

Carpathian Convention Seminar on Education for Sustainable Development



Date: 16-18 April 2019

Venue: Budapest, Hungary

Summary

Mission

Facilitate the launch of cooperation or expand the scope of existing collaboration among the communities of stakeholder groups in ESD in the Carpathian region, and thus contribute to the implementation of ESD policies promoted by prominent international organisations, such as UNECE.

Aims

- By organizing an international seminar, Hungary wished to establish a new and enduring tradition of transdisciplinary networking and cross-country exchange of experience in ESD in the region, thus supporting the joint mission of the Carpathian Convention Countries (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, the Slovak Republic and Ukraine) to work towards sustainability.
- The participants from the seven countries, representing a mixed group of stakeholders, should initiate networking and exchange ideas in ESD, with a special focus on the whole-institution approach in ESD and ESD competences of educators.

Target groups

The 50 participants represented:

- practicing educators at ISCED 0-3 levels
- teacher educators
- professionals working in the field of nature conservation and education
- representatives (leaders and officers) of decision-making bodies in the field of sustainability, environmental protection, environmental education, ESD and public education (including relevant ministries)
- representatives of educational maintenance and governance bodies (state and clerical)
- educational counsellors and experts

Organizers, founders

The seminar was organised by the Ministry of Human Capacities of Hungary in close collaboration with the UN Environment Vienna Programme Office – Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention and the Ministry of Agriculture of Hungary.

The seminar was funded by the Ministry of Human Capacities of Hungary, the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety by the Advisory Assistance Programme for environmental protection in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia and other countries neighbouring the European Union (AAP). It is supervised by the German Environment Agency (Umweltbundesamt, UBA) and the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (Bundesamt für Naturschutz, BfN).

Objectives and outcomes

Besides providing a forum for professional discussion for participants, the transdisciplinary approach will be manifested in the following activities:

- sharing local traditions and approaches and learning from each other;
- exploring ways of facilitating and raising awareness of future generations to recognise the importance of joint actions.

As a more tangible outcome of the seminar, ideas for regional ESD projects or joint publications among the seminar participants are foreseen.

Programme

(see Annex 1 for the detailed programme of the Seminar)

- The plenary sessions highlighted the academic background and the policy context that the whole-institution approach in ESD and ESD educator competences can build on. Lectures: (1) The whole-institutional approach of ESD (by Prof Mariona Espinet, Autonomous University of Barcelona), (2) The Rounder Sense of Purpose project: Developing educator competences in ESD (by Dr Paul Vare, University of Gloucestershire), and (3) Reflection and thoughts on the whole-institution approach and teachers' ESD competences (by Dr Aravella Zachariou, UNECE Steering Committee for ESD).
- Each participating country was invited to offer a workshop. The 9 interactive workshops focused on the practices and approaches on ESD in different countries.
- On-site visits to 2 green kindergartens and 3 eco-schools, whose program on ESD are good-practices in Hungary. The aim of the visits was to offer an insight to the operation of two whole-institutional ESD networks (Hungarian Network of Eco-schools, Hungarian Network of Green Kindergartens), while providing opportunity for informal exchange of ideas.
- The World Café during the final seminar session aimed to plan further steps for a regional collaboration in ESD.

Results, lessons learned

- Carpathian Convention is the only intergovernmental agreement covering the entire Carpathian region and focusing on sustainable development. The *Carpathian Convention Seminar on Education for Sustainable Development* constituted the first time that ESD was the main focus of a Carpathian Convention event. However, a number of previous Carpathian Convention events addressed ESD directly and indirectly, including workshops held during the meetings of the Conference of the Parties (COPs) of the Carpathian Convention, and workshops and sessions during Forum Carpaticum conferences; moreover, discussion on ESD, as one of the cross-sectional issues under the Convention, was often linked to or embedded in some other topics and areas.
- Besides highlighting ESD, placing transdisciplinarity and science-policy-practice interface in the centre of the event was another novelty. Former Carpathian Convention events tended to focus on either policy and practice or science, without focusing on integration of knowledge among the three fields. This time, the intention was to bring a mixed group of teachers, school leaders, educational managers, maintenance experts, policy-makers, teacher trainers and academics together. Not only the transnational exchange was an important aspect of the event, but the programme was formed to generate meaningful exchange and co-produce ideas and knowledge between practitioners from these different fields of ESD, as well as propose policy recommendations for the Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention.
- ESD as one of the cross-cutting topics of sustainability must build on teachers. While they are the vehicles of systemic good practices, they can also represent the bottleneck vis-à-vis improving the quality of education. Therefore, the first international seminar focused on two key thematic areas: 1) the whole-institution approach in ESD supporting teachers' good practices and 2) developing educators' ESD competences to enable and empower teachers to deliver quality education.
- In the past decades, the Carpathian countries have elaborated several valuable practices, most of them building on the strengths of environmental and science education. In Hungary, especially the whole-institution approach of ESD in early childhood education, with a child-centred pedagogy embedding affective elements of learning, sensory experiences and outdoor learning, has been a future-leading practice.
- The way pedagogy and schooling are understood and the way teachers' roles are perceived and lived in the Carpathian region have some common features, which are different from those in Western Europe. The specific needs and strengths of the Carpathian countries in this respect should be identified, and their integration into the understanding and practice of ESD should be encouraged, improving the adaptation of culturally embedded practices in the region.
- Besides exchange, further elaboration and joint improvement of good practices, it is indispensable to recognize common challenges and shared problems concerning ESD and to reveal possibilities for joint action. Regional collaboration in ESD has a vital role in this respect. Regional collaboration can be manifested in joint research or academic publications, but also in practice-oriented projects or peer learning activities. Moreover, ensuring long-term continuous and consistent collaboration and exchange, as well as science-policy-practice interface, is indispensable. The Carpathian Convention could provide a framework for this purpose, such as via establishing a Working Group on ESD.
- Although many regional actors, including universities and NGOs, have been active in certain forms of international cooperation in the past years, they might not have fully realised the relevance of regional collaboration yet and might not be aware of the value of regional opportunities for learning and development in the field of ESD.

- Besides all of the above, collaboration in the Carpathians may have a role in better disseminating research and practice coming from the region in the international community. The Carpathians are underrepresented in large international professional or academic networks and therefore their good practices and knowledge cannot be integrated into the international efforts for ESD. More active professional connections within the Carpathians and between the Carpathian and the international community may enrich shared thinking and joint work for ESD.

Outlook and policy recommendations

- Seminar participants strongly supported the idea of holding Carpathian ESD seminars on an annual or biennial basis. Participants from Poland (unofficially) suggested the possibility of organizing the next seminar in Poland, during the period of Polish presidency of the Carpathian Convention (e.g. in 2020 or 2021).
- Participants have recommended establishing a Working Group (or equivalent) on ESD under the Carpathian Convention. The Working Group (WG) would be tasked with facilitating continuous regional exchange on ESD, as well as exchange with experts from outside the region, supporting joint projects and other forms of collaboration, coordinating communication with donors, as well as potentially developing a respective protocol. Moreover, the WG on ESD would facilitate exchange with other WGs of the Carpathian Convention, to ensure relevant thematic inputs into the educational materials and initiatives, and vice-versa.
- Specific recommendations on science - policy - practice interface included the following:
 - Continuing to integrate discussions and regional exchange on ESD into the COPs of the Carpathian Convention, as well as the Science for the Carpathians events;
 - Involving ministerial officials from the ministries of education and environment in research in order to facilitate integration of the best practices on the policy level;
 - Accompanying the ESD process in the Carpathians with continuous research, including but not limited to encouraging researchers (from the Carpathian region and beyond) to work on evaluating ESD initiatives in the Carpathian countries and to co-create recommendations with practitioners and policy-makers in order to facilitate sustainability transformations in the region;
 - Approaching funding programmes and donors to discuss elaboration of specific funding programmes and calls, focused on ESD and transdisciplinary learning for sustainability transformations in the Carpathian region;
 - Linking science closer to the classroom, including via: 1) Involving teachers and students in research; 2) Supporting citizen science initiatives, with a focus on developing scientific inquiry competences among the teachers and students; 3) Reporting scientific findings back to the teachers and students, and communicating with them better.

Annexes to the report:

- Annex 1. Programme. Carpathian Convention Seminar on Education for Sustainable Development