

ENVIRONMENTAL BEHAVIOR AND SUSTAINABILITY EDUCATION: LESSONS FROM USING INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

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The modern World is ruled by corporations and banks. How can we convince them to act environmentally friendly and socially responsible? How do individuals react to these challenges in professional and personal life? Can environmental behaviors and attitudes be governed efficiently by economic mechanisms only?

What is certain, is that we can try to form new generations of future business managers, and simply people, whose values have a “sustainability gene” embedded since their basic education. Thus, learning foundations of sustainability and ecological economics has to start before college, actually, the earlier the better. The question is what topics and pedagogical methods are appropriate best, where and when.

This paper attempts to elaborate some guidelines for ecological economics and sustainability curricula for different age groups and educational levels: from K-12 to post-graduate. We will bring a comparative analysis of already existing courses world-wide, as well as see how recent efforts of ecological activists in Minnesota to build Ecological Economics programs for schools can be blended with learning experience of undergraduate and graduate students at St. Cloud State, who took a summer class in Socio-Ecological-Economic Information Systems, and an MBA class on Decision Support Systems with a module on Sustainable Development.

Among other teaching methods and tools, we are particularly interested to see the role of Information Technology in both, the learning process, and everyday life. Computer Simulation Environments and Models, GIS technology, Environmental Information Systems, and Web-based Media and Social Networks proved to be extremely efficient in building global awareness, helping understand ecological-economics concepts, and mastering skills in environmental decision making. On another hand, Green IT (e.g. virtualization, smart grid/houses) gives examples of “greening” our daily life behaviors.