

EDUCATION CENTERS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND LOCAL PARTICIPATION

1. INTRODUCTION

In the last years ecological problems related to water consumption, human activities, pollution, resource exploitation, growing population are becoming more and more important both for scientists and for the public. At the same time we are witnessing a strong change in people's ecological awareness especially from 1960s when several studies started to develop in order to answer important questions. As we can understand, there was and there is still a need to educate people and at the same time we need to increase the local community participation in order to involve them. In this way we can form the attitude necessary for people to participate in a responsible, effective and sustainable way in the decision making process related to environmental problems trying to change the mind toward a sustainable community development. But what does it mean Sustainable Community and how we can relate this concept with the ESD center?

1.1. ESD and ESD-Centers as a Tools for Sustainable Community

A sustainable community is a community that looks not only in to the present but and in to the future. It is flexible enough, and wise to maintain its natural, economic, social, cultural and political support systems.

A sustainable community continues to thrive in time because it has:

- A healthy and diverse ecological system that continually performs life sustaining functions and provides other resources for humans and other species
- A social foundation that provides for the health of all community members, respects cultural diversity, is equitable in its actions, and considers the needs of future generations
- A healthy and diverse economy that adapts to change, provides long-term security to residents, and recognizes social and ecological limits.

Taking into account what we said above, we have to analyze the possible solutions that we need to apply in order to achieve both participation and sustainability. According UNESCO:

“The kind of change required by sustainability implicates each community, each household and each individual. Successful solutions to problems at this level of society will need to be rooted in the cultural specificity of the town or region if the people are to be supportive of and involved in such change.” From the UNESCO (1997) *Educating for a Sustainable Future: A Transdisciplinary Vision for Concerted Action*, paragraph 114.

Education for sustainable development (ESD) means including key sustainable development issues into teaching and learning, such as poverty alleviation,

citizenship, peace, ethics, responsibility in local and global contexts, democracy and governance, justice, security, human rights, health, gender equity, cultural diversity, rural and urban development, economy, production and consumption patterns, corporate responsibility, environmental protection, natural resource management and biological and landscape diversity.

It also requires participatory teaching and learning methods that motivate and empower learners to change their behavior and take action for sustainable development. Education for Sustainable Development consequently promotes competencies like critical thinking, imagining future scenarios and making decisions in a collaborative way.

There is a need to educate people, especially the young ones, on ecological and environmental problems. This can be achieved thanks to specific centers that are able to highlight the importance of education for sustainable development using different tools, programs, different resources of information and a way to teach and learn. During the last years the importance of education for sustainable development centers (ESD-Centers) became stronger enough to involve not only the young generations such as children and students, but also the local communities and the society in general, local or global. The main aim of an ESD-Center is to succeed in making individuals and communities understand the complex interactions between them and the nature taking into account all the aspects such as social, economic, cultural, environmental, institutional and technological. Moreover, as we have already said an ESD-Center aims to form the attitude necessary for people to participate in a responsible, effective and sustainable way in the decision making process related to environmental problems. This way, we will be able to increase the awareness of learners towards sustainable development but at the same time they will increase their knowledge, their attitudes and skills in order to change their mind toward a sustainable future.

To achieve a sustainable future we have to make people aware of what is happening, where they live and what they can do. The participation process seems to be the best way to reach this aim. In the paragraph below we are going to explain the importance of the participation process taking into account the main principles and the main step that need to be followed.

1.2. PARTICIPATION PRINCIPLES

As we can understand the public participation in making decisions is vital, moreover the local participation can lead to better decisions in order to meet the needs of more people. Decisions are more likely to withstand scrutiny if the decision-making process is more open, more honest and more accountable. At the same time, we must say that public participation does not guarantee that everyone will be happy with a decision. But involving the public at an early stage in the decision-making process, and finding ways for their views to be heard and taken into account, helps to build consensus. Another important point is the improvement of the democracy. In fact regular public

participation shows people that they are valued and that their views are important. In this way, individuals and community groups can become more active and more responsible for their environment and quality of life.

The first thing that needs to be done is to prepare the public participation process using certain questions, strategies or plans previously agreed.

The second step is to create a participation strategy. To create a participation strategy we need to answer to the following questions:

- what is the purpose?
- who should participate?
- are the public represented?
- how will we make sure all of the public is represented?
- how will we persuade and get the public to participate?
- when should they participate?
- what information do they need to participate?
- when will the public participate?
- how long should be allocated to the public participation stage?
- what do the public need to participate?
- what help will the public need?
- what resources are available?
- how long will the public need to make their comments?
- how will the comments be handled?
- what needs to be done once the decision has been made?

Everyone can benefit from a strategy that helps them become more effective participants. This includes the public, authority officials, businesses and NGOs. Helping people to participate can take four broad approaches. These are:

- helping people get involved;
- helping people understand the issues;
- helping people develop skills;
- helping people build networks;

However, public participation can also create difficulties and it is important to be aware of them:

- it does not automatically lead to consensus;
- people and public authorities can be cynical about the value of participation;
- people may only participate if they think their interests are threatened;
- it can raise unrealistic expectations of what can be achieved;
- it may slow down the decision;
- it costs money and we don't have any

The aim of this study is to assess current situation of the level of local participation in ESD-Centers from four countries Italy, Turkey, Slovenia and Greece trying to compare them in order to recognize advantages and disadvantages from every country in order to define the best ways to increase the involvement of local participation.

2. MATERIAL & METHODOLOGY

In this chapter we are going to discuss which kind of material and methodologies we applied in order to achieve our aim. The web research represents the most important resource of information that we used to delineate the main guidelines of our essay and to analyze the existing situation. We analyzed official web pages of ministries and of the most important institutions. We used several scientific articles, documents and other materials available inside the environmental center in order to have a broad view of the situation. We interviewed the employees from the national park of Parnassos and from the environmental center of Amfissa in order to collect more information about the possible solution in involving local communities. Anyway the material that we used and the time we had, it was not enough to analyze in a better way our topic. Moreover some interviews to the local community should be done in order to improve our research activity. The methodology that we followed was the first thing decided in order to have a clear way of working. The first thing that we did it was a brainstorming in order to delineate the general structure of our work. After that we defined the aim of our research, in this way it was possible to collect in a easily way all the information from different sources of data to reach the fixed aim. All together we had a first general checking of the collected information and we divided the work in order to manage in the best way the time we had. From this moment we had an individual work but taking always into account the work situation of the other team components. In fact during these days several discussion and comparison were conducted among us in order to have always under control the work between us. At the end we joined together the different individual parts in order to compare all the information and to delineate the main conclusions and the main suggestions.

3. RESULTS

2.1 GREECE

The Greek Ministry of Education states that the ESD-Centers aim to emphasize the importance of having the entire local community participating in assessing, exploring and tackling an environmental problem. Furthermore, in addition to understanding the social nature of environmental problems, it states that the experience and knowledge of the local people should be utilized in order to find a solution to a local

environmental problem. As in contrast to the stated aims of educators where there is no direct reference to the local society but merely a general statement of the need to have everybody environmentally literate. We can report that in Greece the participation of the stakeholders and the local community in and with the ESD-Centers is generally limited to one or two day seminars. Although, we should highlight four centers that are combining activities to expose local products within the ESD-Centers and give the opportunity to the producer to argue for the quality of their products and the environment friendly process for production. Those centers are CEE Mallaon and Amfissa and MAB Olympus and Samaria.

2.2 ITALY

The first thing that we must clarify in the Italian context, is that we don't have clear guidelines in involving local communities in a sustainable development even if in the Italian constitution the involvement of people plays a relevant role. As we have already said this leads to several problems related to the decision making process. Anyway we were able to extract some general rules. Before explain this point, we have to say that the environmental education in Italy is entrusted to specific bodies responsible for environmental protection that can be either institutional such as the Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea or associations or non-governmental organizations. This means that we can find few environmental education centers under the state control. In general EC are situated near specific places with high values due to environmental and cultural importance. In Italy the education about a sustainable development is addressed inside programmes applied by the different subjects involved in the environmental education and we cannot find specific ESD centers. Moreover we can recognize a complete lack in an education to a sustainable development during the mandatory schooling. In the Italian context, the involvement of local communities seems to be very uncommon, especially when we are facing with environmental and sustainable development issues. As we have already said, we can recognize thousands of different association, nongovernmental organization, national agency, trying to involve people in the decision making process. The most important ones are WWF, LIPU, Legambiente that aim to increase the participation of local communities using different methods such as TV and radio programmes, local assemblies, web portals, periodical initiatives and questionnaire to be submit, environmental education campaigns to promote and increase the mobilization against

the most important environmental problems for example, against nuclear power, illegal building and on illegal dumping of waste. Naturally the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Environment are involved together them in different programmes in order to "preserve nature starting from the protection of nature, to educate young people to respect the world in which we live, raise public awareness on issues important as the protection of the environment and the attention to health ... "

The local community involvement is achieved thanks to different solution that can be applied in an integrated way. For example we found some interesting way of involvement such as volunteer camps and summer camps open to everyone, completely free, in order to increase the awareness about important issues. Moreover we can find several village festivals all along Italy, especially during summer and autumn periods, which aim to bring the attention toward local sustainable production. A good example is given by the "Sweet Red Pepper Festival" able to involve people thanks to workshops, wine and food tours, exhibitions in order to show how the production can be done through a sustainable way and how they can be involved in the decision process.

We can find other ways to involve people for example, sperimental projects, books and DVD explaining ways to participate in the decision making process. Moreover we are able to recognize some other important national and regional institutions such as INFEA, LABNET, ANDREA, CEA, ORMEA and ARPAV. These agencies are able to give us not only indication on the way of the participation process but they represents archives of information about the environmental sustainable education on different themes according the general guidelines from the Italian Ministry of Education.

2.3 SLOVENIA

Slovenia does not have ESD centers, but we have environmental centers. The environmental center is organized as a place that offers conditions for the operation of environmental NGOs, linking the interested public, while enables the general public to access information and publications on environmental protection and sustainable development.

Main objectives of our centers:

- improve information and public awareness of environmental protection and sustainable development,

- enhance the environmental awareness of individuals and community,
- improve the participation between environmental NGOs and the public in decision-making processes,
- improve public access to environmental information and publications,
- provide basic advice and access to independent advice in various fields of environmental protection and sustainable development.

We couldn't find any official statement of the management and strategy of Slovenia (by the Ministry of Education and Sport) for the participation of the local community in or with the environmental centers. In Slovenia Education for Sustainable Development includes (by the Ministry of Education and Sport):

- respect for human values
- active citizenship and participation
- intercultural dialogue and linguistic diversity
- nature conservation and environmental protection (environmental awareness and responsibility)
- quality education and inspiring working and learning environment
- quality of interpersonal relationships the development of social skills (non violence, tolerance, cooperation, respect, etc..)
- A healthy lifestyle (mental and physical health)
- Strengthening healthy self-confidence and self-esteem,
- Quality leisure time
- Developing entrepreneurship as a contribution to society and the environment,
- Learn about different areas of culture and the promotion of creativity and activity.

2.4 TURKEY

Education for Sustainable Development programme is operated not only by official organizations but also by volunteer organizations in Turkey. This programme supported by local foundations, regional foundations, Ministry of Education and some International Programmes. In addition to Our constitution deal with environmental sustainable development and the law of environment's aim is that, the environment which is the lebensraum of all organism, have been to protected by sense of sustainable environment and sustainable development.

In Turkey also more than 47 volunteer organizations are working about sustainable environmental development both regional and local level (Duru, 1995). The most recognised of them are Foundation for to Compete with Erosion, Planting and Protect Natural Asset in Turkey (Türkiye Erozyonla Mücadele Ağaçlandırma ve Doğal Varlıkları Koruma Vakfı-TEMA), The Foundation for Protect Wildlife (Yaban Hayatı Koruma Vakfı), The Foundation for Protect and Recognise the Environmental and Cultural Values (Çevre ve Kültür Değerlerini Koruma ve Tanıtma Vakfı-ÇEKÜL), Association of Nature (Doğa Derneği), etc. Especially, Ministry of Education organized EDS for students who are in pre-school to highschool. This education organized in 81 cities of Turkey by name Project for Practical Environment Education. For university students ESD programme organized by each university's administration which is interesting in environment (Kaya et al., 2010).

According to Kaya et al (2010), Turkey doesn 't have a national strategy in the coordination of Ministry of Environment and Forestry, Ministry of National Education and State Planing Organization that share the responsibility of the process with the aim of preparing our national strategy. It is defined that there isn't enough pressed and visual education materials in the subject of Sustainable Development for the purpose of being kept informed and become conscious of the society. But, UNESCO National Commission for Turkey (2012) according that, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Environment and Forestry and State Planning Organization have been supported the EDS. Also UNESCO National Commission for Turkey constitute a department to monitor to techniques and politics issues of EDS. The example of this is the eco-education/eco-school which trained by a foundation named TÜRÇEV.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The main problems that arise from our study are:

- In some countries (Italy, Slovenia and Turkey) there are no common institutions able to give common guidelines about environmental education
- In Italy and Slovenia we can recognize some environmental center that are not related with a sustainable development
- A weakness in the involvement in the participation of local communities

Analyzing the different results of our research we can say that we cannot recognize big differences among the studied countries. In particular we can say that the Italian

and Turkish situations seem to be similar. In these two countries the local communities involvement on the environmental sustainable education seems to be unclear and very fragmented without common guidelines. Our proposal is to define common guidelines about the participation, decreasing the number of the different institutions in order to have a clear structure both in the Italian and Turkish society.

The Slovenian situation is something in the middle. In this country the education for sustainable development is a central part in the education process but at the same time the lack of ESD centers leads to some important consequences such as the bad connection within local community and educational centers for sustainable development. So in this case, we need an increase in the links between local community and environmental centers, we also need to start with a process of upgrading and with introduction of new ESD centers, trying in this way to increase the participation of local community in the decision making process about the environmental sustainable development.

The Greek situation seems to be the best one among the studied countries. In fact we can recognize a well distributed structure all over Greece of ESD centers with clear guidelines. But we couldn't find a precise strategy (by the Ministry of Education) for the participation of the local community in or with the educational centers of sustainable development.

5. SUGGESTIONS

Local participation as a term is always used in ESD conversations but we weren't able to find or recognize specific actions to enhance or start some kind of interaction. According to the situation of the countries under study we want to suggest strategies and programs in order to increase the participation of local communities. Our suggestions for acting locally (but always thinking globally) are:

- Involving the local communities in actions in summer or winter camps as volunteers to participate within the working groups in order to provide communication with locals and to get in touch and interact with each other.
- ESD centers should support programs to educate local producers (organic farms, tourism, environmental friendly) and offer advice.
- Periodical newspapers open days for interested public as a way to attract public attention and opinions.

- Certification system for the facilities in the region (green building, eco-school, good practices) joint together in the same institution
- Voluntary programs for environment enthusiasts to involve them in to ESD principles and practices.
- Incorporate education for sustainable development in the curricula.
- Festivals to improve the awareness about local products and local resources.

Finally, we believe that every country should develop a national strategy for sustainable communities by using ESD-Centers as focal points. Our dream is that ESD-Centers will convince people, local or regional, that SD is the new way to produce, to consume, to communicate and finally to live.

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