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Ecological values in the lives of adults

Ecology¹ came into being in the second half of the 19th century as part of the natural sciences. It is “a science about the organisms’ interplay with their abiotic (physical) and biotic (other organisms, including humans) environment. Within this interplay, following correlation levels can be distinguished: individual level, population level (concerning mainly the varying number of individuals), biocoenosis level (groups of populations competing with each other on the same terrain) and ecosystem level (circulation of matter, food web, energy flow)” (Wolański, 2008, p. 453). Various subdisciplines emerged from the development process of the ecological knowledge. They include (among others): plant ecology, animal ecology, sea ecology, forest ecology and landscape ecology. Moreover, the issue of ecology became a field of research for philosophy, anthropology, ethnology, geography, social sciences, psychology, educational sciences (ecological pedagogy), economy and medicine. It is caused by the fact that in the case of *homo sapiens*, if the scientific research was confined to the biological sphere, the subject would be deformed. For humans, the natural environment is the civilization and culture (psycho-sphere, social sphere, noosphere) that they create. Janusz Gnitecki (2004, p. 47) put another significant phenomenon into words: the human being as an bio-oscillator functions in his info-sphere, which is his informational environment available to him thanks to the functioning of brain.

B. Campbell (1995, p. 17) stated that human ecology includes research on human species with its extraordinarily complex correlation with other organic and inorganic habitat components.

Human ecology explores the relationship between the environment and human populations. It covers mainly the social, cultural and environmental conditions of those relations. Napoleon Wolański (2008, p. 54) defined the human ecology as an “interdisciplinary study of the relationship between humans and their natural, social, cultural and built environments. The main issues concern

¹ The etymology of the term ecology is derived from the Greek language, from the words *oikos* – home, environment, habitat, establishment, place of residence and *logos* - - word, science.

philosophical aspects of the environment, biosocial (connected with the flow of energy and information) and ecological problems of human biology and environmental education”.

Autecology, the ecology of species, includes also the *homo sapiens*. Human ecology is based on the scientific research on humans and their culture as a dynamic component of the ecosystem, whereas the biological human ecology carries out scientific research with the aim of explaining how the natural and cultural environments influence the biological character of the human population. It is also worth mentioning that the human ecology consists of both the cultural ecology (it explores the ways in which the culture of various human groups adapts to the natural resources of their habitat and to other groups of humans) and social ecology (it explores the social structure of those groups as a product of environments, in which they live) (Strawiński, 1996; Pawlowski, Zięba, 1992; Sobczyk, 2000). The foundations of social ecology were created in the 20th century (in the twenties) by R. E. Park, E. W. Burgess and R. D. McKenzie.

An intensive development of ecology in Poland took place in the interwar years (1918 – 1939), when the research directions were broadened. In the second half of the 20th century, however, due to an intensification and growth of ecology’s connections with other applied scientific disciplines and human’s practical activities, one could come across the term “ecological sciences” more and more often, especially in the context of sustainable development (eco-development) and social-ecological model of health (Strawiński, 1996, p. 213-221). Ecology became therefore an “unlimited science”, a contact point where many different disciplines met.

Emphasis should also be placed on the credits of the development of the modern science concept (methodological rationalism). It objectified nature, as a result of which the human being became a perpetrator and at the same time a victim of the ecological crisis. In order to fulfill the demand of symbiosis of nature and culture, one should, firstly, revalue the interactions with the natural environment – understood as earth’s ecosystem and its environment, with all the spheres, where life exists: atmosphere, hydrosphere, lithosphere, space sphere, biosphere and anthropological sphere and, secondly, introduce the idea of holistic² nature of the Universe in an evolutionary process of – as Pierre de Chardin expressed it – a creative “coming into being”.

The synthesis of ecological values (Skolimowski, 1993b, p. 147-158) consists of: reverence (understood as a admiration for life), responsibility for the environment, sympathy and compassion as a way of understanding, restraint without

² According to David Bohm, nature is a complete system, which means that all of the components constitute one whole – they depend on each other.

wastage, symbiosis. Reverential thinking considers human life to be a value in itself, love to be an inalienable way of human existence, creative thinking as an inherent part of nature, joy to be an implication of the everyday life and brotherhood to be the basis of the epistemological paradigm. Thus, in the eco-philosophical world view (Skolimowski, 1993a, p. 46; Pawłowski, Zięba), human is a component of nature, which is the mother of the cosmic whole, it has got 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 (health, clean natural environment, living in harmony with the social and natural 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. The eco-philosophical world view values the balance between male and female elements in the social life as well as the art of compromise, intuitive thinking, attending more to family than to economic values, promotion of local and bioregional communities, decentralization of social life.

In order to explain the meaning of ecological values in the life of adults it should also be stated that in the concept of ecological humanism, dynamic ecological balance becomes a part of the humankind homeostasis, which is why knowledge should be connected with the creational forces of nature’s evolution (the physical world should not be atomized). According to this rule, humans should not restrict themselves to the forming of knowledge society, but promote the idea of wisdom society – a society that understands how important it is to preserve the symbiosis of nature and culture. Wisdom, according to the holistic rule of universe’s nature, is the “balance between our existence and other human beings and the whole universe” (Skolimowski, Górecki, 2003, p. 150]. Wisdom is harmony – maintenance of all possible states in the right balance. According to Henryk Skolimowski, the so called “information revolution” is another educational illusion for the 21st century because it is based on the technical awareness – and this awareness is atomizing, quantitative, secular, objective, mechanic and it is derived from the idea of the “world in the image of a machine”.

The relationships of humans and natural environment depend on the dominating system of values, the scale of attitudes “from aggressive and destructive to friendly and sacred, from purely instrumental to protective, from arrogant to respective ones” (Tobera, 1984, p. 17) and on means of influencing the life environment. Thanks to the process of ecological education, an ecological awareness is created, while the social (common) ecological awareness is developing (it is a long-lasting process) in the stages: the stage of colloquial ecological awareness, the stage of

ideological awareness based on knowledge (extreme views) and finally, the stage of common ecological awareness (Sobczyk, 2000, p. 19).

Ecological awareness is an implication of social awareness (entirety of ideas that constitute the cultural work of many generations, the generally recognized attitudes, extreme views and beliefs) and it is the state of people's knowledge, views and images concerning the natural environment, its anthropogenic burden, the level of degradation, endangerment and need of protection, as well as the knowledge about ways and instruments for controlling the usage and preservation of nature (Górka, Poskrobko, Radecki, 1995 p. 16). Ecological awareness is a "system of knowledge, views and beliefs about the natural environment. It enables the understanding and noticing of connections between the state and character of the environment with the conditions and quality of human's life" (Wieczorek, 1998, p. 261). Ecological awareness is defined by the value systems based on the "to be" rather than "to have" attitude, by a friendly moral attitude towards all living beings and by an ecological imagination, an attitude of readiness to undertake ecological activities within the life environment (Wieczorek, 1998, p. 21).

Ecological awareness of adult people is represented by an ecological way of thinking, which considers the ecological aspect to be not less important than other ones that are taken into consideration when solving a particular problem. According to T. Burger, ecological awareness is a "descriptive category which explains how a given social group or the whole society sees its place in nature, how it notices its relationships with the natural environment" (Rosa, 2001, p. 1020). Ecological awareness is being carried out both in the thoughts or experiences of given individuals and in the standards of valuation, of understanding and experiencing of the biosphere, that function in a particular society. Ecological awareness is created by contents, attitudes and emotions.

In the descriptive-technical sphere of ecological awareness, one can distinguish between the ecological knowledge (that is the knowledge about processes that take place in ecosystems, knowledge about correlations and connections that contribute to a better balance of ecosystems, about interplays between human activity and environment) and the ecological imagination, understood as a kind of a disposition, ability to foresee ecological effects of one's behavior and the ability to act according to the ecological knowledge. In the axiological-normative ecological awareness, however, the biocenosis-oriented values system, that constitutes the basis of ecological conscience, is included (Matczak, 2003, p. 24).

It can therefore be generalized that in the process of psychological development of adults that leads to complete humanity, to ecological attitudes and healthy lifestyle – based on ecological values, the starting point is the knowledge

about natural environment and then the responsible attitude towards the environment, formed during all stages of cognitive development, socialization of the given person (ecological awareness) and the system of knowledge and beliefs together with the readiness to act (ecological culture) and finally all activities that are in compliance with the idea of sustainable development. This attitude of life affirmation fosters a permanent coexistence with the natural environment in many different dimensions of humanity, such as *homo sapiens*, *homo faber*, *homo creator*, *homo laborans*, *homo sociologicus*, *homo oecologicus*, *homo oeconomicus* (Aleksandrowicz, 1988; Hull, 1984 p. 253) and an ecological (healthy, natural) functioning in the social life structures – in the cognitive, emotional and application aspect.

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