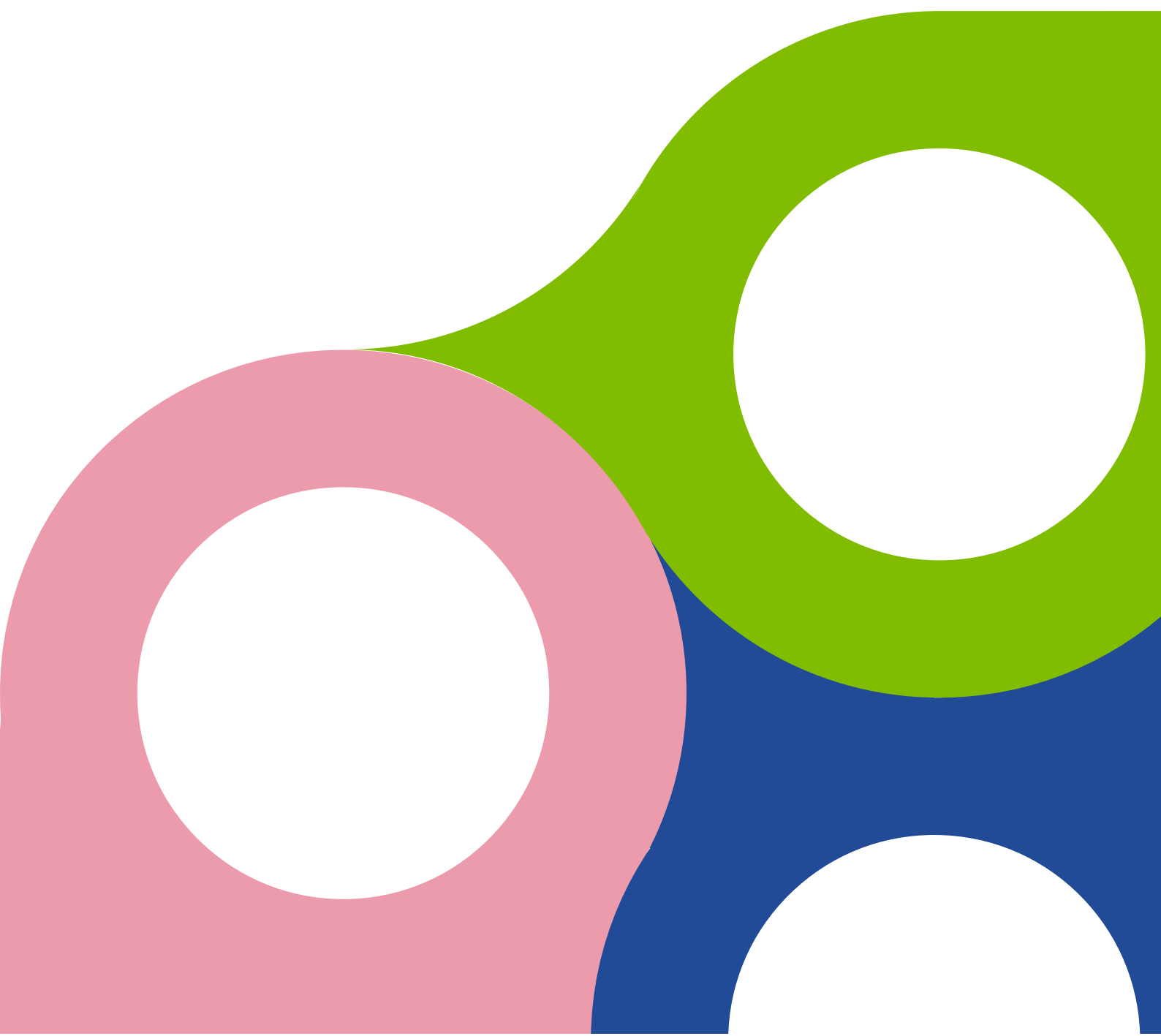


Creativity and critical thinking in green projects



Co-funded by
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Non-formal education, through its flexibility and ability to adapt to the individual needs and interests of participants, is a valuable complement to traditional education, enabling young people to develop key competences necessary in today's dynamically changing world. Creativity and critical thinking competencies are particularly important in the context of a rapidly changing world of work, where traditional approaches are not always able to provide young people with the tools necessary to solve contemporary problems.

Recommended forms of non-formal education for young people to strengthen their creativity and critical thinking skills:

1. Workshops and group projects focusing on problem solving

Organizing workshops and group projects that focus on solving real social or environmental problems can greatly contribute to the development of creativity and critical thinking. An example is the participation of young people in projects related to the circular economy, where participants develop innovative ideas for reducing waste or reusing materials.

The "Once upon a Tree" project is an interdisciplinary project for young people that aims to provide cultural, artistic, ecological and anti-discrimination education. The main goal of the project is to stimulate the creativity of participants and draw attention to the value of trees and the importance of ecology by creating educational artistic projects. Thanks to the participation of Polish and foreign artists, instructors and educators, participants will have the opportunity to create projects inspired by the function and symbolism of trees. The project consists of three parts: "Roots", "Stem" and "Branches". In the "Roots" phase, creative online meetings take place, during which participants gain knowledge about ecology and the role of trees in the ecosystem, as well as generate ideas for their own artistic projects. The "Stem" phase assumes the implementation of these projects, while the "Branches" phase

presents the results and effects of the project.

Source: <https://feri.org.pl/projekty/bylo-sobie-drzewo/>

2. Mentoring and coaching programs

Mentoring programs in which experienced professionals share their knowledge and experience with young people can significantly enrich the educational process. Mentoring and coaching help young people develop critical thinking skills by teaching them how to approach problems from different perspectives and find creative solutions.

In 2015–2018, the Ministers of Education from Austria, Luxembourg, Portugal and Slovenia jointly carried out the "Youth Start Entrepreneurial Challenges" project. Its goal was to develop a flexible, innovative entrepreneurship program that could be easily transferred and adapted, and to evaluate its impact on students. Based on the research results, the educational authorities of these countries plan to implement activities in the field of entrepreneurial education. The program focuses on stimulating imagination, innovation and problem-solving skills, preparing participants for their future professional careers and running their own companies. As part of the program, students take part in a variety of entrepreneurship challenges and projects supervised by experienced business mentors and teachers. Mentors help young people develop business ideas, create action plans and implement projects. Through regular meetings and advisory sessions, participants have the opportunity to develop practical skills, learn the principles of market functioning and develop creativity and innovation. In addition, the "YouthStart Entrepreneurial Challenges" program also includes coaching sessions that aim to support participants in the development of soft skills such as communication, time management, building relationships and coping with stress and pressure. Thanks to their involvement in the program, young people can not only



develop their entrepreneurial skills, but also gain valuable experience and build relationships with professionals from various fields.

Source: <http://youthstart.eu/en/about/>

3. Media and information education

In the era of widespread digitization and the presence of social media, media and information education becomes necessary to develop critical thinking skills. Educational programs teaching how to critically evaluate information, recognize fake news and use the media responsibly contribute to strengthening key competencies for functioning in the modern world.

An example of an initiative in the field of media and information education for young people is the “Mediawijsheid” project implemented in the Netherlands.



This project focuses on developing digital and media skills in young people, including young children, to enable them to use media more effectively and critically analyze media content. As part of the program, participants take part in various workshops, trainings and events aimed at increasing their awareness of the functioning of the media, information manipulation and responsible use of the Internet. Activities undertaken as part of Mediawijsheid aim to equip participants with the skills to assess the credibility of information sources, identify false content and build a healthy distance from social media. Additionally, the Mediawijsheid project also engages teachers and parents, providing them with educational tools and materials so that together they can support young people in developing media competences. Thanks to their involvement in the Mediawijsheid program, young people have the opportunity to develop the skills necessary to use the media effectively and actively participate in social life.

Source: <https://www.mediawijsheid.nl/>

4. Social initiatives and volunteering

Involving young people in social initiatives and volunteering is an excellent way to develop creativity, empathy and critical thinking skills. Working for local communities or participating in international projects allows young people to better understand the complexity of contemporary social and environmental challenges.

A perfect example is the “Erasmus+ Youth” program, which enables young people aged 13 to 30 to participate in a variety of educational, training and volunteering activities. The aim of these activities is to support the personal, cultural and professional development of young people, promoting values such as solidarity, social activity, tolerance and understanding of other cultures and traditions. The “Erasmus+ Youth” program gives young pe-



ople the opportunity to meet new people, acquire new skills, broaden their horizons and experience living and working in an international environment. The “Erasmus+ Youth” program focuses on promoting values such as tolerance, solidarity, active citizenship and intercultural development. Thanks to participation in the program, young people have the opportunity to broaden their horizons, acquire new skills and build international relationships.

Source: <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/opportunities/opportunities-for-individuals/youth-exchanges>

5. Games and simulations

The use of educational games and simulations is an innovative approach to teaching that can effectively develop creativity and critical thinking skills. Games designed with education in mind can simulate various scenarios and problems, requiring participants to think strategically and creatively approach solutions.

The Grydaktyka project, run by the Media School Foundation, is an excellent example of innovative educational practice that meets contemporary challenges in the field of teaching. This project uses computer games as a tool to engage students and make the learning process more attractive and effective. The central element of Grydaktyka are various workshops and lessons that not only integrate elements of video games, but also develop key skills and competences in students. For example, participants can take part in the workshop “Time travel. Tadeusz Soplica in the 21st century”, where virtual reality allows you to find patriotic elements in modern interiors. It is not only enjoyable entertainment, but also an effective tool for learning history and developing visual analysis skills. However, the Grydaktyka project is not limited to only one field. Another example is the “Savoir vivre then and now” workshop, which combines elements of etiquette with the simulation of social behavior in The Sims. Thanks to this approach, students not only learn the rules of good manners, but also have the opportunity to develop interpersonal and language skills. Additionally, Grydaktyka provides support for teachers through demonstration lessons and teaching materials. Thanks to this, the project not only influences the development of students, but also supports the professional development of teaching staff.

Source: <https://grydaktyka.pl/>

6. E-learning platforms and online courses

The availability of online courses and e-learning platforms allows young people to acquire knowledge and skills in almost any area of interest. These courses often offer interactive materials that stimulate creative thinking and teach you to critically evaluate the information you learn.

One example of an e-learning platform and online courses for young people is “Khan Academy”. It is an online platform where you will find free videos, exercises and online lessons in various fields, such as mathematics, natural sciences and economics. At Khan Academy, students can learn at their own pace and according to their own schedule, using available materials tailored to their level. It’s like having a personal teacher who adapts to your needs and helps you understand difficult concepts. For teachers, Khan Academy offers tools to track student progress and adapt materials to the needs of the classroom. Thanks to this, they can create lessons adapted to the level of their students and monitor their development. Khan Academy is a great example of an e-learning platform that provides valuable educational resources for young people,



enabling distance learning in an accessible and interactive way.

Source: <https://pl.khanacademy.org/>

Creativity and critical thinking skills are extremely valuable resources that can significantly enrich green projects, especially those implemented with the participation of young people. Their use can not only increase the effectiveness of these projects, but also contribute to the development of young people.

The way creativity and critical thinking enhance the implementation of green projects or initiatives:

1. Stimulating innovation

Creative thinking workshops - organizing brainstorming sessions during which young people can freely express their ideas regarding green initiatives. Techniques such as design thinking can be used here to encourage participants to innovatively solve environmental problems.

2. Development of critical thinking skills

Case studies - conducting case studies related to ecology and sustainability that will encourage young people to analyze, evaluate and propose alternative solutions to existing problems.



3. Research projects

Encouraging research - enabling young people to conduct their own research on sustainable development, renewable energy sources or other relevant green topics. This can be done through school projects, science competitions or collaborations with local universities and research centers.

4. Social and educational campaigns

Creating campaigns - engaging young people in the design and implementation of educational and social campaigns promoting sustainable behavior and environmental protection. Here, young people can use their communication skills and creativity to reach a wider audience.

5. Technology and media

Use of digital media - encouraging young people to use modern tools and media platforms to promote green projects and share knowledge and experiences with peers from different parts of the world. This may include creating blogs, vlogs, mobile applications or educational games.

6. Cross-sector cooperation

Building partnerships - supporting young people in establishing cooperation between various sectors, such as local communities, business, public administration and non-governmental organizations, which can lead to the creation of interdisciplinary green projects.

7. Feedback and reflection

Reflection sessions - regular meetings enabling participants of green projects to exchange opinions, thoughts and assess progress, which develops the ability to critically evaluate their own actions and the effects of group work.

Using youth's creativity and critical thinking skills in green projects not only contributes to achieving ecological goals, but also supports the personal development of participants, preparing them for future professional and life challenges.

