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EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: UNLEASHING THE POTENTIAL OF THE HUNGARIAN ECO-SCHOOL NETWORK AS A MODEL FOR BUILDING AN ECOLOGICALLY RESPONSIBLE SOCIETY IN EUROPE

Abstract. Education for sustainable development is designed to impart knowledge and skills that contribute to the establishment of a new, environmentally responsible society. This type of education seeks to cultivate new worldviews, values, and social ideals while promoting economic viability and environmentally balanced development. A primary objective is to reorient existing educational programs to facilitate the integrated study of social, environmental, and economic issues, while taking into account local, national, and regional contexts along with global challenges. The aim of the article is to characterize the Hungarian eco-school network as a model for building an ecologically responsible society in Europe. Research methods applied: analysis and synthesis of scientific literature (to clarify the key concepts of the study), systematization (to identify existing scientific approaches to solving the problem under consideration), theoretical generalization (to formulate conclusions). The Hungarian Eco-School Network plays a vital role in coordinating, informing, and organizing in-service teacher training programs for educational institutions that prioritize sustainability in both their curricula and operational practices. The Network consistently prepares and recommends pedagogical supplementary materials, books, and educational packages. Eco-schools implement a curriculum centered on education for sustainable development and building an ecologically responsible society. The Network is accessible to all public educational institutions in Hungary, functioning through a yearly open application process grounded in self-evaluation based on established criteria. Eco-Schools employ a locally tailored curriculum focused on education for sustainable development and implement a comprehensive school approach, thereby extending education for sustainable development activities and fostering an environmentally conscious mindset among all members of the community.

Keywords: ecological responsibility, eco-school, education for sustainable development, environmental education, Hungary.

Introduction. Education for sustainable development (ESD) is designed to impart knowledge and skills that contribute to the establishment of a new, environmentally responsible society. This type of education seeks to cultivate new worldviews, values, and social ideals while promoting economic viability and environmentally balanced development. A primary objective is to reorient existing educational programs to facilitate the integrated study of social, environmental, and economic issues, while taking into account local, national, and regional contexts along with global challenges. A sustainable lifestyle aims to achieve a harmony between the needs of the present generation and the conservation of resources for future generations. It encompasses an awareness of decision-making in consumption, a commitment to social and ecological responsibility, and the cultivation of a balanced way of living [1].

Environmental education serves as a fundamental aspect of ecopedagogy, which incorporates environmental education and provides strategies for actionable initiatives. In contemporary discourse, ecopedagogy has developed into a broader movement that transcends the confines of sustainable development pedagogy. It aligns more closely with sustainable education and eco-education, both of which embrace a wider scope than traditional environmental education. ESD is concerned both with fostering a healthy relationship with the environment and engaging in a deeper exploration of our existence and the implications of our daily choices.

ESD and ecological responsibility, while closely related, are not interchangeable concepts. ESD represents a broader framework that encompasses ecological responsibility and incorporates economic and social dimensions of sustainability. In contrast, ecological responsibility specifically addresses the relationship between hu-

mans and the environment, underlining the necessity for responsible stewardship of natural resources. Although ecological responsibility forms an integral part of education for sustainable development, the latter's scope extends beyond environmental considerations. Thus, while ecological responsibility is a vital component, education for sustainable development provides a more comprehensive approach to fostering a sustainable future.

Analysis of recent research and publications. The term «ecopedagogy» emerges within the context of the evolution of ecological thought. Initially termed the «pedagogy of sustainable development», ecopedagogy has since advanced beyond its original definition. This concept is evolving into a pedagogical movement that encompasses curricular reform. Similar to ecology, ecopedagogy can also be perceived as a social and political movement. As with any nascent movement, it is multifaceted and may evolve in various directions. Moreover, the terminology may be interpreted in diverse ways, akin to the expressions «sustainable development» and «environment.» [2].

Ecopedagogy necessitates a reorientation of curricular design to integrate specific principles. These principles should inform the development of content and educational materials, ensuring that they are meaningful to students. Such relevance is achievable only if the content also contributes positively to planetary health. Therefore, ecopedagogy should not be regarded as merely another pedagogical approach; rather, it represents a distinctive educational framework that introduces novel perspectives and methodologies. The presented concept serves as a global alternative initiative that emphasizes not only the preservation of natural environments (Natural Ecology) and the implications of human societies on these environments (Social Ecology) but also advocates for

the establishment of a new model of sustainable civilization from an ecological standpoint (Integral Ecology). This initiative necessitates a transformation of existing economic, social, and cultural structures, thereby linking it to a visionary objective aimed at altering the relationships between human societies and their environment [3].

ESD represents a complex and multifaceted paradigm, applied in various ways throughout the educational landscape. Nonetheless, all iterations of ESD converge on a unified goal: to enhance the competencies of the younger generation concerning sustainability. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) provides a comprehensive definition of this concept, underscoring its capacity to equip learners of diverse ages with essential knowledge, skills, values, and agency required to confront pressing global challenges. These challenges encompass climate change, loss of biodiversity, unsustainable resource utilization, and social inequality. Furthermore, ESD has the potential to empower learners to make informed decisions and undertake appropriate actions, both individually and collectively, to foster societal change [4].

ESD constitutes a lifelong learning process and serves as a fundamental component of high-quality education. It aims to enhance cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral aspects of learning and encompasses various elements, including learning content, desired outcomes, the learning environment, and pedagogical approaches [5].

I.Franco et al. [6] underscore the imperative for the higher education sector to cultivate an awareness of sustainability among future generations by proactively implementing the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals within higher education policy frameworks.

G.Michelsen and D.Fischer [7] provide a definition of ESD, characterizing it as a distinct concept that effectively complements other interpretations and dimensions of sustainability.

This **article aims** to characterize the Hungarian eco-school network as a model for building an ecologically responsible society in Europe. **Research methods** applied: analysis and synthesis of scientific literature (to clarify the key concepts of the study), systematization (to identify existing scientific approaches to solving the problem under consideration), theoretical generalization (to formulate conclusions).

Results and Discussion. The principles of sheltering and caring underpin ESD, which has been advocated by the United Nations since 2002 through its establishment of the «Decade of Education for Sustainable Development» (DESD). The United Nations' DESD was formally established in December 2002 by the United Nations General Assembly through Resolution No.57/254 [8]. This resolution recommends that UNESCO devise a comprehensive plan, emphasizing that education is an indispensable element for achieving sustainable development.

A.Bory-Adams [9, p.41] articulates that UNESCO has two critical responsibilities concerning the DESD:

- «to catalyze, coordinate and support the global processes initiated under the International Implementation Scheme, particularly in supporting the re-orientation of national educational systems»;

- «to facilitate an enabling environment for the achievement of the objectives and goals of the Decade of Education for a Sustainable Development».

The United Nations' DESD represents a critical opportunity for all stakeholders (dedicated educators at all levels, leaders of educational institutions, students, education ministers, and policymakers across the globe)

to take substantive matters seriously and collaborate on transforming educational systems at all levels [10, p.38.]. The primary challenge of the DESD lies in its implementation; specifically, in the translation of its declarative principles into actionable demands.

Many regions have developed their own strategies to implement the DESD. With the support of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations University, the *Asia-Pacific region* has formulated a regional strategy that emphasizes the critical involvement of stakeholders in ESD. These stakeholders include social activists, governmental bodies, community organizations, the private sector, formal educational institutions, civil society, media entities, youth organizations, and international agencies [11]. Japan was among the first nations to formulate a comprehensive plan in early 2006. «Japan's DESD Plan of Action» establishes many programs to promote quality education according to the principles of sustainability, specially in teacher training: “by actively promoting ESD, we aim to help everybody to come to grips with situations in the world, future generations, our society, in order to participate in the creation of a sustainable society (...). Among the diversity of issues involving the environment, economy, and society, what advanced countries including Japan are now required to do is to incorporate environmental considerations in their socioeconomic systems. Precisely speaking, we must change our lifestyles and industrial structure based on mass production, consumption and waste, and establish sustainable consumption and production systems that ensure biodiversity.» [12].

In November 2006, Latin America successfully established its regional strategy [13]. The region boasts a long-standing tradition in environmental education movements, which have been further invigorated by the challenges associated with the DESD. Key focal points of the region's strategy include the coordination of collaborative efforts, the alignment and harmonization of educational policies across countries in relation to ESD, the enhancement of public policies for continuous improvement, the dissemination of information regarding the concept of sustainability, and the strengthening of cooperation and strategic alliances among various actors in the public, private, and civil society sectors.

In June 2005, *European* leaders established a comprehensive strategy during a summit convened by the Environment and Education Ministers, alongside the Economic Commission for Europe and the Environmental Policy Committee. The strategy emphasized two primary objectives: the training of new educators to integrate sustainable development into their pedagogical practices, and the assurance of access to essential tools and materials necessary for ESD [14]. ESD is embedded within four key European educational programs: Comenius, Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci, and Grundtvig [15]. The strategic framework for the European DESD is guided by fundamental principles, including transparency, interdisciplinarity, cooperation and network development, participation, and research [16].

Numerous European countries have already formulated their own national plans or strategies for ESD, with *Hungary's* eco-schools initiative serving as a good example of effective practice.

Hungary's Fundamental Law delineates the core values related to the transition toward sustainability and underscores the principle of sustainable development. Accordingly, ESD is articulated as a key objective within public education, as outlined in Article 1 of the Act on National Public Education [17; 18]. It is also recognized as one of the priority development areas in the National Core Curriculum, aligning with both European and glob-

al educational initiatives [19].

In November 2010, the Council of the European Union adopted conclusions that encouraged member states to foster the implementation of a «whole-school» approach to sustainability within their educational frameworks [20]. In Hungary, the «whole-school» public education system of ESD is the Eco-school Programme, established in 2000, functions as the comprehensive public education system for ESD [21]. Initially initiated with 22 pilot schools, the network has expanded significantly, comprising over 1,300 schools nationwide over the past 21 years [22].

The Hungarian Network of Eco-Schools is a consortium of educational institutions that focus on principles of sustainability, environmental education, healthy lifestyles, and democratic participation. To qualify for membership in this network, schools must demonstrate their methodologies for monitoring and evaluating their sustainability action plans. The initiative is guided by the school development programme of the Environment and School Initiatives international network, which promotes a holistic approach to environmental education and sustainable practices throughout the institution. This entails integrating sustainable values into educational practices, administrative operations, communication, and professional relationships. Since 2005, the ministries responsible for education and environmental protection have endorsed the promotion of ESD within the Hungarian educational framework through the Eco-school system. The title is awarded jointly by these ministries. Schools seeking this designation are required to undertake a self-assessment, providing evidence of their comprehensive efforts in sustainability pedagogy across eight specified domains. The established criteria for eco-schools ensure that an average Hungarian institution, provided it adheres to its environmental education commitments and fulfills the activities detailed in its application, can retain the title without incurring significant financial costs [23].

The Hungarian Eco-School Network plays a vital role in coordinating, informing, and organizing in-service teacher training programs for educational institutions that prioritize sustainability in both their curricula and operational practices. The Network consistently prepares and recommends pedagogical supplementary materials, books, and educational packages designed to support the daily activities of member schools and to keep them informed of best practices. Eco-schools implement a curriculum centered on ESD and adopt a comprehensive whole-school approach. This methodology aims to extend ESD initiatives and cultivate an en-

vironmentally conscious mindset among all members of the school community. Member schools are encouraged to present their ESD activities on their respective websites, while regional eco-school meetings are organized to facilitate the sharing and exchange of experiences among practitioners. The Network is accessible to all public educational institutions in Hungary, functioning through a yearly open application process grounded in self-evaluation based on established criteria. The application process prompts schools to engage in a reflective assessment of their existing and proposed activities from an ESD perspective, with reference to the quality criteria endorsed by the Network. Schools subsequently set their own objectives and evaluate their outcomes, initiating another cycle of reflection and refinement. Upon the successful completion of the application, schools are granted the title of Eco-School, which may be renewed every three years. Furthermore, after two consecutive successful applications, institutions may apply for the designation of Permanent Eco-School [22].

Conclusions. The concept of ESD is multifaceted, encompassing various approaches within the education sector. Nevertheless, all ESD efforts are directed toward the common objective of enhancing the sustainability competencies of the younger generation. Sustainability may serve as a foundational framework for reconstructing contemporary educational systems, which often remain rooted in a predatory worldview. Environmental education, along with ESD, assumes particular importance when integrated with principles of human rights, gender equality, democratic rights, peace, and sustainability. These elements are essential to the reforms required in education. Consequently, the principal aim of the DESD is to establish a new quality of education characterized by social and environmental considerations, rather than merely improving the existing educational frameworks. Various regions have already formulated their own strategies for the implementation of the DESD. Furthermore, numerous other nations have developed national plans or strategies to promote ESD. Among Europe's "good practices", we can mention Hungary's eco-schools experience. This initiative comprises schools that base their educational projects on the principles of sustainability, environmental education, promotion of healthier lifestyles, and cultivation of democratic participation, education for the forming of ecologically responsible society. Eco-Schools employ a locally tailored curriculum focused on ESD and implement a comprehensive school approach, thereby extending ESD activities and fostering an environmentally conscious mindset among all members of the community.

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ОСВІТА ДЛЯ СТАЛОГО РОЗВИТКУ: ПОТЕНЦІАЛ УГОРСЬКОЇ МЕРЕЖІ ЕКОШКІЛ ЯК МОДЕЛІ ПОБУДОВИ ЕКОЛОГІЧНО ВІДПОВІДАЛЬНОГО СУСПІЛЬСТВА В ЄВРОПІ

Анотація. Освіта для сталого розвитку – це освіта, спрямована на набуття знань і навичок, які сприяють формуванню нового екологічно відповідального суспільства, нових світоглядів, позицій, цінностей і сприяють суспільним ідеалам, економічній життєздатності та екологічно збалансованому розвитку. Основним напрямком створення нової високоякісної системи освіти, заснованої на принципах сталого розвитку та екологічної відповідальності, є переорієнтація існуючих освітніх програм на інтегроване вивчення соціальних, екологічних та економічних проблем, враховуючи місцеві, національні та регіональні умови, а також глобальний контекст. Мета статті: охарактеризувати угорську мережу екошкіл як модель побудови екологічно відповідального суспільства в Європі. Методи дослідження: аналіз та синтез наукової літератури (для уточнення ключових концепцій дослідження), систематизація (для визначення існуючих наукових підходів до вирішення розглянутої проблеми), теоретичне узагальнення (для формулювання висновків). Угорська мережа екошкіл відіграє життєво важливу роль у координації, інформуванні та організації програм підвищення кваліфікації вчителів для освітніх закладів, які надають пріоритет сталому розвитку як у своїх навчальних програмах, так і на практиці. Мережа екошкіл розробляє та рекомендує освітні матеріали та освітні пакети. Екошколи впроваджують навчальну програму, зосереджену на освіті для сталого розвитку та побудові екологічно відповідального суспільства. Мережа доступна для всіх державних освітніх закладів Угорщини та функціонує через щорічний відкритий процес подання заявок, що ґрунтується на самооцінці на основі встановлених критеріїв. Екошколи: використовують адаптовану до місцевих умов освітню програму, зосереджену на освіті для сталого розвитку; впроваджують комплексний підхід, тим самим розширюють діяльність з освіти для сталого розвитку; сприяють розвитку екологічно свідомого мислення та побудові екологічно відповідального суспільства.

Ключові слова: екологічна відповідальність, екошкола, освіта для сталого розвитку, екологічна освіта, Угорщина.