

Policy Paper

Youth Work and Education for Sustainable Development

CHAPTER 1: Problem identification and analysis

The concept of Sustainable Development has been recognized as a crosscut principle in previous decades. Significant efforts are being put by governments, organizations, researchers, scientists and scholars around the world in this direction, aiming to develop a society which ensures harmony between environment, society and economic growth. Although it has been first mentioned way before, in the last decades of 20th century this term has been broadened in a search for a model output that represents a world system that is: sustainable without sudden and uncontrolled collapse and capable of satisfying the basic material requirements of all of its people.¹

Even after several declarations, charters and documents (The Earth Charter², Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, adopted at Stockholm on 16 June 1972³; Rio Declaration on Environment and Development adopted at Rio de Janeiro on 14 June 1992⁴; Rio +20 The Future we Want Document⁵, Kyoto Protocol and its amendments⁶), the world is facing challenges in all dimensions of sustainable development.

According to United Nations' World Economic and Social Survey 2013, focused on Sustainable Development Challenges, more than 1 billion people are still living in extreme poverty, and income inequality has been rising; at the same time, unsustainable consumption and production patterns have resulted in huge economic and social costs and may endanger life on the planet. Global actions and strategies are needed to achieve sustainable development: they need to be ambitious, action-oriented, collaborative and adapted to different levels of development.

Results of the Survey are strongly suggesting eradicating extreme poverty, promoting sustainable consumption and production, and managing the planet's natural resource base for the benefit of all. These are the overarching challenges towards achieving sustainable development.⁷

¹ Donella H. Meadows, Gary. Meadows, Jorgen Randers, and William W. Behrens III. (1972). *The Limits to Growth*. New York: Universe Books

² The Earth Charter <http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/pages/Read-the-Charter.html>

³ Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment
<http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?documentid=97&articleid=1503>

⁴ Rio Declaration on Environment and Development:
www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=78&ArticleID=1163

⁵ Rio +20 The Future we Want Document <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/futurewewant.html>

⁶ Kyoto Protocol and its amendments http://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol/items/2830.php

⁷ United Nations' World Economic and Social Survey 2013, focused on Sustainable development challenges
<http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2843WESS2013.pdf>

On European level, the Europe 2020 Strategy for a Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive growth⁸ intends to achieve similar results: for employment; for research and innovation; for climate change and energy; for education; and for combating poverty.

Simultaneously with these efforts, the concept of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) has been developed. ESD promotes learning for sustainability and rethinking existing education curricula that promotes unsustainable societies. This concept, that represents an umbrella for different forms of education that exist or could be created, aims at raising awareness and cultivating attitudes related to Sustainable Development by enhance the competences of citizens to obtain a vision for the future and work towards it. ESD deals with the well-being of all dimensions of sustainability. It is also interdisciplinary, based on local needs, with understanding that these needs often have international consequences and it involves formal, non-formal and informal education/learning.

Youth work can play a key role in the field of Education for Sustainable Development. Taking into consideration that ESD is a lifelong process; the need to work with young people grows. ESD goes beyond formal education and aims to establish values, lifestyles and attitudes from a young age.⁹ For these reasons, we believe youth organizations should endorse ESD in their activities. In this way young people will acquire knowledge, skills, perspectives, and values that will guide and motivate them to pursue sustainable livelihoods, to participate in a democratic life, and to live in a sustainable way.

CHAPTER 2: Aim and objective of this policy paper

This policy paper aims to advocate for Education for Sustainable Development. It provides a set of recommendations that will enable youth organizations to embed ESD in their activities. YEU argues that youth organizations play a significant role in the holistic development of young people and have the potential to integrate ESD in their activities. Particularly, the objectives of this policy paper are to propose concrete and specific measures that can be implemented by youth organizations in order to:

- raise awareness/ promote ESD
- develop the competences of youth organizations to include elements of ESD in their non-formal education (NFE) activities
- implement multi-stakeholder approach and strengthen their cooperation concerning ESD

⁸ EUROPE 2020 - A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth
Brussels, 3.3.2010 <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:2020:FIN:EN:PDF>

⁹ UNECE Strategy for ESD, 2005, <http://www.unece.org/env/esd.html>

CHAPTER 3: Topics addressed by the policy paper

What Is Sustainable Development?

The idea of sustainable development was defined in 1987 by the World Commission on Environment and Development¹⁰ as: “Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.

Later on, at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa in 2002, the commitment to sustainable development was reaffirmed.¹¹ Since then, the concept of sustainability spread rapidly up to the point of being central topic for many projects of international organizations, national institutions, corporate enterprises, etc.

One of the most important implications of sustainability represents the concept of intergenerational equity. Intergenerational equity is a concept saying that humans “hold the natural and cultural environment of the Earth in common both with other members of the present generation and with other generations, past and future”.¹² Therefore human population inherits the Earth from previous generations and has an obligation to pass it on in reasonable condition to future generations. This means that human population should not affect future generations due to actual decisions and actions. However, it is not easy to coin a definition of the concept that could be unambiguous, conclusive and be translated in practical actions. Many scholars argue that it is impossible to determine today what the future generations could need or plan the correct allocation of resources, unaware of future technological advances.

From another point of view, sustainable development is a target that every population across the world has the right to achieve. The main idea is to adjust the concept of development to the limits imposed by the environment, implying an afterthought of our actual economic system. This might be the only way that sustainability can lead to improved living conditions, equity and efficiency, implementing what could seem utopian or paradoxical.

It is important not to confuse development and economic growth. The latter is a more restricted concept, because it refers only to the increment of wealth produced in a country. Instead, development implies an improvement, not only economic, but also social, a change towards a preferable situation and an increase of individual opportunities to live the life that each one wants. For this reason it cannot be just measured in quantitative indicators, but also in qualitative ones.

¹⁰ Brundtland Commission. 1987

¹¹ The Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development, 2002, <http://www.un-documents.net/jburgdec.htm>

¹² Weiss, 1990, p. 8

Sustainable development encompasses concern for the carrying capacity of natural systems with special emphasis on social, political and economic challenges faced by humanity. In 2000, the United Nations Millennium Declaration identified principles where the concept of sustainable development is founded on three interdependent pillars:

- Ecological, the environment's protection and use of natural resources in a manner that could keep the natural capital and doesn't prevent its renewal, hence respecting the carrying capacity of the life-support system.
- Economical, as expression of human activities that should continue to develop according to efficiency principle, in other words, finding better ways to do something. There's not a refusal of economic growth, but it has to follow a rhythm respectful of environmental limits, founding a balance between different social needs.
- Social, because development is not only an economical matter but it includes the concept of social equity, possible only through a better distribution of the capitals, and the necessity to achieve social goals in order to improve the life's quality for everybody.

In addition to these pillars of sustainable development, there is a 4th emerging dimension, identified either as (Inter)Cultural dimension or as Political dimension, although experts on the topic have not come to a consensus.

What is Youth Work?

Peter Lauritzen, Head of the Youth Unit of Council of Europe's Directorate of Youth and Sport, defined the main objective of youth work as “providing opportunities for young people to shape their own futures. Youth work is a summary expression for activities with and for young people of a social, cultural, educational or political nature. Increasingly, youth work activities also include sports and services for young people. Youth work belongs to the domain of 'out-of-school' education, most commonly referred to as either non-formal or informal learning. The general aims of youth work are the integration and inclusion of young people in society. It may also aim towards the personal and social emancipation of young people from dependency and exploitation. Youth Work belongs both to the social welfare and to the educational systems.”¹³

The main purpose of youth work (as defined in the document “The qualification framework for the youth workers” created as part of “Certification of the qualifications of youth workers – road to greater recognition of youth work” project coordinated by YEU and other partners¹⁴) is “to support young people in the process of becoming independent and helps them to reach their full potential. The youth worker plays an important role in giving and providing support and assists in the personal, social, and educational development of young people in order to help them to be

¹³ June 2006, Peter Lauritzen, Council of Europe's Directorate of Youth and Sport:

<http://www.nonformality.org/2006/06/defining-youth-work/>

¹⁴ <http://youth-workers.eu/>

better prepared to face challenges in life and become active citizens in society. The main role of youth work is to create a safe environment and opportunities for the active participation of young people. In this way youth work provides learning spaces through programmes that are needs-centred and have a social-constructivist approach. These different processes give young people the opportunity to gain competences, skills, experiences and knowledge that could be important for the success in life.”

Youth work is usually based on Non-formal Education and Informal learning processes. Youth work is usually practised by youth organizations, informal groups or youth services, and public authorities.¹⁵

Education for Sustainable Development:

Education has evolved as an essential element of the society throughout the time. Education is not only about learning to read, write and count. It is about increasing knowledge, enhancing skills and developing attitudes. Education is a powerful tool to achieve change in society. After the UN Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1972, “environmental education” gained considerable level of recognition. Environmental education focuses on raising awareness about the environment and its associated changes. Yet, in the next years the need for a more holistic approach emerged. In this context, the idea of Education for Sustainable Development has been born.

According to Huckle¹⁶, Education for Sustainable Development is about the learning needed to maintain and improve our quality of life and the quality of life of generations to come. It is about equipping individuals, communities, groups, businesses and government to live and act sustainably; as well as giving them an understanding of the environmental, social and economic issues involved. It is about preparing for the world in which we will live in the next century, and making sure we are not found needing.

Reorienting education towards sustainable development will give people skills to make lifestyle changes and will enable a society to become more sustainable. People will learn to think beyond the economic, societal, and environmental horizons of their immediate families and communities. They can learn about other lifestyles, careers, and life conditions. This exposure may even ignite a passion to bring sustainable change to any community in which they choose to live.¹⁷

¹⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/youth/policy/implementation/work_en.htm

¹⁶ Education for Sustainable Development-A briefing paper for the Training and Development Agency for Schools, John Huckle, October 2006

¹⁷ Education for Sustainable Development by Charles A. Hopkins , Rosalyn Mckeown, 1999

ESD is beyond the traditional practice of Environmental Education, which focuses on teaching and learning about, in and 'for' the environment. Instead, ESD foresees in engaging people in new ways of seeing, thinking, learning and acting. People are not only able to explore the relationships between their lives, the environment, social systems and institutions, but also to become active participants and decision-makers in the change process. For this reason, some of the main elements of ESD¹⁸ are future envisioning, critical thinking and reflection, systemic thinking, building partnerships and participation in decision-making processes.

CHAPTER 4: Recommendations for youth organizations to embed ESD in their activities

1. Which concrete measures should be taken by youth organizations to raise awareness/promote Education for Sustainable development?

- a. Youth Organizations should organize training courses, seminars or conferences in order to implement actions on sustainable development for young people (18 – 30 years old)
- b. Youth Organizations should organize free of charge informal social events such as public movie projections, performances, art exhibitions about sustainable development and related topics, which might be followed by discussion or an expert's speech
- c. Youth Organizations should encourage organic gardening as part of both schools curricula and/or their community work.
- d. Youth Organizations should calculate their environmental impact (such as carbon and water footprint) on an annual and/or event basis. Next to that, they should develop a label on their web page where they will publish their environmental performances. The aforementioned should be also promoted through other media channels.
- e. Youth Organizations should organize outdoor activities (nature tours, bike riding, rowing, swimming, etc.) guided by specialists/experts in order to promote/inform young people about a sustainable lifestyle.
- f. Youth Organizations should act as role models of sustainability to young people and other Youth Organizations/Non-Governmental Organizations following “sustainability” and “eco-guidelines” in their activities. For instance they could implement recycling and reusing methodologies within every event
- g. Youth Organizations should encourage the usage of existing interactive e-learning tools on sustainable development by the young people they work with.
- h. Youth organizations should measure the usage of paper in their work and plant a tree after spending certain amount of paper. As it is difficult to measure how much paper can be made from a tree, each organization should make their own guidelines to follow (planting a tree per 6 or 12 months; after each event, etc).

¹⁸ Engaging people in sustainability, Daniella Tilbury and David Wortman, 2004

2. Which concrete measures should be taken in order to develop the competences of youth organizations to include elements of ESD in their NFE (non-formal education) activities?

- a. Youth Organizations should ask for expertise and support from environmental organizations in order to enrich their knowledge related to environmental issues. Practical collaboration and exchange on a local level is highly recommended.
- b. Youth Organizations should include ESD in agenda of their annual meetings.
- c. Youth Organizations should use the “living library” method in order to raise awareness about sustainable development. “Library books” in this case can be experts on sustainable development, or victims of unsustainability.
- d. Each youth organizations should use the existing “sustainability” or “eco-guidelines” in order to develop the internal ones and implement them.
- e. Youth Organizations should create an online platform with educational materials and other sources which youth workers can use in order to enhance their competences on ESD.
- f. Youth Organizations are encouraged to broaden their field of activity in both urban and rural areas that are not supported by other youth organizations.

3. Which concrete measures can be taken by youth organizations to strengthen the cooperation among different stakeholders concerning ESD?

- a. Youth Organizations should cooperate with other Non-Governmental Organizations organizing common events and activities about sustainable development in order to reach a wider public.
- b. Youth organizations should create training courses on sustainable development for the teachers of their communities
- c. Youth Organizations should improve the visibility of the campaigns related to sustainable development through multiple media channels
- d. Youth organizations should organize educational activities about sustainable development for young people, inviting children of different stakeholders to take part in them. Through their children, stakeholders will have the chance to learn about sustainable development and reinforce the efforts of youth organizations when it comes to ESD.
- e. Youth organizations should collaborate with local authorities and accommodation owners in order to organize events for families to promote sustainable lifestyle through intergenerational activities.
- f. Youth organizations should organize ESD events in which they invite both young and elder people to participate. In this way, they can use an intergenerational approach and obtain support from elder people in their ESD initiatives.

- g. Youth organizations should organize an orientation event for stakeholders in order to present their successful activities in the field of ESD. Such event can be also used as an opportunity to gather funds for future activities.

CHAPTER 5: Conclusion

Taking into consideration that the need for ESD is imperative, youth organizations can take initiative and endorse the concept in their activities. By implementing the above mentioned recommendations, youth organizations can play a leading role in the field. Youth organizations will be able to raise awareness about ESD among the young people and the communities they work with, enabling them to have life-long access to opportunities, to be aware of and to understand global development concerns and the local and personal relevance of those concerns. In this way young people will be able to enact their rights and responsibilities as inhabitants of an interdependent and changing world by affecting change for a just and sustainable world.

In addition, youth organizations by including elements of ESD in their Non-Formal Education activities, they will achieve to change the values of the young people they work with. Comparing with knowledge and skills, values and attitudes are the most difficult to change. By endorsing ESD in Non-Formal Education activities of youth organizations, a critical understanding, a creative engagement and proactive involvement of young people in society will be achieved.

Last, youth organizations can strengthen their cooperation with different stakeholders concerning ESD and thus attain to introduce cross-sector partnerships that will collectively address the topic of ESD. By joining efforts related to ESD, the results will be faster and more sustainably achieved.