

THEORETICAL SUBSTANTIATION OF YOUTH EDUCATION IN THE FIELD OF NATIONAL DEFENCE BASED ON ECOLOGICAL APPROACH

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Abstract

The ability of the society of the future to develop itself, to ensure the sovereignty of its country, to strengthen the economy, to raise the level of prosperity, to preserve and enrich its culture is being shaped and developed in today's schools and universities as the future generations study / and learn there. Therefore, innovations in the content of general secondary education are needed in Latvia by introducing a new subject National Defence Studies in schools. Model programs for general secondary education and the Youth Guard have been developed. The theoretical basis of the performed research is formed by scientific publications that represent several research directions in human ecology, incl. educational ecology. The aim of the study was to substantiate the diversity of ecological approaches in the education of young people in the field of national defence. The results of the research show that an ecological approach is visible in the development of the national defence content and the provision. One of the manifestations of the ecological approach in education is 'environmental education' (education about the environment; education in the environment; education for the environment). Studies show that the content of national defence training has several dimensions: civil, military, informative and psychological, which many authors also call environmental contexts. Latvia's youth for national defense is being formed, which consists of two inseparable or closely related structural parts: 1) psychological readiness (I want) and 2) competence-based readiness (I am able).

Key words: ecological approach, national defence training, national sustainable development, youth education environment.

Introduction

The current geopolitical situation in the world, and especially in Europe, highlights the sustainability of each society and country in the present dimension and sustainable development in the future. The ability of the society of the future to develop itself, to provide for the sovereignty of its country, to strengthen its economy, to raise its level of prosperity, to preserve and enrich its culture, without prejudice to the interests and needs of other peoples and countries for self-determination, is shaped and developed in today's schools and universities as the next generations are learning and studying there. They will be managing the country in the future, taking care of sustainable development of the society, the economy of their country, its security and defence, being at the heart of our country's future society.

Therefore, innovations in the content of general secondary education in Latvia are needed by introducing a new subject of 'National Defence Training' in schools. At present, everything is being done to implement 'National Defence Training' as a compulsory subject in secondary education institutions from the 2024/2025 school year (Valdība apstiprina ziņojumu ..., 2021).

A legal basis has been developed for the introduction of the new subject, as evidenced by several normative documents (Par Nacionālās identitātes ..., 2018; Par Valsts aizsardzības koncepcijas ..., 2020; Par valsts aizsardzības mācības ieviešanu ..., 2018; Valsts aizsardzības mācības ..., 2020; Valsts aizsardzības koncepcija, 2020). One of these documents is the 'National Defence Concept', which was developed

and approved in 2020. The 'National Defence Concept' is a policy planning document that defines the strategic goals and basic principles of national defence. Comprehensive protection is both one of the goals of the concept and the best tool for building a sustainable society. In the overall context of defence, both formal and non-formal education for young people in the field of national defence is important.

Sample curricula have already been developed for both formal general secondary education in schools and non-formal education of the 'Youth Guard' (Bērziņa *et al.*, 2020; Kukuļinskis, 2021).

In global forums as well as in scientific publications since the end of the 20th century, the ecological paradigm has been substantiated as a transdisciplinary paradigm, but the ecological approach in human thinking, in promoting the development of children and youth, in all kinds of activities (including education) has been substantiated as an imperative (Bronfenbrenner, 1996; Bruntland, 1987; Naess, 1973), which has become more and more relevant in the 21st century (Bonnedahl, Heikkueinen, & Paavola, 2022; Katane, 2007; Messerli & Murniningtyas, 2019; Palmer & Neal, 2004). Therefore, the aim of the research was: to substantiate the diversity of ecological approach manifestations in the education of young people in the field of national defence.

Materials and Methods

The aim of the theoretical research also led to the research question: What are the manifestations of the ecological approach in the education of young people in the field of national defence?

The theoretical basis of the performed research is formed by scientific publications that represent several research directions in human ecology, incl. educational ecology: 1) sustainability and sustainable development; 2) education for sustainable development; 3) basic principles and guidelines of environmental education; 4) ecologically multidimensional approach in developing and substantiating classifications of environmental dimensions/contexts; 5) ecological systemic approach in developing and substantiating multi-level environmental system models; 6) principles of human-environment interaction in *human development ecology* and *ecosophy (deep ecology)*, incl. the principle of ego – and eco – balance.

Research methods: 1) study, analysis, and evaluation of scientific literature (method of theoretical research); 2) reflection of the authors' experience (empirical research method).

Results and Discussion

Substantiation of the country's sustainable development from the point of view of human ecology

Sustainability and sustainable development are among the key concepts of human ecology, including educational ecology (Katane, 2007).

The origins of the concept of sustainable development and the concept itself can be traced back to the end of the 20th century, with the formulation of the ecological paradigm and ecological approach as an imperative for human thinking and responsible action. Initially, the ideas of sustainable development came about in an effort to change the way humanity thinks about our planet and resulted in the publication of a book in 1987, 'Our Common Future' (Bruntland, 1987). Definitions of sustainable development emerged, revealing the diversity of interpretations of sustainable development. The most popular of these are (Hajlan & Kashani, 2021): 1) balanced development of society, economy and natural environment; 2) the preservation and increase of the various resources at our disposal, especially natural resources, so that modern generations do not live at the expense of future generations for the sake of their well-being, but, on the contrary, pass on their material and spiritual values to future generations. Among the greatest values of the nation is independence and one's own country, for which the defenders of our homeland have given their lives. Thus, one of the basic ideas of the concept of sustainable development is also applicable to the sustainable development of our country, so that future generations can be born, grow, develop and live in their own country.

Key findings on national sustainable development can be found in the UNESCO Education for Sustainable Development (Education for Sustainable Development, 2012): 1) all activities at the international

level should be in line with the interests and needs of each country; 2) any kind of war is destructive in nature and therefore runs counter to sustainable development and actions aimed at sustainability; while peace, development, and environmental protection are interrelated and inseparable concepts.

Thus, today the concept of sustainable development is constantly evolving and expanding, as a result of which the concepts of sustainability and sustainable development are obtaining new interpretation and new challenges (Messerli & Murniningtyas, 2019; Sustainable Development in ..., 2021).

New dimensions of the concept of sustainable development are emerging that are directly related to the protection of the country/countries and its/their sustainable development. Here are some examples of the new dimensions of sustainable development:

- sustainable development on our Earth and the sustainability of space (Prasad, 2019);
- responsible action as a guarantor of sustainability (Bonnedahl, Heikkueinen, & Paavola, 2022);
- sustainable development of information environment and cyber security, cyber protection (Galinec, Možnik, & Guberina, 2017) etc.

One of the cornerstones of sustainable development is ecosophy, or deep ecology, in which life and its protection are the core values of an ecologically minded, responsible society (Katane, 2007). It is important to note that among the key findings of ecosophy are insights that are especially relevant today (Naess, 1973; Sessions, 1995): 1) every life has a value in itself; 2) human thinking needs to change, because ecological, technological, and war crises are caused by a crisis in people's thinking; 3) therefore, political and technological structures must change, and the thinking of politicians, of each person, must change.

Ecological approach in the substantiation of the Latvian national defence education content and learning environment

Education plays a very important role in the process of developing world beliefs, values and attitudes, and competencies of new generations. Today, the concept of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is becoming more and more important, which is gaining further development, where teachers' thinking, attitudes and competencies in the field of sustainable development also play an important role, as evidenced by several publications (Education for Sustainable Development, 2012; Sinakou, Boeve-de Pauw, & Van Petegem, 2019).

In order to develop new thinking, value-based attitudes and actions, it is very important to respect the ecological approach in the design of school

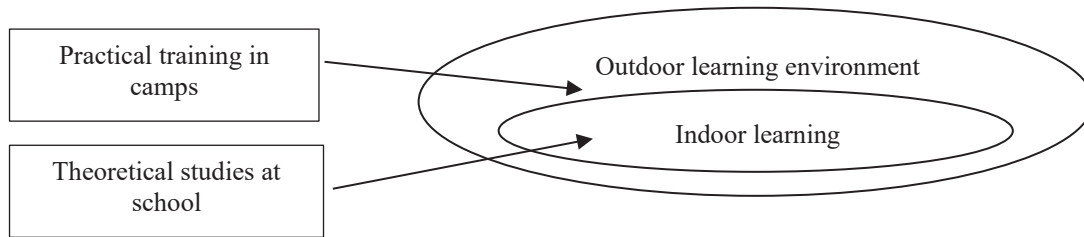


Figure 1. National defence learning environment (created by the authors).

youth curricula and in the maintenance and further development of the educational environment. This also applies to the subject National Defence Training, which represents the formal education of schoolchildren, as well as the content of the Youth Guard training, which is non-formal in nature.

One of the manifestations of the ecological approach in education is environmental education (Sterling, 1992), which is the didactic basis for education for sustainable development.

There are three basic principles of environmental education, which are also called guidelines (Katane, 2007): education about the environment; education in the environment; education for the environment.

All three basic principles of environmental education are also integrated into the *National Defence Training* of schoolchildren (Bērziņa *et al.*, 2020) and the content of the *Youth Guard* training (Kukuļinskis, 2021).

Education about the environment

In order to promote the readiness of school youth for national defence, the history of Latvia occupies an important place in the content of the National

Defence Training. The content of National Defence Training also concerns the study of the surroundings, the specific territory in both theoretical and practical studies and its reflection in topographic maps (military topography and orientation) (Bērziņa *et al.*, 2020; Kukuļinskis, 2021). The psychological resilience and ICT competence of young people is also important, especially in the context of hybrid warfare in the information environment/space, so young people need to be well informed about the processes in the global and national information and technology environment/space (Mattis & Hoffman, 2005).

Education in the environment

The acquisition of the content of the National Defence Training for School Youth (secondary school students) and also the 3-level curricula of the Youth Guard is planned in both indoor lessons (theoretical studies) and outdoor lessons (practical training), thus the indoor and outdoor education environment can be updated (Figure 1).

There is also a theoretical basis for the division of the indoor education/learning environment and outdoor education/learning environment (Figure 2),

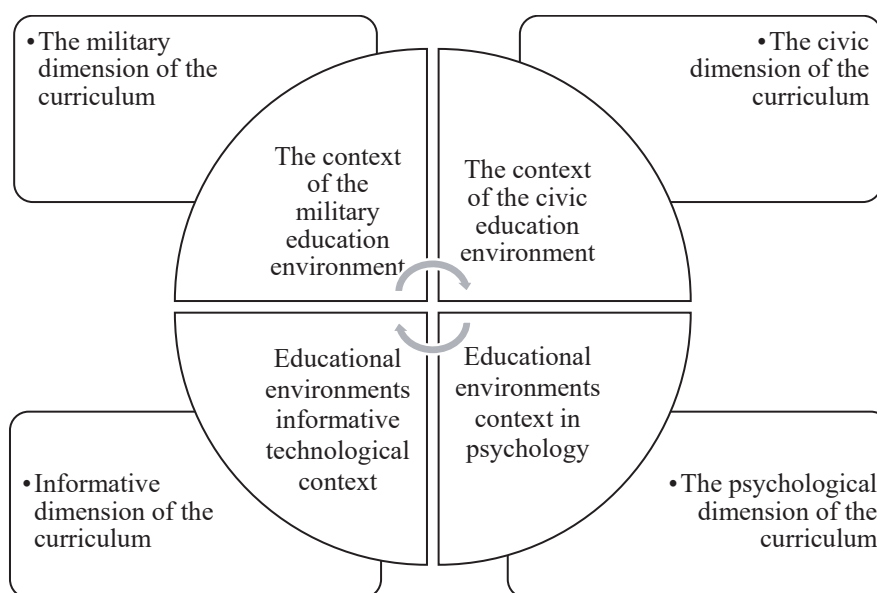


Figure 2. Environmental dimensions of national defence education (created by the authors).

which can be found in several publications (Barnes & Sharp, 2004; Margeviča-Grinberga & Šūmane, 2020).

Based on the ecological approach, the learning environment has several explanations, incl. the learning environment is (Katane, 2007): 1) a learning process as an interaction system, where learning subjects interact: teacher and learner/learners, as well as object: learning content; 2) a field of semantics, thus it can be concluded that the specifics of the national defence learning environment are largely determined by the content of learning in the field of national defence.

Studies show (Berzina, 2020; Kreija-Gaikste & Katane, 2021) that the content of National Defence Training has several dimensions: civil, military, informative and psychological.

In turn, in human ecology, incl. the ecology of education, based on an ecologically multidimensional approach, several environmental dimensions are distinguished, which many authors also call environmental components and also environmental contexts (Hiemstra, 1991; Īriste, 2018; Katane, 2007; Katane & Katans, 2014).

Based on the above, the authors have singled out four dimensions or contexts of the school youth's national defence education environment (Figure 2): 1) the environmental dimension of military education; 2) the environmental dimension of civic education; 3) the informative technological dimension of the educational environment; 4) the psychological environment of the educational environment.

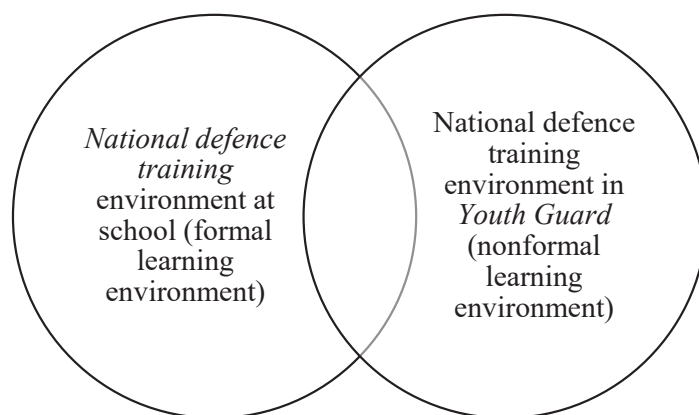
In Latvia, based on the justification of lifelong learning (Katane & Kalniņa, 2010), when formal education is supplemented with non-formal education and the diversity of the education offered allows creation and development of a very wide range of

competencies, national defence education will soon be offered in all Latvian schools as formal education within the compulsory subject National Defence Training and also as non-formal education (Youth Guard Training).

It also identifies overlapping types of national defence environmental segments (Figure 3): 1) National defence learning environment at school (formal learning environment); 2) National defence learning environment in Youth Guard (non-formal learning environment), which together form the school youth education environment in the field of national defence, because: 1) many high school students are also youth guards; 2) in many schools, Youth Guard training is offered as non-formal or interest education, and in general it forms the educational environment for young people in the field of national defence.

Education for the environment

The main finding arising from the goal of ecological upbringing is the promotion of the new generation's environmentally friendly attitudes and responsible actions, understanding the term 'environment' as the diverse environment of human life, incl. social environment, cultural environment, natural environment, economic environment, information environment and other types of environmental dimensions. Therefore, it is still relevant in the educational sciences that the content of education is an important pedagogical means of educating the new generation and that the result of education is a system of attitudes based on values (Špona, 2004). Responsible attitude towards the state and its security is a precondition for Latvia's existence as a state (Nacionālās drošības koncepcija, 2019), as well as an important task for the new generation of national defence education.



Youth environment of formal and nonformal national defence training

Figure 3. Youth education environment in the field of national defence (created by the authors).

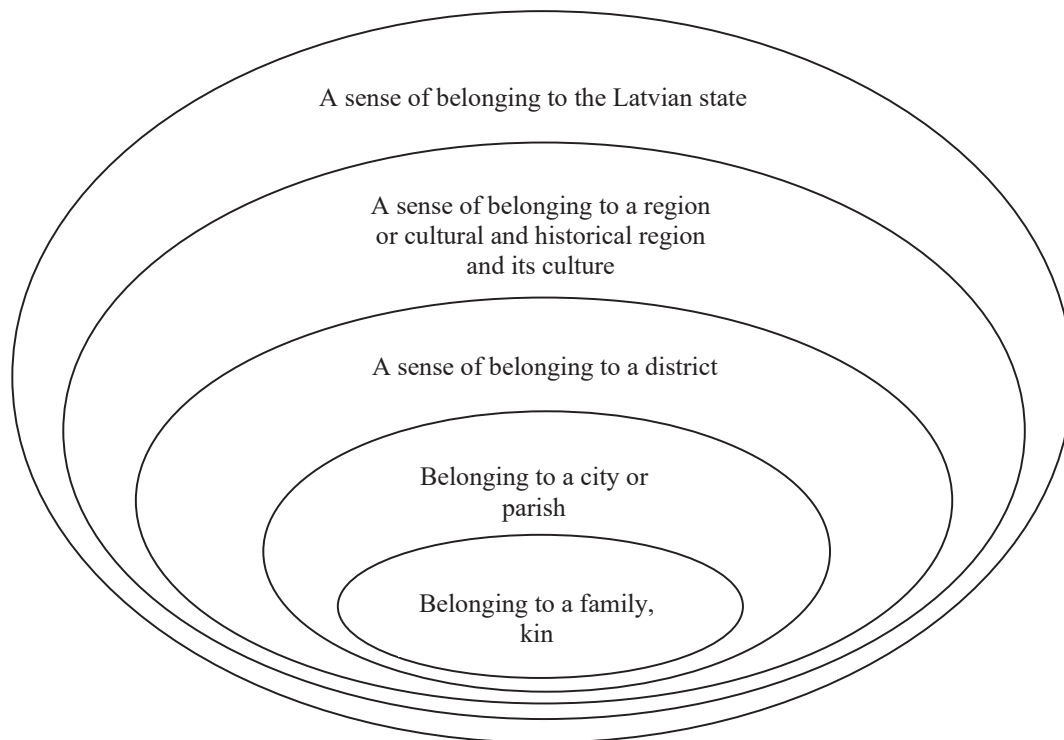


Figure 4. Model of a person's belonging to their multilevel living environment (Created by the authors).

The concept of comprehensive national defence (Par Valsts aizsardzības ..., 2020) points to the great importance of the desire and ability of the whole society and each of its individuals, incl. young people, to protect their country, as the guarantor of national sustainability is national security.

A large part of the content of national defence curricula for young people (secondary school students, some of whom are also youth guards) has a patriotic upbringing function. Responsibility for the security and sustainability of one's country is not the only goal of patriotic upbringing. Equally important is the patriotism of young people, which is largely based on their love for their Fatherland (homeland) and a sense of belonging to their family and kin, their city or parish, administrative district, region or cultural-historical region: Kurzeme, Zemgale, Sēlija, Vidzeme and Latgale and its culture, Latvia as a whole (Figure 4). Young people's belonging to at least one of these levels of the environment is very important in the process of forming a national identity. The Cabinet of Ministers Order No. 345 issued in 2019 also reports on the policy of national identity, civil society and integration in Latvia (Par Nacionālās identitātes ..., 2018).

The authors' created 'Model of a person's belonging to their multilevel living environment' (Figure 4) is based on an ecological systemic approach in human developmental ecology, which makes it possible to show the environment as a supersystem

(ecosystem) with several environmental subsystems (environmental levels). The ecological systemic approach has been used by several authors to justify the human living environment and/or the educational environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1996; Huitt, 2012; Katane, 2007).

Thus, it can be concluded that the goal of patriotic upbringing in the framework of National Defence Training is the formation of young people's attitudes and perseverance towards their country, where the focus is on patriotism, the integral components of which are responsibility for national security and sustainability, love for one's homeland, and a sense of belonging, starting with one's family and kin, the place where the young person lives (city or rural parish) and belonging to the entire state of Latvia.

Based on scientific publications (Bronfenbrenner, 1996; Reņģe, 2002; Špona, 2004), it can be concluded that attitudes can be considered as personal connections with the surrounding world, it is a whole system of attitudes that develops during life in relation to various objects and subjects that are formed in the process of interaction with the human environment. Although the structure of attitudes has several components: emotions, knowledge, habits, research shows that initially the main component of attitudes is emotional experiences, which also determine liking or disliking, loving or not loving, respecting or not respecting, feeling belonging or feeling excluded etc., and which become the main

indicators for evaluating events, relationships and values. Any narrative, whether it is about the history of the country, or about the experiences of family members during their lives, in the context of the historical events of our country, is emotionally experienced, perceived and interiorized in the form of reflections of the external environment, in the internal environment or in the human psyche, where notions, imaginative images of what is heard and learned are formed. Events find their reflection not only in the form of new ideas and knowledge, but also emotions, values, attitudes, personally experiencing everything and ‘living’ in the imagination. As a result, these narratives become personally relevant to young people. Also, attitudes are either positive or negative or ambivalent (contradictory: both), but attitudes can’t be neutral, because in that case there is no such attitude at all, which is possible if there is no necessary information, knowledge, if something is not assessed cognitively or emotionally, simply – a person has no experience and opinion on a particular issue. Therefore, in order for young people to have as a diverse experience as possible in the field of national security and defence, to develop attitudes based on emotional experiences and values, not only the content of the study, the diversity of the learning process and the student-centred approach, but also the pedagogue’s own attitudes in the learning process, examples of his experience in the form of narratives, his methodological competence, and creativity in organizing various types of activities in the field of national defence are very important.

Thanks to the acquired knowledge, skills and competencies, as well as attitudes and motivation to participate in the comprehensive national defence system, the readiness of young people for national defence is being formed. As a result of theoretical research (Baltušīte, 2012), the authors concluded that the readiness of young people for national defence consists of two integral or closely related structural parts: 1) psychological readiness (I want) and 2) competence-based readiness (I able).

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Conclusions

1. Since the end of the 20th century, the concept of sustainable development has further developed, expanded, and the basic ideas are reflected in the concepts of sustainable development of society, economy, culture, and others in the form of transfers. Based on one of the interpretations of the concept of sustainable development, it can be concluded that it is necessary to ensure and promote the sustainable development of our country so that future generations can be born, grow up, develop and live in their sovereign and secure country.
2. There is the diversity of ecological approach manifestations in the education of young people in the field of national defence. The content of national defence education and the learning process itself is and will continue to be based on the three basic principles of environmental education: education about the environment; education in the environment; education for the environment.
3. The basic principle of education in the environment allows to explain the national defence educational environment from various aspects and manifestations of the ecological approach: 1) the ecological systemic approach makes it possible to distinguish between the internal and external environment of national defence education and substantiate belonging to the multilevel human living environment; 2) the ecologically multidimensional approach makes it possible to distinguish several contexts of the national defence education environment, the specifics of which are determined by various dimensions of national defence education content.
4. Thanks to the acquired knowledge, skills and competencies, as well as attitudes and motivation to participate in the comprehensive national defence system, the readiness of Latvian youth for national defence is formed, which consists of two integral or closely interrelated structural parts: 1) psychological readiness (I want) and 2) competence-based readiness (I able).

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