Chapter 55
Social Media–Based Communities of Practice for Education in Citizenship and Sustainability

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter we support the view that communities of practice (CoPs) with the support of social media can serve the education for citizenship and sustainability, with a clear benefit on citizens' culture towards future public reforms. This has led to the development and implementation of the policy for sustainability, which is a European and national strategic objective.

The chapter begins with a small analysis of public sector reform towards sustainability and the presentation of the basic principles of education for sustainability and citizenship (ESDC) and the model of CoPs and the social media that facilitate their use. It focuses on the analysis of the three models of belonging -engagement, imagination, alignment- in the application of CoPs for ESDC. In combination with this analysis we demonstrate that CoPs can be supported by social media.

Finally the chapter reinforces the view that the development of such communities in education offers on the long run the ability to remodel the public sphere, strengthen public consultation, promote proposals from the citizens, promote the policy of sustainability, and finally, the efficient use of new technologies, both in society and education.

INTRODUCTION

Going through the first decade of the new millennium more and more problems appear in social, economic and environmental terms. The extended and multifaceted crisis that takes place in modern societies is a result of social inequality and conflict, increasing scarcity of natural resources and generally in situations that lead to loss of social, economic and ecological stability.

Addressing these issues is the great challenge of the new millennium and demonstrates the need to encourage active citizenship and greater social cohesion (European Commission 2000) to address social and economic change in the perspective of a democratic and sustainable world. At the same time highlight the need for public sector reform of the state. As it is phrased in the 1st Conference of European Ministers responsible for social cohesion (26-27 February 2009, Moscow, Russia)

Social cohesion is an essential condition for democratic security and sustainable development because divided and unequal societies are not only unjust, but also unstable in the long term (Davis, 2009).

An important factor in achieving these goals is the education because

Education, including formal education, public awareness and training should be recognized as a process by which human beings and societies can reach their fullest potential (Agenda 21, 36.3.).

It also emphasizes on the fact that education (formal) is important when it's turned towards education for sustainability and should be a priority for many countries in the world and combined with the overall efforts to combat poverty and promote social and economic development.

In this context two interlocking and interactive fields of educational emerge: education for citizenship and education for sustainability.

At the same time questions rise, such as: what is the content of such education, what are the critical characteristics of people that will activate them and lead them to involvement and action for sustainability, what knowledge, skills and values must be cultivated, what strategies and what tools would help in this direction?

In any case, the introduction of these fields in formal education requires more flexible curricula and adapting to new realities in terms of content and methodology because

… sustainable development calls for additional and different processes than those traditionally thought of in education…The quest for sustainability demands new approaches to involve people, rather than convey just a body of knowledge (Fien &Tilbury &., 2002, p.1 -12).

Modern democratic societies need active, informed and responsible citizens who are willing and able to take responsibility for their communities and contribute to social and political - economic processes for sustainability.

PUBLIC SECTOR REFORM TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY

During the last decade of the 20th century, due to the focus of public management reform programs and research on New Public Management (NPM) the public sector reforms have been neglected (Elke Löffler & Colin Talbot, 2004). As Talbot argues that there are "four paradoxical models that underpin the NPM: let politicians decide, let managers manage, let customers choose, let stakeholders participate" and since "tensions" between them "will not go away" he believes that "the only real issue is how best manage these contradictions" (Talbot, 2004p. 17).

Public sector has been driven to a different direction to the managerial reforms of the 1980s

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