

# Sustainability and Bildung

– a Concept



**BILDUNG**

## 1. Background

As the consequences of ignoring the natural boundaries of our planet become more and more obvious, the concept of “sustainability” gained momentum in the previous decades. In 2015, world leaders adopted the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a framework to respond to the challenges.

Education has to play a central role in reaching these goals. Target 4.7 of SDG 4, which covers the education sector, defines the related objectives: “By 2030 ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others through education for sustainable development (ESD) and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development.”.

ESD focuses on a holistic and global view of our complex world with its interdependent ecological, economic, social and political dimensions, while valuing the importance of interventions at the local level. A social process of understanding and negotiation is needed on what the path to a sustainable society can look like. In the background of urgency, adults have to be acknowledged as the main drivers for the changes needed. The World Conferences for ALE, CONFINTEA VII in June 2022 claimed that “ALE must be part of this green transformation. It gives youth and adults an understanding of the issue, raises their awareness



and equips them with the knowledge and agency needed to adapt to and counter climate change, and develop resilience and agency for transformation.”

The European Union’s European Green Deal highlights as well the importance and urgency of a transformation towards a sustainable society and economy.

## 2. The Role of Bildung

The concept of Bildung can enrich the debates and the practices of ESD in several aspects:

- The Bildung concept reminds us to widen the existing ESD concepts by including more elements dealing with e.g. narratives, ethics and aesthetics, recognizing their potential in the change processes ahead.
- The aspects of individual learning, with its emphasis on emotional depth and morality, are weakly reflected in the current ESD concepts. This has to be rectified.
- ESD and the Bildung concept talk about the need to expand people’s sense of responsibility beyond the community and the nation-state, including the responsibility for the planet and humanity.
- Finally, the idea of empowering citizens to become “agents of change” is to present the Bildung concept, underlining how adults can become active transformative forces as well.

## 3. Recommendations

### 3.1. Recommendations to ALE providers and practitioners

- Invest in capacity building for managers and trainers: Educational professionals must be trained permanently to become familiar and confident with sustainability, green skills and concepts of the circular economy. Involve all aspects of the Bildung Rose in the training: not only knowledge but also ethical, emotional aspects, etc.
- Communicate sustainability positively and attractively by focussing on the benefits of a more sustainable lifestyle.
- Use the ideas of the Bildung concept to think and implement ALE holistically, combining various dimensions and avoiding strict distinctions between vocational and non-vocational ALE.
- Sustainability demands a sense of responsibility for people and nature beyond national borders, thus including international solidarity and global belonging in all activities. Take up ongoing community projects targeting implementing SDGs to promote action-based learning.
- Engage people of all ages to establish an intergenerational dialogue establishes for a culture of sustainability.

### 3.2. Recommendation to national decision-makers

- ALE institutions must be part of sustainable networks, to provide opportunities for the mutual exchange of materials and practices.





- Include modules about Bildung with all its dimensions in the university courses of initial and continuing education in the field of ALE.
- (social, national, gender)
- Build bridges between ALE and concrete action on the local level by opening up more spaces for citizens to engage.

### 3.3. Recommendations to European-level decision-makers

- Extend good Bildung practices nationally and internationally, including through project-based fundraising
- Respect the diversity in Europe and design ESD opportunities open for many providers and participants
- Design an ALE policy, which aims at creating a “European sense of belonging”, including better and more options for European adults to meet, discuss and act together.

