

European Conference  
**Cities and Urban Spaces: Chances for Cultural and Citizenship Education**

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# Report

## Workshop VI Living in Green Cities: The Significance of Cultural and Citizenship Education for Sustainable Urban Development

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### Scientific Inputs:

Eric van der Kooij, City of Amsterdam (The Netherlands)  
Manfred Wirtitsch, The Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture (Austria)

### Project Presentations:

“YPAC – Youth Parliament of Alpine Convention”  
presented by Irmgard Senhofer, Moritz Schwarz & Federica Waldenberger, Academic Gymnasium  
Innsbruck (Austria)  
“Make the link – Climate exChange”  
presented by Veronica Persson, Citizenship Foundation (UK)  
“htl donaustadt”  
presented by Gerhard Lindner, Rahul Sharaf & Natalie Strohmayer, htl donaustadt (Austria)

### Moderation:

Manfred Wirtitsch, The Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture (Austria)

Education is crucial for achieving sustainable development, both in the broader context of social life and in the specific context of cities and urban spaces. The workshop on Living in Green Cities dealt with the impact of cultural and citizenship education in cities and urban spaces. Scholars and practitioners from all over Europe shared their knowledge and discussed what chances and challenges are faced by education in the green city of today. The workshop was structured as a puzzle and each of the speakers delivered an often different but complementary part of the whole picture. Manfred Wirtitsch enclosed the overall frame of the topic and spoke about education for sustainable development (ESD) in the context of the current UN Decade (2005-2014). Eric van der Kooij continued narrowing down to the chances for participation of communities in the creation of a vision of the future sustainable city. Veronica Persson subsequently focused on how we can rebuild cities into green cities by empowering young people and engaging them in the decision-making process. The students involved in the Youth Parliament of the Alpine Convention as well as those from the htl donaustadt college in Vienna completed the picture by giving examples of both, educational measures and youth participation in projects on sustainable development of cities.

### Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

The UN Decade for ESD goes beyond sustainable development and encompasses different educational approaches. Basically, to carry out the UN recommendations, states need to implement the UN strategy into the national strategy for education. Manfred Wirtitsch talked about his home country Austria, where this process took five years, so half time period and in many countries the strategy has not been implemented at all. The content of the strategy is influenced by the Key Action Themes, which include Gender Equality, Health Promotion, Environment, Rural Development, Cultural Diversity, Peace and Human Security, Sustainable Urbanisation and Sustainable Consumption. One of the big successes of the Austrian strategy for education for sustainable development as part of the education for a democratic citizenship (EDC) is its adoption to the EU ESD Strategy in 2006. So what the Austrian government proposes is an approach to ESD from the perspective of EDC. Manfred Wirtitsch explained EDC as a way “*to teach, to empower and to enable the individual for participation in a democratic society in an adequate way*”, whereas ESD deals with the next level, or “*how does a democratic society learn how to deal with limited resources [...]*”.

So the educational measures need first to address the individual, starting with gaining competences, which include opinion forming, activeness to adopt and occupy an own position, competence of gaining knowledge and using various methods. Then on the level of democratic society attention should be paid to 1) global history for global learning, 2) intercultural history for intercultural learning, 3) global thinking – local acting and 4) individual responsibility for a democratic society. Manfred Wirtitsch showed the actual implementation of the measures with an example where students are supposed to work with a dilemma of a family living in poor circumstances where the girl child is supposed to work to support the family. Students are confronted with questions about Gender, Education, Parenthood, Peace, Wealth and Health Protection.

### Good Practice

Further examples focusing on education and sustainability this time in the narrow context of urban development were delivered with the three projects presented at the workshop. Veronica Persson talked about **Climate exChange**, an initiative about empowerment of young people between 11 and 19 years in order to be able to participate in the decision-making process concerning sustainability and climate change. She talked about the project as a “way to link education and sustainable urban development in order to make a positive change in the attitude of young people and the community towards climate change”. The initiative promotes active learning, dialogue and actual climate change by linking schools and youth groups in different countries, in Africa and in Europe.

How the project works: the main idea is to raise awareness of climate change through information. The materials used include seven teaching units in different languages and the internet as the most efficient tool of communication where the young people from 369 schools can exchange their knowledge and experience. Another step is active citizenship training like building up competences in order to empower the students to run their own climate campaigns in their countries.

The project **YPAC** (Youth Parliament of Alpine Convention) is also based upon the dialogue between students from different countries, this time united around the region of the Alps. The YPAC initiates parliamentary meetings where topics relevant for the region are discussed. At the end of the process the students come up with recommendations, which are handed in to the Alpine Convention. The recommendations are not binding but the committees at the convention can take them into consideration, especially when they decide upon measures, concerning young people.

In general the parliamentary simulations boost active participation of young people in their region, help students form their own opinions on an issue, be it of ecological, economical or cultural relevance, and makes them take responsibility in the decision-making process.

Responsibility but in this case particularly for the environment is also what students from the Austrian College **htl donaustadt** learn in a very early stage of their studies. The main focus of the numerous projects initiated at the school – both as part of the curricular and extra-curricular – is sustainability at the local, regional and national level. They develop different strategies for ecological businesses. One of the results is a project with the Austrian power provider “Verbund” for the renaturation of pressure pipelines out of use with the goal to have the ecosystem completely recovered in 10 to 15 years. Another project is dealing with software, which helps companies optimise their environmental costs. Further events organised by the school are the “Night of Sustainability” and the “Laugh Club”. Students at the htl donaustadt college learn to think and act in a responsible way concerning the environment and transfer their knowledge and practice to entrepreneurs which is a good starting point for themselves to become someday responsible entrepreneurs with sustainable businesses. So good education is not only a driving force towards positive change but also towards changing attitudes on sustainability. Participation goes hand in hand with education and is as important as the latter.

Eric van der Kooij talked in his presentation about the ways of active participation on what the city of the future could be.

### **The future city**

The core question was “What should the city of 2040 look like?”. The inability to answer this question quite open showed that what cities nowadays lack is a vision of what they should be. The role of the community is to contribute to the vision and thus to sustainability. As Amsterdam, where Eric van der Kooij is working for the government as urban designer, has a long planning tradition, a lot has been done so far on sustainable development. Now the task of the government is to involve the community in the process of creation of its future. The city of Amsterdam has started a number of initiatives to deliver residents and visitors platforms to share their thoughts and join the overall discussion. Eric van der Kooij underlined “story-telling turned to be the best ground for planning practices in Amsterdam, as planning has to do with 80% communication and 20% imagination”. So the exhibitions or the online platforms like [www.binnen30minuten.nl/](http://www.binnen30minuten.nl/) are tools not overburdened with legislative and financial details, but offer instead a “space to dream and create public awareness and innovative solutions that become accelerating powers, rather than solving day-to-day problems”.

So going back to the specific topic of the workshop a few general statements and recommendations have been made.

### **Recommendations**

#### *Chances of cultural and citizenship education in the context of city development/ urban spaces*

The environment of urban spaces has a huge and simultaneously unique advantage – it is a place, which has the potential to bring people from different cultures together in a very natural way. The more diverse cities become, the more important the issue of hospitality turns. So cities offer a natural surrounding for gatherings of people around different social activities which combined with educational measures can be a tremendous contribution to combating fear of the otherness which has to be appreciated in a respectful manner instead. Integration is not an issue concerning only different ethnic groups, but also groups from different social and economic background as different habits lead to isolation.

So, in order to use the chances for cultural and citizenship education, the proper conditions should be created. The responsibility for the creation of these conditions lies both with the democratic society and the authorities. Some good examples about initiatives that invite people with different backgrounds to involve other people in their social activities were quoted from Amsterdam and Trieste. Among these are cooking events, and campaigns by Douwe Egberts or OMO, which has brought people to meet up for a coffee or on the street for a street battle. In Trieste there are youth communal clubs where young people can go and meet other young people for different activities like music, sports, and arts. But many cities are lacking public spaces for youngsters and this is a task for the authorities to solve. Next to the physical urban spaces also virtual ones could be used as an additional platform for participation and decision-making but only as a complementary mean.

*Additional benefit (new perspectives and conclusions) by thinking in categories of urban (cultural and citizenship) education*

One of the biggest benefits for cities by thinking in educational categories could be filling the gap between the planning tradition, which is quite physical and the practical and actual demands from public urban spaces. Focusing on citizenship education in urban development means that people will be incorporated in the process itself before the actual planning takes place and this is the biggest challenge. Society, seen in the frame of space is mobile in its compounding parts, which makes both inclusion and exclusion possible. So people should be empowered to dare having a vision of their city and be encouraged to take part in the decision-making processes about their urban environment.