



Decade of Education for Sustainable Development in Flanders: current assessment

Background

The United Nations has designated the 2005-2014 period as the **Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)**. In order to give tangible expression to this initiative, UNESCO has developed an international implementation scheme. In addition, UNECE (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe) has unveiled a Regional Strategy for ESD (Vilnius strategy), which was adopted in March 2005 by the UNECE member states' ministers for education and the environment. The aim is that they should associate the strategy with their specific local context, to be put into practice via a three-phase regional implementation plan. In Flanders this is achieved with the ESD operational project in the Flemish Strategy for Sustainable Development (FSSD).

The **UNECE strategy** seeks to encourage the member states to promote ESD, while incorporating it into their formal education systems, in all the relevant subjects and in non-formal and informal education. In practice, six objectives are proposed under this heading:

- 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.

UNECE is looking to each country to decide in the first phase (up to 2007) what action it has already taken that fits in with the strategy: an overview/identification of the existing policy measures, legal and operational frameworks, financial mechanisms, educational activities, impediments and gaps, etc. A relevant **national implementation plan** has to be devised. During their 'Environment for Europe' -conference in Belgrade (October 2007) the relevant ministers had an opportunity to demonstrate their commitment towards the strategy, while providing feedback about the progress made with the national strategies. The implementation of the strategy provisions must be underway in the second phase (up to 2010). The progress made with implementing the national strategy has to be examined and revised if need be. During the third phase (up to 2015), the countries are expected to make great strides in the bid to implement ESD.

Indicators (with related subindicators) are being developed in the light of the aforementioned objectives so as to be able to make a review and manage the entire implementation process throughout the three phases. For each indicator there is a reference to what phase of the strategy it applies to. We proceed from the phase I indicators so as to highlight the present state of affairs while orienting the **Flemish implementation strategy**. We do not want to confine ourselves simply to making an assessment of the present situation. It is equally important to go about making suggestions and recommendations for the ESD policy and, more specifically, the Flemish implementation plan for the UNECE strategy. Towards this end, recourse was made in October 2007 to the members of the ESD consultation platform, a competent body responsible for issuing policy advice. The review formed the basis for making an investigation, via focus groups, of the opportunities and strengths available and

any gaps and obstacles. This revealed the ESD-related success stories and otherwise, while helping to guide and focus the Flemish implementation plan.

Objective 1: *Ensure that policy, regulatory and operational frameworks support ESD*

Indicator 1.1 Operational frameworks lending support to the promotion of ESD

1.1.1 Is there a strategy available in Dutch?

Yes, the UNECE strategy has been translated into Dutch.

1.1.2 Is there a coordinating body for the implementation of the strategy?

The strategy implementation process is being coordinated by the **ESD consultation platform**¹, which is incorporated into the Nature and Environmental Education unit of the Environment, Nature and Energy department and seeks to give operational substance to governmental policy decisions. The decision-making is focused on formulating a joint advisory opinion about the implementation of ESD. Proposals are prepared by a liaison group (editorial committee) but decisions have to be approved by the entire platform. The aim is to develop advisory opinions on the basis of a consensus, otherwise the consultation platforms are required to develop a majority view, while referring to the reasoning of the members who do not share this position.

1.1.3 Do the Authorities of Flanders have a formal structure for ESD-related interdepartmental cooperation?

The **ESD consultation platform** comprises representatives of various departments of the Authorities of Flanders: Environment, Nature and Energy department, Education and Training department, Agriculture and Fisheries department, Welfare, Public Health and Culture department, ... This consultation body has to be extended with unrepresented stakeholders within the Authorities of Flanders.

Apart from being a channel for interdepartmental cooperation, the ESD consultation platform is also a forum where stakeholders from outside the Flemish administration can consult with each other. Federal and provincial government agencies are represented, along with a wide variety of stakeholders from civil society. The consultation platform may be extended on an ad hoc basis with new albeit not permanent representatives when the agenda so requires. Annex: composition of the ESD consultation platform.

In the case of this external representation, maintaining a balanced delegation of relevant stakeholders is also a key priority in the short term.

It is important to be able to count on a permanent, balanced and feasible group so as to achieve a dynamic and interactive approach. A sufficiently large level of support and a certain degree of continuity are also key criteria for the platform activities.

¹ Van Oost, R. (2005). *ESD consultation platform: proposal for a work method starting in 2006*. Taken from www.milieueducatie.be dated 14/12/2006. This document was approved by the ESD consultation platform on 17/11/2005.

The Government of Flanders decided in 2005 to establish a ‘**multisectoral public administration working group on sustainable development**’ in the light of interdepartmental cooperation focused on the wider policy area of sustainable development. This working group is presided over by the policy officer from the sustainable development unit. The officer is assisted by a day-to-day administration, where the economic, social and environmental components are represented, as is Flemish foreign policy

The working group has to guarantee that comprehensive, coordinated sustainable development policy objectives are formulated, so that a converging policy approach can be applied at public administration level. We seek to achieve proactive standpoints and initiatives both in Belgium and at European and international level. The key priority of the Working Group on Sustainable Development is to forge a Flemish sustainable development strategy.

The administrative working group on sustainable development is assigned three tasks:

1. Administrative coordination of policy preparation and assessment focused on sustainable development
2. Policy preparation and assessment in the case of sustainable development cooperation with other regional authorities and the federal administration
3. Preparation of the Flemish position vis à vis European and international fora where sustainable development is on the agenda.

The specified representatives of the administrative working group are assigned the following general duties:

- providing requested information in the light of their policy area in accordance with the decisions of the administrative working group;
- informing the policy area about the activities of the working group ;
- clarifying the thrust of their policy area vis à vis international and national sustainable development-related fora and communicating this to the president of the administrative working group ;
- seeking to achieve a consensus about administrative working group policy recommendations on sustainable development ;
- lending support to the formulation, follow-up and implementation of a Flemish Strategy for Sustainable Development

This working group on Sustainable Development comprises representatives of:

- Diensten Algemeen Regeringsbeleid (DAR –General Government Policy Services)
- Diensten Algemeen Regeringsbeleid (DAR) – Study Service of the Government of Flanders)
- Administrative Affairs (BZ)
- Finance and Budget (FB)
- Internationaal Vlaanderen (iV – Flemish Ministry of Foreign Affairs)
- Toerisme Vlaanderen (Flanders Tourism)
- Vlaams Agentschap voor Internationale Samenwerking (Flemish Agency for International Cooperation)
- Vlaams Agentschap voor Internationaal Ondernemen (Flemish Investment and Trade)
- Vito (Flemish Institute for Technological Research)
- Economie, Wetenschap en Innovatie (EWI- Economic Affairs, Science and Innovation) – Economics department
- Onderwijs en Vorming (OV - Education and Training)
- Welzijn, Volksgezondheid en Gezin (WVG – Welfare, Public Health and the Family)
- Culture, Youth, Sports and Media (CJSM – Culture, Youth, Sports and the Media)
- Werk en Sociale Economie (WSE – Works and Social Economy)
- Landbouw en Visserij (LV - Agriculture and Fisheries)
- Environment, Nature and Energy (LNE)
- Mobiliteit en openbare Werken (MOW – Mobility and Public Works)

- Ruimtelijke Ordening, Woonbeleid en Onroerende Erfgoed (RWO - Inspectorate for Spatial Planning, Housing Policy and Heritage)

1.1.4 How much cooperation is there between the various ESD stakeholders within the Authorities of Flanders?

See subindicator 1.1.3.

The short-term target of the ESD **consultation platform** is as follows:

- review the existing initiatives that can be placed under the ESD heading;
- map out a Flemish implementation ESD strategy;
- lend support to and boost current initiatives
- take the initiative to develop uniform criteria/indicators for ESD;
- continue mapping out and fine-tuning the methodology and interaction with the working group on sustainable development.

The consultation platform meets three half days a year. The Flemish implementation strategy is an integral part of the agenda, which is also always focused on one theme, ideally chosen in the light of the current processes.

1.1.5 Has a ‘national’ focal point been designated?

No. UNECE calls for one focal point per member state, which is not a cut-and-dried affair in the Belgian context of a federalised state structure. Sustainable development is a policy area shared by the federal administration and the federated states, not solely for the three pillars of sustainable development but also within each pillar. Whether it be formal, non-formal or informal, education may broadly be considered as a municipal issue.

Attention is currently being paid to the question of designating a national focal point and aligning regional strategies and initiatives with a national implementation plan.

1.1.6 Are there any ESD-specific operational frameworks for non-formal education at national/local level ESD?

There are **no operational frameworks that are explicitly focused on education for sustainable development**, but there are a policy framework and mechanisms involving nature and environmental education along with development education. These also cover optional and ad hoc initiatives based on ESD principles to varying degrees. However, the policy framework available is not invariably focused on systematically promoting ESD.

The Environment Integration and Support section of the Environment, Nature and Energy department is busy turning the ‘**Nature and Environmental Education Programme**’ into reality. The Flemish Environment Policy Plan 2003-2007² states:

“Nature and Environmental Education boasts a system of coordination that goes further than the Authorities of Flanders’ system. This involves a Nature and Environmental Education network in which the education, welfare, public health and culture departments, environment and nature associations and provinces are also participating.

Apart from the continuing careful attention being paid to nature and environmental education within the education system, we are also keen on developing and promoting extracurricular nature and environmental education for young people

² Heirman, J.P. (2004). *Milieubeleidsplan 2003-2007*. Brussels: Ministry of the Flemish Community, p. 337.

(youth work) and adults and families (training organisations) during this planning period. Practical, clear agreements should result in networking within the nature and environmental education sector. Various policy levels have to align their activities in a complementary fashion, while improving cooperation between various Flemish environmental agencies.

In the case of specific target groups (such as farming, industry, construction and the tourist sector), the administration is working in cooperation with intermediary organisations to create specific nature and environmental education activities, based on the sector's specific problems and associated with the target group policy being conducted.”

In the Vision and Policy document for Nature and Environmental Education - Flanders 2004-2009 nature and environmental education is focused on the movement towards sustainable development.

Approved by the Flemish Parliament's 31 March 2004 meeting, a Decree on **development education** describes the aims of development education policy-making as follows³:

“The policy seeks to make a contribution to the development of a base of support for international cooperation and the development of an international solidarity approach with a view to achieving a sustainable global society ”.

Development education is therefore the explanatory memorandum of this Decree⁴, summed up as an “activity focused on the development of the views, approaches and practices of individuals so that they help in creating a more caring and sustainable global society. This involves both individual and joint actions. Consequently, development education seeks to promote active citizenship. Development education is unique for being explicitly based on certain social themes, and giving priority to never losing sight of the North-South perspective, according to which values such as sustainability, equality and justice are key objectives.”

More explicitly than the nature and environmental education policy documents, the Decree on development education is based on the sustainable development reference framework. It is regarded as a “cross-cutting theme” in the context of development education activities.⁵

The explanatory memorandum envisages this as follows:

“In the field of development education more and more connections have been made in recent years with social themes that were not initially covered by standard development education but were a key factor in the push for a sustainable and caring society. All of these kinds of education are crucial for attaining the objectives of creating a more caring, just and sustainable global society.

Thanks to the commitment to a wide interpretation of development education (in a global training prospective), the following principles take a prominent place in the policy:

- *the advantages of crossovers (between North and South, between themes, between stakeholders);*
- *the need for cooperation between various stakeholders;*
- *the importance of reciprocity (or the opportunity for mutually beneficial relationships between North and South on the basis of equality);*
- *the need for development education to be established on the basis of various social themes ;*
- *a focus on capacity-building for the relevant stakeholders.”*⁶

³ Somers, B. & Tavernier, J. (2004). *Decree on development cooperation*. Art. 3, p. 4.

⁴ Somers, B. & Tavernier, J. (2004). *Explanatory memorandum pursuant to the Decree on development cooperation*. p. 1.

⁵ Somers, B. & Tavernier, J. (2004). *Decree on development cooperation*. Art. 11

⁶ Somers, B. & Tavernier, J. (2004). *Explanatory memorandum pursuant to the Decree on development cooperation*, pp. 1-2.

1.1.7 To what extent are a public budget and economic ‘incentives ’ available to lend support to ESD?

There are **no public budgets or economic ‘incentives ’ available to lend support specifically to ESD** but there is a nature and environmental education project fund, financial support for development education and a sustainability fund providing optional and ad hoc initiatives applied according to ESD principles to varying degrees.. However, the funds are not invariably focused on systematically promoting ESD.

The ‘decision of the Government of Flanders to lay down special rules for funding sustainable environment and nature policy’ projects ⁷ provides such items as **grants for Nature and Environmental Education projects**. According to article 4 of this decision, this allows “young people and/or adults to take an interest in nature and the environment as a result of education and the communication required towards this end, via perceptions and practical experiences. Nature and environmental education pays attention not only to the transfer of knowledge but also to perspectives, personal experiences, thought processes, values and behaviour.”

A detailed assessment of all the sustainable environment and nature policy projects is made in the light of the following items⁸:

- a well-defined theme;
- compatibility with the objectives of the Flemish environment policy;
- being of a high quality;
- being result-based;
- establish cooperation with others;
- fulfilling an example-setting role;
- new initiatives and developments;
- target group approach.

In the case of the nature and environmental education projects, account is also taken of the following specific criteria⁹:

- a coherent pedagogical approach;
- substantive, methodical and formal consistency with the target group (s);
- emphasis on the personal involvement and daily behavioural practices of the target group;
- active involvement of the target group in establishing and implementing the project;
- looking beyond the standard education orientation.

None of these assessment criteria are specifically intended to promote ESD (orientation) in the context of nature and environmental education projects.

Op 8 October 2004 the Government of Flanders announced its approval for the decision to implement the Decree on development cooperation¹⁰. Covering **funding for development education projects**, this decision sets forth the conditions a project has to meet to qualify for a grant. Projects “are uniformly assessed via an assessment framework”¹¹, where, pursuant to the Decree the follow items are considered:

1. *“the description of the cooperation [...]*
2. *the effective involvement of all stakeholders (including the target groups)*
3. *the relevance of the themes from the perspective of the North-South relationship*
4. *the cooperation strategy for capacity building*

⁷ Decision of the Government of Flanders to lay down special rules for funding sustainable environment and nature policy projects, 30/10/2003, BS 04/11/2003

⁸ Ditto, art. 9 §1.

⁹ Ditto, art. 9 §2.

¹⁰ *Decision of the Government of Flanders on the funding of development education projects*

¹¹ Ditto, art. 6.

5. *the cooperation strategy for an internal review and appraisal*
6. *the scope of the broadening and innovation dimensions*

The Government of Flanders considers sustainable development and gender as cross-cutting themes in the context of development education activities. During the quality assessment, a review has to be made of how far projects fully incorporate both themes. The Government of Flanders may determine additional quality criteria”

The Decree ¹² describes development education as follows:

“Development education: activities involving information, awareness-raising, motivation and guaranteeing focused on the development of the views, approaches and practices of individuals so that they help in creating a more caring and sustainable global society. This involves both individual and joint actions. Consequently, development education seeks to promote active citizenship. Development education is unique for being explicitly based on certain social themes, and giving priority to never losing sight of the, North-South perspective.”

More than the aforementioned definition of nature and environmental education projects¹³ this description is focused on promoting ESD within development education. The Government of Flanders regards sustainable development and gender as cross-cutting themes in the context of development education activities hence “the quality assessment [...] reviews how far projects fully integrate both themes.”¹⁴

There are also a number of funds/budgets that feature education-oriented initiatives without being specifically earmarked for this purpose :

- aid scheme for Sustainable Development (Flemish)
- millennium fund (federal)
- cooperation agreement with the provinces and municipalities (Flemish)
- environmental project fund (Flemish)

In its **advisory opinion** of 22 March 2007, concerning the organisation and administrative deployment and coordination of Nature and Environmental Education in ESD policy developments, the Environment and Nature Council of Flanders (**Minaraad**) expresses the following concern:

“A general sustainable development fund is not feasible but existing project funds may be drawn upon for ESD-based projects and actions. The allocation criteria of these vertical project funds may be partly explicitly opened towards ESD-based forms of education, which is also in keeping with the Flemish Strategy for Sustainable Development where every Minister is held responsible for sustainability policy within his/her sphere of influence.”¹⁵

Participants in the “ESD in informal en non-formal learning environments” workshop held during the ESD consultation platform pointed to the lack of project funds offering an opportunity to organise informal and non-formal ESD, so there is little scope for an experimental platform. Organisations have to be offered the chance and encouraged to work on an innovative basis.

One of the objectives of the UNECE strategy is for the administrations to “ensure that the policy, regulatory and operational frameworks support ESD”. The workshop participants claim the present policy is too tunnel-visioned, allowing no scope for innovative initiatives.

¹² Decree on development education, art. 2.

¹³ Decision by the Government of Flanders to establish special regulations for funding sustainable environment and nature policy projects, 30/10/2003, BS 04/11/2003, Art. 4

¹⁴ Decree on development education, Art. 4.

¹⁵ Environment and Nature Council of Flanders (Minaraad) (2006). In its advisory opinion of 22 March 2007, concerning the organisation and administrative deployment and coordination of Nature and Environmental Education in ESD policy developments. Brussels.

For example, it is said to be quite a struggle in practice to get policy areas to interact. Up to now, no framework has been created for a more integrated policy, while there is a dire need for experimenting beyond the confines of all these borders. Opportunities can be provided by bringing the stakeholders together.

Indicator 1.2 Policy and regulatory frameworks for underpinning the promotion of ESD

1.2.1 In which Flemish policy document is ESD examined?

ESD is considered in the **Flemish Strategy for Sustainable development (FSSD)**. Chapter 5 ('Flemish strategy for sustainable development') features a short paragraph on 'Awareness-raising, education and communication':

*"In the light of the Flemish strategy for sustainable development, and, more specifically, the operational projects, awareness-raising, education and communication initiatives have to be carried out, as they are key factors for putting the strategy's aims into practice. In formal education, in various kinds of training, or in the informal sector, education is a key instrument for continuing to achieve internalised results in the context of consumption and production patterns."*¹⁶

Chapter 7 ('Governmental components of the strategy') includes a paragraph on 'Information, communication, education and awareness-raising':

"Information, communication and education and dialogue are of crucial importance for achieving sustainable development.

Exchanges of information and experiences about sustainable development within the Authorities of Flanders represent a key starting point. Consideration may be given to the continuing operation of the sustainable development website, to publications and press releases about sustainable development, etc.

A useful awareness-raising instrument is the carbon footprint.

*Community-based organisations may play a key role in this respect, so they should obviously be involved in developing and introducing a number of dimensions of the strategy to their supporters and to the population as a whole."*¹⁷

Against the background of the European and Belgian sustainable development strategies, the FSSD is focused on 7 key themes:

1. Combating poverty and social exclusion
2. Ageing of the population
3. Climate change
4. Mobility
5. Regional planning
6. Sustainable management of natural resources
7. Tackling health risks

In addition to these general themes, the Government of Flanders has expressly chosen to launch a number of '**operational projects**', which cannot be covered by the aforementioned themes as they are related to more than one theme, therefore highlight the cross-cutting character of the initiatives. The projects have to be addressed in a coordinated and integrated fashion as a result of cooperation between various policy areas. In the second phase of the strategy they are also specified in a number of specific measures and actions to be taken. The non-exhaustive list of operational projects currently features the following items:

1. Sustainable building and living in Flanders

¹⁶ Leterme, Y. (2006). *Samen grenzen ver-leggen. Vlaamse strategie duurzame ontwikkeling fase 1*, p. 45.

¹⁷ Ditto, p. 76.

2. Corporate social responsibility
3. Education for sustainable development
4. Sustainable farming
5. Environment and health
6. Sustainable mobility
7. Sustainable water management
8. Sustainable consumption and production patterns
9. Scientific research and innovation policy
10. Sustainable spatial development
11. Gender
12. Fighting HIV/AIDS worldwide

ESD forms part of these operational projects. The relevant **draft project file**¹⁸ offers the following definition:

“Education for sustainable development promotes and strengthens the opportunities and capacities of individuals, groups, communities, organisations and administrations to make informed judgements and reasonable decisions for the benefit of sustainable development. It can help change people’s mentalities, while increasing their ability to act to make their living environment safer, healthier and more prosperous, with a view to the long term and mindful of the North-South interrelationship.”

The ESD operational project gives concrete form to the Flemish commitment to the UNECE strategy as a result of adjusting this to the specific local context and putting it into practice.

The following challenges are proposed:

1. Positioning ESD in the light of the education available
2. Creating dynamic learning environments through seeking compatibility and cooperation at local level
3. Promoting complementary relationships between governmental initiatives and initiatives of the various stakeholders in the profit and NGO sector
4. Ensuring a transparent funding system for ESD initiatives without the sectoral initiatives accordingly having to deliver financial resources.

This operational project seeks to achieve the following long-term objective:

“Develop and promote ESD in the informal educational system, in all relevant subjects, and in non-formal and informal education [sic] in order to boost people’s knowledge and ability to act so they can live a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature and paying attention to social values, gender equality and cultural diversity”

Prominence is also given to a number of short-term aims:

- Promoting complementary relationships with educational initiatives taken in the framework of other themes
- Making various media more responsible via training programmes for journalists and tapping into their knowledge and distribution channels where possible
- Training programmes might also be envisaged for business leaders, civil society, etc.
- Making a review of all ESD initiatives so as to discover the strengths and weaknesses, the obstacles and opportunities for rolling out the ESD implementation plan at Flemish level.
- As part of a target group-specific process have ESD themes introduced into curricula and syllabuses at all levels of the formal education system, as well as in primary education, adult education and the training programmes of professions and businesses, ideally via intermediaries.

¹⁸ Project N°. 3: Education for sustainable development, p. 1.

- Establishing ESD in informal and non-formal learning processes (via competence building training for policy makers, business leaders, the media, specific professions, leadership development for community-based organisations and via educational schemes for individual citizens).
- Assessing existing educational materials in the light of their potential for being extended to other pillars of sustainable development and their transferability to other training programmes. Develop new educational materials where possible, with differentiated dissemination strategies being developed towards this end.
- Implementing the Regional Strategy of Education for Sustainable Development (UNECE) for Flanders.
- Ensuring the policy, regulatory and operational frameworks lend support to ESD and sufficient material and human resources are deployed towards this end.
- Encouraging scientific research so as to promote the effectiveness of ESD (in the case of effective learning methods, assessment instruments, the deployability of instruments apart from education so as to increase win-win situations, the economic impact and incentives for ESD, etc.)

Aims number nine and 10 in the list are not included in the ‘Focusing according to short-term objectives’, even though these are preconditions for the success of an operational project.

The FSSD is focused on 12 operational themes, most of which are set to have education integrated and implemented via a specific working group, with the themes of mobility, water and HIV/AIDS being the only ones to be addressed by the ESD operational project. However, it seems advisable for a similar approach towards the educational dimension to be adopted for all themes. In a joint advisory opinion¹⁹ on education for sustainable development, the Flemish Education Council and the Environment and Nature Council of Flanders (Minaraad) notified the Authorities of Flanders about the need for ESD to be highlighted in each theme-specific project of the FSSD. They called on the authorities for research to undertaken concerning the opportunities for ESD in the strategy's other operational projects. A complaint was made about the lack of policy preparation research related to ESD.

The **‘Policy document on sustainable development 2006-2007’**²⁰ issued by the Minister-President Yves Leterme also refers to ESD.

Chapter 3 is devoted to the specific development policy within the various policy areas. The paragraph on the Education & Training policy area stresses that in the spring of 2007 the UNECE strategy had to result in a concrete implementation plan for Flanders. During the coming years “work will be undertaken on producing a brochure with examples of best practices for ‘sustainable development’, the Flemish [sic: UNECE] Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development and the Flemish Implementation plan on Education for sustainable development. This should result in more attention being paid to the ‘sustainable development’ theme in Flemish classrooms and Flanders in general.” (p.9)

Within the Work & Sociale Economy policy area the idea is to ensure closer involvement of educational activities in initiatives for promoting corporate social responsibility (CSR), via the ‘learning network CSR and Education’. Against the background of the learning networks various stakeholders are applying CSR instruments in business premises.

In his **‘Policy document on Education and Training 2006-2007’** Minister Vandembroucke devotes a paragraph to ‘education for good citizenship and sustainable development’. He refers to the UN Decade of Education for sustainable development and the need for a specific implementation plan to be developed for Flanders by 2007. In order to attract the Flemish education system to the ‘sustainable development’ issue, he is keen

¹⁹ Flemish Education Council (VLOR) and Environment and Nature Council of Flanders (Minaraad) (2006). *Advisory opinion on education for sustainable development in compulsory education*. Brussels.

²⁰ Leterme, Y. (2006). *Policy document on sustainable development 2006-2007*.

on distributing a publication during the 2006-2007 school year featuring examples of good practices.

As part of the policy implementation process for the 2007 budget year, the '**Policy document Environment 2007**' refers to the creation of a Flemish ESD Implementation plan, together with other relevant policy areas. "The first ESD measures and actions have been taken, starting with a review of the existing ESD initiatives and establishing ESD-indicators based on the Flemish situation." (p. 11)

1.2.2 In which Flemish regulatory document is ESD examined?

No specific ESD-related regulatory document is available. The rules and regulations about funding nature and environmental education projects and development education and grants for Sustainable Development were described earlier on (see 1.1.7).

1.2.3 How far is ESD focused on relevant national legislation and included in the national curricula and/or final objectives, orders, requirements: at all levels of informal education as interpreted by your educational system in accordance with the ISCED code?

As soon as **final objectives** were introduced into the Flemish education system, a number of 'educational programmes' such as good citizenship, health education and environmental education were proposed for secondary education as cross-curriculum themes²¹. In the case of primary education they are included in environmental studies. In today's society, citizens nonetheless have to have more skills than they did 20 or so years ago. Hence the relevance of the call for other educational programmes to be introduced, such as ESD.

The debate underway under this heading concerns whether ESD should be included in the curriculum as an independent education programme or whether the existing educational programmes can provide opportunities for approaching sustainability issues. In a joint advisory opinion²² the Flemish Education Council (VLOR) and the Environment and Nature Council of Flanders (Minaraad) describe ESD as a "compass for other educational programmes". Any educational programme may be deployed as ESD if it picks up on sustainable development: this concept can therefore be regarded as the 'magnet' setting the 'compass needles' of all educational programmes in the same direction. Concretely this means that ESD should not be a separate educational programme in compulsory education but should be included in existing courses and subjects seeking connections with each other for the purpose of cross-curriculum activities, if so desired. Consequently, ESD does not exist as a separate educational programme but a wide range of such programmes, each with its own identity has to include ESD. This involves ESD-based education, where the content is placed in the wider framework of sustainable development.

The development aims and final objectives of **primary education** do not make any specific reference to sustainable development. However, the environmental studies theme does offer a number of opportunities for ESD in the light of the development aims and objectives, depending on how this is interpreted by the relevant teaching staff and/or in the syllabus. For the purpose of illustration (non-exhaustive):

Development aims of environmental studies in pre-school education :

- 1.12: pre-school children display an attitude of care and respect for nature

²¹ Sleurs, W. (2006). *Educatie voor duurzame ontwikkeling: leren met het oog op een betere leefwereld, hier en elders, vandaag en morgen*. Impuls, 37 (2), pp. 90-102.

²² Flemish Education Council (VLOR) and Environment and Nature Council of Flanders (Minaraad) (2006). *Advisory opinion on education for sustainable development in compulsory education*. Brussels.

- 4.5: pre-school children realise that some people have different ways of living, when they are faced with images, information or people from another culture

Final objectives of environmental studies in primary education :

- 1.19: pupils can use specific examples from their own surroundings to illustrate how people deal with the environment in negative and positive ways and how environmental problems are often the result of a clash of interests.
- 4.4: pupils can illustrate that wealth is distributed unequally both in Belgium and in other areas of the world

Secondary education has final objectives related to sustainable development explicitly included in the subjects geography and biology. The concept also exists in some cross-curriculum final objectives of the environmental education theme.

Geography 2nd stage (general secondary education, art secondary education, technical secondary education):

- 22: students act with respect for sustainable development in time and space

Geography 3rd stage (general secondary education, art secondary education, technical secondary education):

- 10: students can relate food production and consumption and resources to changes in population sizes and welfare conditions in the context of sustainable development
- 26: students can present proposals for space utilization in the context of sustainable development

Biology 2nd stage (general secondary education):

- 26: students can demonstrate the relevance of sustainable development

Environmental education 2nd stage (general secondary education, art secondary education, technical secondary education, vocational secondary education) :

- 2: students are prepared for the sustainable use of raw materials, products, energy and transport systems

Environmental education 3rd stage (general secondary education, art secondary education, technical secondary education, vocational secondary education) :

- 4: when making purchases or using services students seek new environmentally-friendly alternatives or small-scale alternatives in the context of sustainable development.

Even if they do not make any specific reference to this theme, other subjects may obviously make a meaningful contribution to ESD. In the light of an initial screening of the final objectives and development aims for the presence of **key themes from the UNECE strategy**, the Flemish Education Council (VLOR) and the Environment and Nature Council of Flanders (Minaraad) created the table shown below. They have asked the Minister for Education for the screening process to be carried out in a more detailed and exhaustive fashion, while extending to the development aims for special education.

Minister Vandenbroucke's reaction was as follows²³:

“As requested in the advisory opinion, the Curriculum entity shall undertake an exhaustive screening exercise, focused on all final objectives and development aims (both subject and course-based and subject and cross-curriculum), including those in special education, to discover their relevance for the ‘sustainable development’ theme. The screening findings shall be included in a brochure the Curriculum entity is developing in cooperation with Coprogram, the Flemish federation of NGOs for development cooperation.

²³ Vandenbroucke, F., *answer to the president of the Environment and Nature Council of Flanders (Minaraad) on the advisory opinion of 22 March 2007 concerning education for sustainable development in compulsory education*, Brussels, 12 July 2007.

As for the recommendation to take account of the changing social perception of sustainable development in general and education for sustainable development in particular in the evaluations of the final objectives, I can now state that this is indirectly included. The final objectives for sustainable development are reflected in the survey of respondents. Community-based organisations, as well as teachers, directors and students are asked about the feasibility and the educational and social relevance of the final objectives.”

Table 1: screening final objectives and development aims in the light of the key themes in the UNECE strategy

ESD in the existing final objectives and development aims					
Key themes	KO ²⁴	LO	SO stage 1	SO stage 2	SO stage 3
Poverty reduction					x
Corporate responsibility					
Management of natural resources		x	x	x	x
Biodiversity			x	x	x
Good citizenship	x	x	x	x	x
Cultural diversity	x	x	x	x	x
Democracy/good governance	x	x	x	x	x
Ethics	x	x	x	x	x
Gender equality		x	x	x	x
Health	x	x	x	x	x
Landscape diversity			x	x	x
Human rights		x		x	x
Environmental protection	x	x	x	x	x
Countryside and urban development			x	x	x
Production and consumption patterns		x		x	x
Justice		x	x	x	x
Security	x	x	x	x	x
Responsibility		x	x	x	x
Peace	x	x	x	x	x

The Flemish Education Council (VLOR) and the Environment and Nature Council of Flanders (Minaraad) have concluded that the key themes “ [are] present in the final objectives, but the relationship between the various themes cannot altogether be deduced from the final objectives. These crossovers and the way educators apply them are necessary precisely for sustainable development. Each autonomous school is tasked with providing these crossovers on the basis of its pedagogical project. Towards this end, they have opportunities provided, for example, by subject-specific final objectives such as in environmental studies in primary education and cross-curriculum final objectives in secondary education and syllabuses. They may also count on support and draw inspiration from the pedagogical guidance offered by the networks, continuing training from the networks or from outsiders, from ‘good practices’ in other schools, etc.”²⁵

The **pedagogical guidance** from the networks therefore plays a key role in the implementation of ESD in the classroom. On the basis of the final objectives and development aims all schools have to pay attention to the various educational programmes.

²⁴ In Dutch KO = pre-school education, LO = primary education, SO = secondary education

²⁵ Flemish Education Council (VLOR) and Environment and Nature Council of Flanders (Minaraad) (2006). *Advisory opinion over education for sustainable development in compulsory education*. Brussels, p. 11

However, school teams are able to use ESD-based educational programmes in a wide variety of ways. At the very least, use should be made of themes appearing in the final objectives and development aims. At the very most, a school may deliberately opt for ESD and the interdependence between the various themes. A multitude of variations are possible between these two extremes. A school's willingness to include ESD in a pedagogical project along with the creative talents of the stakeholders may be decisive for managing to incorporate ESD into the curriculum. During the "ESD in compulsory education" workshop organised during the 2 October consultation platform, the participants pointed out that the pedagogical guidance services are demand-driven, hence the importance of the schools themselves developing a sensitivity for ESD.

During the workshop, a call was made to develop an effective pedagogical learning line for sustainable development, taking a cue from the Netherlands and Australia.

Within the Nature and Environmental Education sector, the compulsory education system has been involved in the **MilieuZorg Op School (Environmental care at school - MOS)** project ²⁶ for the last 10 or so years. MOS seeks to lend support in a pedagogically responsible way to initiatives focused on an establishment's own environment performance system. Those taking part in the workshop regarded this as an effective channel for bringing forward and maintaining ESD in compulsory education. MOS operates via a broad base of support, establishes the required crossovers, allows for extensive guidance, training and support for schools. Attention is also drawn to the need to cooperate with NGOs.

The policy does not lay down any specific ESD-related requirement for **higher education** but the Authorities of Flanders have launched and/or backed a number of initiatives for incorporating the sustainable development theme into the curricula more effectively. The following are a sample of the initiatives taken:

- **ECOCAMPUS**: this is the environmental performance project of the Authorities of Flanders in a form tailored to higher education. This three-pillar project involves creating an environmental performance system (internal management) geared to higher education, promoting the environmental performance in student activities and incorporating environment-related themes into curricula. The third pillar has already been developed into teaching materials and study days have been organised for health care training.
- **DOEN project!**: this project is focused on creating and developing a theme-specific learning network for higher education in Flanders based on the following themes : CSR, social economy, sustainable development and business ethics. This project provides the opportunity to submit schemes for co-funding with the focus being on incorporating these themes into the curriculum and the management of higher education institutes. The DOEN! project also marshals forces from various policy areas: Education, Environment and Employment and the Social Economy;
- **TRIVISI**: this project was launched in June 2000 by the then Minister of Employment and Tourism. It grew out of the need for a more sustainable system of entrepreneurship. The TRIVISI project was the setting for trying to shape corporate social responsibility on the basis of behaviour modifying instruments. Various higher education establishments submitted projects for developing the CSR-related training provision. In addition to resources from the Authorities of Flanders under the heading of the TRIVISI project, ESF funding has been provided to develop CSR-related instruments and methodologies.
- **CSR digital knowledge centre**: featured in the TRIVISI project, this initiative is aimed in particular at offering information about CSR to various target groups, including the higher education sector.

²⁶ See also: www.milieuZorgOpschool.be

In the “ESD in the higher education” workshop organised during the 2 October ESD consultation platform the participants stressed that curricula are generally created on a single discipline basis, while nothing less than a trans-disciplinary approach is required for sustainable development. However, it is more feasible to introduce sustainable development into separate subjects in the short term, even though this is not the best possible solution.

ESD may be incorporated into higher education as a regulatory idea (see above) and/or as a separate subject. The workshop participants specified that both options may complement each other and outlined a number of potential scenarios:

- The existence of a ‘sustainable development’ course has a leverage effect on the process of incorporating development as a regulatory idea in the other courses. This applies above all when the course is taught not in the first but in the last year as a finishing touch.
- In the different courses of several (all) curricula, attention is paid to sustainable development also with a complete elective course (or compulsory course) on ‘sustainable development’ based on a trans-disciplinary approach.
- Post-college/university provision opportunities, such as post-graduate (certificate), banaba (Bachelor after Bachelor diploma) or manama (master after master diploma) in sustainable development (as well as trans-disciplinary but with a separate certification or qualifications).
- Incorporating sustainable development as a regulatory idea may have the sharpest impact if it is regarded as a basic competence for training. It is best to start with explaining sustainable development competences that are already included in other fields of competence. DHO-Nederland has already made positive achievements under this heading.

What is important for the purpose of implementing ESD in (primarily professional) training is the contact with businesses applying sustainable development in their management systems and products, as a result of involving these business in training via courses, placements, etc.

During the workshop various opportunities for promoting ESD in higher education were cited:

- cooperation with SMEs incorporating sustainable development into their management systems and/or products;
- research focused on sustainability in management;
- allowing teachers (and students) to gain experience in such businesses;
- financial incentives: project funds are often at the root of any push to incorporate sustainable development into higher education establishments, as their maintenance of this is generally necessary for releasing funds within the establishment;
- Including ESD in the accreditation criteria of the NVAO (the educational accreditation organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders) ²⁷ should provide a huge incentive for its incorporation into training;
- continuing and extending existing projects (DOEN, DHO, expanded Ecocampus, ...) so as to maintain and propagate the dynamic process that is underway;
- making connections with other themes in higher education, such as diversity

The participants also point to the availability of a measuring instruments for sustainable development in higher education: AISHE (Auditing Instrument for Sustainability in Higher Education)²⁸, and to the associations recently signing a declaration of commitment to

²⁷ <http://www.nvao.net>

²⁸ <http://www.dho.nl/aishe>

sustainable development, undertaking to carry out an inventory, to organise meeting days for management and creating learning networks.

1.2.4 How much attention does informal and non-formal learning receive in the Flemish implementation plan for ESD and/or relevant national policy and/or regulatory documents?

The **FSSD** specifies that "in formal education, various kinds of training, or in the informal sector"²⁹ education is a key instrument for continuing to achieve internalised results.

The file on the **operational project** on education for sustainable development interprets ESD "in its broadest sense", as 'lifelong learning', not only in formal education or a training context but also in various types of informal and non-formal learning"³⁰. The stated long-term objective (see above) also makes an explicit reference to diversity in learning environments where ESD can be included. The specific measures towards this end are reflected in the short term aims.

Civil society plays a key role in informal and non-formal learning, as we see with socio-cultural activities for young people and adults, non-governmental organisations, trade unions, employers, etc. The FSSD attaches a great deal of importance to the involvement of community-based organisations. "As a result of their creative and innovative initiatives, often in the educational sphere, they sometime act as a 'pioneer' in developing sustainable initiatives, [...] thereby increasing the base of support for sustainable development and contributing to the population's change of mentality on a number of themes."³¹

1.2.5 How much attention does the 'public awareness-raising' component receive in the relevant ESD-based policy documents?

The **FSSD**³² seeks to make a contribution to bringing about a change of mentality, an awareness of various dimensions of sustainable development and, above all, the development of a new way of thinking and acting with regard to the administration, the business sector and consumers."

"Sustainable development is broadly a question of attitude. For most northern cultures, thinking in terms of sustainable development straightaway also implies a change of paradigm, adopting new approaches, abandoning the existing consumption and disposable culture. Education for sustainable development is of crucial importance precisely because this attitude plays such a key role. During the UN Summit in Rio (1992) education was cited as one of the main components for achieving a sustainable society."

One of the challenges facing the **ESD operational project** is the need to promote complementary relationships between governmental initiatives and initiatives by various stakeholders from the profit and NGO sector, so as to maximise the impact of learning, while boosting the awareness of how interdependent the core concepts of ESD are"³³. The short-term aim is therefore to establish and promote ESD in various informal, non-formal and informal learning processes. The UNECE strategy pays particular attention to the (mass) media as a major intermediary player in the context of ESD. Consequently, one of

²⁹ Leterme, Y. (2006). *Samen grenzen ver-leggen. Vlaamse strategie duurzame ontwikkeling fase 1*, p. 45.

³⁰ Project N°. 3: *Education for sustainable development*, p. 1.

³¹ Leterme, Y. (2006). *Samen grenzen ver-leggen. Vlaamse strategie duurzame ontwikkeling fase 1*, p. 41.

³² Ditto, pp. 28-29

³³ Project N°. 3: *Education for sustainable development*, p. 2

the short-term objectives of the ESD operational project is to make various media more responsible for conveying an unambiguous message about sustainable development and to tap into their knowledge and distribution channels where possible. The FSSD specifies that “the media, too, can make a contribution to educating people to become capable consumers and families. Care has to be taken to ensure the media does not encourage people and families to embrace excessive consumption and indebtedness.”³⁴

Indicator 1.3 Flemish policy to support synergies between sustainable development and ESD processes

1.3.2 Is ESD a component of any sustainable development policy your country may have?

The sustainable development policy in Belgium is spread across **various levels of governance**. There is a (retiring) State Secretary for Sustainable Development at federal level. In Flanders sustainable development is the policy area of the Minister President Kris Peeters.

Education for sustainable development is primarily focused at Flemish level: the Ministers for Education (Frank Vandenbroucke) and the Environment (Hilde Crevits) are jointly responsible for ensuring the UNECE strategy is implemented in Flanders.

ESD is one of the FSSD operational projects (see above), but it cannot be said to be (exclusively) a component of sustainable development. It was pointed out earlier that ESD does not receive enough attention in any of the FSSD theme-specific projects.

1.3.3 What synergies are available at national level between the UNECE's ESD process, UNESCO's overall process concerning the ESD decade and other policy processes concerning ESD and sustainable development?

Flanders does not have any formal synergies between UNECE's ESD process, the overall UNESCO's process and other policy processes concerning ESD. The implementation of ESD in Flanders is based on UNECE objectives, stages and indicators. The idea is for the Flemish ESD implementation plan to give direction to the ESD operational project under the Flemish Strategy on Sustainable development.

Objective 2: *Promoting sustainable development in the light of formal, non-formal and informal learning*

Indicator 2.6 Strategies and instruments are in place to assess changes affecting knowledge, attitudes and practices as a result of citizens being involved in non-formal and informal learning related to ESD

2.6.1 Is there a policy focused on non-formal and informal learning?

Different policy areas have given rise to various initiatives that are (may be) placed under the heading of informal or non-formal learning. The Culture, Youth, Sports and Media department is systematically pursuing non-formal actions, more specifically within the socio-cultural sphere.

³⁴ Leterme, Y. (2006). *Samen grenzen ver-leggen. Vlaamse strategie duurzame ontwikkeling fase 1*, p. 43

Admittedly, **socio-cultural activities** do not cover all types of non-formal education but they do include most of them. Socio-cultural activities represent a part of Flemish cultural policy, where the aim is to³⁵:

"Induce major sections of the population to take an active part in the democratic debate about the future of society and help shape decisions that are taken at various policy levels. This role helps to enhance the standard of the debate and strengthen the social fabric. These efforts are undertaken in a multitude of activities, such as education in associations, organisations and projects for adult education and amateur arts."

Informal and non-formal learning in Flanders is referred to in particular in the context of **adult education**. Informal adult education is understood to mean any type of learning acquired during day-to-day activities, whereas non-formal adult education is described as educational activities organised outside the informal educational systems.

However, these kinds of adult education are not in fact always kept strictly separate from each other.³⁶ They are juxtaposed in the same activity, supplement or conflict with each other. Education is now a human, dynamic activity.

As part of the socio-cultural experience, **socio-cultural activities for adults play a key role in** non-formal learning. The Decree describes non-formal learning as:

"A component of the policy area covering socio-cultural activities; this refers to activities for the development of adults and their participation in the main social networks; people are voluntarily involved, quite apart from any relationship with a school and independent of any kind of vocational training. "

Under the heading of socio-cultural activities for adults, the Flemish Community provides support to organisations making a contribution to training a community of competent, emancipated and socially committed individuals.

Non-formal learning and informal learning is also incorporated into **youth work**³⁷. Youth work is by its very nature described as *"socio-cultural activities based on non-commercial goals for or by young people in the context of leisure time, under educational guidance and seeking to promote the general and full development of young people taking part on a voluntary basis"*. A youth worker is *"anybody who accepts responsibility and has demonstrable experience or makes efforts in terms of youth work-related education or training"*.

Flemish youth policy seeks to help maximise the involvement, development and growth of all children and young people, as individuals and in informal and formal groups. Special attention is paid to social involvement and responsibility, based on a confidence in the capabilities of young people and a belief in the great diversity of young people, regarded as stakeholders in their own right and joint owners of democratic society.

The Authorities of Flanders are keen to shape this development along proactive, systematic, sustainable and coherent lines, in dimensions, departments, structures and levels of its policy implementation process, and along interactive, participatory and dialogue-based lines.

As a vital, vibrant and successful pedagogical project, youth work is a type of informal learning to varying degrees, taking place during leisure time and on a **voluntary basis**, often between or among peers. The European Commission's White Paper on Youth highlights four key issues for the youth sector: voluntary work, participation, information

³⁵ Framework Decree of 4 April 2003 concerning socio-cultural activities for adults

³⁶ Vanwing. (2002). *Agogen, cipiërs van het levenslange leren*. In: *Vizier op Agogiek*. Leuven: Garant

³⁷ Anciaux, B. (2006), *Vlaams Jeugdbeleidsplan 2006-2009*. Brussels: Government of Flanders.

and knowledge about children and young people. The federal administration recently approved the volunteer status, while the Authorities of Flanders, in turn are anxious to facilitate the commitment by young people and lend support to both pathways.

Informal and non-formal learning is also often featured – pre-eminently in the context of ESD – in the **activities of NGOs**. Indicators 1.1.6 and 1.1.7 already outlined the frameworks available towards this end within the nature and environmental sector and the North-South movement.

2.6.2 Are there any instruments available to promote non-formal and informal learning?

Informal and non-formal learning is promoted within **socio-cultural activities for adults** via economic, legal and social instruments.

Economic instrument

The Authorities of Flanders lend support to a variety of organisations taking the form of an association, movement or training establishment. The accreditation and funding differs according to the activity. 54 associations, 13 Vormingplus centres (regional adult education centres), 26 training establishments and 32 movements are currently enjoying financial support under this Decree³⁸.

Legal instrument

Organisations keen to enjoy financial support under the Decree need to draw up a policy plan for each policy period. Pursuant to the rules and regulations decided on in 2004³⁹ this has to demonstrate the deployment of the socio-cultural methodology, the availability of a vision concerning people and society, the target policy of the organisation, the tasks, the strategies used, the processes being supervised and the operating principles and approaches.

Socio-cultural activities for adults have four tasks: cultural, social motivation, educational and community leadership. The tasks represent the type of project the organisation establishes and the kind of impact required. The different organisations assume various types of tasks. The Decree refers to the kinds of tasks the various kinds of organisations have to take on. The educational task is featured in every activity.

Social instruments

Set up to offer practical support to socio-cultural organisations, the SoCiuS (Socio-Cultural Adult) centre is an autonomous entity carrying out the following key assignments in the field of socio-cultural activities for adults: practical support, development of activities; image formation and communication. The support centre carries out its key tasks via activities such as guidance, staff training and applying quality control, research, development and intelligence gathering, information and communication, representation and international cooperation.

The Federatie van Organisaties voor Volksontwikkelingswerk (FOV – Federation of Adult Education Organisations), upholds the interests of about 90% of accredited associations, movements and training establishments in dealings with all kinds of authorities laying down guidelines, rules and duties for organisations.

Both Socius and FOV enjoy the financial support of the Authorities of Flanders.

Youth work, too, can count on legal, economic and social instruments for promoting informal and non-formal learning.

³⁸ Ditto.

³⁹ Baert H., Ketelslegers, B., Vriendt, J. *Sociaal-Cultureel volwassenenwerk, regelgeving 2004. Wat is een 'Sociaal-Culturele Methodiek'* Brussels: SoCiuS

Legal instrument

The legal framework for youth work was created by the Decree of 29 March 2002 on the Flemish Youth Policy⁴⁰. An association's accreditation as a nationwide youth association is dependent on the entity meeting certain general conditions. The associations have to produce a module at least six times. The modules cover:

- guidance for local youth associations
- activities for young people
- guidance or training for youth workers
- product development

Economic instrument

The Government of Flanders seeks to facilitate young people's involvement and participation in the policy and promote a positive image of young people by offering financial support to non-profit-making associations and projects designed to encourage young people's participation in preparing or implementing the Flemish Youth Policy plan, while improving information to or communication initiatives about young people.

In addition to qualifying for three-yearly grants, accredited nationwide youth associations may also be awarded financial support for completing a project. The projects are focused on priorities specified in the Flemish youth policy plan and lend support to cooperation with adjoining sectors.

The Decree of 29 March 2002, concerning the Flemish youth policy, featured regulations governing the funding of :

- nationwide youth associations
- experimental youth work
- participation and communication
- international projects
- youth culture (including art educational associations for young people)
- Jint (International Youth Work Coordination Agency)
- the Flemish Youth Council
- The Youth Support Centre (Steunpunt Jeugd)

Social instruments

Launched to provide support to the sector, the pluralistic Youth Support Centre seeks to make a contribution to maximising the effectiveness of how youth work operates at all levels and from all points of view. Towards this end, it is set to promote knowledge and the forming of opinion about youth policy and youth work both nationally and internationally while facilitating cultural diversity. This will be achieved on the basis of items such as information and documentation, promotion and publicising, study and research. The support centre has the following tasks:

- Collection and helping along the multiplier effect
- methodology development, training and support in the case of participation
- communication
- services
- research
- information and exchanges

Youth policy pays a great deal of attention to the need to offer training and education to thousands of volunteers and semi-volunteers. The borders between formal learning, non-formal learning (examples are leadership development in youth work and conscious involvement in training) and informal learning (such as learning via participation or involvement) are becoming blurred in favour of a general recognition of prior learning (RPL). The question of recognising learning people have acquired from taking an active part in voluntary organisations presents civil society as a whole with a dual challenge. Each community-based organisation has to investigate how it can improve itself as a dynamic

⁴⁰ Government of Flanders (2002). *Decree of 29 March 2002 on the Flemish Youth Policy*. Brussels.

learning environment for its volunteers. The second challenge involves using learning that volunteers acquire through their active participation in the association experience to exploit it elsewhere, in other associations, in training programmes or even in professional activities.

Up to now the Authorities of Flanders have confined themselves to promoting voluntary work and the (merely formal) approval of a number of certificates. Recent developments involving RPL (recognition of prior learning) and lifelong and lifewide learning have nonetheless induced the Authorities of Flanders to adopt a more proactive competence policy.

The new instruments for recognising prior learning should not, however, result in the rationalisation or formalisation of informal learning. The underlying principle is and remains that youth work is important for what it is: an enjoyable and pleasant gathering of young people. The policy being developed first and foremost has to lend support to these valuable activities so that as many children and young people as possible can be involved. Associating RPL with youth work also involves a delicate balancing act represented by excessive or unwelcome institutionalisation. First of all there are many opportunities offered by RPL, which are important in social, psychological and economic terms. Second, youth work and, by extension, voluntary work remains a key “area of freedom” that cannot and should not always be colonised by a one-dimensional, utilitarian approach⁴¹.

The Flemish Youth Policy Plan for the 2006-2009 period outlines initiatives for training youth workers:

- In the light of a funding agreement, the Authorities of Flanders are encouraging the Youth Support Centre to continue focusing on its key tasks: development of activities and practical support for the youth sector and information issued by and about the sector (see also article 9 of the Decree of 29 March 2002 on the Flemish Youth Policy).
- The Authorities of Flanders are encouraging all nationwide associations to maintain their commitment to training their volunteers.
- At the appropriate time, in response to demand and invariably in cooperation with relevant partners such as the provinces, the Youth Support Centre, VVJ (Federation of Flemish Youth Services and Counsellors), the Authorities of Flanders will personally introduce the necessary training or coordinate it across the different dimensions of its various decrees.
- Working together with the provinces, Youth Support Centre, VVJ..., the Authorities of Flanders will introduce training at regular intervals concerning the general and specific dimensions of the local youth (work) policy.
- The Authorities of Flanders are investigating the added value of the current rules and regulations for its approved certificates and assessing them. In the case of amendments to these rules and regulations, account is also taken of the trends and debates now underway in the European arena and RPL-related developments.
- The Youth Support Centre keeps track of developments, seeks examples of good practices, while preparing itself and the youth work sector to cater for new developments, if need be.
- The Youth Support Centre is paying more attention to a high-quality personal policy in youth organisations, so the focus is on items such as the professional profile of the professional youth worker and having roots in a labour law context (Flemish Intersectoral Agreement, Joint Committee 329, relations with employees/employers organisations, etc.).
- The Youth Support Centre is encouraging the youth work sector to consider the question of 'quality' in its own sphere and makes connections with the quality approach in other areas such as well-being, childcare and sports, so that a specific conceptual framework can be developed.

⁴¹ Anciaux, B. (2006), *Flemish Youth Policy Plan 2006-2009*. Brussels: Government of Flanders.

- The Socio-cultural Activities for Young People and Adults Agency is keeping a close eye on international and major social developments in terms of RPL, certificates and quality control, while consulting with the sector as part of the drive to reflect these developments in Flemish youth work activities. The perceptions and the interests in these matters expressed by the entire youth work sector, its employees and members are being upheld in the context of a whole host of international platforms and the DIVA consultation platform (Dienst Informatie Vorming en Afstemming - Training and Alignment Information Service).

The criteria for awarding certificates to youth workers form a basis for granting four types of certificate: community education worker, head community education worker, instructor, head instructor.

Informal and non-formal learning via the **activities of NGOs** is facilitated by the legal instruments described in indicator 1.1.6 and the economic mechanisms explained in indicator 1.1.7.

2.6.3 How much attention does ESD receive in the policy and these instruments?

ESD is examined in a very abstract way in the Decree of 2 April 2003 on **socio-cultural activities for adults**.

“The key objectives involve the development of a personal identity, promoting social inclusion and social participation and the creation of a democratic, sustainable and inclusive society.”

No further reference is made to this issue but in practice a number organisations are actively involved in sustainability, which is (partly) funded by this Decree. This applies, for example, to the Netwerk Bewust Verbruiken (NBV), Mobiel 21 and Wervel.

During the 2006-2007 academic years a VUB (Free University of Brussels) student completing a social and cultural andragogy programme wrote a thesis on “Education for sustainable development in informal and non-informal learning processes in Flanders”⁴². The aim of the research was to find out what initiatives had already been taken that could be placed under the ESD heading, to consider what the factors for success and failure are in this respect and discover how this type of education can be promoted. The research findings show just how much confusion there is in practice about applying ESD or otherwise. This is blamed on the concept being interpreted in so many different ways. What is more, many organisations do not have any clear idea about ESD. According to the respondents, the success factors when applying ESD include: the authenticity of the supervisor, the knowledge of the target group, cooperation with the mass media, financial advantages and cooperation with several partners. The inevitable question in the case of these success factors is how far they fit into the context of ‘sustainable development’. The following failure factors have been highlighted: non-participation, lack of methodologies and too large a scope. ESD can also be facilitated by concept clarification, vision development and interprofessionalisation. It is vital in this connection for structures to be created and the necessary resources budgeted for.

The **Flemish youth policy plan for 2006-2009** sets forth the principles for sustainable development as a framework. As part of the process for formulating the objectives of the youth policy plan the Authorities of Flanders are keen to pay constant attention to striking a balance between ‘planet’, ‘profit’, ‘people’ and ‘participation’.

⁴² Frederix, M. (2007). *Educatie voor Duurzame Ontwikkeling in informele en non-formele leerprocessen in Vlaanderen*. Brussels: VUB.

Under the 'VerdraaiDe **Wereld**' heading a number of youth work initiatives, North-South NGOs and nature and environmental associations have been focusing on the sustainable development issue, showing that sustainable development forms part of the social environment of children and young people. They are in favour of more justice, respect for the Earth's capacity, for a world where all views are heard and where the needs of everyone are met, now and in the future.

ESD is also featured in the campaigns **and activities of NGOs** from the North-South and the environment sector.

The "ESD in informal and non-informal learning environments" workshop held during the ESD consultation platform highlighted the need for the **supply and demand situation to be aligned and coordinated**. Towards this end, the authorities are anxious to take a number of initiatives. Bringing people together from disciplines can provide incentives for ESD. This is feasible not only in the context of management training but also for the accessibility of what is on offer. However, this type of bridging role requires a great deal of energy.

Globelink (which organises a lot of youth participation projects) assigns itself the role of establishing a bridgehead to the youth work sector, but the organisation is not paid for this. Routinely bringing youth work organisations together with NGOs has led to the discovery that sustainable development does fit into their activities. Globelink's key concern now is more accessibility to what is on offer. Within the context of socio-cultural activities for adults, the Netwerk Bewust Verbruiken is keen to launch a campaign where the central themes are "climate change and consumption". Socio-cultural organisations are to be encouraged to ensure their services include training on these themes during the 2008-2009 period. The snag is that NGO training courses are much too expensive for these organisations. This campaign will address this issue.

Economic operators are not involved enough in ESD initiatives, even though this is highly desirable, particularly because in practice it is not always easy to bring out the potential of sustainable development's economic pillar in a balanced way. Encouragement has to be given to cooperation with stakeholders from the business community and the social economy.

A call was made during the workshop for **sustainable development as a reference framework** to be more firmly enshrined in a number of policy documents, such as the Flemish Youth Policy Plan or the local youth work policy plans. This provides an opportunity to incorporate sustainable development into all dimensions of youth work, to cite one example. In any event, the creation of these youth work policy plans is a participatory process. The workshop participants stress that ESD has to be more than one (obligation-free) section of the overall plan. It is a framework where all the mechanisms have to be approached, hence items such as infrastructure and purchasing policy as well. One activity concerning sustainable development does not constitute ESD.

Objective 5: Promoting ESD Research and development

Indicator 5.1 Encouraging ESD research

5.1.4 Availability of post-graduate courses on ESD or related to ESD (for MSc/PhD)

We have no knowledge of any postgraduate courses on ESD in Flanders.

But there are a number of postgraduate courses that (may be) are related to ESD:

- **Master after Master in Environmental science:** The post-experience master's in Environmental science is a one-year full-time environmental training programme accessible for master's degree graduates from various disciplines. Organised by the University of Antwerp's inter-faculty Institute for Environmental science, the training is intended for generally trained environmental scientists. Towards this end, the training is based on a) the perspective of sustainable development and b) an integrated approach to the environmental sciences. The students are expected to apply and use these principles in the light of cases reflecting reality. They will also acquire knowledge and gain an understanding of the consistency and complexity of environmental issues, with both the ecological and the social contexts being considered. Based on an interdisciplinary approach the courses are focused on graduates from various disciplines who, in the wake of their initial master's training are keen on an in-depth follow-up. The programme of study covers in particular courses on 'Sustainable development' and 'Environmental education'.⁴³
- **Master after Master in Sustainable Development and Human Ecology:** the VUB's Human Ecology department has organised this training under various titles since the 1975-1976 academic year. The training provides a multidisciplinary approach to the environmental issue, hence as well as an assessment of the human-affected environmental problems, a description is provided of how the changing environment affects people, their health, biology and social organisation. The course is focused on guiding students thought the huge variety of environmental issues, providing them with the necessary conclusions concerning the evolution of scientific thinking about how human beings and the environment interact, the concept of sustainable development and a number of concepts located within the natural living environment, with the emphasis on the social dimension. The curriculum covers in particular stages on 'sustainable development', 'environment and development (cooperation)' and 'environmental education'.⁴⁴
- **Master after Master in Conflict and Development:** the general aim of this course is to train students and prepare them for a professional career in international cooperation. This one-year inter-disciplinary training is intended more specifically for individuals who, with national or international organisations, (will be) are faced with the special relationship between 'conflict' and 'development' or people anxious to go deeper into this via research. Students are offered a programme to enable them to gain an understanding of the overall development issue, make a scientific assessment of specific problems involving conflict and development and take part in working out practical solutions. The aim is also to involve students in current research work. This master's training is underpinned by various research groups that are more broadly-based than the University of Ghent's faculty of Political and Social Sciences: Conflict Research Group (CRG), Middle East and North Africa Research Group (MENARG), Centrum voor Duurzame Ontwikkeling (CDO – Centre for Sustainable Development) and Centrum voor Islam in Europa (CIE – Central For Islam in Europe). The programme of study includes the 'sustainable development' stage.⁴⁵

5.1.5 Availability of government grants for post-graduate or doctoral research on ESD (for MSc/PhD)

We do not know of any government grants specifically focused on promoting post-graduate or doctoral research connected to ESD. (Bachelor-degree-holding) researchers may normally apply for standard sources of finance, such as the Scientific Research Fund

⁴³ www.ua.ac.be

⁴⁴ www.vub.ac.be

⁴⁵ www.ugent.be

involving projects related to ESD. In practice, we note that a Google search for "scientific research funds" combined with "education for sustainable development" does not produce any relevant hits. Moreover, nor does the search term "education for sustainable development" lead, via Google Scholar, to any publication on (Dutch-language) scientific research concerning ESD. Conversely, the English equivalent "education for sustainable development" produces 1,460 hits.

FSSD refers to innovation, science and research – as well as items such as education – as horizontal fields of activity that cross-cut (several of) the six themes. With a view to the continuing inclusion of sustainable technological development in science and innovation policy, the idea is to go beyond the tendency towards compartmentalisation within scientific research and seek a long-term approach and cross-sectoral cooperation. Scientific research and innovation also represent one of the **operational projects** developed following the example of the FSSD.

The aim is to seek a broad base of university support so as to identify the impact of the coordinating policy on sustainable development. What this means in practice is creating a sustainable **development policy support centre**, with a view to:

- collecting and extending the existing policy-based capacity for sustainable development in Flanders;
- conducting research on specific themes or having it conducted in support of the policy ;
- extending the factual basis of the sustainable development-based policy.
- reinforcing, extending and deepening scientific research on sustainable development;
- disseminating the research findings to a broader public so as to create a broader base of support for sustainable development.

“The support centre's policy support task is to provide the policy with data, analytical instruments, methodologies and assessments that can be deployed in future policy-making. The support centre has to be able to carry out short-term assignments (such as three-month research activities). Long-term assignments will also be required. The frame of reference for this research is the Flemish strategy document on sustainable development. A schedule and timetable is being drawn up for policy preparation research in the light of the priorities set forth in the strategy document. A key advantage of a support centre is the way it provides a channel for the Government of Flanders to look beyond the short-term requirements, which is one of the basic principles of sustainable development. In the case of some of the support centre's assignments, comparative research has to be undertaken with comparable countries and regions that have some degree of expert knowledge about the topic the research is focused on.”⁴⁶

The aforementioned initiatives have a bearing on research into sustainable development in general. Specifically in the case of **education for sustainable development** one of the short-term objectives ⁴⁷ is promoting scientific research so as to boost the effectiveness of ESD (see above). However, this objective is not given any further consideration in the paragraph 'Focusing according to short-term objectives'.

Additions on the basis of the workshops

During the 2 October 2007 ESD consultation platform three workshops were held:

- ESD in compulsory education

⁴⁶ Leterme, Y. (2006). *Policy document on sustainable development 2006-2007*, p. 7-8.

⁴⁷ Draft operational project file

- ESD in higher education
- ESD in informal and non-informal learning environments

The workshop findings were incorporated as much as possible into the aforementioned description on the basis of the indicators. A number of suggestions and thoughts expressed during the workshops are nonetheless unrelated to the indicators developed for the first phase of the UNECE strategy. A short explanation of these is provided below, because the information originating with these workshops, together with this indicators report and the advisory opinions of the Flemish Education Council (VLOR) and the Environment and Nature Council of Flanders (Minaraad) form the context analysis on which the Flemish implementation plan for ESD is based.

Training and continuing training

The thesis “Education for sustainable development in informal and non-informal learning processes in Flanders”⁴⁸ points out that ESD may be further promoted in the light of **concept clarification, vision development and interprofessionalisation**. This viewpoint was echoed during the workshops.

Vision development is regarded as a key step in the implementation of ESD that has to be included in the implementation plan. As far as possible we have to reach out towards a shared vision. There should invariably be scope for a **debate**. The importance of participation is highlighted in the texts of the UNECE strategy. Consequently, the vision has to be developed on a participatory basis.

The members of the ESD consultation platform point to the need for **practical training** as much as an in-depth study in the context of sustainable development. Consequently, there is call for a) practical teaching materials, and b) continuing training about **general competences** for ESD, about systemic thinking. In the case of the last item, people can be brought together from various disciplines. Both types of continuing training are necessary for complementary purposes.

A **transition** is required from the myriad theoretical and conceptual publications and debates about ESD to something in a human language, something that may be immediately used in practice. Consideration is being given to a practice book that is due to be published by the Education department shortly. This should demonstrate how projects can be developed in the direction of ESD.

Process management is also being highlighted as a valuable instrument for the implementation of ESD. Thanks to process management various organisations can avail themselves of the expertise they do not have. Types of peer supervision may also be organised in the margin of this system: so as to be able to steer the sector more in the direction of ESD. Budgets obviously have to be available for this purpose, but this does not invariably take the form of a project fund. There is also a heavy demand for expertise.

Equally important is to allow the expert knowledge and experiences to be transferred to other relevant stakeholders. This can be achieved by creating a **network of excellence**. An ESD support centre may operate as an interface for underpinning and undertaking exchanges of materials and expertise.

Education materials

It is important for educational materials and teaching resources to be made available, **formally, systematically and methodologically**. An inventory of what is on offer is required as well as more effective alignment and coordination between the supply and demand side (see above).

The **quality** of the materials has to be guaranteed. Any product intended for education has to fit in with the final objectives and what is on offer should be tailored as effectively as possible to the intended target group.

It is vital for **civil society** to be involved in the development of new materials.

⁴⁸ Frederix, M. (2007). *Educatie voor Duurzame Ontwikkeling in informele en non-formele leerprocessen in Vlaanderen*. Brussel: VUB.