

Ecological Footprint, Sustainable Energies ... misconception in “master minds”

Cíntia Campos, Alexandra Nobre

Departamento de Biologia/CBMA (Centro de Biologia Molecular e Ambiental), Universidade do Minho
anobre@bio.uminho.pt

Ecological Footprint, Sustainable Energies, Clarification of Concepts, Education for Citizenship

During 2009, worldwide known as the Year of Darwin, the Department of Biology of Minho University carried out several actions inserted in the project "Darwin à moda DUMinho". One of them was the release of a national contest of ideas, with the aim of spreading some cutting edge concepts in the scope of Biology *senso lato*. Nowadays, environmental concerns are extremely actual subjects. Terms like energy sustainability, shortage of drinking water, global warming, extinction of species among others, demand conscious decisions of all of us and the re-programming of our behaviors in a very short period of time. But is the society in general, well informed and conscious of the true meaning and implications of these terms that daily we are faced with? The University has an enormous responsibility in education for the citizenship and should be assertive and consequent in the measures that it takes. In order to survey the way the university students of different courses, that possess a privileged access to Knowledge and for that reason can disseminate it outside of the Universities, understand concepts intensely published in the media like "Ecological Footprint" and "Sustainable Energies", we decided to accomplish a small analysis and diagnosis inquiry. The questionnaire was driven to three hundred students of the University of Minho of C1 courses belonging to different areas of the Knowledge (Sciences, Engineering, Humanities, Administration, Basic Education), and planned in order to be accessible, short and appellative (multiple choice answer during no more than six minutes).

The results were preoccupying, as they allowed us to verify that more than two thirds of the inquired population was not capable of identifying correctly the meaning of the concepts Sustainable Energies and Ecological Footprint (only 35% and 23%, respectively gave the right answer) independently of the inquired course. It is important to emphasize that, if this the panorama in a population with a privileged access to information and knowledge, outside the university walls the scenery will be, very probably, still worse.