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## Teachers' Values Related to Sustainable Development in Polish and Latvian Secondary Schools

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### Abstract

The aim of the paper is to present the results of the research on highlighting values related to sustainable development in Poland and Latvia by secondary school teachers and to compare two models by the use of action research. The research is presented as a process of identifying values mainly from the point of view of social development which is an important component of sustainable development. The research results presented below provide a picture of a comparison between Polish and Latvian secondary school teachers' views on values related to sustainable development and the process of values education. The paper is based on the doctoral thesis of the author.

*Keywords:* values, values education, sustainability, sustainable development

### Introduction

The beginning of the twenty-first century is an appropriate moment to ask questions about the future of civilisation and humankind. The world at the beginning of the twenty-first century is unsustainable, as it is reflected in many international documents and studies (Pirages, 1996; Brown, 2005; Martenson, 2011). The lack of sustainability results from the materialistic attitudes of people to each other, to the Earth's resources and to the way in which these resources are used. The role of education in the process of social-cultural development is particularly essential.

From the research perspective, in the broadest sense, the modern paradigm of development has been used and seen by the world as a composite unit, along with the various adaptation or evolutionary processes occurring in it. The most appropriate paradigm is presented by Ervin Laszlo (2008). The person is seen as the essence of seeking his or her own path of development, aiming at sustainable development. As Laszlo (Laszlo, 2008) reports, more natural resources were used in the previous six decades than in the whole previous history of civilisation.

Therefore, *education* and *education for sustainable development* are essential in this process. They should be based on *values* which form the foundations of moral education and help us to get to know both ourselves and others better. The work is also based on the philosophy of science, presented by Rozov and his theory of *socialnyie estafety* (социальные эстафеты = *social relay – link theory*). The use of the theory of

Rozov (1995) was determined by the conformity based on the paradigm of modern science and coincides with contemporary needs and expectations. According to this theory, the concept of *socjalnyie estafety* is defined as a dynamic wave (Rozov, 2006), embodying a human action and activity. This model of human activity, from one act to another, in the form of wave, is called the *kumatoid* (“kuma” – for the Greek for wave). According to this theory, the school may also be a *kumatoid* which changes via activity and actions.

The term ‘value’ could be analysed from many different points of view: psychological, philosophical, economical, historical or sociological. The term is not easy to define and could have many different meanings. Throughout history, the meaning of values has also changed. It is also associated with the change of the paradigm of modern science.

This paper focuses on the understanding of the notion of value in a context of sustainable development, with particular consideration of the process of implementing education for sustainable development among the teachers in Polish and Latvian secondary schools.

### Theoretical Frame of the Study

The conceptual and methodological frame of reference of the paper is based on ideas of the following authors: philosophy of science (Rozov, 2006, 2009); philosophy and theory of development (Marietta, 1995; Salite, 1998, 2002; Laszlo, 1995, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2012); understanding of values (Young, 1949; Kluckholm, 1962; Rokeach, 1972; Schwartz, 1994; Świtała, 2015; Minkov & Hofstede, 2012); values education (Meyer, 1976; Harland & Pickering, 2010; Świtała, 2012; Novíček, 2013); education for sustainability and sustainable education (Salite, 1998; McNernen & Davis, 1996; Sterling, 2012); action research as a research method (O’Brien, 1998; Salite, 2002; Holland & Mulcahy, 2007).

The following research questions were raised in the research process: (1) how do secondary school teachers in Poland and Latvia understand the concept of value? (2) which values, in their opinion, are the most important ones from the point of view of social development? (3) how do teachers in Polish and Latvian schools understand the concept of sustainable development? (4) which values are the most important ones in the context of sustainable development? (5) how do Polish and Latvian teachers nurture values or how do they organise the didactic process to achieve these specific values?

### Methodological Framework and Participants

Action research in two Polish and two Latvian schools was conducted to achieve the final results. One of the schools in Poland (school No. 1 S1, n=43) is a large complex of schools located in a small town. The other school (school No. 2 S2, n=21) is a general secondary school – a non-public school with public school accreditation, located in a large town. One of the Latvian schools (school No. 3 S3, n=30) is a large state gymnasium in a big town. The other school (school No. 4 S4, n=21) is a Polish gymnasium in a big Latvian town. Teachers of general subjects, at different ages and with different periods of work experience participated in the study in each school in both countries.

The research design consists of the following four stages (circles): 2009/10 – **first stage** (first circle) – study of the phenomenon of values in the scientific literature; a year

of preparation materials and research tools, study of ESS data – to build a general framework of values related to an understanding of the world, 2010/11 – **second stage** (second circle) – elaboration of a list of the most important values from the point of view of secondary school teachers in Poland; exploration of research participants' understanding of the notion of sustainable development and values related to sustainable development in Polish schools, 2011/12 – **third stage** (third circle) – exploration of research participants' understanding of the notion of values, the notion of sustainable development and values related to sustainable development in Latvian schools, 2012/13 – **fourth stage** – reflection, gathering teachers' opinions about the achieved results by the use of google.docs.com, presentation of the research results in schools; elaboration of the final report on the research and thesis.

Participation in this research was voluntary for everybody, but none of the teachers wanted to be excluded because of their own interest in the future implementation of the results. Nevertheless, the participants' contribution to the research was very high. The discourse with them during all meetings allowed the author to prepare better tools for the next steps and allowed him to better understand the ongoing processes during the study.

## Results and Discussion

The understanding of the notion of values depends on the conditions in which a school functions only to some degree. The concept of 'value' is complex and should be understood in many different ways.

The process of education for values demands a considerable involvement from teachers and adequate understanding of the concept of sustainable development and education for sustainable development.

The understanding of the concept of sustainable development among teachers is intuitive rather than based on scientific and theoretical knowledge.

Identification of the most important values, both from the point of view of social development and sustainable development, should result from the understanding of the requirements of social development and sustainable development as well as the tasks with which education is faced in this respect.

Teachers' assumptions about making one's own decisions and being free as well as caring for nature and the environment, traditional action and secure surroundings were considered values with approximately similar significance (in a quantitative evaluation).

The results achieved during the second stage of the study show how wide and diverse the understanding of the notion of value is. In most answers the Polish respondents indicated values as norms and principles that regulate social life, whereas the Latvian respondents chose material and non-material goods. In Poland and Latvia, the time for deep reflection and proper actions with respect to responsibility and work for the environment and its sustainable development has not come yet.

What is considered by teachers who responded to be right is a certain value, and what was recognised as wrong was not a value, quite apart from whether the respondents represent an eco-centric or anthropocentric orientation.

In Polish schools the most important value is honesty. Honesty was also often mentioned as an essential value by the respondents in Latvian schools. Health and family are the two values extremely frequently indicated in both countries. These values are connected with two highly significant aspects of human life.

They also show *per se* the most essential aspects of social life in these countries. Family has always been regarded as a very important element of social life and the process of education.

In the process of nurturing values the most important is teachers' and educators' own example, showing standards of behaviour. This seems to be particularly well-founded by taking into account the fact that what seems to be the most problematic is the issue of teaching values.

The results obtained with regard to the understanding of the notion of sustainable development are also surprising and indicate to a poor understanding of the notion by the secondary school teachers in Poland and Latvia.

In Polish schools, sustainable development is often understood as a responsible development. Actually, it coincides with the theoretical understanding of sustainable development. Teachers' knowledge in this respect is purely intuitional because, there is no condense information system in Poland for teachers in this respect and even official documents present a very limited understanding of the notion of sustainable development. Sustainable development as viewed by the Latvians respondents is also a well planned development for a long period.

In both, the Polish and Latvian cases, the most important values are responsibility and security. Latvians are also aware of the importance of education and the role of education in the above-mentioned process of sustainable development of each society.

The models of importance of values obtained for Poland and Latvia indicate their great resemblance; the correlation coefficient is 0.553 in this case, and the values which belong to the group of norms and individual traits have been recognised as the most important ones.

In spite of working in completely different conditions and other cultural conditions, the understanding of values is similar. The respondents very often indicate the same or very similar aspects of understanding values as well as of a sustainable development.

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