

## 3<sup>rd</sup> Pan-European Days on Environmental Education toward Sustainability – Barcelona, 1-2 October 2015

Round Table:

### “Higher education and sustainability”

Chair:

**Jordi Segalàs**, Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya

Panellists:

**Mercè Junyent**, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

**Bernard Mazijn**, Institute for Sustainable Development - Belgium

**Aida Guerra**, University of Aalborg

### Conclusions of the round table

It is widely recognized that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) play an essential role for the transformation of the global society to a more sustainable and equitable one. During the last decade, there have been many efforts to integrate Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and environmental education (EE) into Higher Education system, using different strategies. Regretfully, despite infrequent successful experiences, ESD/EE are still far from being effectively integrated in the curricula and there are still numerous challenges that need to be overcome.

A decisive factor for achieving a culture of sustainability in university training for future professionals is to effectively tackle current lack of competences of educators. Therefore, it is vital to promote an effective professional development in ESD addressed to the staff who teach and support student learning in HE institutions. Integrating ESD into academic practices requires an important effort because of the need for change not only in contents but, above all, in methods and approaches towards teaching and research. Interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches, such as those adopted by Sustainability Science, represent a coherent framework to integrate sustainability issues in the academia.

Bottom-up approaches, such as faculty professional development, are a necessary condition but they are not sufficient to boost changes at institutional level. ESD should become a clear political commitment of all universities. Within this context, HEIs should facilitate the democratic participation of the various stakeholders in the definition of the institutional strategies addressed sustainability issues. Besides, institutional structures and adequate incentives should fully support appropriate professional development programs as well as the development of coherent evaluation processes. In this sense, it is worth outstanding that these demands for changes reflect wider social debates to which universities cannot remain indefinitely indifferent. In fact, currently, are students themselves that are strongly calling for a more relevant curriculum for the needs of a more sustainable society.

Complementary top-down initiatives should be boosted in order to foster changes at institutional level. Specifically, professional bodies and accreditation agencies could play an important role to improve the involvement of the HEI's towards the integration of competence related to sustainable development in universities' curricula. These entities, which are supposed to be active in responding to and anticipating future societal needs, must consider the issue of appropriately integrating ESD content in academic programs. Therefore, advocacy and policy action, at European and national level, should be undertaken with the aim that ESD competences be included over future accreditation reviews.