

UNECE-Report 2010 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 II¹) and 2015 (Phase III). The answer to the national reports should be done in the broadest possible multi-stakeholder process. Specifically, the official call of the UNECE in this regard is 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".*

For the preparation of national reports for the Phase II (2010) also the following objectives are:

*"Start **integrating SD into learning programmes and curricula, review processes made in the implementation of the national strategies and revise them, if necessary.**"*

To 2010 to establish in Austria a broad national multi-stakeholder process for reporting and in the context of ESD goals also to use it as their own participatory learning and design process, in 2007 the Austrian Ministry of Education commissioned the FORUM Environmental Education with the co-ordination of the first nationwide reporting procedure.

The result of this process - the Austrian UNECE report - was presented by FORUM Umweltbildung (Forum Environmental Education) in the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture on February 16, 2010, was subsequently amended by further information from experts of the Austrian Ministry of Education and finalized in June 2010. The now completed final report reflects these additions and will be forwarded by the Austrian Ministry of Education to the UNECE in the coming days.

The reporting-process

The central core of the reporting-process was a working group of six independent experts of various fields of formal, informal und non-formal education which was established and coordinated by FORUM Umweltbildung. The nomination for this working group was orientated

¹ 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.

by the six fields of action / objectives of the UNECE-strategy which also define the composition and structure of the national report. Each of the working group participants took responsibility for data collection in one of the following actions on the basis of their personal expertise:

- **Objective 1: Policy and legal frame**
(Ensure that policy, regulatory and operational frameworks support ESD)
- **Objective 2: Learning processes and sustainability**
(Promote Sustainable Development through formal, non-formal and informal learning)
- **Objective 3: Teacher pre-service and in-service training**
(Develop the competence within the education sector to engage in ESD)
- **Objective 4: Materials and tools for ESD**
(Ensure that adequate tools and materials for ESD are accessible)
- **Objective 5: Research and Development**
(Promote research on and development of ESD)
- **Objective 6: International ESD-Co-operation within UNECE**
(Strengthen co-operation on ESD at all levels within the UNECE region)

The data collection and interviews with stakeholders were done by the experts in the period January to September 2008. In relation to the type of data collection there was no specific guidance, which is why different methods and approaches were chosen individually. The spectrum ranges from network queries on personal interviews to surveys by e-mail. The experts were responsible for the selection and integration of the collected information as well as to answer the specific questions of each field.

The meetings of the working group were used to discuss and to structure the results from the six objectives and subsequently to outline a first common "picture" of ESD in Austria. The meeting focused in particular on problems which showed up during the survey or on the sometimes highly divergent perceptions and difficulties of implementation of ESD in the various fields of activity. The outcome of these meetings resulted in the first interim report in autumn 2008. On this basis a provisional national report was created and published on the website of the „Dekadenbüro“ (www.dekadenbuero.at) in January 2009.

Based on this on-line publication the FORUM Umweltbildung initiated a nationwide feedback process. Stakeholders from all sectors concerned were invited to comment and supplement the report online within eight months. Users were free to refer to and to attach amendments to all questions of the UNECE-report or only to selected fields of action. During PR activities parallel to the feed back process over 350 persons out of the Austrian "environment" of ESD were contacted and invited to comment on the interim report. The result of this process was summarized in the preliminary final report – the national UNECE-Report 2010.

II. Results

The summarized results and the first interpretations of the national interim reports were presented and discussed in the Ministry of Education on February 16, 2010. Particular attention was paid to the different aspects and perceptions about each six areas of action. Besides the primary objective of creating a well-secured and well-founded National Reports for the UNECE it was essential to get a comprehensive picture of the current state of ESD in Austria. The focus of the questionnaire and the nature of the data collection reflect primarily the perception of ESD among the various stakeholder groups, which offers the possibility to adapt communication and dissemination of ESD to the various stakeholder groups and pay particular attention to remaining blind spots.

Objective 1: Policy and legal framework

Objective 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 results in a high number of positive mentions for this objective which characterises Austria as one of the pioneer countries in Europe for ESD. Especially good in this objective is the availability of the data. Most data are collected centrally in the Austrian Ministry of Education, which has to be seen as an indication of the relevance of ESD topic in the Ministry.

Outstanding feature in 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 Points²

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

Even though the Austrian activities in this objective are to be assessed as largely positive the report highlights three latent weaknesses: First, there is still no explicit mention of ESD in curricula and in education standards³. A similar deficit is the complete absence of ESD in official guidelines and documents regarding the non-formal and informal education sector. Furthermore, the report clearly shows the lack of any explicit mention of ESD in general legal guidelines and documents relating to formal education topics.

² The UNECE calls of the individual member states the obligatory cooperation regarding the implementation of ESD between the Ministries of Education and Ministries of Environment. Unlike many other UNECE countries this cooperation has been well established in Austria between these two ministries - the national Focal Points - for several years.

³ In relation to the discussion on the integration of ESD in educational standards it is essential to note the problem that the concept of fixed standards runs contrary to the continuous learning and adjustment process within dynamic ESD processes. Therefore the discourse should focus more on flexible quality criteria for ESD.

Objective 2: Learning processes and sustainability

In the area of formal education objective 2 reflects a positive perception of the national anchoring 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 anchoring of many sustainability issues in various curricula and teaching objectives indicates an ever growing discussion about sustainability in schools and universities.

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 gradually keeps its entry.

Furthermore it can be assumed that the very successful preliminary work of the classic environmental education in Austria has an impact so far that federal initiatives - such as the National Environmental Performance Award for Schools and Educational Institutions - have strict quality criteria with a clear reference to ESD and thus also influence highly formal learning processes.

Despite the above mentioned encouraging results of the UNECE-report objective 2 also shows clear deficits:

On the one hand there is a complete lack of a uniform national quality control of ESD in classroom teaching.

Additionally it can be noted that until the conclusion of this report in June 2010 no further leading analysis regarding the connection between ESD, curricula and cross curricular principles is available.

Moreover, in the range of learning processes and sustainability, the focus clearly lies in the formal education sector - a fact which is underlined by the absence of any evaluation of ESD processes in non-formal and informal education.

Objective 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, ESD network of Salzburg, the teacher trainer course for ESD of FORUM Umweltbildung and the University of Klagenfurt or by programmes of individual teacher training universities. Accordingly the majority of responses to this objective outlined an encouraging picture of implementation of the UNECE strategy in Austria. Positive in this objective is the high level of network support on the part of the Ministries.

In contrast to strong signals in the direction of anchoring of ESD in the Austrian teacher pre- and in-service training and the training of university teachers in the field of ESD is currently not an issue. This finding shows that in Austria schools operate far more innovative in the fields of didactics and methodology than universities. In addition to the 'blind spot' uni-

versity teachers the report also documents that also in the area of the management of educational institutions no structured and comprehensive training on ESD is offered.

Objective 4: Materials and tools for ESD

In Austria, according to the interviewed experts and stakeholders groups, ESD relevant materials are developed and used in various fields (environmental-, civic-, health-, gender-, consumer education, etc.). 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, which play a prominent role as regards the dissemination of ESD materials in Austria.

With regard to existing deficits for this objective is to be stated that in Austria neither a national strategy for the development and dissemination of ESD materials or ESD tools nor a consistent guideline for the quality of ESD materials exists.

Objective 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" means here 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 the Forum Umweltbildung, the Fund for Health and Sustainable Development Environmental Fund or the Zentrum Polis .

The relatively good performance on application-level research is facing a large deficit in university research. So until the completion of this study in June 2010 there are no institutionalized PH.D or master programmes about ESD. In addition there is still no specific research on the implementation of ESD in Austria. This critical image is underlined by the fact that until to date only three dissertations on ESD in Austria exist.

Objective 6: International co-operation in ESD within the UNECE region

The sixth objective unexpectedly turned out to be one of the most critical and most difficult to assess. At first glance this area of the UNECE report was the one which showed only positive responses. A large number of different projects with very diverse stakeholder participation were enlisted.

However a closer analysis of the listed projects and initiatives showed that most of the examples had no clear ESD focus. A number of entries which subsequently provided no answer to specific questions of the report had to be deleted for this reason. In addition, objective 6 shows the long-standing problem of a very vague and primarily to "environmental protec-

tion" accentuated image of sustainable development. In international comparison Austria is no exception when equalising subjectively perceived "quality education" with the concept of ESD, resp. ESD is rarely connected with real examples of good practice. There are relatively few international co-operations for ESD in the strict sense, therefore, according to the results of this report.

III. Summary

The present UNECE report is based on the subjective perceptions and reflexions of experts and stakeholder groups from the formal, non-formal and in-formal education regarding the situation of ESD in Austria. Based on a standardized questionnaire, the report serves primarily to describe the quality of the national implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD. Based on this the report needs to be analyzed with the question, what specific measures and possibilities have to be planned in the future to enhance the support of ESD processes in Austria. In this sense the following key results of the national reporting process are listed:

- The Austrian UNECE Report 2010 will be positively accepted by the UNECE.
- In formal education and in regard to the specific political framework conditions, the report shows a positive image of ESD in Austria.
- Regarding to ESD network activities in schools, Austria is expected in top ranks within the UNECE.
- There is big need for action in the area of non-formal and in-formal education as well as in the field of quality assurance of curricula and teaching materials.
- In the field of academic research to ESD and ESD principles there are currently too few activities.
- Sustainable development is still perceived very abstract in Austria - ESD even far more abstract.
- The existing set of indicators for the reporting did not prove universally practical for a real multi-stakeholder process.
- In the future far more qualitative studies should deal with ESD on the process level. A relevant definition of position should focus on the connection between ESD, curricula and teaching principles.
- Within relevant stakeholder groups ESD is too often seen as even competing education concept.
- Among various stakeholder groups still exists a strong reservation to ESD - not all ESD-relevant initiatives could be covered in the reporting process.
- The report clearly shows that ESD is still far too rarely perceived as quality criterion within the Austrian education system.

Looking to the next five years the key question therefore is, how the rest of the UN Decade could be used to anchor ESD as a quality criterion in Austria even more, and how the various stakeholder groups can be better integrated in this participatory learning process.