

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH NETWORK (FWO-WOG)
'PUBLIC PEDAGOGY & SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGES'
KICK-OFF SYMPOSIUM | 22-24 MARCH 2017 | GHENT, BELGIUM

FOCUS OF THE NETWORK

In this network, researchers at Ghent University (BE), University of Leuven (BE), Södertörn University (SE), University of Gdańsk (PO), Uppsala University (SE), Aarhus University (DK), Örebro University (SE) and Rhodes University (SA) share a scientific research interest in the relation between education and societal transformation. They want to deepen and widen our understanding of the public role of education in the face of sustainability challenges, nourish and facilitate further theoretical and empirical research and foster much-needed interdisciplinary collaboration of political theorists, educational theorists and sustainability education researchers. Through the organisation of symposia, guest lectures and scientific collaboration the network will develop a theory of public pedagogy with a focus on sustainability challenges and address – both theoretically and empirically – questions such as: How can education play a democratic role in addressing sustainability challenges? What are vital conditions or obstacles to make this possible? What does this imply for designing sustainability education practices? What are the theoretical, methodological and empirical implications of researching sustainability education as public pedagogy?



PARTICIPANTS

Joke Vandenabeele (University of Leuven), Jonas Lysgaard (Aarhus University), Stefan Bengtsson (Uppsala University), Petra Hansson (Uppsala University), Carl Anders Säfström (Södertörn University), Leif Östman (Uppsala University), Danny Wildemeersch (KU Leuven), Erik Andersson (Örebro University), Michael Håkansson (Södertörn University), Maarten Deleye (Ghent University), Johan Öhman (Örebro University), Jeppe Læssøe (Aarhus University), Hanne De Winter (Ghent University), Hans Schildermans (Leuven University), Jan Masschelein (University of Leuven), Thomas Block (Ghent University) and Katrien Van Poeck (Ghent University).

WEDNESDAY 22ND MARCH 2017

We start the kick-off symposium on Wednesday evening by attending the first session of this year's Studium Generale. The Studium Generale is a yearly series of four sessions with public lectures that takes place in arts centre 'De Vooruit' in Ghent. The theme of 2017 is the sustainable university.

Erik Paredis

Introduction

Erik Paredis, senior researcher at the Centre for Sustainable Development, Ghent University, gives an [introduction](#) on both the Studium Generale in general and tonight's session '*Keep it complex! Towards a sustainable 21st century university*'.



René Schwarzenbach

The Sustainable 21st Century University: More than just wishful thinking?

René Schwarzenbach is the president of the platform 'Science and Policy' ScNat and president of the board of the International Sustainable Campus Network (ISCN). He gives a [presentation](#) on embedding sustainability in the contemporary and future university and focuses on the challenges that the set-up of present-day university life offers and possible ways to tackle these. Two vital principles are put forward: 'Sustainability is matter for the boss' and 'Sustainability needs to be integrated into all relevant activities within the university'. ETH Zurich is presented as an illustrative example. René concludes that, despite many good initiatives, there is still a (very) long way to go and that what is needed first and foremost is courage for cultural change.

Leif Östman

Sustainability, worldviews and education

Leif Östman, professor at the department of Education (Uppsala University) and scientific director of the research group SMED (Studies of Meaning-making in Educational Discourses), gives a [presentation](#) on worldviews in education and the importance of being aware of them in relation to including sustainability education in university programmes. Reluctance against the latter because 'sustainability is a normative concept and university education should be focused on the transfer of knowledge' does not make sense, Leif argues, since particular worldviews are always automatically and necessarily connected to the knowledge content of education – as 'companion meanings'. The three general purposes that are often attributed to education – preparation, socialisation and person-formation – are thus also connected. When preparing students by transferring scientific knowledge, for instance, is in the forefront, it is always also a matter of

offering socialisation content (e.g. specific views on nature) and person-formation content (e.g. a scientific identity as a manipulator of nature) as ‘companions’ in the background. Hence, it is impossible to avoid worldviews and person-formation in university education and important to be aware of the potential moral and political dilemmas this brings about. Critical reflection and discussion about that are therefore vital in view of designing sustainability education at the university (e.g. with a focus on enlightenment, scientism or pluralism).

The keynote lectures are followed by a brief discussion with audience questions for both speakers. The discussion covers a broad area of topics: the importance of the context of the university, the need to break away from dominant cultures, whether the biggest challenges are situated in the area of education, research or campus operations, the importance of valuing transdisciplinarity, the value of connecting education to students’ prior work experience, how to choose research priorities, the search for best practices, etc.

THURSDAY 23RD MARCH 2017

The second and third day of this kick-off symposium take place in *Monasterium PoortAckere* in Ghent.

Thomas Block

Getting to know each other. Welcome and introduction

We start the second day with an introduction and [presentation](#) by Thomas Block, promotor of this scientific research network. Thomas welcomes the participants and presents the Centre for Sustainable Development (CDO), focusing on its identity, research lines, courses and services to society. He highlights how the CDO approaches sustainability challenges as political issues with no clear solutions and pays a lot of attention to the multi-level perspective on sustainability transitions (Geels). Referring to Funtowicz and Ravetz’ work he explains that when stakes are high, values in dispute, facts uncertain and decisions urgent, ‘post-normal science’ becomes necessary. Do we also need something like ‘post-normal education’ then? And how to understand and design it? How can education question the status quo and challenge dominant, unsustainable systems?

This presentation is followed by a wide and interesting discussion. We discuss the use and misuse of models and representations of sustainable development and provide different interpretations of the place of the environment in the nested model. Furthermore, we talk about the meaning of system-challenging education, and about the question whether it is actually possible *not* to do system-challenging education. A related topic of discussion is the role and possibility of education in general in tackling societal challenges such as sustainability problems. It is argued that we should not be too idealistic regarding what education can ‘fix’. We also talk about the potential of using the multi-level perspective on sustainability transitions in educational research.

Johan Öhman & Erik Andersson

The place of democracy in the three selective traditions of environmental and sustainability education

Johan Öhman & Erik Andersson give a joint [presentation](#). First, Johan Öhman presents the three selective traditions of environmental and sustainability education (ESE), with a focus on the different fact-value relationships, the different place attributed to the democratic process and the main criticism and problems in each of these traditions. Next, he presents a case¹ that makes clear how discussions between students in pluralistic settings often end up in a pursuit of consensus. This presentation is followed by a lively discussion on a wide variety of topics. We discuss how the three traditions have been identified (on an empirical basis in Swedish schools) and how they are or can be positioned towards each other. There seems to be a huge impetus in the group to find a fourth tradition (i.e. community-based, aesthetic...). The discussion moves on to the place of democracy in the school and education in general and ends with a discussion on how education is filled with political acts.

Building further on Johan's presentation, Erik Andersson presents his research on social media discussions on the topic of climate change². He presents the Black Heart conversation 'Global warming is a hoax' and how this was less consensus driven. In the discussion that follows we focus on what makes this case so different from the analysis of classroom discussions: is it an effect of the setting (e.g. school versus informal setting), the content, the controversial nature of the opening statement, etc.? Furthermore, questions are posed such as how conflict was defined in the study and how to conceive of moral and political agency in education. It is argued that even within what has been defined as 'the pluralistic tradition', a wide variety of practices exist.

Joke Vandenabeele

Turning diversity into solidarity. An interventionist perspective

After lunch, Joke Vandenabeele [presents](#) her work on a case study in the neighbourhood 'Rabot Blaisantvest' in Ghent. It was part of a large-scale action research project in which 29 cases in the areas of work, leisure, housing and education were studied with the aim to explore under which conditions transformative forms of solidarity can emerge in a super-diverse society. Solidarity, here, is understood and investigated as a practical concern: it is about concrete practices in the here and now that involve the sharing of material and immaterial resources in ways that sustain the idea of fellowship. The presented case in Ghent, for instance, involves urban farming initiatives and the introduction of an alternative currency as a social cohesion project. Joke argues that transformative forms of solidarity are utmost educational and can be seen as minor acts of a public pedagogy. She ends her talk with presenting some ideas for a public pedagogy research agenda.

Again, a lively discussion with a lot of interesting comments takes place. We discuss the specificity of the use of the concept of solidarity, which, at first sight, is quite an old-fashioned concept. Furthermore, we focus on the specific nature of the study: When can you speak of action research? How do you define 'interventions'? How does a researcher position herself in relation with the subject? Etc. The meaning of public pedagogy within this project is also discussed and questions are raised about the interdisciplinary design of the research project.

¹ See: Johan Öhman & Marie Öhman (2013) [Participatory approach in practice: an analysis of student discussions about climate change](#), *Environmental Education Research*, 19:3, 324-341.

² See: Erik Andersson & Johan Öhman (2017) [Young people's conversations about environmental and sustainability issues in social media](#), *Environmental Education Research*, 23:4, 465-485.

Jeppe Læssøe & Jonas Lysgaard

Bildung and sustainable development in Danish folk high schools



The next session is a [presentation](#) by Jeppe Læssøe and Jonas Lysgaard about the Danish folk high schools. Explaining the specific educational focus approach of these schools and their recent interest in sustainable development issues, Jeppe and Jonas discuss their relationship with (and potential for) the pursuit of a more sustainable world. The discussion focuses mainly on two topics. First, the unique nature of the Danish folk high schools is discussed. We focus on the way they relate with the other educational forms in Denmark, what the role of the government is, and what makes them unique. Second, we

focus on the notion of ‘Bildung’ used both in the discourse of the folk high schools themselves and in the presentation. It is argued that this involves dangers as it can be easily misused to serve and strengthen a neoliberal agenda.

Jan Masschelein

What if we are wrong? University, public methodologies and collective study.

The last presentation of the day is given by Jan Masschelein who talks about how universities are (or can be) a very particular way to address societal challenges. He starts from the observation how the European Area of Higher Education and the European Research Area create two figures: the figure of ‘the independent learner’ and the figure of ‘the innovative researcher’. Jan discusses how the contemporary university is expected to offer protection and facilitation for these two figures. Through such an individualistic way of governing universities – and the associated governmentalities – a concern for a common world has been pushed into the background (or even disappeared). In contrast with this contemporary university, the notion of the ‘*universitas studii*’ is presented: a gathering or assembly of people to study. Important to realise, here, is that this is not a concept that understands the university as an institution but rather as a movement or a pedagogical form. It is something that ‘happens’ – or not happens. Next, Jan presents a concrete example: a course in which educational science students went to Athens in 2013. They walked (42 km each) and ‘mapped the city’ by following a protocol (i.e. a ‘profanated method’ without pre-defined ends) based on specific parameters, thus indicating where they observed abandoned buildings, graffiti, etc. The aim was to turn Athens into a university, to give Athens a voice that would allow it to make us think and to make us hesitate. Core elements of this course contrasted sharply with the expectations that universities face within the European Area of Higher Education and the European Research Area. Here, it was about complicating learning instead of facilitating it and about de-protecting rather than protection. It was a collective, ‘public’ form of education and research instead of the dominant, very individualistic approach to it. Becoming attentive to a common world or a matter of public concern, Jan emphasises, requires exposure, a form of distance, and an experimental ethos (radically understood in the sense of ‘not knowing what we do not know’). That is why he deliberately organised the

course in a way that would create discomfort (e.g. tiredness, which weakens intention) as a means for being attentive and worked with a protocol according which the students had to follow specific lines on a map instead of letting them walk around 'freely' – which is very 'un-free' as they would then be steered by, for instance, light and darkness, tourist attraction poles, etc.

The discussion on this presentation covers a lot of subjects. We start with discussing the impact of the embeddedness of the course in current university context dominated by things like ECTS frameworks. The question is also asked what happened with the qualitative data in the Athens project. The students presented their findings during a public workshop with an exhibition, lectures, etc. Furthermore, an interesting link was made with artistic work and how this project relates to it. Jan emphasises that there is also an important difference between artistic and educational practices: in the university or the school, it is not (only) about creating something but the main focus is on *studying* something. We also discuss the way the touristic bubble (Plaka) related to the rest of the city and in which way the Plaka is different and less 'real'. There are also a lot of questions concerning the students: What was their role in the design of the public methodology? How do they react to such a course? What does being a student entail? Etc. The protocol for mapping Athens was designed in advance by the teachers, but



during the course slightly adapted through conversations with the students. In a *universitas studii*, everybody becomes a student. In this course, Jan tried to create conditions to enable this. Furthermore, the role of discomfort is questioned: Is it the only way to become attentive? And, if not, is it the best way? Shouldn't we take into account moral considerations? What are other possible ways to foster attentiveness? In addition, the role of experience in this course is discussed. It is not just about experience, Jan explains, but about making the experience a subject of study. Experience in itself is not enough. A last interesting remark is on the importance of creating a new vocabulary to talk about education.

FRIDAY 24/03/2017

Carl-Anders Säfström

Paideia and the Search for Freedom in the Educational Formation of the Public of Today

The first lecture of this last symposium day is given by Carl-Anders Säfström. He presents a paper in progress starting from the notion of Paideia as described by Werner Jaeger in 'Paideia: the ideals of Greek culture' as a process through which citizens as well as culture are formed. The paper explicitly approaches education as a field in its own right, not just the application of something like it is often seen in other disciplines. From this perspective pedagogies are, by definition, 'lawless'. According to liberal thinking about education (cf. Rawls' political liberalism), education is about adjustment to the laws of nature, as a logical category, which gives societies stability over time. The problem is, however, that this makes radical change – a central notion in for example Dewey's ideas about education – impossible. Carl Anders points out a similarity with fascist ideas like those of Mussolini that see education as an adjustment to the moral law represented by the nation which

gives meaning to people's life. He argues for a pedagogical theory that is in essence lawless and draws on the ancient Greek concept of *paideia* that places education at the centre of society, based on the idea that we need a shared space of communality for political and social life to exist at all. Education is vital to make this possible and has a very radical potential: through education, all people can become the carrier of culture and become morally and politically mature. As such, education makes democracy possible. Both are inseparable. But without a radical openness (lawlessness) democracy cannot exist. Hence, education is necessarily anti-liberal and anti-fascist. Carl-Anders defines three forces of abstraction that distance people involved in education from this radical potential: textbook-democracy alienated from experiences of democracy in students' lives, schooling adjusted to the neoliberal economic system (cf. the Machine – Boudrillard), and democracy built on 'the people' (\neq the population). He concludes with formulating two strategies of resistance: to blur the lines between the population and the people, and to supplement oneself to the people (i.e. to claim 'I am the people too'). Teaching, then, is about the very possibility of staging the world differently.



Again, we have a very interesting discussion on a wide variety of topics. Firstly, we discuss the relation between education from an instrumental perspective and the possibility of change. Questions are posed like: Does such a strong focus on lawlessness not involve an enormous reduction of what it means to teach? Could there ever be a political theory that is not based on a law? Are the proposed resistance strategies strong enough? And how to understand them? For instance, should we move outside 'the Machine' or can we work from within and what about attempts to make new, 'better' Machines? In addition, it is stated that

although education alone cannot solve the problem, it does not mean you cannot address the problem. We also discuss the notion of change within pedagogy. The perspective on change is what makes a theory pedagogical. But we will always face a tension between the need to be open for change and the search for order. The remarks also come that resisting to define the public is not a 'weak' strategy at all and that it may be necessary that several publics define themselves (cf. Dewey and Sharon Todd's 'multiplicity of publics'). What is, then, the role of pedagogy in this? By inhabiting and, thus, claiming places, it is argued, pedagogy can add something to artists' work. And it can offer (individual and collective) temporary resting places, playing with the relationships between continuity and change, sameness and difference. Truth, then, is about de- and re-constructing harmony. Someone also refers to Hannah Arendt's work on a new beginning, which always also aligns with a certain notion of lawlessness.

Danny Wildemeersch

Silence. A Matter of Public Concern: Reconsidering Critical Environmental and Sustainability Education

The next [presentation](#) is given by Danny Wildemeersch who discusses a paper³ about the case of 'Waerbeke', a socio-cultural movement promoting silence and quality of life through creating 'silent territories' (e.g.

³ Danny Wildemeersch (2017) [Silence – a matter of public concern: reconsidering critical environmental and sustainability education](#), *Environmental Education Research*, pre-published online.

around the village of Waarbeke in a rural area in Flanders), conferences, publications, networks, exhibitions, etc.. Waarbeke is an organisation that propagates silence and quality of life. They developed a 'Pedagogy of Silence'. Danny elaborates on that pedagogy and relates it to the notion of the commons and to an understanding of silence as a matter of public concern. Then, he argues how this pedagogy of silence bears some resemblance with ideas developed in critical pedagogy and points out important 'limit experiences' of critical pedagogy (e.g. in relation to the 'wickedness' of many contemporary societal problems). Drawing on the work of Rancière and Arendt, he subsequently discusses the issues of truth, emancipation, equality, power and solidarity. He concludes his talk with a plea for education as suspension and the tension between this idea and the sense of urgency surrounding environmental challenges. A revisited critical pedagogy/ESE is then about 'taking your time in times of urgency'.

In the discussion afterwards, someone wonders if the project's notion of silence should be understood mainly as the absence of certain things. If so, it seems to imply a negative definition of nature as not-urban (while nature –e.g. wind at the West coast of Denmark – is not that silent either). Isn't that a rather mechanical view and maybe also a quite elitist and romanticised image. Thus, the question is posed what silence exactly means in this project. We also discuss the focus on the individual in Rancière's work and the lack of attention for / recognition of the role of movements, which are also important. For Rancière, political subjectification can exist in one single person (body) that voices a suspension of ordinary time, a clear, new beginning. What kind of relationship does this create to the very messy state in which we live.

Katrien Van Poeck

Urban sustainability transitions: Political spaces and/or educative spaces?

Katrien Van Poeck gives the last [presentation](#) of the meeting and talks about an ongoing research project on urban sustainability transitions as spaces for experiential learning. Her aim is to present it as an example and subject for discussion about the potential of interdisciplinary scientific collaboration and dialogue that crosses the borders of sustainability education research, educational theory and political theory – which is also the objective and focus of this scientific research network. She explains the project's theoretical ambition to understand and investigate urban sustainability transitions as settings where political spaces and educative spaces interrelate and elaborates about how the project draws on diverse theoretical backgrounds (sustainability transition studies, political theory on new modes of governance, and pragmatist educational theory: Dewey's theory of experience) as well as different analytical methods (practical epistemology analysis and dramaturgical analysis) to investigate four cases in Sweden and Belgium.

The discussion focuses on the research focus, the content and on the methods. We go deeper into the practices of dramaturgical analysis and the added value of that research method. We also discuss Dewey's notion of freedom of intelligence and what this has to offer in this context. Furthermore, there is a discussion on Maarten Hajer's notion of 'the institutional void': how does he define it throughout his work and how can this be a useful concept from an educational perspective. We also discuss the link between the notions of envioning and landscaping and have a discussion on zooming in and zooming out in research. We end the discussion with situating the cases within a multi-level perspective on sustainability transitions and debating the pedagogical focus within such a model.

PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE OF THIS SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH NETWORK

We end this symposium with exploring and discussing prospects for the future for this scientific research network. We have funding for the coming five years and want to deliberate on how to organise the network and use the resources in a way that optimally meets everybody's ambitions and expectations. Several issues are discussed:

- **The format of the meetings.** The group is in general satisfied with the current format of presenting interesting research and connect it to a shared theme/focus, i.c. public pedagogy and sustainability challenges. It is deemed interesting to see what is going on in each other's work. The value and importance of creating time and space for long discussions is underlined. It is a luxury to meet in small-scale settings and have people reflecting on your thoughts in an open atmosphere. This specific format is hence evaluated positively. We should keep the positive qualities of this meeting: time to think and and talk, a space to gather and test ideas, crossing boundaries of disciplines and research fields, the opportunity to make yourself and emerging ideas vulnerable in an open atmosphere where one can share doubts and struggles instead of only presenting our 'finished thoughts' like on conferences,...
- **The frequency of the meetings.** Although we have sufficient resources for organising two network meetings a year, we want to discuss the feasibility of that. Opinions differ a bit on that matter. Some argue that, especially in the beginning, such a scientific research network requires that we meet regularly in person so as to keep up the dynamics created in a meeting. On the other hand, everybody is very occupied and some of us are also part of another international network: SEDwise 'Sustainability education – Teaching and learning in the face of wicked socio-ecological problems'. It might be interesting to create an overlap with the SEDwise network meetings so as to limit travelling and foster cross-fertilisation (although it is recognised that both networks have a somewhat different focus and ambition). As it is always difficult to find moments on which everybody can attend a meeting, it is very important to decide on date well in advance and preferably after consulting the network members. However, it is also possible to organise – besides plenary meetings – sub-meetings on specific topics with a limited number of participants. Another idea raised is to meet for a longer period but less frequently.
- **Communication and collaboration within the network in-between meetings.** Which tools and methods can we use to communicate and work together? It might be useful to have a joint 'library' (shared Dropbox folder?) for sharing texts, references, etc. Also a blog is an option, this might allow us to communicate to 'outsiders' as well and might function as a forum for collaborating on developing unfinished ideas. For some of us, writing is productive way of thinking. It is suggested to engage in joint writings – in new, boundary-crossing constellations – in-between and to present and discuss the results of that in the next meeting.
- **Output of the network.** There is an explicit expectation (e.g. by the Research Foundation Flanders – FWO) to produce output in the form of international publications. Although we want to be careful not to overload this network with things that we 'have to' do (which would destroy precisely those qualities that are so much appreciated now – see above), we also agree that it seems 'inevitable' that the interesting discussions and potential collaborations will result in common output (and that it will be interesting output). So, rather than seeing 'producing output' as our main goal (i.e. be output oriented) we are very confident that it will be a fruitful side-effect of inspiring network activities. The idea is raised to work on a special issue or a book together. It is also possible to develop a course or summer school with the network (see further below).

- **The content.** It was good to have a broad programme in this kick-off symposium during which it was important to get to know each other and each other's work. In the future, however, we want to focus more systematically on the core concepts of this network: 'public pedagogy' and 'sustainability challenges', and particularly the relation between both. If we aim to develop a theory of public pedagogy with a focus on sustainability challenges it will be vital to pay substantial attention to defining the concept of public pedagogy and to take the specificity (urgency, wickedness, post-normal character) of sustainability issues seriously. We should move beyond a focus on sustainability challenges as merely 'a case' of/in public pedagogy. It is also important to identify major (theoretical, methodological and empirical) challenges for research on public pedagogy in the face of sustainability issues. In order to make this possible, input from and interdisciplinary dialogue between sustainability science, political theory, educational theory and ESE research is vital. Furthermore, the idea is raised that it would be worthwhile to explore connections with artistic communities, social movements, etc. The balance between having a shared theme/focus and bringing our own research to the table is highly valued. This can also be achieved by centring around a specific problem or an issue, instead of by presenting papers.
- **Concrete suggestions for future meetings and activities:**
 - Looking for inspiring meeting environments (the monastery was already a good example).
 - Going outside, for example to a conference centre in a more rural area.
 - Organising field trips, walk and talk together – not merely as 'an alternative activity' but as closely related to what we are doing and discussing (e.g. walking seminars).
 - Putting something (texts, films...) on the table to discuss – for example reading seminars on literature about public pedagogy.
 - Shifting between 'closed' and 'open' activities that involve external people as well (artists, students, social movements, other scientific networks...).
 - Study the issue of public pedagogy in the face of sustainability challenges together with (doctoral) students and, as such, opening-up this network to develop into a course or summer school.
 - Communicating publicly (e.g. blog posts, publications).
 - Moving to other places (e.g. encourage network partners to host a meeting).
 - Trying-out a bit more experimental meeting formats and new modes of discussing (e.g. enabling conviviality, discomfort...).
 - Invite external persons for lectures.