



ENjoinED Learning: Cross-Sectoral CSO Platform for Sustainability Education in a Group of Post-Communist Countries

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1. Civic initiative for sustainability education

ENjoinED initiative is a non-formal network of civil society organizations (CSOs) and research institutions from traditionally separate 'sectors' – *environmental* and *educational* - that promotes Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) through research, advocacy and training in 8 countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Estonia, Georgia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Romania and Slovenia. It stems out of *Education for Sustainable Development Partnership Initiative* (ESdPI) project, supported by European Commission IPA funds for strengthening partnerships among CSOs, and is coordinated by the *Network of Education Policy Centres* (NEPC). Based on the experience of work in the post-communist Eurasian region, it was recognized at NEPC that there is a growing need to address ESD in the countries where it remains a seldom apostrophized topic in formal education systems, most readily equated with environmental protection education. Moreover, in this region ESD is rarely one of the principles of curriculum development or education as such.

As the United Nations Secretary General's High-level Panel on Global Sustainability warns "Economies are teetering. Inequality is growing. And global temperatures continue to rise. [...] We need to change dramatically, beginning with how we think about our relationship to each other, to future generations, and to the eco-systems that support us." [5]. But sustainable development is not a fixed future destination, a goal to be achieved by some deadline and then shelved. It is a historical process of adaptation learning and action. In that education has to evolve from the present transfer of historical knowledge into education for changed conditions, for adaptation and action, as well as be the intellectual tool to establish the interconnections between the key components of sustainability: economy, society and the natural manifold. If sustainable development is a matter of humanity's choice, education is best positioned for presenting the options available, ways of realizing them and the competences required. ESD ought to ensure that all of society can contribute to the solutions addressing today's challenges, but also to be able to capitalize on the opportunities they bring.

An important lesson for the countries participating in this initiative, small and relatively well developed but not powerful, globally marginal, is that sustainability is about both social equality and attitudes to the environment. Whilst most of the countries have an HDI (not adjust for inequality, though; [6]) at or just below the EU 27 level, their Happy Planet Index values [7] are mostly above that of EU 27 and closer to that of developing countries. This indicates a better balance of the costs and benefits of development than in the leading global economies, and smaller sacrifices incurred in transformation towards sustainability. Whilst sacrifices are still necessary, they can in such constellation provide opportunities for their respective societies, as well.

2. Internal learning: research, seminars, summer school

The activities of the *ENjoinED* initiative set off to tackle this issue along three parallel strands of action. Firstly members of the initiative were instructed and supervised through the comparative research on formal curricular content in compulsory education. The rationale behind that was to assess the validity of claims that ESD is not a major presence in formal compulsory education, as the only universal educational content available to (if not imposed on) all the young citizens in the participating countries. Although England is by few, if any, means similar to the countries participating in the project, it too was included in the basic stage of the research so as to provide a common ground against which to compare this to other ESD-oriented research results. England has a tradition of addressing ESD issues in education and academic research conducted in that vein. By including it in this research under same methodology the *ENjoinED* Central Research Team expected it to provide a link to similar research world-wide. The main findings relevant for this paper will be surveyed below, but are also available in the forthcoming comparative volume [8].

The research was conducted by the participant CSOs under supervision and guidance from the Central Research Team. Conducting the research opened up the national curricula and textbook first-hand to the CSOs participating in the research and trained them to adopt an ESD-based perspective on the educational content. This learning was to be strengthened, in parallel, though a series of intra-initiative seminars addressing the issues ranging from climate change and energy policies to educational policy advocacies and the existing European actions fostering awareness of sustainability through formal education. But the most important outcome expected from both the research and seminars was to engender locally-relevant sustainability topics for the participating countries and their neighbors. Though this is an ongoing process, the exchange of know-how from different organizational backgrounds learning about most relevant topics concerning ESD resulted in the focus of subsequent learning and advocacy campaigns on the socio-economic aspects of sustainability, despite the participating countries' level of development and environmental degradation problems.

Whilst a lot of globally relevant knowledge of the impending environmental constrictions will be included in the third strand of the social learning project within the initiative: the public oriented informal educational modules, it can be



expected that the popularly neglected socio-cultural and economic aspects of sustainability play a lead role in those as well. The modules will be created for public authorities (primarily local authorities), teachers (in primary and secondary formal schooling) and small and medium enterprises. The modules are an as yet underdeveloped segment of the initiative's three strands, perhaps bringing greatest anxieties to *ENjoinED* participants as most visible and least centrally coordinated outputs of social learning and exchange within the initiative (see 4. Outcomes below).

The most important forthcoming internal learning event is the Summer School, where the initiative members influenced the choice of topics and speakers, but will also open the learning process to interested parties from outside the participating organizations (university students and public authority employees). The objective of the Summer School is to bring *ENjoinED* partners and other interested parties together for five days of professional and social learning on the topics of the socio-economic aspects of sustainable development (SD) under natural constraints. It is expected that such cooperation helps shifting social consciousness towards sustainable development and is expected to play a prominent foundation for the promotion of ESD to a wider community of stakeholders in the region. The issues that the Summer school will tackle (in part based on the participants' own expressed learning needs) are (i) varieties in sustainability discourses world-wide (including institutional and psychological obstacles to sustainability-thinking); (ii) development paradigm in education (growth vs. de-growth); and (iii) education as a stage for equal rights and cooperation.

3. Comparative research findings

The research conducted through the initiative, though academically instigated, did not only aim to contribute to the growing stock of academic knowledge on educational structures, content and framing, but to assist the participating organizations (half of which have had very little contact with the formal education sector, whilst others often focused on policy rather than content) in envisaging different formats of formal education for sustainable development. The primary research findings were drafted by the in-country researchers themselves and are presented in national reports available at:

<http://www.enjoined.edupolicy.net/index.php/en/publications.html>.

The aim of the research was to identify, collect and systematically present the existing content most directly relevant to sustainable development in the national curricula in 9 Eurasian countries, based on a uniform coding matrix and research process.

The coding matrix for extracting curricular content contained both 'cognitive', and the 'skills and values' content, which was then assessed for framing [9]. The research was conducted in three phases (Analyses of Framework curricula, Analyses of Selected Subject Curricula and Analyses of selected textbooks). In implementation of the methodology the researchers faced a number of challenges: a) non-existence of universally defined ESD curriculum; b) lack of operational definition of Sustainable Development that educational process should provide for; c) the fact that the research was done in 9 countries and in 9 languages; d) that the national research teams often had no ESD experience; e) that the national education systems vary greatly and rely on different types of curriculum documents from descriptive to output based. Different experiences of work and cooperation were drawn on to approach these obstacles, justify some of the choices and developed the modalities of teamwork.

The specificities of findings differ across countries, and interested readers are advised to consult individual country reports alongside descriptions of the educational system structure. Nonetheless, some commonalities emerge across this diverse region, which can be only summarily outlined here due to limitations of space (for more, cf. [8]). There is ESD content in all the countries' formal educational documents, and quantitatively it is largely focused on the socio-cultural segment of sustainability. Given the calls for sustainable development as the leading paradigm in current and forthcoming societies, ESD should be one of the educational principles in the formal curricula, whilst it is currently not in any of the countries. Where it is stated as a notional goal of education, this is just a formal mention at a very general level. The content that is relevant to ESD is scattered across subjects and grades, but it is not shaped into a broader ESD agenda in any of the countries, making the framing and interconnection of the existing content the most immediate task in educational policy. Some countries urgently require strengthening of the economic and environmental components of sustainability, whilst most need individual empowerment components to help students become better prepared to engage in shaping sustainability practices of most immediate concern to their communities. By and large formal education is focused on understanding rather than engagement, educating about rather than for. Finally, even where it is present the economic content of curricula is not at all oriented on sustainability, but on unsustainable practices of materially driven growth and capital accumulation.

4. Outcomes

An independent expert is tasked with monitoring learning process and outcomes (to be reported in full at the final conference in November 2012) throughout all of initiative's cooperation. At the very outset the participants represented an inhomogeneous group (regardless of the CSO sector) according to prior knowledge and concern for environmental sustainability. In general they had less confidence about what the solutions are to environmental problems than there was confidence about what the causes are; there was no consensus on whether modern development only harms the environment or whether one's country needs economic growth to protect the environment, whether poorer countries should be expected to make less of an effort than richer countries to



protect the environment and the like. Early on the participants indicated that their own learning outcomes are affected by (1) the person conveying the content, (2) the way the content is conveyed (active or passive), (3) the social context and (4) intrinsic motivation. The seminars tried to focus on content and social sides of learning through encouraging social ties both through the working part of the day (e.g. group/pair work), but also during breaks etc. Learning "on site" was also shown to matter though might be more appropriate for some stakeholders rather than others. Most importantly it was noted that teaching about SD in an interactive manner (e.g. group work, open space' etc.) is the favored way of teaching about the issues of concern. However, to this day anxieties remain about the participants' own leadership role in advocating for ESD in their countries, but foundation in common-owned evidence-based policy aims to alleviate that. In the words of the *ENjoinED* project coordinator: the people from participating organizations believe " that education for sustainability is something crucial for the countries with a difficult heritage of the past (war, social inequalities, pollution, development without the clear vision [...], where the decisions that concern all members of the society and their future successors were (are) often made [...] based on particular interests, [and that it begins with 'scientific' evidence] of what exists in the national education curricula that is relevant for sustainability" [10].

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