

Tbilisi+35: Environmental Education for Sustainable Development
Plenary session V - ESD Ways Forward: Looking Ahead and Beyond
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Educating in a changing world

1. Jointly liable for our future

First of all, I would like to thank very much and to congratulate UNESCO, UNEP and the Government of Georgia on this important intergovernmental meeting 35 years after the Tbilisi Conference in 1977 and to compliment the Government of Georgia for its organization and hospitality.

I would like to underline that in the title of the 2012 Conference, in the speeches and in the final *Communiqué*, the terms “Environmental Education” and “Education for Sustainable Development” march *jointly*, which is good. Even though the names are different, there are not substantial differences between them if the aim is the same and if there are strong cultural, pedagogical, epistemological, and ethical bases.

We are all *jointly* liable for our future. Institutions, educators, and civil society, *jointly* and *severally*, must improve knowledge, awareness, responsibility and engagement for a better world.

From both a social and an environmental point of view, the aim of environmental education is a sustainable world, and to support people’s knowledge, abilities and attitudes that are useful in fighting climatic changes, loss of biodiversity, desertification, hunger, poverty, injustice, disease, and so on...

With its 40 years history, the environmental education and ESD of course are a capital and now also a heritage we cannot waste: a capital of energies, of expertise, of resources and of enthusiasm.

Educational activities are recognized as a fundamental tool in strengthening citizens’ participation in decision-making processes and therefore democracy, for the support of ecological awareness in communities and therefore encouraging new methods of production and consumption, more sensible use of resources (energy, water, raw materials, land, forests, etc.), respect for nature and all living species.

2. Aim and history of the WEECs

Consequently, the aim of the WEECs is to encourage discussion amongst everyone involved in environmental education and sustainable development: universities, public institutions, non-governmental organizations, schools, parks, thematic or territorial networks on various scales (local, regional, world-wide), professional associations, institutes and research centres, mass media, businesses, and so on...

The World Environmental Education Congresses have taken place periodically since 2003.

The WEEC, a worldwide network of debate and research, was established to give the Congresses continuity. The world meetings are coordinated by a Permanent Secretariat that has its headquarters in Torino, Italy.

This consequently can favour discussions about the key issues in environmental education; the exchange of thoughts, experiences and proposals from one Congress to the next; and the creation of a worldwide community of research and practice in environmental education and sustainability.

The idea of an international meeting on environmental education became a concrete reality in 2003 with the First World Environmental Education Congress (1st WEEC) held in Espinho, Portugal.

The 2nd WEEC took place in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) in 2004, in order to improve the network. The 3rd Congress in 2005 in Torino (Italy) brought an end to the phase of consolidating the Congresses and paved the way for the series of biennial Congresses that followed. Significantly, the 3rd WEEC in Torino in 2005 occurred during the inaugural year of the Worldwide Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (UN-DESD), proclaimed by the United Nations for the ten-year period of 2005-2014.

The Congress of 2007 in Durban (South Africa), and the one in Montréal (Canada) of 2009, confirmed the continuity of the network.

The theme of the Congress in Durban: "Learning in a changing World" has opened the opportunity for critical reflection on the role of education - practice and theory.

The theme of Congress in Montréal, "Earth, our common home", invited the 2,200 participants to contribute to the most important project of our humanity: to learn to live better together on Earth.

The 6th World Environmental Education Congress took place in 2011 in Brisbane, Australia and the 7th WEEC will be held in 2013 in Morocco.

In spite of the distance and the international economic crises, about 800 delegates from more than 50 countries from all continents joined the event in

Brisbane, which involved plenary sessions, paper presentations, workshops, round tables and symposiums. Climate was one of the main issues that emerged from the congress. How can people be educated to mitigate impacts on climate and adapt to the ongoing climate changes? How can we reinforce community resilience to the dramatic consequences of global warming?

Other recurring subjects of the WEEC congresses were young people's participation, context variety, partnership and networks (keywords that have been mentioned in many speeches), the role of universities, the need to increase the attention of decision makers to the themes of environmental education.

3. Two invitations

Therefore, I would like to invite all you to attend two important meetings.

1. I would like to invite the European participants to *Tbilisi plus 35* to attend the first European Day at the third national meeting of the French EE for ESD, on 4 March 2013, in Lyon, France.

France has an excellent network linking Government, local bodies, NGOs, schools, parks, companies for profit, trade unions, the Third sector and non-profit associations.

In collaboration with our French friends, we are building a European network and asking for the establishment of a permanent European space for consultation between civil society and European Union Institutions.

Every four years the French community of multi-stakeholders EE-ESD organizes a general assembly of environmental education for sustainable development with thousands of participants.

This first European Day will be a whole day of workshops and debates and an opportunity for professionals and for decision-makers to share promote and create innovative solutions for the EE for ESD. The goal of the first European Day is "Getting to know each other and acting together empowered by our differences".

Website:

www.assises-eedd.org

2. I would like to invite all participants, all your countries and institutions, your networks, and your profit and non profit organizations to attend the Seventh World Environmental Education Congress, on 9-14 June 2013 in Marrakech, Morocco, under the royal patronage of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, and under the presidency of Her Royal Highness Princess Lalla Hasnaa,

President of the Mohammed VI Foundation for Environmental Protection. It is the first time that a congress is held in a country of Arabic and Islamic culture. It is very important.

Now we are looking for the locations for the 8th and the 9th Congresses. The call for proposal for the 8th WEEC in the 2015 is closed, but the call for the 9th in 2017 is still open.

Websites:

www.environmental-education.org

www.weec2013.org

4. The tasks for EE and ESD

Jointly, EE and ESD must improve their role in the society worldwide, and must improve their organization, networks, tools, audience, effectiveness and incisiveness, since EE and ESD concern people all over the world.

Our tasks, both for EE and ESD, are:

- To match and to collect all institutional and social parts acting in EE and ESD.
- To make EE and ESD part the public agenda by decision-makers, mass media, and financial bodies, so that worldwide society endorses, supports and funds EE and ESD.
- To spread the knowledge and the abilities needed for changing the social-economic paradigm, so we can bring together the ecological/environmental awareness that EE improve since its birth with the “green education” in a lifelong and life wide education.
- To unite research, “sustainability science”, for example, with EE and ESD.
- To unite technical and scientific innovation with social innovation.

Education acts at a cultural level, but the “culture” includes the arts or other manifestations of human intellectual achievement as well many societal aspects and behaviours: attitudes, beliefs and way of life, language, customs, values, norms, mores, rules, tools, technologies, products, organizations, and institutions.

For those of us involved and interested in environmental matters, we realize that the humankind had a profound impact on the environment. We live in the “Anthropocene” era, as Paul Crutzen has suggested, and the environment retroacts onto human society.

Therefore, building a *culture of* (fair, equitable and ecological) *sustainability* is an enormous and transversal/cross-cutting challenge.