

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

15TH INVITATIONAL SEMINAR ON ENVIRONMENTAL & SUSTAINABILITY EDUCATION RESEARCH

13–16 June 2022

Ghent, Belgium

“CHALLENGES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL &
SUSTAINABILITY EDUCATION RESEARCH
IN TIMES OF CLIMATE CRISIS”

CHANGE OF DATES



**GHENT
UNIVERSITY**



SEDwise

SUSTAINABILITY EDUCATION

Teaching & learning in the face of wicked socio-ecological problems

Since its first edition in 1993, the Invitational Seminar on Environmental Education Research series has provided a unique opportunity for researchers from around the planet to discuss critical problems, trends and issues in research on environmental and sustainability education (ESE).

From 13 to 16 June 2022, the 15th edition will be organised in Ghent, Belgium, by the Centre for Sustainable Development of Ghent University in collaboration with partners of the SEDwise network ('Sustainability Education – Teaching and learning in the face of wicked socio-ecological problems').

HISTORY & ETHOS OF THE SEMINAR SERIES

The first Invitational Seminar was organised in Denmark in 1993. Since then, every 18–24 months, seminars have been hosted in Australia, England, New Zealand, Denmark, USA, South Africa, Switzerland, Canada, Australia, Sweden, Brazil and South Africa.

For almost three decades, the Invitational Seminar on Environmental Education Research has provided a unique dialogical platform for participants worldwide to **discuss ‘face to face’ the vital issues of research development in the field**. These deliberations occurred in a specific seminar mode of collegial intellectual exchange with conversations aiming for **depth, richness and engagement**. Issues are generally discussed slowly, both during formally and informally timetabled hours. This is in sharp contrast to typically ‘fast’ and ‘short’ conference presentations. As such, the seminar series has been a rare and valuable opportunity for a relatively small group of active researchers (early, mid, later career) from different parts of the world to meet alternately in the Northern and Southern hemispheres.

THEME

The central theme of the seminar is **“Challenges for environmental and sustainability education research in times of climate crisis”**.

We welcome a rich variety of contributions that can foster critical and inspiring discussions about topical issues relevant for ESE research ‘in times of climate crisis’. This implies that the overall theme stretches beyond a narrow focus on strictly delineated ‘climate education’ and encompasses the wider challenges the climate crisis has on ESE research and practices.

Furthermore, as the root causes and effects of sustainability problems vary within different locales, so do the scientific, political and cultural frameworks that inform ESE research and practice. Recognising such different local challenges, developments and approaches raises important questions regarding the transferability of theoretical frameworks, methodologies as well as empirical results *between* and *within* North and South. We therefore welcome a wide variety of contributions which challenge us to **critically discuss developments in ESE research from different standpoints**.

SUB-THEMES

To enable rich and in-depth discussions, we invite you to address the general seminar theme “Challenges for environmental and sustainability education research in times of climate crisis” in relation to one of the sub-themes listed below. After a brief introduction, we further describe each theme through a (non-exhaustive!) list of questions which are meant to serve as an inspiration.

1) SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES AS CONTROVERSIAL EDUCATIONAL CONTENT

Sustainability issues like the climate crisis often cause controversy. They are resistant to single right answers and ready-made, simple solutions. Ethical standpoints may prove irreconcilable, facts and knowledge are sometimes contested and fierce political antagonism regularly arises. Addressing the controversial aspects of sustainability issues is a pedagogical challenge.

- To what extent does ESE research succeed in providing guidance for tackling this challenge?
- What are different local manifestations of and/or ways to handle this challenge? (How) do ESE researchers approach it differently in diverse local contexts?
- How to incorporate perspectives from other local contexts into research and education?
- Is the long-lasting debate about 'normative' versus 'pluralistic' ESE gaining or losing relevance in the face of such issues? Or should it be approached from novel perspectives and, if so, which ones?
- What, if anything, does ESE (research) have to offer for coping with increased polarisation about sustainability issues?
- How can educational systems and teaching practices deal with the complexity of sustainability issues? Are tendencies towards separation and simplification causing barriers?
- Etc.

2) EMOTIONALLY CHALLENGING AND EXISTENTIAL ISSUES IN TEACHING AND LEARNING PRACTICES

Severe and far-reaching sustainability problems can cause strong feelings of worry, anxiety and ecological grief. They can be experienced as existential in the sense of putting our mode of being, attitudes towards life and the meaningfulness of our lives at stake. The emergence of emotional reactions and existential experiences whilst dealing with sustainability issues poses complex challenges for teaching and learning.

- How can educators prepare for recognising and coping with such experiences?
- How can ESE research succeed in providing guidance for tackling these challenges? Where does it fall short in providing such support?
- To what extent is the growing attention for the emotional dimension of ESE blurring the differences between a psychological and a pedagogical approach?
- What are theoretical and methodological challenges for investigating (how students and educators cope with) existential experiences?
- Which theoretical approaches may be useful to progress ESE research on this topic?
- How are these issues perceived and dealt with in different areas of the world?
- Etc.

3) THE RELATION BETWEEN EDUCATION AND THE PURSUIT OF SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION

Over and over again, education is called upon to contribute to solving societal problems. This is also the case in the light of sustainability problems. A strong sense of urgency about the escalating climate crisis – which becomes visible in activist movements such as Fridays for Future – leads to demands for an educational response. Yet, the role of education in the pursuit of societal transformation is the topic of vibrant discussions in educational scholarship.

- How does the escalating sustainability crisis affect the conceptualisation of the purpose of education in ESE research?
- How is ESE research responding to increasing urgency and climate emergencies? Do we need alternative responses?
- How are ESE researchers and practitioners from different areas of the world dealing with specific local escalations and corresponding challenges?
- To what extent is the focus on climate emergency something to welcome? Is there reason for concern about undesirable reductionism that may distract attention from other vital issues for ESE (research)?
- Should ESE research be more disruptive or activist in times of global systemic sustainability crises and, if so, what does this imply for the content and practice of research?
- Etc.

4) BOUNDARIES BETWEEN ESE RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

A lot of – if not all – ESE research is grounded in an ambition and engagement to contribute to improving ESE practices. Yet, we often face boundaries between research, education and services to society. Crossing these boundaries and pursuing fruitful research–practice collaboration bring about a variety of challenges as well as valuable opportunities.

- How do we – or how can we – cross the boundaries between research and practice to co-create better ESE practices?
- What kind of research does this require in terms of questions to address ('objects of knowledge'), research design and empirical focus ('objects of study')?
- What are fruitful collaborative settings?
- Is there a risk of conflation of research and practice? If so, how to avoid it?
- How to understand the (complementary?) roles of researchers and practitioners and how to shape the relations between them?
- How to deal with local differences in a globalised research landscape?
- Etc.

OPEN CALL

Traditionally, the Invitational Seminar was only open to participants who received a personal invitation. Thus, the number of participants was limited in view of safeguarding the specific ethos of the seminar series. However, the field of ESE research has evolved considerably since the start of the seminar series and does no longer consist of only a handful of researchers spread around the world. As this makes it impossible to know all potential invitees, we launch this open invitation and spread it as widely as possible within the research field.

For this 15th edition, we thus warmly invite *all* ESE researchers who are interested in participating in the seminar to submit a proposal in the form of a **1–2 page essay (550–1100 words)** about a topic in ESE research related to the seminar's theme and in particular to one of the sub-themes. Since a limited number of participants is necessary to guarantee the seminar series' typical qualities like depth, richness, slowness and engagement, these essays will be reviewed and, based on the criteria outlined below, 35 applicants will be invited to the seminar. The selected contributions will be compiled into an online book.

The deadline for the submission of proposals is 15 February 2022.

GENERAL GUIDELINES & EXPECTATIONS

The invited essays differ from a typical conference proposal in the sense that they should raise and discuss **critical problems, trends, challenges and issues for the development of ESE research**, rather than presenting the results of (ongoing) research. Thus, instead of being elaborately presented during the seminar, the essays will serve to nourish an in-depth collegial intellectual exchange and dialogue between researchers from all over the world. Therefore, each contribution should in one way or another engage with questions such as:

- Is ESE research today offering adequate responses to the challenges we face?
Which blind spots and lock-ins may impede an adequate response?
- What sort of knowledge is lacking and how can we create it?
- Which theories and methodologies are over- or under-represented?
- Do we notice any promising new ways forward – empirically, theoretically and/or methodologically?
How can these be strengthened? How do they relate to established research traditions in our field?
- Are we, as researchers, facing new ethical issues?
- What does it mean to be an ESE researcher in times of climate crisis?
- How to foster academic dialogue, exchange and accumulation that respect global diversity and turn it into an asset?
- What are issues of colonisation and pathways for decolonisation in ESE research?

SELECTION CRITERIA

FOR INDIVIDUAL PROPOSALS

- Relevance of the proposal: relevance in terms of critical problems, trends and issues in ESE research; relevance in relation to the theme of the seminar as well as the chosen sub-theme
- Quality of the proposal: focus; depth; originality in relation to existing ESE research; awareness of previous work; coherence in argumentation; international perspective; promise to stimulate in-depth and engaged discussion
- 'Cutting edge' nature of the proposal: e.g. contributions raising good, challenging questions and providing not-yet fully explored suggestions for theoretical/methodological innovations

OVERALL

- Scope of international coverage: the group of participants needs to consist of ESE researchers from across the world and from a variety of research networks/communities
- Inter-generational: the group of participants needs to consist of a balanced combination of early, mid and later career researchers
- Gender-balance

SEMINAR PARTICIPATION

In line with the aim of the seminar to enable critical and in-depth discussions, participation in the Invitational Seminar requires preparation (writing an essay, submitting a 'bio', pre-reading). During the seminar, plenary input (e.g. brief introductions to sub-themes) will function as scene-setters and facilitate 'break out' discussion in a 'generative' way and workshop style after which findings and recommendations are reported back.

SUBMISSION

We invite you to submit your proposal **via the submission form**. Please keep in mind the general guidelines, expectations and selection criteria as outlined above.

[SUBMISSION FORM](#)

TIMELINE

- 15 FEBRUARY 2022** Deadline for the submission of proposals
- 31 MARCH 2022** Announcement of selection results
- 30 APRIL 2022** Deadline for registration
- 13–16 JUNE 2022** Invitational Seminar (start Monday, 13 June, with a 'Meet & Greet' dinner; end Thursday, 16 June, with a lunch; optional excursion on Friday, 17 June)

CHANGE OF DATES

ORGANISATION COMMITTEE

Katrien Van Poeck (Ghent University & Uppsala University) & Nadine Deutzkens (Ghent University), coordinators of the SEDwise network and SEDwise network members Maarten Deleye (Uppsala University & Ghent University), Jeppe Læssøe (Aarhus University), Heila Lotz-Sisitka (Rhodes University), Jonas Lysgaard (Aarhus University), Johan Öhman (Örebro University), Leif Östman (Uppsala University, Maynooth University & Ghent University), Arjen Wals (Wageningen University & Norwegian University of Life Sciences) & Ellen Vandenplas (Ghent University).

For any questions, please contact the organisation committee at invitational.seminar@ugent.be.

