

A wide-angle photograph of a snowy landscape during sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a warm, golden glow over the scene. In the foreground, a path of snow leads through several large, dark rocks. To the right, a portion of a modern building with large windows is visible. The background shows a vast, flat landscape with some distant structures and a line of trees under a sky filled with soft, colorful clouds.

# Environmental awareness and education from an NGO point of view

*Sigrún Helgadóttir*

# The new Nordic Strategy for Sustainable Development

- Production and consumption in the Nordic countries has considerable negative impact on the environment worldwide.
- A radical change in consumer behaviour is needed.
- We must emphasise collective responsibility and joint action – that each and everyone behaves responsibly for example by practising green shopping.



Sustainable Development –  
New Bearings for the Nordic Countries

Revised edition with goals and initiatives for 2005–2008



# An article in Morgunblaðið

- 300 thousand Icelanders
- will spend about 90 million euros for the December holidays this year,
- or about 300 euros each.
- Most adults expect to buy presents for 300-550 euros.
- About a fourth expects to spend 550-800 euros.





Halgi Smor



“I choose to spend my own money which I have earned in an honest manner, for myself and my family at Christmas. I am completely at loss in understanding why other people are so concerned about my December shopping.”

# Customs and traditions

- Customs and traditions are thoroughly rooted in the soul of every nation and individual,
  - customs of Yule and other holidays and feasts,
  - everyday routines that make life comfortable,
  - what we buy to eat or use,
  - how we live and travel.
- How can we break this circle of comfort - which is actually often a vicious cycle in a wider and longer context?

# Change with laws and rules?

- It is important to have enlightened and responsible politicians who create sensible legislation.
- In a democratic society people will not respect laws and regulations that they do not understand.
- If the people are ignorant then next time around they may well elect new politicians who can be worse than they now have with regard to environmental issues!
- Therefore the public needs to be educated.



# Children – Adults?

- “The children need to be educated, we old folks have become so stuck in our habits, we can hardly be changed.”
  - This means:
- “We are going to do what we like and the children can sort things out after our day.”
  - This is irresponsible and arrogant
- We must all change our way of life.

# Education > knowledge

- Behaviour is not determined by knowledge
  - People continue to overuse cars, to eat unhealthy food and even to smoke in spite of knowing that these things are unhealthy for themselves and the environment.
- Complex knowledge cannot reach everyone
  - Reports of economy and science
- Information and knowledge should influence legislation and regulations
  - but **we all need to** understand it in our own way

**be educated**

# Problems and fear

- Information about problems can frighten people
  - i.e. Rachel Carson, 1962 : *Silent Spring*.
  - Scare tactics can have strong effects and alter behaviour
  - But ..
- Fear is an uncomfortable emotion
  - people try to shield themselves and other from it, deny the danger, refuse to face up to the issues,
  - something we must not do.
- We cannot rely on scare tactics
  - we must know the dangers facing us and deal with them with the strength and resolve needed to make things better.
- How can we get that strength?

# Love is stronger than fear

- We take great risks in order to save something or someone we love.
- Without love and care for our children and our environment we would not have survived as mankind.
- We, the industrial and technological people, have removed ourselves from the Earth and we do not understand the ecosystems that feed us.
- We may get away with it for a while – but not for long.
- We must learn again to love the Earth.



# Reconnecting with nature

- Rachel Carson, 1985: *The Sense of Wonder*: Children have an inherent interest in their environment. Adults tear it down with disinterest and faulty values. Adults should experience and sense Nature with children in order to form an emotional caring relationship with Nature. If one succeeds it will not only benefit Nature but also provide the individual with everlasting strength and happiness.
- Sociologists, psychologists and psychiatrists: Intellectual and spiritual contact with Nature enhances the peace of mind, and gives joy and fulfilment.
- Reconnecting with Nature generates the affection for Earth which is so important for the will to contribute - for example by changing our style of life for the good of the environment.

# Theatre all around us

- We enjoy movies and going to the theatre even if we do not know the names of the actors.
- We do not need to know everything, for example names of plants and birds, to enjoy Nature.
- The play of Nature is all around us and similar everywhere with little variations.
- We must go out to enjoy and learn to respect and love Nature.























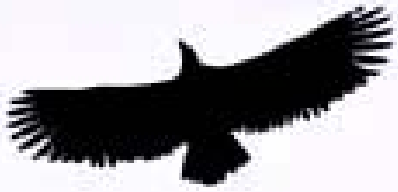






# Individuals and NGOs

- **Individuals** differ and must be approached in different ways.
- **Public bodies** are usually confined by some generally accepted knowledge and often by politics.
- **NGOs** are of a diverse nature.
- **NGOs** reach more people and in more diverse ways than authorities and schools and are less restricted.



An example:

## The Icelandic Society for the Protection of Birds

- The Icelandic agricultural society disliked predators, for example eagles.
- The sea eagle was nearly wiped out early in the 20th century by means of a government poisoning campaign.
- The Icelandic Society for the Protection of Birds took up the flag for the eagle and countered with an educational campaign together with ornithologists.

Five months ago the 12 year old girl Sigurbjörg dragged an injured eagle out of an oily slick and waited for hours with the eagle in her arms until somebody came to help her





**The eagle** was rehabilitated and last week he was ready to be released back into his natural habitat.



And the saviour Sigurbjörg was the one who released him





# Official teaching of sustainable development

- Iceland took part in the Rio conference in 1992, approving the policies and declarations on the importance of sustainable development.
- This is still neither apparent in the government sponsored elementary school curriculum nor in the Iceland University of Education.



•Although the UN has pronounced the years 2005-2014 the decade of education for sustainable development there is no noticeable effort.

•The system sleeps just like a slow moving giant.



Teikning: Áslaug Jónsdóttir



# Teachers and NGOs

Individual teachers and schools make an effort to keep up to date and offer their students education according to what they consider important.



The Icelandic minister of education hands the Green flag over to a small school in the Icelandic westfjords



# NGOs play an important role

- NGOs are far ahead of authorities.
- NGOs build bridges between international and professional agencies and the public.
- The governments participate in international agreements but are slow in changing things.
- The NGOs explain, adapt, interpret and translate.



**LANDVERND**



# More about NGOs

- The tradition of volunteering time and money is becoming weaker.
- A larger part of the population is working and unemployment is low.
- Important to secure the basic running costs of NGOs – is a good investment.
- The NGOs need to have rights and authority as described in the Aarhus convention.
- Unfortunately the Aarhus convention is still not ratified by all parties, for example not by Iceland.





# Conclusions

- General education is a basis for sustainable development.
- The objective of education must be to help people reconnect with Nature, to value and enjoy Nature and culture.
- Education must be diverse and gratifying and NGOs have repeatedly shown that they are good at carrying out this task.
- Public funding of NGOs has been shown to be a good investment.
- NGOs must have recognition and rights in accordance with the Aarhus convention.