



Activity sheet 2 Sustaining Europe and the world

The environment belongs to everyone, so the EU has rules about, for example, stopping pollution and protecting plants and animals. These rules apply in all EU countries and their governments have to make sure they are obeyed.

This activity sheet will help students to understand more about sustainable development, including the links between environmental and social issues.

Plastic fantastic?

GCSE WJEC, Design and Technology (Graphic Products)
For general curriculum links, see the Teachers' Introduction

Should the EU force countries to have the same environmental policies?

- Plastic shopping bags became common in the 1970s. Because they were sturdy, convenient and cheap to make, people thought they were a great idea. Today, hundreds of billions are produced each year worldwide. Many end up clogging drains, hanging from trees, or eaten accidentally by animals.
- Bangladesh and Taiwan have banned plastic bags altogether. Australia, South Africa and Ireland tax the bags to discourage people from using them. Kenya and South Africa have made thin plastic bags illegal; in Benin, they are recycled to make bracelets or handbags.
- In the EU, 5-10 million tonnes of various plastic waste are burned or buried each year. EU members are required to make laws about waste, which include reusing and recycling it – not just burying it in the ground. Some countries are better at recycling than others – the Netherlands recycles over 60% of its waste, while Portugal recycles only 5%.
- In 2003, the European Parliament passed a law to the effect that “the polluter pays” – i.e. companies that cause pollution should pay to clean it up, rather than taxpayers. Taxing plastic bags might be against the spirit of this law.

Activities: In the bag

- (1) In groups, design a decorated paper bag or carton that is reusable or recyclable, and could be used instead of plastic bags. Try to make it ‘European’ in feel, so that it could be used in any country.
- (2) Calculate roughly how many plastic bags your class uses each year; then estimate how many are used by your town, and by Wales as a whole. Then work out how far into Europe these would stretch if they were laid end to end.

Discussion points:

- Why are some countries more “advanced” than others in looking after the environment? Is this acceptable?
- Should the EU “force” all of its member countries to have the same policy?
- Should there be a tax on plastic shopping bags? Should there be an outright ban on shops giving them out?
- What do you think about recycling in your local area? What about in your school?

Carbon emissions

GCSE
A2

WJEC, Geography – The Fragile World / Economic Activities
WJEC, Geography – Sustainable Development

- In 2002, all of the EU's member states (15 at the time) ratified the **Kyoto Protocol** – an international agreement to reduce emissions of the 'greenhouse gases' that are seemingly warming up our planet. The EU is also calling on other countries to ratify the agreement, and is urging the United States to participate.
- The EU produces 22% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions. By 2010, it aims to have reduced its emissions to 8% below their 1990 level.
- A system of **emissions trading** is now in place. Each country sets a limit on greenhouse gas emissions, and can 'sell' any part of its allowance which it does not use. Some people say that this system makes countries less accountable for the pollution they create, and countries have been accused of deliberately providing over-generous allowances to their industries.

Activity: Pollution scenario

Divide the class into four groups to discuss the following scenario:

An alternative scheme to emissions trading is introduced, in which the EU's most polluting industries will be subject to individual fines. A Welsh concrete factory complains that it will have to close down, as it will be unable to pay the heavy fines.

Following this initial discussion, allocate one of the following roles to each group:

- **Factory manager.** Your concern is to keep open your factory. You might care about the environment, but you see this as secondary to the future of your business and your employees.
- **Local MEP** (Member of the European Parliament). You need to balance the needs of the local community with the need to follow European law.
- **European Commission representative.** Your job is to defend EU policy.
- **Environmental campaigner.** You are concerned about pollution in the local area, and think that businesses should be forced to comply with environmental rules.

Students should discuss their respective role in detail; then, each group should write a short statement on their position and should appoint a spokesperson. You can now convene a meeting in which the groups try to find a solution to the situation. After each group makes its statement, allow an opportunity for general debate. After a while, ask the smaller groups to reconvene to discuss whether their position has changed, then bring them together for one final plenary discussion.

Further discussion points:

- Why should we take account of the needs of businesses, rather than just the needs of the environment?
- Should countries be able to buy other countries' right to pollute?
- Is it better for individual countries to decide how to tackle pollution and carbon emissions, rather than the EU doing so?

Introducing sustainability

A2

WJEC, Geography – Sustainable Development
For general curriculum links, see the Teachers' Introduction

Why are some decisions about sustainable development difficult to make?

- **Sustainable development** means treating the world as if we are here to stay – whenever we make decisions, we should consider the needs of future generations, and not just our own.
- Many people think that sustainable development just means caring for the environment. This is only one part of the picture. We also need to tackle poverty, look after communities and strengthen our economy – and sometimes it is difficult to achieve all of these things at the same time.
- The EU's **Sustainable Development Strategy** says that governments, businesses and other organisations must join forces to achieve economic development, social cohesion and protection of the environment.

Activity: Balancing acts

Here are some EU policy areas that have an impact on sustainable development:

Economic development
Climate change and energy
Managing natural resources

Poverty and social exclusion
Transport
Global partnership

In groups of 4-6, consider how the following scenarios fit into the EU's priorities. Do the good points of each idea outweigh the bad points?

1. Building new nuclear power stations across Europe
2. Building tens of thousands of low-cost houses in Cardiff and Newport
3. Moving a call centre from the UK to Slovakia
4. Paying European farmers to produce low-cost sugar, instead of importing it from Africa

Discussion points:

- What's more important – looking after our own needs or those of others? Is it possible to do both at the same time?
- Why should European countries join forces to tackle sustainability?
- Should we care what the world is like in 10 years' time? What about in 50 years? In 500 years?
- How should the EU balance its members' needs with the needs of poorer countries in Africa, Asia or Latin America?

About Citaware

Citaware aims to increase understanding in Wales of European citizenship, and to enable people of all ages to engage with EU institutions. It is funded by the European Commission and organised jointly by:



Welsh Centre for International Affairs (WCIA)

National forum for the exchange of ideas on international issues.
www.wcia.org.uk



Council for Education in World Citizenship – Cymru

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