



## ОСВІТНІ СИСТЕМИ ТА ІНСТИТУЦІЇ

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### *ECOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN POLAND AT THE TURN OF THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY*

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*У статті представлено проблему екологічної освіти в постмодерній культурі другої половини ХХ - поч. ХХІ ст. Екологічну освіту розглянуто як ідею збереження природи і практичну діяльність у глобальному масштабі. Автор звертає увагу на особливості екологічної освіти в Польщі після реформи 1999 року. Структура статті базується на класифікуванні проблем, перед якими постає екологічна освіта у світі в цілому і в Польщі, зокрема.*

*Ключові слова: екологічна освіта, постмодерна культура, екологічна освіта в Польщі.*

#### **1. Introduction**

The ecological education issue in the general post-modern culture trend from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> and at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is being developed in Poland by many researchers, among them: D. Cichy, J. M. Dołęga, L. Domka, J. Frątczak, W. Grębecka, A. Kalinowska, A. Papuziński, W. Sobczyk, L. Tuszyńska. Ecological education is an implication of the idea of nature conservation and the practical activities in this field on a global scale. The aim of this article is to present the ecological education in the Polish Republic after the education reform from 1999. The article's structure is based on the problem differentiation concerning international activities in the field of nature conservation and ecological education in the Polish education system.

#### **2. International nature conservation activities**

On 26<sup>th</sup> May 1969, as a result of concern for nature, a report entitled «Problems of the Human Environment» was published. Its author, Sithu U Thant, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, has set priorities in the field of nature conservation. In 1972 in Stockholm, the first Earth Summit «Only One Earth» took place. On this occasion the Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme defined meanings of peaceful coexistence and the solving of problems concerning the natural environment conservation. The debate was devoted to the sustainable development concept (eco development). In addition to that, an action plan aiming at nature conservation was outlined. In the same year, during the 17<sup>th</sup> Session of UNESCO's General Conference, the «Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage» was adopted and came into force in the year 1975. Also, an international list of cultural and natural heritage objects was created. It includes rare goods of spiritual and material culture as well as monuments of nature, which should be protected from damage or even annihilation [cf. 13, p. 49-53, 165-168].

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Numerous international conferences were devoted to the issue of environment conservation and ecological education. The UNESCO conference in Belgrade from the year 1975 can serve as an example. There, a charter on environmental education («The Belgrade Charter»), which defines the aims of environmental education, was adopted. Similar topics were covered during a congress in Kyoto (1975), during the «Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe» in Helsinki (1975) and during the «United Nations Conference on Human Settlements» in Vancouver (1976). At the «UNESCO/UNEP Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education» the «Tbilisi Declaration» was adopted, which obliged all member states to put the pro-environmental curricula into practice.

On 29th January 1978 in Brussels the «Universal Declaration of Animal Rights» was adopted and it claimed that every animal has got the right to respect, the right to expect protection from people and that it cannot be a victim of maltreatment and cruelty. In 1982, participants of an international conference in Nairobi discussed the canvassing of social life institutions (including employment enterprises) with the aim of environmental protection. Since 1983 the debates were conducted by the World Commission on Environment and Development appointed by the United Nations, with Gro Harlem Brundtland from Norway holding the office of the Chairman of the Commission. In 1987 it published the report «Our Common Future». It dealt with the issue of sustainable development of societies [4, p. 5–22].

In order to provide further examples of international activities in the field of nature conservation, one should mention the year 1989 and the international symposium that took place in Vienna. It was supported by the UNESCO and UNEP and resulted in the adoption of the «Vienna Declaration». It stressed the need to undertake holistic cooperation of governments and societies in order to carry out the broadly defined pro-environmental education. In the days 3<sup>rd</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> June 1992 in Rio de Janeiro during the Earth Summit entitled «Environment and Development», the «Stockholm Declaration» was confirmed (adopted already on 16<sup>th</sup> June 1972 as part of the sustainable development plan). It stated that human beings have got the right to live in harmony with nature, with the consideration of the development and environmental needs of contemporary and future generations. In this respect nature conservation has to constitute a significant part of the development processes (it cannot be defined separately). Peace, development and nature conservation were declared as correlated and indivisible; ideals, work and courage of the young should be stimulated to develop a global partnership, a consistent and sustainable development to secure a better future and cooperation for the countries [cf. 2, p. 102–108]. This conference led to the creation of the idea of «Global Action Plan for Agenda 21», the «Local Agenda 21» and a program of the most important tasks that were to complete in the years 1993–2000 [cf. 7, p. 15]. The Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Improvement of the Environment were adopted in Rio de Janeiro.

### **3. Ecological education in the Polish education system since the year 1999**

In 1974 professor Henryk Skolimowski (who worked at universities in many different countries including the United States in the years 1965–1990) defined the term *ecological humanism*, referring to the social and natural environment [cf. 17, p. 21]. He explained the meaning of ecological values, on the basis of which ecological attitudes should be developed. He stressed that according to the eco-



philosophical world view [cf. 16, p. 21] nature is «the mother of the cosmic whole», with the human being a part of it, that has the talent of transcendentalism, controls the consumption desires, distinguishes spirituality from religion, values meditation. In order to secure a high life quality for future generations, it subordinates economic values to life quality indicators, such as vital values (a healthy, clean environment). It does not exploit all of the possibilities connected with the fast technological development. Instead, it relies only on the «soft technology» solutions – in harmony with nature and with a responsible participation in the creation of social reality in the biosphere. This world view constitutes a valuable fundament for the ecological education in the Third Polish Republic. It also reflects the social idea of the Catholic church, especially the ecological concept developed by the Pope John Paul II («civilization of life, love and peaceful coexistence in the social and natural environment» [cf. 6, p. 15]), continued by the Pope Benedict XVI [15, p. 60–66].

Since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with respect to the education reform in Poland (1999), the issue of ecology, ecological education and forming of the attitude of respect for the environment is carried out in the Polish education system, starting with the preschool upbringing of children and as part of the educational content on all stages of school education, where it is recommended to acquire knowledge about the environment through a direct contact with nature. It helps to understand the relationship between the particular components of the natural environment [cf. 5, p. 4, 8, 13]. According to Iwona Nowakowska-Kempna, «every human being is an individual and can see the world in his or her own, unique way; a child should be allowed to experience the beauty of nature's diversity according to its personal abilities. (...) Such an attitude, gained already at the stage of nursery school, plays an important role later in the adult life. It allows to notice beauty in and identify with every aspect of nature, to participate in the nature's life» [14, p. 27, 133]. In the «Core curriculum of preschool education for nursery schools and preschool departments at primary schools» the educational aims include the forming of a child's relationship with the social, cultural and natural environment [cf. 3, p. 32]. The program of integrated preschool education also included the issue of relationship with the environment [cf. 8, p. 19–20].

The first educational stage in primary schools (grades 1–3) carries the aim to evoke the need to commune with nature, especially with the child's surroundings. Moreover, it indicates the nature conservation forms in the immediate area [cf. 9, s. 16]. The aim of the ecological education, carried out on the second stage of primary school education, is to make children notice the changes in the surrounding environment, to teach them to evaluate those changes and to develop sensitivity to the problems of the life environment. Among the children's achievements in this field there are observations of the immediate surroundings and pointing at the positive and negative aspects of human integration within the environment [cf. 10, p. 42–43]. In the primary school curriculum, grades 4–6, the issue of ecology comes up in biology classes [cf. 8, p. 99], where students learn to have an active, healthy lifestyle and to take up activities aimed at the protection of the surrounding nature, to represent ecological attitude towards other living organisms, which the child encounters. Ecological contents are also delivered during Polish, history and civic education classes. In addition to that, the educational path of biology classes

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(providing with theoretical knowledge on the subject as well as on how to behave) serves as another interesting example. It is carried out alongside subjects and subject sequences, starting with the second stage of primary school education.

In the educational process in the lower secondary school, alongside subjects (subject sequences) there are also educational paths carried out, amongst which ecological education is to be found [11, p. 15]. The ecological aims of this educational path concern making young people aware of the natural environment dangers, which are present in their domicile. It is also important to evoke and develop respect for nature. Schools are obliged to the following: providing appropriate conditions for the recognition of correlation between the different components of the environment, for the understanding of the effects of human interference in the natural environment and for the shaping of students' pro-ecological attitude. On the other hand, following abilities can be listed as the desired effects of education: noticing, describing and explaining of correlations between the natural components of the life environment, of the humans and their activity, providing a critical analysis of the relation of human activity to the state of the environment, organizing of activities which serve the environmental improvement in the area, starting ecological activities in the immediate surroundings and in the child's own life.

The issue of ecological education is present during chemistry, biology, ethics and geography lessons. The education reformers stressed the fact that old school handbooks (used before the year 1999) for the 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grades can still be implemented in the educational process if their contents are in compliance with the core curriculum and the teaching program that is being carried out [12, p. 68]. The core curriculum<sup>1</sup> of ecological education in secondary schools defined the aims concerning the awareness of humans' impact on the environment and the attitude of responsibility for the life environment as well as readiness to actively support the sustainable development [cf. 18, p. 9-10, 141-142].

#### 4. Conclusion

Thanks to the reform of the Polish education system in the year 1999, ecological education is being carried out on all stages of the educational process<sup>2</sup>, and the aim of the multi-subject ecological path is, above all, to make young people aware of their responsibility for the social and natural environment. The educational programs include the specific characters of the local environments. The knowledge about nature conservation can be broadened at the stage of higher education, at the Nature Conservation Faculty introduced in Poland in the year 1992.

Another fact worth mentioning is that the «Core curricula and teacher education standards in the field of ecological education» present important educational aims, starting from the noticing of changes in the environment surrounding the child and the development of its sensitivity for the problems of life environment. On the stage of lower secondary school, the educational aims are connected with making young people aware of the dangers of the natural environment, which are present in their domicile and with the shaping of a respectful attitude towards nature. In the educational process of secondary schools, the educational aims include the building of awareness about the positive and negative

<sup>1</sup> The decree of the Minister of National Education dated 15<sup>th</sup> February 1999 - The core curriculum of general education, in the Journal of Laws No. 14, item 129 and No. 60, item 642.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. The core curriculum of general education, in the Journal of Laws No. 16, dated 19<sup>th</sup> June 2001, item 625.



aspects of human integration within the environment, the shaping of practical recognition abilities and attitudes of responsibility towards the current and future state of the environment with the readiness to undertake activities supporting sustainable development<sup>3</sup> in the quickly changing «...fluent modernity...» [1, p. 40]. They also present the general trend of the post-modern culture at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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<sup>3</sup> The decree of the Minister of National Education and Sport, dated 7<sup>th</sup> September 2004 in the issue of the educational standards for teachers, in the Journal of Laws 2004, No. 207, item 2110. Cf. Educational standards for the faculty: Education Studies (Attachment No. 78), in the Journal of Laws 2004, No. 207, item 2110 ([www.rgs.edu.pl/files/active/o/pedagogika20070210.pdf](http://www.rgs.edu.pl/files/active/o/pedagogika20070210.pdf), p. 8 (entry date: 27<sup>th</sup> August 2010)). Cf. The State's ecological policy for the years 2003–2006, with consideration of perspectives for the years 2007–2010, in: [www.abc.com.pl/serwis/mp/2003/0433.htm](http://www.abc.com.pl/serwis/mp/2003/0433.htm) (entry date: 25<sup>th</sup> August 2010). Cf. National Strategy of Ecological Education. The Ministry of Environment, the GEA publishing house, Warsaw 2000. Cf. Sustainable Development Strategy for Poland until the year 2025, published as an effect of the government's work, in: [www.access.zgwrp.org.pl/materialy/StrategiaZrownowazonegoRozwojuPolski/index1.html](http://www.access.zgwrp.org.pl/materialy/StrategiaZrownowazonegoRozwojuPolski/index1.html), p. 17, 26 (entry date: 25.08.2010).