



## **SOCIO-PEDAGOGICAL ASPECTS OF ECOLOGICAL EDUCATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN PRE-ADOLESCENT AND ADOLESCENT AGE IN THE FUNCTION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

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### **Key word:**

socio-pedagogical aspects, ecological education, sustainable development, descriptive method, critical observation.

### **SYNOPSIS**

This paper deals with the *topic* of sociological and pedagogical aspects of young people's education in the pre-adolescent and adolescent age in the function of sustainable development. The *aim* of our research is, from sociological and pedagogical aspect, to:

Define the categories of ecologically sustainable education:

Observe and categorize the forms of ecological education present in our contemporary practice:

Analyze the contents of ecological education aiming to realize sustainable development:

Measure the effects of school - as the most spread and most organized form of education – on attitudes of those being educated:

Instead of a conclusion to offer hypotheses for modernizing ecological education in the function of sustainable development.

In accordance with the abovementioned aims, we will be faced with a number of research *methods*. During defining the categories we will combine the descriptive with the method of critical observation, and the usage of fundamental concepts in everyday life. It seems that such a combination is the most adequate one for a thorough understanding of the contents and influence of education on people as ecological beings.

## **SOCIOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S EDUCATION BEFORE AND DURING ADOLESCENCE**

The pre-adolescent and the adolescent periods personality development is exposed to intensive socialization. Numerous and various social subjects are simply invading young people at these two ages. Never again will the interaction between

society and individual be as one-sided as in the first eighteen years of their life, regardless of the fact that the later period of adolescence will last a certain time.

Ecological education and upbringing is one of the many areas to which a young person will go on "excursion" after which he/she should be able to recognize the way and make it more and more perfect all his/her life. A social and generic being should be able to recognize and overcome the destructiveness of the existing practice, learn theoretical knowledge and accept socially desirable attitudes for sustaining ecosystem development. The social forms of people's organizing have changed through history. Communication methods have become more humane, there have been social conflicts, periods of "darkness" and "light" have exchanged, but the goal has always remained the same. Why? A human being cannot survive outside of an ecosystem.

The need for a new science – socioecology or social ecology is increasing. This science that is at its beginning is loaded with eclecticism of sociology and biology as developed social and natural sciences. There is no ecology without biology, but there is also no ecology without man and his social community. However, the arguments are not enough so that man would either imitate or treat nature as a consumer. Today it is socio-ecological activism, tomorrow a socio-ecological study, later on a socio-ecological study. The road leads through the education of young generations.

There is an obvious need to examine the factors of society that influence the development of the adolescents' ecological awareness, as well as mechanisms that provide such social awareness. Likewise, socio-ecological science in cooperation with other sciences must look for new mechanisms for providing greater influence on the realization of those qualities of a socio-ecological community that guarantee sustainable development. The present educational influence should be critically reexamined starting from the subjects who create it, through contents offered to young people in pre-adolescent and adolescent period to measuring effects that are realized in the existing way.

In our approach to this problem we on purpose divide the sociological aspects of ecological education from pedagogical views. From the sociological viewpoint it is important to determine the society factors that influence the development of young people before and during adolescence. Next we should discover the mechanisms of realizing influence. The limitations of this paper imposed research only of dominant factors.

## **1. SOCIAL SUBJECTS OF PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT**

Our research starting hypothesis was to rely on theoretical achievements of social factors that influence the process of forming a personality. Out of a context of numerous concepts of society factors we have decided to note down the following: social environment (understood as life and work environment), social institutions (school, church, cultural institutions), family, social organizations (political, non-political, civic associations), and fellows (understood as belonging to the same

generation, formal or informal groups). We took pupils who reside in the Hostel for secondary school pupils in Sremska Mitrovica as a sample for measuring the influence of social factors. What have the results shown?

**Table 1: Results of the questionnaire for residents of the Hostel for secondary school pupils - ranking of the factors of influence on forming students' ecological attitudes**

<b>Grades Factors</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Family</b>	6	19	15	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
<b>Relatives</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	38
<b>School</b>	19	15	0	5	0	0	0	1	1	0
<b>Church</b>	1	1	2	0	0	37	0	0	0	0
<b>Environment</b>	12	5	19	3	0	0	0	0	0	2
<b>Fellows</b>	1	0	0	33	6	1	0	0	0	0
<b>Media</b>	1	0	4	0	32	0	4	0	0	0
<b>Oneself</b>	1	2	1	0	3	0	0	33	1	0
<b>I don't know</b>	0	0	0	0	0	4	37	0	0	0

We can notice the following indicators from Table 1:

- The results showed that school, family and social environment played the greatest role in the forming of their ecological attitudes. For 47% of pupils school is the primary factor, graded the highest value. The second place is taken by social environment that was graded 10 by even 12% of the pupils, while family took the third place. It is interesting to notice that a very small number of pupils gave a high grade to his/her generation (2%), although there is a conventional opinion that a generation attitude is the most acceptable for a young person. During talking to the pupils after publishing the questionnaire results we came to the conclusion that adolescents highly appreciate of their generation but that they are aware that they do not represent the most qualitative solutions. This could be seen at grade seven (7) given to their generation's attitudes by 80,5%. Graphically, grade 10 could be shown in the following manner:

- Least influence was attributed to relatives (only 1 point by 38 polled pupils or 92,7%), but they were also critical towards their own merits – average grade was 3,8 (from 1 to 10). As much as 80,1% gave only 3 points to their own contribution. The explanation of this could be boiled down to the following sub-conclusions: a) Relatives' influence obligatorily pass the family filter before they are accepted: they are considered family attitudes; b) when evaluating one's own attitudes, it mostly boils down to positive projecting of one's will and merits for acquiring new knowledge and habits, and the role of creativity and independence in making decisions are minimized.

- If we add the next grade (9) to the highest grade, we can see that family has greater importance in the total sum than the social environment. Grades 9 and 10 were given to family by 25 pupils (60,1%), and to social environment by 17 pupils (41,5%). The data show that family is considered a primary factor of ecological education and that social environment can in a particular moment or in a particular group be more significant, but that in the course of time family is uncovered under the

veil of society. The following example can be an argument for this: the total sum of family's influence in 41 pupils is 352 and for the social environment it is 340. What is the reason for this? The values of a social environment necessarily pass through the family, existential filter, and then, processed in that way, they become a factor of a young person's development. Another question is how a young person assesses those values? As family's testament or as broader social values he/she is ready to accept without objection.

- Grade 6 was mostly given to the media. This means that they are at the fifth place according to their influence on the pre-adolescent and adolescent population. The conversations led after the questionnaire show that secondary school pupils were influenced by the media mostly in the period before primary school or during it. Most of them acquired (positive) attitudes towards biodiversity although they were not aware that it was the subject of ecology as a science, even before primary school by watching cartoons of programs for children.

- The school factor induced by time some early knowledge about the environment but it pushed into the background the other factors only in secondary school. What makes the "school factor" so powerful is the fact that education is present in the lives of young people in a systematic and continuous way. It would not be humane to experiment whether school would have the same influence if it educated in the manner opposite to other personality developmental factors.

- The small influence of church in the polled population is explained by the argument that church in their environment has a status of a historical value (tradition, culture), and not of a current one. Grade 5 was given to it by 37 pupils (90,2%) and higher grades were given by pupils who still go to church regularly.

## 2. SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT AS A FACTOR OF ECOLOGICAL EDUCATION

We define the social environment as the social, living and working surrounding created for human beings to express themselves. The process of expressing oneself means that there are written or unwritten mechanisms, systems of values and manners of control over individuals by the society. In this light, social environment is on one side a fruitful field for expressing individuality, and on the other side it is a determinant of its extension.

Above all, social environment means social activity of individuals and groups. And, as said by **Max Weber**, every activity is not necessarily social activity. Only if someone's own behavior is meaningfully directed towards the behavior of others it gets the form of social activity<sup>1</sup>. Social environment with its written and unwritten mechanisms and systems of values assesses the character of social activity. It rises above individuals and smaller social groups.

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<sup>1</sup> Maks Veber: "Privreda i društvo", Vol.1, p.15, Prosveta, Beograd, 1976.

## 2.1 ATTITUDES OF POLLED PUPILS

The social environment influence on ecological education of young people in pre-adolescent and adolescent period is proportionate to the collectively accepted values of ecological development. If the ecological sustainable development is intensified, the social activity in this direction will also strengthen. And vice versa, if the attitude towards these issues is passive, social activity will be at minimum or even turned against ecologically sustainable development.

**Table 2: Ranking list of the social environment values according to the polled pupils**

Values	Grades									
	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Honesty	2	5	8	0	0	5	0	4	14	3
Sincerity	0	1	2	7	12	4	11	3	0	1
Justice	1	11	10	19	0	0	0	0	0	0
Health	11	17	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Material security	20	7	13	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nature protection	0	0	0	0	0	13	0	12	4	12
Diligence and creativity	5	0	8	9	19	0	0	0	0	0
Education	0	0	0	1	7	6	20	6	1	0
Religiousness	1	0	0	1	0	7	9	16	0	7
National membership	1	0	0	4	3	10	1	0	22	0
War <sup>2</sup>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10

Because of these reasons we wanted to find out by means of a questionnaire where the influence of the social environment is directed to. At the same time we were interested in discovering where the residents of the hostel would direct the attention of the social environment. Table 2 shows the answers to the question in numbers from 1 to 10: make a sequence (from smaller to bigger) of values which your environment respects.

**Table 3: Grouping of grades for social environment into categories of value**

Values	Highly assessed values %	Important social values %	Marginal social values %
Honesty	36,6	12,2	51,2
Sincerity	7,3	56,1	36,6
Justice	53,7	46,3	0
Health	85,4	0	14,6
Material security	97,6	2,4	0
Nature protection	0	31,7	68,3
Diligence and	31,7	68,3	0

<sup>2</sup> 31 pupils did not want to grade this category

creativity			
Education	0	34,1	65,9
Religiousness	2,4	19,5	88,1
National membership	2,4	41,5	56,1
War <sup>3</sup>	0	0	24,4

We will begin the analysis by grouping the grades into three categories: a) group of highly assessed values – grades 8-10; b) group of important social values - grades 5-7; c) group of marginal values – grades 1-4. Another criterion that will be taken to help grouping the social values is the percentage of those who answered. The percentage over 50 belongs to one of the three groups of values. If the percentage is more equably divided so that no group is given priority, it will be put into the group of important social values.

**Table 4: Ranking list of values, according to the polled pupils**

Values	Grades									
	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Honesty	0	8	1	2	4	4	13	5	0	4
Sincerity	4	10	0	3	6	1	12	0	0	5
Justice	0	13	0	7	11	9	0	1	0	0
Health	32	7	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Material security	5	3	9	17	7	0	0	0	0	0
Nature protection	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	22	13	3
Diligence and creativity	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	7	15	16
Education	0	0	9	11	11	10	0	0	0	0
Religiousness	0	0	1	0	0	1	7	8	13	11
National membership	0	0	18	0	0	16	7	0	0	0
War	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1

According to the polled pupils, the group of highly assessed values of the pupils' living environment consists of: 1) material security; 2) health, and 3) justice. The group of important social values consists of 1) diligence and creativity and 2) sincerity. Marginal values are: 1) religiousness, 2) nature protection, 3) education, 4) national membership and 5) honesty. War could be grouped into undesirable values

We will now try to analyze the personal attitudes of the polled pupils for which we mentioned the fact that they can represent a corrective or, at least, a comparative factor.

**Table 5: Answer groups in categories of values**

Values	Highly assessed values %	Important social values %	Marginal social values %
Honesty	22,0	24,4	53,66
Sincerity	34,1	24,4	41,5
Justice	31,7	65,9	2,4
Health	100	0	0

<sup>3</sup> 31 pupils did not want to grade this category

Material security	41,5	58,54	0
Nature protection	0	4,9	95,1
Diligence and creativity	2,4	2,4	95,1
Education	22,0	78,0	0
Religiousness	2,4	2,4	95,1
National membership	43,9	39,0	17,1
War <sup>4</sup>	0	0	2,4

We may have not received the answers we expected. But, objective research always represents to a certain degree a doubt in accepted attitudes. The group of highly assessed values, according to our criteria and pupils' answers, here boils down to only one value – health. Important social values are: 1) national membership, 2) education, 3) justice, 4) material security, and 5) sincerity (as many as five out of 11 offered values). Marginal values are: 1-3) religiousness, diligence and creativity and nature protection, and 4) honesty. Here war is in the group of undesirable values (2,4%, others did not grade it at all).

Let us try to translate their answers into the language of ecosystems. Young people are slightly more static and inclined to look at highly assessed values in black and white. Sustainable community (health) got 100% acceptance on the part of young people, but without sustainable development. Diligence and creativity (that we categorized under sustainable development in the previous analysis) got a low grade. Pupils are more inclined to the idealistic concept of sustainable development because they above all put ideas – sincerity, justice, school knowledge and national values – into the group of important social values. For these pupils, religion, nature protection and honesty are ecologically unsustainable categories which should urgently be transformed in the direction of a sustainable community. The same also applies to the manner of working and creating so far.

This is very interesting. Each result could have its own strongpoint. Was religion not one of the strongpoints of recent war conflicts in the polled pupils' surroundings? Why pupils do not want to rank war in social values, even with the lowest grade? Does this indicate that the disturbed ecosystem is speaking out from the very nature of human beings? Why is there so little confidence in honesty, both in pupils and in social environment?

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The research issue of this paper was ecological education of pre-adolescent and adolescent population in the Republic of Serbia. Beside the analysis of the contents of documents and literature, we built into the theoretical processing of this issue the results of a questionnaire organized in high schools in Sremska Mitrovica and Sid, and with the pupils who reside in the Hostel for secondary school pupils in Sremska Mitrovica.

<sup>4</sup> 31 pupils did not want to grade this category

By carrying out a questionnaire with pupils we found out that most of them get their first knowledge about ecology in primary school and a little less in the family. Therefore we thought it was necessary to critically re-examine these two institutions. A critical review of family and preschool education was performed by simple observation and empirical noticing of factors of influence. In order to make a more detailed research, of course, we should also question parents and other family educators who have influence on the young person's upbringing.

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