

A NEW APPROACH OF ENVIRONMENT COMMUNICATION

COMUNICAREA DE MEDIU – O NOUĂ PROVOCARE ÎN CONDIȚIILE GLOBALIZĂRII

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Abstract

Starting from this reflection we will try to see what are the main barriers and obstacles that stay in the way of an effective environmental communication. In the last years, we have more and more the sensation of a stagnation in what is considered to be a real progress in the process of environment protection. Despite the existence of a large number of conferences, political talks and debate, the results are less and less important while the global warming and its negative effects could be felt everywhere on the planet. Therefore in this paper we will try to propose a different style of communication, a new proposal or suggestion about what we have to do in order to achieve better results in environment communication. The objective is to reach to more people and make them react in a proper way and on a longer term. Nevertheless this paper could be only the beginning of a larger research area; the results will be communicated later on.

Key words: *environment communication, education, investment, recycling.*

JEL Classification: *O3, O4*

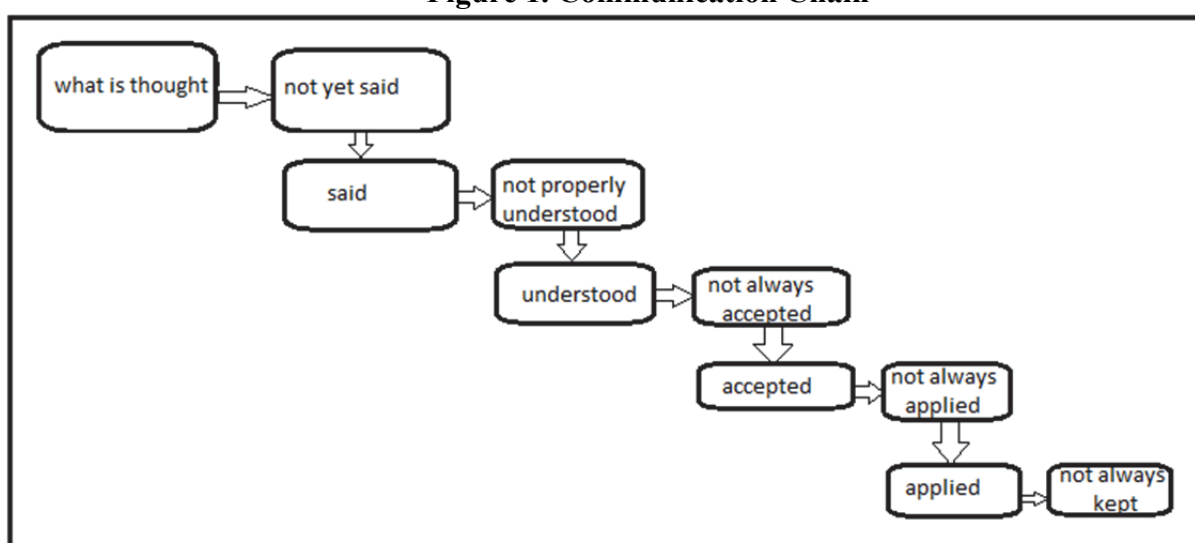
INTRODUCTION

In the picture under we tried to materialize the Konrad Lorenz idea about the communication. Starting from this, we will try to adapt this scheme to environment communication area, to see why we are confronting today, despite the appearance of such a big volume of materials, data and information on internet, symposiums, conferences etc., with a situation of less real results, stagnation of advancement in the negotiation area to fight against global warming and even mistrust in authorities. More and more we have the feeling that actually protecting the environment is not our responsibility but rather the government job, as if we don't live on the same planet. The situation is even more complicated because there are many countries where not even the

government act responsible; there are many situations where other economic and financial private interests are coming as a first priority.

In order to understand why we are confronting with these situations, let's have a look at the first step of our chain of communication. Thoughts are the first thing from where we start because communication is starting from our head. When we talk we express our thoughts, experiences, ideas, even though not entirely, but everything is starting from thoughts. Since it looks like we have a failure of environment communication maybe we have to check the basement of this process and understand if the young generation really understand what is about to happen with our planet and ultimately with our lives if we don't save the environment. From our point of view this is happening because this situation is not explained properly at school, at all levels of education. It is considered that parents will complete this task but actually they not even know the reality, or they act as they don't know it.

Figure 1. Communication Chain



Source: <https://worldtop20.org/education-data-base>

Already in the moment when someone has thoughts but is not expressing freely it means that either he has fear to not be properly understood or he is adapting his communication to the partner. Sometime it happens because the level of information is not sufficient to sustain a conversation to choose to not express your point of view.

The next important step after understanding is accepting because it is needed a certain level of education in order to filter the information that you received and passing it to your own judgement to finally being convinced from what you heard. Again, the level of education needed is very high. Even at the last steps, when someone is convinced to apply certain behaviour of reducing the consumption of resources, for example, it is needed a high level of aspiration, conscience, devotion. All these feelings are coming from understanding of the reality, understanding the nature and the need of protecting the environment

If we look back, we can see that at every step we need intelligence and education in order to go further, therefore the question of understanding the role of education in protecting the environment is coming naturally.

We will try to assess the level of education of different countries and their system of waste management, quality of air, recycling habits, etc. in order to see if there is any link between this information. We have to say that this is only an early stage of the research, other statistical and

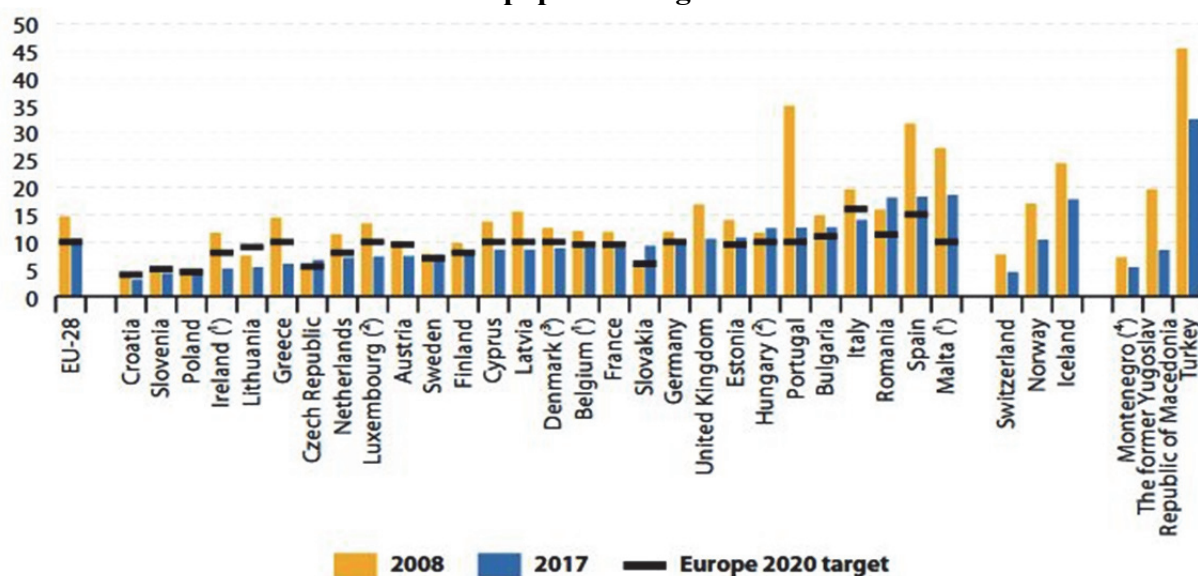
econometrical analysis will be done later on. We are starting from the assumption that educated people can understand better the environment challenges so that can directly contribute. Each country assessed its own target, in accordance with EU targets, but we have to say that at each level of society, no matter if we talk about the government, NGOs or local community, behind the organisations are people. So in order to solve the environment protection issue, the responsibility belongs to people. If they are well educated and can understand and put the general interest before the personal objectives and short term results, then we could have a better chance to success.

The first stage of our analysis begins by a short view of the general quality level of education by country. Among the various rankings who are assessing the country's education we decided to look at The International Education Databaseⁱ who aims to measure and rank the impact each nation's education system has had in stabilizing their economy, in developing their social environment, protecting their's naturel environnement.

According to this review, South Korea is the first, followed by Finland and Norway. In the first ten we can find also other EU countries as Estonia, Latvia and Sweden. Romania is ranked 52th. The International Education Database will also serve as a public centre to survey, evaluate, and report the progress of the educational goals of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal Initiative (2015 to 2030). As we could see, in Top 10 we have a majority of European countries, which might lead us to the general conclusion that overall, European citizens are benefiting by a performant and conclusive education.

Let's have a look at what is happening with students, if they are really interested by these educational programmes, if there is a real interest in following the school.

Figure 2. Early leavers from education and training, by country, 2008 and 2017 (% of the population aged 18–24ⁱⁱ).



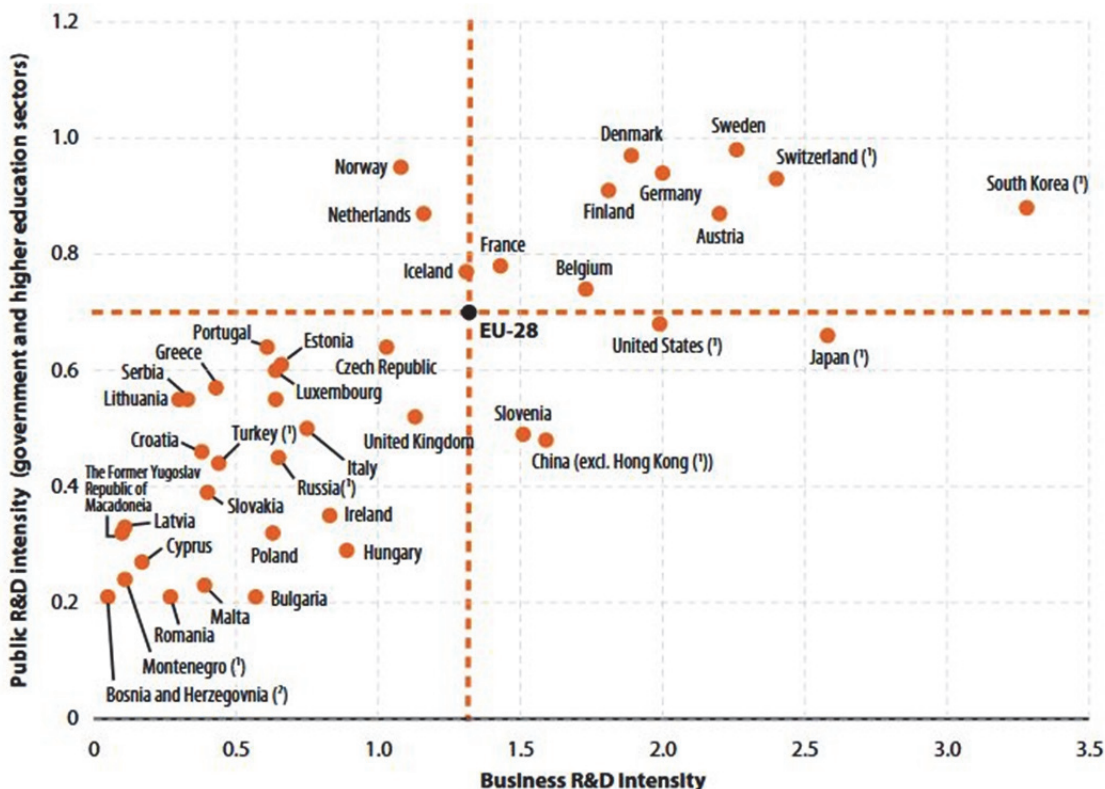
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If we take into consideration data provided by Eurostat regarding the early leavers from education and training, by country, between 2008 and 2017, we can see that despite the progress registered by EU 28, who fixed as an objective to decrease the level of people who leave education program to 20% till

the end of 2020, in the case of Romania and Hungary, these are the only states where the level of this indicator is actually increasing. It is obviously that even though overall the mean is approaching the objective, in the case of these 2 countries the reality shows that there are much more people who are quitting the school before the end of the programme in 2018 comparing with 2008. This indicator express that there is a big chance that in those 2 countries we have a young population with a low level of education, which might have as a consequence, among others, a wrong perspective of the environment reality. By consequence, this might be a reason why in these countries the perception regarding the protection of environment is perceived as being an irrelevant issue. Indeed it is needed a high level of understanding to correctly asses the environment reality.

Another interesting indicator is represented by the percentage of the GDP spent in research and development. Again, Romania, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Hungary are among the countries who are investing too little in R&D. We believe that one of the causes is because there is no interest and resources available to invest in this sector but also there is a link with the fact that there are a growing number of people who are quitting the studies before the end of the programme, so that there is a smaller qualified human resource left, capable to work in this area. Nevertheless, it is known that there is a large mass of skilled people who leave Eastern European countries to work in rich West European countries. We might assume that at least a part of them could work on R&D (including environment area) so that this indicator might improve. [Cox R., & Pezzullo Phaedra C., 2016]

Figure 3. Gross domestic expenditure on R&D, by sectors of performance, by country, 2016 (% of GDP)ⁱⁱⁱ



Note: Provisional or estimated data for most of the countries.
 (?) 2015 data.
 (?) 2014 data.

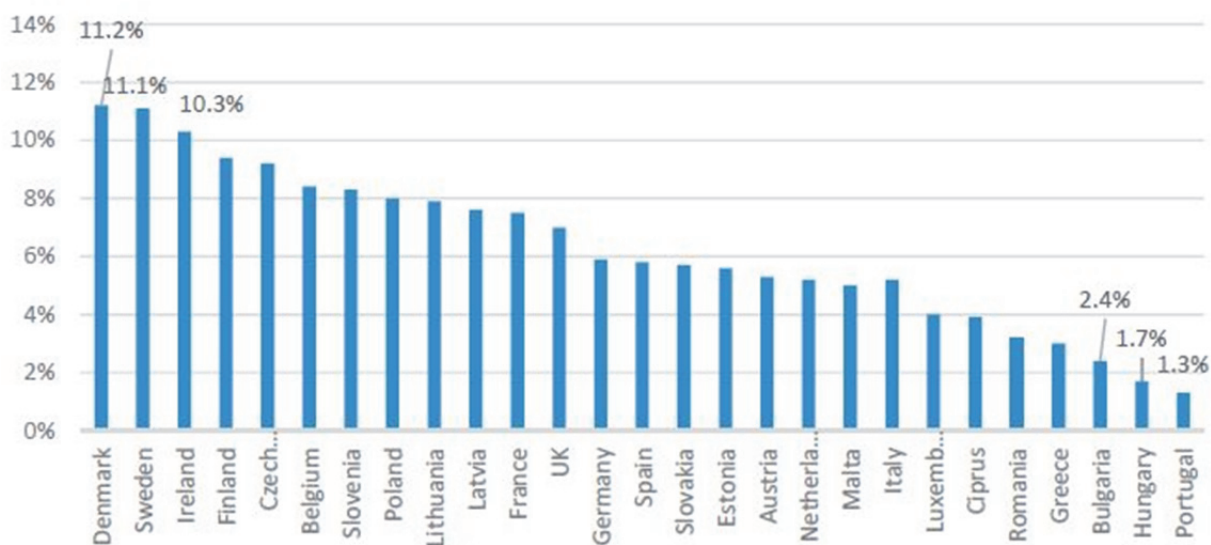
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When we look at the performers of this indicator we can see that Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Germany, Austria are countries where investment in R&D represent a priority. It is not by chance that these countries are having a population with a higher degree of education, their universities being in top from decades.

Another indicator that might be interesting to look at is the percentage of people working in the area of services and products for environment protection. It shows the interest that a certain countries have for this area (at the government but also at the private level) from the investment point of view. Of course, an investment remains an economical decision for the entrepreneur but still, when we look at the data we find more or less the same countries on the top of ranking: Denmark, Sweden, and Finland. At the opposite side, coincidence or not, we find Romania, Greece, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Portugal.

The fact that in these countries less people are working in the protection environment sector shows that there is no interest but also it might be because there is no qualified labour, adapted to this type of business. In any case, comparing with Northern European countries it is clear that there is huge gap, which could be transformed in a future opportunity.

Figure 4. Share of workers employed in the production of goods and services for environment protection^{iv}. Data from Eurostat, 2017.



Source: <https://www.eea.europa.eu/>.

Since we found out that there is an important gap between countries regarding labour force engaged in environment protection activities, let's go further and see what the habits of people regarding the recycling activities are. In other to do this we will look at the figure 4, Recycling rate of municipal waste.

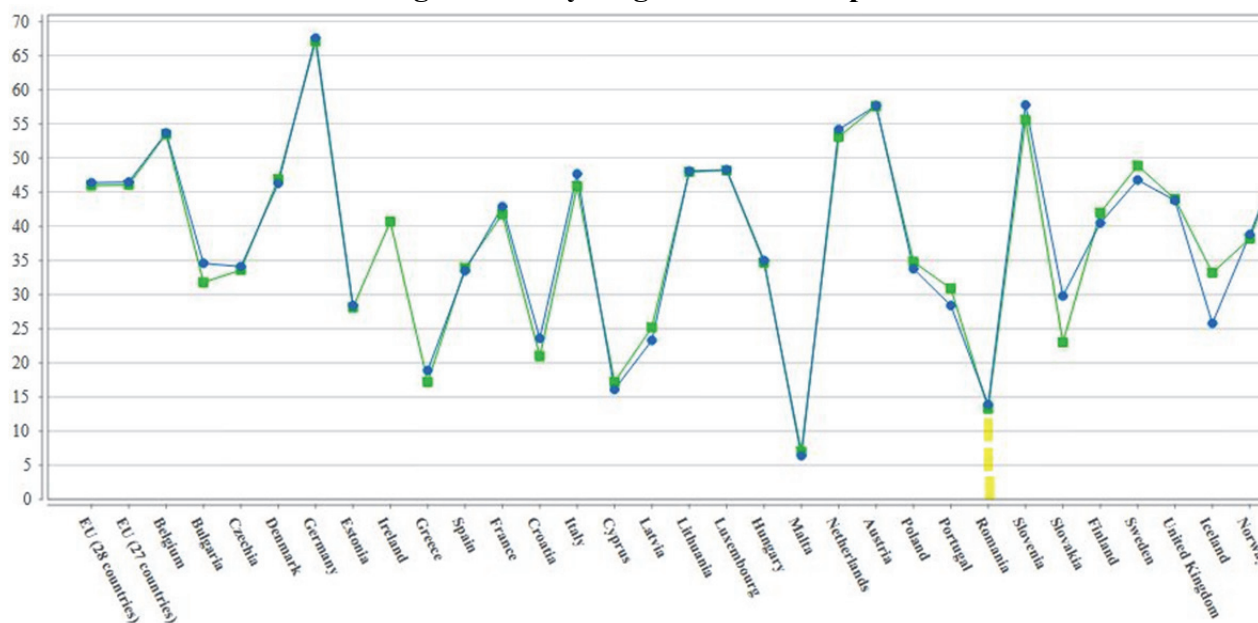
From this analysis we could see the countries of which populations are recycling more, as a proof of understanding the environmental messages and acting continuously and constantly in order to protect the environment. We will not be surprised that again Romania is one of the countries with lowest level. The indicator measures the share of recycled municipal waste in the total municipal waste generation. Recycling includes material recycling, composting and anaerobic digestion. The ratio is expressed in percent and measured in tonnes. Green line represents 2016 while blue line is

2017. Easy to see that almost the same countries are on the top for this indicator as well, Austria, Sweden, Finland, Holland but we can find also eastern countries like Lithuania and Slovenia.

Nevertheless the champion remains Germany who succeeds to recycle almost 70% from the waste they produce, which is really exceptional. Of course, despite the fact that recycling is one of the main solutions for a sustainable development, education of people is not entirely responsible for that. Western countries developed an entirely infrastructure in order to help people to participate at this process but they did it in many years, during the time citizens developed a culture of reuse, recycle, reduce. The fact that few eastern countries are on top prove that there is a possibility everywhere to extent this phenomena.

Still, the link between education and recycling is very strong because it is needed a certain level of education, determination and citizenship spirit in order to put in practice the right decision. [Trica, C. L., et all., 2019]

Figure 5. Recycling rate of municipal waste^v.

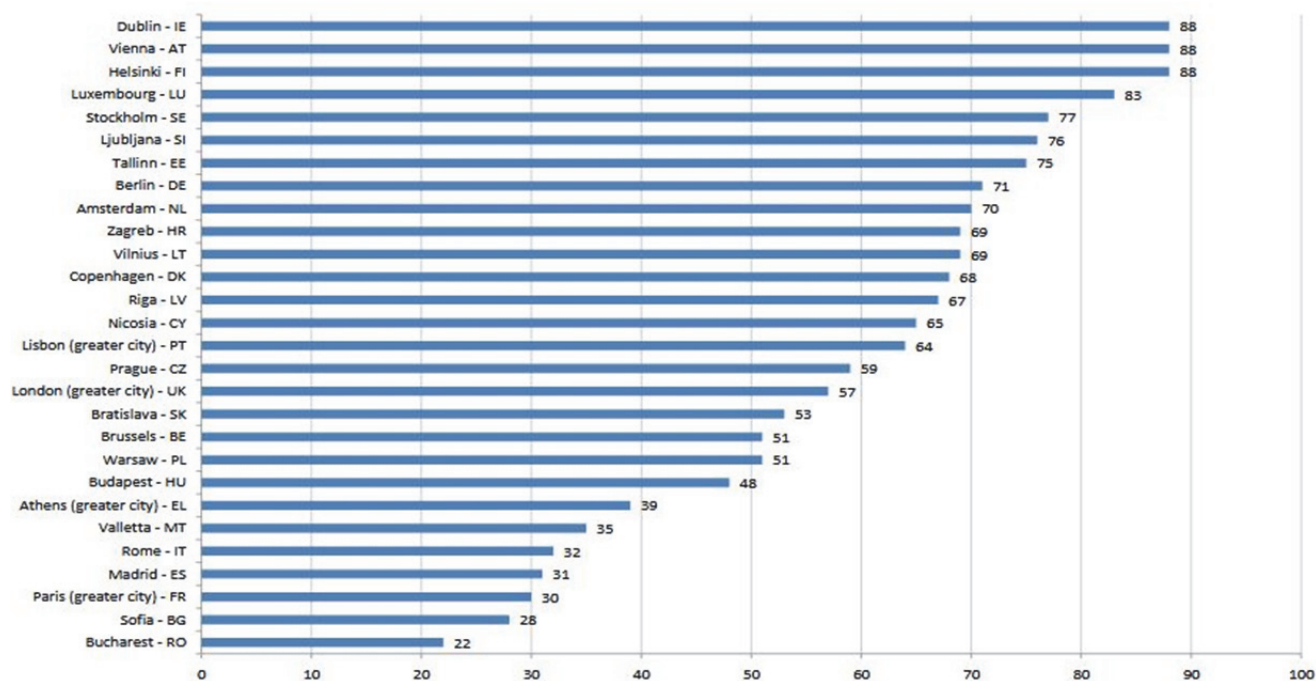


Source:

https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/graph.do?tab=graph&plugin=1&pcode=t2020_rt120&language=en&toolbox=type

Nevertheless, in some countries there is a difference of culture but if we take into consideration that recycling means at least saving money, to not mention about improvement of population health and landscape, we should see a bigger effort in the poorest countries, which is not the case for the moment.

Figure 6. Satisfaction with the quality of air in EU capital cities, 2015 (% of resident population)^{vi}



Source: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/7427955/8-03062016-BP-EN.pdf/0d471c36-ae6-47e8-b52b-b63e4f40302f>

At the EU level, at least 3/4 of inhabitants are very or rather satisfied with the quality of air. The top cities are Dublin, Vienna and Helsinki (all 88%), followed by Luxembourg (83%), Stockholm (77%) and Ljubljana (76%). The lowest share of satisfied population is Bucharest (22%), Sofia (28%) and Paris (30%).

If we compare the results, we can see a clear link between educational systems, investment in R&D, labour involved in environment protection and waste recycling. It is obviously that, for example Romania, is among the least in all these aspects but is also clear that people are not happy with the environment quality.

From this perspective, it is not a coincidence that quality of air, land and water pollution is better in the northern countries comparing with south since these people are recycling more and overall investing more in environment protection. The fact that they have better schools and education programs, make them more environmental understanding of reality and eager to react. In time, they developed an environmental culture of living.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we started from the assumption that despite the general idea that today almost everyone has access to information, due to internet and high technologies, there are some countries where there is a lack of understanding regarding the urgency of the environment protection. We showed that in every step of communication it is needed a certain level of intelligence. It is not enough to receive the message if you can't understand properly and more important if you don't act accordingly. If we don't recycle the waste but we are not happy with the environment landscape it means that there is a misunderstanding somewhere and we tried to prove that this is coming from a lack of education. We proved that there is a clear link between education quality and environment

protection actions. In order to do this we demonstrated that people from countries that invest less in education they do the same in environment sector. Despite this reduction of spending money and effort they are not happy with their lives. Consequently, the conclusion of this paper is that societies should bring environmental subjects and debates at all level of education, because the actual situation is not satisfactory for the people. From all data above we deducted that western countries are better environment, healthier habits but also solid educational systems and therefore the happiness of their citizens is coming naturally. Finally, we recommend that eastern countries should invest more on education and specifically on environmental educational programmes. If we want better results we have to communicate properly, people have to get used with the idea of environment urgency and be aware of the situation. Introducing the environment subject at all level of education could bring a new perspective and efficiency of environment communication, even in countries with a different culture.