



Word of guest editors

A complex network of causal relations between environmental issues, expected unlimited economic growth, and social issues (from the world's population growth to wars) is the reality of modern times. It is in this context that the role and significance of sustainable development and education can and should be considered. The concept of sustainable development has been developed as a strategy of harmonisation, or rather reconciliation, of economic and social developmental goals with the limitations and specificities of our environment. In its broadest sense, the aim of the concept is to reestablish a disrupted harmony between nature and humanity, and foster harmony among human beings, as the World Commission on Environment and Development stated clearly in its report *Our Common Future* as early as 1987. The same report contains a definition of sustainable development which insists that the needs of present generations must be met, along with catering for the needs of the future ones. This is the concept of development that must be environmentally appropriate, and socially acceptable – it includes altruism (the basic needs of *all people* must be met and everyone should be provided with opportunities for a better life) and (parental) care for posterity, in other words, inter-generational responsibility. Though this is the widely accepted and quoted definition of sustainable development, it still remains somewhat contentious. Many authors have sensed in it, and justifiably criticised, a hidden anthropocentrism, while different interpretations of the definition are nothing more than a manifestation of a bigger problem which revolves around the question what is it that should be *sustained*: natural resources for merely functional reasons or nature itself, beyond its usefulness to humankind. On the other hand, the solution for the current and interrelated problems in the environment, economy, and society should be sought in the very causes. The causes are many, but we will allow ourselves on this occasion to identify the modern man's preoccupation with material gains and consumption as a common denominator of all (or at least the most of) problems. Overconsumption is the root of all environmental issues. In addition, the focus on satisfying material needs distances people from their own spiritual development and other (immaterial) values, it creates or, at least, contributes to our insensitivity towards nature and other human beings. Therefore, if human beings could manage to shift their focus away from the satisfaction of material needs (more precisely – wants), that might be a starting point for achieving the goal of sustainable development: to reestablish and foster harmony between human beings and nature, as well as among people in general. However, just the opposite might be true as well: by developing the humans' sensitivity towards nature and other people, the problems of obsession with material gains and consumption could, at least, be alleviated. Despite many dilemmas and problems, the importance of the sustainability concept is immeasurable, while, based on the above-mentioned observations, its implications on education and its role in the given context can also be drawn.

At all conferences organised by the United Nations (Rio de Janeiro conferences in 1992 and 2012; Johannesburg, 2002; New York, 2015), which were important for the global evolution of sustainable development and the strengthening of a collective responsibility in line with the principles of the concept,

a consensus was reached on education as a crucial factor in the dissemination of sustainability values. The significance of education in this context was further emphasised when the UN proclaimed the period 2005-2014 as a Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. In other words, the future of sustainable development and transformation of human society into a sustainable one depend on the appropriate system of knowledge and values, as well as the ability of individuals to implement that knowledge and values in everyday life, and education is a powerful tool for making these changes happen. Education should thereby be focused on important objectives, such as nurturing love and respect for nature, development of relevant competencies and skills to use the Earth's resources at a pace which will enable it to renew itself, as well as developing justice, solidarity, peace-making and tolerance. Several prerequisites must be met, if we want to realise the goals of sustainability and let the education fulfil its important role. First, sustainable development should be incorporated at all levels of formal education, from preschool age to university. Furthermore, the issues of (un)sustainability include serious problems and challenges that require life-long learning in order to be addressed. A successful integration of the sustainable development goals in any educational system also requires taking into consideration all specificities of the concept, while one of the most important characteristics of sustainable development is a functional unity of environmental protection and economic and social development. This unity calls for a holistic and simultaneous approach to all interrelated issues in this field, which means and solutions to individual problems depend on the awareness of the whole. This approach also requires interdisciplinary solutions, by addressing an issue from different perspectives and by applying different methodologies. The last, but not the least, sustainability goals must be adapted to suit not only the characteristics of the school/study subjects they are integrated in, but also the age of school children.

This special issue looks at the problems pertaining to education for sustainable development from different perspectives, while adhering to a holistic and interdisciplinary character of the concept. The common denominator of all papers published in this issue is a deep insight into the current state of affairs with regard to education for sustainable development, including the predictions of the expected changes in this area, based on the significance of the educational concept and the problems arising from the implementation of its key objectives. At the same time, this special issue reflects diversity primarily in terms of the selection of the research topics. The first three papers are scientific reviews. They tackle some issues related to the relationship between sustainable development and education, offer a critical perspective, solutions and implications on education. Bonett examines the values of sustainability which have already made an impact on education, as well as the ones that should influence education in the future. Andevski offers a critical perspective on the development of environmental education and its transformation into sustainable education. Kundačina and Visković elaborate on learning strategies as a prerequisite for the development of environmental competencies. The remaining seven papers explain the results of empirical research on the role of education in the context of sustainable development. Several authors deal with different aspects of integration of education for sustainable development as a whole, or specific segments of it, in education, and offer solutions for the successful integration of the concept in primary schools (Skribe Dimec; Veinović; Stanišić) and at university level (Starč; Orlović Lovren). Some authors (Srbinovski; Jovanović and Živković) have identified and analysed the impact of specific factors on the formation of the environmental worldview and pro-environmental behaviour. Some papers discuss sustainable development in general and from a phenomenological perspective, while others offer empirical analysis and interpretation of problems at local level, in terms of the realisation of sustainability goals in the education systems of different states (Slovenia, Serbia, Macedonia). This special issue also illustrates the fact that education for sustainable development is the topic of research of experts in different fields, including philosophers, pedagogues, methodologists, management experts, andragogists. Given our observations expressed earlier in the

text, the special issue offers different aspects of the holistic approach, inherent to sustainable development and the educational concept based on it.

There is a lot of room for the improvement of the quality of education for sustainable development, in general and in its specific aspects, both in theory and in practice. However, all of us who deal with these issues know that we are not looking only at the potential for the improvement of the concept of sustainable development. We are talking about our *obligation* to make it happen. All scientific and expert literature written to date has confirmed this necessity, and many questions were addressed in the studies and papers included in this special issue, which was one of its goals. We also believe that the special issue will contribute to promoting this important educational concept and its better implementation at all levels of formal education. While supporting the relevance of different goals of education for sustainable development with sound arguments, the papers published in this issue also look at the obstacles to the realisation of these goals. Moreover, the papers can be viewed as a pool of ideas for a more efficient integration of sustainability goals in different levels of formal education.

Jelena Stanišić¹

Zorica Veinović²

1 jstanisic@ipi.ac.rs

2 zorica.veinovic@uf.bg.ac.rs