

YOUTH, EDUCATION AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Lanzarote, 9 March 2023

The Institute of European Democrats (IED) held a seminar on the island of Lanzarote (Spain) on 9 March 2023 in which **experts and public representatives from a number of European countries examined the challenges faced by the European islands due to the impact of climate change, and the need to implement the 2030 Agenda** in order to address these new threats.

Under the title «Young people, education and climate change», the seminar had two panels coordinated by **Aridane González**, from the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, and **Iñigo Arbiol**, from the University of Deusto. Both were accompanied in their respective panels by public representatives and experts **from the Canary Islands, Madeira, Italy, Greece and Cyprus.**

The seminar was opened by the former president of the Canary Islands and senator of the Autonomous Community, **Fernando Clavijo**, and the Administrateur Délégué of the IED, **Mikel Burzako**. The closing speech was given by the councillor from the City Council of Arrecife, **Echedey Eugenio**.

The matters discussed and the conclusions reached are set out below:

- The 2030 Agenda, a political and economic model for sustainable development
- Climate change and the Blue Economy: the environmental challenges of the European islands
- The specific case of the Outermost Regions
- The Blue Economy: an opportunity for young people and the health of the oceans
- Blue heritage: opportunities and threats

Introduction

We are immersed in anxious uncertainty about the present and the future. Certainties are almost non-existent in the face of the intense changes that we are experiencing as a result of the global crises (the pandemic, climate change and the knock-on effects of the current invasion of Ukraine).

Changes that have forced Governments to offer innovative responses in an endeavour to protect the pillars of the welfare society that we have built in Europe.

However, despite the urgent nature of the matters that we are now dealing with and those that we will need to address in the future, and although we are carried along by the need to focus our attention on the present situation, there is a far-reaching challenge that cannot be put off. **Any decisions taken today will have consequences in the future.** This seminar therefore seeks to reflect on this, by combining three decisive elements: **the involvement of young people, education as part of collective awareness and knowledge building and, finally, the conservation of the landscape as part of the fight against climate change.**

In this regard, **the islands are facing some unique challenges due to their geographic and climatic conditions.** They are less accessible than the mainland regions and often the only way to reach them is by boat or plane. They are regularly exposed to weather-related events such as hurricanes and to subsequent flooding. The rise in sea level, one of the most visible effects of climate change, represents a serious threat to many islands. These conditions result in a higher cost of living, fewer job opportunities and poorer overall economic performance. Therefore, **it is difficult to compare the situation of the EU island population with that of the EU mainland.**

The 2030 Agenda, a political and economic model for sustainable development

In a global context, the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is an opportunity for countries to act in unison when addressing those common challenges faced by the international community, such as the effects of climate change, healthcare, food insecurity and inequality.

Despite the fact that the 2030 Agenda is a unique opportunity to reach a consensus between States, since its launch in 2015, its history has been marked by tectonic movements in international relations, caused by the transition towards a new, more sustainable political, economic, social and environmental model that leaves no one behind.

In economic terms, we are moving from an exhausted growth model that was short-term and linear, unable to grow vertically and horizontally at the same time. This is why it is continuing to create tremendous inequalities at both a global and local level. The 2030 Agenda stands as an alternative to this model, offering a long-term roadmap based on achieving a transition to a sustainable and inclusive world.

On the other hand, at a political level, the liberal international order is being questioned and is less attractive, for young people in particular who view politics with growing disaffection given that it does not respond to their concerns. To a certain extent because it is part of the problem but not part of the solution. Questions such as the rule of law, human rights and democracy based on equality are now exposed to debate and some non-democratic powers contend that alternative political models are able to offer better results, rejecting some of these foundational rights and values in exchange.

It is evident that this transition is creating considerable pressure at both a political and economic level, given that there are powerful players who are focussing on maintaining/restraining/slowing down the transition by making use of political options that reject the 2030 Agenda and the need to focus on sustainable and inclusive development

It is true that the Sustainable Development Targets have slowed down considerably and that we are lagging behind in the achievement of the agreed targets. Furthermore, this reality could have catastrophic and irreversible consequences. However, we should be in no doubt whatsoever that the 2030 Agenda continues to provide the most powerful framework that will allow us to move towards a better future. It is a rationale, a taxonomy, a universal language, an aspiration in which, from the diversity of our realities, each and every one of us can and must find ourselves.

The 2030 Agenda is, therefore, a political option and a commitment to a set of values that drive a new political and economic model that we may or may not adopt. However, by doing so, we are sending a non-neutral message about our desired model of society and of growth.

In the search for trust and legitimacy, among young people in particular and today more than ever, it is necessary to advocate the need to include a new key factor in international relations.

We need to go beyond international relations dominated by the States and to immediately include subnational governments on a massive scale. It cannot be achieved without the States, but the success of its implementation is going to depend on the involvement of local and regional governments.

These subnational governments are key public agents in the design and implementation of strategies and policies that support a new political and economic model for sustainable global growth.

The local/subnational political communities have a unique capacity for making and implementing policies on sustainable development, in questions such as public participation, tax policy, equality, urban planning and integrated environmental management.

This process, which is internationally referred to as localisation, makes it possible to align the plans and actions at a local level with the 2030 Agenda. On the other hand, it has a tremendous capacity to transform the vision of how each of these territories interprets itself, as a player in local and global transformation.

There are a number of reasons why localisation is essential and offers a great competitive advantage:

- Localisation makes it possible to incorporate local leaders who are close to the general public, as agents of sustainable development. This closeness to the general public permits rapid and direct impacts. It also achieves a greater involvement of citizens with the sustainable development model, moving from words to action.
- Localisation makes it possible to adapt an international commitment to the actual specific needs of each territory. The implementation of the international sustainable development commitments would be impossible if account is not taken of the different governance models that exist. In this regard, it is important to bear in mind that 70% of the competencies necessary for the successful implementation of sustainable development are at subnational levels.
- This gives us the ability to include the question of sustainable and inclusive development in public debate, compared to the difficulty in doing so at a national level.
- Furthermore, localisation allows us to more accurately measure the indicators and to pass them on to participatory accountability processes. The greater the proximity and impact of the policies, the greater the need for accountability, yet there is also a greater identification, legitimacy and affinity with these policies.

Taking these circumstances into account, both at a micro and macro level, we consider that:

- It is essential that the 2030 Agenda is understood as a new social pact / social contract, in which an intergenerational pact needs to be embedded through new educational processes that make it possible to work on capabilities; active listening; instil complex reasoning with a systematic analysis; rethink the areas of knowledge (far more hybrid and cross-cutting); understand the new challenges and the capacity to transform and develop new forms of leadership and collective thinking in order to educate the new generations.

- The business world must integrate sustainability into the business model, both in its purpose and also in its management tools. By doing so, enterprises gain greater adaptive capacity and a greater capacity for cultural change, allowing them to become visible and recognizable by this new generation which instinctively seeks projects that measure up to their concerns, young people in particular. The Z generation is changing the way in which talent is attracted to organisations. This change of business management and mentality represents a challenge but also an important opportunity to attract sufficient talent to allow us to innovate and to grow economically.
- Young people today are digital natives and have a potential for creativity and for the development of projects that could have an impact on the reality in which they live. They work connected to a network and are committed to sustainability, however there is a risk of their disaffection as far as institutions are concerned. Based on public policies, there is an opportunity to invest in mobilising a public innovation ecosystem, with the significant participation of young people. Such an investment would create windows of opportunity that are scalable and connectable at a local / regional / national / global level.
- With regard to the above, we need to guarantee a public innovation system that is capable of providing solutions that have an impact on the transformation of the territory. And we need to fight against the disaffection of young people with the institutions by making them part of the transformation process and its oversight.

Also ensuring that they play a key part in the mobilisation of the general public in the transformation process. Not always should everything be dependent on public policies and their transformative capacity.

Climate change and the Blue Economy: the environmental challenges of the European islands

From an environmental point of view, the loss of biodiversity is one of the most critical global issues relating to severe negative impacts on human wellbeing and on the environment.

Although islands account for just 5.3% of the surface area of the earth and are critical points of biodiversity, they are at the epicentre of the loss of biodiversity. 61% of documented extinctions have been on islands and they are home to 37% of critically endangered species.

All the islands of the EU are different in terms of economy, culture, surface area, participation of the inhabitants, policies and also in their investment in the investigation and protection of nature, etc. However, we do share the same climate crisis challenges: direct impacts on societies (extreme weather events, sea level, coastal erosion) and on ecosystems (loss of biodiversity, reduction in ecosystem services) and others that affect us indirectly such as the propagation of diseases and invasive species.

In order to combat this climate crisis an urgent, multidisciplinary approach is required; we need to reduce the risks and impacts; we must mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change, but we also need to increase the resilience of habitats and ecosystems and to invest in natural resources.

From the point of view of the European Green Deal, which provides for the development of a sustainable blue economy in the European Union, we need to invest in smart mobility, inclusive societies and a better quality of life, protection for coastal communities and the use of renewable energies, without forgetting the conservation of marine ecosystems and the oceans, the fight against illegal fishing, the promotion of sustainable fishing, and the fight against the contamination of the oceans.

Investment in clean energy is one of the tangible solutions: electricity from renewable energy sources produces between 90 to 99% less greenhouse gases compared to coal-fired plants and creates 70 to 90% less pollution. But everything has its price: wind farms can lead to the destruction of habitats and the loss of species; energy transmission can be the direct cause of the death of many bird species, and the transition of the growing demand for energy (without any regulations or restrictions) could become one of the main threats to biodiversity, affecting sea birds and insects (important pollinators and disease-control agents).

For this reason, we need to analyse this matter from a broad perspective. Although renewables are the solution to energy production, we also need to invest in energy efficiency and in the conservation and reduction in energy consumption. As consumers, we need to question the solutions presented and, whenever possible, to consider the pros and cons of each one, given that resilient habitats (and those societies that invest in the protection of nature) will be richer in resources and more resilient against climate change. And this will naturally have a direct impact at a social and economic level.

Although islands are the best laboratories for the implementation of policies, action and management plans to mitigate the impact of climate change, we still need multi-disciplinary teams to support mitigation and to adapt to climate change.

Young people are not just victims of climate change. They should be seen not only as mere beneficiaries, but also as active and valuable contributors for climate action. They are agents of the change, entrepreneurs and innovators. Either through education, science or technology, young people are intensifying their efforts and using their skills to accelerate climate action.

The specific case of the Outermost Regions (ORs)

The pandemic and the subsequent invasion of Ukraine have had the greatest impact on the most isolated territories of the European Union: the Outermost Regions. Social inequality has increased and price rises have irretrievably led to a widening gap in relation to mainland Europe.

The 2030 Agenda is a unique opportunity for the ORs. Sustainability is an unavoidable commitment, not only to guarantee the survival of their sensitive ecosystems but it is also an opportunity to develop their tremendous potential in renewable energies, among other subjects.

Although the opportunities are present in the 2030 Agenda, decisions take forever and fail to materialise in the ORs. There are too many promises and insufficient action. More courage and political determination is needed.

Poverty, as a result of the pandemic and the current international crisis, has risen sharply in the ORs. In Madeira, 26% of the population is at risk of poverty, the highest percentage in Portugal. The situation in the Canary Islands is even worse: affecting almost 4 out of 10 persons. It is also the highest in Spain.

Strategies with regard to the eradication of poverty, one of the principal goals of the 2030 Agenda, are failing and our quality of life is decreasing.

Access to healthcare is another pillar with considerable shortcomings. In Madeira, a region of 250,000 inhabitants, there are currently 118,000 on the waiting list. The same is true of the educational system. Although schooling in the Portuguese archipelago is compulsory for children aged between 6 and 16, the results are unfortunately far from the most optimistic expectations. 57% of the population aged between 16 and 89 years has either no education or only elementary education.

With regard to access to accessible, reliable, sustainable and modern energy, Madeira is even considered internationally as a great example of a pioneering island in the energy transition. In 2022, renewable energies accounted for 26% of the global power generation. However, if a comparative analysis is made of the millions of euros invested and the expected profitability, then the results are not so satisfactory. 26% is far below the 50% expected for 2020.

The extra cost of energy is conditioning part of the future of the outermost regions. All fuel is imported. And transport to the island represents an additional cost that is often unbearable and that has a significant impact on the power generation prices on the island.

These are extremely small stand-alone systems whose cost could be up to 10 times higher than the mainland. A cost that represents an important challenge and conditions their future. And it is an added reason for speeding up the introduction of renewable energies.

Not only would there be an economic gain, given that renewable sources are cheaper than petroleum-derived fuels, but this would also be an advantage in addressing the decarbonization challenge through the use of solar, wind, marine and geothermal energy.

A further challenge faced by all the ORs is the sustainable use of the oceans and the challenge of rolling out the Blue Economy, also seen as an opportunity for job creation in those production fabrics that are highly dependent on monocultures, basically tourism.

The Outermost Regions have tremendous potential in the Blue Economy thanks to their unique assets: rich biodiversity, strategic location and extensive marine economic areas. However, despite their enormous potentiality, no strategies have been developed and neither is sufficient funding available.

An incomprehensible shortcoming in territories in which there are persistently high unemployment rates, particularly among young people. This leads to greater vulnerability against the effects of climate change and to extreme weakness in sea links, highlighting their isolation. It is particularly serious in the case of Madeira given that, at present, it has no regular passenger ferry service with the mainland.

We need to move from words to deeds. There needs to be joint action for the islands and the outermost regions in particular given that, despite our differences, we share common challenges and problems. We need concerted action at all institutional levels, as this is the only way to guarantee a positive future for the islanders.

And what should be the role of young people play in this challenge? This is the most important role of all. Without their involvement, it is set to fail. For a better future we need new outlooks, open minds and we need people to lead the change. We need young people who have travelled the world, who bring new solutions and tools and adapt them to their own territories and who can also share and develop creative and innovative processes.

We believe that, more than mere beneficiaries, young people must be the active architects of future strategies and must take part in the implementation processes. The commitment of young people is vital in order to achieve sustainable, inclusive and stable societies and face up to the impact of climate change, unemployment, poverty and inequalities. Young people are the true agents of change. They have the world in their hands and they cannot wait any longer to define their future and ours.

The Blue Economy: an opportunity for young people and the health of the oceans

The development of the Blue Economy is one of the greatest opportunities that the planet is offering us to change our way of creating jobs, of generating economy. In this regard, we need to learn from the mistakes made on the mainland, because people have grown up with their backs to the sea. The development of economic activities in the sea must be linked to the conservation of the marine environment, diversity and the ecosystemic functions.

It should be acknowledged from the outset that, although any human activity has an impact on the environment, these impacts must always be minimised and monitored.

The Blue Economy offers us a wide range of possibilities, but society needs to be educated and trained. We cannot simply wait for jobs to be in demand. This is why education must play a strategic role, at both a University level and with regard to Occupational Training.

Although in the Canary Islands and in other islands or archipelagos alike, there are great opportunities with regard to Biotechnology, Aquaculture and Marine Energies, we still continue to ask ourselves the following question: In the case of the Canary Islands, which are a paradise for development, why are we at the tail end of Europe?

Without a doubt, the Canary Islands are a natural laboratory just like the other European islands. However, Europe must understand that the current administrative control system is not helping the sectors to take off, or to develop social entrepreneurship. This is why there is a need to change the management systems yet without weakening fiscal control. Perhaps the solution lies in the people, given that they are the ones to think and generate knowledge.

Blue heritage: opportunities and threats

Following the implementation of the Blue Growth Strategy (2012), the vision of the marine area is progressively changing: from something that simply needs to be protected from exploitation and deterioration it has progressed to become a place of opportunities and investment, for the traditional and emerging economic sectors alike.

The Cultural Heritage (Maritime/Underwater Cultural Heritage - MCH/UCH) emerges as part of the panorama and as one of the sectors of the Blue Economy. If we define the Blue Economy as the sustainable use of the seas and oceans, it is clear that the heritage cannot remain off-stage. It covers the traditional tourist industries related to the sea. Given that the cultural and natural heritage are considered and used as "attractors" and "attraction", they promote different types of tourism (scuba-diving tourism, eco-tourism, sustainable tourism, etc.)

The MCH and UCH programmes include tangible remains, such as submerged prehistoric and historic sites, coastal and underwater archaeology, as well as intangible elements, such as cultural practices, artistic and linguistic expressions, local skills, traditional and historical knowledge. Its "positive" exploitation can be linked not only to tourism but also to creative industries (interconnected).

As part of the EU Blue Growth strategy, the coastal and marine tourism sector has been identified as an area with special potential to promote a smart, sustainable and inclusive Europe. Unfortunately, this change is not only generating benefits but is also creating serious threats

We therefore need to safeguard our cultural heritage in which the sea has multiple uses, particularly when greater importance is given to these other uses than to the preservation of the cultural heritage. These issues must be addressed when seeking Blue Growth and Economy and guidance must be offered to the coastal towns and cities/islands with regard to how the cultural heritage can be used sustainably within the coastal tourism sector.

There are growing threats that must be addressed from different perspectives: overtourism; the growing urbanisation of the coast and islands; the rise in sea level and severe storms; heat waves and salinity.

Due to a combination of the thermal expansion of the sea water and land-based ice melt, the level of the Mediterranean sea has been increasing at an average rate of 2.8 mm per year over the last 30 years. In general, an increased risk of floods and coastal erosion is expected, primarily associated with storm surges and high tides, due to the increase in the average sea level. Even today, many cultural heritage sites in the Mediterranean region are facing serious risks of coastal flooding.

A number of heritage sites located in coastal areas are increasingly more exposed to coastal hazards. The UNESCO has already estimated that a number of heritage sites located in coastal areas are at risk of coastal hazards due to the rise in sea level. Therefore, coastal towns and cities must play an increasingly important role in the fight against climate change and its devastating effects.

We need to recognise that there is a greater threat to the Blue Heritage in the coastal towns and cities and islands than the heritage located in other places, or at least that there is a need to address many different issues that are related to its proximity to water, to salt water and, therefore, extra care is required.

The small island developing States (SIDS), for example, are already experiencing a loss of their resources due to rising sea levels and to a greater frequency of extreme weather patterns. The extension to coastal towns and cities is a matter of time.

We need to understand, recognise and use the Cultural Heritage (Maritime/Underwater Cultural Heritage) as a sensitive asset in the marine area and, as a priority challenge, to reconcile its preservation and promotion from the perspective of Blue Growth.

We need to rethink the way in which we interact with the sea in order to harness its potential while maintaining a healthy ecosystem.

Sustainable tourism and projects can create valuable economic opportunities for local communities and young people, and inspire them to pursue careers in the Blue sector.

And, in order to harness the full potential of the Blue Economy, we need to include young people in coastal decision making and support the development of their skills through training programmes and mentoring in order to create suitable employment opportunities for the present and future generations.