

10th NEPC Primary Colors of Education Conference
on the occasion of **NEPC's 20th anniversary**



LEAD_{FOR} ECO JUSTICE

EMPOWERING EDUCATORS TO LEAD CHANGE FOR A SUSTAINABLE PLANETARY WELLBEING

CONFERENCE PROGRAMME



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Lana Jurko
Executive Director NEPC

20 YEARS OF NEPC

**LOOKING BACK, MOVING FORWARD
EDUCATION THAT EXPLORES,
PARTICIPATES AND CHANGES**

Twenty years ago, a group of education professionals across Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe and Central Asia recognised that education policy is too important, and too often too poorly understood in our regions - to be left to isolated experts working alone. They founded the Network of Education Policy Centres not as an institution in the conventional sense, but as something rarer – a community of people and organisations who chose to bind themselves to one another through shared values and the belief in the importance of education.

That founding choice has shaped everything that NEPC has become. Across two decades and dozens of countries, our members have never been united by a single government, a single funding stream, or a single language. What has held us together is a mission: quality education for all, inclusion as a non-negotiable principle, and solidarity – not as an abstract ideal, but as a working method. When one member centre faced hardships, others supported them. When one country's reform stalled, others shared what had worked and what hadn't. This is what it means to be a network of professionals: not a hierarchy, but a web of mutual accountability and care.

NEPC's first twenty years have been about building solidarity across borders in defence of inclusive, quality education, and the wellbeing of all. Our next chapter is about bringing that same solidarity into how education itself responds to the ecological consequences that the next generation will inherit. There is no wellbeing of all without planetary wellbeing, which is why ecological justice is a natural continuation of our mission. Ecological justice in education, like educational justice more broadly, demands connectedness rather than isolation: connectedness to nature, to one another, and to the communities who are too often left out of the decisions that shape both their schooling and their futures. It demands the kind of polycentric, distributed responsibility that NEPC has practised since its founding, no single centre holding all the answers, but many centres, working through education policy and practice, holding each other accountable to shared values.



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This is why ecological justice belongs so naturally in NEPC's story today, not as a new cause alongside education, but as a question we ask through education. Who has access to quality education, whose knowledge counts, who bears the costs of exclusion: these have always been our questions, and they are also the questions ecological justice asks of schools and education systems: whose knowledge of the natural world is taught, whose communities are prepared to face environmental change, and whose children are left without the tools to do so. Climate change and environmental degradation do not affect all communities, all countries, or all children equally, just as educational opportunity never has.

As we mark twenty years, we do not celebrate an institution. We celebrate a community: the people who built NEPC, the organisations that have sustained it, and the members who continue to prove, year after year, that solidarity is not a sentiment but a practice. That community, bound by mission rather than mandate, is precisely what we will carry into the next twenty years.



**10th NEPC Primary Colors of Education Conference
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Wednesday, 16th September, 2026

16:00 – 18:00

Registration

18:00 – 19:30

Lana Jurko
Opening

Mura I

Keynote: Dr Mike Bottery, University of Hull, England

**Educational Leadership and the Challenges of
Societal and Existential Collapse: the need for a
planetary ecological perspective**

Mura I

Moderator: Lana Jurko



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PROGRAM

Thursday, 17th September, 2026

Keynote: Arjen Wals, Wageningen University, Netherlands

9:30 – 11:00

A Whole School Approach to Ecojustices and more Hopeful Futures

Mura I

Moderator: Burcu Meltem Arik

11:00 – 11:30

Coffee break

Parallel sessions

Presentations

Tijana Jovanović Petrović, KidHub Creative educational Centre, Belgrade, Serbia

Shared Leadership for Ecojustice: Science Playgrounds as Polycentric Learning Ecosystems

Yeliz Ergöl, Roots & Shoots Türkiye, Türkiye

A BioBlit Guide as an Ecojustice Tool for Youth-led Biodiversity Knowledge and Local Environmental Action

Mura I

Milica Marušić Jablanović, and Jelena Stanišić, Institute for Educational Research, Belgrade, Serbia -

Connecting Environmental Identity with the Principles of Ecojustice

Moderator: Ana Mlekuž

11:30 – 13:00

Workshop

Sanja Brajković, Network of Education Policy Centers

Lead for EcoJustice - Transformation of School Culture

Mura II

Workshop

Ajša Alagić, Slovenian Forestry Institute, Slovenia

The forest as a classroom of ecological justice: how connecting with nature develops knowledge, responsibility and care for the environment

Mura III

Workshop

Erzsébet Hadnagy, Fészek Waldorf school, Hungary

Organic Personal Growth

Terrace or Fun Zone

Thursday, 17th September, 2026

13:00 – 14:30

Lunch

Mura I

Keynote: Jelena Puđak, Ivo Pilar Institute of Social Sciences, Croatia

14:30 – 16:00

From Climate Awareness to Social Change: Education for Life Within Planetary Boundaries

Moderator: Branko Ančić

16:00 – 16:30

Coffee break

Parallel sessions

Panel

Franco Borgogno, European Research Institute, Italy

Burcu Meltem Arık, Education Reform Initiative, Türkiye

Woven lives: ecology, ethics, and our inseparable connections to nature

Mura I

Moderator: Eموke Takacs

Workshop

Bassey Klára, BKSZC Creative and Handicraft Technical School, HUNGARY

Shared Pattern

Mura II

16:30 – 17:30

Workshop

Dr. Katarina Rončević, Greenpeace Germany, Germany

Whole School Approach: A practice-oriented Framework, the example of "Schools for Earth"

Mura III

School Living Libraries

Petra Vogrinc, Anton Martin Slomšek Primary School, Vrhnika, Slovenia

When Nature Becomes Part of You

Klavdija Petrovič et's , Ivanjковci Primary School, Slovenia

Let's Not Forget Ecojustice

Fun
Zone

Nenad Matić, Kralj Petar Prvi Primary School, Serbia

Ecojustice Transforms the School Culture

Moderators: Mateja Mlinar and Petra Bozovičar

18:00

20 Years of NEPC – Looking Back, Moving Forward

Education That Explores, Participates and Changes

Mura I

Friday, 18th September, 2026

Parallel sessions

School visits

8:30 – 11:00

Workshop

Katarina Ivče Farnell, Forum for Freedom in Education, Croatia

Ecoality: Climate Change and Social Justice — A Transformative Education Model for Climate and Gender Justice in Secondary Schools

Mura II

NOTE: This session will be in the Croatian language

Workshop

Miljenka Kuhar, Society for Sustainable Development Design, Croatia

Gender Perspective of Climate Policies

Mura III

Bicycle tour

Branko Ančić, Institute for Research in Education, Zagreb, Croatia

Eli Pijaca Plavšić

Nature

11:00 – 11:30

Coffee break

Parallel sessions

Panel

Jelena Vranješević, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, Serbia

Melina Kalem, Regional Education and Information Centre for Sustainable Development in South-East Europe - REIC, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Youth Activism Across Time and Place: From Soweto to the Climate Crisis

Mura I

Moderator: Lana Jurko

11:30 – 13:00

Presentations

Rimantas Ževys, Vilnius University, Lithuania

Polycentrism in teacher education: perspectives of intra-state and inter-state cooperation

Aljoša Petek, PIC, Slovenia

How to Defend the Future Generations? Children's Rights in Environmental Matters

Mura II

Poster session

Moderator: Rima Bezedo

Friday, 18th September, 2026

Parallel sessions

Workshops

Mateja Mlinar and Petra Bozovičar, Pedagoški inštitut, Slovenia, Mojca Rankl, O. Župančič Nursery School, Slovenia

Connecting with Nature through Experience

Mura III

Eva Neumayer, Mihály Benicsek, Krisztina Czinkiné Mészáros, Magosfa Foundation, Hungary

Biomimicry in Education – What Can We Learn from Nature?

11:30 – 13:00

School Living Library

Špela Podgoršek Pirc, Brinje Grosuplje Primary School, Slovenia
Lead for ECO changes

Dragica Ukmar Kodelja, Danilo Lokar Primary School, Ajdovščina, Slovenia

The Path to a Greener School

Fun Zone

Erzsébet Hadnagy, Waldorf School Budapest, Hungary
The Ladybird School

Danijela Stiplošek
How Our School Lives Ecojustice

Moderators: Miroslav Markičević

Closing

13:00 – 13:30

President of the NEPC Governing Board, Petrit Tahiri

13:30

Lunch

14:30 – 16:30

NEPC members General Assembly

Mura II

PROGRAM

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KEYNOTE LECTURES



10th NEPC Primary Colors of Education Conference
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Dr Mike Bottery

University of Hull, England



EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND THE CHALLENGES OF SOCIETAL AND EXISTENTIAL COLLAPSE: THE NEED FOR A PLANETARY ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Much of an educational leader's focus is unsurprisingly at the micro- and meso-levels, as such work needs to deal with student, staff and community issues, as well as responding at the institutional level to issues of policy and inspection. Yet an increasing number of problems and threats are emerging beyond institutions, regions, and even societies, but which then impact on these levels. Whilst some global effects are now discussed in the educational leadership literature, the potential for both societal and existential collapse remains largely untouched. Key issues here include the failure to understand the complexity of the processes which underlie most of these threats, the development of educational perspectives which provide a better understanding of such global threats, and the need for an educational leadership role which creates the educational ethos within which students/future citizens can acquire the skills, attitudes and values to acquire such perspectives. This paper then assesses the possibilities of such threats of collapse in the present day and in the near future, and the need for educational leaders to become more aware of, and to use a planetary perspective to form appropriate responses and strategies to them.

Mike Bottery has published eleven books and many peer-reviewed articles on values, policy in education, leadership, sustainability, and education's role in global sustainability. His book 'Sustainable School Leadership' (2018) was shortlisted for the American Publishers Association's English Prose Award, and 'Writing a Watertight Thesis' (2019) was expanded to a second edition. His latest, 'The Educational Leader in a World of Covert Threats' (2022), is followed by a forthcoming book, 'Leading into Unknown Territory', at Bloomsbury.

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Arjen Wals

Wageningen University, Netherlands



A WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH TO ECOJUSTICES AND MORE HOPEFUL FUTURES

In this talk, Arjan will introduce the WSA as a lens that can help schools and the school communities in which they are nested to work more systemically, critically, and relationally towards a more sustainable world locally. He will touch upon all the petals of the WSA as depicted in the flower of Mathie and Wals (2022) and stress the importance of building agency and action competence and of cultivating lightheartedness during what for many seem to be heavy times. Arjan will also present the framework and toolkit for the development of Whole School Approaches as developed within the context of the UNECE.

Arjen Wals is a professor of transformative learning for socio-ecological sustainability at Wageningen University, where he also holds the UNESCO Chair of Social Learning and Sustainable Development. His work focuses on supporting ecologies of learning that promote sustainable living through relational, ethical, and critical ways of knowing. Much of his research develops whole institution approaches to sustainability and decolonisation of education. He has (co)authored and edited hundreds of works in environmental and sustainability education.

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Jelena Pudač

Ivo Pilar Institute of Social Sciences,
Croatia



FROM CLIMATE AWARENESS TO SOCIAL CHANGE: EDUCATION FOR LIFE WITHIN PLANETARY BOUNDARIES

Climate change and the ecological crisis are increasingly framed as problems that can be solved through technological innovation, green investment, and changes in individual behaviour. However, a growing body of evidence suggests that more efficient technologies and sustainability policies alone are not sufficient to halt the transgression of planetary boundaries. At the same time, research on public attitudes shows that citizens generally recognise the seriousness of climate change but often fail to see a clear connection between their everyday practices, social institutions, and the urgent social transformations needed.

Drawing on the sociology of climate change and research into the social dimensions of sustainability, this lecture examines the social assumptions underlying the dominant model of development and explores possibilities for acting within planetary boundaries. Particular attention will be paid to debates about different responses to the ecological crisis and to the question of what role education can play in empowering citizens to imagine alternative social and economic futures.

The lecture will open a space for reflection on education not merely as the transmission of environmental knowledge, but as a process of developing critical understanding of the interdependence of society and nature, ecological justice, and collective responsibility for creating the conditions for a good life within planetary boundaries.

Jelena Pudač is a sociologist and senior research associate at the Ivo Pilar Institute. Her research covers the sociology of climate change, social ecology, sustainable development, degrowth, and the social and political dimensions of climate transition. She has participated in numerous domestic and international research projects dedicated to climate change, environmental policies, and ecological movements. She is the author of the book 'Who Cares About the Climate? Towards a Sociology of Climate Change' and a series of academic papers on public attitudes towards climate change, climate policy, and the social transformations needed to live within planetary boundaries. She is also active in science communication and public debates on the climate and ecological crisis.

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PANELS



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Woven lives: ecology, ethics, and our inseparable connections to nature

Franco Borgogno, European Research Institute, Italy
Burcu Meltem Arik, Education Reform Initiative, Türkiye

Every species on Earth, including humans, depends on a delicate web of life to keep our planet habitable. Yet, in our modern daily lives, we often lose sight of these vital connections. This engaging panel discussion invites you to step back into the web of existence and rediscover the relationships that sustain us. Together, we will explore why preserving biodiversity is not just an ecological necessity, but the most urgent priority for our collective well-being and eco-justice. The session brings together two distinct yet deeply complementary perspectives:

- The ecological reality: Franco Borgogno will guide participants through the extraordinary relationships that bind us to the sun, water, and all of nature. From the changing seasons to the counterintuitive dynamics of predator-prey communities, you will awaken a fresh awareness of how deeply we depend on natural cycles.
- The ethical and educational lens: Burcu Meltem Arik will shift our focus to how we perceive and value these ties. Drawing on ecofeminist approaches, she will challenge traditional hierarchies and question whose knowledge counts when we discuss sustainability. Together, we will examine the "ethics of attention" and look at how local wisdom, everyday observation, and memory help us connect with our landscapes.

Through concrete, vivid examples – including lichens, dung beetles, the deep ocean, mountain glaciers, and the critical importance of darkness –, this panel moves beyond textbook definitions. It revisits the foundational roots of ecology to ask a pressing modern question: What does it mean to be human if our lives are always shaped by other forms of life?

Whether you are an educator, an activist, a scientist, or simply curious about our place in the cosmos, join us to discover what happens when we truly learn to notice the world around us.

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Youth Activism Across Time and Place: From Soweto to the Climate Crisis

Hugh McLean NORRAG, Kazakhstan South Africa

Jelena Vranješević, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, Serbia

Melina Kalem, Regional Education and Information Centre for Sustainable Development in South-East Europe – REIC, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

This panel brings together three generations and geographies of youth activism to explore what drives young people to organise, resist, and demand change. Hugh McLean (NORRAG) reflects on the youth of the 1976 Soweto Uprising and South Africa's struggle for liberation, drawing on his own experience of that era. Jelena Vranješević (University of Belgrade), a developmental psychologist and long-time researcher of children's rights and participation, discusses youth activism in contemporary Serbia – including her own support for the recent student protests. Melina Kalem (REIC), a researcher and project manager in energy transition, brings a climate justice lens, drawing on her research into the Fridays for Future movement in Slovenia and the wider region. Together, the speakers trace what stays constant in youth-led resistance across decades and borders – and what each new struggle demands anew.

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WORKSHOPS AND PRESENTATIONS



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The forest as a classroom of ecological justice: how connecting with nature develops knowledge, responsibility and care for the environment

Ajša Alagić, Slovenian Forestry Institute, Slovenia

In the context of increasing environmental challenges, education needs to go beyond the transmission of knowledge about nature and foster a deeper understanding of relationships between humans, other living beings, and ecosystems. Forests provide a space where children and adults can develop a sense of connection to nature, responsibility, and an understanding of ecological interdependencies through direct experience.

This workshop is based on the Flow Learning approach developed by Joseph Cornell (Sharing Nature), which guides participants from sensory awareness of the natural environment to experiential understanding of ecosystems as interconnected networks. The forest is used as an active learning environment where participants explore ecological relationships through movement, observation, and role play.

The core of the workshop is an interactive simulation of an ecosystem, where participants take on the roles of different organisms and experience environmental scenarios such as drought, invasive species, and human interventions. Through this process, they explore ecological justice as the uneven distribution of space, resources, and vulnerability within ecosystems.

The approach translates complex ecological concepts into direct experience, fostering empathy, systems thinking, and reflection on interdependence. The workshop targets educators and highlights possibilities for integrating experiential, nature-based learning into school curricula across disciplines.

Whole School Approach: A practice-oriented framework for school leaders and teachers, using the example of the 'Schools for Earth' initiative.

Dr. Katarina Rončević, Greenpeace Germany, Germany

The Whole School Approach: A practice-oriented framework for educational leadership and pedagogy, illustrated by the Greenpeace Germany 'Schools for Earth' initiative.

How can educational institutions effectively address contemporary global crises and equip students with future-oriented competences? This Schools for Earth project by Greenpeace Germany examines the strategic integration of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) as a catalyst for institutional school development. It delineates pathways to transform schools into democratic arenas for visionary planning and civic action. Educators and school leaders operate at the core of this systemic transformation. Their primary responsibilities include steering organisational development processes, establishing structural frameworks, and cultivating an institutional culture predicated on sustainability. Utilising Greenpeace's guiding metrics for carbon-neutral school development, the "Whole School Approach" (WSA) is conceptualised as an empirically grounded methodology to systematically embed ESD across all dimensions of school governance, curriculum design, and community operations.

Lead for EcoJustice – transformation of school culture

Sanja Brajković, Network of Education Policy Centers

The 'Lead for EcoJustice' is a professional development programme for school leadership teams. It is designed to address the global environmental crises by integrating principles of ecological justice into all aspects of school culture. This programme responds to the pressing need for humanity to reconnect with the natural world. It also aligns with the call of many educational practitioners and scholars to transform schools toward an appreciation of nature, justice and sustainability. By transforming school culture, the programme aims to improve schools' processes and procedures according to ecojustice education and positively influence the present and future collective wellbeing of human and non-human beings, offering hope and motivation for a sustainable future. Namely, it means embedding Ecojustice principles in governance (e.g. mission statements, key guiding frameworks, monitoring progress); curriculum teaching and learning (e.g. cross-curricular projects, assessments; action learning); school environment (e.g. reducing waste and their carbon footprint; providing green and healthy school grounds); and relationships within school and community partnerships.

In addition to building knowledge about ecojustice concepts, the 'Lead for EcoJustice' programme fosters a sense of planetary stewardship within schools to evolve through: 1. Encouraging attitudes and beliefs that respect diverse ecosystems, 2. Developing the ability to implement school practices aligned with ecojustice principles.

During the workshop, participants will be introduced to the programme's content, various resources available for scholars, and the programme's impact on school culture.

Shared Leadership for Ecojustice: Science Playgrounds as Polycentric Learning Ecosystems

**Tijana Jovanović Petrović, KidHub Creative Educational Centre,
Belgrade, Serbia**

Ecojustice education requires more than teaching environmental facts: it calls for learning environments in which children, educators, families, and communities share responsibility for ecological change. This paper presents the Science Playground, a participatory model for transforming school and preschool grounds into living learning ecosystems. The model combines nature-based learning, design thinking, biodiversity activities, and the co-creation of interventions such as butterfly gardens, bird and insect habitats, sensory paths, and growing areas.

Drawing on implementation experiences from educational institutions in Serbia, the paper examines how educators can act as convenors of polycentric change rather than as the sole providers of knowledge. Children participate as researchers, designers, decision-makers, and caretakers, while families, civil society organisations, experts, and educational institutions contribute complementary knowledge and resources. This distributed approach reflects polycentric governance, in which multiple centres of initiative coordinate around a shared ecological challenge (Ostrom, 2010).

The paper argues that the Science Playground links everyday nature connection with democratic participation and place-based responsibility. Regular contact with living systems can strengthen children's connectedness to nature (Liefländer et al., 2013), while co-creation enables them to experience environmental stewardship as a collective civic practice. The model also supports UNESCO's call to transform learning environments, strengthen educator capacities, empower young people, and accelerate local action for sustainability (UNESCO, 2020).

A BioBlitz Guide as an Ecojustice Tool for Youth-Led Biodiversity Knowledge and Local Environmental Action

Yeliz Ergöl 1/2, Doruk Karalar 1, Bengisu Şensoy 1/2, Saliha Akkayüz 1, Tuğçe Nur İlbaş Gür 1/2, Umut Hasanoğlu 1, Aslıhan Niksarlı 1

1 Roots & Shoots Türkiye, Istanbul, Türkiye

2 Eurasia Institute of Earth Sciences, Istanbul Technical University, Istanbul, Türkiye

Citizen science is recognised as a powerful method for biodiversity data collection, and it also serves as a great participatory approach to ecological learning, inclusion, and local action. This paper examines the potential of a youth-oriented BioBlitz guide as an ecojustice tool that transforms biodiversity observation into not only accessible, youth-led knowledge production, but also local environmental action through tools to improve the local biodiversity. A BioBlitz guide can lower barriers to participation in biodiversity science while supporting ecological literacy and environmental justice, it could also support the well-being of children and youth by fostering self-efficacy and collective action. Designed for educators, students, university clubs, and community-based youth initiatives, the guide combines conceptual, methodological, and action-oriented components. It introduces key ideas related to biodiversity and citizen science, provides practical guidance for using iNaturalist and documenting species through ethical field observation, and offers a step-by-step framework for planning, facilitating, and reflecting on BioBlitz activities. It also provides concrete steps for post-event biodiversity action, encouraging participants to translate observations into locally grounded environmental projects. By framing the guide as a participatory educational resource grounded on ecojustice, this paper contributes to discussions on how citizen science can expand access and democratise biodiversity knowledge-making and support youth-led responses to local ecological challenges.

Connecting environmental identity with the principles of ecojustice

Milica Marušić Jablanović and Jelena Stanišić, Institute for Educational Research, Belgrade, Serbia

Between 2023 and 2025, a multidisciplinary team of science and education experts conducted a study on the environmental literacy and environmental identity of students in Serbia. The mixed-methods study was conducted on a stratified sample of 13- to 14-year-old students. The 46 participating classes were ranked, and the two highest-performing classes were invited to complete an open-ended questionnaire and interviews exploring the sources of their strong connection with nature and the features of their environmental identity. Building on these findings, this paper proposes ways of fostering environmental justice through the environmental identity features identified in the study. Sensitivity to the beauty and diversity of nature can be linked to questions of accessibility and equal opportunities to experience natural spaces. Concern for endangered nature can open discussion about environmental equity: which groups are more affected by polluted water, air, soil and whether available solutions depend on income or social position. Students' moral reasoning, expressed through criticism of environmentally harmful behaviour and a sense of internal reward for acting responsibly, can be connected to questions of responsibility and justice. The paper opens a discussion on whether environmental identity may serve as a starting point for fostering ecojustice competencies in the school context.

Gender Perspective of Climate Policies

Miljenka Kuhar, Society for Sustainable Development Design, Croatia

The workshop will take place in three parts. During the first part, the meaning of the term "just energy transition" from a gender perspective will be briefly discussed, as well as "who is left behind" in the implementation of European climate policies, and why it is crucial to raise the issue of increased vulnerability of certain social groups to climate change adaptation measures in public climate policies. We will also briefly discuss the complex concept of climate justice in the context of energy transition and fair climate change adaptation measures, and why the definition of climate justice cannot be simple and unambiguous.

With the participants, we will also open the question of how gender, socioeconomic status, education, status in the labour market, etc. increase climate vulnerability and affects climate risk exposure and adaptability.

In the second, participatory part of the workshop, participants will analyse a specific scenario of climate change adaptation measures in small groups. Participants will assess the proposed measure from a climate and gender justice perspective. In doing so, it will use an intersectional approach and consider how gender intertwines with age, socioeconomic status, health, care responsibilities, place of residence, mobility and other circumstances.

Participants will then analyse who benefits the most from the proposed measure, so that it can be made more inclusive, and whose needs may remain unrecognised.

Sticker Puzzle: Shared Pattern

Bassey Klára, BKSZC Creative and Handicraft Technical School, HUNGARY

This workshop explores how participatory art can foster awareness of the interconnected relationship between humans, communities, and the environment. Designed for international and multicultural settings, the activity relies primarily on visual communication and shared creative experiences rather than verbal instruction, making it accessible regardless of language, cultural background, or artistic experience.

Participants collaboratively create a large-scale artwork by tracing and overlapping the outlines of their hands on a puzzle-shaped surface. The intersecting lines generate a network of geometric forms that are subsequently coloured using a limited palette. As the composition develops, participants often recognise visual patterns resembling natural systems such as leaf veins, river networks, root structures, or cellular formations. Through this process, individual contributions merge into a collective image, highlighting themes of cooperation, mutual dependence, and ecological interconnectedness.

The workshop concludes with a reflective observation of the completed artwork and a symbolic final step: each participant removes and keeps one puzzle piece from the composition. While the original image is physically separated, its meaning persists through the distributed fragments, emphasising that individuals remain part of larger social and environmental systems.

By combining collaborative creativity, visual symbolism, and experiential learning, the workshop offers an engaging and inclusive way to reflect on sustainability, shared responsibility, and humanity's embeddedness within the living world.

Organic Personal Growth

Erzsébet Hadnagy, Waldorf School, Hungary

This interactive 60-minute workshop uses clay modelling to explore the diversity of individual perspectives and the value of collaboration within a group. Guided by the facilitator, participants begin by creating the same assigned shape from clay while working independently and following identical instructions. Once completed, the shapes are displayed together, allowing the group to observe both the similarities and the unique variations that naturally emerge.

The clay forms are then arranged into a meaningful sequence, revealing how each individual contribution can become part of a larger whole. Participants change their seats according to the position of their clay piece in this sequence and continue working while paying close attention to those beside them. This encourages communication, responsiveness, and cooperation as everyone adapts their work to create continuity with others.

Through this simple yet powerful process, participants experience how individual strengths, differences, and limitations contribute to healthy, organic development. The workshop highlights the importance of recognising diversity, adapting to changing circumstances, and building meaningful connections rather than striving for uniformity. It reflects the principle of polycentrism by demonstrating how a coherent whole can emerge from many distinct yet interconnected contributions. The activity also encourages careful observation of natural forms and illustrates how cooperation, flexibility, and mutual awareness can lead to balanced and sustainable outcomes.

Ecoality: Climate Change and Social Justice — A Transformative Education Model for Climate and Gender Justice in Secondary Schools

Katarina Ivče Farnell, Forum for Freedom in Education, Croatia

This workshop, conducted in Croatian, introduces secondary school teachers and educational staff to 'Ecoality: Climate Change and Social Justice', a training developed within the EU DEAR-funded project ECOALITY: Youth and Local Community for Climate and Gender Justice. Grounded in a transformative education framework — Learn, Think, Empower, Act, Transform — the session equips participants across general and vocational subjects with core concepts and pedagogical approaches linking the climate crisis to social and gender inequality, including notions such as intersectionality and ecofeminism.

Participants will engage directly with the training's participatory, practice-based methodology and leave with concrete, ready-to-use classroom materials and lesson plans to deliver activities with their students. The workshop draws on experience from previous training cycles, in which 180 educators from schools and student dormitories across several Croatian counties took part, reporting strong relevance for cross-curricular teaching and meaningful impact on their own critical awareness. Attendees will leave with practical tools to help their students engage critically with climate and gender justice as interconnected global challenges.

Polycentrism in teacher education: perspectives of intra-state and inter-state cooperation

Rimantas Ževys, Vilnius University, Lithuania

The highly centralised Soviet system of initial, in-service training of teachers and educational research in Lithuania was eventually transferred into a decentralised provision of teacher training and research services. However, the polycentric model did not lead to the expected synergy of intra-state and inter-state cooperation.

Financial reforms, implemented under the influence of neoliberal ideology, have raised serious obstacles to the cooperation of teacher training institutions. The introduction of the principle “money follows the student” forced universities to compete for students. By combining the efforts of teacher training institutions, the development of pedagogical competences could become much more diverse, especially in areas such as inclusive, ecological and intercultural education. However, under the current neoliberal model, Lithuanian universities are not interested in jointly training students, as this would also mean sharing the money allocated for studies.

The neoliberal approach in higher education complicates the polycentric division of power: sharing power with institutions also means sharing limited financial resources. Intra- and inter-state cooperation could improve the development of competences important for teachers and open up new partnership opportunities, but despite the attractive rhetoric, education policy in Lithuania continues to be shaped in accordance with the neoliberal market-oriented model.

How to Defend the Future Generations? – Children's Rights in Environmental Matters

Aljoša Petek, PIC, Slovenia

Children and young people are increasingly recognised as essential participants in environmental and climate decision-making, both as holders of their own rights and as voices closest to future generations. This paper examines the legal and practical conditions for their participation in environmental matters in Slovenia. It draws on international children's rights standards, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Chiara Sacchi decision, General Comment No. 26, and principles concerning future generations, and assesses their relevance within the Slovenian legal framework.

The presentation considers the three Aarhus Convention pillars: access to environmental information, public participation, and access to justice. While Slovenian law formally enables children and young people to access information and participate in environmental and spatial-planning procedures, meaningful participation remains limited. Key barriers include complex and technical documentation, insufficient child-friendly information, procedural limitations, questions of legal standing, and reliance on adult representation.

The presentation argues that effective environmental governance requires stronger mechanisms for child and youth participation, especially at the local level. It highlights the need for accessible information, supportive civil society structures, broader recognition of children's legal interests, and participatory formats that allow young people to influence decisions affecting their environment and future.

Reconnecting with Nature: Experiential Learning for Ecological Justice in Schools

Mateja Mlinar and Petra Bozovičar, Pedagogical Institute, Slovenia
Mojca Rankl, Oton Župančič Nursery School, Slovenska Bistrica, Slovenia

This 45-minute interactive workshop presents an experiential activity from a professional development programme on ecojustice in education, focusing on reconnecting with nature as a foundation for sustainable and just practices.

The workshop is grounded in the understanding that ecological justice requires not only cognitive knowledge, but also emotional, sensory, and relational engagement with the natural world.

Participants will take part in the activity called 'Meet the Tree', designed to foster sensory awareness, attention, and personal connection with the environment. If conditions allow, the workshop will take place outdoors; otherwise, an adapted indoor version will be implemented.

The experiential component is followed by a facilitated reflection, linking participants' experiences to broader concepts such as interdependence between humans and nature, biodiversity, and the role of education in addressing ecological and social challenges.

The workshop emphasises the importance of integrating such approaches into school culture and everyday educational practice, moving beyond knowledge transmission towards transformative learning that supports responsibility, empathy, and action.

Participants will be invited to reflect on how similar activities can be adapted to their own educational contexts.

The forest as a classroom of ecological justice: how connecting with nature develops knowledge, responsibility and care for the environment

**Éva Neumayer, Mihály Benicsek and Krisztina Czinkiné Mészáros,
Magosfa Foundation, Hungary**

Biomimicry, the practice of learning from nature's designs and processes, represents one of the most promising frontiers in modern science and technology.

Nature has sustained life on Earth for 3.8 billion years. It has already refined solutions to nearly every problem we encounter, and by studying and adapting these strategies, we can build a more sustainable future for humanity.

As part of the BioLearn projects, we developed educational materials for children aged 9–12 and 12–16 (see: <https://biolearn.eu/en>). This workshop offers a taste of these resources.

We will introduce the basic principles of biomimicry and share inspiring examples, then try out some of the activities and experiments ourselves. We will also try to "invent" something inspired by the natural world. Finally, we will present the downloadable card game, available in five languages, and show where to find the guide for organising a Biomimicry Day.

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LIVING ECOJUSTICE SCHOOLS LIBRIARIES



10th NEPC Primary Colors of Education Conference
on the occasion of NEPC's 20th anniversary

Let's Not Forget Ecojustice

Klavdija Petrovič, Ivanjkovci Primary School, Ivanjkovci, Slovenia

a school situated in an environment 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 Eco Justice program 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.”

To be continued....

The Path to a Greener School

Dragica Ukmar Kodelja, Danilo Lokar Primary School, Ajdovščina, SLOVENIA

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 much 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 remarked a visitor from the local library.

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.

To be continued....

When Nature Becomes Part of You

Petra Vogrinc, Anton Martin Slomšek Primary School, Vrhnika, Slovenia

When the school joined the Lead for EcoJustice project, a member of the leadership team—who also works as a school nutrition coordinator and laboratory assistant—began a gradual process of transformation. At first, she perceived the project mainly as a professional opportunity, but over time it gained personal significance and began to influence her way of thinking and acting.

On a personal level, she became more attentive to the world around her. As she explains: “I am more attentive to the world around me, I feel nature more deeply, and I have improved my relationship with it.” Everyday decisions became infused with a sense of responsibility—she increasingly reflects on the impact her actions have on the environment and the future of nature.

She identifies a stronger connection with nature as the most significant change—one that goes beyond a purely rational understanding of environmental issues and touches her values and overall outlook on life. This shift was not triggered by a single moment, but rather by an ongoing process: a series of reflections, conversations, and experiences within the project that encouraged deeper thinking. It was precisely this space for reflection that enabled her to begin perceiving the environment not as something external, but as something she is inherently connected to.

This internal transformation also has important implications for her leadership role. Because she now feels a deeper connection with nature, she can convey her values and perspectives to others in a more authentic and convincing way. As she emphasises: “Because I feel nature more deeply myself, I can be a better role model and share my thoughts more sincerely.” Her leadership is thus becoming more authentic—grounded in personal experience rather than solely in professional knowledge.

To be continued....

Brinje Grosuplje Primary School in Lead for ECO changes

Špela Podgoršek Pirc, Brinje Grosuplje Primary School, SLOVENIA

At a primary school in an urban setting, where school life has long extended beyond the classroom, participation in the Lead for Eco Justice program 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 the 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.

To be continued....

The Ladybird School

Erzsébet Hadnagy, Waldorf School Budapest, HUNGARY

Erzsébet 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 practice of biodynamic farming, rooted in the principles of anthroposophy.

For Zsóka, this process was not only institutional but also personal. Working on ecojustice 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 project 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 school and 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.

The integration of 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.

To be continued....

Environmental Justice on Top of Kunagora

Danijela Stiplošek, Janko Leskovar Primary School, Pregrada, CROATIA

Forests and hills surround Pregrada and its surroundings. 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!" said Dorian. Noa suggested,

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

While Teo concluded, "Learning outside is so much fun. It's easier and nicer than being in the classroom – especially on such a beautiful day."

To be continued....

Ecojustice Transforms the School Culture

Nenad Matić, Kralj Petar Prvi Primary School, SERBIA

Nenad, the principal of the Kralj Petar Prvi Primary School in Belgrade, has experienced a substantial change in his personal attitudes and lifestyle through the Lead for EcoJustice project, an unfamiliar topic. Slowly, taking small steps, he became a more conscious and mindful person in his everyday actions. He recognised that he unconsciously making 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 behaviour changed gradually, in an unforced, natural way. He realises how influential it is to connect to nature. Talking about ecojustice and practising it also affected his family, household, and the his school's community. He plans to use poems or haikus to encourage students to turn off the taps and switch the lights off in the school to be more aware. Little steps can make significant changes, by sneaking into our daily practices.

To be continued....

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POSTERS



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Youth Participation and Institutional Readiness for Ecojustice in Slovenia

Ana Mlekuž, Urška Štremfel, Educational Research Institute, Slovenia

Ecojustice raises fundamental questions about democratic legitimacy, intergenerational justice, and the capacity of institutions to include young people in shaping sustainable futures. Within an ecojustice perspective, youth participation extends beyond symbolic consultation and becomes a structural element of democratic governance and social transformation. This paper examines youth engagement in the context of the ecojustice through three interrelated dimensions: (1) young people's environmental orientation as an indicator of support for environmental and ecojustice goals, (2) their readiness to participate as an expression of civic and political agency, and (3) perceived institutional conditions for participation as an indicator of the openness of educational and governance structures to youth involvement. Drawing on a secondary analysis of international and national datasets, the paper explores the relationship between young people's expressed willingness to engage in ecojustice-related decision-making and their perceptions of opportunities to influence ecojustice-related policies and practices in Slovenia. Particular attention is given to the role of schools and other public institutions as potential spaces for meaningful participation and democratic learning. The findings reveal a persistent gap between young people's strong commitment to environmental issues and the limited opportunities they perceive for influencing decisions that affect their futures. The paper discusses the implications of this gap for school culture transformation, arguing that meaningful youth participation is essential for fostering democratic, sustainable, and socially just responses to contemporary ecological challenges.

Let's change the climate – conference for teenagers, from teenagers

Radka Tyslová, Educational Centre TEREZA, Czech Republic

Presenting a best practice example from the Czech Republic, the poster will feature information, photographs, the measured impact and a link to recordings of a unique Czech climate conference. The conference is called 'Let's change the climate' ('Změňme klima') and its double-meaning name reflects the attitudes of the organising team of the Czech Eco-Schools programme, which is that environmentally positive change is necessarily preceded by societal changes (emotional wellbeing and safety, self-efficacy, awareness of societal conditioning, active citizenship, etc.). 'Let's change the climate' is unique because its target group is children and young people from the age of 12 and the conference speaks to them directly. To be as relatable as possible for the target audience, the speakers at the conference are mostly also young people (teenagers or in their early 20s), who have been active in environmental or climate protection themselves, and who share their goals, their stories as well as the barriers they faced, including differences in opinion among peers or authorities, emotional pressures, performance expectations and so on. The attractive 'pecha-kucha' format of the presentations and the overarching topic 'The climate and me' are just some of many tools that keep the whole conference inviting for the young audience, and ensure measurable change in self-efficacy, climate-literacy and optimism in the members of the audience. The conference has run annually since 2020 and has been bringing over 150 people together (with many more watching the online recording).

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SCHOOL VISITS



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The Tomaš Goričanec Primary School, Mala Subotica

The Tomaš Goričanec Primary School, in Mala Subotica is a vibrant, inclusive school built on the belief that diversity is a strength. Located in the heart of the Municipality of Mala Subotica, it serves around five hundred students from Mala Subotica and surrounding villages, including a branch school in Držimurec-Strelec that mainly serves children of the Roma national minority, alongside a dedicated preschool programme for Roma children.

The teachers and staff are known for their expertise, creativity, and constant drive to innovate—embracing project-based learning, outdoor education, STEM, digital skills, sustainability, and volunteering, while empowering students to become active changemakers in their community.

The school's achievements speak for themselves: the students won the UNICEF UPSHIFT award (2021/2022) for 'From School to the Willow,' transforming a neglected space into a nature and learning trail. We've also developed our own resource, the handbook 'The Bell Is Calling Us,' supporting Croatian-language learning for minority students.

Guided by their vision — 'Equal in Diversity. We Learn and Grow Together in a Safe Environment.' — school staff and pupils invite you to discover how their school is turning diversity into opportunity and inclusion into everyday practice.

Josip Slavenski Grammar School, Čakovec

For about sixty years, our school has systematically and comprehensively prepared pupils to continue their education at all faculties. We offer four streams: general, science-mathematics, languages, and the newest one, science gimnazija (grammar school). While the general gimnazija provides knowledge across all general-education subjects, the languages gimnazija offers an increased number of foreign language lessons.

What makes our school special is the diversity within the gimnazija itself. Around fifteen optional subjects and some thirty forms of cross-curricular activities, jointly created by pupils and teachers, contribute to the school's positive spirit. We encourage pupils to discover and develop their interests and to pursue them at school, offering content from all fields: from every branch of the arts, the sciences, computing, and robotics, to life skills and languages. Pupils at our school have the opportunity to gain international language diplomas in German (DSD) and French (DELFI), and can also take part in numerous international projects and pupil exchanges with schools from the Netherlands, Poland, Macedonia and Croatia.

Through all of this, we foster collaboration, initiative and (self-)critical thinking in our pupils, develop their independence, and equip them for lifelong learning. Open communication between pupils and teachers, a pleasant working atmosphere, a focus on excellence, inspiring teamwork, and continuous encouragement and monitoring of pupils' progress are our core values – and our results have made us well recognised throughout the region and across Croatia as a whole.

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VISIT MEĐIMURJE



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Pedaling Toward Ecojustice: A Bicycle Journey Through Međimurje

Branko Ančić, Institute for Social Research, Zagreb, Croatia
Eli Pijaca Plavšić

This session invites participants on a guided bicycle ride through Međimurje, Croatia's northernmost region, known for its patchwork of vineyards, the Mura and Drava river landscapes and small farming communities. Beyond a scenic tour, the ride serves as a moving conversation about sustainable mobility, rural resilience and environmental justice in practice.

As we cycle through villages, wetlands and agricultural land, cyclists will encounter firsthand opportunities at the intersection of ecology and equity.

It is designed for conference attendees at all fitness levels.