



*“UWC makes **education** a force to unite people, nations and cultures for peace and a sustainable future”*

***Environmental Sustainability
National Committees
&
Short Courses
Awareness Campaign***

Questions and comments:

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Why care about environmental sustainability?

Climate change is increasingly becoming the most pressing global issue we face today. Barack Obama said in an interview for CNN in September 2017 that "[climate change is a threat that may define the contours of this century](#)". There will be many more climate-related problems in the coming decades, but a dangerous depletion in the availability of fresh water reserves as happened to Cape Town this year as well as the drier conditions that Californian forests are experiencing which are responsible for an increase in forest fires might be the most devastating. The United Nations has stated that "[water is the primary medium through which humans will feel the effects of climate change](#)".

The effects of climate change include alternation of weather patterns, including changes in the frequency and volume of rainfall, and an increase of droughts and floods in different parts of the world.

The city of Cape Town, a city of over 2 million and South Africa's second largest city, felt the impact of this scenario very significantly in 2018 when freshwater reserves were reduced to 18.3% of capacity in April 2018. The situation forced the city to impose strict rationing of its water resources which included Capetonians using only 50 litres of water a day, for cooking, showering, and flushing the toilet. It is not very much; fifteen litres allows for a 90-second shower. It was less than the minimum the UN recommends for daily domestic water needs.

Depletion of water and other natural resources will invariably lead to social unrest and the world could see a drawback in many of the freedoms that have been so hard to obtain. Extreme scenarios could also lead to [overt conflict over natural resources and war](#). Refugees as a result of a globally changing climate will also increase this century by a significant margin. The United Nations refugee programme (UNHCR) has estimated that there have been 22.5 million people displaced by climate and weather-related events since 2008 and this number is expected to jump to 50 million by 2050.

One other problem that is currently getting attention are the so-called 'plastic islands'. Large amounts of discarded plastics end up in the oceans. The largest plastic island is located in the Pacific Ocean between Hawaii and California, and it is referred to as the 'Great Pacific garbage patch'; it is about 1.6 million square kilometres in size, similar to the land surface of Iran, the 18th largest country in the world.

As ecosystems worldwide are depleted, many of the world's cultures who directly depend on natural ecosystems for survival will disappear too. A striking example is the people who live in Pacific islands such as [Tuvalu](#) and who are seeing the land go because of sea level rise. Other examples include the [Masaai and Oromo](#) of Kenya, who have to relocate to cities because of desertification impacting their native lands. Losing this cultural wealth is an issue that UWC should also be concerned about.

Environmental Sustainability at UWC National Committees

To contribute to the fight against climate change, the Spanish National Committee proposed the International Office to carry out a small environmental sustainability project that started in April 2018 to help six other NC's to reduce their environmental impact. The committees of Macedonia, Uruguay, Mexico, Portugal, Costa Rica and Thailand agreed to implement a series of actions to make their pre-selection and selection processes more environmentally friendly. This project was inspired in the work of the Spanish National Committee and the reduction of the environmental impact that its activities and alumni had during the selection year 2017 – 2018. The Spanish NC also implemented activities during its annual summer programme 'ActionxChange' and during its winter short course 'ActionxPeace'.

To do this project, we contacted 50 NC's overall from all 5 regions, including 7 from Asia, 5 from Europe, 10 from MENA, 18 from Africa and 18 from the Americas.

The team also delivered a workshop at the European regional meeting in Bulgaria in June 2018 with participants from European National Committees, UWC schools and the International Office. The workshop focused on the science of climate change, the potential of UWC to reduce the use of energy and resources, and the potential for the UWC to invest in renewable energy production. The workshop also included a *spectrum*

line game where participants had the chance to express their knowledge and opinions on different aspects of environmental sustainability.

During the selection process, the seven NC's focused on actions related to **food, transport, energy, lifestyle**, including recycling and the use of materials, saving **water**, and other **environmental awareness** actions. You can see a detailed list of activities per NC in the following section by following the colour code.

Spain	
<p>Substituted the use of snacks for fruit and nuts.</p> <p>The fruit available was also seasonal and grown nationally, which also reduces their environmental impact.</p> <p>The NC also substituted fizzy drinks for fruit juices and vegetable drinks such as coconut milk.</p> <p>Alumni who participated brought their own reusable plastic bottles.</p> <p>Avoided the use of paper almost entirely – including evaluators' dossiers and diplomas of participation.</p>	<p>Processed foods carry a larger ecological footprint than unprocessed foods.</p> <p>Seasonal foods require less energy to grow. Local food does not need as much transport and its associated fuel consumption.</p> <p>The avoidance of meat-based snacks also resulted in a lower impact as 83% of the world's farmland is used for growing cattle, and the production of cow products such as beef, milk and yoghurt has an added impact as cows produce methane, which is a greenhouse gas 85 times more powerful than CO₂, the most common of these gases.</p> <p>Using reusable items such as water bottles not only prevents the unnecessary production of waste, it also avoids the associated energy loss to manufacturing and transport of the bottles.</p> <p>Documents also included a QR code for parents to be able to access all documents from their phones. In the long term, this type of action also makes sense financially with a reduced cost to the NA.</p>
Estimated savings	2438 L water & 433 Kg CO₂ (± = taking public transport instead of driving)

ActionxChange

One of the main purposes of ActionxChange(AxC) is to promote Critical Engagement. Participants learn not only about how to create a social project but also to question the process that leads to it. Participants of the short course were asked how they could implement a Sustainability Strategy.

The role of the facilitators was to take ideas from their daily activities that might be more environmentally friendly but without imposing these habits on the participants. Facilitators wanted to allow them the opportunity to think about what is *Sustainability* and what entails to live towards a sustainable future, in other words, what actions should be taken at AxC and at their own lives to reach that *sustainable future*.

In that way, AxC became an experiment for this Sustainability “first-time-ever” strategy. Facilitators held two sessions to i) explore the concept of Sustainability (not only ecological but economic and personal sustainability) and set up working groups depending on the participants' interests and ii) share the plans and actions that each group was going to implement. Participants worked through the topics in two sessions.

During the first session, participants worked on a definition of what sustainability is. Participants took a position on an imaginary spectrum line, ranged from 0 to 10, depending on how much they agreed with a given statement. Participants then had the chance to explain why they had chosen a particular position and change it as the conversation evolved. Participants were then asked to write down on a post-it what was sustainability for them. Then they walked around the room and told another person what their definition was and exchanged papers. Then, next time they encountered someone, they explained: “That person over there believes Sustainability is... “. This exercise was repeated several times. Finally, the participants divided themselves into ‘Food’, ‘Energy’, ‘Water’, ‘Waste’ and were given time to work on those categories.

In the second session, each group explained the actions they were going to take to make the short course more sustainable. Participants also had the opportunity to learn about the use of geothermal energy that provides the venue with electricity. To cool the rooms the participants needed to close their windows, blinds and doors during the day and open them at night.

food

transport

energy

lifestyle

water

environmental awareness

Macedonia

Printed only four pages (over the whole period) and it was on reused paper.

Offered candidates vegetarian options and encouraged them to choose that.

Reused water cups for the whole period, 1 cup per person

Candidates liked that it was explained to them what the goal of this initiative was and that they were asked what else to do next year.

Substituted other paper documents with an electronic version.

Drove candidates in a bus from Skopje to the place of interviews, 48 people in total.



Uruguay

Avoided the use of disposable plastic bottles.

Made a meal from a different world region with candidates for homeless people.

Recycled paper, containers and plastic.

Offered only vegetarian options in the catering.

Carried out sustainability-oriented information activities.

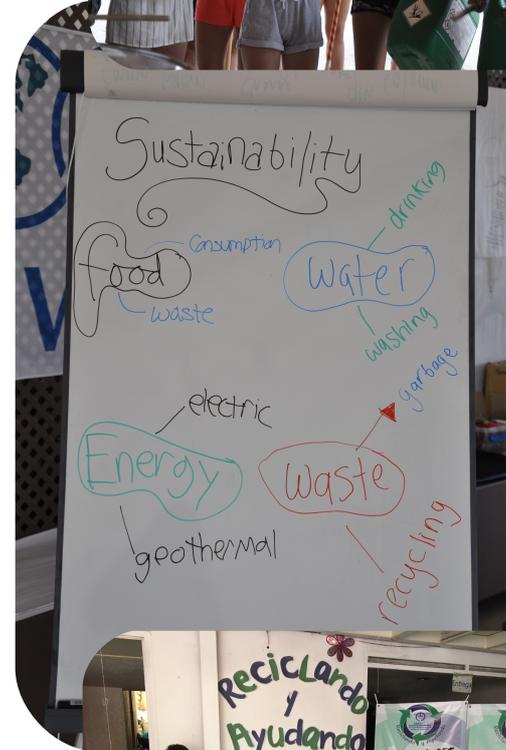
Managed food waste (compost, etc.).



Mexico

Shared brief to reduce energy and water.

Collected plastic bottle tops to raise funds for the Mexican Association of Children with Cancer (AMANC).



Costa Rica

Included a menu with vegetarian options.

Eliminated the use of paper whenever possible, for example in the sharing of documents during the selection process.

Shared brief to reduce energy and water.

Included two vegetarian meals for everyone.



Thailand

Substituted styrofoam containers with card-based containers.

Avoided the use of plastic cups.

Portugal

Had a conversation about waste and candidates were all very excited about implementing their ideas in the colleges.

Candidates were asked to bring their lunch but without disposable plastic water bottles and wrapping materials. As a result, candidates brought reusable bottles and lunch boxes.

The NC has sent out a survey to current Portuguese UWC students to understand what is being implemented at the schools and propose further sustainability actions and projects.



Broader impact

We want this project to be an opportunity for UWC graduates and prospective students to engage in wider environmental sustainability issues and carry out actions to lower their environmental impact at home and their workplace whenever possible. We would also like to draw attention to the potential that UWC NC's, UWC schools and the UWC community in promoting environmental sustainability worldwide. UWC students, particularly, have a tremendous opportunity to make of environmental sustainability central to their career. The renewable energy industry, for example, is a booming industry throughout the world especially now that [electricity generated from renewable sources](#) will be cheaper than that generated by fossil fuels. UWC graduates can also take part in the implementation of [cradle-to-cradle design](#) and the [circular economy](#) that will become increasingly relevant in the 21st Century as well as the development of environmentally sustainable transport and food systems. The [Ocean Cleanup](#) company has developed a system of nets to clean up oceanic waste patches such as the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. Airlines such as Dutch carrier KLM have begun to use second-generation biofuel mix generated from waste cooking oil in its [flights between Los Angeles and Amsterdam](#), and the French-German conglomerate has built the iLint, [the first train powered by water](#) that does not produce greenhouse gas emissions. The New Zealand company Sunfed Foods have produced [chicken-free chicken](#)[®] from pea extract and in 2013 the Dutch company Mosa Meats created [the first artificial hamburger](#) by growing cow cells in a lab without rearing or slaughtering cattle and its associated environmental impact.

Sustainability also brings other benefits, and it is central to the new Sustainable Development Goals that the United Nations has set to achieve by 2030: goal #7 “Affordable and clean energy”; goal #11 “Sustainable Cities and Communities”; goal #12 “Responsible consumption and production”; goal #13 “Climate action”. Two last goals focus on the conservation of ecosystems that are also essential for maintaining the level of pollution low and for ensuring healthy food systems that we depend on. These two goals are #14 “Life below water”, which targets the conservation of marine ecosystems, and goal #15 “Life on Land” that focuses on terrestrial ecosystems and includes combating desertification. The United Nations has, therefore, given much more room to environmental sustainability with these goals than it did with its previous 8 Millennium Development Goals when only goal #7 had a focus on environmental sustainability.

We think that National Committees have a responsibility to engage UWC candidates and students to take part and develop sustainability initiatives during the pre-selection and selection processes, the time at UWC and their future as UWC graduates. We also think that NC's should collaborate with one another and share good practices that lead to lower environmental impacts between NC's and update this information regularly. The same principle could apply for UWC Schools, which also have the opportunity to develop a comprehensive system as part of their CAS programme. In this case, activities could extend to the conservation of natural spaces and the local flora and fauna as some schools are already involved in.

Through this initiative, we also encourage UWC students and graduates to engage in projects such as those that led Chido Govera to become a [mushroom entrepreneur](#) and educator after escaping abject poverty in rural Zimbabwe. Students and graduates can also start activities similar to those taking place at the UWCs, for example, the [food waste minimisation strategy](#) at Pearson College in Canada or the [organic food garden](#) at Robert Bosch UWC in Germany.

Lastly, we suggest that National Committees engage in the UWC Hub to inform the UWC community of opportunities to engage in the field of environmental sustainability, whether as a prospective or current UWC student, a recent graduate or as UWC alumni. In this way, the UWC movement can grow to become a force for environmental sustainability contributing in a significant way to the United Nation's goals linked to the subject.