# Chapter 13
# Exploring Different Forms of Engaging Different Publics With Environmental Sustainability

**Rita Campos**

https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4184-3269

*CES-UC, University of Coimbra, Portugal*

## ABSTRACT

*Sustainability has become a key concept for several contexts – politics, economics, education, or conservation. This chapter presents a review of some concepts of sustainability, and sustainable development and then focuses on environmental sustainability to discuss emerging trends on engaging citizen: engaging students in the classroom, engaging local communities in their regions, engaging visitors in areas of potential touristic interest. In each case, a theoretical framework is complemented by case studies illustrating how sustainability can be used to promote scientific literacy, positive changes in perceptions and attitudes for biodiversity management and conservation, and to incorporate different knowledges and ways of living. From more classical formats to collaborative and participatory processes, the examples give an overview of current work being done to endorse the values subjacent to environmental sustainability, communicating the interrelatedness between human population and the natural environment and ultimately trying to promote a healthier and sustainable planet.*

## INTRODUCTION

Sustainable Development as a global political concept was first coined in 1987, in the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) report "Our Common Future" (popularized as "Brundtland Report"). As originally stated in the report, it is a "*development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*" (WCED, 1987, p. 41). Considered as a milestone for global awareness on the need for a new development paradigm able to protect the natural resources of the planet, sustainable development has since been part of international policies looking to respect the interconnection of economic growth, social inclusion and environmental

protection as pillars for the individual and collective well-being (Sachs, 2015). The last of these efforts was put forward in 2015 by the 193 member-states of the United Nations (UN): the new Agenda for Sustainable Development, "Transforming Our World" - a formal declaration for international cooperation built around 17 goals, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs; United Nations, 2015a). The world-wide adoption of the SDGs lays the foundations for politics and societies to act, promoting responsible ways of living, integrating the three most common dimensions of sustainable development - economic, social and environmental (Imran, Alam & Beaumont, 2011; Sachs, 2015).

For the past 30 years, sustainability has become the key-concept for several contexts, such as politics, economics, education or conservation (e.g. Morelli, 2011). But different definitions can be found in the literature, as well as different uses of the word, even though the use of the concept of sustainability often underlines efforts to improve the quality of life of human societies and the health of the environment. The main goal of this chapter is to address the multi-dimensional nature of sustainable development, both at the theoretical level, considering the complexity underlying its definition, operationalisation and critics around it, and at the practical level, considering some empirical examples on how sustainability has been used in different activities and projects targeting specific groups. The literature review focused first on work that critically reflects on the construction and meaning of the concept of sustainable development and the associated political actions (in particular, the global agenda and the SDGs) and secondly on work that can illustrate current efforts to endorse the values subjacent to sustainability, with a focus on its environmental dimension. It is organize to present 1) a brief review of some main conceptualizations and critics of sustainable development, the SDGs, and the links to environmental questions; and 2) reflect on the concept of environmental sustainability, how it interconnects to all other possible dimensions of sustainability and how it can be operationalized to promote effective changes and alternatives to current economic and social systems. As such, after a short presentation of theoretical considerations and current debates around sustainable development, the discussion shifts to present examples of emerging trends on engaging citizen in diverse ways to communicate the interrelatedness between human population and the natural environment and ultimately contributing to a more just and balanced environment. Specifically, three forms of engagement, targeting different publics, are addressed: engaging students in the classroom and school settings; engaging local communities in their regions and/or in affected regions (i.e. regions affected by environmental degradation or ecological unbalance); and engaging visitors in areas of potential touristic interest.

The chapter is presented as a reflection based on previous experiences from the author, and structured around five key-questions: 1) how has the concept of sustainable development been defined?; 2) what are the underlying values and practical implications of sustainability?; 3) how can environmental sustainability be defined and related to other dimensions of sustainability?; 4) what is being done in recent years to endorse the values of environmental sustainability and protect natural (and socio-cultural) resources and systems?; 5) what can we learn from the theoretical criticisms and practical examples to push forward effective transformational alternatives able to face current planetary threats?. It does not intend to give a complete and systematic review of the topics addressed; instead it tries to contribute to current debates on sustainability discourse and how its environmental dimension is linked to other dimensions of sustainable development, and on initiatives and practices that exemplify sustainable and equitable socio-economic alternatives and/or that support paradigmatic changes. Combining a theoretical framework with examples from different parts of the planet, promoted by the author or chosen from the scientific literature to illustrate alternative practices and policies, these sections aim at illustrating how environmental sustainability can be used as a core-concept to promote scientific literacy and drive

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