

Communicating Environmental Problems as a Basis for Creating Sustainable Family Habits. CRO Laudato Si' Research Results

Komunikowanie problemów środowiskowych jako podstawa budowania zrównoważonych nawyków rodzinnych. Wyniki badań projektu CRO Laudato Si'

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Abstract: The paper presents the results of a research conducted among Catholic believers in Croatia during 2020 and 2021. The research was carried out as part of the CRO Laudato Si' project (N=1324). In the second phase, four focus groups were conducted with 20 participants. The overall objective of the research is to determine whether families communicate about environmental problems and to describe the experience of communication and sustainable habits in the family. The results show that communication on environmental problems in the family is democratic and open. The vast majority of respondents (97%) mostly or completely agreed with the statement: "It is necessary to point out the importance of environmental problems in one's own family and society". The results of the focus group provide a deeper insight into family relations and reveal the family as a social relationship within which environmental problems are not discussed regularly, but some habits are cultivated spontaneously. These are daily sustainable habits such as waste separation, water and energy saving, etc. However, the results show that younger family members pass on information on this topic to the elderly and therefore their role on micro-level is significant. That role is related to meso level, and to educational institutions in the phase of secondary socialization. We conclude that families from our sample have a non-economic exchange of information on environmental problems. Communication (non-verbal especially) about environmental problems in the family is important for both children and parents and can empower the willingness to change unsustainable family habits.

Keywords: family, socialization, social relation, sustainable habits, CRO Laudato Si'

Streszczenie: W artykule przedstawiono wyniki badań przeprowadzonych w Chorwacji w latach 2020-21 wśród katolików. Badania przeprowadzono w ramach projektu CRO *Laudato Si'* (N=1324). Drugi etap obejmował badania czterech grup fokusowych z udziałem 20 uczestników. Ogólnym celem jest ustalenie, czy tematyka dotycząca problemów środowiskowych jest poruszana w rodzinie, a także opisanie charakteru komunikacji w tym zakresie oraz budowaniem zrównoważonych zachowań w rodzinie. Wyniki pokazują, że problemy środowiskowe są komunikowane w ramach rodziny w sposób demokratyczny i otwarty. Zdecydowana większość respondentów (97%) prawie lub całkowicie zgodziła się ze stwierdzeniem, że: "Zarówno w rodzinie, jak i społeczeństwie konieczne jest zwrócenie uwagi na istotę problemów środowiskowych". Wyniki badań grupy fokusowej dają lepszy wgląd w interakcje wewnątrz rodziny i pozwalają spojrzeć na rodzinę jako relację społeczną, w ramach której problemy środowiskowe nie są regularnie omawiane, a niektóre nawyki są budowane w sposób spontaniczny. Zrównoważone nawyki obejmują codzienne zachowania prośrodowiskowe, takie jak segregacja śmieci, oszczędzanie wody i energii itp. Wyniki badań pokazują, że informacje na temat środowiska są przekazywane

głównie od młodszych członków rodziny do osób starszych. Wskazuje to na istotną rolę młodszych członków rodziny na poziomie mikro. Rola ta związana jest z poziomem mezo i placówkami edukacyjnymi w fazie socjalizacji wtórnej. Wnioskujemy, że rodziny poddane badaniu prowadzą pozaekonomiczną wymianę informacji na temat problemów środowiskowych. Komunikacja (zwłaszcza niewerbalna) dotycząca problemów środowiskowych w rodzinie jest ważna zarówno dla dzieci, jak i ich rodziców i może wzmocnić chęć zmiany nawyków rodzinnych niezgodnych z zasadami zrównoważonego rozwoju.

Słowa kluczowe: rodzina, socjalizacja, relacja społeczna, zrównoważone nawyki, CRO *Laudato Si'*

Introduction

Pope Francis states in the encyclical *Laudato Si'* (2015) that it is necessary to effectively tackle environmental problems, which is a cultural, spiritual and educational challenge. Pope Francis stresses the great importance of the family: “In the family we first learn how to show love and respect for life; we are taught the proper use of things, order and cleanliness, respect for the local ecosystem and care for all creatures. In the family, we receive an integral education, which enables us to grow harmoniously in personal maturity.” (Francis 2015, 213).

According to the functionalist sociological approach, these values are adopted by primary socialization, while secondary socialization refers to upbringing and education in institutions. The Pope also emphasizes the importance of education, “Education in environmental responsibility can promote ways of acting that directly and significantly affect the world around us, such as avoiding the use of plastic and paper, reducing water consumption, separating refuse, cooking only what can reasonably be consumed, showing care for other living beings, using public transport or car-pooling, planting trees, turning off unnecessary lights, or any number of other practices.” (Francis 2015, 211). Some of these activities were carried out in the Cro *Laudato Si'* project during 2019 and 2020: respecting non-working Sundays¹, saving energy for household heating,

saving water, avoiding food waste, saving electricity and avoiding plastic. Activities were carried out in cooperation with the National Fraternity of the Franciscan Secular Order and Franciscan Youth over seven months (Brgles, Turza and Žagmešter 2022, 29-30).

The Cro *Laudato Si'* project was confirmed by the Croatian Catholic University and lasted from 2019 to 2021. The main objective of the project was to “point out the importance of the Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home* (2015), and by following the instructions stated in the Encyclical letter, to inspire the members of the Franciscan Secular Order and all interested individuals, to complete project activities planned in the project” (Brgles, Turza and Žagmešter 2022, 30). In addition, within the project, we carried out several scientific activities (Brgles 2020, 210-213). In this paper, we will present the results of research (surveys and focus groups) on communication on environmental problems and the willingness to create new sustainable habits in the family. In the first chapter, we will define the basic concepts, and then present the theoretical framework on which we base the research and some results of recent research. In the second chapter we will present the methodology and in the third, the results. We will discuss the main results in the Conclusion remarks.

¹ For the research results about the non-working Sunday see: Brstilo Lovrić and Mravunac (2021).

1. Family as a social relationship, socialization and creation of sustainable habits and behaviours

There is disagreement in sociological theory about the definition of family, so it is not surprising that in some sociological dictionaries the definition of family cannot be found. Given the limited scope of this work, we cannot discuss this issue more extensively. However, although the authors of the *Dictionary of Sociology* (Abercrombie, Hill and Turner 2008, 238) claim that “the conception of family as a unique phenomenon is somewhat wrong” because “there are a multitude of household structures other than the conventional nucleus consisting of husband, wife and children”, in our research we mean family as a social relationship, in which the marital relationship is the foundation of both nucleus and extended family.²

In a functionalist sociological perspective, knowledge of the importance of primary and secondary socialization is relevant, within which children adopt norms, values, habits and behaviours. “The term socialization has, most often, been employed to refer to this (developmental) process (sometimes referred to as primary socialization). It has been used to examine the social roles of parents, peers, and social institutions such as the school as agents of socialization.” (Rapley and Hansen 2006, 591). Parsons and Bales (1955, 42) describe socialization “as a series of phases.” In primary socialization, the family is an agent of socialization. Parents carry values from their own upbringing and family socialization prepares its target for secondary socialization in peer group, in school, and in new family formation (Parsons and Bales 1955). Thus, in secondary socialization, the role of the family is (partly) assumed by educational institutions and peers. Our

research is based on these concepts because the subject of the research is communication about environmental problems in the family.

We define communication as “conveying a message from one side to the other” (Abercrombie, Hill and Turner 2008, 169). According to Trenholm and Jensen (1996) there are four main styles of communication among families:

1. *Chain*
2. *the ‘Y’*,
3. *the Wheel* and
4. *the all-channel* networks.

We are interested here in *the all-channel network*. This network is the most decentralised network of all and the style of communication in this network is open and democratic.

In addition, we put our research within a broader framework of Pierpaolo Donati’s relational theory. “The relational approach is based on relational metaphysics and, therefore, on an ontology of relationships where these are regarded as the fabric of every society.” (Rossi and Carrà 2017, 11). Donati considers family as a specific social relationship. “Comprising the emerging effects of the individual and relational qualities of people, the family becomes in itself a certain type of social relationship that is unique, original and primary. It has meanings and functions that have no functional equivalent. Its meanings, functions and relationships are unsubstitutable by other types of relationships, whether actually existing or even envisioned as potential substitutes.” (Donati 2012, 17). Donati redefines the Parsons’ AGIL scheme. “The AGIL scheme does apply neither to the unit act (as in Parsons), nor to the system (as in Luhmann), but to the social relation.” (Donati, n.d.). “Thus, the family relationship presents a structural aspect and mutual expectations deriving from the bond; there is a (non-economic) exchange between the subjects, expressed by the concept of *religio*; furthermore, the subjects carry a cultural heritage which they represent within the bond.” (Rossi and Carrà

² As a social scientists, we are extremely pleased that in the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia (Art. 62) marriage is defined as “the life union of a man and a woman”, which facilitates the conceptualization and operationalization of research, especially those relating to Catholic believers.

2017, 11).³ However, family relationship cannot be reduced to the concepts of *religo* or *refero*. “Only the family’s generative dimension can help assess the depth of relationship and its capacity to generate something new (...)” (Rossi and Carrà 2017, 11).

Hosany, Hosany and He (2022) have done a review and research agenda on children sustainable behaviour. Some research has addressed the connection between parenting (families who have had their first child) and sustainable habits. The results showed that parenting has no crucial role in promoting new habits and behaviours related to sustainability, except for parents who already have sustainable habits. Thomas *et al.* (2017, 261), based on a study from the UK, conclude: “(...) having a new child is associated with a small decrease in the frequency of a few environmental behaviours. Only parents with already high environmental concerns show a small increase in the desire to act more sustainably after the birth of their first child.” A study from Indonesia “found that self-initiative and parental assistance in terms of environmental care during the pre-school phase were not sufficient to drive up individual responses to littering behavior” (Herdiansyah *et al.* 2021, 1). The study states that “children’s perceptions of the environment that are influenced by parents can be improved or changed through formal education to avoid littering behaviour” (Herdiansyah *et al.* 2021, 16). On the other hand, research shows that communication during the period of first and second socialization in the family plays a key role in creating new habits but also that children have influence on their parents! Both parental styles and the frequency of communication have notable impacts on teenagers’ influence on their mothers’ pro-environmental behaviours (Gentina

and Muratore 2012). Results from one Danish study showed that “the parent–child correlations are stronger for specific pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours. The positive correlations suggest that family socialization exerts a significant influence on young consumers’ pro-environmental orientation.” (Grønhøj and Thøgersen 2009, 414). In addition, research shows that consumer micro-environments have important implications in terms of children’s consumption behaviours and, more importantly, their consumer socialisation process within the family setting (Kerrane and Hogg 2013).

There are studies that, like our practical activities, have focused on just one habit or behaviour. For example, energy saving. The results show that “there were strong significant correlations between parents’ and adolescents’ energy-saving behaviours, mediated by adolescents’ perceptions of their parents’ behaviour.” (Wallis and Klöckner 2018, 275). During secondary socialization, children in educational institutions acquire knowledge, and share this knowledge and information in interaction with their peers and parents. Thus, new functions of socialization arise, and some authors write about reverse socialisation (Singh *et al.* 2020). Other claim that “socialisation is a bi-directional process, as parents and children try to influence each other by sharing standards of acceptable behaviours.” (Hosany, Hosany and He 2022, 244). According to relational theory, communication in the family is therefore extremely important in transferring knowledge and encouraging changes in habits and behaviours. Leger and Pruneau (2012) have done case study research (30 interviews and monthly journals) on behaviour in families to mitigate climate change. According to the authors, “personal values that are altruistic and biospheric lead to more environmental behavior” and “family dynamics represents a new influencing factor on climate change mitigation behavior in families” (Leger and Pruneau 2012, 84). “The families that successfully integrated mitigation behaviour were

³ Donati (2016) is going further in explaining how relational sociology seeks to answer basic questions on which depends the ability to correlate human (social) relationships and relationships with each other divine (supernatural). He sees it as “enigma of the relationship”, the enigma that lies in relationality as such.

those in which members interacted cooperatively, helped each other through challenges and underwent change as a family unit.” (Leger and Pruneau 2012, 84). Some research is also based on Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological theory of family (ecosystems approaches) which “place the person in the middle of the learning system and depict how other aspects of the system act upon them, in the learningscape frame, everyday and incidental experiences provide the glue.” (Ardoine and Heimlich 2021, 1693). However, the authors do not understand learning as an isolated process, which takes place only in educational institutions. “Learning, and environmental learning in particular, occurs across a variety of biophysical and sociocultural settings, experiences, and contexts and is thus recognized as being lifewide; lifelong or occurring throughout the lifecourse; and life-deep, or influenced by one’s culture, values, beliefs, and ideologies.” (Gould *et al.* 2019; NRC 2009, through Ardoine and Heimlich 2021, 1682).

2. Research methodology

The overall objective of the research is to determine whether families communicate about environmental problems and to describe the experience of communication and sustainable habits in the family. The specific objectives are:

1. determine the frequency of conversations about environmental problems in the family and determine whether there is a connection with parenting;
2. examine agreement with the claim that it is important to point out environmental problems in the family and the environment;
3. determine the level of willingness to discuss more about environmental problems and changes in family habits and determine whether there is a connection with parenting;
4. identify how to communicate about environmental problems in the family, who communicates and what are sustainable habits in the family.

We used a mixed methods approach and collected quantitative and qualitative data to better understand and describe the subject of the research (Creswell 2014). The research was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Catholic University of Croatia. The research was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, a survey was conducted during 2020. Survey sample totals 1,324 respondents (all were Catholics). Intentional sampling was carried out and the sample is not representative. We presented the sample description and details of the survey and the survey instrument in a previous article (Brgles, Turza and Žagmešter 2022). In the second phase, during 2020 and 2021, four focus groups were conducted with 20 participants (all were Catholics too). The main advantage of focus groups is their ability to provide different perspectives. From the perspective of pragmatist approach to the philosophy of knowledge “focus groups serve as tools for producing knowledge and the nature of such knowledge depends on both the prior beliefs that one brings to research and purposes that one hopes to serve through that research” (Morgan and Hoffman 2018, 253).

In qualitative research “selection is crucial, regardless of the variant of qualitative research involved, and regardless of whether the selection is intentional on the part of the researcher, or inadvertent.” (Barbour 2018, 221). We decided to have homogenous focus groups. Our goal was to maximize the potential of “common ground” (Catholic faith) to elicit sharing and comparing experiences, thoughts and conclusions of participants (Morgan and Hoffman 2018). A total of 20 participants were invited. According to Schreier (2018) qualitative research limits itself to few instances or units and the sample size can range from the single case study to a sample size of around 20 to 40. Accordingly, 10 students aged 20 to 24 from different universities in Zagreb and 10 employees aged 36 to 58 participated in our research. The sample is, according to Creswell (2014) deliberate and purposeful, and the results

cannot be generalized. We find this as a limitation of research, especially since it was conducted exclusively among Catholic believers in Croatia. We also see as a limitation the recruitment of focus group participants who are all residents of Northwest Croatia and are highly educated. All participants were familiar with the purpose of the research, and all signed an informed consent. Participation in the research was anonymous and participants could withdraw their consent from the research. We protected the identity of focus group participants and assigned them code names. For participants from focus groups of students, the code names are Student 1, Student 2, Student 3, etc. For other focus group participants, the code names are Employee 1, Employee 2, Employee 3, etc. The protocol for the focus group consisted of five topics, and in this paper, we will present the results of the first topic in which we discussed with the participants the communication on problems related to the environment in the family and sustainable habits in the family. We focused on narrative data, and we believe that “narratives are not just life stories in the most general sense but also stories about everyday experiences, especially disruptions of daily life” (Murray 2018, 266). Focus groups were recorded with an audio recorder. We made transcripts of the conversations and destroyed the recordings, and then we cleaned the data and carried out an axial coding. Three researchers coded the transcripts, and based on the codes, we did thematic analyses. Thematic analyses focuses on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas within the data (Guest, MacQueen and Namey 2012). The goal is to build the themes, sub-themes and categories around the codes. We followed the idea of Guest, MacQueen, and Namey (2012) who claim that data analyses in interpretivism tend to be less structured and less occupied with measurement and quantification, and more with highlighting the meanings.

3. Creating sustainable family habits - who, how and why?

3.1. The main characteristics of the environmental communication in a family and willingness to change the unsustainable habits

1324 respondents participated in the research, of which 28.3% were men and 71.7% were women.

The age structure of the respondents is equally distributed by age category, as shown in Table 2.

When asked if the respondents have children, 35.8% of them answered that they did not, and 64.2% of them answered that they did.

When asked whether environmental problems were discussed in their family and surroundings, many respondents (42.5%) answered that those problems were often discussed, i.e. at least once a month or more often. As the frequency of conversations about environmental problems decreases, so do the respondents' answers, which shows us that the respondents, their families, and society are aware of problems related to the environment.

On the next question, the respondents were supposed to express their (dis)agreement with the statement that it is necessary to point out the importance of environmental problems in their own family. As many as 97.3% of respondents mostly or completely agreed with the statement that it is necessary to point out the importance of environmental problems in one's own family and society. It is important to emphasize that the percentage of those who completely agree is higher than those who mostly agree with the statement. We thus conclude that the respondents attach great importance to environmental problems and are ready to point this out to others.

When asked to what extent respondents were ready to change their own habits in order to contribute to the preservation of the environment, the largest percentage of them answered that they were mostly and completely ready, 95.2% of them. After the first two variables that gave us an insight

Table 1. Distribution of respondents according to sex

Sex		
Male	375	28.3%
Female	949	71.7%
TOTAL	1324	100%

Table 2. Distribution of respondents by age

Age		
18 - 24	178	13.4%
25 - 34	170	12.8%
35 - 44	226	17.1%
45 - 54	266	20.1%
55 - 64	251	19%
65 and more	233	17.6%
TOTAL	132	100%

Table 3. Distribution of respondents by parenthood

Do you have child/children?		
No	472	35.8%
Yes	848	64.2%
TOTAL	1320	100%

Table 4. Conversations about environmental problems

Frequency of conversations about environmental problems in the family and society		
No, never	84	6.3%
Yes, rarely (once every 3 months or less)	255	19.3%
Yes, sometimes (6 to 10 times a year)	394	29.8%
Yes, often (at least once a month or more often)	563	42.4%
No response	28	2.1%
TOTAL	1324	100%

Table 5. Importance of environmental problems

It is necessary to point out the importance of environmental problems in one's own family and society		
I don't agree at all	11	0.8%
I mostly disagree	20	1.5%
I mostly agree	412	31.1%
I completely agree	876	66.2%
No response	5	0.4%
TOTAL	1324	100%

Table 6. Willingness to change own habits

Willingness to change one's own habits that can contribute to the preservation of the environment		
I'm not ready at all	7	0.5%
I'm mostly not ready	49	3.7%
I'm mostly ready	855	64.6%
I am fully prepared	407	30.7%
No response	6	0.5%
TOTAL	1324	100%

Table 7. Willingness to talk more about environmental problems

Willingness in the family and society to talk more about environmental problems and the importance of changing habits that can influence their reduction		
I am not ready at all	22	1.7%
I am mostly not ready	86	6.5%
I am mostly ready	676	51.1%
I am fully prepared	518	39.1%
No response	22	1.7%
TOTAL	1324	100%

Table 8. Frequency of conversations about environmental problems and parenthood [in %]

	Do you have children?		
	No	Yes	
Frequency of conversations about environmental problems in the family and society	No, never	10.5	4.1
	Yes, rarely	25.7	16.2
	Yes, sometimes	28.1	31.9
	Yes, often	35.8	47.8
TOTAL	100	100	

Table 9. [in %]

	Do you have children?		
	No	Yes	
Willingness in the family and society to talk more about environmental problems and the importance of changing habits that can influence their reduction	I am not ready at all	2.8	1.1
	I am mostly not ready	10.1	4.7
	I am mostly ready	51.4	52.2
	I am fully prepared	35.7	42.1
TOTAL	100	100	

into the state of awareness of environmental problems, this, the third variable shows us how willing the respondents are to implement and change habits in practice in order to preserve the environment. This percentage shows us a high readiness for change, which is also the result of awareness of environmental problems.

To the statement about willingness to talk more in the family and society about

environmental problems and changes in habits, respondents answered to a greater extent that they were mostly ready and completely ready, 90.2% of them. Moreover, this variable shows us the readiness to react and talk about changes in habits and environmental problems.

Furthermore, the results obtained by conducting a test of the probability of association between two variables follow.

One variable is sociodemographic, while the other relates to claims about environmental problems and the environment.

There is a statistically significant dependence between parenthood and the frequency of talking about environmental problems ($\chi^2 = 43.716$, $df = 3$, $p < 0.01$).

Respondents who have children often discuss environmental problems in the family and society to a greater extent (47.8%) compared to respondents who do not have children (35.8%). At the same time, those respondents who do not have children to a greater extent never discuss environmental problems (10.5%) compared to those respondents who have children (4.1%). These data show us that parents are more willing to raise and discuss environmental issues, and one of the assumptions is that they are aware of environmental problems and are concerned about the future of their children.

There is a statistically significant dependence between parenthood and willingness to talk more about environmental problems and changing habits ($\chi^2 = 21.716$, $df = 3$, $p < 0.01$).

This statement shows us how willing the respondents are to talk more about environmental problems and changing habits, and the results we obtained agree with the previous table. Respondents who have children are more willing to talk more about environmental problems and changes in habits in the family and the environment (42.1%), compared to respondents who do not have children (35.7%).

3.2. A significant role of young people

“Qualitative data analysis is applied to discover and describe issues in the field or structures and processes in routines and practices.” (Flick 2014, 5). Barbour (2014, 313) stresses that “there is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to analysing focus group data”. Our analysis was framed to address some theoretical concerns but also to emerge some new perspectives about the research problem. We used thematic analysis while “(...) substantive theories obviously have

important implications for analysis, including the coding categories that researcher creates and the identification of segments of data to which analytic procedures will be applied.” (Maxwell and Chmiel 2014, 21). We used axial coding and have found more than 300 codes focused on routines and practices of participants and relations in their families. We were building categories and themes around the similar codes and have found four “umbrella” themes. Some of them have sub-themes, like mistrust etc. We recognize them as a very important in a broader context, but we left them out of the focus while they deserve deep analysis in a broader context. Four main, “umbrella” themes are:

1. awareness of environmental problems in the family,
2. adoption of environmental habits and behaviours,
3. the role of non-verbal communication in the family, and
4. the role of young people in communicating environmental problems in families.

The role of young people is the *primus inter pares* theme and it is very strongly connected with other main themes through few categories: socialization as a bi-directional process, the role of secondary socialization, type of communication, daily family routine, positive vs negative examples of family habits and consistency of sustainable habits. Regarding that, it is not possible to show the results in a rigid and structured way. We rather highlight the meaning – both personal and social – interpreted within the discourse (Guest, MacQueen and Namey 2012). We want to enter the dynamics of a relations in the families and our goal is to show how above-mentioned categories are connected and how they build the relations in a family. We have not extracted the quotes from the transcripts in our analysis while the focus groups were conducted on Croatian language, and we would like to avoid “the lost in translation” effect.

Participants in the group of students are aware of environmental problems, but not active enough in the family, although they

believe that they have acquired sustainable habits through education (Student 1, Student 4, and Student 8). They believe that their family habits are sustainable on the “average” level (Student 6), and some point out that children in the family are “more aware than parents” (Student 2). As sustainable habits in the family most often, mention separating waste, saving water and avoiding the use of plastic bags. We have identified that the encyclical *Laudato Si'* has generally not been read in the family and they believe that the family does not often talk about environmental problems, which is a bit different result from the one from survey.

Some of them, especially those who come from a rural area, have adopted ecological habits and behaviours (zero-waste), believe that they have become “routine” and that parents are responsible for this. Therefore, this topic is not communicated regularly, and it is not part of family daily schedule. Also, those who have adopted environmental habits and behaviours express suspicion and mistrust. They wonder whether waste is really recycled and disposed of in the correct way (Student 2, Student 3, and Student 4). We have deduced from the discussions that local; national and EU policies have an important role to play in the application of sustainable family habits.

Participants from urban area point out that they teach parents and grandparents about environmental habits, although they “find it difficult to get into the routine” and emphasize that this social group needs to be better informed (Student 3). While some young participants are directly considered “environmentally conscious” (Student 5), employees are identified as neutral, “neither aware”, “nor unaware” (Employee 1, Employee 2). Discussing environmental problems in the family is “moderately important” to them (Employee 3) Also, if they carry out some sustainable activities, they are not consistent (Employee 4, Employee 6 and Employee 7), which leads us to conclude that they have not cultivated sustainable habits.

We have found out that non-verbal communication in the family also plays an important role because the participants themselves note that although “children at school learn about sustainability” in the family, they do not behave in accordance with sustainability. Employee 4 gives the example that during the winter they “walk home in short sleeves” and do not save energy for heating, which leads us to conclude that the consumption of energy products is not discussed at all in families. Participants believe that they should be better informed, and those who work in education system (Employee 7) have transferred their habits from work to home (waste separation) and learn about environmental habits from students. They also believe that children are better informed precisely because of secondary socialization and that they can get information from them that is crucial for sustainable habits and behaviours (Employee 10).

Conclusion remarks

Our results can be interpreted in a broader framework of relational theory of P. Donati and concepts of primary and secondary socialization of functionalist theory. We can establish that family is an essential social relationship when we talk about communication on environmental problems within the family and the application of sustainable habits within the family. During primary socialization, although environmental problems may not often be communicated, there is an intensification of “unwritten rules” related to basic sustainable habits. It is more clearly seen in the rural environment, where, as participants state, “zero-waste” habits are adopted, which are also part of lifestyle. However, habits are also “brought” to the family thanks to secondary socialization and educational institutions. Pope Francis stresses that “education can bring about real changes in lifestyle” (2015, 211).

We point out that communication on environmental problems in the family is democratic and open, i.e. compliant with

the *all-channel network* type (Trenholm and Jensen 1996). This is also shown by the results of our research (Table 5) because the vast majority of respondents (97%) mostly or completely agreed with the statement that it is necessary to point out the importance of environmental problems in one's own family and society.

To the statement about willingness to talk more in the family and society about environmental problems and changes in habits (Table 7) respondents answered to a greater extent that they were mostly ready and completely ready, 90.2% of them.

We conclude that children and young people are key carriers of information about environmentally sustainable habits in the family because they acquire knowledge about environmental problems and the creation of sustainable habits through education. We therefore agree with Hosany, Hosany and He (2022): socialisation is a bi-directional process. That brings us to relational theory and shows how both – relations among the family at micro level and relations among the family and educational system on the meso level – are significant.

Also, the results showed that there is a significant correlation between parenting and the frequency of conversations about environmental problems, as well as the correlation between parenting and the willingness to talk more about environmental problems and changing habits. The results of our research well complement some of the studies we mentioned in the first chapter. Namely, communication about environmental problems in the family is important for both children and parents, that is, for the trait of the family that can be investigated as *unicum* (family and its members, according to Rossi and Carrà 2017), in which there is a non-economic exchange of information about environmental problems, which can empower the willingness to change family habits. These are general sustainable habits, such as waste separation, energy saving for household heating, water saving, etc., but “there is a nobility in the duty to care for

creation through little daily actions” stresses Pope Francis (2015, 211).

From our focus groups, data emerged that some habits are cultivated spontaneously, especially in the rural area. Young participants believe that EU, national and local environmental politics have an important role in urban area while they can give information and structural help to families and can start changing some habits (like waste separation etc.) and here we emphasize the relations between micro and macro level.

The vast majority of respondents (95.2%) in our research stated that they are mostly ready or fully ready to change their own habits in order to contribute to the preservation of the environment. However, for these “little daily actions”, non-verbal communication in the family is also important. Nevertheless, through non-verbal communication (such as dressing), attitudes are present in families that do not support the adoption of environmental habits. An example of this is the consumption of energy for heating, which is an extremely “hot” topic in Europe now due to the war in Ukraine and the price increase (*sic!*). Wallis and Klöckner (2018) showed that there is a correlation between the behaviour of parents and teenagers related to energy saving. Here we see the possibility for further research, as well as in the aspects indicated by researchers from the perspective of Bronfenbrenner's theory, which “expands” beyond primary and secondary socialization. We also recommend further research and application of Donati's methodology and a reformed AGIL scheme (2022) in which the topic could be viewed in the framework of “secondary relational goods”.

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