

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: DISCOURSE ON ENVIRONMENTAL VALUES IN LATVIA

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Abstract

The paper deals with the dynamics of the discourse on environmental values in Latvia basing upon traditional emotional attitudes towards nature in the Latvian culture, changes in environmental values in comparison with the dynamics of other values of the Latvian public, and the role of the discourse on environmental issues in the formation of civil society in Latvia. The dynamics of the public attitudes towards ecological problems and the discourse on environmental values is presented on the basis of the historical information, as well as the data of the World Values Survey and the research performed by the Latvian Public Opinion Research Centre SKDS. The factual material mostly covers the period of the last twenty years.

First of all the paper reflects traditional attitudes of the Latvians towards nature and environmental values, which go deep into the Latvian culture. These traditions are widely represented in the Latvian folklore, and the paper provides a brief overview thereof. Further, the paper offers the comparison of environmental and other values in the opinion of the Latvian public on the basis of the abovementioned studies. Finally, the paper provides the analyses of the role of environmental values in the formation of civil society in the Latvian context, where environmental values are viewed as a mobilising factor for social and political activities of the public.

The article is aimed at the provision of an overview of historical information and research materials on the dynamics of environmental discourse in Latvia.

The analysis of historical and literary sources and research materials related to the subject matter of the paper, and the comparative analysis of quantitative data of surveys have been used as the methods of this paper.

Topicality of the paper resides in the fact that modern society faces various conscious and unconscious risks, and in this context the activities aimed at the provision of long-term sustainable development are of great importance, which is impossible without the formation of environmental discourse. Therefore, it is essential to provide an in-depth analysis of changes taking place in the environmental values and opinions of general public towards ecological issues in order to enable proper response to these transformations on the part of decision-makers, as the society should be educated and informed properly to enhance the development of its ecological consciousness.

Keywords: environmental values, sustainable development, environmental awareness, history.

Introduction

Ancient history of Latvia has underwent a complicated and sometimes even dramatic development. However, Latvians, who today represent one of the two „living” Balt nations, have managed to preserve their traditional environmental values which go deeply into the history of the nation and represent an integral part of the traditional Latvian culture. In the recent times the role of environmental values become essential in the formation of the civil society in Latvia.

The article investigates the development of the discourse on environmental values in Latvia on the basis of a research of traditional attitudes towards nature and the environment in the Latvian culture, dynamics of the opinion of the public towards environmental problems and the place of environmental protection in the development of the country, and the role of the discourse on environmental issues in the formation of civil society in Latvia in the context of risk society and provision of sustainable development.

The object of the article is to provide an overview of historical development of environmental values in Latvia, to provide theoretical basis of the concepts of risk society and

sustainable development and an insight in the application of these concepts in Latvia, as well as to analyse the results of the recent studies conducted in relation to environmental issues in Latvia over the period between 2006 and 2011.

Research methods used in the article include the analysis of literary sources, including theoretical literature and research materials related to the subject of the paper, as well as a comparative analysis of data acquired in the course of public opinion surveys .

The subject of the article is topical, as modern risk society today has to find solutions for numerous risks, which requires joint activities of the society at all levels, which, in its turn, appears to be impossible without the formation of environmental discourse. Therefore, it is essential to provide an in-depth analysis of changes taking place in the environmental values and opinions of general public towards ecological issues in order to enable proper response to these transformations on the part of decision-makers, as the society should be educated and informed properly to enhance the development of its ecological consciousness.

Historical roots of environmental values in Latvia

Latvia has an ancient history, which underwent a complicated development, and the Latvians today represent one of the two „living” Balt nations. Up to the 13th century, when Christian traditions were set up in Latvia, religious traditions here shaped under the influence of the beliefs of paganism. People believed in spirits and ghosts and polytheism – worship of more than one god – was characteristic for this period. Each of the gods was responsible for its own sphere. Typical divinities were gods of the sun and fertility, the creators and mother divinities. Even in remote ages the Latvians worshiped the Sun, the Thunder, the Moon, the Mother Earth, the Mother Wind, and the Mother Forest (Kokare, 1999). Long before Christ was born the ancestors of the Latvians believed that natural forces and phenomena, as well as the environment itself influence human mind and existence.

Environmental values also represent an integral part of the traditional Latvian culture. Folklore reflects the perception of the world of any nationality at a level, which expresses its social and cultural identity. The Latvians have a distinctively emotional attitude towards environmental values, which resound in folklore. In Japan the part of the folklore is haiku, the Slavs have folk tales, and the Latvians have their folk songs. These songs reflect their understanding of nature and their attitude towards it; nature is glorified:

Who owns those hills, who owns those vales,
Who owns those verdant oak-trees?

Pine-trees do own the hills; spruce-trees do own the vales;
Bees do own the verdant oak-trees (Švābe, 1952-1956)

In the folk songs not only worship and love for nature is expressed; they also teach that nature should be preserved and not destroyed:

I walked through an argent grove,
Snapping no twigs,
If I snap any twigs,
I would walk in tears (Ambainis, 1955).

Considering the history of the Latvian literature, the nature and its phenomena, for example, in Anna Brigadere’s tale in „Sprīdītis”, Edvards Virza’s „Straumēni” are not just mentioned, but rather word-painted with great love; nature has powers that are able to control and even destroy men, if not treated with due respect.

Turning to a more recent history – the 20th century – when Latvia was occupied and forcibly included into the Soviet Union, the development of the state went on in compliance with the concepts and directions of Moscow. Economical development of Latvia was implemented according to the industrialisation and agricultural collectivisation policy adopted by the USSR. Up to the end of the 1960s Latvia experienced a relatively successful, although problematic, development, if compared to other republics of the USSR; however, it was still behind the Western economies, especially in terms of the development quality. Such concepts as environmental protection and quality of life were not quite popular among the public.

The forced industrialisation in Latvia from the 1950s exercised a significant influence on the environment, as extensive industrial construction resulted in an intensive pollution of the environment. At that time it was more important to implement the so-called five-year plans, rather

than think about the evolving environmental problems due to the construction of a vast number of industrial facilities in such a small territory.

At the end of the 1980s the role of environmental values in the formation of the civil society turned out to be vital. Characterising the processes of awakening in this country in 1980s and 1990s, which laid the foundation of regaining independence, it is impossible to omit mention of the campaign against the construction of the Daugavpils hydroelectric power station. Today Dainis Ivāns says that his article of those times, which was directed against this construction, arose from the desire to live in a clean environment and green Latvia. Although in this case environmental values turned into the public socially-political mobilisation factor and the protests against the construction of the Daugavpils power station are mostly associated with the onset of the period of awakening, initially they were aimed at the protection of a natural environment and ecological values.

From this period environmental protection in Latvia has been developing very rapidly after the creation of the Ministry of Environment and Regional Development in 1993 national legislation related to the protection of the environment has been normalised and investments into many specific environmental projects have been mobilised. For example, “Procedures for Carrying out a Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment” were issued by the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia in 2004, which specified the types of planning documents requiring a strategic assessment, the consultations prior to the commencement of the development of these planning documents, the information to be included in the environmental accounts, the procedure of informing of the public, organisations and bodies during the preparation process of environmental accounts, and the procedures for informing the European Commission (Latvijas Republikas Ministru Kabinets, 2004).

On the other hand also general public has become much more active in relation to environmental protection. Thus, in 2008 the “Big Cleanup” project has been launched in Latvia. The idea of the Big Cleanup Latvia belongs to the writer Anna Žīgure. The project is based on voluntary participation to keep our environment tidy, bring people together and promote positivism and satisfaction with the achievements. The ultimate target of the project is to turn Latvia into the cleanest country on the world map by its 100th anniversary in 2018, making nature garbage-free, allowing it to recover and urging people to take care of their environment (Big Cleanup).

All the above proves that environmental values in Latvia, owing to their deep roots in the history of the country, can become a strong basis for further development of the country along with the preservation of nature and its resources for the generations to come.

Risk society in Latvia

When Latvia has regained independence in 1991 most of the spheres of national policy have been reviewed including the aspects of environmental policy. Today the supported concept in Latvia is that the improvement of the quality of life should not be accompanied by destruction of the environment. Therefore, it is necessary to provide the balance between the activities of the industrial society and natural resources, which

in its turn requires an advanced environmental consciousness and ecological culture of the public.

This concept conforms with the idea of sustainable development, which is not quite new. The term of sustainable development was first introduced by the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development in its report "Our Common Future". Since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), which took place in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro this concept has been widely used all over the world. The most widespread definition of this sustainable development claims that it is meant to "meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Brundtland, 1987). Therefore, a traditional tendency of the modern society is orientation on a stable development, improvement of the quality of life, and technological progress, while preserving the environment.

In the second part of the past century it was a prevalent belief that environmental problems are limited only to the shortage of natural resources, which is just a problem of economic nature requiring economic solution. However, as environmental problems grew deeper, environmental protection became seen as one of the principal priorities in the development of each country.

Environmental problems in the view of human-environment relations become more topical in the course of time. Solution of global environmental problems will require joint activities of many generations of people. In this context sustainable development has turned into the main aspect in the relations between the public and the environment (Sutton, 2007).

German sociologist Ulrich Beck in the 90s of the last century stated that in the course of the globalisation industrial society is transformed into the global risk society. He considered that the problems of risk society are not limited to the threats caused by the pollution of the environment. Risk society is characterised by a complete vanishing of time, territorial and social boundaries. Beck illustrated this idea by the Chernobyl accident in 1986, as the consequences of this accident have affected not only Ukraine, but the whole Europe, and these effects are felt even today (Beck, 1992).

Considering risk society from the point of view of sustainable development it should be said that similar to an industrial society, risk society is not sustainable. It endangers the use of natural resources by excessive depletion, as well as by the fact that the pollutions resulting from industrial production harm the environment and keep it from recovery (Beck, 1999).

Today the society has to face various perceived and unperceived risks and has to find solutions for this numerous risk to provide for successful formation of everyday life and to minimize the effect of different negative aspects of the development and progress on the life of people and the environment. British sociologist Anthony Giddens believes that it is very difficult to define the sources of environmental risks. (Giddens, 1996) However, it should be noted that a right combination of social, political and economical components would allow both the protection of the environment against disasters and essential improvement of ecological situation in general. Furthermore, some theorists argue that social, political and institutional reforms are necessary to

accommodate the transition from industrial modernity, which was focused on the production of material goods, to reflexive modernity, which is focused on the production of knowledge, the avoidance of risk and the preservation of nature (Ekberg, 2007).

Beck's concept of the risk society is basing, among other things, upon the rise of a new "risk consciousness" around techno-social developments (Wilkinson, 2001). The environmental and health risks from technologies, for example, like pesticides, would be expected to dominate public discourses in a risk society (Blok, 2008). Common knowledge interlaces with issues of scientific expertise in various ways (Lidskog, 1996). Therefore, besides the significance of risk regulation regimes, it is necessary to analyse, how the public is engaged in active forms of experimental knowledge-making.

The Basic regulations for sustainable development of Latvia state that the goal of sustainable development is the formation of a stable economy of Latvia, which should secure the needs of the society and ensure that the rates of economic growth exceed the rates of pollution of the environment and use of natural resources. It is necessary to provide the environment that would be safe and harmless for health both for the current and further generations, as well as sufficient activities for the preservation of biological diversity and protection of ecosystems. It is also essential to develop responsible attitude towards natural resources and to continuously increase the efficiency of utilisation thereof (Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia, 2002).

Effective balancing of economic, social and environmental considerations requires active involvement of the entire society into the policy development process. Providing that the major part of the society is actively involved, it will be possible to find optimal solutions and effective response to global challenges (SIA "Analītisko pētījumu un stratēģiju laboratorija", 2007).

As a separate issue the problem of raising public consciousness in relation to environment and awareness of environmental risks was mentioned. This problem should be considered as the question of the highest importance, since implementation of new legislation and policies by government, as well as effective use of such legislation and policies shall be possible only with active support by population (Brizga J. at all, 2002).

Although sustainable development is a society-wide social and economic process, every individual in an everyday life is able to participate in it, if he or she is ready to take up certain activities. Therefore, provision of comprehensive information related to environmental risks is essential to raise environmental awareness, and to develop environmental consciousness and environmental conduct. To accomplish these tasks it is necessary to properly define the target audience and to ensure sufficient quality and quantity of such information, as proper environmental information would help the public to orient better in their choice of the patterns of environmental conduct. One of the primary prerequisites for the achievement of this goal is the awareness of the current state of information provided to the public, as well as the level of comprehension and perception of such information. In this context studies of public opinion are seen as a very efficient tool for the evaluation of public awareness regarding

environmental issues and the readiness to act to contribute to the environmental protection.

Dynamics of environmental attitudes in Latvia

Various studies are being carried out all over the world and the results of such opinion polls are used as to assess attitudes of the public towards the environmental protection, as well as to determine the level of readiness of people to adopt environmental conduct.

The World Values Surveys and European Values Surveys series was designed to enable a crossnational, crosscultural comparison of values and norms on a wide variety of topics and to monitor changes in values and attitudes across the globe (ICPSR). The range of questions the respondents are asked in these studies also cover the perception of the environment, technological development and its impact on the environment (World Values Survey). Latvia took first part in this survey in 1996. Unfortunately, Latvia's participation in this study was irregular.

Regular studies being performed at European level are studies conducted by a research service Eurobarometer dealing with the research of public opinion in Europe. Attitudes of the European public towards the issues related to the protection of the environment have been conducted by this service since 1982.

The survey named "Attitudes of European citizens towards the environment" was conducted in 2007 and Latvia took part in it. One of the topics of this survey was related to general environmental concerns of the European public. Since climate change was already associated with the concept of environment in general, this issue was mentioned as top concern in almost all European countries. On the other hand, in Latvia other issues were more likely to be mentioned than climate change.

Another question of this survey was aimed at the investigation of the opinion of Europeans regarding the responsibility for responding to environmental challenges. To that end the participants of the survey were offered two statements concerning the role of corporations and industry in environmental protection and the extent to which, in their judgement, the public can play a role in the protection of the environment. Europeans in general tend to see environmental protection as a joint responsibility. As for Latvia, almost all respondents (98%) placed the responsibility with the big polluters, while 71% thought that they, as individuals, can play a role in protecting the environment in their countries (Eurobarometer, 2008).

Lots of various studies covering the issues of the environment and environment protection have been also performed in individual member-states of the European Union.

In order to investigate the changes in the public attitudes towards environmental problems and the readiness to act to improve ecological situation the Public Opinion Research Centre SKDS in 2006, 2010 and 2011 has performed vast surveys related to these issues.

Within the framework of these studies, among other things, the opinion of the Latvian residents with regard to the most topical environmental problems, the extent of readiness to adopt environmental conduct, as well as the position regarding the priority of the environment protection over the economic growth were analysed.

In 2006 the survey was ordered by the Ministry of the Environment of the Republic of Latvia. In 2010 and 2011 the survey was repeated by SKDS to allow the comparative analyses of attitudes of the Latvian public towards environmental problems. The studies were performed with the use of the database of the Latvian residents registered with the SKDS Web Panel: 1000 respondents at the age between 15 and 74. Interviews were performed in the way of web assisted personal interviews. The selection has been made on the basis of the latest data of the Register of Population of the Republic of Latvia.

This research method has been chosen due to the fact that along with the increase of the population of the Internet and on-line users, this method allows researchers to reach target segments more effectively (Aaker, 2001).

The results of these surveys allow the comparison of the attitudes of the Latvian public and the analysis of the dynamics of discourse on environmental values in Latvia.

One of the questions of these three studies was related to the topicality of different environmental problems in Latvia (Fig. 1).

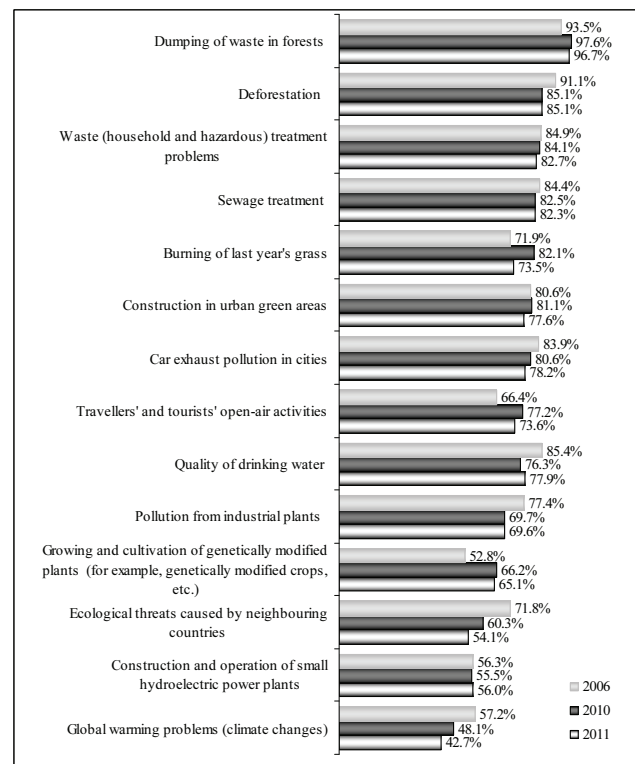


Figure 1.

The analysis of the answers to this question shows that no great changes happened during the period covered by the studies. The matter of top concern in 2006, according to the respondents, was dumping of waste in forests. This problem was mentioned by 93.5% of the participants of the survey. In 2010 and 2011 this issue remained the most topical (97.6% and 96.7% respectively).

The importance of deforestation has slightly decreased over these years. In 2006 this problem was indicated by 91.1% of the respondents, while both in 2010 and 2011 it was mentioned by 85.1% of the questioned respondents.

Another issue, which has undergone certain changes, was

burning of last years grass. In 2006 71.9% of the participants of the studies mentioned this problem as a topical issue. In 2010 the number of the respondents, who indicated this answer was much higher (82.1%), while in 2011 this number decreased almost to the level of 2006. Only 73.5% of the respondents considered that this is a matter of great concern in Latvia.

The opinion of the public regarding ecological threats caused by neighbouring countries has also become less negative over the respective period. In 2006 71.8% of the respondents believed that these threats are important in relation to the Latvian environment. In 2010 the number of such respondents amounted to 60.3%, while in 2011 only 54.1% of the participants of the survey believed that neighbouring countries pose a significant ecological risk. The decrease of ecological threats caused by the neighbouring countries in the opinion of the Latvian public was possibly influenced by the closure of the Ignalina nuclear power plant (which was located near the border of Latvia).

On the other hand, there were several problems that, according to the respondents, eventually have become more topical. Among these problems open-air activities of travellers and tourists and growing and cultivation of genetically modified plants could be mentioned. In 2006 only 66.4% of the respondents were concerned about the effect of traveller's and tourist's activities on the environment. The same problem was indicated by 77.2% in 2010 and by 73.6% in 2011. As for the growing of genetically modified plants, this answer was mentioned by 52.8% of the questioned participants in 2006. In 2010 the number of the respondents, who believed that this problem is very important in Latvia, grew up to 66.2%. In 2011 65.1% of the respondents mentioned this issue. This increase in concerns could be explained by the fact that there is a broad debate in media about GMO-free regions.

Another important result of these studies is consistent with the abovementioned conclusion of the survey performed by Eurobarometer in 2007. The problem of global warming, in the eyes of the respondents, was the least important in Latvia if compared with other issues offered by the questionnaires. In 2006 climate changes were mentioned by 57.2% of the participants of the study, in 2011 this problem was indicated by 48.1%, and only 42.7% of the respondents in 2011 considered this issue to be of high importance.

Another important question of the studies under consideration was related to the readiness of the Latvian public to get involved in certain activities aimed at the improvement of ecological situation in Latvia (Fig. 2).

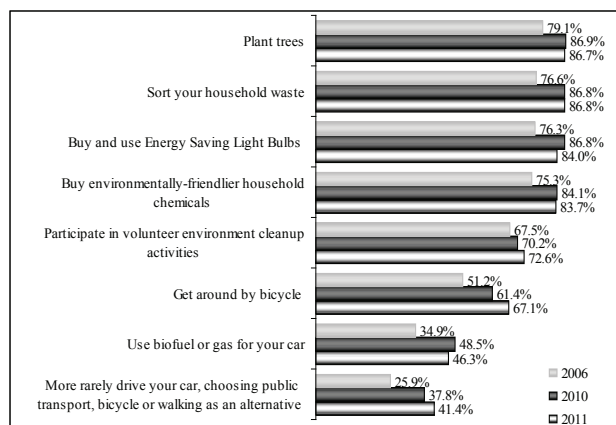


Figure 2.

According to the results of the studies it could be said that in the course of time the Latvian residents tend to become more environmentally conscious and more disposed to make their contribution to the protection of the environment.

In 2006 79.1% of the respondents indicated that they would be ready to plant trees to improve the quality of the environment. In 2010 this answer was mentioned by 86.9% of the participants of the survey with slight reduction in the number of such respondents by 2011 (86.7%).

Readiness to sort household waste has also increased over the period under question. In 2006 this answer was indicated by 76.6% of the respondents, while both in 2010 and 2011 86.8% of the participants of the studies claimed that they would be ready to adopt this custom.

Buying and using energy saving light bulbs was mentioned in this question by 76.3% of the respondents in 2006, 86.8% in 2010 and 84.0% in 2011.

Readiness to buy and use environmentally-friendly household chemicals has also grown during the period of the studies. In 2006 this answer was indicated by 75.3% of the respondents. In 2010 the number of such respondents has increased to 84.1%, while in 2011 it amounted to 83.7% of the participants of the study.

Another answer, which also was more frequently mentioned by the respondents, was participation in volunteer environment cleanup activities. In 2006 this answer was indicated by 67.5% of the respondents. In 2010 and 2011 respectively 70.2% and 72.6% of the respondents mentioned that they would be ready to take part in such events.

Other activities offered in this question of the above opinion polls, such as getting around by bicycles, using biological fuel or gas for cars and driving cars more rarely, while choosing public transport, bicycles or walking as an alternative, were less frequently mentioned by the participants of these studies. However, it should be mentioned that the increase in the percentage of such respondents over the years was more significant than it was in previously analysed answers.

Readiness to get around by bicycle was indicated only by 51.2% of the respondents in 2006, while in 2010 the number of the participants, who would be ready to adopt this habit has grown to 61.4%. In 2011 this number has increased even more and amounted to 67.1% of the respondents.

Using biological fuel or gas was mentioned by 34.9% of the respondents in 2006, 48.5% in 2010 and by 46.3% in 2011.

25.9% of the respondents in 2006 would agree to choose public transport, bicycle or walking instead of driving their cars. The same answer was indicated by 37.8% in 2010. In 2011 such alternative was considered to be acceptable by 41.4% of the questioned participants of the survey.

In the next important question of these studies the respondents were asked to evaluate, whether the environmental protection in Latvia must be a priority in relation to economic growth (Fig. 3).

The comparison of the results of the four surveys shows that in 1996 only 40.3% of the respondents believed that environmental protection should be a priority, while 36.1% indicated that economical growth is more important than the protection of the environment (World Values Survey).

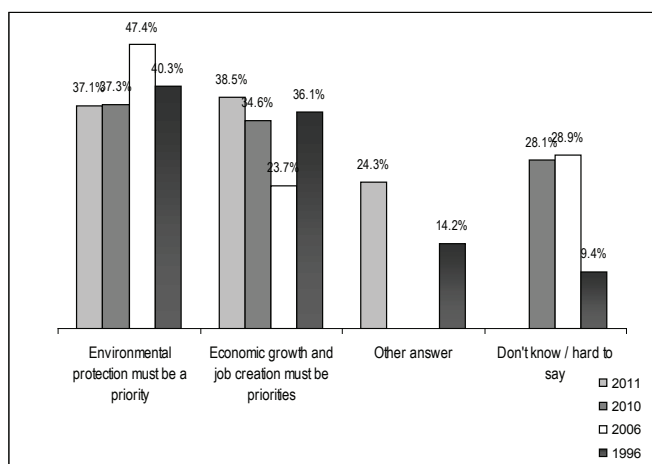


Figure 3.

The situation changed sufficiently in 2006. 47.4% of the respondents believed that environmental protection should be a priority, even if it would mean slower economic growth and loss of a certain number of jobs. In 2010 the number of the respondents, who supported this point of view was much lower. Only 37.3% of the respondents indicated this answer. In 2011 this idea appeared to be even less popular, as only 37.1% of the participants of the study agreed with this statement.

On the other hand, if in 2006 only 23.7% of the respondents believed that economic growth and job creation should be of top-priority, even if it would cause certain damage to the environment, the number of such respondents has grown considerably by 2010 and 2011 (34.6% and 38.5% respectively). 28.9% of the participants of the study could not define their position in this question in 2006, 28.1% answered that they could not choose any of these statements in 2010, and 24.3% could not answer this question in 2011 (SKDS, 2006-2011).

Basing upon the above research and the analysis of the surveys conducted in Latvia in relation to the public opinion towards environmental issues certain conclusions can be drawn regarding the development of the discourse on environmental values and the role of environmental values in the formation of civil society in the Latvia.

Conclusions

The discourse on ecological issues in Latvia has developed on the basis of ancient Latvian traditions and Latvian folklore. Latvian people have a special emotional attitude towards environmental values. They always have been a significant component of the traditional Latvian culture. Before Christianity was introduced in Latvia in the 13th century, the main religious elements or figures were ecological, natural or environmental images – the Moon, the Thunder, the Sun, the Mother Forest, the Mother Earth, and the Mother Wind. In the Latvian folklore, which reflects the nation's perception of the world at the level demonstrating the development of its social and cultural identity, nature and environment has been mentioned both in folk songs and fairy-tales.

Due to the complicated circumstances of the Latvian history, the Latvian nation has often been restricted in expressing its own opinion on various issues, including the issues of environmental protection; however, cultural

traditions has been rooted so deeply in the Latvian culture that at the end of the last century, when Latvia regained its independence, the role of ecological values in the process of forming of civil society became particularly significant.

The onset of awakening and regaining independence started not as standing for freedom, but rather for the environment and, consequently, for environmental values. Today environmental protection in Latvia is not just one of the topical points in election campaigns of political parties.

At the moment, when society is exposed to a variety of conscious and unconscious risks, emphasis is placed on long-term development, including the process of formation of environmental discourse. The industrial society shall develop, though, in harmony with natural resources and opportunities. Society shall be educated, informed, enhancing development of its ecological consciousness.

To this end it is essential to monitor the opinion of the public in relation to environmental issues by conducting vast regular surveys. Today Latvia participates in cross-national studies related to the environmental protection, including World Value Survey and surveys performed on the request of the European Commission by a research service Eurobarometer. Also Latvian public opinion research centres during the past years have conducted several studies to analyse the level of environmental awareness of the Latvian public, the readiness of the Latvian residents to act for the sake of environmental protection, and the extent to which, according to the public opinion, environmental protection should be given a priority over economic growth.

According to the data summarised by the Public Opinion Research Centre SKDS the opinion of the Latvian public in relation to the most topical environmental problems in Latvia has not changed significantly over the past 5 years. People still consider that dumping of waste in the Latvian forests is the matter of greatest concern in this regard, while such global problems as climate changes is not considered to be especially topical. This conclusion is also supported by the results of the study “Attitudes of European citizens towards the environment” conducted in 2007.

It should be also noted that the level of readiness of the Latvian public to adopt environmental conduct has grown considerably over the last five years.

At the same time the results of the World Values Survey and the surveys performed by SKDS in 2006-2011 people in Latvia still find it difficult to decide whether environmental protection should be a priority, even if it means a slower economic growth and a loss of a certain number of jobs, or whether the priority should be given to the economic growth and the creation of new jobs, even if the environment is harmed to a certain extent. On the other hand, the studies conducted in 2010 and 2011 show that the number of people giving preference to the protection of the environment over the economic growth and creation of jobs has shrunk. Such results can be explained by a difficult economic situation in the country and the level of unemployment caused by the crisis, as people, who are unable to satisfy their basic needs, i.e. to buy food and clothes, unfortunately are less concerned about environmental issues.

Basing upon the above developments it could be concluded that Latvia has every possibility to become a developed European country, where people foster ecological

culture and environmental consciousness. Such a developed society in its turn would guarantee sustainable development of the country in future. Development of such society requires proper information and education of the public in the matters related to environmental protection, which is one of the essential tasks of the government, policy-makers and other stakeholders in meeting the goals of sustainable development.

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