact (P1) depending on the belief in the effectiveness of individual actions (P2).

Source: author's own elaboration.

The obtained results indicate that the hypothesis was confirmed. The relationship between the variables is positive and statistically significant, but its strength is moderate, which suggests that the perception of environmental impact is one factor shaping the belief in the effectiveness of individual actions, but does not fully explain it.

Verification of Hypothesis 3

Similar to the previous hypothesis, an analysis of Spearman's rank correlation and the Kruskal-Wallis test were conducted.

The Spearman's rank correlation analysis did not reveal a statistically significant relationship between self-assessed environmental awareness and the declaration of considering the employer's pro-environmental attitude when choosing an employer, $\rho = .06$, $p = .071$ ($N = 858$). It is worth emphasizing that the relationship is positive, but does not reach statistical significance ($p > .05$), and the strength of the relationship is very weak. The obtained results are presented in Table 7.

Table 7.
Spearman's Correlation

	P3	**P4**
Spearman's rho		
P3	1,000	,062
P4	,062	1,000
Sig. (2-tailed)		,071
N	858	858

Note: Spearman's rho – Spearman's rank correlation coefficient; P3 – question regarding self-assessment of environmental awareness (scale 1-5); P4 – question regarding the declaration of taking into account the employer's pro-environmental attitude when choosing an employer (scale 1-3); Sig. (2-tailed) – two-sided significance level; N – sample size.

Source: author's own elaboration.

Additionally, the Kruskal-Wallis test revealed no significant differences in the level of self-assessment of environmental awareness between the three groups of respondents, $\chi^2(2) = 3.51$, $p = .173$ (Table 8). Although mean values of self-assessment were slightly higher in the group of individuals declaring they took their employer's pro-environmental attitude into account ($M = 3.69$; $SD = 0.82$) compared to the "n" group ($M = 3.53$; $SD = 0.77$), these differences did not reach statistical significance (Table 9).

Table 8.
Kruskal-Wallis Non-parametric Test

	P3
Chi-Square	3,51
df	2
Asymp. Sig.	,173

Note: Chi-Square – value of the H statistic (approximated by the chi-square distribution); df – degrees of freedom; Asymp. Sig. – asymptotic level of significance (p-value).

Source: author's own elaboration.

Table 9.
Mean Ranks and Descriptive Statistics of Self-Assessed Environmental Awareness (P3) Depending on the Declaration of Considering the Employer's Pro-Environmental Attitude (P4)

P4	N	Mean Rank	M	SD
1 – No	363	409,38	3,53	0,77
2 – Hard to say	386	435,27	3,61	0,64
3 – Yes	109	454,92	3,69	0,82
Total	858			

Note: N – sample size; Mean Rank – mean rank in a given group; M – arithmetic mean; SD – standard deviation.

Source: author's own elaboration.

The obtained results do not support Hypothesis 3 and indicate that the self-assessed environmental awareness is not a significant predictor of declared career decisions in the analyzed area.

In the remainder of the study, a content analysis of open-ended responses was used. In the first stage, open coding was conducted, and then the codes were grouped into thematic categories. The respondents were asked to indicate what pro-environmental activities they would expect from their employer. The structured responses are presented in Table 10.

Table 10.
Categories of actions expected from the employer

Category	Examples of solutions indicated by respondents
1. Waste management	office waste sorting, selective collection containers, e-waste collection, recycling system, limiting single-use packaging
2. Reduction of plastic	elimination of plastic cups and bottles, water dispensers, replacing plastic with biodegradable materials
3. Paper reduction	document digitization, e-invoices, electronic signature
4. Energy and water saving	energy-efficient lighting, equipment shutdown, renewable energy installations, energy consumption monitoring, motion sensor lighting in less frequently used rooms
5. Environmental/ESG strategy	climate neutrality, reporting of CO_2 emissions, transparency of environmental activities
6. Environmental education of employees	training, information campaigns, webinars
7. Green benefits and mobility	inclusion of electric cars in the fleet, bicycle subsidies, carpooling, subsidized public transport, company buses, remote work

Source: author's own elaboration.

The respondents' expectations focused particularly on operational activities, including waste management, resource efficiency, and plastic reduction. Responses related to the strategic level (ESG, reporting, and climate neutrality) were less frequent. From the perspective of the green HRM concept what dominated were the sustainable workplace practices and green operational practices, with the strategic green HRM to a lesser extent.

The respondents were then asked what pro-environmental initiatives companies should engage employees in. The structured responses are presented in Table 11.

Table 11.
Categories of Employee Engagement Initiatives

Category	Examples of Solutions Mentioned by Respondents
1. Ecological Volunteering	Tree planting, cleaning green areas, "Clean Up the World" Campaigns
2. Waste Reduction Programs, Waste Management	Zero Waste Competitions, Battery Collections, Electronic Waste Collections, Waste Sorting
3. Reducing Plastic in the Workplace	"Plastic-Free" Campaigns, Joint Initiatives to Reduce Single-Use Products
4. Energy and Water Saving	Energy-Efficient Lighting, Turning Off Equipment, Monitoring Energy Consumption, Saving Water
4. Environmental Education and Workshops	Training, Thematic Workshops, Expert Lectures, Pro-Environmental Campaigns, Pro-Environmental Competitions
5. Sustainable Consumption	Avoiding Food Waste, Joint Campaigns to Promote Local Products, Sharing of Items and Equipment Between Employees
6. Ecological Transport	Cycling Days, Carpooling, Car Sharing, Promotion of Public Transport

Source: author's own elaboration.

Participatory activities dominate the respondents' responses, particularly cleanups, tree planting campaigns, and waste reduction programs. From a green HRM perspective, this clearly reflects an ecological organizational culture, ecological employee engagement, and ecological engagement strategies.

5. Discussion and Summary

The aim of the study was to assess the level of environmental awareness among Generation Z representatives and determine its relationship with their declarations of pro-environmental actions in the organizational context.

The obtained results indicate that the vast majority of respondents recognize the significant impact of the environment on their lives and health. The high level of agreement (92.8% overall) indicates a well-established perception of the relationship between the state of the environment and quality of life. Furthermore, a significant, albeit weak, positive relationship was found between the perception of environmental impact and the belief in the effectiveness of individual actions. This result is consistent with the role of awareness in shaping pro-environmental attitudes presented in the theoretical section of the article. However, it should be noted that the moderate strength may indicate other, additional factors shaping Generation Z's beliefs.

However, the third hypothesis, which postulates a relationship between self-assessed environmental awareness and the declaration of considering an employer's pro-environmental attitude when choosing an employer, was not confirmed. This result may indicate that for young adults, the process of transitioning from self-assessed awareness to career decisions is complex. Therefore, other factors, such as market, economic, or pragmatic ones, may be crucial.

The obtained results are consistent with the concept of the attitude-behavior gap, indicating that people's declared values are not always linked to subsequent actions (Cui et al., 2019, pp. 1105-1118; Souza-Neto, Marques, 2022, pp. 200-202; Carrington et al., 2015, pp. 21-38). In the analyzed case, high environmental awareness does not necessarily correspond to declared career choices.

The analysis of the open-ended responses of representatives of Generation Z indicates two distinct dimensions of the perception of pro-environmental activities in organizations: the operational dimension (e.g., waste management, energy and water savings, plastic reduction, and paper use reduction) and the participatory dimension (e.g., community initiatives, team-building activities, and workshops). Therefore, respondents perceive the role of green HRM primarily through the lens of operational practices and organizational culture, and less so as an element of strategic management.

In summary, from the perspective of young adults, implementing the concept of green HRM in an organization requires a coherent combination of practical operational practices, employee integration activities, and transparent strategic communication.

The identified limitations in the research process indicate that the research sample consisted of representatives of a single generation; comparative intergenerational research could deepen our understanding of differences in perceptions of pro-environmental activities of organizations. Furthermore, the study was cross-sectional in nature; future research could be longitudinal, allowing for the observation of changes in attitudes toward green HRM over time.

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