

# DEAR TOMORROW!

We can all contribute to the work of creating a sustainable future, not just the decision-makers. We consider it essential that political decision-makers and stakeholders provide adequate support for creating an environment that supports the green transition. Therefore, as caring young people from Slovakia, we would like to present some observations, suggestions, desires, and the foundations for a livable future to our policy makers and those who work for and with young people.

## **PROVIDING YOUTH WITH RELIABLE INFORMATION**

Information and counseling for youth are mentioned and considered in numerous international, European, and national policy documents. In most cases, the existence of media and channels to reach young people is assumed, but this is far from the reality. Throughout the project, we encountered many young people whose interest, openness, and willingness to participate in similar initiatives and projects were high, yet they lacked access to such content due to insufficient information. The European Union offers many opportunities for young minds beyond Erasmus+, allowing everyone to participate in initiatives based on their needs, but they are unaware of this. Additionally, the bureaucratic, official language of some program criteria also poses a barrier for young people. Given the importance of providing young people with reliable information and supporting their ability to seek out, produce, and share quality information, we call on decision-makers to:

- Provide continuous professional development opportunities for youth information workers („Youth information services / workers aim to support and empower young people with full and reliable information on their rights and options to address their needs, interests and well-being“) to acquire new methodologies, skills, and knowledge that can support the adaptation of their services to the current needs of young people.

- Invest in quality youth information as a tool to achieve the green goals set by the UN and the European Union. Ensure that environmental topics are part of the continuous professional development of youth information workers. Integrate environmental, social, and economic sustainability issues into the offerings and practices of youth information services. Youth information workers should be knowledgeable about these sustainability issues (viewed holistically), possess advanced media and information literacy, and promote environmental awareness and commitment among young people.

- Contribute to developing young people's media and information literacy in our digital age. Young people need to be aware that they should question the information they find.

- Support the introduction and practical “application“ of green standards and certifications among young people. (With the small yet important detail that these standards work as intended and there is no possibility for misuse or greenwashing.) It is not only important that youth information services inform young people about environmental sustainability, but also that young people can make responsible decisions regarding a brand, product, organization, company, or anything else in their everyday actions and decisions.

- Make a comprehensive information resource available that outlines the various funding opportunities offered by the EU for young people who want to act for the planet. Provide special funding systems for young entrepreneurs starting ecological businesses (micro-financing systems).

## **GIVE YOUTH A VOICE, MAKE THEM PART OF THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS**

Today's young people know and understand better than previous generations that climate change, biodiversity loss, ecosystem disappearance, human exploitative behavior towards nature, pollution, and the constant growth imperative are among the most serious global problems. Youth activist movements and projects worldwide confirm that young people are committed to participating in the creation of a sustainable future. Therefore, they have ideas they are ready to share.

- Ensure the voice of youth across sectors: Involving young people in political decision-making should not be limited to youth policy but should be integrated into all sectors. We encourage political decision-makers and stakeholders at all levels to understand new forms of participation and invest in involving young people to create responsible and impactful policies.

- Create and evaluate measures with young people: To develop successful awareness-raising activities that engage young people, they must play a crucial role in defining strategies, creating, and evaluating environmental sustainability measures with regional coverage.

## **EDUCATING ABOUT ENVIRONMENTAL AND SUSTAINABILITY TOPICS**

- It would be nice if people had the opportunity to learn about sustainability from a young age. It would be nice if kindergartens and primary schools already had this type of education, so it would be possible to build responsible adults in the future. Climate Education should be part of the education plan.

- It is really important to educate young people about environmental topics but the older generation is always left out. The world is not only for young people but for every living being. More companies, workplaces or even towns and villages should make workshops or educate the older generation somehow. Help them understand the weird non-traditional terms, expressions and words that youngsters use in today's world. The generation gap between young and older generations should be narrowed.

- Rich people should also be educated about responsible sustainable living. After all, it is their actions that are most crucial to sustainability.

- There would be a need for similar programmes like the Green Triangle project, made possible by the Slovak Eco Quality organization, not only for people between the ages of 16-30 but also for older and younger ones as well. We hope that many more such projects will follow.

- Educating the population about the importance of living in a sustainable way (try to reach each generation by educating children from a young age / releasing apps & reaching the younger generation through the Internet or the media, partner with influencers and celebrities who resonate with young audiences to promote environmental causes and sustainable lifestyles / writing about these topics in newspapers, talk about them in television so that the information gets to older people as well) Launch EU-wide campaigns on social media, television, and other platforms to raise awareness about climate change and promote sustainable behaviors.

- Let's educate ourselves so that we become able to answer questions supported by proven facts because people are likely to be skeptical and pessimistic when it comes to green topics, so we should somehow MOTIVATE them to educate themselves.

- Fund youth initiatives in connection with green topics to involve more and more youngsters and encourage them to spread the knowledge they have acquired. To make it easier for young people to access projects and applications, simplify bureaucracy and make it more accessible for them to implement their ideas. And also make them understand that their voice really does matter.

## **TO EASE ACCESS TO SUSTAINABLE / GREEN SOLUTIONS**

- Require companies to provide clear information about the environmental impact of their products, enabling consumers to make informed choices.

- We need more support for villages and towns and facilities in them. Making the application process easier and somehow working together with the facilities to create a greener community.

- Green solutions should be as available and practical as possible because this is the only way to reach a greater and more active audience (if they require too much energy people might give up doing them sooner).

- Don't support consumerism and encourage others to do the same. Let the EU's current values not be determined by corporate interests and lobbying.

- Don't make sustainable solutions expensive. In many cases, this prevents people from adopting sustainable lifestyles.

- Give financial support or tax relief to green companies and companies that start using green technologies.

## **Closing words**

Proactive pro-environmental behavior should always be rewarded in some way. Research has shown that positive reinforcement, such as recognition and rewards, can significantly influence behavior. Munuera (2022) suggests that the dopaminergic system, which influences our response to delayed outcomes, could be "hacked" to promote climate-friendly behaviors. This idea is supported by Weber (2015), who emphasizes the need for a combination of political, technological, economic, and behavioral actions to

achieve sustainable climate goals. By creating systems that reward sustainable actions, we can harness the power of dopamine—the brain's "feel-good" chemical—to support and encourage pro-environmental behavior. This could include everything from loyalty programs for eco-friendly purchases to public recognition for community environmental efforts. So it could be a win-win situation.

Thank you for reading through the suggestions in the hope of a better tomorrow!

Jun 24, 2024 - Jun 26, 2024

BRUSSELS

The Slovak team: Veronika Pinkeová, Ágnes Kulcsár, Klaudia Bedečová, Dorottya Molnár, Viktória Zorkócyová, Csongor Kelecsényi