Are Greek High School Students Environmental Citizens?
A Cluster Analysis Approach

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ABSTRACT

Environmental citizenship is specifically concerned with understanding the nature of global issues and taking an active role in addressing them. The aim of the present paper is the identification of the characteristics that constitute the environmental citizen among high school students in Greece. Literature review revealed the characteristics that an environmental citizen should possess. Thus, a research was conducted via a closed-type questionnaire in order to identify those characteristics in the students' responses. The results suggest that the knowledge of the students on certain environmental issues is sufficient. Also, the major motive for participation in environmental activities is the high level of awareness of the students about the global environment. Finally, a classification of high school students in five clusters, describing the relevance of their responses to the environmental citizenship characteristics, is presented.

Keywords: Cluster Analysis, Education, Environmental Citizen, Greece, Secondary Schools

INTRODUCTION

In today's complex world, issues of the global environmental movement, coupled with the growing public awareness of ecological problems, do not seem to have worked out as expected. Despite the increasing attention given to the idea of environmental citizenship, there is still an unresolved problem, i.e. how to move from theory to practice. What causes the discrepancy is that although every citizen is expected to act in an environmentally responsible manner, this does imply that, at the same time, his actions will also be enhancing his personal interests. Or in other words, as Dobson (2007) states, environmental citizenship involves the recognition that self-interest behaviour will not always protect or sustain public goods such as the environment.

Rethinking new models of citizenship should begin from this fact. For everyone, there

are a number of different, but interrelated modes of life: being, doing, and thinking; together they constitute what we wish to convey in talking of the private sphere. It is also about rights, responsibilities, duties and entitlement which make citizens capable of applying their discipline in local, national and international contexts. It's about checking self-interest against the common good in systematic ways. The private sphere for each individual seems to be particularly important since environmental protection is the main locus of a promising life in a modern society (Barry, 2006). Citizen participation and activity for the common good is actively encouraged to find fulfilment in many ways. Individual decisions to act in the environment are influenced by the surrounding community. Personal reasons for acting merge with the activities of others to produce a cultural or community response, dictating patterns of use and consumption (Schmitz, Stinson, & James, 2010). These practices and literary choices can enhance and conceptualize dimensions of citizenship education. They also enhance commitment to a cause or principles using informed, purposeful, and active citizenship learning expectations. Accepting personal responsibility and acting accordingly, individuals' actions aim to changing behaviour towards more sustainable lifestyles motivated by an ethical position (Meerah, Halim, & Nadeson, 2010).

The model of ecological citizenship is based on the assumption that environmental citizens make a commitment to common good (Dobson, 2007). It requires a deep shift in attitudes that ultimately results into new "green" virtues.

Similarly, Aristotelian notions about citizenship and ethics are one. "Ethics is from the standpoint of the individual. Citizenship is from the standpoint of the group. The moral character of an ethical person is the same set of characteristics or virtues needed to be a good citizen". Citizens are, therefore, regarded as the main actors for social and environmental change (Melo-Escrihuela, 2008). To be regarded as an environmental citizen, an individual must make connections and develop a more critical view on the political, economic, and cultural

dimensions of the environmental problems. The duty of the environmental citizen is to live sustainably so that others may live well (Dobson, 2007) because quite often, those affected by some of our actions will be too far away, too invisible, or even actively muted to voice their bargaining position (Luque, 2005).

As MacGregor (2006a; 2006b) argues, in such articulations of ecological citizenship, selfish and irresponsible citizens are understood to be at the root of environmental problems. Latta (2007) has called this "ecological citizenship as self-restraint", where sustainability is perceived as emerging through an "inner revolution." Luque (2005), also, declares "environmental citizenship precisely encompasses the capacity of people around the world to inhabit a shared imagined community where global issues, to which there is always an environmental dimension, are, first of all, visible in their interconnectedness, and, secondly, in part as a consequence of this experience of sharedness, amenable to common regulation" (pp. 212-213). Consequently, environmental citizenship is linked to the potential of individuals to look deeper than surface facts to the cultural, political, and social issues that affect the environment and mediate their capacity to use this information (Schmitz et al., 2010).

Ecological citizens will not emerge spontaneously; they have to be created (Melo-Escrihuela, 2008). A curriculum for sustainability in a civil society would locate environmental citizenship among its primary objectives (Ajiboye & Silo, 2008). So the question arising now is "How do we train environmental citizens?" Alabaster & Hawthorne (1999) conceptualised environmental citizenship as the culmination of the environmental education process, the first stage of which is the acquisition of information via knowledge sources. Luque (2005) declares that knowledge is both a mediator and an inhibitor of environmental citizenship. Similarly, Kenis & Mathijs (2012) found that a further rising of citizens' knowledge is not required, at least for those who are environmentally aware. What seems to be needed, is the comprehension of the root causes of the environmental

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