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Education and sustainability issues: an analysis of publics-in-the-making.

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In contemporary society, learning emerges as a solution for numerous social and political problems (Biesta 2004; Simons and Masschelein 2009). Individual learners should acquire the ‘proper’ knowledge, insights, skills, and attitudes in order to ‘learn’ to adapt their behaviour to what is considered desirable and make themselves competent to deal with the given challenges. Hence, experts and expertise play an ever more important part. This propensity applies to sustainable development in particular¹. The dominant discourse on education for sustainable development (ESD) defines issues of sustainability as matters of individual learning, as problems that can be tackled by applying the proper learning strategies (Van Poeck and Vandenabeele 2012). In policy discourse as well as in academic literature, ESD is mainly seen as an instrument to foster the values and principles of sustainable development, to promote corresponding behavioural changes, and to qualify people for the role of active participants that contribute to the democratic realisation of sustainable development. This framing of social and political problems as learning problems is reinforced by the increasing hegemony of the discourse of ‘ecological modernisation’ (Hajer 1995; Læssøe 2010). An ecological modernisation perspective acknowledges the structural character of the ecological crisis, yet assumes that the existing political, economic, and social institutions can internalise the care for the environment. A fundamental idea is the possibility of reconciling economic growth, techno-scientific innovations, and the solution of ecological problems. Within this discourse everyone is expected to do their bit and the environmental challenge is considered a positive-sum-game depending on the participation of every individual, firm, and country as allies rather than as adversaries.

Framing sustainable development as a learning problem faced by individuals reflects what Biesta (Chapter 1) calls a socialisation conception of civic learning, assuming an instrumental relationship between learning, citizenship, and democracy. Education, then, is about learning for future citizenship. Yet, reducing civic learning to the socialisation of everyone into the same standard fails to acknowledge citizenship as an essentially contested practice and tends to exclude marginalised voices and alternative arguments and points of view. This is particularly problematic in the context of sustainability issues that are pre-eminently open to uncertainty and contestation and characterised by strongly intertwined, often irreconcilable values, interests and knowledge claims. Critics have raised the concern that education for sustainable

development – like education *for* anything else – tends to reduce education to a mere instrument for promoting a specific but implicitly taken for granted form of ‘sustainable’ behaviour (Jickling 1994). A sustainable society then emerges as something that is – or, at least, can be – well-known and accordingly pursued systematically. In this chapter, we want to articulate a different perspective on ESD – labelled elsewhere (Van Poeck and Vandenabeele 2012) as ‘learning *from* sustainable development’ as opposed to learning for sustainable development –, one that attempts to move beyond the omnipresent socialisation perspective and leaves room for a struggle over divergent interpretations of what can be regarded ‘sustainable’ in face of concrete issues.

We are inspired by Biesta’s idea of learning *from* current citizenship, incorporated in his subjectification conception of civic learning. Learning, then, is not aimed at the acquisition of particular knowledge, skills, competences, or dispositions but stems from an exposure to and engagement with practices in which democratic citizenship can develop and where public solutions for private troubles are sought and negotiated. With respect to ESD a democratic approach is broadly regarded as preferable. Yet, democratic practices do not as a matter of course prevent sustainability problems and serve ‘the common good’. This paradox between the sense of urgency emerging from a deep concern about the state of the planet and the living conditions of its inhabitants on the one hand and the conviction that it is wrong to persuade people to adopt pre- and expert-determined ways of thinking and acting on the other (Wals 2010) brings about an ambiguous relation between democracy and sustainable development (Læssøe 2007). If all learning outcomes are considered equally valid as long as they have emerged from a democratic process, this might lead to an ‘anything goes’ relativism which is problematic since it prevents legitimate criticism of erroneous views and opinions and runs the risk of neglecting the far-reaching implications of many sustainability issues and the injustices they often bring about.

Researching education in the light of public issues

This ambiguous relation between democracy and sustainability underlines the need for an alternative perspective on ESD, one that enables to understand how educational processes can move beyond a socialisation perspective without falling into undue relativism. Therefore, we introduce the idea of ‘learning from sustainable development’ understood as an educational practice presenting sustainability issues as ‘public issues’, as matters of public concern. In the context of sustainability, transparent and uncontested facts are rare. Sustainability issues are characterised by uncertain expert knowledge and a lack of undisputed normative frameworks for ethical decision-making. They are so complex, entangled, uncertain, and contested that they resist being treated as matters of fact (Latour 2004). Hence, they do not fit within existing routines and traditional institutions are inadequate to deal with them. When neither the existing policy order, nor the available expertise are able to claim a problem, it can develop as a ‘public issue’ if the diverse actors affected by it organise

themselves as a 'public' (Marres 2005; Simons and Masschelein 2009). The issue then becomes a matter of concern (Latour 2004) that, because of its nature, blurs the traditional boundaries between those who know and those who do not (yet) know or between views, questions and interests taken into account and those not taken into account. Precisely these boundaries are implicitly taken for granted in a socialisation perspective on ESD. Therefore, we focus on how a public might emerge within educational practices as a point of departure to further understand how these practices can fully acknowledge the democratic paradox and go to the core of the tension between democracy and sustainable development.

Drawing on the insights of Dewey, Marres (2005, p. 47) explains how the specificity of the public rests on the particular way in which it is implicated in issues, or, in her words, how 'issues call publics into being'. In Dewey's account, a public consists of actors who are affected by particular actions or events while they do not have direct influence on them. An issue qualifies as a public affair, then, if the spread of the effects of a given action is far enough to substantially affect actors who are not directly involved in the action. If these actors are to address the issue at stake, they must organise into a public. Such a public is, thus, *caught up* in the affair. Latour, too, argues that our globalised world is characterised by the intimate entanglement of a variety of actors that are, willingly or unwillingly, connected by the expansion of all kinds of 'makeshift assemblies' such as markets, technologies, science, ecological crises, wars and terrorist networks (Latour 2005a, p. 27). Those many differing assemblages are *already* connecting people no matter how much they don't feel assembled by any common dome. Our relation to public issues, he argues, should thus be understood in terms of 'attachment'. This notion of attachment is used by actor network theorists² to refer to a special relation between human and nonhuman entities. Attachment, in this account, is a mode of 'being affected by' whereby actors are both *actively committed* to an object of passion and *dependent* on it (Marres 2005). They must do a lot of work so as to create the situation in which they can be overtaken by the object while, at the same time, the object binds them in the sense that their pleasure and perhaps even the meaningfulness of their world is conditioned by it. Starting from these attachments, Marres argues that one cannot adequately define a public by merely referring to actors that are commonly implicated in an issue. The fact that actors are all affected by the issue at stake is not a sufficient characterisation for it. She emphasises that actors are not only jointly but also *antagonistically* implicated in public issues: they are bound together by mutual exclusivities between various attachments. 'They come together in controversy because they are divided by the issue at stake' (Marres 2005, p. 128). Obviously, such a public cannot be conceived of as a *social community*³. On the contrary, a public comes into being precisely when no social community exists that may take care of the issue at stake. The task of the public is thus to take 'care of the serious trouble in which those who do not necessarily share a way of life are collectively implicated' (Marres 2005, p. 56). A public is therefore not to be understood as a sociable collective, a convivial get-together of people that share a lifestyle or a commitment. Being jointly implicated

in an affair is not necessarily based on ‘shared interests’. Rather, what binds actors is that, in order for them to take care of an issue, they must take into account the effect it has on others. It is, thus, *the issue* that brings actors together, not the bonds of a shared form of life. And these issues transgress the boundaries of existing social communities.

As a conceptual framework to guide our investigation, we draw on Marres’ distinction between the ‘privatisation’ and ‘public-isation’ of issues. She defines public-isation as an attempt to articulate issues, draw actors into it and formulate a possible settlement for it. In contrast to privatisation, public-isation implies the broadening instead of limiting of the involvement of actors in a given affair. Yet, public-isation cannot be reduced to the inclusion of actors since such an approach would fail to acknowledge the issue and its content as a crucial dimension for public involvement. Therefore, public-isation also entails the proliferation of conflict, making room for contestation and controversy as an occasion to enact the irreconcilability of the actors’ attachments. Privatisation, by contrast, is characterised by the containment of conflict and contestation. Instead of paying attention to antagonistic attachments, privatisation limits the scope to issue definitions that assemble shared attachments. In doing so, the exclusivity among the multiplicity of concerns, claims and ideals is sidestepped. Yet, it is precisely such sustained attentiveness to joint and antagonistic attachments to issues that goes to the core of the democratic paradox we described. Marres emphasises that a public does not emerge ‘out of the blue’. Organising a public around an issue takes time and effort. Actors have to be drawn in and work has to be done in the sense that a ‘public-in-the-making’ must engage in the public-isation of the issue, in articulating the joint and antagonistic attachments at stake. This ‘work’ is the focus of the case study we present below: we analyse how such publics-in-the-making engage in this endeavour and whether (and, if so, how) a public is composed around the sustainability issues that are at stake within two different practices of ESD. An attempt to move beyond a socialisation perspective requires a change in research focus shifting attention from examining the acquisition of individual competences to analysing concrete *practices*. An analysis of publics-in-the-making allows for such an alternative perspective on educational practices.

In order to understand how publics-in-the-making engage in privatising and publicising practices related to the issues at stake we developed an analytical framework inspired by the Policy Arrangements Approach (PAA) (Arts et al. 2006). As Latour (2005b) argues, a public organises itself within an actor-network, that is, through interactions of human and nonhuman actors. Using the PAA we want to reveal such actor-networks by analysing practices of ESD on four closely intertwined dimensions: the actors involved and their coalitions, the resources that are mobilised (educational tools, methodologies, and activities), the formal and informal rules of interaction, and the discourses on sustainable development and ESD. Furthermore, the PAA allows us to examine how actors engaging in such practices are on the one hand affected by

long-term, structural developments (such as the above mentioned tendency to frame social and political problems as learning problems as well as the increasing influence of ecological modernisation) but are, on the other hand, able to develop alternative practices and discourses. By analysing this duality of actor and structure, as well as both the content and organisation of these practices (cf. four dimensions) we seek to reveal whether and how a public is composed within the two cases and how this affects the way in which sustainability emerges as an issue of public concern. Our aim is not to characterise the two cases as either ‘privatising’ or ‘public-ising’ practices but rather to contribute to a better understanding of what it means and requires to deal with the issue of sustainability in ESD and of how these practices can foster a broad involvement of actors and the proliferation of contestation and controversy.

Composing a public around sustainability issues: analysis of two cases

We conducted a multiple case study in both formal and non-formal learning settings. In the remainder of this chapter, we describe and analyse two diverging educational practices: the project ‘Environmental Performance at School’ (incl. six participating schools) and a ‘regional centre for action, culture, and youth’. Data are collected by means of document analysis (55 documents), audio-recorded in depth interviews (10) and video-taped observations (25). The data have been analysed using the qualitative analysis software QSR NVivo.

The Environment, Nature and Energy Department of the Flemish government established an environmental management project for kindergarden, primary and secondary schools: ‘Milieuzorg Op School’ (MOS) or Environmental Performance at School. The project attempts to raise pupils' awareness of environmental problems through the school's own environment. A school entering the MOS project, commits itself to developing environmental performance activities in order to become an eco-friendly and sustainable school. Currently, nearly 4000 schools (74% of the Flemish schools) participate in the project. MOS coaches support schools by giving them teaching aids, examples of good practice, training and advice. As an incentive MOS introduced labels as awards for good work. The ‘MOS logo’ is a three-level quality label. The criteria to receive a first, a second or a third logo are the same, but the requirements to be met become more stringent each time. To obtain a logo, schools must realise both educational and environmental benefits in connection with the theme(s) chosen (water, energy, waste, mobility, greening) and take into account the following process criteria: view and planning, pupil involvement, support, communication, and embedding.

‘t Uilekot’ describes itself as a ‘regional centre for action, culture, and youth’. The centre consistently addresses environmental issues in the context of international solidarity and social justice. It runs a café and develops activities in four domains: ecology (e.g. supporting resident's associations, organising political actions, guided tours of the wastewater treatment plant or ecological garden, making films about ecological issues), international solidarity (e.g. action and education concerning

peace, racism, and development cooperation, selling fair trade products), culture (e.g. organising concerts, literary cafés, theatre, and expositions, selling second hand books and CDs) and youth work (e.g. workshops, courses, excursions, holiday camps, a pupils' parliament).

Actors and coalitions

The document analysis and interviews revealed that an abundance of actors is involved in the MOS project, which reflects a concern for broadening the involvement of actors. Four civil servants of the Flemish government coordinate the project under the authority of the Minister of Environment. An advisory board consisting of representatives of the Environment, Nature and Energy Department, the Department of Education and Training, the Provinces, educational institutions, etc. formulates advisory opinions concerning the overall management of the project. Sixteen provincial MOS coaches visit and support the participating schools. At the school level, a crucial role is attributed to the teachers. They have to put MOS into practice and translate the project's aims into educational initiatives for pupils. Usually, one teacher or a group of colleagues serve as a focal point for MOS. The headmaster/-mistress plays an influential part in whether or not to support and facilitate the project, take decisions, and consider or reject proposals. As suggested in the project's guidelines, the administrative and maintenance staff often is involved through practical and technical tasks and most schools develop collaborations with partners such as local authority services, NGOs, and relevant actors in the school's neighbourhood. The project's process criteria, guidelines, and the advices given by the coaches or included in the manuals seek to broaden the involvement of a variety of actors that can bring in expertise and suggestions and contribute to environmental performance activities concerning the five MOS themes.

In line with this, a key role is reserved for the pupils. They are MOS' ultimate target group and 'pupil involvement / participation' is one of the project's process criteria. Pupils are involved in the project through lessons or by participating in environmental performance activities. Furthermore, the project urges schools to engage (a group of) pupils more intensively. We found that this is predominantly applied through formal and task-oriented structures, procedures, and tools such as 'MOS councils', working groups with representatives of all classes, pupils' councils, elections for the MOS council, surveys, suggestion boxes, etc. Exceptionally, more informal participatory practices occur.

'In the group discussions, there they can certainly say what they want to be rid of. Yes. It's possible that a child saw things, images of, of deforestation or of drought there in Peru because we muck up... It can happen that a child is worried about it and brings this in in the discussion. If you feel as a teacher that other children, too...It's possible that, that this is the start for working on it for two or three weeks.'

Almost all interviewees remarked that realising this participation criterion is very difficult. Furthermore, the participatory ambitions differ a lot among the varied MOS schools. Complaints were frequently voiced about the lack of commitment on the part of the majority of pupils and teachers. Respondents remarked that it is difficult to motivate people for the project. Since not many people spontaneously find it appealing teachers as well as pupils are regularly designated as members of a working group or as a focal point instead of volunteering for it.

‘Working groups like sports, those are the things people like. But who is really engaged for the environment anyway? Except for those few green people. It’s not sexy.’

The coordinator and MOS-coaches we interviewed reported that ‘real participation’ is rare. They presume that teachers are often afraid to lose control and to (partly) give up power. The coordinator described such ‘real participation’ as the involvement of pupils throughout the whole process and specifies that they are faced then with broad questions such as: what do we find here? Is this a problem? Why is it a problem? Who suffers from it? Who benefits from it? What can we do about it? What are the possible solutions? What is the result of our actions? Did we expect this result? Are there any other actions required? Etc. Our analysis of documents, observations, and interviews with MOS teachers confirms the coordinator’s and coaches’ criticism. We found that participation is often limited to carrying out practical tasks (e.g. being responsible for closing doors and putting the lights off, maintaining the compost heap, measuring the amount of waste, water- or power consumption, checking the compliance with environmental management measures), delivering messages to fellow pupils (e.g. reporting the outcomes of working group meetings, making posters and drawings, writing poems, creating slogans), and having a say in decisions that are only indirectly connected with the sustainability issue at stake and therefore rather tend to distract attention from it (e.g. trivia regarding the organisation of happenings such as a voting whether or not the pupils would make noise during a parade in the neighbourhood and a brainstorm about the means they could use for this). Hence, sustainability is presented as something that is known, uncontested and reducible to compliance with environmental management rules at school and ecologically sound behaviour. Participation, then, is mainly a matter of becoming a member of a particular social community that shares a commitment to environmental performance at school and engages in finding ways to contribute to this. Yet, the questions raised by the coordinator do reflect another perspective on participation, one that acknowledges the importance to take care of sustainability issues with the openness to take into account the effect the issue and the actions that are undertaken have on others.

The regional centre for action, culture, and youth has about 300 sustaining members and 30 to 40 volunteers that run the café and / or participate in working groups to prepare actions, organise activities, etc. The centre employs three (part time) staff members. Activities are organised for children / youth as well as for adults. Just like the MOS-project, the centre seeks to involve a variety of actors, yet, in a very

different way. Here, the emphasis is on how people are, directly or indirectly, deeply (and often unequally) afflicted by sustainability issues. By collaborating with poverty organisations, community arts projects, unions, etc. they deliberately try to reach vulnerable people such as poor persons, illegal foreigners, and people suffering the consequences of sustainability issues. An interview with a staff member, the document analysis as well as several observations showed the centre's aversion to forcing taken-for-granted top-down measures or solutions upon people. It rather seeks to build coalitions with them, looking for solutions together and supporting initiatives started by people that are concerned about or affected by sustainability issues. For instance, when the centre organised a concert, one of the musicians turned out to be a fisherman who used sustainable techniques. He talked about his experience that it was utmost difficult to stand up to the competition with the fleet using common, intensive fishing methods and that he started a petition striving for an inshore three miles zone for sustainable fishery. This encounter was the trigger for making the documentary 'Fish and Run'. It shows the centre's openness to the entrance of new actors into the public-in-the-making.

'Euhm, most people here hate... discussions without a basis. Nobody feels like, euhm, going to a conference... about sustainable fishery where... three minister's advisors, three civil servants and seven professors come to explain how it must, how it all works. That doesn't match reality. But if people who are engaged on it say, like, I want to start a petition, then we say: man, this is terribly interesting. [...] Then we say: they are mates. We're going to give them a boost. They can count on us. That's what we want to be engaged in.'

This particular way of broadening the public-in-the-making, starting from ad hoc collaboration with concerned people, affects the way in which sustainability issues are dealt with. The very particular concern of the fisherman and the idea he strived for (in other words: his 'attachments') were acknowledged, examined further, complemented, refuted, and adjusted by others' points of view. Thus, making the film became a quest for a sustainable future for the fish as well as the fishermen. The issue of sustainable fishery was no longer a matter of implementing well-known solutions but was presented as a matter of concern in which a multitude of attachments are caught up.

Besides collaborating directly with actors affected by sustainability issues, the centre also consistently attempts to emphasise their attachments, perspectives, experiences, and concerns. 'Giving voice to the voiceless' is a continuous and deliberate endeavour frequently reflected in the texts and films they have published, in the arguments used in debates and actions, etc. Through diverging initiatives, they have focused for instance on the fishermen mentioned above, on poor people facing difficulties to pay their energy bills yet for whom energy-saving measures are unaffordable, and on people in the South suffering by the consequences of consumption in affluent countries. Social commitment and emotional involvement with these people were indicated as an important underlying motive for action.

'Those are the people you love. [...] It moves, it still deeply moves me. Also if you see... Even if I watch the film for the twentieth time, if it's a while ago, I still watch it indignantly. And I think like hey, this system sucks, it's a fucking unjust society, I don't wanna have anything to do with it....'

We repeatedly observed this effort to draw in actors affected by sustainability issues and their attachments during debates and actions concerning the sustainability label FSC (Forest Stewardship Council). The centre made a film about it ('Sustainable on Paper') and discovered that the large scale plantations required to meet the growth of paper and wood consumption worldwide (although they are FSC certified) destructively affect the life and environment of local people. Whereas representatives of FSC recognised the problems revealed in the film but continuously referred to procedures for stakeholder consultation and reaching consensus amongst the members of FSC, staff members and volunteers of the centre consistently expressed their concern about the suffering people.

'Like you and me, we have the time to hold a debate on it every year. That woman whose son is out of a job, she doesn't have the time. She wants a solution, right now. Those 22.000 people in Uganda who are displaced, they don't wait for [the certification agency] to arrive there.'

In doing so, they emphasised that sustainable forestry is not merely a matter of gathering and applying the proper expertise through adequate procedures but requires that the concerns and attachments of the people affected by it are taken into account. Yet, as we argued, drawing in the actors that are affected by an issue is not a sufficient characterisation of the public-isation of the issue. Therefore, in the next section we will analyse whether or not a multiplicity of attachments (and, thus, conflict, contestation, and controversy) can emerge and how this is affected by the kinds of interactional practices that take place

Rules of interaction

Indeed – especially in the centre, but also in MOS schools – we observed interactional practices that encouraged participants to voice their attachments such as asking open questions to probe people's opinions, emotions, concerns, etc. For example, at the start of the first day of the centre's youth camp about 'the city of dreams', the instructor asked the children to talk about their dreams and desires and about what made them happy, sad, or angry.

'If you would be God, what would you change in the world? ... First for yourself and then for the world. What would you change for yourself?'

This kind of questions contrast sharply with another frequently used type (particularly though not exclusively in MOS schools), one that rather prevents attachments from being expressed: asking questions to elicit an answer that one has already determined

in advance. For instance, on World Water Day two pupils of a MOS-school counted the number of drink cartons and cans the children brought to school. The day before, they were asked to bring only refillable bottles with water.

- *Teacher: ‘What do we try to make you do?’*
- *Pupil 1: ‘Drinking water.’*
- *Teacher: ‘No. What do we try to teach you about all that waste?’*
- *Pupil 2: ‘That we put it in the right rubbish bin.’*
- *Teacher: ‘No. We just have to see that we have to sort out less, that there’s not so much waste.’*

Another interactional practice that fosters the utterance of divergent attachments is the discussion of sustainability issues. We observed this frequently in the centre but never in MOS schools. During a debate and an action concerning the FSC label, during the shootings for the documentary ‘Fish and Run’, the pupil’s parliament, the youth camp and a working group meeting, plenty of time was taken for in-depth discussions. Divergent points of view were elaborated and clarified, participants frequently objected to each other’s opinions and they were given the opportunity to ask questions and / or to answer them extensively. Not only did those discussions enable a multiplicity of attachments to be expressed, they also served as a forum for criticizing and challenging each other’s opinions or knowledge claims. This was made possible by the opportunities for objection, by keeping on asking questions in order to challenge people to clarify, refine, or revise their arguments as well as by calling people to account regarding the consequences of their own opinions or behaviour. For instance, during the youth camp some children talked about their dreams in a rather self-centred way, only expressing consumptive desires regarding e.g. games consoles. Later on, the instructor returned to it when they discussed the slashing of rainforests out of avarice:

‘Because those rich people only think about themselves, just like you only think about your Wii, they too only...’

These regularly occurring challenging kinds of interaction are a striking contrast with the restraint concerning accusations that we found within the MOS project.

‘Let’s all do our bit and see how we can do better without condemning each other or starting to do frenetic, euhm, yes, or accusing each other or...’

These observations as well as explicit remarks during the interview with the staff member revealed that the centre shows great openness to contestation and controversy. Activities are often aimed at discussion and at the explicit articulation and clarification of divergent opinions. Not only is conflict regarded legitimate, it is considered indispensable in order to reform society.

'Basically, every deviating opinion is a contribution to the debate. That's how you deal with it internally or, euhm, externally with other organisations... Just... more than half of social and political life doesn't think this way. They can't stand it anymore. Instead of viewing a different opinion as a contribution to the debate, as we do, they consider it a sin.'

In contrast, both observations and interviews revealed that the MOS project generally aims at fostering consensus rather than the sharp articulation of dissent.

'And sometimes you have to distil the essences from the variety of opinions. Like okay, we don't really know if it happens there too, but do you think that the environment, in a very general... do you think that the environment ought to be protected? Just thinking out loud. Often, opinions contain essences, and those essences are precisely the compromises.'

Nevertheless, the way in which this pursuit of consensus is dealt with differs strongly at the level of individual schools. One respondent of a MOS school explicitly defines deviating points of view as essential for democracy and an enrichment of the educational process. Discussing the variety of opinions is therefore considered an essential part of the learning process. In two other schools, yet, the absence of contestation seems to be easily taken for granted.

'Also, our school regulations and so on, it says what's our view on MOS. So, if parents read this, they must approve of it, don't they.'

One of the teachers we interviewed even indicated repeatedly that deviating opinions did not occur concerning the MOS project. Yet, when we observed an action in this school during which the compliance with waste reduction measures was checked, several pupils obviously displayed disagreement. The teachers and pupils organising the action ignored the critical comments. On other occasions too, the school aimed at avoiding discussion. We observed a MOS council where teachers conferred on an action to check the use of bicycle lights. They expected pupils to start an argument about whether or not it would be bright enough to put off their lights.

- *Teacher 1: 'Yes, but if you are there with the pupils and they say like, Madam, look, it's bright enough, I won't give you my school diary...'*
- *Teacher 2: 'Yes, but, no discussion, right? That's just the way it is.'*
- *Teacher 3: 'No discussion...' [...]*
- *Teacher 2: 'It's beyond discussion, I tell them. They have to be switched on.'*

Although in a general sense most respondents said that they consider contestation legitimate, it is sometimes treated as irrational when it comes to concrete issues. Consequently, trying to convince people with deviating opinions by providing (more) information is a strategy that is often applied. For instance, one of the MOS coaches mentioned a discussion in a school striving for a third MOS label concerning the

choice between reusable bottles or recyclable drink cartons:

'And they still argued about shall we go over to glass or just muddle on with the drink cartons. Come on, it was a heated discussion there. I thought well now, a school on that level, should this still be under discussion here in this meeting?'

He responded to the situation by explaining 'Lansink's Ladder', a hierarchy in waste management recommending re-use over recycling.

We found that contestation and controversy regularly occur within the MOS project as well as in the regional centre for action, culture, and youth. Yet, our analysis of the interactions shows how both cases handle manifestations of dissent differently. In line with the MOS project's task-oriented focus on promoting educational as well as environmental benefits we mainly observed a pursuit of consensus and of the containment of conflict. On the contrary, the centre regularly fostered the proliferation of conflict by going into antagonistic attachments.

Resources

We analyse the use of educational tools, methodologies, and activities in order to understand how expertise is drawn into publics-in-the-making through knowledge claims incorporated in the use or development of these resources and the way in which they are treated. This also affects the proliferation or containment of contestation and controversy.

Both cases make an appeal to expertise within their educational practices. Experts are deployed for giving advice, bringing in all kinds of expertise and sometimes to judge issues based on proper knowledge. Nevertheless, interviewees of the MOS project emphasised that expertise is neither unerring nor neutral. For the centre too, it is deemed necessary to take into account layman's knowledge as well.

'Let the people speak, euhm, who are hands-on experts, euhm, or those who are involved or damaged, instead of, euhm, inviting the 77th expert. What doesn't mean that experts... don't have a part in it, right, but combine it then. See that there are also people with some sound... common sense.'

Furthermore, the centre and one of the MOS schools also deliberately aim at building expertise themselves. Engaging pupils and teachers in developing expertise concerning sustainability issues, the MOS teacher argues, contributes to fostering commitment. The centre aims at developing expertise through action and research in collaboration with the people affected by sustainability issues.

Whereas the role of experts thus seems to be rather limited, our analysis of the resources dimension shows that they can also enter the public-in-the-making through the use or development of educational tools, indicators, methodologies, and activities. This affects whether the involvement (here understood as active contribution) of

actors is broadened or otherwise limited as well as whether controversy over knowledge claims is proliferated or contained. The interviews, observations, and document analysis revealed that the resources that were used indeed varied strongly in this regard. Generally speaking, we found devices that were open to the involvement of actors and to contestation and controversy (e.g. working group meetings, drawing one's city of dreams, informal conversations) chiefly in the centre and devices that tended to prevent involvement and contestation (e.g. tests with water according to well-defined procedures, forms for completion, punishments and rewards related to environmental management precepts) more frequently in the MOS project. Yet, in both cases mixed forms (e.g. watching and discussing films, guided tours, role-playing, reflecting on pictures of sustainability issues) appeared.

Whereas within the MOS project a selection of educational tools and methodologies is suggested in the thematic manuals for schools, the centre prefers direct and spontaneous conversations over the use of educational tools and methodologies.

'Throw away all those toolkits, methodologies and educational games [...] and just talk with people about the things you want to talk about, right, instead of... rendering education infantile so that euhm, it becomes a schoolish affair that straitjackets people.'

The centre emphasises the importance of the café in this respect. The informal meeting place is particularly appreciated because of its contribution to informal discussions at the bar, frequently bringing about new actions or other educational initiatives. MOS schools, too, pay attention to the material learning environment. For example, two of the six analysed schools as well as several schools that were discussed during the judging of the MOS labels have a school garden offering the pupils vegetable gardens to maintain, a stretch of woods to play in, a particular biotope to study, animals to take care of, etc. This enables children to experience and discover nature in a more or less unorganised way. The café as well as the school gardens provide a space for a variety of actors to get involved and for a multiplicity of attachments to be experienced, clarified, articulated, and contested.

Not only the selection of educational tools but also the way in which they are developed affects this space for diverse actors and attachments. We have already mentioned the centre's films. Shooting and editing such a documentary offers opportunities to develop and express one's attachments concerning the issue at stake. Yet, this chance is predominantly reserved for the staff members here. Within the MOS project, pupils are regularly involved in creating educational tools such as posters, brochures, and texts but the extent to which they can express their attachments and confront them with each other varies strongly. Sometimes pupils are completely left free to write a poem or a text about a sustainability issue. On the other hand, we analysed for instance an 'Ecological Footprint Booklet' consisting of precepts and drawings. It was the teachers who searched and selected suitable suggestions to reduce one's ecological footprint whereas the pupil's role was limited to provide each precept with a matching drawing.

The ecological footprint is a well-known example of a very particular kind of educational tool, namely all kinds of indicators or measuring instruments regarding sustainability. Within the MOS project, specific measuring instruments are developed in order to monitor the realisation of environmental benefits in schools. The ecological footprint, too, is frequently used in different ways. Several of the interviewed teachers emphasised its employability in order to raise awareness about our ecological impact. Frequently, this goes together with the use of educational games or other tools providing well-defined behavioural precepts aimed at reducing pupils' footprints. One teacher explained that she uses the concept within religious education to address the issues of social justice and solidarity in the context of sustainable development. She particularly emphasises the unequal distribution of ecological footprints and discusses with students what it would mean to live within the limits of a global average fair share.

Discourses

Finally, analysing which particular discourses on sustainable development and ESD are nourished in both cases enables us to understand further how they deal with contestation and controversy as well as which attachments are taken into account within a public-in-the-making.

In both cases, interviews revealed that the term 'sustainable development' is widely considered an unusable concept. For the centre, it is a meaningless catch all term susceptible to divergent interpretations.

'Under the veil of sustainability, euhm... FSC cultivates plantations that are monocultures, hectares in size, and Indians are driven away from their land... So, that term means nothing to me.'

Therefore, as we have already shown above, the centre prefers to start from concrete sustainability issues about which people are concerned. Sustainability, then, is a continuous quest for what could be regarded 'sustainable' in these concrete situations. MOS teachers repeatedly indicated that the concept is too difficult to understand for children and youngsters. As a result, they prefer to translate it into concrete subject matters, rules, and practices starting from the five themes the project puts forward. In order to explain the content to young children, mascots are regularly used.

'It is euhm, if we tell the children like Max is coming, then they know immediately what it is about, right, or Max asked to close the windows. And the children use it at home too, you know, like mom, we're not acting okay, Max won't be pleased now. Just to... for the children, well, the youngest anyway...'

Here, sustainability is easily translated into a matter of 'do's and don'ts' that limit the space for contestation and controversy.

Both cases differ strongly with regard to how they conceive the pursuit of sustainable development. In line with the focus on do's and don'ts MOS understands sustainable development as the result of individual efforts.

'We want to keep on, euhm... spreading the positive message that, if everybody would to their bit, that there are still plenty of possibilities for a splendid future for the children.'

For the centre, realising sustainability implies a political struggle. This provides space for conflict over antagonistic attachments. The centre indicates that it explicitly pays attention to power relations and ethical considerations regarding injustices brought about by ecological issues.

'We want to build kind of a counterforce, We are, we are largely convinced that it is not... through lobbying, or through... persuasion that you can change things somehow but, but through, well, power is a dirty word, but anyway, through your own force, as a group or euhm, also as a group of victims or a target group.'

With regard to the purposes of ESD, the centre's discourse is that ESD should especially aim at arousing interest for sustainability issues, gathering and inciting people to action and to play their part as critical citizens, helping those suffering from sustainability issues, and evoking questions.

'Kind of deliberately, we choose from the start not to offer solutions. 'Cause, because we... always are a group that wants to ask questions, right, people have to think themselves and decide what they... We won't serve ideology... or solutions. And for a lot of people currently, in comparison with twenty years ago, it's not easy anymore. And they said... well, I thought I would get the solutions, and now I have even more questions than before... But I think, I think it's good. So if you can make people think and ask questions, than it's okay.'

For MOS, the principal purposes of ESD are to foster changes in behaviour and attitudes, raising awareness, realizing environmental benefits and creating support for environmental management measures.

'You could call it knowledge, in a sense, but I think it's more important to change behaviour, too, and eh, change attitudes. I think that's more important than general knowledge about waste, waste-disposal and so on, or sorting waste. How you must sort it is important, of course, but it's more important that you just breed that behaviour, that you'll do everything you can.'

Most respondents of the MOS project argued that they want to prepare children and youngsters for their future role in society.

'Raising our children's awareness, especially, making them much more aware of everything... Yes. Actually, preparing them a bit already, for society, what

*they can already bring in, qua environment, health... et cetera, safety, euhm...
It's now that we have to teach our children, right.'*

Our analysis of the discourses on sustainability and ESD reveals how sustainability issues can be presented as well-known matters translatable into behavioural precepts and proper attitudes everyone should adopt unanimously or otherwise as disputed matters that require a continuous quest for and struggle over what is 'sustainable' in real situations causing people's concern.

Concluding remarks

In this chapter, we wanted to inquire into whether (and, if so, how) a public is composed around the sustainability issues that are at stake within two different practices of ESD. We analysed how publics-in-the-making engaged in the endeavour to present these issues as 'public issues'. More specifically we wanted to understand how the arrangement of educational practices contributed to the 'privatisation' or otherwise 'public-isation' of issues. The four dimensions of the PAA turned out to be an adequate framework to take into account the variety of actors in the actor-network within which publics-in-the-making organise themselves. Furthermore, our analysis reveals the duality of actors and structure. Although the structural development of framing sustainability as a learning problem as well as the discourse of ecological modernisation tend to prevent the emergence of sustainability issues as public issues, we found that actors within educational practices can enable that in particular moments and places issues can emerge as a matter of public concern. As Marres (2005) argues, organising a public around issues takes time and effort: a public-in-the-making must engage in articulating joint and antagonistic attachments through which actors are caught up in the issue. A sustained focus on those joint and antagonistic attachments is crucial to move beyond a socialisation perspective on ESD without falling into undue relativism (and, thus, to take seriously the democratic paradox). At particular moments, the cases indeed seemed to engage in such an articulation. Nevertheless, it requires a continuous vigilance so as to prevent that one falls into one pole of the democratic paradox, for instance by reducing participation to building a (task oriented) social community in order to deal efficiently with the urgency of sustainability issues or to the (procedural) involvement of (affected) actors without the attempt to articulate their diverse, mutually exclusive attachments.

By analysing the involvement of actors, the interactional practices, the use and development of educational resources and the discourses that are nourished we aimed at examining the cases as *practices* in which the privatisation as well as public-isation of sustainability issues take shape. Our aim was to further understand how education can emerge as a 'public space' in the context of ESD. In public-ising practices of ESD, education is not aimed at socialisation but creates a space for subjectivation. Simons and Masschelein (2010) introduced the concept of 'pedagogic subjectivation', understood as an experience of potentiality, a strong experience that one 'is able' (to

do something, to know something, to speak about something ...).

'[P]edagogic subjectivation includes engagement with 'school material' (texts, books ...) that one has at one's disposal. Teachers can turn this material into a 'thing-in-common', in the face of which others are perceived as equals and an experience of 'being able to' can emerge. This experience, we suggest, is the experience of students' leaving the family and entering the school: not as a selection or qualification machinery but as a 'public space' because one is equally exposed to a thing-in-common.' (Simons and Masschelein 2010, p. 601)

The 'thing in common' in the case of ESD is the issue at stake and the joint and antagonistic attachments it brings about.

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Notes

¹ Although 'sustainable development' is omnipresent in policy discourses, the concept remains largely contested (see e.g. Bruyninckx 2006). Critics consider it a vague catch all term susceptible to divergent interpretations. Its meaning is highly ambiguous as the concept conjoins profoundly contradictory meanings. However, this shallow consensus conceals convictions and interests that are still basically antagonistic. Sustainable development is thus the subject of a continuous, more or less explicit struggle over divergent interpretations. We decided to use this problematic concept nonetheless as a key notion in this chapter because it indeed largely affects policy discourses as well as educational practices, particularly in the field of environmental education. Yet, it is important to emphasise that we do not put forward one particular interpretation of how a sustainable society should look like. On the contrary, what our analysis reveals is precisely how educational practices can deal very differently with the ambiguity inherent in the concept and the struggle over diverse interpretations it brings about.

² Actor Network Theory (ANT) is an approach that evolved out of Science and Technology Studies. Authors such as Bruno Latour, Michel Callon and John Law developed a distinctive approach to social theory and research characterised by a constructivist perspective (avoidance of essentialist explanations), a 'material-

semiotic' method (mapping relations that are simultaneously material and semiotic) and an extension of the understanding of the social by focussing on networks of human as well as nonhuman actors (thus acknowledging the agency of nonhumans, their power to transform society).

³ In 'No Issue, No Public' Marres (2005) goes into the concept of 'community' in the light of public issues. She characterises Dewey's notion of the public as 'a community of strangers' and criticises his ambiguous account of community life. Although this discussion is utmost relevant in the context of ESD, we cannot elaborate it within the scope of this book chapter. By introducing the concept nonetheless, we want to emphasise that in face of public issues, a public cannot be understood as a social community / sociable collective.

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