

Editorial

Is Sustainability about Education for Life Satisfaction?

Arto O. Salonen 

Department of Social Sciences, University of Eastern Finland, P.O. Box 1627, FIN-70211 Kuopio, Finland; arto.salonen@uef.fi

Received: 21 January 2019; Accepted: 22 January 2019; Published: 24 January 2019



Our planet is undergoing a comprehensive transformation. As a result of this transformation, societies will be organized in such a way that the pursuit of a good life is possible in the context of the one and the only planet Earth. Sustainable societies and sustainable lifestyles are a necessity because mankind itself is the greatest threat to a sustainable future.

The fact that human values have become more diverse in recent decades is not a threat to sustainable development. The deep, ultimate values of people are usually on the side of a sustainable future. After all, hardly anyone actually wants, for example, to accelerate climate change. The real challenge is our actions. Our behavior does not always proceed in the direction of our values. It is essential to turn good thoughts into everyday actions.

Everybody strives for a good life. The ways of pursuing a good life are related to what we eat, how we move from point A to the point B, and how we consume goods and services. The global transformation is described by the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: "We resolve, between now and 2030, to end poverty and hunger everywhere; to combat inequalities within and among countries; to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies; to protect human rights and promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls; and to ensure the lasting protection of the planet and its natural resources."

What makes people happy and satisfied? Should Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) focus more on life satisfaction? Should we then help people in pursuit of greater reasons to wake up to a new day?

According to old wisdom, maximum life satisfaction can be reached when examining sufficiency. In sufficiency the focus of being is on what people already have, rather than what they lack. However, the prevailing logic of societal development is the opposite. A need for economic growth assumes that what we have now is not enough. A satisfied citizen who does not want to have more goods, commodities and services is a threat to a prosperous welfare society driven by continued economic growth. This is where the challenge lies: Economic growth is always based on use of natural resources and human input.

Non-material factors of a good life can grow forever. Therefore, the role of non-material things for human well-being is an essential issue in materialized industrialized societies. It seems that more than ever before we need a visionary policy that recognizes the power of non-material things in order to increase the life satisfaction of citizens.

Humans are social beings. Social relationships are an example of a non-material factor of life satisfaction. The identities of humans are formed by mirroring themselves in other people. In communal cultures, people are used to thinking that they are because we are. The opportunity to share the joys and sorrows of everyday life gives people strength and life satisfaction. Moreover, unconditional acceptance in social relations reduces the importance of material things.

The power of *education for life satisfaction* lies in the fact that behavioral change is sought through positive approaches instead of prohibitions and restrictions. In this way, humans' natural selfishness

can be harnessed to serve unselfish, common good goals. Maybe this approach can help us to close the gap between our values and actions.

Sustainability is a phenomenon that is based on systems thinking. Studying the interaction between life satisfaction and sustainable lifestyles can help us to conceive more comprehensively the opportunities of ESD. Sustainability is about things that make life worth living—it is about education for life satisfaction.

The Special Issue Teaching and Learning for Sustainability brings together 26 empirical and theoretical peer reviewed pieces of research from different fields in the quest for a good life on the finite planet.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.



© 2019 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).