



Knowledge hub
-
Collection of best practices

Summary of the best practice

1. Title of the best practice (e.g. name of policy, programme, project, etc.) *

Whole-institutional ESD school network

2. Country or countries where the practice is implemented *

Hungary

3. Please select the **most relevant** Action Track(s) the best practice applies to *

- Action Track 1. Inclusive, equitable, safe, and healthy schools
- Action Track 2. Learning and skills for life, work, and sustainable development
- Action Track 3. Teachers, teaching and the teaching profession
- Action Track 4. Digital learning and transformation
- Action Track 5. Financing of education

4. Implementation lead/partner organization(s) *

Ministry of Human Capacities of Hungary

5. Key words (5-15 words): Please add key descriptive words around aims, modalities, target groups etc. *

sustainability
formal education
network
whole-institutional approach
self-reflection
learning organisation
school community

6. What makes it a best practice? *

Initiated as a bottom-up approach then mainstreamed in public education, this 22 year-old network has lessons of transformation, self-reflection and a story of growing from a handful of local schools to a national network. It is completely voluntary, building on school communities' ownership, dedication to become learning organisations for sustainability at a local level, and supporting them by providing opportunities for sharing and building knowledge at national level. The ministry coordination aims to bring international trends and knowledge to schools and provide rather tools for growing locally and regionally on a long term than direct short-term project sources.

Description of the best practice

7. Introduction (350-400 words)

This section should ideally provide the context of, and justification for, the practice and address the following issues:

- i) Which population was affected?
- ii) What was the problem that needed to be addressed?
- iii) Which approach was taken and what objectives were achieved? *

Founded in 2000 with 22 schools on board, the Hungarian Eco-School Network was the first official and nationwide environmental education school network in Hungary, which has been coordinated by the Ministry of Human Capacities of Hungary. From the very beginning, it was a whole-institutional network, open to all types of educational institutions from primary schools to secondary schools, VET schools, special needs schools, art schools and dormitories. Then it transformed to an ESD network, establishing own criteria, awards system, self-reflection cycles along indicators describing aspects of 'ideal practice'.

The original aim was to create a supporting peer community and a knowledge sharing platform. Then it transformed to an excellence network keeping the strong traits of the supportive peer network but also establishing own criteria and award system. Nowadays a strong aim is to promote the whole-institutional model of operation (thus transforming the learning environment and approach) as well as to support local collaboration with a variety of actors (from local communities to regional up to international partners) and to provide a strong knowledge building platform. Another aim is to recognise schools' achievements and efforts and encourage a continuing learning journey of the school communities towards sustainability. The Hungarian Eco-school Network coordinates, announces and organises in-service teacher trainings and programs for those schools that put the principles of sustainability in the centre of their curricula and operation. Moreover, pedagogical supplementary materials, books and educational packages are prepared or regularly recommended by the Network to support the daily work of the member schools and to keep them up to date.

The Hungarian Eco-school Network has reached over one-third of student and teacher population as well as one-third of schools from all school types (including public, private and church schools). Its 22 years of existence is a testimony in itself that the approach is working, but also a proof that the self-reflection, the agility and the adaptiveness of the whole network is needed for continuous operation.

Members of the Hungarian Eco-school Network work along a set of shared values and pedagogical approaches that not only allows but nurtures setting local criteria, targets and indicators for each school. The Network defines itself as a learning community for sustainability where knowledge building and peer support outscore other benefits from being members. Honest self-reflection and trust are core values in both the awarding system and the daily operation of eco-schools.

8. Implementation (350-450 words)

Please describe the implementation modalities or processes, where possible in relation to:

- i) What are the main activities carried out?
- ii) When and where the activities were carried out (including the start date and whether it is ongoing)?
- iii) Who were the key implementation actors and collaborators? (civil society organizations, private sector, foundations, coalitions, networks etc.)?
- iv) What were the resources needed (budget and sources) for the implementation?

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Eco-schools operate with an ESD-focused local curriculum and a whole-school approach. Schools are requested to showcase their ESD activities on their own website, while regional eco-school meetings provide opportunities for them to share and exchange experiences. The Network has ongoing activities since 2000.

Based on the National Core Curriculum, schools in Hungary are expected to support students in developing their sense of responsibility for the environment, for cultural values and for the future of our communities. This is already a challenging and vital mission to them, but eco-schools go beyond it. Besides the daily practice of learning, they extend ESD-related activities and the value-based attitudes to their community lives. On top, they organize whole-institutional project days and thematic weeks, and take part in regional, national, and international programs. The daily life in these schools and kindergartens is special, compared to other public schools, because ESD values are present in all segments of school life. Students engage in a variety of activities: volunteering, advocating, raising parents' attention, collaborating with local businesses and communities, or as green student entrepreneurs. Eco-schools invite their students to take tangible actions for their local environment and they empower students to reflect on global challenges of sustainability. Students participate in field trips, collaborate locally, and get involved in mapping and solving ESD-related problems – already from an early age. In these schools, students' voices are heard, and students' actions are regarded as important contribution to the local community's life.

The constantly growing Network is open to every Hungarian public educational institution with a yearly open application system built on self-evaluation according to a set of criteria. The application process invites schools to go through a reflective cycle including the revision of existing and proposed activities from an ESD point of view referring to the set of quality criteria provided and accepted by the Network, then setting their own challenges and assessing their results leading to another cycle of reflection and revision. After a successful application, schools are allowed to possess the title Eco-school, which they may renew every three years. After two consecutive successful applications, schools are eligible to apply for the title Permanent Eco-school.

Eco-schools collaborate with a variety of other stakeholders, from other educational institutions to universities, research institutions, industries, NGOs, sports clubs, churches etc.

Resources are needed to organise knowledge building (such as e-platform, regional meetings, school visits to peer members), to coordinate the award application and for monitoring and mentoring schools.

9. Results – outputs and outcomes (250-350 words)

To the extent possible, please reply to the questions below:

- i) How was the practice identified as transformative? (e.g., impact on policies, impact on management processes, impact on delivery arrangements or education monitoring, impact on teachers, learners and beneficiary communities etc.);
- ii) What were the concrete results achieved with regard to outputs and outcomes?
- iii) Has an assessment of the practice been carried out? If yes, what were the results? *

According to research, the whole-institutional approach has impact on the school's ethos, atmosphere, organisation, management processes, but also on students' engagement, place attachment and even dropout rates. Teachers are more motivated in eco-schools to engage in educational innovation, more open to share their practices and to collaborate with local community actors. Students remain or become more open towards sustainability topics and have a more developed agency to act for their environment. The application process that builds on honest reflection and trust also has beneficial effects on the whole network. It can be assumed that the practice is transformative in terms of personal and community value sets, attitudes and in developing ESD-related competences.

In the past 22 years the Network has grown to over 1300 schools all over Hungary, representing about 35% of schools in the country. All school types in the spectrum of the Hungarian public education system are represented in Eco-school Network. These schools engage in a yearly reflective self-evaluation cycle along shared values and indicators and establish and revise their local aims, criteria and indicators for 3-year cycles.

There has been a number of research projects (including master and doctoral thesis works connected to the Hungarian Eco-school Network), and findings support the notions mentioned above. New research initiatives are also planned.

The fact that it is a network that is constantly growing for 22 years supports that the network has a transformative effect to the entirety of the public educational system in the country.

10. Lessons learnt (300 words)

To the extent possible, please reply to the following questions:

- i) What were the key triggers for transformation?
- ii) What worked really well – what facilitated this?
- iii) What did not work – why did it not work? *

The key triggers for transformation are the shift towards becoming learning communities, the power of peer support and recognition and the access to shared knowledge.

The most powerful result is that the network shares values and aims, constantly builds knowledge on pedagogical approaches in ESD and is flexible enough to adapt to changes, even by revising its own criteria. This latter point however is what also implies challenges: reflection to changed approaches and developing new answers and approaches to them are demanding tasks for members and for the entire network. Secondly, the shift from environmental education to ESD imposed challenges on members, by adopting new practices, opening to new attitudes, embracing other values, extending learning to other fields. This is an ongoing challenge though, as emerging topics and solutions are present. Thirdly, it is a challenge is to find or keep motivation for members on the long-term. The Network coordination is constantly seeking solutions – and in many cases finds meaningful answers, such as changing roles for the most experienced or oldest members of the Network as hosting regional meetings, collaborating in research and development activities, supporting other members – however, it is an ongoing task.

11. Conclusions (250 words)

Please describe why may this intervention be considered a “best practice”.

What recommendations can be made for those intending to adopt the documented “best practice” or how can it help people working on the same issue(s)? *

In Hungary, the Eco-School Network with its respective self-assessment and award system is an efficient representative of the whole-institutional approach of ESD. Every third student is educated in these institutions and more than 30% of the overall population of Hungarian teachers are involved into this challenging task. The Network has been operating since 2000, and in itself is a valuable example of a learning organisation building on honest self-reflection, trust and knowledge-building. Central coordination allows extension from local to national levels and channels in information form international organisations, frameworks and trends, while directly supporting the operation of the network. Guidelines are updated every year and available as awarding scheme.

The network is adaptable, but enough time and space should be allowed for bottom-up growing and horizontal knowledge sharing and building within the network. Also time, support and trust should be dedicated to participating schools to establish their own vision, aims and criteria.

12. Further reading

Please provide a list and URLs of key reference documents for additional information on the “best practice” for those who may be interested in knowing how the results benefited the beneficiary group/s. *

https://www.oktatas.hu/kozneveles/pedagogiai_szakmai_szolgaltatasok/fenntarthatosagra_nevel-es