

LEAD FOR ECOJUSTICE SCHOOL NARRATIVES

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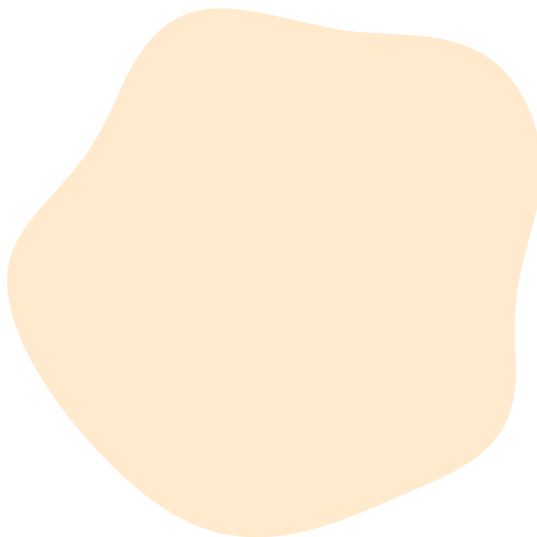
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INTRODUCTION

This publication brings together individual and collective stories of ecojustice from schools across Croatia, Hungary, Serbia, and Slovenia, developed by school leadership teams who took part in the *Lead for Ecojustice* professional development programme. The programme's approach asks school leaders to foster a mindset—a set of attitudes and beliefs that respects the diversity of ecosystems, human and more-than-human alike, and to build the practical capacity to translate those values into everyday school practice.

Through this programme, school leaders, teachers, and school communities engaged in a shift toward ecological justice, and the stories collected here reflect what that shift looked like in their everyday functioning and professional practice, in their own words. Rather than simply reporting on activities undertaken, school leaders and teachers were invited to reveal the deeper shifts in awareness, values, relationships, and practice that the *Lead for Ecojustice* programme set in motion within their school communities.

Ecojustice education, in this sense, calls for a paradigm shift: from a leadership model focused solely on academic achievement, towards a transformative model that integrates humanistic and ecological priorities as inseparable concerns within the school climate. As the stories in this collection show, this shift affects how schools procure materials, how they teach outdoors, how they talk with students and parents, and how they understand their place within a wider community and ecosystem.

The stories that follow cover three interconnected themes that guide schools toward an ecojustice approach:

- Nature connection – recognising the interdependence of humans with the land, air, water, and other species with whom we share this planet.
- Alignment of school culture with planetary boundaries – questioning patterns of hyper-consumption and commodification that have led to the exploitation of natural and human resources.
- Polycentrism – embracing multiple centres of control and authority, multiple perspectives, and distributed responsibility as essential foundations for environmental and social equity.

The stories in this collection were gathered using the Most Significant Change (MSC) technique, a participatory monitoring method that collects and analyses personal accounts of change. The result is a collection of authentic, first-hand narratives that capture the diversity and depth of ecojustice transformation across diverse school contexts.

Together, these stories offer both inspiration and practical guidance: evidence that meaningful change toward ecojustice, however it begins, is possible in any school community willing to take the first step.



**LEAD FOR ECOJUSTICE
SCHOOL NARRATIVES**



SMALL CHANGES, BIG IMPACT: A PRINCIPAL'S PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THE LEAD FOR ECO JUSTICE PROJECT

Since the school joined the *Lead for EcoJustice* programme, the principal has undergone a multifaceted personal transformation, reflected in both her thinking and in her everyday actions. Her awareness of environmental challenges has increased, particularly in relation to connection with social justice.

This shift in awareness has quickly translated into concrete behavioural changes. The principal now makes more considered decisions about resource use, waste management, and energy consumption. At the same time, her sense of personal responsibility has strengthened, which is evident in her greater willingness to actively engage in environmental initiatives and activities both within and beyond the school.

Among all the changes she has experienced, she identifies heightened awareness of environmental issues and their broader societal impact as the most significant. She sees this shift as fundamental, because it enables and drives all other changes:

"When I am more aware of environmental problems and their consequences, I can make more responsible decisions and better understand why sustainable habits are important not only for the environment but also for the well-being of people and communities."

Lead for EcoJustice programme activities—particularly workshops, group discussions, and practical tasks—played a key role in this transformation. They provided her with a deeper understanding of the complexity of environmental challenges and created space for the exchange of diverse perspectives.

This personal transformation also has important implications for her leadership role. The principal now understands her role more broadly—not only as an organisational or administrative function, but as actively shaping the school's values and culture. She recognises her influence within the community and strives to lead by example in her everyday actions, while systematically integrating ecojustice principles into the school's practices. She fosters collaboration, opens space for dialogue, and strengthens collective initiatives that contribute to a more sustainable and just school environment.

Sonja Strgar

Primary school Antona Martina Slomška
Vrhnika, SLOVENIA

FROM THEORY TO THE GREEN TABLE: HOW PETZELT SCHOOL IN HUNGARY BECAME A SCHOOL OF ACTION?

Before the József Petzelt Technical College and Vocational School joined the project, sustainability and ecojustice existed within its walls more as theoretical goals than as practices shaping everyday life. Although the intention was there, the programme launch marked the decisive turning point, transforming scattered initiatives into organised, purposeful and systematic action.

Although numerous positive developments have taken place within the school's culture – ranging from the creation of the eco-garden, through professional sustainability theme weeks, to the mandatory vegan menu at events – the most significant change is the student's council city-wide success and social activism.

This change is the most important because shaping young people's attitudes is key to the future. The project's greatest achievement was not delivering of dry academic content, but creating of opportunities for genuine engagement. The pupils have become not merely passive listeners when it comes to environmental protection, but active shapers of it. As a result, they won the award for the city's most active pupil community, along with an outdoor table tennis table.

The change was triggered by a shift in mindset among the management and teaching staff. The following principle became the school's motto:

"The death of action is rationalisation!"

Project management became more decisive, whilst an 'eco' identity took centre stage amongst the staff.

School management developed a strongly supportive attitude, providing the space and structure for teachers with creative, good ideas to collaborate.

Instead of a theoretical focus, they organised tangible initiatives that work at a local level: plant care, greening, and plant propagation – all combined with charity work and building relationships with local civil society organisations.



**József Petzelt Technical College and
Vocational School**

Budapest, HUNGARY



The change has clearly become embedded in the school's daily practices and decision-making processes:

- Personal relationships: Like-minded colleagues are more willing to reach out to one another and share their gardening experiences even on a personal level.
- Educational environment: When the weather is fine, outdoor teaching has become the norm.
- The atmosphere within the community: Although this is more of a collective feeling than a specific, individual story, a sense of pride and the reassurance that the school is heading in the right direction can be felt in the corridors. This sense of achievement is highly motivating for moving forward.

If they were to share this story with a school that is just embarking on this journey, the most important advice, based on the experiences of the Petzelt József Technical College, would be:

"Focus on a single good idea that is tailored to your own environment and organisation. Don't try to change everything at once: take small steps, but always in good spirits!"

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FROM RECYCLING BINS TO RESPONSIBILITY

Biljana Miltenović, a teacher at the school, says one of the most significant changes the programme brought is the development of environmental awareness among students and staff.

According to her, environmental awareness did not develop overnight, but gradually, through numerous activities, conversations, and shared learning. At the beginning, workshops and classes were held on the importance of recycling, saving water and electricity, and proper waste disposal. Students embraced these activities with great interest and were encouraged to think about nature and their relationship with the environment.

As part of the project, boxes for collecting paper and plastic were placed in classrooms, and environmental campaigns and activities to improve the school grounds were organized. Teachers began linking environmental topics to different school subjects, helping these themes become part of the school curriculum and everyday work. The school leadership supported these activities, and cooperation among teachers became more intense and focused on shared goals.

Biljana considers it a particularly significant change that students gradually became active initiators themselves. They began independently proposing environmental actions, taking care of the cleanliness of classrooms and the schoolyard, and reminding one another of the importance of preserving nature. Many students developed a sense of personal responsibility and the belief that even small actions can lead to major change.

She notes that the programme also strengthened the school's partnerships with parents and the local community, who supported activities aimed at protecting the environment. The school environment has become tidier, greener, and more conducive to learning and student life.

As the most significant change, Biljana points to the shift in the mindset of students and staff. Today the school pays more attention to a responsible relationship with nature, and environmental values have become part of the school culture. For this reason, she believes the programme left a lasting mark and contributed to building a more responsible and aware school community.



Biljana Miltenović

8th October Primary School
Vlasotince, SERBIA

ECOJUSTICE: THE HEART OF THE PROFESSION

For centuries the area around the confluence of the Kupa and Sava rivers for centuries has been a crossroads of important routes. This important position contributed, among other things, to Sisak's industrial tradition, which today is being shaped in the spirit of environmental justice. The students and staff of the Industrial and Crafts School Sisak have taken on contemporary challenges with the support of the *Lead for EcoJustice* programme. The school, which trains automotive technicians, locksmiths, plumbers and electricians, shows that technical skills and care for the environment should complement one another, and that this is a perfect opportunity for developing both key and vocational competencies as well as a positive relationship with the environment.

One more recent activity that brought students and teachers together involves a vertical farm. Through the European project TEENS4GREEN, students together with teachers built a vertical farm two years ago, which has become one of the school's centers of green activity and serves as a nursery for herbs that later find their way to the school garden.

The farm is also a living laboratory where students monitor seed germination, keep a growth diary, and learn about the optimal conditions for growing plants in a controlled environment. Herb seeds sown in the farm become seedlings that, at the right moment, go into the soil of the school garden, completing a small but important cycle from germination to flowering. Students who work daily with metals, pipes and electrical installations have found in the vertical farm a completely new kind of task, but also an opportunity to reconsider their trade through their relationship with other living beings around them.

Student Damjan Kopejtko from grade 3rd notes the following:

"I planted and observed the development of tree seedlings, monitored growth parameters, and transplanted plants into the schoolyard. In a technical sense, I applied and expanded my vocational knowledge, gained agricultural knowledge, and developed and became aware of environmental consciousness. Through precise control of parameters in the vertical farm, I paid attention to every drop of water and every kilowatt of electricity. Through smart management, including ventilation, water and heat, I reduced my carbon footprint. The activities on the farm were a new, interesting and instructive experience, and I will definitely share this knowledge with others"



**Industrial and Vocational
School Sisak**

Sisak, CROATIA

The city of Sisak and the wider community, still recovering from the earthquake, have in the Industrial and Vocational School an ally that is actively positioning itself as an open knowledge centre, ready to cooperate with craftsmen, associations, local businesses and citizens.

Through a range of activities, the school prepares students to become masters of their trade, with a strong sense of the environment and the space they inhabit daily. They will be especially aware of how we must behave within a system that has its limits, just as our planet does.



In the workshops of the Industrial and Vocational School Sisak, leftovers are produced daily: pieces of metal, cut pipe, small bottles and parts that cannot be fully used during regular classes. Instead of ending up in a container, these materials have been given a new purpose.

Students make metal ornaments for the school garden out of recycled metal, combining aesthetics with vocational skill, as well as "metal ladders", frames for climbing plants and for supporting flowers and herbs, and trash bins that give the school back something it had long been missing: functional, beautiful, homemade items.

The school cooperative ZIOŠI is the driving force behind this process. The cooperative promotes environmental awareness through a practical approach: repair instead of discarding, repurpose instead of buying new. Students enter the cooperative with technical knowledge and leave with something not listed in the curriculum: a sense that what they made is valuable, useful and beautiful.

Alongside the metalwork, students plan to install a drip irrigation system for the school garden and build a rainwater collection tank. Solar lighting for the yard is also planned. All of these are examples of how students' technical knowledge can be translated into concrete environmental solutions.

Among the plans, the school's students and staff want to focus especially on the school's environment and yard. The wish is to turn the yard from a place one passes through into a place one spends time in. This is especially important given that the school is located in a part of the city with more greenery and open space than is typical for secondary schools.

The plan is for each class to take on daily care of the space during homeroom periods. Small, regular and ongoing cleanup actions should help develop students' relationship with shared space. The Student Council would be responsible for proposing content that could enrich the yard. A space that until recently was merely a backdrop for breaks is becoming a field of action.

There are also plans to launch a school Eco Center, led by older students who would mentor younger ones.

The Industrial and Vocational School Sisak clearly demonstrates that ecological justice is not merely an abstract concept. Instead, it is a lived daily reality, fully accessible to anyone ready to look around, notice what can be improved, and reach for a tool—just as its students do every single day.

Participation in the *Lead for EcoJustice'* programme has further strengthened our school's efforts to pass on, alongside quality vocational knowledge, the values of a responsible relationship with the environment. We believe that young people are the bearers of positive change, and that they will apply the knowledge and experience gained through such activities throughout their lives and careers. Our goal is to educate professionals who understand the needs of the community, respect natural resources, and actively contribute to sustainable development through their knowledge."

LET'S NOT FORGET ECOJUSTICE

At a school located where nature is closely intertwined with everyday life, efforts to introduce sustainable practices had already been underway for some time. However, joining the *Lead for Ecolustice* programme brought a deeper shift—one that went beyond individual activities and began to influence the thinking, decision-making, and actions of the entire school community. The change did not begin with large steps, but with a different perspective on what had previously been taken for granted. As the principal explains:

"Today, I think differently about every public procurement—I check certificates, consider materials, and reflect on environmental impact. Before, I didn't pay much attention to this."

Gradually, these changes extended into everyday practices: less printing, more reuse, and more thoughtful decision-making. What was once peripheral became part of the routine.

Yet the most profound transformation occurred in the classrooms. As one teacher reflects:

"I realised that we don't need special outdoor classrooms—nature itself is already a classroom. We can learn in it, from it, and for it."

They began planning a school eco-garden - where students would not only observe but also experience—smelling herbs, tasting produce, and exploring with all their senses. Learning became experiential and more closely connected to life.

"We talk more with the children now. We pause. We reflect. We no longer just rush through the content."

Changes also became visible in other small but meaningful actions: students use second-hand colouring pencils, share materials, participate in clothing exchange initiatives, and the school repurposes existing and used materials when arranging spaces.

"You don't need new things for good teaching. Sometimes it's enough to look differently at what you already have."



**Klavdija Petrovič,
Nada Pignar,
Zdenka Rakuša
Saša Veler**

Ivanjkovci Primary School,
Ivanjkovci, SLOVENIA

Perhaps the most unexpected transformation appeared among students—and at home.

Students began to think differently—about waste, relationships, and community. They transfer what they learn into their home environments, where the changes continue.

“This is no longer something that happens only at school—it goes home with them.”

Among the most visible changes at the school level is the decision to use public transport for all school trips, activity days, and medical check-ups.

“We went to Planica with the students—by train, with transfers, carrying our luggage. And everything worked. We saved money and significantly reduced our environmental impact.”

In addition, twice a year (in autumn and spring), the school cancels all school bus routes for a week, with teachers and staff walking to and from school together with students.

Reflecting on what made this shift possible, the team highlights several key factors: leadership support, openness of the staff, and educational activities that raised new questions and expanded perspectives.

“At some of the training sessions, I experienced a real cultural shock—I began to see things from multiple perspectives,” one teacher notes.

Ecojustice is no longer something they teach—it is something they live. To other schools, they offer simple advice: start with nature, not with new equipment. Travel by public transport. And encourage families to spend time together—outside, in nature.



“Parents told me that their children no longer wanted toys for the holidays, but rather time with family or a trip.”



**Ksenija Benko
Monika Kogoj
Dragica Ukmar Kodelja**

Danila Lokarja Primary School,
Ajdovščina, SLOVENIA

THE PATH TO A GREENER SCHOOL

At a primary school where the corridors had until recently felt rather empty and lifeless, a story of change began—one that initially seemed simple, but gradually evolved into something far more profound.

It started with the idea of bringing more nature into the school. The plants now arranged along the corridors are not merely decorative; they are the result of a collective effort. Parents brought them from home, the caretaker helped with installation and maintenance, the leadership provided financial support, and teachers began integrating them into their lessons. The change was immediately visible—but even more striking was how it began to be felt.

“What have you changed here? Your school smells completely different,” once a visitor from the local library remarked.”

With the greening, however, the transformation did not stop. It gradually expanded into ways of working, teaching, and collaborating.

New ideas began to emerge. In technology classes, students started designing and building birdhouses and insect hotels themselves. Instead of following ready-made plans, they had to explore, think critically, and make decisions.

“They were much more active than usual,” observed one of the teachers.

At the same time, the school introduced a “packaging-free week,” which opened up new questions about everyday habits—from students to the school kitchen. At first, the idea seemed almost unfeasible, but through joint effort, it became a reality.

“If we could expand this further, it would be the biggest change,” emphasised one participant.

Another important step was the shift towards outdoor learning. Teachers began using the school garden as a classroom, supported by a simple yet effective system—a shared schedule where they could sign up.

“You see others going, and it encourages you to go as well,” explained a teacher.



“Sometimes, it is enough for a school to begin to “breathe differently”—and in doing so, transform everyone within it.”

At the beginning, there were many doubts: Would the plants survive indoors? Would students damage them? Would it all be too demanding? Yet the opposite proved true. The plants thrived, their care became part of daily routines, and initial scepticism gradually transformed into pride. When the team members reflect on what made this change possible, they highlight several factors: the project itself, which provided a framework; leadership support; initial funding—and above all, the willingness of colleagues to collaborate.

“They were sceptical, but in the end, no one said no.”

And this is where the most important change lies. Not only in the plants along the corridors or the new activities, but in the way of thinking—in greater openness, collaboration, and a willingness to try something new.

They would also like to encourage other schools embarking on a similar journey: start with small steps, involve a wider circle of colleagues, invite parents and students—and it becomes much more achievable.

Sometimes, it is enough for a school to begin to “breathe differently”—and in doing so, transform everyone within it.



“Little steps can make
significant changes, sneaking
into our daily practices.”

ECOJUSTICE TRANSFORMS THE SCHOOL CULTURE

Nenad, the principal of Kralj Petar Prvi Primary School, Belgrade, Serbia, has experienced a substantial change in his personal attitudes and lifestyle through the *Lead for EcoJustice* programme, an unfamiliar topic. Slowly, taking small steps, he becomes more conscious and mindful in his everyday actions. He recognised that he unconsciously makes sure to turn the lights off or use less water. The little free time he has, he spends in nature rather than getting another coffee at a café while waiting for his daughter to finish her ballet class. The project's influences were not a conscious choice. His behavior changed gradually, in an unforced, natural way. He realizes how influential it is to connect to nature. Talking about ecojustice and practising it also affected his family, household, and the school community. He plans to use poems or haikus to encourage students to turn off the taps and switch off the lights in the school to be more cautious. Little steps can make significant changes, sneaking into our daily practices.

Nenad Matić

Kralj Petar Prvi Primary School
Belgrade SERBIA



Creative and Vocational Technical School

Budapest, HUNGARY

FROM LETTING GO OF COMPETITION TO GENUINE CONNECTIONS: HOW COLLABORATIVE CREATION TRANSFORMED THE CREATIVE TECHNICAL SCHOOL

Teachers at the BKSZC Creative and Craft Technical School often felt overwhelmed and helpless due to overly ambitious, theoretical commitments. Although plans were in place, day-to-day school problems and the large number of pupils drained their energy. However, joining the *Lead for Ecolustice* programme and the financial resources provided brought methodological support: the huge goals were broken down into achievable small steps, whilst further training inspired the teachers to adopt new approaches.

The most significant change for them was letting go of the pressure to perform and building a people-centered community.

Although a green, plant-filled relaxation area—much loved by the pupils—was created within the school building, and the corridors became friendlier, the most significant change was a profound shift in mindset: moving away from external competition in favour of long-term projects centred on people and nature.

This change is the most important because it has redefined the concept of success. The school has consciously moved away from high-profile official funding applications, which entail unnecessary administration and foster a competitive environment. Instead, they have focused on internal values, slowing down, flexibility and the power of community. This shift stabilised the teachers' sense of purpose, reduced their anxiety and brought them closer to their colleagues, pupils and parents alike.

Secure funding and a mutually supportive alliance amongst the teachers brought about the turning point. The teachers gained greater credibility in the eyes of their pupils because they became more environmentally conscious in their day-to-day lives (for example, by returning PET bottles for recycling or reducing waste in the classroom). The management and teaching staff began to experiment boldly with a more playful, open-ended approach to knowledge transfer, and invested far more energy into communication.

The finest example of this shift in attitude was the ecojustice art camp organised by the school. The pupils created art in beautiful natural surroundings, where the theme was depicting the forms of nature. Here, the pupils did not see rigid teachers, but fellow creators and mentors seeking a connection with nature. This atmosphere of trust opened the young people up, and a mini-community open to ecological perspectives was born.



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internal values,
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The camp leaders also kept the parents constantly informed, and the parents met them in person at the start and the end of the art camp.

That's when the breakthrough occurred: the parents, who had previously been difficult to engage with, started talking, offered each other help, and one mother even asked the teachers for advice on buying specific eco-friendly products. The process of becoming a community had begun.

Letting go of the pressure to perform did not lead to a decline in quality, but rather to an improvement:

- More green programmes: the number of outdoor activities (outdoor drawing, painting, art history) increased by 50 per cent.
- Genuine value creation: Working together, the various classes used waste materials from the printing and clothing industries to produce high-quality, artistically valuable sketchbooks as representative gifts.

If this experience were to be passed on to an institution just starting out, the message from the Creative Technical School would be:

"Never measure yourselves against the achievements of other schools! Your own local environment and the nature of your community determine your goals. Implement a plan that promotes sustainability as a tool for community-building, because even small changes count. Start with a thorough survey: ask parents what they'd be happy to get involved in, as openness and human experiences are what will sustain the process in the long term!"



**“The more we talk about it,
the more aware we become,
and the more we can do.”**

Marjetka Kolbl

Brinje Grosuplje Primary School,
Grosuplje, SLOVENIA

WHAT ABOUT ANIMALS?

A biology and science teacher experienced a process she describes as a deepening and systematization of her already existing beliefs during her participation in the *Lead for Ecojustice* programme. Sustainability had long been part of both her personal and professional life, but the programme enabled her to more consciously situate her actions within the broader framework of ecojustice.

Among the various changes, she highlights the development and deepening of her understanding of polycentrism as the most significant. In her view, this concept is not limited to theoretical discussions, but is reflected in everyday decisions and practices.

As she explains: *“Polycentrism can be found in everything—even eliminating plastic bottles and introducing reusable ones is connected to it.”*

In doing so, she draws attention to broader consequences, including the presence of microplastics in the environment and their impact on all living organisms. This shift is particularly important to her because, as she emphasises:

“We think too egocentrically and do not consider the well-being of animals.”

She illustrates this with the example of wild bees: they are often valued only for their usefulness to humans as pollinators, rather than as living beings with intrinsic value and their own habitats. According to her, such a perspective leads to practices that threaten their survival, for instance by reducing their habitats. In response, their school decided to establish a meadow with pollinator-friendly plants, which they plan to mow only in the following spring.

As a key catalyst for change, she identifies the importance of continuous dialogue and shared learning. She sees the project as a space that enables reflection, exchange, and the gradual deepening of understanding. For example, she highlights an initiative carried out at the school in December: students consciously decided not to use firecrackers and instead organised a fundraising campaign for abandoned animals at the Ljubljana Animal Shelter.

This insight has also significantly influenced her perception of her own role. As both a leader and an educator, she sees her responsibility primarily in disseminating reliable, scientifically grounded information and raising awareness about the consequences of irresponsible behaviour. Her role is thus shifting from the transmission of knowledge to the active cultivation of critical understanding and responsible action in the world.



Through all these activities, this school by the Drava actively contributes to building a relationship of respect and responsibility toward nature, toward the Drava itself, and also toward others – shaping a community equally dedicated to preserving the "beautiful, green Međimurje."

Donja Dubrava Primary School

Donja Dubrava, CROATIA

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ALONG THE BANKS OF THE DRAVA

A well-known Međimurje folk song sings of a beautiful, green Međimurje. It is no surprise, then, that it is precisely in this region, in Donja Dubrava, right next to the Drava River, a primary school exists that not only teach environmental justice from textbooks, but actively lives it. Donja Dubrava Primary School with its 206 students, Donja Dubrava Elementary School has joined the *Lead for Ecolustice* programme with a clear vision: ensuring that the entire school contributes equally and collectively to the care of our shared environment.

Right at the entrance, in the school's lobby, there is an eco corner: a waste-sorting island with motivational signs and bottles. Collecting plastic bottles is not just an environmental activity but also a financial project managed by the students themselves. The Student Council decides what to purchase for the shared space using the funds collected. This mechanism, in which environmentally responsible behavior directly improves the place everyone shares, is one of the most evident examples of what environmental justice means in practice.

Between the classroom and the "Vrata pažuta" forest educational trail, the student cooperative runs a range of engaging activities. Students plant and tend medicinal and aromatic herbs in the rocky terrain, pick leaves and flowers, dry them, and finally distill them to obtain essential oil. From this oil come soaps, balms, creams, scented sachets against moths, and decorative items that find their way to the local community. Students thus take part in an entire chain that begins with a seed and ends with an object in someone's hand, combining many subjects from the curriculum while learning responsibility in one step. Renata Heric, the teacher who leads the student cooperative, describes what this process brings to the students:

"Through work in the student cooperative, students had the opportunity to follow the entire process – from planting and tending medicinal herbs to producing finished products. In this way they learned that natural resources have value, and that by using them responsibly we can create useful products while respecting nature. We are especially pleased that products made at the school find their way to the local community."



"As headmistress, I consider the project's greatest success to be that the students took the initiative. Today we no longer just talk about environmental protection – we witness their proposals, actions and responsible behavior every day. This readiness of students to act and change their surroundings is the best indicator that the project is achieving its goal."

Sixth grade students received a special task: bring in old clothing items and make something new from them. Through workshops on so-called fast fashion – a trend that encourages excessive consumption and the discarding of clothing – students first got acquainted with the problem and then proposed solutions. Old jeans, curtains and sheets were turned into eco bags decorated with natural materials, while pillows filled with recycled textiles are taken by a shelter for abandoned animals. Teachers monitor and support the process, but it is the students who make the decisions: what will be used, what will go to the Humana Nova Social Cooperative in Čakovec for further processing, and what the finished item will look like. Monika Kanižaj Silaj, a biology and chemistry teacher, noticed the effect of these workshops:

"The activities related to fast fashion showed students that sustainability is not just a theoretical concept. From old clothing they made eco bags and pillows for a shelter for abandoned animals, and through their own work they realized that an object we would throw away can gain new value. The biggest change came when they themselves started proposing new ways to reuse materials."

The next activity was designed to involve every grade in the school, so that no one's eco story would be left out. For example, first-graders drew their ideal park with clean air, green grass and a trash bin. Second-graders came up with a comic strip featuring a hero who seeks fair solutions for nature. Fourth-graders listened to a story about a boy whose river is polluted by a factory, and wrote the continuation of the story themselves. Eighth-graders were given the most serious role: environmental marketing. They made posters and signs and recorded a video message for the local community. All these works end up on school bulletin boards or elsewhere in the school, forming a living, ever-changing catalogue of environmental awareness.

The school is attended by students of various nationalities, and nearly a fifth are children of Roma national minority background. That is why all planned activities are designed to include every student equally, because environmental justice without social justice remains incomplete. Students who take part, regardless of their background, become messengers of change both in their families and in their neighbourhoods.



Darja Šega

**Anton Martin Slomšk Primary
School,
Vrhnika, SLOVENIA**

Shift is reflected in her behaviour, as she now more consciously encourages cooperation, the inclusion of diverse voices, and joint problem-solving.

KNOWLEDGE, ANIMALS, AND PERSONAL GROWTH

Since their school joined the *Lead for EcoJustice*, a home economics and science teacher, who also works in extended-day programmes, has experienced a significant shift in her understanding of ecojustice—particularly in how she perceives the interconnectedness between individuals and the wider community. Although she had already recognised the importance of collaboration, the project deepened her thinking. She began to understand more clearly how strongly individuals and collectives are interlinked, and how their decisions affect one another and the environment. One key change is her awareness of the impact people have on each other. While she previously viewed collaboration mainly as an organisational approach, she now understands it as a fundamental value that enables meaningful change. As she emphasised:

“A perspective on how we are connected as a community.”

This awareness developed gradually through project activities, discussions, and exchanges with other participants, who often reflected on their roles within the broader context of the school and society.

Among all the changes she identified, the most significant for her is precisely this realisation of mutual influence. She considers this shift crucial because it creates space for concrete action and improvement. As she stated:

“Because we can change and improve a great deal.”

This marks a transition from passive awareness to active sense of responsibility, where the individual recognises their agency within the community.

This transformation was primarily triggered by the insight that effective action is only possible within a community. Through collaboration and shared reflection, the programme enabled her to reconsider processes within the school—not as the responsibility of individuals, but as a collective commitment. This shift is also reflected in her behaviour, as she now more consciously encourages cooperation, the inclusion of diverse voices, and joint problem-solving.

In her leadership role, this change represents both a confirmation and an upgrade of her previous approach. She has always been inclined towards teamwork and often acted as a coordinator, but she now understands this role in a more strategic and value-driven way. It is no longer just about organising tasks, but about creating a space in which the community can grow together and contribute to more just and sustainable practices. This insight strengthens her role as a leader who not only guides processes but also actively builds a community where all members can co-create change.



„Jure Kaštelan“ High School

Omiš, CROATIA

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE BETWEEN MOSOR AND THE ADRIATIC

The mighty Mosor and Omiš Dinara, the emerald Cetina and the blue Adriatic Sea simply inspire awe toward nature and call for care and preservation of this natural beauty for future generations. The staff and students of the „Jure Kaštelan“ High School in Omiš, who have joined *Lead for Ecojustice* programme, have answered the call.

Principal Tereza Srdelić points out that the school's vision is to be a key stakeholder in building an inclusive and encouraging community.

Ecojustice plays an important role in all of this because, as the principal states, through

"the ecojustice approach the school wants to enable students to understand the connection between the environment, society and the economy, and to empower them to actively contribute to a fairer, more sustainable and more humane future."

Staff and students first focused on caring for resources such as water, energy and paper. Students tracked consumption of these resources and shared their findings with all students. Presentations across all grades introduced every student to the concept of sustainability and environmental justice.

Students showed great interest in the topic. Instead of passively listening, most actively followed the presentation, which concluded with a knowledge check via an interactive quiz. Based on their activity during the presentation, it was evident that most students had some prior knowledge of sustainability concept, but were surprised by the scope and breadth of development, which includes social, economic, and environmental components, as well as by the difference between the concepts of ecology and sustainable development. One of the students' most frequent questions was,

"How does this concern me, and what can I change today?" The students discussed this question in detail, which made them realize that "a small step today is our shared path tomorrow."

The discussion also sparked other interesting ideas among the students.

Faced with the data from tracking resource consumption, the school's staff and students decided on their first steps. The school installed new paper towel dispensers in the restrooms, and every switch and tap received a sticker with a message reminding everyone in the school to use resources wisely.



The school will pay special attention to incorporating environmental justice into the curriculum in the coming period. In addition to a small bicycle parking area that has already been set up, the school will encourage all students and staff to use bicycles to get to class. A special activity is a herb garden, which reminds both students and teachers daily that everything we have comes from nature and that we are obligated to care for it.

As professor Pandža describes it, the purpose of the herb garden

"is not just the use of plants, but creating a relationship with nature through care, patience and understanding that even small natural systems require attention and respect. Through short conversations and reflections, students become aware of the connection between humans and nature and understand that caring for plants stems from a relationship of respect, not merely from the need to use natural resources."

This example of blending a school subject with the concept of environmental justice ensures that students achieve learning outcomes and acquire competencies, while also developing a responsible relationship with nature, spending more time in contact with plants, and more consciously choosing locally produced foods, of which Dalmatia has an abundance.

The full-circle process, from growing herbs in the school garden to using them in cooking classes, is a valuable example of teaching practice that combines vocational skills with environmental responsibility.

"My village is beautiful, for it has poplars..." Jure Kaštelan writes in his famous poem, "Poplars" ("Jablani"). A small park near the school, filled with these very trees, is dedicated to the poet and his work. The poem and the park alike serve as a timeless reminder that our villages, towns, and cities are beautiful because they hold poplars, nature, and life itself. This close connection to nature, the stewardship of its resources, and a deep understanding of its many voices lie at the heart of ecological justice. With these foundational steps, "Jure Kaštelan" High School has answered both the needs of its students and the poet's enduring call:

*"in them birds nest
in them clouds tangle
and stars race through."*

*"We strive to be a school where respect
for nature, cooperation, critical thinking
and social justice are nurtured. Our goal
is for our school to be a place that
encourages students to create positive
change in their community and beyond,"*



"For some children, this might be their only opportunity to connect with nature."

**Martina Arbeiter
Iva Kladošek
Mirko Škundrič
Mojca Tršavec**

**"Leon Štukalj" Primary
School,
Maribor, SLOVENIA**

SMALL STEPS LEAD TO BIG CHANGES

At a primary school in an urban environment, where many students live in apartment blocks and have limited daily contact with nature, an important transformation is underway.

Although the school had previously engaged with environmental issues, joining the *Lead for EcoJustice* programme marked a turning point. It brought new momentum, fresh ideas, and above all, a more systematic approach to change. As one member of the leadership team explained: "I think we were already doing some things in this area before, but the programme broadened our horizons and showed us new possibilities for what we could do."

One of the first concrete steps was to establish a development team focused on environmental care and sustainability. Composed of teachers from different levels and programmes, the team became the driving force behind change. As one teacher highlighted:

"What seems most important to me is that we formed such a team... and within this team we develop ideas and pass them on to our colleagues."

Through this step, change began to spread across the entire school. Teachers no longer acted as isolated enthusiasts, but as a community with a shared direction.

Gradually, these changes became visible in the everyday life of the school. In classrooms, ecological topics were integrated more systematically, students were encouraged to use resources responsibly, and reminders promoting sustainable were posted throughout the school. In the school parliament, students discussed ways to reduce food waste and actively sought solutions.

"They started preparing posters, collecting ideas about what else could be done,"
one teacher noted.

The school placed special emphasis on experiential learning. Younger students began sowing, planting, and caring for plants."

This connection did not remain confined to the school. Students began bringing ideas home—planting on balconies, reflecting on food, waste, and the environment.

"Children who plant something at school want to do the same at home."



The most significant change, however, did not occur only in activities, but in ways of thinking. Sustainability is no longer seen as a project or an additional task, but is becoming part of everyday decisions—how teaching is approached, how resources are used, and how people collaborate.

Gradually, the changes also reached parents and the wider community. The school began involving them in collection campaigns, clothing exchanges, joint events, and planned clean-up actions. At the same time, they started building partnerships with the local community to further strengthen sustainable practices.

The most significant change, however, did not occur only in activities, but in ways of thinking. Sustainability is no longer seen as a project or an additional task, but is becoming part of everyday decisions—how teaching is approached, how resources are used, and how people collaborate.

Reflecting on what enabled this shift, the team returned once again to the beginning—to the program and shared learning.

"It gave us an extra push... we started thinking more strategically." "Ideas were just flowing during those workshops."

Their story is not one of a single major breakthrough, but of many small steps that together create meaningful change—in classrooms, corridors, homes, and the wider community. As one teacher concludes:

"Small steps matter. You always have to take the first step—and then the path begins to open."



*"Ecojustice begins when we learn
to treat resources, people, and
nature with equal care."*

**"Stojan Zivkovic Stole"
Primary School**

Trnjane, SERBIA

"A NEW THREAD – FROM WARDROBE TO RAG RUGS" – A STORY OF SUSTAINABILITY AND SOLIDARITY

As part of the "A New Thread – From Wardrobe to Rag Rugs" activity, our school wanted to introduce students to textile waste, overconsumption, and the importance of reusing materials. The activity brought together students, teachers, and parents around a shared idea – that old clothes don't have to become waste, but can instead become a new resource.

Students brought in old clothing, learned how much the textile industry contributes to environmental pollution, and came together to find a way to reuse the material. They turned old clothes into rag rugs, decorative items, and materials for creative workshops.

The most significant change was how students think about consumption and the value of things. They began to understand that "new" is not always necessary, and that a responsible approach to resources can be both creative and useful.

Jelena Veličković, a member of the school team, said:

"This activity reminded us that eco-justice isn't just about ecology, but also about solidarity, togetherness, and responsibility."

Parents got actively involved, donating materials and helping with the workshops, which further strengthened the cooperation between the school and families.

Sixth-grade student Miljana Grujić said:

"Now I look differently at the clothes I no longer wear. I think about what else they could become."

Through this activity, the atmosphere at the school also changed – there is now more talk about sustainability, exchange, and responsible consumption. Students showed that small creative actions can have great value for the community and the environment.

The key message of our story is that eco-justice begins when we learn to treat resources, people, and nature with equal care.



The most significant change for school was letting go of theoretical inertia and integrating the new approach into everyday life.

**Dobos C. József Catering
Technical and Vocational
School**

Budapest, HUNGARY

FROM OVERCOMING PESSIMISM TO GREEN GASTRONOMY: HOW ECOJUSTICE IS TAKING ROOT AT DOBOS

The Dobos C. József Catering Technical and Vocational School is a dynamic vocational institution with a long history and putting the principles of sustainability into practice was not easy at first. There was a certain scepticism among the teaching staff, and the school as a whole – particularly when it came to engaging parents who were difficult to reach – was still in its infancy. However, participation in the programme sparked an internal shift, and a coalition of committed teachers emerged from what had previously been isolated initiatives.

The most significant change for the school was letting go of theoretical inertia and integrating the new approach into everyday life.

Although transformation at the institutional level is gradual and slow, the most significant change is the radical strengthening of personal awareness and the shift from theory towards everyday, active practice.

This change is the most important because educators have realised they are not passive observers of these processes. Initial pessimism has given way to a responsible, proactive attitude. The aim is no longer to hold isolated, one-off events, but to ensure that environmental issues and the fair management of resources become integral to everyday life. Teachers themselves are engaging much more deeply with the subject, thereby setting an authentic example for their pupils.

Two main factors triggered this internal shift:

- An inspiring professional community: The biggest impetus came from the conference in Budapest, where colleagues learned about best practices from other schools and received specific, practical tips.
- The power of the 'green island': A small micro-community of teachers has formed within the school. These are the people who really 'dig deep' into the subject and, by supporting one another, fight to secure more opportunities, time and programmes to put their ideas into practice.



This hands-on approach also lays the foundations for the long-term, visionary goal set by one of the form tutors: to bring about a radical shift in the mindsets of their future class over the next five years, so that the pupils do not view environmental protection as an issue unrelated to them or alien to their lives.

At Dobos, 'going green' was not merely an abstract concept, but was directly linked to the catering profession. The finest practical example of this is the creation and maintenance of the school garden.

The plants and herbs tended and grown by pupils and teachers in the greenhouse have been directly incorporated into practical lessons for chefs and pastry chefs. In this way, the chefs of the future experience first-hand what it means to respect local ingredients, practise sustainable gastronomy and apply the principle of reuse during events.

This hands-on approach also lays the foundations for the long-term, visionary goal set by one of the form tutors: to bring about a radical shift in the mindsets of their future class over the next five years, so that the pupils do not view environmental protection as unrelated to them or alien to their lives.

If this story were to be shared with a school that is also at the very beginning of its journey and struggling with initial apathy, the most important advice from the teachers at Dobos would be this:

"Even a small step is a step! Don't lose heart if there are only a few of you at the start, or if progress is slow. Read, watch videos, find inspiration, and most importantly: talk to one another! Look for specific, small practical opportunities within your own subjects, because the tiny seeds of changing attitudes will eventually bear fruit."



Erzsébet Hadnagy

Waldorf School
Budapest, HUNGARY

THE LADYBIRD SCHOOL

Zsóka describes the school's transformation as a gradual and organic process rather than a sudden reform. The school has long been known for its strong ecological awareness and its practice of biodynamic farming, rooted in the principles of anthroposophy.

For Zsóka, this process was not only institutional but also personal. Working on eco-justice themes encouraged her to reflect more deeply on her own values—how care for nature intertwines with care for people, and how education can nurture empathy as much as knowledge. She often says that the programme helped her “see the familiar through new eyes.”

The most meaningful change is that the school now sees itself as part of a broader local ecosystem. Boundaries between the school and the community have softened. Students participate in local environmental actions, like cleaning streams or removing invasive plants, which boosts their agency and pride. Neighbours recognise the school's role in improving the environment, often joining activities or offering support.

Integrating ecojustice principles has influenced teaching, allowing teachers to connect environmental and ethical topics across subjects—such as math lessons on patterns in nature and energy use, and art classes on human-environment relationships.

“The introduction of the ecojustice approach added a new perspective—connecting environmental responsibility with social justice and community well-being.”



**Katja Čakš Bekanovič, Marjetka
Kolbl, Špela Podgoršek Pirc,
Amalija Škerlj,**

Brinje Grosuplje Primary school,
Grisuplje, SLOVENIA

SMALL STEPS FOR BIG CHANGES

At a primary school in an urban setting, where school life has long extended beyond the classroom, participation in the *Lead for EcoJustice* programme created space for a more systematic reflection on how the school understands, lives and puts ecojustice into practice.

From the very beginning, it was clear that change would not come solely from decisions made by school leadership, but through a shared process involving the whole school community. One member of the development team explains:

“It is not about the school leadership telling us what to do but about finding out what we can all do together so that it becomes part of our culture.”

This very shift – from individual initiatives towards shared responsibility – laid the foundation for the changes that followed.

Changes quickly became visible in the school environment. One of the most tangible changes was the decision to stop using single-use plastic bottles during activity days and introduce reusable water bottles instead. This measure not only reduced waste but also contributed to a broader understanding of responsible resource use:

“We don’t spend as much on plastic bottles, so we can allocate more money to locally produced food.”

At the same time, the school began putting in place the conditions needed to support such choices, including drinking fountains and more accessible infrastructure.

Significant changes also took place in teaching practices. Outdoor learning became more frequent, supported by the purchase of basic equipment and encouragement from the school leadership. One teacher describes the pupils’ response:

“The children are already asking us: when are we going outside again?”



Among the many changes, participants found it difficult to identify a single most significant one. However, establishing a shared agreement and action plan emerged as particularly important.

Although the beginnings were challenging, it became clear that contact with nature brings a different dynamic to learning and contributes to greater well-being.

At the same time, initiatives connecting the school more closely with the natural environment and other living beings were strengthened. Pupils and teachers planted a school garden together, began growing sprouts and mushrooms, established a pollinator-friendly meadow, and made bird feeders.

The campaign against firecrackers was one initiative that clearly demonstrated how students can become agents of change. Through the student council, they made a conscious decision not to use firecrackers during the December holiday period, based on their understanding of the negative impacts firecrackers have on the environment, animals and people. Instead of spending money on firecrackers, they donated food and other essential supplies to the Ljubljana Animal Shelter. The pupils also prepared posters and awareness-raising activities and linked the initiative to a visit to the shelter. The campaign showed that even simple steps, when they are thoughtful and taken collectively, can lead to broader shifts in the behaviour and values of the school community – from an anthropocentric perspective towards a more inclusive understanding of the world, which is also one of the key dimensions of ecojustice.

Cooperation with families and the local community has also played an important role. Parents contributed materials and helped improve the school grounds, while the local community provided the school with access to land for its garden. As one teacher points out:

“The response from parents was really wonderful – you can feel that we are doing something together.”

In this way, the school opened itself more to the wider community and became a space for collaboration.

Among the many changes, participants found it difficult to identify a single most significant one. However, establishing a shared agreement and action plan emerged as particularly important. It enabled individual ideas to develop into systematic action:

“The turning point came when we agreed on something as a school – and then actually started putting it into practice.”

For other schools just beginning their journey, participants offer clear advice: start with small, concrete steps.

“You can always find something you can do – even small gestures can bring about big changes.”



"We are particularly proud to mark our School Day in an ecological spirit, through activities that promote unity, creativity, and environmental responsibility."

"By doing so, we want to show that the values we talk about do not remain just words. We live them daily alongside our students, teachers, parents, and the broader local community."

**'Mijat Stojanović'
Primary School**

Babina Greda,
CROATIA

ECO-FASHION SHOW IN BABINA GREDA

As the "Mijat Stojanović" Primary School celebrates its landmark 250th anniversary, its participation in the *Lead for EcoJustice* programme aligns perfectly with the celebratory motto of this historic milestone:

Through the *Lead for EcoJustice* programme, the school acknowledges that modern education must extend beyond traditional knowledge, skills, and attitudes. It must foster a deep connection with nature and champion responsible resource management for the generations to come.

For this school, situated in a municipality of just over 2,700 residents, ecological justice is far more than a theoretical concept. It serves as a practical driver for community empowerment and local sustainability. The project established clear, actionable goals: to motivate students and staff members alike, to revitalize school's physical environment and to actively engage the local community in preserving their natural heritage.

Through these targeted efforts, the school is transitioning from a traditional educational facility into a "living laboratory" for sustainability.

"Following our entry into the project, we placed environmental topics at the absolute forefront,"
explains Principal Đurđica Babić.

"We do not treat these themes as mere add-ons to the regular curriculum. Instead, they form the foundation through which we connect academic subjects, projects, and extracurricular activities."

Principal Babić emphasizes that sustainability, environmental stewardship, and responsible resource management have now become core pillars of the school's identity and future growth strategy.

This focus on ecological justice will take centre stage during the upcoming School Day celebrations.



*"It was great! My mom helped me make it.
We ran into a few small problems at the
beginning, but I was persistent. It was
completely worth it because I won first
place! The fashion show was so much fun,
and we all had a blast."
Lucija, a 4th-grade student*

*"The past taught us, the present shapes us,
the future awaits us."*

The school's participation in this program marks a vital shift from isolated, individual initiatives toward collective cooperation, as it is only by working together that the community can actively build the school and the sustainable future they want to see.

One of the most memorable moments of the project was the Eco-Fashion Show, held on February 13th in the school's sports hall. Utilising recycled paper and waste materials, the students demonstrated that what we typically consider trash can be given a vibrant, creative second life. The audience—which included nearly the entire school—witnessed the incredible depths of children's imagination when given the freedom to think outside the box.

Through this hands-on activity, students received tangible proof that with a little imagination, any object can find a new purpose. This perfectly reinforced the core principles of "reduce, reuse, recycle." Furthermore, the fashion show successfully brought together students, teachers, and parents.

The school's journey toward ecological justice continues far beyond the fashion show, driving initiatives that are actively transforming both the school landscape and institutional culture. Preparations are currently underway to build a spiral sensory garden utilizing repurposed old bricks. This space will serve as an interactive, hands-on outdoor classroom focused on medicinal herbs and preserving local botanical heritage.

In addition, the school is dedicating special attention to wildlife conservation, specifically protecting local storks. Plans include registering the stork nest located directly on the school's roof and installing educational signboards around the grounds.

These combined efforts aim to educate both children and adults about the importance of local biodiversity and how to harmoniously coexist with these majestic birds.

The "Mijat Stojanović" Primary School has firmly set out on its path toward ecological justice, dedicating itself to resource conservation and caring for all living beings. In doing so, they are shaping future generations to step forward with pride and responsibility. The school community in Babina Greda has powerfully demonstrated that even in times when rural villages face downsizing due to emigration, a community can remain "great" through a shared, steadfast commitment to caring for our planet.



“Ivan heroj Muker” Primary School

Smederevska Palanka, SERBIA

“NATURE WITH ALL THE SENSES” – LEARNING THAT LEAVES A MARK

As part of the *Lead for Ecolustice* programme, students in this school had the opportunity to take part in activities that encouraged them to experience nature in a completely different way. Through the “Forest Bathing” activity and a flower-planting workshop, students learned how to build a deeper connection with nature and recognise the importance of personal responsibility for protecting the environment.

A special place in the project was given to the “Forest Bathing” activity, carried out with students from the satellite school in Baničina. During their time in the nearby forest, students were not merely observers of nature – they were invited to experience it with all their senses. They paused to listen to the rustling of leaves, identify different scents, notice small details in their surroundings, and pay attention to things that often go unnoticed in the rush of everyday life.

Through guided activities and conversations, they explored how spending time in nature affects mood, concentration, and a sense of inner peace. What began as an ordinary walk gradually turned into an experience that awakened curiosity, attentiveness, and a desire to explore in the students.

Darija, a seventh-grade student, said after the activity:

“What I liked most was that we had time to stop and really look at the nature around us. I realised that we miss a lot of beautiful things because we’re always in a hurry.”

Uroš Petak added:

“It was interesting to learn in a different way in the forest. I felt more relaxed than in the classroom, and I’d like us to have more activities like this.”

After their time in nature, students turned their knowledge and enthusiasm into concrete action. A flower-planting workshop was organised in the schoolyard, first involving members of the Environmental Section, who were then joined by other students.

Working together, they improved the school grounds, planted flowers, and discussed the importance of green spaces for quality of life. A particularly valuable part of the activity was the initiative shown by the students themselves: they proposed ideas, divided tasks, and took responsibility for the space they use every day.



The greatest significance of these activities lies in the fact that students learned through direct experience. Instead of only hearing about environmental protection through classroom content, they had the opportunity to experience it, explore it, and actively take part in preserving it.

Maša, a sixth-grade student, said:

"It felt good that we worked together on something useful for the school. When I walk past the flowers we planted, I feel proud because I know we planted them."

The greatest significance of these activities lies in the fact that students learned through direct experience. Instead of only hearing about environmental protection through classroom content, they had the opportunity to experience it, explore it, and actively take part in preserving it.

Teachers noted that during the activities, students showed a high level of cooperation, responsibility, and mutual support, and conversations held afterward confirmed that these forms of learning left a strong impression on them.

The activities carried out on the initiative of the *Lead for EcoJustice* programme showed that environmental awareness develops most successfully when students have the opportunity to connect knowledge with personal experience. Through their time in the forest and working together to improve the school grounds, students developed responsibility, a sense of belonging to the community, and an understanding that caring for nature begins with small, everyday actions.

In this way, the school continues to build a culture of sustainability and encourages young people to become active guardians of the environment, ready to lead positive change in their community by their own example.

OUR ACTIONS AFFECT EVERYTHING AROUND US

The school's participation in the *Lead for Ecolustice* programme sparked a deep process of personal awareness in one of the teachers, which gradually evolved into a more holistic relationship with the world around her. Although she had already reflected on responsibility towards nature before, her involvement in the project strengthened and deepened this awareness, placing it within a broader community context.

On a personal level, she highlights:

"...a greater awareness of responsibility for all living beings, or for nature as a whole."

Among the various changes in her attitudes, values, and behaviours, she identifies the most significant as:

"The awareness that our actions affect everything around us."

This reflects a shift from focusing on individual decisions to understanding their wider impact on people, nature, and the broader community.

This change is particularly important to her because it goes beyond environmental thinking alone and embraces a more comprehensive relationship with the world. It is no longer only about nature, but about relationships—with people, animals, objects, and the community. As she emphasises, it is essential to cultivate a relationship with everything that surrounds us, as this very relationship shapes our everyday decisions and behaviours.

A pivotal moment that further reinforced this shift was a lecture within the project, which resonated with her existing beliefs and deepened them. She also points out the importance of personal history—the relationship with the world that develops from early childhood and enables individuals to truly hear and internalise such messages. For this reason, she stresses how crucial it is for students to encounter these themes from an early age.

Today, this new understanding is clearly reflected in her pedagogical and leadership practice. She sees her role as an opportunity to actively shape values and relationships. As she puts it, her task is to:

"Respond and nurture a relationship with the world in all situations—during lessons, in spontaneous conversations, and in guided activities."



Amalija Škerlj

Brinje Grosuplje Primary
School,
Grosuplje, SLOVENIA

WHEN GREEN THREADS COME TOGETHER: HOW HAS SHARED RESPONSIBILITY BROUGHT THE BUDENZ COMMUNITY CLOSER TOGETHER?



Within the walls of the József Budenz Primary and Secondary School, a commitment to sustainability is nothing new. Teachers and pupils have long lived their daily lives in line with the eco-school philosophy; however, during the project period, they succeeded in 'putting this into writing', and the school officially became an eco-school. This formal recognition gave greater weight to the results of the work carried out to date and provided fresh impetus to the internal drive for continuous change, improving the environment and fostering community well-being.

The most significant change that has been initiated by participating in the *Lead for Ecolustice* programme was the active involvement of the parents' community and open communication.

Although the official eco-school status and the integration of green content into lessons are major milestones, the most significant change is nevertheless the active involvement of parents and the closer, more open and friendlier relationship that has developed with them.

This change is the most important for the school because an environmental education objective can only be truly complete and successful if teachers, parents and pupils are all pulling in the same direction when implementing individual best practices. As a result of the hard work invested, not only has the physical environment been improved, but the community's mental wellbeing and general sense of well-being have also reached a new level: in a more beautiful, greener environment, everyone feels better, and it is easier to learn and work.

The basis for the change was teachers setting a personal example and working together. Teachers paid closer attention to their own behaviour at school and worked on ways to make everyday life more liveable for the children. This approach sparked the pupils' interest and sense of responsibility.

The wave of greening within the school soon spread beyond its gates: parents and local decision-makers joined the initiative, and even the mayor got involved in protecting the local chestnut trees around the school.

**József Budenz Primary
and Secondary School**

Budapest, HUNGARY



The way the community has come together is best illustrated by a specific example from the school. The parents of one family with three children attending the school are gardeners by profession. When the school launched its greening initiatives, this couple were delighted to take the lead and used their professional expertise to coordinate the landscaping events.

This shared gardening work became a bridge for dialogue: through these parents, the other parents also began to talk and interact with the teachers in a much more open and direct way. Digging, planting and beautifying the grounds together broke down barriers and created a much more family-like atmosphere at the school.

If this story were to be shared with a school that is just setting out on the path to becoming an eco-school, the most important message would be:

“Dare to dream and make it happen! The most important thing is to focus on creating a more liveable, sustainable and constantly evolving environment for yourselves and your pupils – and don’t be afraid to involve parents as partners in this work.”

The basis for the change was teachers setting a personal example and working together. Teachers paid closer attention to their own behaviour at school and worked on ways to make everyday life more liveable for the children. This approach sparked the pupils’ interest and sense of responsibility.



"Now the students themselves ask when we can go outside—and they even encourage teachers who were not very enthusiastic before."

**Samo Jezovšek
Domen Višič
Sanja Žgavc**

Primary school Pohorskega
bataljona,
Oplotnica, SLOVENIA

TOGETHER FOR A GREENER FUTURE AT POHORSKI BATALJON PRIMARY SCHOOL OPLOTNICA

At a school closely connected to its local environment and surrounded by nature, participation in the *Lead for Ecoljustice* programme opened a pathway towards gradually rethinking how they think, act, and collaborate—with each other, with students, and with the environment.

The changes began with small but concrete steps. One of the first was a more systematic approach to waste separation, while one of the most visible shifts occurred in teaching practices. Although the school already had an outdoor classroom, it had long remained underused. The program created space for reflection: why aren't we using it? What is holding us back? Teachers recognised their own concerns—lack of equipment, a different teaching dynamic, and a sense of losing control. As one teacher reflected:

"I think it's the teachers' fear that needs to be overcome. You have to push past yourself and make the decision."

Once they took the first step, things began to move. They introduced surveys, listened to students and each other, and identified practical solutions—from purchasing a whiteboard to planning a week of outdoor learning.

The changes did not remain confined to the classroom. The school strengthened its connections with the local community, established new collaborations with associations and organisations, and provided students with more experiential learning opportunities. At the same time, students began contributing ideas that went beyond standard school tasks:

"Ideas are pouring in... now they want to set up a toy repair workshop."



Teachers recognised this as one of the greatest values of the transformation—ideas emerging from students themselves. Such ideas do not remain on paper; they come to life in practice and spread among peers, families, and the wider community.

“They take this behaviour home, into their families—and spread it further.”

When reflecting on what enabled this shift, they did not point to a single moment, but rather to a combination of factors: leadership support, space for dialogue, concrete actions, and—perhaps most importantly—the willingness to try.

“We started talking... and that’s when the outdoor classroom truly came to life.”

They also emphasised the importance of gradual progress:

“Schools should start with smaller projects so students can get used to them—and then build from there.”

They conclude with a simple but powerful message:

“Anything you do is better than nothing—because doing nothing is the easiest option, but it is not good —not for us, not for our students, and not for future generations.”



The school takes particular care to hold Nature classes regularly outdoors, among trees, streams and soil.

Primary School Janko Leskovar

Pregrada, CROATIA

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ON TOP OF KUNAGORA

Forests and hills surround Pregrada. In such an environment, dominated by Kunagora, the Janko Leskovar Primary School has joined the *Lead for EcoJustice* programme, continuing a path the school had actually begun long ago – a path on which nature has long been part of teaching, not an addition to it. The school marked Earth Day this year with a climb up Kunagora, and the forest, as they themselves say, did not just show itself to them that day – it spoke to them. Trees offered clues for little Plant Detectives, animal tracks in the ground turned into mysteries to be solved, and every rustle of leaves was an invitation to curiosity. With plaster for making track casts in their backpacks and zero-waste meals packed for the trip, students that day walked, observed and created – but also enjoyed nature, the forest, and the view from Kunagora. Workshops dedicated to environmental justice further enriched the day, emphasising fairness, responsibility and creativity. By the end of the day, students had not just learned something about nature – they had learned together with it, and Kunagora once again confirmed that an outdoor classroom is not an escape from school, but one of its strongest forms. Fifth-grade students were especially delighted.

"Best day ever – I love being in nature!" says Dorian. Noa suggests:

"We should learn like this at least once a month,"

while Teo concludes: *"Learning outside is so much fun. It's easier and nicer than being in the classroom – especially on such a beautiful day."*

Kunagora is not a one-time outing but part of the school's rhythm. Alongside outdoor lessons, the school's everyday life is marked by eco-patrols that ensure consistent waste sorting, routines for saving energy and water that have become part of classroom culture, and step-count competitions that encourage students and staff toward a more active lifestyle and less car dependency.



"This isn't a project we're carrying out – this is how we behave. In our school, students, teachers, parents and the local community together create a culture of responsibility toward nature. Learning outside the classroom is not an exception – it's part of our identity."

The school takes particular care to hold Nature classes regularly outdoors, among trees, streams and soil. Students measure water properties and learn about its role in the ecosystem, observe air and photosynthesis, and discover how forests produce oxygen while through soil layers and humus they learn the foundations of fertility. Nature thus becomes a co-teacher, and curiosity grows into knowledge. None of this would be possible without outside support. The school cooperates intensively with a number of local stakeholders: hiking and mushroom-foraging associations regularly share their knowledge of the forest and mountain, and parents get involved in workshops and actions.

Special effort is put into encouraging student leadership – through eco-patrols, student councils and project teams – giving students real room to take initiative, make decisions, and propose their own solutions. They do not just participate – they lead. The teachers who led the activities on Kunagora point out that the day showed what the school has long believed: that students grow the most when allowed to learn in a real, living environment:

"On Kunagora they were braver, more curious and more creative than ever. Nature simply moves them. When we give them room to explore, they take the initiative, ask questions, and find answers on their own. That's learning that stays with you."

Through these activities, Janko Leskovar Primary School shows that learning does not have to stay confined to the classroom, and that nature, given room, becomes the best teacher of all. It is a school where every student's voice carries weight, where families are partners, and where environmental justice is slowly but surely becoming part of everyday life – not as a project being carried out, but as the way the school already behaves.

As the school's headmistress sums it up:

"This isn't a project we're carrying out – this is how we behave. In our school, students, teachers, parents and the local community together create a culture of responsibility toward nature. Learning outside the classroom is not an exception – it's part of our identity."

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