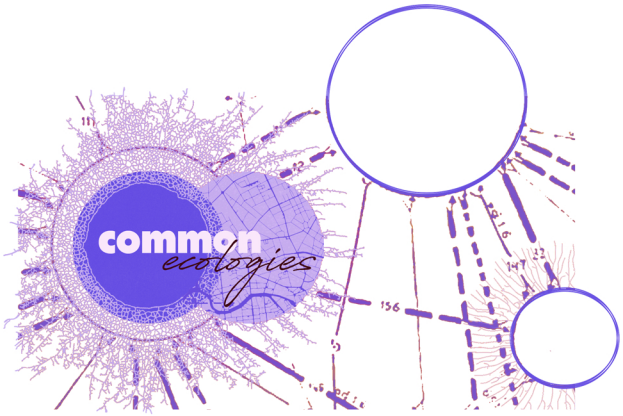
Ways into Ecosocial Education



Common Ecologies 2026

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Common Ecologies *is a movement school and a platform for movement learning, alliance-building and co-research. We work with people, groups and movements that struggle for socio-ecological transformation and justice in a way that favours long-term organising, meaningful engagement and honest alliances. Our focus lies on earthcare and agro-ecological change, ecosocial education and ecological syndicalism, as axes of transformation. We organize discussions, encounters, co-learning processes and courses, combining online translocal activities with embodied and place-based engagement. Our work is mostly based out of different locations in Europe, linking to a network of allies, collaborators and referents across the world.*

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introduction

Mushrooming into Ecosocial Education and Justice

Schools, as complicated as they are, are strange and magical places. Or could be. They're the only spaces where we all have to share our daily time with a group of people we don't necessarily have much in common with, a space designated for becoming and learning and growing. A school building is a bit like a magic mushroom to us when we're kids, with secret corners, delicate spots and slippery slopes - full of relations, challenges, emotions and encounters. Schools are like mushrooms in our cities and towns, there's more of them than our eyes can see, and sometimes they even take unexpected forms, in the forest or in a temporary space.

In this book we're centered on the public school and its manifestations, including its decentering by the many other ways of learning, teaching, inhabiting that different educational experiments bring. We're interested in the back-and-forth between the public institution and the great big outside as well as the diverse and rustling inside. We're interested, in particular, in the pathways we make in and out of those buildings called schools - primary and secondary, but universities too. We know that schools, as institutions shaped and weighed down on by state and market, are not easy spaces of transformation: it takes some magic and persistence to unfold that potential within them.

Pathways in

This book is about ways into ecosocial education, meaning: what pathways, secret or overt, do we create to take ecosocial education into schools, and to connect schools with other places of ecosocial learning? This is about exchanging, translating, trafficking, guiding and experimenting: there's no one way to do ecosocial education in a school or outside it. Education, like anything else, grows from diversity and care, not from rigid principles - which is why we made this book as a compendium of little stories, tactics, practices and methods. It's meant to be a toolkit that allows different people to experiment, get inspired and find their way in.

These pages hold a diversity of seeds, spores and tales that are close to the work and lives of all of us writing this across places, rather than an exhaustive compendium or register of what is out there. We hope they can work as an excuse for conversations and experiments.

There's two main layers to how we can get into eco-social education and learning - as a frame of mind and practice, a pathway of transformation and justice, as a possible institution, and a community of humans and other life.

The first layer - which constitutes the first section of our book here - is to do with who we are, with the roles we play in education, the hats we wear. Are we a teacher, parent or other caregiver, institutional agent, activist or student? Each of these roles comes with different possibilities and limitations in terms of getting in. We're not interested in them as identities as much as positions we can choose to inhabit for parts of our time, each with their tactical and practical remits and tools. We all hold some knowledge and power in this dance called education, and this book is about how we can create synergies, alliances and common dreams across our respective positions and possibilities.

A teacher may have a ladder and a rope they can fetch from the sports hall, to make a pathway into school; while a student might have a nimble body to climb a tree and hop in, to open the door from the inside; a parent may have a shovel and an aunt may have a big pot, to dig a tunnel under the fence or make a delicious meal that has everyone follow its smell to the outside; a principal, administrator or policy maker may have a phone line they can put to good use, running or even leaking some important information over it; an activist may have paint to make beautiful graffiti outside school that everyone ponders as they go in and out, or indeed a big umbrella to make the school extend beyond its walls... and so on.

The second layer is not about who we are, but about where we are. Ecosocial education is not a thing you can apply to places from above. It's not a canon or syllabus, but a series of ideas and principles that live in places, in different ways. And it's very much about how our places are connected. We live in a globalised world, and our schools are full of people marked by this world: from the clothes we wear to the migrations we make to the information we absorb via our screens. The challenge of ecosocial education is about starting from where we are - our situated, embodied, common grounds - and seeing and drawing the connections to where we inter-depend with. Ecosocial education, in this sense, is deeply ecofeminist, alterglobalist, community and justice driven.

While you teach recycling over there, we get the trash from your country dumped over here near our village school; while we start to see drought and climate crisis over here, you've already come from a long path of adaptation and migration, and could teach us a fair bit about crisis and care; while we're anxious and depressed from spending too much time online, you folks have been struggling against that data center and the way it sucks up freshwater and energy. You're students, we're movements, you're teachers, we're families, you're migrants, we're locals, you're decision-makers, we're changemakers, you're children, we're older, you're biological family, we're queer or transspecies kin, you're friends, we're community, you're urban, we're rural - and so on.

What do we mean by ecosocial education?

To us, ecosocial education is many things, a plurality of approaches, but with some common underlying drifts:

- It's both eco and social, meaning it's not just environmentalism on one side and people with their dirty business on the other. Ecosocial means the social and ecological are part and parcel of the same thing, they interdepend. There's no saving nature from a sovereign human position, just as there's no pure nature spoiled by nasty humans: we're entangled in symbiotic systems and contradictions that we need to resolve through other means than categorical differentiation or ideas of supremacy or superiority. It's neither nature first nor people first, it's both.
- It's about recognizing interdependence and vulnerability, as sources of strength and learning. Our planetary boundaries just as our personal boundaries, and our ways of needing things and one another for survival and love, are not something

to try to get rid of. We educate for care, in a critical spirit. Ecosocial education is about teaching and learning which bonds and ties are toxic and which are precious, it's about knowing what we need and appreciating where we get it from, whilst recognizing what others need and grasping what we don't need.

- In ecosocial education, we work with local and embodied problems whilst tracing their connections to broader translocal and global dynamics. We learn and teach about ways of struggling - collectively and personally - to overcome problems in ways that address their origin, not just their effects. Ecosocial education is radical education in this sense of going to the root of problems, rather than dealing with symptoms only.

- Ecosocial education, learning and organising is not a thing of specialists or professionals, it's something all of us do and can do. It's about the ways in which we interweave and intervene with our own realities and pay attention to those of others, knowing that people are always best equipped to set their own terms and demands. Ecosocial education, the way we understand it, is therefore a grassroots matter. It can involve facilitators, caretakers, people with certain experience and expert knowledge, those affected - all at an equal level. It's an everyday practice.

- Ecosocial education is deschooling, in the sense that it challenges us to step back from the state- and market-based demands on education that are to do with conformity, productivity, hierarchy, profit, individualism and competition. We try to learn and teach other ways of being, living and working together, as human communities as well as with other species and ecosystems. So we learn to de-center the human, patriarchal, profit-driven 'normal' - which is in great minority globally - and relearn and reschool for care, justice, peace and respectful curiosity.

- We are always both learners and teachers in ecosocial education. We sometimes have things to share whilst at other times we have things to learn. Our roles are not fixed identities but functions of our entanglements and responsibilities. Ecosocial education encourages us to become responsive and at the same time know our limits and the boundaries of others. It's rooted in pedagogies of listening as much as of engagement.

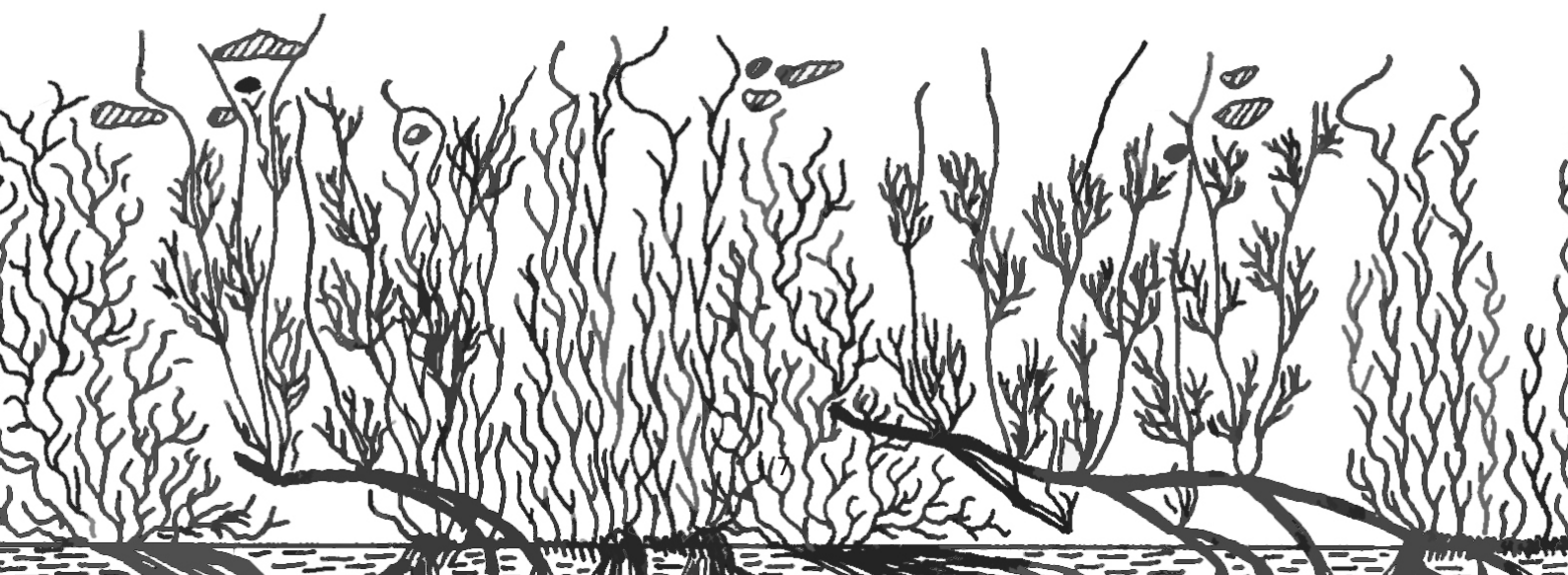
- In this learning process we embrace the feminist ideas of knowledge in plural, and understand knowledges as different, situated ways of knowing (Haraway 1988). We pay attention to local knowledges, intergenerational knowledges, knowledges of the more than human world around us, the same way we engage with knowledges from books, different sciences, and different ways of understanding the world. Our paying attention is fueled with respect, love and criticality.

About this Book

This is a guidebook, a toolkit, for anyone wanting to find their ways into ecosocial education and schools, and transform them from the inside, outside, or anywhere in between. It's made so that a thousand mushrooms can spore and change the world by slow metabolism. There's no right or wrong way of using this book, nor are any of the things stated here total. Take them and make them your own; question them and translate them into your context; try them and go beyond them as you see fit. Read one section or many. Use it as an excuse to start conversations with others around you about ecosocial justice in your education settings. Add a section. Make your own.

Part 1 is to do with our roles in education and ecosocial justice, and works its way through a series of positions and their potentials: what can we do as teachers, families, institutional agents, students and activists? We suggest you don't just read the section that corresponds to your current role: we conceived this section like a prism where you can look through different perspectives and positions, to learn more about your own and how you might build an alliance.

Part 2 is to do with where we are speaking, teaching and learning from when we try to address ecosocial issues in schools of different types, in a geographical sense. It builds on 5 key regional entries, written by our regional nodes in the Eastern Mediterranean,



Iberian Peninsula, British and Irish Isles, German speaking countries and South Africa. These are featured because that's where we had sufficient collective grounding. Each regional entry talks about the forms of eco-social consciousness, struggle and institutionality that exist in regions and countries, to map out what ecosocial education means in different geographical contexts. Because ecosocial education is not at all the same thing in different places, even if across those places there are many connections.

Part 3 has worksheets, which relate to the role- and place- based entries of previous sections and offer concrete ways to address problems in the classroom and beyond. It has exercises apt for teachers, students, families, activists and institution-makers - to be adapted to context. These work through questions of waste education, community gardening in schools, generational memory, roleplay, critical science education and AI-related technologies. They offer glimpses into how we who made this book do things sometimes - a not at all complete sample for your inspiration and experimentation.

We made this book for easy printing at home or in school, as well as for photocopying. It's designed for low ink use and easy self-distribution. It's licensed as open content so please sample and remix it as you see fit, within your educational, activist, work or home communities. We would love to see this book bound in school libraries and handed out at teachers meetings, circulated online as a Pdf, and used as a toolkit by those who train teachers, campaign for change or work freelance to shape education. We hope to see it translated and used in different languages.

The 'we' who made this book is very plural - there was a core group of a dozen of us who wrote texts within it: Manuela Zechner, Nelly Alfandari, Amerissa Giannouli, Raúl Almendro, Martina Huber Kriegler, Déna Jansen, Julija Petrovska, Alexandros Kioupliolis, Nancy Serrano, as well as Burcu Meltem Arik and Evie Kouroumaki. We wrote under the guidance of Nelly Alfandari and Manuela Zechner who coordinate the Ecosocial Education strand of Common Ecologies, and had facilitated a year of online fora to build the process, group and knowledge base we draw on here. We highly recommend the video recordings of those sessions as complementary material, you can find them linked below. Manuela did the overall framing and editing work. Ottawa-based illustrator nicole marie burton gave our writing shape, shade and beauty with her design and illustrations.

We all worked in our respective local contexts as we shaped this text, learning and commenting and experimenting, so this book builds on a spiderweb of situated experiences that we feed out of as well as into. That's work which doesn't begin or end with this book: thankfully. We're grateful for the muti-year funding we got from the Centre for Applied Ecological Thinking at Copenhagen University, as well as the support we got from many of the organisations and people mentioned in the books first pages: it's those bits that made all this possible and feasible.

We dedicate this to all the kids who make a fuss and mess, who ask the important questions and refuse to accept simple answers; who feel their connection and know this is what matters most; to all the teachers who have guided and oriented us and to all our elders in place and time; to those who came before us and fought and worked tirelessly for a world that's beautiful and alive; to all the living creatures that have taught us process, patience and composition - in gardens and flower pots, parks, fields, balconies, forests, farms, rivers, lakes and the sea. We know that we are connected, and that we are born to learn.

- *Manuela Zechner and Nelly Alfandari,*
coordinating editors

To dive in more, see our ecosocial education fora videos: *https://tinyurl.com/EcosocialCurricula* **and the Common Ecologies Ecosocial Education strand page:** *commonecologies.net/strands-2/eco-social-education*

part 1

The Hats we wear, the Roles we play... in Education

In education, we can play different roles: teacher/educator, family/caregiver, student/trainee, institutional or policy agent, activist/facilitator... for sure, we all are learners, and we often inhabit several of these roles at once. This can make us feel schizoid and crazy at certain moments, and wise and empowered at others.

In this section, we go through some of those key positions we can occupy in education – the possibilities and challenges they bring, and the potential ways in which they can be transformatively aligned and allied with other positionalities.

Being different is always enriching, even when we struggle with it. Sometimes it takes such a struggle to be able to build something new, go beyond the usual boundaries, expectations and identities. Sometimes it also takes firm opposition, a refusal or a strike, and our positions can't be consolidated – either way, it always helps to understand each other's remits and needs. This is why in this section, we try to open as many doors into the school as possible – including back doors and cranky windows, the door through which the garbage is taken out and that front door with the sign. We aim to provide inspiration for how we can help each other into the school through these different pathways, lifting each other over obstacles or giving away the secrets of success.

The roles we play are like costumes we wear, hats we put on – we like to see them not as fixed identities but as positions in a greater game. Playing along, or indeed trying to win something, requires strategies and tactics, knowledge of the field and other players. The aim we work towards, our shared horizon of winning, is to do with the ecosocial transformation of schools and education – not with careers or better grades. In order to build lasting transformation, we need to understand the needs, interests and desires of others (as well as our own) as we exist within a system. That's why you may well want to read more than just the section corresponding to your current identity, below. Jump and skip through this as you see fit – you can add your own thoughts in the margins and blanks of these pages, or cut them up and hand them to friends, perhaps even for some role-play. And remember: in one way or another, you may well already inhabit several of these roles, even if you don't think of yourself that way. Enjoy!

Are you a teacher?

To this day, school is the only obligatory process everyone has to participate in for a specific period of their lives. It can therefore be seen as a compulsory 'workshop' where we rehearse living together with people from different parts of life, and the first time with people outside the family structures we are brought up in. For most of us, and to varying degrees, it is the only time throughout our lives when we are confronted on a daily basis with people who are different from us: in terms of socio-economic status, background, life experiences, language, beliefs, oppressions (both exercised and suffered), etc. Educating could then be seen as learning how to live together and learning together how to live, as stated by philosopher Marina Garcés (Garcés, 2020). We, as educators, should keep in mind that it is within these 'living-together laboratories' that society disputes and unequally distributes its futures. As teachers for social justice, to us this means to understand our profession as a struggle of the every-day against inequalities, injustices and exclusions that impact our ways of living together and affect possibilities for change. Let's see some ways of trying to approach this difficult and fascinating task.

Ways in to teaching ecosocial education

How to be able to do it

Depending on your geographical location and its education system or national curriculum, as well as the type of school setting (public/private/etc.), and also the type of neighbourhood and demographics in the school – there are many institutional and cultural differences to consider when trying to figure out how to propose delivering ecosocial justice lessons, or even attempts to shift the curriculum as a whole. However, thinking of the classroom level, the actual learning moments shared with your students, there are many similarities across geography and demographic. Here are a few different negotiation strategies and experiences of trying to be able to get into the classroom:

See also:
The Advocacy Campaign of *Teachers for Future* and *Scientists for Future* (p 42), *FUHEM* (p 37) and *EDUALTER* (p 39)

Institution Tango

What aspects exist in my institutional contexts, which are part of the curriculum/ learning set up, that could be somewhat compatible with the ecosocial justice classes we have in mind? How much of your ideas will you need to give up or negotiate, in order to fit into the institutional structures? Are there any traditions or subjects in your educational context that would lend themselves to ecosocial justice classes?

Opening the back door

Maybe as a teacher your hands are tied, or you don't feel equipped to actually deliver the class, but maybe you have some liberties of inviting others into your classroom, or organising an excursion? Here it can be exciting to think about whom to invite/ visit, and maybe use this opportunity to diversify the type of person, language and ways of perceiving the world, students are usually exposed to in their school. Maybe this can help introduce different kinds of role models to them, even different references of knowledge sources, etc.

How to do it
(Methodological/ Content)

Once you made your way into a setup of being able to work with a group of students on ecosocial education, the question arises: How do I teach this bearing in mind the differences students might bring to this learning space, their different bodies of knowledge, experiences, family contexts, in relation to ecosocial justice. Based on their possible trajectories of migration, class background, living situation etc., some students or their families might well be exposed to some of the issues you want to discuss. Gloomy facts and figures around the climate crisis, might bring about strong emotional reactions from students. So what methods can be helpful in setting up learning spaces around ecosocial justice? There are various educational movements and pedagogical frameworks we can learn from, to help us with this (social justice teaching, environmental education, anti-racist education, critical pedagogies, place-based pedagogies, etc.):

- engaging with local issues the students might know about, like a struggle to save a local park from being built on, a parking lot turned into a neighbourhood garden, a nearby polluted river, struggle around drinking water, tourism etc. (e.g…)

- exploring local knowledges around this topic (school community, neighbours, family members, local archives etc.)

- critically exploring these contexts, practicing critical literacy and critical thinking. For example, ask questions like:

    » What is taken for granted? Who speaks? Whose perspective is being shown? What are the assumptions behind it? Whose voices or experiences are excluded? Are there contradictions? How is information being gathered and shared?

    » This is a resource that inspired us: *https://decolonialfutures.net/headsup*

- imagining just alternatives, exploring what would justice mean in this context, who is implicated/affected by the situation, and how? What is the background context to the situation, historically and geographically?

- Are there different ways of understanding the situation?

- What knowledge do we lack to understand the context/ situation/ what knowledge do we need to propose alternatives? Where can we find it/ learn about it? How?

Thinking of a lesson/ series of lessons:

This kind of work can be developed as project work and ties into different curricular aspects. It lends itself to practicing group work and student-led research. Creative teaching tools like art and drama could be included. But it can also be delivered as a series of maths problems, or a text based reading and writing lesson.

See also: Ecosocial Participatory Action Research, Critical Science Education (p 52)

What does eco-social education mean
in school life, beyond the classroom moments?

How do I want to implement this in my teaching practice overall? How can I bring these ideas into my daily practice, understanding my overall teaching practice as ecosocial justice practice? In an ideal imagination, the limits between teaching a clearly framed 'eco-social justice class', and the practice of being a teacher, blur. Here some questions we are thinking about:

How do I relate to the students, to my colleagues and co-workers, superiors/ educational authorities/ school management... and the school as a place in general, with an ecosocial pedagogical vision? How can I combine other aspects of my teaching with these ideas? Like for example when we discuss a math equation, an exam prep class, a playground duty, after school club, a lunch time moment, etc.?

Can there be a relationship between my life in the neighbourhood or city, and my work as a teacher? And can there be a relationship between my activism and teaching?

Strategies to support yourself

» Create or join teacher networks to do this together (see: rad ed clinic example, p 48)

» Possibilities through teacher training

» Supervision for teachers!

See also:
The *Be Resilient Project*, Cape Winelands Biosphere Reserve (p 50)

for example...

Docents 083

Our platform was born, driven by the Sindicats d'Habitatge de Mataró i del Baix Maresme (Regional Housing Unions of Mataró and Baix Maresme). This is in line with the creation of similar platforms such as Docents 17190 and Docents 080 from Salt and Barcelona. We felt the urge to respond in the name of the schools located in Maresme (a Catalan region in the province of Barcelona) to the housing problems suffered by our society and, in particular, a good part of our students. We understand that the school is not a bubble and we therefore cannot ignore this problem, as students who live in substandard housing or are at risk of eviction also suffer from this at school. We cannot defend equality in education without also addressing such a conflict that generates so much inequality among students.

From the first moment, we have received demands from other teachers, head teachers or AFAs (Students' Families Association) who, when faced with the eviction of a child at their school, feel helpless and ask us what they can do. Therefore, one of the first things that we did was to develop a protocol on how to act in case of an eviction, especially to accompany the children but also their families. The aim is to make resources available to them and at the same time support them not to feel shame and guilt for not being able to access decent housing in the current market. Yet it was clear to us that, as teachers, we also had to focus on developing tools to be able to explain this problem to our students, to help them understand the origin and consequences, but also to break myths or prejudices that circulate and that are the breeding ground of the extreme right and of a society that is becoming more and more individualized and insensitive to the misfortune of the other.

We believe that educational communities (teachers, students and families) are a key tool to change the vision of society and understand the importance of having decent housing. As teachers we believe that we had to take a step forward, but the involvement of AFAs and neighborhood associations is also essential to create a network and to force the administration to address the problem in a more holistic way.

- Bernat, Docents 083

Are you a parent/caregiver?

As parents, we're in a strange position vis-a-vis this strange beast they call school. We're not quite in, but also not quite out. We leave our kids at the gate but sometimes go in to see end-of-year performances. Particularly in public schools, and even more so in poorly resourced areas and systems, it can be hard to find the ways into an institution that lacks resources, staff and time.
As parents, we can be vital actors for enhancing a schools' capacity to care about more than the bare basics of schooling, but we need to proceed with great thoughtfulness. It takes time to get to understand this fluffy beast, and often our kids are already halfway through their time at an institution when we've finally connected to other parents and teachers, and begin to socialize ideas about what could be done. It's really helpful to not walk into this situation unprepared, which is why we propose these pages of ideas and advice for parents. If you feel it's time to get working on bringing ecosocial thinking and sensitivity into your kid's educational environment, this is for you!

Starting school:
Mapping and Finding Allies

When we start at a new institution – and as parents we do, alongside our kids! – we have a lot to learn. Being a parent is a rollercoaster of learning new institutional protocols and challenges, building new relations and guiding our child as well as ourselves through it all. No one prepares us for this experience, nor does anyone accompany us automatically. We have no maps to navigate by: schools have changed since we ourselves were pupils in them, and in any case our position as parent is radically different from that of student, so we need to map out things anew. If we're in a context very different from the one we grew up in, be it in terms of geography, language, culture or class, we're even more challenged to develop our own roadmaps.

All we have is ourselves and the allies we find: and allies and mapping go together! Other parents, sometimes those who have several kids in a school and run through various cycles in the institution, are invaluable sources of information, mutual support and care. Never walk alone in a school! Get chatting to other parents, go to socials and find ways to talk to other parents. Everyone is awkward in these moments, but ultimately they're all grateful to exchange information and contacts, because we're all in the same boat, needing allies to navigate this time. If you're in a solid enough situation to organise socials to make parents meet, that works wonders! You can use your kid's birthday party to create occasions for socializing, or go via the school's parents association to organise events, where there may also be a budget for this. Try building many alliances, rather than sticking just to 1-2 other parents, to build collective strength rather than just a fraction.

At the same time, meeting teachers on less formal and high-pressure occasions is also important. It's vital to build trust with your child's teachers, and they will often be overworked and cautious of what they share. So make sure to take time to get to know them, show appreciation when you can, thank them for their work and offer support when parents can come in. You might not agree with their style or personality, but they are the keys to your child's education and what you need to work with. At minimum, try to establish a relation of respect – if it feels like there is an opening on which you can maybe build to eventually make proposals, go for it! You need to both go slow to build trust, and seize the opportunity when it arises.

Building Alliances and Making Proposals:
Via the Parents' Association and Beyond

Your school's parents association is the prime space for you to get organised with other parents. Even when it looks like a very conservative, closed group, its general purpose is to enable all parents to participate, so you needn't feel bad for pushing your way in a bit. Most times, its members will be thankful for new members and energies, even if they lack the capacity to reach out – but even when you don't get a warm welcome, this is the place for you to be! Find allies to get into the association together, if you can, and take some time to understand the different actors and tendencies within it. Parents associations are perfect places for proposing ecosocial education projects, whether those are making a school garden, building raised beds or water collection systems, going on an excursion, bringing external facilitators in for special project days, or also bringing in certain learning materials.

Talking to teachers about ideas, proposals and materials can also be a very fruitful pathway for bringing ecosocial education into your kid's school. Approach them carefully and offer things humbly and casually, ideally thinking of what it takes for the teachers to activate whatever you are proposing. Would it take some budget to realise this? Maybe you can fundraise in your kid's class, via the schools parents association, at festive gatherings or through a newsletter. Would it take more people to join and help? Offer your support and rally other parents to offer theirs. If your proposal doesn't fit with any taught subjects, maybe it can be an afterschool activity, to be organised via the parents association, or as part of afternoon care in the institution? If you want to propose an alternative to a standard school activity that's problematic, research it before and offer support to teachers (see example below).

The neighbourhood:
No Ecosocial Education Without It

Your school's surroundings, both in social and ecological terms, are a key to making change real, accessible and sustainable. Resident neighbours and workers, built environments and open spaces, as well as local institutions and public spaces are a key part to ecosocial education. No school is an island. It's not just that most families going to a school live in the area around it, but also that a school environment is its space of possibility for transformation. Education means little if it's not lived; if school teaches us a bunch of abstract principles to be applied elsewhere, it's clear those principles are hypocritical and not worth remembering. Every child understands this. If we preach recycling, permaculture, diversity, care and solidarity but don't think about the highway bordering the neighbourhood, the waste incinerator nearby, the person standing at the corner asking for money, they deportation of a family from across the road, the fire in the council block next door, the new development of luxury flats built on the lovely plot that sprouted wild flowers and shrubs for years... then our teaching will have little meaning and effect.

As families, we are rooted in the neighbourhood. What all parents in a school have in common is the care for their neighbourhood, as their place of life, their children's space of play and socialization. Everyone wants social and environmental health to define this space. This shared desire and attention is vital for ecosocial education, and as caregivers we can take this into the school. We can often do this better than teachers, who may live in different neighbourhoods and only experience school as a place of work. Pollution and toxicity are great conversation starters in this sense, whether it's to do with air, water, soil or indeed also food, school meals, materials or construction within the school. Common gardens as spaces to take care of together as neighbours, whether within or outside the school grounds, are amazing sites for building complicity, solidarity, cohesion and collective power.

As families, we can demand our school as well as local council to give us agency in designing the space we live within, bringing campaigns for more green or safer spaces, for playground renovation or public housing into the school. Schools are resonant spaces for such campaigning, bringing together a very high proportion of people who care about their local environment, and once we find the allies within them that can help us carry our claims and imaginaries, we can go far. All this takes time and energy. If you are reading this, chances are you have the capacity to make this happen, at least in terms of motivation and understanding. Bundle your forces and knowledge with those of others: it always starts with a small hint, a conversation, a loose idea.

Ways in, in a nutshell:

- ***Parents association:*** *propose making working groups on the school gardens and nature, make ecosocial care fund to cover activities and equal participation.*
- ***Conversations starters with other families:*** *food and health, screen time and outdoor time, motherhood and eco-feminism, pollution and safety,*
- *energy prices, heat or cold.*
- ***Propose an excursion to an interesting socioecological site:*** *a local community garden or farm, the tram depot, the waste plant, local water infrastructure, a forest or protected nature site, train infrastructure sites, urban beekeepers, etc.*
- ***School gardens:*** *set them up, offer help maintaining them, link them to the neighbourhood!*
- ***Neighbourhood gardens:*** *set them up starting from the school, link them to classes, do weekend activities there, get a diverse community going via soil and seeds!*
- ***Organize events:*** *celebrations in nearby parks with other families, or a water day in school, similar seasonal and cyclical activities (seeding, harvest, sun, moon...).*
- ***Invite kids to talk*** *about socio-ecological challenges their parents faced where they came from, and why they moved where they moved.*

Families *are never just local*

A key challenge in many schools is to find ways of breaking the class, race and gender divide that defines our current paradigm of ecological care. If we're not to only be white, middle class, citizenship-endowed and often feminized primary caregivers to talk eco-education, we need to think the social with the ecological and also think outside our own cultural and geographical boxes. This means to recognise that we often don't understand each other's concerns, experiences and positionalities as families of different backgrounds. Listening is required, and while this is often hard to enable between parents, it is very possible via our children. They talk to each other, and talk to us, and as such are key mediators of knowledge and experiences.

An idea: Invite kids to talk about climate&ecological challenges and tricks in their parents' countries – so kids can ask their parents how they dealt with drought, heat, growing food in dry climates, too much rain, as a way to valorize their parents' knowledges and experiences and share stories. And/or propose to invite the parents to come talk about socioecological challenges in relation to their migration trajectories. Whether those trajectories are local-regional or international, people often migrate to give their kids a healthier and safer environment, from pollution to drought to floods. This can put different migration paths on an equal footing and valorize knowledge of those from areas already more affected by climate and ecological crisis.

for example...

The art of making proposals

When my daughter started in school, I got the agenda of all planned activities for the year and saw there was an expensive excursion to the airport scheduled. I thought this was a very bad idea and expressed this to the teachers in too direct a way: they got quite offended. I apologized and kept quiet for a while, but also proposed they do an excursion to the central train station and operation rooms instead. The teachers were open to the proposal, saying they didn't know of such a possibility: when I researched, I realised the national railway company offered no educational activities at all. I had to concede, the airport trip went ahead and the kids were immersed in fancy flight simulators and vague lies about fossil-free aviation futures. But I learned my lesson: I proposed with more foresight, diplomacy and consideration next time, when we set up a school garden in my kid's primary school.

- Manu,
parent-activist in Vienna

See also: "School Garden Recipe" in *Worksheets* section (p 66)

for example...

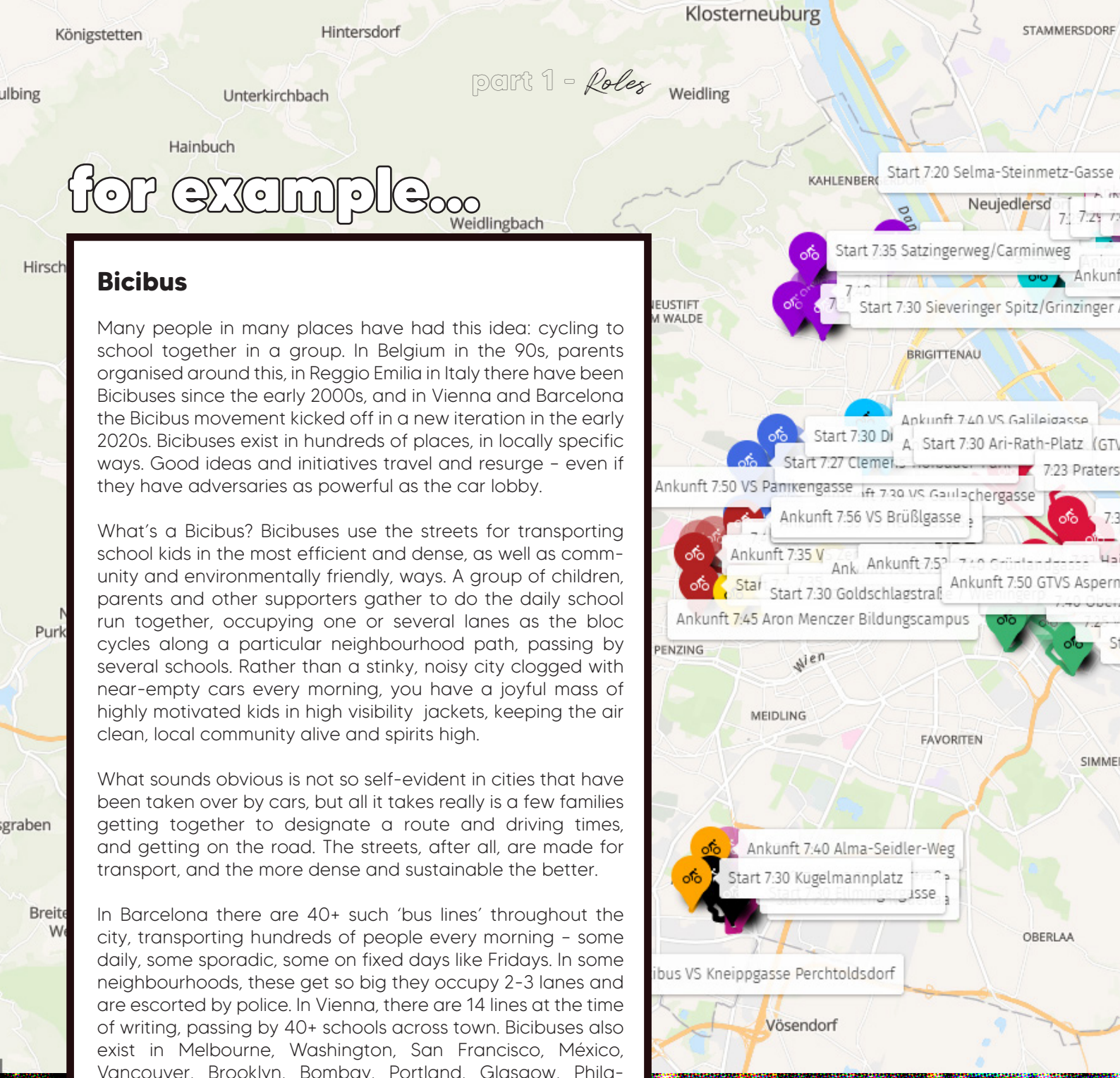
Bicibus

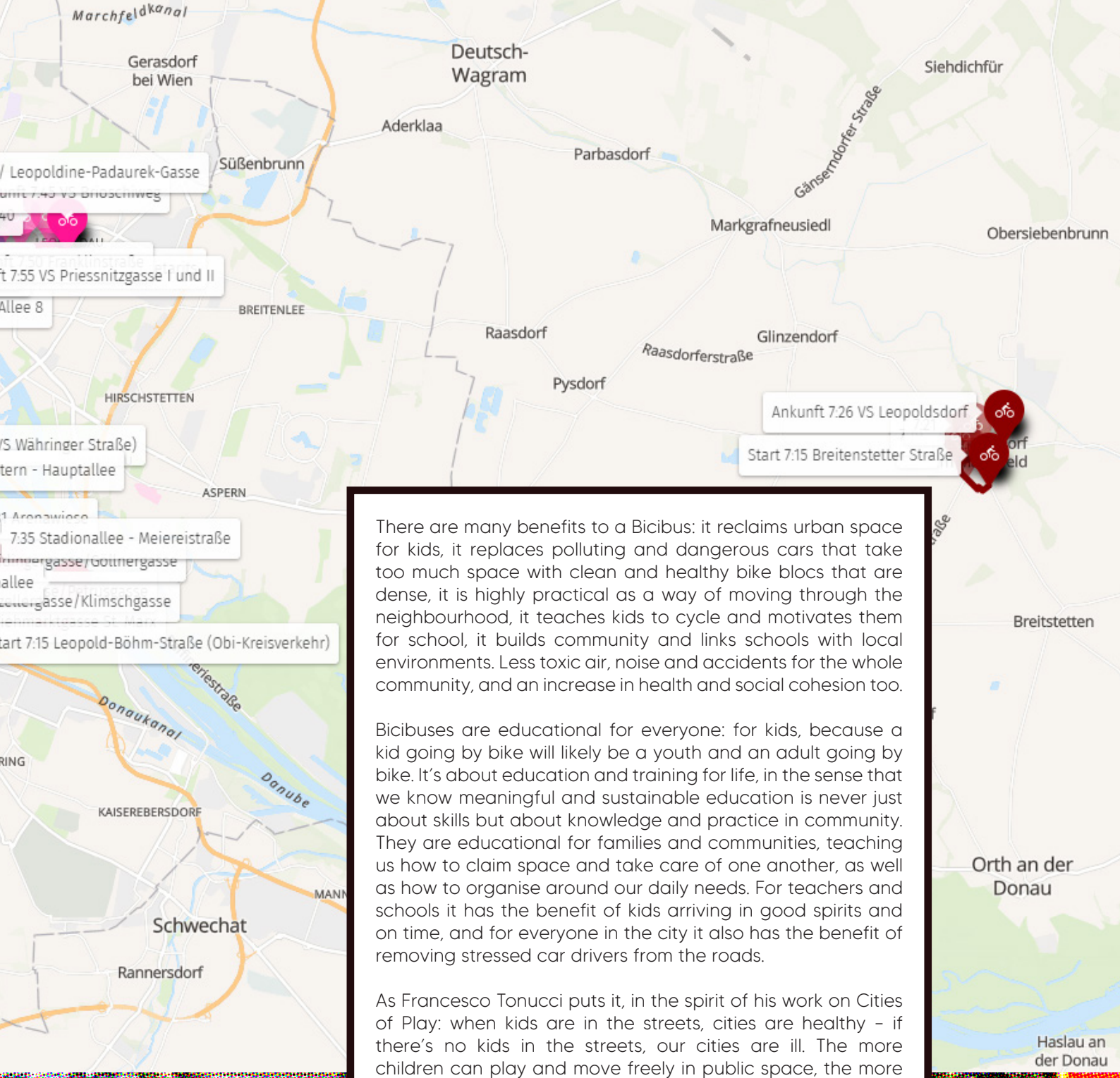
Many people in many places have had this idea: cycling to school together in a group. In Belgium in the 90s, parents organised around this, in Reggio Emilia in Italy there have been Bicibuses since the early 2000s, and in Vienna and Barcelona the Bicibus movement kicked off in a new iteration in the early 2020s. Bicibuses exist in hundreds of places, in locally specific ways. Good ideas and initiatives travel and resurge – even if they have adversaries as powerful as the car lobby.

What's a Bicibus? Bicibuses use the streets for transporting school kids in the most efficient and dense, as well as community and environmentally friendly, ways. A group of children, parents and other supporters gather to do the daily school run together, occupying one or several lanes as the bloc cycles along a particular neighbourhood path, passing by several schools. Rather than a stinky, noisy city clogged with near-empty cars every morning, you have a joyful mass of highly motivated kids in high visibility jackets, keeping the air clean, local community alive and spirits high.

What sounds obvious is not so self-evident in cities that have been taken over by cars, but all it takes really is a few families getting together to designate a route and driving times, and getting on the road. The streets, after all, are made for transport, and the more dense and sustainable the better.

In Barcelona there are 40+ such 'bus lines' throughout the city, transporting hundreds of people every morning – some daily, some sporadic, some on fixed days like Fridays. In some neighbourhoods, these get so big they occupy 2-3 lanes and are escorted by police. In Vienna, there are 14 lines at the time of writing, passing by 40+ schools across town. Bicibuses also exist in Melbourne, Washington, San Francisco, México, Vancouver, Brooklyn, Bombay, Portland, Glasgow, Philadelphia, Santiago de Chile, Galway, Buenos Aires and many other places by now, and there are maps and apps to find routes and co-travellers.





There are many benefits to a Bicibus: it reclaims urban space for kids, it replaces polluting and dangerous cars that take too much space with clean and healthy bike blocs that are dense, it is highly practical as a way of moving through the neighbourhood, it teaches kids to cycle and motivates them for school, it builds community and links schools with local environments. Less toxic air, noise and accidents for the whole community, and an increase in health and social cohesion too.

Bicibuses are educational for everyone: for kids, because a kid going by bike will likely be a youth and an adult going by bike. It's about education and training for life, in the sense that we know meaningful and sustainable education is never just about skills but about knowledge and practice in community. They are educational for families and communities, teaching us how to claim space and take care of one another, as well as how to organise around our daily needs. For teachers and schools it has the benefit of kids arriving in good spirits and on time, and for everyone in the city it also has the benefit of removing stressed car drivers from the roads.

As Francesco Tonucci puts it, in the spirit of his work on Cities of Play: when kids are in the streets, cities are healthy – if there's no kids in the streets, our cities are ill. The more children can play and move freely in public space, the more cohesion, solidarity and good spirits there are. The more bikes and other non motorized vehicles there are, the healthier and livelier our spaces are too.

Are you working at the institutional or policy level?

The integration of ecosocial considerations into school curricula remains a complex and emerging practice. Conventional education systems often prioritise preparing students for the labour market without offering the critical grounding and foundation for reflection on broader ecosocial and economic systems that are shaping their lives. Ecosocial education is often fragmented and inconsistent due to its reliance on individual educators' passion, the limited accessibility of alternative schools, and restrictions on external educators within formal schooling. Ecosocial education often focuses on mainstream sustainability topics like recycling, while Sustainable Development Education broadens the discussion to social and political issues, despite its theoretical shortcomings. However, it risks being perceived as a privileged, top-down approach, whereas indigenous and alternative ecosocial perspectives may better resonate with local communities and inspire systemic educational change. Addressing these gaps demands innovative strategies and inclusive integration across formal and informal spaces.

Challenge: Ecosocial Curricula and Policy Integration

Typically, educational curricula are focused on preparing students for the labor market, often without offering a critical framework to reflect on broader ecosocial and economic systems. Even as society evolves and issues like the climate crisis impact our daily lives, these developments are not integrated into school curricula effectively or quickly enough. This is largely because incorporating ecosocial considerations into the curriculum is a highly bureaucratic process. While official processes for changing the curriculum exist, they are typically time- and effort -intensive. Additionally, the intentional compartmentalisation of courses creates rigid subject boundaries, limiting opportunities for cross-curricular collaboration.

In terms of public schooling, where subject content needs to follow guidelines set at a national level, a lack of clarity in those guidelines on how to practically engage environmental and/or social themes can hinder their prioritisation. This then breeds further unequal application because ultimately better resourced departments or regions actually have the 'freedom' of choice and variety (by virtue of their access and capacity) in how to administer ecosocial curricula.

A possible solution - challenge compartmentalisation

A potential pathway for advancing ecosocial education and its institutionalisation involves challenging the compartmentalisation of the curriculum to promote systems thinking. One approach could be to cluster related subjects, creating more time and flexibility to focus on ecosocial education, both during and beyond school hours. Additionally, school spaces should be reimagined to provide areas where students, teachers, and the broader school community can come together to co-create projects and activities. For instance, dedicating four hours per week or month to collaboration across different age groups and subjects could foster interdisciplinary learning. To prevent any single teacher from losing instructional time, this collaborative period can rotate across different days and times. This allows for dynamic engagement without disrupting the overall schedule, while promoting a more holistic approach to learning and allowing for more opportunities to integrate ecosocial education.

See also: The Frei Day Schools (p 20)

Challenge: Capacity Constraints

We often see independent activities and initiatives related to ecosocial education, both within and beyond formal schooling, which frequently rely on the interest, passion, and availability of teachers and school administrators. Although alternative schools supported by networks of educators – such as autonomous, democratic and forest schooling – may act as small-scale prefigurative experiments, they may not cater to all age groups and are sometimes viewed as elitist. Meanwhile, access for external educators to host activities within the formal school environment with the students, such as NGO representatives, can be restricted when specific permissions are required. As a result, ecosocial education tends to be fragmented and inconsistent.

A possible solution - linking ecosocial education to existing institutional structures and processes

A potential way to systematise the diverse formal, non-formal, and informal initiatives in ecosocial education is by linking them with existing institutional structures and ongoing processes. For example, Municipal Youth Councils can support long-term eco-social education activities, creating a bridge between the school environment and broader community issues. This provides opportunities for students and youth to contribute their own ideas and perspectives on ecosocial education. Additionally, Parents' Councils can apply pressure for specific changes in school programs, advocating for a stronger focus on ecosocial topics. Moreover, local and national institutional departments, even those not directly responsible for education, can play a role by incorporating ecosocial principles into their own activities. This broader institutional engagement can ultimately influence and enhance ecosocial education within the formal school system.

See also: The Youth Council of Kalamata (p 53)

Challenge: Cultural and Socio-Economic Factors

With regard to ecosocial content, most environmental activities tend to focus on nature-based education and offer very mainstream or limited approaches to sustainability, such as recycling. Sustainable Development Education aims to broaden this scope by introducing more social and political topics into the discussion about ecological sustainability. While it is recognised that Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have both theoretical and empirical shortcomings (Kopnina 2020), they currently seem to provide a coherent framework for initiating conversations about ecological issues in relation to broader socio-political and economic challenges. International efforts to universalise Sustainable Development Education serve as an entry point for influencing curricula, particularly if they are accompanied by critical reflective processes that question and challenge the concepts underlying Sustainable Development (Kopnina 2020).

Importantly, in different contexts, Sustainable Development Education can be seen as imposed by privileged white people, disconnected from the lived realities of diverse communities. Alternative ecosocial visions, such as those rooted in indigenous narratives and cultures, often emphasise communal ways of living, careful interdependence with nature, and more conscious resource extraction. These perspectives may better resonate with local communities and inspire genuine passion and interest for educational institutional change. Incorporating such alternative frameworks could prove more effective in shaping ecosocial practices and promoting the integration of eco-social curricula in formal education.

A possible solution - community and youth-led participatory initiatives

In order to challenge one-sided perspectives about ecosocial education and support its meaningful integration in the curriculum, another idea is to design strategies that support community education that incorporates local and/or indigenous knowledge and histories. This refers to community projects that bring the children and youth from outside the formal school environment into the community, supporting a more place-based approach to ecosocial education.

For example, connecting school activities with those of public libraries and museums facilitates ecosocial learning for students. Book clubs, fiction and poetry groups, and cultural retreats can be powerful tools for stimulating interest and fostering emotional connections to both human and non-human experiences, ultimately cultivating a greater sense of care and responsibility towards the environment. Another aspect is to involve children and youth in the co-design, development, and maintenance of community initiatives and supporting of urban commons, such as urban gardens.

See also: Urban Gardens (p 31, 34, 69)

Importantly, in cases of school and community segregation, having diverse schools work together also stimulates intercultural dialogue. Emphasising long-term engagement in these activities has the power to deepen students' connections to their surroundings and enhance their understanding of ecosocial issues. Methodologically, this approach can be facilitated through Participatory Action Research, which actively involves students, teachers, and community members in the learning process. The method can also empower marginalised voices and ensure that ecosocial education reflects the diverse needs and experiences of the community.

See also: Ecosocial Participatory Action Research, Critical Science Education (p 52)

Finally, in order to keep long lasting activities and their impact alive, it is important to connect with different levels of administration, organised civil society and the general public and continuously advocate for policy changes. This can take a lot of time and effort but also generates a great amount of pressure.

See also:
The Advocacy Campaign of *Teachers for Future* and *Scientists for Future* (p 42)

» ***Systemic challenges*** *hinder ecosocial education: bureaucratic hurdles, rigid existing curricula and resource disparities*

» ***Subject compartmentalisation*** *limits interdisciplinary approaches*

» ***Practical guidelines*** *for ecosocial theme integration into curricula are insufficient*

» ***Innovative solutions*** *are emerging to promote systems thinking, community collaboration and leveraging institutional structures*

» ***Local and culturally relevant information*** *can ensure broader and more equitable engagement*

for example...

In a nutshell:
The FREI DAY Schools

Margret Rasfeld, German educator and co-founder of the meanwhile transnational school network Schule im Aufbruch ('School on the move') has described a very simple and yet revolutionary and easy-to-adopt concept to transform any school of any school type into a space where learning for the future can take place: The Frei Day. For non-German speakers: The term 'Frei Day' plays on the German 'Freitag' (Friday) and the word 'frei' (free) and it means just that! The Friday demonstrations of pupils following Greta Thunberg's 'Skolstrejk för klimatet' in the January of 2019 inspired Rasfeld to develop the concept of a free morning in school when pupils could deal with the most burning questions concerning their future in a time slot freed of all curricular restrictions and also the boundaries of classes / age groups. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals were introduced as the conceptual basis.

As it happened, Rasfeld started out with one pilot school using Friday mornings to allow pupils to define their questions in groups solely defined by interest, research the answers to them and very importantly – get into action to do something very concrete to contribute to one of the goals in their immediate surroundings – be that the class or school itself or the community in which it stands. The amazing personal growth that those children and youths experienced when they were allowed to pursue their very own interests in small groups of like-minded colleagues, Rasfeld describes in her book 'Frei Day – Die Welt verändern lernen! Für eine Schule im Aufbruch' (2021). So far over 80 Frei Day schools of all school types in Germany and about 15 in Austria have adopted the basic principle of freeing one morning per week throughout the school year for the pupils to work independently and to experience self-efficacy in projects that change not only some aspect of their daily life into a more sustainable form but give them hope to be able to cope with the enormous challenges their future holds for them. Practicing 21st century skills whilst fulfilling the 2030 Agenda of Education for Sustainable Development, which our countries signed, legally authorized the innovative approach of the growing network.

For more information, see
https://frei-day.org (Germany) and
https://www.frei-day.at (Austria)

The cornerstones in a nutshell:

» 4 contingent school hours every week over the whole school year

» Searchings for answers to important questions the pupils have (!) concerning the future (embedded/based on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals)

» Teamwork across classes and grades, teachers only as support when needed

» Projects are realised on the spot in the immediate living environment

Are you a student?

There was the time when students all over the world rose up to demand change on climate policy, realising that their futures were being sold off to petro- and other industries that make a profit off raising global CO2 levels...

That was the time around 2020, years when most of us first faced the terrible facts of climate science and starting to feel the effects of global heating even in the global North. You probably know the story: a generation of students got organised, starting with Greta Thunberg and her mates, and soon there was Fridays for Future everywhere – high school students took time on Friday to protest and strike, and got global attention. Those were mostly middle class students and it was mostly the liberal media paying positive attention to them, sure – farther right, they were shunned as naive or too radical –but their protest made a difference. There was no ignoring them, and it was hilarious to see conservatives outraged at 'children rising up' whilst some lucid teachers supported their cause and let themselves be transformed by their force and intelligence. Good teachers always learn from their students.

Are you a student? Are you familiar with this story? The Fridays for Future generation has now grown up – as we type these lines in 2025, they've left schools and gone to study or work, many of them continuing to be active in the climate and ecological movements, working for NGOs that deal with socioecological problems, or taking these issues into workplaces, and their lives in general. In schools, the climate has changed a fair bit since 2020: students and teachers are painfully familiar with the projections for climate and ecological catastrophe, they've seen years go by in inaction, blabla and hopeless negotiations. Once the big COP Climate Summits started to be hosted by petrostates and became marketplaces for trading in ways to profit off the crisis whilst further fuelling it, many people – not just students – turned away from this problem. Petrocapitalist greenwashing largely won over the institutions. Now some of us feel cynical, others afraid, others hopeless, others angry – and many of us feel all those things at alternating times. 'Climate anxiety' some call it and sure enough there were plenty professionals ready to medicate the problem away. The problem is that you can't make a problem disappear by merely treating symptoms: you have to go at the underlying cause. This is what students who organize know, and what we learn with them.

There are many who keep going at the underlying cause – the entanglements between capital, colonial legacies and continuities, gender discrimination and petro-patriachal rule, the disrespect for other species and so on. Greta Thunberg is so far doing very well in becoming a young elder. We need elders – whether we're young or old – and at the same time we need to harness our radical force and collective power. New generations of students have learned deep lessons from the Covid pandemic, Black Lives Matter Movements, the Trans and Queer movements – they're constituting new eco-political subjectivities and politicizing their 'dysphoria mundi', as Paul Preciado puts it (Preciado 2025).

We who write this booklet as mostly teachers, parents, researchers, activists and public servants, we see this generation and feel its force. And we know that after it, another generation will come. And another. We won't speak on behalf of students and young people here, but we want to share and honor stories of how students organise to transform their schools and universities, to inspire and remember that education is always a key space of transformation and rebellion from below, and at the base and ground of it are the students (here's a text from when some of us were still wearing student hats, Zechner 2010). Student unions, student campaigns, student groups and spaces, student occupations and strikes: they are incredibly powerful tools. They are and always have been: they are the school of life that we need.

for example...

End Fossil

End Fossil Barcelona is a youth movement that fights to stop the use of fossil fuels and to promote a just ecosocial transition. Education plays a key role in our struggle, which is why we have squatted/occupied educational spaces and put pressure on institutions to assume their responsibility in the current climate and social crisis. In Catalonia, we occupied the University of Barcelona and the Autonomous University of Barcelona to demand, among other things, the inclusion of a compulsory course on the environmental and social crisis at all university degrees. And we succeeded. We believe that in a society that is becoming increasingly polarised and uninformed, it is essential to generate critical knowledge and tools to understand the climate crisis as a systemic and collective problem, not just a technical one.

For more information, see
https://linktr.ee/endfossiloccupy_bcn

In collaboration with EduAlter (see p 39) we are currently conducting ecosocial education and activism workshops in public secondary schools, connecting with teenagers and giving them the tools to transform their indignation into collective action, with the idea of acting locally but thinking globally. Age proximity makes it easier for them to listen to us and, drawing on our experience, to see themselves as political agents capable of bringing about change. Seeing the involvement of young people who were previously demobilised inspires us to continue working. Through this experience, we ourselves are learning about critical pedagogies and the need to imagine alternative futures to counteract the prevailing pessimism. We believe that our political practice is in itself a form of ecosocial education, as it generates collective imaginaries that challenge hegemony and pave the way to different ways of life.

- Jose and Sara, *End Fossil Barcelona*

Are you an activist?

As activists we are often driven by a sense of urgency. We see that things should have changed yesterday and want to push for them to change today. Schools, particularly the lesser funded public ones, respond to other temporalities and can be frustrating to push up against. They require us to develop different strategies to our usual activist toolkits, which can be a source of wealth and learning: education is an interesting space for activism, whether we're taking action as students, teachers, parents or people only peripherally linked to the school community. There's no changing education without building ties and alliances, but we can have different strategies in relation to formal education: operate outside of it, within it, or somewhere in-between.

Inside

Inside educational systems, we have many possibilities of twisting, bending, hacking, blending and mending things, even if it's hard to make those change the overall system. All change starts with small action though, and literally no system will meaningfully and sustainably transform without people pushing from below. When we can build alliances with activists and communities outside the walls of our institutions, our force grows: the more we can articulate broader ecosocial sentiments and needs, the more difference we can make. When teachers like Docents 083 (p 12) and other teacher collectives mobilise for the right to housing and against evictions for their students in Catalonia, in line with a larger region- wide mobilisation for housing, they are enriching the housing movement as well as their own educational space. Education is not at all a single issue, it's part of the web of life in which many forms of practice and indeed injustice interdepend: which is why we need to steadily work to open the school to social movements and demands, to ecological vulnerabilities and connections.

Outside

Some people understand activists to be people who try to change something from the outside only. While we don't coincide with this vision – as the many examples and positionalities of activism across the sections of this book show – we still want to honor this position here. Not all of us are presently engaged in school but we remember our own days, our own frustrations, and maybe we see or hear how schools are failing young people, via the experiences of close ones. We might want to abolish schools as they exist in state and private systems, and invent radically new approaches to learning, and to what it means to be a person within social and other living ecologies. We desperately need this – radical experiments and approaches that can set their own terms, run their own pilots and build their own communities and generational processes, outside (in as much as possible) of state and market dictates.

Anarchists have often been great educators, as the modern school movement around Francesc Ferrer i Guàrdia initially, and then Emma Goldman and others in the US, show. Popular movements are where learning happens from experiences and the struggle, and with a deep rooted sense for social justice, beyond the confines of literacy, as we know from Paulo Freire, bell hooks, Augusto Boal, Grace Lee Boggs, Mariama Kaba and so many more. There is a lot of education and learning happening outside schools – oftentimes more learning happens out in the world than in the classroom – but there is something about schools, understood as spaces dedicated to learning, that matters and makes them meaningful. Ideally, a school is a space where we can discover, experiment, address, observe, doubt, care, struggle and imagine – and many people stubbornly hold on to this idea when they set up school-like spaces. Popular universities, teach-ins and movement schools are as much on that spectrum as private educational initiatives of alter-pedagogical ilk.

Beyond

It's precious, the freedom we can have when we take educational initiative beyond or semi-beyond formal systems. That freedom always needs to be claimed and asserted, time and again, in order to push up against more rigid educational forms and to articulate with social processes and communities as well as ecosystems. When activists in Greece set up the Solidarity Schools in the midst of a crisis both of public education and of refugee welcoming, they didn't care much to transform the state school system but set out to support those excluded from it or marginalized within it – the children of migrants and refugees in this case, who were doubly excluded when they didn't get a chance to learn Greek and do well in school, be part of a community in education. Their example is as follows...

for example...

Solidarity Schools in Greece

The *Greek Network of Solidarity Schools* is currently made up of eight schools, from Thessaloniki in the north to Mesopotamia and the island Chios, in the south. The schools of the network associate themselves with new social movements which constitute self-organized communities independent from the state, crafting tentatively their own institutions and procedures. In their activities, they actively involve participants in all steps and functions, nourishing relations of trust and mutual empowerment. They stand opposed to inequality, social injustice and centralizing state logics. They aspire to a more democratic and just world in accord with their own democratic communities.

The *Solidarity School Mesopotamia* is a key node in this network. The citizens' movement Mesopotamia was created in 2003, by a citizens' group of Moschato, a district in Athens close to the port of Piraeus. The political, ecological and social issues affecting the time and the district and the realization of the need for direct and collective mobilization prompted them to take action in common. *Mesopotamia* very soon established itself in the consciousness of the active citizens of the city and other citizens from neighbour areas and the broader region as a collective with many-sided action in the fields of social struggles and culture. Important landmarks in the trajectory of all these years were the fight against the privatization of the seafront from 2004 to-date and the immigrants' and refugees' school functioning for several years.

Throughout the year, *Mesopotamia* organizes a variety of cultural events and socio-political interventions, such as friendly basketball games against racism, talks and open discussions on patriarchy, gender violence and LGBTQ rights. The Solidarity School is an action realized through the voluntary contributions of qualified teachers. It is addressed to young students and people of any age who seek to enhance their knowledge, to amplify their formal qualifications or to pursue 'any other activity aiming at personal and social development.' Its key objective is to 'break the barriers in education, to support everybody to meet their educational needs by creating a community of learning' -a 'solidarity, non-profit oriented community of learning.'

The school was launched in 2013. Since then, it has offered courses to hundreds of students, many of whom have entered university. The school was created in the 'society of crisis,' when access to education is subject to intensifying class exclusions and the public educational system is dismantled. Hence, this structure forms an integral part of the *Mesopotamia Time Bank* and its broader solidarity network. Courses include supplementary tuition for high school students, preparation for the university entrance exams, foreign languages, courses of Greek language for migrants, and occasional seminars and labs.

The school proclaims that it is committed to a socially sensitive, inclusionary education. It makes decisions collectively, without hierarchies. Its everyday operations rely on 'work groups' (teaching, secretariat, house maintenance) in which parents and adult students are also involved. Next steps and extrovert activities are proposed and decided in the quarterly mixed assemblies by teachers, parents and students alike.

In this context, ecosocial education is pursued not only through labs, seminars and the awareness raised by the volunteer teachers, but also through the diverse social-ecological actions and struggles in which *Mesopotamia* engages from the outset.

For more information, see https://www.mesopotamia.gr and https://solidarity-schools.gr/ as well as our ecosocial education forum on Solidarity Schools and Migrant Climate Justice https://youtu.be/FWav1Jb3220?si=r_zNqyygmzzyrk_7

part 2

Geographies of Ecosocial Education

Ecosocial education is not the same thing in all places. While there are some underlying principles that guide ecosocial educational work generally – as we have outlined in our introduction here – the concrete form that educational practices take are different from place to place. There's no universal curriculum or best practices that can simply be imported and exported: rather education is something that has to be made from the ground up, taking local and regional problems, possibilities and actors into account, and working with their specific forms of knowledge and subjectivity.

Each of the places we come from has a different history, different forms of social and ecological consciousness and thinking, different kinds of institutional arrangements and economic entanglements. Even if global capitalism structures and streamlines a lot of processes and problems we face, we can only find solutions and ways out by engaging from where we are, taking into account the very ground upon which we stand. That ground is always a web of collective histories and stories, of relations of power and forms of resistance and of care. So we wrote this section from our respective places – as small groups of people engaged in different educational contexts in the countries mentioned here. We reflected, discussed and researched in order to describe some basic ways in which ecosocial education plays out where we are based, and imagined what ecosocial education could and should mean.

You find five key regions portrayed here – based on our collective places of belonging and work: the Eastern Mediterranean as encompassing Greece, Macedonia and Türkiye; the Irish and British Isles; the Spanish State as encompassing Catalonia and specific examples from Madrid and Andalusia; the German speaking countries as encompassing Austria and Germany; and then South Africa as encompassing the Western Cape province especially, a welcome outlier to decenter our mostly European perspectives and experiences. The choice of examples is, as we already said elsewhere, not based on a value judgement of what places are important, but based on our own constitution and process as a group: we didn't want to write about things we were not engaged in. The strength of our work here is that it's based in experience.

In our region and country profiles we focused on local conflicts as a way to understand entangled realities, drawing lines between different places and regions where possible. We tried to briefly describe forms of ecosocial thinking in the region, imagine desirable and possible local-regional futures, and to situate pedagogical trajectories and institutional processes. We are inspired by the idea of schools as educational social centres, and feature a wide range of stories and examples of projects, practices and spaces in each regional section, with some links to initiatives and resources. Our descriptions here are not meant to be absolute, but starting points for thinking, debate and complementation: you can add your own regional and country sections to our book, make your own versions and corrections based on other viewpoints, experiences and geographies. We hope our work serves as an inspiration.

Eastern Mediterranean

The Eastern Mediterranean region faces intertwined challenges deeply rooted in its historical, socio-political, and environmental contexts. Decades of conflict and socio-economic crises have left many of the places in the region challenged by long-term effects of war, corruption, distrust, and right-wing populism, fragmented institutions, inefficient administration, and increased socio-economic inequalities.

Post-war reconstruction has prioritised the immediate rebuilding of infrastructure and the stabilisation of economies over concerns about environmental sustainability. This has resulted in anarchic urbanisation, heavily polluted cities, and a lack of public space. More recently, neoliberal austerity policies have deepened socio-economic inequalities, limited social mobilisation, and further complicated the region's ability to address shared challenges. Nationalism and the lack of cooperation among countries in the region, despite their shared culture and struggles, have exacerbated the situation. Meanwhile, efforts to address environmental degradation have been sporadic and localised.

Problematic models of economic development have been prevailing, perpetuating cycles of exploitation and environmental neglect. For example, there is a stark contrast between urban and rural areas in terms of access to education and resources, undermining climate awarness and resilience, particularly in marginalised regions. State-owned land is leased to local and foreign businesses for industrial production, providing some employment, but undermining small-scale, local producers. Moreover, gender inequalities in workload distribution are present in rural and urban areas alike. More explicitly, over the years, extractivist policies have further worsened the socio-ecological realities of rural environments in North Macedonia. In Greece, the touristification of islands in the region increased, unequally distributed, economic growth at the cost of ecological stability. In Türkiye, insufficient regulation and illegal industrial fishing practices driven by high demand for seafood has led to over-fishing and marine pollution threatening marine biodiversity and the livelihoods of small-scale local businesses.

Ecosocial thinking in the region

The ecosocial consciousness in the Eastern Mediterranean is influenced by common ecosystems, natural landscapes and rich history of shared cultural traditions that could potentially inspire sustainable practices and awareness on eco-social issues. There have been emerging networks advocating for peace, self-management, and environmental cooperation, especially against extractivism, yet their actions keep staying in the margin of the mainstream political discourse.

Indeed, there is an increasing need to radicalise environmental education and integrate it into public discourse. In Greece, for instance, mainstream NGOs seem to follow mainly the *Sustainable Development* discourse. Grassroots activism exists, often connected to the anti-globalisation movement and with limited efforts to make a bridge with ecological demands. Similarly, in North Macedonia, ecosocial consciousness is something very new. Although cultural centers and youth initiatives exist, their activities often remain theoretical with little practical applications and impact. In Türkiye, ecosocial education could play a crucial role in bridging environmental and social justice, particularly in rural and marginalised communities. Building on Türkiye's rich biodiversity and cultural heritage, education efforts need to address both ecological challenges and societal inequities, especially concerning women, youth, ethnic minorities (such as Kurds and Laz people), and refugees.

Desirable local-regional futures

Imagining desirable and possible local-regional futures in the Eastern Mediterranean requires embracing the region's shared ecosystems, cultural traditions, and interconnected challenges. This includes building upon the ecosocial potential and political character of networks and grassroots initiatives, such as permaculture projects, seed banks, community based energy systems, and other examples of solidarity economy to experience their transformative effect and describe alternative visions of the future. We must also take into account dilemmas such as balancing the urban-rural divide, addressing gender-based inequalities present in both rural and urban areas, and ensuring that youth, refugee and other marginalised communities are included as central actors in ecosocial transitions. These efforts could evolve into a broader, region-wide ecosocial movement that prioritises strong ecological sustainability, social justice, community empowerment and participatory democracy over growth dependencies, extractive policies and nationalism. This will go hand in hand with the role of the schools as educational social centers that foster ecosocial consciousness and solidarity, while increasing awareness about the socio-economic realities and ecologies of our shared environments and histories.

GREECE

The Greek sea and landscape display a wild diversity of ecological characteristics, from Mediterranean forests and wetlands to mountainous regions and islands. However, in recent years, due to the climate crisis, Greece has experienced severe climate phenomena, which have risen in frequency, intensity and overall impact on social and environmental domains. Dramatic natural disasters, particularly wildfires, floods, and draughts, have brought about socio-economic devastation to people. The loss of one's household, belonging, business, family and community – along with the felt threat to personal safety – can have profound and lasting effects on the mental health of survivors, often lingering for years.

Particularly in the case of wildfires, the measures taken by the state to limit the number of forest fires and the damage caused disregard needs linked to local social and economic activities, especially remote areas of the country – such as border areas, islands and mountainous regions. The current decisions, significantly limited by budget cuts, prioritise fire suppression over preparedness and prevention, they fail to actively involve local communities and do not draw on local knowledge. As a consequence, the root causes of socio-natural disasters remain unaddressed and social conflicts persist.

Another case of adverse top-down decision-making in Greece bears on the renewable energy transition which has given rise to extensive social conflict with local populations across the country. Large corporations dominating the energy sector have implemented large-scale industrial renewable energy projects without consulting local communities. The projects barely benefit these communities while they often engender socio-ecological destruction. Over the years, local resistance has intensified, with numerous groups protesting against these corporations and their projects. Energy communities composed of local citizens and non-for-profit organizations have emerged in response, as a democratic and empowering alternative that fosters climate justice.

Grasping the complexities and entanglements between the socio-economic and ecological systems is crucial for elaborating effective preventive mechanisms and responses to climate crises by embedding more bottom-up approaches in civil defense and protection. In this direction, a bill submitted to the Greek Parliament recently purports to strengthen social participation in environmental decisions, in response to the call made to all parliamentary parties by 12 civil society organizations which seek to address the serious lack of information and effective public participation in environmental policy-making.

Ecosocial thinking and practice in Greece

Social provisioning in Greece is generally on decline after the financial crisis of 2008 and beyond. Budget cuts have also affected public education, which used to be free and open. Hence, environmental education has been likewise compromised.

Mainstream environmental education in Greece focuses on natural sciences and technical solutions, and does not delve into the connections between ecological problems, socio-economic struggles and political conflicts. Meanwhile, although Sustainable Development education introduces more diversity in the context of environmental education, it comes with its own problems and contradictions.

Environmental education in formal educational environments is pursued through the *Environmental Centers* in a more long-term perspective. There are also short-term activities organised by teachers and organisations within the schools (eg. the Mamagea NGO has sponsored school gardens in recent years, see *https://mamagea.gr/projects*). However, the scope for intervention within the formal public school curricula is limited.

Hence, environmentally oriented education is easier to pursue in private schools (as in the case of the School of Nature in Thessaloniki, *https://www.theschoolofnature.gr/?lang=en*). Also, experiments and processes engaging in ecosocial education unfold within eco-communities such as the Free and Real organization on the island of Evoia (*https://www.freeandreal.org*), and the Building with Cob eco-cooperative (*https://cob.gr/en*). However, such eco-communities do not usually engage children and youth below 18.

Ecosocial consciousness is nurtured in practice in Greece through social and solidarity enterprises and initiatives informed by principles of ecological sustainability, social justice, and community participation. Among others, the *Solidarity Schools network* in Greece which are self-organized grassroots initiatives undertaking a variety of educational activities in terms of solidarity, engage in social and ecological struggles raising awareness about social inequalities, exclusions and environmental issues (see also Kioupkiolis 2023).

Desireable Local-Ecosocial Futures

Energy democracy, regenerative food systems, sustainable transportation, solidarity schools, and collective housing schemes can serve as catalysts for ecosocial education and action. In this sense, desirable local futures in Greece call for reimagining and supporting existing and new hubs of collective ecosocial transformation. In particular, cooperative forms of production, commons, and solidarity economies challenge growth-based approaches to sustainability and offer responses to environmental and social crises while building communities rooted in social justice, strong ecological sustainability, and shared responsibility (Liodaki, 2024). Furthermore, formal educational institutions, such as public schools, should develop dynamic interactions with their local contexts, empowering youth and marginalised groups to co-create educational contents and activities by drawing on their local realities and needs, while influencing their communities in the direction of democratic ecosocial justice and change.

for example...

Energy communities

Energy Communities are civil cooperatives that are active in the energy sector, with a particular interest in Renewable Energy Sources (RES). Citizens can use this tool to produce clean energy collectively and promote energy democracy, and, therefore, have an active role in the energy transition. To date, energy community projects are mainly:

- self-production projects aimed at meeting the energy needs of members (virtual net-metering projects) and
- commercial RES projects, which generate profits for community members through market participation. In the context of this multi-layered action to build and promote citizens' sustainable energy communities in Greece and South-eastern Europe, the *Electra Energy Coop* conducts various educational and training activities aimed at raising awareness, building capacity and upskilling programs (*https://electraenergy.coop/en/home/*).

In September 2024 1,742 active Energy Communities are recorded in Greece. Of these, 40 *Renewable Energy Communities* (*RECs*) and 17 *Citizens' Energy Communities* (*CECs*) were established under the new institutional framework (Law 5037/2023) adopted in March 2023. Most connected RES projects by energy communities are located in Central Macedonia (*https://thegreentank.gr/en/community-energy-watch-en/*).

In this field, the *Electra Energy Coop* has been a key actor promoting citizens' energy communities since 2016. Founded in Athens, Greece, it works for the development of community energy in Greece and South-eastern Europe. Its stated objective is to facilitate the transition towards a democratic, inclusive, and sustainable energy system, placing citizens and local communities at the forefront of this movement. It pursues action research on community energy, encompassing business modeling, financing, governance, social impact, and mitigating energy poverty. It assists citizens, small and medium enterprises, and municipalities in the development of community energy projects. It monitors and seeks to enhance policies, regulations, targets, and strategies related to community energy. It currently supports 25 energy communities and citizen-led initiatives, engaging more than 3400 citizens and undertaking more than 20 advocacy actions.

MACEDONIA

Despite being a landlocked country, Macedonia's landscape is quite varied. The interconnected mountain ridges, the fertile valleys along Vardar river and its many tributaries, the canyons, as well as the wetlands around the three natural lakes are home to rich biodiversity. However, in recent years, the effects of the climate crises in the form of natural disasters such as wildfires, floods, and drought have dramatically reduced biodiversity and caused socio-economic destitution for a wide majority of the population outside of the capital. Additionally, due to political, religious, nationalistic and ethnic affiliations united mainly by monetary interests, budgeting is a long-standing problem and most public institutions function with insufficient response capacity to deal with both social and environmental problems. The aforementioned corruption underlies almost every aspect of society. The trend of creating new public institutions, providing employment to party-loyal bureaucrats is a serious blow to a budget that could be better used for infrastructure, preparedness and prevention mechanisms. Hence, the wide majority of people are left to their own devices to deal with the aftermath of natural disasters with little (if any) systemic help from the state.

According to the latest available Shadow Report (2023) On Chapter 27 of the *UN Sustainable Development Goals*, Macedonia has made no significant progress under the sub-chapter of horizontal legislation regarding the cornerstone Directives on Environmental Impact Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment. This, in turn, negatively impacts all the environmental sectors, infrastructure investments and overall public participation and perception.

Pollution is an ever-present reality and it has been getting worse over the years. Water, groundwater and soil pollutionare the result of creaking wastewater infrastructure, poor waste management and illegal landfills, irresponsible mining practices, as well as poorly planned urbanization and illegal or 'shady' construction projects that lead to gradual deterioration of natural habitat and resources. Air pollution is the most pressing issue, especially in the overpopulated and traffic-clogged capital Skopje. Burning imported chemical waste in industrial facilities situated in urban areas and non-compliant with filter regulations exacerbates the problem.

Similarly as in Greece, large corporations have taken over and divided the energy sector, continuously raising the price of electricity. Large-scale industrial renewable energy projects implemented by the aforementioned corporations without consulting local communities have caused socio-ecological destruction. Local resistance and networking has not been sufficient to bring about a positive shift in policy. Additionally, until recently, household alternative energy producers could return only up to 4Kw to the grid on compensatory basis, with no limit for companies. The new Energy Law (2025) introduces the prosumerism concept and envisages better conditions for investments in renewable energy sources, electricity storage, introduction of civil energy communities, and development of transmission and distribution infrastructure that would guarantee stable electricity prices and greater supply security.

There is a stark contrast between urban and rural areas in terms of access to education and other resources, undermining climate awareness as well. The decentralization process started around 20 years ago did not work. Lack of work and education opportunities spurs massive youth migration from villages and smallertowns to larger towns/Skopje abroad. State-owned land is leased to local and foreign businesses for industrial production of crops, fruits and nuts, providing some employment, but undermining small-scale, local producers. Gender inequalities in workload distribution are present in rural and urban areas alike.

All of the above, along with the ever-rising poverty and the politics of fear and blaming 'the other' has had profound negative effects on the overall wellbeing of people.

Ecosocial thinking and practice in Macedonia

Environmental education in the public school curriculum is thinly spread across various natural sciences books, and does not explore the connections between ecological problems, socio-economic struggles and political conflicts. Clientelist changes in public administration with each change of government have led to poor implementation of the Bologna reforms and deteriorated the quality of didactic materials.

Historically, environmental education efforts date back to 1999: the NGO OHO implemented the project 'We Have No Spare Planet' in 10 primary schools and developed a wide range of didactic materials. In 2011/2012, with the support of the Ministry of Education and Science, the program, renamed 'Integration of Environmental Education in the Macedonian Education System', was implemented in 51 kindergartens, 231 primary and 55 secondary schools. Other prominent contributors include the *Center for Environmental Resources* (https://rec.org.mk) with their 'Green Package' didactic materials and teacher trainings; *Eko Svest* (https://ekosvest.com.mk), and the *Institute of Communication Studies* (https://iks.edu.mk) with their environmental education platform Doma (https://doma.edu.mk) and 'Young Ecologists' project done with the *Macedonian Ecological Society* (https://mes.org.mk/en/about-mes). Presently, extracurricular environmental and climate change awareness education is implemented in public schools by enthusiastic teachers participating in various civil society programs.

There are plenty of challenges: adults struggle to devote time to environmental activities due to the lower-than-desired life standard; children are targeted by marketing from a young age, and easily develop consumerist habits. If there is no environmentally aware behaviour among adults, even children who at an early age adopted a certain environmental practice, abandon it as teenagers, viewing it as 'childish'. Another issue is that children are rarely raised with the three R's (Reduce, Re-use, Recycle) principle in mind, as the entire focus of environmental education is on recycling, not mentioning the difference between materials that can be recycled many times and materials with low recycling potential, such as plastics – or indeed the politics of waste more globally.

See also:
Waste Education: More Than Recycling (p 57)

Since the government is part and parcel of the environmental problem, the dire situation has given rise to numerous public protests. In 2018 and 2019, 35 civil society organizations protested together as *Zelen Front*. The most recent public protest in Skopje (December 2024) put forth citizens' demands for urgent short and mid-term measures against air-pollution (publication of the register of legal subjects obligated to have a B-IP-PC permit, but working without one; ban on traffic lanes wider than the legal norm and measures to promote cycling and public transportation, preparation of a traffic regime to be activated when pollution is higher than the borderline for longer than 24 hours, ban on import of used vehicles older than 10 years, public institutions to switch to photovoltaic energy generation, photovoltaics subventions for families). Over the years, artists have also risen in protest, the most contemporary example being the multimedia art festival *Pod Zemja Polesno se Dishe / It Is Easier to Breathe Underground*[1], based in the underground garages in the centre of Skopje and organized by the art collective *KULA* since 2013.

Desirable Local Futures

Macedonia's realities, being in the centre of the Balkans, are forever shaped by various internal and external forces in play. Some catalysts towards desirable local futures are grassroots movements towards solidarity economy, social centres, car-pooling/share a ride groups, slow food/local producer initiatives and cooperatives, school gardens, youth engagement and youth participatory processes and activism, informal education, local activism and volunteering, time banks and so forth. Relevant objectives include:

- creating equal access educational platforms and spaces;
- creating conditions for sustainable development from an economic, political and social perspective;
- education of pedagogic workers in the formal educational system and civil society organizations through non-formal education methods;
- and creation of specialized educational programs for marginalized communities.

for example...

Skopje's First Community Garden: Bostanie

The principles of solidarity and permaculture are united in Skopje's first community garden *Bostanie* – a word coined from the Turkish word 'bostan' (cucurbits) and 'vostanie' (uprising). This amazing place of resistance and resilience celebrated its 5th anniversary in October 2024 with several workshops (making seed balls, a scarecrow, and reading garden stories with children; perma-models in urban gardening; beneficial microorganisms; collecting, drying and storing seeds; natural cosmetics), collectively prepared yummy food for all present and, inevitably, good music to round up the day (see also Blazhevski 2022). Through its numerous seed exchanges, workshops, lectures, and various other activities, Bostanie and its founding organization Zelenata Arka (The Green Ark) keep uniting people of all generations and backgrounds, offering a friendly space for collaboration, relaxation and education to anyone and everyone willing to get their hands a bit dirty. The Green Arch has welcomed many elementary and high school visits to Bostanie, and held gardening workshops in several kindergartens.

– Julija,
participant and parent-activist
of *Bostanje*

TÜRKIYE

In Türkiye, ecosocial education can play a crucial role in bridging environmental justice with social justice, particularly in rural and marginalized communities. We could draw on Türkiye's rich biodiversity and cultural heritage, recognizing that education must address not only ecological challenges but also the societal inequities that come with them, especially for women, youth, ethnic communities (such as Kurds and Laz people), and refugees. This context is relevant for communities that are often excluded from mainstream discussions on environmental issues, as well as young people who are increasingly advocating for sustainable presents and futures. Türkiye's geopolitical position as a bridge/edge/ecotone between Europe and Asia, along with its history of hosting diverse civilizations, creates unique opportunities for cross-cultural learning and solidarity-based education models. Ecosocial education in Türkiye must be shaped with those most excluded at its core.

Current environmental and social challenges in Türkiye include rapid urbanization leading to loss of agricultural lands, industrial pollution affecting coastal and rural communities, and the impacts of large-scale infrastructure projects on local ecosystems and communities. The centralized education system often fails to reflect regional diversity and local ecological knowledge, while economic pressures force many young people to migrate from rural areas to cities, disrupting intergenerational knowledge transfer. Local ecological knowledge should inform both formal and informal education.

There is a series of dilemmas we face with ecosocial education however:

- **Urban vs. Rural Focus.** One key dilemma in Türkiye is the stark contrast between urban and rural communities in terms of access to education, resources, and awareness about climate issues. While urban centers may focus more on green policies, rural areas are more vulnerable to environmental degradation, deforestation, and the loss of traditional agricultural knowledge. How do we balance these contexts and ensure that ecosocial education addresses both?

- **Gender and Social Justice**. Ecosocial learning must challenge gendered exclusions in both discours and practice. Another concern is ensuring gender equality and social justice are integral parts of ecosocial education. In Türkiye, gender-based inequalities persist in many sectors, including education and environmental work. How do we ensure that women and girls and LGBTI communities, especially in conservative areas, are empowered through ecosocial education?

- **Youth and Refugee Inclusion.** Learning spaces should be co-created with youth and displaced communities. Türkiye hosts a large population of young people and refugees, both of whom are critical to shaping the country's future. However, these groups often face exclusion from educational opportunities and ecological discussions. How do we create inclusive and participatory education models that incorporate the voices and experiences of these groups?

- **Multilingual Education and Cultural Diversity.** Mother tongue education is key to sustaining cultural-ecological knowledge. Given Türkiyes multicultural composition, how can ecosocial education support mother tongue education rights and cultural diversity? Developing educational materials in Kurdish, Laz, Arabic and other languages, while preserving traditional ecological knowledge, presents both opportunities and challenges within the current political context.

- **Centralization vs. Local Autonomy.** Local actors need space to shape education around place-based realities. Türkiye's highly centralized education system often conflicts with the need for place-based, locally relevant ecosocial education. How can educators navigate bureaucratic constraints while developing curricula that respond to local environmental and social realities?

Ecosocial Thinking and Practice in Türkiye

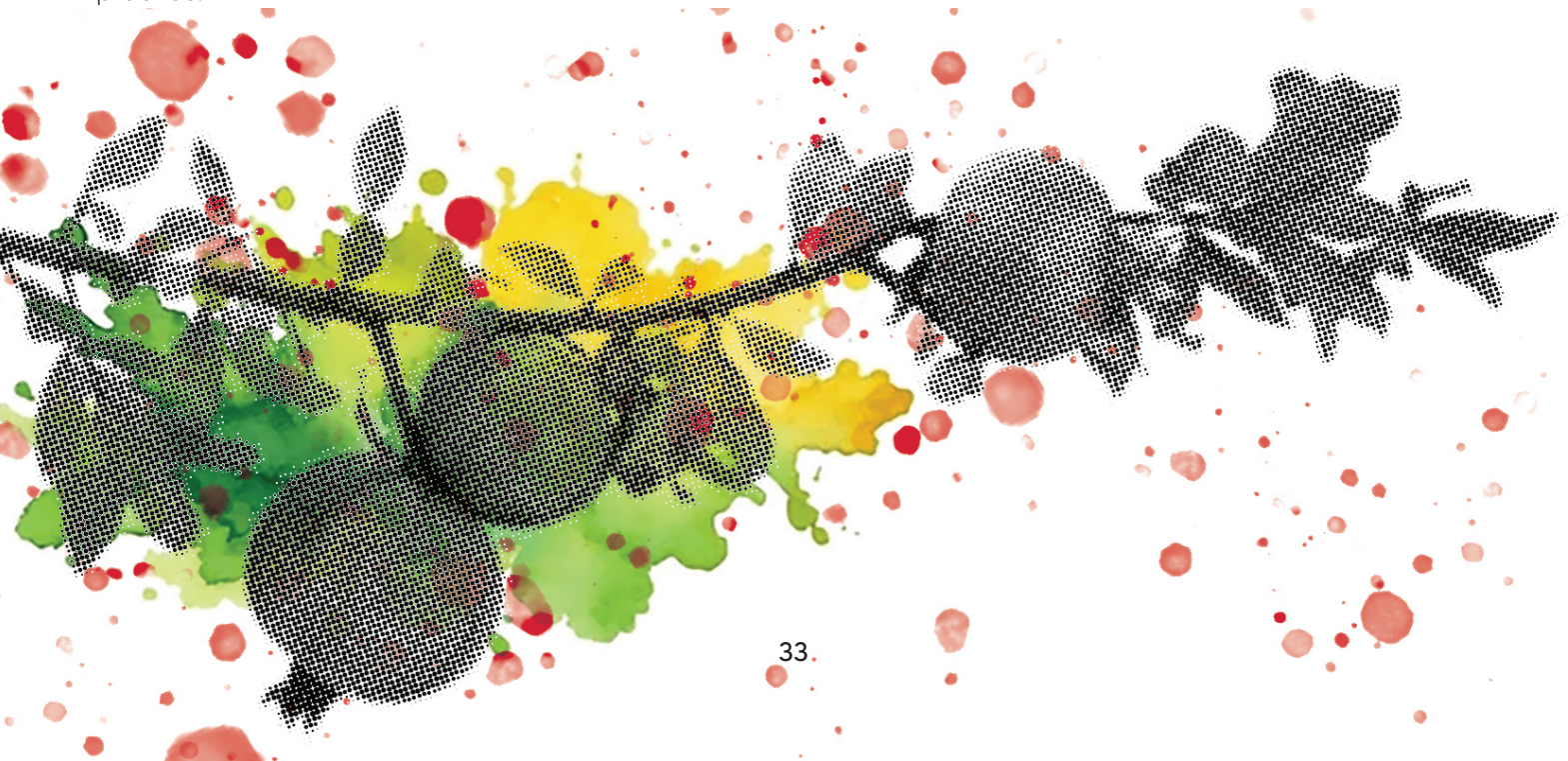
Environmental education in Türkiye's formal system remains largely focused on technical knowledge and individual behavior change, with limited integration of social justice perspectives. However, grassroots initiatives are emerging that connect environmental concerns with broader questions of democracy, human rights, and community empowerment. Civil society organizations, particularly those working with marginalized communities, are pioneering approaches that link ecological sustainability with social transformation. These grassroots efforts demonstrate key principles of ecosocial education: connecting local environmental issues to broader systems of power, centering marginalized voices, and creating spaces for collective learning and action. Cases below illustrate how ecosocial education is taking shape across Türkiye.

Seed Exchange Networks

Across Anatolia, farmers and urban gardeners participate in seed swaps that preserve traditional varieties while building community connections. Organizations like the *Buğday Association for Supporting Ecological Living* https://www.bugday.org/blog/the-bugday-movement, local Slow Food Conviviums and other local NGOs coordinate networks where participants learn not just about plant cultivation, but about corporate control of agriculture, climate adaptation, and food sovereignty. In workshops, farmers share their expertise about selecting seeds, understanding soil health, and reading weather patterns, knowledge that was nearly lost during decades of industrial agriculture promotion. These exchanges create eco-social learning environments where participants connect biodiversity loss to economic policies and explore alternatives through hands-on practice. These exchanges rebuild ecological memory through shared practice.

Art-Based Ecosocial Programs

Gola Culture, *Arts and Ecology Association* https://www.golader.org/hakkimizda in the Eastern Black Sea region, demonstrates how creative practices can foster ecosocial consciousness within Laz community contexts. Founded in 2006 to address discrimination against Laz culture and preserve the ancient wisdom of this Indigenous people, *Gola* works to document, archive, and sustain the Laz language and cultural knowledge through art and culture. The organization's *Iron Apple Festival* https://ortaklasa.iksv.org/hibe-programi/demir-elma-festivali brings together artists, educators, and community members around Borçka's geographically trademarked iron apple fruit, creating spaces for inter-generational dialogue where elders share traditional ecological knowledge while younger participants explore contemporary responses to environmental challenges. The festival serves as a platform for developing region-specific cultural approaches while fostering cooperation among different community actors through workshops, performances, and installations centered on the iron apple's cultural and ecological heritage. Gola's 'Goat School' programs, organized through their tourism initiative *Goluri*, integrate sustainable animal husbandry with cultural preservation. Participants learn traditional shepherding practices alongside nature observation skills, witness goat births, and engage with local shepherds who share stories and knowledge about seasonal cycles, traditional wool spinning, and sustainable livestock management. These programs demonstrate how eco-social education can emerge from immersive experiences that connect participants with traditional ecological practices while fostering critical awareness of rural livelihoods and environmental stewardship. Cultural revival and ecological care can grow from the same root.



Urban Community Gardens for Women

Practising food sovereignty in İzmir's Kadifekale neighborhood, women from diverse ethnic backgrounds including Kurdish and Syrian refugees participate in a municipality-led community garden that serves as both a food production space and site of empowerment. Established in 2022 on previously neglected land deemed unsuitable for construction due to landslide risks, the garden provides 137 rent-free plots (each measuring 15 – 19 square meters) exclusively to women residents. The municipality supports the initiative by providing seedlings, fertilizers, irrigation infrastructure, farming tools, and annual agricultural training, while the women gardeners are responsible for planting and cultivating seasonal vegetables. The Kadifekale garden demonstrates how ecosocial education emerges through practical engagement with food sovereignty and community organizing. Participants learn not only about sustainable growing practices but also about their rights to healthy food, collective decision-making, and community resilience. The garden creates informal learning environments where women share knowledge about seed saving, seasonal cultivation, and traditional food preparation, while addressing broader questions of urban development, environmental justice, and women's empowerment in marginalized communities. The initiative demonstrates how municipal support, combined with participatory structures, can foster both individual empowerment and collective action among marginalized groups. Similar municipal initiatives in other İzmir neighborhoods, such as Kadifekale garden serving 30 women with individual plots, demonstrate how these practices can address food insecurity while fostering community organizing and collective ownership across the city. Everyday growing becomes a form of collective self-determination (see also *Abrantes et al* 2025).

Community-Based Fire Prevention

Following the devastating 2021 forest fires in Antalya and Muğla, local communities have organized fire prevention networks that combine traditional ecological knowledge with modern techniques and women's leadership. İzmir Municipality's innovative Forest Villages and Rural Area Fire Response Unit has distributed hundreds of water tankers to villages around İzmir's periphery since 2022, enabling villagers to respond immediately when they detect fires. The program demonstrates ecosocial education principles by recognizing women's crucial roles in fire prevention; from women shepherds' intimate knowledge of terrain and water sources, to women village leaders' ability to mobilize diverse community members and coordinate emergency responses. These initiatives create learning environments where participants connect traditional ecological practices like controlled grazing for firebreak maintenance with contemporary climate adaptation strategies, while challenging conventional assumptions aboutwho can contribute to disaster prevention and environmental stewardship. Fire knowledge is carried not only in tools, but in people.

Nomadic Pastoral Knowledge Systems

The Sarıkeçili nomadic community, one of Türkiye's last remaining nomadic groups, maintains seasonal migration routes between Mediterranean coastal plains and Taurus Mountain highlands that demonstrate alternative models of land use and resource management. Their mobile lifestyle challenges dominant assumptions about property ownership, sedentary agriculture, and territorial boundaries. Sarıkeçili families navigate complex negotiations with settled communities, government regulations, and changing landscapes while maintaining livestock herds that support local food systems and landscape management. Their practices reveal how mobility can be a form of ecological adaptation, distributing grazing pressure across different ecosystems and preventing overuse of specific areas. Within Sarıkeçili communities, elders transmit knowledge about seasonal timing, pasture management, and weather prediction to younger generations through daily herding practices and storytelling. These intergenerational knowledge exchanges preserve understanding of ecosystem relationships while adapting to contemporary challenges such as climate variability and restricted access to traditional grazing areas. Seasonal movement holds knowledge that exceeds fixed borders and systems. The Sarıkeçili way of life offers a living pedagogy of attunement and resilience.

The Spanish State

To understand the complexity in terms of educational issues and tensions in the Spanish State, connecting it back to its social and historic past, gives valuable insights.

Historical and Geographical Context

The Spanish State is situated in the South of Europe, both geographically and economically speaking. Yet, globally it forms part of the global North, and as that, its histories and current struggles. It has been shaped over a succession of historical stages that have led to significant territorial diversity. From the pre-Roman peoples and the Roman Empire to the Germanic kingdoms and Christian kingdoms, different languages, cultures, and traditions have coexisted, with institutions and borders continuously changing. The Muslim presence on the Iberian Peninsula (Al-Ándalus) strengthened this mosaic through intellectual exchange and advancements in various fields, leaving a profound mark on the territory's culture. Subsequently, the colonial expansion of the crowns of Castile and Aragon promoted the centralization of power, alongside policies of religious and cultural homogenization that marginalized minorities such as Jews, Moorish people, and Roma and Sinti communities.

The liberal state of the 19th century promoted a separation between state power and the conservative drive of the church, while in the 20th century, emancipatory movements pushed for measures to preserve cultural and linguistic diversity and combat inequalities and poverty. However, the 1936 coup d'état thwarted the reforms of the Second Republic, triggering the Spanish Civil War and leading to the Francoist dictatorship, which consolidated an authoritarian, conservative, fascist, national-Catholic, and clientelist state apparatus. During the 1960s, Spain underwent a definitive transformation from a pre-industrial, pre-capitalist society to an industrial capitalist society. Today, it is evident that the transition to democracy was largely a regime change orchestrated by the power structures, which did not break with authoritarianism, repression, and the disciplining of the working classes, persisting into the present.

Current Struggles

The territorial and historical diversity of the Spanish State shapes current popular struggles, where the memory of resistance against various models of domination remains alive in multiple conflicts. The centralization of power contrasts with the persistence of identities and community systems that advocate for self-management, self-government, and territorial sovereignty. Thus, struggles against touristification and real estate speculation emerge from the tension between a globalized market and the right to dignified housing, while land accumulation and the expropriation of commons reflect the clash between large landowners and those seeking to reclaim forms of community production. The exploitation of resources and the expansion of large-scale factory farms and wind farms highlight the tensions between private profit and ecological sustainability. In parallel, migratory conflicts at the southern border illustrate the colonial dynamics still present in controlling human movements. In a context of increasing material and energy scarcity, these disputes shape potential future scenarios, where the balance of power between capitalist elites and social movements will determine whether precariousness and misery deepen or if new forms of resistance emerge to enable more dignified, sustainable, and equitable lives.

The field of education has not been immune to all these tensions. On the contrary, state education has reflected political and social conflicts throughout the recent history of the Spanish State, functioning as a battleground where possibilities for emancipation and control have been defined. A fundamental example was the Institución Libre de Enseñanza, which, from the late 19th century, promoted education based on free thought, pedagogical renewal, and rejection of official doctrine, influencing generations of intellectuals and activists. Similarly, during the Second Republic, republican teachers promoted an educational model based on equality, secularism, and accessible public education, challenging traditional power structures. However, with the Francoist victory, education came under the tutelage of the Church and the Army, reinforcing a system based on religious and nationalist indoctrination. Despite the institutionalization of official teaching, networks of popular education emerged that promoted critical thinking and autonomous training in response to the marginalization of the working classes. Today, unequal access to education, privatization, and teacher precariousness continue to reproduce domination structures, consolidating a society where knowledge is distributed according to power and the capacity for resistance of popular sectors.

Education

The most recent education policy outlining the national curriculum in the Spanish State (known as LOMLOE and approved in December 2020) is firmly committed to a competency-based education, in which knowledge is not worked on in an isolated and abstract manner, but is rather deployed in authentic and meaningful contexts. Within this new curricular framework, three key elements can act as levers to move towards a more critical and global justice-oriented approach: citizenship competence, curriculum vectors (especially 'global awareness' and 'democratic participation') and learning situations. However, it is also true that the technocratic conception of education (which understands technology as a key tool for learning and teaching) not only persists but is deepened by this law, opening the door to make students' data, desires and subjectivities even more available to large corporations such as Google and Microsoft in an uncritical way. All this new configuration makes it necessary to rethink the materials, practices and approaches to eco-social education, not only to adapt them to the current curricular architecture, but also to respond to a social and educational context marked by vertiginous changes that require radical, firm positions, convinced that education is a vital political act.

Here we show some different examples of places and organisations across the Spanish State that we are related to, and that can give some insights to its different practices and contexts, but is by no means intended to be exhaustive.

for example...

Transforming Education: The Ecosocial Curriculum and Schools of *FUHEM*

FUHEM is an independent educational foundation with its base in Madrid, that promotes an approach to education centered on ecological sustainability, social justice, and democratic participation. Apart from organising for ecosocial justice across the Spanish State, and dedicating work to research and education, Fuhem runs three different schools, according to ecosocial principles. Through all its activities, it is advocating for a transformative educational model that engages with the climate crisis, global and local inequality, and the social questions around a shift toward fairer and more sustainable ways of living. Its approach is based on educating with criticality and compassion, and the commitment to the common good and the planet's ecological limits.

In its schools, the ecosocial education that *FUHEM* promotes is reflected in a curriculum that integrates topics such as climate change, gender equity, solidarity-based economies, and participatory democracy. It also takes shape in school practices that include active learning methodologies, organic school lunches, educational gardens, and democratic school management. With this vision, *FUHEM* aims not only to transmit knowledge, but also to foster the values, attitudes, and skills that enable students to become agents of change in their communities and the wider world.

They also work to support teachers and schools more widely with developing guides on how to engage with education policy demands, and embed ecosocial justice education. *FUHEM* also designs lesson plans, schemes of work and other educational material, and they are also active in campaigning for a more ecosocial justice-based education system, and pushing educational institutions towards a political change.

For more information, see https://www.fuhem.es/educacion-ecosocial and our ecosocial education forum with Charo Morán of *FUHEM:* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EhUUuaqMTsk

for example...

Ecotono: Ecosocial Education from the South of the Global North

We are a cooperative based in Seville, Andalusia, that was founded in January 2002. Although in our early years we often spoke of environmental education, we never fully identified with that label, which focused almost exclusively on raising awareness or knowledge of the natural environment. Today, we dare to say that we work within the theoretical and practical framework of ecosocial education, doing everything we can to integrate an intersectional perspective that includes, at the very least, gender, age, and ecological sustainability, and we hope and believe we are also making progress in incorporating class and anti-racist perspectives. There is still a long way to go, but we find it essential not only to name these issues but to act with intention and develop educational tools that allow people to view the world and its problems through all these analytical lenses – and to create or promote ecotopian ways of acting that take them into account.

Andalusia is a diverse and peripheral territory. Just in our own city, Seville, alongside the tourist showcase that the city center has become, are 6 of the 15 poorest neighborhoods in Spain. We share territory and reality with exploited precarious agricultural day labourers, janitors, sex workers who are denied the most basic rights – even by people who identify as feminists. With undocumented or exploited migrant people. With people who can't access decent housing, while thousands of homes serve as temporary lodging for lost tourists crowding the city center – even during unbearable heat waves. None of this reality is foreign to us, and we do what we can both through our work with exchange value and through the work we do that has only use value (for those who benefit from it).

Everything we create – educational materials or learning situations for teachers and students, reports, reflections – absolutely everything, is always available for the common good, and must continue to be so. Our most immediate challenge – no small task, ahí es na – is to deepen an ecosocial education that not only denounces injustice, but is also capable of imagining, proposing, and building other possible realities. We continue to dream and to invest in educational processes where people are the protagonists, where sustainability is a real and daily commitment, and where intersectionality stops being an aspiration and becomes a real, everyday pedagogical practice.

– Ana, member of *Ecotono Sociedad Cooperativa Andaluza*
https://ecotonored.es

CATALONIA

During the first four decades of the 20th century, the libertarian movement (made up of anarchists, anarcho-syndicalists and sympathisers) built a radically revolutionary educational and pedagogical process as an alternative to class domination and capitalist structures. From the Modern School (an educational institution founded by the pedagogue Francesc Ferrer i Guàrdia in 1901 in Barcelona, whose essential aim was to educate the working class in a rationalist, secular and non-coercive way), through the rationalist schools and teachers of the CNT trade unions and atheneums, to the commitment to public, active, co-educational and liberating education (Escuela Nueva Unificada) during the Social Revolution of 1936 in Catalonia (Cortavitarte, 2019). The Francoist regime that followed sought to eliminate this educational legacy, spreading in the schools the ideological principles of the victors of the Spanish Civil War and establishing a pedagogical ideology based on authoritarianism, national Catholicism, sexism, classism, etc., as well as purging teachers who were not in favour of the regime from the teaching profession.

This dispute is now mirrored in the tensions between neoliberal colonialist vs. emancipatory education, and the power struggles that arise from this continue to define educational practices: which imaginaries are promoted and which are hidden or penalised among Catalan classrooms. Some months ago, for instance, a mural made by a group of students and families at Pins del Vallès primary school (located in the municipality of Sant Cugat del Vallès) to call for solidarity with the Palestinian people was later removed by the school's leadership team at the request of the City Council, which argued that it could generate hatred. Weeks after, students from various schools in the municipality – along with their families – repainted a full-scale replica of Pablo Picasso's 'Guernica' in the colors of the Palestinian flag, to highlight the City Council's 'attempt to silence' them (ACN 2024). Many schools are also protesting against the continuous evictions that are taking place (Catalonia recorded 7,381 evictions during 2024, 26.8% of the total for Spanish State) and that also affect their students and families, fostering school failure and contributing to the breakdown of the social fabric and the community.

Over the past decade, state schools in Catalonia have increasingly adopted neoliberal principles, such as giving head teachers more autonomy and emphasizing performance metrics and innovation. One of the outcomes of the innovation is that more and more schools try to adopt project-based learning. However, the problem is that focusing on innovation can often ignore inclusion. In fact, it can make schools less inclusive. As innovative schools become more popular, families who don't know how to navigate the system of school choice policies – often migrants or those with fewer resources – are left out (Collet-Sabé, 2017, Tarabini et all, 2018). So, instead of helping all students, the push for innovation has sometimes created more division and made it harder for some students to access good education. As innovation becomes a key measure of school success, decision-making has shifted away from collective governance toward more top-down approaches, often sidelining equity in favor of results.

At the same time, different models towards making a desirable future are being tried out throughout Catalonia. From cooperative housing and a solidarity economy model, to housing organising and self-organised schools following the libertarian tradition, which are so far mainly functioning at nursery and kindergarten level. At the same time, some public primary and even secondary schools experiment with critical ideas and are fostering emancipatory learning spaces of change. One very inspiring example from recent years, are the Escoles populars, which have sprung up all across Catalonia. Tightly linked to local housing movements, groups of activists and families have come together to create neighbourhood after school spaces for kids and teenagers, drawing on critical and popular pedagogies. The activities range from homework and study support, to engaging with injustices the kids face, like housing issues and racism or sexism. On a local level, the spaces the groups create, help knitting a tighter neighbourhood network, celebrating festivities together, discussing pedagogies, and helping each other out generally amongst neighbours.

for example...

EduAlter: A Bridge between Organized Civil Society and Education Centres

EduAlter is a Catalan association, non-profit, secular and independent, founded in 1999. We are an organisation specialising in ecosocial education, with a strong background in promoting and facilitating training, reflection and collaboration processes among educational actors in the formal and non-formal spheres.

We understand ecosocial education as that which projects and struggles for a future of dignity, emancipation and global justice. This translates into three main pillars: The first consists of providing a critical perspective that analyses the causes and consequences of the inequalities and oppressions produced by the capitalist and patriarchal system. The second consists of offering tools and strategies to build more dignified and respectful relationships between people, with other living beings, and with te ritories. The third is to become actively involved in s cial transformation aimed at ending power and domination over all forms of life.

Our work with teachers, students, NGO professionals, public administrations, etc., includes developing, implementing and disseminating ecosocial educational resources on various topics such as climate emergency, democratic participation, gender equality and feminisms, culture of peace and critical perspectives toward technology, among others. We are active in teacher training and also collaborate in spreading and scaling up campaigns and platforms that seek to influence public education policies in favor of global justice. In everything we do, we draw on the experience, practices and knowledge of organized civil society: activist groups and organizations that fight for human rights and defend their territories, both those in our own region and those that inspire us from other parts of the world. We collaborate with several of these groups and bring them into the classrooms so that students can be aware of their struggles and get involved, which often results in interesting synergies and transformative learning. We think it is important that young people look up to activists as role models and begin to understand themselves as political agents capable of bringing about profound changes in society.

- Raúl,
project coordinator at *EduAlter*

For more information, see: *https://www.edualter.org/ca* and our ecosocial education forum video on teacher training: *https://youtu.be/N86XY0_MK8U?si=eT6ZvLU-5wXuq8Sy*

German-speaking countries

The German-speaking countries in central Europe –Germany, Austria, Switzerland– have a series of things in common when it comes to how ecosocial matters are dealt with and ecosocial education has come to be shaped. Below is a summary of some overarching tendencies.

Social Movement Histories

Shaping Ecosocial Consciousness and Discourse

In the 1970s, following social 68-movements that were less radical than in neighbouring countries, this region had quite powerful and radical anti-nuclear and environmentalist movements. The generation of these movements strongly shaped ecosocial consciousness and debate as it stands in the German language context today. Different achievements were made due to local campaigns and direct action, soon to be translated into policy as environmental activists went on to build up Green parties. A certain institutionalization of ecological struggles ensued as this generation took to party politics, laying the groundwork for many ambitious regulations. Experiences like the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear accident marked this generation: in Austria, nuclear power is taboo since the blockading, fierce battles and referenda surrounding the Zwentendorf plant (which was built but never put to function), Switzerland is phasing out nuclear energy via a prohibition of new plants, and in Germany the last remaining three plants were phased out in 2023, with the Fukushima disaster also having played a role in reaffirming the rejection of nuclear power.

Those battles and gains were only partial, as Germany relied heavily on coal for instance and it is only since the years surrounding 2020, with rising awareness of climate disaster and movements like *Ende Gelände*, that this sector is being strongly targeted by activists and communities. Car culture, so important to the German economy, is a powerful national ideology and subject of fierce debates, with climate activists of *Extinction Rebellion* https://rebellion.global and *Letzte Generation* https://letztegeneration.at being targeted as terrorists by the liberal elite. Climate science has played an important role across these movements in the German speaking world – wedded as it is to ideas of enlightenment, science and technology – tied in with the generation of *Fridays for Future* https://fridaysforfuture.org and pushing for radical change. Recent struggles led by young people have also focused on the preservation of forests and water, opposing the construction of highways and certain industries, as well as pushing for a socio-ecological expropriation and socialization of energy infrastructure (see https://rwe-enteignen.de).

Until more recently, in movements as well as in politics and mainstream discourse in the German speaking countries, environmental matters have tendentially been seen as separate from social matters – couched in discourses of security, nature preservation and pollution that stand opposed to capitalist economic interests but did not formulate their own socioecological economic demands or models. Matters of social justice have tendentially remained separate from ecological and environmental questions – especially social matters pertaining to the many who don't hold citizenship in these countries. This kind of white environmentalism with a big blind spot on the colonial and intersectional nature of environmental injustice, as can be found in many other European countries too, has a specific prehistory in Germany and Austria.

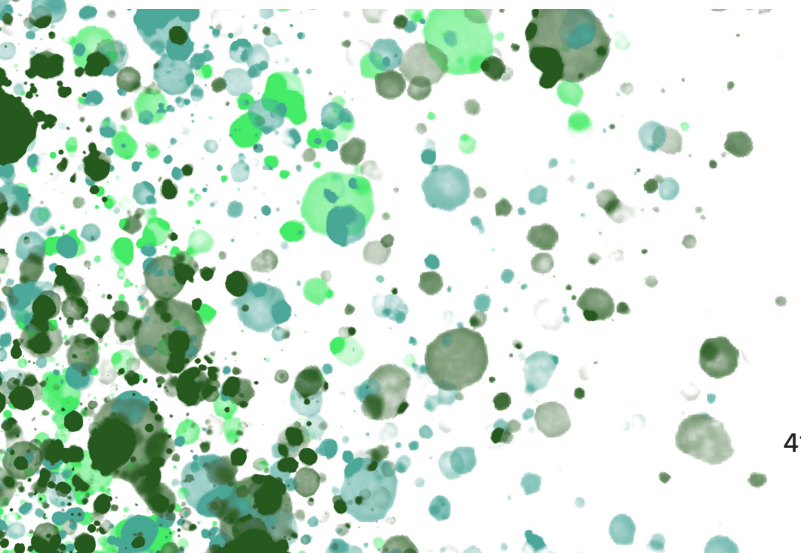
The elephant in the room with this separation of social from ecological matters is of course Nazi fascism. Hitler and his followers were fond protectors of nature, in discourse at least, and cast their chosen enemies as enemies of nature, whether those were Jewish, gay, Roma/Sinti or communist. Nature in this fascist understanding is a national, ethnic and heteropatriarchal matter, one from which all the designated others of the German race were barred. This kind of 'brown ecology', as it is sometimes called, still lives on in various ways today. It lives on in far right fascist pockets, but indeed also in liberal discourses of conservation that fail to take environmental justice into account as an intersectional matter. It's the subaltern people in our societies who do the reproductive work and thus sustain the system whilst themselves being the least polluting and damaging subjects in ecological terms; and at the same time those workers (in waged, informal or reproductive spheres alike) are the ones most affected by environmental-ecological problems and damages.

The Eco, the Social and the National

In this story, not unfamiliar to other places in the global North, ecological struggles fail to articulate with social matters more broadly and to thus build proper momentum and alternative economic as much as ecological visions, remaining restricted to white middle class constituencies. The contribution of worker, bipoc (black, indigenous and people of colour), queer and anti-racist struggles to socio-ecological possibilities of transformation can not be underestimated in this sense, and is actually happening. In the newer climate movements, which start to look beyond climate only and take different planetary boundaries and communities into account, there are active efforts to bring together labour, anti-racist and decolonial, queer and other movements.

School System Politics

School systems in the region largely reflect this white and middle class bias, promoting environmentalism as a matter of distinction or shunning it as a snob problem, but rarely articulating it with the populations of migrant and lower class families who make up much of the existing and even more of the future workforce in these countries. This bias is often perpetuated by badly ressourced and structured teaching of German as a second language, leading to non national students to have less voice and representation. In Austria for instance, 23% of children in AT have primary languages other than German (in Vienna it's 68%) in primary school, but most people who teach German as second language don't speak a second language or don't receive proper training. Teacher training institutions to this day have failed to establish adequate taining in the field of German as a second language as compulsory in their curriculums, resulting in the fact that only a minority of teachers (those who qualified themselves voluntarily) who teach the subject are properly equipped to do so successfully. The far right, in Austria like other countries in the region, loves to campaign against 'foreigners' who 'don't learn German' – a self-perpetuating system of racist and classist sentiment, scapegoating those who have been deprived of adequate educational opportunities for decades.



AUSTRIA

The Austrian education ministry has since many decades been led by the Conservative party and curricular change hindered by class interest as well as regional rule over educational matters, and teachers have largely been recruited from rural conservative milieus. The education system divides students into class-based tiers from a very early point, as at age 10 students are sorted into eitheracademically oriented schools ('Gymnasium') and professionally oriented schools ('Mittelschulen'). For over 40 years now, Austria has had model experimental schools (Schulversuche) which have tested new approaches with considerable autonomy, but have had barely any influence on national education and often remain underfunded – they remain exceptions that prove the rule. Various networks – *Oekolog* https://www.oekolog.at, *Schule im Aufbruch* https://www.schule-im-aufbruch.at, *Freiday Schools* https://www.frei-day.at (see also p22), *Teachers for Future* https://www.teachersforfuture.at (see also p42) and so on – push for change but have little impact on teacher training, as the institutional interfaces are slow and hard to access. A recent joint campaign by *Scientists for Future*, *Fridays for Future* and *Teachers for Future* set out to push for change that incorporates climate crisis into national curricula (see below) but much leeway remains to be made. New initiatives have to reckon with the fact of generational change, with many student-activists of the *Fridays for Future* generation having gone into universities, ecosocial NGOs or the labour market: newer generations of students respond to discussions of climate crisis with disinterest and disillusionment. Yet new efforts for anti-discriminatory, intersectional and socio-ecological learning exist and are likely to be in increasing student demand as both social and environmental injustice increases locally and globally.

For more on this, see our eco-social education forum video on Teacher Training: https://youtu.be/N86XY0_MK8U?si=eT6ZvLU-5wXuq8Sy

for example...

Advocacy campaign of *Teachers for Future* with *Scientists for Future*

In 2023, *Teachers for Future Austria*, in collaboration with *Scientists for Future*, have drafted an open letter advocating for the inclusion of ecosocial education in the school curriculum*. After gathering key information about the legal possibilities and avenues for influencing policy change, they revised their demands to address the school administration, local government authorities, and the Ministry of Education accordingly.

Open Letter Demands:

- Every school needs a paid ecosocial advocate.
- Influence the school programming for the entire year or multiple years, depending on the local context, to include ecosocial education content and activities.
- Facilitate the exchange of good practices among schools through conferences and forums.
- Hold regular meetings with local governance and national education institutions, which should be open to NGO representatives and experts.

Their key strategy was to identify civil servants at various levels of political administration who were eco-sensitive, either due to their political responsibilities and/or genuine ecological concerns. These civil servants did not necessarily have to be from the Ministry of Education. On the contrary, they focused on individuals in influential positions across diverse policy departments. Below, two steps for running a successful campaign are outlined.

Step 1: To be seen in the Ministry

You have to understand the political structure– who is proposing changes, how decisions are being made, and by whom. Teachers for Future Austria and Scientists for Future used their existing contacts with eco-sensitive civil servants in lower-level departments to discuss their advocacy strategy. They studied public documents related to various departments and areas of responsibility to create a mailing list for their open letter. It was important to include specific individuals on this list and be able to explain to each one why they were responsible for the necessary changes. Reputable representatives from Scientists for Future managed to directly contact top ministry officials, seeking a response and raising their awareness.

Step 2: To Be seen in public

The second step involves connecting with and mobilising the general public. This includes forming alliances with other organisations or taking relevant actions to support the letter. Teachers for Future Österreich and Scientists for Future also funded an official press release and utilised a large mailing list of press agencies. The subsequent collaboration with the Ministry of Education proceeded slowly. The task of creating materials to support schools in taking their first steps toward Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) was assigned to Teachers For Future. The ministry announced to distribute these materials but acted hesitant. Therefore the 'ESD Package - Mobilty as Game Changer' containing a video, a PDF-guide and slides was published by Teachers For Future.

- Florian,
Teachers for Future Austria

For more information, see *Teachers for Future Austria*'s ecosocial education forum video on Campaigning, Institutions and Policy: https://youtu.be/2l5s6TE7Q7E?si=-JTS2izjLGc7PDNr

* - https://www.scientists4future.at/2023/09/12/brief-nachhaltigkeit-an-schulen

GERMANY

Germany is an important economy within the European context, a nation with a large industry, producing cars for instance, and an emphasis on technological development. It's a country with relatively strong environmental regulations on the one hand, thanks to environmental movements and a longer complicated history as outlined above, where ecological matters are however sometimes captured by the far right on the one hand, or handled technocratically on the other. German 'Staatsraison' (reason of state) is based in industry, technology and economic liberalism and materially encompasses a significant military sector as much as the renewable energy sector. This reason of state is applied in repressive and contradictory ways, both domestically and in foreign policy, when national or geopolitical interests are at stake. The push for renewables is accompanied by a strong reliance on coal, and liberal ideology comes with a good amount of repression when protest becomes uncomfortable: the criminalization of the climate activists of Letzte Generation is one example, the criminalization of people protesting against the German involvement in the Gaza genocide starting in 2023 is another.

A major challenge in the German context is thus addressing and overcoming the contradictions of techno-capitalist developmentalism and environmentalism as well as imperialist *Staatsraison* – in order to introduce pluralist and care-based social, ecological and education practices. Migrants play a major role in this, as they are both scapegoated by the centre and far right, daemonized as 'others' to a supposedly pure and clean German nature and culture, and relied upon for the functioning of the economy. Where 'brown' ecological discourses drive ideas of nature preservation as a matter of expelling 'foreign' elements, opposing migrants to supposedly native people and other species, transformative ecosocial thinking centers migrants as protagonists of socioecological change and unhinges the idea of autochthone purity or purist localism: this is what the Klima.Gerecht.Machen example featured below addresses. At the same time, there has been a significant generational upheaval in relation to climate and ecological crisis, kicked off by the student generation of Fridays for Future, raising powerful challenges for education and activism alike, as resonates in the reflections of Nord Süd Forum below.

for example...

Klima.Gerecht.Machen

Klima.Gerecht.Machen is a multiplier project by, for, and with young people in Munich up to the age of 26. In cooperation with *Green City e.V.*, sixteen participants from *MIKADO UMdieWELT* have been trained as climate justice multipliers within the framework of *Education for Sustainable Development* (*ESD*). Our training covered sustainable development, transformative learning, climate protection, social and global inequalities, decolonial perspectives, and anti-discrimination approaches. Drawing on our knowledge and lived experiences, we have designed workshops to highlight the intersection of climate and social justice. *Klima.Gerecht.Machen* remains an active project in 2024/25, with workshops led by young trainers who have completed the Train-the-Trainer program.

Why does it matter who talks and teaches about the climate crisis? What's the role that migrant youth have to play in this, particularly in Germany? A recurring question in climate discourse is why BIPOC communities and people with migration biographies are less visibly active in environmental movements. Throughout the project, it became evident that issues of equality and discrimination often take precedence over topics like recycling, upcycling, or organic food. Addressing climate justice means acknowledging these priorities and ensuring that environmental activism is not disconnected from broader social struggles.

Migrant youth in Germany play a crucial role in expanding the climate discourse by bringing perspectives shaped by lived experiences of inequality. Their participation fosters cross-movement solidarity and ensures that climate action is not just about technical solutions but also about justice and systemic change. By amplifying these voices, Klima.Gerecht.Machen challenges exclusionary narratives and helps build a more inclusive and impactful climate movement (more info in German, see *Klimaherbst 2023*).

– Asmir, *Klima.Gerecht.Machen*

For more information, see https://www.greencity.de/projekt/partizipatives-projekt-zu-klimagerechtigkeit as well as our ecosocial education forum on Solidarity Schools and Migrant Climate Justice https://youtu.be/FWav1Jb3220?si=71XFWJKJEdmk-WPe

for example...

Learning with *Fridays for Future*

In 2019, *Fridays for Future* organized a landmark demonstration in Berlin on eco-social issues, drawing over a million participants – an unprecedented turnout by German standards. However, the political response was completely absent. This lack of reaction led to significant resignation among this generation and the ones following, in contrast to previous generations where such mobilizations had succeeded and led to empowerment.

In workshops with students, their perspectives often appear relatively resigned, showing few radical positions compared to the *Fridays for Future* generation. They tend to be more conformist. Especially among upper high school students (Gymnasium), there is an awareness of what the right answers to ecosocial justice questions might be, as well as the necessary knowledge, but students rarely connect this to their own realities or organize around it. In vocational schools, students seem to take a more technocratic stance. They are very aware of the problems but it rarely goes beyond a feeling that something political must be done. Here, the role of the workshop facilitator becomes truly important.

A diagnosis of the times: We live in a society that struggles to envision desirable futures. Realism dominates, and progressive futures appear highly obscured. This generation, marked by the experience of the Covid 19 experience, might have higher needs for security, and there is a clear lack of political imagination, opposed to personal needs.

Our role as facilitators and organisers is that of a catalyst: The expertise generally exists, unless people are unwilling to learn more. For example, on conservative energy policy, technical knowledge is present. But when it comes to questions of attitude and organising will – how one politically positions oneself on these issues, there is very little engagement, especially when students are focused on giving 'the right answer'.

At the level of Civil Society Education, there is a strong interconnection between environmental education and global learning. In contrast, at the political level, these two aspects – environment and social justice – are often kept far apart. As a result, learning about ecosocial justice tends to happen mostly outside of formal school settings.

Teachers are generally very committed and eager to learn, but they lack structural majority support within schools. As external facilitators and organizations, there is an opportunity to support and accompany these dedicated teachers. School leadership, however, is extremely difficult to reach within the complex and bureaucratic German education system.

Nevertheless, there are a few schools that have successfully integrated ecosocial justice as a cross-cutting theme, demonstrating that it is possible. The 'whole school approach' is probably still a relatively new concept in this context.

For more information, see
https://www.nordsuedforum.de

– Matthias,
Facilitator from ecosocial education initiative *Nord Süd Forum* in Munich

See also: *Teachers for Future* and *Scientists for Future* (p 42)

Irish and British Isles

IRELAND

Ecosocial Education: Current Landscape and Challenges

While the term ecosocial education is not widely used in Ireland, many of its principles are evident in the work of NGOs engaged in *Education for Sustainable Development* (*ESD*) and *Global Citizenship Education* (*GCE*), particularly in adult and community education. These initiatives largely operate outside the formal education system. *ESD* and *GCE* have become the dominant terms over the past few decades, building on a foundation laid by *Development Education* since the 1960s. Though they have distinct emphases, there is significant overlap.

Despite increasing urgency due to the climate crisis, progress has been slow and fragmented, driven mostly by NGOs and grassroots efforts rather than Government leadership. These initiatives remain underfunded, uncoordinated, and often lack the systemic support or critique necessary for broader impact. Government responses tend to be conventional and cautious, with little innovation or structural change. Many would argue formal policies uphold existing class structures, for example grants to homeowners to upgrade their houses in renewables, but no effective rent gaps or supports.

Within the formal education system, ecosocial content can be woven into subjects like Geography and Civic, Social and Political Education, but this depends heavily on individual teachers. Our *Climate Action Short Course*, currently being piloted, is one of the few efforts to attempt to integrate ecosocial education.

A new senior cycle subject, *Climate Action and Sustainable Development*, is set to launch in September 2025. Developed by the Department of Education, it aligns with the *Climate Action Short Course* and could mark a significant step forward – though much depends on how effectively it is implemented.

Curricular coherence remains a challenge. For example, the revised senior cycle Business course makes no meaningful critique of capitalism, consumerism, or infinite growth, and includes only superficial references to sustainability. While sustainability principles have been adopted in policy, their practical application often lacks depth.

Strategic Developments and Implementation Gaps

The government's Education for Sustainability: National Strategy on ESD (2014 – 2020) aimed to equip learners with knowledge and values for sustainable development. It was followed by ESD to 2030, which aligns with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and promotes a whole-of-government approach. However, implementation has been weak. Schools and teachers are not receiving the structural or pedagogical support needed, and educational institutions remain largely unchanged.

Historical Context and the Power of Ecosocial Learning

Ireland's colonial history under British rule offers a powerful lens for ecosocial education. Connecting historical injustices such as land dispossession, language loss, and the erosion of traditional ecological knowledge to current struggles – like the Palestinian cause or climate justice – can deepen learners' understanding of systemic oppression. Ecosocial education can help Irish learners relate their own history to global injustices and inspire meaningful action.

In light of Ireland's shift toward tech capitalism and industrial agriculture, education must also foster critical media literacy, interrogate green capitalism, and challenge dominant climate narratives. Reclaiming cultural identity and ecological wisdom can empower learners to envision just, sustainable futures.

Public Awareness and Cultural Potential

Climate awareness in Ireland is growing but often remains surface-level, focusing on personal responsibility, recycling, or green technologies. Systemic issues like climate justice and inequality rarely feature in mainstream discourse. Government messaging reinforces individualised and capitalist narratives.

Yet, there is a growing, if fragmented, movement – led by youth, educators, and activists – linking climate to social justice, colonialism, and inequality. These voices, often seen as too political, are key to transformative change.

In rural areas, strong ties to land and farming can create resistance to mainstream climate narratives, especially when perceived as anti-farmer. However, these same cultural roots hold immense potential for place-based, community-led ecosocial education.

Structural Barriers and the Need for Reform

The Irish education system's heavy emphasis on exams limits space for critical, interdisciplinary, or place-based learning. The structure pushes both students and teachers toward measurable outcomes, often sidelining ecosocial goals. Most school leadership prioritises academic results over holistic, meaningful critical learning.

For ecosocial education to flourish, systemic change is essential – beyond new strategies or curriculum add-ons. The architecture of schooling itself must evolve to support critical thinking, collective imagination, emotional literacy, and action for climate and social justice.

for example...

***Climate Action Short Course*: A Contextualized Ecosocial Education Initiative**

In Ireland, the *Climate Action Short Course* is an ecosocial education initiative designed for mainstream secondary teachers to deliver over 100 hours across three years. This is the first formal subject in Ireland co-designed with young people, focusing not on climate science, but on root causes – capitalism and colonialism. It uses place-based, holistic, and democratic methodologies, aiming for transformative learning for both students and teachers. It's shaped by Ireland's history, evolving identity, cultural norms, and relationship to place.

The *Climate Action Short Course* directly acknowledges the status quo, asks who benefits, and introduces new ways of relating, making meaning, and acting collectively. It engages critically with the norms of the education system it operates within and explores their influence.

The course considers the perspectives of teachers – their training, methods, and worldviews – and the needs of young people navigating countercultural ideas in a system unprepared for the complexities of climate action. Consent and care are central. The *Climate Action Short Course* challenges dominant norms and invites reflection, while supporting learners through discomfort, grief, inspiration, and empowerment as they explore collective responses.

We collaboratively work with the Student *Climate Action Network* (*SCAN*) in Ireland to be parallel with the *Climate Action Short Course*. They now gather to build relationships and learning; 45 students from four schools came together to take part in an overnight trip to Larch Hill National Scout Centre as part of their *Climate Action Junior Cycle* short course. They engaged in workshops on *Climate Justice* and *Global Citizenship Education* and nature connection, seed planting, outdoor cooking and other outdoor activities and games.

Our students carried out action projects for the final assessment. One school group chose the topic of 'Football for Climate Justice'. They researched a community-owned football club *Bohemians in Dublin*, who run *The Spark*, a project, working with community partners, local businesses, and some big institutions. As young people keen on sports, this project captured their imagination and demonstrated how sustainability and climate change links with everything.

- Nancy and Kathryn,
coordinators of the *Climate Action short course* pilot programme

For more information, see *https://www.climateactionshortcourse.ie* and our ecosocial education forum on Teacher Training: *https://youtu.be/N86XY0_MK8U?si=nRvRFBBH1cQuZsRo*

England

The Neoliberalization of Education

In Europe, England is where neoliberalization of education is generally piloted, influenced by Anglo Saxon, North American visions. The education system emphasises student performance (both in how they are doing in their exams, as well as in how they are dressed and behave) and continuous data production through data monitoring. Policy discourse sets clear markers towards student attainment via a standardisation of knowledge and audit. Schools prime themselves with neoliberal slogans such as 'striving for excellence', at the same time as they are being assessed for being 'inclusive'. The mix of all this means that teachers face constant pressure to meet performance metrics such as test scores and attendance, while also having to show how they differentiate their lessons. This creates a tension between policy demands and the realities of teaching a diverse student body with many needs, amidst a soaring mental health crisis, which implies that schools become more and more exclusionary spaces.

The pressure of performativity and test scores also makes it difficult for teachers who want to implement eco social justice ideas into their lessons. This has to always be balanced with curriculum and exam demands. It is common in the UK to have special days to celebrate *Black History Month* for example, or other social justice themes, however these are often rather symbolic/performative and disconnected from a more thorough engagement with the topics, let alone engaging with them on a structural level.

School Exclusions

School exclusions have been on the rise in recent years, disproportionately affecting students from marginalised backgrounds. Many of these exclusions are attributed to disruptive behavior, which generally reflects disengagement with lessons rather than supposed misbehavior. At the same time neoliberal education policies assign the blame for failure on the students' individual behaviours and capabilities to be part of the school and learning culture. Yet there is no structural reflection of the broader issues of inequality in the education system, where students who don't conform to mainstream expectations are disproportionately punished, and a curriculum which only represents a specific minority of the student body.

Ecosocial Justice School Movements

In recent years, initially as part of the global *Black Lives Matter* movement in 2020, as well as engaging with the spiralling precarisation due to the Covid19 pandemic, various groups have formed in the UK to campaign against school exclusion with a strong anti-racist stance (e.g. *No more Exclusions*, *Coalition of Anti-racist Educators* (*CARE*) or the *Black Educators Alliance* (*BEA*), etc.). At the same time climate justice movements like *Fridays for Future* or *Extinction Rebellion* gained support and momentum amongst young people, and climate strikes were especially popular amongst school students. In response, in the autumn 2020 the conservative government released a policy guideline which, amongst others, prohibits the teaching of material critical to capitalism and to engage or 'promoting divisive or victim narratives', implicitly targeting anti-racism groups as well as climate justice organisations. A specific focus of these policies is the history curriculum, where conservative politicians push for more teaching on 'the empire', while declaring decolonial histories as divisive.

Science Education

The problematic state of dominant Science Education has been an issue of debate for many years. As early as the 1990s, many notable SE scholars have criticised relevant policies and practices for functioning in a context that privileges Western, middle-class viewpoints while simultaneously undermining alternative worldviews.

A main feature of dominant SE is that it presents science as linked to absolute truths, without being influenced by power relations and privileges. Evidence to suggest this is that mainstream SE textbooks avoid making references to how problematic relationships between corporations and scientific research institutions lead to the manipulation of science. Examples of such relations can be drawn from the numerous instances of how companies have paid scientists to undermine scientific conclusions which discredit certain technological products, for instance relating to the petroleum, tobacco and nuclear energy industry. Similarly, school science often omits making references to the way that gender, race and class privileges promote inequalities within the field of professional science. Another characteristic of SE in neoliberalism is that SE learning is limited to the acquisition of decontextualized technical skills and fragmented scientific knowledge. This process evolves in tandem with the effort of major educational institutions to glorify fields of science and technology, in order to attract students to STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) careers. Such careers involve a specific technical focus and lack a more holistic scientific approach. Finally, from a pupil's perspective, school science often feels like an ongoing individualised assessment and evaluation. Success depends on the learners' abilities to absorb large amounts of rapidly delivered and decontextualized laws and theories. These are often rapidly transmitted to them through positivists and authoritarian pedagogical approaches that make use of cookbook laboratory exercises always leading to predetermined conclusions. The above explored mentality can be described as a consumerist ethic, as pupils compete to gain personal access to the best products of SE in order to compete in the frame of the STEM division of labour.

for example...

The Radical Education Forum and its Clinics

Come along to exchange, vent, get mutual support or experiment ideas you have for your teaching/lessons/lectures/sessions/practice! What: a free flow discussion meeting we have been holding regularly for the past year, to share experiences, frustrations, desires we are going through in our everyday practice as educators.

The *Radical Education Forum* was a space organised in London roughly from 2010 to 2021 by a group of people working in a wide range of educational settings who met monthly to discuss radical pedagogical theories and techniques, and contemporary issues of interest to those involved in education. Interested in how these theories and questions can inform our practice, the *Forum* supported social justice in education, linking practitioners within mainstream educational institutions, community education initiatives, social movements, arts organisations and self-organised groups.

For a period we ran a mutual support clinic, which acted a bit like the staff room we all wished we would have had. A space to vent, critically reflect on the state of education and the daily issues in the classroom, support each other and explore ways to transform the difficult situations we and our students were facing. Many of us had recently become teachers, and were dealing with the effects of the neoliberalization of education. We typically started our sessions with a 'puke round', a moment to vent and share all the difficult moments we had encountered, rage against school policies, structural injustices and things which just don't make any sense in school education. We then focussed on the one or the other aspects that came up. One of the big recurring issues was pressure we felt to adhere to behaviour management policies and practices in the schools, and the contradictions this caused us, politically and ethically. Practices which led to exclusions of students, which to us had structural reasons, but we had no resources or possibilities to engage with in our capacities as teachers. We used some Theatre of the Oppressed exercises to explore some of these situations, to use the collective perspective to zoom out of individual situations and see them in wider contexts of social justice and structural injustice, which helped to put our own experiences of the situation into perspective. Another big aspect we worked on was the UK Prevent policy, which turned teachers into border agents, having to communicate thoughts and ideas students voiced to enforcement officers. We felt this practice was acting against our duty of care of the students, and infringed upon the relationship of trust in the classroom. Organising together helped us to develop a shared political analysis of individual situations, criticise the policy and explore shared strategies towards a more just classroom.

- Nelly, teacher and *Rad Ed Forum* participant

For more information, see
https://www.tumblr.com/radicaleducationforum

SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa's ecosocial consciousness journey is shaped by its colonial and apartheid history. It reflects a society grappling with legacies of inequality while striving for greater equity and sustainability. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have long been the primary pioneers of environmental awareness – and thus ecosocial consciousness – in South Africa. However, many early efforts were predominantly led by white activists – which, while not an inherent issue, caused a disconnect between their approaches to environmentalism and the lived realities of marginalised communities. Today, race and socioeconomic status remain critical factors in shaping engagement with environmental issues as daily struggles for basic needs often overshadow broader ecological concerns.

Policy and Education Frameworks

The *National Environmental Management Act 107* of 1998 has been imperative in promoting environmental education in the country. It emphasises public awareness and sustainable development. The *1995 White Paper on Education and Training* had also highlighted environmental education as a priority for integration at all levels of education and training. More recently, the *2020 National Climate Change Adaptation Strategy* reinforces climate education as a tool for community resilience.

In schools, the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement promotes environmental education through integrated approaches though its implementation has faced many of the bureaucratic challenges detailed in the 'Ways In: Institutions' section of this booklet. A large-scale example is the international sustainable education programme, *Eco-Schools*, nationally managed by the *Wildlife and Environmental Society of South Africa*. This project-based initiative encourages students to engage in sustainability practices, environmental management and community engagement.

NGOs, like *Wildlife and Environmental Society of South Africa* and its support from the *Environmental Education Association of Southern Africa*, work to bridge the aforementioned policy implementation gaps through teacher training and curriculum integration. However, challenges persist, including fragmented efforts and competing priorities within a bloated formal education system, which often further marginalises true ecosocial content in the curriculum.

Ecological and Climate Context

South Africa's rich biodiversity and varied climates all shape ecosocial perspectives. Climate change threatens agriculture – critical for rural livelihoods – by disrupting rainfall patterns, for example. Southern Africa is also understood to be warming twice as fast as the global average – a fact epitomised by Cape Town's 2018 'Day Zero' crisis. Such events expose inequality in resource access, thus highlighting the ecosocial nexus.

Additionally, our endemic biodiversity, considered a source of national pride, is increasingly vulnerable to climate change and land degradation. Thus, tensions also persist between conservation goals and economic development.

Economic and Social Contexts

South Africa's economy was built on resource extraction. The main economic plan for the country, the *National Development Plan* (*NDP*) *2030*, outlines a green transition by advocating for carbon pricing, recycling infrastructure and greener innovation. However, the NDP falls short of practical implementation guidance – a symptom of broader functional challenges in South Africa's policy landscape. Siloed policymaking and weak public engagement hinder progress, and this reflects the chasm between aspirational political goals and grassroots realities.

Persistent poverty and inequality dominate the lived experiences of most non-white South Africans which relegates ecosocial concerns to the periphery. Immediate crises of unemployment, healthcare access and resource scarcity eclipse long-term environmental threats. Climate change awareness, a more well-known local proxy for ecosocial consciousness, is often fragmented by cultural and religious interpretations. Many view environmental crises as divine interventions rather than systemic failures which then disempowers collective action.

Worsening conditions, under unmitigated climate change, land degradation and social ills, will make it even harder to foster collaborative and inclusive solutions. Ecosocial consciousness in South Africa will need practical and implementable ecosocial approaches to education and training for every societal level to acknowledge and overcome its systemic barriers.

Way Forward?

Developing the ecosocial consciousness of South Africa will require deep ecosocial work – dismantling historical inequities and bridging policy-implementation gaps. Grassroots initiatives need to be aligned with national strategies and policy needs to be widely and effectively consulted on and monitored robustly, coupled with timeous feedback loops for adjustments. Education should prioritise environmental education, adopt and implement participatory methods and provide contextual relevance to local realities. Economic reforms must balance green transitions with economic job creation, and historically disadvantaged and excluded groups need to be collaborators in decision making from the very beginning of policy and curriculum development.

Ultimately, inclusion and intersectional approaches are needed to confront the dual crises of inequality and ecological decline.

For more information, see also our ecosocial education forum on Campaigning, Institutions and Policy: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2l5s6TE7Q7E

for example...

The *Be Resilient Project*, Cape Winelands Biosphere Reserve - GOGREEN[17]

This was a project managed by the *UNESCO Regional Office for Southern Africa* and funded by the Government of Flanders. The target location was the *Cape Winelands Biosphere Region*, in the Western Cape Province of South Africa, from 2021 to 2023.

Rural and/or working class communities from at least five towns were brought together to engage in citizen science activities such as river and stream monitoring with the objective of enhancing their resilience through community-based water management.

Ultimately, the project saw improved community engagement due to citizen involvement in decision-making and environmental monitoring. Training citizens to use monitoring tools and interact with their local ecosystems fostered a sense of ownership and responsibility over their immediate environments. These feelings of stewardship have opened up the possibilities to engage in their own initiatives to address water quality issues, reduce pollution and promote sustainable practices.

A key outcome of the project was the introduction of a community 'code of conduct' that was collaboratively developed by all the citizen scientists to address the 'initial and foremost challenge' of tensions due to cultural differences and a language barrier. The communities from the five towns were from predominantly Coloured and Afrikaans-speaking cultures and isiXhosa-speaking Xhosa communities.

The group collectively agreed to use only English when different groups were working together and that mocking each other's proficiency in English was prohibited. These socially-conscious foundations of the project codified the conduct in a manner that fostered further ownership over the rules and an understanding that breaking them meant violating standards they had set themselves.

For more information, see https://www.capewinelandsbiosphere.co.za

part 3

Worksheets

Since we're making this book both as and for practitioners at different levels and entry points of education, we are including a few worksheets for inspiration. Those too, are ways into ecosocial education, smaller and bigger formats you can try out in the classroom, the school building and beyond – as teacher, parent and carer, activist, institutional actor and student. Make those your own, play and experiment – and have fun!

Worksheet 1

Students produce their own knowledge: Co-research, Participatory Action Research and Critical Science Education

Co-research as ecosocial self-education practice

Co-research historically stems from workers movements, where organised workers in factories developed questionnaires in order to understand and politicize working conditions, and initiate conversations with their co-workers about this. Such embedded co-research flourished in the autonomist movements of '70s in Italy for instance, but keeps being a key tool for all kinds of movements that want to produce knowledge from below and in participatory and partisan ways. It has also been called 'militant research' and is widely known in engaged and transformation-oriented academia, but hasn't been thought about much in relation to schools and children or youth. There have certainly also been all kinds of socio-ecological forms of co-research in peasant and community contexts that escaped documentation in the great book of History: the basic idea of co-research is that in order to change something, we need to collectively gather information about it (the actors, factors, needs, problems, contradictions involved), have discussions and build common visions for transformation, and get organised around them in whatever in/formal ways make sense.

What might it mean to imagine a co-research process in a school? Schools and universities are factories of sorts, preparing young people for the workplace – and just like workplaces, they often keep students from organising and thinking too critically or transformationally. In the big student movements that protested the privatization of education in Europe around 2010, this was exactly the line of analysis and action many students shared: that the university was a factory, and edu-factory, and that co-research was needed to map out how certain policies and protocols made education more exclusive and labour market oriented, in order to then organise around this injustice.

What about younger kids though – can children and youth be inspired and supported to map out the problems and possibilities of their schools themselves? To talk to each other and interview each other about those, in order to come up with visions and demands for transforming knowledge and education? Of course they can. This entry gives some short cues as to how.

Many critical pedagogical methodologies encourage the kind of questioning we're calling co-research here: where students are not only finding things out by themselves (through collaborative basic research, not just via a search engine or AI query- see our AI Worksheet on p 70) and in the process are encouraged to carefully consider and set the parameters of the questions they want to be asking. Getting students to develop questionnaires to ask each other about what should change, what they like and don't like about their working conditions in school, their environments, and allowing them to discuss this in assembly or groups (see Kalamata example on next page), can be a powerful way of allowing for forces of transformation to bubble up from below.

Ecosocial
Participatory Action Research

In ecosocial education, Participatory Action Research (PAR) encourages diverse community members to collaboratively investigate and develop solutions to interconnected ecological and social challenges. When the focus shifts to engaging children and youth specifically, this approach is often termed Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR). YPAR empowers young people to actively contribute to change, giving them a voice in pointing out the issues that affect them and realise solutions within their communities. Below, we outline a few common steps typically involved in the PAR process while incorporating co-research:

- Exercise and example by Amerissa, youth worker and action researcher

Step 1: Identifying an Issue. Identify an issue and related needs together. Identify a local ecosocial problem.

Step 2: Systems Thinking. Reflect on the connections between environmental and social well-being, and reveal the systemic nature of the problem.

Step 3: Co-research. Gather information and insights about the problem by reaching out to relevant people involved in the local context and affected by the issue. Typical research methods could include secondary data analysis, surveys, interviews, and focus groups. Alternatively, more creative approaches such as participatory photography and collective mapping can be used to capture impressions of the problem.

Step 4: Co-design and Collective Action. Co-create an action plan to address the problem and co-decide to implement specific actions through different processes of self-organising and democratic decision making. These might include, among other things, campaigns, workshops to raise awareness about the problem and its systemic challenges, and community-based activities.

Step 5: Evaluation and Follow-up. Evaluate the impact and influence of the activities undertaken and plan the next steps.

for example...

The Youth Council of Kalamata

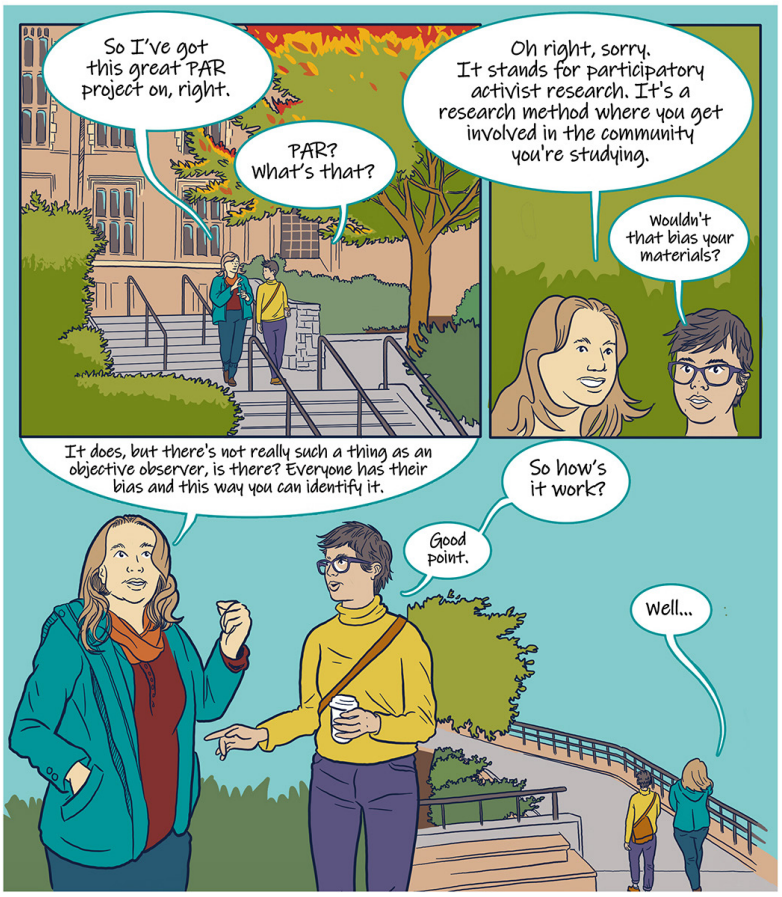
In 2024, the Youth Council of the Municipality of Kalamata was launched as an open and inclusive space where young people aged 15 to 25 could practice democratic decision-making. The youth council is independent of any political party and is organised around diverse thematic working groups, such as the Green Spaces Group, Cultural Activities Group, and Connecting Youth with the EU Group, among others. As a newly established structure, it has encouraged experimentation with youth ideas, communication styles, and collaborative approaches. In particular, one of its most interesting aspects is that it operates using sociocracy, meaning decisions are made by consent rather than hierarchy or democratic majority votes. All decisions are brought to the General Assembly, where every registered member, active or not, can vote on priorities and proposals for the city.

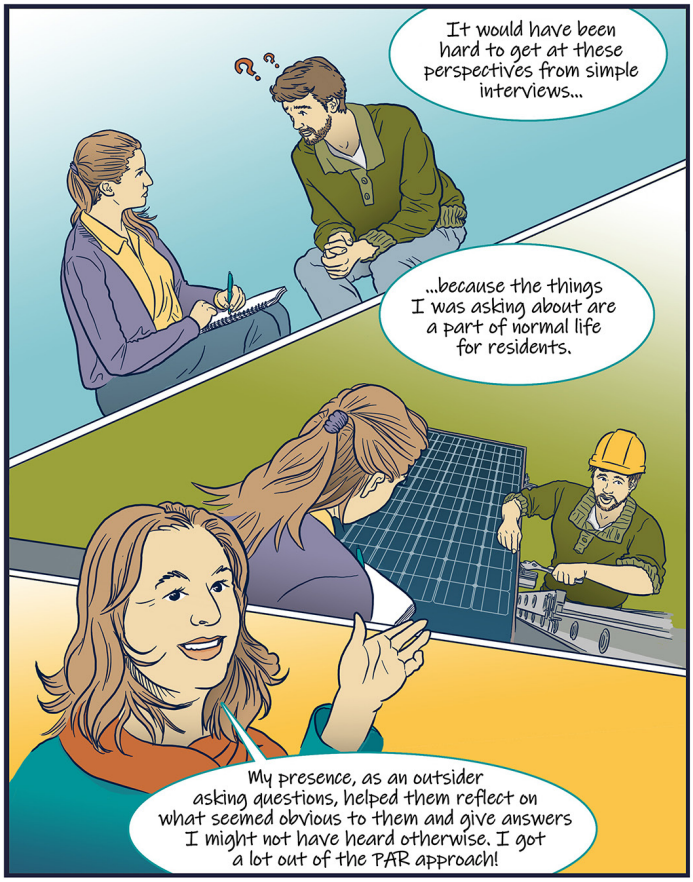
However, the process hasn't been without its challenges. At first, many young people found it difficult to identify and express their needs and interests. They were also unfamiliar with practicing decision-making, as they were more used to others making decisions on their behalf. However, through participation and support, they have started building confidence, learning to take initiative, and shaping the Council's direction together.

The Youth Council is helping to nurture a democratic culture of participation, open dialogue, and youth-led change in Kalamata. Young people have already expressed interest in creating a collectively managed youth space that would host activities such as a repair café and various environmental and cultural events. It is just the beginning, but it is a meaningful step toward a more youth-driven future in the city.

WHAT IS P.A.R.?

A Comic Explainer...





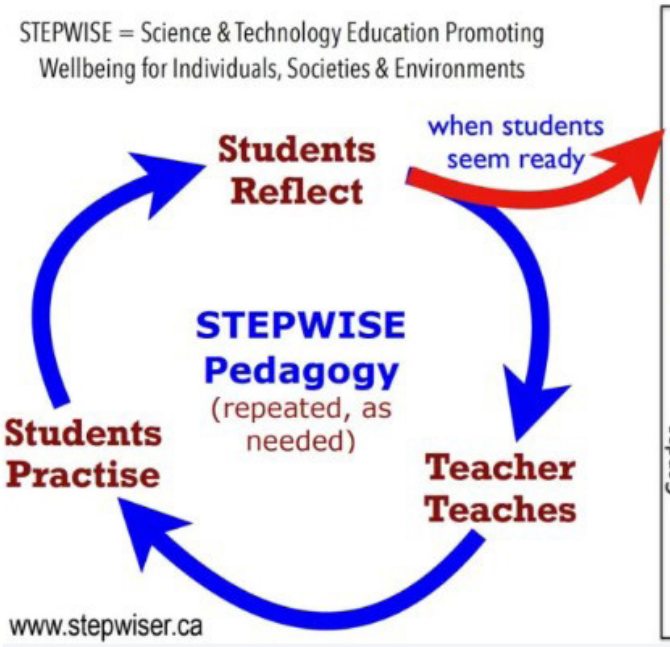
Comic by Jenny Pickerill (School of Geography and Planning, University of Sheffield, UK) and Petroglyph Comics, Ottawa, Canada (*petroglyphstudios.org*). Art by nicole marie burton

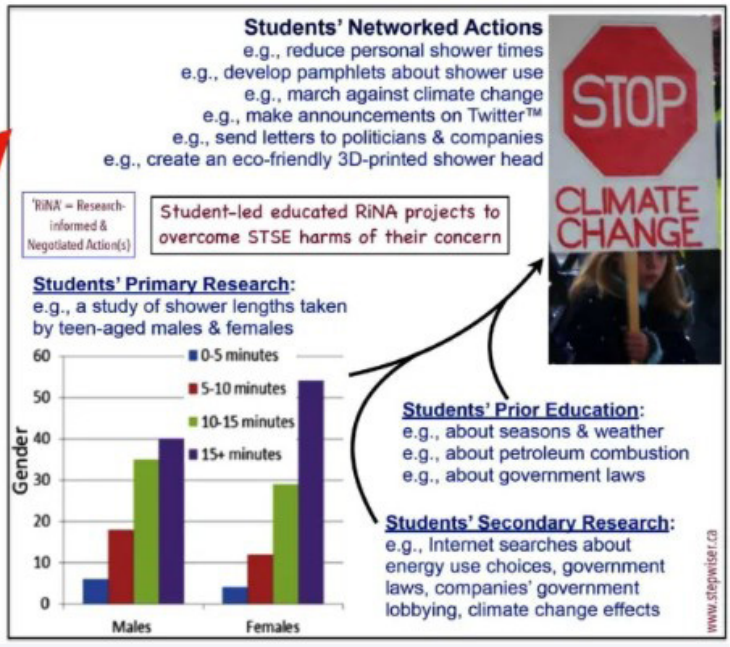
Critical Science Education
and how to implement it

Science is a particularly important field for implementing ecosocial education, because it is often considered as merely technical or disconnected from social, political or indeed ecological issues. Critical science education is referred to here as an umbrella term for something that a minority of environmental education and science teachers have been doing and continue to do consciously or unconsciously for years. That is engaging with the preconceptions and questions that students bring to science classrooms to promote knowledges, attitudes, behaviours and actions for a transformative and just vision of what society and the environment should look like.

Of course, when it comes to applying something like that in real life, particularly in schools, it can be difficult and often disappointing. In a way, it can be like a game of chess in which teachers can start off in a difficult position (for example due to dominant educational priorities that are based on performativity such as examination results) and may feel that they are always a few moves behind. However, if there is a meaningful communication between like minded colleagues and some sort of strategy in place, there are ways to reclaim the space needed to promote a critical perspective of time spent in classrooms. This is, of course, a gradual step-by-step process which will also involve building alliances with other colleagues, parents, and students.

The aim of the critical science education framework *STEPWISE* (Science & Technology Education Promoting Wellbeing for Individuals, Societies & Environments), for instance, is to facilitate a process in which students learn to conduct their own research with the goal of carrying out an action to improve problematic situations relating to science and technology. For the purpose of this text, we will not describe the framework further – you are welcome to read about it using this link (*www.stepwiser.ca*) and by watching the video of our Ecosocial Education Forum on it (see references section for link) – instead we will give a short example of how the resources that *STEPWISE* contains can be used in class (in this case adapted for a lower secondary science class in Athens).





Worksheet 2

Lithium classroom activity

If you are a chemistry teacher planning to teach the periodic table, surely you will have to go through content relating to alkali metals. Lithium is an alkali metal used to make batteries in electric cars. However, the technology of lithium batteries tends to be beautified by the media presenting only its advantages, omitting to elaborate on any disadvantages, e.g. deriving from the environmental effects of lithium mining. Here are some steps to guide students through for understanding lithium in a critical and co-research spirit:

(1)

Students reflect on the reaction of lithium with water. This can be demonstrated in class or shown using a relevant video. The teacher can ask:
'Is this a chemical reaction or a physical change? How did you know? What might happen when lithium batteries get disposed of in the environment? How might chemicals affect the land and water?'

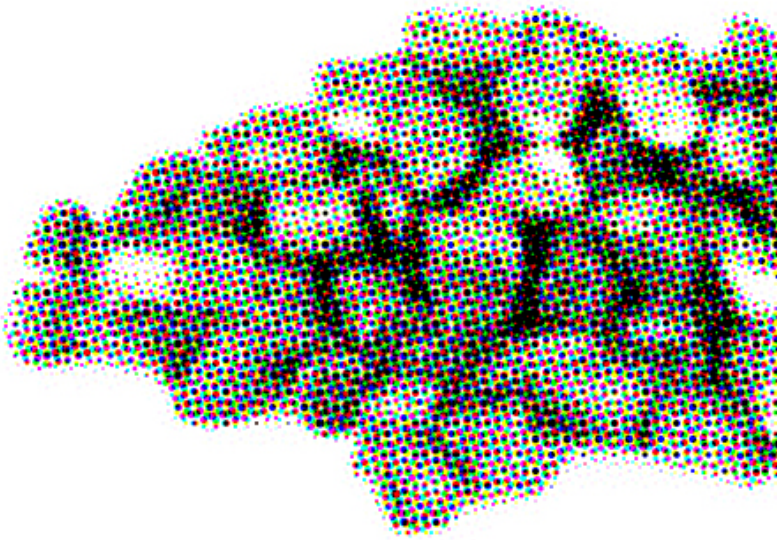
(2)

A video of a demonstration taking place in relation to a planned lithium mining project is shown in class (for example this one from Belgrade, but there are tons more as lithium mining sweeps the globe). The teacher can ask: 'What is happening? Who is involved in decision making about creating lithium mines in Serbia? Who might benefit and who might be harmed by this project? How might this relate to us here in Greece?'

(3)

Students are given an article with information or shown an adapted video with pros and cons of lithium batteries technology and mining. Students work in groups discussing and answering a set of questions:

- Is lithium in high demand? If so, why? If not, why not?
- Why is the extraction of lithium harmful for the environment?
- Is lithium toxic? How does it affect animals and local communities?
- How might lithium mining affect the soil and plants?
- How can lithium mining affect water, rivers and lakes?



Students can discuss whether they strongly or partly disagree or agree with the statement ' lithium mining should be restricted for the sake of a sustainable future'. They can do this by moving around in the class, exchanging their ideas and debating. As they do that, they continue to change positions as they notice that their initial reflections can be modified through arguments and discussions.

Alternatively (or additionally, depending on time), they can present their findings in class and consider how they could plan an action to raise awareness.

- Exercise by Dimitris,
critical science educator based in Greece

See also:
Eastern Mediterranean section (p 27)

Pictured: nursery kids receiving a talk on recycling after a day collecting trash on the beach

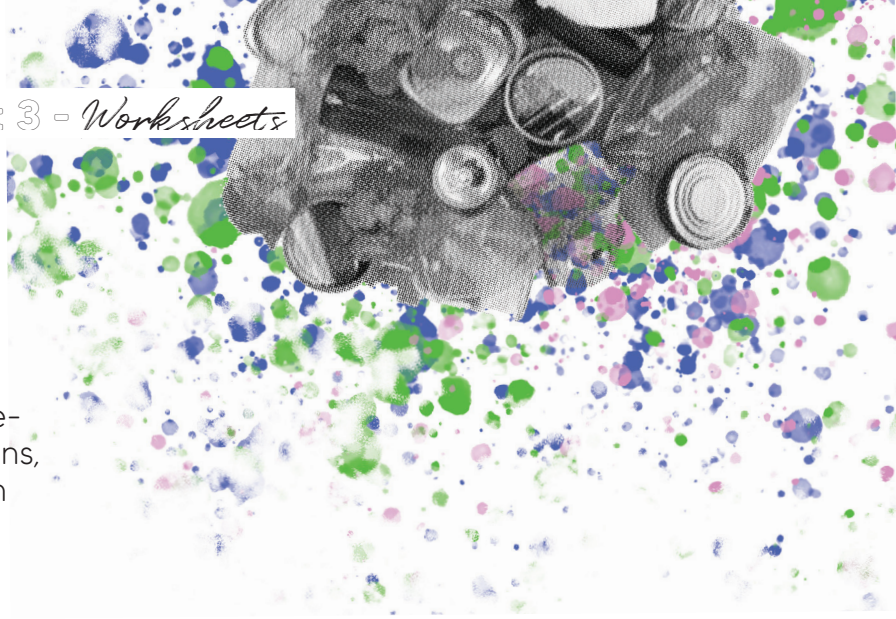
Worksheet 3

Waste Education: More than recycling

Waste is a central topic to a lot of ecosocial education, with kids being told how to recycle from an early age in education, as well as told not to throw things away in the wrong place or, even better, to try to avoid generating waste and using plastics in general. kids have a powerful sensibility for materials, environments and pollution, and develop a strong understanding of ecological care and ethics this way.

Pollution and waste are, however, about much more than just dropping things in the right bin.

They are, as mentioned, to do with overconsumption and planned obsolescence, with the extractivism of materials and exploitation of labour to make consumer goods, which end up as waste way sooner than they should. So one aspect to addressing waste adequately with children, young people and students is to speak about the three key dimensions of ecocidal consumption, perhaps by following the commodity chain of one particular object:



(1) material extractivism and the ecological and social destruction it causes,

(2) the exploitation of labour -often of children and young people- under toxic and often unfree conditions, at the site of production, and again also the ecological harm caused by industrial production, and

(3) the consumer side, with planned obsolescence (via hardware and software) and the seduction and coercion of pushing people to constantly buy new objects, 'the latest things', and the way this plays out via peer pressure that in the end contributes to ecocide and social injustice.

Pollution and waste are also about unjust and globally unequal systems of export and landfill, where rich countries that produce a lot of waste often ship discarded products and toxins to poorer countries and regions, via intermediary companies (sometimes under the auspices of 'recycling'). Most exported waste in Europe goes to Türkiye (12.5 million tonnes in 2022) but many other countries receive several million tonnes a year too, and despite efforts at legislation, international waste is oftentimes dumped -done illegally and poisons soils, water and the air in receiving countries and localities.

It is important for people to understand the political dimensions of 'waste colonialism', in order for ecosocial waste education to go beyond moralizing or technical approaches.

So **(4)** at the waste processing and export level, it is important to speak about capitalist and postcolonial dynamics, to present students with the full picture of where waste comes from and where it goes.

for example...

Turning Waste into an EcoSocial Issue

Can we turn waste into an ecosocial issue? This is what we, four primary schools[1] located in Sant Cugat del Vallès (a town and municipality north of Barcelona, Catalonia), together with the City Council and the local *Learning Resource Centre* (CRP, abbreviated in Catalan) have asked ourselves, because we are tired of focusing on recycling and technological processes that talk about materials but do not make visible the social, political and economic aspects that determine what happens to waste. When we talk about reduction, are we referring to an individual action (stop buying) or do we have to consider political actions of very large scope?

We have found that it is worthwhile to consider the waste issue in 'scales' or 'areas' of action: individual action, community action, commercial action, local government action, legislative action, action by the major powers, international waste transport, entire industrial cycles, the design of the economy, and so on. Seeing it in this way gives rise to debates on public policies, gender perspectives on domestic tasks, citizen initiatives that strengthen the community, degrowth, international inequalities... a much more ecosocial perspective that resituates everything and opens up new educational paths for us to follow.

- German, *Sant Cugat City Council*, Environmental Educator

1. Escola Collserola, Escola Joan Maragall, Escola Jaume Ferran i Clua and Escola Pi d'en Xandri.

Worksheet 4

Waste archaeology and forensics:
Investigative online research worksheet

Below is an outline of how such a co-investigative process might look in class, imagined for 14/15 year olds and a multi-class process or longer workshop (this, like all the classroom exercises here, can be team taught with other subjects). It's designed for online and library research - you can bring some pre-research too, or give students research homework - and can be done in groups or with everyone sharing a big screen. It's about finding things out as much as about discussing gaps in our knowledge and inaccessible or intransparent knowledge: when the group hits limits in terms of what can be found out, use this as base for discussion on transparency and on commodity chains, as well as allowing for the group to speculate. You can encourage students to make a map of what could and couldn't be found out (adding details like company names, places, effects, protests). If possible, you could combine it with a site visit to local waste processing plant or similar site.

1. **Choose an Object.** This can be anything; you will be investigating how it becomes waste.
2. **Production.** The group investigates how this object was made: first, where the producing company is registered and second, in what factory they likely had the object made; and what the conditions there are/were.
3. **Materials.** Second, the group researches what materials are used in that factory (or similar factories) and where this factory or similar factories gets those materials from (teacher to offer some help/training in investigative online research).
4. **Mining.** Research the mines or sources of the core materials of the object, or where similar products are sourced from; focus in on one mining site and look for reports on conditions there, any protests or resistance by locals (introduce/discuss European commodity chain laws, their shortcomings and potentials).
5. **Discarding.** Discuss where the object could end up if gotten rid of in different ways (recycled, dumped, passed on, disassembled...).
6. **Waste.** Now this object is waste. Research where it would end up from the moment of being put in the bin in your municipality: where are the waste management plants?
7. **Waste Processing.** Research what the waste management plant does with this kind of object. Does it disassemble it? Burn it? Put it into landfill? Export it? What companies are involved in these steps?
8. **Waste Export.** Are the materials of the object exported abroad? Where to?
9. **Offloading and Problems.** When all or parts of the object are sent to be buried, burnt or reprocessed, there are often local resistances against the toxicity these processes generate. Look into possible protests or campaigns that happen at this destination of your object or its materials.

Questions for Reflection: What did we find out, what couldn't we find out? What shocked or surprised us? What are the key problems? Where are the root causes of this problem? How do given laws address those- what can the state do? What can we do as people, communities?

- Exercise by Manu, parent and facilitator

Worksheet 5

A Memory Exercise For Parents and Teachers

Our present time offers a multitude of differences and challenges that we as societies have to come to terms with. In spite of all these often conflicting developments, we certainly need a basic consensus with regard to the education of the next generation. As dynamic as our world has become, this also means that education has to adapt to the fluidity and speed (!) of developments while creating and conserving positive and democratic values as a foundation for all co-existence in a given territory/ community. A huge challenge!

As a parent you certainly want school to equip your child with the knowledge and skills s/he will need now and in the future. This also often means that educational goals and methods have to adapt to the new realities. However, teachers who want to work with innovative creative methods and collaborative approaches in schools often face resistance from parents who expect school to be the same for their kids as it was back in their times as pupils. At the same time expectations for their children's success and achievement skyrocket without taking current contexts in education into account.

Here is a small questionnaire that could be used in parents' evenings to make parents reflect on what they really think or feel about their own school experience which maybe could help to separate old feelings from present time expectations and wishes. The absolute prerequisite for an activity like this is that parents have met several times beforehand and that the teacher has established a trustful relationship and culture of conversation with them (do absolutely NOT use at the very first parents' evening in a new school!). If possible, ask a friend, colleague or engaged parent to facilitate the activity with you.

For this exercise, which takes about an hour, you need a room with moveable chairs and copies of the questionnaire below, as well as a pen for everyone and 5-10 bigger sheets of paper (A3 or flipchart).

Worksheet 5

A Memory Exercise For Parents and Teachers

1. Introducing
the worksheet, and its two options of questions, as an individual reflection tool to be filled in on the spot.
(3min)

2. Individual work.
Parents fill in the worksheet in silence. Make sure that all parents have access to translated versions in their first languages, if possible. Otherwise use this English version plus translation tool on the spot.
(5-10min)

3. Discussion in small groups. Parents share whatever they feel comfortable with in their group - no pressure on shy or introverted people! Be aware of language barriers and provide translation aid if possible.
(15-20min)

4. Visualization phase.
Ask each group to make a small poster with a symbol, a word, a phrase they can all agree on to summarize their discussion (not their individual views or experiences).
(5min)

5. Debriefing and plenary.
Put all posters in the middle of a big circle and ask each group to briefly comment on their poster and one highlight from the discussion. Pinpoint messages that help parents realize if/where they confuse their own experiences with expectations for their children's present schooling.
(10min)

6. Closing.
Explain your personal vision as a teacher for this specific class within the upcoming semester/school year! Ask the parents for their trust in your professional good judgement to realize these goals with their children even if some of your methods might surprise them... ;-)
(5min)

A Memory Exercise (continued)

You have two options:

Option 1
Thinking-feeling into the past: remembering school

Close your eyes and imagine yourself on your first day of school as you were standing outside the school building. What did the building look like? Who was there beside you? How did you feel? Were you excited? Afraid? What were your hopes and expectations for that school? What do and don't you remember?

Did you like your (first) teacher(s)? What are your main feeling thinking back at the end of

primary school?

secondary school?

vocational / tertiary school?

Note your thoughts down.

Now try to "see" your child with your heart - what were their feelings on their first school day? Does your child like to go to school? Do they struggle with teachers, colleagues, contents, subjects? What do you think are the reasons for such struggles (school structure, teachers, methods, other reasons...)?

Before discussing your thoughts with the other parents and the teacher, try to come up with very concrete examples to illustrate what you mean.

Option 2
Thinking-feeling into the past: work and environments

If you briefly think about your current profession, your current life circumstances, and you compare that to how you lived and worked 20 - 30 years ago, (or how your parents and grandparents used to live and work even longer ago), would you say that a lot of things in general have changed? Have social and ecological circumstances changed? If so, make a note of how they changed.

Would you say that (work) processes at your workplace, your home, your surroundings have changed considerably? What feelings – fears and hopes for example – do you have now in relation to decades ago, and what do you think your child might face (thinking of labour markets, environments, social conditions, ...)? Give an example of what changed (for example, think of tools that you used decades ago in comparison to now).

Have relationships at your workplace, your home and local ecologies changed in comparison to your childhood and youth? If so, give an example of how they changed.

Compare these changes to the changes and challenges that you are noticing now at your child's school! What visible changes are there? What invisible changes can you describe?

What were your parents' expectations of you when you went to school? What are your expectations as a parent for your child now? Take some notes of your thoughts.

- Written by Martina, teacher trainer and member of *Teachers 4 Future* based in Graz, Austria

Worksheet 6

Eco-educational Live Action Role-Play

Role-playing games, in different formats and with different names, have been a common tool for education since a long time ago. Anthropologically speaking, humans create meaning through story-telling and shared experiences within communities. These stories, whether realistic or mythical, help guide us through life. In times of ecosocial crisis, it's very important to foster plural imaginaries and scenarios of transformation and alternative systems and ways of life. Schools and other educational contexts are key places for such experimentation, making role play not just fun but also educational, ie. designed for a specific educational agenda (in role play speak, this is then called an Edu-LARP, an educational live action role-play). When using role play in education, you can either use an existing educational role playing game as it is, adapt it, or invent your own game for specific learning objectives.

How can educational roleplay assist ecosocial education?

Role-playing games can be adapted to teach virtually any subject, training cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills. They can be a useful tool to contextualize previous knowledge by asking the participants to apply that knowledge in a new setting. Since role-playing is a social activity, it focuses not only on content learning but also on social learning, empathy, and personal development. Role-playing is also co-creative, which leads to a more even distribution of power compared to what is commonly seen in a classroom. This learning approach encourages learners to 1) use their imagination when thinking about the future, 2) tap into their intuitions and creativity, and 3) assess the possible steps needed to achieve their preferred ecosocial future. Below is an example for how you may facilitate an eco-social live action role play in an educational setting.

An Educational Live Action Role Play Exercise

1. Setting yourself up

The Scenario: create or find a scenario. The facilitator creates a simplified scenario reflecting local ecosocial challenges (e.g., community transition to renewable energy, addressing biodiversity loss, equitable resource use, the use of natural resources for Artificial Intelligence, extreme heat waves etc). To enhance empathy towards animals and other non human entities, it is recommended to also include non-realistic characters to your scenario, such as animals, fungi etc.

Ensure the scenario includes:

- **A central challenge** (e.g., "The town faces water scarcity as the local reservoir is drying up.")
- **Key roles to play** (e.g., community mayor, renewable energy expert, farmer, activist, local youth).
- **Decision-making dilemmas** and conflicts of interest. (at least one).

The rules:

» During the play all participants should stay in character and act accordingly.

» Any view that is presented in the set is not personal.

» We don't touch anyone without asking before, and we don't try to harm anyone.

» The participants should focus on collaborative storytelling, and help the story move forward, rather than "winning".

The Roles: Share roles with participants in advance. Provide character backgrounds, motivations, and any resources they can use during the LARP or either let the students create their characters as they will.

The Scenario: Give a short description of the main theme, for example: "It is the year 2100, you live in a small settlement struggling with extreme weather phenomena and resource shortages, but a movement that asks for a more equitable resource use and ecosocial societies, try to navigate a transition."

The Geography: Give specific instructions on the geography and weather conditions, for example: "*The place of your settlement is in a post-apocalyptic mega city, without natural elements, while outside of the city walls, there are several jungles.*"

2. Play phase

Getting into action: it's the time for role play, participants start interacting with each other enacting their roles. The goal is to discuss based on their role's characteristics, and set out their different views and opinions. This can take xxxtime...

3. Reflection phase

De-rolling and debriefing

Now is the time to unwind it. Remind participants to use the third person rule while talking, not interrupt each other and listen actively to others' experiences.

Derolling: Participants get their costumes off (in case of costume use), in order to help them get out of their character's role. It helps to "shake off the character", by engaging the whole body, by moving the body, jumping up and down, flapping arms, singing etc. Try to stretch each muscle to release the tension, and breathe deep to focus again.

Debriefing: Ask the participants to discuss their experience and what insight they got through their experience about possible ecosocial futures:

"What tensions emerged?"
"How did your character feel during this event?"
"Were there any breakthrough moments during play?"

Ready to play scenarios:

Solar Punk
https://ctc.ee/publications/games/solarpunk

Ceremony for Hope
https://nausika.eu/pl/ceremony-for-hope

Podcast:
"LARPs - How to build scenarios for educational role play games"
https://playversity.co/2022/12/01/podcast-larps-how-to-build-scenarios-for-educational-roleplays

Worksheet 7

SCHOOL GARDENS AND OTHER COMMUNITY GREEN SPACES

Gardening in the city is a powerful tool of ecosocial education and transformation, especially when it links to schools. This is a worksheet on how to instigate community gardens in and near schools, built on different experiences in Vienna, Skopje and Thessaloniki. Whether you are a parent, teacher, activist, institutional actor or student, dig in here to find inspiration and guidance!

Recipe for making a school garden

Preparation time: you need about 1 year plus a capacity for continuity.

Serves: as many as you like, especially kids, teachers and other school staff, families and neighbours – it's not about the quantity of produce but about the amount and quality of connections and communal growth and learning.

Ingredients: different people big and small that make up the school community, as well as other critters within it (worms, insects, soil life, birds); soil; seeds and plants; shovels and rakes small and bigger; watering cans bigger and smaller as well as a hose; access to water nearby; a bigger box/crate for storing tools; sunshine for plants as well as capacity for making shade for outdoor teaching or play. And potentially, if given/desirable: wood for building raised beds or compost; spaces and/or structures for sitting/hanging out; capacity for collecting rainwater; access from within as well as outside school.

Setting up: as a base, you need some families enthusiastic about the idea of making a garden or some raised beds; approval and ideally active support of the parents association; an idea/dream for what you could do and where (raised beds in the yard? dig into that lawn and plant veggies or bushes? try get hold of that little empty plot opposite the school?); an idea for how you might raise resources for this (crowdfunding, applying for local or other funds, donations from local businesses...); and some commitment to facilitate the setting up process as well as at least a handful people who want to make this happen and will still be at the schoon in the coming year/s.

Process: you'll need to establish a line of communication to school leaders and teachers, to hear their thoughts and test their enthusiasm and get their support (there tend to be school regulations that need to be worked around by those in leadership positions – be they to do with access to space, rules for what can be done on school grounds, capacity to tie the garden to the curriculum and school calendar); a working plan for the space in question (dream up elements for a garden layout and call everyone to ma meeting to brainstorm this together – what could the school need, what could be fun, what could grow, what could be maintained without intense effort); an idea of a timeline for how you could bring people together to come up with a joint vision and then to start acting on it in tune with the seasons.

Recipe for a school garden (continued)

Timeline: human connecting and dreaming has to be in tune with the seasons. Plant the seeds of the idea in spring/summer when people are eager to to gardening and be outdoors, start more serious conversations on the idea in autumn, have first meetings to bring together different actors in winter and confirm a plan, and kick off building/digging/planting in early spring, then use the rest of spring to establish infrastructure and plant first literal seeds and plants (in small pots in classrooms first as well as directly outdoors), giving the garden a beginning, and then use early summer to establish a rota and/or system for watering the garden over summer (think modestly and realistically, and have this in mind from the start!

Recommended plants: choose crops that don't require intense watering or ripen primarliy over summer (sorry dear tomatoes!), ideally those that can be pre-raised from seed indoors in spring (a lovely classroom activity) – peas, radishes, salad, beans depending on your climate zone of course. Bushes are great, the sturdier the better: many nuts and berries can be harvested in autumn and they can also provide shade. Flowers are lovely and can be brought into classrooms at the end of term, particularly those that bloom in early summer. Herbs can be used for snacks and drinks (chives on butter toast, mint in lemonade, thyme and sage can be dried for winter teas, ...).

Water: is of the essence, and school gardens are great places to teach kids how we interdepend with rain and water systems. You don't need a fancy watering system, but to get through summer in climates that have heat, you'll either need some kind of sprinkler with a timer, school janitors who are willing to water with a hose, or a lively community around the school that can sustain a watering rota so someone comes and waters twice a week or so during hot summer breaks. School janitors are your allies, as are neighbours who want to go water and do a little harvesting over summer. You can celebrate water days in the garden too, build rainwater collection systems and overall use watering cans a lot for the kids to go get water, which is great as a very concrete exercise to understand the importance and materiality of water. Watering hoses and sprinklers are also fun for summer months in school!

Bees and other insects, worms: they are your friends! In a school garden, kids can understand very concretely how important it is to have pollinators, to map out where nearby bees and other insects live, when they are active. Same goes for worms and the work they do for soil, what they need and how we can take care of them. And the soil itself is alive, needs some care and not too much compression: get the kids involved in making the school garden from scratch, and they will understand all this.

Harvesting: the point of a school garden is not a massive yield of produce, but the joyful and mindful distribution of small bits of harvest in ways tied to school life. Flowers or bits of herbs for classrooms, families, school celebration – bits of berries, peas, nuts and other fruit/veg to nibble in the garden. School gardens teach us that food is precious, and alive!

-Written by Manu, parent and facilitator

for example...

The Schulgarten of the Praxisvolkschule Ettenreichgasse in Vienna

As we were writing this guidebook after gathering in Vienna in autumn 2024, and partly inspired by some of the conversations and alliances woven there, a school garden was quietly taking shape in Vienna. The 'recipe' instructions right above are based on this experience, at the Praxisvolkschule Ettenreichgasse. This garden grew out of a year or so of slow and careful parental investigation, networking and trust-building, further catalyzed by some cultural funding we got to fund materials and some excursions of kids to a nearby community field, the Laaerbergbäurinnen.

After some winter meetings of preparation, liaison between the principal, teachers, afternoon educators and the parents association, we had a vision for spring: some beds for experimenting with different vegetables, some bushes with fruit and nuts, a compost, some shade and grass, a box with little tools and seeds. After a lot of complex negotiation between the principal and the state authorities on whose lands the school stands, we were assigned a spot: some 50m^2 between two buildings, so far with lawn.

Throughout spring and summer terms, we dug out beds, planted, raised and watered: at bi-monthly gardening sessions on afternoons with families, as well as during school mornings and afternoon playtime when educators felt like taking the kids out. The kids were incredibly energized by the soil, the worms and bugs they found when digging, the seeds and slowly growing plants, and finally the bits of salad, pea and strawberry we harvested. At the school celebration just before summer break, we had the hose ready to spray hot kids with cool water, made lemonade from our herbs and berries, painted with colours made from mushed plants, and even did some cooking with a solar oven.

The garden has slowly but solidly grown to be part of the school, built community and a sense of agency for all involved. Through the garden, the school built a long-term collaboration with the Laaerbergbäurinnen as well as Solarmanufaktur who run solar cooking workshops in Vienna schools. We have a chat group for loosely coordinating and updating each other, with families as well as daytime teachers, afternoon educators and some school staff. This little garden grew very organically and beautifully, out of a mix of planning and improvisation, and built a lot of trust and connection, despite quite some odds! We hope that every year, in its active season from March to October, it will keep growing, hosting new experiments and species!

- Manu, parent and facilitator

See also: Laaerbergbäurinnen *http://www.lbb.wien* and solar workshops *https://www.erlgasse.at/2022/kochen-mit-der-sonne-ein-solarworkshop-im-technischen-werkunterricht-mit-irene-lucas*

for example...

Agri/cultural Practices for Climate Justice: Anti-Racism, Arts and Ecologies Guidebook

Agri/cultural Practices for Climate Justice is a guidebook that was developed directly from a series of practical workshops around Berlin during 2023/24. The workshops experimented with putting into dialogue Theatre of the Oppressed techniques, games and exercises and Permaculture and Agroecology ethics and principles. We work with theatre games, exercises, improvisation and performance techniques, as well as with other arts and collective reading practices, to learn and re-develop agroecology principles, design actual spaces and engage in debate and exchange about environmental racism.

We found that this supported our political and pedagogical wish to find embodied and collaborative ways to acknowledge and actively engage with the many different relations, associations and kinds of access to land, to soil, to grounds, to gardens, to rural sites, to agri/cultural knowledge and practices and crucially to very different experiences of past and present structural racism and violence. We offer this guidebook for others to experiment with, to change and expand the proposed methodologies so they adapt to their own contexts and groups.

- Mojisola and Nicole,
makers of the experimental
workshop guidebook

See also:
https://havel-kranich.org/wp-content/uploads/Agri_cultural-Practices-for-Climate-Justice-anti-racism-arts-and-ecologies-an-experimental-workshop-guidebook_final.pdf

Kalamata: An Urban Garden Story

The way we think about sustainability is deeply influenced by our social and economic positions. For some, green spaces like pocket parks represent green recreational areas, offering a place to rest, socialise, and enjoy green urban spaces. For others, access to land for gardening is a matter of food security and self-sufficiency. These differing needs reflect broader questions of social justice: Who benefits from certain environmental policies and urban planning decisions? Whose voices are prioritised?

During a participatory spatial planning activity with students as part of my master's thesis, the students engaged in an interesting discussion that highlighted these tensions. It revealed to me and to them how class influences the way we imagine and engage with sustainability. We were having a discussion about what they like and do not like in their environments, when a student referred to the urban vegetable garden close to the school which had been provided by the municipality but a large part of it was abandoned and in poor condition. The current plan was to transform it into a pocket park which was a nice development according to the student. However, another student highlighted the importance of preserving the space for families that still wish and need to grow their vegetables. In fact, there is still one poor family that still uses this urban garden to grow their own vegetables.

That conflict triggered a very interesting conversation about reconsidering the revival of urban gardening by educating and raising awareness about it among the wider community. Young people, with the support from an available organisation or, simply, their school community, could take part in organising communication activities related to urban gardening. The students themselves could engage in gardening as they used to do in their schoolyard a few years ago. This conflict/discussion gave us the opportunity to critically reflect on different interests and needs, providing a space to consider solutions and ideas that we might have not considered. It was indeed an important lesson for the students about social justice and sustainability. I believe these different ways of thinking about sustainability influence the way we perceive and practice ecosocial education. And I think it is important to reveal these tensions in order to identify different approaches to social justice. Who might need an urban garden for growing food vs those needing a pocket park? What class position do we think from when we imagine ecosocial infrastructures and education?

- Amerissa,
youth worker and action
researcher in Greece

Worksheet 8

AI and the Capacity to Think

Carefully, Critically and Contextually

This thing they call 'artificial intelligence' is omnipresent as we write this book – meaning machine learning technologies that sieve through large volumes of data to produce summaries based on algorithms that tell them what to look for. The word 'intelligence' is a bit misplaced here if we think of that as a capacity to evaluate, adjust and learn, but we don't need to go into that here – the point is that machine learning and algorithms (or algorithmic governance, for we are talking about a regime of governing here) are impacting not just our work and personal lives as well as environments and ecosystems, but very much also our educational systems. In this entry we look beyond the grand promises of automation to ask how we can deal with the many problems and challenges AI poses to us as educators, parents, activists and public servants – as well as the opportunities it may offer. This is meant as a base for activities and conversations in the classroom, at home, in the parents association or community.

First, let's clarify what AI is and isn't. It isn't computers becoming autonomous and thinking for themselves; it is supercomputers that have huge processing power and are programmed to go through large volumes of information (so-called datasets) and to summarize them. These computers, as complex as they may be, don't do that on the basis of magic or thinking, but on the basis of algorithms that tell them to find the answer to prompt X based on statistical average. So when you ask an AI something, you get the most average answer it can find in a certain dataset – and with it all the bias of the datasets it draws from. This is why AI is heavily biased and discriminates, because the datasets it feeds from feature the sum of what is available online: a lot of racist, sexist and otherwise problematic content (the first facial recognition algorithms were built on prison mugshots, for instance, as Kate Crawford details in her seminal book 'Atlas of AI').

In education, just as in other sectors, capitalist tech firms promise us great revolutions brought by AI (as other technologies previously did – for this it's worth reading into Audrey Watter's book 'Teaching Machines'). That's because AI is a way for those firms to generate massive profits and power. We need to look more critically however, and as teachers and parents we already see many effects of AI. Students use AI tools to find answers to anything, becoming increasingly illiterate in critically and specifically researching information and losing grasp of what it is they are actually dealing with. That's because as opposed to a good old internet search, AI searches don't give us a clear picture of where information is drawn from and what the politics of those sources are. It's as if there's a magic uniform answer to any question – when actually it's just the most mediocre answer we're getting to our prompts. Studies have shown that AI leads to a decrease in cognitive ability (see Chow 2025), critical thinking skills, increased anxiety (Klimova and Pikhard 2025) and more – leading to 'cognitive debt' (as a recent MIT study has shown, see Kosmyna et al 2025) and increasing social isolation. As those of us teaching have noticed, 'A creeping standardization of expression – the emergence of an ubiquitous AI-speak – is already becoming evident in student work, leading to the same effect discussed above: a measurable decline in lexical and topical diversity.' (Becker 2025) Marking essays has become a futile and annoying exercise, for students and teachers alike.

The toxicity of the situation is that many of the same organisations promoting AI also are those in the business of standardised testing. Both sides of the same coin, as those tests, in the pretense to be 'accountable', only test for a certain type of 'universal' knowledge, which can be assessed with a simple pass or fail (Watters 2025). Complexity, criticality, creativity or a different perception of the world, are out of the question. A shift in how we understand teaching and learning, in changing what assessment actually means, making it relational, experience based, situated and place-based, and promoting change, would hack its way out of AI- simplified answers.

There's a lot of precautions and ethical as well as political, social and ecological considerations we should consider when talking about AI at home or in the classroom. It's a long and complex story we'll only touch upon minimally here, sharing key points to discuss with students. These are some key terms you should bring into the classroom and home, to make sure everyone is familiar with them and can make informed choices when it comes to AI: AI bias; Cognitive debt; AI-speak; Model collapse; Data centers; Data harvesting; Deskilling, ...

The Ecological Impact

AI and cloud computing don't run on clouds, but on electricity and a lot of water for cooling the processors. As a 2025 MIT report states, 'By 2026, the electricity consumption of data centers is expected to approach 1,050 terawatts (which would bump data centers up to fifth place on the global list, between Japan and Russia).' Data centers already now consume more electricity than major industrialized nations, at a time when we urgently need to be reducing global energy consumption – AI is a major accelerator of global heating and climate break-down for this very reason.

And so AI is as anti-ecological and ecocidal as it gets: 'It has been estimated that, for each kilowatt hour of energy a data center consumes, it would need two liters of water for cooling' states the same report. With freshwater becoming more and more scarce, AI is pushing another planetary boundary to a tipping point. Last but not least, the metals required for microchips are all mined somewhere, not just at environmental but also at social cost; and data centers don't float in the air but destroy land and landscapes. In all this, it is key to understand that AI runs on scale. It's a technology of scale that doesn't consist of major qualitative differences to previous computing – we've not yet seen 'the singularity' emerge out of a data centre like a genie out of a bottle – but is driven by scaling up quantitatively. This scaling up – a race to the bottom between countries and companies – is hugely ecologically damaging, and driven by profit rather than anything else.

The Social Impact

While complex computing is useful for things like quick translations between families in school, when they don't speak the same languages – many school apps have autotranslate built in by now – or for medical and other important research, its usefulness in everyday life is questionable. It saves us search time online, but at the same time hooks us more to our screens as we spend more time using personal AI assistants or putting in banal queries that don't really improve our life quality, but rather make us dependent, lonely and anxious. A 2025 study by ChatGPT and MIT found that the more time people spend interacting with ChatGPT, the more lonely they feel (see Camprell 2025).

In terms of labour markets, AI replaces labour in very problematic ways. It makes people lose jobs or see their jobs downgraded, meaning that rather than do a task in a meaningful and comprehensive way they just push buttons or check up on machines. It makes our experience of everything – from shopping to moving around to communicating to decision-making and so on – one step removed from physical and embodied realities, rendering reality abstract and more easily manipulable, as well as deprived of human contact and affect: who prefers to be dealt with by a non-thinking computer, programmed to give statistically mediated output, rather than an intelligent, sensible and embodied human being? The social impacts of AI are too manifold to mention, and mostly they are negative. One of the most gruelling examples of this is automated killing, tested for example in Israels genocide of Gazans though its Lavender AI system, that no longer requires a human to make the dirty decision of killing, bombing places based on data from maps and other datasets chosen by army and politicians.

The Educational Impact

Supercomputed research and writing takes away the occasion to think, weigh, discuss, reconsider and re-confirm, as well as to know the background of knowledge. As such, it seems to take away the purpose of education itself: to equip people and communities to think carefully, critically and contextually. Its use in education is rarely meaningful. Students look up talking points or answers in class without understanding what they're saying or where what they're finding out comes from: they become unable to discuss or grasp knowledge in deeper ways. Students submit essays they had barely any involvement in thinking through, except by giving prompts and perhaps editing their final form, depriving them of the learning and writing experience and wasting their own as well as their teachers' time with commonplace generalities or falsehoods – because AI does make mistakes, since to a computer an untruth is as good as a truth if it conforms to the statistical model upon which it was programmed. An AI literally can not tell the truth from untruth.

Students come to have the same problem the more they rely on pre-digested knowledge; they lose touch with questions of context and are thus easy to manipulate. While maybe there sometimes are occasions where a very well informed and critically and contextually thinking person makes use of a quick AI search without that diminishing their thinking powers, this would need to remain quite exceptional – and all trends point towards ever more immersive interfaces and experiences. The worst outcomes of these are when young people – and old people too, but the young are particularly vulnerable here – get stuck in algorithmic bubbles where apps show them the same kind of content and message over and over, and as such they become alienated, obsessed and radicalized. School shootings and all kinds of sexual, gendered, racial and economic violence are fuelled by such algorithmic regimes, where it is also increasingly impossible to tell fact from fake.

Careful and Critical Use of Technologies

In sum, as educational communities we have an enormous responsibility in addressing the impacts of supercomputing, at their various levels of social, eco-logical, climate, mental, psychological, neurological and also economic and historical impact. The ecological and climate crisis are not an anecdotal way to look at this, but a key factor to our survival as a species, just as much as social and mental health and care are key to this survival. Young people are increasingly tired of the internet, social media and tech: a 2025 study in the UK found that almost half of young people would prefer a world without the internet, and 70% feel worse after using social media (Boyd 2025). Young people are sensitive to the problems of capitalist technology and how it wrecks their lives and environments, and often more capable of critical technological thinking than adults who have grown into ideologies of progress, innovation and growth as absolutes. It is high time we build critical and careful thinking about technologies in our classrooms and homes – rather than just prohibiting – and support young people in building counter movements and counter cultures of their own, to safeguard their future.

An AI Research Exercise

Takes 2-3 hours in class: one block research, one block presentation, one block discussion

Divide the class into teams and ask them to research the impact of AI in different areas: social impact, ecological impact, educational impact. For each area, there are two teams: one uses AI, the other standard internet search. Give each group 30-60minutes to write up key points, and have each group present their findings and considerations in 5-10 minutes, allowing time for some Q&A at the end of each group presentation. After a break, use another hour to discuss how each group presentation went, how the research process and outcomes felt to those present, what differences you note between groups... Make sure to also discuss ethical questions to do with saving time and energy, and ask students to take position and debate on those.

-Exercise by Manu, researcher and activist

part 4

References & Resources

Ways into Ecosocial Education
video playlist

Check out the videos of our Ecosocial Education Fora! There you can see many of the questions, examples and stories of this book shared live and in community:

https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLvSbE4v4CV7fho3YruiBv8YOwAtdATbxG&si=RmSHAFfz1A-zTitV

You can also look to the Common Ecologies website for Ecosocial Education news and materials:

https://commonecologies.net/strands-2/eco-social-education/

Toolkits and other resources

Clim@venture
adventure-based learning
to support the 1.5 degree climate goal
of Paris, co-funded through Erasmus+;
open source, free learning materials
https://forum-via.org/de/climventure-1-5/

Fair Enough?!
Für Kinder, junge Menschen (14–30)
und Pädagog:innen (2023, in German)
Klimaherbst Magazin
https://klimaherbst.de/2016/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/KH-Magazin-2023-Web.pdf

Toolkit for Agri/cultural Practices (2025)
by Mojisola Adebayo and Nicole Wolf.
If you are interested in accessing
the guidebook (English or German version), see
https://havel-kranich.org/wp-content/uploads/Agri_cultural-Practices-for-Climate-Justice-anti-racism-arts-and-ecologies-an-experimental-workshop-guidebook_final.pdf

Toolkit for decolonizing educational practice: HEADS UP
by the Gesturing Towards
Decolonial Futures. (GTDF) collective.
https://decolonialfutures.net/headsup

Educar con enfoque ecosocial
análisis y orientaciones
en el marco de la LOMLOE (2022)
By A. de Blas García et al.
Madrid: FUHEM, educación+ ecosocial.

Competències per transformar el món
Cap a una educació crítica
i per a la justícia global a l'escola. (2018).
By Barbeito, Egea, Flores, Massip.
Barcelona: Graó.

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By Charlotte Fleischmann and Irene
Lucas Ferrández.

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How do we bring ecosocial education into schools and their environments?

Ways into Ecosocial Education answers this question with many stories and strategies. Written on the basis of a multi-year co-research process across different parts of Europe as well as South Africa, this book insists on ecosocial education as a pluriversal and co-creative practice. Not one single answer, but many: all of them pointing at horizons of justice, care and learning. The many practitioners involved in making this book, as part of the ecosocial education strand of Common Ecologies, keep the ecological and the social connected: because we are teachers, teacher trainers, parents, activists, students and institutional actors, we wanted this book to speak to all those complex roles and positions. Thus the first part of this book talks about the roles we play in education, from the classroom to the neighbourhood and beyond. In a second part, we learn how and why ecosocial education isn't the same thing everywhere, exploring different geographies of ecological justice and learning across the Eastern Mediterranean, the Spanish state, British and Irish Isles, German-speaking countries and South Africa. In the final section, you can find work-sheets for use in both school and community, accompanied by resources.

We wrote this for all to play with, expand, test and discuss: whoever and wherever you are, make it yours!