



Learning for Our Future World

Scouting and Education on the Environment

By Eduardo Missoni

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Article

As the world enters the first decade of the twenty-first century, the environmental problems facing mankind have moved to centre stage. It is true that the awareness of protecting the environment, and not threatening the survival of future generations in order to satisfy the needs and "wants" of the present generation, has soared in recent years.



Photo Courtesy of WOSM

However, it is equally important to recognize that no society, no country, has yet fully embarked on the ambitious turnaround strategies that will make today's societies "sustainable". The reason is threefold: those strategies are painful and expensive, and therefore have to be implemented by Governments with the full support of populations; they imply a shift in values and consequently a shift in behaviour, and this requires not only a rational conviction but also a moral commitment; and this is, therefore, not only a matter of political debates but also of education. Education is a long process, particularly when it implies the acquisition of knowledge or skills, as well as the change of behaviour.

Being a matter of education, it is a matter which concerns Scouting. From the beginning, Scouting put a systematic emphasis on the importance of observing the wonderful processes of nature, understanding and protecting them. Perhaps the best way to illustrate how Scouting's founder Robert Baden-Powell considered the educational impact of activities in nature is to quote a paragraph addressed to 18- to 22-year-old Scouts. Talking about the forest, he wrote: "And yet in it all there is life and sensation, reproduction, death and evolution going on steadily under the same great law by which we are governed. Man and his nature-comrades among the forest plants and creatures. For those who have eyes to see and ears to hear, the forest is at once a laboratory, a club and a temple."

Scouting uses activities in nature with a threefold objective:

- A laboratory: a place where young people can discover our planet as a system of complex and fragile interactions that supports life and therefore has to be protected and saved for our benefit and that of future generations.

- A club: a place where young people can participate in the creation and development of a small-scale society for themselves, with its objectives and rules in harmonious relationship with the environment, as they do, for example, in a Scout camp.

- A temple: an opportunity for young people to discover the wonders of the universe and its spiritual dimension.

At the beginning of Scouting—the time of the second industrial revolution—camping was seen as a way to get fresh air in the countryside, away from polluted cities. However, camping in nature provides many other educational opportunities, and the most interesting is, without doubt, the possibility offered to young people to learn how to live and work together, building their own democratic society, making decisions and living in harmony with themselves, the environment and surrounding communities. They have to learn how to take the best from natural resources and also how to save them.



Photo Courtesy of WOSM

From the beginning of the World Organization of the Scout Movement (WOSM), Scouts have learned how to camp with a minimum impact on the environment. This requires motivation, adherence to values, knowledge and technical skills, as well as social and managerial skills. A camp is a small democracy of small teams working together, electing leaders and making group decisions. In this way, Scouts experiment and learn what it is to be a citizen and

how to manage community life for the benefit of all members while also respecting the environment. This is a concrete way of learning about sustainable development.

However, Scouts are not isolated in the forest. A camp is a “detour” from everyday society to prepare young people to develop their social skills and find their place in the larger society. By definition, Scouting is and has always been deeply rooted in the community. The role it can play in the improvement of the quality of life in society permeates the whole of Baden-Powell’s writings. In his last message to young people, he summarized his philosophy by saying: “Try to leave this world a little better than you found it.”

The terms “sustainable development” and “millennium development goals” are relatively new, but the concepts behind them have been part of Scouting for a long time. Consider these phrases from its world Constitution: “The purpose of the Scout Movement is to contribute to the development of young people in achieving their full physical, intellectual, social and spiritual potential as individuals, as responsible citizens and as members of their local, national and international communities”; “loyalty to one’s country in harmony with the promotion of local, national and international peace, understanding and cooperation”; and “participation in the development of society, with recognition and respect for the dignity of one’s fellow-man and for the integrity of the natural world.”

Cooperation with the United Nations Environment Programme has been going on since the early 1970s. In 1989, UNEP provided funds for the preparation of resource material on nine environmental areas, which were not generally reflected in Scout programmes. This led to the publication of “*Scouting: Action for the Environment*”, an activity booklet produced in many languages. In 2004, a “Memorandum of Understanding” was signed between WOSM and UNEP.

Jamborees are a Scouting institution, famous for bringing together large numbers of young people. In 1991, the Global Development Villages were introduced as part of every world jamboree programme. They have become very popular and are estimated to have had the direct participation of more than 1 million young people. They are an active information space to promote development education, peace education and environment education through the principle of “learning by doing”. Scout organizations create activities based on their successful development projects, and workshops are provided by UN agencies (UNEP, United

Nations Children's Fund, World Health Organization, International Labour Organization) and many non-governmental organizations on issues such as drugs, AIDS prevention, nutrition and hygiene, housing, sanitation, recycling, wildlife conservation and many more.

All over the world, young people have undertaken thousands of projects to protect the environment and respond to the needs of their communities. However, these projects should be better known and recognized in order to show other young people, and the community as a whole, that change is possible. In the framework of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Scout Movement is launching the "Youth of the World" campaign, whose purpose is to sensitize and mobilize young people on issues relating to sustainable development and peace, encourage them to reflect, debate and act upon these issues in their own communities, and help them make their voice heard and their projects recognized.

We believe that sustainable development and peace can only be achieved through empowering young people, because they represent the future. We are therefore looking for new ways to form partnerships among youth organizations, the public sector, including Governments and local authorities, and the private sector, including companies and the media, to provide a catalyst for change. With the Youth of the World campaign, we want to: mobilize young people, aged 15 to 26, to support the MDGs and encourage them to develop projects, responding to the needs of their communities; produce educational resources to help them acquire motivation, knowledge and skills to further the MDGs, as well as the ability to carry out projects; and support them in using the media or creating alternative ways of informing, sensitizing and mobilizing other people in the community, as well as a wider audience, in relation to the MDGs and issues relating to sustainable development and peace.

Within the campaign, young people will have the possibility to get the Scouts of the World award, given to individuals who have successfully accomplished a "Scouts of the World Discovery"—an active training course focused on the environment, development or peace—and a period of voluntary service to support or develop a project related to the MDGs. In September 2005, the first "Youth for Development Prize" will be awarded by a world jury to teams of young people having achieved an innovative project in the fields of environment, development and peace. UN agencies will be represented on this jury.

From the first Scout camp in 1907 on an island with twenty boys, Scouting has grown to become a global organization with more than 28 million members of girls and boys. This is the largest network of young people existing in the world and a fantastic educational tool for youth of all cultures, all religions and all countries to learn about their future and prepare themselves to be able to shape it.

Biography

Eduardo Missoni is Secretary-General of WOSM since 1 April 2004, leading some 28 million members in 216 countries and territories. A medical doctor specializing in tropical medicine, he started working as a volunteer in Nicaragua and later as a UNICEF officer in Mexico. For 16 years, Dr. Missoni was responsible for the Italian Government's health cooperation programmes in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa.



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