

# THE ETHICAL AND CIVIC DIMENSIONS OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Marţian IOVAN<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** *The author proves that the efficacy of the environmental education could be much higher if it is included within the broader sphere of moral and civic education and if it is driven by a more extensive ideal sprung from the fundamental human right to a clean and well preserved environment, by the contemporary moral and civil values. Based on empirical research, the author pleads and motivates for an increased capitalization of the humanities and social sciences, of art, of environmental ethics and aesthetics in shaping “the ecological personality” of the tomorrow people. Seen as a result of the environmental education, the ecological personality materializes in volunteering in order to find the answers for the environmental issues in the contemporary societies. When shaping these personality traits through environmental education activities, one must emphasize the importance of practice and applied actions aimed to protect the environment, and in general, the practice of civic-moral education methods.*

**Key words:** *environmental education, eco-ethics, sustainable development, volunteering, moral values.*

## 1. Introduction

The increasing interest of the educators, the researchers in Education Sciences, the decision-makers in the public policies for the protection of the environment, the managers concerned with environmental preservation and protection, is closely related to human health and welfare, both locally/ nationally and on a global scale as well. All over the world, more and more people do realize the destructive effects of the ecological crisis that endangers the health, the quality of the human life, the biodiversity conservation, the historical evolution of human civilization and this awareness has led to strengthening the

beliefs of the educators, the specialists in environmental issues and the decision-makers of educational policies regarding the environment, meaning it is imperative to focus our attention and efforts on optimizing the curriculum, from the national curriculum to any school unit at all educational levels and forms and particularly, to increase the formal and non-formal environmental efficiency/ effectiveness [7], [23-25]. On the other hand, the increased advertising in the public sphere of the third generation of fundamental human rights – i.e. the human right to a clean and well preserved environment – enhanced the public claims for the international, national and local

---

<sup>1</sup> Director of the Center for Social Research, *Vasile Goldiș* Western University of Arad, Romania.

authorities, responsible in solving the environmental problems [7].

Due to these conditions, the formal and informal environmental education has become the subject of multidisciplinary research which, since 1960, led to curriculum reform, teaching innovations, creating and promoting educational activities designed to generate superior performance in the work practice of the environmental education.

The environmental education has gradually evolved from a monodisciplinary to an interdisciplinary, systemically approached and value oriented education [32], [35]. The frequent curricular upgrades included and valued the scientific information about man, society, nature, the environment in general, and their interconnections viewed in their continuous historical development, purposes for the environmental education and ways of achieving it as well, encompassing all levels of learners with a special emphasis on exercises and practical activities organized in the classroom, in school and out of school [23]. In the contemporary international context, the environmental education is getting closer and closer to the concept of education for the sustainable development of the planet, for the green economy and society.

This study intends to prove that the outcomes of the environmental education could be much higher due to a wider capitalization of the humanities and social sciences, of art, of the fiction literature, aesthetics, ethics, of moral and civic education methods and procedures – actions generally managed by a philosophy of ecological values, respectively an eco-philosophy. The concise result of the environmental education is the shaping of the ecological personality on the individual level. This is directed by the moral, civic, aesthetic and ecological values, having a strong intrinsic motivation and volition,

affection and respect attitudes for the natural, social, cultural and spiritual environment, so that this kind of personality can freely decide about solving the environmental issues through specific actions and personal involvement. Those having this kind of personality shall not confine within a theoretical and reflexive horizon, but they will be capable of action, creativity and innovation in solving the environmental problems; the ecological personality represents a character with firm attitudes towards the environment, who easily shifts from intentions to actions and who achieves its environmental awareness by triggering personal activities meant to protect and preserve the environment.

The theoretical-demonstration approach in the present study is confirmed by the results of an empirical research using the questionnaire method, the focus group, the Delphi method, the case analysis, the conversation - especially among young students and MA students, age 18-30 years.

## **2. The ideal of the environmental education in civic-ethics terms**

The environmental education with all its formal/ informal variants, within and outside the education system, harmoniously develops including all the other aspects (moral, intellectual, professional, economic, civic, aesthetic, hygienic, etc.) of education, and will reach the correspondent final stages of the whole social-economic, scientific, technological and cultural development, guided and targeting a long-term ideal.

The ideal or the ultimate goal of the environmental education “the relatively perfect projection of personality as the ultimate purpose of the complete education” [3, p.72], a relatively perfect foresight of the personality to be formed in the complex and long-term process of the environmental education.

If we accept the personality definition by Gordon W. Allport: "Personality is the dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his characteristic thinking and behaviour" [2, p.40], then the ideal of environmental education will essentially consist in the formation of that specific personality, when every individual included in any ecological training will fully be capable to take the appropriate decisions to solve the environmental problems in its natural, social, economic, political, cultural - spiritual environment and to be practically involved in their materialization in partnership with other members of the community to which he/she belongs. From this point of view, all of the environmental education either in a school or in a region, a country or globally, is marked by the adopted educational goal, linked to "the sustainable development" and "the green economy" project, also connected with the sphere of generally society accepted values, with the respect for fundamental human rights, particularly the human right to a clean, healthy and balanced environment, and with the principles of democracy. The final product of the environmental education is the organic personality of individuals who got specific educational services.

The ecological profile of the contemporary individual's personality includes the ecological, civic, environmental and moral awareness oriented towards environmental values and standards, abilities, skills and habits meant to identify and solve the environmental problems, with positive feelings and attitudes for anything that can help preserving the ecological balances, to protect nature, to prevent the environmental degradation phenomena and also includes critical attitudes that will emerge in face of any human actions contrary to the legal norms and the

environmental ethics. Such an environmental personality profile can be more or less identified in the volunteers who frequently are involved in practically solving the environmental problems.

The individuals with an ecological conscience and behaviour complying with the society's environmental norms and values will not act to external "orders", under exterior pressure or certain requests, but because of the inner subjective reasons due to the ethical, civic and ecological values internalized in the psyche/personality of the individual and consolidated during the environmental education process. Volunteering to solve the environmental issues is a common practice in the contemporary societies that confirms the extent that environmental education has achieved its ultimate goal, the degree to which it reached the assumed ideal.

The ideal of environmental education has moral, civic, legal, economic, aesthetic, political, historical, spiritual and imaginative dimensions. The realism degree of the environmental education ideal depends on all of these issues and particularly, on its attachment to the society and environment-related sciences. The risk mitigation of the educational project's realism also depends on the eco-philosophy adopted by those who define the ideal. Regardless the authors' philosophical orientation and attitudes, the structure of the environmental education ideal also includes a variable dose of imaginary and utopia generated by people's aspiration towards achievement and perfection [9].

The personality pattern reflected by the ideal of environmental education includes the directional aspect for behavioural guidance and coordination – its origins are axiological consisting of generally social values and moral and civic principles: to do good and to avoid damaging the

human-environment relations, including socio-cultural and spiritual environment; to respect the fundamental human right to a healthy and balanced environment; to promote any industrial, agricultural, commercial, medical, cultural, religious action that protects the environment, the biodiversity, the beautiful abiotic environment, the rule of law, social peace, elements that do not harm the nowadays or future society, to eradicate the evil of all human activities that lead to pollution, global warming, environmental degradation, extinction of animals and plants species, etc. and to comply with the environmental legislation; to legally and morally sanction the actions that harm the environment and consequently, the society; to effectively intervene against those who underestimate or deny the importance of future-related environmental policies and behaviors; to prevent social conflicts, poverty, various forms of human degradation, etc. However, the environmental policies and behaviors perceived as ecological actions have moral and civic sizes and represent ethical and legal imperatives, shaped as free assumed moral duties, designed to coordinate and adjust people's environmental behavior.

The ecological values and welfare aimed by any ecological personality are the essential landmarks that guide the decisions about behaviours, any kind and any level environmental education policies and strategies; they are also standards for assessments, particularly regarding the efficiency and effectiveness. Being ecologically moral means being able to put the triumph of good before opportunities, efficiency or momentary satisfactions for environmental actions, and "means to do well even when this is contrary to our wishes" [see Ch. Le Bihan, 1999, p. 6], and also is about being responsible for your acts as the subject of actions that may adversely affect the environment.

The ideal of environmental education includes the civic dimensions shaped through education and civic and legal experiences, targeting the social, economic, cultural and spiritual environment. The personality guided by ecological values realizes the importance of ecological legislation, guaranteeing fundamental human rights, including the right to a clean, balanced and protected environment; it has democratic beliefs and attitudes embodied in actively supporting the rule of law and the citizens' respect of law. After all, knowing and respecting the environmental laws and adapting our behaviour to the environmental and law requirements represent the corollary of the environmental education [10].

The ideal of the environmental education's meaning has "an indicative value for all that is done in the direction of training and education of man" [16, p. 177], in order to develop the ecological personality and to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of eco-educational processes. The reform measures of the ecological education system, the decisions on curricular changes, the teachers' choice of appropriate methods, procedures and techniques, the teachers' training and retraining, promoting new eco-educational policies cannot be adopted without taking into account the ideal of environmental education and the aims of education. Thus the pedagogical ideal also represents an essential managerial landmark meant to redesign and reorganize education the educational process on all levels [4, p.211].

The complete ecological personality is characterized by openness and receptivity to the new scientific researches regarding the environmental technologies used in the environmental protection, the environmental law, that are going to be applied in order to solve the environmental issues in the endless stream of human relations with nature and all that surrounds

it, and for the human civilization and its environment [11]. In this context, the ecological personality has sufficient motivational resources and attitudes toward self and others, which leads to permanent self-education and self-improvement efforts during one's lifetime.

### **3. Volunteering environmental actions - Synthetic evaluation criterion of eco-education performance**

The most relevant product of the environmental education is the volunteer's personality, which manifests itself in solving the environmental issues. Volunteering developed after the 1970s, particularly in the last two decades, from the U.S., Canada, Australia, the European Union and other countries, marked by the green policies implemented by governments, by the progress of environmental education developed by the national education system, various environmental organizations, the media and the Church [14], [21].

In essence, volunteering can be defined as assuming and taking the initiative to conduct an activity by any person for the benefit of others or of society, without claiming or receiving in exchange any monetary or material payoff. It is voluntary that person, who without any compulsion, decides to conduct, to participate in environmental activities, provides his/hers spare time, expertise, skills, energy, efforts to do good to his/her fellows, without seeking any material or without pay.

Volunteers can work within non-governmental organizations, public institutions, and political organizations or in an informal setting - when triggered spontaneously, individual or group actions aimed at solving simple problems of environmental protection, the prevention of some forms of environmental degradation, critical reactions to those who

commit acts of environmental destruction or support of environmental organizations.

By definition, the notions of voluntary and volunteer have essential civic and ethical meanings. This also explains why the environmental education cannot be effective and cannot achieve its aims unless it transforms into a multidisciplinary and multicultural education, included in the human rights education in close connection with the moral and civic education. In turn, the moral and civic education will not be completed without creating the ecological dimensions of contemporary human personality, without acquiring the ecological culture based on positive attitudes towards the environment and the individual's belief for a sustainable development and the real possibility of building "the green society" and the human rights commitment to a healthy and balanced environment.

The above ideas have been mainly confirmed by the collected results from a survey research using the questionnaire, the Delphi technique, the interviews, and the case study research applied to students in educational sciences, psychology, law and medicine. The questionnaire contains 6 (4 close-ended and 2 open) questions regarding the need to involve the citizens in preventing and solving the environmental issues, the importance of volunteering, the personality traits of a true volunteer, the main ways of forming the children and young people's character in order to be involved in voluntary activities and organizations, implicit in the protection of the environment.

The sample included 166 subjects; all students aged 20-29 years. Of this total, 95.18% realize the gravity of the ecological crisis and the need for personal involvement in solving local environmental issues in the future professional practice; 72.28% said that

they were involved in formal volunteering (21%) and informal volunteering (51.28%).

In a statistically-probabilistic manner, the conclusions drawn from the data analysis and processing confirms the main ideas, principles and assessments expressed in this study. The majority of respondents acknowledge the social and personal development of volunteering as a whole and the importance of children and youth environmental education as part of the process of moral and civic training. Thus, 62.5% of respondents believe that people who have a strong environmental education with a well-defined sense of responsibility are actively involved in protecting our planet in order to ensure a healthy, balanced environment; 61.4% of respondents claim that only those people who have breadth of mind, a clear view of Earth's evolution and future, those who understand and cherish life on Earth, those who want for future generations a well-preserved environment, natural resources, a conflictless society, based on respect for the fundamental human rights, are more motivated than others to get involved as volunteers; 85.55% claim that the environmental awareness nor the ecological culture gained through education is not sufficient in order to become a volunteer and to achieve an ecological personality profile; just a simple environmental education by means of natural science is also ineffective without capitalizing the formative sciences process of man and society, economic and legal sciences, the arts and literature, fiction and, not at least, the eco-ethics. It is obvious that volunteers comprise a specific moral profile superior to their peers since their time and energy are spent in doing good for others, without seeking material benefits, being more altruistic and attached to civic values.

When asked: "What do you think are the

defining qualities of real volunteers personality?", the majority of responses highlight the features of will and character and the personality ethical and civic qualities (the study has identified over 400 words and phrases that denote moral qualities of the volunteer's personality) as follows: the real volunteers show a higher morality, possess strong will, respect for the others, feelings of altruism, a strong belief in the Christian principle of love of neighbour, the desire to leave a better world for future generations, team spirit, commitment; they are hardworking and nature-loving, showing solidarity and greater empathic abilities; they are gentle, sociable, dedicated for a better life, with civic sense, kindness, compassion, initiative; the real volunteers are committed to changes and to future projects and have a superior ecological and moral conduct, including the will to do good; they are real friends of nature, cherish the beautiful in the natural world, have increased ability to understand the environmental issues and persevere to overcome them; they are open-minded and respect the moral values of the community, with positive traits of character; they show interest in themselves, others and nature, with a strong personal motivation; they are good citizens; they desire to do good to their fellows and the community; they have an increased nature-related sensitivity; they link leisure with pleasure, show spirit of sacrifice, also being self-confident and generous; they worship the environment and show sense of organization, responsibility for the fate of future generations, a critic and civic point of view, patriotism, modesty, simplicity, nonconformism, good managers, benevolence, preserving the environmental health, etc.

Concerning the role of the factors that could contribute to maximizing the results of environmental volunteers' work,

89.51% of respondents believe that strong desire, will and motivation to do good for people and the community is such a factor; the vivid beliefs and commitment to moral values (28.91% of the sample); the superior civic spirit embodied in a sense of duty, in the moral and legal compliance on human-environment relationship - 65.06%; promoting first and foremost the interests of the society - 15.66% of all respondents.

As the main direction of ecological personality training in children and youth so that they get involved in volunteer organizations and activities and acquire positive constant attitudes towards the environment, with intrinsic motivation decisions, the answers are: 57.83% of the respondents claim that the beliefs and attitudes regarding the environmental issues do not emerge mostly from the theoretical environmental awareness training but from implementing the environmental activities as practical applications; 53.01% claim that the environmental personality of young people is the result of environmental, moral and civic education; 28.91% consider the role of training, courses, public debates on environmental issues and organizing the activities for environmental protection as optimum at any age; 18.07% of the respondents consider that the young people environmental awareness training is the major way to shape the environmental personality.

#### 4. Conclusions

Not only the theoretical-demonstrative approach and the empirical research applied on a 166 students' sample, but also decades of accumulated teaching experience and communication with students, M.A. and Ph.D., lead to several conclusions:

- Following the evolution of the environmental education since 1970 and to

date, we identified a qualitative enhancement and development by implementing interdisciplinarity in new and various educational practices at all ages, in formal and non-formal education, in national and international activities, gradually increasing the formative role of the humanities, arts, ethics, aesthetics, social and legal sciences. If at the initial stages, the environmental education focused on the transmission of natural sciences knowledge [21], in the recent decades, it has broadened the general objectives focusing on developing the environmentally friendly personality [18], [21]. The present research emphasize that most of the investigated subjects (over 67%) understand and support such a paradigm of environmental education in nowadays world.

- If in the 1970s, the environmental education objectives were focused on the nature's scientific knowledge and on training the ecological consciousness resulting from the acquisition of environmental scientific information, then - after the International Conference in Tbilisi – 1977 [22], and especially after the Rio de Janeiro Conference - 1992, the goals of environmental education have been redefined beginning with the reassessment of the environment concept. In addition to the biosphere and the abiotic environment, man-made environment, material civilization, social and economic life, legal and moral system, culture, collective mind, aesthetics of biotic and abiotic environment have been introduced in the environment concept. The national education systems' curricula and institutions were reformed on this basis, with an increasingly contribution of social sciences and humanities, the arts, ethics, legal rules to protect the environment, or environmental aesthetics [13 -14].

- From one decade to another, there has been a gradual process of democratization

of the environmental education through the exponential growth of all ages and socio-professional categories beneficiaries. Currently, the world population is mainly aware of the importance of environmental education for building a green society. The research shows that 95.18% of respondents affirm the utility of environmental education in achieving a sustainable development.

- The ideals of environmental education - as a reference guide for shaping the environmental policies, the improvement of the environmental education activities and the national curriculum or the choice of appropriate methods, procedures and techniques for training and modelling the ecological personality - must expand by focusing on the personality of the educated. The essential for shaping and defining the environmental education goals is not so much an environmental awareness training, but the development of the axiological dimensions of personality, the internalization of moral and civic values, feelings and beliefs connecting to the environment and the rejection of any individual or group behavior that can harm the environment, during the formation and strengthening of attitudes, will and character traits - the central point of the ecological personality. order to solve the environmental issues. Enhancing ecological knowledge does not guarantee efficiency for the environmental education but, mostly, training human will and the ability to act will do. A UNESCO - 1985 study shows that students from several developed European countries have highly superior environmental attitudes but the desire to act and to solve the environmental issues, or to be active in any environmental organizations is very low [23]. The rift between a well-developed ecological consciousness of many citizens and the lack of involvement in environmental practice and protection can

be overcome by switching the ratio between the knowledge and the practice of environmental activities, imposing the last and the priority use of specific methods of moral-civic education. Over 57% of the answers identify and support this opinion regarding the environmental education.

- Nowadays environmental education must be designed and developed as human rights education, in particular the right to a clean, undegraded and preserved environment, to health, life and peace, as education for sustainable development and shaping the green society [5], [8]. In this context, the environmental education could become much more effective as it will connect with the broad scope of moral, civic and aesthetic education - without losing its identity, without failing to promote the generally accepted human values, i.e. Good, Beautiful, Just, Legal in human relations, between them and their environment [6], [12].

- Volunteering for the environment protection and preservation is one of the synthetic evaluation criteria regarding the efficiency and effectiveness of environmental education activities and the volunteer personality prototype represents the best education ideal of environmental education [12]. Due to the current reduced state of volunteerism on a global scale, with the exception of countries such as the Netherlands, Denmark, U.K., U.S.A., Canada, Australia etc., with a volunteering rate of less than 1% of the population [17], and 4% in the European Union [8], it follows that environmental education has vast perspectives in the coming decades, the relationship between the active individuals in every environmental organization and the inactive people, even if the latter knows about the future of Earth and has an ample ecological conscience / culture.



## References

1. Albulescu, I.: *Morală și educație (Morals and Education)*. Cluj-Napoca. EICON, 2008.
2. Allport, G. W.: *Structura și dezvoltarea personalității (The Personality Structure and Development)*. Bucharest. Editura Didactică și Pedagogică (Didactic and Pedagogical Publishing House), 1991.
3. Bontaș, I.: *Tratat de pedagogie (A Treaty on Pedagogy)*, 6th edition. Bucharest. Editura ALL (ALL Publishing House), 2008.
4. Cristea, S.: *Dicționar de termeni pedagogici (A Dictionary of Pedagogical Terms)*. Bucharest. Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, (Didactic and Pedagogical Publishing House), 1988.
5. Dușu, M.: *Politici publice de mediu (Environmental Public Policy)*. Bucharest. Univers Juridic (Legal Universe Publishing House), 2012.
6. Elliot, Robert: *Etică ecologică (Ecological Ethics)*. In: *Tratat de etică (Treaty of Ethics)*, Peter Singer (ed.). Iași. Polirom (2006), p. 313 – 322.
7. Englerom, D., Yockers, D.: *A Guide to curriculum planning environmental education*, 1994.
8. European Commission: *Attitudes of European citizens towards the environment. Special Eurobarometer. 68.2 (2008)*. Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs\\_295\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs_295_en.pdf). Accessed: 18-09-2014.
9. Iovan, M.: *Eco-Education: A Required Element of Public Policies for Sustainable Social and Economic Development*. In: *Academicus International Scientific Journal* (2014) IX, p. 14-29.
10. Laveille, J.-M.: *Droit international de l'environnement (International Environmental Law)*, 3rd edition. Paris. Editions Ellipses, 2010.
11. Legros, B., Delplanche, J.-N.: *L'enseignement face à l'urgence écologique (The Educational System facing the Ecological Emergency)*. Bruxelles. Aden Publishing House, 2009.
12. May, Th. S.: *Elements of Success in Environmental Education Through Practitioner Eyes*. In: *The Journal of EE* (2000), Vol. 31, No. 3.
13. Mircescu, E.: *Educație ecologică și voluntariatul în protecția mediului (The Environmental Education and Volunteering for the Environment Protection)*. Fundația pentru Cultură și Educație Ecologică ECOTOP & Centrul Național de Voluntariat PRO VOBIS (ECOTOP The Foundation for Ecological Culture and Education & VOBIS The National Volunteering Centre), 2003. Available at: [http://www.repf.ro/uploaded/files/file\\_a9f19a36a6.pdf](http://www.repf.ro/uploaded/files/file_a9f19a36a6.pdf), p. 55- 103. Accessed: 15-09-2014.
14. Monnier, C.: *Crise ecologique et education. Vers une nouvelle position ethique dans le lien entre l'homme et la nature (The Ecological Crisis and Education. Towards a New Position in the Ethical Relationship between Man and Nature)*. In: *Revue d'ethique et de theologie morale* 3 (2012) No. 270, p. 97 – 112.
15. Needleman, J.: *De ce nu putem fi mai buni? (Why Can't We Be Better?)*. Traducere în limba română de Carmen Ion (Romanian translation by Carmen Ion). Bucharest. Curtea Veche Publishing, 2008.
16. Nicola, I.: *Tratat de pedagogie școlară (A Treaty on Pedagogy)*. Bucharest. Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, (Didactic and Pedagogical Publishing House), 1996.

17. Nistor, L.: *Sociologia mediului înconjurător. Aplicații privind atitudini și comportamente în România (Environmental Sociology. Applications on Attitudes and Behaviors in Romania)*. Cluj-Napoca. Presa Universitară Clujeană (Cluj University Press), 2009.
18. Orr, D. W.: *Ecological Literacy: Education and the transition to a postmodern world*. SUNY Press, 1992.
19. Rajsp, M., Fosnaric, S.: *Environmental Education and Its Impact on Children*. In: Croatian Journal of Education (2014). Vol. 16, No. 1, p. 119-148.
20. Stern, P.C., Dietz, T., Abel, T., Guagnano, G. A., Kalof, L.: *A value – belief – norm theory of support social movements: the case of environmentalism*. In: Human Ecology Review (1999) No. 6, p. 81–97.
21. Toth, M.: *Mediul înconjurător în educație: educația ecologică, educația pentru mediu sau educația privind mediul? (The Environment Reflected in Education: the Environmental Education, Education for Environment or Education Regarding the Environment?)*. Cluj-Napoca. Studium Publishing House, 2002.
22. UNESCO: *Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education*. Final Report UNESCO – UNEP. Tbilisi, 14-24 October 1977. Paris. UNESCO, 1978.
23. UNESCO – UNEP: *International Environmental Education Programme, Series 17. A Comparative Survey of the Incorporation of EE into School Curricula*, ed. UNESCO, 1985.
24. UNESCO: *International Strategy for Action in the field of Environmental Education and Training for the 1990s*. 1987: Nairobi/ Paris, UNESCO, 1987.
25. UNESCO: *L'education relative a l'environnement: Principes D'eisegnement et D'apprentissage (Education relative to the Environment: Principles of Learning and Early Learning)*. In: Programme international d'education relative a l'environnement. UNESCO – PNUE (1986) No. 20.