

THE ARAB SOCIETY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Rania SHALASH

Moldova State University

This article deals with the relationship between the Arab society and the environment. The relationship between the Arabs and the environment is influenced by their traditional lifestyle. Through their traditional lifestyle, Arabs perform several behaviors that aim to maintain the environment. Today, few young people are still clinging to the traditional lifestyle but there are behaviors which are related to the environment still exist even today in the modern lifestyle. But in spite of that, Arabs are not considered as people with good environmental awareness. There are many environmental problems in the Arab sector, especially in Arab villages. Many researches have shown that there is a big difference between the Arab and Jewish sectors in terms of environmental awareness, environmental attitudes and a willingness to act for the environment. Schools and teachers, who are exposed to environmental issues in the Arab sector, are very few.

Keywords: *The Arab Society, Environment, Environmental Aspects, Environmental Education.*

SOCIETATEA ARABĂ ȘI MEDIUL ÎNCONJURĂTOR

În articol este abordată relația dintre societatea arabă și mediul înconjurător. Atitudinea arabilor față de mediul înconjurător este influențată de stilul lor de viață tradițional, prin care realizează mai multe activități ce au ca scop de a proteja mediul înconjurător. Astăzi, puțini tineri au un stil de viață tradițional, în stilul lor de viață modern existând tot mai multe comportamente legate de mediu. Totuși, arabii nu sunt considerați că conștientizează adecvat importanța problemelor de mediu. În sectorul arab din Israel, în special în satele arabe există multe probleme de mediu. Numeroase studii au arătat că există o mare diferență între sectoarele arabe și cele evreiești în ceea ce privește conștientizarea problemelor de mediu, atitudinea față de mediu și dorința de a acționa pentru mediul înconjurător. În sectorul arab foarte puține școli reacționează la problemele de mediu.

Cuvine-cheie: *societatea arabă, mediu, aspecte legate de mediu, educație pentru mediu.*

The Arab society has been living in Israel for many generations. In the Arab society there are diverse populations (farmers, Bedouins and urban) that their relation to their environment is affected from their traditional lifestyle. Environmental aspects, in the traditional lifestyle, include, farming clean from chemicals, rainfed agriculture and water saving agriculture, consumption of homemade or local products, using local medical herbs and spices, exploring the surrounding environment in an intimate way, connection and belonging to the place, family olive harvest, reusing products and more. Today, few are the young who grow in a traditional lifestyle, but some of these aspects are preserved and integrated into the modern lifestyle. Tarabaih [9], lists the environmental issues that Moslem sources deal with, extensively: the importance of water and conservation of water resources; The importance of air and conservation of air resources; Conservation of the various natural resources and pollution prevention; Conservation of flora and fauna and biodiversity; Importance of maintaining environmental balance; Conservation of nature and environment regarding all the biotic and abiotic components; Wise use of resources to human needs for material and spiritual targets, while maintaining the delicate balance between the various components in land and sea and preventing the formation of nuisances that can harm the human.

Environmental aspects can be found also in the other religions and traditions among Arabic speakers in Israel. The moral and practical basis of sustainability exists in their traditional religion and lifestyle. This is an important tool in promoting sustainability education in the Arab sector. In spite of the environmental aspects in religion and tradition, the Arab public is perceived as a public that has low environmental awareness both in his own eyes and in the eyes of the general public. This stems from neglecting infrastructure (mainly sewage and garbage collection) in the Arab communities and neighborhoods. A neglect that is not related specifically to citizens but is the responsibility of local authorities and the state. Until today, no study was done to examine the level of cleanliness (e.g. trash dumping) in the different sectors in Israel. The problem in villages is infrastructures: no infrastructures, no transfer stations, no solutions for construction waste and solid waste, entire communities are not yet connected to the sewage system, therefore students can learn and learn and at the end they want a solution but they don't know what the solution is and Where else they can throw the garbage. If there were infrastructures like in the Jewish sector, the situation will improve a lot. Another problem is that the educational system must write educational programs in Arabic language that suit the situation in the Arab society and not to translate because the situations are different and if translating then there must be intrinsic adjustments.

Among the Arab society, the relation to environment, in the Israeli context, is complicated. For several people, development of the environment by and for the needs of the Jewish people (for example establishing new Jewish settlements, developing the forests of JNF (Jewish National Fund), the green patrol) creates antagonism and politicization of the environment. For others, the environment is perceived as a global and apolitical topic, which is worthwhile to act in it for the Arab public welfare in particular, and for the Israeli citizens in general. The environment domain creates also equivalent employment opportunities which are required among young Arabs. Researches around the world show that differences in religious belief and ethnic background are related to differences in environmental attitudes, but not necessarily to lesser extent of environmental attitudes. For example, it has been found that traditionalism is related to ethnocentric environmental values and not biocentric (according to these values man is more important than other creatures) but not necessarily lesser extent of environmental values [7]. In another research, it was found that environmental values are revealed in different groups in the population regarding different environmental topics [10].

According to Negev and colleagues [6], most schools in the Arab sector are not exposed or are exposed very little to the environment. The exceptions are the schools in which a director or teacher promote this interest, often in conjunction with an external factor. About 2,000 twelfth grade students are tested each year within "Bagrut" tests (5 units), in "Environmental Sciences". These students who are exposed to environmental issues are a minority out of all students.

However, in comparison between the Jewish and the Arab sector in the environmental aspect of school children, students and teachers, no conclusive findings were found. According to Metany's study [4], who examined the characteristics of the environmental attitudes of teachers from the Arab sector in Israel, perceptions regarding the role of the environmental education in their eyes and the links between their environmental attitudes and their role perception, Metany [4] concluded that teachers among Israeli Arabs hold environmental attitudes that match the approach that advocates the preservation of the environment and the promotion of ecological values, and these attitudes make them suitable to serve as agents of change in promoting appropriate ecological attitudes, but the perception of their role as active designers of environmental attitudes and behaviors among their students is inadequate. Most of them see their educational role as information transmitters about issues relating to prevailing environmental perceptions.

Goldman, Yavetz and Peer [1] have shown in their study that dealt with the environmental literacy of educators that there are significant differences between Jews and non-Jews in most behavioral categories examined. Jewish students were more active than non-Jewish students in the behavioral categories reflecting low environmental commitment as wise environmental consumption and collection for recycling. Non-Jewish students reported a distinct high level of activity in categories that reflect high environmental commitment such as environmental activism and activities for the public without personal financial gain.

Nasser, Nasser and Monsonogo [5] noted in their study that dealt with attitudes and willingness to act for the environment, that in comparison between educators and students (Arabs and Jews), it has been found that the positive attitudes of the participants regarding environmental issues reflect the importance they attach to the subject of the environment and the feelings of sympathy for protecting the environment. Positive attitudes as it turns out from the correlations examination are related to the high level of awareness related to environmental problems and to the level of factual knowledge on environmental issues. Educators reported positive attitudes in relation to students, and Arabs reported more positive attitudes in relation to the parallel group from the Jewish sector.

In addition, in a study of 3121 students in grades six and twelve in 77 schools in the school system by a staff of researchers from Ben Gurion [8], they examined and assessed the different dimensions of the environmental literacy (knowledge, attitudes and behavior), the connection between them and their connection to demographic data and to the direct experiences in nature. This study compared between three demographic groups: the state sector, the state religious sector and the Arab sector, and it was found that in the knowledge dimension, the Arab sector was much lower comparing to the two other sectors in grades six and twelve alike. However, in the attitudes dimension, although the Arab sector was indeed lower than the two other sectors, but the gap was more moderate, while in twelfth grade, the opposite trend was found, the Arab sector had the highest environmental attitudes. In the behavioral dimension there no significant difference between the three sectors was found.

These researches corroborate the claim of the multicultural approach, that according to it, there is no such group in the population which has environmental attitudes and that other groups must be aligned according to their attitudes. But each group has values, cultures and lifestyles that include important environmental aspects, whether they are identified as so or not. Also, each group in the population can and should learn from the other groups in the moral aspect and the practical aspect [2], [3].

In this context it is important to indicate that the environment is perceived as a possible bridge in mixed educational programs for Arabs and Jews. There are several bodies that work in this field, and these programs are a field for mutual learning. Mutual learning about environmental aspects in different cultures in Israel can also be integrated in the educational system. Events about education for sustainability, such as conferences, advanced studies, competitions and other events, can be a place for meeting and mutual fertilization for Arabs and Jews.

A problem that has risen in many contexts in several researches is the language gap. Most of those who work in education for sustainability are Jewish (non-Arabic speakers), and most of the existing teaching materials are in Hebrew. This also exists in the governmental offices, non-governmental organizations and other bodies. This makes it very difficult to contact and work with Arab students, mainly in elementary and intermediate schools.

Another cultural difference is the support of parents and Authorities. Fundraising is not acceptable in the Arab sector, therefore it is important to think about other ways of giving for cultural target. Giving, in the sense of recruitment to a project, such as recruitment of parents or mothers for a period of time. Time is also a resource that can be translated into money.

Therefore, if in general in Israel, there is room for improvement regarding the level of awareness, and environmental actions after all, the problem in the Arab sector is much more tangible, and lack of awareness is expressed in serious environmental problems.

Summary

The Arab sector is considered to be neglected with regard to the environmental matters and the relationship between Arabs and environment is not inadequate as mentioned above. This is not because they being Arabs, but because of the lack of proper interest by the authorities and because the subject of the environment is not a priority for the Arab officials in the local authorities. Every society has its own customs, traditions and beliefs. Lifestyle in the ancient and modern Arab community indicates the presence of behaviors and attitudes that aim to preserve the environment, but most of the schools in the Arab sector are not exposed to environmental issues adequately and Arab teachers do not see or consider themselves as designers of the environmental behaviors and attitudes of students. This problem is serious and it must be resolved suspiciously fast. On the other hand, some of the environmental programs that are currently operating in the field, bring together Jews and Arabs, and this helps improving the relations between them.

Bibliography:

1. GOLDMAN, D., YAVETZ, B. & PE'RE, S. *Environmental Literacy of Educators: A comparison between students at the beginning of school and prior to graduation*. Research Report prepared with the assistance MOFET Institute (in Hebrew), 2008.
2. KYMLICKA, W. *The Rights of Minority Cultures*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, p.387
3. KYMLICKA, W. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 1998, vol.1, Issue 2, p.143-157.
4. METHANY, R. *Environmental attitudes of Arab teachers in elementary and secondary schools*. M. Ed thesis in environmental education, led by Dr. Bela Yavetz, College of "Seminar Hakebutssim" (in Hebrew), 2010.
5. NASSER, F., NASSER, A. & MONSONEGO, A. *Awareness, attitudes and willingness to work for the environment: a comparison between student teachers and pupils Jews and Arabs*. Research Report no.2 Research and Evaluation Unit, Beit Berl College (in Hebrew), 2002.
6. NEGEV, M., SAGY, G., GARB, Y., SALZBERG, A., & TAL, A., (2008). Evaluating the environmental literacy of Israeli elementary and high school students. In: *The Journal of Environmental Education*, 2008, 39(2), p.3-20. Ne-man institute. Nozick, M., (1995). *Between Us: Rebuilding our communities*. Montreal: Écosociété.
7. SCHULTZ, P.W. & ZELEZNY, L.C. Values as Predictors of Environmental Attitudes: Evidence for Consistency Across 14 Countries. In: *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 1999, vol.19, no3, p.255-265.
8. TAL, A., GARB, J., NEGEV, M. SAGAY, G. & VESELBERG, E. *Environmental literacy in the education system in Israel*. Ben Gurion University of the Negev (In Hebrew), 2007.
9. TARABEH, H.A. *Management and settlement of environmental conflicts in clefted societies towards creating culturally adapted model: analysis of conflicts cases in Galilee*, Ph.D. thesis, led by Deborah Shmueli and Rassem Khamaisi, University of Haifa, 2008.
10. WHITTAKER, M., SEGURA, G.M. & BOELER, G. *Racial/Ethnic Group Attitudes Toward Environmental Protection in California: Is Environmentalism Still a White Phenomenon*, *Political Research Quarterly*, 2005, vol.58, no3, p.435-447.

Prezentat la 15.09.2014