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To the environmental responsibility among students through developing their environmental values

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Abstract

This research explores interconnection between environmental values and environmental responsibility among young people. Basic question of this study was whether and to which degree the environmental values influence the development of the environmental responsibility? By answering on this question, we want to provide guidelines for educational activities in schools which aim to develop environmental awareness among the young people of Serbia. The survey covered a sample of 252 students from primary and secondary government schools from Belgrade. Students were tested on a five point Likert type scales which examined environmental responsibility and environmental values. To assess the reliability and validity of the scales standard statistical procedures were used. The results of our study confirmed positive linear dependence between environmental values and environmental responsibility. On the basis of students' environmental values 48% of their environmental responsibility can be predicted. On the basis of our results, it is possible to conclude that students who believe that efficient functioning of society and the survival of life on the Earth is unimaginable without environmental protection, display desirable attitudes towards environmental responsibility. The obtained results may help to identify future directions of formal education activities regarding the improvement of personal environmental responsibility among young people.

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1. Introduction

Growing public concern over the quality of the environment and the intensification of the environmental crisis has created among researchers a continuing interest in the study of environmental awareness and development factors for environmental responsibility among individuals. This study examines the interrelatedness of environmental values and environmental responsibility among primary and secondary school students in Belgrade. By answering the question whether and to which degree the students' environmental values influence the formation of personal environmental responsibility among them; we want to provide guidelines for educational activities in schools which aim to develop environmental awareness among the young people of Serbia. We believe that this issue is of the utmost importance for environmental protection, since the task of resolving current and future environmental problems on both local and global levels will fall upon the younger generation; furthermore along with informal education, formal education is an important external factor in the development of a pro-environmental individual. This study should in fact initiate a dialogue on the most effective methods to be employed in environmental education in order to develop environmental responsibility among young people, and as such it contributes to the development of the theory and practice of environmental education.

Values may be defined as "Criteria people use to select and justify actions and to evaluate people (including the self) and events" (Schwartz, 1992). Therefore, values may be viewed as an important part of the identity of each individual, on the basis of which they form various specific attitudes in specific situations (Rokeach, 1973). Previous studies have shown that environmental values have a considerable influence on pro-environmental behavior, while some scientists have found that there are differences in the influence of certain types of values (Stern, 2000; Barr, Gilg, & Ford, 2005; Gärling, Fujii, Gärling, & Jacobsson, 2003). It has been seen that anthropocentric and ecocentric values have a positive influence on pro-environmental behavior, where individuals with anthropocentric values behave in a pro-environmental manner for the sake of benefit to humans, and those with ecocentric values do so out of concern for nature and the biosphere. There are varying opinions on whether ecocentric (Barr, Gilg, & Ford, 2005) or anthropocentric (Nordlund & Garvill, 2002; Poortinga, Steg, & Vlek, 2004) values are better predictors of pro-environmental behavior.

From the standpoint of psychology, responsibility can be defined as self-chosen limitations of the individual with regard to taking action depending on how it would affect other people (Bierhoff & Auhagen, 2001). The issue of the formation of environmental responsibility is of vital importance because its viability is based on the conviction that it is possible to persuade individuals and institutions to accept responsibility for causing environmental problems and to change their everyday practices to mitigate negative consequences (Barr, 2003). The sense of personal responsibility concerning environmental issues is connected to personal norms and belongs to the personal moral domain. Personal norms are defined as personal expectations about personal behavior in various situations (Abrahamse & Steg, 2009). These norms consist of feelings of personal moral obligations towards other people and/or nature. However, the sense of personal responsibility does not always have a moral aspect because people often feel obliged in a conventional manner (Kaiser, Ranney, Hartig, & Bowler, 1999). Obligation due to convention arises when people feel responsible under pressure of social norms. For example, tradition or state organs could make people feel obligated due to conventions.

The designation of environmental values among students as an independent variable and personal environmental responsibility as a dependent variable in our study was due to several reasons.

It is a fact that the teaching of environmental protection content in primary and secondary schools in Serbia is mostly focused on imparting knowledge of environmental problems, while the formative moral, affective and behavioral components of environmental education are almost completely neglected. This is an inevitable conclusion to be reached after an examination of the curriculum, goals and results achieved in the courses (biology, geography, chemistry, physics, mother tongue and fine arts) within the framework of which environmental content is taught. The formal environmental education of the young people in Serbia is carried out on an integrated level. Optional subjects such as Guardians of Nature in primary schools and Ecology and Environmental Protection in vocational secondary schools certainly cannot compensate for the disorganized and fragmented teaching of environmental content in a multi-disciplinary model of environmental education. It has been noted that there isn't enough environmental content being taught and not enough is to be found in textbooks being used to teach certain subjects. In the case of most teachers the attractions of a multi-disciplinary model of environmental education pale when put into practice, since

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