

Education Initiative for Environment and Sustainable Development

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The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) offers a unique opportunity to take a new look at the ever-evolving framework for environmental education, to adjust our position, to express our expectations, and to describe briefly our future plans in promoting, in a concrete way, our ideas for environmental education and its contribution to sustainable development.

I am convinced that the prerequisite for sustainable development is the achievement of the so-called Education For All (EFA). Education For All, according to the Dakar framework for Action² and the Millennium Declaration,³ concerns primary schooling for all children everywhere, boys and girls alike. This

is what we have campaigned for through Education Re-Affirmation for the 21st Century (point 3 of ERA-21).⁴ In Bali, in May 2002, this was included in the Draft Implementation Plan,⁵ and we expect that it will be confirmed in the final outcome of Johannesburg.

As I had the chance to present in the Roundtable of the Education Caucus in PrepCom IV, while I believe that all our education needs readjustment and reorientation toward sustainable development, a specific component of education devoted to environment and sustainability is also needed in order to allow deeper understanding of key issues and serve the advocacy function of education for sustainable development.

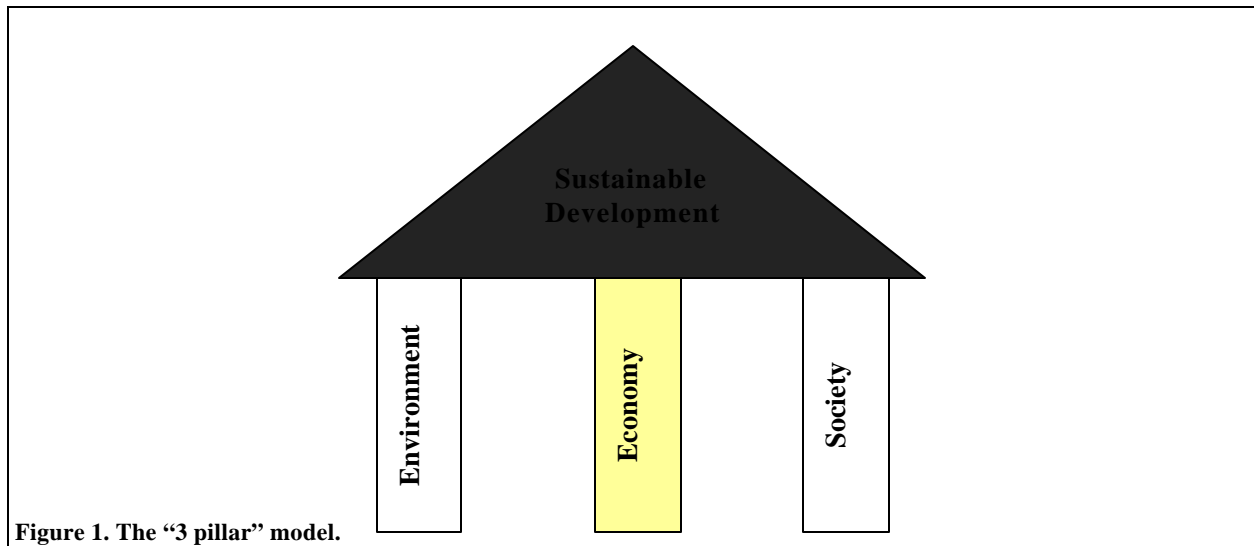


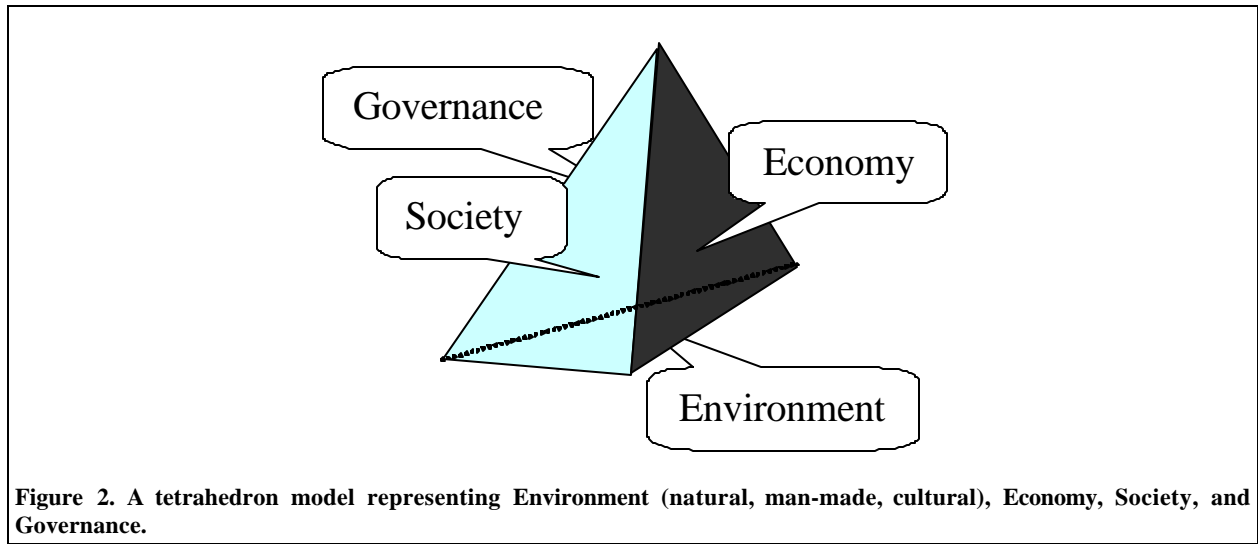
Figure 1. The “3 pillar” model.

The common “3 pillar” model (Fig. 1) used to describe sustainable development could equally serve education theoretically and operationally. To the contrary, it may create misunderstandings and misconceptions because it may lead to the conclusion that environmental education, with the addition of some elements of education on society and economy, could constitute education for sustainable development and promote sustainable development.

What is clearly missing in such a model is the demonstrated commitment, efforts, and mechanisms necessary to integrate in a balanced, harmonious way

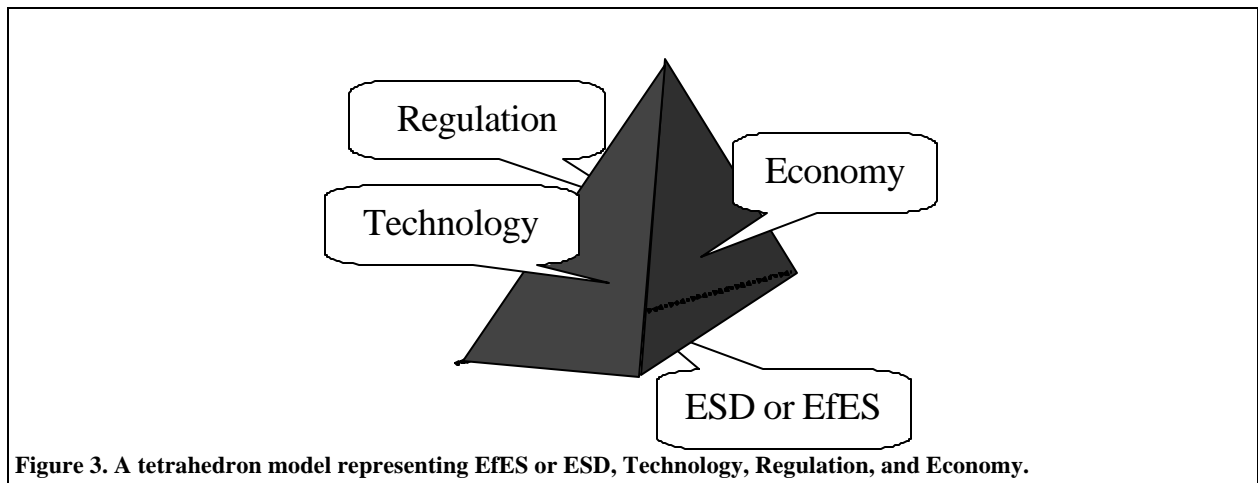
these 3 components. Such an entity could be described as the needed overall governance for sustainability which includes policies, institutions, and networks at global, national, and local levels, activities, and sections (one of which is education in all its forms). Education has a dominant role and shapes or contributes to many other activities.

A more appropriate representation model for sustainable development, in my view, is that of a tetrahedron with 4 facets representing, respectively, Environment (natural, man-made, cultural), Economy, Society, and Governance (Fig. 2).



All of Society and part of Environment are man-made, or at least follow rules determined by humans. The natural environment, however, has qualities, limits, and carrying capacities that are set by the natural world. This is why an education which has the ambition to make sustainable development understandable and achievable (some call it “Education for Sustainable Development” [ESD]) has to be, in fact, an “Education for Environment and Sustainability” (EfES) as it was defined also in Thessaloniki (1997).⁶

A second tetrahedron could define the connection between EfES or ESD as a tool used with instruments provided by Science and Technology, relevant Regulation, Legislation Institutions and Economy to obtain sustainable development (Fig. 3). Appropriately tuned Education for Environment and Sustainable Development combined with economic, social, and technological instruments (eco-efficiency, eco-taxes, etc.) emerges as a crucial political instrument that facilitates economic development, reinforces social values and social cohesion, and ensures integrity of the natural environment and of biodiversity.



While these 2 tetrahedrons help us envisage the simplified and comprehensive way in which the role of education in general and of EfES/ESD in particular helps obtain sustainable development, we should not believe that in the real world we would obtain easily symmetrical and orderly “inclusive” prisms. Such an

approach could be characterised as almost too optimistic while we are all aware of the very asymmetric background and unbalanced conditions prevailing in our world which could distort and transform the tetrahedrons into a series of almost flat, irregular triangles.

In order to avoid systematic distortions and asymmetries we need to safeguard cultural and philosophical diversities through education and translate our theories into action by applying them in the real world. Sustainability, like all other targets and ideas such as democracy and human rights, could be implemented and perfected only if “exercised.”

Of course, the ultimate goal is to achieve peaceful coexistence among peoples, with less suffering, less hunger, less poverty in a world where people will be able to practice their rights as human beings and citizens in a dignified way. At the same time, the natural environment will be facilitated to play its regenerating role by avoiding biodiversity loss and waste accumulation in the biosphere and the geosphere. Richness in diversity in all sectors of the natural, cultural, and social environment is a basic component for a stable ecosystem and for the safety and resilience of every community.

In an era where globalisation is often perceived as the dominance of market economy providing identical goods for different peoples it is essential to safeguard diversity and identity. One application of content and idea the Mediterranean Information Office for Environment, Culture and Sustainable Development (MIO-ECSDE)⁸ together with the Government of Greece, UNEP/MAP, and UNESCO launched in Johannesburg was the Type II Initiative, “Mediterranean Education Initiative for Environment and Sustainability” (MEDIES), which tries to demonstrate how formal, non-formal, and informal educators (schools’ and NGOs’ networks) could place EfES in the center of policy options together with regulation, public participation, economic, and technological tools. The core of this initiative is a network of educators and schools in countries around the Mediterranean basin which will implement the integrated educational programs on cross-cutting themes such as water and waste. The educational material that will be used during the first year is the package, “Water in the Mediterranean,” drafted by postgraduate students of environmental education under expert guidance, elaborated by joint-groups of formal and informal educators in 6 Mediterranean countries and translated and published in many Mediterranean countries. All interested formal or non-formal educators will be facilitated to participate through a webpage, operational by the beginning of 2003. The educational material will be available on line on a rotational basis and the webpage will be regularly updated with all projects in each Mediterranean country. Educators participating in the network will be

able to interact, send comments, or have on-line discussions during and after the process of implementation of the various educational activities.

Notes

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2. The Dakar Framework for Action, Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitments was adopted by the World Education Forum, Dakar, Senegal, 26-28 April 2000.
3. “United Nations Millennium Declaration” Resolution was adopted by the General Assembly, September 2000.
4. “ERA-21” is available at www.mio-ecsde.org.
5. “Draft Plan of Implementation for the World Summit on Sustainable Development.” Commission on Sustainable Development Acting as the Preparatory Committee for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Bali, Indonesia, 27 May-7 June 2002.
6. “Environment and Society: Education and Public Awareness for Sustainability.” Proceedings of the Thessaloniki International Conference organized by UNESCO and the Government of Greece (8-12 December 1997). Edited by M. Scoullos, Athens, 1998.
7. “Water in the Mediterranean.” M. Scoullos, A. Alamei, A. Boulouxi, V. Malotidi, and S. Vazeou, Educational Package, MIO-ECSDE and GWP-Med, Athens, 2001.
8. MIO-ECSDE, the Mediterranean Information Office for Environment, Culture, and Sustainable Development is a Federation of Mediterranean Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) for the Environment and Development. MIO-ECSDE acts as a technical and political platform for the intervention of NGOs in the Mediterranean. In cooperation with Governments, International Organizations and other socioeconomic partners, MIO-ECSDE plays an active role for the protection of the environment and the sustainable development of the Mediterranean Region.