

EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: A SLOVENIAN PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The paper presents the development and fulfilment of the aims of sustainable development in the Slovenian educational system. The meaning of education for sustainable development and its goals are presented through introducing new ideas into schools, which is one of the most demanding tasks, especially when the initiative comes from non-educational sources.

Keywords: *education, content, sustainable development, curriculum, Slovenia*

INTRODUCTION

“We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.” – Albert Einstein

Pressing environmental, economic and social problems put forward the term “sustainable development” which has become almost a permanent fixture of various international agreements and legal documents. Many understand it as a magic formula that will solve the long-accumulated problems of mankind. However, the path to realizing sustainable development is very long and depends on the level of economic development, of social development, on the political system of each country, and on the awareness of its inhabitants.

Sustainable development is the paradigm of a new period requiring modified or entirely new patterns of thinking and behaving. Professionals, who are planning future development, people, responsible to make decisions and fulfil them, and residents with their daily habits and actions, all affect the future economic, social, and spatial development. The process of sustainable development starts with people and their way of life that (also) depends on the perception of their living space. People are the ones who directly or indirectly influence the use of space, although we often lack the awareness that space is a limited resource (Urbanc, Fridl, 2007).

How we perceive the space depends on several factors, among which education plays an important role. Through education, we want to upgrade conceptual knowledge, which is prevalent in our present world, to perceptual knowledge. It is essential that the information that we (our brains) have (conceptual knowledge), replaces the information we receive from the environment (perceptual knowledge). Only then can we educate people to develop a different relationship towards space and new patterns of behaviour and thinking.

The need for changes in a person's lifestyle and in his/her acting and the need to develop new development strategies became necessary decades ago. The latest scientific discoveries conceived efforts to achieve sustainable development of society; they underscored the need for comprehensive treatment of problems and pointed out that each act has an impact on the state of the environment, other people and other activities. It is of crucial importance to be aware of the consequences of our decisions and acts.

Therefore, education for sustainable development is looking for ways to prepare citizens to cope with the challenges of present and future decision makers and responsible management of the world. A fits-all model of education for sustainable development has not been developed yet, because it is a complex concept that is constantly evolving although the importance of education in the 21st century is no longer necessary to be discussed. Without it, man would not have reached today's level of economic, social, cultural, and yet another development. In today's education, process the importance of acquiring skills and knowledge to raise the overall quality of life of individuals and society and to develop a responsible attitude towards their living environment is increasingly emphasized. In this process, the concept of sustainable development stands as a way and as a target. Sustainability is setting the course of our life and work. Taking into account its principles is to ensure a responsible attitude towards our environment. It is no coincidence that the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), which operates within the framework of UNESCO, declared the period between 2005 and 2014 as the "Decade of Education for Sustainable Development".

The entire education system must encourage students towards the above mentioned goals, because this is the only way to form conscious, critical, and socially active citizens. We are convinced that the awareness of the rights of individuals and social groups in the planning process is a fundamental prerequisite for sustainable development. It would be

especially effective if it becomes part of the educational process in primary school and continues at all levels of education. Young people are the most receptive to change attitudes and behaviour, while we need to be aware that they will, at the same time, in a few years, assume the burden of responsibility for future development.

Sustainable development has become a leading developmental paradigm. It requires that we think about our lifestyle, the consequences of our actions (regarding development, social progress and the environment), and develop solutions. We should not think only about creating a better quality of our lives, but also about the possibilities and opportunities of the coming generations. To understand means to recognize that economic, environmental, and social well being are closely intertwined.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND ITS EDUCATIONAL IMPORTANCE

Educated population is vital to the implementation of sustainable development, whose restriction or blooming is actually dependent on the level of citizens' education. Developmental opportunities and quality of life are closely related to education. Consequently, a whole series of issues related to awareness, understanding and identifying the responsibilities of an individual together with his/her ability to change behavioural patterns have arisen.

The relationship between education and sustainable development is therefore highly complex. Research shows that basic education is of key importance to achieving the objectives of sustainable development, both at the state level and beyond. Numerous studies confirm the impact of education, research, and lifelong learning to be essential for the development of a knowledge-based economy of an individual country supported not as much by technology as by local innovation and creativity (ACEID UNESCO, 1997). Education for sustainable development is therefore a permanent, life-long (learning) process whose contents should be part of a majority, if not of all, preferably interdisciplinary connected subjects.

Modern school should be directed towards critical thinking, action teaching, dynamic, towards an interdisciplinary and problem-solving approach, towards collecting and managing information, towards ethical, moral and professional responsibility, and, in particular, it should understand learning as a process. Such education should aim not only to teach about sustainable development, but also to take into account its complexity and responsiveness to social changes, to understand it as a living organism that responds differently in different situations. We cannot ignore the fact that a more educated society creates a more challenging environment and more qualitative foundation for students' further progress.

As Murray (2011) affirms, sustainability is such a vast and complex field that we could quickly become daunted by the thought of absorbing all the information associated with it. He believes that the safest option is to

strike a balance, cultivating a broad understanding of the big picture, while developing deeper expertise in the areas where we are most active (Murray, 2011, pp. 170-171).

In recent years, we are more and more aware of the international dimension of social needs. Poor decisions of one country often do not remain within its borders. Awareness of the implications of decisions and actions of both the individual and society as a whole is crucial. Therefore, education for sustainable development is looking for ways to prepare citizens to face the challenges of present and future, and decision makers to act responsibly. Education for sustainable development is a complex concept that is constantly evolving, although the universal model of education for sustainable development does not exist. However, there are key values that should be promoted by the education for sustainable development:

- to respect the dignity and human rights of all people around the world and to commit ourselves to achieving social and economic justice for all;

- to respect human rights of future generations and the pursuit of intergenerational responsibility;

- to respect the wider community and to care for it in all its diversity, which includes protection and restoration of Earth's ecosystems;

- to respect cultural diversity and to work towards a local and global community of tolerance, non-violence, and peace (YouthXchange, 2007, p. 9).

In addition, we shall also teach young people, as Alan Kay (YouthXchange, 2007, p. 75) said that it is better to create the future instead just predicting it. A new vision of education emphasizes a comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach to obtaining knowledge and skills needed for a sustainable future, as well as change in values, attitudes, and living habits.

A SLOVENIAN CASE

In Slovenia, we had to strive to integrate content of a broader context of sustainable development into the curricula of primary and secondary schools. Although in some countries there is even a separate subject dealing with sustainable development that was not the intention in Slovenia. We did not want to deploy a special course or subject on sustainable development, but integrate the existing curricula with this content to make teaching more relevant in a tendency to equip students with knowledge and skills for life. Slovenian teachers considered the introduction of the content interesting and important (Resnik Planinc, 2006).

METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS OF THE EXISTING SITUATION IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS

The project named R.A.V.E. Space (Raising Awareness of Values of Space), which met the criteria of the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development, gathered nine partners from five countries (Greece, Italy, Montenegro, Poland, and Slovenia), which participated in the INTERREG III B programme for countries within the CADSES area (the Middle, the Adriatic, the Pannonian, and the South-Eastern Europe). These partners joined the project because they shared the opinion that there was insufficient awareness of values of space that were closely connected to sustainable development. In accordance with the project goals, two international surveys were undertaken. Both surveys were devised and conducted by the Department of Geography, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana and carried out with help of other project partners from Slovenia, Italy, Poland, Greece and Montenegro.

Firstly, an international survey about the values of space was undertaken to provide valuable information about the spread of these values at different levels throughout the educational systems in the participating countries. Secondly, a survey of primary and secondary school teachers was carried out to analyse the present situation regarding teachers and students' preferences, and their perceived resistance to various sustainable development and space related topics and teaching aids through which these contents were included in the educational process (Resnik Planinc, 2008).

The results of both surveys (Resnik Planinc, 2006, 2008) prove that:

- according to teachers we do not need to require any additional contents and ideas; what we do need is a thoughtful and well-defined illustration of the existing ones from the viewpoint of spatial planning and sustainable development;

- public participation is very important to teachers, but people must be educated to understand the complexity of spatial problems and to understand that opportunities for their active involvement exist;

- teachers are not particularly willing to change things by themselves, because they prefer to wait for some "higher" authority to solve the problem – therefore the awareness that everyone is responsible for the social, spatial, and environmental conditions that we live in, should be raised;

- a lack of teaching tools and literature is an important obstacle in the presentation of sustainable development-related topics;

- the choice of teaching tools and teaching methods needs to be harmonized with students' preferences, whilst at the same time, teachers should be acquainted with innovations and changes regarding teaching tools, teaching methods, and ways of organizing work in classrooms;

- school is the most important media for improving awareness of sustainable development-related topics.

In accordance with the above mentioned results and dilemmas we proposed the aims of education to implement the sustainable development into schools and consequently raise awareness of values of space (Table 1).

Table 1. Implementation of sustainable development into schools and raising awareness of values of space – aims of education

(Demšar Mitrovič *et al.*, 2007)

Key aims	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To encourage individuals' awareness of the effect their judgements and acts may have on protecting and developing the values of space. 2. To endow students and adult target groups (e.g. teachers, school personnel, parents and guardians, various professionals, etc.) with knowledge and skills needed for active participation in sustainable development actions – to influence the abilities of cognitive thinking and practical action. 3. To raise the degree of functional literacy with focus on “sustainable development and spatial literacy” in future generations, such as the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - being able to use and make maps and other practical and graphical two and three-dimensional representations of physical space and new developments in space, understanding abstract, artistic, and other symbolic ways of presenting attributes of physical space; - being able to use, make, and connect different data and their interpretation for the use of defining the state; changes and decisions regarding sustainable and spatial development; - being able to analyze the current state, define problems and solutions, to be able to define the right balance between preservation and development, different opinions, and to cooperate when carrying out common tasks.
General aims in schools	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To assure good conditions for formal education about sustainable development in primary and secondary schools. 2. To help raising the quality of educational institutions (and, indirectly, other living environments). 3. To stimulate forming viable links between schools and local communities for practical educational programmes and other activities within schooling and planning mutual projects in local communities. 4. To include students, teachers, schools personnel, parents and guardians, local communities, and different related groups of professionals in the educational strategy programmes.
Broader aims	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To endow all citizens with the knowledge to deal with sustainable issues, so that they can effectively take responsibility for using space as limited resource and can learn to use space in ways that respect the needs of future generations. 2. To assure conditions for balanced spatial development. 3. To protect space values from influences based on unfavourable and unsustainable development.

In general, sustainable and spatial development issues combine social, environmental, and economic issues that are all dispersed throughout the less obvious subjects of design, history, local democracy, politics, science (including chemistry, biology, and natural science) and home economics.

EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: A SLOVENIAN PERSPECTIVE

In Slovenia, we followed the idea that newly introduced programmes have to be taught according to the following seven key concepts of sustainable development (ESD, 2004 in *Raising awareness ...*, 2007, p. 41), that are focal to the successful new concept of teaching:

- interdependence – to understand how people, the environment, and the economy are linked at all levels, from local to global;

- citizenship and stewardship – recognizing the importance of taking individual responsibility and action to make the world a better place;

- needs and rights of future generations – understanding how our own basic needs and the implications of the needs of future generations affect actions taken today;

- diversity – respecting and valuing both human diversity (cultural, social, and economic) and biodiversity;

- quality of life – acknowledging that global equity and justice are essential elements of sustainability and that basic needs should be met universally;

- sustainable change – understanding that resources are finite and that this has implications for people's lifestyles, for commerce, and for industry;

- uncertainty and caution – acknowledging that there is a range of possible approaches to sustainability and that situation is constantly changing, indicating a need for flexibility and lifelong learning.

We must be aware that introducing a new theme into the school is always difficult. The educational system reflects the community values system and leans towards stability, which makes it very rigid and inflexible for upcoming changes.

Therefore, the main aims of the project called for a detailed list of the objectives, contents, and notions connected with sustainable development, spatial planning and values of space currently written into the curricula of different school subjects in all the participating countries. The examination of the actual situation regarding the inclusion of the spatial contents in the syllabi and spread of the values of space at different levels of educational system was done in four phases.

Phase 1: Analysis of the syllabi

During the first phase, the syllabi (primary and secondary schools) of all participating countries were analysed. Project partners were responsible to go through all syllabi of the relevant subjects, where sustainable development and spatial planning could be found, and to prepare the table of aims, contents or/and notions connected with the chosen topics.

Phase 2: Sorting of aims and notions

During phase 2, aims and notions were sorted out according to their relation to sustainable development and spatial planning and country/subjects/age groups.

Phase 3: Selection of aims and notions

Table 2. Proposal for the main skills required in teaching spatial planning (Demšar Mitrovič *et al.*, 2007)

Aims of sustainable development and spatial planning: to develop a plan of where to extend new activities within a space, how to ensure sustainability, and how to deal with existing (problematic) activities.		
Steps in sustainable development and spatial planning	Skills needed	School subjects/good practices, teaching methods developing skills
To analyse the physical characteristics of the area (geology, relief, water, soil, climate, natural resources, space problems, etc.).	Good knowledge & understanding of different environmental elements & the factors having meaning/influence on life.	Geography, ecology, biology, chemistry, environmental studies, etc.
To analyse the social characteristics of the area (population, economy, etc.).	Good knowledge & understanding of different aspects of society, problems that occur, good practices, processes & methods, ability to foresee future perspectives & prognoses, etc.	Geography, social studies, sociology, civil education, etc.
To analyse the needs of the area.	Ability to analyze & foresee future prognoses & perspectives according to social characteristics, ability to define needs in an area; tolerance is needed.	Civil education, ethics, geography, natural resource management, etc.
To combine physical and social characteristics and find possible solutions according to needs.	Good conception of the interaction between nature & society & understanding possible changes.	Geography, natural resource management, art, etc.
To evaluate solutions, prepare scenarios.	Good interdisciplinary knowledge is needed.	Geography, natural resource management, art, and design.
Public presentation of the plan.	Decision making, argumentation, public appearance, etc.	
Legislation	Good interdisciplinary knowledge is needed.	Civil education, social studies, etc.

During phase 3, the most important notions and aims in the existing syllabi, which are directly or indirectly connected with the sustainable development and the values of space, were selected. The list was long, covering many different contents and notions, whilst the objectives and skills were not well defined. It would be fair to say that we required no additional contents and ideas; but what we needed was a thoughtful and well-defined illustration of these from the viewpoint of sustainable development and spatial planning, through which we can teach about the values of space. Using the

results of the survey, a chart proposing the range of skills required in teaching sustainable development and spatial planning was created (Table 2).

The results of the survey prove that sustainable development followed by spatial planning is an interdisciplinary activity based upon physical and social environmental knowledge. The complex linkages, interactions, and processes between both need to be understood and intertwined. Different subjects offer a general overview, qualifying the ability to understand the interactions and processes between the natural and social environment, but only a few subjects offer the applied knowledge required for sustainable development and spatial planning. It is also very important to teach the actual process of problem-solving, evaluation and decision-making. Pupils and students can acquire these skills through discussion, teamwork, project work, case studies, etc.

Phase 4: Preparation and analysis of the questionnaire

International survey among primary and secondary school teachers was carried out to analyse the present situation regarding teachers' and pupils' preferences for and perceived obstacles in various space related topics and teaching tools through which these topics are included in the educational process.

Preliminary research conducted under this project have shown that education for sustainable development has to be primarily related to expanding knowledge about the values of space, spatial problems, and ways to solve them, about the complexity and interdependence of activities in space while looking forward to developing a responsible relationship towards space. Thus, when leaving, pupils and students should:

1. upgrade their existing thinking patterns;
2. understand that any decision has consequences;
3. identify and evaluate the effect of specific interventions in the area;
4. be aware of the lasting effects of interventions in the area;
5. thinking about the solutions of pressing problems connected with sustainable development;
6. learn about careers that are related to the regulation of the natural and built environment;
7. develop a positive attitude towards their role in the planning of future development.

IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation of new content into the existing school program is a difficult task on which no universal answer exists. School systems are different, particularly in terms of openness to novelty (Marentič Požarnik,

2005, *Manual for School*, 2004). It is especially difficult, as many authors point out, when the initiative comes from non-school areas (McKeown, 2002). In the case of education for sustainable development, it is expected to shift from data to process, relationship and relations with cognitive and project learning and cross-curricular integration. These expectations methodologically match with the development of teaching itself.

Review of international practices suggests that learning about sustainable development is included into school programmes in the following ways:

- through the curriculum;
- with new knowledge and teaching tools for teachers;
- with the relocation of classes into an open space around the school and in the local environment;
- with the involvement of school building and its surrounding among teaching aids;
- with the involvement of external experts;
- with the implementation of a variety of supplementary programmes.

To achieve the above mentioned objectives in Slovenia it was, according to the majority of experts, necessary to add some new content into the curricula, which required an assessment of the essential new content, and to review and critically assess the existing programs. Due to the Slovenian curricular reform that took place between 2007 and 2008 in the case of education for sustainable development, many circumstances were in favour of the implementation of new topics and approaches into curricula. With the help of experts, detailed proposals for substantive amendments to individual subjects and for supplementary measures to promote education on sustainable development were prepared.

On the one hand special emphasis was given to the new content (e.g. land use, planning of spatial development, space management, conflicts of interest in space, etc.) while on the other hand we addressed spatial dimensions of existing content on a larger scale (e.g. use of natural resources, population density, natural and cultural heritage, transport, tourism and leisure, pollution and waste management, economic development, etc.). Proposals to amend the curricula have been prepared for the following subjects: Geography (the whole vertical from the sixth to ninth grade in the elementary school, secondary technical education, vocational-technical education, and general high school), Environmental education, Social studies, Science and technology, Social studies for secondary vocational education and Education for sustainable development as an interdisciplinary curriculum area.

Table 3. Proposal of (new) curricula content (Demšar Mitrovič et al 2007)

Topic	Content
Space	values of space, space limitation, complexity of space, sustainable spatial development
Settlement	typology of settlements, spatial pattern of settlement, the system of central settlements, typology of buildings, architecture, building materials, quality of life, green areas, cultural heritage, cultural and historical monuments
Infrastructure	natural resources (renewable / non-renewable), transport infrastructure, public transport, stationary traffic, sports and recreation infrastructure
Landscape	land use, protected areas, degraded areas, afforestation, natural disasters (floods, earthquakes, avalanches, landslides)
Human being – environment and space	waste water, hazardous waste, waste collection, global change, the impact of spatial interventions
Human environment	trans-national, cross-border and interregional cooperation, individual responsibility and responsibility of community
Space planning	system of spatial planning, democratic planning, public participation, coordination of interests

We assume that through the thoughtful approach to sustainable development pupils and students can acquire the following skills:

- analytical and constructive thinking and work;
- to be able to evaluate (harmonious – disharmonious, aesthetic – non aesthetic, functional – dysfunctional, etc.);
- to develop critical thinking (about information, media, society, etc.);
- to develop ability to analyze given situation;
- to develop a complex approach of solving diverse spatial problems;
- to learn different modes of expression (verbal, graphical);
- to develop tolerance in communication;
- to be able to coordinate different ideas;
- to accept decision-making and accountability;
- to develop positive attitude towards their own role in shaping the future development and
- to understand consequences of everyday actions (Fridl *et al.*, 2007).

Today, education for sustainable development has a central position in the development of education in the Republic of Slovenia. The Ministry of Education and Sports has prepared the guidelines for education for sustainable development from pre-school to university education. Their main purpose is to emphasize the importance of education for sustainable development and to show potential for achieving sustainable development in formal, non formal, and in informal learning (Table 4).

Table 4. Proposed measures for education for sustainable development
(*Smernice vzgoje in ...*, 2011)

Institution	Proposed measures
Kindergarten and school	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Preparation and implementation of annual educational work plan. 2. Planning and conducting the professional training for teachers. 3. Self-assessment of set goals concerning the education for sustainable development. 4. Continuous monitoring of achieved goals written in curricula. 5. Parental involvement in preschool and school activities. 6. Integration of pupils/students into school bodies/authorities.
Ministry of Education and Sports	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Updating the curricular documents through integrating education for sustainable development. 2. Development of instruments for determining the quality of self-assessment at school and the quality at national level. 3. Preparation of annual calls for education programmes for professionals in education. 4. Preparation of calls for development and research projects from European Structural Funds. 5. Integration into important international projects and initiatives.
Public organizations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Follow-up of curricula activities. 2. Systematic production of informative and professional tool kits. 3. Preparation professional training programs. 4. Creating a central web site for education for sustainable development.
Non-governmental organizations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cooperation with kindergartens and schools. 2. Proposals for the preparation of project, materials and teacher training in the field of sustainable development.
Municipal communities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cooperation with kindergartens and schools in achieving the objectives of education for sustainable development. 2. Providing conditions for preparation and implementation of projects in kindergartens and schools.

CONCLUSION

A society's ability to manage and exploit its developmental possibilities depends on the knowledge of individuals and of social groups about values of space and how they can be supported and protected but also exploited and developed. In the European Union, spatial development is an open question in cohesion debates and a certain level of harmonization on spatial planning

practice and related governance is expected to reach sustainable development goals. Modern society is often unaware of the wide spectrum of differently intertwined values of each individual, which are a reflection of both the local, and the broader, communities within which they live, work and make decisions. As Plut (2002) stated, interdependence and equilibration of the basic values of a new sustainable orientation lead to environmental responsibility, economic success and social justice, and, consequently, the skills students will need as adults fall into one or more of the three realms of sustainable development – environmental, economic, and social.

Teachers are a very important target group because they are the direct link to their students, and therefore they need to be informed and educated to understand the importance of teaching about sustainable development. Teachers should be equipped to help young people identify and think about the complexities of issues from the perspective of many different stakeholders. When teachers will fully support these ideas, we will be halfway to achieving the proposed objectives.

In Slovenia, we should achieve the following goals:

- to establish the principle of sustainability as a quality criterion in all areas of development;
- to follow the proposed educational strategy on sustainable development;
- to follow the social development objectives enshrined in the fundamental strategic development documents;
- to enforce the principle of sustainability;
- to train and educate young people in terms of sustainable development, whereby we must be equipped with the proper knowledge and skills.

Due to the unique position as a formal carrier of knowledge, the school should be even more committed to the implementation of the new paradigm. Now that the revised curricula only fully entered into force, it is too early to evaluate the work performed. Time will give us the answer whether our expectations and our decisions were correct.

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