

Real World Learning Network

Review of country reports



**Real
World
Learning**

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Introduction

The aim of country reports (status reports) was to examine the current provision of outdoor science and sustainable development in each partner country –namely; the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Slovenia and the United Kingdom. It was focused on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to outdoor learning.

The review of country reports (the final status report) should provide a shared understanding of the situation in each country and a detailed understanding of the tasks each working group will need to address.

The research was carried out on the basis of guidelines for baseline research produced and finally agreed on by all partner countries, co-ordinated by the Czech Republic, and completed by the third month of the project implementation. The research involved SWOT interviews with selected educators to establish support needs as well as desk research into recent outdoor science and sustainable development learning. The research took approximately three months, including the preparation of country reports. The final status report was synthesised during the following month.

The research focused on four areas: use and assessment of quality criteria in outdoor learning, the relationship between outdoor learning and sustainability, pedagogical approaches to outdoor learning, and the situation concerning the development of career and green skills.

All countries (except the UK) had to use a translation for outdoor learning and the Real World Learning concept. The majority of partner countries struggled at this point as they usually do not have a unique translation/understanding of these terms.

Summary (key points and SWOT)

The individual country reports inform about the general situation of outdoor education in their countries. All authors of country reports analysed the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to outdoor learning and identified the key-points to be taken into account when preparing the terms of reference for the project working groups. From there, we tried to identify points which were mentioned by more countries or that we felt were important enough to be mentioned here.

Before beginning the preparation of topics for working groups, it was necessary to find and agree on suitable national translations for the term outdoor learning and the Real World Learning concept, with teachers and professionals dealing with this form of education in Italy, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovenia. These terms are used and uniquely understood in the United Kingdom and Germany.

Outdoor education has been widely provided in the United Kingdom and Germany (very heterogeneous), less in Slovenia (although supported by government), the Czech Republic and Hungary and almost not at all in Italy.

The experience with outdoor education in the countries reflects the situation of existing/non-existing quality criteria for outdoor learning and its assessment. There is an existing and highly recognised system in the United Kingdom (though it was mentioned that there is a need to work on the assessment of learning in a holistic and accessible way). In Germany there are more heterogeneous

lists of criteria and methods of assessment, some in the process of preparation. In the Czech Republic there are some existing criteria lists for whole environmental education and some forms of assessment. In Hungary and Slovenia there are not any commonly known and shared criteria for outdoor education, although there are some forms of evaluation. In Italy the process of using criteria for the assessment of the teaching of environmental education has just started. All countries believe in the importance of a useful quality criteria system and form of assessment, although some are afraid of the obstacles involved in the creation of a good set of widely accepted criteria.

In accordance with the country reports and the first discussions at the inception meeting, the method of “assessment for learning” as understood and implemented in the UK, would be interesting for partner countries.

There was agreement among all the countries that there is a strict relationship between outdoor learning and sustainability. According to the UK, more work needs to be done to integrate big scientific issues and concepts such as climate change and eco-system services, and also to show how outdoor science can link with national and international issues of current importance and how outdoor learning can support social change.

There are various pedagogical approaches to outdoor learning in all the countries, including for example wilderness education (in National Parks and Free Wilderness Schools) and forest education in Germany. We believe that it would be beneficial to share examples of good practice from individual countries during the project.

In the majority of the countries there are no unique career and green skills lists defined (excluding Germany and United Kingdom). However, all the countries believe that such definitions are vital for their further work at environmental centres and schools.

Shared threats concerning outdoor education are lack of funding (from parents, grants, governments etc.), lack of political support (excluding Slovenia), strict health and safety rules and a traditional approach to education. Furthermore, the Hungarian government has recently introduced a new law restricting the individual initiatives of schools and teachers. In Italy there is a crisis in the education system in general at the moment.

Methodology

The aim of the baseline research was to provide a review of the current situation concerning Real World Learning in each partner country. The methodology used in the research was quite similar for all partners. Three main approaches were used. Firstly web and desk research was done. Secondly questionnaires were developed by each country (except Germany) focused on questions that could not be adequately answered using secondary sources of information. Online questionnaires were used by some countries, such as UK, Italy, and Slovenia. The other partners sent their questionnaires to the interviewees by email. Finally, in-depth interviews with people representing the target groups were conducted.

Target groups

Each partner specified the target group of the research according to the specific situation of the country. The broad target groups that involve school teachers, out of schools outdoor learning providers, academic authorities and people in charge of outdoor and sustainability education were

specified by Hungary, Italy, Slovenia and the United Kingdom. The target group in Germany didn't include school teachers and the target group in the Czech Republic was focused specifically on environmental education centres.

Report:

1) Developing quality criteria for success and assessment for learning

The partners agreed that appropriate quality criteria were an important and meaningful tool for the assessment and improvement of outdoor learning. They can provide feedback to the providers and the guidelines to develop their lessons, methods etc. It can be a guarantee of quality for students and their teachers who are receiving the education as well as for decision makers and for the persons who fund the education.

Outdoor learning quality criteria implementation is a long-term process at the various stages in the partner countries. Some countries such as Slovenia, Hungary and Czech Republic haven't defined national quality criteria. In Italy there are theoretically developed but the criteria are not used in practise. Germany and the United Kingdom have a lively experience with the quality criteria implementation and using in the field of and sustainability education. Table 1. gives more details about outdoor learning quality criteria in the partner countries. The national researchers revealed interesting questions that could be discussed by the working group

Table 1. Quality Criteria for Outdoor Learning (OL)

Germany	Slovenia
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • existing quality criteria used in the field of OL and sustainability education • criteria are efficient when connected with a certification process • list of topics and goals that could be considered while developing quality criteria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • criteria for OL do not exist • criteria important for OL providers as well as for students • existing criteria are set individually by teachers • project is an opportunity to develop national criteria for OL
United Kingdom	Italy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • most providers assess learning (experience: Quality Badge, Golden standards...) • quality Badge widely recognised • divergent assessment approaches (strength/weakness) • difficult to gather evidence of behavioural change • list of points to discuss within working group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hotly discussed in Italy • knowledge is assessed / learning processes or competences rarely • theoretically developed tools for assessment by National Network for Environmental Education centres – need to be put in practice • regional accreditation processes of environmental education and sustainability education providers
Czech Republic	Hungary
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not specified quality criteria of OL • assessment should be formative, helping with improvement • providers of env. education believe in meaningfulness of the criteria • existing criteria for environmental education providers • opportunity to be inspired by “assessment for learning concept” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not unified criteria for OL • quality criteria based on Plan-Do-Act-Check cycle are not included in schools • teachers accept quality criteria as useful but afraid of negatives such as documentation needs increasing, subjective meaning

2) Outdoor science (OS) and sustainability (SUST)

Support of sustainability education that encourages students to behave sustainably in their lives seems to be one of the aims of the RWL project. National surveys asked how outdoor science education contributes to sustainability education and Table 2 describes the results of the surveys. Outdoor science was found to be vital and strongly supportive element of sustainability, despite the fact that outdoor science emphasizes more nature topics (e.g. nature conservation) and it is rarely focused on the social field (changes in society, etc.). In some partner countries (Slovenia, Hungary, Czech Republic) there are no accurate national terms for Outdoor science and there are no clearly understood differences between the two terms (teachers consider outdoor science and sustainability education to be the same or very similar).

Table 2. Outdoor Science and Sustainability

Germany	Slovenia
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • science should be an immanent part of sustainability • case studies of examples combining both approaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outdoor science vital for sustainability • missing accurate definitions for both approaches • teachers consider OS and sustainability to be the same thing • OS – nature topics /SUST. – broad understanding (more topic)
United Kingdom	Italy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainability and outdoor science seen as very compatible • Focus on nature/conservation behaviour rather than social change • new topics (<i>climate change, ecosystem services</i>) need to be integrated • OS brings long-terms benefits • contribute OS to the SUST:: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - understanding how the natural systems work - encourage action to be more sustainable - helps engage learning more effectively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • complicated position of science in Italian education system • negligible amount of schools practising OS • several examples of good practice • list of points to discussion within working group
Czech republic	Hungary
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accurate national terminology of OS is missing • not strictly distinguished by OS providers (teachers) • OS is a step toward sustainability • OS and SUST have a common aim: personal responsibility for the future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accurate national term for OS is missing • terms OS and SUST used by teachers as similar meaning • there should be more SUST education than OS

3) Pedagogical approaches to outdoor learning (OL)

Outdoor learning is experienced and organised in a variety of schemes in the partner countries. The national surveys proved that teachers believe learning through experience and being in touch with nature is an effective form of learning. The majority of interviewees mentioned similar values that should be developed by OL (e.g. various forms of respect, conservation behaviour, awareness of connections, transferring theory into practice, positive attitudes toward nature, cooperation, critical thinking, multi-approach thinking, etc.). According to the different national situations, different approaches were developed to deliver OL, such as; forest schools, environmental education centres' programs, adventure learning, wilderness education, identification with the area people live in , cultural landscape learning, education for transformation, etc. These approaches give inspiring examples of good practice to the partners and provide points of discussion for the working groups. Some countries such as Hungary, Italy and the Czech Republic were seen to be missing clear OL

terminology and definitions and work in this field needs to be done. Funding cuts were found to be a common threat that influenced OL in a negative way. Table 3 gives more details about pedagogical approaches to OL in partner countries.

Table 3. Pedagogical Approaches to Outdoor Learning (OL)

Germany	Slovenia
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • heterogeneous situation (approaches, providers, methods etc.) • OL providers: NGOs, freelance environmental educators, EE academies • various examples of approaches, aims and methods described in the research: <i>wilderness ed., forest ed., ed. for transformation, adventure ed., cultural landscape learning, local place identification etc.</i> • tendency to focus more on sustainability field 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OL encouraged by government but parents pay • OL provided by schools (50 years tradition) • values: <i>respect, knowledge of nature, positive attitudes towards nature, transfer theory into practise</i> • used methods: <i>work group, observation, exploration, experiment, field work</i> • <i>RWL project gives an opportunity to form and developed national OL didactics</i>
United Kingdom	Italy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • good learning approaches experience + diversity of learning approaches and opportunities • focus on changing behaviour and attitudes of learners • less evidence to support social change • threats: health and safety, funding cuts, lack of political support • list of points to discussion within working group • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • national terminology is not clarified • bottom up spreading (motivated teachers) • lack of money funding • OL strong relationship with environmental education • examples of good practice • list of questions to discuss within working group • schools struggle to experience situations of learning outside the school walls • lack of suitable places for OL in towns and cities
Czech Republic	Hungary
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not unique national definition and missing clear understanding of OL • list of methods, approaches, model used within OL (real experience) • importance of OL depends individually on the will of school teachers or school management • advanced in practice, implementation OL, searching for suitable pedagogical approaches • OL often provided by environmental education centres (teachers at the centres experienced with OL) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • national terminology is not clarified • OL is not deeply integrated into Hungarian public education • rapid decreasing of funding resources • list of values to be developed by OL • list of OL methods • universities do not train pedagogy student in OL • experience/good practice with OL was revealed at civil society organisations

4) Real world learning and developing career competences

Awareness and understanding of terms such as carrier skills, green skills and green jobs varies among the partner countries. There are also differences in the level of implementation of career competences. Table 4 describes the current situation. National questionnaire surveys often revealed that competencies such as critical thinking, seeking alternatives, sensitivity to the environmental dimension of the problem, sharing ideas, outside the box thinking, learning for action, etc. need to be developed. It was suggested that these competences be developed according to the general idea that students should take into consideration the influence of human behaviour on the environment and on sustainability during every activity (also work). The majority of partners found the

introduction of the green career competence concept to be an opportunity that is inspiring, meaningful and useful.

Table 4. Green Career Competences Development

<p>Germany</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • examples of existing green competence lists developed by national or regional institutions • Certified forest educators • certified wilderness guides • “Northern German Declaration of Vocational Training for Sustainable Development” • „Vocational Education for Sustainable Development” 	<p>Slovenia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • national green career competence list doesn't exist • competences that should be developed: <i>empathy towards nature, science education, environmental protection, , understanding of the connection between human and environment, respect for the nature</i>
<p>United Kingdom</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • limited connection between Outdoor science and world of work 	<p>Italy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • national green career competence list doesn't exist • schools are not focused on development career competences in general – there are also exceptions) • list of points to discuss within working group
<p>Czech Republic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • national green career competence list doesn't exist • green career competences are developed unintentionally • competences that should be developed: <i>responsible behaviour, decision making ability, ability to put something into practice, planning, autonomy</i> • 3 main areas that should be developed: <i>personal values, motivation and relationship to the nature</i> 	<p>Hungary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • national green career competence list is not clarified • academic paper “Competence for eco-industry” • school system - implementation of competence-based education • examples of competencies that should be developed • green skills and career skills not clearly separated

Annexes:

- Czech Republic
- Germany
- Hungary
- Italy
- Slovenia
- United Kingdom