

# Social Environment and Environmental Attitudes

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Contributor: Rutenis Jancius

Social environment may the formation of citizens' attitudes toward the natural environment, namely, the environmental attitudes.

social environment

New Ecological Paradigm

education

ecological approach

Values

## 1. The Significance of the Social Environment

People create the environment from which they learn and where they receive the negative elements that shape the behavior of young people. Negative behavior is the result of immature thinking and lack of life experience. Social environmental factors can influence and be a source of learning in shaping behavior through various social learning models <sup>[1]</sup>. Social maturity is the ability to achieve an acceptable level of social behavior. Students should be exposed to socially mature people so that they can model their behavior accordingly <sup>[2]</sup>.

Attitudes and motivation are transmitted from the social environment to the child when they are growing up and are essential sources of motivation and attitude formation. The social environment comprises different levels of influence on the child: The most influential are the family and peers, the school, neighbors, the media, and the parental workplace. The child is influenced by society, culture, history, economics, and national laws <sup>[3]</sup>. Thomas <sup>[4]</sup> observed that, within the family, mothers are more concerned about the health and safety of their children, while fathers are generally more concerned about the material well-being of the family and less concerned about the environment. The family environment influences the performance of students and inspires parents to develop appropriate attitudes toward school and education, cultural baggage, and a value system <sup>[5]</sup>. The family environment plays an important role in the well-being and social development of adolescents <sup>[6]</sup>.

The classroom social environment focuses on the learning and competences of students and includes a range of effective teaching strategies that challenge and motivate students. Stewart <sup>[7]</sup> indicated that the school environment, in addition to the professional experience of teachers, influences the teaching of philosophy and attitudes toward learning, which can affect the perception of students about the social environment of the classroom. This environment enhances the motivation, well-being, and adjustment of adolescents at school by developing their academic and social competences. School is a privileged place for promoting well-being, where adolescents can be happy and healthy by making friends, developing social and emotional skills, and developing their personality <sup>[8]</sup>. Garibaldi <sup>[9]</sup> saw schools as emotional systems that develop social, emotional, and academic

skills in children and young people that help them make friends, resolve conflicts respectfully, and make ethical choices.

## **2. Ecological Approach to Nature**

The guiding principles of environmental issues are behavioral principles <sup>[10]</sup>. Teaching must be based on the knowledge and attitudes of students toward environmental protection. The diversity of traditions, religious and spiritual attitudes, and philosophies can lead to different views of nature and the environment. By understanding the relationship between human attitudes toward the environment and the factors that influence these attitudes, it is possible to find the right way of teaching to improve societal attitudes toward nature <sup>[11]</sup>.

Tarfaoui <sup>[12]</sup> noted that attitudes tend to evaluate an object favorably or unfavorably and can also define and guide action and dictate behavior. Marcinkowski <sup>[13]</sup> indicated that attitudes have cognitive, affective, and behavioral components such as dispositions that can influence behavior. Predicting a specific behavior requires a specific attitude toward that behavior. When the specificity of attitude and behavior is high, attitude is more likely to predict behavior and the relationship between the two becomes stronger. Environmental behavior is different from environmental attitudes, and attitudes alone do not guarantee environmental behavior <sup>[12]</sup>. Attitudes predict or influence behavior, which depends on many factors (beliefs, the nature and strength of emotions, etc.). Marcinkowski <sup>[13]</sup> defined environmental behavior as the attitude of an actor, as a behavior that aims to change the environment and an intention that becomes an independent cause of the behavior but may have no effect on the environment. An intention is both a personal factor, whereby a person favours or disfavours a particular behaviour, and a social factor, whereby there is perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the behaviour <sup>[14]</sup>. Leeuw <sup>[15]</sup> notes that negative behavior is the result of immature thinking and lack of life experience. Young people bear the burden of past and present environmental neglect, which is also a driver of behavior change.

Attitudes have three components: The cognitive attitude, which consists of individual beliefs or opinions; the conative attitude, which expresses the emotional aspect; and the affective attitude, which manifests itself through human behavior <sup>[16][17]</sup>. Attitudes as a combination of beliefs, emotions, and behavior toward the environment, based on knowledge and information on environmental issues, create positive attitudes toward the environment and environmental education <sup>[18]</sup>. Behaviours are beliefs that influence attitudes towards behaviour, and normative beliefs, which are the main determinants of subjective norms. Each behavioural belief links a behaviour to a particular outcome or to some other attribute, such as the costs incurred in performing the behaviour. "...Subjective value then contributes to the attitude toward the behavior in direct proportion to the strength of the belief, i.e., the subjective probability that performing the behavior will lead to the outcome under consideration" (p. 455, <sup>[14]</sup>). Lucarelli defines pro-environmental behaviour as behaviour that consciously seeks to reduce the "negative impacts of the one's actions on the on natural and the built world <sup>[19]</sup>."

Human behavior has led to environmental problems, which are moral problems that require ethics and morality to overcome. The ecocrisis that humanity is experiencing is the result of fundamental philosophical errors in thinking about ourselves, nature, and the ecosystem as a whole. Misperceptions can lead to mistreatment of nature.

Preventing a more severe crisis requires appropriate human attitudes and behavior in our relationship with nature and with other people throughout the ecosystem <sup>[20]</sup>. To reduce environmental degradation, we need to educate the public about environmental issues by providing knowledge, skills, values, environmental attitudes, and solutions to environmental problems <sup>[21]</sup>.

The beliefs, values, and attitudes of a person influence their behavior. Attitude is defined as an evaluation "...based on cognitive, emotional, and behavioral information and is a combination of cognition, feelings, and readiness to do something" (p. 145, <sup>[22]</sup>). In order to change their behavior, people must first change their attitudes <sup>[22]</sup>, which are shaped by their emotions, opinions, and behavior toward an object. Saricam <sup>[23]</sup> indicated that if a person has a positive attitude toward an object, they will tend to behave positively, i.e., the person will show concern for the object and help it. Attitudes toward the environment are also shaped by all of the positive or negative opinions a person has about the environment and their behavior toward it. A stronger emotional response from a person can lead to favorable environmental behavior. Emotional connection is important in shaping beliefs, values, and attitudes toward the environment <sup>[24]</sup>.

## **2. Influence of the Social Environment on Ecological Attitudes**

As social beings with their own personality, human beings are influenced by their environment, which is unique in its nature and in the way that it influences human behavior <sup>[25]</sup>. The cultural environment shapes the person who accepts himself or herself as a member of a particular group and affirms it through their behavior. Mahalakshmi <sup>[26]</sup> observed that there is a link between personality and the home environment in which personal values are formed. Küçük <sup>[27]</sup> noted that the behavior of people shows how they are influenced by family, environment, and education. For the students, school becomes an environment characterized by different behaviors than in a smaller family environment, as well as experiences of self-reliance, conflict, and getting along with other students and teachers <sup>[27]</sup>. For children and adolescents, school is an important part of society, where they spend a lot of time and have new opportunities to interact with their peers and adults. A positive school experience is a healthy ecological environment in which social and emotional development takes place, caring for the quality of life of the community, both individually and collectively. The social, emotional, and academic needs of all students can therefore be adequately addressed by appropriate school policies <sup>[28]</sup>.

For Lithuanian students, school is not the environment in which they can fully develop themselves, and the institution is not crucial for their behavior in nature. This shows that the ongoing reforms in Lithuania are not adequate and have a negative impact on pupils, who should feel comfortable developing themselves as individuals who are responsible not only for themselves but also for their behavior in nature.

The members of a family environment are emotionally connected, in which each family member is accepted unconditionally through love. The family function expresses the ability to protect the family by resolving conflicts, forging alliances between members, achieving discipline, etc. Zakiei <sup>[29]</sup> noted that in well-functioning families, children are free to express their opinions, to speak their minds on a range of issues, and to make suggestions

when necessary. The emotional support of the family helps a person to shape their personality. Jogdan <sup>[30]</sup> pointed out that parents are the first guides and teachers in the lives of their children, meeting their physical and emotional needs and providing social and psychological support. The presence of parents here and now increases the awareness of a child, preventing them from being subjected to peer group pressure or the influence of the outside world <sup>[30]</sup>. Parenting styles and parental attitudes have a strong influence on the psychosocial and personality development of adolescents, and the quality of relationships is a determining factor for adjustment and interpersonal communication <sup>[31]</sup>. In Lithuania, family is more important than school for students in terms of outdoor behavior. This shows that families are talking about nature, the problems caused by climate change and its consequences, and the aspect of responsibility. Students and their families are not indifferent to or unaware of environmental problems, and at the same time, they encourage appropriate personal behavior.

Ajzen <sup>[14]</sup> highlights that behaviour is controlled by a voluntary decision to do or not to do it, which depends on the availability of suitable opportunities or resources (time, money, skills, cooperation of others, etc.). Outdoor behavior is most influenced by friends, who receive information about nature from school and family. The human and ecological values of the students show that they adjust their behavior on the basis of these values, suggesting that both the family and the school are providing appropriate value arguments. Chang <sup>[32]</sup> noted that every interpersonal relationship is a unique social context, and the complex interplay of circumstances shapes the values, attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs of people. Herein confirms the similarity of the behaviors that adolescents value in friendship. The importance of the experience of friends and close peers as an indicator of life satisfaction is significant, because satisfied individuals tend to have stronger and more intimate social relationships <sup>[33]</sup>. However, peer groups are often more likely to encourage or endorse risky behavior than families, as adolescents have increasing autonomy in their choice of friends, which depends on the values passed on by parents. For children, parental values determine the rules and boundaries set for behavior and the everyday family atmosphere, which serves as a model for behavior <sup>[34]</sup>.

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