

Educational eco-communities - inspiration for eco-activists

Образователните еко-общности- вдъхновение за еко-активисти

Date of creation

2021

Description

The practice consists of the following steps:

1. Training model and resources: This phase includes the development of two manuals for trainees and trainers and a detailed course curriculum in Bulgarian language, achieved through collaboration and sharing of good practice between the partners.

2. Preparation of the sites: The project contributes to the creation of four educational eco-hubs in nature, where the trainings take place.

3. Eco-trainings in educational eco-communities: The four partner organisations conduct 10 eco-trainings, each lasting nine days, with small groups of about 10 participants, reaching a total of 100 young people. The trainings are based on a "learning by doing" approach and cover topics such as: living in harmony with nature and caring for its elements (land, water, air, plant and animal life), eco-building techniques, permaculture, community engagement on a local and global level, working with local authorities and development of eco-initiatives, art activities (creation of outdoor sculpture exhibition with sculptures made from natural waste materials).

4. Interaction with local communities and authorities :

- Practical application: the trainees, supported by their trainers, develop 16 eco-initiatives to implement in their home regions.
- Artistic exposition: Together with the Norwegian installation artist Jonas Landstad, participants created a sculpture exposition with natural materials "The forest speaks to you" demonstrating how art can attract the public attention to significant environmental causes, highlighting the critical role of forests in combating climate change.
- Local government engagement: Representatives from the four partner organisations met with the local authorities of four municipalities to present the eco-activist training model and to explore collaboration opportunities to improve the environmental situation on a local level.

5. Dissemination of the results: The organisers engage in direct outreach to relevant NGOs and eco-communities in Bulgaria and the EU, as well as youth centres, schools, and the Bulgarian Ministry of Education. All training materials are freely accessible on their website. Additionally, promotional video presenting the initiative, shared on YouTube, Facebook, and the websites of all four partners, as well as other relevant FB groups were produced. The project concluded with a public event in the town of Klustendil with a sculpture exhibition and concert. The dissemination strategy also included radio interviews, publications in national and regional media and a strong online presence.

Beneficiaries

 **NEETs in recent search**

NEETS 18 to 29 year olds

Other young people of the same age

Countries

 **Bulgaria**

Education level and sector

 **Adult education**

Non-formal and informal education

Environmental education

Level of implementation / Scope

 **Provider level**  **Local level**

Aims of policy/initiative

The aim of the practice is to provide high quality non-formal education for young people, particularly NEETs, equipping them with valuable knowledge and skills, supporting their need to take action against climate change, while providing a unique experiential learning journey.

This was achieved in a structured way as follows:

1. Development of a training model: The collaborative approach ensures that the training model reflects best practices, making it adaptable to a variety of eco-educational contexts. It is freely available to other relevant stakeholders.

2. Educational eco-hubs: The aim is to provide a unique and most appropriate learning space. These hubs are designed for harmonious living in nature and provide a sustainable and relevant environment for conducting eco-trainings.

3. Eco-trainings for potential eco-activists: The aim is to empower young people, to stimulate positive changes of attitude, social and environmental engagement. The project uses non-formal education methods and “learning by doing” approach to keep high levels of motivation and facilitate the learning process of NEETs.

4. Interaction with local communities and authorities: The aim is to expand the impact and reach of the call for greener and more conscious living to the local communities and to create a space for dialogue and initiation of ecological activities in cooperation with the local authorities.

5. Dissemination of the training model: The aim is to disseminate the eco-activist training model widely and to make the resources freely available to organisations and institutions interested in environmental non-formal education.

Features and types of activities implemented

At the core of our training model is the approach of 'learning by doing' - the basis of both the programme and the methods by which the educational process takes place in practice. The programme is designed for young people who want to acquire knowledge and skills in a non-formal way and apply them in practice, in an environment with specific conditions and with the presence of trainers and practitioners. This approach is more engaging than reading a textbook, listening to a lecture, or learning in a traditional classroom. According to the organisers, there is no better way for learners to acquire new problem-solving skills than by putting them into practice.

The important elements of the "learning by doing" approach are:

1. Less theory, more practice: When presenting a topic, they use an interactive approach for examination, looking for techniques to go deeper into the topic and at the same time gaining practical experience so that the theory can be applied and integrated into practice.

2. Stimulating and reflecting on the experience: An important element of the learning is the daily sharing circles, where everyone is encouraged to participate, share and reflect on their impressions and experiences of the activities in which they have participated, the challenges, the victories, etc.

3. Promoting self-awareness through self-directed exploration:

Through these exercises young people learn to answer their own questions using research tools and acquire the skills to discern and develop a critical mind.

4. Developing social skills: The development of social skills is one of the main objectives of the training and is implicit in all activities.

5. Principle of choice and non-violence: Every day different activities are offered, and participants can choose in which area they want to gain new knowledge and skills and how far they want to go. This enables the organiser to offer a personalised programme that meets individual needs and interests of participants. The approach is to give space for creativity and initiative and to allow participants to choose their own activities, programme, and curriculum. No participant is forced to speak, share, or participate. Everyone can choose the role of observer or participant.

Types of activities:

Practical eco-activities: different techniques of building with natural materials, permaculture (soil building, growing organic food, composting, etc.), low-tech, zero waste practices;

Art activities: painting signs for environmental protection, making sculptural exposition from natural waste, singing, playing music;

Activities for mental and body health: yoga, dance, meditation;

Community engagement activities: development of eco- initiatives, activities for harmonious community life (equal participation of all members), cleaning and recycling trash.

Target group

- **Youth organisations and NGOs** focus on non-formal education and skills development for NEETs, looking to implement experiential and practical training methods in eco-education.

- **Vocational Education and Training (VET) providers** who aim to engage NEETs through short, flexible training programmes.
- **Local government bodies and community organisations** are interested in conducting eco-activities in eco-hubs or supporting community-based learning initiatives for NEETS.
- **Educational institutions and schools** are looking for models of non-formal, practical environmental education, designed for NEETS.

Resources

The amount of EUR 86,200, funded by Active Citizens Fund of EEA GRANTS (2015-21) "Eco-educational communities - inspiration for eco-activists".

Project partners:

Association "Hope for us-2008"

Association "Trinoga"

Foundation "Ura Gora"

Association "Ladies invite"

Evaluation of the measure

Monitoring, reporting and evaluation:

Participant feedback surveys, participant FB posts, photos, video material, observation and face-to-face participation, team performance evaluation surveys, reporting documents, monitoring reports.

Evidence of effectiveness of the measure

A total of 100 new young eco-activists were trained in nature camps - mostly NEETs, including 20 representatives of the Roma community. A total of 4 sustainable eco-communities have become educational structures that will multiply the effects of the developed technology for practical training of active citizens in the field of ecology. The created training materials were shared among 60 NGOs, 50 cultural centres, 1,000 young people and part of the population of 4 municipalities and the Ministry of Education and Culture.

The training model was presented to the local authorities in four municipalities, and it was also sent to the Ministry of Education and Culture to be included in the civic education classes. Norwegian artist Jonas Landstad held a workshop for making sculptures out of waste forest materials that communicated environmental messages and "decorated" the "Earth Speaks to You" concert held in Kyustendil to activate the local community. A film about eco-communities was also produced, see [here](#).

The three partners of the project had a key role in the development of the training methodology and the implementation of the camps in different locations - the village of Zhelen, the village of Malomirovo, the community of Bunovo and the village of Smolichano.

Success factors

The idea of the project is innovative in combining elements that have been applied so far but takes it to a new level of systematic and sustainable educational action by eco-communities who have accumulated sufficient knowledge and demonstrate its application in real life through their example and lifestyle.

This practice realised its concept of creating centres for environmental training in nature, offering practical training to young people through a "learning by doing" approach. The transmission of knowledge and skills is made through real life experiences and practices where the trainers are living examples of people who have devoted their lives to preserve and take care of the environment.

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Related intervention approaches



Skills development

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