

Sustainability for who?

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SEA-U is a company that works according to the ideas that the sea belongs to everyone and that everybody should be given the opportunity to learn about it, as knowledge creates environmental awareness. Since 2005 they have been organizing pedagogic activities for students from kindergarten to the university, with or without special needs. During some of the activities, these different groups are mixed in order to create space for meetings that otherwise would not happen. It started off as a small-scale project, but until today over 25 000 students have participated. The arrangements range from one-day excursions in which the participants get the chance to explore the world under the water surface in Öresund, to projects of longer duration. The activities include snorkeling and catching small water animals to study them, as well as fortifying seaweed banks in an environmentally friendly way. While they are mainly directed towards students, during the summer the general public is invited to take part.

The focus of SEA-U is on learning by doing, and a central principle is that everyone should be given the chance to participate, regardless of age or ability. This requires the employment of a variety of equipment and methods. Around 70 wet suits have been acquired, in different sizes and adapted to all seasons. The equipment also includes water wheelchairs, small rubber boats and rafts. When the organizers became aware that some Muslim schoolgirls could not participate as they did not want to expose themselves in wetsuits, special suits were designed for them in dialogue with a local Muslim association. It is important to meet people where they are, said one of the presenters, giving the example of a schoolboy with autism. During the first excursion the boy would not even get close to the water, but later on he accepted the wetsuit and participated enthusiastically in the activities.

SEA-U has a contract with Malmö City, which means that all Malmö schools can participate for free, while those in other cities have to pay a fee. Outside of Malmö, schools and centers for handicapped children and adults can participate free of charge in a longer-term project to increase knowledge on nature and environment. The activities have gained much attention in the media and become very popular among schools. SEA-U is currently involved in the planning of a marine ecological science center for research as well as public activities, aiming to build bridges between academia and the overall society. They are also planning a project together with Sida, in which they will work with schoolchildren in Namibia. An important aspect of this project will be creating contacts between schools in Sweden and Namibia.

After the presentation, the workshop participants were eager to discuss the project. A teacher at an English speaking school asked if activities could be organized in English, and wanted to know the procedure for booking an excursion. Another participant suggested that the project could be extended to include lakes, a proposal that was warmly received by the facilitators. Someone else wanted to know whether feedback from the students is used for improving the activities and developing new frameworks. The facilitators replied that they find it very important to communicate with the students and teachers and that they always hand out evaluation forms. However, they are a small organization and do not have as much time as they would like for such tasks.