

School Agenda 21: drafting and realization

CONTACT

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FOCUS	Education/Learning	Environment	Research / Development
	Educators	Rural Development	Regional / international cooperation
	Health Promotion	Sustainable Consumption	
	Sustainable Urbanization	Citizenship	

DESCRIPTION

<i>Type</i>	Local (school) - Agenda 21 for the Novopolotsk Secondary School No. 12 is a programme for the sustainable development of the school community, drafted on the basis of the Guidelines for Sustainable Development adopted by the United Nations in 1992. In this Agenda, an attempt was made to relate the issues of the school community to the need to solve local problems, taking into account environmental and social factors and the real economic possibilities for achieving those objectives. The draft contained the idea that environmental problems and sustainable development were not about nature conservation, but the need to learn to live in harmony with the environment, the local community and oneself.
<i>Working language(s)</i>	The working language of the Agenda is Russian; however, some of the issues and activities we deal with straightforwardly, clearly and richly in Belarusian!
<i>Target group(s)</i>	As the initiative was school-based, the target groups were all the members of the school community: pupils, teachers and technical staff; parents and close relatives of the pupils; alumni of the school and future pupils; the management; members of the neighbouring community (a typical housing estate with multi-storey buildings), in total more than 1,700 people.
<i>Starting year & duration</i>	Work on the establishment and implementation of Agenda 21 was begun in 2002 and continues to this day.
<i>Budget & funding sources</i>	Agenda 21 is realized using funds allocated from the local budget for the maintenance of the school. The environment-related measures are also financed by the National Nature Conservation Fund.
<i>Partner organisations</i>	Novopolotsk Municipal and District Inspectorate of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation, the Education Department of the Novopolotsk Municipal Executive Committee, the Municipal Industrial Organization of the Housing Maintenance and Utilities Board, Polotsk Forestry Division, the city's media (Novaya Gazeta and the Vector television channel). In addition, contacts are sustained with voluntary organizations: the Green Cross Belarus, the Children of Chernobyl Committee, the Belarusian Scouts, the Russian Association of Environmental Education, the NGO Keep Sweden Tidy, the Minsk International Education Centre, the Institute of Experimental Botany of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus and the National Environmental Centre for Children and Youth.

Stakeholders

The following participated to varying degrees in the implementation of the Agenda: nurseries No. 31 and 33, the community pupils' room (educational and awareness-raising work), the city's extracurricular activities centre (joint activities), the city's job centre (summer job placement for pupils), Polotsk State University (alumni study there), the city's Hygiene and Epidemiology Centre (joint research), the Polotsk diocese (moral education), the Polotsk State Regional Archives (area study) and the Novopolotsk National Craft Centre (hobby club).



OBJECTIVES

School Agenda 21 covers:

- the organization of a school educational process based on the principle of sustainable development, health care and harmony with nature;
- drawing up and conducting environmental lessons by older pupils for children in the neighbourhood's nurseries (preparing future pupils);
- organizing under the auspices of the school sport and recreational activities for pupils, teachers, parents and sponsors;
- providing educational and medical services to the housing estate;
- awareness-raising and media activities on sustainable development;
- environmental research work by pupils;
- activities which are useful to the inhabitants of the housing estate and improve the state of the environment;
- organizing the life of the school on the basis of energy- and money-saving principles.

METHODOLOGY

Work on School Agenda 21 began with theoretical training (courses for the teachers of the Environmental Association, Russia) and the establishment of an initiative group. With the help of surveys, the interests of all members of the school community were identified, and then a strategic plan of action was worked out and a risk analysis and drafting of indicators for success in resolving the tasks were completed.

Education: an integrated model for environmental education is being introduced, through which information about the environment is taught in all educational disciplines. Specialized courses are also being developed.

Information: campaigns aimed at informing society of impending issues and of results, media publicity and establishment of external relations.

Social sector: mobilizing and awareness-raising activities, and work-related activities.

RESULTS & EVALUATION

Results

- The sustainable development course for 8 to 10 test classes was followed by more than 200 pupils. In addition, the children had the opportunity to study traditional ecology and 10 of the author's specialized natural sciences and valeological courses, to attend "Environmentonomic" (environmental and economic), "Eco-messenger", "Ecotourism", folk dance, environmental area

study and health and the environment groups, etc. Special sessions on electricity, heat, bread and even chalk have become a tradition in the school. Since the last academic year, pupils from eight classes have followed a course on saving energy and energy efficiency.

- The children learned to teach: under the teachers' supervision, the older pupils held courses on "Eco-awareness", "The Miracle at the Window" and "Eco-saving" at nurseries and primary schools.
- Arrangements were made for the use of two school gyms and training rooms, not just for the pupils' lessons, but also for their parents and the school directors, which, because of the lack of sporting facilities on the housing estate, is greatly appreciated by the inhabitants.
- The school doctor and psychologist provide the pupils, their parents, pre-school children – and sometimes the inhabitants of other areas of the city – with help and consultations, and even teach the pupils about ways to heal with plants.
- Considerable experience was gained from the awareness-raising work. Regular outings, activities and patrolling of recreational areas taught the children themselves to convince their elders credibly and forcefully not to harm nature. The children distribute leaflets and put up posters, hold lectures, workshops, debates in which their parents participate and publish articles on nature conservation in the local newspaper (the last article appeared on 29 September 2006).
- Through the efforts of the pupils, in 2006 a database was set up of those educational institutions which are concerned with the issues of environmental teaching and education (more than 20 schools were included in this). Contact and friendly relations were established with many of them and joint projects are under development.
- Links with 15 State and community organizations concerned with the environment and sustainable development were established. As part of cooperation and cultural exchange with Belarus' neighbours, visitors went to the Ludza Municipal Duma, Latvia, and a return visit is now expected.
- Pupils successfully carried out research in the areas of the environment, the economy, social sciences and local history. Over three years, more than 60 research projects were carried out. The most interesting were on the following themes: comparative analysis of the photosynthesis mechanisms of trees in wooded areas surrounding and outside the city; bioindicators of snow on housing estates; a project to set up small bioenergy installations; statistical analysis of the sickness rates of pupils and teachers; study of the state of micro-organisms on the school premises; the problem of recycling the school's everyday waste; the road to Polotsk, a modern view; and the water we drink. But, under the school motto that research should not be merely for research's sake, but for practical action, each project results in a well-defined nature conservation or educational action. This is clearly shown by recent initiatives on the housing estate (Collect seeds and help a tree; Glass and plastic bottles equal what?; Waste ... of money; Decorate the school with your own hands) and the exhibition and sale of products made from recycled materials in a neighbouring shop. Historic and cultural sites of significance from the twelfth to the seventeenth centuries have also been found.
- Pupils of the school have regularly won at regional, national and international competitions and conferences (in 2006 alone, they won or were placed in 24 competitions).
- On the urban setting of the housing estate, pupils and teachers reconstructed a "rural corner", which we called "Nashy Vytoki" (Our origins). According to our information and the relevant archives, that was how the area looked when the town was beginning to be built. A little marshy watercourse was built with characteristic vegetation, the trappings of village life, a mini vegetable garden and a clearing with medicinal plants. It all looked very unusual with the backdrop of the standard city high-rises 100 metres away.

Strengths

The project gave the pupils a good theoretical and practical training as part of the sustainable development course and enabled them to demonstrate significant activity in crafts and research, as well as to initiate wide-ranging links with like-minded people.

Problems encountered

The lack of a continuing source of funding for the initiatives of the School Agenda 21 means that it cannot be implemented to its full extent.

Conditions for successful replication

The conditions for successful replication of our experience are the presence in the school of flexible administrative resources and the pupils' high social involvement.

Unresolved issues

Because of a lack of funds, we were not able to rebuild the school's greenhouse in which we hoped to grow vegetables for the school canteen and sell any extra to the housing estate's residents (the Green Vitamin project).

Why do you consider this a good practice?

As a result of the implementation of our Agenda, according to medical examinations, the health indicators of the children have improved. Our own research shows some improvements to the condition of the housing estate and, according to our observations, the number of instances of anti-social behaviour has fallen. In addition, more than 10 independent projects have been initiated and are running, whose aims and outlooks are the following: environmental monitoring of the state of the flora of Novopolotsk; the green shield; youth ecology; paradise gardens (for children of pre-school age and just having started school); joint projects on the work of the Ecohouse pre-school summer camps (planned together with a Senno region school in the Minsk oblast) and joint environmental and tourist activities with the Malosita School in the Polotsk district, a project established in the school of the Centre of Ecological Monitoring and Nature Conservation and cooperation projects with the Polotsk power grids, among others. There is no better testament than to say that our School Agenda 21 is a living organism which is growing, expanding and being perfected, and we are always ready to share our experience!
