

PST34 - Can environmental education actions change public attitudes? An example using the pond habitat and associated biodiversity

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Ponds provide vital ecological services. They are biodiversity hotspots and important breeding sites for rare and endangered species, including amphibians and dragonflies. Nevertheless, their number is decreasing due to habitat degradation caused by human activities. Despite the efforts of scientific research and conservation actions, the public perception, attitude and behavior towards ponds and its biodiversity has a crucial role in overcoming this problem.

The “Ponds with Life” environmental education project was developed to raise public awareness and engagement in the study of ponds by promoting the direct contact between the public and nature, researchers and pedagogical hands-on exploration activities.

In order to understand the impact that environmental education projects can have, a pre-post- project survey was set-up to assess the effects of the “Ponds with Life” project on the environmental consciousness, knowledge and attitude changes towards ponds and the associated biodiversity of school students aged 15 to 18. The survey questions were based on Likert scales and their pre-post project comparisons used an innovative multivariate hypothesis testing approach.

The results showed that the project significantly improved the students’ knowledge and attitudes towards ponds and associated biodiversity, especially the amphibians.

Ponds can be found or constructed in urban areas and despite small sized, they proved to be interesting model habitats and living laboratories to foster environmental education, by encompassing a high number of species and a fast ecological succession.

The results of this study resulted in the first paper on the use of ponds in Environmental Education entitled “Can Environmental Education Actions Change Public Attitudes? An Example Using the Pond Habitat and Associated Biodiversity”.