



**Universität  
Zürich<sup>UZH</sup>**

**Right  
Livelihood**  
CENTRE ZÜRICH

# **Sustainability Now! Analysing Empowerment for Change**

«Change Processes through Education»

## **Veranstaltungsbericht**

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26.05.2023

On the evening of the 25th of May (2023), we - Sophie Hasler, Elizabeth Schilpp, Niels Heini - had the honor of moderating a panel discussion. This panel discussion included Neshan Gunasekara, the legacy holder of the 2007 Right Livelihood Award winner Judge Christopher Weeramantry, Isabelle Bosset from the Éducation21 foundation and Prof. Dr. Roland Reichenbach, the Chair of General Education Studies at the University of Zurich.

This event took place as part of the interdisciplinary lecture series «Sustainability Now! Analysing Empowerment for Change». The selected Laureates of the Right Livelihood Award, who are invited in the spring semester of 2023, are leaders in promoting human rights and environmental protection by mobilizing communities and strengthening grassroots initiatives. In addition to the attending Laureate of each event, the organization invites one representative from academia and another representative from civil society.

The title of our evening was «Change Processes through Education». The keynote speaker Neshan Gunasekera is the Legacy Holder of the 2007 Right Livelihood Award winner Judge Christopher Weeramantry. Neshan is a lawyer, coach and educationist and is currently employed at the Raoul Wallenberg Institute in Sweden as a research fellow. In his speech, he shared how meaningful the collaboration with Judge Weeramantry was and linked this to the concept of experiential learning. He provided input on how we can learn through lived experiences and sharing these experiences with other generations.

All of the key messages of the evening linked to the title of the evening, Change Processes through Education. Thus, a central question was also how (and when) children should learn about sustainable development and sustainable education in school. According to information provided through discussion by our panelists, it seems important to not overburden the children or to instrumentalize children towards certain topics; rather it is crucial to expose them to these issues and to guide them through the issues. In this process, the teacher holds a crucial position and should be convinced of what he/she is teaching and how to situate it accordingly. However, it seems that the role of the teacher also shows a tension in the school system, namely the pressure from society to perform and also from parents that have a certain path envisioned for their children, e.g., a desire for them to be good at mathematics and not learn other things. But it is important to state that there are things that can be done to introduce the idea of sustainability to students in all stages of education and ages. Another issue that is prevalent today is the misinformation on social media, and on the internet in general. Here, a question on how the school can respond to this was raised.

The discussion also emphasized the importance of learning outside the school institution by experiencing things and exchanging ideas with various people. When it comes to our own actions in terms of sustainable development, it is important to arrive at an informed middle ground. While it is clear that (probably) none of us are perfect (i.e. very few individuals that never take the airplane, never eat meat, etc.), but regardless, we can still take action. It is important that globally, everyone stops with their short-term thinking, and also thinks about future generations and learns from previous generations.

As a moderation group, we have several take-home messages. The first is that education and the change it can bring forth, is very complex and there is no simple answer. Secondly, there is always room for activism, it is important to learn from and connect with other people. Third, in the midst of new technological advancements, it is important to not lose the connection to nature. We would like to thank everyone attending this evening for the inspiring and thought-provoking discussions and questions.