

Learning Network 'Orientation of social work on sustainable development': what can we learn?

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Content of our presentation

- The development of a 'learning network' (LN) about social work (SW) and sustainable development (SD)
- Content discussed so far
- Didactic approaches addressed so far
- 3 perspectives:
 1. Policymaking
 2. Professional education
 3. SW practice
- Critical factors: "do's & don'ts"
- (SD and the SW profession)

Development of the LN

- 'DHO Vlaanderen' (Sustainable Higher Education Flanders) → learning networks of teachers in different fields of study
- Overall aim: promoting SD in the curriculum
- Leuven University College (Department of Social Work) → small research project 'Orientation of Social Work on Sustainable Development' → LN for SW
- Actors involved: **teachers** of university colleges for SW + **practitioners** in the field (interaction between theory and practice)
- **Chair** = teacher - **coordination**: DHO Vlaanderen - Flemish government

Development of the LN

- The LN brings together teachers and social workers from diverse organizations for **study**, **building knowledge**, and **exchange of expertise and initiatives** for SD in the SW curriculum
- The LN combines **content and didactics** for sustainability to develop and incorporate education for SD into the social work curriculum and into the education system
- It aims at increasing the **awareness** of the fact that SD touches upon the very core of the SW profession

Content discussed so far

- the interrelatedness of SW and SD
- education for sustainable development (ESD)
- ecological economics
- transition management
- consumption and debts mediation
- empowerment
- competences for SD
- global inequality
- globalization
- solidarity as a basic value in social work
- resilience
- etc.

Content discussed so far



- The themes and issues treated in the LN also inspired the content of a recently published **handbook** about social work and sustainable development (Peeters, J. [Ed.] 2010)

Didactics addressed so far

- Social-artistic approaches and theatre as a way to broaden students minds regarding SD
- Film and audio-visual media in teaching SD
- Games as a tool for learning for sustainability
- "Games for change"

3 examples of outcome

- Policymaking
 - LN contributes to the implementation of **ESD policy** in Flanders
- Professional education
 - An **Intensive Program** (IP) about SD
- SW practice
 - **Globelink**, a youth organization focusing on global inequality

Policymaking: UN Decade of Education for SD

Policymaking



- 1992: Rio Conference (UNCED) → **Agenda 21**: "Education = important tool for the realization of SD"
- ESD predominantly developed as a policy concept
- 2005-2014: **United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD)**
- *"The overall goal of the DESD is to integrate the principles, values, and practices of sustainable development into all aspects of education and learning. This educational effort will encourage changes in behavior that will create a more sustainable future in terms of environmental integrity, economic viability, and a just society for present and future generations."* (UNESCO 2005, International Implementation Scheme for the DESD, p. 6)

Policymaking




- United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (**UNECE**): Regional Implementation Strategy for the DESD
- **Objectives:**
 1. ensure that policy, regulatory and operational frameworks support ESD
 2. promote sustainable development through formal, non-formal and informal learning
 3. equip educators with the competence to include sustainable development in their teaching
 4. ensure that adequate tools and materials for ESD are accessible
 5. promote research on and development of ESD
 6. strengthen cooperation on ESD at all levels within the UNECE region

Policymaking



- ESD Implementation Plan "Learning for a viable future": adopted by the Flemish Government in May 2009
- 7 actions:
 1. ESD consultation platform
 2. ESD coordination network
 3. Process guidance + action research
 4. Promoting ESD with legal policy instruments
 5. Promoting ESD with financial policy instruments
 6. Promoting ESD via training and courses
 7. Promoting ESD via educational material



Policymaking

- **Formal** educational system
 - SW professional education
 - Fostering ESD in the curriculum
- **Non-formal** and **informal** learning
 - SW practitioners in diverse setting of non-formal and informal learning
 - Fostering ESD in these learning contexts
- **Educators** learn from each other
- Discussion about ESD **competences** for SW(education)
- Development and exchange of **tools and materials**
- **Cooperation** on ESD

Professional education: SoS!-IP

2011 at University College Katho KORTRIJK
 2012 at University College Arteveldehogeschool GENT
 2013 at University College KHKempen GEEL

70 students and university teachers of FINLAND, CZECH REPUBLIC, GERMANY, LITHUANIA, SLOVAKIA and SPAIN



SW practice: Globelink

SW practice: Globelink

- Youth service
- Youngsters 16+
- To aspire a just and sustainable world
- Youngsters = equal and full partners
- Opportunities and tools to
 - To participate in society
 - To reinforce voice of young people
- To stimulate shaping critical view on global themes

SW practice: Globelink

- Projects which focus on capacitybuilding to make just and sustainable choices
- Focus = HOW to Think
- Education on Sustainable Development
 - HEAD – knowledge
 - HANDS – Engagement/commitment
 - HEART – Values and beliefs

SW practice: Globelink

- Globelink and LN
 - Theoretical perspective: back-up for Globelink
 - Best practices: inspiration for Globelink
- Non-formal and informal learning: emphasis on heart and hands
- Search for alternatives
- High level of participation -> ownership

Critical factors

- Strengths:
 - Cooperation teachers from university colleges for SW (chair!) + coordination/support DHO Vlaanderen or Flemish government: **a strong basis**
 - Involvement of teachers as well as practitioners: combination of a **theoretical and practice-oriented** perspective
 - Working towards **concrete results**: better output and projects: commitment of participants → return of output that can be used in (teaching) practice (e.g. master-powerpoint, list of relevant literature, overview of relevant films and video's, etc.)
 - **Cooperation** between several schools, e.g. handbook in order to achieve useable output

Critical factors

- Strengths:
 - Structure by fast reporting and making presentations and didactic material available on our website
 - <http://www.lne.be/doelgroepen/onderwijs/ecocampus/aan-de-slag/lerende-netwerken/thema-sociaal-werk>
 - Commitment of partners
 - Quality of keynote speakers
 - discuss the meaning for social work
 - Informal contacts and spontaneous cooperation around specific projects
 - presentation ENSACT conference
 - IP
 - publication

Critical factors

- Obstacles:
 - **Time-factor** → planning of the meetings in advance (before the start of the academic year)
 - Commitment of participants on a **voluntary** basis → important to guarantee the return of valuable output

Thank you for your attention!

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SD and the SW profession

- SW has a role to play in addressing the challenges involved:
 - urgency and compelling character of the current ecological crisis
 - relatedness between environmental and social problems
 - concept of 'person-in-environment' → both the social and the natural environment
 - basic principles of human rights and social justice
 - focus on well-being, social change and problem solving

SD and the SW profession

- SW has much to offer:
 - the focus on the person-in-environment adds a unique perspective and stresses the complex, bi-directional transactions between people and their social as well as natural environment
 - SW's typical holistic approach to reality and the ability to 'think big' (micro, mezzo and macro levels)
 - SW offers a focus on well-being that can broaden the concept of 'needs', central to SD discourse, towards other aspects of welfare

SD and the SW profession

- SW has much to offer:
 - SW can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the social dimension of SD, drawing on its basic aim of social justice
 - SW has experience in processes of multilevel and multi-actor cooperation
 - SW can contribute to building resilience and enhance a process of transition in society by participation and empowerment, especially for those groups in society that have no voice

SD and the SW profession

- Vital conditions:
 - reconsideration of its basic concepts from a point of view that takes the ecological crisis into consideration: integrating the natural environment perspective within the notion of person-in-environment, both in theory and practice
 - taking a global perspective, linking the structural and the personal and revealing connections between the neoliberal global agenda and day-to-day experiences
 - contributing to the construction of an alternative to unsustainable societies and strengthen the belief that another world is possible, not a monolithic world but a diverse one
 - accept conflict and confrontation as part of intervention