

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND LEGAL SOCIALIZATION

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Abstract

This paper deals with forming a responsible relationship to the environment and sustainable development, for which environmental education is the key, which not only transfer ecological knowledge, but also cultivates people in the field of nature protection. Applying Kohlberg's theory of moral development, the authors recall the issues of creating attitudes and accepting values, as well as the interconnection of social behaviour and social values.

Cognitive maturity is a necessary, but not sufficient, prerequisite for moral reasoning of higher stages of moral development. Therefore, it is very important, in addition to acquiring knowledge, to develop proper internal motivation, which seems to be the most difficult task in today's hedonistically oriented society. This paper includes model types of legal socialization, including a number of examples that demonstrate the necessity of values, attitudes, internal motivation and critical thinking, which enable people to adequately understand the legal environmental regulations, which often damage nature in the interests of economic and contemporary civilization needs. Without deep understanding and internalized motivation of environmental protection the human cannot act in the interests of nature and pursue reasonable environmental regulations. At the end of this paper, the authors clearly present the questions and problems that research in this area faces.

Key words: internalized motivation of nature conservation, legal environmental regulations, moral development

Introduction

Environmental education is a lifelong process whose aim is to understand the relationships between humans and the environment and to promote a responsible approach to nature. Its goal is to enable individuals to adopt attitudes and behaviours that reduce the negative impacts of human activity on the environment. Through this process, people develop respect for both living and non-living nature, adopt environmentally friendly consumer behaviour, and acquire critical thinking skills. This includes the ability to recognise the impact of human activities on ecosystems and to seek solutions that support the preservation of biodiversity. Environmental education therefore plays an important role in shaping individuals in the field of nature conservation and in developing their values and attitudes.

There are many definitions of environmental education, the scope of which goes beyond the limits of this text. Therefore, we will deliberately mention only the definition provided by UNESCO, which, although not directly related to environmental education, formulates the broader concept of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). According to UNESCO, education for sustainable development should provide learners of all ages with the knowledge, skills, values, and abilities needed to address interconnected global challenges, such as climate change, loss of biodiversity, and the unsustainable and unequal use of resources. UNESCO has also explicitly declared that environmental education "must be a core component of the curriculum by 2025" (UNESCO declares environmental..., 2023). Education for Sustainable Development also enables learners to make informed decisions that lead to active participation and contribute to positive social change. It is a lifelong learning process and an integral part of quality education. It supports the cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioural dimensions of learning. The inclusion of environmental education as a cross-curricular theme at all levels of schooling has led to a significant shift in its understanding. It is no longer seen merely as a subfield of biology, but as a genuinely interdisciplinary area that integrates both natural sciences and the humanities, linking environmental topics with philosophical, sociological, economic, political, and legal issues. Environmental education is thus becoming an essential part of the socialisation of each individual.

Materials and methods

The paper takes the form of a review study using analytical and comparative methods. The theoretical foundations provide the basis for the results as well as for both explicit and implicit proposals for further topics that would merit attention.

Theoretical background

In its most general sense, socialisation is understood as the process of integrating an individual into society, as well as the process by which society accepts the individual. The search for and attainment of a balance between individual self-assertion, symbolising creativity, and social control expressed primarily through generally accepted values and norms of behaviour, constitutes the core of socialisation. The outcome of socialisation is the formation of a fully developed personality, that is, a personality that has adopted and internalised specific values and developed a sense of moral responsibility. The philosophical and sociological perspective on this issue relates to the system: human – world – normative order – responsibility. Responsibility is understood as a dialogue with other people and, in this context, also with nature. It may also be viewed as an issue of personal responsibility. The achievement and development of a system of internal restraints is one of the main aims of the socialisation process. The goal is the internalisation of socially approved values and norms, which should become an inseparable part of personal identity.

Environmental education should play a key role in fostering responsibility for the environment in which we live. In addition to personal responsibility, there is also legal responsibility, which is acquired through legal socialisation (Urbanová, 2006).

Environmental education and legal socialisation represent interrelated processes that fundamentally influence individual behaviour in relation to the environment as well as the legal system. Environmental education seeks to develop knowledge, values, and skills that lead to a responsible approach to nature and to an understanding of the consequences of human activity for ecosystems (Palmer, 1998; UNESCO, 2017). It is not limited to the acquisition of factual knowledge but also involves the formation of attitudes and the development of critical thinking skills, which enable individuals to make informed and sustainable decisions (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). Legal socialisation, by contrast, represents the process through which individuals acquire the norms, rules, and values of the legal system, including respect for law and institutions (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). This process takes place within the family, educational institutions, and wider society, leading to the internalisation of legal norms—that is, their acceptance as one's own (Bandura, 1977). The connection between these two areas lies primarily in the fact that environmental education provides the substantive basis for understanding the importance of environmental legislation, while legal socialisation ensures that these norms are not perceived merely as external constraints, but as legitimate instruments for the protection of the public interest (Stern, 2000). The result is a higher level of voluntary compliance with rules, active civic engagement, and responsible behaviour on the part of individuals, all of which contribute to the sustainable development of society (Ajzen, 1991).

However, in light of the ongoing degradation of the environment, it cannot be concluded that environmental education is functioning effectively. Environmental Education, Training and Awareness (EVVO) has a long tradition in the Czech Republic. While there is a wide range of programmes for schools of all types, the theoretical dimension does not fully correspond to them.

The issue is not merely the acquisition of certain habits and skills, but rather a transformation of values and attitudes towards nature and its protection. This is a topic currently addressed by numerous studies and academic publications, for example Činčera, J., Goldman, D. & Válková, T. (2026); Činčera, J. & Kroufek, R. (2022); Kroufek, R., Jáč, M., Janštová, V., Pražáková, M. & Čiháková, K. (2020); Činčera, J., Kroufek, R. & Bogner, F. (2023); Svobodová, S. & Kroufek, R. (2016); Svobodová, S. & Kroufek, R. (2022); Činčera, J., Šimonová, P., Kroufek, R. & Johnson, B. (2020); Činčera, J., Johnson, B. & Kroufek, R. (2020); and Chawla & Flanders (2007).

The legal regulation of nature protection in the Czech Republic is primarily based on Act No. 114/1992 Coll., on the Protection of Nature and Landscape. This is followed by Act No. 16/1997 Coll., an amendment regulating procedures in matters of nature protection. Nature protection is defined as a matter of public interest. Within the framework of legal awareness, the principle “Ignorance of the law is no excuse” applies. Therefore, it is necessary in environmental education not only to become familiar with legal regulations, but equally importantly, to internalise them in terms of values and attitudes. All of this is achieved through legal socialisation.

Legal socialisation should be understood as a functional necessity for the existence of law as a sphere of social life (Večeřa, 2013). Its purpose is primarily to reproduce knowledge of legal norms and ways of acting in legal relationships and situations, as well as the frameworks of legal motivation, values, and attitudes in relation to law. In this process, we acquire legal regulations concerning nature—that

is, notions of what is permitted and prohibited. Our values and attitudes towards nature are also formed. Legal socialisation serves as a means of influencing everyday social life, fostering a well-established value-based legal consciousness, and shaping the capacity to distinguish right from wrong, and permissible from impermissible, from early childhood. „One manifestation of society's expectation to maintain the regulatory function of law is the pressure for the law to adapt to a changing reality.“ (Lubelcová, 2024, s. 34)

In addition to legal socialisation, a range of other factors within environmental education significantly shape individual's attitudes and behaviour towards the environment. As previously mentioned, the family plays a key role as the primary socialisation environment, where individuals acquire basic values, habits, and behavioural patterns, such as attitudes towards nature, consumption habits, and approaches to responsibility (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Bandura, 1977). Equally important is the influence of educational institutions, which, through formal teaching and informal activities, develop environmental literacy and support critical thinking (Palmer, 1998; UNESCO, 2017). Media and social networks are also significant factors, shaping public opinion, providing information on environmental issues, and motivating pro-environmental behaviour, while at the same time potentially spreading distorted or incomplete information (Boykoff, 2011).

Cultural and societal norms further determine which behaviours are considered desirable or acceptable, thereby influencing an individual's willingness to engage in environmental protection (Hofstede, 2001; Inglehart, 1995). Economic factors, such as income levels, energy prices, or the availability of ecological alternatives, can practically facilitate or hinder environmentally responsible behaviour (Stern, 2000). The influence of peer groups and the broader community should also not be overlooked, as they can reinforce or weaken certain attitudes through social pressure and shared experiences (Ajzen, 1991; Chawla, 1998, 2007).

Finally, personal characteristics of the individual, such as value orientation, empathy towards nature, sense of responsibility, and long-term thinking, play an important role. Together, these factors create a complex framework in which environmental education operates and determine the extent to which acquired knowledge translates into real-life behaviour (Schwartz, 1992; Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002).

A significant contribution to the analysis of legal socialisation was provided by the cognitive-developmental approach of the American social psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg, who emphasised the close interconnection between cognitive, moral, and legal development. Kohlberg linked the stages of moral development to the formation of an individual's relationship with legal norms and identified developmental stages of legal socialisation that are closely tied to the maturation of cognitive abilities and the development of social experience (Heidbrink, 1997). Kohlberg's stages of moral and legal development have become part of the scientific discourse in numerous fields, including legal sociology, social psychology, and psychology, and are also applicable to environmental education, as it is not only about receiving information but also about internalising it, adopting it, and transforming social values and attitudes.

Kohlberg (1981, 1984, 2008) formulated three main levels of legal socialisation, each of which is further divided into two qualitative sub-stages. The following section presents the application of this theory to environmental education.

Results

The application of Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development to environmental education represents an important approach to understanding how individuals' moral attitudes towards environmental protection are formed. Kohlberg's framework distinguishes three basic levels of moral development—pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional—each further divided into two stages (a total of six stages), with each stage reflecting a different motivation for ethical behaviour.

At the pre-conventional level, the first two stages are located. Stage 1 – obedience and punishment orientation – is characterised by behaviour aimed at avoiding sanctions; in an environmental context, for example, an individual may sort waste solely to avoid a fine. Stage 2 – instrumental relativism (reward orientation) – involves acting based on self-interest; pro-environmental behaviour is motivated by expected personal gain, such as financial savings or other rewards.

At the conventional level, the individual is guided by social norms. Stage 3 – “good boy/good girl” orientation – is based on the desire for recognition from others; the individuals behave environmentally because they want to be perceived as responsible and proper members of society. Stage 4 – law and order orientation – reflects respect for rules and authorities; environmental behaviour is motivated by the belief that laws and regulations should be obeyed because they maintain social order. However, at this stage, there is little consideration of the fairness or moral quality of the laws themselves.

At the post-conventional level, values are more deeply internalised. Stage 5 – social contract orientation – is based on the understanding that rules exist to protect the public interest and may be

changed if unjust; in environmental education, this is reflected, for example, in support for environmental policies and active participation in shaping them. Stage 6 – universal ethical principles – represents the highest level, where the individuals act according to their own moral principles, such as justice, responsibility, and respect for life; environmental protection is regarded as a moral duty, regardless of external rules or expectations.

The application of these stages in environmental education emphasises the need to systematically develop individuals' moral reasoning. Pedagogical approaches should therefore support discussion of environmental dilemmas, critical thinking, and value-based decision-making. The goal is not merely to increase knowledge, but primarily to advance towards the post-conventional level of moral reasoning, enabling responsible and sustainable action based on internal conviction.

Applying Kohlberg's theory in environmental education highlights the necessity of developing not only knowledge but also moral reasoning. Pedagogical approaches should foster discussion of ethical dilemmas, critical thinking, and the ability to adopt prosocial and pro-environmental values and attitudes. This shifts the focus from mere rule-following to conscious and value-based internalisation of norms, which is essential for long-term sustainable and responsible individual behaviour towards the environment.

Kohlberg formulated the stages independently of their specific content, based on the apparent universality of what is considered good, right, just, and desirable, as well as the standards applied to human behaviour. Contemporary postmodern contexts, however, relativise these assumptions to some extent. For socially differentiated content of good and evil, right and wrong, just and unjust, and other bipolar concepts, it is difficult to assign specific stages of legal socialisation unequivocally, as different individuals, societies, or legal systems may attribute different weight to these values (goodness, correctness, loyalty, etc.) in specific situations. This is also evident in the acceptance of nature protection.

Discussion and Conclusion

Legal socialisation and environmental education together form a significant tool for shaping responsible citizens who are aware of their rights and duties towards nature.

Our study raises a number of questions and issues related to research that connects environmental education and legal socialisation. These issues can be categorised into the following areas. (Since very little specialised literature addresses the link between environmental education and legal socialisation, we also include references that are inspirational for the respective category.):

1. Assessment of educational impact

Despite the existence of theoretical frameworks and empirical studies, the measurement of the actual impact of environmental education on pro-environmental behaviour and compliance with legal norms remains insufficiently clarified. While environmental education provides a wealth of valuable information, it is difficult to empirically track how this knowledge translates into changes in attitudes and values. It therefore remains unclear how to precisely evaluate the influence of knowledge, attitudes, and values on individuals' long-term behaviour (Chawla, 1998; Činčera, Kroufek & Bogner, 2023).

2. Integration of legal and environmental education

There is a significant gap in the systematic integration of environmental education with legal socialisation. While environmental programmes often raise awareness of ecological issues, they pay less attention to how this awareness can be transformed into concrete compliance with legal norms (Ajzen, 1991; Cotterrell, 1992).

3. Social influences and normative pressures

Peers, family, schools, mass media, social networks, and the community environment play a major role in shaping prosocial and pro-environmental behaviour. Individuals are also influenced by habits, traditions, customs, morality, religion, ideology, and occupation. It remains an underexplored question how these social factors modulate the effectiveness of educational interventions and the extent to which they support the internalisation of environmental and legal norms (Bandura, 1977; Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002; Činčera, Šimonová, Kroufek & Johnson, 2020).

4. Moral dimension of environmental behaviour

It remains unclear how the moral development of the individual influences environmental decision-making. For instance, the application of Kohlberg's stages of moral development to environmental behaviour and the internalisation of legal norms provides potential hypotheses; however, empirical testing of these hypotheses is very challenging (Kohlberg, 1984; Heidbrink, 1997).

5. Contextual and cultural determinants

Cultural and institutional influences are significant but still insufficiently studied. Different cultural frameworks, value systems, and institutional structures can substantially affect how effectively

environmental and legal education shapes individual behaviour (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Hofstede, 2001; Inglehart, 1995).

In addition to these research problems, we see other professional challenges in a deeper interconnection of the theoretical framework of environmental education and legal socialization, in the discrepancy between declared attitudes and actual human behaviour, in the operationalization of concepts, since in the research on environmental education and legal socialization we work with very complex concepts. Furthermore, ethical issues must also be considered (e.g. intentional incitement to unecological behaviour within the framework of research), economic aspects (financial cost of longitudinal but also other studies), and the limited connection between research and practice, i.e. research findings are not always effectively reflected in educational programs or public policies.

Resolution all of these issues is crucial for both the theoretical understanding and practical application of environmental education programmes.

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Souhrn

V tomto příspěvku se autorky zabývají budováním odpovědného vztahu k životnímu prostředí a udržitelnému rozvoji, přičemž klíčovou roli přisuzují environmentálnímu vzdělávání a právní socializaci. Toto propojení obou oblastí by mělo vést k formování komplexní odpovědnosti za prostředí, ve kterém žijeme, a spočívá zejména v tom, že environmentální vzdělávání poskytuje obsahový základ pro pochopení významu environmentální legislativy, zatímco právní socializace zajišťuje, že tyto normy nejsou vnímány pouze jako vnější omezení, ale jako legitimní nástroj ochrany veřejného zájmu zajišťující bezpečnost, ochranu zdraví, životního prostředí a hodnot přesahujících individuální zájmy, s nimiž se jednotlivec vnitřně ztotožňuje.

V tomto kontextu je v příspěvku mimo jiné představena aplikace teorie morálního vývoje Lawrence Kohlberga na oblast environmentálního vzdělávání. Autorky ji využívají jako názorný nástroj k pochopení toho, jak se formují morální postoje jednotlivců k ochraně životního prostředí. Studie rovněž nabízí přehled otázek a problémů spojených s empiricky zaměřenými výzkumnými aktivitami propojujícími environmentální vzdělávání a právní socializaci.“

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