



Young people, education, and sustainable development

Exploring principles, perspectives, and praxis

edited by:

Peter Blaze Corcoran

Philip M. Osano

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Ours is a unique historical moment. The scope and range of human impacts on Earth are unprecedented. So, too, are the possibilities to build a secure basis for a sustainable and sustaining future. Never has so much depended on our wisdom, foresight, and the quality of our thinking. Higher education has a strategic contribution to make in helping to rediscover ancient truths, create new ideas and equip, empower, and inspire the rising generation. These goals, in turn, require mobilizing the research, educational, and organizational resources of the university community. The Center, then, is designed to meet the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century boldly and creatively.

The Center for Environmental and Sustainability Education works toward realizing the dream of a sustainable and peaceful future for Earth through scholarship, education, and action. The Center advances understanding and achievement of the goals of environmental and sustainability education through innovative educational research methods, emergent eco-pedagogies, and educational philosophy and practice based on ethics of care and sustainability. The Center seeks to elevate the environmental mission of Florida Gulf Coast University and serve the university community, the local community of the Western Everglades and Barrier Islands, and the wider community of scholars.

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*Wageningen Academic
P u b l i s h e r s*

The ability to thrive in challenging conditions, the abundance of cultural uses, the potential for extreme age, and the captivating appearance of the baobab tree help explain its importance in myth and the reverence in which it is held by many cultures. One belief is that the presence of a baobab ensures the perpetual survival of a village. An African proverb states “The truth is like a baobab, it is too big for one person to put their arms around.”

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*To our living parents,
Gideon and Zipporah Molo
and Jane Coughter Corcoran*



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Chapter 4

Youth participation in addressing global challenges: the promise of the future

Dumisani Nyoni

At a time when most conventional measures of human prosperity around the world show unprecedented levels of wealth, global society is still caught in an uncomfortable co-habitation with some of the most unjustifiable and inhumane realities of extreme poverty. We have enough examples, cases, and evidence that eradicating poverty is possible, alongside the creation of opportunities and better conditions for the economically and socially marginalised populations worldwide. Unfortunately, billions of people are still confronted with hunger, diseases, and environmental degradation as part of their daily realities. Through the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs), the United Nations firmly fixed targets, and an implementation plan for poverty reduction within the first two decades of the 21st century (United Nations 2001). Nonetheless, the poverty challenge remains daunting. Indeed, sustainable economic development, not just poverty eradication, is perhaps the most urgent and daunting of challenges for present generations because of its complexity and the wider social, economic and environmental implications.

Global warming, hunger, HIV/AIDS, armed conflicts, and other factors related to poverty all directly impact how we human beings manage our global resources. Most of these ills, and our seeming inability to respond to them, stem from, among other things, our low capacity to resolve complex challenges, and, perhaps, our unwillingness to confront the reality on the ground. Three challenges facing the human society are:

1. Failure to agree on how economic resources are to be managed – most models of economic development leave large sections of the society excluded from the benefit of rapid growth and expansion of income bases. Mostly, resources are managed in such a way that the wealth remains concentrated in the hands of a few at the expense of the majority of the population worldwide. Sadly, this distributional distortion accentuates the already fragile state of global affairs.
2. Failure to understand and appreciate the interdependence of living things – that if balance and sustainability are not placed central to policy-making and business principles, the resulting imbalances will give rise to insecurity about peoples' capacity and potential to generate productive and sustainable livelihoods. Unfortunately, more often than not, human response, when faced with insecurity of any kind, is to resort to defensiveness and violent confrontation.

3. Failure to overcome cultural limitations, perceptions, and perspectives in a globalising world – that our participation in the world is dynamically influenced by various cultural norms, values, and principles that have shaped our view of the world. The diversity in cultures on the planet is so rich and differentiated that, on the surface, these immense divides seem impossible to bridge. A deeper look into the state of affairs across the various segments and divisions that emerge out of our cultural differences calls for a deeper yearning and possibility for co-existence among the rich but diverse cultural and religious groups globally. This can be promoted, for instance, through dialogue, understanding and respect for all cultures. At the same time, major cultural transformations are required to take place locally if there is to be a global shift towards a more just, peaceful, and sustainable world. Reflections and enquiry on a wide range of issues such as equity, violence and non-violence, conservation and consumption, justice, development, and economics have to be undertaken in the context of a great transition towards a significantly different reality for humans on planet Earth.

The question of economics takes center stage based on the basic reality that on a daily basis, to extremely varying degrees, humans experience desires to meet basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, and education, and also the fact that, on a daily basis, we depend on the natural resources such as water, land, and so forth. This has been a part of the human condition since the beginning of the evolutionary process. Moving way ahead from that point in time, we find ourselves with over six billion people (United Nations 1999), all of whom are engaged in that quest of matching wants and needs with the limited resources available. Close to half of that population are young people below the age of 30. For example, India alone has a population of over one billion people. According to a Time magazine report, ‘one in three Indians is currently younger than 15 [years of age]’ (Robinson 2007). This demographic trend is apparent among developing countries, and causes many to ask and re-think the answers to some of the most urgent and critical questions: can global resources cope with the coming population surges? Can countries and their economies generate enough productive work for today’s labour force and the generations immediately following? Are the present institutional systems and governance structures sufficient to handle such unprecedented human population figures?

Perhaps most important to all those concerned with such issues should be the question: how do young people factor as participants in addressing contemporary and future global challenges? What is their role, and how can we best help to prepare them to make needed and meaningful contributions? Remarkably, young people today are already asking these questions. In large numbers never seen before, they are organising and mobilising themselves into action. Most are doing this out of personal motivation since they are not being drafted or conscripted

into institutions and structures that force them to be actors in any kind of social change. Instead, they are voluntarily responding to their curiosity about how their world works and how it can be improved. Young people are creating their own organisations – profit-making enterprises and non-profit/non-governmental organisations – to deal with the problems they face. They are also opting to work for governments with genuine commitment. Modern tools and communications technologies are facilitating sprawling global communities and networks – mostly internet based – spurring collaboration and learning around important issues prominent on the world stage but inspired by local pragmatism.

The mainstream is also adapting. Youth departments at all levels of government are commonly established with real mandates to address the needs and concerns of young people. Businesses, for a whole range of reasons, better understand that youth are central to their corporate strategies. There is a growing appreciation of the value young people bring to society across the board.

However, a broader look reveals that despite all this progress there is still a lot of work to be done to fully incorporate today's youth and coming generations into a world in transition towards sustainability. Let us, for a moment, go back to that fundamental question posed earlier: how do young people factor as participants in addressing contemporary and future global challenges? That same question reads very differently when rephrased this way: how do young people factor in addressing contemporary and future global challenges? The change in phrasing is small but its implications are large. By removing the words '*as participants*' from the original question, the list of possible responses to that enquiry changes dramatically. Any group in a society that is not given the option and opportunity to participate in generating solutions remains a part of the problem.

Participation is a key element of any change or development process. Inclusion gives people an important sense of self and a connection to the world they live in. People with a stake on an issue have a greater interest in being a part of the conversations that most affect their holdings in that entity – be it a corporation, community, and, indeed, a planet. The Earth Charter, a declaration of fundamental ethical principles for building a just, sustainable, and peaceful global society in the 21st century, expresses the aspirations of millions of people across the world²⁸. In principle 13, the Earth Charter challenges us to 'strengthen democratic institutions at all levels, and provide transparency and accountability in governance, inclusive participation in decision making and access to justice'. At the most basic level, 'inclusive participation' is a core human value. The happiest families are inclusive and participatory. Love is about inclusion and embracing others. Some of the

²⁸ Learn more at www.earthcharter.org.

most successful corporations and organisations value participation. The healthiest communities and nations give people an opportunity to be involved. So, how do we truly include young people as participants in addressing contemporary and future global challenges?

One answer to that question lies in education; formal, non-formal and informal learning processes. I will focus attention, however, on the formal side of education while recognising the importance of non-formal and informal learning in shaping the attitudes and values of young people. Schools and other formal educational institutions play a strong role in the shaping of society. They are, to a large extent, the factories that mould society's participants. For many fortunate people, the school system provides the first opportunity for formal participation in an organised system. Some of the most important lessons of human life and living are learned in schools; collaboration and competition, discipline, dealing with diversity and difference, and, of course, the skills of engaging with society at large. Almost everywhere in the world, leading agents of change in all sectors are a result of the formal education system. These realities have many important implications.

One significant impact of formal education is that those who fail to be a part of that system are likely to be excluded in other aspects of life, including work/employment and economic participation. Well-researched and documented results of unemployment and economic marginalisation indicate that those on the outside of the main streams of the economy and education systems are also often left out of some of the most critical dialogues taking place across the world today. They are mostly absent in parliaments, university lectures, debates, and discussions. They are not present or represented at conferences of different kinds and other symposia. The perspectives, desires, and aspirations of these 'uneducated' people inadequately appear in policy and legislation, and their ideas and potential contributions to address challenges such as climate change, social unrest, and the battle against HIV/AIDS may never be realised.

In terms of including young people as participants in the quest for solutions to global problems, a focus on the formal education systems is critical. The spaces provided by schools and universities do much to influence youthful minds to generate some of the approaches needed to overcome our failures to agree on how economic resources can be managed for a more just, sustainable, and peaceful world. Bringing larger numbers of economically and socially marginalised people into formal education can enhance our understanding of the concept of interdependence. Schools can teach a lot about containing diversity and difference in a limited space. Our world indeed has physical limitations, and, as our population grows, managing diversity is essential. Formal education systems

can be all-important training grounds for fostering and promoting a culture of tolerance, non-violence, and peace.

In looking at schools as an important vehicle for youth to participate in addressing the many complex problems facing the world, the first part of our challenge is to increase the participation of young people in the formal education system. Leading on from that is the enormous task of creating (and reforming current) education systems to be more humane, caring, and embracing of those values that we want to see become widespread in our world.

I make reference to the Earth Charter in describing and defining sustainability and the kind of world that many people and institutions worldwide are striving for. This is because, in many ways, the Earth Charter is the embodiment of those core values and principles that guide the transition to a more sustainable planet. A result of the most expansive and profound global dialogic initiative to date, the Earth Charter conveys a series of values that people from almost every segment in the world believe reflect the possibilities in our common future. Thus, the Earth Charter can act as a guiding document or road map whose principles can help in driving institutional reform processes to transform schools and universities into being factories for positive societal transformation.

To give this some context, and to connect it with some current activity, allow me to present the case of some work I am involved with in Zimbabwe. Our organisation, Zimele Institute, is a part of an indigenous, non-governmental organisation called the Organisation of Rural Associations for Progress (ORAP). ORAP is working to put some of these ideas into practice by working with over 70 schools in marginalised communities in Zimbabwe. The primary focus of our work with these schools is to invest in educational and learning resources, and to assist teachers and educators with improving the academic performance of students and to help them advance through the formal education system. There is an attempt to strike a balance between the academic endeavor and the overall personal development of the youth and all involved in the programme. Strong emphasis is placed on community building, values, and development thinking. One of the positive, unintended consequences of the work has been to see the increased participation of community members in the development of the schools and in taking responsibility for the educational development of the young people who are enrolled in these institutions.

As our work progresses, the transformation of these schools and communities is become evident and small steps towards sustainability are already apparent. Young people whose dominant experience of life has been flavored with the pain of exclusion now see hope, and they are beginning to ask different questions about

themselves and their relationships to the world around them. Developmental conversations with these youth are creating change-makers in many villages. In a small way, Zimbabwe's future will be positively different as a result of this work. The schools and communities that these youth are a part of are helping to mould them as powerful participants in society with a greater sense of belonging and a need to make a contribution to the well-being of those around them. Can the lessons learned in our relatively small laboratory have global ramifications and application? There certainly is an invitation and opening to study this model and to learn both from our successes and failures.

The enormous challenges we face as humanity require radical shifts in our way of living. Solutions to these complexities may not need to always be creating completely new systems and approaches, but rather to bring new thinking and innovation to that which already exists. For young people in the developing world, the space for participation may be the most important gift they can receive from the world. Examples of what youth have done once they have entered that space are not only inspiring, they also justify the investment in young people as innovators and creators of solutions.

When I was younger, I used to read a quote stuck on my mother's dressing table that read, 'I am, because I participate.' Those words are, for my mother, a life philosophy. She chooses to participate. Since her youth, she has been given, and has taken, opportunities to be a participant in addressing some of the challenges facing our world. In her youth, she founded ORAP. As is evident by the organisation's contribution to sustainable development in Zimbabwe and around the world, the impact of her participation is making a difference across generations. The same philosophy of 'I am, because I participate' is one that has grown with me, too. It has enabled me to find a place in the world where, together with others, I can be involved in creating a better world. Imagine a world where three billion young people realise the potential of their existence through participation. When that is accomplished, we will begin to see global challenges, not from the errors of the past, but from the perspective of the promise of the future.

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Chapter 22

Youth-friendly urban spaces: the case of the city of Essaouira, Morocco

Hind Ottmani

In the context of the human population bulge that the world is facing, youth issues have become a major concern for policy makers, both at the national and global levels (World Bank 2006). This is happening at a time when the human population growth in urban areas is also rapidly increasing, especially in developing countries. According to UN-HABITAT, the United Nations Agency for Human Settlement's *State of the World's Cities Report 2006/7*, the year 2007 marked a turning point in human history – for the first time ever, the urban population equaled the world's rural population and the number of slum dwellers in the world crossed the one billion mark (UNHABITAT 2007). The youth, estimated to represent more than 30 per cent of world population, are largely expected to dominate urban areas. This represents a big challenge for the developing world in terms of urban planning because the majority of them are found in informal settlements. As vulnerable members of society, young people are often the most affected by poverty, pollution, instability, disease, illiteracy, or urban violence. For youth, the consequences of globalisation are at times positive, but at other times, the cause of exclusion and marginalisation.

Young people are often subjects of special concern in major sustainability initiatives and declarations. At the Rio Earth Summit in Brazil in 1992, representatives of world governments agreed upon the principles of Agenda 21, the Program of Action for Sustainable Development. Chapter 25 of Agenda 21 identified children and youth as among the major groups that could promote more sustainable and fair societies. Chapter 28 called upon local authorities to undertake consultation processes, along with the citizens, in order to establish a local Agenda 21 for each community, encouraging women and youth integration efforts in the decision making, planning, and project implementation. In 2000, the United Nations Millennium Summit developed a world action plan against poverty and agreed to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. Many of the MDGs focus on improving the conditions of youth, such as access to education or empowering girls and women. Further, in 2002 at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg, South Africa, the international community focused on the means to meet MDGs and of advancing Agenda 21.

Specifically, the third session of the World Urban Forum (WUF), in June 2006 in Vancouver, Canada, highlighted the importance of scaling up urban spaces to make them meet specific needs of certain categories of citizens, such as women, handicapped people, youth, children, and elders. Many development programs aim at developing strategies of addressing the specific needs of young people in urban areas in terms of education, employment, health, and leisure. Moreover, youth participation in local urban governance has been identified as a key element to their integration in the planning process, considering them as actors, more than as passive recipients. This chapter summarises a research project on youth-friendly urban spaces that was carried out in Essaouira, a coastal city in southern Morocco. Reflecting on the issue of youth-friendly urban spaces is a vital step in broadening the perspective of architects on the urban level.

The 2007 World Development Report, entitled 'Development and the Next Generation', (World Bank 2006) identified some real challenges represented by youth in terms of economic development. On one hand, it noted that investing in the training, education, health, and employment of a generation that has never been as large, educated, and healthy as today's youth presents a unique opportunity for developing countries; but, on the other hand, it recognised that missing this chance could mean transmitting poverty to the next generations and reducing their development opportunities. Creating youth-friendly policies, setting up orientation and counseling mechanisms, investing in preventive healthcare, and creating 'second chance' programs are some of the recommended solutions for the development of the human capital that youth represent. These recommendations are the main outlines of a development strategy that requires the mobilisation of national expertise that can adapt to local challenges (World Bank 2006).

Morocco, a country of an estimated 34 million people, is an example of a developing country that would stand to gain from investing in its youth: more than 57 per cent of its population is urban; more than 60 per cent is younger than 30 years old; and an estimated 20 per cent is aged 15 to 24 years old (Government of Morocco 2004). The statistical projections indicate that the population under 30 is on the increase, especially in urban areas, hence the importance of addressing the needs of this category of the population in urban development planning. Historically, the needs of young people in Morocco have not been sufficiently addressed in the policy process. It is evident, for example, in the weak education system, unemployment, few or no leisure spaces, lack of integration in political parties, and lack of participation in urban planning, among others. In this sense, Moroccan youth have been rather passive compared to the adult citizens. This passivity is compounded by the fact that many young Moroccans are not educated, and illiteracy levels among youth aged 15 to 24 years are close to 30 per cent (Government of Morocco 2004). However, in spite of their lack of involvement, Moroccan youth have a

very optimistic image of their country. Setting up concrete actions in terms of training, sports, and leisure spaces has been identified as one of the solutions to the problems that affect youth. Another one is developing employment creation mechanisms, which encourages youth fulfillment, changing their status within the society, and thus involving them in community development as active citizens, integrating them in positive change dynamics.

A 'youth friendly city' is one that encourages all aspects of a young person's development, from education to leisure, from cultural harmony to connection to diverse ranges of urban environments. The design of playgrounds and secure leisure spaces, education and training spaces, involvement in urban governance, employment opportunity creation, better access to natural resources, and basic municipal services are among the potential solutions to the diverse problems of urban youth. A city's potential can be measured through the services it offers and how it accommodates its youth. A investment in youth, as future leaders and decision makers, and in youth-friendly policies is a long-term investment in a city's health and sustainability. Since more and more youth live in cities, it is important to involve them as change actors within the spaces where they live. A youth-friendly city encourages youth participation by creating livable communities. Youth bring creativity, energy, and practical and localised skills to create healthier cities. In exchange, involved youth develop their ingenuity, their ability to solve problems, gain more independence and self-confidence, as well as expand their social consciousness within their community.

A youth-friendly city can be considered as a space of participation, but most of all of inclusion. It is not about involving youth who are already able, through their education and their access to the decision-making, to participate in urban planning processes, but, it is more about integrating youth participation into a global strategy aimed at reducing poverty and social exclusion through youth action at local levels. Spatially, a youth-friendly city is a city that promotes youth's psychological, cultural, social, and political development. It provides them with spaces of discovery, meeting, exchange, learning, and inclusion. Spaces used by youth – not only specialised spaces where they are confined, but the ones in which they develop – should be created following the perceptive and cognitive activity linked to stages of development. The complex relationships between people, objects, the social aspect of a place, the context, and even light and sound quality, affect the learning experience. This means giving importance to the material conditions that surround youth during their development, like space distribution and constructive qualities, and letting them, as users, take initiatives on this space.

The city of Essaouira is located in southern Morocco, on the Atlantic coast. It is a city of approximately 95,000 inhabitants. Among these, 19 per cent are aged 15

to 24 years old. Even if the city has never presented a clear social stratification, the anarchic development that it is experiencing now is starting to reveal gaps among different social classes. Youth are particularly concerned by this trend, since they are likely to be the first to face social exclusion and urban violence that might arise from a highly economically stratified city. The city has mainly focused on tourism and cultural development through its physical, social, and economic characteristics. It is a city that is open to foreign influences, and its many festivals and sports competitions make it a city that is popular and highly appreciated by young people, both Moroccans and foreigners.

In our study, we conducted interviews with various local NGOs and members of the civil society, as well as with young people about developing a youth friendly city. We identified a striking need for leisure and training spaces specially designed for youth. Moreover, the youth themselves observed that contact with nature is for them an important component of their development, and a space that would be designed for them should take this element into account. The challenge, therefore, was to end up with a concept that would meet young people's needs in training, education, and leisure spaces, on a site chosen by the users themselves during the interviews, and that would also have a strong sustainability dimension. This is how we proposed an Ecomuseum, within an Urban Park, inside of the Green Belt of Essaouira (Figure 22.1).

The Green Belt is the site of a forest that was partly cleared in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Since the beginning of the century until the 1950s, some reforestation works were undertaken under the French protectorate, which enabled dune stabilisation. The ecological interest of this place is undeniable because it is a natural space composed of replanted dunes and lagoons. Apart from its rich landscape diversity, it is also a space that is rich in biodiversity. Unfortunately, because of its position at the periphery of an urban area, it suffers from environmental degradation and pollution and lack of occupancy. It thus became important to think about assigning a new function to this space, in order to protect it and to promote its richness and diversity. Implementation of a youth-focused training and leisure function to this space was seen as a way to preserve it, and at the same time, to allow for the education of young people on environmental protection and sustainability.

As a consequence, the Urban Park within the Green Belt is to be designed as a meeting point for young people of Essaouira. Through its Ecomuseum, it would encompass interactive learning activities to experience nature and the site's environment. The Ecomuseum is composed of different modules discretely spread on the site (proposing thematic training and educative activities), and nature trails, offering different options to discover local biodiversity, fauna, flora, and

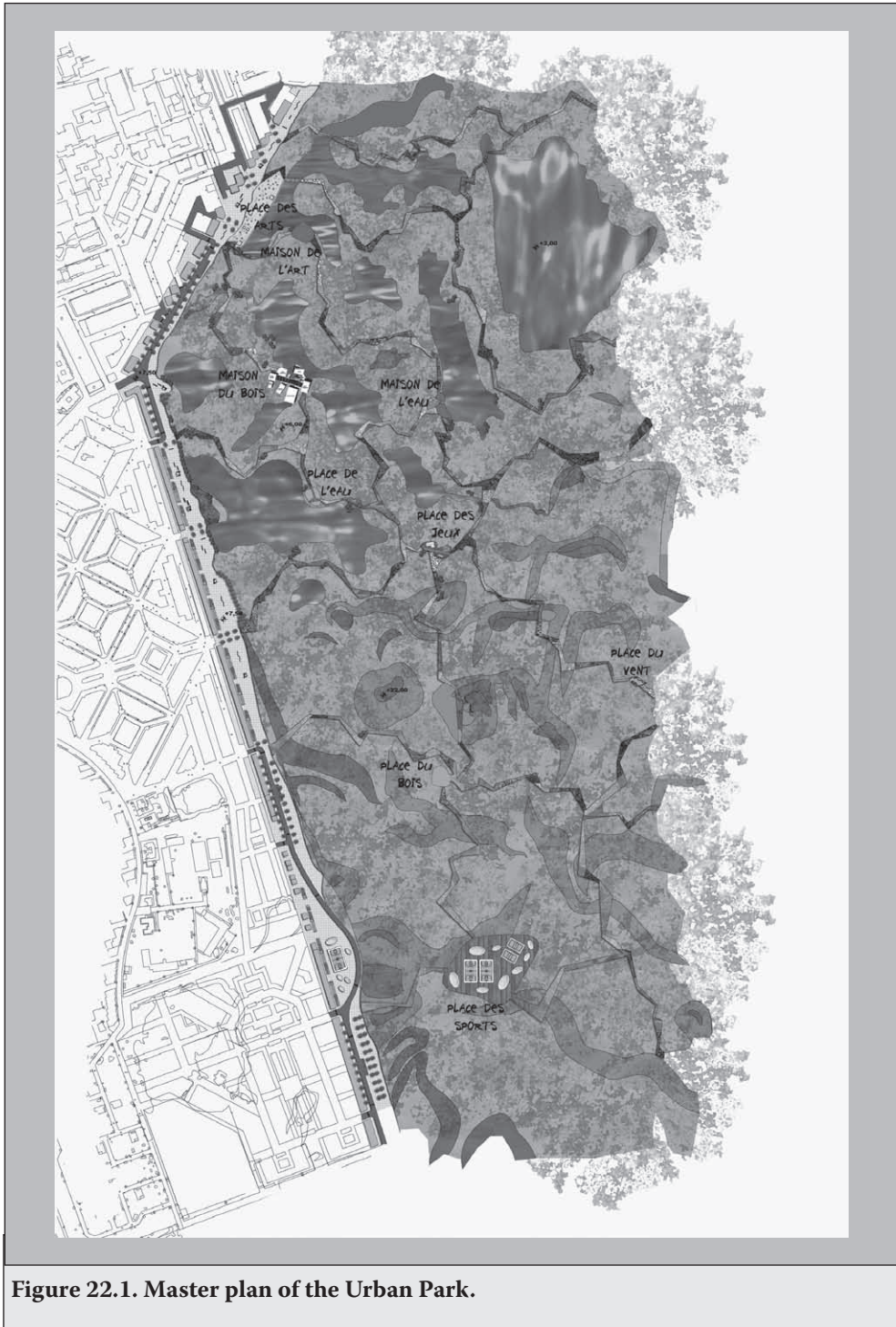


Figure 22.1. Master plan of the Urban Park.

even traditional cultural heritage through the connection of the Urban Park with a neighbouring village specialised in traditional lime production.

In the context of the increasing urbanisation that the world is facing, the growth, expansion, and management of cities raise many questions. The quality of life in urban areas, as well as sustainability of urban settlements remains one of the main concerns. Moreover, because of the projected rapid world population increase, especially in developing countries, the future of urban youth represents a big challenge for all policy makers and urban planners. Raising the issue of youth-friendly urban spaces is thus a striking point in the debate on urban sustainability. Thinking about spaces especially designed for young people supposes taking their needs into consideration, and putting youth in the center of the debate on urban planning and development. Considering youth as actors in this process is a step forward towards including them in the shaping of the spaces that they are meant to evolve in, as well as putting them in the front row of the quest for sustainability within urban settings as has been demonstrated in the case of the city of Essaouira, Morocco.

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Chapter 26

Diversity and participation in sustainable development learning processes for youth

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Creating awareness amongst today's youngsters on the issue of sustainable development is not just a matter of teaching – it is about inspiring action. In the Netherlands, there are several programs and projects that attract young people's attention to sustainability issues and provide perspectives for participation. Although an understanding of immense problems, such as food scarcity in developing countries, might be vital to finding solutions, knowledge alone does not necessarily trigger youngsters to be passionate about the subject or to change their own behaviour. In fact, methods that solely focus on transfer of knowledge about sustainable development issues lead to passivity, as youngsters feel that the problems are too big for them to make changes. For example, in biology lessons students learn about the functioning of plants and trees, such as photosynthesis, the year cycle of a leaf and tree, and so forth. Some find it fascinating but others are extremely bored. However, literally taking students close to nature might have a different impact. One of the projects executed by the Dutch National Youth Council, 'What's Your Nature?', shows youngsters in high school that spending time in nature doesn't have to be associated with staring through a binocular at birds all day. By going out of the classroom and into nature, students discover that there is a wide variety of ways to spend time and recreate in nature.

One of the most important points of departure, in our experience, is asking: what is the aim of passing on information, increasing knowledge, or raising awareness? Is it enough if young people know, for instance, that climate change is considered a threat to human existence? Or, must efforts be aimed at the adjustment of the consumption pattern of youth? If these questions are answered, there are still others to be raised: which methods comply with the aim of education and awareness raising; which also connect to the needs of the target group? And, who are young people anyway? What are their specific needs? How can we reach out to involve them? Perhaps, more importantly, why should they actually be involved?

Without pretending to answer all of these questions sufficiently in our contribution, we argue that educating youngsters on sustainable development issues is most effective when it is based on generating experiences and active involvement of youth – not only as a 'participant' in programs and projects, but, in particular,

as an actor in the development and organisation of such things, including initial policy making and political decision making. We illustrate our argument by using lively examples from the Netherlands. We hope this chapter will bring you some practical ideas and inspiration for whatever interest you have in education on sustainable development with regard to youth.

We would like to emphasize that our understanding of education goes beyond classrooms and transmitting information and knowledge. Our definition of education has to do with the learning process, which can take several forms. This process is not dependent on a teacher-student relationship and can also be found on a more individual level, such as people teaching themselves.

We will first turn to the diversity of young people and the complexity this generates in targeting youth in initiated learning processes. Furthermore, we will glance at different methods and ways to involve youth in sustainability projects and policies. In conclusion, we will connect these elements to give an overview of what should be taken into account in practice. According to the UN, *youth* are people between the age of 15 and 24 years old. Different institutions apply different definitions to *youth*. You can imagine that a 14-year old living in India, already married for instance, can lead a much more mature life than a 27-year old still studying in the Netherlands. In some African countries, leaders of youth organisations can be over 30. Aside from these formal definitions, organisations and institutions tend to mix up children and youth and put them all under the same denominator of youth.

In most cases, youth is defined by age only. Public policy, the media, and public opinion regularly treat youth as a homogeneous group of people. Two stereotypes of youth tend to appear as a public discourse. On the one hand you have the higher-educated, successful, articulate, semi-professional youth. And, on the other side of the spectrum, we have the problematic youth; they cause trouble in the streets, are involved in criminal activities, they are lazy and lack ambition. That neither of these stereotypes apply to all youngsters seems quite obvious, but what then can be said about youth?

In the Netherlands, a company named Motivaction has done research dividing the Dutch youth population in different so-called 'mentality-segments'. The company incorporates many years of in-house research using a panel of over 100,000 respondents to provide insights into a target group's motivation and behaviour. A subprogram of this model specifically aims to research and portray macro-classifications of the motivation and behaviour of young people, and is one of the very first successful attempts to break into the 'black box' – of the in-reality heterogeneous social grouping of youth. The model identifies eight main population segments and corresponding values and lifestyles in the whole of

Dutch society, and it has been used to construct one that is specifically based on young people⁷¹. The Young Mentality model moves away from traditional socio-economic characteristics that are used to distinguish between societal groups. This research shows that the effect of socio-economic factors on attitudes and values of youth are very limited.

Awareness of the diversity amongst youngsters is crucial when it comes to communication. Whether you are talking about formal or informal education, participation, or awareness raising, it is all about sending and receiving messages. Different 'types' of youngsters are interested in different ways of participating. Some are more attracted to political ways of participation, while others favour a more creative approach.

In the Netherlands, Simple Questions, Sustainable Solutions (SQSS)⁷² is a project in which young people advise the government on their internal sustainability. Participants are trained to ask questions of civil servants in a ministry or a provincial department about how they translate sustainable development into their daily work – with regard to their use of materials and facilities, as well as the content of the policy they formulate. The ministry is taken over by the youngsters for one day, and after their examination they report back to the minister about their findings. An agreement is made on how to improve the sustainability within the ministry and that agreement is enforced. This is a typical example of a project which is attractive for somewhat older, higher-educated youth with a clear interest and some knowledge about sustainable development.

Another example of youth participation in sustainable development projects and policy that has worked well because the concept was well-adjusted to the specific target group is the Rotterdam RJME debate⁷³. The debate in the city of Rotterdam stimulates less-educated youth to give their opinions on climate change, recycling, and the environment in the city. The debate was organised as a follow-up project on excursions that the classes made to several companies near Rotterdam. All companies involved were in the middle of implementing sustainability measures which they showed the classes during the excursion. The debate was meant to translate what the youngsters had seen in the excursions into a more general picture of what was happening with our global environment. The way in which

⁷¹ Retrieved on 2 December 2008, Amsterdam: www.en.motivaction.nl/106/Segmentation/Key-Insights-Values-%26-Lifestyles/

⁷² An initiative of the Dutch National Youth Council, implemented at the time of writing, in, amongst others, the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and the Ministry of the Environment, Housing and Spatial Planning.

⁷³ RJME stands for Rotterdam Youth Environment Excursion and was initiated by Lokaal Rotterdam.

these students were introduced to the subject of sustainable development was very appealing to them because of the local and practical approach and the competition element in the debate in which classes from different schools competed against each other. Again, in this project the content as well as the format of the project complied with the interests, capacities, age and needs of the specific target group.

It is not only the approach and concept in relation to the 'type' of youth that matters. There are also a variety of ways in which youth can play an active role themselves in learning processes, depending on the level of participation. Youth participation can be seen as a means of educating our young generation to become critical, aware, and empowered citizens who strive towards a better world. If young people are involved in the development of programs, projects, and policies on sustainable development, it will prove to be beneficial for both the quality and the actual commitment of youngsters. As sociologist, Roger Hart's (1992) ladder of youth participation illustrates, manipulation, tokenism and decoration are forms of participation which are not meaningful, nor respectful, for youngsters to be 'included.' We feel that realising youth involvement in a way which is meaningful is a first step in the process of truly educating our youth about what sustainable development is supposed to be, and more importantly, what they can do to make it happen.

Therefore, it is vital that all stakeholders that are committed to include youth in sustainable development issues know what role to fulfil and how to go about in achieving their aims. In the following, we will give you an idea of how we see this, based on experiences in the Netherlands. The current generation of young people processes information in a different way than former generations did. Young people of today are part of a globalising world. They are good at multi-tasking and are considered to be socially and intellectually better-equipped than the generations before them (Groen and Boschma 2006). As a consequence, it is necessary to develop a communication strategy towards youngsters that suits 'their world.' If projects fail, this is what often causes the failure.

In the Netherlands, a project called '*Doe Mee*'⁷⁴ has proved to be successful when it comes to by-youth, for-youth organisation, making difficult subjects attractive for a young public. The project was organised by the Dutch National Youth Council with the support of SenterNovem, an agency of the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs that promotes sustainable development and innovation. '*Doe Mee*' consisted of a series of debates on a broad range of issues related to sustainable

⁷⁴ '*Doe mee*' literally means 'do/work along/with us' in Dutch, but is mostly used as the informal imperative of the English verb 'to participate.' It might also be translated as 'be part of it,' illustrating the participatory and active nature of the debating project (for, with, and by young people).

development, organised by youth, for youth. The project included, in part, a sustainable fashion show and a lively debate on trendy, sustainable clothing and consumption in a popular club in Amsterdam. Another crowded event focused on the meat industry. Young farmers, young politicians, musicians, and others voiced their opinion on the issue. The series of debates resulted in an advisory document that was presented to the government. The combination of discussing a subject in a fun way, and using the outcomes to influence the government seems especially exciting because you feel it is not just a talk-shop you're involved in, rather, you actually can have influence by giving your opinion.

A common problem among organised youth is knowledge management. Young people develop themselves and their interests quite rapidly, and the way in which a youngster chooses to be involved in an organisation or an activity can change from year to year (or even month to month). In addition, the cycle in which more experienced young people move on, and new youth join, is faster than for other civil society groups. Young people can tackle this problem easily by developing peer-to-peer mentoring systems. The Dutch National Youth Council has gained many positive experiences in the past couple of years with several peer-to-peer mechanisms. It simply means that youth educate their peers and relatively inexperienced youngsters are linked to more experienced ones. Keep in mind that a peer-educator in a certain context can be the 'student' in a different context and *vice versa*.

Formal education institutes can also play a role in striving towards sustainable development by integrating the subject in their curricula or by executing special projects in co-operation with external organisations, as we have seen in the Netherlands. In Dutch high schools, debates on climate change have been facilitated through a project called 'Choose the Future'⁷⁵. School youth presented, amongst other things, plans for combating climate change in their local environment. Some choose an architect point of view by designing zero emission neighbourhoods and others created an awareness campaign for the school students and teachers. The plans were discussed with local experts and politicians in school. This example affirms that projects become more interesting and successful if several stakeholders are involved and if a spill-over effect from the youth to politics is realised. This chapter has focused on two important elements in involving and educating youth in the path towards sustainable development. The fact that we have chosen diversity as an angle in targeting youth and for-youth, by-youth methods as a perspective for our experiences does not mean that it is all there

⁷⁵ 'Choose The Future' (*Kies de Toekomst*) is initiated and executed by Consultative Committee of Sector Councils for Research and Development (COS), Jongeren Milieu Actief and the Dutch National Youth Council.

is to account for when working with youth on issues like climate change, food scarcity, or consumption. Our justification, rather, lies in the fact that a narrow ‘type’ of youngster is usually targeted in initiatives and policy, while it is simply do-able and more effective to consider *all* young people as actors in the process of sustainable development. Knowing the ‘types’ of youngsters you want to address and involving them in a way which is attractive and interesting for them is a key for successful organisation of learning processes.

We acknowledge the lack of research conducted into the mentalities and motivations of young people – marginalising the largest social group in the world. We strongly encourage studies like Motivaction’s YoungMentality that are of crucial importance in policies and projects involving young people. In emphasising for-youth, by-youth methods, our justification is similar – it is not emphasised or practised enough in what goes on in projects and policies.

We have tried to pinpoint important methods by portraying several examples of projects that have been executed in the Netherlands. May they serve as a source of ideas and inspiration to stimulate our young generation to get themselves involved in learning processes with the goal to cherish our planet.

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