

## WhoSGreen Project

### Online summary of key findings

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WhoSGreen research project investigates the practices of sensitization of children to non-religious ethics and ecological values. It combines different research approaches to offer a better understanding of non-religious parenting, their challenges and difficulties, risks and achievements in sensitizing their children to their non-religious and ecological values. The project draws attention to the everyday work of negotiation of secular and religious aspects in which non-religious parents are engaged in the public sphere and in the private sphere of their families.

In other words, this project explored Humanist atheism and agnosticism, with a focus on environmental activism, members "work" of transmitting their values to the next generation, aspects of their identity construction and everyday experiences.

The research was conducted in three countries – Romania, Hungary and Slovakia. We used a range of different methods: a content analysis of the websites of Humanist associations, publications produced by these associations; in-depth interviews with non-religious parents (i.e., Humanist atheist and agnostic parents), and diaries to investigate the everyday interactions and transmission of values from parents to children; participant observation of some events organized by the same secular Humanist associations.

As a research study inspired by Institutional Ethnography – a critical sociological approach developed by the Canadian scholar Dorothy Smith which aims to put people's everyday experience at the centre and understand the social changes that they desire – this project made and attempt to explore the gaps between institutional discourses and people's everyday actual experiences, but also it tried to track how institutional texts affect the way in which members, at a local level, act in terms of environmental activism.

The texts analysis in different Western countries (Tartari and Üzümcü 2023) showed that climate change is framed as the main environmental issue in institutional texts (i.e., texts made available by Humanist associations to their members and a general audience). This representation is commonly present in the texts shared by different associations in different countries. The aim of Humanist environmental activism is mainly represented as to tackle climate change through institutional campaigns, sensitization towards individual/collective responsibilities and promotion of a scientific thought and evidence-based approach. Discourses concerning environmental issues and activism seem to be general and not specific. The national associations taken into consideration by this project seem to follow the wave of these suggestions with general reflections in some cases or with no room to environmental issues in

other cases. This means that, through the analysis of institutional texts, we have noticed that the attention of the Humanist associations towards environmental issues varies in relation to socio-cultural-historical factors which shape different sensitivities toward the environment. Even if social problems like climate change are defined at a global level by international Humanist associations, each national association shows a peculiar way to address them, and this “way” is framed by different historical, social and cultural factors.

Parents who were interviewed showed great attention and sensibility towards environmental problems and try to fill in the lack of attention to these issues showed by some associations by applying and putting into practice general principles suggested by the critical and scientific thinking promoted by these associations.

This can be interpreted as a sort of everyday micro activism, co-constructed in the everyday interactions between parents and children, which seem to be not considered by the associations or institutions.

From the interviews three main narratives emerged: 1) a narrative concerning the importance of promoting a sustainable life and considering environmental issues beyond climate change; 2) a narrative concerning the importance of promoting a sense of collective responsibility; 3) a narrative concerning the importance of promoting a sensitization about individual actions and individual responsibilities that is not connected with religiosity or religious thought. This is what sometimes we called as “the short-cut discourse”: interviewees point out the importance of understanding that non-religious people do not use the justifications and strategies that instead religious people apply to avoid to feel responsible or change their behavior to support the protection of the environment. For instance, the interviewees synthesized the use of this moral “shortcut” applied by religious people with this sentence: “Religious people say: if we keep praying, God will solve the environmental issues. We as non-religious don’t say and don’t do that.”. This difference of perspectives between non-religious and religious people about the individual responsibilities and behaviors seems to limit the development of a more inclusive and coordinate effort shared with religious group to tackle environmental issues.

Humanist (atheist and agnostic) parents who were interviewed socialize their children to forms of critical and scientific thinking through dialogue and experiential learning, with modalities that follow those of intensive parenting (e.g., Faircloth 2014) that is a peculiar aspect of contemporary parenting. These forms of socialization can be interpreted as forms of micro-activism.

At the level of everyday practices, results show that there are numerous family ecological practices taught “through the example” by the interviewees to their children at home (e.g., recycling, animal care, observation and care of the environment like planting trees, vegetable garden, diet attentive to vegetarian choice, reduction of car/plane travels, etc.)

Parents point out how important is the discussion of environmental problems (e.g., climate change) based on scientific evidence (in relation to age, without too much concern, but also without minimizing), with the use of resources such as books, films, documentaries. Explanation and continuous dialogue are privileged. Critical thinking education is suggested.

Moreover, parents highlight the importance of direct experiences (e.g. outdoor walks) and involvement in public activism (marches to express dissent, ecological initiatives such as planting trees, cleaning woods, etc.).

Furthermore, parents point out the importance of parents-children conversations focused on the issue that there is no "shortcut", i.e., that there is no God who will miraculously repair human mistakes with the environment, but that everything depends and will depend on how humans behave.

An important problem highlighted by most of the interviewees concerns a lack of relevant activities concerning environmental issues in the schools attended by their children and a lack of consideration, in these schools, toward non-religious critical scientific thinking and non-religious children.

Finally, many interviewees expressed the need to establish active circle of eco-humanist people to discuss and debate environmental issues and solutions. Moreover, many interviewees expressed the interest in collaborating with this Project's Director to write a policy brief based on the project's results.

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