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WORLD ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CONGRESS

**8<sup>TH</sup> WEEC Planet and People**

- how can they develop together?

5. (Re) emerging concepts for environmental stewardship and sustainability

### **Pathways to a possible world: conflicts, participation and environmental education**

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#### **Presentation format:** Oral

**Introduction:** The management of the environment and of natural resources is often associated with the development of conflicts, among different stakeholders but also among people of different ages and gender. In the future, conflictual dynamics are likely to escalate and become globalised, involving actors and geographical areas that may be very far from one another.

In order to prevent, understand, and resolve conflicts, participation is increasingly crucial. Yet, the discourse on participation – on that virtuous process generating ideas, projects, and actions, fed by dialogue, discussion, negotiation, construction of consensus, commitment, and responsibility – seems to be disappearing. Despite much talk on bottom-up decisional processes, personalisms and leadership are gaining ground and top-of-the-class behaviours, victimhood, individualism, lack of confidence, and dejection are becoming widespread.

On the other hand, new scenarios of active citizenship open up, due to the need of a shared management of "commons" which will impact on the reformulation, design and implementation of public policies for an ecologically sustainable economy.

**Objectives:** The key objective of this work is to present the results of a discussion group among various actors of Environmental Education (EE) on the topic of conflicts and participation. The group focused on discussing the state of the art and the potential need to redefine objectives, role, and methods of EE in a changing society.

**Methods:** The working group was established within the budding Italian WEEC network. It came together three times in 2014 (in Venice, Genoa, and Bergamo) and kept collaborating remotely between one meeting and the next.

17 people from very different EE backgrounds and sectors (academia and research, natural parks, public administration, NGOs and associations) participated in the discussion, sharing their experiences and analysing best practices.

**Results:** The working group approached the subject of “conflicts and participation” from different points of view, discussing, for instance, the role of public administration, school system, research, and ICT. Various

aspects of participation were analysed, such as the evolution of its form and language, the ways in which ideas are circulated and best practices implemented, and a certain tendency to swing between purity and compromise. Lastly, it was decided to further investigate the issue of participation among the younger generations.

**Conclusion:** The activities of the working group made it possible to achieve a greater awareness of the topic, highlighting the need to promote the importance of participation in preventing and resolving environmental conflicts, while also emphasising the key role of EE. Furthermore, the group focused on the difficulties encountered in holding continued discussions among actors which are heterogeneous and distant from one another, as well as on the opportunities offered by the new Italian WEEC network to overcome said difficulties.

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