Structured Dialogue Cycle VI Thematic report (please consult the Introduction document to the Final Reports for the methodology)
Authors: Dan Moxon and Ondrej Barta from The Pool of European Youth Researchers

Young People, The Environment and Sustainability

What are the challenges young people are facing?

Young people who responded to the consultation raised a wide variety of concerns they had about the environment. It is clear many believe there is a need for radical change in our societies to prevent climate change, reduction of biodiversity and other environmental damage. This report focuses on **the role that young people can play** in creating this change.

Although many young people are aware of environmental issues, there was a call to enable them to become **ambassadors of change** and to be at the forefront of the environmental movement. They want their involvement in the agenda to expand beyond individual actions and personal responsibility, such as recycling and ethical consumption. There are said to be **too few youth programmes** that enable young people to make a positive impact on the environment. Many young people believe their **voice is weak on environmental issues** and they often take low priority issue on the agendas of youth councils, schools council or other political youth organisations. Whilst young people are not the only actors within the environmental and sustainability agenda they feel they have the capacity to play a greater role.

What is young people's vision for the future?

Young people who took part in the consultation called for **increased awareness** of the issue amongst all young people so that more young people are motivated to be active in the agenda.

They wanted a society where young people can take **greater personal responsibility** for their lifestyles. This means that young people must have **access to sustainable consumption options** such as effective public transport, ethical produce and renewable energy, and be sufficiently motivated to use them.

Finally, young people want to be positive change makers. This means, greater **involvement of young people in environmental protection programmes** - acting as volunteers, peer educators and activists in programmes that directly create positive environmental change (tree-planting, cleanup operations etc). In addition, young people wish to **take a greater role in political discussion** and campaigns on environmental issues.

What solutions did young people propose in the consultation?

To enable young people to play a greater role in the environmental agenda several solutions were proposed;

- **Trust worth and youth friendly information sources** on the environmental agenda.

- **Promotion of environmental educational programmes** for young people - within schools, youth centres and other settings. The could start from an early age, and be linked to concepts such as the Sustainable Development Goals and eco-citizenship.

- Promotion of opportunities for young people to **join existing environmental campaigns.**

- **Increased environmental volunteering opportunities** and stimulate all youth-led initiative aiming at supporting to environmental issues.

- Youth organisations **directly lobbying politicians** on environmental issues.

A wide number of solutions regarding how environmental issues could be directly solved, such as improved public transport, promotion of regional foods, and stronger regulation were also suggested through the consultation.

The Survey Data

How important is this issue to young people?
This issue ranks seventeenth among the priorities, as rated by the young people. It has been measured by one separate item.
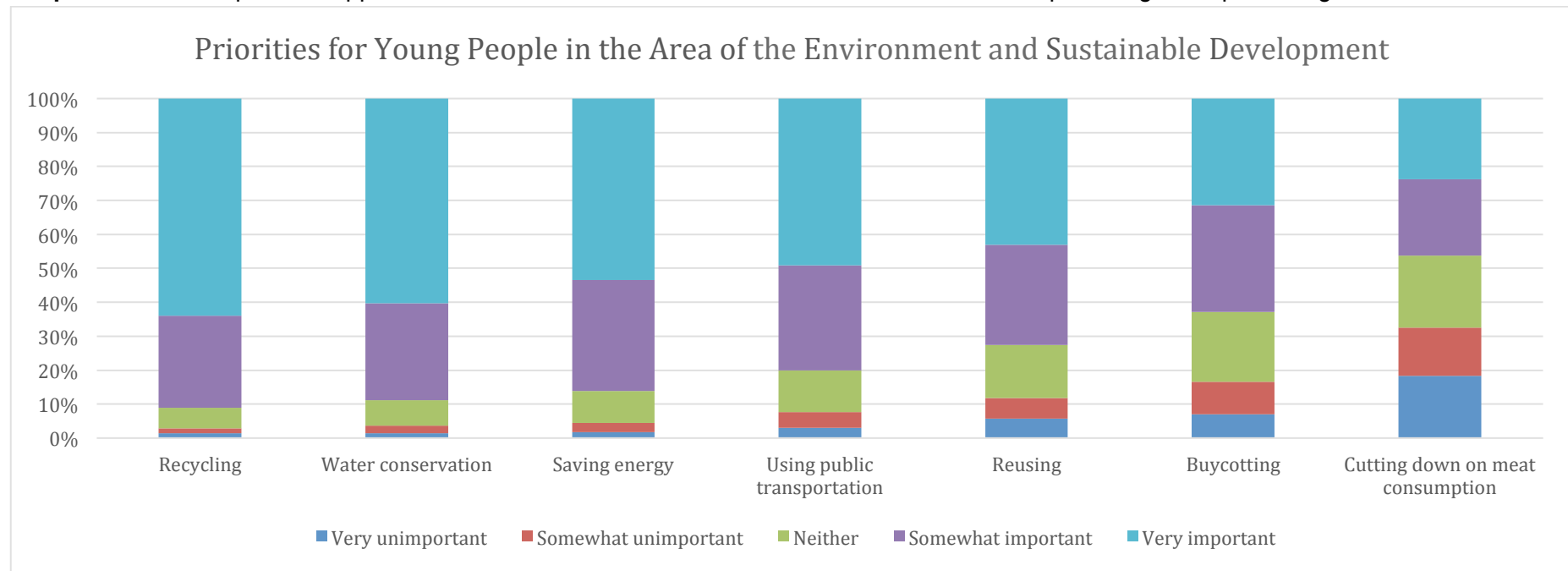
What are the priorities for young people?
Environmental issues were part of the survey with young people[1]. The findings presented in the graph below suggest that the young people consider it important to stick to the most widely spread means of sustainable development: recycling, water conservation, and energy saving. On the other hand, relatively new forms of environmental actions, such as reusing, boycotting, or cutting down on meat consumption, seem to be of considerably lower interest to young people.

The graph below summarizes a more detailed analysis of the findings on environmental and sustainable development area. Two breaking points are visible, creating three categories of mechanisms: the most important for the young people are recycling and water conservation; the second group consists of energy saving, using the public transportation, and reusing; and the third, least favoured group includes boycotting and cutting down on meat consumption. These results lead to a question of information available to the young people, since clear contradictions can be found: in case water conservation is in the most important group, how come cutting down on meat consumption is in the

---

[1] The item read: „ How important are the following environment-related activities to you personally?"

least important? It might be the case that some links (e.g. between the animal production and water waste) might not be clear to the young people. The fact that the first group (the most important mechanisms) consist only of the notorious measures taken all over the world, there also is a question of the general level of information on what boycotting, for instance, stands for.

Graph: The most important support mechanisms for the environmental and sustainable development agenda; percentages.

Priorities for Young People in the Area of the Environment and Sustainable Development

Where does this report come from?
This report is based on responses to consultation question '*What role can young people play in the environmental and sustainable development agenda and how can this be enabled?*'. This question was developed from harvesting tools submitted at the first conference.