

# Learning for Sustainable Development:

*exploring learning  
strategies across  
the lifespan*

sustainable  
development

lifelong  
learning



Netherlands  
National Commission  
for UNESCO



With great pleasure the Netherlands National Commission for UNESCO presents the final report of the project on Sustainable Education. This project has been developed by the Netherlands National Commission for UNESCO in cooperation with CINOP, an independent, international research and consultancy agency specialized in lifelong learning, vocational education & training (VET), adult education and human resources development.

The project was launched in order to connect the issue of Life Long Learning with the issue of Learning for Sustainable Development. Two issues of major importance for society. This final report reflects the outcomes of several scientific reports as well as an international expert meeting 'Learning for Sustainable Development, exploring learning strategies across the life span' (Leiden, 23 -24 April 2008). The scientific reports and the international expert meeting both focused on finding learning strategies for sustainable development across the life span.

Three of the reports discussed were carried out by the University of Groningen as well as CINOP. Professor Max van der Kamp was the leading scientist in the studies of the University of Groningen. After completing the studies and in the middle of the process of organizing an international expert meeting to our great regret he suddenly passed away and much too early..

We remember Max van der Kamp not only as an excellent scientist, but also as an eminent member of the Netherlands National Commission for UNESCO. Originally this report should have been publicized in 2008, but because of the death of Max van der Kamp it was postponed.

The Commission would like to place this final report in the memory of Max van der Kamp. By doing so we also honour his work in the issue of sustainable development and life long learning in particular for the National Commission. It was his contribution to the debate to link up both issues.

The aim of this report is to strengthen the knowledge and to set the agenda on the issue of sustainable development in relation to life long and life wide learning.

We hope that this report provides a starting point for fruitful learning strategies for sustainable development across the life span.

**Dr. B.E. van Vucht Tijssen**

*President Netherlands National Commission for UNESCO*

# Learning for Sustainable Development:

## *exploring learning strategies across the lifespan*

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brunna  
braga



# 1. Background of the report

The programme 'Learning for Sustainable Development, exploring learning strategies across the lifespan' was initiated by the Netherlands National Commission for UNESCO and the Dutch Institute for Vocational and Adult Education (CINOP). The programme consists of three scientific reports on the issue and an international expert meeting. This report is a reflection on and a synthesis of the three reports and the international expert meeting. The goal of the entire programme was to build bridges between the issues of Lifelong Learning and Sustainable Development. Until recently these two issues were mostly treated separately. They seemed to be two separate worlds. For example; in the Netherlands there are lecturers on Lifelong Learning as well as lecturers on Sustainable Development. There are none on combinations of the two issues. In the conviction that both issues can strengthen each other the Netherlands National Commission for UNESCO and CINOP have organized this programme.

The following reports were made:

- Sustainable learning and societal participation. Van Esch et al, CINOP.
- ON COURSE. The contribution of lifelong learning to sustainable development. Van Beilen, University of Groningen (RUG).
- Sustainable development and education. Theory and practice. S. Tebbes, University of Groningen, (RUG).

The first report deepens the knowledge of the learning process itself. The second and the third discuss sustainable development in relation to lifelong learning, two issues of major importance to our societies.

The expert meeting was organized by the National Network for Sustainability in Higher Education (DHO), 23-24 April 2008, Leiden, The Netherlands. The goal of the expert meeting was to strengthen the knowledge of and to set the agenda for the issue of sustainable development in relation to lifelong learning. The conference was organised for two main reasons:

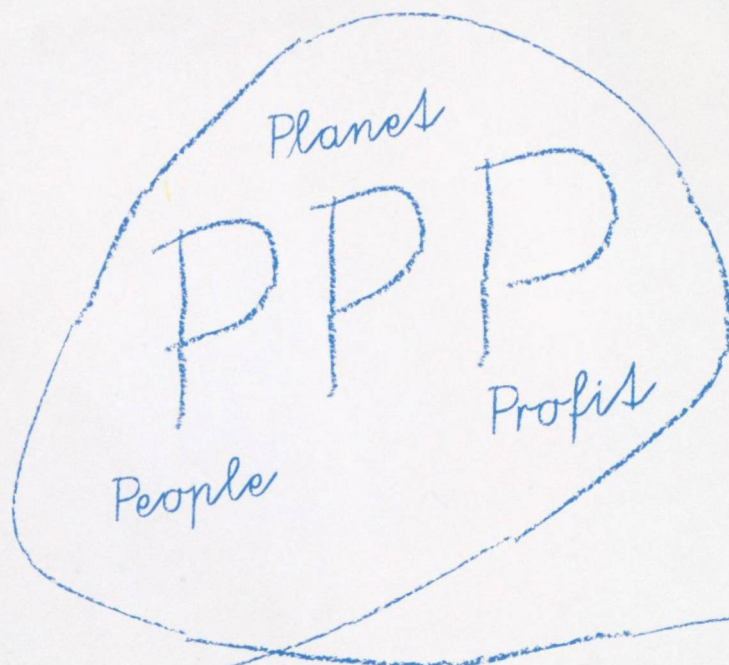
1. Strengthening the content of the two subjects. European policies regarding lifelong learning focus on employability and social cohesion; a relevant question could be whether sustainable development can be a third conceptual focal point. Systematic analysis examples of good practice should lead to a deeper understanding of adult learning strategies (non-formal and informal) for sustainable development. The link between these and societal development, e.g. through creating learning arrangements, is a relevant approach and connections with formal education should therefore not be neglected. The global perspective should be ensured by including various international contributors and by emphasizing an international angle in all contributions.

2. Setting the agenda. UNESCO and other institutions will be targeted in order to try to incorporate the outcomes of this conference in their agenda.

### **Content of this report**

In chapter 2 short introductions to the issues of Sustainable Development (SD) and Lifelong Learning are given. In the same chapter a theoretical background is presented, based on the three reports and the conceptual basis presented by Wildemeersch. This acts as a start to the discussion that was held during the international expert meeting. Before the discussion is presented in chapter 4, case studies of sustainable development and lifelong learning will be presented in chapter 3. In chapter 5 content and policy recommendations are given and chapter 6 provides the conclusions based on the reports, conceptual basis and discussions.









create  
change



## 2. Conceptual input

### 2.1 // Definitions

#### 2.1.1 Sustainable development - a short introduction

Sustainable refers to a situation that can continue. Development can be described as creating better living conditions. Together sustainable development can be summarized as *'a better future for all, now and in the future'* (Van Ginkel, UNESCO-UNU, Tokyo 2007).

The official definition of sustainable development, as presented by Brundtland is *'to ensure the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The concept of sustainable development does imply limits, –not absolute limits– but limitations imposed by the present state of technology and social organisation on environmental resources and by the ability of the biosphere to absorb the effects of human activities.'* (VN commissie Brundtland in het rapport *Our common future*, 1987). Besides this present-and-future-perspective, sustainable development has its global perspective: how can we connect local contexts to global developments? Answers to these questions should find a balance between the three pillars of sustainable development: social, ecological, and economic. Internationally the pillars of sustainable development have been captured in the triple P of *People, Planet and Profit*. Sustainable development, in fact, has become the guiding principle for achieving just and equitable development options that ben-

efit all people everywhere. Sustainable development can thus be understood both in time and space: it takes into account the needs of future generations, and equally the needs of people today in every part of the world.

In the light of persisting global patterns of poverty and inequality, as highlighted by the Millennium Development Goals agenda, along with emerging issues such as the impact of climate change and the current financial and economic crises, sustainable development is one of the key challenges facing the world today. Sustainable development is not only a goal for decision makers, political leaders or companies. It concerns everyone and is part of even the most minor decisions people make in life. People need to know how to generate creative solutions to current global challenges; about reflecting on new lifestyles which combine well-being, quality of life and respect for nature, environment and other people. It is the decision to use the car or your bicycle and whether to buy fair trade products or not. Therefore, it is important that people learn about sustainable development, learn how to take responsibility and become aware of the interconnectedness of local and worldwide developments.

Sustainable development is on the political and educational agenda. The United Nations proclaimed 2005 – 2015 the

'Decade of Education for Sustainable Development'. UNESCO is the UN-agency responsible for the implementation of this programme. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) seeks to integrate the tenets, values and practices of sustainable development into all aspects of education and learning. ESD aims to provide every individual the opportunity to acquire the values, competencies, knowledge and skills that enables him or her to contribute to a humane, socially just, economically viable and ecologically sustainable future. Therefore, education for sustainable development creates the conditions to learn how to live together on one planet in peace, dignity and mutual respect without causing irreversible damage to that planet by human production and consumption patterns. Among other things, ESD promotes a sense of both local and global responsibility, encourages future-oriented, anticipatory thinking, builds recognition of global interdependence and emphasizes cultural changes that embrace the values of sustainable development. Rather than remaining passive in the face of the above-mentioned challenges, ESD seeks to empower societies, communities and individuals everywhere to shape their future actively and responsibly ([www.esd-world-conference-2009.org](http://www.esd-world-conference-2009.org)).

### 2.1.2 Lifelong learning - a short introduction

Lifelong learning is defined by the OECD as: 'lifelong education means education resulting from integration of formal, non-formal and informal education so as to create the ability for continuous lifelong development of quality of life. Learning is therefore part of life which

takes place at all times and in all places. It is a continuous lifelong process, going on from birth to the end of our life, beginning with learning from families, communities, schools, religious institutions, workplaces.' Lifelong Learning is the continual acquisition of knowledge and skills throughout somebody's life. Lifelong learning occurs in preparation for, and in response to, the different roles, situations, and environments that somebody will encounter in the course of a lifetime.

In recent years Lifelong Learning has become a fundamental goal of education policies, both at a national and international level. It is often advocated as a way to achieve socio-economic development and as a tool to promote the 'information' and 'knowledge based' society.



## 2.2 // Outcomes of the reports

### 2.2.1 The CINOP Report

Sustainable learning and societal participation.  
CINOP. Van Esch et al, July 2006

CINOP has carried out a study into sustainable learning in relation to participation in society, with a focus on non-formal and informal learning. The research did not focus on education for sustainable development. Instead it focused on how dropouts (vulnerable groups who do not graduate) can be included in the learning process in such a way that they can build social capital and can contribute to society again. The conclusion of this study will be presented below.

A distinction is made between lifelong learning and life-wide learning. Lifelong learning is the process of learning that an individual goes through during the entire lifespan. Life-wide learning refers to the fact that this learning process takes place in different learning settings. Learning is not limited to the formal education system, but includes also non-formal learning and informal learning. Life-wide learning is therefore seen as part of lifelong learning.

In this study different non-formal and informal learning settings were investigated:

- **Sports Club:** learning processes in the club are aimed at sport-specific and sport-related norms and values, knowledge and skills. These processes are more or less structured and take place during training, games, tournaments, internal courses, clinics and meetings. Unstructured processes are friendships and recreational activities.

- **Food Banks:** facilitates and supports literacy of groups of individuals. Structured processes are the weekly meetings and unstructured processes take place when people meet each other at the food bank.
- **Mothers' Centres:** contribute to the development of social and citizenship competencies, personal development, experiencing societal growth and a growing feeling of self-esteem. Structured processes are activities and courses. Unstructured processes take place as informal meetings, friendships, intercultural parties and trips.
- **Community Centres:** contribute to self-organization, forming of networks, informal learning and the development of social capital. Learning is not a main focus, it happens along the way and people only realize what they have learnt when they start thinking about it. This also accounts for the exchange of knowledge and experiences. Possibilities for formal learning are courses and thematic meetings offered by the government.

In all examples investigated there were good possibilities for non-formal and informal learning. And these possibilities were put into practice as well. Non-formal and informal learning takes place in networks, which are a vehicle for the building of social capital. Social capital in turn is a condition for the initiation and existence of these networks.

In some cases, like the sports club setting, non-formal learning takes place in planned

structures. In these cases the initiative comes from the learning itself. In other cases non-formal learning is difficult to plan (like the case of the literacy for low-educated inhabitants). Informal learning is mostly spontaneous and not controlled.

Looking at the cases several dimensions of lifelong learning can be distinguished. First of all there is the economic dimension of learning. Educated people are more profitable to the state and the labour market and are better able to take care of themselves. For example, illiterate people who go to the food bank to follow literacy courses. This is an example of informal learning that may lead to a progression to formal learning and to participation in the labour market. The second dimension is the social-societal dimension, which aims at developing social qualities, the creation of possibilities for participation and active citizenship. The example of the community centre shows that the presence of such centres leads to active citizenship and participation, and contributes to the development of social qualities through informal learning. There is also the social-cultural dimension and this dimension focuses on the stimulation of self-development and the stimulation of social cohesion. An example in this case is the mother's centre, because it helps disadvantaged women to develop themselves in a safe environment. The development of intercultural tolerance is also supported, because women from different ethnic backgrounds get to know one another better in the centre. However, these women do not have contact with one another outside the mother's centre,

which means that social cohesion only exists within the centre.

In conclusion one can say that non-formal and informal learning are essential to build social capital. It seems that negative experiences in formal education block the possibilities for non-formal and informal learning, because the learner is not willing to take part in these learning settings. This is illustrated in the case of the low-literate people. They refuse to take part in social networks so they do not have to show their lack of basic skills. For these people it is essential to be brought to these social networks so they can become part of these non-formal and informal learning settings. Such settings have been shown to help them become more active in society.

Volunteer organizations are of the utmost importance to create social capital, especially in relation to vulnerable groups in society. This is strongly illustrated by the mothers' centre, where volunteers are able to stay in contact with mothers who are almost impossible to reach by official health and welfare organizations. The mother centre provides a safe haven. Non-formal and informal learning activities can be organized by volunteers. These volunteers are mainly women who themselves participated as a mother in the centre some time ago. In this way they are able to function as a very valuable 'teacher' for new participants. In the case of both the mothers' centre and the food bank the conclusion can be drawn that low profile facilities and a safe learning environment are essential and critical success factors in



relation to building social capital with vulnerable groups in society.

The cases investigated use different forms of social capital. At the sports club the emphasis is on 'bonding' and 'linking'. Bonding is the process of increasing the bonds and solidarity between homogeneous groups. Linking involves connecting to social networks outside one's own community. The food bank and the community centre aim at bonding. The mothers' centre focuses on 'bridging'. Social capital in the form of bridging focuses on increasing the relations between different networks.

The building of social capital also contributes to confidence and identity of vulnerable groups, a very important part of the process to become a full member of society again.

Social capital should be connected to what is called the power to mobilise the available capacities, competences and external sources.

In the process of strengthening the participation of citizens four phases can be distinguished.

1. Building of social capital.
2. Exploiting the social capital in informal and non-formal learning processes.
3. Developing the power to mobilise available capacities.
4. Strengthening of participation in society.

In this process non-formal and informal learning are an indispensable part of strengthening the participation of citizens. However, there is a risk to value the benefits of non-formal and informal

learning processes from the point of view of formal learning. This means that the economic value is valued more than the social value. The cases show that informal and non-formal learning have an intrinsic positive impact. This can be strengthened by using the previously acquired competencies procedure, in such a way that non-formal and informal learning can lead to formal education or work.

Valuing the role of informal learning solely on the basis of current education and labour market criteria should be avoided. What is more important is that the social-societal and social-cultural dimension of learning is as valuable as the economic dimension. In that way informal and non-formal learning are just as valuable as formal learning. Furthermore, informal and non-formal learning may even support formal education systems (in)directly by creating social skills and qualities and stimulating self-development in a way formal education cannot offer.

### 2.2.2 Reports by the University of Groningen

Van Beilen and Tebbes. With observations by Van Dam Mieras, Leiden University.

The University of Groningen (RUG) has conducted two reports on education for sustainable development across the lifespan:

- **ON COURSE.** The contribution of life-long learning to sustainable development. Van Beilen, University of Groningen (RUG).
- **Sustainable development and education. Theory and practice.** S. Tebbes, University of Groningen, (RUG).

The text below is a synthesis of both reports.

### Context of learning

In the two research the following elements (at different scale levels) are stated as relevant to achieve learning for sustainable development in a lifelong and life-wide learning environment:

#### 1. Policy level

- Education concerned with SD should take place in a local context as information needs to connect with people's own experiences.
- Education concerned with sustainable development should take into account people's vulnerability to global threats and whether they are in a position to change their behaviour.

#### 2. Project level

- The project should take place in a learning environment: an environment in which the individual is neither entirely determined by societal demands, nor entirely free to determine his or her own future; therefore there should be lively interaction between practice and its context.
- The vision and purpose underpinning the project with regards to sustainable development should be directed at all three pillars: economic, social, ecological, without neglecting the cultural dimension.
- Projects that provide learning for sustainability should be directed at a wide range of societal groups and ages; it is vital for all members of society to have the capacity to assess and address their sustainability concerns – thus a priority should be the educationally disadvantaged minority groups and the socially excluded.

- The pedagogical climate and didactics are characterized by interaction and seek to connect 'thought' and 'action'. A variety of formal, informal and non-formal approaches are used. More specifically, the project incorporates the elements of social learning. Social learning is concerned with solving social problems, uses interaction and communication as tools, focuses on action and experience and is typically interdisciplinary in nature.
- The project should give learners control over their own learning process and create an emancipated, democratic and transparent world with critical, competent citizens who are encouraged to take part actively in decision-making and problem-solving.
- The project is carried out by several active partners in order to create leverage and to embed the program in policies and a wider context.
- Projects and partnerships have a long-term perspective, continued over a certain period of time, and are concerned with the future.

#### 3. Level of the learner

- The learning process ensures that people have more knowledge about sustainable development (knowledge), are able to take a position by making a negotiated choice (ability), develop a preference for one choice over another (will) and the resolve to make this choice in real life (courage).

### Examples of good practice

In order to get insight into this learning process it is important to look at case studies and examples of good practice. In The Netherlands different examples of



good practice can be found, like the National Programme on Learning for Sustainable Development and the National Network for Sustainability in Higher Education. Also internationally many examples of good practice can be found, like the Regional Centres of Expertise (initiated by the United Nations University). Common to these examples is that they are working to create a better future for all by creating a learning process involving different stakeholders, different perspectives and different scales to be addressed.

In addition to these examples, the University of Groningen has carried out two surveys in order to strengthen the knowledge in this theme. The main focus of the two surveys was to investigate case studies in order to gain insight into the contribution of lifelong learning to sustainable development. The purpose of the studies was to identify and disseminate examples of good practice. The examples of good practice identified are referred to as projects. The following projects were investigated:

- Regeneration of underdeveloped areas, (SOM) The Netherlands.
- SD in communities, Australia.
- Empowerment of client councils, (CVVG) The Netherlands.
- Sustainable tourism, Belgium.
- Liveability and demographic issues, The Netherlands.
- Excursions to water and nature, The Netherlands.
- Training for elderly employees, The Netherlands.
- Involving young people in SD, The Netherlands.

- Schools researching a cubic mile, The Netherlands and Estonia.
- Training course sustainable soil, The Netherlands.
- Protection of the Wadden area, The Netherlands.

In the article Sustainable Development: the Role of Lifelong Learning three of the projects are described in detail.

#### 1. Regeneration of underdeveloped areas, The Netherlands

*Content:* participatory planning process for adults, children and adolescents in order to realize a new development plan for a dune park.

*Strengths and weaknesses:*

- strong interest from participants to stay involved;
- people are positive about the process;
- different perspectives between youth and the older population, what makes it uncertain is whether everyone will support the final outcome.

#### 2. Empowerment of client councils, The Netherlands

*Content:* aims to promote further empowerment of client councils by standardizing and professionalizing their support staff and volunteers and keeping them well-informed. It further aims to emancipate the elderly through a cultural change approach: to keep improving life, (health) care, and welfare of the residents of retirement and nursing homes, now and in the future.

*Strengths and weaknesses:*

- councils learn from each other's experiences, difficulties and solutions;
- participants feel more independent,

aware and empowered;

- councils are afraid to voice criticism in fear of repercussions from management;
- the project is vulnerable because of governance issues and budget cuts in health care;
- lack of continuance of key people and client councils leads to a fragile balance in the collaboration.

### 3. Schools researching a cubic mile, The Netherlands and Estonia

*Content:* This international collaboration project is focused on the exchange of experiences and views of learners in both countries, concerning the quality of the natural and social environment surrounding their schools.

*Strengths and weaknesses:*

- the interdisciplinary approach beyond the normal school subjects is considered very stimulating;
- learners welcome their active role in the research and exchange activities;
- from an intercultural perspective both schools had learnt a lot about the other country;
- working with the issue of sustainability was not seen as an explicit, always visible, activity as such;
- lack of accessibility of the website and the lack of support by subject teachers were mentioned as points for improvement;
- interpersonal exchange was limited and differences in expectation and motivation were not recognized.

### Observations

Van Dam-Mieras makes the following observations on the 11 projects:

1. Internal motivation is the strongest driving force to participate in the projects because the context is not focused on sustainable development.
2. The funding is mainly by external partners and the projects are not embedded in the long term.
3. Projects that were carried out in the formal education system are not embedded in curricula. Therefore the projects remain incidental and marginal. When funding decreases, the projects will end.
4. In most cases different aspects of sustainable development come into focus: society, environment and economy (the three pillars of SD), here and now, future, (inter)cultural and intergenerational issues. However, participation is often chosen as a focal point.
5. Although the scope of the 11 projects is wide, the focus remains on the local context. There is limited attention to the global perspective and the impact of one's own actions on others.
6. In most projects the need for collaboration is recognized, but in every day practice the collaboration remains local and ad hoc.
7. There is attention to innovative aspects such as creative, interactive and participatory methods involving heterogeneous groups (age, social background, discipline, experience).



## Conclusion

What can be learnt from these case studies is that the lifelong learning process is not in itself a process of learning for sustainable development. In most case studies learning for sustainable development is not the main focus. The focus on different aspects of sustainable development is an almost incidental benefit. Furthermore, none of the case studies focus on all three pillars, which is necessary for sustainable development. All of the case studies deal first and foremost with self-development, which makes them examples of good practice of lifelong learning. However, they are still some steps removed from learning for sustainable development in a lifelong and life-wide learning environment.

It is clear that much remains to be done to strengthen practices of sustainable development, to enhance the productive spin-off in all elements of sustainability, and to embed them in more coherent and financially substantial policies which connect the mutual and value-added focus on sustainable development and lifelong learning. The results from the case studies are encouraging but much remains to be done to mainstream learning for sustainable development and lifelong learning in mutually productive interaction.

## Conceptual basis

2.3 //

Contribution by Professor Wildemeersch

Wildemeersch has developed a conceptual basis of learning and explains them using examples of learning for sustainable development (LSD). The basis of his contribution consists of the explanation of the three metaphors of learning and the application of these metaphors to LSD.

Wildemeersch identifies three metaphors in learning:

1. The Inevitable 'Acquisition' Metaphor Of Learning (AM)
  - a. Dominant metaphor with regard to formal(sized) education processes
  - b. Classical conception of Learning for Sustainable Development and citizenship: acquire the correct knowledge, attitudes and skills often defined by experts within the 'rational' or the 'functional' community
  - c. In line with well defined frameworks, offering fixed solutions (e.g. ecological technology)
  - d. Offers secure perspectives to deal with problems and enables us to make clear distinctions between right and wrong, true and false
  - e. The learning process is 'close ended'
2. Engaging With The 'Participation' Metaphor (Pm)
  - a. Citizenship and sustainable development today reflect the complexity of our society
  - b. The living and working conditions are insecure, complex and hard to predict
  - c. They need to be dealt with in a reflexive way
  - d. Reflexive modernity implies learning

as a basic strategy to deal with these complexities (Giddens, Beck)

- e. Therefore, learning is necessarily open-ended, emergent, ‘in the making’, non-formal/informal, problem-posing, involves dialog, etc..

### 3. Embracing The ‘Participation’ Metaphor For Lsd (Rm)

- a. Social learning (Wildemeersch, Vandenabeele): learning in/of groups, communities, social systems in response to a variety of challenges whereby the problem-solving capacity of the individuals and the system is improved
- b. Learning in communities of practice (Lave & Wenger): learning conceived as a communicative and situated process, resulting from ‘legitimate (peripheral) participation’; it is a joint enterprise, with mutual engagement and a shared repertoire

How can these metaphors of learning help us to clarify the relationship between lifelong learning and sustainable development?

The three metaphors are complementary; each metaphor reveals a specific way of understanding learning for sustainable development; each metaphor also has its own blind spots. We are very familiar with the AM, becoming familiar with the PM, fairly unfamiliar with the RM. Yet, the participation metaphor opens up unexpected perspectives and challenges to traditional conceptions of learning for sustainable development in a lifelong setting.

|                       | AM                               | PM                                   | RM                           |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| CONTEXT               | Stable                           | Complex                              | Contradictory                |
| PERSPECTIVE           | Reproduce                        | Manage complexity                    | Co-ordinate plurality        |
| POINT OF DEPARTURE    | Observed deficiencies            | Available capacities                 | Experienced anomalies        |
| LEARNING ORIENTATION  | Learning to do<br>Learning to be | Learning to do<br>Learning to become | Learning to live together    |
| RELATIONSHIP          | Hierarchical                     | Seeking consensus                    | Confrontational              |
| PRACTICE MODE         | Transfer practices               | Participatory practices              | Narrative/discursive         |
| ACTORS                | Experts/Recipients               | Stakeholders                         | Citizens                     |
| INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT | Formal                           | Non-formal/informal                  | Overarching                  |
| PROCESS               | Close-ended                      | Open-ended<br>Problem solving        | Open-ended<br>Problem posing |



## 2.4 // Summary

The RUG and CINOP reports and the conceptual basis presented by Wildemeersch show us that certain conditions are necessary for learning for sustainable development in a lifelong and life-wide environment.

First of all the CINOP report describes cases in which people, who did not have the possibility to learn in a formal setting, achieve learning in an informal or non-formal way. It shows that learning is not only about acquiring the correct knowledge, attitudes and skills often defined by experts. People also learn social qualities and skills from the interaction with people from different cultures and by working together in projects. In these cases learning is often open-ended and focused on participation in society.

The CINOP report and Wildemeersch's conceptual basis show that lifelong and life-wide learning are positive contributors to participation in society, the learning of social and intercultural skills and understanding each other. The RUG reports focus on examples of good practice of learning for sustainable development. Most of the projects surveyed consist of a mix of formal, informal and/or non-formal learning. All projects focus on one or two of the three pillars of sustainable development: (social, economic, ecological) but not on all three. All projects are locally based and the global perspective of sustainable development is not addressed. The participants learned to participate in society and learned to participate in consensus meetings. People

developed themselves, but did not learn to contribute to sustainable development although this was the objective of some of the projects.

Thus two main learning strategies seem to emerge from the reports:

- Learning to express one's self: self development
- Learning to change: contribute to a sustainable world.

The question is how the two strategies interrelate and how they contribute to learning for sustainable development across the lifespan. A preliminary answer to these questions will be given in chapter 4 and chapter 5. But first different case studies on sustainable development in relation to lifelong learning will be presented.



learning  
process





### 3. Case studies, world wide

In order to grasp the complexity of the two issues (ESD and LLL) several case studies are presented below. These case studies can provide answers to the question: how do we build bridges between lifelong learning and sustainable development?

#### 3.1 // Building New Futures Project

*Organisation:* Regional Centre of Expertise on Learning for Sustainable Development Rhine-Meuse *Author:* Jos H.A.N. Rikers

##### **Abstract**

The Regional Centre of Expertise on Learning for Sustainable Development (RCE) Rhine-Meuse, operates within the framework of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. The RCE stimulates and supports sustainability initiatives in its region. This region stretches across three countries: the south of The Netherlands, and the border region between Belgium and Germany.

The RCE Rhine-Meuse has developed the Building New Futures (BNF) project. This project aims at social and economic inclusion of underprivileged groups. The target group for the BNF-project are young people who have just finished their initial education and are coming on to the labour market. The BNF-project aims to support these youngsters in their development, especially those who have poor chances on the labour market. The

project aims to build their confidence and self-respect and thus to increase their chances on the labour market.

The BNF-project acts as an exchange project between partners in the Netherlands and partners in a developing country. The participants on both sides are involved in an intensive training programme, where practical skills, intercultural communication and understanding are key values. So far the project has finished one round of exchanges and is preparing the second. Some of the results of the first round of exchanges are presented as well as the structure of the second exchange.

#### Strategies for ESD in VET in the Netherlands

// 3.2

*Rob de Vrind, Chairman of Sustainable Vocational Education of the Netherlands*

##### **Abstract**

Universities in The Netherlands (both traditional and universities of applied science) already pay much attention to sustainable development. This is not the case for Vocational Education and Training (VET) in the Netherlands, although the largest group of students in The Netherlands are those in vocational education programmes. This means the largest group of students still does not acquire thorough education in SD. However, a number of VET-institutes in the Netherlands have formed a

network to work together to increase the attention paid to SD. They have created a website containing information about problems and solutions with regard to SD, information about the relationship between SD and a range of VET-disciplines, SD concepts, many examples of projects completed in this field and tools to change the institutes themselves into more sustainable ones. At present a thematic site for an SD-knowledge network is being constructed: this will be the portal for education for sustainable development in VET in the Netherlands.

However, attracting young people to SD in VET needs more and different strategies. Young people like challenges and so SD should be made more attractive, for instance by organizing competitions and contests (as the Frisian Solar Challenge, the Bet, Ecocars, Formula Zero, etc.), awards (the Future Award, the Sustainable Students Enterprise Award etc.), or by providing certificates for their portfolio (when students have paid much attention to SD during their diploma or degree programme). Creativity can be added to SD-education by letting young students be the ambassadors for their own generation. Finally, by involving communities and industry in ESD win-win situations are created. In this way a solid basis for ESD is created. Young people find this interesting, it engages them and is much more rewarding than a negative experience.

## Experiences in Germany

Secretariat UN- Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, German Commission for UNESCO, Alexander Leicht

### Abstract

The goal of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD), for which UNESCO is the lead agency, is to integrate the principles, values and practices of sustainable development in all aspects of education. This educational effort will encourage changes in behaviour that will create a more sustainable future in terms of environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society for present and future generations. At the start of the decade, UNESCO has been slow to start the process. At present there is progress and many initiatives are taken and being supported.

In Germany the government has set Education for Sustainable Development as a main instrument for education. The DESD has resulted in a set of activities:

- Every year a roundtable is organized, in which over 100 organizations are involved.
- A DESD-award is realized. Every year schools, kindergartens etcetera can apply. The prize is prestige instead of money. Until now 500 projects have applied.

In Germany DESD has had two great benefits. Firstly, it has fostered broad political support and tremendous interest from all sectors of the education community. Secondly, it has created the opportunity to promote ESD as an overarching theme that gives much more political



weight to stakeholders than they had before. DESD-activities have also identified significant challenges including the difficulty of bringing very diverse stakeholders together and having them agree on specific objectives. Another challenge is to establish a clear definition of ESD that is not too broad and in danger of encompassing everything and therefore meaning nothing.

In 2009, 5 years of the DESD have passed. This means it is time for a mid-term review: the worldwide midterm review meeting will be held 31 March – 2 April 2009 in Bonn, Germany. The objective of this meeting is to:

- clarify the relevance of ESD to education;
- foster international exchange, North-South and South-South cooperation;
- take stock of where we are in DESD;
- design strategies for the next 5 years;
  - North-South and South-South partnerships;
  - exchange of knowledge.

Until now DESD-projects in Germany have taken place at school level, and have not focussed much on lifelong learning. This is relatively new. At present the relevance of SD is being discovered by different partners. Projects for the elderly were not implemented but are now being explored. It is important that people discover the importance of ESD. Therefore, the strategy should not be to explain the ESD to insiders, but to make it attractive to outsiders. The question ‘what benefits can ESD provide to education as a whole?’ is of the utmost importance. For instance: are dropouts more attracted by ESD than by tradi-

tional education? In addition to this, research is needed at the level of universities to see if universities who have integrated sustainable development into their curricula are more or less successful in achieving overall education goals (grades, attrition rates, student numbers, etc.) than universities who do not focus on ESD. This research should not just include universities but all levels of education.

## **Collaboration between Universities and Local Stakeholders for ESD in Okayama City: Achievements and Challenges**

// 3.4

Hirofumi Abe  
Dean, Graduate School of Environmental  
Science, Okayama University  
Chair holder, UNESCO Chair in Research and  
Education for Sustainable Development at  
Okayama University

### **Abstract**

The Okayama region was acknowledged as a Regional Centre of Expertise (RCE) in June 2005. Prior to that acknowledgement, experts and leaders in Okayama City reached an agreement to co-operate to promote ESD. The Okayama ESD-Project started in April 2005. Meanwhile, Okayama University submitted a proposal for a UNESCO Chair Programme on ESD and received accreditation in April 2007. Subsequently, a cooperative relationship between main stakeholders for the promotion of ESD was established. This included government agencies, citizen groups (NGOs), and higher education institutions. The paper presents an overview of ESD-activities in Okayama City, with particular emphasis on the de-

velopment of partnerships between local stakeholders. It concludes by presenting a discussion of the roles of higher education institutions in ESD and the challenges confronting ESD-activities in Okayama City.

## 3.5 // Experiences in Companies

Jeroen Bordewijk  
The Advisory Council for Research on Spatial  
Planning, Nature and the Environment (RMNO)

Companies have a lot of experience with learning for sustainable development. During the development of ESD learning strategies in combination with lifelong learning it is important to look at examples set by companies.

Companies are taking sustainable development as a value proposition. By strengthening the social and ecological aspects companies can also strengthen their economic position. In recent years there has been a move from pilots and projects to mainstream strategies. Examples are the roundtable on palm oil, the involvement of the Marine Stewardship Council in fish production by Unilever and the international roundtable on sustainable agriculture. The most important lessons learnt from these experiences are:

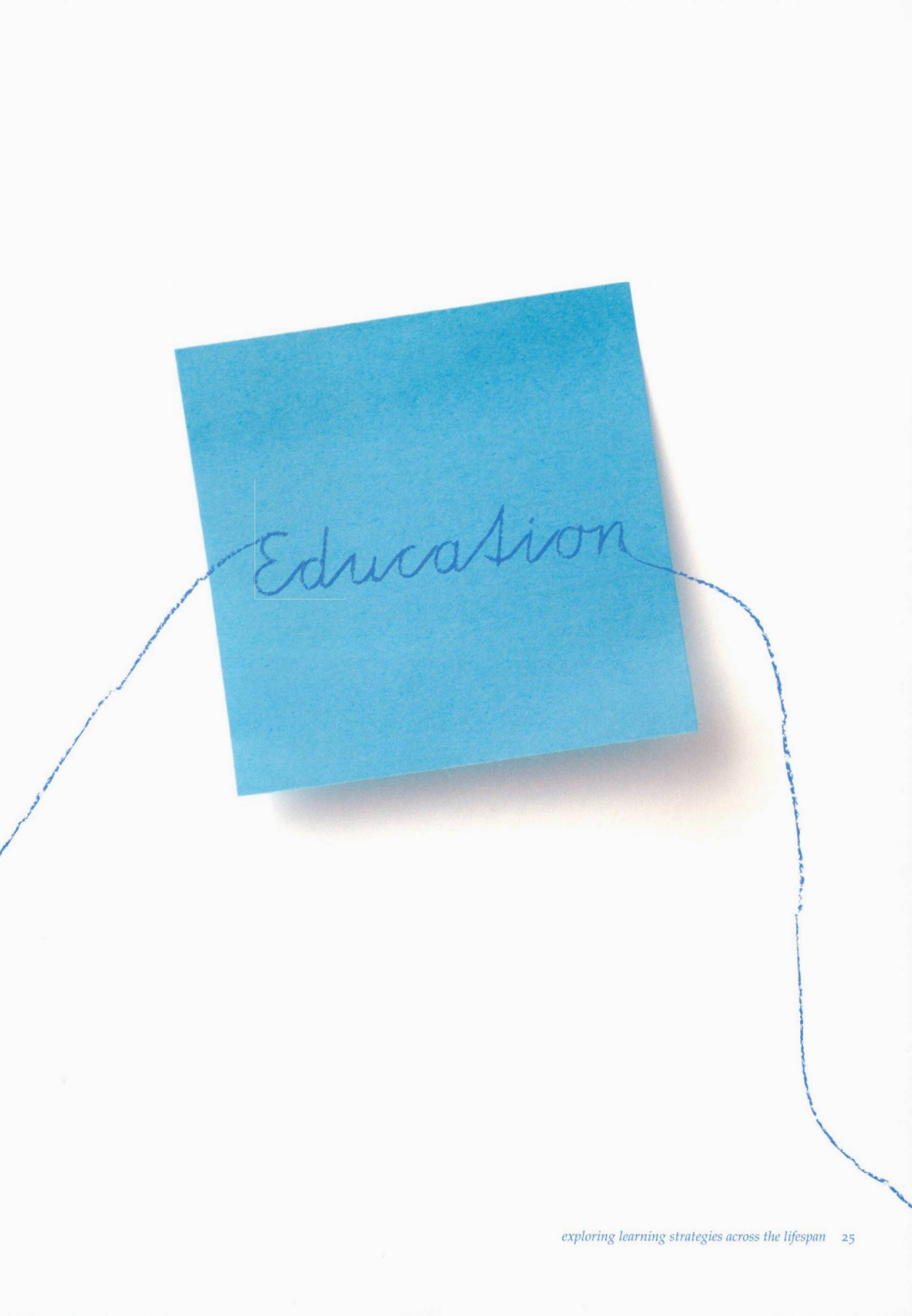
- Interaction with stakeholders. Education for sustainable development should include interaction with different stakeholders.
- Recognize issues of power. In a stakeholder dialogue there can be a difference in the power position. Usually a level playing field does not exist and should

be created. For instance, the major stakeholder can take more risks in the solution than a minor stakeholder.

- Present ESD in a value chain: it creates value and is better and more profitable.

Until now there seem to be just a few examples in which highly motivated people from business and formal education work together on ESD. It would be extremely useful to think of a way in which universities are guided on ESD by young employees of companies. Many contacts already exist between formal education institutions and companies, for instance companies are represented in university Advisory Boards. These boards offer many opportunities for ESD. These opportunities remain untapped until now, also because research in universities is mostly disciplinary and not multidisciplinary as is the case in companies and in real life. Trying to bring these two worlds together should be a main focus for the coming years.



A blue sticky note is placed on a white background. The word "Education" is written in a blue cursive script across the middle of the note. A thin, wavy blue line starts from the left side of the note, loops around the word, and extends downwards and to the right, ending near the bottom right corner of the page.

Education

a better  
future  
for all





## 4. Outcomes of the discussion

Learning for sustainable development is a process that continues throughout life and, therefore, takes place in learning environments ranging from formal, to non-formal and informal. The ultimate objective is 'a better future for all'. With this in mind, discussions were held during the expert meeting in Leiden. In order to focus and structure the discussion different themes and questions were raised. This also strengthened the outcomes of the reports. The main discussion outcomes are presented below.

### 4.1 // Strategies

The most important issue in the programme is to define different learning strategies for sustainable development and to link these strategies.

As stated earlier there are two different learning strategies:

- Learning to express one's self: self development
- Learning to change: contribute to a sustainable world.

In these strategies the goals for the learner and the broader society differ. In many lifelong learning projects the aim is to get people involved in society again, to change from a dropout to an engaged member of society. Learning for sustainable development is about learning to change parts of the world in order to balance social, ecological and economic

aspects. Integrating both aspects means changing the world and working on your own ability to express yourself. One of the definitions for sustainable development, used in primary schools in the UK, is that one should:

- Express one's self;
- Respect the other;
- Respect the planet.

In this definition the learning strategy to express yourself is important for sustainable development but should be seen as a first step: it is not a comprehensive strategy for sustainable development because it only addresses the first point. In other words, the first strategy focuses on self-development. The second learning strategy is a strategy for sustainable development if you also learn to express yourself and respect other persons and the planet.

In other words: in ESD self-development by itself is not enough. It certainly is a prerequisite but it is not the entire process. People also need to learn that they have the possibility, the duty and the right to contribute to society. This takes us one step further than motivating people to participate in society or learning how to deal with diversity or the environment. It is about being aware of the necessity to participate in society, the effects of your behaviour on your surroundings and even on the world. From this perspective ESD not only provides aspects of sustainable development in the

context of learning, but also makes sure that people know they are learning to become citizens who are self-aware and able and are expected to contribute to a sustainable world. This does not mean that all learning settings have to focus on sustainable development, because it is important that people have the opportunity for self-development before learning about sustainable development. But as people reach a certain level of self-development learning for Sustainable Development should be seen as a next and necessary step in one's learning strategy.

The conditions necessary for learning for sustainable development in a lifelong and life-wide environment include:

### 1. Self-development

- Local context: information needs to connect to people's own experiences.
- A variety of formal, informal and non-formal approaches should be used. The learning is necessarily open-ended, emergent, 'in the making', involves dialogue, etc.
- The project should give learners control of their own learning process and should stimulate the learner to play an active part in society.

### 2. Sustainable Development

- The vision and purpose underpinning the project should be directed at all three pillars: economic; social; ecological, without neglecting the cultural dimension.
- The learning process ensures that people have more knowledge about sustainable development (knowledge), are able to take a position by making an informed choice (ability), develop a preference for one choice over another (will), and have

the resolve to make this choice in a real-life context (courage).

- Learning has to take place in a local context that is connected to the regional/national/global level.
- Learning in communities of practices: the learning should contain lively interaction between practice and its context.
- Social learning: learning takes place in/ people learn from groups, communities, social systems (should be directed at a wide range of societal, cultural and age groups) and is in response to a variety of challenges, learning should involve solving social problem. Learning uses interaction and communication as tools, focuses on action and experience and is typically interdisciplinary in nature.
- Projects and partnerships are long-term, continued over a certain period of time, and are concerned with the future.

In formal education the two strategies are increasingly combined, especially in higher education. In many ESD-examples little effort seems to be made to include dropouts and the unemployed. In non-formal and informal learning, ESD is not a commonly integrated part of the learning process. This should be improved by combining the two learning strategies. This is already being done at Regional Centres of Expertise and in some formal education programmes.



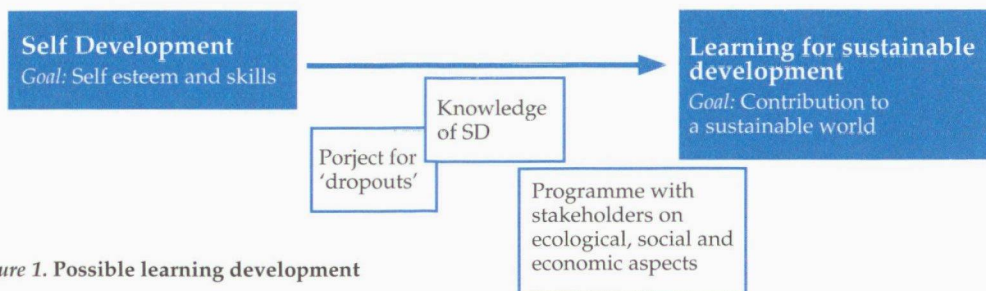


Figure 1. Possible learning development

## 4.2 // Formal, non-formal and informal learning

It is important to make a distinction between formal, non-formal and informal learning because the settings and the learning process itself are different. For instance: in the formal system there is a fixed curriculum and it is therefore quite a rigid system. Non-formal education seems to be more flexible because it does not have a fixed curriculum. The distinction helps us to understand the different processes. The question is whether it is possible to integrate certain positive elements from one setting into another. Companies have a lot of experience with Communities of Practice. However, in formal education this kind of learning approach is not yet mainstream. Integrating experiences from Communities of Practice might enrich the formal education system. In this way we can learn from learning processes taking place in different settings - in the end the intrinsic motivation of the learner is crucial in all settings. Therefore, it is important to create a natural flow in learning processes at the individual level. Learning should be organized without too many restrictions between the different learning settings.

The conclusion is that the distinction helps to understand the differences and lessons learnt from different learning settings. In order to benefit from the different learning settings it is important to:

- Create links and interactions between formal, informal and non-formal learning
  - Knowledge on useful ways of education/learning for sustainable development in the different systems. For instance knowledge about Communities of Practice. There already is a lot of knowledge on these learning processes. Extract this knowledge and develop guidelines and transfer it to formal, non-formal and informal education settings.
  - Integrate aspects from one system into the other. For instance: integrate informal learning strategies (learning without control) in formal education. In other words, do not teach, but work on a project together, with the understanding that everyone can contribute something.
- Create freedom in all learning settings. Do not focus too much on rules, but use open learning strategies.

Distinctions help us to understand the differences so we can learn from the other system. However, focus in discussions should be on the way people are motivated and on the way one can optimize the learning process in the different learning systems. Of course the three learning systems will continue to exist. Discussions like 'should they be in practice the coming years' are therefore not very useful. Focus should be on how the three systems can strengthen each other.

## 4.3 // Complexity

What contributes most to developing knowledge and competences: learning with models of complex reality or learning in complex reality itself?

Learning settings are only considered to deal with sustainability if the issues to be learnt involve people and planet and profit. If not, then the issue is not one of sustainable development. With sustainable development we try to grasp complex problems, problems of different scales, having many dimensions and a variety of stakeholders (companies, NGOs, governments, scientists, etc.). Therefore ESD should prepare people for uncertainty, in formal and informal education. The will and resolve and the acceptance of failure are important points in ESD. We need to shift from understanding (the first learning metaphor) to the will and resolve to change things. Therefore, it is necessary for the learning system to develop the learner's confidence. It is not sufficient to assess learners with written exams only, to just give them marks and credit

points, and note the number of hours they attend lessons.

At this moment there are a lot of case studies on complex learning. We need to provide case studies with a framework in order to structure:

- Formal, informal and non-formal education.
- School and university curricula and programmes for companies and NGOs.

Another part of the discussion related to complexity focused on the use of models or the use of complex reality. During the discussion it became clear that there are two main points of view:

1. As stated above, motivation is one of the key factors of success in learning. People are motivated more by success than by failure. Therefore, it is important to create a situation in which people can have success. If a certain problem is too complex for the learner to solve, he/she might think 'it's too complex, I can't change the situation'. Sometimes complexity can be overwhelming and may lead to a feeling of failure and may discourage the learner.
2. On the other hand, when learning involves problems which do not exist in real life you cannot have real success either. Learning will not change real life in those cases.

The way out of this dilemma might be to take a complex, real-life problem and work on a smaller part in a local context so that the learner can be successful. So not the entire reality is introduced into



the learning setting but only that part on which the learner can have some impact. It is important to create the opportunity to make a difference.

The challenge for educators is to find and use case studies which allow learners to work on real life situations and whose outcomes can also be put into practice. In order to address this challenge the following three steps were identified:

1. Identify case studies in which a complex problem can be reduced to manageable issues.
2. Identify people who can make these case studies suitable for education.
3. Teachers should be able to work with these case studies at two levels:
  - a. Coaching the students during the case study
  - b. Helping to transfer the lessons learnt in the case studies to real life situations.

In this manner, students in all learning settings can work on complex problems and have success at the same time.

## 4.4 // Inhibitors

What do you consider to be major inhibitors of ESD across the lifespan?

Sustainable development is always related to context. It means something different in a small primary school in Kenya than in a small company in Somalia. Therefore, the description of inhibitors should be linked to the context as well.

In primary schools it might be the lack of willingness to change. At the start of DESD there was a possible overlap in UNESCO with the Literacy Decade. It is difficult to identify inhibitors with a universal impact. However, there are some inhibitors whose scope is more general:

- Capabilities/competencies of teachers. As explained above, a teacher involved in learning for sustainable development should be able to let the students work on change in reality. That is a huge challenge for most teachers. There are usually insufficient resources for training-the-trainer programmes, both in formal and in non-formal education.
- Incentives for success are now input-based and not output driven. For instance, professors are assessed by the number of publications in A-ranked journals, not on the change they have made in reality. Teachers are assessed on the number of students they teach and the number of students that pass their exams, and not on the level of motivation and willingness to contribute to society.
- Budget. The current distinction between formal and non-formal learning is also based on the different budget systems. In most countries the government takes responsibility for formal education, at least at the level of primary education. Companies are left responsible for their own non-formal learning processes. It is important to start a discussion with the World Bank, IMF and the Gates Foundation for instance. Currently, education for all means primary education for all. For ESD it is important to change this into

Education for all across the Lifespan. The present generation simply cannot risk letting the next generation solve all our problems. Combining lifelong learning with sustainable development also means linking the sources of funding. UNESCO can play a role here. It can bring together partner organizations such as UNEP, FAO and UNDP to create budgets for ESD across the lifespan. It would mean a great deal of support for the local learning processes if those institutions can bring their ambitions and budgets into one framework.

## 4.5 // Cooperation at local level

How can local stakeholders be stimulated to work and learn together for sustainable development?

How can an effective meeting between stakeholders from different domains (public, private, NGOs) be organized?

Although sustainable development is a global issue, success can be reached at the local level. Here one can bring all stakeholders together, here one can learn from formal, non-formal and informal education. In order to create learning environments for sustainable development at the local level Regional Centres of Expertise (RCE) have been established. These are centres working on ESD in a local setting. The scope of a centre's region should be large enough to have enough institutions involved and yet should be small enough for people to identify with the region. RCE are a successful form of local cooperation which aims at education for sustainable development, acting within the frame-

work of the global DESD. In RCE formal education institutions, companies, museums, NGOs and local governments work together. Currently there are 55 RCE worldwide. RCE also form a global network. The idea of the United Nations University is that during the DESD this RCE-network will develop into a global learning space for sustainable development. Hence, the global-local aspect is clearly present in the RCE-initiative.

## Conclusions

// 4.6

The case studies presented in chapter 3 have more or less the same shortcomings as the case studies presented in the scientific reports. Some of them are not focused on a heterogeneous group of people or focus only at a certain form of education. However, all case studies are based on the concept of sustainable development and try to create a balance between the three pillars. Furthermore, they try to combine the two learning strategies of learning; to express one's self and learning to change. Therefore, they are a good first step on the way to learning for sustainable development in a lifelong and life-wide learning environment.

At present ESD is focused on the creation of a certain context and content. The ideal situation would be a combination of formal, informal and/or non-formal education working together with other stakeholders (companies, NGOs, government). The group of people is heterogeneous (age, culture, level of education, social class) and the learning takes place in a complex reality that can be understood by the participants and on which

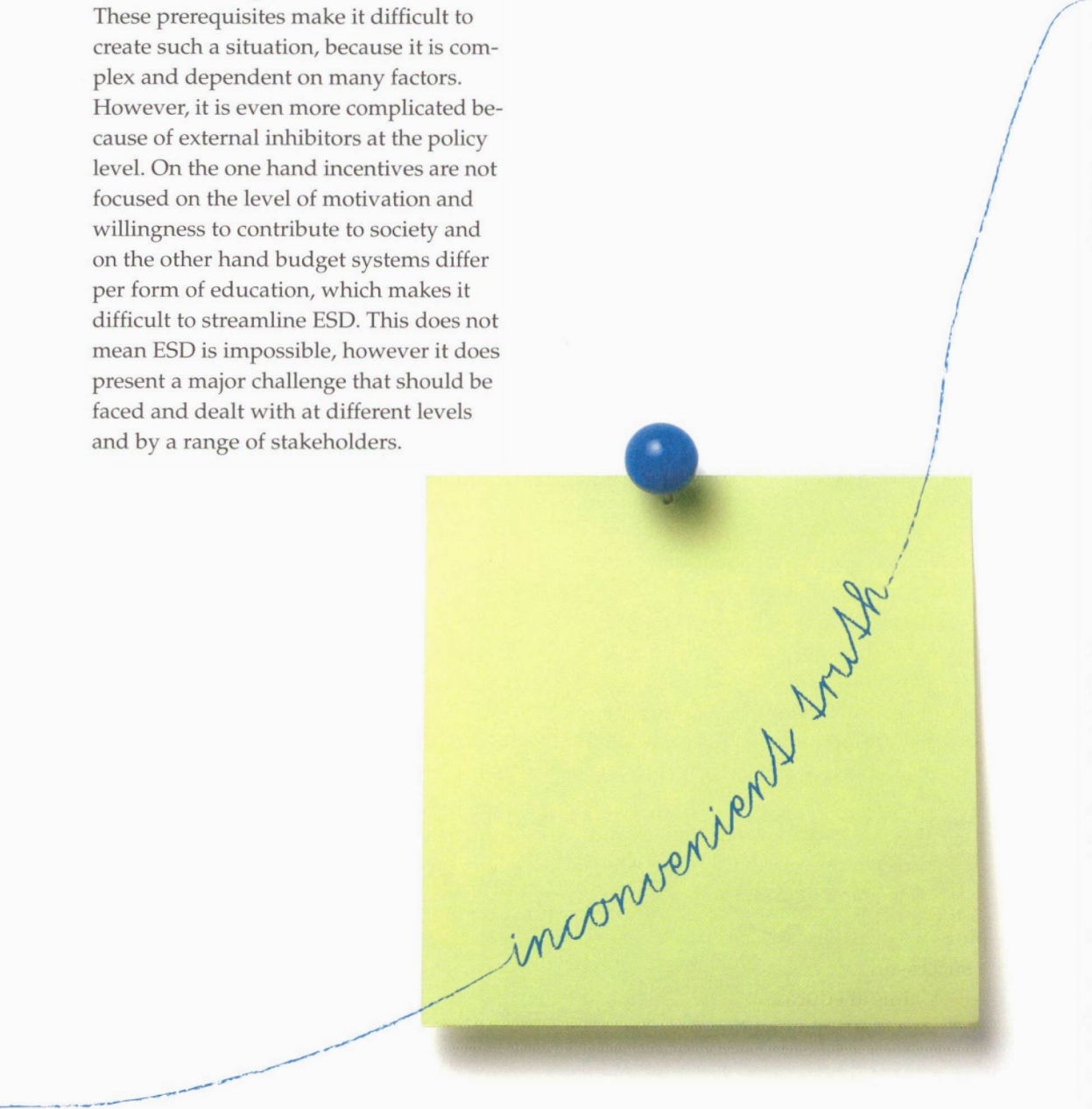


they can have an impact. The content of the learning should create a balance between the social, ecological and economic aspects of sustainable development and should combine two different learning strategies (express one's self and create change).

These prerequisites make it difficult to create such a situation, because it is complex and dependent on many factors. However, it is even more complicated because of external inhibitors at the policy level. On the one hand incentives are not focused on the level of motivation and willingness to contribute to society and on the other hand budget systems differ per form of education, which makes it difficult to streamline ESD. This does not mean ESD is impossible, however it does present a major challenge that should be faced and dealt with at different levels and by a range of stakeholders.



*inconvenient truth*



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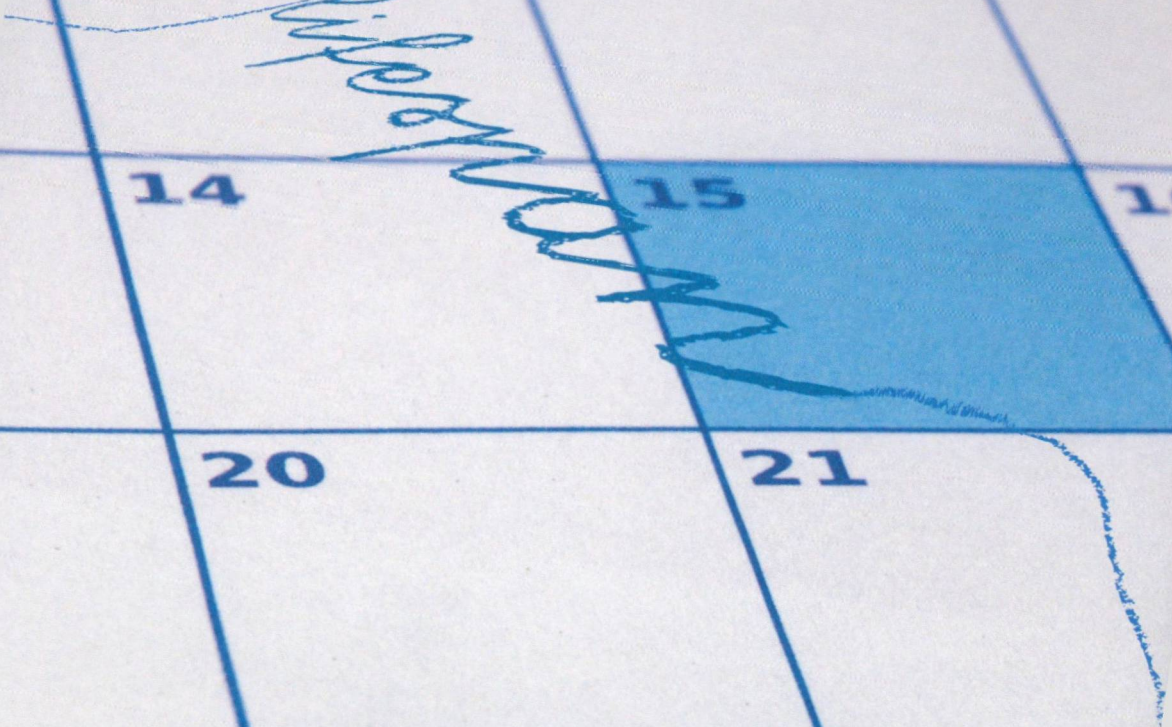
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## 5. Recommendations

The following content and policy recommendations were developed by an expert meeting in Leiden, The Netherlands. Attention was paid to the question which issues should be addressed in the coming months and years.

### 5.1 // Content

Which research questions should be investigated to facilitate learning for sustainable development across the lifespan? Recommendations to address this question were presented by Van Ginkel.

#### 5.1.1 General remarks

Learning for sustainable development in combination with learning across the lifespan includes both the dimension of time and the dimension of life-wide learning. Thus the goal is to learn for a better future for all, in a way that provides the optimum combination of the three different types of education / learning. Van Ginkel first made these general remarks on this issue:

1. The problem with this goal is that nowadays most people try to optimize their income. This should change into what you can contribute to society. The striking thing is that most people are motivated to bring something to society and to change for the better. ESD only works when we are able to focus on specific parts of the issue and at the same time able to look at the broad spectrum of the problem.
2. At this moment universities and other centres of research are good at limiting complexity. Most research is done on narrow issues, with simplified models, without looking at the real life implementation. This can lead to an absolutely clear answer to an unrealistic question. This should change: researchers should consider both the narrow issue and the broad application in society.
3. If you learn for sustainable development you want to put the knowledge in practice. Students ask for applications. What can they do? ESD is about learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together. In ESD there should always be a perspective of taking action. It is important to look at the issue from different angles (theoretical, practical, social, economic and ecological). The difficulty is that it depends on the context. In the learning setting of a primary school complexity should be addressed in a different way than in a learning setting at a university or a company.
4. The starting point for change can be found at the regional level. Here all stakeholders can be brought together; here one can learn from formal, non-formal and informal learning settings.

### 5.1.2 Research topics

The following research topics should be addressed in the future in order to create education for sustainable development across the lifespan:

1. People are not ready to change the world when they are 24 years old. An important question on this issue is 'what are the elements of a good starting competence / basic skill for education for sustainable development?'. In other words, at what point have people reached a certain level of self-development and a certain ability to change and contribute to a sustainable world? Further research on this question is needed.
2. The question 'what can ESD contribute to education as a whole?' is of the utmost importance. For instance: are dropouts more attracted by education for sustainable development than by other forms of education and learning? In addition, research is needed to determine whether institutions which have successfully implemented ESD are more or less successful in attaining overall education objectives (such as grades, attrition rate, student numbers, etc.) than institutions who have not done so. This research should cover all levels of education.
3. Teachers play a major role in changing education systems. Despite this major role it is not clear whether teachers are competent and in the position to take up this responsibility. Teachers should not be left alone in this; teachers should be able to make use of expertise from companies, NGOs and so on. With regard to teachers and ESD there are three main research topics:
  - a. What competences should teachers have in order to teach for sustainable development?
  - b. Do they possess these competences?
  - c. How can teachers make use of external expertise?
4. In some education systems student progress is monitored with what is called a portfolio. This is an interesting tool to apply to ESD across the lifespan. Questions to be addressed could be:
  - a. Is it possible to create a portfolio for ESD across the lifespan?
  - b. What should one focus on in the portfolio?
  - c. Can one measure the competences or does it measure attitude?
5. In order to let formal, non-formal and informal education strengthen each other it is interesting to look at the role of ICT. For instance the creation of a portfolio is possible by using ICT. ICT is also a good tool to use if you want the learning to take place in a local context that is connected to the regional/national/global level and takes place in an international context.
6. Which learning processes are successful in developing competences for sustainable development in the different learning environments? Can Wildemeersch's learning metaphors serve as a conceptual basis for defining successful learning processes?



## 5.2 // Policy

The conference focused on strengthening the content and setting the agenda. Therefore, policy recommendations were also given. Which issues regarding learning for sustainable development across the lifespan should be on the agenda? On whose agenda should they be? The group focused on agendas in international settings with a specific attention to UNESCO.

Recommendations to address this question were presented by Ouane (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning)

### 5.2.1 General

Ouane started with some general remarks. We should try to integrate the theme of sustainable development in other, more concrete themes, such as water management and poverty reduction. Almost every UNESCO theme can be easily linked to sustainable development. It is important to take the specific issue and try to broaden it to a perspective of sustainable development. Within all UN programmes one should always

ask: For what or why do we want a change? For example, if the answer is:

For social cohesion, the next question should be: Why do we want social cohesion? If the UN wants to reach a more sustainable society the answer should be: to create a more sustainable society.

In all those programmes (education for all, social cohesion, lifelong learning etcetera) the direction of change can be towards a more sustainable future. 'We do not just learn across the lifespan, we learn across the lifespan in order to create a better future for all!'

### 5.2.2 Agenda

An outline for the UNESCO agenda is presented below.

1. UNESCO policy, but also that of other UN-agencies, should change from reducing unemployment and providing basic education for all to education for sustainable development. Lifelong learning should not just be lifelong learning, but it should be learning within a perspective of sustainable development. Sustainable development should provide direction to all sorts of processes and all sorts of programmes. The question is not 'How can ESD contribute to education for all?' but rather 'How can education for all contribute to sustainable development?' Education for all and literacy are preconditions for ESD.. The programmes should not pamper it but should produce very ambitious statements on ESD. All programmes with possible links to sustainable development across the lifespan should be included in ESD and should identify specific objectives.
2. Therefore all UN initiatives, like UNESCO and others should articulate a statement on Education for Sustainable Development and should address or develop activities to be implemented.
3. In order to speed up this process of changing the focus of priorities and activities there is a need for a high level international commission. On its agenda should be a discussion regarding the focus as well as how to generate more resources. UNESCO can put forward or suggest this idea.

4. UNESCO can ask the national governments who supported DESD to implement activities. UNESCO can ask them to make sustainable development a compulsory part for all education programmes (like the example set in Sweden).

5. At the level of meetings UNESCO can put ESD across the lifespan on the agenda of its own meetings. Furthermore it can try to interact with other organizations in order to put it on their agendas. More specifically: in July 2009 the theme will be Higher Education. Education for Sustainable Development is also important in Higher Education, so integration is possible as well.

motivate national governments to actively integrate SD in education.

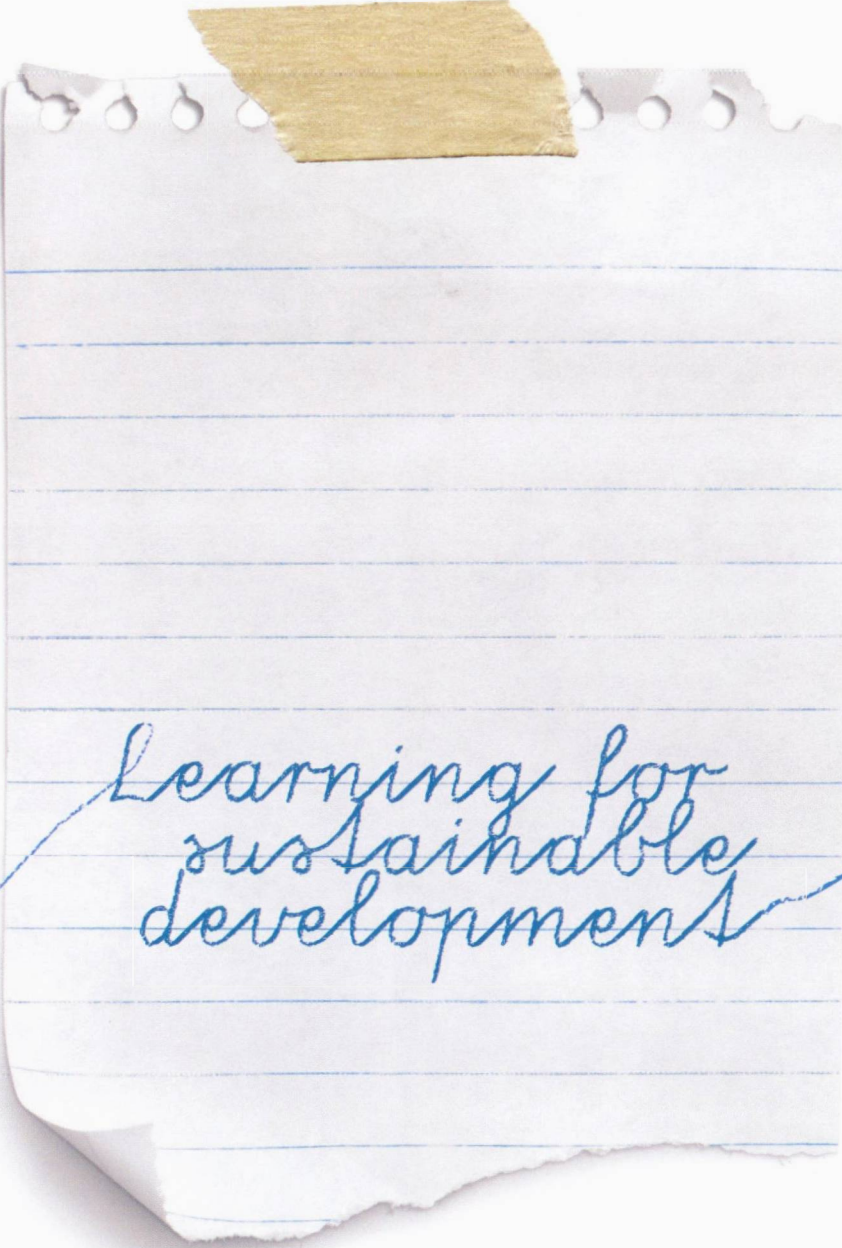
The next chapter links these recommendations and the outcome of the discussions to the conclusions from the three scientific reports.

## 5.3 // Summary

The content recommendations were formulated as research topics. Some of the research topics focus on the integration of sustainable development, others on lifelong learning, but one also addresses the question: 'What is the added value of sustainable development to education and its target group?' The answers are important in order to create a learning environment that not only exists in theory, but also works in practice.

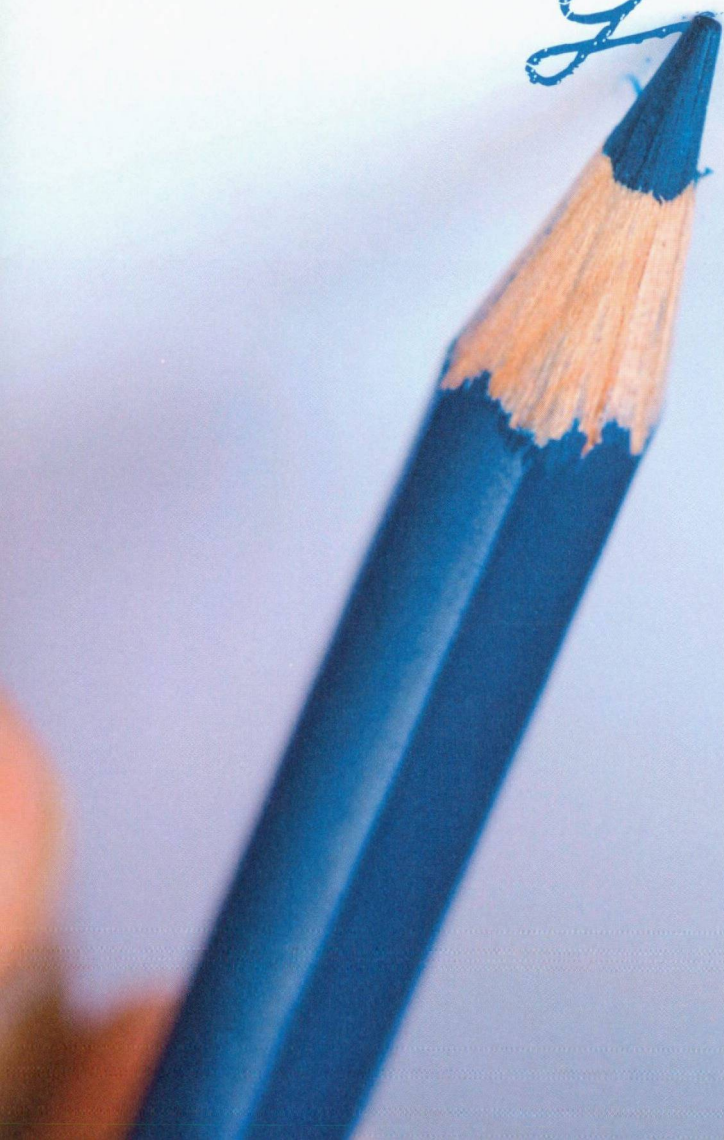
As UNESCO is the lead agency in the DESD, policy recommendations are focused on the UNESCO agenda. This concerns the changing of the focus from education for all to education for sustainable development and placing lifelong learning in this context as well. Funding is addressed and the role of UNESCO to put ESD on the agenda and





Learning for  
sustainable  
development

ability





## 6. Conclusions

Formal (at school), non-formal (in a learning setting, outside of school), and informal (in a non-learning setting) learning are considered important for achieving sustainability.

However, a large number of initiatives, in the Netherlands and internationally, regarding ESD emphasize formal and initial education. Learning for sustainable development does not stop after initial education, reflecting on the 'inconvenient truth' is a challenge across the entire lifespan.

The programme 'Learning across the lifespan' was organized in order to strengthen the content of the subjects of lifelong learning and ESD and to link the two. The main conclusions of the reports and the expert meeting are presented below.

The first conclusion centres on the importance of sustainable development. Learning for sustainable development is a process that continues lifelong and therefore takes place in a whole range of learning environments from formal to non-formal and informal. The ultimate goal is 'a better future for all'. One important, perhaps basic, aspect of learning for sustainable development is that the vision and purpose underpinning the learning setting should be directed at all three pillars: social, ecological and economic without neglecting the cultural dimension. The conclusion was that ESD should determine the direction of

all kinds of processes and all kinds of programmes, such as lifelong learning, social cohesion, education for all and others. If the UN wants to create a better future for all, programmes should not just focus on learning across the lifespan. They should focus on learning across the lifespan in order to create a sustainable future. To create this future there should be better co-operation between the different sectors of education and better co-ordination of their learning processes. Formal, informal and non-formal education are often seen as separate systems which do not cooperate. However, formal education can learn a lot regarding tools for education for sustainable development from non-formal learning processes as organized in companies and also from the open learning processes going on in informal education, and vice versa. Tools such as communities of practice, problem solving education and others were mentioned.

One of the challenges in this process is where, when and how to integrate sustainable development in the learning process. Sustainable development is not an easy issue to teach and learn. It is a process that should address different scales, should balance different perspectives and should take place in different learning settings. At the same time the direction of learning is not open but should lead to 'a better future for all, now and in the future'.

Schematically:

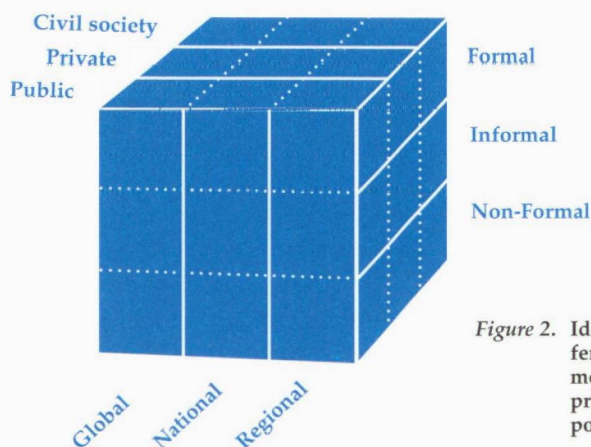


Figure 2. Identification of and interaction between different learning spaces. Sustainable Development should be an underpinning steering principle for the direction of learning in all possible combinations in the scheme.

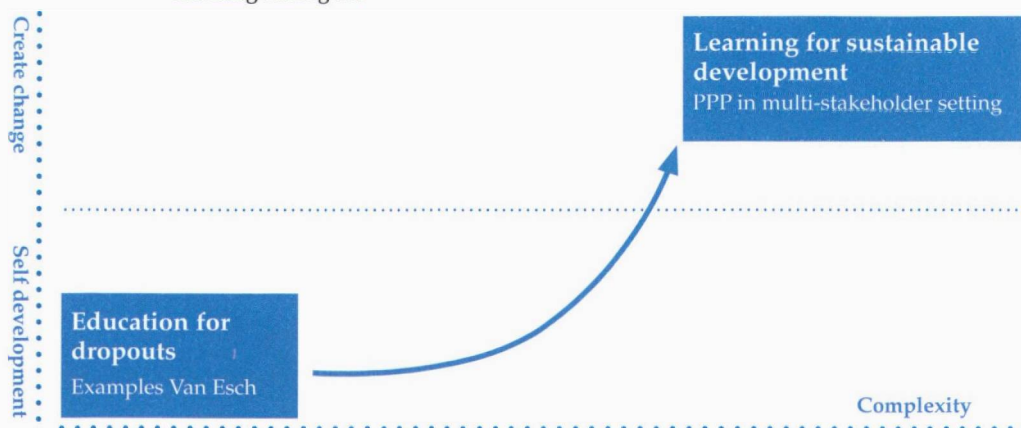
The second conclusion is centred on the distinction between the two main learning strategies, self development and learning to contribute to a sustainable world. The first and at this moment most important goal of education is to acquire knowledge, attitudes and skills. This will lead to self-development of people, they learn how to express and respect themselves. This is a prerequisite to learn how to respect others and the planet. Integration of sustainable development in education will teach people how to create change in order to contribute to a sustainable future.

Self-development is part of initial formal education. Non-formal and informal education will lead to self-development of dropouts for example. Using the first metaphor of learning: learning, in this phase, focuses on the acquisition of skills, knowledge and attitudes. But learning in this setting will not lead to full self-development, because the complexity of real life is not integrated in the learning. Citizenship and society reflect the complexity of our society (second

metaphor). Without learning how to deal with and how to react to this complexity, participation in society is not possible. Therefore, social capital is only built when learning is open-ended, emergent, 'in the making', non-formal/informal, problem-posing and dialogical. In this learning setting people really develop themselves, but also learn to deal with the society they live in. The first step towards learning for sustainable development has been taken. However, to make sure that people learn to become self-aware citizens who are able and expected to contribute to a sustainable world, one more step is needed, using the third metaphor: participation in order to change. This means introducing learning in/of groups, learning in communities of practice, where people have mutual engagement and a shared repertoire. People become aware of the necessity to participate in society and of the consequences of their behaviour for their surroundings and even the world. In this way they become actors of change for a sustainable future.



Figure 3. Schematic coherence of learning strategies.



The third conclusion focuses on the actions that should be taken to reach the condition described above. It is a challenge to combine sustainable development and lifelong learning, because it needs a different perspective on learning. In order to improve the situation regarding the issue of ESD actions can be taken at the level of content and policy.

Teachers need different competences and research should focus on specific aspects of an issue, but at the same time look at the full complexity of the problem. Complexity has to be part of the learning process, new incentives have to be implemented and education has to take place in a local context that is connected to a global context. And most of all, the added value of learning for sustainable development should be clear.

At the policy level the issue is one of acknowledgement of importance. Education for sustainable development across the lifespan should be put on the agenda of international meetings. National governments should be motivated to

actively integrate sustainable development in education and more funding should be mobilized for ESD.

Therefore, UNESCO policy, but also that of other UN-agencies, should include sustainable development as a basic principle in all programmes. For example, lifelong learning should not just be lifelong learning, but it should be learning in the perspective of sustainable development.

Sustainable development should determine the direction of all kinds of processes and all kinds of programmes.



This report is based on three scientific reports. Therefore, the references of the three reports were used. Below the references of the RUG and CINOP reports are listed.

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