

A young girl in a school uniform is the central figure of the image. She is wearing a grey sweater over a blue-collared shirt and a grey and white checkered skirt. She is smiling and looking towards the camera while holding a wooden crate. She is standing in a garden bed with dark soil. In the background, there is a wall made of reddish-brown earth and a metal pole. To the right, there are green plants. The overall scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

FOUNDATION FOR
ENVIRONMENTAL
EDUCATION –
A STORY

A note from the editors

This book is the fruit of a series of interviews with Jan Eriksen, President of the Foundation for Environmental Education, Finn Bolding Thomsen, Green Key International Director, a number of discussions with FEE staff members, National Operators and a little bit of what we have experienced in the process.

The information collected and presented in the next pages is aimed at reminding the oldest amongst us of how FEE came about whilst colouring-in some black and white memories and narrating for the youngest the story of our organisation, told by a beloved and, unfortunately, outgoing president.

Thank you, Jan, for showing us and the rest of the family a little bit of what it is to be FEE.

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The early years of the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE)

When the environment started to climb up political agendas in the 60s and the 70s, the idea of being more respectful towards the environment evolved, slowly but surely, into an international movement.

In the early 70s the first environment ministries came together, and the first United Nations Conference on the Human Environment took place in Stockholm in 1972. The main question raised at the Conference was how countries could reinforce knowledge about the environment; it was not only about natural history, but also about understanding the ecosystem. The recommendation, therefore, was to reinforce environmental education for the coming generation.

The first Conference on Environmental Education was convened in Tbilisi, Georgia, in 1977, when a number of education experts were asked to provide the Council of Europe with information on the subject. These experts came from numerous European countries, and found the Conference such a stimulating environment, that they decided to

keep meeting two or three times every year.

In 1980, Harry Wals organised an international seminar with the imposing title, 'Pedagogical instruments to stimulate social participation in finding solutions to the environmental problems in the urban environment'. The theoretical basis of this seminar and the group of people involved were the origins of FEEE.

Leiden, in the Netherlands, saw the birth of the 'Foundation for Environmental Education in Europe' in 1981. FEE was born, with a third 'E', to indicate the geographical area of the implementation of its work – Europe.

At first, FEEE's purpose was simply to raise awareness of the natural environment by bringing people to conferences, and by creating the platform

for collaboration. The first conferences were mainly organised in zoos, which at the time were seen as places where children could be taught about wild animals' habitats and enhance their understanding of ecosystems.

Up to 1985-86, FEEE had been a small group of people that aimed to spread environmental education amongst young people. It was not yet an organisation, but still the same group of people put together for the Tbilisi Conference with four member countries, since the four founding members came from Denmark, France, Germany and Spain.

To show how informally they worked, the position of the president was taken by Harry Wals from the Netherlands, which was not a FEEE member.



BLUE FLAG

1985 was the year when FEEE France introduced the idea that 'pollution does not recognise any borders', be it air or sea pollution; it only followed the wind and the currents.

Then FEEE France asked 1000 French students to prepare a letter, in which they explained who they were, where they lived and the purpose of their letter. The students were trying to find out how the ocean currents spread pollution around the world: they put their letters into bottles that were then corked and released in the Mid-Atlantic Ocean by the French navy. They hoped the bottles would float to either South America, North America, Europe, or Africa, and that somebody would send them a response.

A symbol of the action was created: a flag, a blue flag with a white circle and three waves, with a bottle on the top of them. A few years later, this concept developed into the Blue Flag as we know it today.

The action was repeated the following year, and this time the French Air Force dropped the bottles in the Atlantic Ocean. However, no response was ever received.



Nevertheless, the idea to look at sea pollution as a whole led to the question of whether something could be done to improve the marine environment. The next step was the creation of a questionnaire with a list of criteria about beaches and marinas, on how to create cleaner and safer sites, including ideas on environmental education activities. This was the beginning of the Blue Flag.

At the time, the European Union had a directive about bathing water quality, which was later revised, since it had not been as effective as expected. Hence, the EU saw the Blue Flag as a tool to help implement the directive. This collaboration was the first step towards a relationship between the European Union and FEEE France.

In 1987, a brand new initiative was presented: an ecolabel, i.e. the Blue Flag, represented by the already existing logo with the white circle and three blue waves. It was going to be used for those beaches and marinas that would fulfil the established criteria.

The concept of the 'ecolabel' is, as we say in FEE, based on a 'carrot and stick' approach: if you do not reach a certain standard, you will be hit by a stick, but if you will be rewarded with something. It

was a completely new approach at the time, in the mid-1980s, that could bring environmental education much closer to people. Therefore, the Blue Flag was introduced as a cooperation between FEEE, which owned the brand through the French initiative, and the European Union.

Even though FEEE had only four members during its first year of implementation, Blue Flag was run by ten countries. It was an immediate success, as it caught the attention of local people, tourists and the media. People thought it provided useful information about the sites they were visiting, the water, equipment, etc., as well as a good series of environmental-related activities, information boards, and guided tours.

In 1989, it was decided that FEEE could no longer accept countries running the Blue Flag without being members, and that there should be stricter rules about awarding the Blue Flag, in order for it to have the same value in each country. This is when the first FEEE statute was created, and in 1992 the Blue Flag was back on track, with all countries following the same criteria.

“The Blue Flag was not only the first FEEE programme, but also the first ecolabel in the world. As President, I’m very proud to say that we still represent it, and even if it is our oldest programme, it is still growing in numbers, not only in terms of applying sites but also in participating countries”



THE OTHER PROGRAMMES

Eco-Schools, YRE

1992 was an interesting year for the organisation. It was the year when new ideas for new programmes besides Blue Flag were presented. Once again a French initiative called 'Young Reporters for the Environment', and a Danish one for 'Green Schools' – later called 'Eco-Schools' – were introduced.

It was therefore decided to run them on a pilot basis at the national level for two years, before fully introducing them. Needless to say, Eco-Schools and Young Reporters for the Environment became the next official FEEE programmes together with Blue Flag, in 1994.

"I think it is very important to highlight the fact that all FEE programmes were developed in the member countries, but the ownership later passed to FEE. It helps understand the spirit and soul of FEE"

“The first people who started FEEE at the end of 1970s and beginning of 1980s, used to have great fun at their meetings. They used to sing and dance, and have a nice time beside conferences and formal meetings. And today, sitting here with 25 years of experience in FEE, I am still surprised to see that the FEE spirit has been kept. It is clear to me, whenever I participate in a National Operator Meeting, or go to the General Assembly”



LEVELS OF AWARENESS RAISING

"From my understanding, you could divide environmental education into three levels: there is formal education in schools, high schools and universities; there is staff training, and then awareness raising.

Taking Eco-Schools as an example, we can see that formal education and teacher training play a major role. But a minor part of it is represented by awareness raising, performed by the students when they go back home and say to their families: 'We have to save water in our home because of this and this, and I also have some ideas on how

to do it.' This is awareness raising performed at home.

The same can be said for Blue Flag, which includes a lot of staff training (beach manager, lifeguards, etc.), but at the same time is able to reach a greater portion of society through non-formal education, represented by environmental activities.

So we can say that the five programmes fulfil environmental education for society as a whole, but in different ways and addressing different groups."

General Assembly 2008,
UK





... Learning about Forests

In 1996, at the Nicolas Hulot Conference on Environmental Education, Calle Carlsson from Sweden introduced a programme called 'Forests in School', which later became 'Learning about Forests'.

For a few years it was discussed how to bring the very experienced Swedish, Finnish and Norwegian programme into a FEEE context. It was a new situation, since the programme was not invented by a FEEE member, but came from outside instead. A Steering Committee was then introduced, to decide on the ways to incorporate this external programme into our organisation.

"I was one of the speakers at the conference. He came to me and said: 'We have a splendid programme in Sweden, Norway and Finland, and you have a fantastic network' (at that time we had reached 16 countries)"

... and Green Key

The process of introducing a programme owned outside of FEEE was repeated in 2003 with Green Key. Green Key was originally a Danish programme inspired by Blue Flag, conceived by the Danish Outdoor Council as an ecolabel for hotels and hostels.

It was brought to the FEEE General Assembly in 1998, but it was not accepted as an official programme until a few years later, when France also started running it. It was confirmed and officially included as a FEE programme following the same steering committee procedure followed for Learning about Forests.

FEEE now had five official programmes: three concerned with environmental education and two related to sustainable tourism. From the start, FEEE had aimed to foster environmental education addressing society as a whole, yet it had not been possible to do it with only one programme; in that sense, it had to expand!



The technical structure of FEE

The Blue Flag experience was brought into the new programmes, but many things developed over the years.

In Blue Flag, at the beginning the Jury was composed by National Operators, yet, it soon became clear that an independent Jury was needed. However, this first experience was not valueless: the early Jury meetings became the National Operator Meetings, which were later introduced for all other programmes.

Differentiated membership was another system that was introduced in the early '90s. An organisation can be a Full Member, an Associate Member or an Affiliate Member. The idea behind the Associate Membership was that, since becoming properly familiarised with FEEE takes time and effort, a five-year framework could be introduced to ensure eligibility for a Full Membership.

Later on a mentoring mechanism was introduced, to help an Associate Member get on board. This assistance role was to be taken up by experienced people from FEEE, mainly the Board of Directors members or the Head Office staff.

“I think this is also safeguarding the spirit of FEE, because when you enter a new organisation there are many things you just can't know from the very start. But having an annual visit from your mentor, who is meeting with you, your staff, your board, is something that gives you the feeling of being part of a group”



The concept of sustainability

FEEE as an organisation is undoubtedly influenced by current affairs. The Rio Conference in 1992 introduced a completely new way of thinking, and the book 'Our common future' by the former Prime Minister of Norway Gro Harlem Brundtland, caused a 90-degree turn.

Until 1992 the idea was to save the Earth's resources, otherwise the survival of humanity would be under threat. The new philosophy behind sustainability, however, explained that it was possible to create more wealth in the world, and this had to be done sustainably, by recycling and using resources in an intelligent way.

At FEEE we realised that this new way of tackling environmental challenges was already present in our work; sustainability was already part of our programmes, and especially after the Johannesburg Conference in 2002 and the Rio+20 in 2012, we had actively worked on elaborating it, and creating more understanding of sustainable development among our participating audience.

Withdrawal of the EU support

When the Blue Flag was first introduced, it had a strong support from the European Union, as it encouraged EU countries to implement the Bathing Water Directive introduced in 1974.

The European Union granted its financial support and made the Berlaymont building in Brussels available for the annual International Jury meetings.

However, in 1998, EU financial support stopped and the European Union presented a project for an EU flag for beaches and marinas. This was strongly questioned on the national level, although eventually discounted. Yet, it did not change the fact that the European Union suddenly withdrew its financial support for Blue Flag.

This incident called for an Extraordinary Board Meeting, whose agenda had one sole point: 'How to help Blue Flag continue without EU support'.

It was January 1999, only three months ahead of the International Jury and five months before the opening of the Blue Flag season, when the solution presented was the introduction of a levy that countries had to pay to the International Coordination, for each site that was awarded. It was initially introduced for Blue Flag, and later for the rest of the programmes as well.



FINN BOLDING THOMSEN

... currently Green Key International Director, was hired in 1998 as Blue Flag Assistant. After the withdrawal of EU support and the introduction of the levy, he became Blue Flag European Coordinator until 2004.

"When Blue Flag was EU-funded, we were able to do control visits in many different locations. When the first levies were introduced, they made it possible to pay my salary and not much else, so I remember doing control visits by bike along the coast north of Copenhagen. I was able to check a few beaches and marinas, but it was not a very satisfying solution, so after that the BF levy was increased and we found a sponsor.

In this way the programme recovered little by little."

FEEE goes global and becomes FEE

In the late 90s, FEEE saw a significant increase in the number of countries outside of Europe that wanted to become members, mainly because of Blue Flag.

"I visited South Africa in October 1998 for family reasons, and I was invited to the Department for Environment and Tourism in Cape Town. During a meeting, I was told that they were really interested in introducing the Blue Flag programme in South Africa.

At that point I had to say that FEEE was a Foundation for Environmental Education in Europe. We were not outside of Europe and it was not possible to start the Blue Flag programme without being a FEEE member. In fact, the message I had to bring back was: 'Why doesn't FEEE consider the possibility of operating also outside of Europe?'"

The same interest was later expressed by the Caribbean Association for Sustainable Tourism, on behalf of a number of countries in the Caribbean area.

At that point the possibility of going global started to be actively discussed within FEEE.

A vast majority of members stated that if FEEE had a mission, there should certainly not be any geographical limits to it. On the other hand, this challenge would have unquestionably raised new issues.

In 2000, at the General Assembly in Dubrovnik, Croatia, the proposal of opening FEEE to the rest of the world was intensely discussed; some of the major issues concerned the name of the organisation, and the financial and political implications of such change.

In 2001, at the General Assembly in Copenhagen, Denmark, it was decided to take away the last

"For the new name, we tried different alternatives. One of the options was 'Foundation for Environmental Education Worldwide', but FEEW was perhaps not a very good abbreviation, so the idea was dropped quite quickly. We left it as FEE, as we have today"

Blue Flag Ceremony
in Denmark, 1998.
Ole Løvig Simonsen
and Prince Henrik of
Denmark



Ole Løvig Simonsen
and Jean Baptiste
de Vilmorin, France
1989



THE BEST SOLUTION

"But here we have one of those examples when we said 'We want to go outside of Europe', but in reality we had endless discussions about the way we had to ratify in 2001. But it went through. There have been some critical voices afterwards... It's like democracy. Democracy has its mistakes, but you just have to say: 'Is there anything better?'"

One of the main challenges with growing beyond Europe was protecting the family spirit within FEE and between members: old and new. National Operators, however, keep being interested in the big project of coming together for the common purpose of environmental education and, thus, help strengthen the bonds by doing as little as coming to a meeting, to as much as mentoring each other on the implementation of the programmes.

I do not feel that the family spirit will disappear, because it has survived until now and it will continue. No doubt about it."

Danish delegation visit
to FEEE France, 1989



'E', which stood for 'European', in order to simply make it 'Foundation for Environmental Education'.

In this way there was no need to change either the statutes or the differentiated membership; there would still be Full Members, Associate Members and Affiliate Members, along with the Honorary Members. It was discussed whether to secure a seat for each continent, however, at the General Assembly it was pointed out that FEE should rather work on tangible membership requests.

The membership rules did not change considerably: the first non-European member was South Africa, followed by an agreement with the Caribbean Association for Sustainable Tourism. The latter was allowed to run Blue Flag in the Caribbean, yet with the prospect that their member-states would

become FEE members within the following two years.

The concept of solidarity between members kept appearing in discussions; FEE had to create a system that would accept countries with the same economic level as Western Europe, as well as countries that did not have the same financial possibilities. The General Assemblies were going to attract people from all over the world, but as long as the majority of members were European, they would continue to be held in Europe.

From the financial point of view, it was at this point necessary to create a completely new system. A reimbursement system was therefore created, that was connected to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Later, the membership fee started to be calculated based on GDP as well. Nonetheless, it was

recognised that an organisation from a rich country is not necessarily wealthy, and for this reason the contingency fund was established. This is how the principle of solidarity was put into practice.

Since 2001, FEE has been growing mainly outside of Europe, and now has members in each and every continent.

UN recognition

Thanks to the Blue Flag programme, FEE had initially been closely related to the European Union. However, with the internationalisation in 2001, it started being more and more recognised by world institutions and organisations, and firstly by the ones attached to the United Nations.

The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) were the first to collaborate with and recognise FEE as a leading organisation in the field of Environmental Education. UNWTO saw Blue Flag as one of the first ecolabels, since it followed the guidelines of the Rio and Johannesburg Conferences regarding sustainability. They recognised that Blue Flag was dealing with all three pillars of sustainability: the social-cultural one, the financial and the ecological one. This recognition brought a closer cooperation between them, and a Memorandum of Understanding was then signed between FEE and UNWTO.

UNEP recognised FEE as a key environmental player. Thanks to the Secretary General, FEE was invited to be part of the biannual

or triannual conferences on issues concerning civil society. One of the outcomes of this cooperation was a workshop held in 2000 in Nairobi, Kenya, where FEE invited European FEE members – the organisations from those countries that were known to run aid programmes for developing countries – and a number of African organisations. At the workshop they had the opportunity to meet and establish cooperation agreements, which would eventually bring the African organisations to join FEE.

The Danish FEE member (Danish Outdoor Council) established a cooperation with Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Malawi. Kenya and Uganda are now full members of FEE.

When UNESCO proclaimed the decade for Education for Sustainable Development, back

in 2004, it was clear that the Eco-Schools programme was already providing Education for Sustainable Development. By the end of the decade, with the World Conference on ESD held in 2014 in Nagoya, Japan, FEE had been recognised as one of the world's leading Environmental Education organisations on sustainable development.

It is worth mentioning that, apart from the UN bodies, FEE has an ongoing cooperation with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), TheGoals.org, Earth Charter, and the Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges (EAUC).

These collaborations have brought FEE to the advantageous position where international institutions are ready to give their support by being part of



an independent jury, i.e. in the cases of Blue Flag and Young Reporters for the Environment. The role of the jury is, not only to evaluate programme participants

yearly, but also to give valuable inputs and bring new ideas on how to develop the programmes from the respective institutional perspective of its members.

The Ugandan experience

“Blue Flag and Eco-Schools have often been the driving forces for attracting new countries and getting them to join FEE. I personally experienced it when I travelled to Uganda in 2012 to visit CECOD, our Ugandan organisation. We went to visit some Eco-Schools around the country and I must say that it was a very emotional experience for me.



One of the schools was partly a boarding school, but it also had students from the surrounding villages. The headmaster told me that, besides being an Eco-School, it was also part of a programme between the Danish Outdoor Council and CECOD. Then he proudly showed me some huge water tanks provided by this programme: they were five tanks that could contain 15.000 litres of water.

When I asked him: 'Where do you get the water from?' he said that a gutter pipe collected it from the roof, but thanks to the tropical rains they could fill those five tanks with more than 75.000 litres of water.

I asked him what they were using all that water for, and he replied that they used it for watering their garden, their corn and tomatoes. 'But most importantly' he said 'we have now water for hygiene purposes. Before, most girls that reached the age of eleven would drop out of school because we had no showers. But now, thanks to the water, instead of losing two thirds of the female students, it's only one third that leaves'.

It meant that the Eco-Schools programme doubled the number of girls who continued attending boarding school after the age of eleven. It was a great thing to hear, because how can you achieve social equality if you don't have equal opportunities in education?

But it didn't stop there, because then I was asked to visit the villages. I could see that every small house – typical African houses – had a rain gutter connected to big containers, so they were collecting water as they did at the school. I was told, especially by the women, that they were really thankful, because now they didn't have to walk to the river any more.

They didn't have to walk two kilometres every time they needed water thanks to this water-collecting system their own children taught them, and thanks to the small loans the programme granted, that could be invested in the gutter pipes around the houses.

Coming back to the headmaster, he also told me that the corn they grew in the school gardens was given as a morning meal to the students before

starting classes, as some of them were walking a long distance to go to school.

'We even have a small income now' he added 'because with the water we can grow plants that we didn't have before, like coffee. So we have opened a small shop on the way to the school, where we sell corn, tomatoes a coffee beans. This generated a small income for the school'.

At that point I thought that, when Eco-Schools was created in Denmark before bringing it to FEE, we would have never imagined that it could have made such a difference to someone's life. This shows perhaps that environmental education has no limits or borders, and it can actually help develop a more sustainable lifestyle."

THINGS TO BE PROUD OF

"Once I joined a big conference in Uganda and there were some university professors that had done some research and saw Eco-Schools as progress for Ugandan society. By comparing data from several schools (grades, age at graduation, etc.) they affirmed they could prove that the Eco-Schools were actually the highest ranked schools in Uganda, and that some schools had moved up after becoming Eco-

Schools. I am not a researcher and I do not know how they found this result, but those researchers said that it was pure evidence.

For me it is already an overwhelming result, that a programme conceived in a completely different context can adapt to different societies and be used all around the world. It's fantastic.

I also think that sometimes it is good to visit another country and see things from a different perspective, in order to understand what could be improved and what is actually very effective.

Blue Flag has meant a lot for many small tourist sites: it has increased the tourism flow, and created more jobs and income. Moreover, from a survey that was carried out in Denmark in 1994, five years after introducing Blue Flag, it turned out that 55% of the population knew about Blue Flag. Three years later, this percentage had increased to 97%. Besides, according to research carried out in the coastal city of Den Helder (Netherlands), approximately 100% of the German tourists with children demanded a Blue Flag to choose the beach.

These results are not something we often think about, but when you stop to look back at what you have done and realise there have been such results, you should definitely let yourself be proud of it. "

The Danish Outdoor Council
(Friluftsrådet), 1986



The unification of FEE

The Blue Flag programme started in France, but the coordination was moved to the Netherlands a year later, and then to Denmark. The same happened with Eco-Schools: it was invented in Denmark, and then moved to England and Portugal, while Learning about Forests moved to Germany and Norway. Green Key was coordinated by two different member organisations in Northern and Southern Europe.

Since the early start of FEE, there was an established tradition of national organisations coordinating the programmes at the international level. When Portugal decided to give up the coordination of Eco-Schools, FEE published a call for tender and asked member organisations to apply for the management of the programme. As a result of weak applications, FEE had to find a different solution.

The initial proposal for the unification of FEE was first voiced in a Board Meeting in Turkey, November 2009. A SWOT analysis and a series of discussions proved that a unification of FEE, with 55 members at the time, was a great solution, although a long process.

Half a year before the General Assembly of 2010, members were informed about the Board's plans and ideas and were asked to provide their feedback and remarks on the unification transition. An overall positive response by members, despite requests for clarifications, and concerns on the implications, brought the idea to Shenzhen, China, in June 2010, at another General Assembly of the Foundation for Environmental Education.

A main issue arising from the unification process was the communication between programme coordinators. With two categories of programmes running under FEE, the educational and eco-tourism

“...there was perhaps a need for creating some sort of FEE universe where the coordinators could actually interact with each other and use each other's experiences”



one, it was clear that a real link needed to be established between the people working for FEE; that would create space for good interaction and a possible collaboration.

This was the start of becoming the structured organisation we are today. The Board was at this time placing the foundational stones in building FEE further.

“How do you build an organisation?” asks Jan Eriksen. How is bureaucracy limited, and how does FEE create a possibility for synergy between the different programmes? How do we build democracy between the members, the General Assembly, the Board of Directors?



After going through the statutes, the rules, the procedure, China's General Assembly decided the launch of a two-year pilot phase, until the next General Assembly, where the idea would be either ratified, or rejected.

In a meeting in London, in 2011, with help from a facilitator, the members and the Board of Directors came together to advance discussion on the process, the progress, questions arising, and reflect on the General Assembly of the previous year.





At this time, FEE was heading towards a radical decision concerning its future.

For the following year FEE had to resolve the more practical issues of a potential unification.

Headquartering in Copenhagen, Denmark

As 60% of the members at the time came from Europe, it was decided that at least for the following four to five years, the FEE Head Office should be located in Europe as well. After assessing a list of potential European capitals, and a series of parameters (cost of living, transportation facilities,

international airport, corruption levels, labour laws, etc.), the Board drew a shortlist of five cities: Copenhagen, London, Berlin, Amsterdam and Paris.

With the international coordination of Blue Flag, Green Key, Eco-Schools and Young Reporters for the Environment already based in Denmark, the Board of Directors decided that the Head Office was to stay in Copenhagen.

The following year, at the General Assembly of 2012 in Dublin, the rules of procedure, the new statutes, and the pilot project of a unified FEE were ratified.

“If you have made a decision, you don’t have to be afraid of your shadow. Your shadow will always be there, but you have to look ahead and not look back at your shadow”

“If I look back on a process that started in November 2009, and at the beginning of January 2014 when everything was actually in place – a CEO, a location, the city was decided... Sometimes telling other people about an organisation with 70 members or more, that we did that in almost three years, with two General Assemblies and a meeting in between... I would like to say that it tells me something about FEE.

It tells me something about how we act in trust, how we believe in each other, because of course there were critical questions – there need to be critical questions, it’s the only way to think better. And also being asked critical questions, about the plan, etc. But to realise that it happened in such a short time, and we have a well-functioning organisation in place today, makes me very proud. Proud of course, being the president, but very proud on behalf of the members of FEE, on the secretariat, that everyone was able to adapt to the new situation, but first of all to make this happen as quickly as it did.”

FOUNDATION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION HEAD OFFICE

In December 2013, Daniel Schaffer joined FEE as the most suitable candidate to lead the organisation as the first Chief Executive Officer.

The new rules of procedure ratified in 2012 identified a need to transfer political responsibilities from the hands of the volunteer Board members to the ones of an anchor-role; they ultimately built the position of the CEO as the political leader of the organisation, who was to become the link between political and administrative work.

Along with the expansion of the organisation in different continents, the internal growth of FEE is also notable, considering the sudden and rapid development in numbers. With all five International Coordinators – later called Directors – in Copenhagen, the organisation built its first unified team. As of 2016, 10 different nationalities are represented by 15 Head Office members (directors, assistants, and volunteers).

The global nature of the organisation, its structure, and the general progress mirrored in the numbers of both the joining country members and the Board and Head Office members, have made FEE into the great and growing organisation it is today. Albeit unexpected and fast-paced, the development of the unification process had been a success; the General Assembly of 2014 in Copenhagen, Denmark with the presence of members and directors in the hosting city of FEE has been the living proof that this organisation can only aim higher.

“I personally think that we had to follow the fact that this organisation is a success, and out of that came that we had to find a reasonable solution for the future. I personally feel very comfortable about how we have built it up to now”

Future challenges for FEE

The founders of FEE, back in 1981 could have never imagined what their idea would become in 30 years' time. Nevertheless, to ensure the continuation of stable growth, a lot needs to be taken into consideration.

Other than the expected growing bureaucracy, what is important for anyone involved with this organisation is to keep the so-called 'soul' of FEE. Meetings, National Operator Meetings, General Assemblies; they were all first organised to bring togetherness and ensure successful cooperation between members and the Head Office. With the development

and financially efficient use of technology, FEE needs to ensure that the importance of physical contact and dialogue isn't entirely replaced by an otherwise fantastic conference call.

FEE has become a force to be reckoned thanks to its recognition by several UN bodies, like the UNWTO, UNEP and UNESCO, as a world-leader

in the fields of Environmental Education and Education for Sustainable Development. The continuation of this recognition by other, international bodies, as well as the enhancement of its current partnerships is crucial towards its further development and dissemination of its work.





COLLABORATION BETWEEN MEMBERS

Collaboration between members is an issue always brought up in meetings and consultations. For the years ahead there is an increasing need to see an exchange of themes between the programmes themselves, and even more so a stronger link between schools, students and countries involved in them; forest myths, the distribution of flora, cultural differences, or even the itinerary of migratory birds could be points of reference in the creation of a stronger cooperation network.

“For me it has been very important to say that in every international organisation you will have submarine reefs that you have to avoid, to sail with your big ship – today I call FEE a ‘big ship’”



Challenging country cases

One of the challenges that FEE has had over the years is whether it could be the stage for international political conflicts, and the organisation experienced this happening from time to time.

When China wanted to become a FEE member, it raised some political issues inside the organisation. The Board wondered if it could take England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as independent countries into the organisation when the UK went through its devolution, or how it would deal with unity in Cyprus.

One of the rules that applied was to look at how other international bodies deal with such issues. On the other hand, there had been other countries, such as Belgium, where half of the country was not participating in FEE programmes. In this case, Belgium created contacts with another organisation in the other part of the country and their collaboration has been successful since.

However, FEE avoids being part of any political questions as much as possible.

“I know there was a big, fantastic statement years ago, that started with ‘I have a dream’. I cannot be compared with him, but if I have any dreams that I think haven’t really come true, the optimum of life in FEE, in my terms as president... I think that between the NOMs and the General Assemblies I would like to see much more interaction among the countries.”

“How did you see the barn swallows? How long did you stay by the lake to observe them?” The same question could be asked in Uganda, in Turkey, in Hungary, in Iceland. This could therefore be maybe the theme that we could bring into our educational programmes, where we make much more use of the FEE members network in a programme. I would like to see that happen, I would like to see that through it FEE also joined what I believe would be more and more important for the researchers, citizen science”

Wishes for the future; cooperation between the programmes

The digital age we are in at the moment allows us to cross borders in an instance. However, this possibility has not been explored as much. Schools in different countries, or different continents can communicate, share experiences, activities, and the knowledge they have developed working under the FEE themes.

Through the five ground-breaking programmes cooperation links can be created; this can be achieved through sharing the themes and working on them from the different programme angles.

We have five programmes. They seem to be very much like columns with their pedestals, with the Director and Board Member on the top. I think we should try to break down the walls a bit, and try to see if there is anything from the marine environment from the Blue Flag that could be easily introduced as a theme in Eco-Schools.

I know that a lot of people know I am actually very interested in birds, but if you look at them they seem to be an indicator of what is happening in the world...They start migrating North in March, and they can be followed by all our Eco-Schools students, when they pass Kenya, Uganda, Morocco, Turkey, going through Europe, and you can do exactly the same in the American and Asian continents. You could really make a story out of it. Not only 'when do they reach Uganda?', 'when do they reach Turkey?', 'when do they reach Iceland?' By the way, it's two months later.

Structured mentoring mechanisms can be established internally for older members to assist new country members integrate better within the organisation, and aid programmes can be developed to promote cross-border cooperation between developed and developing countries. Both means could aim at bringing members together and at developing true bonds between them.

Environmental Education and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

In the late 60s, beginning of the 70s, a lot of the environmental discussions taking place were about pollution. Pollution was the issue at the time; it only became about the environment after the first UN Conference in Stockholm in 1972.

Twenty years later, at the UN Conference of 1992, sustainability first became part of the global environmental agenda under the motto 'Think globally, act locally'. It introduced the idea that people can act at home, at school, at their workplaces, towards being more sustainable. Since then, up until the recently ratified 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals, the journey of the environmental movement has been long, yet evolving and inclusive.

The Foundation for Environmental Education, working for both Environmental Education and Education for Sustainable Development continues to grow in the field, and works towards the progressive directions of sustainable growth; its name, and the nature of the organisation allows for participation and involvement in any kind of environmental and educational activity.

Great stories from General Assemblies

“Over the years we’ve had a lot of General Assemblies, and every hosting organisation has made a big effort, even if some have more resources than others. It doesn’t mean that the meetings are not as great, it’s all about the family spirit and the meeting itself.

One or two of the meetings that made a special impression on me would be the FEE General Assembly we had in 2004 in Morocco. It was the time when Jan Eriksen took over as President and I took over as Managing Director, so just that was really special.

The meeting was officially under the patronage of King Mohammed VI’s sister, Princess Lalla Hasna. It was an amazing experience to meet the princess, to see her engagement – especially in FEE Morocco, but also in the whole General Assembly. It was fantastic to see her officially open the GA, but it was maybe even more fun to see, during the internal farewell dinner, that there was a woman sitting in the back of the restaurant in jeans. She turned out to be the princess, who had come once again to say goodbye to us and be there informally.

Some of the excursions and of the dinners they had planned were extraordinary. Again, as I said, they don’t have to be all fantastic in order to be great General Assemblies, but it is something that I still remember. Especially one dinner, which took place in one of the palaces: we were on a pontoon, and the food was the most amazing I had ever tasted. The whole setup was just taken out of ‘One Thousand and One Nights’: there were musicians on a boat passing by our dinner place; on the other side of the lake there was a person dressed in white on a white horse... it was something really special that I will remember forever.



With the Princess of Morocco

Another quite amazing GA was the one in South Africa, in 2006. It was special because it was basically a road trip through South Africa. We had the event held over six days: part of it were formal meetings, which took place in the Drakensberg Mountains.

Our FEE Executive Board Member from South Africa normally comes to Europe for the FEE Board Meetings, and when they take place in the wintertime he is always very cold. So he was really happy to welcome us to South Africa, but the Drakensberg Mountains in June – which is wintertime there – are actually freezing cold. I think many of us – including me – were not completely prepared clothes-wise for frosty mornings, but of course it was amazingly beautiful to look at the mountains from the meeting room.

Then we went down to the lower lands, to have a safari as part of our agenda. I think that seeing the wildlife of South Africa in connection with the General Assembly was something unique for everyone.”



Finn Bolding Thomsen, Green Key International Director

General Assembly 1998, Bulgaria



Side Event at the General Assembly 1998, Bulgaria

Some concluding thoughts by the President

The most important value... is firstly to believe in human beings. I believe that people are always trying to do something for the benefit of the case, unless they behave in another way. But as long as they don't, I believe that is the case

I believe that FEE is able to make its contribution to a more peaceful, more sustainable world through its programmes, because it is about the environment, but it is also about people and the environment. Being international, we have countries around a table, in the programmes, at the General Assembly, which from a higher, political level perspective are not friends. They might be enemies, but they are in a FEE context, sitting around a table, discussing and finding solutions, being in workgroups together, etc.

This is where I find it so valuable, that FEE also contributes to

common understanding among people and countries. To make that happen, I believe you have to meet people with open arms, and then try to remember where they can actually work together, and that is just the simple attitude of networking. And I am a networker...

You can always use that possibility for the good cause of your work. You can always write a letter to one of the persons you have met, it doesn't matter if it is the Moroccan princess, the director of UNESCO or the Minister of Environment or Education in Uganda. I respect their positions, but they are also human beings, like me and anybody else. We all want a good life, a good life for our kids and, when you reach my age, also for our grandkids. That has been a driving force behind what I have been doing.



Jan Eriksen, 2016

FEE History in points

— 1981 — 1987 — 1994 — 1998 — 1999 —

Early start in the Netherlands

European Year for the Environment: Blue Flag launched as a European campaign in partnership with FEEE.

Four national member organisations: Spain, France, Germany and Denmark.

Eco-Schools and Young Reporters for the Environment (YRE) are the first FEEE programmes related to environmental education in schools.

Withdrawal of the EU support for Blue Flag. Introduction of a levy for beaches and marinas in order to keep the programme alive.

Learning about Forests (LEAF) becomes the 4th FEEE programme.

2001

2003

2010

2012

2014



At the General Assembly in Copenhagen, Denmark, FEEE goes global and officially becomes FEE.

South Africa is the first member non-European member.

Green Key becomes the 5th FEE programme.

Launch of a two-year pilot phase for the unification of FEE at the General Assembly in Shenzhen, China.

General Assemblies become biennial.

At the General Assembly in Dublin, Ireland, Copenhagen is chosen as the headquarters of the new FEE Head Office.

Unification of the Foundation for Environmental Education

FEE facts

PRESIDENTS OF FEE(E)

Year	President
1981-1989	Harry Wals, Netherlands
1990-1994	Ole Løvig Simonsen, Denmark
1994-1996	Lauge Prip, Denmark
1997-2004	Graham Ashworth, United Kingdom
2004-2016	Jan Eriksen, Denmark

PROGRAMMES

Programme name	Starting year	Country where it started
Blue Flag	1987	France
Eco-Schools	1994	Denmark
Young Reporters for the Environment	1994	France
Learning about Forests	1999	Sweden
Green Key	2003	Denmark

GENERAL ASSEMBLIES

Year	Places General Assemblies were held
1998	Sunny Beach, Bulgaria
1999	Azores, Portugal
2000	Dubrovnik, Croatia
2001	Copenhagen, Denmark
2002	Istanbul, Turkey
2003	Boltenhagen, Germany
2004	Marrakech, Morocco
2005	Antwerp, Belgium
2006	South Africa (various locations)
2007	Sperlonga, Italy
2008	Kendal, UK
2009	Liepaja, Latvia
2010	Shenzhen, China
2012	Dublin, Ireland
2014	Copenhagen, Denmark
2016	Ahmedabad, India

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