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LEARNING FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE: GEOGRAPHICAL SCHOOL PRACTICE IN SLOVENIA

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ABSTRACT

We analyse some aspects of the integration of sustainable education in school practice in Slovenia with special reference on geography. The results of analyses (since 2007) have shown that the objectives, which should contribute to the achievement of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) are not all realized. So far the legal bases that support ESD, as well as the revised national curricula for primary and secondary schools have been provided, although they should be upgraded as we notice on school geography example. Less activity was observed in the area of accelerating teaching research and strengthening cooperation between the various stakeholders in the field of ESD at all levels. At this point, it is our opinion that the greatest attention should be, at this moment, put on training of professionals, especially teachers and educators, because they still have not internalized the principles of ESD to such an extent that it exercised decisive influence on their theaching philosophy. We strongly believe that education for a sustainable future must be based on the level of personal beliefs and to become a part of life of educators too.

Key Words: Sustainability, education, curriculum, teacher, geography.

INTRODUCTION

The United Nations has declared the period from 2005 to2014 as the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD). UNESCO was chosen as the agency in charge of promoting the Decade and was asked to initiate a draft international scheme. The underlying vision of the DESD is a world where each individual can benefit from quality education and learn the values, behaviour and lifestyles needed for a sustainable future and for positive societal transformation. (Interboard Education for Sustainable Development Group, 2005) They have put in the forefront the values and respect – to others, to diversity, to nature and to natural resources. With the inclusion of mentioned values in all points of education and learning we would encourage changes in people's behaviour. With this a stronger future would be allowed concerning the purity of nature, development of economy and fair society for present and future generations (UNESCO – Education for Sustainable Development).

In 2007 Ministry for Education, science and sport of Republic of Slovenia has issued educational guidelines for sustainable development from preschool education to university education. As they wrote in this document the main goal of this guideline is: *»…to emphasise the importance of education for sustainable development and to show possibilities for implementation of sustainable development in formal, unofficial and occasional learning«.* (*Ministry* for Education, science and sport of Republic of Slovenia, *2007, 2).* It is determined that in education sustainable development must include environmental, economic and social questionsjavascript:IzberiBesedo2(5,174) and that they that are connected mutually. Like this ESD is not only addition to previous general education, but must:

- Be extensive, complete, harmonious teaching process, that comprises relationship between a person and nature and relationships between people;

- Leeds to understanding all-round correlations between environmental, economic, social and political systems and co-dependency of people, living in different parts of the world;
- Tries actively to save present and future environmental and social questions of mankind.

Some conditions, those need to be met for successful implementation in Slovenia on all levels of education:
- Ensure normative bases, that are supporting ESD;
- Quality professional workers with ESD;
- Provide suitable didactic and other materials for implementation of ESD;
- To expedite research and development of ESD;
- To strengthen cooperation of all factors on the field of ESD on all levels (local, regional, national). (Ministry for education, science and sport , 2007)

In Slovenia, the principles for ESD have been the starting point for renovation of curricula for secondary schools in 2008 and in 2011 for renovation of national curricula for primary schools. The ESD principles were determines in cross-curricula competences, which the pupils should develop. With the ESD principles the new vision of education is connected, inside which the interdisciplinary approach is being emphasised to obtain knowledge and skills that are needed for sustainable future as well as the change of values in behaviour and life habits.

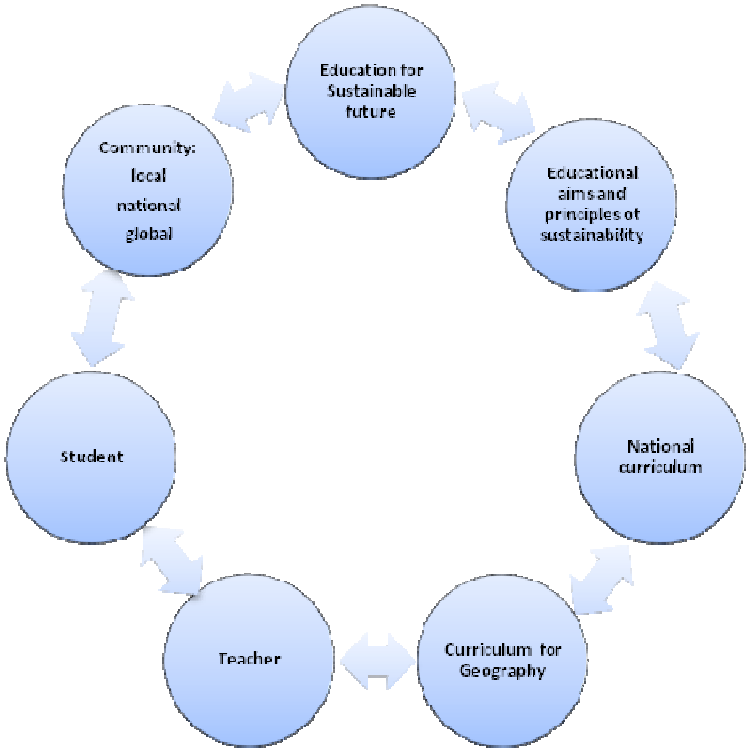
GEOGRAPHY AND EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Important feature and in the same time a large educational advantage of geography is in achieving goals in education for sustainable future, that enables complexity of information on public, professional and private life of people in different physical and socio-economic background, which enables pupils to realise, to understand and to accept civil responsibility for active involvement in local, regional, national and global space. These are basics for understanding the meaning of relationships and values at decision-making, readiness for responsible use of knowledge about space and the awareness of co-responsibility for it.

Sustainable development features in all educational key stages and the fact that geography has come to be seen as education for sustainable development's natural home. (Huckle, 2006) Geography education can offer quality in connecting natural and social knowledge and common values in order to understand both local and global problems and to encourage students to respond to these responsibly. This is the main educational potential of geography in civic education and education for sustainable development and living (Kolnik, 2009).

For achieving this goals all elements and actors of educational process must be cohesive (picture 1), which demands thorough deliberation on their today's role as well as curtain changes in general national educational policy.

Picture 1: Interdependence of elements and actors of education for sustainable future as the case of geography teaching and learning.



Source: Kolnik, 2011

A large role in changing of curriculum have the changes of educational philosophy, were the curriculum is the result of compromise among existent educational philosophies () and changes, that we want to include in them from the point of view of new educational guidelines as reflection of social needs.

Konečnik Kotnikova (2009) found when lists, that the deciding on curriculum can go on mostly on the level of teaching (in this case a profound influences of teachers is detected), on level of institution or schools and on the state level (e.g. influence of government services such as Ministry of education, science and sport, the National education institute of the Republic of Slovenia, etc.)

The examination of developmental orientations of geographical education in Slovene and European space indicates that last decade of former century has brought the consciousness that is important to establish more quality attitudes within the use of space: change the attitude towards the surroundings, fellow men and future nations (education for coexistence, multicultural education and environmental education).

The beginning of 21st century closely connects school geography with interdisciplinary didactic goals of protection of the environment for the survival of humankind and sustainable development on local, regional and planetary level (). Such defined educational objectives are integral part of curricula, according to some researchers of Slovene school geography () are important if not already decisive at influence on the class of geography alone. It is also important to know geography teachers, their competences, knowledge of their acceptance and understanding of starting points and characteristics of renovated curricula as key holders of didactic process.

Geography teachers and ESD

Learning for sustainable future rests on the assumption that a person's views on sustainability integrate his/her past experience (emotional, cognitive and conative). In their activity in the life world, students should have varied opportunities to obtain different kinds of experience and information. Each student can combine this

input with pre-existing experience and directly or indirectly obtained information, in a combination that can become a catalyst for reflexive-constructive thinking (ESD, 2005).

Active teaching and learning offers more opportunities for interaction among pupils and teachers, among pupils themselves and last but not least among pupils and the contents. Pupil is not only a passive listener, but an active participant in the learning process. Active teaching and learning requires also a changed role of the teacher, primarily as a mentor and consultant. A cooperative environment, flexibility, learning from mistakes, learning based on problem solving and process thinking is encouraged. (O`Donoghue & Cusack, 2008).

New educational approach demands also new didactics that is by pupils developing skills and competences for partnership, participation and engagement and for these suitable qualified teachers.

This move influenced on the conceptualization and acceding to matters that are: school management, didactic approaches, curriculums, additional didactic activities, resource management, school basics and partnership in a community.

In the period between 2006 and 2008 a research named Analysis and stimulation of involving primary school education in sustainable development has been conducted in Slovenia. The research was looking into which elements of sustainable development teachers know in practice, and which contents they think are important and are recognised as a priority. The sample contained 172 teachers from different primary schools in Slovenia. Among others the research indicated, that the interviewed teachers at determining of key contents of sustainable development had showed little readiness for consideration of contents active citizenship (30%) and developing of enterprise (24%). The authors of the research have expressed concern over low percent of teachers that previously mentioned themes seem important. They are warning, that disequilibrium of key contents of sustainable development show wrong understanding of mentioned concept at teachers, consequentially also by pupils. A presenting problem are also approaches, which demand more contemporary manners of work and in space oriented curricula (case: only 25 % of teachers made possible for pupils to alone threw empirical way look into problems of sustainable development) (Jamšek & Javrh, 2009).

Important personal experiences gained during the education on different points of view regarding sustainable development are not only present at teachers but also among students, future geography teachers. In the year 2011 at the Department of geography at the Faculty of Arts in Maribor a pedagogical experiment was conducted involving students – future geography teachers. The goals was to find out if students during their studies gain good examples of mentorship and are developing necessary skills and competences for their future profession based on contents and principles of education for sustainable development: 42 students cooperated, that were finishing two-subject study of geography were involved. In the first part of the teaching experiment the students with five keywords described their understanding of the sustainable development. Findings indicated that the cooperating students listed keywords from three fields of sustainable development (environmental, social and economic). In the second part students in groups analysed curriculum for geography at general high schools and based on that independently made a project didactic work for pupils of general high school, which was bases on principles of education for sustainable development at class of geography. Out of eleven groups, eight chosen goals from fields of ecology, two groups from field of economy, and one from field of population. On question why the vast majority decided for themes from field of ecology, the answer was because they have the most experience on this topic during the course of their so far education (Kolnik, 2011).

From the listed literature it can be summarised that themes and contents from fields of social sustainability are not sufficiently and equally engaged in education of sustainable development, which influences wrongly on understanding and knowing the concept of sustainability. Goals and principles of education for sustainable development will not be able to be achieved completely, if teachers are not only professionally suitable but also that they recognise the meaning of principles of sustainable education and in a larger degree also recognise on a personal level as important in all their dimension. Co-creators of didactic process (teachers and pupils) have to be able to be aware of the meaning of holistic approach within the education of sustainable

development. The whole integrated treatment and integrated education on concept of sustainability leads not only to a more complex knowledge and understanding of such problems, but also towards integrated solutions that are the sole way to sustainable society.

CONCLUSION

One of the basic characteristics of school Geography is its constant adjusting to natural environment and the social (educational, economic, cultural, etc.) needs and also to the development of Geography as a science. In order to achieve the goals of upbringing and education for sustainable future, all the elements and agents of the educational process need to be sound with each other, which calls for a thorough consideration of their current role as well as for certain changes in the entire national educational policy. The latter include also the guidelines of upbringing and education for sustainable future on all the educational levels.

We can be satisfied in Slovenia with the Geography Curriculum as a basic pedagogical documentation for Geography classes from the point of view of their accordance with the principles of education for sustainable development. However, important changes in them, for primary and secondary schools, which were recently revised, are still ahead of us. This refers in particular to the revision of Geography classes from the point of view of educational philosophy, according to which students and teachers should not only carry out the aims and topics of curriculum or consume knowledge produced by others (as case the teachers educators, didactic materials, etc.), but also produce and co-create this knowledge. Instead of "reaction" to the educational changes and novelties, they need to develop a proactive attitude as a starting point for innovative learning. Innovative learning, which encourages the upbringing and education for sustainable future, is composed of anticipatory learning (encouragement of creativity in the sense of long term planning of the future and assuming responsibility for one's own decisions) and participatory learning (an individual's active involvement and participation in group formation of problem directed questions and anticipation of alternative solutions for these questions), and directly supports the implementation of the educational principles for sustainability.

Goals and principles of education for sustainable development won't be able to be achieved completely, if teachers are not only professionally suitable but also that they recognise the meaning of principles of sustainable education and in a larger degree also recognise on a personal level as important in their entire dimension. Co-creators of didactic process (teachers and pupils) have to be able to be aware of the meaning of holistic approach within the education of sustainable development. The whole integrated treatment and integrated education on concept of sustainability leads not only to a more complex knowledge and understanding of such problems, but also towards integrated solutions that are the sole way to sustainable society.

Coming to the main task: we must achieve cohesiveness between educational documents, didactic guidelines of education for sustainable development, modified curricula for geography in a way that teachers internalise them as their own. Only this way, teachers will implement them and direct these guide pupils on their own way to the future of sustainable society.

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