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Education for Responsible Citizenship and Sustainable Development

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Abstract

This paper deals with the contribution of Citizenship Education for Sustainable Development. It focuses on three aspects: a) Education for Responsible Citizenship (ERC), b) Ethic Economy for Sustainable Development, c) Enhancing the sustainable behaviour of people, both individually and in groups, for contributing to sustainable development.

Civic education in formal, non formal and informal ways involves a variety of cognitive and attitudinal strands, it concerns students' knowledge and conceptual understandings, interests, skills and competences, values, attitudes and dispositions to get involved.

There is considerable discussion as to what constitutes 'effective' education and training for active and responsible citizenship. The role of school is consistent in preparing young people for their task of citizens: contents, school ethos, classroom climate, school participation, teaching methods and tools, particularly schoolbooks are very important in the formal education. Active teaching and learning approaches offer opportunities for interaction between educators and learners, between learners themselves, and between learners and the topic.

Education for Responsible Citizenship can support citizens (as customers, investors, shareholder and consumers, as purchaser of services, like ethical banking etc., as employers, as members of governmental and non governmental Institutions and organizations) to become aware of the relevance of their roles in order to further promote the expansion of sustainable development and to appreciate the advantages of corporate activities all over the world. All this can strengthen the commitment of the persons working with ethic aims in all sectors (economy, environment, education, sport, tourism etc.). As a consequence, all the work CSR companies do, in order to become more engaged in society, is fairly recognized and rewarded and such companies are better able to benchmark themselves against the performance of different enterprises and future generations can take advantages of the sustainable development .

The purpose of this paper is dealing with the contribution of Citizenship Education for Sustainable Development. The text is organized in three parts: Education for Responsible Citizenship (ERC) to civic behaviour; Ethic Economy for Sustainable Development; and, Enhancing the Sustainable Behaviour of people, both individually and in groups, for contributing to sustainable development.

Education for Responsible Citizenship (ERC)

Education for Responsible Citizenship (ERC) is a premise for enhancing responsible civic behaviour of both individuals and organizations, and also of political parties and

enterprises, in order to foster sustainable human development. The term 'citizenship' mainly denotes a legal status and the juridical relationship between the citizen and the state. Citizenship can be perceived also as related to the knowledge and exercise of rights and responsibilities, as well as to civil values (reliability, sense of belonging, participation, social justice, loyalty, solidarity and respect for diversity), attitudes and dispositions. Citizenship ranges from socio-cultural to political and economic dimension of citizenship (Audigier, 2000), all closely connected among each other. Heater and Oliver suggested individuals to become citizens when they actually practice civil virtue and good citizenship; such citizens' example is able to teach others citizenship, while stressing practice and participation. Citizenship, in this sense, can be seen as a duty (Heater and Oliver, 1994). Active Citizenship can be explained as Civic Engagement in society, in community, and/or in political life; an engagement characterized by mutual respect and non-violence, in harmony with the respect of Human Rights (Ogris, Westphal, 2006). Active citizenship requires the ability to engage in action for social change, the establishment of active solidarity, and the extension of rights (Ross, 2007, p. 5). The term 'responsible citizenship' closely inter-related and mutually supportive Education for democratic citizenship and human rights education, it underlines the readiness, the competence and the engagement to behave in responsible way according to the situation; it implies also the thinking about advantages of civic habits of persons, workers, customers and entrepreneurs in the society and, on the contrary, the disadvantages of the lack of civic values both in human and economic field.

Many countries promote citizenship education in the formal school curriculum in their educational legislation and referring official documents, produced by the National and International Institutions: National Ministries, UNESCO, UNO, the Council of Europe (2005, 2010), the European Union¹ etc. The teaching / learning of civics at school may be provided as a single separate subject, or it can be integrated into several subjects, such as history, social studies, geography, philosophy or religious / ethics education) as a cross-curricular theme, some times with participatory school culture, in extracurricular activities (participation at school and in the community etc.).

Very important is that civic education reaches the interiority (conscience) of the learners and that responsible civic behaviour becomes a habit, i.e. a part of the one's own identity.

Civic education involves a variety of cognitive and attitudinal strands, it concerns students' knowledge and conceptual understandings, interests, skills and competences, values, attitudes and dispositions to get involved. Competence are intended as the ability to apply knowledge, know-how and skills in a stable/recurring or changing situation; two elements are crucial: applying what one knows and can do to a specific task or problem, and being able to transfer this ability between different situations (Chisholm, 2005). It is a result of formal, non-formal and informal learning; Formal Education is defined as education provided in the system of schools, colleges, universities and other formal

¹The development of active citizenship is one strand of the EU's strategy; the Lisbon process set the goal for Europe and the "Active citizenship" in the second education objective, The Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (2005) place civic competence, along with interpersonal, intercultural and social competences, conceived to help implement Community programmes, policies and objectives.

educational institutions (school, curricula, teachers' training, training methodologies, available resources); non-formal education" means any planned programme of education designed to improve a range of skills and competences, outside the formal educational setting, informal education means the lifelong process whereby every individual acquires attitudes, values, skills and knowledge from the educational influences and resources in his or her own environment and from daily experience (family, neighbourhood, examples by the governors and by the society, media etc.).

UNESCO underlines the promotion of Sustainable Development reminds the importance of that as general aim for all teaching and learning work, not limited within the UNESCO project. The United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014), for which UNESCO is the lead agency, seeks to integrate the principles, values, and practices of sustainable development into all aspects of education and learning, in order to address the social, economic, cultural and environmental problems we face in the 21st century.

Ethic Economy for Sustainable Development

Sustainable Development and ethic economy seem to be no longer a wishful thinking for the future of Europe and of our world. The concept of sustainability was introduced in 1987 by the Brundtland Report. "Sustainable development means development that meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs" (Brundtland, 1987, p.43). It means the transformation of socially responsible principles into commercial value (Schwab, 2008, p.107) through day-to-day activities, by using corporate powers and resources in ways that benefit rather than damage the social, economic and environmental conditions in which we live. In fact responsible civic behaviour identifies good corporate citizenship as one of the new priorities for the next years and decades in order to make healthy choices. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) (Crane et.al., 2008), responsible business and corporate social opportunity are concepts whereby organizations consider the interests of society by taking responsibility for the impact of their activities on customers and suppliers, while operating with a perspective broader and longer than their own immediate, short-run financial returns. CSR incorporates a host of concepts and practices, it implies that a company's conduct extends beyond the statutory obligation to comply with laws, voluntarily taking further steps, according to the nature of the enterprise (agriculture, transport, energy, landholding, banking, brokerage or financial engineering). Core concepts of business engagement is adequate corporate governance, which implies that a company complies with local and international laws, with transparency and accountability requirements, with ethical norms, and social codes of conduct. A shared deep professional ethic is required for all members at all levels: for decision makers, for managers and for workers. A key part of corporate governance is the development and implementation of internal programmes in order to promote ethics, moral standards, socially acceptable practices, or training which helps employees make ethical decisions whenever possible, which helps as well in fostering in-house efforts to prevent bribery and corruption.

Taking responsibility for its impact on society means in the first instance, that a company accounts for its actions. CSR can be measured through the so-called triple

bottom-line accountability, according to which a company reports not only on its financial results but also on environmental and social responsibilities (the Global Reporting Initiative is a programme, launched in 1997, with guidelines for sustainability reporting, the publishing of an organization's economic, environmental, and social performance and impact), where regulation in itself leads to burdensome legal processes bogged down in interpretations of the law and debatable grey areas.

Responsible actions are to be found in many fields: 1. Human Rights, peace, justice, poverty reduction and hunger eradication, sustainable relationship between the human being and the technology and against mercification of the human being, 2. respect for the environment (the Kyoto Protocol, Copenhagen, beyond petroleum environmental tilt, and the management of resources, energy conservation and alternative energy, water shortages, decisions aimed at drastically reduce the pollution, 3. adherence to labour standards such as good working conditions, employee relations (ethic recruitment of workers, attention to diversity, implementation of workplace safety standards, pensions for when workers retire), 4. health care (health of workers and of people in general, strong actions against infectious diseases and pesticides, against unequal global distribution of wealth), 5. guaranteeing regular fair trade purchases, by cultivating transparent relationships with customers, public bodies, shareholders, communities and other stakeholders, by providing necessary information, by avoiding to misguide or ill-inform investors, by training suppliers and clients to ensure that a product or service can be effectively and safely used, 6. financial and lobbying, while excluding mafia connections and the laundering of dirty money, 7. social investing in areas and in ways in which the companies can contribute meaningfully, even if the core of CSR is less focused on charitable efforts and on volunteering corporate philanthropy.

A big challenge of CSR at a global level is operating worldwide as corporate citizens with respect to labour standards and impact on the human and natural environments even away from the countries with severe restrictions, following guidelines and a code of conduct. That requires to get rid of the Milton Friedman's idea, that the enterprise has the only responsibility to maximize the on profit and the returns to its shareholders (Friedman, 1962, p. 32).

Adopting CSR practices can bring a number of advantages to the enterprise itself in multiple ways including reduced costs, improved bottom lines, the improved perception and a better public image, a building of reputation for integrity and best practice, a raising of trust with the public and with government (to facilitate access to capital f.i.); it also implies preventing the likelihood of corruption scandals or environmental accidents for breaching laws or moral norms.

Organizations also see secondary benefit in increasing employee loyalty and pride in the company, as employer's conduct at all levels is expected to interiorize work rules as well. It is a danger when corporations adopt CSR programs only for the potential benefit they enjoy through adding visibility to their policies and activities.

Enhancing the sustainable behaviour of people, both individually and in groups for contributing to sustainable development

Things can change only when people are well informed and sincerely convinced about the value of ideas and measures. Education for Responsible Citizenship can help in supporting awareness of population for sustainable development and willingness of corporations for CSR. It plays a role in building customer loyalty based on information and distinctive ethical values. When people fully understand, then they appreciate and price CSR, while choosing their products and services, by preferring companies that guarantees reliability at all levels.

If citizens (as customers, investors, shareholder and consumers, as purchaser of goods and services, like ethical banking etc., as employers, as members of governmental and non governmental Institutions and organizations all over the world become aware of the relevance of their roles in order to further promote the expansion of CSR among enterprises, corporate companies, in their turn, will improve their competitiveness and their motivation to be involved in society improvement. Interest in business ethics shows an acceleration during the last decades; profit has not always considered to be the only valid criterium to measure the task of managing economy, Many companies now place importance on values and develop ethics codes (e.g. Code of Vendor Conduct, social responsibility charters).

And S. and Sen A. (1996) point out that concerns for the traditional dimensions of economic development, an approach to the wealth maximization, are in contrast the human development. New indicators of well being are welcome. The most used and well-known index of development is the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita; complementary to it is the Human Development Index (HDI) which was launched by the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP), it was devised by the economist ul Haq M. in 1990 and in the following years with the help of a group of well known development economists (among others A. Sen's work gave important inputs) (Haq ul, 1995; McGillivray, White, 2006, pp. 183-192).

Three main dimensions are included in the HDI: a) life expectancy at birth, b) knowledge and education, as measured by the adult literacy rate and the combined primary, and c) gross enrolment ratio, standard of living, as indicated by the natural logarithm of gross domestic product per capita at purchasing power parity.

Although the Human Development Index has been criticised on a number of grounds, it is a good improvement in the way to measure well being. For this fact many Institutions adopt alternative indicators to measure development (Informal and formal volunteering at least once a month in the last 12 months, Source Citizenship Survey CLG; Perceptions of anti-social behaviour, Source BCS Home Office; Children in relative low-income households (a) before housing costs (b) after housing costs, Source DWP; Positive mental health, Source NHS Health Scotland etc.).

There is only a slight interest in the practice of citizenship. One of the reasons for the lack of civic interest is to be found in the diffused feeling of the uselessness of civic engagement. In fact nowadays the traditional forms of participation are of little effect. Instead the citizens have more power when they take steps together for sustainable forms of economic behaviour. That is why it is advisable that ERC concentrates on the economic aspects of citizenship too. In a democratic society, ERC has to be improved in

view of enhancing the responsible behaviour of people.

There is considerable discussion as to what constitutes 'effective' education and training for active citizenship. I'll stress some basic elements as possible solutions for ERC in schools' influence decision making in cultural, political and economic sectors. Schools, families and society are basic actors in educational field and the mass media are powerful opinion makers. The role of school is consistent in preparing young people for their role of citizens: school ethos, classroom climate, school participation, citizenship norms have an high correlation with civic and social engagement. Teaching methods and tools, particularly schoolbooks (Bombardelli 2009) are very important in the formal education; transmissive methodologies (as lectures) and teacher-centred approaches pass on content without actively involving the learners. In contrast active teaching and learning approaches (workshops, cooperative learning, peer tutoring, inquiries by the pupils, role play, case study etc.) offer more opportunities for interaction between educators and learners, between learners themselves, and between learners and the topic. Of course the (initial and in service) training of teachers for ERC should be a major goal of educational policies of all countries.

The research and the use of indicators (Ogris and Westphal 2005 etc.) to evaluate policy in the area of active citizenship (Hoskins, 2009) needs further work, because there is a considerable compliance gap between policy and implementation in this field. Civic education, in formal, non formal and informal ways can support citizens to become aware of the advantages of corporate activities, and in appreciating the complex challenges CSR companies face and in adopting ethical consumption, while preferring the purchase of a certain product because it is made and traded in a way that is not damaging the environment. All this can strengthen the commitment of the persons working with ethic aims in all sectors, including enterprises, banking systems, and even research and culture and sport, in view of a sustainable future. As a consequence, all the work CSR companies do, in order to become more engaged in society, is fairly recognized and amply rewarded and such companies are better able to benchmark themselves against the performance of different enterprises. Educated people will be able to discover when corporations adopt CSR programs only as superficial window-dressing, to distract the public from ethical questions posed by their core operations.

Concluding remarks

In a democratic society, the awareness and the engagement of competent and responsible citizens can in fact influence the decision making in personal, social, cultural, political and economic fields. If all citizens become more aware of the environmental, political and social implications of their day-to-day decisions and of the daily behaviour related to their environmental and ethical concerns, through - requiring information about the production standards and processes, - through socially responsible investing, - consumer behaviour, opinion making, boycotting, - exercising collective pressure to support and price CSR, the ensuing result will consequently be the development of community that holds businesses responsible for their actions is growing and that further promotes sustainable development and the expansion of CSR.

Sustainable Development and Corporate Social responsibility seem to be no longer an

option; awareness in economic issues is a new effective way of participating in democracy. However, this practice is far from being fully consistent or universally accepted and we do need ERC. In this paper was argued that information, advanced education and training in Education for Responsible Citizenship are likely to be the best way in supporting sustainable development and economic actions with ethical implications, and that top down and bottom up approaches together can improve sustainable development in human, environmental and economic field.

In fact Responsible Citizenship is linked not only to a particular territory at local, regional, and national level, but there is a closed interdependence of political issues in each country and in each region. Such awareness of a common shared future should contribute in building up civic behaviour worldwide.

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