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Some Aspects of the Role of Education in Building a Sustainable Society

Abstract. The following article examines aspects of education for sustainable development. The author argues that the most effective way of changing the ecological situation is to alter the social reality through appropriate education. Assuming that a structural analysis of the education phenomenon can improve our understanding of how education works, the author proposes dividing the educational process into four components, called fields of education. Based on the idea of fields of education, the author also proposes distinguishing three levels within the ESD system – ecological enlightenment, ecological consciousness and ecological culture. The author also gives some practical examples of how we can use these classifications in ESD.

Keywords: education, social order, social governing, ESD, field of education, ecological enlightenment, ecological consciousness, ecological culture

1. The Importance of Education in Building Sustainable Society

We all now face such global problems as the greenhouse effect; air, water and noise pollution; soil corruption; the extinction of species; etc. And with every year we are closer to the situation when there will be no chance to ignore the consequences of global ecological problems. The point is that the vast majority of global problems has social nature and thus can be solved only through the social reality altering. As Anthony Giddens said: “A fundamental problem is achieving the lifestyle changes that would lead to lower emissions” [Giddens 2009: 11].

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One of the main fields of interest of modern social sciences is the idea of social order and the problem of its establishing and maintaining. In general, the concept of sustainable development is a part of more general idea of the sustainable society. The point is that the concept of society is still rather sophisticated and it is really hard to get the comprehensive definition for what society really is, as it was mentioned by the famous German sociologist Niklas Luhmann: “The word “society” does not refer to a clear-cut idea. Even the common term “social” has no incontestably objective reference” [Luhmann 2012: 1]. One can imagine the contrariety of the idea of social order in the modern humanities and as a result the real challenge in the defining of the social governing concept. In order to make the idea clear the next working definition for social governing should be proposed – the specific type of the subject-to-subject activity aimed on the setting and achieving of certain goals through establishing and maintaining of the certain social order by appropriate means and methods using the power resources and also the process of implementation of these activities. I consider the education management to be one of the most important methods of social governing, especially in the reality of the Information society.

Plato considered any society to be effective only in case it has the ultimate Aim of its existence. The absence of this aim leads to the uncertainty of the social order requisitions and thus no one can pretend to build an effective sustainable society. “Upon the educational side, we note first that the realization of a form of social life in which interests are mutually interpenetrating, and where progress, or readjustment, is an important consideration, makes a democratic community more interested than other communities have cause to be in **deliberate and systematic education**. The devotion of democracy to education is a familiar fact. The superficial explanation is that a government resting upon popular suffrage cannot be successful unless those who elect and who obey their governors are educated. Since a democratic society repudiates the principle of external authority, it must find a substitute in voluntary disposition and interest; these can be created only by education” [Dewey 1916: 46]. I propose such a big citation to show that the real meaning and role of education in the life of society can hardly be overestimated and it was already mentioned a hundred years ago. Besides, one of the main functions of education is to socialize people, to make the process of incorporating of a person into a society easier and more effective. Moreover, I can claim the state system of education to be one of the most effective methods of socializing [Dewey 1916]. So, if the Aim is to change the World, to make it turn from “consumption fever” to a sustainability, it is not about building new “green” plants and involving the Euro-4, 5,9, etc. standards (though, it doesn’t mean that they are useless), it is about the change of peoples thoughts, about fundamental change of world view, it is about re-learning of how to be ecologically effective and environmentally friendly.

2. Fields of Education in the Life of a Person

The problem of education has many aspects and I naturally have no opportunity to touch upon all of them. Different countries have their own systems of education which are the results of unique national development, cultural, historical, geographical, and other conditions. Even though nowadays there is a tendency to unify the educational systems of European countries in terms of Bologna process, there are still so many differences between them that it seems to be an idea of extreme complexity. I'm going to analyze educational structure on the basis of the ex-USSR (it refers to a Belorussian and Russian to a certain extent) educational system. So, the educational system in the Republic of Belarus has the pre-school level – kindergartens; the basic school level – schools; gymnasiums, lyceums; the professional education level – vocational and technical institutions; the high education level – universities and academies, and also the level of retraining and further adults' education level – just according to the idea of Life Long Learning (LLL). So, one can see that the process of socialization [Clausen 1968: 5] starts from the very childhood and literary never ends. As far as I'm speaking about the role of education in the life of the modern society let me propose a kind of general scheme which is believed to clarify some points. The proposal is to divide all the process of education in four fields of education (FOE). The main difference between the levels is the main "source of knowledge and motivator" and that is an important matter.

The first FOE starts from the very birth and lasts without changes until the child starts to visit kindergarten or school. So, the main source of knowledge for a person is his family. Parents and relatives are teaching person the basics of the social order and they are a kind of barrier or filter to the stream of information. So the first field of education can be named as "Family field."

The next field we propose to call "institutional field of education" – it is a vast field which contains all the state educational establishments from kindergarten to the university. The characteristic feature of this field is that the educational schedule is determined by the governmental educational standard. For instance in Russia there is a number of educational schedules for kindergartens: "Rainbow," "Development," "Childhood," etc. All schools and of course all universities also have their training programs, so the government decides what people should know in order to be effective in the society. One of the main problems of the state educational standards is that they are rather inert and immobile and it takes ages to feel some changes in the educational system. An important thing is that in the Republic of Belarus, in Russian Federation and to some extent in Ukraine there is

also a compulsory system of qualification training for all people who are engaged in the educational process.

The main source of knowledge here is a class of professionals who are reproducing the present social order and their contribution into the process of socializing is really enormous. The second FOE has a crossing part with the first one, and the influence of the second FOE on the person's life is increasing steadily with the process of person's growing-up. I have to admit that the compulsory nature of the second FOE stimulates people to confront the sources of information to a certain extent.

In parallel with the institutional FOE there is another, I'd say competitive field – the “extra-institutional” FOE. This field consists of any sources of information which are not parts of the state system of education and which propose various types of activities. That can be sports, modeling, music, martial arts, skating, debate club or whatever [Zaki Dib 1988]. The main idea here is that person can choose the source of information on his own (or at least there is an illusion of choice). The third FOE is an important part of human's life and the older person grows the more important this field becomes [Latchem 2014].

The fourth FOE can be named as “self-motivated”. It is the field where person decides on his own what he needs and what should he do. It means that either the person chooses the proposed “sources of information” or training programs or he or she invents their own. Either way this field is connected not only with maintaining of the existing social order, but it provides the real opportunities to development, to finding new effective ways of building a sustainable society, though, of course, the creativity sometimes brings new problems. So, as far as there is LLL-system so far it has to be used as effective as possible.

3. From Ecological Enlightenment to Ecological Culture

Of course I do not deny the effectiveness of green technologies but I presume that they can help us to cope with the consequences of the ecological problems, not with the reasons. Nobody will argue that Nature is a number of complex systems of interaction and so all systems can be classified according to the degree of reciprocation power and their importance to the society and human functioning. That is why we propose it should be: the single object level; the regional or local level; and the global level.

In accordance with the idea of FOE and following the proposed classification of Nature systems I propose to divide the education of sustainable development system (ESD) at 3 Levels [Golubev & Lapina 2015: 101]:

The first level – the level of ecological enlightenment, starts from the first FOE and continues at primary school. This level forms the basic ecological skills and experience and makes the foundation for a future ecologically oriented world view. It's a common knowledge that all of us still keep reproducing a large number of stereotypes we were taught at the kindergarten. It means that we have to form a specific educational schedule for kindergartens and primary school in accordance with the demands of a sustainable society.

The second level – the level of ecological consciousness, grants the basic knowledge of ecological problems and forms in the students the need in ecologically secure environment. This level is the continuation of the first FOE and steadily touches upon the institutional and extra-institutional FOE. It is connected with the educational standards of school and high school levels. Such school subjects as biology, geography, chemistry, health and safety, history can be used in order to form the high level of ecological problems and sustainability understanding. And of course there have to be special school subject "ecology." At this level pupils and students can get acquainted with different types of environmental problems, their causes and methods of overcoming through various activities – both theoretical and practical. Everything depends on a teacher's professional level – and this makes the system of qualification trainings really important.

The third level – the level of ecological culture, is the level when person acquires the appropriate knowledge of how to act according to Nature needs using the logic of sustainable development. It is closely connected with the second and the third FOE but it grants the opportunity to reach the "self-motivation" FOE. People should come to understanding that Nature protection is a part of normal social life which is not less important than economy, ethics or politics.

"Only gradually and with a widening of the area of vision through a growth of social sympathies does thinking develop to include what lies beyond our direct interests: a fact of great significance for education" [Dewey 1916: 77]. So if people are provided with valid environment friendly compendium of knowledge and skills they will be likely to succeed in building of a sustainable society.

4. Some Cases of Ecologically Oriented World View Training

I'm going to propose some practical ideas which can be implemented into the educational process at different levels of ESD.

First level is very important because, as we have already mentioned it forms the basis for literary all person's activities in the future. While being in Sweden I get acquainted with the experience of Swedish kindergartens – children are be-

ing taught to sort the rubbish from the earliest childhood. Everybody knows the game – “find the inappropriate subject,” so in a form of game children can be taught to sort the rubbish and to understand the importance of rubbish separation for an Environment.

Second level is also important and has a large variety of cases. One can take the “Basket game” example, where pupils collect all their rubbish into a special basket and are analyzing what they are consuming during the day – so, they can see with their eyes their personal level of ecological responsibility. Or there can be a practice of planting trees, collecting of plastic bottles, collecting waste paper or any other kind of activity. For students there can be proposed the debates, writing essays, workshops or making various projects. One group of students proposed to make a big “Ecological Path” which was the war-path of a soviet hero of World War II, a famous in Belarus soviet tank officer Z. Kolobanov. The idea was that the group of students follows his war-path, cleans all the rubbish along this route and plants trees in order to commemorate his heroic deeds.

The third level – is a level of creativity. People usually propose their ideas and projects of how we can make our environment secure. A group of people with a developed ecologically oriented world view made a bunch of small cartoons about the importance of correct warmth preserving in winter time, energy saving, etc. Besides there is a special subject at the quality training and retraining courses – National Strategy for a Sustainable Development. As far as any academic group always consists of professionals from different spheres, the attendees usually analyze their professional parts of a Strategy and then a conference or round tables are being conducted. This usually results in a thesis or scientific articles, and of course all the participants enrich their ecological scope.

So, this is a small amount of examples of ESD, we can admit that there are no limits for creativity and everything depends on our own desire to live in a secure environment.

5. Conclusion

Many people know that the Earth Charter “seeks to inspire in all peoples a sense of global interdependence and shared **responsibility** for the well-being of the human family, the greater community of life, and future generations.”¹ The author considers ESD to be one of the most appropriate ways of incorporating people into the sustainable social reality through formation of ecological worldview and

¹ <http://earthcharter.org/discover/the-earth-charter/> [access: 10.12.2016].

through bringing up in modern people the high level of ecological culture and responsibility. However, the conclusions to be drawn from this paper are that:

1. There should be a clear understanding of the fact, that the main ecological problem lies not in the technical level, but in social, and so there should be more ideas of how to change the world view of people. There is need for greater understanding of how to enable the transition from "consumption" world view to ecologically oriented one.

2. Research and evaluation are needed in regard to the fields of education, the role of state system of education.

3. More needs to be done to share and to popularize the practical ideas of how people can apply the ESD in their lives.

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Rola edukacji w tworzeniu społeczeństwa zrównoważonego – wybrane aspekty

Streszczenie. Tematem niniejszego artykułu są zagadnienia edukacji dla zrównoważonego rozwoju. Zdaniem autora najskuteczniejszym sposobem zmiany sytuacji ekologicznej jest zmiana rzeczywistości społecznej poprzez odpowiednią edukację. Ponieważ strukturalna analiza edukacji może pomóc w lepszym zrozumieniu mechanizmu kształcenia, autor dokonuje podziału procesów edukacyjnych na cztery obszary. Proponuje także wyróżnić trzy poziomy w ramach systemu edukacji dla zrównoważonego rozwoju: oświecenia ekologicznego, świadomości ekolo-

gicznej i kultury ekologicznej oraz podaje przykłady zastosowania ich w edukacji dla zrównoważonego rozwoju.

Słowa kluczowe: edukacja, porządek społeczny, zarządzanie społeczne, edukacja dla zrównoważonego rozwoju, obszar kształcenia, oświecenie ekologiczne, świadomość ekologiczna, kultura ekologiczna