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EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE EUROPEAN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

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PREFACE

The book is the result of cooperation between researchers from four European universities: DSW UNIVERSITY OF LOWER SILESIA, GOETEBORGS UNIVERSITET, UNIVERSIDADE DO ALGARVE, UNIVERSITA' DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA, which formed a consortium for the implementation of the ESDEUS project: European Universities as Community Leaders of the Education for Sustainable Development (2023 – 2025) co-financed by the European Union under the agreement number 2023-1-PL01-KA220-HED-000156638 (www.dsw.edu.pl/esdeus).

Under EUGreenComp(2022), all educational settings provided by the university develop awareness and civic competences to take action to transform society into a more sustainable one. ESDEUS aims to build university capacity as a leader in Education for Sustainable Development.

The main ESDEUS project activities are (i) mapping and collecting HE ESD policies, strategies, and instruments, (ii) identifying stakeholders' ESD perspectives and collective actions in the ESD field, (iii) comparing ESD practices in different EU regions, and (iv) designing-implementing a course called "Introduction to ESD". The consortium implements these activities by conducting research (desk research and field research), organizing Intersectoral Teaching Learning events, using various methods based on problem-solving, peer learning, and exchange of good practices, and by typical academic activities like publishing articles, books, podcasts and conferences.

The book is one of the project results. Mapping out the stakeholders' perspective of ESD and identifying the ESD collective actions in different regions of Europe are the research priorities of ESDEUS group. We believe that the book will contribute to building bridges among the citizens' local communities, higher education institutions and education for sustainable development, and strengthen the concept of partnership.

Spring, 2025

Ewa Kurantowicz
ESDEUS project leader

PART I

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY STAKEHOLDERS' ESD PERSPECTIVE

INTRODUCTION

Ewa Kurantowicz

In the context of dynamic socio-climatic changes and the growing need for integration among academic, local government, non-governmental, and civic communities in actions aimed at achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the national research reports and comparative analyses presented in the monograph represent an important step towards building integrated models of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and local cooperation. The national reports (Poland, Sweden, Portugal, Italy) provide a rich body of empirical material, diverse in both contextual and thematic terms. This makes the comparative analysis of the national reports particularly valuable for identifying similarities and differences in the perception of ESD and understanding the perspectives of local stakeholders from such different regions of Europe, as represented by the ESDEUS project partners.

A comparative analysis of national reports also provides insight into how the universal goals of the 2030 Agenda are understood and implemented in different cultural, political, and economic contexts. At the same time, it reveals a spectrum of diverse strategies – from institutional and systemic approaches to grassroots and activist initiatives – that local actors employ to put the idea of sustainable development into practice. It is also worth emphasizing that the analyzed national reports offer examples of good practices, but also highlight the barriers and challenges faced by local communities. In this way, both the national reports (chapter I) and the comparative report (chapter II) can serve as tools for reflection as well as sources of inspiration for designing public policies, university strategies, and social actions in the field of ESD.

The research design. All national reports were developed based on a unified set of research questions while maintaining local autonomy regarding the selection of methods and tools. The main research questions applicable to all partners were as follows:

1. What kind of actions do local actors take in relation to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?
2. What are the patterns of collaboration and building engagement with other actors in realizing SDGs?
3. How do local actors understand ESD? What kind of values shape their understanding and action towards ESD?

In Poland, the method of narrative in-depth interviews (IDI) with representatives from higher education institutions, local governments, non-governmental organizations, and civic initiatives was applied (a total of 11 interviews). The respondents mainly came from the Lower Silesia region. The interviews were open, allowing respondents to freely develop narratives concerning both practical actions and values as well as reflections related to education and sustainable development. The research process involved transcription, coding, and qualitative analysis with reference to categories linked to the research questions and the local context. Additionally, an attempt was made to classify the statements according to the level of SDG implementation and engagement in ESD practices.

In Sweden, qualitative interviews were conducted with representatives of non-governmental organizations, educational, cultural, and social institutions, focusing on the identification of good practices, models of cooperation, and educational values. The Swedish team used a semi-structured approach, which allowed for both comparability of data and flexibility in exploring local contexts. The research placed strong emphasis on issues of inclusion of marginalized groups, education for gender equality, youth work, and climate education. Particularly interesting was the diversity of approaches to ESD between institutions with a more educational profile and those connected to culture and the arts.

In Portugal, the study began with a questionnaire sent to 346 entities in the Algarve region, covering various sectors: local governments, schools, museums, research centers, civic organizations, and parishes. The questionnaire included both closed and opened questions, allowing for the assessment of both the level of engagement in SDG-related activities and the organizations' self-awareness regarding the concept of sustainable development. Based on the responses, 13 entities were selected for the in-depth interviews. The selection of respondents considered both sectoral diversity and the range of activities – from environmental and educational initiatives to equality policies. The study aimed to capture the diversity of ESD and SDG actions, with particular attention to local strategies for inclusion and cooperation.

The Italian partner of the ESDEUS conducted qualitative interviews with representatives of benefit companies, foundations, social enterprises, networks of associations and a regional park. The respondents were all located in the Lombardy region and, specifically, in the area around Milano and Bergamo. The team used a semi-structured approach developing in-depth interviews and the narratives materials collected were explored and compared through a thematic analysis. It was possible to highlight different

core topics related to sustainability (biodiversity, social justice, climate change, gender equality, urban regeneration etc.), a plurality of complementary roles in developing ESD on the territory and a common need to create and maintain an active community. Fragmentation is considered, in fact, the greatest obstacle to the implementation of systemic actions and, even if the function of a potential leadership is appreciated, there is not a clear idea of who could assume it.

The analysis of the data was based on a qualitative approach, using thematic coding, narrative analysis, and comparative analysis. The research aimed to triangulate sources and contextualize statements in light of public policies, educational programs, and local development strategies. Particular attention was paid to the presence of elements such as the language of values, the reflexivity of local actors, and the real, rather than declarative, implementation of the idea of sustainable development. The analysis was supported by expert consultations within the research teams and a review of local and national documents related to ESD and SDG.

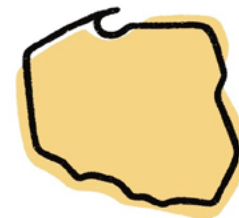
CHAPTER I

INTERVIEWS WITH THE LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS. COUNTRY REPORTS



1.1 POLAND

Pawel Rudnicki & Ewa Kurantowicz



The implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Poland is supported by a variety of organizations and informal groups that integrate local needs with global challenges. Interviews of the Polish research part of the ESDEUS project include academic institutions, NGOs, and local governments and communities. In the research, we refer to these entities by the term „local stakeholders,” including external stakeholders from higher education, other community social actors, as well as higher education institutions themselves. The change in the composition of the original study group (universities’ external stakeholders) happened due to the initial identification of the research area and the partial negation of the research assumption made in the ESDEUS project, during the application phase, on the educational leadership of higher education institutions in Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). Sustainability in social practice appears in the implementation of locally important tasks undertaken by community leaders or individuals involved in institutions and organizations. The identification of such understanding and practice of ESD, has changed the perspective of the study. Expanding the group of actors integrating sustainability into their daily activities confirmed both the diversity and multifaceted understanding of the concept of sustainability, as well as intersectional differences in the use of the concept of SD.

It seems that the day-to-day activities of the participating entities in the research reflect a multidimensional approach to Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), which combines environmental, social and economic aspects.

In interviews, representatives and leaders of the surveyed entities indicate that their work is mainly focused on environmental education, support for the circular economy, activities related to sustainable food production, creation of programs for conscious participation in society. Respondents emphasize that cross-sectoral cooperation, alternative/innovative teaching methods and ways of learning, and activities that involve different age and social groups, diverse in terms of education, place of residence or professions, are most relevant to Education for Sustainable Development.

Key areas of educational activities of the entities participating in the survey of the Polish partner of the ESDEUS project include: sustainable mobility, education on the protection of natural and cultural resources, and the promotion of responsible consumption and production. At the same time, organizations face challenges such as limited financial resources, lack of citizen involvement in the immediate environment, and low environmental awareness in some communities.

The report presents local stakeholders’ perspectives on the Sustainable Development Goals and Education (SDGs, ESD) in three key areas: (i) the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), (ii) emerging patterns of local stakeholder cooperation in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and Education (SDGs and ESD), and (iii) local stakeholders’ understanding of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). Each area is described according to the following scheme: an introduction, an analysis of selected statements from the narrative, and a conclusion that focuses on answering the research question.

10 open-ended, narrative interviews were conducted with representatives of Lower Silesian universities (3), local government (1), NGOs (4), company (1), local school (1), free civic initiatives (1). The interviews were recorded in audio form. In the next step, they were subjected to automatic transcription, validated by the researcher. The next step in the data work was primary coding (after the research questions), extracting relevant categories and groups of categories. Subsequently (for the purposes of this report), the researchers used excerpts from the narratives to prepare scientific texts. The appendix to the report contains descriptions of organizations, institutions, initiatives whose representatives, leaders, educators took part in the research.

SUSTAINABILITY DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN COMMUNITY

INTRODUCTION

The Sustainable Development Goals provide universal guidelines, but their implementation requires adaptation to local contexts. Poland, with its peculiar economic structure, historical conditions and regional diversity, creates unique conditions for realizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and building different strategies for their implementation in communities. First, because regions are diverse in terms of economics, natural resources, historical and natural heritage. Second, regions have particular experiences in building community involvement in local and immediate neighborhoods. Third, models of intersectoral cooperation in the regions differ, including cooperation with universities and communities. Narratives provided by respondents from the Lower Silesia region reveal that local actors undertake a variety of activities in the areas of education, technological innovation and the promotion of sustainable lifestyles, responding to the both needs of local communities and global challenges.

At the formal educational level, institutions such as universities emphasize the integration of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into their curricula and the topics of their research. At the same time, Wrocław universities introduce innovative educational projects based on community involvement and cooperation like the „Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)” initiative of University A. Local government initiatives, on the other hand, offer informal education and focus on implementing sustainable transportation solutions, teaching and involving inhabitants in the process of changing their daily transportation habits (e.g., the activities of the one of Wrocław’s Town Hall departments). NGOs, on the other hand, conduct community education activities and show how local projects implementing Sustainable Development Goals can gain international recognition and support (e.g. GP NGO in cooperation with UNESCO). Free/ad hoc social/civic initiatives are the least precise when it comes to identifying specific sustainable development goals and most often start from bottom-up deeply considered needs to live in a sustainable world.

INTERVIEWS

Below, we present selected excerpts from the narrative, along with a discussion in the context of the question of local stakeholders’ practices and actions in support of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

We have several majors that are directly related to sustainable development, and we teach there. There we simply have subjects that and in the name have sustainable development and in the content of teaching have sustainable development. **Starting with the direction of environmental protection, environmental engineering, spatial management, landscape architecture, renewable energy sources, of course. But also on agriculture, horticulture.** A number of contents are related to sustainable development. **We also have a mass of researchers who are studying different areas of this sustainability in their research.** [...] We are now even in the process of such mapping and improving our syllabuses, because **for the past year we have actually been implementing such a project, which actually, so to speak, in addition to building an alliance of European universities, is dedicated to better sustainability and better implementation of sustainability at universities too. The EU Green project, a large alliance of European universities, where in general our such main goals¹ is education for sustainability, research for sustainability - University for Sustainability Development. (PoL_2)**

¹ The bolded excerpts from the interviews were selected by the researchers as particularly important and/or illustrative of a specific situation to be analyzed/interpreted.

The above excerpt from a narrative by a researcher from the University A demonstrates a strategic approach to integrating sustainability into educational and research processes. By offering majors such as environmental protection, spatial management or renewable energy, the University is responding to the contemporary environmental and social challenges. The EU Green project (network of nine European universities) highlights the international

nature of cooperation and efforts to implement sustainable academic practices, combining theory with innovative solutions in teaching and research practice.

[...] We also now have the third season of **CSA**, and this is **socially supported agriculture**. Three years ago we fired up, we fired up. Actually it was kind of a splinter of that Shift project, because we talked a lot about local food and supporting farmers and looking for such innovations in food production. Well, and **because we have greenhouses, we have gardeners, we have farmers, we have food that we produce in our facilities**, in our stations, **well, and we have customers, meaning us, the employees of the university**, who would like to buy this food. [...] And this is a project on a European scale, I think, where university employees sign up for the CSA program, because CSA work in such a way **that I sign a contract with a farmer paying him, for example, 1,500 zlotys, and he undertakes for several dozen weeks 30 weeks in the growing season to deliver me a package of food**. But I don't know what will be in that package. It will be what is grown and it will be as much as it is grown. And **it's on a huge level of social trust in between**. That is, I have to trust that the farmer will do his due diligence to deliver this good to me. But for example, if a frost has come and there will be no cherries, I can't wait expect there to be cherries. He will simply plant quickly, I don't know, more cucumbers and I will get more cucumbers. Generally I will get this food, but I don't know what will be in the package. Third season. **[One hundred and a few packages a week]**. Some parcels quadruple, because, for example, you can sign up for a one-person household or a two-person household. Then there is a scale different of this package and every Thursday we receive such a surprise package. **Every Thursday we open a surprise package**. It costs a package of 30 zloty a week. [...] On Thursday we pick up the package and from Thursday we eat what the university provides us with. In general, the idea of CSA is that farmers have certain customers. (PoL_2)

The University's Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) project is an example of an initiative that integrates local food production, education and community building. The program is based on trust between farmers and consumers – participants, in advance finance the growing season, receiving in return a regular supply of food. Its content depends on the current harvest. Such a system promotes sustainable consumption, financial stability for farmers and reduces waste. The project uses the University's resources, such as greenhouses and research stations, and involves employees as customers. The activity strengthens local social ties and at the same time promotes SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), helping to raise environmental awareness and support sustainable agricultural practices. This initiative, demonstrates how innovations in food production can respond to global challenges while creating a collaborative model based on mutual trust and commitment.

The University combines science with a practical approach to sustainability in its work, focusing on local needs and global challenges. Research on the food self-sufficiency of Wrocław has shown that the city has the potential to meet local food needs in various scenarios. The analysis of available land and the construction of sustainable production systems underscore the importance of responsible consumption and carbon footprint reduction, which fits in with the implementation of SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production).

Similarly, the "Urban Farm" CSA sub-project, extends this vision by making practical use of the University's resources - such as experimental stations, greenhouses and student expertise - to support local organic food production. The initiative promotes locality, seasonality and sustainable eating habits, while providing healthy and safe food to urban facilities such as nurseries and nursing homes. The University also educates the next generation of professionals and consumers, creating awareness about responsible production and consumption.

These activities demonstrate that local initiatives are key to achieving the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By engaging in research and education projects, the University is pointing to the need for synergy between science and practice, creating space for building more resilient and sustainable communities.

As part of the activities of **the Bicycle Officer**, there is also, for example, just educational activities **in schools**, that is, that kids know how to handle the bicycle, and in fact here **we have such a strong cooperation with an organization, an NGO in Wrocław, which lobbies very much for bicycle cards to be**, [...] but **respond to current needs and requirements**. Because in fact, at the moment, a bicycle card is such a legal exam, it's on the playing field, we ride between the poles, and it's actually implemented, these are the so-called Dutch exams and the training of children also in urban space. So after such, after such an ordinary exam, because of course. Well, the regulations are such that a child without a bicycle card, that is, once he or she has reached the age of 10, he or she, if he or she has a bicycle card, must ride on the roads like an adult cyclist. (PoL_1)

A statement from an official at the Sustainable Mobility Office points to innovative educational efforts to promote clean transportation and reduce CO₂ emissions. Cooperation with local NGOs and involvement in training children and young people cycling in urban spaces reflect the practical implementation of SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). The bicycle card project, oriented to the real needs of users, supports the development of practical competence among young road users. By integrating educational and infrastructural activities, the office is creating a model for effective cross-sectoral cooperation for sustainable urban development.

*[...] I wanted to say that, as it were, the slogan sustainable development, it's a slogan that has been falling everywhere since elementary school, and not really so.... Well, and actually going deeper into specifically the goals of the 2030 Agenda and how to implement them is quite a new idea or not an idea [...] Of course, the global working group working with the global Geopark network to help, because it seems easy on the surface, and so when you have to dig deeper into the topic, it turns out that it's not so easy to assign certain activities to a specific goal. She tossed up a table like this, where they are listed a certain type of activity most commonly found to each target. So it makes this identification easier that we can send such a table, but really. Well, all in all, if you look at it, every activity we do, every project, every meeting with residents is the implementation of a specific goal. We at the moment are trying to. [...] Campaign 17 goals that **the Polish public completely knows nothing when it comes to details and naming. Everyone does, but if you ask a person. What is target number 8, we don't know it. And indeed, this public knowledge about the implementation of these goals is terribly lacking. It also came to me quite recently. I connected the facts that certain government programs are actually the implementation of these goals.** It is a pity that this is not given to the public. Maybe it will. Maybe it will somehow change? (PoL_7)*

GP NGO staff's narrative reveals the complexity of implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the local level. While the buzzword „sustainable development“ is widely used, actual understanding of the 2030 Agenda and its goals remains limited. GP NGO highlights the difficulty of mapping actions to specific SDGs, which requires deeper reflection and support, such as tools like tables mapping typical actions to specific goals. The organization points to a lack of public knowledge about the SDGs, which hinders their widespread implementation. Nonetheless, every GP NGO initiative, from educational projects to meetings with residents, contributes to the selected goals. The campaign to raise public awareness about the SDGs and to understand their links to local government programs underscores the need for better communication and education in this area. The narrative reflects the need to deepen public knowledge and strengthen cooperation to more effectively achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda.

*So I had to save money over the years. And the biggest money spender is clothes. It's the simplest thing when it comes to clothes, but I also have a lot of older cousins. This is an example of how we often exchange these clothes. At the same time, we didn't feel in our immediate environment that we were throwing something away, but giving something valuable to someone, and if someone didn't like it, they would say to us, 'Listen, I'm not going to take it, but someone will'. It was so cool! It felt like I was doing something good, something maybe totally random, maybe someone had thrown something away, but I really felt that it was okay. [] Well, I also often needed a specific piece of furniture. I really like all the campaigns in all the major cities in Poland. Like when a garbage truck comes. People just put things out. [...] and people really do help each other. It's great. I didn't know it worked so well until I started using it myself. [...] **That's what I think of minimalism.** (PoL_10)*

Through the entire interview only once, in a response to a repeated question from the researcher, the leader define which sustainable development goal is being pursued by the group - 17. But it seems that internalization and the conviction to take action are more important. They pursue the goal 'by the way' and not as the one that organizes or directs their local practices. They do not act for the goal (SDG 17), but out of the conviction that what they do is important for them and other involved persons.

SUMMARY

The cited narratives show that despite barriers such as low public awareness of the SDGs or limited financial resources, local initiatives play a key role in building sustainable development and implementing its goals in Poland and the region.

It is worth distinguishing three dominant trends in community-based sustainability education initiatives. The first is the use of theoretical and research resources of academic entities and their combination with the practice of implementing initiatives in the community. This feature of educational initiatives is exquisitely illustrated, for example, by the „Community Supported Agriculture“ project of the University A. In this context, the integration of educational, technological and social activities becomes the foundation for the successful implementation of the SD goals (especially SDG 11 and SDG 12).

The second trend is the effective adaptation of global sustainable development goals to local conditions, for example, in the field of natural resource conservation (SDG 15, SDG 17). An excellent example of intergenerational education in this regard is GP's environmental activities. Educational activities offered to residents build and deepen awareness of environmental issues and shape the skills and behavior of the region's citizens towards local natural resources.

The third trend of local SD education initiatives is collaboration between partners from different sectors (public, private, NGOs) and industries (education, marketing, local media, manufacturing companies, etc.). For example, the activities undertaken by the Town Hall department illustrate how local institutions can effectively implement SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) by promoting sustainable mobility, permanent (continuous) education of the city's community and also implementing management, strategic, promotional solutions towards Wrocław's transportation. Another example of this trend is the activities of 'free' citizens' initiatives, loosely connected with local institutions or organisations, which from time to time, use the resources of institutions to achieve their goals in the area of sustainable development, e.g. „*Re - the community movement*“.

It is worth mentioning that local initiatives in the Lower Silesia region also develop critical thought and deconstruct the idea of sustainability. Some local organizations (e.g., Ecocenter) conduct in-depth analyses of global socio-economic trends and set directions for critical debate on sustainability and education from a global perspective as well.

Summarizing the results of the analyses of the collected research material (narratives), it is important to point out the complexity and diversity of local stakeholders' approaches to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their implementation. The narratives contain descriptions of real-life examples/cases of implementation of the SDGs, which can serve as inspiration for other regions. The results of the study reveal the great potential and importance of local action in the context of meeting global challenges in the area of sustainable development.

COLLABORATION AND ENGAGEMENT ON SDGS AND ESD

INTRODUCTION

The implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) requires a comprehensive effort that relies on cooperation between diverse actors - academic institutions, NGOs, the public and private sectors. This cooperation must not only be flexible, but also tailored to local contexts and needs to enable effective implementation of the SDGs. The narratives of the surveyed actors indicate that both grassroots initiatives and those at the international level, which combine global goals with local actions, play a key role in the process of achieving the goals.

With a wealth of experience in sustainability efforts, universities emphasize the importance of transnational university alliances and joint projects that involve multiple countries and areas of activity - from science to green campuses. Such initiatives allow for the transfer of knowledge and resources, as well as the building of lasting relationships with the socio-economic environment.

On the other hand, NGOs and civic initiatives highlight the need to take into account the social and economic dimensions of climate actions, emphasizing the need to protect the poorest sections of society from the negative effects of the ecological transformation.

The emphasis on the cooperation, the creation of local and cross-sectoral alliances, synergies between NGOs, local government and communities is most often present in initiatives to implement the Sustainable Development Goals of local government.

The narratives show that sustainability cooperation and commitment-building are not only institutional activities, but primarily grassroots community initiatives, ad hoc actions or situations that require immediate intervention.

INTERVIEWS

This section of the report discusses specific examples of collaboration mechanisms and building civic engagement based on the interview data.

We've been doing this for 30 years [...] we went through different phases. Were we first enthused about the idea of sustainability. Today we say that the idea of sustainability is passing away. This is my personal opinion. It's past its prime, it's past its prime. So watching what's going on in the world, the environmental signals, the temperatures, the hurricanes, the floods, the droughts, and in a moment the climate migrants, it's actually these actions that need to be taken very, very quickly. And still the question: will we make it? And of course we do as much as we can to make it in time. Also in didactics a lot, in science too. (PoL_2)

Drawing on years of experience, the University points to the evolution of approaches to sustainability. The narrative emphasizes that the original enthusiasm for the idea is stepping out to the reflection on its limitations in the context of growing global challenges, such as climate change, droughts, floods and climate migration. The institution emphasizes the need for rapid and decisive action, while expressing concern about whether the time available will allow for an effective response. In this context, the University is pursuing intensive activities in both teaching and research, seeking to maximize the use of available resources and knowledge to address environmental crises. The narrative reflects the university's commitment to pursuing more effective models of action for sustainable development.

A supranational alliance of European universities, nine countries, a project that has several packages with us. 9 from what I remember, and each package is dedicated to a different area of university activity. That is, we have science, we have didactics, we have green campus, we have green, mobility we have. Cooperation with the socio-economic environment, or engagement. Still we have accessibility issues. That is, a university that is accessible to all. This project covers all areas of the university. (PoL_2)

A narrative by a researcher from the University shows the importance of transnational cooperation in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Participation in the alliance of nine European universities allows the institution to develop comprehensive projects involving learning, teaching, green campuses, mobility and cooperation with the socio-economic environment. The University also emphasizes accessibility issues, highlighting its openness to diverse stakeholders. The multifaceted nature of the activities provides a comprehensive approach to sustainability, demonstrating that universities can be leaders of change by integrating educational, scientific and infrastructural activities with global goals.

[...] the context of [...] thinking about sustainability, [...] empowerment, people with lower incomes, because there is a fight against poverty there, and at the same time some of the ways to fight what is threatening to the climate, does not take into account this perspective of the end of the month, that is, the perspective of people who will lose their jobs. And additionally in Poland the context of the 89 year trauma. In general, what language to talk about it? One, to talk, and two, so that they don't end up talking, and people, so that they don't feel cheated again, that someone promised them some fair. Transformation, they will end up with a reduced quality of life. That's because the middle class is having a blast. (PoL_3)

The narrative by an activist from the SD Foundation. Foundation highlights a key problem in implementing sustainable development - the need to take into account the social and economic perspectives of people with lower income. She points out the risk that climate transformation could lead to deepening social inequality, especially when decisions do not take into account the realities of everyday life, such as job stability or the cost of living. In the context of Poland's history, including the trauma of the 1989 political transition for the poor, there is a communication challenge - how to talk about a just transition so as not to arouse feelings of disillusionment and deception. The narrative draws attention to the need for a balanced approach that not only declares goals, but ensures that they are actually implemented in a fair and socially acceptable way. The activist's narrative points to the need to include honest dialogue and pay attention to the power of the voice of the most vulnerable groups. to the effects of the climate transition.

*[...] **we are very eager to use and benefit from the help, experience and such enthusiasm of NGOs.** And here, for example, such one example is the organization of Sustainable Mobility Week. This is such a pan-European Sustainable Mobility Week, where cities organize various events for residents to encourage them to introduce this sustainable mobility in their lives. [...] We just organize competitions every year for cool projects that will be related to this. And we already see also at the beginning we also meet with these NGOs, we ask them listen, what do you propose, what should we do? [...] **We invite these organizations to such that they help us organize the competition, because as officials we know something there, we know how formally it is supposed to look, while we also like to take such inspiration and ideas from the indexes, because they are up to date, they do all these actions, attractions and so on.** (PoL_1)*

A statement by an official from the Town Hall Department underscores the importance of cross-sectoral cooperation and the involvement of NGOs in green transportation efforts. An example is the organization of the European Sustainable Mobility Week, in which cities implement events promoting sustainable mobility. The office actively draws on the knowledge and ideas of NGOs, which bring fresh insights and practical experience to complement the formal competencies of officials. Activities such as competitions for environmentally friendly projects and consultations with residents help raise public awareness and build commitment to SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). The narrative shows how effective partnerships can support the implementation of environmental solutions in the daily lives of residents.

*Students, doctoral students who would like to get involved just in identifying green areas at the Wrocław University of Science and Technology. So this is one of the last such projects that is actually taking place and is not just a slogan that we are doing something or that we are going to do something, because something is actually happening. Also ecomobility, yes. Here **we also have internal projects that have served to develop infrastructure. The use of bicycles? Well, in the context of, let's say, well, as an incentive for employees and students also to simply reduce this individual carbon footprint.** That is, to choose these zero-emission means of transportation, and to get to the workplace, to places of activity. So here are various sources of funding for these activities. **Some of them are internal projects of the Wrocław University of Science and Technology, for which we vote. Something along the lines of such a civic budget.** And on the principle there is a committee, I'm looking at it, or on which one here, which somewhere selects these projects, and then reports the position. So this initiative is dedicated to a wider audience? Yes, it will contribute to whether it will be used. And it is clear that also more people will vote for it, also we are so open. And in terms of hearing this academic voice from different perspectives, one thing is such an activity on the plus side of integration, openness. (PoL_4)*

A statement from an academic from University B focuses on engaging the academic community in sustainability efforts. Students and doctoral students participate in projects such as the identification and development of green spaces and eco-mobility initiatives. Through internal projects, financed, among others, in the form of civic budgets, the University supports reducing individual carbon footprints by promoting the use of bicycles and other zero-emission modes of transportation. These initiatives, aimed at both employees and students, combine education with practical environmental action. Openness to the voice of the academic community and the integration of different perspectives strengthen the effectiveness of ongoing projects that respond to local needs and contribute to the implementation of SDGs such as sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11).

[...] to consciously inform the consumer regarding all these nutritional values of plant-based foods as equal alternatives [...] If at least nutrition in educational institutions, that is, at least once a week an egg meal or a vegetarian meal, a vegan meal, but this as an equal, as a full-fledged option and able to provide the same amount of nutrients needed for the development of a child as well as adults, that she can be balanced, and not flip-flopping on the principle of stop eating meat, the planet will be healthier [...] You don't have to be a vegan right away. You don't have to be a vegetarian. You can. You can just from the perspective of your life try to reduce it. It reflects well on your health. It reflects well on your wallet. It [...] It is fair. It is good for the animals. Everyone can find something for themselves while not feeling coerced. (PoL_5)

The activist narrative from VEG NGO focuses on consumer education and the promotion of a plant-based diet as an equal dietary alternative, friendly to both health and the environment. The organization stresses that vegetarian and vegan meals can be wholesome and balanced, so implementing them in educational institutions is an important step toward sustainable consumption. VEG NGO encourages a gradual reduction in meat consumption, which has health and economic benefits and reduces greenhouse gas emissions. The approach does not assume radical changes, but instead relies on voluntarism and individual choices, making it more socially acceptable. The organization's activities support SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), contributing to a more conscious society that strives to balance the well-being of people, animals and the environment.

*The good thing about such a solution, besides saving water, is that it shortens the supply chain, because such hydroponic farms [...] can be located anywhere or everywhere. [...] It can be a year-round alternative to traditional farming, but especially it doesn't require big acreage and big sites, because it can be vertical, that is, it can be vertical, it can be. We had four levels, and there can be many more levels. Of course, we use the appropriate spectrum of light selected in the form of LED light [...] We can use sunlight, but it must be very well regulated so that it is not too strong. On the other hand, on cloudy days and in winter, when it was less light, that is, we use LEDs. In systems that are properly enclosed and quite airtight, we protect these plants and animals from the elements. As a result, they are not exposed or minimally exposed to disease pests. As a result, we don't have to use pesticides or any chemicals. That is, **we have, first of all, a water-saving system that can be self-sufficient and assess water, energy and nutritional we do not have to use. That is, we have healthy, clean food next to us. [...] So here we also have an alternative to the food crisis** for what has been happening lately, that is, from the pandemic, to the blockade of the Suez Canal, the wars in Ukraine, where, where supply chains are shut down somewhere, where there is some food insecurity, and hydroponics can, as it were, secure the needs. (PoL_6)*

A leadership statement from Aqua Company highlights the innovative potential of hydroponic farms as an alternative to traditional agriculture. With vertical farming, closed systems and LED lighting, hydroponics minimizes the use of water, energy and chemicals, and reduces susceptibility to diseases and pests. Located close to consumers, these farms shorten supply chains, making them more efficient and stable in the face of global crises such as pandemics and wars that disrupt food logistics. The project responds to SDG challenges such as responsible consumption and production (SDG 12) and climate action (SDG 13). Aqua Company demonstrates how local technological solutions can contribute to global food security and the creation of sustainable food systems.

*[...] we also try to give such an opportunity for residents [...] to listen to specialists, but speaking in simple language on topics that are important not only for Geopark residents. But this is the problem of drought, water retention, invasive species. And we're also trying to organize such events that can help them, give them a handle on some problems that everyone has. It is also a little bit at the moment imposes such, we can say, a kind of obligation to participate in this UNESCO Geopark world network, to **prepare the population through them, to reduce the effects of natural disasters. It's a big emphasis on this [...] how to go so straight to the residents, how to cope in times of flood? [...] But these are the kind of actions towards residents.** The broad environmental education that we do. And this I say is not just focused on one topic, but on it, and not just on children, because we invite them too. (PoL_7)*

The leader's narrative from GP NGO underscores the crucial role of environmental education and community involvement in addressing environmental challenges such as drought, water retention and invasive species. The organization not only provides residents with access to expertise expressed in simple language, but also engages them in hands-on events that teach them how to deal with problems, such as during floods or other natural disasters. These activities stem from its membership in UNESCO's global network of Geoparks, which further obligates it to promote practical adaptation solutions.

GP NGO organizes events targeting a wide range of audiences, both children and adults, offering comprehensive educational support and raising awareness of local and global environmental challenges. Of particular importance is the emphasis on reducing the effects of natural disasters such as droughts and floods, making these activities directly linked to the implementation of SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation).

The above statement shows that environmental education in the broadest sense cannot be limited to a single topic - an integrated approach is needed that encompasses various aspects of sustainable development and enables residents to actively participate in ecological transformation processes. GP NGO shows that local actions can have a global dimension if properly communicated and supported by international networks such as UNESCO.

*One such social activity is that **we organized a collection of clothes on the „Clothes to Donate” portal. This is also one great example of a closed-loop economy and a great business [...]** And It's based on the fact that **we announce a collection of clothes on this „Clothes to Donate” portal. As if **one can report there the willingness to donate cartons of unneeded clothes, indicating at the same time that he wants to support such and such an organization. And then **a courier comes to our house for free, picks up this carton of clothes, it is then weighed there on the spot, in a warehouse in Warsaw, and every zloty from each kilogram of these donated clothes goes to the purpose of the organization that was indicated. We did a campaign called „Dress Wroclaw in green,” and this was even picked up by the national media, because it turned out that sometimes a family from over the sea heard about the fact that our organization was conducting some kind of collection of clothes there. [And then we collected 4 thousand zlotys. From these clothes we bought 40 tree seedlings, which were planted in Wroclaw. (PoL_8)*******

The excerpt from the Eco NGO leader's response is an excellent example of how local initiatives can integrate the closed-loop economy with environmental efforts. The „Clothes to Donate” project allows residents to donate unwanted clothes, which are transformed into funds to support environmental causes. The funds that have been raised allowed to purchase 40 tree seedlings, which were planted in Wroclaw as part of the „Dress Wroclaw in Green” campaign. Through this initiative, the organization raised public awareness about recycling and sustainable consumption, while strengthening the community's commitment to climate action. Support from national media further raised the project's visibility, showing how local actions can have a broad impact on the implementation of SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) and SDG 13 (Climate Action). This initiative shows how simple actions can effectively contribute to building more sustainable communities.

Re: Community movement and other educational local activities for sustainable development combine both the social and environmental dimensions of sustainability; individual and group needs, allow us to understand the current state of affairs and plan for the future.

We are all part-time students and we all work very hard to be able to afford our studies and to live. So we started with it being a [...] project, and then entering the business, so that we have this documented part showing that we can do it before we apply for funding, e.g. from the city. [...] For me, it was important, and also when I talked to everyone else, it was important that it was not a job where we have to do something we disagree with, i.e. a job that is in line with our ethics, so that we can create a workplace that will bring us joy and where we can talk about what is interesting to us. (PoL_10)

[...] we work together and also run workshops together. At the beginning, it was just me and W, and B., W. would just bring things, take things to the car. And then, seeing how cool it looks [...] they themselves offered to come here and do this or that station. There was indeed a lot of interest and everyone had fun. It turned out that people had a lot of fun. Afterwards, we also had a lot of [...] questions about how to come here, [...] or where to get information. I feel that it really moves people and it's even kind of relaxing [...] Nowadays, culture puts a lot of emphasis on these kinds of activities, on activating small communities, right? And it's a very good idea to activate small communities [...] to get people to meet. It's a small thing. It affects all of us, because we all have some clothes or a mat at home. Anyone can come and do something wonderful. (PoL_7)

SUMMARY

The implementation of the SDGs in Poland demonstrates the complexity and multidimensionality of cooperation between different sectors, institutions and communities. The University A, with more than 30 years of experience, engages in international alliances that enable knowledge transfer and development of projects such as green campuses and innovative teaching solutions. The Ecocenter emphasizes the importance of including the social dimension in environmental transformation, paying attention to the protection of vulnerable groups. Local initiatives, such as Eco NGO's clothing collections and Sustainable Mobility Town Hall projects, engage communities in activities that promote responsible consumption, environmentally friendly modes of transportation and a closed-loop economy. Bottom-up initiatives, such as GP NGO's activities, show how practical environmental education and the promotion of low-carbon solutions, such as photovoltaics, can build trust and raise awareness among residents. Wrocław University B implements eco-mobility projects financed by civic budgets, integrating various social groups into efforts to reduce CO₂ emissions. Cooperation between different entities, universities, local governments and NGOs shows that only by integrating resources, knowledge and experience is it possible to build sustainable solutions.

In summary, the analysis of the narrative interviews reveals three social patterns of cooperation and commitment to sustainability and education. These can be identified as: „Local – Global“ „Integration - Redistribution“; „Solidarity - Transformations“. The indicated features in the various „patterns of cooperation and involvement“ are inseparable and co-occur in the actions of local actors. They have the character of coexistence, and their dominance in the activities of stakeholders depends on the purpose, capabilities and constraints of the acting actors.

UNDERSTANDING OF ESD IN LOCAL ACTIVITIES

INTRODUCTION

Understanding of what Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is can be formed in people's daily activities, communication and dialogue with others, or in joint action with local community or a global activist group. The tools that build understanding of ESD are practice, experience, reflection. The obvious way to gain knowledge about sustainable development is through science, publications, research and various community platforms interested in the issue. It seems that understanding ESD among local actors should be based on an integrated approach to learning and education. However, it is not just about integrating knowledge sources, methods or forms, but also about incorporating and disseminating knowledge about the values and needs of the community. Such an approach is guaranteed to build a more sustainable future.

INTERVIEWS

In the selected quotes, we try to focus on the search for individual and shared meanings in communities on the understanding of Education for Sustainable Development. Thus, in the final conclusions, we formulate the values that guide the actions of local sustainability actors.

We also finished such a study not long ago about this, the purpose of which was to answer the question of whether Wrocław could be self-sufficient in food. From it. We did an analysis of available land, available land. The company's assumption of a hundred kilometer living, heavy zone of Wrocław, but also of Wrocław itself. Wrocław can be self-sufficient, food-wise, in various scenarios. (PoL_2)

He simply relies on such cooperation in food production. So far there is no scientific thread there. Probably as another layer there will be a scientific thread there. Choose to actually **simply use the existing resources of the university. Combine that with the needs of the city.** We in general finished such a project [...] **it was about changing this kind of approach to food and food production, that is, in the context of changing food in the city and [...] it was about both eating habits, and locality, seasonality and studying the impact of food on the environment.** Like a multi-faceted project, but also the city was responsible for building community gardens next to schools, that is, as if community gardens were being created next to schools. [...] **Our fields, to put it colloquially, can provide food that is needed at city facilities.** [...] We have a lot of hectares of fields, we are the University of Life Sciences, we have, we have experimental stations, we have greenhouses, we have students of horticulture and agriculture, who during their classes also learn food production, food growing. That's exactly what it is with the station at Swojc responsible for agricultural production. **Plenty of acreage that is available for use, which with skill workers who can produce organic food. Well, and the city's demand for food, if only for nurseries, DPS.** [In addition, we know that this food is produced by my neighbor. We actually know how it is produced, under what climatic conditions and so on. So it is safe food, all of it. (PoL_2)]

These activities indicate that education, research and cooperation with the social environment can lay the foundation for building more conscious and responsible production and consumption models. Education, according to respondents, must be multifaceted and inclusive. Emphasize the potential of local communities and point to values such as the health of current and future generations, investing in healthy food and the competence of local residents to produce it as economically viable solutions.

[...] **sustainable development has become a kind of agenda, behind which, as I said, various. You could say capitalist** [...] based on infinite growth, a system that in fact could be said to be at odds with sustainable development, which assumes on the one hand that everyone's needs are met, and capitalism in a certain sense seeks accumulation and stratification is in its favor. **And from how I understand the goals of sustainable development, it is rather that stratification should be minimized and satisfied.** [...] Growth, on the other hand, is so as a certain development, that is, we don't have to grow in order for it to have something only you can say, **we can develop, but not grow.** Yes, yes. And here is this category of growth, where it can be sort of justified and understood at a certain economic stage, but, for example, in our economies you would think we don't need to grow anymore. (PoL_3)

The ECO NGO takes a critical look at the contemporary understanding of sustainable development, pointing out its often superficial nature and entanglement with capitalist systems based on infinite growth. It stresses that true development should minimize inequality and meet the needs of all, rather than promote wealth accumulation and social stratification. The narrative points out that developed economies no longer need to focus on growth, but on qualitative development that takes into account social and environmental aspects. This approach reflects the need to redefine economic goals in favor of a more sustainable and equitable system.

*[...] in fact, these grassroots activities are, as it were, brilliantly combining and complementing the government's activities. Because I see something like this If the government runs the „Clean Air“ program and even stove replacements, the average Kowalski so called, well, either he doesn't trust it, or he says it's some other government scam, or he's afraid of the bills, or he doesn't have the money. And now the associations and this grassroots activity is able through education, meetings, as we would do. [...] **We found low-carbon farms, small farms, some businesses even one-person businesses, where people were able to come and see with their own eyes how photovoltaics work at someone's house and see if it actually reduces bills or not.** (PoL_7)*

The leader's narrative from GP NGO reveals the key role of grassroots efforts in complementing government sustainability initiatives, such as the Clean Air program. Residents, distrustful of the activities of public institutions, are more likely to get involved in local projects run by associations and organizations that provide education and practical support. GP NGO organizes meetings where participants can see in practice low-carbon solutions, such as photovoltaics, and assess their impact on bills and the environment. These activities raise environmental awareness, build confidence in sustainable technologies, and support the implementation of SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) and SDG 13 (Climate Action) by combining education with concrete examples of practical solutions.

*Well, it is this approach to nature with us is very important, but so simply care about which we give the organization some such, less cleaning. **Now we have such a sports challenge, also for adults who run, walk, to just collect this garbage in the forests. In our place locally we organized.** (PoL_9)*

The School takes a hands-on approach to environmental protection, integrating environmental education with everyday activities. Locally organized initiatives, such as sports challenges for adults, encourage participants to engage in physical activity combined with litter picking in the forests. These activities not only promote care for nature, but also engage the local community in simple but effective environmental practices. The school emphasizes the importance of building environmental responsibility through grassroots activities that have a direct impact on the environment. In this way, it combines social activism with nature conservation, supporting the implementation of SDG 15 (Life on Land) and SDG 13 (Climate Action).

*It's hard to tell what a value is today and what is a mission. But community is certainly important. Building awareness in such a **community**. Because it's a good way to start a conversation. Always. [...] basically, I mean **returning to nature**. And creation. **Creativity!** It's like when something happens with a piece of clothing that I don't need, and someone suddenly takes it in their hands and manages to make a style out of it, something different, something of their own. That's always fascinating to me. (PoL_10)*

SUMMARY

Research shows that Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is understood as a process that integrates science, practical education and social or individual needs. ESD is primarily **practical knowledge**, produced and implemented through action in community and scientific projects, such as research on food self-sufficiency in Wrocław and the University A and the „Urban Farm.“ These types of projects combine science with practice and promote local food production. Project activities also support sustainable eating habits of residents and educate about the environmental impact of consumption. ESD is also **critical knowledge** for sustainable development. It involves deconstructing growth-based economies and policies and acquiring the competence to debate and redefine development towards social and environmental sustainability (ECO NGO). ESD is also **community knowledge** derived from participation in locally organized neighborhood meetings, events, workshops. For example, teaching residents to implement low-carbon technologies, such as photovoltaics, while sharing knowledge and experiences with other fellow citizens on the subject are examples of grassroots initiatives that increase confidence in environmental activities and awareness of local environmental problems.

(e.g., GONGO's educational activities). A similar learning mechanism accompanies joint activities, one-off actions that promote responsibility and care for nature (School).

All of these narratives show that the key values shaping ESD are collaboration, critical thinking, practical approaches, and community engagement. Local action, based on a holistic approach, effectively supports the realization of the SDGs, pointing to the potential of education as a driver of transformation towards a more sustainable society.

The research conducted aimed to learn about the perspective of local stakeholders on the area of Education for Sustainable Development. At this stage of analysis, the following conclusions can be made:

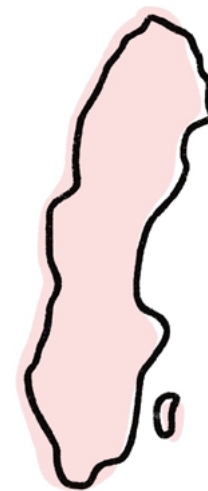
- i. Academic institutions, non-governmental organizations, local governments and communities implement various educational initiatives in the field of sustainable development
- ii. Local education initiatives often integrate the global goals of the 2030 Agenda with local needs
- iii. Stakeholders form alliances, cooperatives, consortia across represented sectors, industries together with local citizens
- iv. Engaging citizens and creating a framework for their free action promotes sustainable development goals
- v. The exchange of resources among stakeholders is necessary for success in achieving goals, as well as educational impact in the area of sustainable development

Harnessing the potential of collaboration among local communities, academic institutions and NGOs, local stakeholders are pursuing (in small steps) the Sustainable Development Goals. These actions, although implemented in different contexts and scales, share a common goal - to build a more just, sustainable and resilient society. The transformation towards sustainability requires further support, but the experience of Polish institutions shows that it is possible to reconcile local needs with global challenges.

Recent years have brought numerous challenges that have confirmed the need to accelerate sustainability efforts. The COVID-19 pandemic and socioeconomic crises have highlighted the importance of synergies between different sectors. Local communities, with their flexibility and adaptability, have played a key role in mitigating the effects of global problems. At the same time, institutions, community organizations, spontaneous civic movements in Poland have taken steps to become more involved in ESD initiatives, which is reflected in numerous research and education programs, but also in implementations (such as those described above). The experience of Polish stakeholders shows that transformation to a more just and sustainable society is possible, as long as the actions are based on cooperation, trust and a long-term vision. However, it is crucial to increase systemic support, including financial and legislative, to further strengthen grassroots initiatives and their impact on local communities.

1.2 SWEDEN

Adrianna Nizinska & Dimitrios Papadopoulos



The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), implemented in Sweden, encompass a broad range of objectives, addressing social, economic, and environmental dimensions. HE external stakeholders, hereafter referred to as local actors (including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), cultural institutions, and community groups), play a crucial role in realizing these global ambitions. Their actions, shaped by local needs and values, contribute to both global and local solutions for sustainability.

This report explores the role of local actors in achieving the SDGs, with a particular focus on understanding and implementing ESD. Through interviews with key local actors in Sweden, the report delves into the practices these organizations use to promote sustainability, collaborate with various stakeholders, and integrate ESD into their daily activities.

By examining the actions, collaborations, and values of local actors, this report provides a comprehensive overview of their contributions to the SDGs and ESD in Sweden. It highlights the importance of collective action and the role of local actors in fostering sustainable futures.

SUSTAINABILITY DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN COMMUNITY

Multiple actions and practices of Swedish interviewees demonstrate a comprehensive approach to advancing the SDGs through education, gender equality, reducing inequalities, responsible consumption and production, life on land, climate action, and building partnerships. The interviewed actors operate at both local and international levels, tailoring their strategies to specific community needs while aligning their efforts with broader global goals. The organizations' efforts highlight a) the importance of grassroots initiatives and b) the need for broader support to amplify their impact.

ACTIONS SUPPORTING SDG 4: QUALITY EDUCATION

Local actors emphasize the role of education for sustainable development. Girl on Cloud hosts webinars and panel discussions on various topics, including the impact of geopolitical crises on women. They also produce fact sheets to combat misinformation. Ana from Big Bear states:

Education for sustainable development has been a part of Big Bear for quite a long time... we tried to, mostly in education for sustainable development, develop a lot of the teacher materials.

As such, they work with the education system to integrate sustainability into curricula and provide teacher training. Hattie adds:

We have produced a MOOC for principals... to support the leaders in the school to take a holistic approach.

SDG 4 is also central to Westtown's work, particularly through their investments in adult education and inclusive learning opportunities. Mia mentions:

Education, as I said earlier... we work with education based on the needs that exist and to be able to adapt the content to these needs. And that can be about anything, from having an interpreter to actually having procured services so that if someone is deaf or visually impaired, there is also education for them.

This demonstrates a clear effort to ensure equitable and accessible education options for everyone, regardless of background or circumstances. Similar initiatives are mentioned by Maya in Harbourn town highlighting extensive efforts to provide quality education for all, particularly through adult education, vocational training, and flexible learning models:

Then there is the goal for, if I remember correctly, good education for all. That's one of those goals and then it's connected to the steering documents. It's connected to our strategic goals, local politics and it's connected to the committee's goals and that's what's going down in our systematic quality work.

The Botanical Garden also plays a significant role in promoting SDG 4 by offering nature-based learning experiences. Through partnerships with local schools, the organization provides a hands-on, immersive education by helping students understand biodiversity and ecological

balance. Their educational work spans a wide range of activities, such as teaching students about wildflowers, biodiversity, and ecological systems. Chris from the Botanical Garden emphasizes outdoor pedagogy, mentioning how children excel outside the classroom:

The fact that you're actually using all your senses, which you don't if you're sat in the classroom, looking at a book and looking at photos of plants. You realize that plants can look different when you're outside. They don't look exactly the same as they do in the book. And actually, feeling them and looking at them with like a magnifying glass or sketching them or smelling them or just observing, I think gives a new dimension to learning.

In addition, Theater X works with local communities, including schools, to integrate sustainability into their activities. According to Peter, the organization tries to educate and involve local actors in sustainability through workshops, seminars, and educational events related to environmental topics.

ACTIONS SUPPORTING SDG 5: GENDER EQUALITY

The organization led by Hane (Girl on Cloud) focuses heavily on promoting gender equality. They engage in raising awareness by organizing events and conferences to highlight the impact of economic crises on women in Europe. Hane mentions:

We organize debates and discussions with female candidates for the European Parliament to address gender perspectives and issues affecting women.

Additionally, they support migrant women by forming networks and associations to help them integrate and become active in the community. Hane explains:

We provide platforms for migrant women to voice their concerns and participate in local governance.

Maya's organization in Harbourn town is also committed to gender equality and value-based education, ensuring a safe and inclusive learning environment:

And then the fifth (goal) that is called equality. Yes, we are also working on that here and we have had a lot of work towards values. We work on implementing values that should be a natural part of our organization [...] And we work on theme days, that should permeate teaching. We have an approach where we have zero tolerance toward threats, harassment and abuse [...] It is equality, and it is also that we work for everyone's equal value and not just in a document, but we dare to work with it practically in everyday life.

ACTIONS SUPPORTING SDG 10: REDUCED INEQUALITIES

Efforts to reduce inequalities are evident in the focus on marginalized groups. Hane's organization (Girl on Cloud), for example, addresses the intersection of gender with other issues such as migration and economic inequality. Hane's descriptions show the organization's efforts to encourage the political involvement of women with migrant backgrounds, aiming to reduce inequalities by empowering marginalized groups. Ana from Big Bear highlights the importance of context-specific approaches, saying:

To be really humble in their reality and see their needs and build everything up based on what they see as their problem.

This approach ensures that their initiatives are inclusive and culturally sensitive. Westtown's efforts to include marginalized groups – such as those with disabilities or those coming from criminal backgrounds – into education and the labor market also align with this goal. As Mia argues, their initiatives focus on bridging gaps and creating opportunities for vulnerable populations, "to break the patterns that may exist." Similar activities to reduce educational inequalities, particularly for students with migration backgrounds and diverse learning needs, are enacted by Maya's organization in Harbourn town:

And so we also have the goal of reduced inequalities, a strategic goal that everyone should have education on equal terms [...] Another target group is many more students with different neuropsychiatric diagnoses. And many students who belong to both first and second generation of immigrants have come. They have had a tough school background. They have failed high school. They may have come as unaccompanied individuals, attended three years high school and nothing happened. They didn't have time because they didn't have the conditions and so on.

Reducing inequalities also revolves around efforts to bridge gaps, particularly in Swedish regions and areas with lower education levels and higher unemployment. For example, the county in which Theatre X is located is often referred to as one with the lowest education level and highest unemployment rates in Sweden. Peter highlights these societal challenges and the ways in which they use theatre to stimulate local involvement and dialogue about sustainability to achieve parity with other, more prosperous regions. Ana from Big Bear mentions an ongoing youth program on leadership:

We are really trying to find youth from the suburbs with socioeconomically lower backgrounds for more equal representation. And also, to engage more guys, because it's usually girls that are expressing their interest and their commitment in the sustainability issues. So, we want to raise other voices of the society.

ACTIONS SUPPORTING SDG 12: RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

Big Bear's "School Food for Change" project aims to transform food systems in schools by focusing on sustainable food procurement and reducing food waste. As Ana describes:

The whole school food approach contains four pillars. One is policy and leadership, to have the formal and strategic thinking when you work on these issues. Then it's education for the pupils, but also for the canteen staff and for the teachers and so on. One is the food that is procured and served, that should be sustainable and healthy. And so, one of the things that the project is working on is to produce procurement settings or do good procurement. And then it's collaboration with the surrounding societies, both the caretakers and the local shops, the pharmacies and farms.

Theater X has made efforts to change its practices, such as prioritizing sustainable production methods and reducing its ecological footprint. Peter speaks about their initiatives, including the development of a more comprehensive sustainability program and ensuring that the resources used for productions are environmentally sustainable. He describes a switch towards a more active engagement with sustainability:

It is the purchase of goods and to some extent the transportation. It is a fairly limited area that does not encourage making any major changes but rather minimizes the risk of the impact. But then we started the work of writing a new sustainability program and it became quite extensive work, because it was not just writing a policy, but we did investigative work in different ways and took in many different perspectives.

Chris from the Botanical Garden mentions his work with children on topics like organic gardening, composting, and understanding food production: "This morning I've been working with gardening with children, understanding where food comes from, working with it. So, they've been sowing seeds, and they were here about four weeks ago, and they had already, you know, a lot of their salad. They've been harvesting salad today and lettuce, and they've been harvesting radishes that they could take home and eat. And then the potato, they see that potatoes are getting really big. The plants are getting really big. So, the understanding with food comes from understanding about organic gardening. We've also been working with compost today, understanding what happens with compost and how it becomes soil and what the importance behind this is." These activities encourage awareness of sustainable agricultural practices and the importance of reducing waste and using resources responsibly.

ACTIONS SUPPORTING SDG 13: CLIMATE ACTION

Local actors, particularly those involved in environmental advocacy, also focus heavily on SDG 13, which calls for urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. Girl on Cloud participates in European projects that address climate change and its impact on vulnerable populations. Callie from Global Kid mentions their work in crisis preparedness and emergency response, particularly in relation to climate change:

We are working with crisis preparedness and emergency... psychological first aid for children in direct response to natural catastrophes, terrorist attacks, or war.

Andie from Global Kid discusses their internal environmental group, which focuses on promoting sustainability practices among employees:

We reworked the travel guidelines to make them stricter... the recommendation now is to avoid flying if your trip can be done in 12 hours or less.

Similarly, Big Bear's initiatives are centered on both environmental education and practical measures to mitigate climate change. They work on various projects, including promoting energy-efficient practices within local communities. These initiatives support not only local climate resilience but also provide educational opportunities for individuals to understand and respond to the impacts of climate change. Hattie mentions: "It's really important if you get them on board in a good way and then you can also keep them there. I think we learn more and more about how we can reach people and how we can get them interested in these issues. Because many people think, oh, it doesn't matter what I do, I can't do anything anyway. So, to try to have them realize the emergency for the climate and the nature, but at the same time, find the strength to do something."

Theater X's contribution to SDG 13 takes the form of artistic productions that raise awareness of climate issues. Through theater, they engage local communities, especially children and youth, in discussions about climate change, fostering a sense of urgency and agency. Peter mentions:

The greatest potential of the theater to noticeably influence a larger transition is to use the platform that our activities constitute towards our surroundings. To raise questions, ideas, future visions and good examples that we believe lead in sustainability for the climate and the environment. Changing our own internal structures, working methods and resource utilization is also important. But it should happen hand in hand with a broader conversation outside

the organization. That we should become climate-smarter, and we should use our resources wisely and clean up in front of our own door. But if we think in a broader perspective, it is not where we as a theater make our biggest mark for sustainability, but it is through the fact that many people care about what we do. We have channels out in society in different ways. It means that we have an opportunity to raise questions for people as well.

Theater X's work exemplifies how the arts can be used as a tool for education, engagement, and advocacy on pressing environmental issues.

The Botanical Garden's work in biodiversity and awareness-raising inherently supports climate action by addressing the threats of species extinction and habitat destruction. For example, the garden conducts workshops on the impact of climate change on species and the environment. The discussion about the consequences of ecosystem degradation and the decline of species due to climate change ties into the goal of taking urgent action to combat climate change.

ACTIONS SUPPORTING SDG 15: LIFE ON LAND

The core of the Botanical Garden's mission focuses on preserving and promoting biodiversity. Chris talks about their efforts to raise awareness about the value of local wildflowers and the importance of native plant species: "I've worked with a project for the last five years, and this is about creating pedagogical, wildflower areas at schools to both promote biodiversity, to promote learning about biodiversity, and also understanding the importance of all our local wildflowers. Even the 15-year-olds were engaged in taking and creating these wildflower areas. And the children have learned, you know, they're really proud of their wildflower area, and how they've learned about pollinators and understanding plants in a different way, which they wouldn't have done previously." As such, the Botanical Garden plays a critical role in promoting biodiversity conservation and ecosystem restoration, particularly through its education projects aimed at children and schools.

ACTIONS SUPPORTING SDG 17: PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

Building partnerships is a key strategy for the majority of the organizations. Girl on Cloud collaborates with European networks and local municipalities to secure funding and support for various projects. Hattie from Big Bear discusses their collaboration with a municipality outside Stockholm, highlighting the importance of local leadership in sustainability initiatives:

They have committed to put it into the steering documents... they have a long-term commitment.

The interviewees from Big Bear also highlight their work with civil society organizations (CSOs) in the Global South to strengthen local efforts towards sustainable development:

We have this collaboration with Pan-African youth organizations. And they're depending on four CSOs and they have different kind of focus. One of them works a lot with policy advocacy and the other works more with that canonical partner of sustainable development.

Linda from Global Kid emphasizes the organization's efforts in advocacy and policy, using the SDGs to engage with governments and other stakeholders:

We use the SDGs in advocacy, positioning, and fundraising... it frames it as a lighter entry point because people understand it better.

Mia highlights the collaborative nature of Westtown's work and the importance of establishing collaborations:

We will also not be able to overcome societal challenges if we do not seek out these forms of collaboration. So, it will be important for us to both seek out civil society, but also to provide opportunities for civil society to find us and in what areas we can collaborate.

Maya from Harbourtown also stresses that collaboration between municipalities, labor market stakeholders, and educational institutions is crucial for long-term success. Involving multiple stakeholders like civil society organizations, businesses, and various municipal departments, outlines thus a clear example of partnerships to achieve the goals.

Peter from Theater X emphasizes the importance of collaboration with other local cultural institutions, universities, and even international organizations to work toward sustainability. For instance, he refers to regional projects and the potential for stronger collaboration with the local municipality and other local actors to promote sustainability more effectively. Similarly, Chris from the Botanical Garden highlights several collaborations with universities, research institutions, and NGOs to promote sustainability and environmental education. For instance, the garden works closely with a local research center on biodiversity, universities, local museums, and even with theater and art groups. These partnerships foster interdisciplinary work and community engagement on sustainability.

COLLABORATION AND ENGAGEMENT ON SDGS AND ESD

Collaboration is essential to achieving the SDGs, as local actors often face limitations in terms of resources, reach, and impact. The organizations represented by the interviewees build partnerships and collaborations to realize the SDGs through various strategies. Here are the most common strategies followed by the challenges they face.

COMMON STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION

Organizations like Girl on Cloud, Hane's NGO, emphasize **international collaboration**, particularly within European networks. This allows them to secure funding and support for their initiatives and address global issues such as gender equality and climate change on a broader scale. Hane mentions:

We are much more active in associating ourselves with European organizations, European networks. So, we are much closer to this collaboration with Europe than organizations, feminist organizations.

This collaboration enables them to participate in European projects and consortia, which are crucial for tackling global challenges. Chris explains that the Botanical Garden is also involved in a European project, which includes five countries – Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands. This European project focuses on restoring grasslands and promoting biodiversity, with partners from multiple countries working together. Peter from Theater X outlines a network of collaborations which exceed the European framework:

Theater X has also traditionally had a strong presence outside the county and around the world. For example, for a period we collaborated with India, China and a third country in a larger international project.

Collaborating with local governments is crucial for facilitating events and activities. This support helps in organizing local events that raise awareness and engage the community. Hane from Girl on Cloud states:

Many of the events that we have organized during these years have been possible, thanks to the support of the municipality and the local municipality, to help us to finance a lot of these events.

Such partnerships are essential for implementing local projects and increasing the organization's impact on the ground. Peter from Theater X describes how an agreement with the local municipality both creates obligations and possibilities for collaboration:

I should also mention our local municipality, which I think has done a great job with something called the climate agreement. When we sign this agreement, we promise as an organization that we will have to measure our emissions and that we will set goals for our sustainability work that we will follow up... Everyone active in the municipality is welcome in the network. If you sign this agreement, you also come around to each other and listen. How do you work with sustainability? Is there anything we need to learn more about it?

Organizations actively **engage with migrant communities** to promote political participation and social integration. This involves forming networks and associations that provide a platform for migrant women to voice their concerns and participate in local governance. Hane from Girl on Cloud explains:

We formed a network of associations of migrant women in our city and the broader region. We do lots of activities from all these local groups of migrant women.

These networks help in reducing social and economic inequalities by empowering women and providing them with resources and opportunities. Mia from Westtown describes actions that aim to support individuals in migrant communities, particularly through language support and community integration efforts:

We have a plan that deals with how we meet the citizens who are on parental leave. The open preschool, for example, where there have been initiatives to provide some kind of Swedish language support during the time when they may be on parental leave and thus do not have the opportunity to attend formal education language classes.

Big Bear collaborates **with local municipalities and schools** to integrate ESD into the curriculum. Hattie mentions their cooperation with a municipality outside Stockholm.

We have been educating all the principals... to support them with their local struggles.

This collaboration ensures that sustainability is embedded in the educational framework, fostering long-term commitment from local leaders. The Botanical Garden collaborates extensively with schools, providing classes and educational programs, especially around biodiversity. One project, for example, involves creating wildflower areas at schools to promote biodiversity awareness among students. Chris mentions:

We've had nearly 20,000 children involved in this project now, and the idea of the project is that you apply to be a part of the project. And then in the beginning of the year, we sent out materials. We're also working with not only learning about biodiversity, understanding plants, understanding the value of our native plants, but also working to reduce plant blindness.

Interviewees from both Westtown and Theatre X mention work with different educational levels, reflecting the integration of ESD within various levels of education in their municipalities.

Big Bear has also established a **global education community** that brings together offices from around the world to share experiences and best practices. Ana explains:

We gather all the offices on a voluntary basis... to share experiences and give each other tips.

This community facilitates knowledge exchange and strengthens the organization's global impact on sustainability education.

A lot of the local actors **collaborate with universities and researchers** to develop educational materials and conduct workshops. Hattie from Girl on Cloud notes:

We got some funding from Pharma X... to produce educational material on water resources with researchers from Stockholm University.

Linda from Global Kid highlights their work with academia:

We work with universities to get inputs on different topics and to include them in our research and documentation.

These collaborations leverage academic expertise to enhance the quality and effectiveness of their educational initiatives. The Botanical Garden collaborates with universities, including the local one. There are connections with specific courses, and the garden also works with a research center on biodiversity, involving researchers from various disciplines. Mia from Westtown describes a close connection between their activities and the local university:

We currently have a scientific leader for the education administration who is employed by the municipality and also has her employment at the local university, which she shares her employment with. And that is a lot to connect the academy with the municipality. So, that is one way that we work with the university.

Maya from Harbourn town also discusses the need for stronger engagement from universities and researchers in adult education and vocational training while acknowledging challenges in establishing such practices:

We've been struggling for a long time to get into collaborations.

Hane from Girl on Cloud is more skeptical. They used to collaborate closely with universities but find it challenging these days:

When I was active at the university, I mean the university use these as the, you know, the third mission and completely free. And it didn't cost them anything. And I was very active on this. And of course, I got the support of the locations. We could have access to the university buildings etc., to organize things, but they were extremely passive in their support.

She sees it as a part of broader, **structural problems in academia**:

It's very difficult to make an academic career. You are always under pressure. And especially in Sweden, it is extremely difficult. [...] The system right now gives money to universities to teach, not to make research. [...] And that leaves nothing... nothing left for involvement in society. So, the whole system is extremely perverse in that sense.

Organizations run **programs that involve young people** in sustainable urban development. For instance, Big Bear's "Our City 2030" project in Zambia led to the creation of a youth council. Ana highlights:

They actually did a youth council in the municipality... they involved them in their work to develop the city.

Such initiatives empower youth to participate in sustainability efforts and influence local policies.

CHALLENGES IN COLLABORATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Securing funding and resources for projects is a significant challenge. Hattie from Big Bear mentions:

We are an organization that depends on funds from others... it's not so easy.

Limited funding can hinder the implementation and sustainability of their initiatives.

Integrating ESD into formal education systems can be challenging due to the existing workload and priorities of schools. Ana states:

It's very hard to get the teachers to see that this is not an add-on.

Overcoming these barriers requires persistent advocacy and support to demonstrate the value of ESD.

Contradictory understandings of ESD between cooperating organizations was also raised as a challenge. Peter from Theater X, for example, highlights how a recent shift in the political landscape has brought a different understanding of sustainability:

A sustainability like in the business world, an economic sustainability you could say. And like a different kind of circular thinking about money rather than ecological sustainability [...] so there was a deletion of the focus area of sustainability replaced with growth, which I think is quite interesting.

However, things turned out better than expected as a new agreement (culture plan) brought sustainability back in focus:

It is clearly stated that we must work with sustainability. Not how, but that we must do it.

Mia from Westtown also refers to challenges emerging because of her organizations' sustainability work at the intersection of three main political – and often contradictory – areas: labor market policy, integration policy and education policy. To overcome such contradictions, she considers important to establish stable communication strategies with their cooperating stakeholders.

Working in diverse global contexts presents challenges in **adapting programs to local needs and realities**. Ana from Big Bear emphasizes the importance of being humble and understanding local contexts:

To be really humble in their reality and see their needs and build everything up based on what they see as their problem.

Tailoring initiatives to fit different cultural and legal environments is crucial for their success. Andie from Global Kid also stresses the importance of context-specific approaches.

Evaluating the impact of their educational and engagement efforts is another challenge. Hattie points out the difficulty in measuring qualitative outcomes:

We don't have any good follow-up systems for that... it's very hard to tell what impact we actually have.

Developing robust evaluation methods is essential to understand and improve the effectiveness of their programs. Helen from Global Kid also highlights this issue.

Ensuring that sustainability and environmental issues are prioritized within the organization can be challenging. Linda from Global Kid mentions that climate and environment are not currently a priority in the Swedish strategy, which affects the overall focus and resources allocated to these areas:

At Swedish level, climate environment is not a priority in the strategy... it's very concerning.

This **lack of prioritization** can hinder the organization's ability to address these critical issues effectively.

These strategies and challenges illustrate the complex landscape of collaboration and engagement in realizing the SDGs. Despite the obstacles, the organizations remain committed to their goals, leveraging partnerships and fostering a culture of sustainability to drive meaningful progress. Most of those organizations heavily rely on their members' engagement, so commitment is part of the job description, so to say. This topic has been also revisited in Q3 while discussing values.

UNDERSTANDING OF ESD IN LOCAL ACTIVITIES

Local actors understand ESD through various lenses, shaped by specific values and principles. The content and everyday practice of their work in organizations is also of high importance as they often build their understanding of ESD in relation to their day-to-day operations.

UNDERSTANDING OF ESD

Girl on Cloud NGO

Hane's organization understands sustainability and ESD through a lens that emphasizes awareness, accurate information, and the intersectionality of various social issues. **They do not explicitly label their activities as ESD**, but their work aligns with its principles. Hane explains: "I have never qualified what we are doing as sustainable development education. Yeah, I think, yes, sustainable development in the sense that we are trying to focus not on economic growth, but on all the consequences of different phenomena for society, especially for women."

Botanical Garden

The Botanical Garden understands sustainability and ESD as deeply **interconnected with its core focus on biodiversity**. They believe that their educational activities naturally align with the principles of ESD, especially through raising awareness about biodiversity, climate change, and ecological sustainability. The organization places significant importance on outdoor pedagogy, using nature as a classroom. Chris mentions how working with plants outdoors engages children's senses and enhances learning beyond the classroom, which he believes is essential for understanding ecological processes. This approach ties into ESD's broader goal of integrating sustainable practices into learning.

Theater X

Peter from Theater X explains that their organization approaches ESD through **a blend of artistic, environmental, and social responsibility**. The organization integrates sustainability into its artistic and operational practices, aiming to use its platform to influence both the public and other cultural institutions. They aim to use the power of their artistic platform to inspire sustainability awareness and action, though challenges in structural support remain.

Harbourtown

Maya's organization understands ESD as **a systematic, integrated, and practical approach to education** that aligns with local and national policies, focusing on long-term sustainability and adaptability. Their interpretation of ESD is reflected in several key aspects, such as their expressed long-term commitment integrated into their policies and strategies. ESD is also seen as a means to promote social inclusion, ensuring education is accessible to all, particularly vulnerable groups.

Big Bear

Big Bear views **sustainability as a holistic concept** that encompasses environmental, social, and economic dimensions. Ana states: "Living in harmony with nature," which encapsulates their mission to balance human needs with environmental preservation. Their approach to ESD is comprehensive, aiming to integrate sustainability into both formal and informal education systems. Hattie elaborates: "We try to include all dimensions and... holistic and transdisciplinary approaches with democratic ways of working."

Global Kid

Global Kid emphasizes a **holistic and inclusive approach to ESD and sustainability**. Linda explains: "When we say education for sustainable development, for me it relates to child participation and awareness raising." They integrate ESD with a human rights-based approach, ensuring that sustainability efforts are aligned with human rights commitments. Linda mentions, "We are anchored in the convention on the rights of the child... and we use the SDGs to frame the problem and state commitments."

Westtown

Mia's organization understands sustainability and ESD as **a broad and integrative approach** that focuses on creating sustainable communities through a combination of education, social services, and employment. Their approach to ESD is aligned with the municipality's policies and goals, which emphasize cooperation across multiple sectors and stakeholders to address social, economic, and environmental challenges. As such, the organization's understanding of ESD goes beyond environmental education and integrates social and economic sustainability through strategic collaborations and practical initiatives aimed at improving quality of life and fostering inclusive growth.

VALUES SHAPING THEIR UNDERSTANDING AND ACTIONS

Hane's organization prioritizes **raising awareness and providing accurate information** to combat misinformation. Hane states: "What is most important is that people are aware of and understand the phenomenon the world is going through today and get the right information on what is happening." The organization also addresses the **intersection of gender with other issues** such as economic crises, environmental challenges, and geopolitical conflicts. Hane explains: "We are speaking out of not only of economic crisis, environmental crisis, testing gender, but also in geopolitical crisis." The organization is deeply committed to **promoting gender equality and empowering** women, particularly those from marginalized communities. Hane emphasizes: "We are extremely focused on women's rights in general. Not only women's rights, but very much focus on women's rights at the economic level." At the same time, Hane's organization faces challenges in explicitly defining and communicating their work as ESD due to the complexity and broad scope of sustainable development. Hane admits: "I don't really have a position because I have not reflected on the term in itself in education for sustainable living. [...] I would never describe that as the occasion for sustainable development. I would say this is kind of awareness of the situation."

Big Bear's approach to ESD employs **holistic and transdisciplinary methods**. Hattie mentions: "We try to include all dimensions and... holistic and transdisciplinary approaches with democratic ways of working."

The Botanical Garden sees **biodiversity as a core value**. Their work is deeply rooted in promoting and teaching biodiversity and this is seen as central to their ESD activities, with a focus on understanding species, ecosystems, and the interconnectedness of natural order. Chris mentions: "I feel that everything really that we work for is connected to education for sustainable development. I think we, you know, we're really focusing on biodiversity because that is part of the garden's goals, that we have to teach about biodiversity." Collaboration with schools, universities, and other institutions also reflects their value of **engaging the broader community** in sustainability education. They actively work to involve different age groups and stakeholders in their projects, creating a shared responsibility for sustainability.

Global Kid highlights the importance of **practical and contextual education**. Andie notes: "A lot of the projects we do also in the domestic program... we do things with children out in nature and maybe teaching them about nature, how to take care of it." Both Global Kid and Girl on Cloud, however, struggle with public engagement and securing consistent institutional support, which hinders their ability to effectively disseminate their message and expand their impact. Linda mentions: "We are an organization that depends on funds from others... it's not so easy."

Theater X integrates **sustainability into its artistic work**, emphasizing that the arts can be a platform to raise awareness about sustainability issues. Peter argues: "The greatest potential of the theater to noticeably influence a larger transition is to use the platform that our activities constitute towards our surroundings. To raise questions, ideas, future visions and good examples that we believe lead in sustainability for the climate and the environment." The organization aims to blend ecological, social, and artistic sustainability, ensuring their productions reflect these values without being limited to "climate theater".

Westtown's organization emphasizes the **importance of inclusivity** in its policies and programs. They focus on providing opportunities for individuals with disabilities, long-term unemployed persons, and marginalized groups to access education and the labor market. Mia highlights: "We work with individuals transitioning from criminal behavior, so that it is about this belief in the human ability to want it. These are like values that we really have with us in what we are trying to build but also in the meeting with individuals afterwards."

Maya's organization in Harbourn town highlights the importance of equal opportunities for all learners. Their approach is shaped by **a commitment to equity and lifelong learning**, providing flexible and accessible education tailored to individual needs. Collaboration is central, involving partnerships with the labor market, universities, and policymakers to align education with societal demands. Ultimately, their ESD strategy integrates practical solutions, policy alignment, and value-based education to create a sustainable and inclusive learning environment.

In summary, local actors understand **ESD as a multifaceted and inclusive concept, shaped by values of awareness, intersectionality, empowerment, and practical education**. Their initiatives reflect a commitment to integrate sustainability into education and community practices, despite facing challenges in defining, communicating, and securing support for their efforts.

This report underscores the pivotal role of local actors in Sweden in advancing the SDGs through ESD. Their actions demonstrate the power of localized, values-driven approaches in addressing global sustainability challenges. By integrating education, advocacy, and collaboration into their practices, these actors not only contribute to the realization of the SDGs but also foster a culture of sustainability and inclusivity.

The insights gained from interviews reveal that local actors employ innovative strategies to address diverse issues, from gender equality and reduced inequalities to responsible consumption and climate action. They emphasize the importance of partnerships, such as working with local governments, NGOs, universities, and communities to amplify their efforts and drive systemic change. Despite facing challenges such as resource constraints and varying political priorities, these organizations continue to adapt and find ways to effectively integrate ESD into their activities.

Values such as raising awareness, gender equality, inclusivity, and social justice underpin the actors' understanding of ESD, guiding their commitment to empowering individuals and communities. By fostering awareness and agency, they ensure that ESD becomes a transformative force for sustainability.

1.3 PORTUGAL

Amanda São Vicente, Liliana Paulos, Carla Vilhena, António Fragoso



The objectives of Work Package 3 (WP3) of the ESDEUS project are to map the perspectives of participants from the local community in relation to Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), with an aim to promote collaboration and collective learning on ESD among the various local actors. To achieve these objectives, a questionnaire was drawn up and sent via email to 346 contacts from different entities in the Algarve region in Portugal, including Municipalities, parish councils, schools, senior academies, associations, museums and research centres. In this questionnaire, organisations were given the opportunity to indicate whether they work with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specify the goals they work towards and describe the ESD actions they carry out.

52 organisations responded. Out of these, 15 organisations do not carry out projects related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This group includes 10 civil society organisations, 2 schools, 3 parish councils and 1 municipality. The remaining 37 organisations indicated that they carry out projects within the scope of the SDGs. Among them: 5 town councils, 6 parish councils, 17 civil society organisations, 2 companies, 2 research centres, 3 museums and 2 schools.

From the group of 36 organisations, 13 were selected to be interviewed in order to find out more about the ESD practices they adopt. The participants were selected with the aim of guaranteeing the diversity of SDGs covered in the actions developed by the organisations, as well as ensuring the representativeness of different types of organisations. The participants include representatives from a Marine Conservation Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO); two research centres, represented as Research Centre A and Research Centre B; a Secondary School; a Socio-Educational Intervention Cooperative; a Municipal Museum; five civil society organisations represented as Artistic Association; Local Development Association; Consumer Protection Association; Mental Health Association; Residents' Association; and two Municipalities, represented as Municipality A and Municipality B.

The interview script was developed in English by the project ESDEUS team, based on a literature review and then translated into the national language of each partner (Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Swedish). In order to assess aspects such as the clarity, appropriateness and relevance of the questions asked, the script was tested with two people who were not part of the final group of interviewees. After analysing the test, the script proved to be consistent, and no changes were made. The interview was organised into three main blocks:

1. SDGs in the community: in this initial block we sought to provide an overview of the history and values of the institutions, organisations or local authorities, and to identify the SDGs that are included in their projects or initiatives. We also sought to understand how these actions contributed to the promotion of sustainable development and what impact they had on the local community.
2. Collaboration and involvement in the SDGs: the second part of the interview explored the degree of community involvement in the actions carried out, as well as collaboration with different partners, including higher education institutions.
3. Understanding ESD in local activities: the last part was dedicated to the understanding how Education for Sustainable Development was integrated into the projects, what skills and knowledge were expected to be developed and what educational methodologies were used. It also sought to encourage reflection on the areas in need of improvement and the points of ESD.

SUSTAINABILITY DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN COMMUNITY

The results show that the organisations interviewed play a fundamental role in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by adapting them to the specificities of the communities in the Algarve region. The analysis not only highlights the SDGs most frequently addressed, but also shows how these goals are integrated across broad contexts covering multiple dimensions of sustainable development.

SDG 1 – NO POVERTY

The initiatives under this SDG integrate different dimensions of sustainable development, combining economic development efforts, social empowerment and the promotion of individual autonomy (Por_1, Por_5, Por_8, Por_9, Por_10 and Por_11).

A frequent approach identified was the creation of economic opportunities through sustainable tourism, with a focus on valorising local natural and cultural resources in balance with environmental preservation (Por_1). This strategy fosters job creation and strengthens community identity by reducing reliance on volatile economic sectors.

Empowering communities, especially in the rural context, stands out as an essential tool for overcoming poverty. Programmes that encourage the sustainable use of endogenous resources contribute to economic autonomy and the reduction of regional disparities, valuing local knowledge and strengthening community resilience (Por_8). A specific example is the intervention with Roma communities in Faro, which addresses basic issues such as access to housing, creating a foundation for social and economic inclusion (Por_5).

The promotion of financial literacy was another relevant dimension identified. Empowering individuals to manage resources and avoid over-indebtedness contributes directly to economic stability and to building financial safety nets (Por_9). More than an immediate response, these initiatives foster the transition from a survival economy to one of planning and saving, reducing long-term vulnerability. However, it is necessary to assess how these skills translate into structural changes in the participants' lives.

Social and community support programmes play an essential role in the immediate alleviation of poverty. Initiatives such as providing food, housing and education are effective in addressing the most urgent needs of vulnerable populations (Por_10). The creation of social and employment support centres, meanwhile, shows a commitment to breaking the cycle of poverty by integrating inclusion and professional retraining strategies (Por_11).

SDG 2 – ZERO HUNGER

The activities identified, stood out for addressing hunger in an integrated way, while promoting the sustainability and resilience of food systems (Por_3 and Por_8).

One of the organisations interviewed highlighted the role of biotechnology in promoting food security by developing innovative alternatives to food sources (Por_3). This reinforces the importance of scientific research as a support for tackling food challenges. The application of biotechnologies in local contexts not only expands sustainable production options, but also strengthens the capacity to respond to future food crises, such as those created by, for example, climate change. Another central focus identified was the integration of food education with the recovery of traditional agricultural varieties (Por_8). These initiatives promoted access to nutritious food and also encouraged sustainable agricultural practices that strengthen the resilience of food systems and the preservation of agricultural biodiversity. The valorisation of endogenous species and traditional techniques contribute to strengthening food sovereignty and reducing dependence on agro-industrial systems, which are often unsustainable.

SDG 3 – GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

The initiatives carried out emphasised integrated approaches involving education, culture and intersectoral collaboration, with a focus on barriers elimination and increasing access to health system (Por_5, Por_10 and Por_11). One of the most innovative strategies reported was the use of the Theatre of the Oppressed to address public health issues (Por_5). This methodology sought to promote community awareness of complex health problems by transforming them into accessible and participatory narratives through theatre. By stimulating collective dialogue and critical reflection, the initiatives strengthened the communities' sense of agency, mobilising them to identify possible solutions to the problems presented in the context of the plays.

In addition, community health programmes and partnerships with health services underlined the importance of collaboration between different actors to increase access and the effectiveness of care (Por_10). These actions were key to reaching vulnerable populations, often marginalised by conventional health systems. A good example of such initiative is the effort of a neighbourhood association to guarantee access to basic healthcare on an island, overcoming financial, geographical and social barriers (Por_11). This example reinforces the need to treat health as a fundamental human right and to prioritise initiatives that eliminate inequalities in access to essential healthcare services.

SDG 4 – QUALITY EDUCATION

The importance of education in ESD initiatives was widely mentioned by the interviewees. The actions highlighted range from integrating teaching and scientific research to projects that promote lifelong education in formal and informal contexts (Por_2, Por_3, Por_6 and Por_7).

Research centres (Por_2, Por_3) have played a crucial role in connecting teaching with scientific practice. Projects such as the challenge of measuring and analysing water quality demonstrate the effectiveness of experiential learning, which puts students at the centre of the educational process through practical activities (Por_2). This approach not only increases student engagement, but also promotes the acquisition of scientific competences as well as environmental awareness. In addition, integrating teaching and research ensures that the knowledge imparted in the classroom is grounded in recent scientific discoveries (Por_3). This cycle fosters scientific literacy and critical thinking, allowing students and teachers to contribute to relevant contemporary issues. Citizen science projects, such as those involving local populations in research, exemplify this approach by broadening scientific and environmental literacy and by promoting the active involvement of communities.

The promotion of education beyond the classroom was highlighted by initiatives carried out in museums and other cultural spaces (Por_6 and Por_7). A local museum promoted activities for adult and school audiences that emphasised interdisciplinarity and cultural literacy. For adults, the actions explored complex themes based on objects or collections, promoting dialogues that enrich understanding and encourage the sharing of knowledge. For children, the guided tours encouraged active observation and personal interpretation of the collections, emphasising the importance of educational experiences that go beyond formal learning (Por_6).

SDG 5 – GENDER EQUALITY

The actions carried out reflect significant efforts to integrate the gender perspective into educational, cultural and socio-economic contexts (Por_5, Por_7, Por_10 and Por_12).

Socio-educational projects played a central role in promoting gender equality. Theatre activities led by the socio-educational cooperative (Por_5) created safe spaces to discuss gender inequalities and explore ways of overcoming them. In addition, in their work with vulnerable populations, such as the Roma community, gender sensitisation has been integrated as a cross-cutting focus, gradually promoting cultural change.

In the artistic context, collaborative practices were used as inclusive tools to address gender inequalities (Por_7). Through simple examples, such as deconstructing stereotypes associated with skin colour, these initiatives fostered dialogue about gender involving audiences from different age groups. These actions highlight the potential of creative activities to demystify prejudices and encourage collective reflection.

Another project took an innovative approach by combining environmental education with gender equality (Por_12). Through training actions aimed at people who menstruate, the project

encouraged sustainable practices, such as the reduction and elimination of disposable waste, and promoted training actions aimed at people who menstruate.

Gender equality was also progressively incorporated as an institutional guideline by a mental health association (Por_10). This was motivated by the predominance of women in social and voluntary sectors, often associated with caring roles. The institution recognised the importance of challenging these cultural norms and committed itself to create equitable participation opportunities for everyone, regardless of gender.

SDG 6 – CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION

The initiatives cover scientific research, education and community mobilisation as ways of guaranteeing equity and sustainability in access to this essential resource, particularly in a vulnerable region like the Algarve, where water scarcity is a constant challenge (Por_2, Por_3, Por_4, Por_5, Por_8 and Por_11).

The research centres (Por_2 and Por_3) have played a strategic role in addressing urban sustainability through the efficient management of the water cycle. Their activities include monitoring water quality and promoting sustainable consumption practices, combining scientific research with training and awareness-raising. This approach improves water management in urban areas and contributes to increasing the resilience of communities in the face of fluctuations in water availability.

In the educational field, initiatives in schools stood out as key tools for promoting water literacy and efficient resource management (Por_4). A notable example is the school project that trains students to monitor water and electricity consumption, to encourage them to save both. However, this project faces significant institutional barriers, such as the centralised management of school infrastructures, which makes it difficult to solve critical problems such as water leaks. This case illustrates the urgent need to overcome bureaucratic obstacles to enable more effective actions in the sustainable use of water.

In the social sphere, initiatives targeting at vulnerable communities, such as Roma communities, focused on improving access to drinking water and sanitation (Por_5). This work is complemented by participatory practices that involve communities in the sustainable management of local resources (Por_8). These actions not only meet immediate needs, but also empower communities to play an active role in the management and preservation of their water resources. In addition, initiatives that combine traditional practices with modern technologies demonstrated the potential for innovation in achieving SDG 6 (Por_11). Projects such as the reactivation of cisterns and research into desalination aim to increase the self-sufficiency of communities by offering them sustainable solutions adapted to local conditions. These practices increase access to water resources and strengthen communities' resilience in the face of water scarcity, a challenge exacerbated by climate change.

SDG 7 – AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY

Initiatives demonstrate a significant effort to promote the energy transition, integrating scientific research, education, community capacity building and technological innovation (Por_3, Por_4 and Por_13).

Research centre B (Por_3) excelled in the exploration of renewable energy sources, with a special focus on marine energies. This research area contributes to technological and scientific advancement, aligning with global energy transition goals and promoting solutions adapted to local conditions. Although innovative, these technologies face challenges of scalability and integration into conventional energy networks, reinforcing the importance of partnerships between academia, the private sector and communities.

In the educational context, innovative initiatives integrated SDG 7 into school curricula, promoting a culture of sustainability among the younger generations (Por_4, Por_13). A striking example is a school project that combines renewable infrastructure - such as photovoltaic plants - with educational tools such as real-time energy production monitors. These actions not only train students as energy and water auditors, but also foster youth engagement in identifying and implementing practical solutions for energy efficiency in schools and beyond.

A consumer rights association (Por_9) has played a crucial role in combating energy poverty by supporting consumers with access to the social energy tariff and resolving problems related to excessive bills. In addition, initiatives such as online courses and participatory labs promote energy literacy, empowering vulnerable communities to make more informed and sustainable

decisions. These actions are key to reducing inequality in access to energy and encouraging environmentally responsible energy consumption.

The energy transition takes on a particular dimension in island communities, where access to energy has historically been limited. A relevant example is the energy autonomy project on an island where electricity only arrived in 1992 (Por_11). Today, around 30% of local energy needs are met by renewable sources, thanks to the installation of solar panels and the creation of an energy cooperative that guarantees affordable prices. This initiative combats energy poverty and serves as a transition model for other isolated communities.

SDG 8 – DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

The initiatives carried out reflect a commitment to sustainable, inclusive and innovative practices that combine environmental conservation, territorial development and the circular economy (Por_1, Por_10 and Por_11).

An NGO dedicated to marine conservation (Por_1) developed strategies that balance environmental preservation with economic growth to promote decent work practices. The creation of marine protected areas encourages ecological tourism and sustainable fishing, generates jobs that respect the responsible use of natural resources. The introduction of technological solutions that increase transparency in fishing practices strengthens the confidence of fishing communities, adding value to their activities and consolidating an ethical and sustainable economic model. This focus on green jobs emphasises the importance of aligning economic practices with the protection of ecosystems.

An association dedicated to mental health (Por_10) takes an inclusive approach, by educating people with mental disabilities and other vulnerable groups for their insertion in the labour market. With training in areas such as gardening, administrative practices and hospitality, followed by internships in local companies, the association facilitates the integration of these individuals into the labour market. Through partnerships with job centres and ongoing support, such as adaptations in the workplace, promoting equal opportunities, structural barriers are overcome.

In the island context, one residents' association (Por_11) stands out for implementing practices that promote sustainability and local entrepreneurship. Initiatives such as the introduction of solar-powered boats to transport shellfish reduce costs and environmental impact, while the reuse of materials such as fishing nets and oyster shells transforms waste into innovative products such as furniture and building materials. In addition, the formation of a co-operative encourages young people to develop projects based on the circular economy and energy transition. These practices enhance the community's economic resilience and generate decent jobs aligned with sustainability principles.

SDG 9 – INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

The action mentioned under this SDG demonstrates how the partnership between scientific research and the industrial sector can boost efficiency in the use of resources, reduce environmental impact and strengthen industrial infrastructures (Por_3). The partnership between a research centre and a canning industry for the recovery of tuna waste promoted innovation by developing advanced methods for the extraction of high-value compounds, such as oils rich in Omega-3 and Omega-6, with applications in the cosmetics, pharmaceutical and medical industries. As well as opening up new market opportunities, the initiative has helped to reduce the volume and pollutant load of industrial effluents, demonstrating the potential of the circular economy to promote cleaner, more efficient and economically profitable processes.

SDG 10 – REDUCING INEQUALITIES

The initiatives highlighted promote inclusion and equal opportunities by integrating cultural, educational and community strategies to challenge structural barriers and prejudices (Por_4 and Por_5). One initiative mentioned in the school context (Por_4) was the organisation of a monthly event to exchange used clothes. By eliminating the costs and stigmas associated with charity, the project promotes sustainability and inclusion, particularly among students and staff who face economic difficulties. In addition, international cultural and educational exchanges for disadvantaged students prove to be effective tools for mitigating educational inequalities. These experiences broaden the cultural perspectives and skills of young people from vulnerable backgrounds, breaking down structural barriers that limit their aspirations.

The work of a socio-educational cooperative (Por_5) illustrates a comprehensive approach to tackling inequalities, working with Roma communities, young people from social neighbourhoods, ex-prisoners and ex-drug addicts. Through cultural and educational activities, the co-operative promotes skills development, strengthens social engagement and facilitates access to resources that are often inaccessible to these groups. This work challenges prejudices and creates support networks that combat structural inequalities, while valorising the cultural expressions of these communities as tools to combat exclusion and transform narratives of discrimination.

SDG 11 – SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

SDG11 demonstrates how culture, sustainable tourism and community mobilisation can contribute to create more resilient communities (Por_6, Por_8 and Por_11).

A local museum (Por_6) played an important role in raising awareness of urban sustainability by involving the community in cultural and historical initiatives. Exhibitions that explore the history and evolution of the city or community not only enrich the urban environment, but also encourage reflection on the relationship between cultural identity and sustainable development. In addition, community participation programmes promote local engagement, strengthening citizens' sense of belonging and co-responsibility in caring for the urban space.

In the field of local development, a project that promotes a decentralised tourism model, by focusing on rural and mountainous areas was highlighted (Por_8). This model reduces pressure on popular urban areas, redistributes tourist flow and promote economic development in less exploited communities. By valuing local culture and adopting environmentally responsible practices, these initiative balance economic development with environmental and cultural preservation, and create a positive impact for both rural areas and the urban fabric.

Another striking example is the project led by a residents' association on an island (Por_11), which seeks to transform the site into a model sustainable community. The fight for the community to remain on the island, through the legalisation of the houses and urban requalification solutions rather than demolitions, reinforces the commitment to safe and resilient human settlements. At the same time, the implementation of innovative practices in areas such as energy, waste management and environmental preservation contributes to the overall sustainability of the island, preserving its cultural identity and guaranteeing the well-being of its residents.

SDG 12 – RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

The initiatives demonstrate how raising awareness, training and promoting local practices can boost more conscious consumption and more sustainable production (Por_8 and Por_9). One of the organisations interviewed (Por_9) has SDG 12 as the central focus of its actions, by promoting practices that make citizens aware of their ecological footprint and the impact of individual choices. Through campaigns and training, the organisation encourages changes in consumption habits, highlights practices such as recycling, reusing and reducing consumption. Its work in schools is particularly relevant, as it educates the younger generations about the importance of sustainability and conscious consumption, and creates a basis for lasting change.

Another organisation (Por_8) focused its actions on training communities to adopt more responsible practices, especially in the sustainable use of local resources. The promotion of healthy and sustainable food is one of the main areas of its action. The organisation emphasises the importance of using local products, reducing food waste and respecting natural production cycles. These practices eliminates dependence on imported products and strengthen the local economy and minimise environmental impact. By prioritising the use of endogenous resources, the association contributes to the creation of consumption and production patterns in line with the principles of the circular economy.

SDG 13 – CLIMATE ACTION

The activities highlight how community mobilisation, the development of strategic plans and environmental education contribute to mitigate and adapt to climate change (Por_12 and Por_13). For example, Municipality A (Por_12) integrates community mobilisation as a central pillar in its response to climate change. Through focus groups and public consultation sessions, local mitigation and adaptation strategies are shaped by the needs and perspectives of the population. This participatory model strengthens community commitment, promotes

co-responsibility and ensures that actions are aligned with the specificities of the territory. Municipality B (Por_13) adopted a pioneering approach with the approval of the first municipal climate action plan in Portugal. The plan combines climate change mitigation and adaptation measures, such as detailed analyses of the impacts of rising sea levels and the occurrence of droughts. As well as mapping vulnerabilities, the plan guides practical actions, including the renaturalisation of streams and the conversion of green spaces to native species. These initiatives not only promote the conservation of ecosystems and biodiversity, but also reduce dependence on water resources, preparing the territory for extreme weather events.

SDGS 14 – LIFE BELOW WATER AND 15 - LIFE ON LAND

Various activities cover from habitat conservation to educational and technological actions by promoting sustainable practices that recognise the interdependence between different ecosystems (Por_1, Por_2, Por_3, Por_4, Por_10 and Por_11).

Protecting marine ecosystems is a priority for several local organisations. A marine conservation NGO (Por_1) is dedicated to preserving marine habitats, combating predatory fishing practices and protecting endangered species. These actions are complemented by research centres (Por_2, Por_3), which develop technologies and promote research aimed at mitigating the impacts of overexploitation of water resources, encouraging responsible aquaculture as a sustainable alternative. In addition, educational initiatives play a crucial role in promoting environmental literacy, sensitising local communities to the importance of marine conservation. Examples include school actions that highlighted the interdependence between the sustainable use of water resources and the health of marine ecosystems (Por_4), and activities such as beach clean-ups organised by a mental health association, which reduce ocean pollution and protect marine biodiversity (Por_10). In the island context, local fishermen implemented practices such as collecting waste from the sea, contributing to the protection of aquatic environments (Por_11).

Regarding terrestrial ecosystems, the local initiatives stood out for their environmental regeneration and protection of biodiversity. The marine conservation NGO (Por_1) raises awareness of forest and soil preservation. Research centres complement these efforts by developing technologies for waste treatment and studying solutions to desertification, such as innovative environmental restoration practices (Por_2, Por_3). School initiatives (Por_4) promoted the planting of biodiverse forests in urban areas, involved students in practices that combine environmental education with concrete actions. The mental health association (Por_10), meanwhile, leads organic gardening projects that integrate regenerative agricultural practices and sustainable water use, by collecting rainwater and reusing it for irrigation. At community level, projects such as reforestation with native species and dune strengthening (Por_11) helped to mitigate erosion, protect habitats and ensure the resilience of terrestrial ecosystems.

SDG 16 – PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

The SDG 16 initiatives, which focus on peace, justice and strong institutions, demonstrate how cultural and educational activities, community strategies and local governance can strengthen social cohesion and trust in institutions (Por_6, Por_9, Por_12 and Por_13).

The museum (Por_6) plays an essential role in promoting peace and social justice by addressing issues such as governance, human rights and social justice. Its exhibitions and educational programmes turn museums into privileged spaces for dialogue and critical reflection, where collective awareness and reinforcing democratic values are promoted. These initiatives encourage civic engagement and strengthen citizenship education, create opportunities for the community to reflect on the role of institutions.

Por_9 is active in protecting consumer rights and promoting effective governance. This organisation represents citizens' interests with companies and public administrations, facilitating conflict resolution and promoting transparency. In addition, by participating in national and European initiatives related to sectors such as energy and consumption, they contribute to more inclusive and sustainable public policies, strengthening trust in institutions and the effectiveness of their actions.

The creation of public consultation boards, thematic commissions (Por_12) and the establishment of a municipal environment and territory observatory (Por_13) shows how the articulation between participatory mechanisms and evidence-based governance can strengthen local institutions and promote more effective and inclusive public policies. While participatory bodies guarantee the inclusion of different voices in the political process, the observatory provides data and indicators that support informed and transparent decisions. Together, these initiatives

foster trust in institutions, reinforce transparency and ensure that fairness and accountability are fundamental pillars of public administration.

SDG 17 – PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

SDG 17 actions stood out as an essential pillar for realising the SDGs in the Algarve region. All the initiatives reported by the interviewees highlight the importance of multi-sectoral approaches, which promote collaboration between different actors and amplify the impact of actions associated with the SDGs. The collaborations identified by the interviewees include a wide range of partners, such as Higher Education Institutions (HEI), Research Centres, Schools, Local Authorities, the Public Sector and the Private Sector, Associations with different scopes of action, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Local Cooperatives, Local Communities, as well as International Cooperation. These partnerships have enabled the integration of resources and competences, by creating the necessary conditions for the development and implementation of actions.

Among the actions highlighted in each of the 17 SDGs, many end up going beyond exclusively addressing a single objective, stressing the interconnection between the global goals. A striking example of this was a project mentioned by Por_8 in the field of food education, for which a starting point were the challenges related to pre-obesity and obesity identified by the Directorate-General for Health. The initiative began with a detailed diagnosis of the situation, which made it possible to understand the main needs and identify the groups most affected. Based on the survey, educational actions were implemented to empower individuals to make informed decisions about their diet, promoting healthier and more sustainable choices. The project also adopted an inclusive approach, prioritising vulnerable groups - such as schoolchildren and low-income communities - without, however, neglecting to raise awareness among the wider community.

Education played a central role in this action. Through educational campaigns, workshops and access to quality information, the project not only contributed directly to the objectives of SDG 2, by encouraging more sustainable food practices, and SDG 3, by combating health problems associated with poor diet, but also had a significant impact on SDG 4. This impact was achieved by strengthening lifelong learning skills, promoting food literacy and empowering individuals to make more conscious and informed choices. The inclusion of schoolchildren in the project reinforced the importance of education as a driver for healthy and sustainable behaviours from an early age. In addition, promoting equity was a central axis of the project, as the actions aimed to reduce inequalities in access to information and healthy eating habits. This example illustrates how well-structured initiatives can maximise impact by linking different SDGs in a synergistic way. By simultaneously addressing issues of health, sustainability and inclusion, the project demonstrated that the SDGs should not be seen as isolated targets, but as interconnected parts of a global effort to achieve all SDGs.

The structure of the SDGs was valued for providing a clear and structured organisation of global challenges (Por_1, Por_3, Por_5, Por_13 and Por_11). Several interviewees considered that the SDGs function as a 'roadmap', which facilitates both the understanding and the practical implementation of the sustainability goals for society in general. The following quote exemplifies this perspective:

(...) I think these 17 [SDGs] are what we have to work with now – they're a good road, they're a good path for us to follow and to try to explain more clearly to others, to students, and to society in general, the problems we have and the methodologies we should, not just can, but should use to solve the problems currently on the table... So, I think the SDGs make life easier for me personally because they've given me this roadmap. They also make life easier for me as an educator, as I can more effectively convey this message in a simple way... (Por_3)

The ability to plan and aspire to a sustainable future, illustrated by commitment to the SDGs, was seen as an indicator that sustainable development is an achievable goal.

The actions analysed emphasise the need to align local initiatives with global challenges, while respecting the specificities of each context. The integration of the SDGs at different levels, from governance to community actions, demonstrates the commitment of these organisations to create lasting solutions to the problems faced by society.

COLLABORATION AND ENGAGEMENT ON SDGS/ESD

Despite the differences in intervention contexts, the organisations converge on common objectives: promoting social wellbeing, strengthening communities and integrating sustainability as a guiding principle in their practices. This holistic and participatory approach reinforces the idea that sustainable development is achieved not just by one-off actions, but by continuous coordination between communities and institutions. This idea reinforces the essential role of SDG 17 – partnerships and means of implementation - which highlights the importance of collaboration between different sectors of society, such as Governments, Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs), Higher Education Institutions (HEI) and local communities in implementing ESD projects. In this sense, all the organisations interviewed indicated that partnership strategies are an essential basis for the success of their actions.

The interviewees emphasised the central role played by the HEI in various contexts. It provides physical spaces and logistical support, facilitating the organisation of activities and events. This type of support facilitates the operationalisation of local initiatives and fosters interaction between academia and society (Por_1). In addition, the HEI role in translating and disseminating scientific knowledge was emphasised, making discoveries accessible to the general population (Por_1, Por_2 and Por_13).

Research centres play a strategic role as mediators and facilitators in supporting external entities, contributing scientific foundations for policies, projects and actions in various areas (Por_1, Por_2, Por_3, Por_8, Por_9 and Por_11). This support fosters sustainable development and generates positive impact on a local, regional and global scale. The main forms of support include: (i) Scientific and technical support that legitimises actions and policies, by strengthening the credibility of partner entities' initiatives; (ii) Promotion of interdisciplinary approaches, by integrating areas such as circular economy and environmental management, for innovative and sustainable solutions; (iii) Collaboration with local and global organisations, by expanding the impact of multidisciplinary projects; (iv) Integration of programmes at an international level, by promoting the exchange of knowledge and the creation of technical and political support networks for sustainable development; and (v) Promotion of the exchange of knowledge and the implementation of practical solutions by acting as bridges between disciplines, institutions and territories. These networks, whether local, regional or international, amplify the impact of partner organisations by combining scientific innovation and technical expertise.

Initiatives that bring students closer to academia and the labour market were also mentioned, such as laboratory activities, study visits and internships (Por_4, Por_10 and Por_13). These initiatives not only encourage the development of scientific careers, but also promote the improvement of professional skills.

The HEI relevance in the context of sustainability was highlighted by Por_8, Por_9 and Por_13, which emphasised initiatives related to agri-food circuits, Mediterranean diets, sustainable consumption and nature-based solutions. This commitment reflects the strategic role of academia in addressing local and global challenges.

Local authorities also play a strategic role in supporting organisations. One of their main contributions is logistical and community assistance, which takes the form of support for specific projects. Their help takes various forms, from providing physical, material or financial resources, to facilitating administrative processes that allow local initiatives to be realised. Examples include the organisation of environmental events such as recycling campaigns or tree planting (Por_4), cultural initiatives such as community festivals and art exhibitions (Por_7), and educational activities such as workshops and training programmes (Por_10).

Another significant contribution is ongoing and territorial support, evidenced by the history of collaboration in initiatives such as the founding of museums (Por_6), as well as the strengthening of inter-municipal partnerships that tackle climate challenges and promote the implementation of the SDGs (Por_12, Por_13). Local authorities play an important role in strategic partnerships and in promoting participatory governance. They contribute to debates and the formulation of public policies, encouraging sustainable resource management and leading regional initiatives that value the countryside and promote sustainability (Por_2, Por_3, Por_8, Por_9). They also provide consultancy and support for sustainable planning and climate adaptation projects (Por_3, Por_13).

In this context, the public sector plays a fundamental role in supporting ESD actions, with examples such as the implementation of moratoriums (Por_1), the promotion of consumer protection campaigns (Por_9), the management of water resources (Por_2, Por_13) and the carrying out of environmental research in remote areas, in collaboration with specialised bodies such as the Portuguese Navy and nautical centres. These partnerships enable the integration of specialised knowledge and the use of advanced technical resources, crucial elements for studying and monitoring ecosystems that are often inaccessible or complex to manage (Por_3).

It also establishes collaborations with schools, museums and cultural centres to promote educational and cultural activities that incorporate the principles of sustainability (Por_6, Por_7). Joint action with health centres, Social Security and hospitals has proved essential in initiatives covering mental health, the promotion of healthy lifestyle habits and the promotion of social equality (Por_4, Por_10). In the rural context, regional and agricultural directorates play an important role in supporting projects aimed at rural development and environmental preservation, with significant positive impacts on local communities (Por_8).

The public-private partnership, in turn, stands out in drawing up plans such as the Municipal Climate Action Plan, demonstrating how pooling resources, expertise and institutional capacities between different players can lead to more effective and comprehensive strategies for tackling the challenges of climate change at a local level (Por_12). In addition, collaboration between the central government and local authorities in implementing measures such as the Coastal Zone Management Plan reflects joint efforts to regulate and protect coastal areas, facing challenges such as the need to guarantee the rights of the communities involved (Por_11).

Regarding partnerships and collaborations with the private sector, this is the most highlighted example: collaboration with local companies that supply organic waste for scientific research and support the management of natural resources, namely the preservation of aquifers by golf courses (Por_2). In addition, partnerships with industries, such as the canning sector, aimed at solving environmental problems, implementing circular economy practices and promoting the adoption of sustainable measures in the tourism sector (Por_3).

Innovative initiatives were also pointed out, such as the sale of renewable energy and the development of products from marine waste, carried out in partnership with regional companies (Por_11). Por_12 reinforces this approach by highlighting business support in the development of climate action plans, demonstrating the impact of collaborations geared towards systemic and transformative change.

In the field of education, Por_4 highlights partnerships between schools and companies like Algar, which promote recycling projects and offer prizes that are reinvested in educational institutions. Por_9 expands on this by mentioning a project to support companies, which aims to measure and evaluate the carbon footprint of their employees and invest in training on sustainability, fostering cultural and behavioural changes in the corporate environment.

At a local level, Por_8 mentions the participation of companies in initiatives aimed at small entrepreneurs, encouraging responsible practices and strengthening community development. In turn, Por_13 emphasises indirect interaction with the private sector, especially in projects focused on sustainability and regional development, reinforcing the breadth and relevance of these relationships. Por_10 stresses the role of large companies such as big supermarket chains (Pingo Doce and Continente), Mar Shopping, FNAC and IKEA, which offer internships and promote the integration of trainees into the labour market, facilitating the transition of people with disabilities or in situations of social vulnerability into professional life.

The interviewees also mentioned strategic partnerships with local and international NGOs and associations. Collaboration with the Living Science Centre to carry out environmental awareness actions (Por_3). Support in carrying out participatory actions such as workshops and community diagnoses (Por_2) and in moderating focus groups to develop the participatory municipal Climate Action Plan (Por_12). Supporting vulnerable communities proved to be a common priority, as evidenced by Por_4's partnership with the Rotary Club for educational exchange opportunities and Por_5's partnership with the Movement to Support the Problem of AIDS (MAPS) for cultural initiatives.

Finally, the organisations interviewed demonstrate a robust and diverse international engagement, with strong alignment with the SDGs, especially in the areas of sustainability and the environment. Initiatives such as the Horizon Projects (Por_2 and Por_8), which promote partnerships between HEI and organisations for global sustainability strategies, Tree for Planet (Por_4 and Por_13), focused on environmental conservation, as well as energy transition projects on islands, with the aim of creating a sustainable community (Por_11), stood out. The exchange of practices and the creation of international networks are also frequent, including the partnership of research networks and joint projects (Por_2 and Por_3), cultural

and educational exchanges with artists (Por_7), and participation in councils and alliances, such as the Council of Europe and other European networks (Por_5). There are also efforts to influence public policies and disseminate good practices, in collaboration with international NGOs and political networks in the field of sustainability (Por_1).

This set of practices reflects a comprehensive and diverse commitment to sustainable development, by highlighting the positive impact of collaborative approaches adapted to local contexts. The initiatives described show how the integration of efforts between public and private organisations, NGOs, HEI and communities can generate significant results.

COLLABORATION AND ENGAGEMENT ON SDGS/ESD

The organisations interviewed have implemented various strategies aimed at fostering collaboration and strengthening engagement with other stakeholders in the context of advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The results indicate the adoption of different approaches, influenced by the social context and the resources available.

Active community engagement in the co-development of projects has proved to be an essential element in the effective implementation of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) actions (Por_8, Por_2 and Por_5). Among the initiatives highlighted are community assemblies and social events, which offer community members the chance to have a direct influence on decisions and related actions. This approach has the potential to promote greater acceptance on the part of those involved, thus helping to strengthen the legitimacy of the projects (Por_7 and Por_13).

The importance of promoting a collaborative and horizontal learning environment, based on the mutual exchange of knowledge and experiences between the facilitator and the participants, was emphasised (Por_7, Por_8, Por_4 and Por_5). Methods that value trust, power-sharing and community involvement prove to be particularly effective in contexts of social vulnerability, as they create the conditions for the authentic and independent expression of participants, which is considered essential in the formation of conscious and participatory citizens. This perspective is illustrated by the following quote:

(...) I think that for people to really change and transform, they must realise what it means for their lives. And they must realise it and they must be involved in these processes, really involved. And when I say really involved, it's not just being consulted, it's being co-managed with these communities. If there's no co-management, it's just the consumption of receiving... It's the famous metaphor of giving the fishing rod to fish... And now, with sustainability... it's giving the tools to fish in water where there are fish. If not, there are no fish... So there must be a lot of explaining first: But what's going to change in my life? And how can I change? What are the tools you give me or that I can create? So, there's a lot of power sharing that must be done... (Por_5)

In this context, the establishment of partnerships and the involvement of reference figures from the community where the project is implemented were identified as particularly effective strategies. These individuals, who act as facilitators, can include representatives of the local population, members of community organisations or representatives of the local authorities (Por_9). Their engagement was considered crucial to fostering and broadening community buy-in, making a significant contribution to the success of the initiatives (Por_9, Por_12 and Por_13). The presence of these key figures boosts community involvement, as they have the trust and respect of the population and act as mediators between the project's objectives and local needs and expectations. In addition, the involvement of these actors reinforces the participants' sense of belonging and responsibility, promoting a more active and committed involvement.

Some interviewees emphasised that when participants get involved in activities that require the practical application of theoretical knowledge, learning takes place through direct

experience and critical questioning of the process. This approach was considered fundamental for building concepts related to sustainability and for stimulating concrete behavioural changes (Por_7, Por_2, Por_6 and Por_10). In addition, this methodology was considered relevant not only for promoting a practical understanding of the content, but also for encouraging reflection and the development of a critical awareness among the participants (Por_1, Por_2, Por_3, Por_10 and Por_11) - an essential element in enabling participants to analyse and question the challenges associated with sustainability, motivating them to adopt more responsible and informed behaviours.

From the perspective of most interviewees, promoting critical awareness through a variety of educational strategies was considered fundamental, above all to deconstruct stereotypes present in children and adults. This endeavour aims to stimulate imagination and creativity, as illustrated in the following quote:

(...) I'd like them to shed many of the stereotypes they already have in their heads. They've carried these since they were little... I'd like them to give more of their opinions. Creativity and imagination start there... We lose imagination and creativity when our minds are filled with fixed ideas, and we can't break free from them... if we can't get out of these little boxes, how are we going to find solutions for any of these 17 parameters presented here? And that's the big challenge that I'm constantly facing, and it's why I'm fighting so hard to make artistic activities and artistic education - not as a way to train artists, but as a means to unlock creativity and imagination. Because this imagination is essential for everything... (Por_7)

Playful approaches, such as using games adapted to different age groups, and practical activities, such as collecting invasive plants, identifying local species and cleaning beaches, were identified as effective strategies for promoting environmental awareness in an accessible and engaging way, especially among children and youth (Por_1, Por_6 and Por_10). The use of documentaries, followed by guided discussions, was highlighted as an effective practice for fostering critical reflection and the exchange of ideas. Some participants considered this format particularly suitable for more mature audiences, due to its potential to stimulate in-depth analysis of sustainability issues, exploring their socio-cultural and economic implications (Por_1 and Por_10). This approach facilitates the connection between the content presented in the documentaries and the participants' experiences, values and prior knowledge, promoting more meaningful engagement. The effectiveness of this method lies in its ability to provoke critical reflection and encourage dialogue.

The implementation of practical examples that connect with everyday life was also considered fundamental (Por_1, Por_7, Por_2, Por_4, Por_3, Por_9, Por_10 and Por_12). One of the interviewees emphasised the effectiveness of highlighting the relationship between the economy and sustainability, demonstrating how environmentally responsible behaviour can translate into direct economic benefits, such as cost savings on energy bills (Por_9 and Por_12). The interconnection between the economy and sustainability thus emerged as an effective strategy for highlighting the practical relevance and economic benefits of sustainable practices.

However, some interviewees mentioned the difficulties in achieving a good participatory dynamic (Por_8, Por_4, Por_11 and Por_12). Por_12 points out that people do not believe that through participation we can achieve long-term satisfactory results in terms of change. Consequently, they tend to consider it not worth getting involved, as illustrated in the following quote:

(...) people are disbelieving at a political level, with political work [...] there is a discontent and a discrediting here. So if I don't believe in it, I don't take part, because I don't believe in what the person is doing. I think it has to do with this, that people feel the problem is theirs and want to participate in the solution... (Por_12)

Overcoming this barrier requires the implementation of strategies aimed at restoring confidence in participatory processes. To this end, it is essential to demonstrate, in a clear and practical way, the benefits or positive impacts already achieved or potentially resulting from participatory initiatives, such as concrete improvements in the community, political or economic changes, or the resolution of local problems. In addition, it is crucial to stress the link between the issues addressed by the initiatives and the daily lives of individuals, taking into account their needs, concerns and values. This approach can help create a sense of personal relevance, increasing the likelihood of motivation to participate. In this way, it becomes possible to consolidate

the perception that participation is meaningful and rewarding, promoting more active and committed involvement.

In the specific context of an island, the dynamics of collective involvement in associative and community processes also reveal various factors that had a negative impact on the population's involvement. As the interviewee (Por_11) pointed out, successful struggles in the past were characterised by strong popular mobilisation and the promotion of a collective good. However, the current reality no longer reflects this scenario. In particular, after the pandemic (COVID-19), which restricted face-to-face interactions and made large-scale mobilisation significantly more difficult, there were even sharper reduction in participation, as illustrated in the following quote:

(...) the struggles were always carried out together with the population, and that's why we won - because it was a fight for a collective good... for everyone's benefit. Once you have that benefit, people become more individualistic. That's human nature. And with the pandemic, which limited us to face-to-face conversations... we stopped holding the in-person meetings we used to have. There's also another issue: people, once the association has given them so much, start believing that the association is obliged to always give and provide everything. They become overly dependent on the association... the struggle is no longer as collective as it used to be... (Por_11)

As a result, the community today seems to be more passive and dependent on leadership roles.

Regarding the technical skills of ESD educators, the importance of prioritising training on the SDGs within the teams before moving on to community education actions was emphasised. This approach aims to ensure the effective integration of the SDGs into the projects developed (Por_12). These practices point to a path that favours a deeper incorporation of the principles of sustainable development, as illustrated in the following quote:

(...) I think the SDGs serve as targets and indicators for us. For me, I see the SDGs as a management tool to help us to achieve global goals at a local level. That's why, without prejudice to training the population in the SDGs, we must first focus on training our internal teams on them. This ensures that, when they're developing a particular project, they can at some point visualise: with this project I'm working on, I'm enabling the municipality, at a local level, to contribute to the fulfilment of this or that SDG. For me, that would be the first objective... (Por_12)

The interviewees also emphasised the need for congruence between the theory transmitted by the educator and their personal practices. In other words, some interviewees stressed that the authenticity of the educator, by demonstrating the principles of sustainability in their daily behaviour, serves as an essential model for learners (Por_1, Por_7, Por_4). The following quote illustrates this perspective:

(...) I think you always must be self-critical, but you also need to understand that if you believe in certain principles, you have to apply them consistently across every aspect of your life. I can't just recycle at home, I also have to insist at my workplace that I do it, because otherwise, there's no point in doing it at home while neglecting it at work. And I can't believe in gender equality and support social gender equality, then come here, witness a situation that contradicts those values, and remain silent about it... (Por_7)

In addition, most interviewees emphasised that establishing an emotional connection with people is a determining factor in increasing community involvement (Por_1, Por_7, Por_2, Por_3, Por_5, Por_6 and Por_12). One of the interviewees expressed this idea as follows:

(...) regarding whom should educate about sustainable development, I think it's all in the power of communication. People who truly can bring this sensitivity to others... I think that in this kind of matter it must be someone who truly believes in it... This isn't a religion, but it ends up preaching a little bit of change. And it's a change that we want for the future. And to communicate a change that is intended for the future, I think that a person needs to have a bit of the gift of a preacher, a teacher, even a politician, of oratory. That oratorical gift of being able to explain and convince others that what you're explaining is true... (Por_1)

From this perspective, effectiveness in promoting ESD depends not only on the content transmitted, but also on the way it is communicated. Emotional involvement and the ability to inspire are seen as key elements in achieving significant impacts. Therefore, in addition to providing information, it is essential to establish effective communication that awakens the sensitivity of individuals and motivates them to adopt concrete changes.

ESD LOCAL PARTICULARITIES

In the Algarve region, organisations, communities and public institutions promote various initiatives to implement ESD in a way that responds to regional specificities. In this sense, the interviewees' perceptions of the ESD panorama in the region highlighted relevant particularities.

Almost half of the interviewees said that they didn't know of any organisation that is exclusively dedicated to ESD practices (Por_1, Por_7, Por_8, Por_4 and Por_9). However, the organisation "SDGs in Action"² was mentioned by three of the interviewees as the one which plays a central role in coordinating ESD in the Algarve (Por_3, Por_12 and Por_13). According to one of the interviewees, "SDGs in Action" works by organising meetings that bring together various stakeholders, including representatives from academia, industry, NGOs, and the education and social sectors, to deliberate and formulate strategies focused on the SDGs. These meetings are based on structured methodologies, which allow participants to address local specificities, with the aim of promoting interdisciplinary collaboration (Por_3). This integrated discussion model allows for a deeper understanding of regional complexities and needs, as well as valuing the diversity of perspectives and languages brought by the different sectors, which fosters innovative solutions adapted to the local context (Por_13).

² "SDGs in Action" is a fictitious name for an initiative that promotes the participation of decision-makers, municipal technicians, local agents and citizens around the SDGs, with the aim of involving them in the development of strategies at local and national level.

The Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) was also mentioned as a reference in the field of ESD in the Algarve, as it is considered a valuable platform for disseminating information and practices related to sustainable development. According to one of the interviewees (Por_2), the SDSN mobilises a wide network of academic institutions and national laboratories to promote transnational collaboration in the search for solutions to local and global challenges. Also, an initiative for SDG laboratories at municipal level is under development (Por_13). This project, which is still in the design phase, aims to enable each municipality to develop spaces for innovation and experimentation related to the SDGs, with the potential to be integrated into a broader structure, covering national or international scales. These laboratories are intended to serve as catalysts for the adoption of sustainable practices in various contexts.

Some interviewees agree that responsibility for ESD is shared by multiple organisations, including municipal bodies, municipal libraries and cultural centres. These institutions integrate ESD objectives into their day-to-day activities, demonstrating how ESD can be incorporated into different spheres of local administration (Por_7, Por_5, Por_6 and Por_12). In addition, schools and libraries were identified as pillars in the promotion of ESD by most of the interviewees. They consider that these institutions implement projects related to reusing water and saving water resources, as well as organising events that address critical issues such as water scarcity (Por_1, Por_7, Por_2, Por_4, Por_12 and Por_10).

In a more specific context, it was mentioned that the residents of a local fishing island practise sustainable development through a community project, supported by a Higher Education Institutions and other local entities. This practice, although not formally structured as an educational programme, represents an example of how ESD can be implemented organically and effectively in specific communities (Por_5). Also in this context, two NGOs were highlighted, one working to improve the marine environment and the other focussed on innovation and the social economy, which are key partners in carrying out ESD projects with residents of the same island (Por_11).

This panorama reflects the Algarve's potential to consolidate ESD as a strategic and collaborative approach, which aims to respond not only to global challenges but also to regional specificities, valuing the active and diverse participation of all sectors of society.

1.4 ITALY

Andrea Galimberti



The Italian research team within the ESDEUS project conducted a series of qualitative, semi-structured interviews with representatives of benefit companies, social enterprises, foundations, regional parks, and association networks based in Lombardy, particularly around Milan and Bergamo. Entities were selected to reflect diversity in both sector and activity type, covering environmental, educational, and social equity initiatives. The research adopted a narrative approach, supported by thematic analysis, to explore the real-world implications of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in local Italian contexts.

The data revealed a highly localized and actor-driven implementation of ESD and SDGs, embedded in community life and contextual needs. The Italian case study sheds light on how hybrid forms of collaboration between civil society, academia, and public institutions contribute to fostering sustainable transitions despite institutional fragmentation and regulatory rigidity.

SUSTAINABILITY DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN COMMUNITY

The organizations interviewed are committed to various SDGs, in particular SDG 1, SDG 3, SDG 4 and SDG 10, which represent a common goal for almost all respondents. Some organizations also highlighted their connection with other areas of focus.

The Italian stakeholders adopt, reinterpret, and operationalize the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in their everyday work. Rather than treating the SDGs as rigid metrics, Italian actors engage with them selectively, often pragmatically, based on organizational goals and local realities. SDGs function as discursive tools, legitimizing projects and facilitating access to funding, yet are also subject to critique for their abstraction or vagueness.

[...] we have set up an organic help-desk to help producers [...] but we also provide training for job placement, particularly for people in prison" (Ita_4). "It goes without saying that goal number 13 is somewhat our beacon in the night when it comes to climate change. But in reality, we work quite across the board on the 2030 agenda" (Ita_8). "Even now in Milan, after the pandemic, nature has become a necessity and its therapeutic and escapist qualities have been recognized, so it is now easier to say that planting a forest is good for quality of life. In a highly urbanized neighborhood, life is worse (...). I like to talk about urban forests rather than woods. (Ita_3)

An interesting aspect that emerged concerns the fact that sometimes the desire to work in an integrated manner on different SDGs is hampered by funding, as calls for proposals often have a more specialized focus:

We are interested in the social aspect of agriculture, social cooperatives (...) and we are interested in the integration of disadvantaged people (...) among other things, the problem is that if you are a social cooperative, you may not be able to access certain agricultural tenders and vice versa (...) (Ita_4)

Some organisations offered more critical views, highlighting the risk of creating a vocabulary that is meaningless, confusing and potentially at risk of maintaining the status quo:

When sustainable development is on everyone's lips, its original meaning is watered down, even becoming the opposite (...) (Ita_3)

That is, being credible because many words such as 'sustainability' or 'environmentalism' – for which you used to be accused of being a bit of an extremist – were clear, but now everyone is sustainable, everyone is green, everyone is an environmentalist, so we have the opposite problem (...) (Ita_6)

SDG implementation in Italy is not linear nor uniform. It is enacted through negotiation, translation, and often contestation, reflecting both the potential and fragility of global agendas at the local level. These processes show that SDGs are not merely policy instruments but become part of actors' own meaning-making, allowing them to reframe sustainability in relational and ethical terms. This embeddedness also creates tensions, particularly when external funding demands adherence to formal goals while grassroots realities are more dynamic and complex. Moreover, when SDGs are used to signal alignment with broader frameworks, they risk becoming symbolic rather than transformative. Stakeholders call for reconnecting the goals with the original ecological and social justice imperatives.

The Italian case illustrates that SDG engagement gains substance when it becomes a tool for civic dialogue, place-making, and cross-sector innovation – yet it must be protected from instrumentalization and semantic erosion. True alignment with SDGs requires that these goals be understood not as static benchmarks but as evolving principles rooted in ecological literacy, social justice, and cultural responsiveness. Stakeholders must retain agency to adapt them meaningfully, reclaiming the political and ethical dimensions of sustainable development.

COLLABORATION AND ENGAGEMENT ON SDGS/ESD

The Italian case demonstrates a dynamic and adaptive ecosystem of collaboration. Sustainability initiatives are rarely led by a single actor; instead, they arise from networks that include civil society organizations, cooperatives, benefit corporations, universities, and municipalities. This collaborative ecology is often driven by local experimentation and emergent needs rather than top-down mandates.

The interviews show that, in most cases, ESD-related activities do not originate from institutional initiatives, but rather from grassroots efforts rooted in a complex territorial network involving a variety of active local actors.

They are park managers, as well as other associations we manage to work with, perhaps not specifically focused on environmental issues, but other NGOs. We work hard with a lot of energy, which requires us to focus on the educational side of sustainability. (Ita_4)

There is agreement on the importance of engaging in dialogue with the many actors present in the area. On this front, the role of local administrations is viewed with ambivalence: on the one hand, they are perceived as distant, and on the other, the need to involve them in order to generate real change in the area is emphasized.

From the point of view of local administrations, there is still no awareness of sustainable environmental development" (Ita_2) "Local administrations (...) are not interested. (Ita_7)

The activities we carry out often have an impact on schools and local areas (...) so we have often organized training and awareness-raising projects and activities in small municipalities. (Ita_4)

Companies are also identified as economic factors that could play an important role in education for sustainable development.

The interviews highlight the need to be part of existing networks in order to carry out joint systemic actions capable of having an impact on the social fabric:

We already knew this, but we realised, through first-hand experience, that sustainability cannot be achieved in separate compartments, but must be integrated. (Ita_4)

In some cases, alongside the idea of a "network" inspired by the desire to develop greater synergy of action, there is a desire to "build a community":

The difficulty I feel today is in getting actors to work together, to network, to respond to the city's need for alliances. I feel that this has broken down in recent years for various reasons. However, I think that if we have done anything good, it is this activity in terms of networking, of being able to make the most of the skills of all the actors in the area. (Ita_1)

As regards to the role of universities, academia is seen by some organizations as a partner with whom collaborations based on converging interests, particularly in the areas of teaching and research is worth to be established.

The university helps us to monitor and evaluate various issues, as well as to reflect on methodology... it is a contribution that helps us to systematize the results of the projects we fund, so that they remain a heritage that can continue over time. (Ita_5)

Critical issues also emerge related to the difficulty of collaborating, mainly due to different timeframes and bureaucratic obstacles: “We are very quick to move, which is one of our advantages, but we are too quick for our academic partners” (Ita_7).

More than the issue of leadership, understood as the search for a reference point capable of guiding the various organisations present in the area, what emerged was the need for greater systemic coordination, developed on multiple levels of integration, without therefore the need to delegate this function to a single body.

Networks of collaboration reflect a strategic capacity to align different logics – activist, bureaucratic, academic – into shared projects. These alliances are pragmatic rather than formalized, often operating under project-based logic. They rely heavily on trust, improvisation, and relational knowledge. This hybrid model permits creativity but may lack continuity if structural support is weak. Actors become mediators between different temporalities, institutional cultures, and accountability demands. The involvement of universities is valued not only for their expertise but also as a symbolic validation of practices born in the third sector.

The collaborative field in Italy is vibrant but fragile. It thrives on relational capital and contextual embeddedness, suggesting that sustainable partnerships require more than structural alignment – they need cultural and epistemic synergy. Institutional mechanisms that support long-term collaboration – such as shared governance spaces, flexible funding, and hybrid knowledge infrastructures – could help move from experimental projects to sustained impact. Strengthening cross-sector trust and reducing bureaucratic friction are essential to stabilize and scale ESD initiatives.

UNDERSTANDING OF ESD IN LOCAL ACTIVITIES

Italian stakeholders conceptualize Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) not as a technical framework but as a lived and ethical commitment. Learning is deeply embedded in local geographies, histories, and community relations. This understanding transcends formal education and includes civic spaces, cultural institutions, and social movements.

Citizens. A common theme that emerged from the interviews concerns the desire to connect with large segments of the population through their actions, going beyond the target audience of their interventions to promote greater awareness of sustainability issues.

So, the factor to bear in mind in general lately, precisely since we too have become a benefit corporation, is that we collaborate with other benefit corporations, so we provide services for these types of customers, so our direct interlocutors are almost never citizens, unless the project provides for it. (Ita_2)

For citizens, we have thought of formats such as festivals, but we are thinking of other things. We have held several workshops to listen to citizens, especially in neighbourhoods. (Ita_1)

We have a training programme more aimed at adults. In recent years, we have organised events that are more informal education for adults, perhaps in contexts such as libraries, for example”. (Ita_8)

The world of education remains one of the privileged destinations for projects focused on ESD. The current Italian school system offers external bodies the opportunity to propose projects within pre-established curriculum hours dedicated to civic education (for primary schools) or career guidance (in secondary schools).

The strategy is more than just training a teacher who can then pass on what they have learned during their training or other ideas they have picked up from talking to other teachers to their own class, so that they can then implement these ideas independently. (Ita_6)

I have the feeling that lately there is this reliance on schools as if they were supposed to solve all of society's problems, (...) I was very struck once by a spontaneous comment from a teacher who said to me, 'Yes, now you've given us 33 hours of civic education. But we've always done civic education, every day, all day long'. What I don't think is working so well is that education for sustainable development is more of a vision, a system of values, if you like, so it's something that should permeate our everyday lives. (Ita_8)

ESD in the Italian context is conceived relationally—it is about reconnecting people with places, histories, ecologies, and each other. It resists compartmentalization and speaks to the interdependence of life systems. Stakeholders view education as a dynamic social process grounded in emotion, identity, and everyday practices. Learning is dialogic, participatory, and often informal, expanding beyond school walls to embrace public space, activism, and intergenerational exchange. ESD becomes a cultural and territorial practice rather than a curricular category.

The Italian understanding of ESD invites a paradigm shift—from institutional delivery to place-based, participatory, and justice-oriented learning ecosystems. This reconceptualization challenges dominant metrics of educational success and insists on valuing care, sustainability, and voice. Institutional support must acknowledge and legitimize these non-formal learning forms and foster the networks that sustain them. Emphasizing territoriality and diversity is key to keeping ESD anchored in lived experience and social transformation.

COMMUNICATION AND PARTICIPATION

Communication practices and participatory methodologies emerged as crucial dimensions of ESD in Italy. Stakeholders prioritize the creation of inclusive, creative, and dialogic spaces where sustainability can be critically explored, felt, and embodied. The use of art, storytelling, and media supports emotional engagement and deepens the learning process.

The interviews clearly highlighted awareness of the strategic role of communication both in promoting their activities and, more generally, in spreading a meaningful, understandable and non-trivial culture of sustainability.

And then, if you want, trying to innovate a little and develop a cultural project that is much more in tune with contemporary language, taking care to have a style and tone that is appropriate and to think of cultural products that also appeal to non-experts. (Ita_1)

What we try to do with those we work with – whether they are schools, local communities, municipalities or companies – is to include an educational and informative element in our projects. (Ita_4)

The climate and environmental crisis is becoming increasingly urgent and we need to find ways of communicating it that are less alarmist and do not cause that sense of despair that leads to inaction. (Ita_5)

[...] So, properly promoting a culture of sustainability, where people really understand what is happening and where we are going, could be a good solution. (Ita_4)

Another theme that emerged across many interviews concerns the perceived need to structure education for sustainable development using participatory, dialogic and innovative methods, based, for example, on the use of aesthetic languages.

(...) We want to give students the opportunity to experiment with creative artistic languages that are not only traditional ones such as theatre and singing, but also more modern means of expression such as podcasts and journalism, which stimulate in-depth analysis, critical thinking and re-elaboration, all elements that enable a deeper understanding of the issue. (Ita_5)

At a certain point, we said to ourselves that we shouldn't leave the world of the arts as something separate, but look at those languages as another way to help us understand the phenomena that interested us. And so some of the most beautiful things we did in terms of citizen participation resulted in collective performances. (Ita_1)

The perfect lesson is one where you have worked beforehand, but during the lesson it almost seems like you are not working because the students are doing things. So cooperative games, simulations, role plays, debates. And all this range of activities in a systematic mix of analogue and digital. (Ita_7)

Participation in ESD involves more than presence—it entails voice, agency, and mutual recognition. Communication is understood not only as transmission but as co-production. Stakeholders recognize that sustainable change requires a shift in cultural narratives and symbols. Thus, aesthetics, creativity, and emotional resonance become vital to transforming passive awareness into engaged practice. Participatory methodologies are both pedagogical and political: they empower learners to question, co-create, and act. These approaches are particularly effective in reaching marginalized communities and young people.

For ESD to be transformative, it must cultivate communicative ecologies that are inclusive, creative, and rooted in shared experiences of care, struggle, and hope. Effective communication strategies are not ancillary but central to fostering systemic awareness and action. Supporting such engagement requires professional development, media literacy, and institutional openness to dialogic processes across age groups and sectors. Creative methodologies also enable a shift from compliance to commitment, from knowing to doing.

The Italian case reveals ESD as a plural, context-sensitive, and deeply situated process. It is driven not by central policy but by the energies of local actors who weave together knowledge, ethics, and action. The key challenge lies not in defining ESD, but in nurturing the conditions for it to emerge: trust, openness, imagination, and systemic support.

What unites the diverse narratives is a commitment to sustainability as a practice of relational repair—between human and non-human, urban and rural, expert and citizen. Italian stakeholders offer a compelling vision of ESD as both resistance to fragmentation and affirmation of interdependence.

In conclusion, ESD in Italy challenges us to rethink education as a form of collective world-making. It calls for adaptive institutions, supportive policy environments, and above all, spaces where people can learn with and from each other how to inhabit the planet differently. Its transformative potential lies not in technocratic planning but in fostering deep, situated, and shared learning rooted in the dignity of communities and the vitality of ecosystems.

MAPPING OUT THE ESD PERSPECTIVE

Ewa Kurantowicz



2.1 RESEARCH RESULTS IN A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE: THE EUROPEAN REGIONAL SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN THE APPROACH TO ESD

The comparative analysis of the national research reports prepared within the ESDEUS project – covering Poland, Sweden, Portugal, and Italy reveals a number of common features as well as significant differences arising from local social, political, educational, and historical conditions. This section of the report is organized according to the areas derived from the research questions and includes comparative analyses based on the following points:

1. Common themes and practices
2. Contextual and institutional differences
3. Comparative analysis of values and understanding of ESD
4. A synthetic summary of key observations presented in tabular form or through mapping out the stakeholders' perspectives (to choose by editorial team)

COMMON THEMES AND PRACTICES

THE HOLISTIC UNDERSTANDING OF ESD

In all national reports from the ESDEUS project partners, ESD is understood holistically as an approach integrating various aspects of social life – from ecology through civic education to issues of equality and local engagement. The entities participating in the research do not treat ESD solely as a domain of formal education; on the contrary, many activities are informal or non-formal and often rooted in social, cultural, and civic practices. A distinctive common feature is the interpenetration of environmental topics with social issues – climate education, circular economy, and responsible consumption are closely linked with themes of equality, inclusiveness, and citizenship

GRASSROOTS AND LOCALITY OF ACTIONS

In each of the four countries, actions related to ESD are deeply rooted in local communities. In Poland, these are often civic initiatives and non-governmental organizations responding to systemic shortcomings. In Sweden, many activities are led by local NGOs that maintain strong cooperation with local authorities and educational institutions. In Portugal, locality is reflected in the prominent role of municipalities and parishes, which create structures supporting sustainable development directly within residents' surroundings. In Italy, a key role is played by foundations rooted in the territory that represents a resource in terms of fundings and project leading but there are also a plurality of actors (benefit enterprises, social companies, associations) gathering in collaborative networks dealing with local authorities (municipalities, regional parks, etc.) Grassroots initiatives in each case also imply flexibility, responsiveness, and high effectiveness of actions – although they simultaneously generate challenges related to long-term sustainability and systemic support.

INTERSECTORALITY, MULTISECTORALITY, AND PARTNERSHIP

Intersectoral cooperation is recognized as a key factor for success in ESD initiatives. All authors of the national reports emphasize the importance of building partnerships between universities, local governments, schools, non-governmental organizations, economic entities, and residents. In Poland, an example of such cooperation includes initiatives in the area of community-supported urban agriculture; in Sweden, joint activities involving museums, schools, and local leaders; and in Portugal, comprehensive educational and ecological programs implemented with the support of local administration and scientific institutions. In Italy, an example is the cooperation between social rehabilitation centers for isolated individuals and an association involved in the production and sale of organic products. Interdisciplinarity as well as sharing resources and competencies prove to be conditions for the effectiveness and sustainability of the undertaken activities.

REFLECTION, VALUES, AND CRITICAL APPROACH

All reports include reflection on the meaning and language used in relation to sustainable development. Local actors often point out contradictions between political declarations and social and ecological realities. Critical voices emerge regarding the excessive institutionalization of the SDGs, which – while helpful as frameworks – can be detached from local contexts. Values such as social justice, solidarity, participatory democracy, and care for the common good are indicated as the foundations of actions. Respondents refer to historical experiences (e.g., the systemic transformation in Poland), local identities (e.g., fishing communities in Portugal), or universal threats (climate change, migration, inequalities) to justify the need for education that not only informs but also mobilizes and transforms. and systemic support.

CONTEXTUAL AND INSTITUTIONAL DIFFERENCES

POLAND

The Polish context is characterized by a high dynamism of grassroots and civic initiatives, which often arise as a response to institutional deficits and a lack of systemic support for education for sustainable development. There is noticeable caution or skepticism towards the formal SDG frameworks, which are perceived as too abstract or technocratic. ESD activities often have a critical nature – they challenge dominant development models and expose their social costs. An example is the work of the EkoCentrum Foundation, which raises issues of justice in the ecological transition in the context of social inequalities and the historical trauma of the systemic transformation.

Higher education institutions in Poland present a diverse approach – from strong engagement and integration of sustainable development goals (e.g., the University of Life Sciences in Wrocław) to more conservative or research-focused approaches. Cross-sector cooperation is sometimes hindered by bureaucracy, limited resources, and a lack of coherent public policy on ESD. At the same time, local communities demonstrate a high level of innovation and engagement – for example, in areas such as responsible consumption, urban mobility, and the circular economy.

PORTUGAL

The Portuguese context is distinguished by a high level of integration of ESD and SDG activities within local government structures, as well as a strong embedding of education for sustainable development in public institutions – such as schools, museums, parishes, and municipalities. Local authorities often act as facilitators and coordinators, supporting civic organizations and co-creating educational and environmental programs with them.

Unlike in Poland and Sweden, Portugal demonstrates a very strong presence of inclusive and social themes – many ESD activities are aimed at supporting marginalized groups, improving quality of life, access to public services, and building local communities. Examples such as educational programs for people with experience of homelessness, public health initiatives, or climate education on the islands illustrate how deeply ESD is rooted in citizens' everyday lives.

Portugal also offers an interesting model of synergy between environmental and artistic activities – many initiatives combine ecological education with cultural expression, social art, and intergenerational cooperation. Partnerships with higher education institutions are strategic and long-term – their role is not only to provide knowledge, but also to animate local activities and support their documentation and dissemination.

SWEDEN

In Sweden, education for sustainable development is strongly embedded in public policies and educational strategies. The existing legislative and institutional frameworks promote the integration of ESD in the formal education system, as well as in the activities of cultural institutions and non-governmental organizations. The Swedish model is characterized by systematicity, a high level of professionalization of activities, and a strong role of the state as a partner.

In practice, however, many ESD initiatives are implemented independently by local organizations and institutions – schools, cultural centers, libraries, community gardens – which introduce innovative education methods, such as learning through theater, outdoor activities, or experiential learning. Respondents also point to certain limitations of the systemic approach – the institutionalization of ESD activities may limit their flexibility and sensitivity to local needs. Despite the support of state structures, there are voices indicating insufficient involvement of higher education institutions in real social actions.

ITALY

The Italian context is characterized by a plurality of initiatives coming from the third sectors which developed a web of grassroots activities. Typically the initiatives start from a collaboration among benefit companies, social enterprises, associations in collaboration with a local foundation or among a partnership aimed at financing a common project with public fundings. Municipalities and public actors (including universities) are involved in a second phase (rarely during the design process) in order to get material resources (e.g. public spaces) or innovative contributions (e.g. state of the art knowledge from the university). One of the main points shaping this dynamic is related to an high degree of bureaucracy and an often unclear decision making process that make very difficult an efficient cooperation with public actors in relation to the time constraints posed by the funding calls. This pattern was recently partly changed by top-down national actions like the National Resilience and Recovery Plan that promoted a leadership role for the public sector (especially for the Academia) and funded many different projects related to public engagement where higher education was asked to create and coordinate local networks of social actors addressing sustainability issues.

Local communities are active and a lot of bottom up initiatives are flourishing, even if there is a general perception of a lack of systemic action that is perceived to be more and more critical as the awareness of the magnitude of the problems that need to be addressed grows.

VALUES AND UNDERSTANDING OF ESD – A COMPARISON

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) has been identified as a multidimensional process that, in each of the analyzed countries, is shaped by local values, historical narratives, and the social understanding of the role of education. Despite common references to the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the values underlying ESD activities vary in nature.

POLAND

In Poland, ESD often functions as a tool for critical analysis of social and ecological realities. Respondents' statements include values such as social justice, intergenerational solidarity, equal access to resources, and protection of the natural environment. Education is understood not only as a process of building knowledge but also as a space for debate, resistance, and developing alternatives. The values of ESD are frequently confronted with the realities of the systemic transformation and the neoliberal development model, resulting in a considerable degree of skepticism toward institutional language and a need to build independent narratives.

SWEDEN

In the case of Sweden, ESD is based on values rooted in the welfare state model, such as equality, human rights, inclusiveness, and social participation. Respondents often emphasize the importance of education as a practice that empowers individuals and communities. Climate and equality education are strongly present, and ESD values are integrated into public policies-particularly in the areas of gender equality, inclusive education, and environmental protection. At the same time, there is ongoing reflection on the "technocratization" of SDG language and the need to humanize it.

PORTUGAL

In Portugal, ESD is deeply rooted in local and social practices. The prevailing values include community, care for the well-being of people and nature, openness to cultural diversity, and responsibility for future generations. ESD practices are clearly linked to everyday life-from educational activities in schools, through public health programs, to engagement in local climate adaptation strategies. Education is seen here as a dialogue and a process of co-creating knowledge, rather than a one-way transfer of content. Ethical and aesthetic values (such as the beauty of the local landscape) also play an important role in motivating actions.

ITALY

In Italy ESD is disseminated in many initiatives partly related to the public education system (from kindergarten to university), partly managed from a panoply of private actors (mainly no-profit or benefit organization composing the so-called "private third sectors"), and partly involving civic associations or other public institutions that don't have education as one of the main goals (e.g. regional parks).

ESD is related to values rooted in a democratic society: some are directly connected to a recent past where civic and environmental rights came to the fore (e.g. environmental education or civil rights during the '70s) and others are located in a more recent global context (e.g. global citizenship, global partnership). Even if there is a general acknowledgment of the fact that some issues are emerging and much more widespread than in the past (e.g. climate change issues) there is also concern about a perceived trivialization of meanings and a general confusion on SDGs. This sounds quite paradoxical as Agenda 2030 is unanimously considered a common framework but at the same time it is mainly described as a technical object useful for the bureaucratic language (for example for having a clear reference during the application for fundings) and not as a source of meaningful understanding.

THE COMPARATIVE SUMMARY

The following summary synthesizes the most important similarities and differences in the approach to ESD among the four countries participating in the ESDEUS project. It reveals not only the diversity of institutional contexts but also the deeply rooted cultural values that shape educational practices for sustainable development.

AREA OF ANALYSIS:				
	POLAND	SWEDEN	PORTUGAL	ITALY
DOMINANT TYPE OF ACTORS	NGOs, grassroots initiatives	NGOs, educational institutions	local governments, HEI, local communities	foundations, social enterprises
ROLE OF HEIS	critical, diverse	limited but systemic	proactive, partnership-based	partnership-based in a bottom-up dynamic
COOPERATION WITH LOCAL AUTHORITIES	low, critical	established, though selective	systemic, supportive	disseminated in different territorial areas but fragmented
DOMINANT VALUES	justice, resistance, solidarity	equality, participation, inclusion	well-being, community, care	justice, community, care, global citizenship
TYPE OF ESD	non-formal education, social education	climate education, equality education	culture education, environmental education	climate and biodiversity education, equality education, citizenship education
APPROACH TO SDGS AND ESD	alternative, practical	integrated with politics	strategic, everyday, local	context-related, contingent, pragmatic

Table 1. Comparative summary. Map of Perceptions and Understanding of ESD by Local Stakeholders

2.2. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ESD BASED ON THE ESDEUS PROJECT RESEARCH REPORTS

The following summary synthesizes the most important similarities and differences in the approach to ESD among the four countries participating in the ESDEUS project. It reveals not only the diversity of institutional contexts but also the deeply rooted cultural values that shape educational practices for sustainable development.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ESD

The comparative analysis of four national reports – from Poland, Sweden, Portugal, and Italy – serves as a basis for formulating several general recommendations ESD, as well as targeted recommendations for higher education institutions, local governments and authorities, non-governmental organizations, social and civic movements, and European institutions and public policies related to ESD. We hope that the presented recommendations will be meaningful not only for the ESDEUS project partners but also for the broader educational and civic community engaged in promoting sustainable development across Europe.

ESD is not a universal concept – its meaning is always locally grounded.

Educational practices take different forms depending on cultural, social, and historical context. In Poland, they are often acts of resistance and critical reflection; in Sweden, a component of integrated public policies; in Portugal, part of social inclusion strategies and local community activities; and in Italy on the one hand an integration to the educational system offer and on the other an effort to contrast poverty of educational opportunities for certain categories of citizens (e.g. adults with mental issues) or focusing on still neglected topics (e.g. the importance of biodiversity).

Partnerships and cross-sector collaboration are a prerequisite for the effectiveness of ESD.

Successful educational activities are those that integrate the resources and competencies of various environments: universities, NGOs, local administration, cultural institutions, and the residents/citizens themselves. ESD cannot be the domain of a single sector.

Values are key to the development and legitimization of ESD.

Justice, equality, solidarity, well-being, and care for the future are not just slogans but real principles that initiate and invigorate grassroots actions, as well as influence their quality and sustainability. Any attempts to implement ESD must be rooted in the values of local communities.

Systemic frameworks are helpful but not sufficient.

The SDGs and ESD strategies adopted by European and national institutions create a context, but they cannot replace the genuine engagement of local actors. In many cases, the most effective actions develop on the margins of official policies or in opposition to them.

There is a need to recognize and support grassroots informal, incidental, and civic education.

The reports repeatedly emphasize that education for sustainable development takes place not only in schools and universities but also in community gardens, cultural centers, galleries and museums, cooperatives, and neighborhood groups. These activities should be systematically supported and funded.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITIES, SOCIAL AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS, EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS.

FOR UNIVERSITIES:

- Develop and implement ESD strategies in a horizontal manner, integrating them with the university's mission, educational programs, and third mission activities;
- Support and document cooperation with NGOs, local communities, and public institutions in ESD projects;
- Promote education based on values, experience, and participation instead of solely knowledge transmission;
- Involve academic teachers, researchers, students, and doctoral candidates in projects related to climate education, social justice, and social innovation.

FOR COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

- Recognize and support grassroots ESD initiatives as part of the local sustainable development strategy;
- Integrate ESD into urban policies, spatial planning, and participatory budgets;
- Create collaboration forums with universities, schools, and NGOs for joint development of educational activities;
- Promote and share examples of good practices within national and international networks.

FOR SOCIAL AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS:

- Continue activities related to civic, climate, and equality education, even if they are not formally recognized as "ESD";
- Build coalitions with other entities to increase the impact and scale of actions;
- Engage youth, elderly people, migrants, and other groups underrepresented in ESD projects; strengthen intergenerational and inclusive learning;
- Document and disseminate local practices (e.g., incidental learning) as models of alternative and transformative education.

FOR PUBLIC POLITICS AND EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS:

- Provide financial support for ESD activities regardless of their institutional form (formal/informal/non-formal);
- Promote the recognition of education as a lifelong process occurring in multiple spaces;
- Take local practices and values into account when designing European educational and climate strategies;
- Facilitate access to international networks and cooperation programs for small, grassroots neighborhood and civic initiatives.

The report prepared within the ESDEUS project demonstrates that education for sustainable development is not merely a technical task of implementing the SDGs, but a process deeply rooted in values, social contexts, and relationships between people. It emerges as a space for resistance, dialogue, cooperation, and social imagination.

Sustainable development, understood not as a set of goals but as a way of thinking and acting, requires a new language of education—a language of community, care, justice, and action for future generations. The analyses presented indicate that, regardless of the country, the most promising educational initiatives are those that arise from local needs, are conducted collaboratively, and are anchored in real cross-sectoral relationships.

In this sense, education for sustainable development becomes not only a goal of educational policy but also a necessary condition for building a more resilient, aware, and just Europe.

PART II

ESD COLLECTIVE ACTIONS OF STAKEHOLDERS AND UNIVERSITIES

INTRODUCTION

António Fragoso

The simplest idea behind sustainable development, popularised a few decades ago, is that we should leave no less for future generations, whether in terms of natural resources or the balance of wealth between rich and poor, among other things. The difficulties within the discourse of sustainable development are many, starting with the fact that it is a global and complex challenge that requires simultaneous changes in many dimensions of life to be effective. The sheer scale of the task suggests that achieving sustainable development is almost utopian, or more precisely, what Paulo Freire called an *inédito viável*: a not-yet-existing but achievable reality, and a call to imagine and work towards a more just, humanising world (Freire, 1994). It is closely linked to his ideas of hope, utopia and praxis – changing the world through action and reflection. There are many ways to conceptualise praxis, but in a simple way we can see it as the transformation of theory into people's life experience. Therefore, we need to use ESD not only as a way to change people's minds or as a tool to change attitudes, but also as a way to empower individuals and communities to contribute to a more sustainable future by making our daily actions consistent with that future. The potential of ESD can only be realized through action, which is the focus of this part of the book – and not just any action. What good would come from action just for action, or blind action that does not take into account the available knowledge and the ongoing innovation processes?

Higher education as a sector, traditionally can have an important role on pursuing a sustainable development. Universities are uniquely positioned to lead a part of the required transformation. They are creating new knowledge in many fields, promoting advanced learning and concerned with transforming knowledge into concrete measures to improve the world. However, their potential can only be fully realized through active collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders, including governments, industries, NGOs, and local communities (Tilbury, 2011). This is a central message of this part of the book. ESD can only make its way if it functions as a collective and for the collective.

To illustrate the 'power of us' the team of ESDEUS project collected some examples of joint actions between higher education institutions and a diversity of stakeholders. In the next pages we have three concise examples of collective actions coming from Poland, Sweden, Portugal and Italy.

CHAPTER I

ESD COLLECTIVE ACTIONS



URBAN FARM IN WROCLAW. SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE FOR PRESCHOOLS AND NURSING HOMES

Wrocław is leading the way in Poland as the first city to launch an urban farm in the Swojczyce district. This innovative project aims to provide healthy, locally grown vegetables for the city's preschools and nursing homes while educating the community about sustainable agriculture and healthy eating. As urban areas increasingly rely on global food supply chains, this initiative demonstrates how local food production can support sustainable urban development and the well-being of its residents.

ABOUT THE PROJECT:

The urban farm in Swojczyce focuses on sustainable agriculture, producing fresh vegetables without the use of chemical fertilizers or pesticides. The farm operates within specially designed greenhouses, allowing for controlled growing conditions year-round. Vegetables such as tomatoes, cucumbers, and lettuce are cultivated and delivered directly to Wrocław's preschools, kindergartens, and nursing homes, helping promote healthy diets among the youngest and oldest members of the city's population.

This initiative addresses the need for healthy, local food while also building ecological awareness among Wrocław's residents. By producing food locally, the city reduces its carbon footprint and fosters environmental responsibility, encouraging conscious food choices that contribute to the global effort to combat climate change.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

The urban farm is more than just a vegetable-growing operation. It represents Wrocław's commitment to social responsibility and serves as a model for urban agriculture in Poland. Through this project, Wrocław demonstrates how local action can contribute to solving global environmental issues, particularly by reducing carbon emissions and promoting sustainable, low-impact farming practices.

Additionally, the farm plays an important educational role. Future plans include workshops for children, teenagers, and adults to teach them about sustainable food production and the importance of a healthy diet. The project also strengthens the local economy by creating jobs and supporting local producers, furthering Wrocław's commitment to sustainable urban living.

WHY FOCUS ON FOOD?

Food production is one of the most pressing challenges facing modern cities. Globally, food accounts for approximately 25% of greenhouse gas emissions, and agriculture is a significant contributor to the loss of biodiversity. Meanwhile, up to 40% of the food produced is wasted at different stages, from farm to table. In cities like Wrocław, issues of food waste, production, and distribution are becoming increasingly urgent.

The urban farm in Swojczyce shows how local initiatives can help address these global challenges. By growing food within the city, Wrocław reduces its dependence on global supply chains, promotes healthy eating habits among its residents, and embraces the principles of a circular economy.

RESULTS AND FUTURE PLANS

The first harvest from the urban farm was collected in 2023, with produce distributed to preschools and nursing homes across the city. The feedback from both staff and recipients has been overwhelmingly positive. Future plans for the farm include expanding the growing area and increasing partnerships with more city institutions. Additionally, educational workshops for the general public are in development, aimed at raising awareness about sustainable agriculture. The project also explores the use of innovative technologies to further reduce the environmental impact of urban food production.

With this urban farm, Wrocław sets a powerful example of how cities can actively contribute to sustainability while improving the quality of life for their residents.

SOURCES:

[Urban farm on Swojczyce – harvests delivered to Wrocław's preschools](#)
[Wrocław grows its own vegetables – urban farm yields crops](#)
[Urban farm in Wrocław – the first of its kind in Poland](#)
[YouTube video: Urban farm in Wrocław](#)
[Radio segment – Radio Wrocław](#)

ABOUT THE PROJECT:

The aim of the "RE;" project is to educate about the concept of "sustainable fashion" and promote the basic form of its implementation, i.e. "circular economy." The creators and implementers of the project are four students of the DSW University of Lower Silesia, who have received funding from a competitive internal call of application announced by the university with the framework of its "Academy of Skills" program. The project implementers have experience and expertise in design and project management, social media, 3D animation and web design.

WHY FOCUS ON CIRCULAR FASHION & SUSTAINABLE DESIGN:

Economy practices. It teaches how to solve textile waste problems, and the project's activities demonstrate that clothing is part of industry, culture and the consumer economy. The project is intergenerational, multicultural and cross-sectoral. It engages students, academic staff responsible for training young designers in the spirit of sustainability, local community, local stakeholders who are involved in the field of fashion, design, circular economy. Increasing environmental awareness, engaging local communities in joint activities, learning useful skills correspond to the Sustainable Development Goals. The project promotes learning and development of professions related to clothes repair, waste reduction and resources respect. The project implementers use modern technology in the service of education and environmental protection.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

The main activities of the project include:

1. Organization of workshops on recognizing artificial and natural fibers, learning about the nuisance of artificial fibers to people and the environment.
2. Workshops on clothing upcycling methods that engage the community and promote circular practices (slow fashion vs. fast fashion) by using a form of gamification and design thinking.
3. Setting up a space for the free exchange of clothing
4. Publishing an accessible e-book that is a shopping aid for second-hand clothing, available free of charge.
5. Creation of a website with educational resources, including the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.
6. Promoting the project through social media, email marketing campaigns and collaboration with influencers.

RESULTS

Raising awareness about sustainability and the circular economy. Providing knowledge for entrepreneurial people about Closed-loop economy. Promoting eco-practices in fashion and design and supporting young artists.

SOURCES:

<https://www.dsw.edu.pl/aktualnosci/re-moda-obiegu-zamknietego-i-zrownowazony-design>

WE ARE BUILDING RAIN GARDENS. THE #ILIKERAIN PROGRAM

ABOUT THE PROJECT:

We Are Building Rain Gardens which store rainwater, counteract drought and increase biodiversity in the city center. The campaign is organized by the Odra Centrum, an educational and cultural center funded by the OnWater.pl Foundation, where educational projects are carried out to spread knowledge about the Oder River, its history, ecology, and environmental protection of rivers and other water reservoirs. The Odra Center also undertakes cultural and social projects aimed at building the Odra identity. Onwater.pl Foundation workshops are led by Kinga Waszkiewicz, M.Sc. – landscape architect, graduate of the Warsaw University of Life Sciences

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY:

During the educational workshop “Water retention and conservation” in a practical way, participants learn about the importance of rainwater in cities and ways of water management. Participants learn good rainwater retention practices, ways to retain water and save water at home. The workshop ends with the making of a mini garden model, which participants take to their school, home, workplace or business and observe its growth. Topics covered during the workshop include:

- the water cycle in nature
- drought and flooding - its causes and effects
- small and large retention
- natural and artificial retention
- ways to save water at home, at school, at work on the example of solutions used in Odra Centrum
- Rain gardens - their construction and types

WHY FOCUS ON WATER?

In the city, as much as 90% of the rain escapes into rivers, which after a while end up in drought again. Progressive climate change, drought, flooding and unusual atmospheric phenomena reinforce the need for smart and interesting education for children, young people, adults.

SOURCES:

<https://odracentrum.org/o-nas/>
<https://odracentrum.org/retencja/>
<https://odracentrum.org/warsztaty/>

ABOUT THE COURSE

This course aims to give school leaders and kitchen managers the knowledge, inspiration and tools to collaborate more around the school meal and use it as part of the children's and students' learning - a Whole School Food Approach. In Swedish, we have chosen to call it the Whole School for Sustainable Food (HSHM).

Approximately 1.3 million school lunches are served in Sweden every day. Food that needs to end up in the stomachs of children and students, so that they can get through the day and learn as much as possible. But school meals can also lay the foundation for healthy and sustainable food choices in the future for today's children and students. Many of the environmental challenges that we have to solve have a clear connection to food. It is therefore one of the most concrete ways that we can all be part of the sustainable transformation of society, bite by bite. In order for the school lunch not only to be a break to replenish nutrition, but also a clear part of the organization's educational mission, the school restaurant and school operations need to join hands and work together.

WWF Sweden offers activities for multiple actors: teacher, students and youth, local communities etc.

WWF has worked with food issues and education for many years and has solid knowledge and experience of how these parts can be linked together. In the EU project SchoolFood4Change, we have developed tools and inspiring examples of how the school meal can both contribute to changing for a more sustainable food system and strengthen children's and students' learning.

<https://schoolfood4change.eu/>

WHY THE TOPIC OF FOOD?

SOME FACTS ABOUT FOOD CHALLENGES:

- Food accounts for about a quarter of the total emissions of greenhouse gases.
- Food production is one of the biggest threats to biodiversity in the world.
- Of all food produced globally, close to 40 percent is lost or thrown away somewhere in the chain from field to plate.
- According to Agenda 2030, food waste must be halved by 2030 based on the 2015 level. Households are responsible for the greatest food waste.
- Until 2023, there was a parliamentary decision in Sweden that 60 percent of the food served in the public sector must be organically produced by 2030. Several municipalities stick to that ambition.
- The Nordic dietary recommendations - which are firmly rooted in research (Nutrition recommendations Livsmedelsverket.se) - state that for health reasons we should not eat more than 350 grams of red meat and charcuterie a week. If environmental reasons are also taken into account, that figure should be even lower.

THIS COURSE INCLUDES:

1. A filmed research lecture,
2. Filmed conversations between researchers and practitioners,
3. reflection questions,
4. Practical tasks that can be carried out at your own preschool/school,
5. Support material as extra inspiration and support.

The practical tasks and support materials become the basis for the continued change work at the preschool/school. Everything is free, no login is needed and you can come and go as you like in the course.

SUBACTIVITY (AS A PART OF THE EU PROJECT) IN MALMÖ

One important part of establishing a sustainable food culture in schools is to break down the perceived barriers between the students and the school restaurant. Two schools in the municipality of Malmö in Sweden wanted to encourage their students to be more engaged in, and to create an interest for, sustainable school food. The goal was to include students in the school meal experience, through a hands-on and fun activity. Inspired by the TV-program MasterChef, the schools collaborated and created a competition for the students, which they named SchoolChef4Change.

SOURCES:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9k3enKU0qoA>

<https://kurs.wwf.se/courses/hela-skolan-for-hallbar-mat-ur-ett-ledningsperspektiv/>

SÅ VILDA! CHANGING THE LOCAL ENVIRONMENT WHILE LEARNING ABOUT BIODIVERSITY

ABOUT THE PROJECT:

Så vilda! Is a project organized by the Gothenburg Botanical Garden with the purpose of creating pedagogical wildflower areas at local schools to promote both learning about biodiversity and also understanding the importance of local wildflowers. 15.000 students have had the chance to change their local environment while learning more about biodiversity, with a focus on plants and pollinating insects. The project can be linked to, among other things, the subject of biology in the primary and secondary school curriculum.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY:

The project aims to spread knowledge about biodiversity and to create engagement. In Sweden, for example, many people cannot name the most common wildflowers. Therefore, one of the more specific aims of the project is to fight "plant-blindness", that is people's inability to either see or appreciate the plants in the surrounding environment. Not noticing or appreciating plant diversity may lead to many species disappearing without people even noticing. By learning the names of plants, a relationship is created and an increased understanding of nature is developed.

Through participation in the project, the students are expected to:

- increase biodiversity
- increase their knowledge about Sweden's wildflowers and their importance
- increase their knowledge about pollinators and ecosystem services
- transform everyday places into blooming oases for people and biodiversity
- create new opportunities for outdoor education

WHY FOCUS ON PLANTS AND BIODIVERSITY?

Facts about wildflowers and biodiversity:

- A lot of research shows that biodiversity is threatened
- Wildflowers have been shaping the environment in the Nordic region for thousands of years. Some plants have come with agriculture and have a strong connection to cultivation.
- Many animal species are completely dependent on wild plants for food. During winter, seeds are an important food source for birds, mice and other animals. If plant diversity decreases, a large number of animal species are threatened.
- Pollinators need food (pollen and nectar) and shelter. For many of them, it is important that food is available near their nest.
- The plants' roots bind the soil around them so that nutrients do not leak into waterways to negatively affect rivers and oceans through eutrophication.
- Many plants contain substances that can be used in medicine. 40% of the medicines prescribed by doctors today originate from the plant kingdom.
- Swedish wildflowers also constitute an important aspect for culture and traditions.

SOURCES:

<https://www.botaniska.se/barn-skola/sa-vilda/>
https://mellanarkiv-offentlig.vgregion.se/alfresco/s/archive/stream/public/v1/source/available/sofia/gbt985-2019468384-8406/native/Broschyr_S5c3%a5Vilda_2022.pdf
<https://press.newsmachine.com/pressrelease/view/priset-arets-pollinator-delas-ut-till-projektet-sa-vilda-pa-goteborgs-botaniska-tradgard-40406>

PERFORMING GREEN. AN INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP ON METHODS OF SUSTAINABILITY IN ARTISTIC WORK

ABOUT THE WORKSHOP:

This international workshop was organized by ASSITEJ Sweden together with Folkteatern Gävleborg and TeaterAlliansen. ASSITEJ Sweden is described as a platform for people working in performing arts for children and young people. It consists of a wide array of stakeholders, such as actors, directors, set designers, playwrights, as well as theatre groups, organisations, and institutions.

Participants of the workshop were directors and stage designers from eight Nordic and Baltic countries. The aim was to commonly explore sustainability strategies from an artistic perspective. More specifically, the workshop focused on:

- investigating what kind of concrete tools individual performing artists, theaters and institutions have
- what areas of friction may exist (socially, practically, and artistically)
- what is further needed for a productive changeover

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY:

Sustainability in the performing arts is a demanding task. The main goal of the workshop was to create, apply, and refine strategic models and methods for sustainable performing arts production, while also examining the connection between the artistic process and climate awareness. Additionally, it aimed to design both a national and international network focused on artistic sustainability efforts.

Three different types of artistic vision and concepts were identified during the workshop:

- A thematic artistic platform with a strong climate focus, designed to create long-term projects. The emphasis is on learning processes and community engagement through artistic practices
- Congenial concepts: Integrating a strong climate focus into the play, alongside sustainable production approaches
- Sustainable production approaches applied to all aspects, not centered on a climate perspective, but with a stronger focus on other themes derived from the play

WHY FOCUS ON PERFORMING ARTS AND SUSTAINABILITY?

Directors are often not directly involved in sustainability efforts, while set designers, due to their expertise in materials, have become more aware and recognized the need for the performing arts sector to begin developing its own sustainability methods and tools. It is important that responsibility is shared among artists, theatres, and policymakers.

SOURCES:

<https://assitej.se/hallbarhet/>

<https://assitej.se/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Its-time-for-Performing-Green-4.pdf>

<https://folkteaterngavleborg.se/om-oss/hallbarhetsarbete/>

CULATRA 2030. SUSTAINABLE ENERGY COMMUNITY

In early 2019, the University of the Algarve (UAlg) and the Culatra Island Residents Association (AMIC) proposed a project to the EU Clean Energy for Islands Secretariat, resulting in Culatra Island being chosen as one of six pilot islands for an Energy Transition Agenda. The project was presented to the island's communities on 24 March 2019 and, on 27 March 2019, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed by various stakeholders, including the EU Clean Energy for Islands Secretariat, UAlg, AMIC, the Algarve Regional Development Commission and Faro City Council.

ABOUT THE INITIATIVE:

The 'Culatra 2030 - Sustainable Energy Community' initiative is a project on the island of Culatra in Algarve, covering several aspects of green transition.

It implements the ambitions of the Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) in Algarve, using a novel Entrepreneurial Discovery Process (EDP) to create a real-life laboratory for green transition, focusing on the specific needs of the island and capitalising on its assets. The key to its success is the active participation of the island's whole community through a continuous EDP process.

The initial Community Participatory Diagnosis was based on a fully inclusive participatory process, which brought together public entities, academia, companies and communities. Following this initial stage, a new governance system for participatory exploration of transition pathways was put in place, supported by different funding opportunities that are continuously explored.

The Culatra 2030 initiative is based on a 'quadruple helix' partnership model, involving the Autonomous Region of the Algarve, local authorities, the University of the Algarve, technology companies and citizens from the AMIC.

The UAlg, AMIC and Make it Better co-ordinate the initiative, forming the 'Island Sustainability Committee' to oversee the project. This committee has been instrumental in speeding up decision-making and ensuring the viability of the project from the outset.

The Culatra 2030 team is made up of researchers from the Marine and Environmental Research Centre (CIMA) and the Engineering Institute of the UAlg, Make it Better (Association for Innovation and the Social Economy), members of three associations of the Culatra Fishing Nucleus and young entrepreneurs from the fishing, oyster farming and other aquaculture sectors.

The main aim is to enable the community to organise itself into a Cooperative for the Sustainability of the Island with the University of Algarve and de Make it Better joining the advisory board without decision-making powers.

STRATEGIC PILLARS

The initiative is supported by the European Commission's 'Clean Energy for EU Islands' programme and is one of the first six pilot islands to have a Transition Agenda by 2030. The Culatra Energy Transition Agenda (CETA) has five pillars:

- Production, storage and distribution of electricity;
- Air conditioning and building efficiency;
- Transport on the island, to and from the island;
- Water supply and treatment;
- Waste management and recovery.

The vision of Culatra 2030 is to create a Renewable Energy Community in the fishing village of Culatra, in the heart of the Ria Formosa Natural Park, through an integrated intervention in the energy management model, waste management, water management and the creation of new Social Responsibility mechanisms.

SOURCES:

<https://www.culatra2030.pt/culatra-2030>

<https://www.amiculatra.pt/projetos/culatra2030%2C-comunidade-energ%C3%A9tica-sustent%C3%A1vel>

<https://www.youtube.com/@Culatra-uv6qy>

ABOUT THE PROJECT:

Rural areas in the Algarve face significant challenges, including an ageing population, the devaluation of agriculture, land abandonment, and demographic and economic decline. These factors contribute to reduced participation of small farmers in the food value chain, particularly those involved in family farming, which struggle with market access due to poor organisation and a challenging regulatory environment.

REVITALGARVE is an innovative project aimed at revitalising rural areas in the Algarve through the creation of a local food system. It seeks to strengthen the region's agricultural sector by building a Network of Local Producers (RPLA) and encouraging the consumption of locally produced food. The project also focuses on fostering innovation, supporting family farms, young farmers, and women farmers, and creating new governance models to improve local economies and social development.

The project is coordinated by the University of Algarve, with support from the PRR (Recovery and Resilience Plan), and involves public and private entities. These organisations aim to improve rural areas' social and economic vitality through sustainable and inclusive growth models, contributing to the diversification of the Algarve's economy, which is heavily reliant on tourism.

MAIN AIMS:

1. Valorisation and Qualification:
 - Promote the value and improvement of Algarve products.
 - Support local producers in creating more sustainable food.
 - Promote short marketing circuits for local products.
2. Sustainable Consumption:
 - Organise a more sustainable food system.
 - Encourage increased consumption of seasonal, local products.
 - Align with the principles of the Mediterranean diet.
3. Research and Innovation:
 - Guarantee the quality and origin of food products.
 - Increase consumer confidence in local products.
 - Create differentiated products, such as valorising endangered local meat breeds, figs, and a regional fish species, thereby boosting producer income.

LINES OF ACTION:

1. Knowledge and Innovation:
 - Creation of innovation support services (R&DI).
 - Development of a system to ensure the safety and quality of RPLA products.
 - Support for sustainable production methods that protect regional biodiversity and resources.

2. Smart Rural Territories:
 - Establishment of RPLA (Network of Local Producers).
 - Development of a brand and certification system for local products.
 - Creation of a technical assistance system for RPLA producers.
 - Implementation of short food supply circuits for collective catering (e.g., school canteens).
 - Establishment of a Local Food System Governance Model.
3. Economic Diversification:
 - Organisation of Local Producers' Markets across the Algarve.
 - Valorisation and innovation of the Algarve's endogenous resources.
 - Implementation of a communication plan to promote local products.

SOURCES:

<https://www.revitalgarve.pt/sobre/>

<https://www.ualg.pt/projetos-de-id?id=379885>

<https://amal.pt/comunicacao/935-revitalgarve-mais-do-que-uma-rede-de-produtores-locais-do-algarve-um-sistema-alimentar-regional>

ABOUT THE PROJECT:

This European initiative brings together associations and organizations to create, promote, and experiment with different and innovative ways to use art to promote sustainability. The project is co-funded by the European Union and includes a diverse consortium, ranging from cultural organizations to environmental associations, universities and theatres.

Sciaena, a non-governmental organization (NGO), is one of the partners in this consortium, bringing its expertise in environmental awareness and knowledge of critical and urgent issues that the ocean and our society face. The Mar Motto, Sciaena's annual artistic festival focused on ocean-related environmental awareness, was selected as one of the four festivals to showcase the work developed under the Big Green. The project includes collaboration with the Faro City Council to host events in 2025 and 2026, demonstrating how Sciaena works with local entities to promote sustainability and conservation.

By integrating art and culture, the Big Green project aims to foster a deeper connection and understanding of these issues among a wider audience.

PROJECT'S PRIORITY LINES OF WORK

- Positive utopias: the project calls on artists to create positive, forward-looking narratives that expand our imagination and our concept of what is possible. They should draw attention to the opportunities for change towards more sustainable ways of living, rather than focusing exclusively on the threats of climate change.
- "Artivism": Using art as a tool to promote social change and disseminate critical information about ecology and climate.
- Ecological learning: Using art as a method of learning about the environment. For many, art can also provide more sustainable forms of learning than those offered by traditional curricula.
- Interpretation of natural heritage: Reinterpreting the role our environment plays in our individual and collective identities, our relationship with nature, our responsibility towards it, what we have inherited and the heritage we pass on to subsequent generations.
- Research: Measuring and analysing how art can contribute to behavioural changes related to socio-ecological transformation.
- Policy and framework development: Sharing best practice, providing guidance on how artists and scientists can best work together, creating an enabling policy environment to better exploit the sector's potential to promote sustainability.

SOURCES:

<https://www.marmotto.com/the-big-green/>

ABOUT THE PROJECT:

The Bergamo Bio-District of Social Agriculture is a network of associations with a strong territorial value, which was established in November 2016 involving 18 cooperatives and organic farms in the province of Bergamo.

A Bio-District is an area in which certified organic farms operate, but it is also a model of sustainable development that involves all local communities that want to act with respect for the environment and its resources.

In Bio-Districts, the production and sale of organic products is linked to the promotion of the territory and a green lifestyle. In Italy it is a rather widespread model and the experiences of the various Bio-Districts have shown how organic can be a means through which to increase the economic and cultural potential of our country.

Inspired by the sense of unity and participation of the various protagonists (farmers, citizens, associations and institutions), the Bio-District decided to combine the economic aspect and the development of organic farming in the province of Bergamo with social commitment and the welfare of disadvantaged people, promoting job placement projects in the agricultural sector. Every initiative is aimed at enhancing the organic farming method, with particular attention to the social and occupational inclusion of disadvantaged people. To this end, it is necessary to involve public administrations, the world of education and solidarity economy networks, to focus on the theme of sustainable local development, quality of life, the fight against waste and the recovery of uncultivated areas. A great deal of attention is also dedicated to the start-ups of young farmers who want to measure themselves against the hardships and beauty of the Earth.

SYSTAINABILITY ISSUES:

Given the relevant presence in the province of Bergamo of both farms and social cooperatives, all of which have in common a special attention to the human condition and the desire to develop activities aimed at the social and labour inclusion of disadvantaged people, the peculiarity of the Bergamasque Bio-district is centred on both the territorial and social aspects due to the particular nature of the farms, connoted by the dual commitment bioproduction and agri-social activity. This implies, for both aspects, the overcoming of strictly corporate and/or individual logics for a systemic vision encompassing the entire territory and its actors, both institutional and non-institutional. The collective strategy is based on criteria of solidarity, equity, and ethics and aimed at common goals: sustainable economic development oriented toward the enhancement of local resources, natural and typical products, conscious and sustainable tourism, biodiversity, cultures and traditions, through

MAIN AIMS:

- Create a network to promote the provision of services and promotional and training activities.
- Promote the organic production method in the agricultural, livestock, agro-industrial and forestry fields, in product processing, in taking care of urban and peri-urban green areas as well as the landscape and protected areas.
- Stimulate and organize the organic culture through research activities (in collaboration with schools, universities, research centres and public and private bodies), dissemination and training focused on organic agriculture and sustainable land management.

- Pursue a development model aimed at the social and occupational inclusion of people in difficulty and/or with disabilities, also addressing the world of education and young people at risk of social marginalization.
- Enhance the relationship with local communities (citizens and their families), with their associations (voluntary associations, cooperatives and third sector) and with local institutions.
- Identify effective strategies to revitalize and restore state-owned areas, uncultivated lands and assets seized from crime organizations, to make them available to organic entrepreneurs capable of creating new job opportunities and available for job placement of disadvantaged people, and to make them usable by citizens (green areas, urban and/or social gardens, parks, bike paths, wetlands...).
- Promote actions useful for the enhancement -even economic- of the multiple benefits associated with the presence of diversified, organically managed agro-environmental systems;
- Promote collaborations and synergies directed at fostering social cohesion and the enhancement of diversity, conscious consumption, and healthy eating, using competences and social inclusion practices characteristic of biosocial enterprises;
- foster healthy and energy-saving lifestyles

SOURCES:

<https://www.biodistrettobg.it/>

The call for proposals "Creative Climate - Promoting education for sustainability through artistic, cultural and creative languages in schools" is issued jointly by the Environment Department and the Art and Culture Department of Cariplo Foundation since 2024. Applications for funding under this call for proposals are submitted by partnerships made up of at least one private non-profit organization active in the environmental field and another active in the artistic/cultural field. Each biennial project must be addressed to a single clearly identified state or state-recognized secondary school, including vocational training centers. This school may be involved as a simple beneficiary of the project activities or as a partner

ABOUT THE PROJECT:

The environmental and climate crisis is now a fact and it is essential that all citizens and institutions commit to taking action to preserve the existing natural heritage for future generations. In this regard, young people are showing a growing awareness of the risks of deterioration of environmental quality, particularly due to climate change, and are expressing concern for their future. According to a survey on Young People and Climate Change carried out by EMG Different and the WWF, about 6 out of 10 young people interviewed state that climate change has an impact on their lives (58% very much or quite a bit) and 56% say they are engaged in daily actions to address the climate crisis. About 8 out of 10 young people (77%) say they are very or fairly concerned about climate change and 44% expect immediate action from institutions. In an era in which access to information is very widespread, the dissemination of scientific data, images and stories about the impacts of the climate crisis has helped to generate a sense of urgency in the younger generations, pushing them to engage in activism and to support more effective environmental actions and policies for the protection of the environment. This interest, which is tangible on social media and in the participation in protest demonstrations, can be stimulated and cultivated at school, in particular through art: its expressive power can help to deeply understand the importance of the environmental issue, to deeply understand the importance of the environmental issue, inspiring positive actions and changes, promoting awareness and individual and collective responsibility. Thanks to their ability to reach a wide and diverse audience, artistic languages can encourage critical reflection and promote a cultural change that leads to a more sustainable and equitable world. Effective storytelling can mobilize the community, encouraging it to actively participate in protecting the environment, to challenge established harmful habits and to support policies and initiatives that promote environmental sustainability.

MAIN AIMS

The call for proposals aims to improve the educational offer of secondary schools and to enhance the school as a social laboratory and community of participation, stimulating the protagonism of young people in the development of cultural projects capable of spreading awareness on the environmental issue in the territory and promoting the assumption of individual and collective responsibilities. In particular, the call for proposals encourages the active participation of secondary school students in the co-design and development of educational programs on environmental sustainability based on artistic and creative languages. The projects will aim to:

- promote the development of citizenship and artistic skills;
- encourage the informed and conscious participation of young people in environmental protection; encourage collaboration between third sector organizations active in the environmental and artistic-cultural fields;
- contribute to the development of local educational networks around the school.

SOURCES:

<https://www.fondazionecariplo.it/it/news/intersectoriali/clima-creativo-l-arte-incontra-l-ambiente.html>

OK!Clima was created to promote correct and effective communication on issues related to climate change and ecological transition; it is a training project financed by the Cariplo Foundation and realized by the University of Milan, the University of Pavia and the Italian Climate Network association. It is promoted throughout Italy by the group of professionals and experts of Climate Media Center Italia and the scientific journal *Scienza in rete*.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The climate crisis is the most serious and complex challenge facing humanity, due to the vastness of its consequences and its implications for society as a whole. It is an issue that involves numerous areas of collective life: energy, management of ecosystems and urban areas, mobility, agriculture, health, the economy and finance, scientific and technological research. Faced with an issue of such great social importance it seems necessary to promote greater awareness, not only regarding the impacts and risks that climate change entails, but also the opportunities and benefits of actions to adapt to and combat emissions. The dissemination of correct information therefore becomes an essential prerequisite for combating the climate crisis and encouraging citizen participation and dialogue with institutions.

Communicating in an accurate and engaging way is essential for collective action and the transition to a more just and sustainable society. Science is useless if it is not communicated: to administrators, who can use it to support their decisions; to the media, who have the task of explaining the world to citizens, and to future generations, through the valuable work of teachers and professors.

MAIN AIMS

OK!Clima was created to improve communication among those actors who, in different roles, are involved in the transfer and sharing of scientific knowledge and information concerning the climate crisis. The project involves the development and delivery of educational content, such as webinars and thematic courses, to different audiences. These will include researchers, professionals and technicians in the environmental and health sectors, journalists and secondary school teachers.

The newly formed Climate Media Centre Italia will be actively collaborating on the project. This is a think tank that brings together scientists and experts in scientific communication with the aim of contributing to the accuracy of news and information on climate change and offering services to support the world of research and the media.

The project will last two years and will initially focus on the Lombardy region, paying particular attention to research on the most effective communication techniques and the development of content aimed at improving the effectiveness of climate change communication for all recipients.

SOURCES:

<https://www.italiaclima.org/educazione-climatica/>

CHAPTER II

THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIP FOR ESD

António Fragoso



We begin this chapter with a brief analysis of the collective sustainability actions implemented across Poland, Sweden, Portugal, and Italy. While each part emphasizes regional needs and contexts, they collectively underscore the importance of community engagement, education, and innovation in addressing environmental challenges. A closer look at the similarities and differences among the initiatives in these four countries reveals both shared values and distinct strategic approaches.

2.1 A BRIEF ANALYSIS ON COLLECTIVE SUSTAINABILITY ACTIONS

The shared features and differences among those collective actions can be analysed in the following categories: A focus on education and community engagement; Sustainability through localised solutions; Differences in sectoral focus and scale; Cross-sector collaboration; Cultural and artistic expression as a tool for change.

THE FOCUS ON EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

A unifying element in all the experiences is the emphasis on education as a tool for promoting sustainability. In Poland, urban farming initiatives and fashion sustainability projects incorporate educational workshops to inform the public about local food systems and circular economies. Sweden similarly prioritizes educational frameworks, offering structured courses like Whole School for Sustainable Food and the biodiversity-focused SÅ VILDA! project that educates students through hands-on involvement with wildflowers and pollinators. Italy takes a broader educational approach by integrating environmental concerns into artistic and cultural education through projects such as Clima Creativo and OK!Clima. These initiatives aim to enhance sustainability awareness by leveraging storytelling, media, and arts. Portugal also aligns with this theme through the Culatra 2030 project, which emphasizes participatory diagnostics and community-led governance, and BIG GREEN, which combines art and sustainability in public festivals.

SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH LOCALISED SOLUTIONS

Each country's initiatives reflect tailored responses to regional ecological and social challenges. For instance, Poland's urban agriculture addresses the need for local food production and reduces dependence on global supply chains. Its rain garden project, #Ilkierain, specifically tackles water retention and urban biodiversity, responding to urban flooding and drought. In Sweden, the focus shifts more toward institutional transformation. The Whole School for Sustainable Food initiative links educational management with sustainability, turning school meals into a learning platform for sustainable living. Projects like Performing Green introduce sustainability practices into artistic production, recognizing the carbon footprint of the cultural

sector and suggesting pathways for more eco-conscious artistic endeavours. Portugal's actions are notable for their focus on systemic change in energy, agriculture, and rural revitalization. Culatra 2030 is a holistic example of community-based transition, involving energy, water, waste, and transportation – not forgetting we are talking about an island, i.e., a very specific kind of ecosystem. Similarly, REVITALGARVE aims to transform rural economies through the development of a regional food system, supporting local producers and preserving traditional agriculture. Italy's projects highlight social inclusion and integration of marginalized groups. The Biodistrict of Social Agriculture combines organic farming with employment opportunities for disadvantaged groups, blending environmental and social goals. Meanwhile, OK!Clima and Clima Creativo focus on communication and public understanding of climate issues, underlining the role of informed citizenship in environmental action.

DIFFERENCES IN SECTORAL FOCUS AND SCALE

While all projects support sustainability, they vary significantly in their sectoral focus. Poland and Sweden emphasize food systems and biodiversity. Portugal places heavier emphasis on energy transition, water and waste management, and rural resilience. Italy's projects are more diverse, touching upon agriculture, education, art, and scientific communication. Scale also differentiates the initiatives. Portugal's Culatra 2030 operates on an island-wide scale with EU backing (and hopes to become a model for other similar European ecosystems), showcasing a large-scale energy and governance transformation. Sweden's school food and biodiversity programs are designed to be scalable within the national education system. Italy's actions often target regional or city levels with deep community integration, such as in Bergamo's bio-district. In contrast, Poland's efforts are highly localized, like the urban farm in Wrocław, but are rich in replicable potential. Although there are differences between those experiences, there is indeed an important commonality: all these projects have the potential to be replicated and scaled-up.

CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION

Another key similarity is the integration of diverse stakeholders. In all countries, projects are co-designed or supported by universities, NGOs, government bodies, and local communities. Portugal's inspiration in the quadruple helix model exemplifies this, merging public, academic, business, and civil sectors in the Culatra 2030 project. Sweden's WWF-supported initiatives connect schools with environmental policy. In Italy, partnerships between environmental and cultural organizations underpin projects like Clima Creativo, while OK!Clima involves universities and media networks to bridge science and public communication.

CULTURAL AND ARTISTIC EXPRESSION AS A TOOL FOR CHANGE

A final point of convergence is the role of culture and arts. Italy's and Portugal's initiatives, particularly BIG GREEN and Clima Creativo, explicitly use art to promote sustainability narratives, a strategy less emphasized in Poland and Sweden. However, Sweden's Performing Green introduces similar themes in the performing arts sector. These programs acknowledge the power of storytelling and creativity in inspiring behavior change and fostering community cohesion.

To conclude this part of the chapter, the sustainability initiatives presented in Poland, Sweden, Portugal, and Italy reveal an image of innovative, locally rooted responses to global challenges in different societal dimensions. Though differing in focus and scope, they all reflect a shared commitment to community commitment, cross-sector collaboration, and the transformative power of education and culture. These collective actions not only contribute to local resilience but also offer scalable models for sustainable development across Europe.

As we said in the introduction, the way in which these challenges are addressed depends to a significant extent on the social and cultural practices of 'us'. In other words, partnerships have immense transformative potential.

2.2 THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIP

Sustainable development is inherently interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral. Addressing its complex and interrelated challenges requires more than isolated academic efforts. It calls for collective action, understood as a coordinated and strategic effort that combines the strengths and perspectives of diverse actors. When universities join forces with external stakeholders, the impact of ESD initiatives is not only broadened but deepened (Wals et al., 2016). For instance, policymakers play a critical role in creating the frameworks and regulations that shape educational priorities. When universities collaborate with government agencies, they can help inform and implement national education policies that embed sustainability at all levels (UNESCO, 2017). This synergy ensures that ESD is not treated as an elective or marginal field, but rather as a core mission of modern education systems.

The private sector, too, has a vital role to play. As engines of economic growth and innovation, businesses influence both environmental outcomes and social structures. Through partnerships with universities, companies can contribute to the development of sustainability-focused curricula that reflect real-world challenges and labour market demands (Cebrián et al., 2015). Internships, co-op programs, and applied research projects offer students hands-on experience while enabling companies to benefit from academic insights and fresh perspectives. Such engagement can help industries transition toward more sustainable practices. It fosters a generation of professionals who are not only technically proficient but also ethically aware and sustainability-minded.

The role of the private sector is seen here at its best potential, but ambiguities do pave their way. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) plays a crucial role in advancing sustainable development by aligning business practices with environmental, social, and economic goals. Companies that embrace CSR can potentially contribute to climate action, ethical labour, and community well-being (UN Global Compact, 2023). Conversely, neglecting CSR can lead to environmental degradation, reputational damage, legal penalties, and financial losses (OECD, 2022). Ignoring sustainability can result in resource depletion or consumer backlash in a market increasingly driven by ethical considerations (World Economic Forum, 2023). Ultimately, CSR is not just ethical—it is essential for long-term business resilience and global sustainability.

This opens up avenues for critical commentary based on policy studies that go back a long way. It calls for an analysis of the (old?) transitions between welfare state and a neoliberal state that has unleashed the power of the market against other pillars of society, such as the state or civil society. In other words, much depends on the ability of states to liberalise economic life and business (as a matter of survival?), while keeping some dimensions of public life relatively protected from market rules. It's clear to us that these discussions are not new. However, there are no known policy mechanisms that impose CSR on the private sector. At best there are state incentives. While some companies may understand that CSR is a healthier option in the long run, even in economic terms, it is clear that many others do not.

One of the most deeply impactful stakeholders in ESD are NGOs and community-based organizations. These groups often work on the front lines of sustainability issues, providing grassroots knowledge and mobilizing local participation. By collaborating with these actors, universities can design learning experiences that are inclusive, participatory, and grounded in real-world contexts. Community-based research, service learning, and participatory projects allow people to engage directly with sustainability challenges in their local environments. This can enhance civic engagement and a sense of social responsibility (Brundiens et al., 2010).

Collective action also facilitates the sharing of knowledge, resources, and best practices. Networks of universities and stakeholders—such as sustainability alliances and global consortia—enable collaboration on joint research projects, curriculum development, and policy advocacy (Leal Filho et al., 2019). These platforms amplify the reach and effectiveness of ESD efforts, allowing innovations to scale and positive outcomes to multiply. It is also important to stress that these collaborations increase institutional accountability. When universities work transparently with external partners, they demonstrate a commitment to serving societal needs. This builds trust and strengthens the legitimacy of higher education as a driver of sustainable development.

While the benefits of collective action are clear, successful collaboration does not happen automatically. It requires mutual respect, shared goals and a willingness to embrace new models of engagement. Networks, which are almost universally seen as crucial in a world threatened by global challenges and thus requiring coordinated solutions, are not easy to build, develop and maintain. Nevertheless, universities must be open to co-creating knowledge with

stakeholders, moving beyond traditional top-down approaches to more horizontal, participatory methods. Similarly, stakeholders need to recognise the value that academic institutions bring, not only as sources of knowledge, but also as agents of change.

The journey toward a more sustainable world demands cooperation, creativity, and courage. Education for Sustainable Development is a powerful tool to equip societies with the means to navigate this journey – but it cannot succeed in isolation. Through collective action between universities and stakeholders, we can transform ESD from an academic concept into a practical, impactful force for global change. Together, we can educate and empower people prepared to shape the future.



CONCLUSIONS

Ewa Kurantowicz, António Fragoso

WHEN THE UNIVERSITY MEETS THE LOCAL COMMUNITY – MAPPING PARTNERSHIPS

This publication is the result of the ESDEUS project, co-financed by the Erasmus+ Strategic Partnerships for Higher Education program. The content of the monograph is based on research conducted using in-depth interviews and case studies carried out by team members from four different regions of Europe. This regional diversity among the project's partners enabled the presentation of territorially rooted approaches to PARTNERSHIP between universities and local communities.

Based on scientific literature and the project's research findings, we would like to conclude by proposing a discussion of three types of PARTNERSHIP between the university and the local community, in connection to the education for sustainable development: strategic, civic, and engaged partnerships. In reality, various forms/types of "partnership" activities most often occur, but we believe it is valuable to highlight the dominant characteristics of these three partnership types in the conclusions.

"Strategic Partnership." Integrates an innovative approach with social responsibility, combining economic development with social well-being. It supports territorial development. A strategic partnership is based on an analysis of local community needs, joint infrastructural and social projects, and participation in local development strategies. Strategic partnership supports social entrepreneurship.

In the context of education for sustainable development, a strategic partnership enables the integration of sustainable development principles into the educational, research, and innovation programs of universities. This type of partnership makes it possible to design interdisciplinary educational programs that combine technical, social, and environmental knowledge. Universities can also promote the ideas of sustainable development by co-creating local policies and organizing training for local leaders, entrepreneurs, and residents. This approach supports the transformation of regions toward more sustainable models of economy and social life.

"Civic Partnership." The shaping of civil society is the task of all social actors in the local environment (the university, local authorities, NGOs, educational and cultural institutions of the region). Civic partnership enables joint planning and

implementation of projects with regional residents for goals important to local citizens, including conducting information campaigns or public consultations. Civic partnership removes barriers to accessing the resources of various local entities, including the university and local governments.

Education for sustainable development within the framework of civic partnership focuses on raising public awareness of environmental, economic, and social challenges. Through courses, workshops, and participatory projects, citizens learn how to build communities resilient to climate change, how to promote social justice, and how to support sustainable development in practice. Such education strengthens civic competencies, teaching responsibility for the common good and cooperation skills in solving local problems.

"Engaged Partnership." The basis of this partnership is the co-creation of knowledge, implementations and solutions, directions of change, and the transformation of institutions, communities, sociocultural surroundings, and the natural environment. In practice, engaged partnership is carried out through research and social projects that are co-designed, co-implemented, and co-evaluated by all interested parties. This approach fosters mutual learning, the integration of academic knowledge with local practical and cultural knowledge, and the generation of innovative solutions for complex social and environmental problems. It is also worth noting that engaged partnership requires a redefinition of the role of the scholar and student, who become co-creators of change, rather than merely external observers or experts. This approach promotes the idea of learning by doing and transformational education.

In the context of education for sustainable development, engaged partnership allows for the direct involvement of students and communities in the learning process through real action for the benefit of the environment and society. This makes it possible to develop competencies in critical thinking, teamwork, and creative problem-solving.

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APPENDIX 1: DESCRIPTIONS OF INSTITUTIONS, ORGANIZATIONS, INITIATIVES (POLAND)

University A - a public university in the natural sciences. The University actively implements the principles of sustainable development through projects such as Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and the Urban Farm. It offers fields of study, including environmental protection, renewable energy, and landscape architecture, that integrate local needs with global challenges. The university's projects, such as research on food self-sufficiency in Wrocław, combine education, practice, and research to support environmental transformation. (PoL_2)

University B - a technical university with an international reputation. The University of Science and Technology is committed to sustainable development, through projects such as the development of green areas on campus and initiatives to promote eco-mobility. Through internal projects funded by civic budgets, among others, the University supports the use of low-carbon modes of transportation and the reduction of its carbon footprint. The institution integrates the academic community around eco-friendly activities, promoting innovative technical and educational solutions. (PoL_4)

TownHall - a local government unit responsible for developing green transportation. The office promotes cycling and public transportation, including through the European Sustainable Mobility Week, and implements bicycle education in schools. Working with NGOs and local communities, it implements innovative infrastructure and educational solutions, organizing environmental competitions and raising public awareness. (PoL_1)

SD Foundation - a non-governmental organization dedicated to analyzing global trends in sustainable development. The foundation emphasizes the need to change economic models based on infinite growth and promotes a just climate transition. It conducts critical debate on economics and politics, promoting sustainable development based on minimizing social inequality. (PoL_3)

GP_NGO - an educational and tourist area belonging to the UNESCO network. Geopark organizes environmental events, such as workshops on water retention and flood reduction. Activities combine education with practical adaptation solutions, supporting local communities in achieving sustainable development goals. (PoL_7)

ECO NGO - an environmental organization working to promote a closed loop economy. It carries out projects such as „Clothes to Donate,” through which it raises funds for ecological purposes, such as planting trees in Wrocław. EcoPotential's activities raise public awareness of recycling and responsible consumption, engaging communities in environmentally friendly initiatives. (PoL_8)

VEG NGO - an international organization promoting plant-based diets. ProVeg educates about the health and environmental benefits of limiting meat consumption, introducing vegetarian and vegan meals to educational institutions. The organization supports the global Sustainable Development Goals, promoting a balance between health, the environment and animal welfare. (PoL_5)

Aqua Company - an innovative hydroponics technology company. The company minimizes water and chemical use by developing vertical farms as an alternative to traditional agriculture. AquaFarm supports food security by shortening supply chains and offering green solutions to global challenges such as logistical crises and climate change. (PoL_6)

School - an educational institution focused on environmental education. The school organizes local initiatives, such as sports challenges combined with trash collection in the forests, which engage the community in environmental protection. It promotes responsibility for nature, building environmental awareness through practical activities and community integration. (PoL_9)

Community Movement is a student project awarded in the 7th edition of the Skills Academy competition at the regional University. The initiative focuses on education in circular fashion and sustainable design, organizing workshops in upcycling, fabric recognition and eco-friendly practices. In addition, the project offers free resources, such as an e-book and a website, to raise awareness about fast fashion and promote responsible approaches to fashion. (PoL_10)

APPENDIX 2: DESCRIPTIONS OF INSTITUTIONS, ORGANIZATIONS, INITIATIVES (SWEDEN)

Girl on Cloud is an NGO described as a network for feminists. Its aim is to engage academics, practitioners and activists in a dialogue around gender and development issues in Sweden and internationally. (Swe_1)

Big Bear is a completely independent environmental and conservation organization, present in Sweden and in a plethora of other countries. Their ambition is to help local communities in working with natural resources, to promote sustainability on different levels of policy making and practice, and to protect species' natural habitats. (Swe2 Swe_3)

The Botanical Garden is governed by one of the Swedish regional councils. Their mission is to protect and work with diversity of the plant world, to promote research, and to organize educational activities. (Swe_4)

Global Kid is a global child rights organization dedicated to ensuring that all children have access to safety, education, and healthcare. The organization operates both in Sweden and internationally, working to protect children from violence, poverty, and discrimination while advocating for their rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. (Swe_5 Swe_6 Swe_7)

Theater X is a regional theater working with artistic productions, educational activities, and the promotion of sustainability through art. (Swe_8)

Westtown is the Labor Market and Adult Education Unit of a large Swedish municipality. The unit has the overall responsibility for municipal adult education. The administration is responsible for organizing labor market initiatives on behalf of the entire municipality and taking the necessary initiatives to promote employment opportunities. (Swe_9)

Harbourtown is the Adult Education Unit of a medium-sized Swedish municipality, responsible for organizing municipal adult education. (Swe_10)

APPENDIX 3: DESCRIPTIONS OF INSTITUTIONS, ORGANIZATIONS, INITIATIVES (PORTUGAL)

The 13 organisations that took part in the interviews are presented below, considering their history and values, as well as their experiences in ESD practices.

Marine Conservation NGO, founded by a group of students from a Higher Education Institution (HEI) in the Algarve region, with the aim of creating an organisation that would bring science closer to the population, enabling cooperation and public participation in ocean conservation. From the outset, the organisation has focused on community involvement and the promotion of environmental sustainability, with the aim of contributing to healthy marine life through the dissemination of information and the involvement of citizens. This organisation values the inclusion of the community in the scientific process and in decisions related to marine conservation, promoting a collaborative and participatory approach.

According to the interviewee, the project that most benefited the community was the creation of the first Marine Protected Area of community interest in Portugal and was led in partnership with the region's municipalities. The creation of this marine area represented a significant victory because it was developed through a two-year participatory process involving more than 70 community organisations. During this period, the local community had the opportunity to decide on conservation aspects, including what would be protected and how, as well as discussing compensation for those who might be economically affected by the creation of this protected area. This project was highlighted as particularly beneficial because it moved away from the traditional model in which decisions are made unilaterally by scientists or politicians, promoting an inclusive and democratic approach that directly involved the community in marine conservation decisions. (Por_1)

Research Centre A, with the aims of studying and implementing sustainable solutions, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration in areas such as energy, environmental management and green technologies. In terms of values, they are orientated towards sustainability, committed to including human aspects, nature conservation and social inclusion in their activities. The aim is therefore to develop solutions that are ecologically correct, economically viable and socially just, thus guaranteeing long-term sustainable development for both the environment and the community.

The project to create a sustainable community on an island off the coast of the Algarve was mentioned by the interviewee as the one with the most benefits for the community. One of the concrete benefits was the development of oyster beds as a sustainable economic alternative for local young people, who were facing a reduction in traditional fishing activities. The creation of these nurseries allowed young people to continue living on the island, avoiding the need to migrate in search of employment, as well as providing a stable source of income. The initiative not only strengthened the local economy but also contributed to the conservation of the coastline, aligning economic development with environmental sustainability. (Por_2)

Research Centre B, created to strengthen academic and research strategies in the study of the marine environment at an HEI in the Algarve region. The most important values for the centre include scientific development in three main areas: research, teaching and social intervention. In the field of research, it focuses on advancing knowledge in its areas of speciality, with particular attention to issues related to the sea and the environment. In teaching, it is committed to transmitting the knowledge produced through research directly to the classroom, thus enriching students' academic training. In addition, it plays an active role in social intervention and communication, endeavouring to make knowledge accessible and applicable to both the academic community and political and social decision-makers. At the same time, it is dedicated to communicating science to the general public, increasing public awareness and understanding of maritime and environmental issues and highlighting their relevance and impact.

According to the interviewee, the project with the most impact on the community was precisely related to the transfer of scientific knowledge, since it not only educated but also actively involved community members in initiatives that directly or indirectly contribute to preserving the environment, thus raising participants' awareness of contemporary environmental challenges. In addition, the interviewee said he believes that interaction with researchers and participation in research projects can significantly increase the community's knowledge and understanding of how marine ecosystems work. These dynamics fosters communication networks that transcend environmental issues, encompassing social, economic and cultural aspects. Therefore, this project stood out for creating an effective bridge between science and the community, not only broadening understanding and awareness of critical environmental issues, but also strengthening the community's ability to act in a sustainable and informed way in marine-maritime contexts. (Por_3)

The secondary school takes an inclusive and humanist approach to education, focused on promoting citizenship, human rights, gender equality and sustainable development.

In terms of sustainable development initiatives, the creation of an office to promote sustainability and involve the school community in environmental projects stands out. The school's values emphasise empathy, respect and dialogue, considering the emotional relationship with students essential for a productive educational environment adapted to recent social changes, including the post-pandemic challenges.

Regarding the projects that most benefited the community, two projects related to waste management were mentioned. Their importance lies in the practice and development of students' environmental awareness and responsibility, with the aim of changing misconceptions about recycling, highlighting that, despite being a theoretically assimilated concept (with the practice of waste separation being perceived as "automated"), in practice many incorrect attitudes persist. Furthermore, the fact that the students came to their own conclusions about laziness and lack of practical application of recycling rules emphasises the importance of projects that not only inform, but also actively involve students in identifying and solving problems, fostering a keener sense of critical observation and personal and collective responsibility towards the environment. (Por_4)

Socio-educational Intervention Cooperative, created in 2005 by a group of young people. The intention was to create an organisation with a participatory management structure, allowing participation in projects, applying for funding, and creating their own projects. Over the years, although the statutes have been slightly modified to focus more on culture and the arts than on social aspects, the essence of the work provided has remained the same. The cooperative's name, inspired by a specific plant in a region of Brazil, reflects the organisation's resilience and strong political and ethical stance.

A theatre project was highlighted as the one that brought the most benefits to the community, as it created an environment in which everyone could be creative and organise themselves autonomously. With a horizontal structure, the project enabled people from different backgrounds to express their visions and life experiences. According to the interviewee, the diversity within the group, which included people of different ages, physical abilities, sexual orientations, and religious beliefs, enriched the discussions, ensuring that all points of view were considered respectfully. The theatre pieces addressed crucial themes such as health, gender equality, inclusion and decent work, directly reflecting the SDGs. In addition, the forum theatre format promoted direct dialogue with the audience, characterised by its political and participatory nature. The interviewee believes that this project not only raised awareness of important social issues, but also validated the dignity and right to expression of each participant, creating a high-quality environment for listening and reflection. The importance of this space was reflected in the mutual respect and appreciation of the diversity of opinions, which meant that the project left a legacy of civic engagement and awareness in its direct and indirect participants. The interruption of the project due to the pandemic marked the end of a significant period of social involvement and artistic creation that lasted around five years. (Por_5)

Museum, founded in 1930 by a community initiative, opened in 1931 in the sacristy of a church with an initial collection of sacred art. Since then, it has expanded significantly in both size and collection, thanks to its founder's dedication to expanding the collections; donations from the community and archaeological explorations have also contributed to this. One of its main objectives is to promote cultural and human development, positioning itself as a space for community participation and the preservation of cultural heritage. Links with the local community have been strengthened, with a special focus on collaboration with schools and energising young people. This effort involves preparing educational activities that go beyond simply showing content, as they aim to teach young people how to interact respectfully and intentionally in cultural spaces. In this way, young people learn about the rules of behaviour during visits and the importance of active observation and discovery. In addition, activities centred on biodiversity and local cultural heritage encourage young visitors to value and better understand their surroundings.

Due to the variety of audiences served and the complementary impact of the activities carried out, it wasn't possible to identify a single project as the most beneficial for the community. However, the interviewee said that the museum's actions have contributed significantly to the well-being and health of the community by functioning as a diverse place of knowledge, encounter and welcome. By offering a variety of programmes that cater to different interests and ages, the inclusion and participation of the community in educational experiences has been promoted. As a meeting place, it facilitates social interactions that strengthen community bonds that can improve emotional well-being. In addition, its cosy and safe environment makes the museum space a refuge that can support visitors' mental health. Therefore, the interviewee considers that the Museum's role transcends that of entertainment, acting as an active space for learning and enjoyment. (Por_6)

Artistic Association, founded by a group of local artists who transformed a former municipal jail into an art space. A year after it was founded, the association evolved from an artist's residency into an arts centre, supported by cultural funds from the government and the city council. The organisation's values are centred on inclusion and welcome, seeking to create an environment where all people are valued, regardless of their differences. They work to promote equality, offering fair treatment and equal opportunities to all. Their interaction with people is guided by a principle of empathy, with a focus on putting themselves in the other person's shoes and acting with integrity. They believe in the power of small interactions and exchanges of ideas, valuing the positive impact they can have, even when they seem insignificant.

Collaboration with local schools was mentioned by the interviewee as a partnership that benefits the community, as it seems to have a direct impact by connecting different generations. For example, when the children, after taking part in the association's activities, take their families to see the facilities, it can help break down possible stigmas associated with the historical past of the headquarters building (it was a prison and served as a reception space for the Portuguese who returned from the former colonies in Africa after the end of the Portuguese Colonial War in 1974). (Por_7)

Local Development Association, established with the aim of strengthening the capacities of women in the region through courses in areas such as handicrafts, sustainable agriculture and rural tourism, boosting their skills and the quality of the products and services offered. It encouraged entrepreneurship with the creation of women-led businesses and co-operatives, providing management and marketing advice, which contributed to increased income and financial autonomy. In addition, it strengthened community support networks through meetings and workshops, valued local cultural heritage and addressed gender equality, encouraging women's active participation in decision-making processes. Over time, this association has expanded from promoting local products to implementing sustainable agricultural practices and revitalising traditional crafts, turning them into sustainable sources of income and recognising people as an active community resource for development.

One of the projects highlighted was Community-Based Local Development (CBLD). The Leader Project played a significant role in strengthening the sense of community pride and identity, through various initiatives that valorised local resources and heritage. Economic autonomy was promoted through cooperation between local actors, such as schools, producers' associations and companies, which developed joint strategies to revitalise and market local and artisanal products. These activities not only helped to preserve declining traditions but also generated new economic opportunities, increasing the community's income potential. From the point of view of environmental sustainability, the project encouraged agricultural and production practices that respected and valued the environment, contributing to biological diversity and environmental resilience, which are fundamental for long-term sustainability. In addition, the project promoted knowledge building, increased sensitivity and control over local resources, especially food, through community education and training. These actions have enabled residents to better understand how to sustainably manage their natural resources and how these can be used for the benefit of the whole community. Therefore, the interviewee considers that the Leader Project was crucial in establishing a solid foundation of community pride, cultural identity, economic autonomy and environmental management, key elements for sustainable and integrated development in the community. (Por_8)

Consumer Defence Association was the first organisation in Portugal dedicated to the cause of consumer protection in the country, filling an information vacuum that not even public bodies covered at the time. Initially focused on carrying out comparative tests of products and services, it later broadened its focus to include quality and sustainability issues, while maintaining its mission of informing and assisting consumers about their rights and choices. The association's guiding values include independence, to avoid external influences, credibility, rigour in information and analysis, and cooperation, a principle recently added to strengthen collaboration with other organisations in the defence and promotion of consumer rights.

A project was highlighted that is bringing benefits to the population at a national level by promoting awareness of the ecological footprint among citizens and organisations. According to the interviewee, it was possible to achieve, for the first time, significant interest in understanding and quantifying carbon emissions through personalised URLs. This interest led to a change in mentality and an increased awareness, which began to translate into real actions to reduce CO₂ emissions. In other words, filling in a questionnaire allowed participants to find out about their own CO₂ emissions, suggesting various practices, from the most complex to the simplest, to help reduce them (e.g. reducing the size of homes, increasing recycling or walking). The aim was to promote more sustainable consumption and thus contribute to combat climate change. (Por_9)

Mental Health Association, founded in 1991 by a group of mental health professionals (e.g. psychiatrists, specialist nurses, social workers, therapists) as a result of identifying a gap in ongoing support after mental health crises, which resulted in a cycle of recurrent hospitalisations. It currently provides vocational training, a vocational rehabilitation centre and a socio-occupational forum. The association's values include initiative and dynamism, team union, integrity, rigour and transparency, in a logic of respect for human rights and the promotion of social justice, social and environmental responsibility, equal opportunities and non-discrimination.

A vocational training project and a theatre project were identified as having benefited the community the most. According to the interviewee, on the one hand, they have enabled people with disabilities, some of whom had been away for a long time, to integrate into the labour market, thus helping them to become autonomous individuals capable of contributing economically to their families. On the other hand, in the case of theatre, by presenting their plays and contributing to the culture of the community, these people experience recognition and pride in their work. In the interviewee's view, this can not only increase self-esteem but can also reinforce the sense of belonging and social usefulness of the participants in the activities. This involvement and the satisfaction derived from feeling useful and fulfilled seems to have been fundamental to individual happiness and community involvement. (Por_10)

Residents' Association, created with the aim of defending the identity, territory and fundamental rights of the residents of an island in the south of Portugal, namely access to drinking water, electricity, education and health. To this end, the association has fought to improve living conditions and see the territory as an integral part of the environment, opposing attempts to displace the local population. The values that guide the action include the defence of the environment, the promotion of sustainability, the valorisation of local identity and culture, and the fight for the fundamental rights and quality of life of the island's residents. In 2018-2019, an HEI in the Algarve region challenged the community to carry out the project of creating a sustainable community, an initiative whose main objective is to transform the community into an example of good sustainability practices, such as the circular economy and energy transition, by 2030. This project was promptly adopted by the community, which saw it as an opportunity to have science-based support for their demands, as well as to plan the island's future in partnership with academia. (POR_11)

Municipality A has created an office dedicated to environmental issues, which has a long history of involvement in sustainable practices and environmental education for the community. Ethics, transparency and effective communication are the pillars that underpin this action. In this sense, the office's promoters always seek dialogue with the community to ensure that the actions taken meet the interests and needs of the citizens.

The interviewee highlighted two main dimensions of the project that had significantly benefited the community. The first dimension centred on raising awareness of the importance of recovering organic waste by providing the community with composters and training on composting. Over the course of a year, the environmental team monitored the composting process carried out by the beneficiaries to determine the impact and effectiveness of the project. The second dimension had a significant impact through the distribution of menstrual eco-kits, which stood out not only for demystifying stereotypes associated with female reproductive and sexual health, but also for comparing the costs and benefits of disposable and reusable menstrual products, emphasising their impacts on health, the economy and the environment. The project gained immediate attention, reflected by many surprised and positive comments on the municipality's social networks. (POR_12)

Municipality B has set up a department to promote sustainable development by reviewing and implementing the municipality's climate change adaptation strategy. To this end, activities are carried out with the aim of building knowledge about the climate and promoting adaptation and mitigation actions. They also focus on the transition to a circular economy, encouraging sustainable consumption and the consequent minimisation of environmental impacts. The project highlighted by the interviewee as having benefited the community the most included the installation of photovoltaic plants in schools. This project also provided training for students to carry out energy and water audits, which may have contributed to the development of environmental awareness, as well as providing benefits for the school community by reducing costs and environmental impact. (POR_10)

APPENDIX 4: DESCRIPTIONS OF INSTITUTIONS, ORGANIZATIONS, INITIATIVES (ITALY)

The 8 organisations that took part in the interviews are presented below, considering their history and values, as well as their experiences in ESD practices.

Foundation A: it is an historical social actor (founded in the '70s) in Milan municipality representing a platform for inclusion and dialogue among academics, local actors, and communities. By combining historical sources, research, and public dissemination, it fosters reflection on the significant issues of contemporaneity and investigate the transformations of our society: the main addressed topics are globalization, sustainability, politics, rights, work, and cities.

Società Benefit: founded in 2016, is a "Società Benefit" (services have a quota of free work and 1% of their annual turnover is donated to projects with a positive impact for all Planet included). It is an experience company aimed at developing social innovation with a passion for positive, collaborative and feasible change. It offers design-driven research services and consultancy to social enterprises, public administrations and third sector players. Participatory processes are the basis to help partners in achieving the eco-social business goals they have set and to respond to the needs of their stakeholders.

Regional Park: formally acknowledged in the '70s as a regional park, it is a public actor located in the metropolitan area of Milano. It is an area for research on ecosystems managed and supported by universities but also aimed at promoting a culture of biodiversity and sustainability through partnership with a panoply of social actors (associations, NGOs, universities, local civic committees etc.).

Network A: established in 2011 as an association, it is a multidisciplinary technical network operating as a Social Enterprise and a Benefit Company. The network supports companies in the development of concrete circular economy projects, sustainable corporate governance, corporate social responsibility, communication and reporting, decarbonization to combat climate change (through carbon footprint, CO2 reduction and offsetting) and stakeholder engagement.

Foundation B: established in 1991 it is a banking foundation, a philanthropic organization leveraging its financial and human resources as well as planning and assistance capabilities to promote endeavours pursuing the common good. The themes on which the foundation places more emphasis are fighting inequality, (especially by aiding the most vulnerable), promoting social and economic growth at the local level and support arts and culture, environmental, social and scientific research projects.

Bio-district: it is a network of associations with a strong territorial value, which was established in November 2016 involving 18 cooperatives and organic farms in the province of Bergamo. A Bio-District is an area in which certified organic farms operate, but it is also a model of sustainable development that involves all local communities that want to act with respect for the environment and its resources. In Bio-Districts, the production and sale of organic products is linked to the promotion of the territory and a green lifestyle. Inspired by the sense of unity and participation of the various protagonists (farmers, citizens, associations and institutions), the Bio-District decided to combine the economic aspect and the development of organic farming in the province of Bergamo with social commitment and the welfare of disadvantaged people, promoting job placement projects in the agricultural sector.

Social enterprise B: founded in 2014 with the aim of promoting active global citizenship education and sustainable development. It collaborates with non-governmental organizations, associations, foundations, training institutions, businesses, and civil society organizations. It provides consulting, training, and support services for the design, formulation, and management of education, training, capacity building, and communication projects. It offers capacity building products and services, project design, and project cycle management support (identification, formulation, funding, implementation, reporting, evaluation); it helps its clients and partners to: identify national and EU funding opportunities suited to their profile and sector; and to design, plan, and/or implement specific education, training, capacity building and communication projects and activities.

Network B: founded on July 18, 2011 in Rome. An association of volunteers founded by a group of people, animated by a common feeling for the fight against climate change and projected to the involvement of many young people in education and advocacy activities. It collaborates with other associations, local groups, companies and public authorities, both at an Italian and international level, in the belief that the answer to this great challenge can only be collective. It is engaged on a daily basis in education, dissemination and advocacy activities, which aim to combine scientific rigor and the ability to address different audiences.

APPENDIX 5: RESEARCH PROJECT DESIGN. MAPPING OUT THE HE EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS' PERSPECTIVE OF ESD

THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

What kind of actions/practices do local actors take in relation to SDGs?

What are the patterns of collaboration and building engagement with other actors in realizing SDGs?

How do local actors understand ESD?

What kind of values shapes their understanding and action towards ESD?

**your group/organization/institution – put the name of LOCAL ACTOR:
activity, group, organization, institution*

INTERVIEWS PROMPTS:

- Actions and practices in relation to SDGs in local community
- Collaboration and building engagement in realizing SDGs with other actors (including university)
- Understanding the Education/Learning for SD by local actors
- Any other important subjects from the cultural, local, regional perspectives and needs

INTERVIEWS QUESTIONS:

I. SDGS IN COMMUNITY

What is the history of your activity/group/organization/institution in the local community/city/ region?

What values are the most important for your group/organization/institution in local actions/activities?

What actions of your group/organization/institution were the significant for local community life and why?

Have you ever heard about SDGs? Does your activity/groups/institution promote any sustainable development goals? If yes, what are the goals of SD most often implemented in the community?

II. COLLABORATION AND ENGAGEMENT ON SDGS/ESD

How does your group/organization/institution collaborate with citizens?

Who/what local actor/ is the most important partner for your group/ organization/institution activities?

Does your group/organization/institution cooperate with the local university? If yes, in what ways? If not, what are the reasons?

How does your group/organization/institution build and promote the attractiveness of your activities for the local community?

III. UNDERSTANDING OF ESD IN LOCAL ACTIVITIES

What understanding (knowledge) and values (attitudes) does your group/organization/institution promote to local community?

What forms and methods of education and learning does your group/organization/institution use in everyday activities?

Who is responsible in local community for the education for sustainable development? Who is a leader of ESD in your local community?

Does the approach to ESD in the community need to change, and if so, what changes?

The creation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 marked the beginning of a collective effort to mitigate critical socio-ecological challenges. A decade later, this volume offers significant insights into how the SDGs are interpreted and implemented through higher education institutions' joint actions in four different countries: Italy, Poland, Portugal, and Sweden. The report builds on the findings of a previous volume (Nizińska, & Galimberti, 2024), in which researchers from the ESDEUS project mapped university policies in the field of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), contextualising their analysis within the national policies of the four countries.

Following the first volume, this comprehensive report focuses on ESD and the role of universities, other organisations, and stakeholders. The current comparative study addresses three key issues: how actors interpret ESD, the actions they take to implement the SDGs, and the collaborative networks created in this effort. It provides a comprehensive guide that showcases actors' perspectives on ESD and the actions they have implemented to promote SDGs, all within the context of local policies. As such, the volume becomes a resource to empower local and European universities, stakeholders and social actors with tools to address ongoing challenges to social justice and sustainability issues effectively.

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