



# 10<sup>th</sup> Conference on Environmental Education in Europe

Old University Building, Valletta - Malta  
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## Thinking and acting outside the box a European manifesto

This manifesto was developed from the collective contribution of educators from different countries attending the 10<sup>th</sup> Conference on Environmental Education in Europe (CEEE 2008, Malta). The conference is part of the ongoing process spearheaded by the Foundation European ESD-net (foundation for Education for Sustainable Development) to enhance and promote, within Europe, quality education associated with sustainable development.

We are almost half way through the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (UNDESD) and having reviewed the development of environmental education (EE)/education for sustainable development (ESD) we feel that we should present this manifesto:

- to build upon the experiences and insights expressed by the international community in Tbilisi (1977), Moscow (1987), Thessaloniki (1997) and Ahmadabad (2007);
- to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the UNDESD to put ESD principles at the centre of educational discourse and practice;
- to provide a critical reflection of our EE/ESD practices;
- to identify the common pitfalls that hinder the development of ESD; and
- to suggest principles and strategies that should guide practice.

**We strongly believe that all educators (developers and providers) should implement EE/ESD as the medium through which:**

- learners are equipped with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that help them develop into responsible citizens;
- citizens are empowered to anticipate, deal with and plan for change;
- individuals are enabled to contribute actively towards the development of a just and peaceful society that respects diversity of life and lifestyles; and
- a global alliance is developed ... "that promotes a socially responsible economic development while protecting the resource base and the environment for the benefit of future generations" (Agenda 21, 1992).

**Consequently, we urge that EE/ESD:**

- be structured around the educational needs and learning patterns of the learner - irrespective of age, gender, race, social role and responsibility or any other irrelevant distinction;
- be built around and reflect the social and economic realities of the learners;

- provide a systemic perspective that relates diverse aspects of reality and helps learners to comfortably function within complex settings; and
- combine a hands-on with a minds-on approach that allows learners to develop ownership of the learning process that goes beyond formal education and projects.

**Therefore, we feel that educational institutions and organisations should:**

- realise that the development of ESD has been hindered by a general reluctance to change traditional educational practices;
- realise that traditional educational practices that promote a one-size-fits-all approach have been largely ineffective;
- invest more on quality training of personnel than just on the provision of resources;
- provide curricula and programmes that promote flexibility of teaching and learning experiences;
- provide spaces for autonomous inputs from civil society that render educational experiences relevant and contextualised; and
- develop alliances and networks that provide spaces where joint forces provide more tangible solutions to issues related to sustainable development.

**We believe that decision makers have a responsibility to show leadership and to sustain this process by:**

- simplifying overly bureaucratic procedures that do not currently promote ‘thinking and acting outside the box’ and hinder the development of EE/ESD;
- ensuring an intersectoral approach towards ESD by developing and implementing regional/national/local EE/ESD policies with clear short, medium and long term objectives that are sensitive to the economic, socio-cultural and ecological needs of the community;
- considering the provision of EE/ESD as an essential part of their plans, rather than an afterthought; and
- promoting structures that are flexible enough to facilitate participation of civil society resulting in more effective networking between policy makers and citizens that stimulates shared responsibility.

We, the authors of this manifesto, have an obligation to promote these principles and strategies in our respective countries. We consider this manifesto as a key step towards ‘thinking and acting outside the box’ in the way we encourage ESD. We strongly believe that our commitment to action is a fitting contribution towards the achievement of the goals of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.