

UNECE-Report 2014  
Summary and Final Report

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# **I. BACKGROUND**

## **The UNECE-Report**

In December 2006 UNECE approved the ESD-indicators which were developed by its international expert group and confirmed the intention to evaluate the implementation of the ESD-Strategy in the single member countries by means of this set of indicators. Based on this set of indicators the individual UNECE-member states should report on the success or quality of the implementation of the UNECE strategy or complete standardized national reporting to 2010 (Phase II<sup>1</sup>) and 2014 (Phase III). The answers to the national reports should be found in the broadest possible multi-stakeholder process. Specifically, the official call of the UNECE in this regard was as follows:

“UNECE Member States should prepare their national implementation reports through a transparent consultative process involving all relevant stakeholders at the national/state level. Countries with a federal structure will submit one consolidated report based on sub-national/state inputs”.

The six main issues of the report were:

- Issue 1: Ensure that policy, regulatory and operational frameworks support ESD.
- Issue 2: Promote Sustainable Development through formal, non-formal and informal learning.
- Issue 3: Develop the competence within the education sector to engage in ESD.
- Issue 4: Ensure that adequate tools and materials for ESD are accessible.
- Issue 5: Promote research on and development of ESD.
- Issue 6: Strengthen cooperation on ESD at all levels within the UNECE region.

For the preparation of the national reports for Phase III (2014) additional objectives were:

- Issue 7: Foster conservation, use and promotion of knowledge of indigenous peoples as well as local and traditional knowledge, in ESD
- Issue 8: Describe any challenges and obstacles encountered in the implementation of the strategy
- Issue 9: Further implementation of Education for Sustainable Development.

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<sup>1</sup> Phase I took place in 2007. Its aims were first volunteer national pioneer-reports as well as the first overview compilation of national ESD-initiatives. Austria was among the countries which delivered a first UNECE pioneer-report by the end of 2007.

## **The reporting-process**

Based on the Austrian UNECE report 2010, experts developed a preliminary draft document which was presented on the website of Dekadenbüro (<http://www.bildungsdekade.at/>) in June 2014. Over 350 persons out of the Austrian "environment" of ESD (who had already been contacted for the 2010 report) were contacted and invited to comment on the interim report within two months. They were free to refer to and to attach amendments to all questions of the UNECE-report or only to selected fields of action.

The result of this process was summarized in the preliminary final report – the national UNECE-Report 2014. This draft report was subsequently amended by experts of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs (subsequently referred to in short as "Ministry of Education"), the Austrian Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management (subsequently referred to in short as "Ministry of Environment") and the Austrian Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy and finalized in October 2014. The final report reflects these additions.

## **II. Results**

### **Issue 1: Ensure that policy, regulatory and operational frameworks support ESD**

Issue 1 is of crucial importance for the UNECE since here the direct transfer of the requirements of the UNECE strategy in the Austrian education landscape is most strongly reflected. In this context the activities of political leaders are most important.

As most important point the questionnaire analysis shows a high number of positive mentions for this objective, thus confirming Austria to still be among the highly active countries in Europe regarding ESD. The availability of data for this objective is especially high. Most data are collected centrally in the Austrian Ministry of Education, which has to be seen as an indication of the relevance of the topic of ESD in the Ministry.

An outstanding feature regarding this objective is also the existence of explicit provisions for the nationwide implementation of ESD, such as the Austrian ESD strategy, the national implementation plan and the ESD-Focal Points<sup>2</sup>.

At the interface of government policies and actions in support of ESD processes and the real education work there were numerous mentions of the two institutions FORUM Umweltbildung and Zentrum *polis* as well as the Austrian

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<sup>2</sup> The UNECE calls for the obligatory cooperation regarding the implementation of ESD between the Ministries of Education and Ministries of Environment in each member state. Unlike in many other UNECE countries this cooperation has been well established in Austria between these two Ministries - the national Focal Points – for more than 20 years.

UNESCO commission, which are well known among the stakeholders and their activities are well received.

The label ESD is not commonly in use but it is clear that ESD has been integrated into many areas of education.

## **Issue 2: Learning processes and sustainability**

In the area of formal education objective 2 reflects a positive perception of the national implementation of ESD among the experts and relevant stakeholder groups. The good connection between sustainability and ESD principles and the various teaching principles were often emphasized by the respondents. In addition the inclusion of many sustainability issues in various curricula and teaching objectives indicates an ever growing discussion about sustainability in schools and universities.

The instruction principle of Environmental Education has been revised and integrates ESD in many aspects. The new basic decree under the title "Environmental Education for SD" was signed by the Minister of Education on August 26. New curricula in teacher education institutions are established just now. They are recommended to integrate ESD<sup>3</sup>.

In addition Austria seems to be one of those countries in which a "whole-institutional approach", respectively an integrative and institutionally reflected access to ESD processes in schools as in universities, has been implemented. There is a quality label for schools and university colleges of teacher education (see below) as well as an award for universities following this approach for which the respective educational institutions can apply for. Furthermore, two quality assurance tools have been developed and implemented by legal regulation, one for general education (SQA), and one for vocational education (QIBB).

The very successful preliminary work of classic environmental education in Austria has obviously had an impact so far that federal initiatives - such as the National *Environmental* Performance Award for Schools and University Colleges of Teacher Education as well as the National Environmental Performance Award for Non-formal and Informal Education Institutions - have strict quality criteria with a clear reference to ESD and thus also influence formal learning processes to a large extent.

It will take further efforts to explicitly integrate topics of ESD and ESD as an overall principle more into existing (as well as new) curricula as well as into cross-curricular activities. (As a basic principle for school curricula, a working group commissioned by the BMBF has already developed a model for cross-curricular competences integrating competences for SD: <https://www.bmbf.gv.at/schulen/unterricht/uek/index.html>). In the future the link between

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<sup>3</sup> Steiner, R., Rauch, F., (2013): "Grundsatzpapier zur Bildung für Nachhaltige Entwicklung in der PädagogInnenbildung Neu" <https://ius.uni-klu.ac.at/inhalte/neuigkeiten/dateien/166/Grundsatzpapier.pdf> and Braunsteiner, Maria-Luise; Soukup-Altrichter, Katharina; Zemanek, Jutta et. al. (2014). Grundlagen und Materialien zur Erstellung von Curricula. Leykam: Graz.

ESD and Life Long Learning initiatives could be enhanced further. Here exist great opportunities for supporting the aims of ESD.

The overall challenge might be described as keeping momentum between structures and processes. Sustainable Development transcends different social groups and structures. It cannot be implemented through education alone. The fact that the European Commission did not support the Decade hampered the dynamic the Decade could have acquired in Europe.

In the new performance agreements between the Ministry of BMFW and the Austrian universities for the period 2016-2018 the topics of sustainable development and education for sustainable development are addressed. The universities have the possibility to develop projects in various areas related to SD and ESD (e.g. teaching, research, administration, human resources and cooperation).

### **Issue 3: Teacher pre-service and in-service training**

In the area of teacher training Austria is certainly one of the few pioneering countries within UNECE. This positive trend in objective 3 is supported particularly through the work of networks such as ÖKOLOG, the ESD network of Salzburg ("SaBine"), the teacher trainer course for ESD "BINE" of FORUM Umweltbildung, the University of Klagenfurt and the University College for Teacher Training of Upper Austria or by programmes of individual university colleges for teacher training. Accordingly the majority of responses regarding this objective painted a positive picture of implementation of the UNECE strategy in Austria. The high level of network support on the part of the Ministries is especially beneficial. It has to be pointed out, however, that these different offers of pre-service and in-service training are all optional.

### **Issue 4: Materials and tools for ESD**

According to the interviewed experts and stakeholder groups, ESD relevant materials are developed and used in various fields (environmental-, citizenship-, health-, gender-, consumer education, etc.) in Austria. In addition many ESD materials from Germany and Switzerland are used. Regarding dissemination the UNECE report illustrates the crucial role of the two institutions FORUM Umweltbildung and Zentrum *polis*. A range of quality control mechanisms and instruments for teaching material (text books, media as well as school quality criteria) exist both for the general education sector and the vocational education sector which reflect key principles of ESD. There is enough material available in the different fields of action defined by the UN Decade. Minor difficulties lie in assessing the material, promoting it and adapting it to the specific needs of educators.

### **Issue 5: Research and development**

As objective 5 requested specific figures and totals which exist primarily in the Ministry of Education and in the Ministry of Environment, only few stakeholders could contribute to the data collection. As a comparative value of 2009 for indirect research on ESD an amount of about € 250,000,- was available. "Indirect" in this context means research on topics of sustainable development which simultaneously has an educational focus, but without explicitly mentioning ESD. The largest financial support in the field of indirect research came from the research programme "Sparkling Science" (about € 100.000,-). Most development achievement is generated at the application level outside of university research institutions such as in FORUM Umweltbildung, in the Education Promotion Fund for Health and Sustainable Development or in Zentrum *polis*. A number of study courses and university programmes have been addressing topics of ESD. Since 2013 FORUM Umweltbildung has been publishing an annual ESD publication with articles by both scientists and practitioners.

### **Issue 6: International co-operation in ESD within the UNECE region**

Results for objective 6 showed a large number of different co-operation with diverse stakeholder participation (from the Ministries themselves to formal and non-formal education institutions) in various international contexts (German-speaking, European, OECD, UN). Some of them, however, do not carry ESD in their titles.

### **Issue 7: Foster conservation, use and promotion of knowledge of indigenous peoples as well as local and traditional knowledge, in ESD**

Local and traditional knowledge played a comparatively minor role in ESD in Austria. A small number of scientific programmes focused on traditional knowledge in the regions (but not exclusively) and a few NGOs dealing with local traditional knowledge were awarded the UNECSO-Decade-label. Links could be seen to local or regional initiatives for cultural heritage, also in context of sustainable tourism.

### **Issue 8: Describe any challenges and obstacles encountered in the implementation of the strategy**

Sustainable Development is a complex, evolving theme transcending different social groups and structures. Thus, it is hard to define and to communicate the term and it cannot be implemented through education alone. It takes a holistic approach to address and to structurally embed ESD. In Austria, however, the Decade was primarily supported by three federal ministries - the Federal Ministry of Education and Women's Affairs, the Federal Ministry for Science, Research and Economy and the Federal Ministry for Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management. Regarding the structural implementation of ESD it became

obvious that financial incentives have to be accompanied by public acknowledgments of achievements for ESD initiatives or educational institutions as well as supported by structural reforms.

### **Issue 9: Further implementation of Education for Sustainable Development**

Among the responsible Ministries and the UNESCO commission there is a basic understanding that the upcoming UN Global Action Programme will be followed. The exact details still have to be worked out and discussed.

## **III. Summary**

The present UNECE report is based on the results of a multi-stakeholder process. The report serves primarily to describe the quality of the national implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD and shows the following key results:

- In formal education and in regard to the specific political framework conditions, the report shows a positive image of ESD in Austria.
- Austria seems to be one of those countries in which a "whole-institutional approach", respectively an integrative and institutionally reflected access to ESD processes on all levels of formal education, has been implemented.
- Regarding ESD network activities in schools, Austria is expected to be in the top ranks within the UNECE.
- There is development potential in non-formal and in-formal education, linking ESD and life-long-learning.
- The label ESD is not commonly in use but it is clear that ESD has been integrated into many areas of education.
- Regarding the structural implementation of ESD it became obvious that financial incentives have to be accompanied by the public acknowledgment of achievements and supported by structural reforms.