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RESPECT AND CARE FOR THE COMMON HOME: AN ITINERARY OF EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABILITY

It is good to maintain and promote life; it is bad to hinder and destroy life. We are moral persons when we emerge from our attachment to ourselves and overcome our estrangement from other living beings (Schweitzer, 1994, p. 27).

ABSTRACT

The environmental issue in our time is more delicate than ever from a cultural and ethical-educational point of view. Never before has there been such a need for new consciences in the new declination of ethically relevant issues, orienting people towards lifestyles that respect the environment in which they live and safeguard the environment that surrounds us. In this sense, ethics and education can do a great deal. We insist on the 'enlightenment' of consciences, but it is a fact that in the society in which we live it is necessary to nurture the formation of ecological consciences in order to transmit values such as the beautiful, the just, the good, the healthy, in which the natural environment is rich.

KEYWORDS: *respect, care, nature, education, ecological awareness*

RESPECT FOR NATURE AND EDUCATIONAL ACTION

The environmental crisis, despite its extreme seriousness, can be an extraordinary opportunity to reflect from an educational and ethical point of view on a question that is as delicate as it is urgent, which is precisely respect for the environment, since humanity is becoming more and more aware of the very serious, and irreversible damage that human action, based purely on economic interests, is causing not only to the homo species, but to the entire biosphere (Leopold, 1968; Carson, 1963)^[1]. In fact, the data on the state of the planet (Worldwatch Institute, 2009; Stern 2009; Ruffolo 2008; Sachs-Santarius, 2007; Poli-Timmerman, 1991; Dellavalle, 1998) and the numerous indicators that record the state of health of our common home constitute an alarm that cannot be ignored and that requires an educational and moral action without any delay in the direction of the rediscovery of the ethical category of the limit and at the same time a drastic reduction of human power over it. The same power of the techno-economic apparatus «seems to want to emancipate from every human instance, where desires become rights and aesthetics seem to take the place of ethics» (Comitato per il Progetto Culturale della Conferenza Episcopale Italiana, 2009, p. XIV)^[11].

We are in the era of the 'Anthropocene', to use the catchy expression of Paul Crutzen, the Nobel Prize winner for chemistry, who has defined this period historical strongly characterised by human intervention, pointing out that, unlike the Pleistocene, the Holocene and all the previous eras, the current one is characterised above all by man's impact on the environment. The famous chemist states that we are the new force, able to move more matter than volcanoes and wind combined, altering the water of the nitrogen and of the carbon cycles and degrading entire continents (Crutzen, 2005). The discussion on environmental problems and the possibility of sustainable development became compelling with the famous report to the Club of Rome in 1972, entitled *The Limits to Development*. Scholars from different disciplines took part in this event, and the debate on environmental issues also caught the attention of the general public. The debate made it clear that the causes of environmental damage are rooted in ethics and a lack of education and training to respect the environment.

And if it is true, as it is true, that pedagogy is a discourse on and of education, it is evident how the role of education is to priority importance about ecological issue and how pedagogy itself designates the relevance of education throughout life (Catalfamo, 1996). The culture of respect for the environment and all that surrounds us is fundamental to affirm a peaceful coexistence and building a sustainable society through the training and promotion of environmentally friendly behaviour and lifestyles in order to create and experience an empathetic and joyful relationship between people and the environment. Roveda notes that there is no peace among men without peace with nature, as injustice and selfishness would reign supreme in the enjoyment of the earth's goods; on the other hand, it is also true that «there is no peace with nature without peace among men, as the former requires shared economic, social, ethical and political decisions, agreed upon in a spirit of responsible solidarity» (Roveda, 2001, p.59).

Only through this ethical-educational reinforcement could be a real hope of acting responsibly and thus being able to live in a healthy, high-quality habitat. Only a decisive, widespread and convincing educational commitment in this direction can be the harbinger of sustainable development and create new and better balances.

This educational commitment must be expressed as educational care, because in the case of the relationship between man and the environment there is an in-relationship subject at work, called upon to make moral choices, and, as Horkheimer states with regard to the concept of *Bildung*, every authentic human relationship is mediated, and is based on the common care of something “other”, whether it be the summum bonum, justice or any simple work. Society, in protecting itself, cannot fail to take care of the world, which it inhabits and which inhabits us. «Education is the moment that decides whether we love the world enough to take responsibility it and thus save it from the ruin that is inevitable without renewal» (Arendt, 1961, p. 193).

Environmental education today is particularly important in learning and in the process of growth, right from the preschool years (Orlandini, Martini, 2013, pp. 92-102). In fact, issues such as the depletion of natural resources, waste and the misuse of production goods can be tackled with greater hope of success precisely in the phase in which children learn to relate to the world.

This is the only way to educate them to take a responsible attitude towards the environment, by using their ability to understand, especially through pictures and stories. In fact, complex issues like the ecological question and the relationship between man and nature can be translated into a language that is accessible to them and that incisively communicates feelings of empathy and respect for the planet and for others, feelings that are at the basis of all ecological behaviour. And as Delors (1996) states «education have to contribute to the total development of each individual: spirit and body, intelligence, sensitivity, aesthetic sense, personal responsibility and spiritual values, and give freedom of thought, judgement, feeling, imagination to allow the development of one's talents» (p. 11).

The ecological unsustainability of the urban condition is well known and is increasingly compromising the integral and harmonious growth of children, especially in terms of the quality of the environment (Campbell, 1996; Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Louv, 2006). The ecological unsustainability of the urban condition also compromises the health of children in particular, causing them to be susceptible to various pathologies that limit attention and learning, and also cause anxiety and stress, all aggravated by a lack of natural multisensory stimulus (Zanato Orlandini, 2011, p. 143-146) for this reason, with reference to environmental education, it is necessary to provide training courses that protect children's psychophysical wellbeing and at the same time are characterised by policies of protection, health and education and therefore responsible attention «to the new dimensions of child wellbeing, including children's life skills, their involvement and participation in community life and their culture» (Ben-Arieh, 2010, p. 13).

A deep reflection on the relationship between man and nature leads us to reflect on the in-terdependence of relations and rights between human development and the environment in the context of a meaningful ecological education. The more the society is able to promote respect «and appreciation for the vital spirit of nature, the more the educational-environmental experiences will be able to influence the mentality of the younger generations» (Malavasi, 2008, p.41).

Our civilisation has developed much more in the field of matter than in that of the spirit. Excessive techno-scientific progress has literally dazzled us

with such enthusiasm for ‘knowledge and power’ that we have become disoriented in our understanding of what is true, beautiful and right. In fact, the enormous progress of technology gives man a power of domination that leads him to rely blindly on science in a materialism that exalts a fact of production and gives excessive primacy to technology. «European man is rather engaged in the situation in which our traveller would find himself next to a suddenly dead driver, thrown at full speed into a car he does not know driving how. He has lost the handle of the universe he has formed, he sees it drifting madly towards events he no longer dominates» (Mounier, 1962, p. 352).

Material advantages have made us forget the true meaning of the spiritual element of life, while at the same time pointing out that a civilisation whose development is galloping in a material sense and not to a corresponding degree in a spiritual one is like a «ship with a faulty rudder whose control is increasingly lost and which is thus rushing towards catastrophe» (Schweitzer, 1994, p. 257).

A respectful approach to the natural world also involves recognition how humanising it is to place oneself in a relational perspective of respect for life as a whole. In this regard, Taylor states: «From the point of view of a life centred philosophy, we have moral duties first and foremost also towards wild plants and animals, since they are members of the terrestrial biotic community. All in all, we are morally obliged to protect or promote their good for their own sake (...). We have such duties towards these living entities by virtue of the recognition of their intrinsic value. These obligations are in addition to and independent of our obligations to other human beings» (Taylor, 1981, p. 197).

Authentic education, which is inherent to relationships, consolidates the dialogical nature of the human being, just think of Buber’s “I-you”, of the “we” that comes before Mounier’s “I”, of the “face of the other” in Lévinas, putting into practice Freire’s principle of reciprocity when he states that «men educate themselves in communion, through the mediation of the world» (Freire, 1971, p. 94). This reciprocity is the basis of a social coexistence, which in the city encounters environmental and relational contexts that are significant for its expression.

In order to ensure that there is a sustainable city, pedagogy must offer educational paths capable of strengthening social, relational and communicative skills for authentic human growth. In education, «it is necessary to know how

to respond to the appeals of social living not only in terms of functionality (preparing for what is needed), but also in terms of morality (preparing for what is worthwhile) because, if education reflects society, it also improves it» (Scurati, 1999, p. 17). Encouraging relational forms in different living environments is one of the objectives of environmental education, which according to Cerovski must identify three unavoidable dimensions: «moving from the environment, studying the environment, acting in favour of the environment» (Cerovski, 1977, p. 80).

THE CHALLENGES OF ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

Understanding the ecological question essentially as a problem of public ethics means considering that the essential aspects of it are played out in the analysis of the visions of human life that take place in the public sphere, in the directions of human and humanizing development, in the very conceptions of life “in common” and “in common”, in the formation of a formative and sapiential path that can favour ethical behaviour in that sphere of existence that H. Arendt (1989) called *Vita Activa*. It is necessary to look at life in its plasticity and subjectivity, in its various dynamisms, not primarily as an object of the illustrative and regulatory discourses of ethics, but rather as a fontal place, in which life becomes a subject and not an object of discourse.

After the Club of Rome’s 1972 report, moral reflection on the environment has become stronger thanks to studies by authors such as Passmore (1974), Jonas (1979), Morin (1988; 1994), Panikkar (1991), thinkers who have endeavoured to identify new principles and norms to regulate relations between man and nature (Naess, 1994).

In western culture, traditional ethics has always been characterised as fundamentally anthropocentric, since it has focused almost exclusively on problems concerning relations between man and man. This is because the backdrop against which traditional ethics was formed was the polis, i.e. the city, the state in its various forms. Aristotle had already defined man as *zoon politikon*, a being characterised by his political and social nature.

The problems arose with the modern age when human reason was transformed into calculating reason with experimental science and advanced

technology. In fact, technology in recent times has reached unforeseeable levels, both in its achievements and in its dimensions, so much so that, to quote Galimberti (2004, pp. 220-221), we find ourselves faced with a desperate and despairing vision of the ethics of our time, which would have been reduced to impotence by technical operations. Techno-scientific progress has generated a progressive loss of balance between the needs of homo sapiens and the system in which he operates. It can be said that contemporary scientific knowledge has lost its memory of what it is investigating (Kun, 1962, p. 58).

Today to it is appropriate refute and overcome the equation: 'everything that is technically possible is ipso facto morally permissible'. The passage from everything is allowed to man to everything is allowed on man would be very short and would lead to the possibility of «being the builders of our own destruction» (Barthes, 1962, p. 157). Technique, even though it has its own logic, is still a work of man, something human, that is, historical. Technical 'doing' remains a human action and therefore controllable by man himself in order to serve man's cause. In this regard, it is useful to recall a quotation from Heidegger who says: «We can make use of the products of technology, conform to their mode of use, but we can at the same time abandon them to themselves (*auf sich beruhen lassen*).

We can say yes to the inevitable use of the products of technology and at the same time we can say no to them, prevent them from taking over us, from deforming, confusing and devastating our being». (Heidegger, 1976, p. 159).

It is clear that if technical action is left to its own devices and becomes merely utilitarian and self-referential, it can lead to planetary catastrophe. And it is at this point that it is necessary today to recover the Aristotelian distinction between the *bonum operis* and the *bonum operantis*, rediscovering and enhancing the ethical category of the limit. On the basis of these considerations, pedagogy and the philosophy of education must indicate the paths to follow for the formation of a moral conscience, without which the damage could be irreversible for the new generations.

In other words, we need a new cultural paradigm that can indicate the path of ecological action, which certainly does not exclude the economic fact and therefore the category of profit, but seeks to reconcile it with the equally precious and now forgotten categories of good, right, true and beautiful. It is

a question of rediscovering, together with the ethical category of limits, those values that calculating and instrumental reason has ended up phagocytising in favour of a reductionist and efficient logic.

The arrogance of technical operations must be countered by the noble path of moral education of which man is still capable. The aim is not to demonise technology, but only to return it to its original function as an instrument and to an alliance with ethical and educational principles, and therefore to respect for human life and dignity, and consequently to respect for nature, which should no longer be seen merely as a 'resource' and therefore as a commodity among commodities, but as a priceless social asset, like the home that man shares with all other natural entities and that he is called upon to care for, preserve and embellish not only for present but also for future generations. It is therefore indispensable to introduce the precautionary principle into environmental policies, and this principle, precisely with regard to a precautionary analysis of manipulations on nature, requires that the principle of the good in the biospheric sense be respected, with the possibility that any action can guarantee the survival of future generations.

What is needed is an educational and training process that begins at basic school level (Persi, 2012)^[111] and raises awareness of nature and leads to the consideration that it is not just a resource, but a space of existence in which we can live with responsibility, convinced that the Earth is our common 'home' (*oikos*), in need of care because, after all, it is the *conditio sine qua non* of our very existence lived with dignity. The concept of care ties in very effectively with the theme of the environment, already highlighted by Pope Francis' interesting encyclical *Laudato si'*, according to which «ecological culture cannot be reduced to a series of urgent and partial responses to the problems that arise regarding environmental degradation, the depletion of natural resources and pollution. It should be a different outlook, a thought, a policy, an educational programme, a lifestyle and a spirituality that shapes resistance to the advancing technocratic paradigm» (Pope Francis, 2015, p. 111; Giulidori – Malavasi; 2016; Indellicato, 2020, pp. 201-209).

Pope Francis' warning is to move away from an anthropocentric worldview and emphasise how important it is to establish forms of biocentrism and ecocentrism (Pope Francis, 2020).

Educational action must aim, above all in the 21st century, to form an ecological conscience that makes each of us aware that we are an integral part of that one great system that is the Earth and that, therefore, only ecological action supported by responsible moral action, as well as good politics (Passmore, 1974, pp. 4-79; Mangini, 2013, pp. 149-175), can lead man to respect for nature seen as a good for all the entire humanity and therefore as a potential planetary resource destined to serve the common good.

ECOLOGICAL AWARENESS: THE FRONTIER OF HUMAN EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The environmental problem today is essentially an ethical educational problem. Discussing the problems related to the sustainability of development implies a conscious analysis of the conditions of the possibility of education in a complex society. «Education for the protection of the environment implies a *dynamic* and incessant interpretation of the relationship of interdependence between the natural world and human society (...). The design of *environmental pathways* prompted by the mystery of the created universe – of which the human being is a part – is much more than a mere application of uniform educational procedures. The design in question, in order to specify its creative potential, must question those who hold political, economic and socio-educational responsibilities on the orientation of action as a possibility and a task» (Malavasi, 2008, p. 40).

Therefore, it is important to recognise the primacy of the human being, of «caring for the unrepeatability of the person and his irreducible otherness» (*Ibid.*, p. 21) when dealing with ecological problems, and hence the need for an educational and training process aimed at forming an ecological conscience supported by a strong morality that must characterise relations between man and his fellows and between man and nature. Indeed, we believe that the loss of moral awareness is precisely the root of the environmental crisis.

Forming ecological awareness (Rolston, 1998; Disch, 1970) is therefore an essential educational task for present and future generations. And if Leopold had spoken of 'earth ethics' in the singular, today, at the beginning of the third

millennium, the complex ecological debate requires a complex educational challenge, not least because it is impossible not to recognise a plurality of 'earth ethics' (Tallacchini, 1970), with the consequence that the formation of ecological awareness becomes complex.

Rodman had already identified four forms of ecological consciousness (Rodman, 1970). The first consists of attitudes that aim for the "conservation of resources" and thus for a just use against the irrational exploitation of nature. According to Rodman's and also Naess's position, ecological consciousness is characterised above all as utilitarian consciousness, within a logic of anthropocentrism and therefore with little respect for nature, since the latter is considered a commodity with a utilitarian and economic value.

A second form of ecological consciousness, according to Rodman, concerns 'the preservation of wild nature'. This position is in contrast to that of 'conservationists'. While conservationists consider the logic of using resources (e.g., clearing forests to build roads or dams), preservationists consider this to be «sacrilege» (*Ibid.*, p. 315), because nature is considered sacred and therefore intangible and inviolable.

A third position is that of *Deep Ecology*, which according to Naess (1998)^[VI] not only condemns all forms of anthropocentrism but considers the principle of "biospheric egalitarianism" to be fundamental, not least to ensure that man not only respects nature but has «reverence for all modes and forms of life» (Naess, 1970, pp. 143-144)^[VI].

A fourth form of ecological consciousness is identified by Rodman as "moral extensionism" insofar as it recognises all natural entities as having an "intrinsic value" and "rights", either because they are endowed to a certain extent with "intelligence" or because they are "sentient", or because each natural entity possesses a certain "degree of consciousness" (Lilly, 1978; Singer, 1990, Stone, 1988).

In the light of the typology of the different forms of conscience set out above, we believe that in educating and training to respect the environment, it is necessary to rediscover the civic duty that recalls the duty of participation, of information, of communication, of resistance (Chiavacci, 1990, pp. 285-296), the application of ethical principles in the governance of environmental

dynamics, the quality of the moral conscience that must illuminate the behaviour of all the subjects of the *polis*.

The environmental issue in our time is more delicate than ever from a cultural point of view. Never before has there been such a need for new consciences in the new forms of ethically relevant issues, to guide us towards lifestyles that respect the environment in which we live and safeguard the environment that surrounds us. In this sense, ethics and pedagogy can do a great deal; indeed, we insist on the 'enlightenment' of consciences, but it is a fact that in the society in which we live it is necessary to nurture the formation of consciences that are prepared, educated and capable of sustaining not only conflict but also what we might call a new «moral drama» (Jankélévitch, 1987, p. 242)^[VI] to be traversed whenever there is a need to take a stand on particular issues, such as the environment, in order to ensure the 'good life' and its survival. «Human action on the environment is mediated by culture and therefore can and must be directed through appropriate education. In order to transmit values and behaviours that are not prejudiced by simplistic views of the environment, technical knowledge is not sufficient, though necessary» (Birbes, 2008, p. 5).

The environment is certainly not an inanimate reality, but it lives and feeds on relationships within which the primacy of the person and the ontotoxicological values that constitute him or her must be claimed. For this reason, pedagogy, as a science of education, has an important role in the construction of the reality of the person, who is and becomes through education more and more a singular, unique and unrepeatable being and who therefore requires relationships with other people, with nature, but also with contents and values – culture – so as to strengthen his or her personal identity in the world and in the environment in which he or she lives. With regard to the environment, education must be implemented as an imperative of respect for help and care (Conte, 2006) and this implies responsibility (Nanni, Rome, 2006), especially in childhood and adolescence, which are the most important periods in the development of each person and require special guidance and support, without denying that this care must also have as its goal the training of adults in accordance with *lifelong learning*^[VII].

Responsibility is an abstraction if it is not embodied in concrete behaviour that respects the values of the environment, sustainable development and human rights. This is why good sustainability practices are all the actions and behaviours aimed at building a more human and just world (Faucecchi-Presta, 2001). Gestures and actions are important, but by themselves they certainly do not change the world. They can, however, set a process in motion and create the conditions for wider change.

In fact, pedagogy, from the origins of its autonomous theorisation, linked to concrete education, has been with Comenio, *Paideia*, the formation of man from the womb until death. Education, precisely in relation to the environmental issue, must be an incessant and continuous process of personalisation, of reciprocity that must imply the dialectic of recognition in the relationship between man and nature, and therefore of gratuitousness, understood not as utility but as a gift. Education as concrete, real action must seek to embody some fundamental aims, not by passively conforming to social models, but, given the complexity of the times in which we live, by adopting a reflective, critical attitude, valuing everything that promotes the possible humanisation of each person in the world in which he or she lives.

In this regard, L. Mortari's position is very interesting, as he invites us to reflect on an education that can restore man's ability to think, to imagine, to adopt a reflective attitude, and to relate to the people who live on the planet, with nature and everything that surrounds us, therefore, starting from oneself without closing in on one's own individuality, but opening up to comparison and dialogue with others (Mortari, 2001, pp. 113-116). Educating people to think critically is certainly a precious capital for man and society; the perspective of E. Morin (2005) is interesting, who in his *Method* underlines the theme of an *ethics of thought*.

For the French philosopher, in fact, the source of ethicality does not consist in the possession of knowledge as the acquisition of content, but in implementing an educational practice that aims to build new thoughts and new praxis for our time, so divided and without a centre, in which, however, we are destined to live and that refers to the ability to "know what you do and why you do it". In the post-modern age, according to Morin (2011), there is a need for a way of thinking that "connects and interconnects" because only

«a way of thinking capable of interconnecting and solidarising separate knowledge is capable of extending into an ethic of interconnection and solidarity between humans» (p. 101). This critical and plural thinking is all the more opportune in the awareness that education is the way to improve society as a whole, and that it prepares «for the common city balanced men, fraternally prepared with each other for the profession of man» (Mounier, 1962, p. 243; Orlando Cian-Xodo, 2007).

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AS A HORIZON OF TRUTH

The profound environmental crisis is increasingly affecting our planet: climate change, global warming, reduction of water resources, water and atmospheric pollution, and loss of biodiversity are the main alarm bells that are increasingly worrying us for our own livability and which at the same time signal the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources and the fact that the ecological limits of planet earth have been exceeded. The statistics on the state of the planet and the indicators that record the state of health of our common home challenge the conscience of each of us and urgently call for responsible educational and ethical action, which we can no longer do without and which must lead us to reflect on the nature and value dimensions of human development (Malavasi, 2007²).

From this perspective, the environmental issue highlights a first and fundamental specificity: the call to an educational responsibility for an earth threatened as a whole in order to avoid consequences that are catastrophic, to say the least, for humanity and its new generations. If, in fact, because of man's cruelty, there are numerous threats to peace and authentic integral human development (think of wars in every part of the world, international and regional conflicts, acts of terrorism, and violations of human rights), no less worrying are the threats arising from the neglect and abuse of the Earth's material goods that God has bestowed.

For this reason, it is essential that humanity renews and strengthens that alliance between human beings and the environment, which must mirror, as Benedict XVI has said, God's creative love, from which we come and towards which we are journeying. In his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* (2009), Benedict

XVI emphasised that integral human development, closely linked to the duties arising from man's relationship with the natural environment, must be considered as a gift from God to all, the use of which entails a shared responsibility towards all humanity, especially towards the weakest and future generations. Humanity has the opportunity to make development sustainable, i.e., to ensure that it meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to have theirs met as well.

Poverty is not only an evil in itself, but sustainable development requires that the basic needs of all are met and that everyone has the opportunity to realise their aspirations for a better life. A world in which poverty is endemic will always be exposed to ecological and other catastrophes (AA.VV., 1988, pp. 27-33). The issue of the environment and sustainable development has to do with the future of life and the responsibility of each of us to find ways and means to continue living and progressing, increasing the quality of life, but above all guaranteeing the right to life, without which the quality of life itself would have no meaning or significance.

Pope Francis writes: «every human being has the right to live with dignity and to develop fully, and no country can deny this fundamental right. Everyone possesses it, even if he is inefficient, even if he was born or grew up with limitations; in fact, this does not diminish his immense dignity as a human person, which is not based on circumstances but on the value of his being. When this elementary principle is not safeguarded, there is no future either for fraternity or for the survival of humanity» (Pope Francis, 2020, no. 107).

The environmental issue and sustainable development are undoubtedly complex realities and therefore require solutions that must involve knowledge in its interdependence in an interdisciplinary perspective that must involve the ethical, political, economic, educational, techno-scientific, sociological, anthropological and bioethical horizons, avoiding any self-referential, compartmentalised view of life, which must instead be considered as a whole, as Aristotle put it. «Talking about sustainability requires a holistic and interdisciplinary approach that brings together different institutions and disciplines while preserving their distinct identities» (Angelini, 2008, p. 276; Malavasi, 2007; Indelicato, 2021, pp. 153-172).

Education is undoubtedly an essential tool in the pursuit of sustainable development, but it cannot be achieved, as S. Sterling argues, within a logic

in which the educational paradigm is connoted as mechanistic and reductionist, increasingly managerial and oriented to a knowledge-business. The educational paradigm should therefore be reconsidered in a humanist, democratic and ecological sense, in the light of an “ecology of education” that relies on a learning that goes from purely transmissive to a “transformative” (Sterling, 2001) that is oriented, as Sterling says, to the future and committed to developing an understanding of the complexity of global society and the interdependence of the contemporary world.

Today there is increasing talk of “educational sustainability” (Brundtland, 1989)^[VIII], a concept addressed with significant reflections in the Brundtland Report, which does not talk about the environment as such, but refers to people’s wellbeing and therefore also to the quality of the environment. The *Brundtland Report* highlights a fundamental ethical principle, namely the responsibility of today’s generations towards future generations, touching on two essential aspects of eco-sustainability: the first is the preservation of resources and the second concerns the maintenance of the environmental balance of our planet.

The concept of sustainability recalls the dimension of the future, the enhancement of everyone’s potential and increases hope in the possibility of changing reality, encouraging behaviour based on respect, principles of competence and responsibility, bearing in mind that responsible and participatory behaviour can be transformed into *business* opportunities (Logotel, 2010).

Sustainability is a concept that sums up the objective of simultaneously maintaining in the long term the conditions of equity, profitability and ecological protection necessary for human development.

On the one hand, talking about *sustainable development* implies knowledge of and respect for the physical limits of the carrying capacity of an ecosystem; on the other hand, talking about *développement durable* emphasises the long-term vision implicit in safeguarding the well-being of future generations» (Malavasi, 2007, pp. 89-90). Talking about education for sustainability means involving seeing and thinking about the world; it is important to educate to a reflective, open and constructive attitude based on responsible actions^[IX].

The development of a sustainable society should be seen as a continuous and meaningful learning process that enables the possibility of finding answers to appropriate solutions. This requires an education that provides critical

capacity, greater awareness and strength to explore new visions and develop new methods^[X]. The challenge posed by the sustainability of development to the culture of education invests the pedagogical discourse, its practical, empirical and value reflexivity, with reference to the formation of the person, the elaboration of a planetary citizenship and the tasks of technology for the preservation of creation (Vischi, 2018).

Certainly, the educational process must begin from the earliest years of life and must involve the environments in which the future man begins his growth process, first and foremost the family and school, the various institutions in the area and mass-media communication, with reference to what the DESS states about education for sustainability^[XI].

Families, schools and local educational agencies must work on the basis of the principle of horizontal and vertical educational continuity for sustainable educational planning (Malavasi, 2010; 2011) in order to create an 'integrated educational system' that can connect knowledge and action, knowing how to do, knowing how to be and knowing how to live in the direction of integral human development and peaceful coexistence with nature as a whole (Birbes, 2011).

We believe that the sustainability of growth on a planetary scale should be framed within a horizon of truth and therefore within a relationship of respect for nature, a relationship that should lead man to appreciate values such as beauty, justice, goodness and health, in which the natural environment is rich, and at the same time encourage him to develop an ever-increasing moral awareness and social responsibility for the ecological issues posed by the concrete environmental social context (Ballarin, 2007). Sustainable development as a horizon of truth allows us not to evade any question of meaning in the face of the protection of the environmental heritage, it allows us to think of ecologically and ethically oriented educational processes, and therefore to conceive of the environmental issue as a cultural fact, fundamental and priority for the liveability of the person and the entire planet. The search for an «ecological conceptual background constitutes the necessary presupposition for the implementation of educational paths capable of nourishing a differentiated and polyphonic way of thinking about nature, which constitutes one of the essential points for the generation of a new cultural attitude» (Mortari, 1999, p. 38).

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ENDNOTES

- [^I] One of the first authors to feel the urgency of an ethical-educational reflection on the environment was certainly the American naturalist Aldo Leopold who, around the middle of the 1900s, peremptorily affirmed the need for a ‚Land Ethic‘, that is, an ethical-educational conception that included among man’s duties not only respect for his fellow man but also for everything that lives and therefore for the entire planet. He therefore advocated the need to place oneself in a position to govern change in order not to be overwhelmed. Leopold’s demands were followed in the early 1960s by Rachel Carson’s denunciations of man’s irresponsible behaviour towards nature.
- [^{II}] We believe that reading this report is very useful because it has the merit of devoting particular attention to the family and the school, considered to be the primary subjects and the place of a desired education as such, but also of not neglecting the educational value of other spheres of social life, such as work, enterprise, consumption, the media, entertainment and sport, which today exert a profound influence on educational action, but which in turn require to be „educated”.
- [^{III}] The book argues that environmental education today plays an undisputed central role in basic school education and highlights the need to raise awareness in order to promote a new responsible and ethical approach to the use of natural resources that is compatible with the need to respect the environment and with the aspirations of human society to live in a just and healthy way.
- [^{IV}] So it can be seen that both Rodman’s conservationists and those who refer to Naess’s surface ecology aim to conserve resources for better use and ‚for the greater good of the greater number’.

- [V] A similar position is held by Naess, who spoke of „superficial ecology” because while on the one hand it fights „against pollution and resource depletion”, on the other hand it has as its „central objective the health and wealth of the populations of developed countries”.
- [VI] Let us think of what Jankélévitch wrote about the „plurality of values” when he states that in the decisions we make there is always „something that remains on our conscience, on our bad conscience, like a remorse or an indigestible scruple”. There is „no option that does not have a bitter aftertaste, that is not darkened by a feeling of dissatisfaction”.
- [VII] The *lifelong learning* that is already being talked about in education today is, in our opinion, to be found in the *pansophic ideal* of Comenio, who stated in latin *omnia omnibus omnino*. He expresses the need for education to be extended to all social classes, but without overburdening the mind, but stimulating it to „the lifelong pursuit of knowledge”. Not only women, but also the handicapped should not be excluded from education, for they too have a soul that must be advanced through learning.
- [VIII] The *Brundtland Report* is a document issued in 1987 by the World Commission on Environment and Development in which the concept of sustainable development was introduced for the first time: «Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs» (WCED, 1987).
- [IX] See the recent Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) report on the *green economy*, which recognises the value of education and training for a sustainable future. The OECD, in fact, in the Synthesis Report on the *Green Growth Strategy* of May 2011 states: «Well-designed green education and training programmes will have an important role to play in helping workers to exploit the potentials of the emerging green economy» (Cfr. OECD) (2011), *Towards Green Growth*, OECD Publishing, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264111318-en>.
- [X] See the Italian version of the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development at <http://www.unece.org/env/esd/strategytext/strategyinitalian.pdf>.
- [XI] According to the DESS definition, education for sustainability must refer to three areas: 1) formal education, which includes the responsibility of education institutions of all levels; 2) non-formal education, which includes local education agencies; 3) information education, which includes old and new media.