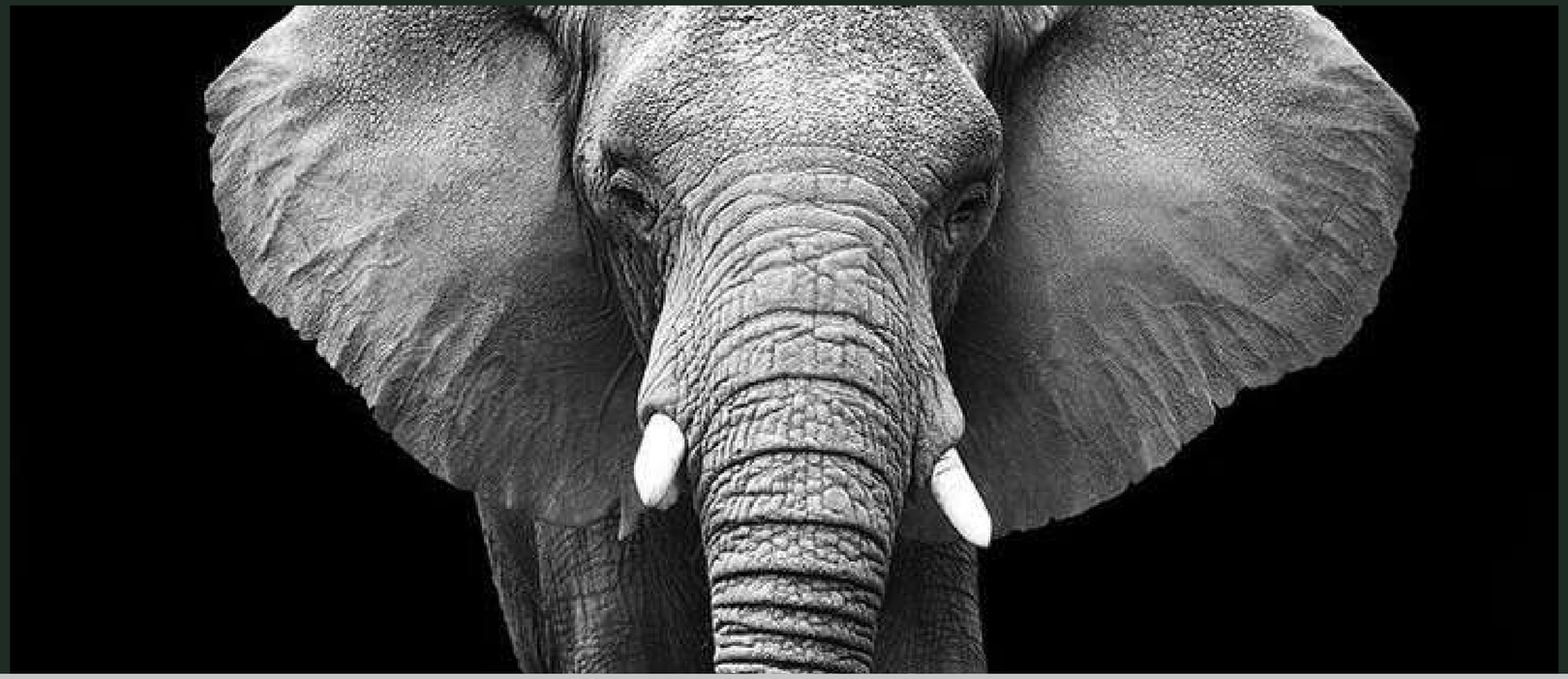
CULTURE-CODING: CONTRIBUTING TO A CULTURE OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN

MANUAL FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AND YOUTH WORKERS

ENVIRONMENTAL COMPETENCE - WHAT IS IT AND HOW TO BUILD IT



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Let's address the elephant in the room

IT IS ABOUT

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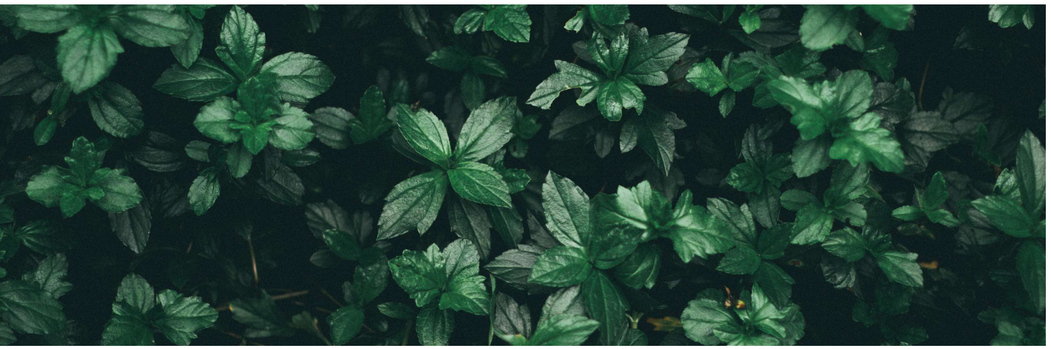

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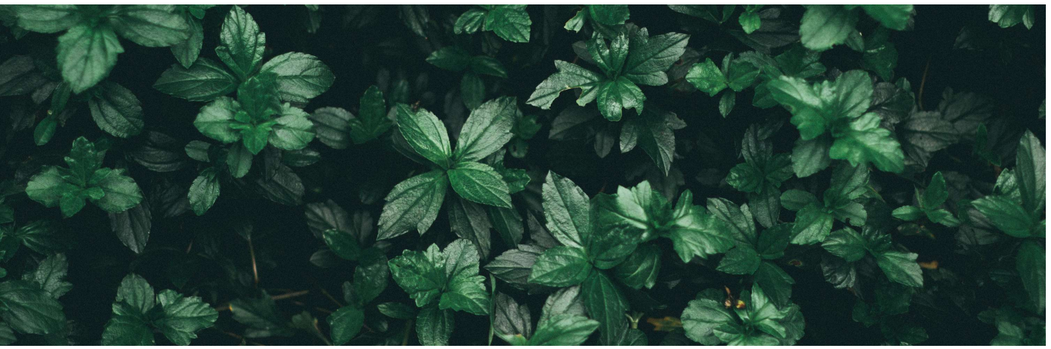

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This manual is designed as an intellectual output of the project “Culture-coding: Contributing to a culture of environmental concern”, supported through Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union and realised in the period 2020-2022. Three partners from Serbia (Magnet), Italy (Youth Action for Peace) and Mexico (Vive Mexico) joint efforts to author it. We are civil society associations working with young people on international level, tackling issues that concern them in the frame of non-formal education. We aim to inspire solidarity, participation, sense of community, responsibility for one's own actions, towards a better and more just society.

This project examines the influence of culture on the beliefs, attitudes and behaviors relevant to environmental issues and through this manual it offers practical solutions for youth workers to tackle this topic with young people. It serves as food for thought and guidance for youth workers, non formal education trainers and formal educators working with young people, as well as young people themselves who strive for self development, as well as environmental and identity awareness. As such, it offers a starting point in exploring what we call here "**the elephant in the room**" - the undeniable, yet alarmingly overlooked in non-formal and formal education settings- **link between nature and culture**, environmental awareness and identity. It paints the outside lines of a bigger picture for learners and facilitators to approach and make use of it according to their needs.

The authors of this manual have used extensive experience and theoretical and practical knowledge from various contributors, mainly participants in the Culture-Coding project and its network of partners, as well as multiple project meetings, to determine the most relevant definition and educational practice of the "**environmental competence**" one needs to develop in order to contribute to a **global culture of environmental concern**.

Environmental issues are a rapidly growing focal point in today’s global discussion. Addressing these issues is becoming urgent due to the devastating outcomes of human environmental carelessness. As a species, humans now have realized the need for a worldwide environmental engagement. This engagement is intended to heighten awareness about environmental problems, build knowledge in education and change human behaviors to improve sustainability. (Jia and Krettenauer, 2020)

We believe this can be achieved by a **joint effort in formal and non formal educational settings aiming to develop young people’s environmental competence**.

New approaches and multiple interventions are needed, and the youth are those who can act as agents of change.

You, the reader, may expect to receive from this Handbook:

- an overview of the **Key competences framework for lifelong learning** and an analysis of current list and description of competences through a lens of environmental awareness, knowledge and skill, showing that what we call here "environmental competence" isn't mentioned anywhere as such, but is "present" everywhere, making it that much more difficult to approach as youth workers and educators;
- a possible **definition of the environmental competence**, one that is described by more than 50 participants in this project: youth workers, trainers in non formal education, University professors, teachers, and most importantly, young people;
- an overview of **the non formal education methodology** aiming to develop such competence among young people, including the approach, setting, partnerships and exemplary methods, as well as tools to self or peer assess the level of competence;
- a practical suggestion on **how to recognise and valorise the environmental competence** using the available tool such as YouthPass;
- a list of **references for further reading** and exploring the topic;
- an **open call for collaboration** with the partner associations who worked on this project.

WHAT MOTIVATES US

We would like to offer our long-standing expertise, resources and dedication to produce a methodology that may prove useful and easily comprehensible for work with young people on such an important humanistic topic that emphasizes the value and agency of human beings, individually and collectively.

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

THE ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURE ARE INSEPARABLE

Culture is seen as **'a dynamic mix of symbols, beliefs, languages and practices that people create, not a fixed thing or entity governing humans'** Thus the structures of daily life that tend to be taken for granted, or seen as natural, are both understood as the product of culture and also subject to human capacities to effect change over time. (Head, Trigger and Mulcock, 2005).

Nature and environment are among the most problematic of these 'taken for granted' intellectual categories, and researchers from various humanities disciplines have debated the ways ideas about nature are socially constructed, as well as the implications of this fact for environmental management. (Head, Trigger and Mulcock, 2005).

History shows numerous instances related to cultural practices of diverse communities in close relationship with environment for many centuries (Mehta, 2017). In both western and non-western societies, nature is not only a subject for contemplation and curiosity, but also linked to questions of power and prestige as well as to fundamental problems concerning human identity. In recent years, culture is being viewed as increasingly important to understand environmental issues, and therefore, it is getting more and more common to see culture-focused research (De Mooij and Hofstede 2010).

Environment, economic growth and culture

Empirical results conclude that cultural dimensions of individualism and uncertainty avoidance, as well as human development components of life expectancy at birth, education, and income significantly influence environmental health performance of countries. Functioning of groups and individuals in terms of their self-conception, relation to authority, and dilemmas faced by conflicts and the ways of dealing with them are all affected by cultural values (Head, Trigger and Mulcock, 2005). In agricultural, farming and fishing communities, issues of soil, sea or water pollution are much more vital and of greater concern than in areas relying on other economic activities. In communities and countries relying on mining or oil extraction, people may be much more opposed to green energy initiatives and stubbornly defend their way of life despite an outside narrative that discourages the continuing use of fossil fuels (Overton, 2017).

Environment and religion

Religion has also had a large influence on the way societies and cultures view and interact with their environment. The Christian Bible teaches that humans are "stewards" of the Earth, which can be interpreted in multiple ways. Some Christians take this as a sign that the natural world is theirs to use as they wish; they are higher than plants and animals and have the right to take any resources they may want. Other Christians see their role as more similar to that of a protector; they have a sacred duty to take care of nature and make sure that the planet is healthy. However, in many other religions and spiritual practices such as Taoism, humans are not seen as separate from the rest of the natural world and are instead viewed as just another component of a greater spirit or cycle of life and expected to show respect towards the natural world because adherents view themselves as inseparable from the all-encompassing "oneness" of life in the universe (Overton, 2017).

Environment and gender roles

In these efforts we should not overlook the gender dimension. The importance of gender equality for a sustainable future has been established in Sustainable Development Goal 5 - Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. However, it is not a stand-alone objective; rather, gender equality is important for the achievement of other global goals, including those related to environmental challenges. While men and women must work hand in hand to confront the environmental challenges of our time, considerations of gender and environment are crucial to our ability to achieve a just and sustainable future. Gender inequalities, such as weak rights to own land and reduced access to energy, water and sanitation facilities for women, have a negative impact on human health, the environment and sustainable development. Therefore, mainstreaming gender into the global environmental agenda is essential to strive for a healthier planet for all. (Geneva Environmental Network)

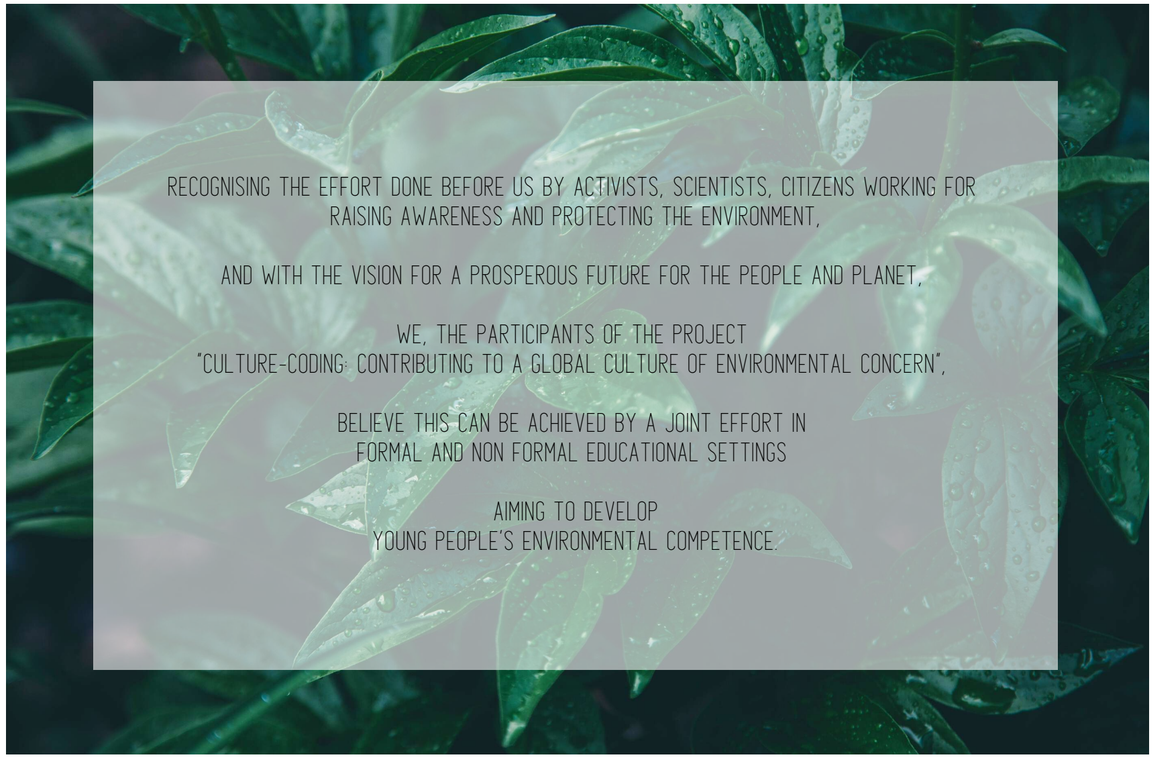
A combination of these as well as many other factors will ultimately determine the way that different cultures respond to the challenges that arise as a result of climate change and human interference in the environment (Overton, 2017).

Access to communication through technology or simple proximity to highly- populated areas; the cultural importance placed upon cooperation, ingenuity, tradition, and scores of other values; the availability of education to the general population; the historical interplay between nature and society as well as the influence of media on the overall narrative of the environment and how it should be treated: all of these components and more will vastly affect the approaches and attitudes of various groups in the face of a changing landscape. You just hope that in the end, the response will be one of empathy and not selfishness (Overton, 2017).

Personal experience and various forms of information, through media coverage, campaigns or environmental education, will affect the development of environmental concern. However, such factors are obviously not the only ones that influence attitudes and beliefs.

If we want to influence (young) people's attitudes toward the natural environment, we must lead them to explore, contrast and understand how such attitudes are part of systems of interpretation and meaning – how they are imbedded in cultural patterns. For example, driving cars is a pivotal culture element for some youngsters, loaded with symbolic meanings regarding masculinity, technical skills and freedom. For them, information about the advantages (environmental or otherwise) of public transportation does not touch the core of the behaviour we want to alter.

At the core of environmental problems is an **individual's understanding of his or her relationship with the natural environment.** Just as every culture has prescribed a set of rules for social interaction, culture also frames the relationship between the individual and nature. We would like to contribute to a global culture or environmental concern by unpacking individual's understanding and values behind personal cultural patterns and life choices and how they impact the environment. As environmental problems have become more apparent, our understanding of them, and the solutions we develop, occur through the filter of culture (Schultz, 2002).



THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

ENVIRONMENTAL COMPETENCE IN THE "ROOM" OF KEY COMPETENCES

Sustainability and education

The necessity of introducing sustainability themes into education, in academic and policy-making arenas occurred as early as in the 1970s. Since then, there has been a general agreement that sustainability competences are needed for society to be able to tackle the sustainability challenges and re-learn to live in tune with the planet on which our economy and our society depend. Yet the lack of a wide-spread and universal competence framework for sustainability has led to the proliferation of many definitions of what knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values for sustainability are, failing to provide a clear and unified direction to educate sustainable citizens.

The term **“21st-century skills”** is generally used to refer to certain core competencies such as collaboration, digital literacy, critical thinking, and problem-solving. Nothing about the burning issue of sustainability.

In 2018 **Key competences Framework for Lifelong Learning** has been revised by the European Union, so that all types of education, including non- formal and informal learning, could refer to.

The Key Competences are:

- Multilingual competence
- Personal, social and learning to learn competence
- Citizenship competence
- Entrepreneurship competence
- Cultural awareness and expression competence
- Digital competence
- Mathematical competence and competence in science, technology and engineering
- Literacy competence

Despite that environmental issues are a rapidly growing focal point in today’s global discussion, **environmental awareness, knowledge and skills** to design and implement creative solutions to mitigate, compensate, fix and reduce the negative environmental impact of one's own behaviour, in one's own daily life, community and the world, **is yet to be clearly put in the educational framework, formal and non formal.**

Competences in sustainability is defined as the interlinked set of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that enable effective, embodied action in the world with respect to real-world sustainability problems, challenges, and opportunities, according to the context. (Guia, 2020)

Key competences in sustainability are a distinctive and multifunctional competence, which is composed of several sustainability competences that functionally relate to each other. It facilitates achieving successful performance and a positive outcome that progresses sustainability (given what is known, valued, and aspired at a given moment in time), while working on specific sustainability challenges and opportunities in a range of contexts (Guia, 2020)

There is a high degree of convergence among scholars, and between academic and grey literature, on what key competences in sustainability are. In particular, the recent works by Brundiers et al. (2020) and Redman and Wiek (under review) best encapsulate the most encompassing frameworks which identified eight key sustainability competences in higher education. They showed how key competences interlink with each other to undertake sustainability challenges. (Guia, 2020)

"Despite recognising the importance of lifelong learning in education" and plentitude of practice in non formal education, "there is limited research on sustainability education beyond higher education." (Guia, 2020)

Erasmus+ and "green" employability

Youthpass is a European recognition instrument for identifying and documenting learning outcomes that are acquired in projects under the Erasmus+ Youth and the European Solidarity Corps programmes. Youthpass uses the revised framework of Key Competences for Lifelong Learning as the reference framework to describe learning outcomes of young participants in non formal educational activities. It is an important tool and a strategy which aims to enhance the recognition of non-formal and informal learning and of youth work in Europe and beyond, to facilitate a better match between skills and labour demand, promote the transferability of skills between companies and sectors.

Green jobs are increasingly growing in a great number of sectors. United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) defines green jobs as "positions in agriculture, manufacturing, R&D, administrative, and service activities aimed at substantially preserving or restoring environmental quality". In other words, environmental jobs are those aimed at protecting and promoting the environment, or those which consider their impact on the health of the planet at all times and endeavour to minimise it. (Iberdrola)

Due to the wide range of green jobs available today, there is no single training profile for those known as green collar workers. Other than degrees, courses and postgraduate courses specialising in ecology, green training for a specific job consists of environmental specialisation within a sector. However, beside vocational trainings, the impact of civil society organisations working with young people on developing knowledge, skills and attitudes related to the environmental topics, using non formal education and voluntary work, is immense. (Iberdrola)

So, we ask ourselves, **how can Youthpass help support young people and their "green" employability?** Among the Key competences for Lifelong Learning there is no specific guidance to recognise the environmental competence, nor there is the name for such competence, hence "the elephant in the room". If a young person would like to assess and recognise what here we describe as the environmental competence, it would recquire creative use of Youthpass, embedding answers into some other competences, e.g. citizenship competence, competence in science, technology and engineering or cultural awareness and expression, or using the space for "other competences".

Non formal education practitioners, as it stands, cannot support young people and youth workers to valorise their environmental competence, as there is no such competence in available competences framework and certification tools. And yet, they help building it for many generations. An adjustment in the current system is needed, so as to provide guidance and tools to the practitioners as well as the necessary recognition.

Moreover, after examining Erasmus+ Dissemination Platform, the Culture-Coding project consortium have not found projects that have developed a non formal education methodology for addressing the sustainability or, as we call it here, environmental competence, among young people and offering guidelines for youth workers in a comprehensible and easy way to approach building this competence, rooted in understanding the relation between culture, identity, nature and environment.

We, the participants of the Culture-coding project strongly believe that **Environmental Competence should be considered as an important 21st century competence** and rightfully put into the spotlight of formal and non formal education.

In the next chapter you may read how we defined the Environmental Competence, the "elephant in the room" of Key Competences.

The Walnut Fund is the world-first Online Agriculture Investment Platform that allows you to invest in fully managed walnut plantations.

WHAT IS ENVIRONMENTAL COMPETENCE

CONCLUSIONS OF THE CULTURE-CODING PROJECT

The environmental competence:

- is the **ability to perceive** culture and nature in an organic way
- is an **evolving process towards sustainable development**, that starts from the personal and advances to the collective level
- it implies a **lifelong cycle of learning** and change/growth of both the individual and the society
- is a **value-based process** that considers the relation to nature as culturally patterned (meaning that environmental engagement differs from one culture to another)
- is **rooted in values and dispositions** such as: respect and empathy with others and nature, critical awareness and curiosity, discipline and commitment, responsibility and resilience, kaxumbekua*
- Based in these values and dispositions, environmentally competent people are driven **to act, to educate, to share, to involve, to engage** with others towards common environmental goals and with a long-term aim to **provoke a change** in cultural behaviours leading to a **global culture of environmental concern**

Environmentally competent person:

- is **aware that culture and nature are intertwined**, that one influences the other
- is able to **recognise cultural patterns** that influence nature and environment, and vice versa, in their own life, their community, nationally, globally
- critically analyses and takes responsibility of the **impact of own action**, positive and negative
- is **proud and satisfied** about own and collective achievement
- **knows and actively researches** about the environmental problems, what causes them and how they are dealt, with in their community, nationally, globally
- is **able to design and implement creative solutions** to mitigate, compensate, fix and reduce the negative environmental impact of their own behaviour, in their daily life, their community and the world
- is **community oriented and inclusive**

* Translated into: Our communal honor, Consuming the Native Other: Mestiza/o Melancholia and the Performance of Indigeneity in Michoacán, Gabriela Spears-Rico, 2015

CULTURE-CODING METHODOLOGY

HOW TO BUILD THE ENVIRONMENTAL COMPETENCE

THE SETTING MATTERS

The Culture-Coding methodology suggests that the setting in which we work with young people on developing their environmental competence, requires special attention as well.

Urban and rural setting and changing venues - it is one thing to organise an international Erasmus+ training in a village and stay there for the entire duration, and completely another to include study visits, even change venues from rural to urban surroundings. This change may bring new learning outcomes and enable participants transfering these learning back to their communities.

International or multicultural groups - the optimal environment to develop the environmental competence is in international or multicultural surrounding, e.g. in voluntary workcamps or European Solidarity Corps projects, because it is the intercultural learning combined with environmental topic, the formula that stimulates the discussion about culture and nature.

Long-term engagement and social engagement - Instead of a one-off activity, plan long-term projects that engage young people over an extended period of time because to change an attitude takes time and practice. Combining international/multicultural residential trainings with a practical phase, when the participants have the task to put what they have learned in practice by working with their communities, and ending the process with an evaluation meeting, is a good recipe for a long-term impact on participants' attitudes and their genuin concern about environmental issues.

Mixed age groups - different perspective comes from different generations, especially in today's world. There has never been a wider generational gap than today, where even a 30-year old may feel completely alienated by the life-style of an 18-year old.

Mixed social, educational & professional background and mixed life experience - the basic principle of non formal education is that we learn from each other. Discussions provoked in such a mixed group will prove much fruitful and contrasted, offering perspectives one may never experience otherwise.

THE METHODS
ARE PLENTY

THE PRINCIPLES
ARE GUIDING

A wide variety of methods - study visits, voluntary work, game design, playing board games, identity workshops and artistic expression, are some core methods, but there are plenty of others. Combination of outdoor and indoor activities, community based actions, co-living and self-organisation, individual as well as group tasks, international as well as local, residential as well as online. And of course, assessment of the environmental competence, whether self or peer-to-peer.

Study visits encourage learning more in depth about the "allies" to nature, their motivation, challenges, small and big victories, innovation and ultimately impact on the culture of environmental concern. Study visits are also important for establishing direct connection to communities.

Games are often exciting and create a fun learning atmosphere. Both formal and non-formal education practitioners can design and incorporate games that are relevant to their educational goals. We suggest workshops about making and playing environmental board games and treasure hunts and so introducing the concept of game design and gamification and exploring it in the context of building the environmental competence among young people.

Identity workshops that question individual cultural identity, life styles and contrast different cultural patterns in relation to the environment; that are rooted in values and dispositions such as: respect and empathy with others and nature, critical awareness and curiosity, discipline and commitment, responsibility and resilience; that are community oriented and inclusive.

Volunteering - Once a person learns to take care of the environment and other people, and volunteering can teach that very well, one's decisions in all life situations will be based on the same principles of solidarity, mutual understanding, empathy, active citizenship.

Artistic expression - Art used in non formal education to inspire learning and personal growth, awareness and civic duty for environmental sustainability.

We have chosen to base our work on **Non-Formal Education & Adult Education basic principles**, as we believe they can approach learning in a holistic way, affecting not only the knowledge and skills level but mostly the one of attitudes and values, core elements for our educational objectives.

All our activities were:
- Participant centered
- Value driven
- Action oriented
- Community oriented

They enabled:
- Active participation
- Recognition and valorization of personal experiences and knowledge
- Critical analysis of information and data

THE PARTNERSHIPS
ARE ESSENTIAL

We strongly believe that cross-sectoral partnerships are essential for culture-coding methodology. Building the environmental competence means including a wide range of specialists of different disciplines and fields.

Universities - Combining formal and non formal education methods may only strenghten the impact of our work. As much as there is a vast practice in non formal education, it lacks academic research to support it. On the other hand, non formal education methods are increasingly more valued and used among professors and teachers.

Schools - It is important to motivate, involve and train teachers to use non formal education methods. Here specifically, to use Culture-Coding methodology to support the development of environmental competence in children and youth through formal education setting.

Civil society organisations and local initiatives - The pillar of social change, civil society organisations contribute immensely to Sustainable Development Goals. Activists make excellent key note speakers: environmental, ecofeminism, intersectional environmentalism or any other influential local or national activists for the environment

Green businesses - Not only for study visits during our projects, green businesses can be allies for inspiring our participants to specialise professionally and even offer internships for learning new environmental tools.

Nature protected areas - The natural partner that provides a learning setting like no other, through volunteering engagements, study visits or by simply be there.

Policy makers - certification that valorises environmental competence may be valuable to the employers who are increasingly sensitive towards the environment. Partnerships with policy makers may help value national or international (e.g. Youthpass) certification that valorise environmental competence, making young people with highly developed environmental competence attractive for many employers.

I**nternational networks and institutions** can adopt, upgrade, multiply the methodology and assessment tools, adding their great body of resourses, practice, practitioners and beneficiaries.

Game designers - can facilitate workshops on how to create environmental board games. Game design and game based learning is a complex and fascinating topic that takes serious dedication to master. Game designers who are also educators are a valuable resource to consider.

Artists with the environmental approach can contribute to projects by facilitating workshops of artistic expression or providing input on how the relationship between art and nature developed through time periods.

EXEMPLARY PARTNERSHIP IN MEXICO

TECHNOLOGICAL INSTITUTE OF MORELIA

The Tecnológico Nacional de México is the largest higher education institution in the country with more than 650,000 students, among 254 technological institutes distributed throughout Mexico. In particular, the Technological Institute of Morelia and the Technological Institute of the Valley of Morelia participated in the Culture-Coding project, through the relationship that they have maintained for years with the participating organizations.

The lessons learned during the development of the project have been many and significant, highlighting the importance of creating a school environment that is conducive to the development of environmental competence. We learned that it is vital to build a set of values and attitudes in the university community, we talked about a new "Ethos", in which the integration of students and teachers (in addition to the academic objective) is given by a socio-cultural link that invites the action of environmental care in their local communities. The latter was revealed during the activities carried out in the Youth Exchange between students and academics, which were planned and carried out by all of them (workshops, reforestation, activities with adolescents, field visits, etc).

The fundamental mission of educational institutions is the training of expert professionals in their fields of study, but committed to sustainable development and social responsibility. To meet this challenge, topics and subjects related to environmental care are traditionally included in the various educational programs, assuming that the conventional educational model is a sufficient condition for the training of young people in these topics.

However, beyond technical training, it is important to generate experiences in young people that immerse them in the real problem of environmental impact associated with human activities, that encourage reflection and lead to action in concrete ways. For this reason, **institutions must create conditions on the school campus that lead to the development of environmental competence.**

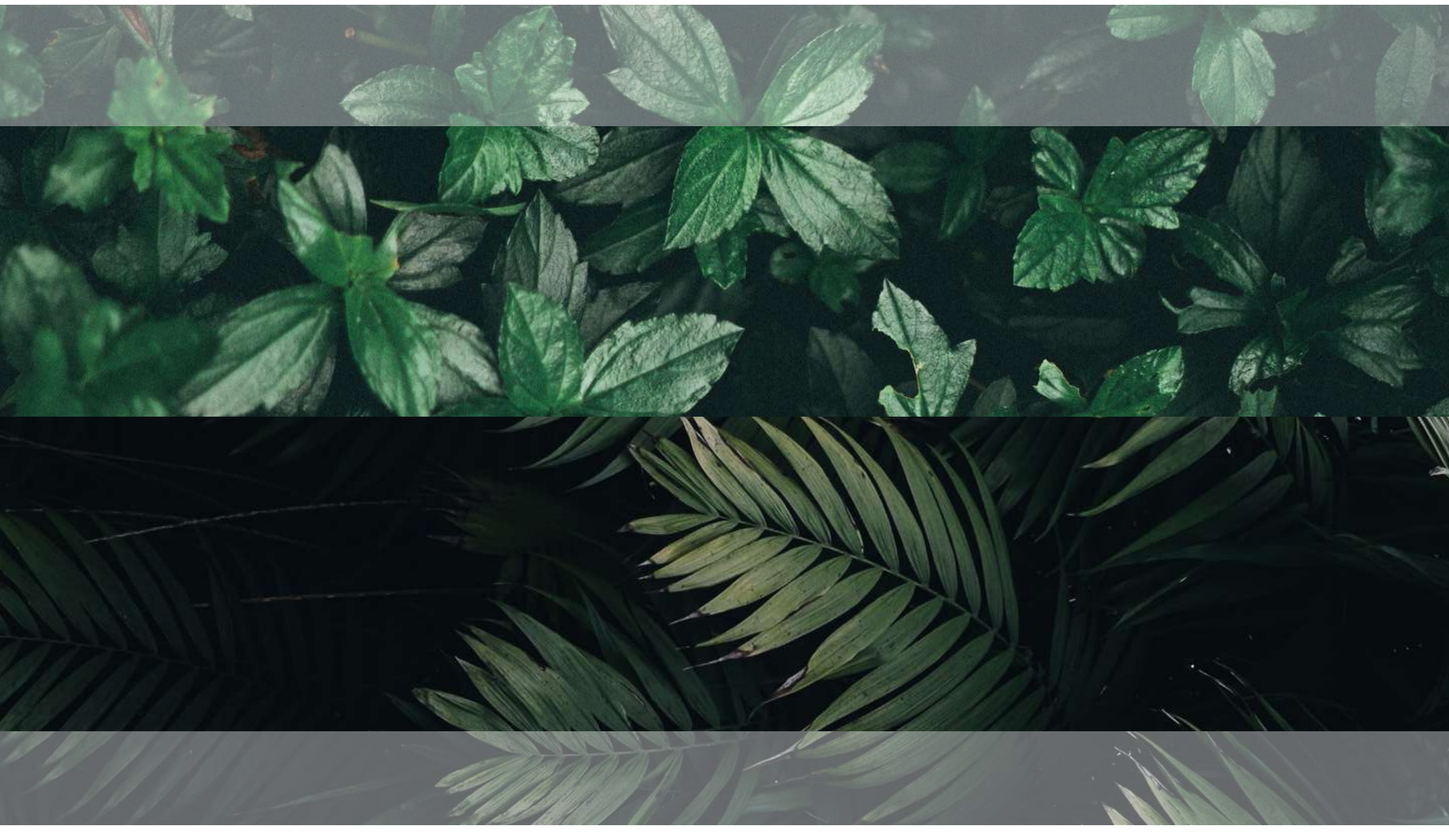
For the development of environmental competence in students, it is necessary for universities to carry out extensive work, below, the most significant learning through international cooperation with this project is listed, including but not limited to.

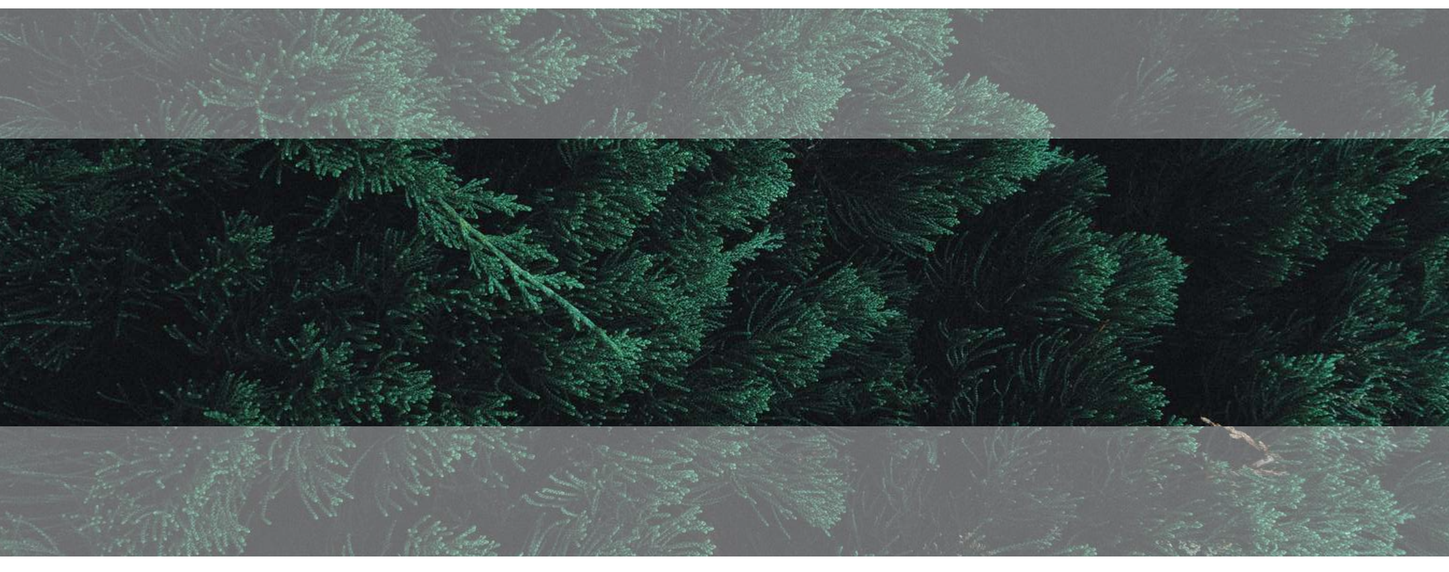
Inside the institution:
1. Based on the commitment of the management team, to place the environmental issue on the agenda as a priority.
2. Establish an institutional planning, with concrete actions and with the participation of students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff.
3. Create new educational roles, for example, “youth empowering teacher” and “environmental competence trainer”. Considering that these roles do not mean new vacancies or hiring, but new meanings.

Outside the institution:
1. Create intersectoral alliances, promoting articulation with public agencies, civil organizations and companies, for the development of environmental competence beyond the campus and towards the whole of society.
2. Intensify international cooperation, since the cultural exchange and ideas foster new ways of working, experiences are shared and it allows to have other points of view.
3. Give new meaning to the impact of universities in the daily life of young people, not only in their training for the future job, but also so that they are capable of generating changes in their homes and in their localities regarding environmental care.

Finally, the activities between students, academics, and managers broke down barriers and stereotypes, creating the right atmosphere for the development of environmental competence. As future work, organization models must continue to be refined in universities, which help to replicate and scale up experiences, such as those experienced in this project, towards mainstreaming of environmental competence in society.

METHODS





STUDY VISITS

Study or field visits are one traditional non formal education method, becoming more and more popular also among teachers and professors, for introducing students to concepts, ideas, and experiences that cannot be provided in a classroom environment. This is particularly true for trans-disciplinary areas of teaching and learning, such as science or environmental education.

The Culture-Coding project methodology encourages study visits as a method that greatly contributes to building the environmental competence of young people, because it means learning more in depth about the "allies" to nature, their motivation, challenges, small and big victories, innovation and ultimately impact on the culture of environmental concern. Study visits are also important for establishing direct connection to communities. We suggest visits to nature protected areas, but also visits to green businesses, activist organisations and local initiatives, centers for women' studies, cultural sites that speak of heritage and relation of ancient civilisations or indigenous people to nature.

Here are some study visits we did during our Culture-Coding project:

VeZa, the first vegan low waste cafe in Serbia
"Vegan means that we do not have any products that were created by the exploitation of animals and that are of animal origin, and low waste means that we try to leave behind as little waste as possible", said the owner of VeZa, where you can also find a free copy of vegan magazine "Vege vodič" with some excellent articles on how to become vegan, sustain it and make it fun. This is great example of a prosperous green business!

Solidarity Kitchen, Belgrade (Serbia)
Provides food and other forms of support to those who need it the most. They are responding to the ever-present problems of poverty and hunger with solidarity and mutual aid.
As we pointed out that environmentally competent person has respect and empathy with others and nature, is community oriented and inclusive, Solidarity Kitchen was the right place to go and learn that. Study visit AND voluntary work in one! We spent a day cooking 80 vegan meals for the homeless in Belgrade.

Punhuato Natural Reserve, Michoacán (Mexico)
Located just 7 kilometers from the urban sprawl of Morelia, it has become a refuge for fauna that has been displaced by the growth of the city. Many youngsters living in urban areas don't have an opportunity to be immersed in untouched nature. Today's people are more detached from nature than any humans in history. Wild nature for many is seen as an attractive, but also dangerous counterforce against an overly civilized world. So - better stay out of it. We say - no. People, espeically young people, need to be able to breath in, touch, observe nature.

Center for Women' Studies, Belgrade (Serbia)
The Center is committed to addressing issues of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race and class theoretically locating potential models of resistance to oppression and marginalization and celebrating differences.
The Culture-Coding participants joined a lecture by one of the Center's activists about Feminism and its apporach to nature. (e.g Ecofeminism and Intersectional Environmentalism movements).
Ecofeminism is an ideology and movement that sees climate change, gender equality, and social injustice more broadly as intrinsically related issues, all tied to masculine dominance in society. Ecofeminism also calls attention to the fact that women are disproportionately affected by environmental issues. Intersectional Environmentalism introduces racial and social justice to the climate conversation.

Tzintzuntzan - P'urhépecha people of Michoacán (Mexico)
This study visit was about experience the relationships between culture and nature associated with food sovereignty of the P'urhépecha people. Food sovereignty is generally considered as the right of people to have access to healthy, culturally appropriate food, produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, including the right of communities to define their own food and agricultural systems. Academics and social movements related to agroecology and defense of the territory, anchor the concept of food sovereignty to diversified production systems, which rescue local practices and knowledge, are free of pesticides and other agrochemicals, use native seeds, are based on the efforts of the small producers’ families, territorially located, and involve healthy and culturally appropriate food in the diverse contexts of regions and continents.

GAMES

Gamification and environmental protection

Gamification is the use of gaming elements and fun factor within non-gaming contexts to provoke real-world behaviour. Gamified programmes and products take the features of games that keep players' attention, like points, badges, leaderboards and challenges, and apply them to real-world situations that otherwise might seem mundane or boring, to increase engagement. These gaming building blocks are used to engage users, solve problems and drive specific behaviours. Gamification is increasingly popular and can be used in lots of different contexts.

This makes gamification both a powerful tool to engage with activists, and the newest weapon in the fight against excessive carbon emissions. Have a look at one of the incredibly fascinating initiatives that uses gamification as an activistic tool for the environment. **Ecologi is a true ally to nature!** It started in late 2018, when one of the cofounders was on his morning commute to work. He was buying a coffee just as he had done thousands of times before, and asked himself: How much climate action could I fund with the money for a coffee? The answer led to a revelation – that the pocket change that billions of us have would not only be a significant upgrade to our own personal contributions to the crisis, but could also one day account for reducing half of the world's emissions.
Every Ecologi donor gets their own dynamic profile. They can watch their virtual forest grow and see the climate impact they are making. On each profile a person can set own climate lifestyle goals. There is a leaderboard that shows who planted more trees on the top of the leaderboard, which inspires healthy competition. All gamified elements finally increase a positive climate impact.

Game based learning and game design

Games are often exciting and create a fun learning atmosphere. Games command the attention of players of all ages. Both formal and non-formal education practitioners can design and incorporate games that are relevant to their educational goals. Students can develop confidence through repeatedly practicing key skills during gameplay. But we must to take into consideration the difference between: board games, video games, escape rooms, toys and gamified educational tools and platforms. All of these have their own users and we must adjust every learning circumstance with appropriate and affordable products. And of course, if they are with ethics for envornmental protection and environmental competences. We cannot educate about carbon emissions, if we use board game which is made with unrecyclable materials.

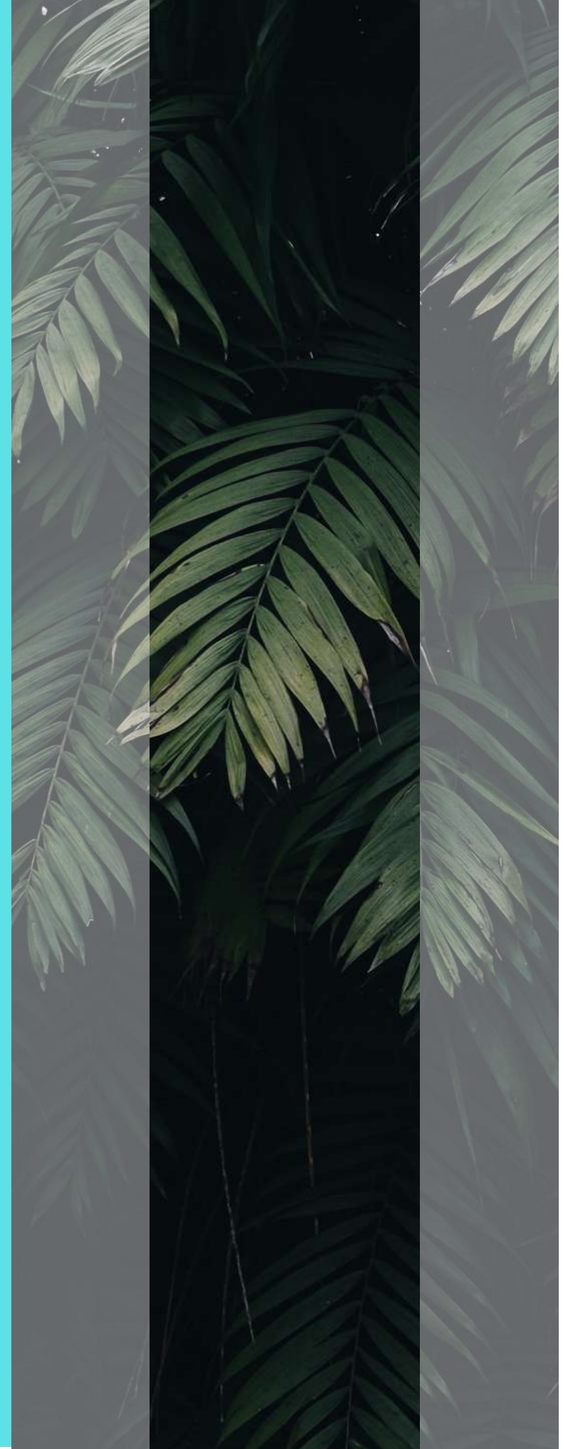
TREASURE HUNT GAMES

Treasure hunt games are becoming a popular way for tourists to explore a new city. Why not designing an environmental treasure game that not only helps a person to get to know the new place, but is fun, cooperative, intercultural and points out to local environmental problems ("environmental bombs") and solutions ("environmental allies"). This is exactly what we did in the Culture-Coding project!

BOARD GAMES

Here are some of the most popular board games based on ecological and/or nature topics: Arboretum, Baobab, Barenpark, Ecos, Wingspan, Photosyntesis, Takonoko

The culture-coding methodology encourages facilitating workshops about making new environmental board games and so introducing the concept of game design and gamification and exploring it in the context of building the environmental competence among young people. In the section Further Reading, you can find website that may help you get into game design and gamification, so you get inspired to use this methodology in your work with young people!



IDENTITY WORKSHOPS

HOT POTATO

Fishbowl method: 3-4 chairs are in the middle and participants surround them. Only those in the chairs are allowed to debate. Everyone can enter the debate by replacing anyone in the chairs. The activity runs until a topic is exhausted naturally. It invites participants to form opinions and arguments related to environmental issues.
Possible statements:
Global warming is not caused by humans but is a natural occurring process. // Recycling is more important than use of electrical cars. // If there would be more women leaders, the global environmental policy would be much more efficient. // People become vegans mostly because it is fashionable.

SILENT WALK

60 minutes silent walk in a forest, where A4 papers with questions about personal habits and relation to nature is examined. It is a self-reflection exercise, without the need to express in plenary. It aims at provoking critical thinking about own impact to the environment.
Questions to think about:
Do I really need all the things I buy? // How often do I consume fast food? Why? // Did I waste food in past 2 weeks? How much? Why? // How much water do I use each day? Could I use less? // Do I know/care about living conditions of animals whose products I consume? // How much money do I spend each month? On what? Whose money do I spend // Where was the clothes I`m wearing made? Check the labels. // How much trash do I produce each day? Could I live trash-free? // How does the society I come from treat women? And how does it treat animals? Any similarities? // When something breaks, do I try to fix it or buy it new? // How many pairs of shoes do I have? How many of them do I actually wear? // Would I consider becoming vegetarian or vegan? Why (not)? // Do I prefer to get buried or cremated, when I die?

TAKE A STEP FORWARD

Advise here the adapted version of the activity of Council of Europe pointing out to social exclusion. In this activity, participants take on roles and move forward depending on their experiences and opportunities in life linked to sustainable living.

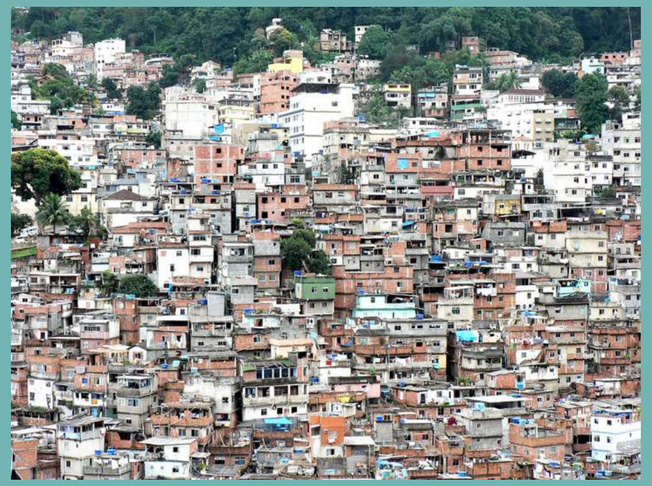
HUNGRY PLANET: What the World Eats (The Guardian article)

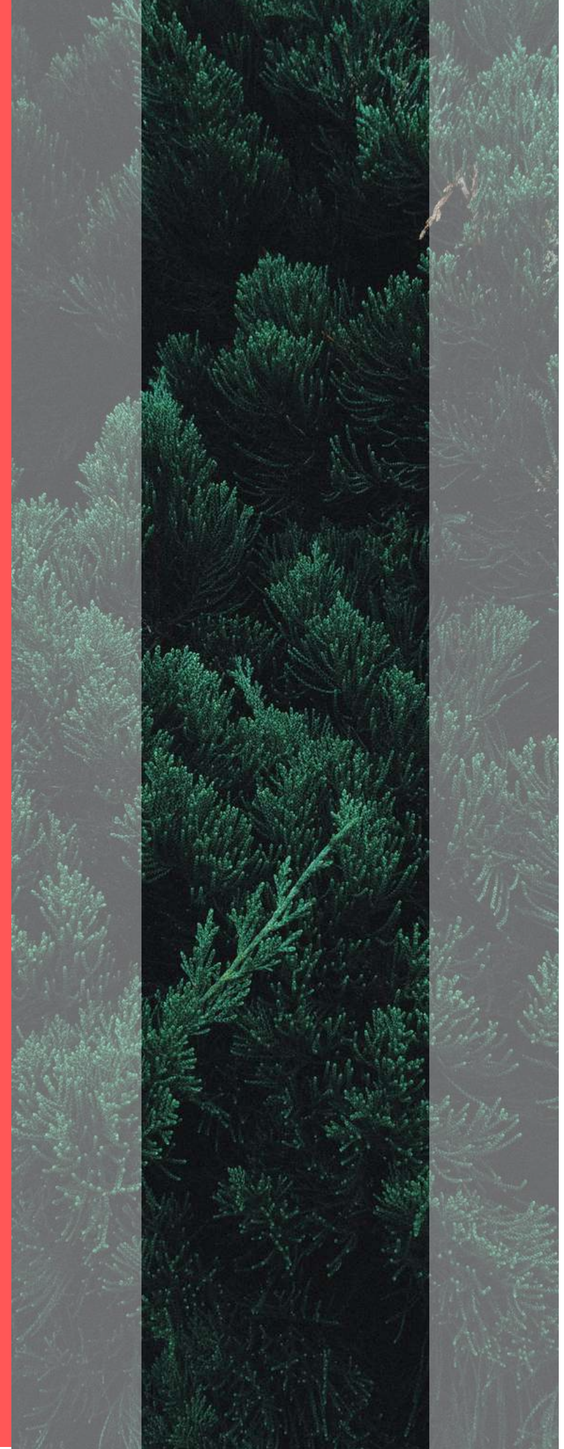
Californian photographer Peter Menzel visited 24 countries for the book Hungry Planet (2013). From the Aboubakar family, from Darfur, Sudan, who spend 79p feeding six people, to a German family who spend around £320, his work shows how much the world's weekly groceries cost.
This is an excellent conversation starter among participants on consumption, packaging, cultural specificities, own habits.

The methodology of the. Culture-coding project emphasises that in the core of the environmental competence must be the ability to perceive culture and nature in an organic way, and is rooted in values and dispositions such as: respect and empathy with others and nature, critical awareness and curiosity, discipline and commitment, responsibility and resilience. An environmentally competent person considers the relation to nature to be culturally patterned (meaning that environmental engagement differs from one culture to another) and it is community oriented and inclusive.

Workshops that question individual cultural identity and contrast different cultural patterns in relation to the environment are optimal in international surrounding.

DO YOU HAVE AN OPINION ABOUT THESE PHOTOS?





VOLUNTARY WORK

Volunteering: A tool for environmental education and contribution to sustainable living

Volunteering inspires solidarity, participation, sense of community, responsibility for our actions, towards a better and more just society.

It is important to volunteer because it is important to accept responsibility for the circumstances in which we live, for preserving the nature, and for relationships with people, all people, those we know but also do not know personally. It is important to have enough life experience to build a critical attitude, consciously choose the values and principles to live by, and the best and most diverse life experience that this can provide is volunteering.

Once a person learns to take care of the environment and other people, and volunteering can teach that very well, one's decisions in all life situations will be based on the same principles of solidarity, mutual understanding, empathy, active citizenship.

Someone who values volunteering will choose to buy a T-shirt at a second-hand store rather than a large sales chain that exploits workers in a developing country, because they once volunteered at a migrant center and heard a story about working conditions in the clothing factories of some big brands in their countries. It would not occur to them to throw a plastic bottle on the street because they used to collect them with volunteers all day along the coast. They will be more open to working with people from different countries and cultures, because they used to spend time volunteering with people from all over the world in a village in France.

Here are some examples of volunteering for the environment:

REFORESTATION AND NATURAL HABITATS PRESERVATION

In the Punhuato Natural Reserve, a protected area by the government of Michoacan and in the Pinetum Natural Reserve more than 150 trees were planted during the Culture-Coding youth exchange.

WORKSHOPS WITH CHILDREN

For example, artistic workshops with natural materials, workshops that inspire creativity and curiosity in children to explore, like riding a bicycle that lights a bulb or observing plants and insects, or presenting the environmental "bombs" and "allies" in a competitive game. Visiting farms is a great way to make children feel at one with nature and learn to care for it and respect it. Investing a few hours in clearing waste will help children to realise how harmful it is for the environment.
Children can go outdoors to learn about plants, trees, rivers, birds and insects, but also about environmental problems such as pollution, gas emissions, energy consumption, recycling, good use of water and a whole host of other important aspects.

CAMPAIGNING

Alone or as a member of an organisation, campaigning for the issues one feels strongly about is important, even if we campaign among our friends, in our community, on internet or as members of international movements. An environmentally competent person is always campaigning, even in an informal way. What are you campaigning about these days?

WORKCAMPS

Ever since 1921, the International Voluntary Service movement organised more than 2000 community-based projects all around the world, involving tens of thousands of international volunteers. In its 100-years history, the movement tackled various social and environmental challenges, in the recent years the majority of work camps deal with environmental protection and nature conservation.

ARTISTIC EXPRESSION

Art and Nature: The Emergence of Ecological Art

Art and nature have always found ways to intersect with one another, the latter being a huge source of inspiration for artists. Found across many forms: rural and historical for the Classicists, grandiose and wild for the Romantics, or sensitive and poetic for the Impressionists.

Creative, inspiring people are producing amazing works that capture audiences. They can communicate problems through images, songs or performances. They can turn a difficult and unpleasant subject into a big conversation starter. In this way, art is a form of activism. It spreads a message. It is an action. Artists have a chance to captivate the public in the realities and perils of climate change while posing the most important questions. Artists around the world are contributing to a global culture of environmental concern, in movements with environmental approach adopted in different disciplines, like **photography, painting, drama, dance, sculpture and others**, who are inspired by nature or use it as a raw material, like earth, stones, leaves and branches, transmitting its beauty and encouraging us to take care of it. Environmental art forces us to think about the consequences of our behaviour on the planet.

Land art is, for example, a movement that attempts to create works directly in the natural environment. Transforming polluted spaces through reclamation art can be considered as a form of land art.

Recycled Art uses upcycling as a more creative alternative to dealing with waste.

Improvisation theatre performance "Mother Earth", by Jelena Laketić and Ana Međeši, participants of the Culture-Coding project, 2022

Eco Theatre expresses artists' ideas, knowledge and concerns about the environment in form of a performance. The first pieces of eco theatre are not always seen as centered on ecological issues, but rather view ecological issues from a social, economic, and ethical perspective. Eco theatre creates to enact climate and environmental justice, cultivate hope, and inspire a thriving future.

Bio Art is the process of working with live tissue, bacteria, and other living organisms.

All of these art forms are used in non formal education to inspire learning and personal growth, awareness and civic duty for environmental sustainability. There is an immense body of practice in youth exchanges, study visits, capacity building trainings about art and nature, voluntary work, and yet, when finally Erasmus+ or European Solidarity Corps participants are to describe their gained competence, they would opt to describe them as cultural awareness and sensitivity, or citizenship competence, rather than as **environmental competence with application in art.**

Possible description of learning outcomes:

- driven to act, to educate, to share, to involve, to engage with others using art expression, towards common environmental goals
- empathic with others and nature
- knows how to employ specific art skills (photography, dance, acting, painting etc) as environmental tools

** Follow references in the next pages for inspiration for your environmental art projects.*

HOW TO ASSESS AND RECOGNISE ENVIRONMENTAL COMPETENCE

The Culture-coding project participants defined the Environmental Competence as:

the ability to perceive the relationship of culture and nature in an organic way and to engage in a value-based process that starts from personal and advances to collective level, aiming to a sustainable lifestyle and sustainable development. It's rooted in dispositions such as respect and empathy with others and nature, critical awareness and curiosity, discipline and commitment, responsibility and resilience.

Suggestions for use in European youth programs:

I exist so I consume.
It is impossible not to excersise environmental competence during international projects of Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programs or other. Volunteers and young participants spend a period of their lives in another country or a new place using resources. For this reason the environmentally competent person should be able to manage their impact and be aware of the choices. The international dimension of the projects offer the possibility to observe other environmental realities in different countries and geographical areas, to share and compare experiences; ideas with peers from different cultures; to see own reality from a broader perspective; to bring back that international dimension to the local reality; to have a global awareness and act as a global community.

Questions that can help participants to reflect when writing their Youthpass:

- Are environmental projects inspiring to you and why?
- What was the impact of the project you participated in on the local environment?
- What did you learn about the local/regional/national and/or global environment?
- Did you contribute to any social or environmental initiatives around you and how?
- Did you acquire any particular environmental skills or learned about new tools?
- Did you learn or discover about any particular environmental problems, what causes them and how they are dealt with in the community, nationally, globally?
- Are you aware about the impact of your culture and lifestyle on the environment? Are you ready to change?
- How was the environmental engagement in the country where the project took place? similar or different from that of your country? And from your personal engagement?

Cochinela tiny cactus bug - Red Dye A $35 Billion Industry

HOW TO ASSESS AND RECOGNISE ENVIRONMENTAL COMPETENCE

Key words for describing this competence in Youthpass, under "SPECIFIC COMPETENCES HIGHLIGHTED IN THE PROJECT". Participants should choose those they think refer to their particular experience and level.

- **is aware that culture and nature are intertwined, that one influences the other and able to perceive culture and nature in an organic way in a specific geographical context (meaning that environmental engagement differs from one culture to another);** *explain specific cultural behaviour you noticed during your project, and how it is intertwined with nature of the place. It could be as simple as an eating habit or local architecture*

- **is understanding of cultural patterns that influence nature and environment, and vice versa, in own life, own community, nationally, globally** *(give an example from your own life and compare it to a pattern you noticed during your project)*

- **a) participates in activities or b) is able to design and implement creative solutions that mitigate, compensate, fix and reduce the negative environmental impact of own behaviour, in own daily life, own community and the world** *(give example of actions you participated in or designed and facilitated during your project; for inspiration, see the "Acqua" project on next page)*

- **is driven to act, to educate, to share, to involve, to engage with others towards common environmental goals (***explain how you involved others in a specific action or how you plan to evolve them after the project; e.g. eco theatre performance)*

- **has the skills and knowledge to use specific environmental tools** *(explain what tools you used during the project; e.g. I volunteered on an organic farm and learned how to implement permaculture principles; in the youth exchange we build a house using mud bricks and learned about the earth architecture)*

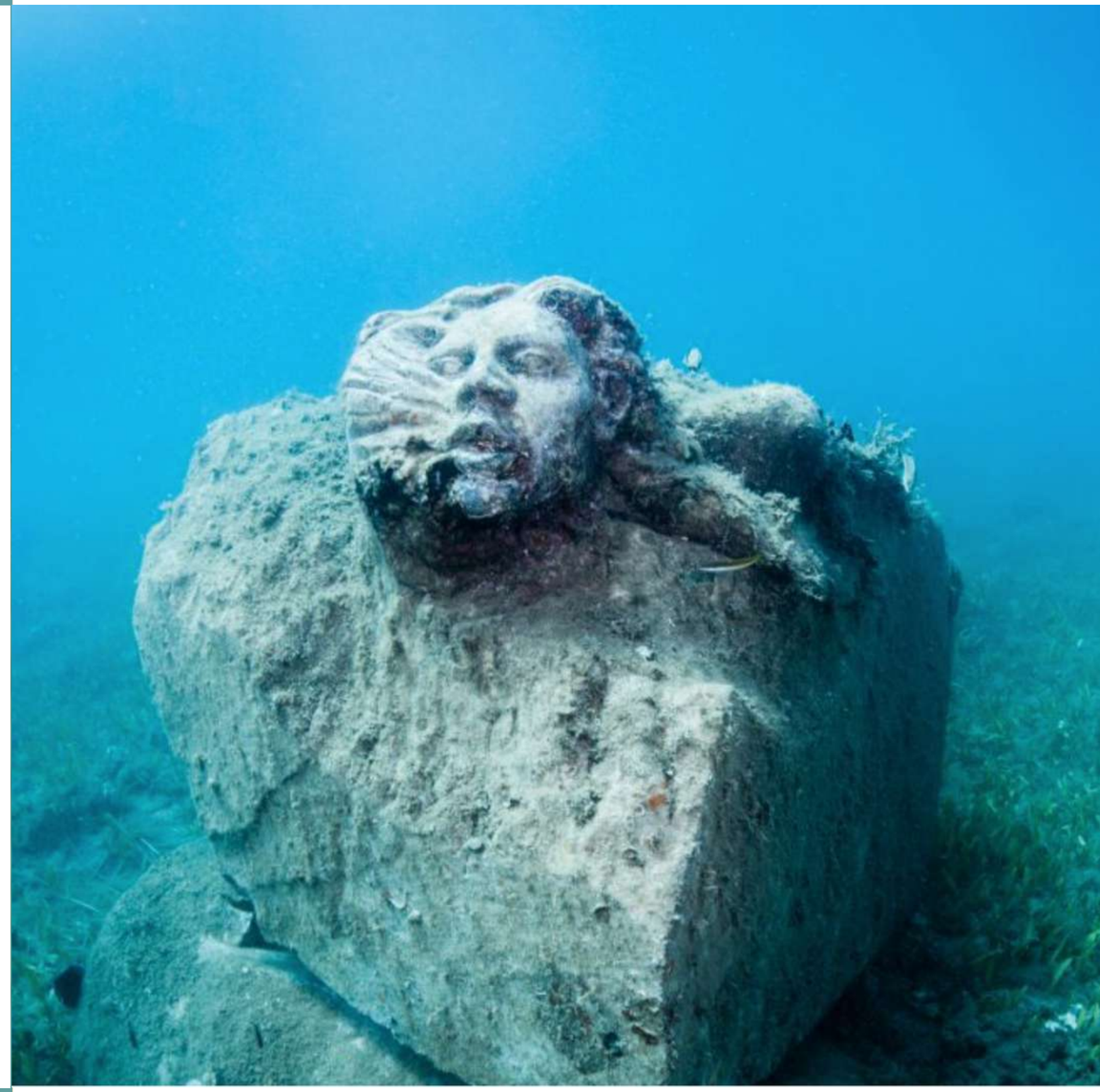
- **is open for exploring environmental topics and participation in similar environmental projects as the one which is described in Youthpass** *(in case you don't feel ready to independently start your own action, this is a good start and a good description of your current level of the environmental competence)*

SFER IK Uh May is Mexico’s groundbreaking natural art gallery located in the forests of the Yucatan peninsula in Mexico

USING YOUTH PASS

HOW TO ASSESS AND RECOGNISE ENVIRONMENTAL COMPETENCE

- **is expressing the sense of being proud and satisfied about own and collective achievement towards sustainable life** *(share what you have achieved during the project)*
- **is community oriented and inclusive** *(especially expressed in voluntary projects, focused on local community environmental needs)*
- **is empathic with others and nature** *(e.g. describe your artistic expression or an art exhibition during the project that is raising awareness about environmental problems)*
- **is appreciative for innovative ways of green industry and green activism** *(give example of something that is particularily inspiring to you, preferably what you learned about or did during the project)*
- **is aware of the impact of own action on the environment, positive and negative** *(explain your most impactful action/behaviour/habit; if negative, explain strategy you have taken to mitigate and reduce, which you may learned on the project)*
- **is curious about, searches, collects and processes information about the environmental problems, what causes them and how they are dealt with in own community, nationally, globally** *(give example of what interests you most or what environmental problem the project was about; share your blog about the topic)*



"Acqua", a carved piece of Carrara marblee by artist Giorgio Butini, 8m underwater; Photo: Gianni Cipriano; Underwater activists drop huge stone sentinels into the sea as part of a radical plan to eliminate illegal fishing and allow damaged ecosystems to regrow

USING YOUTH PASS

TESTIMONIALS

LEONARDO SOTTO HUERTA, PARTICIPANT FROM MEXICO

TESTIMONIALS

"CULTURE-CODING" WAS MY FIRST EXPERIENCE IN NON-FORMAL EDUCATION. GETTING INTRODUCED TO THIS WAY OF LEARNING EXPANDED MY VIEWS ON WHAT EDUCATION IS.

THE PROJECT HELPED ME UPDATE MY KNOWLEDGE ON THE ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES AFFECTING VARIOUS PARTS OF OUR WORLD, THE NOTABLE EXAMPLE BEING THE WATER SHORTAGE IN MEXICO. SINCE THEN, I BECAME MUCH MORE AWARE ABOUT WATER SHORTAGES ALL AROUND THE GLOBE, AND I BECAME MORE MINDFUL WITH MY WATER CONSUMPTION AS A CONSEQUENCE, RANGING FROM MY EVERYDAY ACTIVITIES SUCH AS BRUSHING TEETH AND WASHING DISHES, TO THE CONSUMERIST CHOICES I MAKE.

THE PROJECT PROVIDED ME WITH NEW OPPORTUNITIES, SUCH AS PARTICIPATING AND COORDINATING NFE ACTIVITIES, PLANTING TREES, DESIGNING A BROAD GAME AND EVEN CREATING MY FIRST PERFORMANCE! APART FROM THE CAREFUL PLANNING OF OUR ACTIVITIES DONE BY THE PROJECT COORDINATORS, I CREDIT THE GENERAL OPEN AND SAFE ATMOSPHERE FOR MY READINESS TO EMBRACE THESE NEW EXPERIENCES.

BEING AROUND PEOPLE WHO WANT TO TAKE PART IN CHANGING OUR RELATIONSHIP TO OUR ENVIRONMENT FOR THE BETTER, AND WHO WERE READY TO ENGAGE IN A COMMUNITY OF MUTUAL SUPPORT, WHERE TEACHING AND LEARNING ORGANICALLY TOOK PLACE THROUGH OUR INTERACTIONS, GAVE ME A NEW-FOUND HOPE FOR OUR NOW GLOBAL SOCIETY.

I'M DEEPLY GRATEFUL THAT I PARTICIPATED IN THIS PROJECT SIDE-BY-SIDE WITH YOUNG, ENTHUSIASTIC PEOPLE LIKE ME, BUT ALSO EXPERIENCED, EQUALLY ENTHUSIASTIC EXPERTS WHOM ALREADY HAVE DONE A LOT FOR OUR ENVIRONMENT THROUGH THEIR RESPECTIVE CAREERS. IT WAS TRULY A PLEASURE LEARNING FROM THEM.

WHILE I STILL HOLD THE BELIEF THAT CHANGING OUR HABITS ISN'T ENOUGH TO COMBAT THE CLIMATE CRISIS, I AM MUCH MORE AWARE THAT IT IS A NECESSARY PART OF THE SOLUTION. THE CHANGE OF OUR CULTURAL VIEW ON OUR ENVIRONMENT HAS AN EVEN GREATER IMPACT THAN THIS - I BELIEVE IT IS NECESSARY ALSO FOR THE WELLBEING OF INDIVIDUALS, THEIR FEELING OF GRATEFULNESS FOR THE WORLD WE'RE BORN INTO, AND REMOVING THEMSELVES FROM THE FOCAL POINT OF THEIR WORLDVIEW, AND SUBSTITUTING IT WITH A MUCH MORE COMPLEX, FASCINATING SYSTEM WHICH IS OUR DEAR EARTH AS A WHOLE, WITH ALL OF THE BIG AND SMALL INTERACTIONS AND EXCHANGES THAT MAKE THIS SYSTEM WORK THE WAY IT DOES.

JELENA LAKETIC, PARTICIPANT FROM SERBIA

TESTIMONIALS

PARTICIPANTS IN YOUTH EXCHANGE, MEXICO

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Nils-Udo, celebrates the beauty of nature by working with found materials—such as leaves and branches—to create stunning, site-specific works.

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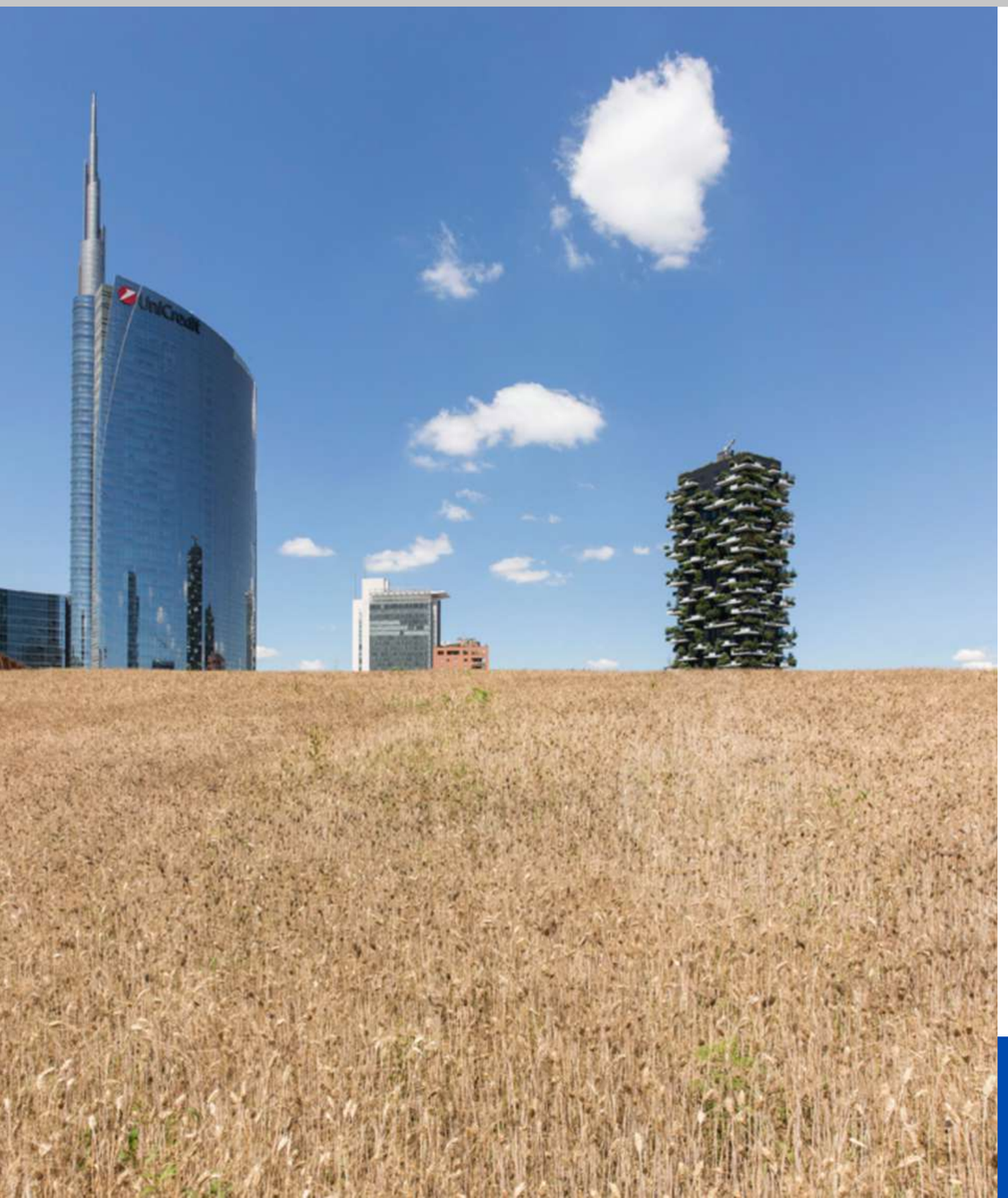
"Arbol de la vida", Ana Mendieta - “Through my earth/body sculptures I become one with the earth.... I become an extension of nature and nature becomes an extension of my body.”

FURTHER EXPLORING



TREND CHANGERS - ACTIVISTS

- One Army is a global community uniting people from around the world to tackle environmental problems
- Phoneblocks - A global campaign to bring to life a modular phone to reduce e-waste at scale
- Vandana Shiva - an Indian scholar, environmental activist, food sovereignty advocate, ecofeminist and anti-globalisation author, associated with the anti-GMO movement
- 5 - an impact media foundation - partners with future-focused organisations working to make a positive impact on our planet
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ART AND NATURE

- About environmental art and a list of some of the best-known artists
- 6 Environmental Artists Who Celebrate Nature and Promote Positive Social Change
- "Planet, Mother, Spaceship: Art to Commemorate Earth Day" artworks addressing the environmental crisis
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Agnes Denes, a pioneer of environmental art, planted a 5 hectare wheatfield amongst Milan's Porta Nuova skyscrapers

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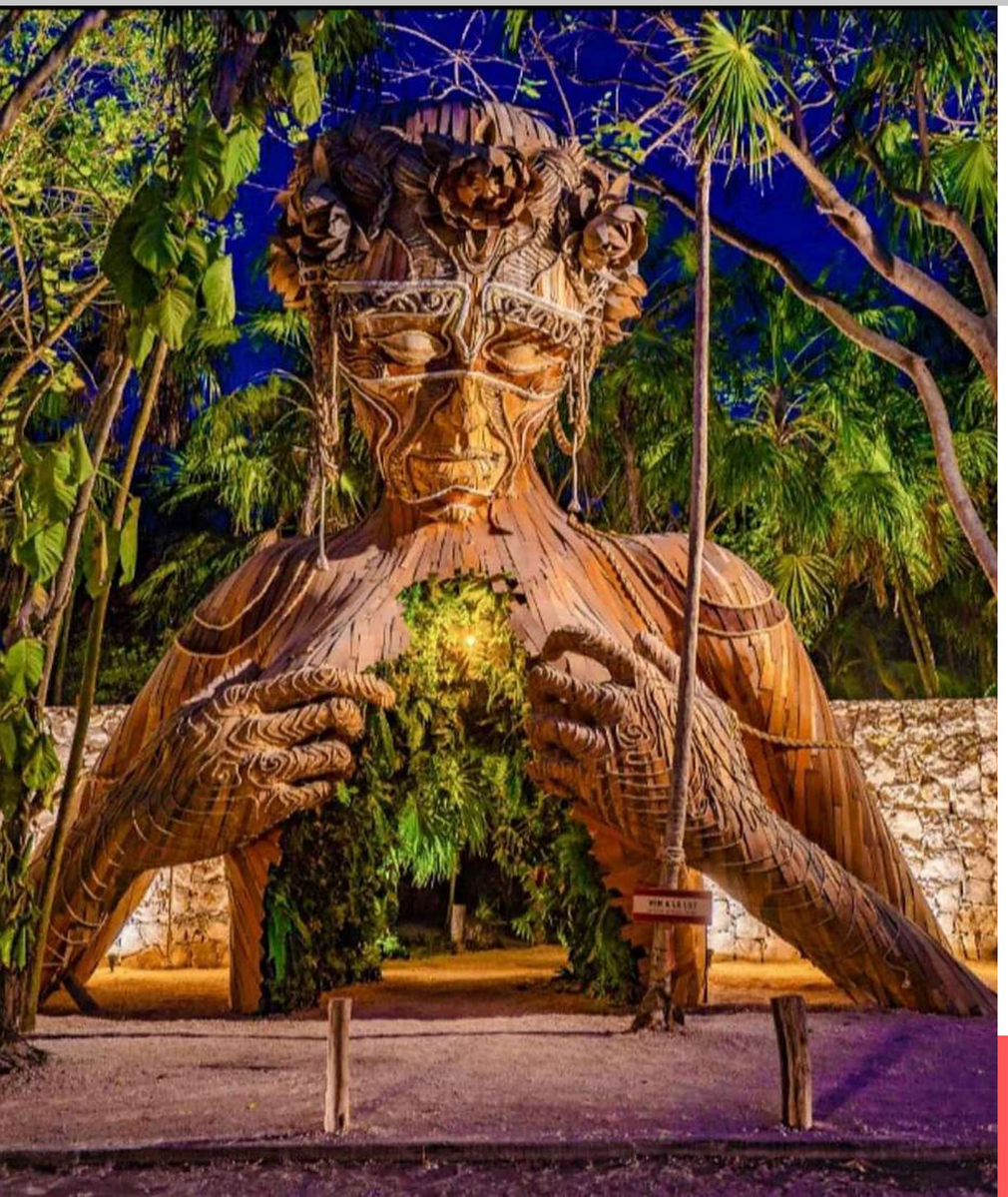
TREND CHANGERS - BUSINESSES

- Fixing Fashion: the online community making mending cool
- Precious Plastic: start your own plastic recycling workshop from scratch
- StoryHoppers - creates videos that share useful information or ways how to change our habits and worldview. Shaping a new culture
- EcoBnB - community of sustainable tourism
- The Walnut Fund - Invest in Walnut Trees

Photographer Benjamin Von Wong creates beautiful, thought-provoking images that create awareness of issues such as climate change and plastic pollution in our oceans.



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GREENWASHING

- Avocados aren't sustainable and other lessons from a day of going green, Podcast FiveMedia
- The troubling evolution of greenwashing, The Guardian
- This app tells you how ethical fashion brands really are, Dazed
- Good On You – the transparent fashion app

GAMIFICATION AND GAME DESIGN

- About Board Game Industry
- 10 steps for Board Design Game
- Board Game Design Lab
- How to Design a Tabletop Game
- Board Game Geek, world database of games and reviews
- Von Gillern S. and Alaswad Z. (2016). Games and Game-Based Learning in Instructional Design, International Journal of Technologies in Learning

"Ven a la luz", Daniel Popper, Mexico - The portal symbolizes our deep connection with Nature and ourselves.

The CULTURE-CODING project was about

RAISING AWARENESS AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE ON HOW DIFFERENT CULTURAL PATTERNS IMPACT THE ENVIRONMENT

CHALLENGING ATTITUDES AND VALUES EMBEDDED IN PERSONAL CULTURAL PATTERNS THAT HAVE A NEGATIVE IMPACT TO ENVIRONMENT

SHIFTING TOWARDS BEING MORE ENVIRONMENT FRIENDLY IN DAILY LIVES

ESTABLISHING A NON-FORMAL EDUCATION METHODOLOGY THAT IS EASILY IMPLEMENTED BY YOUTH WORKERS

ADVOCATING FOR ITS USE AMONG YOUTH ORGANISATIONS

The change of attitudes of young people, as agents of change, reflected in their life choices that have a lesser negative impact to the environment and a stronger commitment to a global culture of environmental concern.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

CULTURE-CODING

The project „Culture-Coding: Contributing to global culture of environmental concern“ (2020-2023) is supported by the European Commission through the Erasmus+ Programme. The civil society organisations from Serbia (MAGNET), Italy (YAP) and Mexico (VIVE MEXICO) explored the influence of culture on beliefs, attitudes and behaviours of individuals and communities in relation to environmental issues.

We hope to have contributed to a global culture or environmental concern by designing a methodology of non-formal education aiming to develop “environmental competence” among young people:

- knowledge, skills and attitudes about environmentally sustainable behaviour,
- based in thinking critically about the relationship between culture and nature,
- raising awareness on how socio-cultural processes play a crucial role in forming of attitudes and behaviours towards nature,
- how cultural behaviours may present practical challenges for environmental sustainability, but also be the key for its application in the life of individuals and communities.

We offered our expertise, resources and dedication to produce a methodology that may prove useful and easily comprehensible for work with young people all over Europe and Latin America on such an important humanistic topic that emphasises the value and agency of human beings, individually and collectively, that emphasizes a concern for man and our responsibility in relation to the world and nature.

This project brought a new perspective of examining every day behaviours, customs and everyday habits that are inherent to culture, but sometimes not seen as primary characteristics of culture, through the prism of protecting the environment.

To any interested young person, youth worker, trainer in non-formal education, teacher or educator in formal setting, this manual brings a methodological approach designed to develop the environmental competence, some exemplary methods as well as testimonials from the project participants and references for further exploring.

Project's residential activities:

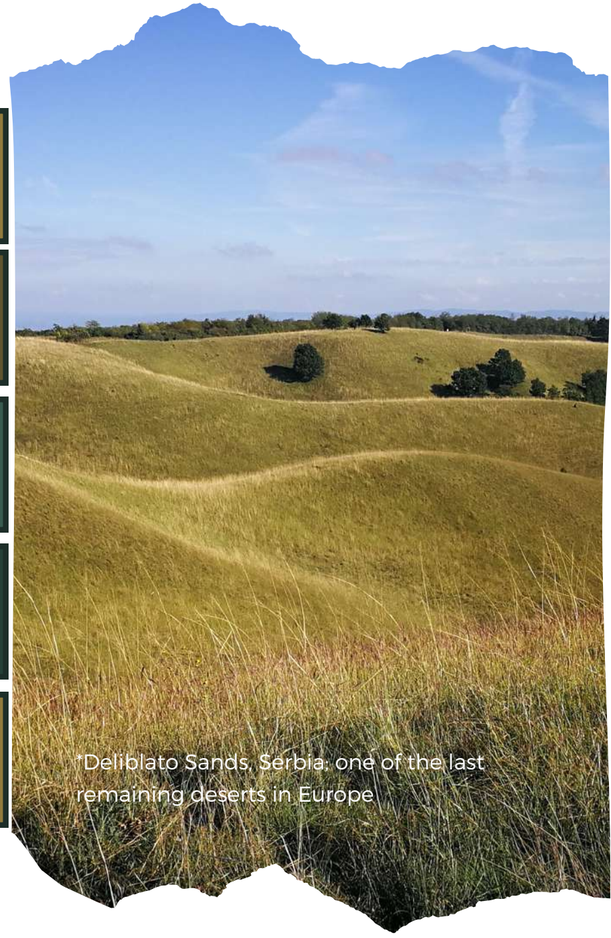
KICK-OFF MEETING
14-17.12.2021,ITALY

TRAINING
6-14.03.2022, SERBIA

YOUTH EXCHANGE
10-23.06.2022,MEXICO

LOCAL ACTIONS
SUMMER 2022

SEMINAR
25.09-1.10.2022, SERBIA



*Deliblato Sands, Serbia, one of the last remaining deserts in Europe

CONTACT US

FOR FURTHER COLLABORATION
IN CONTRIBUTING TO A
CULTURE OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN

SERBIA

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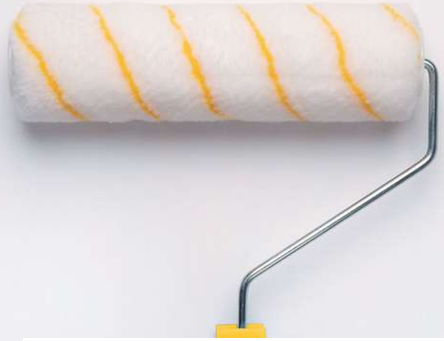

ITALY

YOUTH ACTION FOR PEACE
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MEXICO

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