

BSP in China: “Inform others of your work”

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and Education for Environment, Population and Sustainable Development (EPD)!

ABSTRACT of my presentation on 8 November 2003 - given 20 minutes in the opening plenary session at Kunlun Hotel, Beijing: “Education for Sustainable Development - Baltic 21”

With the Rio Declaration in 1992 focus changed in the Baltic Sea Project, within the UNESCO ASP network of schools, from environmental education onto education for sustainable development with more individual life style teaching. Ten years after, at the World Summit for Sustainable Development in Johannesburg 2002, the Baltic Sea region presented Baltic 21, a regional agenda 21 for the Baltic Sea Region, which consists of three integrated dimensions: the environmental, the economical and the societal-cultural. The Baltic Sea Project has worked with the sectors included in Baltic 21 at school level, and has contributed to the Baltic 21 Education process with Learners' Guide 5. The eight sectors included in Baltic 21 are sustainable agriculture, education, sustainable energy, sustainable fisheries, sustainable forestry, sustainable industry, sustainable tourism and sustainable transport.

Crystal clear weather.

The sun shone on the Siberian and Mongolian plains beneath me, the snow glittered from the mountains when we crossed in over China, I saw terraced fields and I even caught sight of the Great Wall creeping along the mountain tops. I saw the straight line of a road, the compact houses with snow-covered roofs, and the small ponds nearby, frozen in a very special blue colour. I was on my way to Beijing and my first visit to China, ever.

The capital of the People's Republic of China had been whitewashed by a severe and unexpected snow fall just prior to our arrival. The air, therefore, was fresh and cold, and 60.000 Beijing workers were shovelling the snow away, and in a few hours removing the many broken trees and branches. The city and its hustling - bustling traffic was soon back to normal. The dry air enabled the remaining snow to simply evaporate.

I had the important BSP principle “Inform others of your work” on my mind when on Saturday 8 November 2003 I had been asked by the National Commission for UNESCO in Denmark to represent my country and present the BSP Learners' Guide 5 “Education for Sustainable Development - Baltic 21” at the International Forum for Education for Sustainable Development, in Beijing. The Forum was organised by UNESCO of the People's Republic of China, by the Chinese National Working Committee for the UNESCO Project on Education for Environment, Population and Sustainable Development (EPD), by Beijing Municipal Education Commission, by Beijing Academy of Educational Sciences, by Chaoyang District Government in Beijing and by the UNESCO Office in Beijing.

It was a great honour for me to present the outcome of the co-operation of our BSP school network in the nine countries bordering the Baltic Sea. As editor of the Learners' Guide 5 it is my sincere hope and belief that its contents can inspire others all over the world and therefore be of educational use towards and in the UN Decade for Education for Sustainable Development.

In my presentation I was happy to announce that Learners' Guide 5, financed by the Danish Ministry of Education, is now also available in a digital version to be freely downloaded from <http://pub.uvm.dk/2003/learnersguide>

I was invited as a key note speaker in the opening session, following prominent speakers from all over the world, such as Mr John Daniel, UNESCO Paris, speaking about the United Nation's decade for education for sustainable development; UNESCO resource person Mr John Fien, Australia; Mr Bernard Hugonnier, OECD, speaking about the challenges and opportunities in OECD countries; Prof. Jandhyala Tilak, India, pointing out that education leads to sustainable development and that sustainable development leads to education; Mrs Elizabeth Amukugo, Namibia, giving the African perspectives, including HIV/AIDS and poverty; Mr Gordon Dryden, New Zealand, advertising the digital learning revolution; Ms Hu Yamei giving a very personal speech upon health issues with reference to her job as honorary director of Beijing Children's Hospital; Dr. Burgenmeier, Switzerland, speaking on economics and its contribution to sustainable development. EDP was then given the floor. Dr Shi Gendong as director of the national committee for the UNESCO project on education for environment, population and sustainable development gave the basic concepts and his presentation was given further substance by the Chinese students' impressive art exhibition in the foyer outside the plenary hall. His speech was given in Chinese with simultaneous translation, but its contents were clear: EPD was launched in China in 1998 and more than 1000 schools all over the country take part. Teachers are trained, schools with stable leadership and experimental teams and innovative ideas can be nominated experimental schools after two years, and schools with outstanding results can be demonstrative schools promoting innovation of school education and consequently gain access to the title of "EPD eco-schools".

EPD is formulated and implemented to achieve the following objectives:

- to enhance awareness and capability of education in primary, secondary schools and colleges on promotion of education initiatives for environment, population and sustainable development
- to help teenagers to acquire knowledge and skills about environment, population and sustainable development, and cultivate their awareness and readiness to act positively for ESD notion
- to prepare a new generation of citizens with creativity and consciousness of sustainable development and relevant capability
- to work together with partners among the member states to integrate sustainable development with education of environment and population to improve the living environment so as to promote the sustainable development of human beings

Dr. Carole Murphy, USA, then spoke of the role of leaders, leadership and global sustainable development; Prof. Niu Wenyuan introduced us to ESD and human resource development in China; Vice governor of the Chaoyang District in Beijing introduced us to the experiences from his district, to be experienced further on study visits; then it was my turn to share the BSP results and Learners' Guide 5 before Mr Dieter Boehn closed the opening session giving some insights from Germany - and the piece of good advice: Keep and implant optimism!

The impressive conference room had flags from each of the 29 nations present. I was pleased to be seated with the Danish flag and I was seated comfortably between Canada and Finland. It was a pleasure to be seated next to Finland as the BSP initiative was first taken there in 1989.

Chinese students played and sang with talent, and a beautiful board welcomed everyone to the first International Forum for Education for Sustainable Development. The setting was beautiful and impressive.

I was pleased that following my presentation a suggestion was made from Korea that a similar school network could be established regionally between China, Japan, Hong Kong, Korea, Mongolia and others. I do not know if the UNESCO Associated Schools Project Net as is the case in the Baltic Sea Region have ASP co-ordinators in the Asian countries mentioned, but I consider the idea of regional networks excellent and very important. Regional networks may then co-operate and together become global. I still consider local/regional knowledge and democracy a precondition for global understanding. I therefore wish the Asian region good luck, and hope to welcome the region when at major events, for teacher training etc. the regions may benefit mutually from each other.

In the days to follow workshops and study visits enabled all delegates to share ideas and learn more of the various experiences in different regions and countries all over the world.

Chinese students presented their work in art “EPD in my eyes”, in music, drama performances, and a visit to Beijing High School no 80 was an impressive example of an outstanding experimental Chinese eco-school that serves as a model for others. The lessons there are inquiry-based, the 56 students in each class co-operate in experimental learning.

As a master of biology I attended a biology lesson, and had a guided tour through the lab, the exhibition room, the DNA and cell classroom, the biotechnology lab where students made plant experiments. The student who guided me spoke fluently English, whereas language could still be an obstacle when talking to somewhat older Chinese teachers and co-ordinators. Language obstacles, however, were overcome by smiles - and students were always stepping in to assist. At the Agricultural School students were given “hands on” experiences, and we saw the green houses and pepper plants with fruits in various colours, green, yellow, orange, red - and a colour new to me - black peppers!

The cultural program was impressive from students’ performances to the Laoshe Teahouse with its professional and colourful entertainment, as was the visit to the Great Wall in frosty sunshine.

As this was my first China experience I was fortunate enough to also have some time to visit impressive Beijing sites e.g. the Forbidden City, The Summer Palace, the Temple of Heaven. I noted the Beijing traffic, its many bicycles used for all kinds of purposes - for “sustainable transport” of people and goods, often quite heavy loads, and for having an outdoor shop e.g. selling hot yams for lunch, or caged birds - (which I actually disapprove of). When I photographed bikers I had many smiles in return. I was told that SARS, however, increased the number of cars tremendously: People who could afford to buy a car bought one to avoid close contact and risk of attracting SARS in public transport, and a thousand new cars were introduced in Beijing during the SARS period -every day! Sustainable transport?

I noted Beijing’s many parks and the serenity of the Temple of Heaven, the Summer Palace and the Forbidden City, and I noted how people use the parks for singing, dancing, social activities, and I felt very much at ease here. I noted the children. Parents with their only child as a consequence of

the Chinese one-family-one-child policy proudly and willingly posed for my camera when I asked permission to photograph.

I wish to express my gratitude to all organising bodies for meeting the challenge of making the forum international, and for making it a success, I wish to thank the Danish UNESCO National Commission and the Ministry of Education for giving me the great opportunity to share the BSP experiences in the process which hopefully leads to sustainable development - “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” to quote the definition made by the Brundtland Commission.

Like all participants I consider education the key role factor in this process and welcome the UN initiative of declaring the decade 2005-2015 a decade for Education for Sustainable Development. A decade, however, is not enough. We are all responsible for our one world. Always.

Birthe Zimmermann

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Birthe Zimmermann, senior master
former general co-ordinator of the Baltic Sea Project
Amtsgymnasiet i Sønderborg
Grundtvigs Alle 86
DK-6400 Sønderborg
bz@amtsgym-sdbg.dk
www.amtsgym-sdbg.dk
