

# Environmental Education and Sustainable Consumption: The Case of Mexico

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## Abstract

Environmental education for sustainable consumption is one of the most recent challenges in the field of education. In the terms of Chapter 36 of Agenda 21 and the priorities of the schedule of work of the Commission for Sustainable Development, UNESCO itself recognises that this field is "in its infancy." Given the large number of sustainability definitions available, I understand sustainability to be a process that links social equity, economic growth and environmental protection. Therefore sustainable consumption is a mode of consumption congruent with this meaning of sustainability. It is a complex challenge for all of us for it alludes to complexities of modern life, which go beyond the very usual of formal and informal educational processes.

## Résumé

L'éducation relative à l'environnement en vue d'une consommation durable constitue un des plus récents défis à relever dans le domaine de l'éducation. Selon le chapitre 36 d'Action 21 et les priorités du calendrier de travail de la Commission sur le développement durable, l'UNESCO reconnaît que ce domaine est au " stade de l'enfance ". Étant donné le grand nombre de définitions sur la durabilité, j'entends par durabilité un processus qui lie équité sociale, croissance économique et protection de l'environnement. La consommation durable est donc un mode de consommation en harmonie avec cette signification de la durabilité. Il s'agit d'un défi difficile pour nous tous, car il a trait aux complexités de la vie moderne qui dépassent les traditionnels processus éducatifs formels et informels.

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The emerging field of environmental education for sustainable consumption has at least two serious, interrelated problems, which need to be tackled by educators. The first is the polemic surrounding the relationships between consumption patterns and income distribution. More specifically, this problem is grounded in issues of equity in the distribution of wealth and of global shifts towards sustainability policies and processes and the ramifications these issues have with respect to taking responsibility for environmental deterioration. Connections can be made to different patterns of consumption between nations, which compete under unequal economic conditions, as well as between the economic elite and the population masses within each country. The second problem facing educators interested in promoting environmental education for sustainable consumption finds us in the area of developing appropriate pedagogical strategies. We need to find ways of addressing questions such as the following: How can we bring about awareness and the practice of sustainable consumption in people, despite its opacity, through environmental education? Which indicators will give us more meaningful results than those economic instruments currently used to induce or deter social behaviours, aware as we are of the difficulties experienced by almost every country in qualitative progress, and above all, progress in education? How can we control the participation of the media in a world where commercial globalisation has its own rules? What role can schools play if environmental, and even educational, programmes seem further and further removed from the reality of children?

Consequently, the objective of this paper is to outline key issues in the growing discussion of the development perspectives of environmental education for sustainable consumption in the case of Mexico.

### **Consumption Patterns and Income Distribution**

Before discussing education for sustainable consumption in more detail, it is necessary to contextualise its development as an educational goal. In 1987, when the World Commission on Environment and Development defined the concept of “sustainable development” as a condition in which present generations may satisfy their needs without affecting the ability of future generations to satisfy theirs, it provoked much controversy over the emphasis placed on equity between different generations as opposed to equity within one given generation. However, the debate has also had positive repercussions by rekindling interest in analysing the importance of modifying the model of economic growth as a pre-condition of a shift towards

sustainability. Thus, recently, more attention has been paid to income distribution as a crucial factor in the struggle to alleviate poverty. For example, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) observed that “current consumption patterns and trends also raise important questions of equity, both between developed and developing countries and between rich and poor societies” (1997a, p. 5). Of course, this should not be read as a desire to match consumption levels and patterns of developing countries with those of the industrialised ones.

Other factors have played an important role in these discussions. The relationships between overpopulation, poverty and environmental deterioration have always been factored into the analysis, although from different viewpoints. At one extreme, poverty has been considered both cause and effect of the deterioration (CDMAALC, 1991); at the other, it has been seen as only the cause. Furthermore, population has been viewed as an independent variable with no connection to economic structure (Club of Rome, see Meadows et al., 1972) or as one of the consequences of poverty and under-development (Bariloche Foundation, see Angel Maya, 1992). Therefore increases in consumption levels, the distribution and size of population and the rational use of natural resources have had different forms of conceptual and political expression in a range of developed and developing countries. Thus, the sustainability debate has revolved around the demographic explosion, economic growth, quality of the environment and social equity.<sup>2</sup>

Although international concern about environmental deterioration was originally raised by the negative effects of industrialisation and the dominant style of development of developed countries, at the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (1972) the prevalent feeling was that environmental deterioration and, more specifically, pollution and its effects on health were consequences of underdevelopment. This meant that the “solution” was not a reduction in the rate of economic growth, but rather, advice that a continued effort should be made to harmonize such growth with environmental protection. However, at the end of the Conference it was concluded that too much attention had been paid to pollution and not enough to environmental problems brought about by asymmetric international relations.

At a seminar organised by UNEP and UNESCO in Cocoyoc, Mexico, on Models of Natural Resources Management, Environment and Strategies of Development, the dominant development style of industrialised nations was under attack once again, and work strategies were proposed to continue the search for an alternative model to combat the inequalities brought about by

this style with its inherent forms of neo-colonial exploitation. In Cocoyoc it was affirmed that development objectives should be humanistic and not material; for this reason, overconsumption as a means of satisfying needs was severely questioned (Angel Maya, 1992).

In the wake of the Nairobi Declaration 10 years later, the need for a more balanced development-underdevelopment relationship became apparent, especially with regard to the causes of environmental degradation; the blame was placed firmly on both poverty and wasteful consumption. At the Rio Conference (1992) this duality, highly contradictory in nature, was one of the main reasons for the demand for financing and technological transfer in favour of global development with environmental protection.<sup>3</sup>

In this setting, Provencio (n.d.) states that world-wide consumption patterns form a complete panorama. The same products show different consumption patterns in countries with the same income level and within each country there are different consumer patterns and trends, as well as radical differences between the major international blocks, including within the OECD itself.

For its part, eco-development strengthened the relationship between consumption patterns and the production and distribution structure in a "particular kind of development" (Sachs, 1973) which helped to explain the inadmissibility of putting environmental degradation down to just two variables: the demographic growth index and the product growth index. When the pattern of consumption was adjusted to include the alleviation of poverty, eco-development established the importance of bringing the production and distribution structure caused by market forces into line with the goods and services demanded by the satisfaction of basic needs. It also suggested a change in the consumption structure of the high-income sectors and the concept of product quality. Current styles of development coincide to a large extent with these formulations on the need to alter the pattern of consumption to overcome poverty.

Thus, Provencio defines consumption as the mediation between income and its distribution on the one hand and living conditions and poverty on the other and accepts the existence of cultural factors which make this over-determination more complex. That is, level of consumption depends on income, and the patterns of consumption depend on income distribution. In the case of Mexico, Lustig and Székely (1997) found that:

overall poverty and inequality rose during the adjustment years and it practically remained unchanged during the incipient and frustrated recovery of the early 1990s. However, these aggregate trends hide important

differences. While aggregate poverty and inequality remained almost unaltered between 1989 and 1994, a significant proportion of the poorest of the poor were worse off. In particular, poverty (extreme and moderate) increased in the primary sector, among rural workers, and in the backward areas of the southern and south-eastern regions in Mexico. Also, while inequality among non-wage income sources declined, wage inequality showed a significant increase.

They say that the extreme poverty line was calculated as the cost of the basic food basket using the poor population's spending patterns and the prices they had to pay.

Thus, even though income distribution and the pattern of consumption show a clear relationship between each other, it cannot be claimed that this relationship is unidirectional; instead, it is mediated by socio-economic and cultural factors. In other words, "it is likely that a sustainable world cannot be achieved without a greater degree of equity. But a more equitable world would not necessarily be more sustainable" (OECD, 1997a, A8). Therefore, the possibilities of influencing the values and attitudes implicit in consumption by means of educational processes are rife with operative uncertainties, especially when swimming against the powerful stream of product advertising.

### **Consumption Patterns and the Subject of Education**

In 1972, Consumers International recognised why "collective action to protect the environment can only be achieved when there is widespread individual awareness of the environmental consequences of consumption" (DSD, 1998, p. 1). In addition, in 1985, the UN Guidelines for Consumer Protection constituted a broad framework for promoting action not only in relation to issues of product safety and economic efficiency, but also action that generated social justice and economic development (DSD, 1998).

The relationship between consumption, production patterns and development was included in Chapter 4 of Agenda 21 at the Earth Summit in 1992 (Keating, 1993). In 1995, the Commission for Sustainable Development recommended the incorporation of sustainable consumption as one of its goals (UNESCO, 1998). Although the majority of OECD countries have regulatory, economic and social policy instruments dealing with consumption, consumerism is increasing almost everywhere; furthermore, consumer movements in Europe and North America are very different. In Mexico the consumer movement is just starting and has a weak link with environmental education.

Environmental education for sustainable consumption is mainly concerned with promoting supply information (i.e. product information concerning mode of production, possible environmental impacts, advertising costs, etc.) on products and with empowering the consumers' critical capacities regarding their available options, and with taking advantage of growing public concern about the relationship between consumption and environmental deterioration. This approach is underscored to a large extent by a recent UN proposal which states:

Governments should educate, or support the education of, consumers on the environmental impacts of lifestyles; the options for improvement, including extending the useful life of products, even if they are out of fashion; and the benefits of more sustainable consumption. Special attention should be paid to incorporating environmental curricula at every level of the formal education system. Citizens' organisations should be involved in these educational efforts. (DSD, 1998, p.10)

However, nothing is said in this proposal about economic differences, poverty, income distribution and possibilities of basic needs satisfaction.

The UN agenda statements, and those of the OECD itself, recognise the relationship between consumption and production, and the necessity of improving the efficiency of natural resource management among other important aspects.<sup>4</sup> Highlighting the links between economic policy and consumption contribute to easing the pressure on the environment, however, if the assumption is made that consumption in developing countries must be increased, nowhere is it specifically mentioned that income must be increased as an essential pre-condition to obtaining radical progress. Nevertheless, industrialised and post-industrialised countries lifestyles are criticised: "there is also considerable inertia against effective change within politics, markets and society, for the conventional economic growth model and its vision of prosperity has played a central role in the economic, political and psycho-social foundation of western society, and has become a basis for political consensus and stability" (DSD, 1998, p. 7). The truth is that the proposal for each country to establish its own limits and to modify current consumption patterns has not generated much enthusiasm from any of the parties involved.

Paragraph 28 of the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 adopted by the UN General Assembly Special Session on Sustainable Development in New York in June 1997 recommends courses of action required for a shift towards sustainable consumption. Regarding education it only advocates, "Encouraging the development and strengthening of educational programmes to promote sustainable consumption and

production patterns" (CSD, 1997, p. 5). A similar aim is set regarding the role of the media and publicity in promoting sustainable consumption: "Encouraging the media, advertising and marketing sectors to help shape sustainable consumption patterns." Very little for such a great responsibility. However, at the sixth meeting of the Commission for Sustainable Development, held from April 20<sup>th</sup> to May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1998, it was agreed to include education improvement as a cross-sectorial issue in its multi-annual work plan and to report progress made at the seventh meeting of the Commission for Sustainable Development.

Developing and improving environmental education for sustainable consumption requires specific pedagogical strategies for each group and segment of every population; for example, specific strategies are needed for those popular sectors which are highly vulnerable due to their lack of competencies combined with their lack of consumption (e.g. literacy, accessing information and services, etc.) which combines with their lower purchasing power to deny them an efficient participation in the goods and services market. Overcoming legal and economic vulnerability therefore becomes impossible without suitable educational processes for each social sector which would directly influence the "elimination of poverty and consolidation of democracy through wide-ranging processes of public participation and cultural consumption" (CI/CEAAL, 1996 p. 7). Significantly environmental education for sustainable development cannot be set aside from those current social processes which are derived from globalisation (for example, fluid identities, fragmented social groups). Social identities are tied increasingly to consumerism by means of products (food, clothing, music, etc.). Nowadays, business practices generate a set of conditions, which make it ill-advised to insult young people who, for example, identify more with rock music than traditional songs. Their identities have been configured in a particular; enacting from a notion of self and others that differs from that of their parents, and which must be taken into account when considering education processes. Identity is no longer restricted to national territories or to culture since both the material and symbolic dimensions of modern life have been affected by globalization.

García Canclini (1995) claims that the heart of the matter is for people to exercise their rights as citizens and that for them to participate as consumers it is necessary to "deconstruct those conceptions which see consumers' behaviour as predominantly irrational and those which only see people acting as a function of the rationality of ideological principles" (p. 18). To conceive of consumerism as a way of thinking and to recognise that its relationship with the public may give rise to a political strategy, accord-



ing to García Canclini (1995), may help combat the new socio-cultural scene. This scene can be synthesised into the following processes:

- Redefinition of public institutions and circuits of public agency: less clout for local and national organisms in benefit of transnational business conglomerates.
- Reformulation of patterns of urban settlement and cohabitation: from the neighbourhood to the condominium, from intimate interaction to the polycentric dissemination of the urban sprawl, especially in major cities, where basic activities (working, studying, consuming) are often carried out far from the place of residence and where the times spent travelling through unfamiliar parts of the city reduces the time available to be spent in one's own space.
- A reworking of the "very subjectivities" due to the predomination of goods and messages from a globalized economy and culture over those generated in the city and country we live in.
- The resulting redefinition of the feeling of belonging and identity, governed less and less by local or national loyalty and more by participation in transnational or deterritorialised consumer communities (youngsters buying rock products, television viewers who watch CNN programmes, MTV and other chains using satellite broadcasts).
- The transformation of the citizen as a representative of public opinion into the citizen as a consumer interested in enjoying a certain quality of life. One of the manifestations of this change is that discursive, critical forms of participation give way to the enjoyment of shows in the electronic media in which the narration or simple accumulation of anecdotes prevails over the rationalisation of problems, and a brief visual display of events over a structured, prolonged analysis. (Free translation, p. 24-25).

### **Environmental Educators' Regional Networks and Non-governmental Organizations**

This now brings us to focus more closely on Latin America in general, and on Mexico in particular. In relation to education for sustainability in Latin America, it was observed at the IUCN (1997):

The educational actions of the last 20 years were mostly voluntary efforts and show the need for profound change. They have arisen from scientific fields, bringing research patterns and disciplinary traditions that influence analysis and the educational approach. Education is generally based



on cognitive knowledge, on damage, solving problems, and scientific knowledge and concentrates on recycling paper, classifying residues and protecting endangered species. These approaches are not sufficient to change social behaviour, and the economic, cultural and political reality reproduces the most negative aspects of the consuming culture and of poverty. (p. 13)

In Mexico this is expressed through disjointed initiatives and measures, which need to be integrated into co-ordinated strategies from which success indices may be derived, taking into account the inherent complications of evaluating pedagogical results over the short-term. Despite all this, the past five years have seen exponential growth in the number of environmental educators, in their organisational and empowerment processes, in their penetration into different kinds of institutions and organisations, and in environmental educational and recreational centres or the incorporation of environmental education into their work plans. At the moment there are five regional networks of environmental educators covering the whole country, although some are well-organised and others are only just starting up their operations. Similarly, networks of environmental education centres are beginning to appear along with academic programmes for environmental educators in the form of masters degrees, specialisation courses, and diplomas. There also exist directories of organisations and institutions which foment learning and academic exchange.

However, we are also faced with several problems, which are still being worked through. Recognition of the legal character of the regional networks (except the central region), strengthening of the legal framework for environmental education, how to provide environmental educators with professional development, and the inclusion of issues beyond conservation in their teaching repertoire are some of the most important. It is with respect to this last point that we will focus our attention on environmental education for sustainable consumption.

As previously mentioned, environmental education for sustainable consumption is an incipient area in Mexico. Even though some of the issues are dealt with in the field of environmental education, they have not had a specific focus on consumption, but rather on protecting the environment. Only the central region's network of environmental educators have started to consider this area in the way it appears in the publicity for the Second Forum on Values, Consumption and Environmental Deterioration: Practical Considerations of Environmental Educators, held in October, 1998. In addition, the Mexican Association of Studies for the Defence of the Consumer (Asociación Mexicana de Estudios para la Defensa del Consumidor: Amedeco), founded in 1971 and already the

largest of its kind in Latin America and the Caribbean, was one of the first to promote greater sensitivity to consumption issues. This association employs the basic strategy of publicly denouncing companies violating norms of environmentally-sensitive production and of fomenting campaigns against the consumption of certain products, which means that it is not necessarily or directly concerned with specific educational objectives.

Reports exist (see for example, Trimboli & Iturra, 1997, p. 11) indicating that consumer education practices began in Latin America and the Caribbean during the seventies and Mexico belongs to a group of countries from this region who have included these practice in their formal education systems, especially as part of the educational reform implemented in 1993. Nevertheless, the consumer's relationship with the market has been regulated very little and available product information does not reach all sectors or social groups so that they may claim their rights and develop the capacity to critically analyse commercial advertising. This would enable them to distinguish between their true needs and those induced by growing market complexity caused by globalisation phenomena and, in the case of Mexico, more particularly by the trading treaties it has signed which have modified traditional product supply qualitatively and quantitatively in a short time span.

Some groups of environmentalists and educators in Mexico have placed importance upon some of the most pernicious effects of advertising, especially when it is aimed at young children, regarding the treatment of issues not only related to consumption and the environment (food of scant nutritional value, energy and water saving, waste management, trafficking in wildlife, etc.) but also other issues such as violence, human rights, the physically disabled, etc. They most frequently critique those advertisements aimed at high-income sectors of the population (advertisements for cars, designer clothes, luxury items, trips abroad, etc.) which are considered offensive to the majority of the population; that is, those who are in a precarious economic situation.

It is important to strengthen the sustainable dimension of consumption in environmental education projects because the globalisation of communications and attendant economic processes generate high social tensions over the marked differences in people's consumption. These tensions are often expressed in the form of higher incidences of violence and delinquency, especially in urban zones. In the short term this will bring about the need for legislation on commercial advertising to avoid exacerbating the consumerism of the few while faced with the economic and socio-cultural

realities of the great many who do not even have access to the most basic satisfaction of their needs.

Certainly, consumer education flies right into the teeth of the gale of the corporate interests of the big producers and distributors, who have in many cases acted with unrestrained impunity. But true citizenship will never exist without better informed social participation acting in defence of people's interests and aspirations and which "is repaid with consumer rights protection and promotion policies and strategies, which go far beyond the defence of the value of money to encompass what is known as the defence of the value of the person" (Trímboli-Iturra, 1997, p. 11). Small yet valuable local experiences may generate synergic effects. For example, the Prosumo project in Aguascalientes, Mexico, has encouraged the organisation of families of very low purchasing power and provided them with technical assistance for the repair of used electrical devices which were later sold for profit, but still at a low price. In addition to the economic benefits resulting from this activity, there is an educational component rewarded by points for voluntary work done which can later be exchanged for products purchased by the organisation.

It has already been mentioned that it is the most economically deprived sectors which are most vulnerable to the lack of environmental education for sustainable development "because to their defencelessness is added the lack of competency to establish an efficient relationship with the goods and services market" (CI/CEAAL, 1996, p. 7). On the other hand, it is the economically healthier sectors which cause the greatest environmental impacts as a result of unsuitable consumption practices and a market which produces goods and services to satisfy the extravagant demands of a reduced sector of the population who have significant purchasing power. Similarly, consumers' organisations aimed at the bulk of the population become socio-economic, political and cultural strategies which makes it possible to return a decisive role to those who had lost their right to exercise market influence.

It can be inferred from this discussion that these results are unattainable unless environmental educators' networks and civil society organisations in general start including environmental education for sustainable consumption in their work plans. While we are all consumers in one way or another, consumption as a generalised social phenomenon reveals different levels of participation, from the most individual to collective political activity.

## **The National Programme for the Organisation of Consumers, Mexico**

The national programme for the organisation of consumers is promoted by the Federal Consumers' Procurator's Office. This program constitutes an institutional response to public demand for alternatives likely to create a consuming culture. In this proposal, educating the people as to how to choose a suitable form of behaviour with respect to consumption is an essential component. The program comprises four sub-agendas:

- promotion of the consumer organisation,
- legal collaboration,
- improvement of the family economy, and
- consuming culture.

As part of this program, the Federal Consumers' Procurator's Office, in co-ordination with the Secretariat of Environment, Natural Resources and Fisheries, organised a workshop in 1996 on "Education, Consumption and Sustainability" to provide a space for both discussion and analysis of environmental and consumption issues and to develop inter-institutional projects which would lay the foundations for an educational strategy for sustainable consumption. The workshop consisted of eight integrated sessions of exhibitions and work groups. The Federal Consumers' Procurator's Office presented the national program for the organisation of consumers, and the Secretariat of Environment, Natural Resources and Fisheries presented its national, non-formal environmental education strategy. Others made contributions that drew on perspectives ranging from anthropology, pedagogy and economics to psychology. A planning exercise was also carried out to define joint courses of action for both organisations. The conclusions of the workshops were organised into four main topic areas:

- links between consumption and the environment,
- factors which determine consumption derive from consumerism,
- the impact of consumerism on the environment and the quality of life, and
- actions taken by the Federal Consumers' Procurator's Office and the Secretariat of Environment, Natural Resources and Fisheries to attend to problems caused by the consumption/environment relationship.

A synthesis of the conclusions suggests that the relationship between consumption and the environment is overdetermined (Laclau & Mouffe,

1986) and that a consuming culture is a necessary component of education. The current problem posed by this relationship is linked to the western socialising model and its lifestyles as advocated by the mass media and other cultural apparatuses bringing about the irrational exploitation of natural resources with impacts, which are, in many cases, irreversible. Furthermore, this process has accelerated in recent decades as a consequence of global economic processes, globalizing environmental problems and a widening of the inequity gap with regards to the distribution of resources between northern and southern countries. In November 1997, as a result of the workshop described above, a collaboration agreement was signed by the Secretariat of Environment, Natural Resources and Fisheries and the Federal Consumers' Procurator's Office to promote courses of action of mutual interest in environmental education, training, communication and research for sustainable consumption.

Under this agreement, the Secretariat of Environment, Natural Resources and Fisheries and Federal Consumers' Procurator's Office organised a Forum on Environmental Education for Sustainable Consumption. This event boasted the participation of representatives of consumers' organisations, of environmental educators' networks, and of non-government and academic organisations interested in the issue. The final outcome of this forum was an inter-institutional strategy to strengthen education in environmental educators' networks and consumers' organisations and a plan of action with short-term goals.

### **Looking to the Future**

In conclusion, I have arrived at eight recommendations for the ongoing development of environmental education for sustainable consumption in Mexico and elsewhere.

- If it is admitted that consumption patterns can be changed by means of regulatory processes, economic instruments and social instruments such as education, it would be a good idea to try to find a better way to put these three components together. For example, environmental regulation measures to fight poverty and institutionalised educational processes must be promoted or they will not gel. For the moment they work independently from each other, which reduces their margins of effectiveness.

- Environmental education for sustainable consumption must be strengthened in parallel with improvements in income distribution so that increased consumption does not in turn increase environmental impacts. There is no possibility of encouraging sustainable consumption through educational processes if peoples' basic needs have not been satisfied.
- There is a material dimension and a symbolic dimension associated with consumption. No effective educational process can avoid both dimensions, which makes it necessary to develop different teaching techniques, especially for attending to the most vulnerable social segments of a population, such as children and young people from poor families with cultural backgrounds different from those lifestyles advocated by the mass media and which have been established as dominant models.
- For these reasons, pedagogical proposals aimed at promoting sustainable consumption must be specific and designed for each particular situation. Successful experiences in other countries or in different national contexts will be ineffective if they are imposed on other unrelated contexts and realities. Examples of success can be useful, so long as they are analysed as references defined by the boundaries of their own characteristics.
- The organisation of consumers is a necessary pre-condition to obtaining clearer results in the modification of social consumption patterns, in addition to the effort which must be made in the organisation of formal educational systems.
- Environmental education for sustainable consumption must be strengthened as one aspect of environmental education, since a movement has arisen to push independent educational programmes in the context of the range of treaties and agreements promoted by different international agencies and organisms. Thus, we encounter at present education for the protection of biodiversity, for the fight against desertification, etc. If this situation continues, it will not only promote disjointed efforts which divide issues that should be dealt with together, but will also set off a struggle to obtain financial resources for each of the programs. This, in turn, will further reduce the already insufficient funds earmarked for education in developing countries.
- From Mexico's incipient experience on this issue it can be inferred that this country's particular composition and social distribution demands that policies on environmental education for sustainable consumption must vary in accordance with the target population group (rural, urban, indigenous, etc.) and with the producers.

- As one aspect of environmental education, environmental education for sustainable consumption bridges the gap to reach other spheres of public education, such as population studies, sexual education, education for human rights and for democracy, among others. By means of consumption, we Mexicans can reintegrate ourselves as citizens of an increasingly globalised world with our own distinctive, albeit plural, characteristics. It is not a case of defending essential “Mexican” identities because that would be absurd in a world of complex transitions which produces plural, provisional and nomadic subjectivities. It is a question of recognising existing social and cultural diversity and collectively constructing civilised proposals to achieve the right to equity in a world of differences.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> This paper is only a part of the national report presented at the Workshop on Education and Sustainable Consumption, convoked by the OECD from September 14th to 15th, 1998 in Paris. In such a report participated Elisa Bonilla and Armando Sánchez of the Secretary of Public Education, but their contribution is not included in this version.

<sup>2</sup> I have written elsewhere about the complex interrelationships between population size and the consumption levels of developed and developing countries (see González-Gaudiano, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> Another argument was the so-called “ecological debt” which the industrialised world owed to the developing countries.

<sup>4</sup> However, it is recognised that there has been more progress in production than consumption. The policies dealing with clean production and eco-efficiency, for example, have better prospects in the short term. As far as consumption is concerned, the most definite agreements are leading towards establishing policies on purchases made by government offices and their management of waste, which has been called ‘greening the government’.



## Notes on Contributor

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