EcoYOU – Clean and green Minds for Environmentally Friendly Behaviour

A1.18 Developing a Joint Study that includes a Blue-Map used to raise awareness on environmental protection for youth in BSB regions

Guidance and Recommendations

The ***Joint Study that includes a Blue-Map used to raise awareness on environmental protection for youth in BSB regions*** explores the complex and pressing issue of environmental education, with a particular emphasis on youth awareness and engagement within the Black Sea Basin region. Recognizing that environmental challenges are both global and deeply local, the research sought to capture not only statistical trends but also the lived experiences of young people, parents, and educators. Together, these perspectives offer a holistic understanding of how environmental values are formed, sustained, and, at times, hindered by structural barriers.

The findings reveal that young people are not only aware of environmental issues but are eager to participate in addressing them. Their motivation stems from both moral conviction and a desire for tangible action. However, this enthusiasm is often constrained by systemic limitations, such as inadequate infrastructure, rigid institutional frameworks, and limited opportunities for sustained participation. Educators, on their part, strongly affirm the value of experiential learning, creative projects, and interactive teaching methods. Many are already implementing innovative practices in their classrooms despite insufficient resources, demonstrating resilience and commitment. Parents, meanwhile, emphasize the significance of early education within the home environment, highlighting the role of consistent role modelling and family routines in fostering sustainable habits.

Across these groups, there emerges a unified call for reform in how environmental education is approached. Current programs are often perceived as overly theoretical, failing to maintain engagement or connect to the practical realities of daily life. To address this, the study recommends a decisive shift toward experiential and project-based learning. Hands-on initiatives such as recycling projects, tree planting, waste collection drives, and school gardening not only impart knowledge but also cultivate responsibility and ownership among youth. Field trips to recycling facilities, nature reserves, or polluted sites further strengthen awareness by connecting abstract concepts to lived experience.

Interactive and engaging methods are equally essential. Gamified challenges, creative competitions, and digital resources make environmental education both enjoyable and memorable, particularly for younger students. Social media and short-form video content are identified as especially powerful tools for reaching youth audiences, providing accessible platforms that blend education with creativity. At the same time, schools must integrate environmental themes across subjects—from science and geography to arts and civics—so that sustainability is not treated as an isolated topic but rather as a fundamental component of holistic learning.

Collaboration is another cornerstone of effective environmental education. The study underscores the need for stronger partnerships between schools, local authorities, NGOs, and families. Such cooperation ensures access to expertise, resources, and community-based opportunities. Importantly, youth should not only participate in activities but also in decision-making processes, thereby reinforcing their sense of ownership and agency. The role of parents remains vital, as eco-friendly practices within households reinforce lessons learned in schools and cultivate lifelong habits.

Structural barriers must also be addressed if these recommendations are to succeed. The lack of adequate waste management infrastructure—such as accessible recycling bins, composting systems, and collection points—represents a significant obstacle to sustainable behavior. Policy reforms, investment in infrastructure, and the consistent enforcement of environmental laws are therefore essential. At the same time, recognition and incentive systems, including eco-clubs, certificates, or public showcases of student projects, can further encourage participation and sustain motivation.

Ultimately, the conclusions of this study present a hopeful vision. While challenges remain, there exists a strong and unified commitment among youth, educators, and parents to take responsibility for environmental stewardship. The will to act is already present; what is required is a supportive framework of policies, resources, and collaborative networks that can channel this energy into meaningful change. Environmental education must therefore move beyond theoretical instruction and become a lived, consistent practice that connects classrooms, households, and communities. By doing so, we can cultivate a generation of environmentally conscious citizens who are not only knowledgeable but also empowered to safeguard the future of their regions and the planet as a whole.

Based on the combined insights, particularly focusing on what resonates with young people and what parents and teachers believe is effective, here are applicable measures and recommendations for how young people would like to learn about the environment:

1. **Prioritize practical and experiential learning:**

- **Hands-on activities:** Implement more projects like recycling initiatives, tree planting, waste collection drives, and "upcycling" competitions (e.g., bringing old objects back to life).
- **Outdoor and real-world exposure:** Organize field trips to recycling facilities, polluted areas (to see impact), or natural reserves (to foster appreciation).
- Daily routine integration: Embed sustainability lessons into daily school life through responsible waste management, energy use, and consumption practices.

- Organize workshops, field trips, community clean-ups, gardening, and eco-projects.
- Use real-life examples to teach concepts like recycling, waste reduction, and energy conservation.
- Encourage students to apply learned principles at home and in their communities.

2. **Interactive and engaging methods**

- Use games, simulations, and digital platforms (apps, social media challenges, educational videos) to make learning appealing.
- Integrate creative projects like posters, videos, or campaigns that allow students to express their ideas.

3. **Interdisciplinary integration**

- Include environmental topics across subjects: science, geography, civics, and arts.
- Connect sustainability concepts to everyday life and societal issues.

4. Collaboration and partnerships

- Foster partnerships between schools, NGOs, local authorities, and families to create joint programs.
- Involve youth in decision-making and local environmental initiatives to give them ownership.

5. Role models and mentorship

- Teachers, youth leaders, and parents should model sustainable behaviors.
- Invite experts, activists, and community leaders to share experiences and motivate students.

6. Parental and family involvement

- Encourage parents to reinforce eco-friendly habits at home.
- Provide guidance, resources, and activities that families can do together.

7. Regular and consistent education

- Include weekly or recurring environmental education sessions in the school curriculum.
- Use both formal lessons and extracurricular activities to ensure continuous engagement.

8. Recognition and motivation

- Celebrate schools, classes, and students who show active participation in environmental initiatives.
- Award certificates, create eco-clubs, or feature projects publicly to motivate further involvement.

9. Address barriers and provide resources

- Ensure access to eco-friendly alternatives (recycling bins, sustainable transport, educational materials).
- Reduce logistical barriers by coordinating school schedules and community events.

10. Evaluation and feedback

- Assess the impact of environmental education programs on knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors.
- Use feedback to improve activities and make them more relevant and effective.

11. Enhancing education & awareness

- Move beyond theory: shift the focus from purely theoretical lessons to a hands-on, practical approach. integrate more experiments, workshops, and real-world projects.
- Use engaging media: leverage social media, documentaries, and videos to make environmental topics more accessible, interesting, and memorable for young people.
- Promote creative expression: encourage students to use creative methods like drawing, making posters, and creating videos from recycled materials to raise awareness and deepen their understanding.

12. Increasing practical engagement

- Organize regular activities: schedule dedicated time for monthly clean-up campaigns and tree-planting events. this provides a consistent and tangible way for students to contribute.
- Integrate field trips: plan educational excursions to relevant sites like recycling centers or natural reserves to provide practical experiences and connect learning to the real world.
- Dedicate school time: advocate for a designated time slot within the school schedule for environmental projects and activities, ensuring they don't conflict with other classes or upset teachers.
- Introduce regular, hands-on environmental projects (e.g., school gardens, waste audits, composting).
- Organize more clean-up events and tree-planting campaigns with measurable goals.

13. Addressing infrastructure & resources

- Improve local infrastructure: work with local communities and municipalities to install more trash bins and recycling facilities in public spaces, especially in areas where they are lacking.
- Provide school resources: secure funding or donations to provide schools with the necessary materials and equipment for hands-on projects and experiments.

14. Fostering community & collaboration

- Encourage social interaction: emphasize the social and fun aspects of environmental activities. organize group events where friends can participate together to make the experience more enjoyable and motivating.
- Educate the broader community: launch public awareness campaigns to address cultural habits and low awareness of waste management. this can help reduce issues like littering and burning waste.
- Bridge the socioeconomic gap: although not a focus in the provided text, future efforts should address the economic and social barriers that may prevent some young people from participating in environmental initiatives.

15. Foster interactive and engaging methods:

a. Gamification and creative contests: Use games, challenges, and creative competitions to make learning enjoyable and tangible, especially for younger children.
b. **Workshops and project-based learning:** Conduct interactive workshops and sustained projects where students actively solve real environmental challenges, fostering ownership and responsibility.
c. Visual and relatable content: Utilize documentaries and multimedia materials that show direct personal impact and are easily digestible.

16. Leverage modern media and communication channels:

a. **Strategic social media engagement:** Use social media platforms with brief, relatable messages that demonstrate direct personal impact, as this is the most effective channel to reach youth.

b. **Digital learning resources:** Develop and promote online educational content that is interactive and visually appealing, complementing traditional teaching.

17. **Strengthen collaborative ecosystems:**

a. **Formal partnerships:** Establish long-term collaborations between schools, NGOs, and local communities. NGOs can provide expertise, resources, and experiential opportunities.

b. **Community networks:** Create shared networks for resource exchange and best practices, supported by local authorities.

c. **Parent-school synergy:** Schools could assign "homework related to sustainability resources" to involve parents and reinforce learning at home.

18. **Implement policy and resource allocation changes:**

a. **Curriculum reform:** Update school curricula to integrate environmental themes across all subjects, not just science, to provide a holistic understanding.

b. **Teacher professional development:** Provide continuous training and resources for teachers in green education, recognizing them as agents of change.

c. **Funding and infrastructure:** Allocate increased funding for environmental projects (both local and national), and invest in sustainable school infrastructure like recycling systems and eco-classrooms.

d. **Motivation and incentives:** Reintroduce reward systems for sustainable behaviors (e.g., for recycling, waste collection), as motivation is key for habit formation.

e. **Law enforcement and monitoring:** Local authorities should enforce environmental laws more rigorously and establish effective monitoring systems for infractions.

f. **Functional waste management:** Ensure local authorities implement and maintain effective, widespread selective waste collection and functional collection points.

g. **Involve students and teachers in decision-making:** Policymakers should consult educators and young people to ensure that environmental policies and educational strategies are relevant and impactful.

19. Use digital & social media strategies

- Develop short, engaging videos showing real environmental problems and solutions.
- Launch interactive social media challenges (e.g., "7 days plastic-free") to encourage behavior change.

20. Build visible infrastructure

- Install clearly labelled recycling bins in schools and public areas.
- Provide visual boards or apps that show progress (amount of waste collected, trees planted).

21. Foster peer-Led initiatives

- Create youth ambassador programs where students lead campaigns and workshops.
- Encourage peer-to-peer teaching—youth tend to follow examples from people their age.

22. Integrate environmental topics across subjects

- Instead of treating it as a separate topic, include environmental perspectives in biology, geography, and even art or media classes.

23. Collaborate with local communities & NGOs

- Schools can partner with local organizations for workshops, field trips, and sponsorships.
- Community-level campaigns should involve both parents and children to build a shared sense of responsibility.

By combining these multi-faceted approaches, environmental education can become more engaging, practical, and effective, fostering a generation of environmentally conscious and responsible citizens.

Participants prioritized behavior change and public awareness campaigns, emphasizing practical steps such as reducing single-use plastics, promoting eco-products, and adopting environmentally friendly habits in households and workplaces. Many highlighted the need for investment in recycling infrastructure, including accessible composting programs and proper disposal systems for hazardous waste like batteries. Local government involvement was considered essential, particularly in allocating funds for environmental campaigns, waste management projects, and the development of protected area management plans. Some participants suggested financial incentives and community engagement programs, such as reward systems for responsible waste disposal or eco-friendly practices in businesses and neighborhoods, drawing inspiration from successful models abroad. The group also discussed the importance of strategic planning and training programs for implementing local waste management and renewable energy initiatives effectively.

An effective strategy should combine these perspectives: use the modern and digital methods proposed by the youth, within more solid structures and with greater support from adults and authorities, as suggested by the latter.

Regional-level recommendations (all Black Sea states)

1. **Develop a joint Black Sea Environmental Education Strategy.**

    - Coordinate curricula, campaigns, and youth programs across the basin through the Black Sea Commission, linking schools, NGOs, and local authorities.
    - Integrate marine literacy (ecosystems, pollution, climate change, sustainable fisheries) into regional cooperation projects.

2. **Create a shared online "Black Sea Learning Hub."**

    - Digital resources (videos, teaching guides, citizen science tools, data dashboards) available in multiple languages for teachers and students.
    - Connect with EU and UNESCO environmental education frameworks to ensure quality and interoperability.

3. **Citizen science and community engagement.**

    - Promote basin-wide school and youth projects such as beach clean-ups, water-quality monitoring, and biodiversity surveys.
    - Annual Black Sea "Eco-Challenge" events where students present solutions to environmental issues.

4. **Capacity building for educators.**

    - Regional teacher training programs, summer schools, and exchange visits to share best practices in marine and climate education.

Recommendations for Romania

- **Leverage EU environmental and education directives.**
  Romania can integrate Black Sea–specific content into existing environmental education programs supported by the EU Green Deal, Erasmus+, and MSFD outreach activities.
- **Formal education:** Include modules on Black Sea ecosystems and sustainable coastal development in high school and university curricula (particularly in Constanța and Danube Delta regions).
- **Non-formal education:** Expand NGO–school partnerships for marine litter campaigns and citizen science projects supported by the Ministry of Environment and Ministry of Education.
- **Teacher training:** Use EU funding (Erasmus+, LIFE) to create specialized training courses for educators in coastal and riverine areas.

Recommendations for Moldova

- **Integrate environmental education into transboundary river programs.**
  Since Moldova is landlocked, focus on Dniester/Prut water education, linking river health to the Black Sea.
- **Formal education:** Update national curricula to include modules on water cycle, pollution control, and international river-basin management, emphasizing downstream effects on the Black Sea.
- **Community engagement:** Empower rural schools and local councils with low-cost water-testing kits, encouraging students to monitor local rivers.
- **Partnerships:** Collaborate with Romania and Ukraine on cross-border school twinning projects for river and Black Sea awareness.

Recommendations for Georgia

- **Tourism and coastal communities as key targets.**
  Strengthen marine education programs in schools around Batumi, Poti, and other coastal cities, emphasizing waste management and climate resilience.
- **Formal education:** Incorporate marine and coastal studies into national curriculum reforms, using pilot programs in coastal schools.
- **Public campaigns:** Link environmental education with eco-tourism promotion, emphasizing sustainable beaches and fisheries.
- **Higher education:** Encourage universities to develop environmental communication and marine science programs, aligned with EU Neighbourhood standards.

Cross-cutting tools & policy instruments

- **National Environmental Education Strategies** (aligned with the UN Decade of Ocean Science and Education for Sustainable Development).
- **Youth engagement platforms:** National Black Sea Youth Councils feeding into the Black Sea Commission.
- **Integration of SDGs in curricula (Sustainable Development Goals):** SDG 14 (Life Below Water) and SDG 13 (Climate Action).
- **Partnerships:** With UNESCO, EU Erasmus+, GEF/World Bank "Blueing the Black Sea" program for funding and technical support.

Suggested first steps

1. Co-design a **joint environmental education pilot program** with shared curricula and teaching resources.
2. Launch a **regional online Black Sea Education Portal** with open-access materials for teachers.
3. Implement **"Adopt a River / Adopt a Beach" school projects**, coordinated basin-wide.
4. Organize an **annual Black Sea Youth Forum on Environment and Education** to foster collaboration and innovation.