

Environmental Challenges in Migrant Host Communities: The role of Education for Sustainable Development in tackling Waste Management

Kounani, Aristeia

PhD Candidate, University of the Aegean, Greece, kounani@env.aegean.gr

Migration is an ever increasing concern in the world we live in today. We do not only see refugees fleeing war and persecution, but also climate migrants and environmental refugees running away from natural disasters and devastated environments that bring intense poverty. As migrants settle in new communities this results in culturally diverse migrant host communities where people's consciousness and values differ. These differences become increasingly challenging when educating for sustainable development and working towards reaching the 17 sustainable development goals.

In the wake of the European migrant crisis, the Greek island of Lesbos has become one of these culturally diverse migrant host communities. Lesbos is an island near the Turkish coast and is reaching its carrying capacity as migrants cross the Aegean Sea to reach European soil. This is resulting in a number of environmental challenges, with increased waste production being the greatest one. As migrants move to mainland Greece or Europe, the no longer needed life jackets, rubber dinghies, fiberglass boats and municipal solid wastes remain behind.

However, fleeing conflict and intense poverty, the migrants cannot be held solely accountable for these environmental challenges they pose on the host community. It must be recognized that ultimately environmental protection relies on the citizen's culture. Thus, it needs to be understood how people from different cultural backgrounds relate to, engage with, and care about the environment in the host communities.

This presentation looks at the consciousness and values of both migrants and the local population towards environmental issues, and particularly waste management, on the island of Lesbos. A conducted survey revealed information on the knowledge, attitudes, and behavior of migrants and locals towards waste management on the island. The study identified gaps in environmental education and consciousness in an attempt to understand where there is room for improvement and whether there is a need for more focused educational programs towards certain population groups. The proposed presentation reflects on these findings giving insight on how to address controversial environmental issues in culturally diverse communities in order to reach the sustainable development goals. More broadly the presentation will explore what are the challenges we face in reaching Target 12.4 on waste management - By 2030, substantially reduce waste generation through prevention reduction, recycling and reuse - and how can education for sustainable development help overcome these challenges in migrant host communities.