

# INTRODUCTION

## JUMP INTO SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLES

There is a growing understanding of the need to balance human activities with the natural environment in order to achieve sustainable development and reduce negative human impacts on natural systems. Greater focus is now placed on the role individuals play in this process, and this explores how individual lifestyle choices may have global consequences that influence the pursuit of sustainability. Increasingly, efforts are being taken to increase education and learning for sustainable development.

The increasing complexity of current and future environmental and sustainability challenges continue to put pressure on our societies. Rapidly changing climates is only one of many signs of a global system under stress, while the continuation of unsustainable patterns of production and consumption signify how deep these challenges run in the fabric of global society.

Finding pathways to address these pressing challenges will require fundamental changes in what we learn and how education systems as a whole deliver this learning. Currently, education systems are struggling to find appropriate means to help tackle these global challenges, and this requires restructuring of the curriculum and re-thinking of the pedagogy.

Schools must address the need to equip young people with the skills and competencies to understand, anticipate and develop solutions for the future, as well as teaching to cope with complexity and uncertainty of the world, as key goals for modern society. In the Baltic states (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia), sustainable development is still not a central topic of educational system, and long-standing traditions of "transmissive education" practices remains highly influential. This means that lessons are organized systematically and materials taught in an additive nature with each lesson building on the previous one, and this requires extensive preparation by the teacher to adequately convey the material to the learner in such a way that is organized and not overwhelming (Pratt, 2002). "Transmissive education" is usually centered around one source (or expert) that provides knowledge to the student, in other words - "teacher" centered.

Education systems in the Baltic countries to address the calls for education to respond to the challenges of sustainable development, require more "transformative" models of teaching, where pupils can learn to integrate new knowledge and compare new information to what they already know about the world. This should give students opportunities to make meaning from their previous knowledge and experiences.

This toolkit contains several active learning methods and lessons that can help teachers empower students to be engaged participants in the learning process. The toolkit is developed for Baltic countries by adapting PERL methodology for the needs of this region: active cross-curriculum material that supports experiential learning in relation to responsible and sustainable living that is more engaging, interesting, and meaningful.





# PERL AND LEARNING FOR RESPONSIBLE LIVING

The Partnership for Education and Research about Responsible Living (PERL) is a network of educators and researchers developing methods and materials to encourage people to contribute to constructive change through the way they choose to live. PERL partners research social innovation and responsibility; give visibility to creative communities that collaboratively invent new ways of living; promote education for sustainable development, in particular education for sustainable lifestyles; develop teaching methods and materials; provide guidance and advice; develop values-based indicators; and produce policy recommendations for mainstreaming sustainable lifestyle practices. PERL consists of partners from 140 institutions in 50 countries.

PERL is part of the UNESCO Chair for Education about Sustainable Lifestyles and its UNITWIN project, both of which are coordinated by the Centre for Collaborative Learning for Sustainable Development at Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences.

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- The Centre for Collaborative Learning for Sustainable Development at Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences, Hamar, Norway.
- Lithuanian Children and Youth Center, Vilnius, Lithuania.
- Centre of Creative Learning "Annas 2" Riga, Latvia.
- Eesti People to People, Tallinn, Estonia.

## Importance of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

Education is an essential tool for achieving sustainability. People around the world recognize that current economic development trends are not sustainable and that public awareness, education, and training are key to moving society toward sustainability. The international agreement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the 193 Member States of the UN General Assembly in 2015 provides a strong international call for advancing education as an important means for achieving sustainable development.

Education is central to improving quality of life and human development. Education raises the economic status of families; it improves life conditions, lowers infant mortality, and improves the educational attainment of the next generation. Advancing educational attainment raises the next generation's chances for economic and social well-being, and provides beneficial implications for both the individual and the country.

Education for sustainable development consists of acquisition of knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary for functioning in today's society. Moreover, it can contribute to individuals' ability to manage not only their own lives but also effectively manage natural resources.

This toolkit provides materials for teachers and educators to support active learning methods that can facilitate deeper understanding of the importance of sustainable development and inspire students to choose more responsible lifestyles. Youth are the future, and education can stimulate their awareness of the role they play in society and empower them with the skills and values to achieve transformation change towards sustainable development.

# Active Learning – Approaches and Methods

“Active learning methodologies encourage students to question the way they think, the values they hold and the decisions they make in the context of sustainable development.” (O'Donoghue & Cusack, 2008). This toolkit applies active learning approaches to engage students in direct exploration of sustainability topics and reflection on how these issues relate to their personal lives. The pedagogical approaches employed in this toolkit have been tried and tested through the use of PERL's active methodology and values-based learning toolkits, but they also draw on the traditions of many educational philosophers including Edward De Bono, Howard Gardner, and Edgar Dale. The types of activities in this toolkit are diverse in nature, but they all aim to engage learners in experiential education that inspires both reflection and action (i.e. critical praxis).

Baltic countries schools do not yet provide education for sustainable development or responsible living which is value-based, holistic, systematic, active and related to student's everyday life. There is need of active learning methodology, which stimulates the willingness to source correct information, appreciate the perspectives of others, reflect on the outcomes and impact of our actions, and embrace change which is required for us to modify our way of living and reflect a responsible approach to everyday life decisions that foster sustainability. The ultimate goal is for students to be open to change, to act co-operatively, to think, discuss and draw conclusions about different every day activities in a holistic, critical and creative way for the betterment of all humans.

Within the activities presented in the toolkit there is a strong emphasis on “strategic questioning” to support critical thinking and taking action. Critical thinking is an attempt to see and understand from multiple perspectives. Through the different activities in the toolkit, students can discover that others see the world differently and that there may be many issues that are interlinked.

Learning Outcomes supported by active learning methods include:

- **Problem solving:** Students learn not only to identify problems but also to seek innovative solutions.
- **Critical thinking and action:** Students learn how to explore their world through critical analysis of taken-for-granted assumptions and perceptions. Students also learn how to move beyond the thought processes to planning and action—individually and collectively.
- **Collaborative learning:** Through close interaction with the educators and other learners, students develop the ability to search, reflect and find answers in unison.
- **Increased awareness of the importance of environmental stewardship and social justice:** By practicing the art of investigating the causes and consequences of actions, students learn to recognize the interrelatedness of systems and processes, particularly as they relate to sustainable development.
- **Increased self-evaluation and reflection:** The toolkits motivate students to construct their own learning by identifying and evaluating their understanding, values, beliefs and behaviors and taking action accordingly. This deepening of knowledge helps students reflect on their thinking and re-examine their choices in a variety of areas.

# Developing competencies

There is general agreement that sustainability requires that citizens have certain key competencies that allow them to engage constructively and with responsibility towards the world around them and its current challenges. Competencies describe the specific attributes individuals need for action and self-organization in various complex contexts and situations. They include cognitive, affective, volitional and motivational elements: hence they are an interplay of knowledge, capacities and skills, motives and affective dispositions. Competencies cannot be taught, but have to be developed by the learners themselves. They are acquired during action, on the basis of experience and reflection (UNESCO, 2015; Weinert, 2001).

The toolkit can help to develop sustainable development competencies. You can use activities by competence taking into account what kind of learning experience, behavior you need, how much time you have available. Each activity includes a list of the competencies that the activity engages with, and teachers may target these specific competencies for students talk about and reflect on during discussion.

The following key competencies are generally seen as crucial to advancing sustainable development (see de Haan, 2001; Riechmann, 2012; and Wiesek et al., 2001).

- **System thinking competency** – the abilities to recognize and understand relationship; to analyze complex systems; to think of how systems are embedded within different domains and different scales; and to deal with uncertainty.
- **Anticipatory competency** – the abilities to understand and evaluate multiple futures – possible, probable and desirable; to create one's own vision for the future; to apply the precautionary principle; to assess the consequences of actions; and to deal with risks and changes.
- **Normative competency** – the abilities to understand and reflect on the norms and values that underlie one's actions; and to negotiate sustainability values, principles, goals, and targets, in a context of conflicts of interests and trade-offs, uncertain knowledge and contradictions.
- **Strategic competency** – the abilities to collectively develop and implement innovative actions that further sustainability at the local level and further afield.
- **Collaboration competency** – the abilities to learn from others; to understand and respect the needs, perspectives and actions of others (empathy); to understand, relate to and be sensitive to others (empathic leadership); to deal with conflicts in a group; and to facilitate collaborative and participatory problem solving.
- **Critical thinking competency** – the ability to question norms, practices and opinions, to reflect on one's own values, perceptions and actions; and to take a position in the sustainability discourse.
- **Self-awareness competency** – the ability to reflect on one's own role in the local community and (global) society; to continually evaluate and further motivate one's actions; and to deal with one's feelings and desires.
- **Integrated problem-solving competency** – the overarching, ability to apply different problem-solving frameworks to complex sustainability problems and develop viable, inclusive and equitable solution options that promote sustainable development, integrating the abovementioned competences.



# The focus of this toolkit

This toolkit aims to address important themes related to sustainable lifestyles, and through the use of strategic questioning students are encouraged to examine and consider the impacts of their own lifestyle choices. Activities and topics most relevant to a specific subject can be integrated into subject lesson plans. It is also possible to approach this toolkit as topics for unique interdisciplinary module on sustainable lifestyles. Alternatively, the toolkit could be used to structure cross-disciplinary team teaching on these themes, and to carry out related learning activities across different subjects.

## Learning Themes

In the Baltic countries consistent effort is put to increase the quality of education and meet the needs of future job market. In the schools increasing attention is paid to personal growth, self-awareness, behavior and values. At the same time the schools aim to respond to global challenges and provide a background on education for responsible and sustainable living.

To match different curricula, this toolkit combines various topics which address personal behavior and choices on personal, local and global levels. Therefore, these teacher's guidelines respond to the needs of the schools across Baltic countries in three ways:

**1. The themes are cross-curricula.** Global challenges need to be discussed not only in nature science lessons but also in language, literature, math and art classes. This toolkit was developed to offer five different perspectives on the broad topic of sustainability with hope that teachers from all curricula will find suitable activities in it.

**2. Various learning approaches are provided.** Innovative and interesting ways are needed to help students gain a deeper understanding of the topic. The methods selected will increase students' motivation to change their behavior toward a more sustainable lifestyle.

**3. Abstract issues are addressed through everyday life situations.** Formal education includes information about food, water, climate change, human population, consumption patterns and economic inequality. This toolkit suggests learning this information through personal approach.

As mentioned above, five perspectives (themes) on sustainability are offered:

- **Citizenship:** empowering students to create their own future and realize how much they can do;
- **Values:** encouraging students to listen to themselves and others and to consider their lifestyle.
- **Habits:** inviting students to understand the motivation behind their behavior and make it more sustainable.
- **Finances:** developing students' responsibility in their consumption.
- **Media literacy:** deepening students' understanding of and respect for others.

There is no need to do all the activities or to use everything consistently from the beginning. Every teacher is welcome to choose the most suitable parts.

# Structure of this toolkit

This toolkit contains 16 learning activities divided over five themes described earlier (Citizenship, Values, Habits, Finances, Media literacy). Each of the themes is composed of an overview and a few related methods of active learning (activities). The activities are numbered in a way which enables user to quickly recognize the theme.

Description of each activity is structured as follows:

- 1) a table that provides information about sustainable development competencies developed, relevant curriculum subjects, tips for the teacher and materials needed;
- 2) instructions for the activity;
- 3) questions for reflecting upon the activity undertaken.

At the end of the toolkit there is a table that provides an overview of all learning activities (identifying their original source, the pedagogical approach and learning methods). If you want to go deeper into the topic you can use the previously published PERL Active Methodology toolkits or the PERL Values-Based Learning toolkits.