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MARIA JOSÉ MORAIS PIRES

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A UNESCO E A PROTEÇÃO DOS INTERESSES DAS GERAÇÕES FUTURAS

MARIA JOSÉ MORAIS PIRES¹

Ministério dos Negócios Estrangeiros

Palácio das Necessidades

Largo do Rílas

1399-030 Lisboa - Portugal

mariajose.pires@mne.pt

UNESCO is the UN specialized agency that deals with Education, Culture and Science. Now, it may seem somewhat risky to you to address the work of UNESCO which has so far only produced what the Anglo-Saxons call “soft law”. However the pressure created by its rules really exists and the practical efficacy of the supervisory role of its bodies has been generally felt, including in Portugal.

Turning to the main topic of the debate one must refer to the “Declaration on the responsibilities of present-day generations towards future generations” adopted at the UNESCO General Conference in November 1997. It has provided the basis for some important programmes.

I would begin by pointing out the programme for universal primary education –to which the EU contributed with 4,2 thousand M euros- in the context of the Millenium Development Objectives.

Still in the same area, I will recall that the UN Decade for Education for a Sustainable Development (UNDESD) for the 2005-2014 period considers that Education is the key to a necessary change in mentalities and in attitudes in society.

Taking in consideration that Education is not only a fundamental human right but also a pre-requisite to the achievement of sustainable development as well as a major instrument for good governance, UNESCO launched a proposal challenging its member States to integrate Education for a Sustainable Development (ESD) in their national education strategies and integrated action plans at all levels of public administrations.

Thus, well informed decisions and the promotion of democracy will be fostered so as to guarantee a legacy for future generations resting on four pillars: social, environmental, economic and cultural.

1. Maria José Morais Pires,
Former President Substitute
Portuguese National Commission of UNESCO
cnu@mne.pt

UNESCO therefore presented, in January 2005, a Draft Plan for the International Implementation of the Decade for Education for Sustainable Development to be put into practice by each one of its member States. This plan provided broad guidance as to the priorities and strategies for action in this Decade. Its main aim was the fostering of partnerships and actions at all levels of society thus being an instrument for the mobilization of the different social partners and of each citizen towards an active citizenship.

In this context, special attention was given not only to the need for reinforcing civic education and attracting the interest of youth but also to the importance of an environmental education and increasing the awareness of populations as to the challenges of sustainable development, namely the preservation of bio-diversity. Particular stress was given to the meaning of the rational management in the use of natural resources as the basis for promoting standards of sustainable production and consumption that will not handicap future generations from having access and benefiting from those same resources.

One can say that investing in Education for Sustainable Development is investing in the future and this vision arguably goes all the way back to the Brundtland Report published in 1987 by the UN Commission for Environment and Development which defended the need to establish a model for development compatible with the ecological preservation of the Planet and its resources for the next generations.

Today there is a general belief that the solutions to the environmental problems require not only technical means but a parallel change in attitudes, in behaviour, to put it in a nutshell, in Education.

I would now like to briefly touch upon another very important field in UNESCO's activities which is Education for the Preservation of the Cultural Heritage. Such activities aim for example at :

- Encouraging a country's youth to contribute to the preservation of this Heritage ;
- Making all citizens, but namely the younger ones, aware of the meaning of their Cultural Heritage and of the need to respect it ;
- Introducing topics related to Cultural Heritage in the schools curricula and spreading multi-media information about its preservation ;
- Developing the network of UNESCO Schools

To conclude, I would like to emphasize that UNESCO, despite its discreet image in the media, has been playing a very significant role in the protection of future generations, be it through the elaboration of International Law rules, be it specially through programmes to implement such rules.

I believe that the work that has been carried out by UNESCO with regard to the future generations deserves to be better publicized and encouraged not only by governments but by the whole of society so that it can continue to fulfill its aim.
