How to practise ecological, social and economic sustainability in school
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Introduction to SUSDE-Project

Schools and other educational establishments have widespread opportunities to promote sustainable development. Schools can raise environmentally responsible and globally aware citizens of the future. The direct environmental impacts of schools, for example the consumption of energy, water and materials, are substantial. Therefore, the way in which the maintenance and supporting functions of schools are organized is important. The school is also a part of the community and society. Changing the existing conceptions and acting as a promoter of social development can be seen as a basic role of the educational system. Thus, the school can take an active role in promoting sustainable development outside its walls, as well as in the school itself.

The opportunities for schools to promote sustainable development have been noticed. After the United Nation’s Conference in Stockholm in 1972 it was stressed that education is a key issue in transforming attitudes and practices in directions which favour sustainability. The 5th Environment Action Programme of the European Community obliged educational establishments to incorporate sustainable development in their activities. There are also many international projects and programmes which aim to support sustainable development in schools. Educational authorities have brought up the issue at national level in many countries.

Even though a lot has been done in schools, there remains a lot to do for promoting sustainable development. Comprehensive educational models covering all dimensions of sustainable development are still missing. Especially, there is a lack of definitions on the content of social, cultural and economic dimensions and their interpretation in the school context. The driving force behind the SUSDE-project has been to open the discussion on the comprehensive approach of sustainable development in schools.

The educational package developed in the project provides a concrete model of the content of ecological, economic, social and cultural sustainability in teaching and everyday school life. Furthermore, it contains practical instructions on how to construct a sustainability programme for the school.

“The Community emphasises the importance of communication, information, education and training as a means of stimulating awareness of sustainable development issues and promoting behavioural changes in all sectors of society.”

*The 5th Environment Action Programme of the European Community*
What is sustainable development in school?

What do the three dimensions of sustainable development mean in teaching and everyday school life? Even though social and economic sustainability are as important as the ecological dimension, in the educational world the focus has been on the ecological dimension. Environmental education has also formed the basis for education for sustainable development. Models of environmental education have been developed since the 1970s, but comprehensive educational models for sustainable development are still missing. Especially, there has been a lack of definitions and discussion of the content of social and economic dimensions.

Ecological sustainability (Figure 1)

In school, ecological sustainability can be realised by environmental education and introducing environmentally friendly practices in everyday school life. The objective of environmental education is environmentally responsible behaviour. It is usually thought that environmental education can be best implemented using a comprehensive approach and integrating environmental themes into different school subjects.

The direct environmental impacts of school maintenance activities cannot be considered as significant as the positive indirect impacts due to teaching and learning. However, environmental issues related to maintenance activities play an important role in influencing the environmental knowledge, skills and attitudes of the students and school staff. Naturally, the value base and school culture reflect themselves in teaching. Unless they do, they do not support the content of teaching, and there is a lack of credibility.

Social sustainability (Figure 2)

Even though there is still uncertainty on the content of social sustainability in the school context, some important themes have been brought out; such as equality, democracy, global citizenship, reduction of poverty, justice, mutual respect, cultural diversity, human rights, anti-racism, community and co-operation. These are examples of things that could be thought of as forming the value base for social sustainability in school. The themes listed above have also their own educational tradition, which can be used when developing the curricula from the perspective of social sustainability.

The visible part of a school’s organisation culture built on these values should highlight democracy, openness, mutual respect and participation. Other themes typical for the school culture can be ambience, relationships, safety, customs, festivals and traditions, debates, social inclusion, and occupational health of teachers.
Participation of children and youth is a theme that has increased in popularity during recent years. This theme can also be regarded as part of social sustainability. It responds to one of the important challenges of social sustainability, i.e., how to create opportunities for personal mastery, sharing of responsibility, striving after sustainable ways of living, understanding of the impacts of one’s own actions and learning.

**Economic sustainability** (Figure 3)
The greatest potential of schools within the economic dimension of sustainable development lies in the saving of energy and other natural resources as well as educating people to become conscious and thinking customers.

Economic and ecological sustainability, often seen as conflicting targets, may well support each other. For instance, reduction of material, water or energy consumption is an ecologically and economically sustainable action at the same time. Other means of promoting economic sustainability are sharing, loaning and re-using of items, and favouring durable, recyclable, domestic products. In procurements, the school should try to pay attention to the whole lifecycle of products. Environmental labels provide information on low environmental impacts of a product.

Education for economic sustainability should be based on everyday actions in the school life as well as the learning contents of different school subjects. The learning objectives of economic sustainability are very similar to consumer education. The mission of a school is to teach students to identify external factors influencing their own lifestyle, habits of consumption, values and attitudes.

**Holistic view of sustainable development in school** (Figure 4)
Ecological, economic and social contents of sustainable development are not totally new things in the educational world. Instead, they have been discussed under various educational themes, such as the environment, internationality, equality, tolerance and consumer education. Is sustainable development only old stuff under new headlines? Perhaps the revolutionary thing in sustainable development is the fact that it combines the different viewpoints into one whole.

In education, there is a considerable need for adopting a holistic view. In our complex and continuously changing world, all things are...
more and more mixed together yet they still appear as fragmented pictures. Environmental problems are global and they are interrelated with both social and economic issues. The challenge of sustainable development is to bring out the ways in which individual behaviour and local actions can have global influence on environmental and societal issues.

Figure 4: Holistic view of sustainable development.
Education for sustainable development

The emphasis in teaching has been on ecologically sustainable development, although the social and economic aspects are equally important. The tradition of environmental education has formed the foundation for education for sustainable development (SD). In the field of environmental education, models for planning, teaching and learning have been developed, but corresponding models for the entity of sustainable development are still missing. Therefore, the models of environmental education are used as their basis.

A common problem in implementing education for SD is that a lot of good work is done but the systematic approach is missing. Teachers are not necessarily familiar with each others work and good ideas don’t circulate. Education for SD may be dependent on individual teachers, which makes it vulnerable. The organisation doesn’t learn from its experiences and the implementation is not being improved. Therefore, it might be useful to apply the idea of continuous quality improvement (Deming’s Circle) for education for SD.

With respect to education for SD:

- **Plan**: includes integrating SD in the curricula and ensuring adequate resources
- **Do**: the well-balanced realisation of the elements of SD is the essential thing
- **Check / evaluate**: it is important to identify needs of improvement, but also to bring out good practices
- **Act / improve**: includes setting of targets of improvement, and transferring good practices among teachers

![Diagram of Deming's Circle and continuous improvement of teaching](image_url)
Curriculum work
Sustainable development is linked to the core contents of every subject area. Therefore, it is important that teachers should consider the connection between their own subjects and SD. The aim of the process is to include SD in subjects and study entities in a way that is natural for each subject, study entity and age group.

According to Joy A. Palmer (1998), there are three essential elements in environmental education curriculum: empirical, ethical and aesthetic elements; also called education about the environment (empirical), education in or from the environment (aesthetic) and education for the environment (ethical). These elements merge and overlap in teaching, but it is essential to become aware of implementing all of them in a systematic way. The idea of the three elements of environmental education may be applied also for education for sustainable development.

Education about sustainable development
Information on ecology, environmental problems and sustainable development do not as such lead to environmentally responsible behaviour, but is a basic requirement for responsibility. Teaching should provide up-to-date information on the natural and human environment, impacts of human actions on nature, environmental problems and social/economic issues related to them, as well as prevention and possible solutions for these. Essential issues are the dependence of humans on nature and connections between human actions, personal way of living and well-being of the environment.

Teaching should also aim at developing understanding of the whole instead of remembering separate facts. Teaching should support understanding of a multi-dimensional nature related to environmental issues and develop student’s ability to deal with the complexity involved. Teaching has succeeded when pupils really understand the issues on a personal level, analyse and interpret things and try to find ways to solve problems.

Education in or from the natural and human environment
Environmental sensitivity is considered as an important starting point for responsible behaviour. It includes an emotional relationship with nature, with respect and ability to feel empathy for it. Sensitivity develops mainly by obtaining positive experiences in nature. Teaching should increase environmental sensitivity to the natural and human environment and support development of a personal relationship by providing positive experiences in nature. It is also essential to provide purely aesthetic experiences. Teaching should aim at understanding the function of the natural and human environment by reasoning that it is based on observations and experiences.

As for social sustainability, teaching should provide direct experiences of social, cultural and economic issues by interaction with other people when possible. Study subjects can be found inside the school, local community, at national level and also world-wide. Among possible activities are lessons in nature or in the school neighbourhood, familiarising oneself with people who are elderly, handicapped or with different cultural backgrounds.
Education for the natural and human environment

Empowerment is a cornerstone of education for sustainable education. Trust in one’s potential and influencing skills is essential: a person confident in his/her skills of influencing will much more probably act in a responsible manner than a person who feels powerless. The confidence develops by acting in the surrounding society. Educational establishments should provide students with genuine opportunities of influencing and participation, and support building of confidence in one’s own action. Education for SD should develop pupils not merely as individuals but also as members of communities and societies, so co-operation and social skills and values should be emphasised.

Teaching should provide information on the operation of the society and decision making systems, and develop student’s skills and knowledge of democracy. It is also important to bring out individual and group-based potentials of influencing, because one well-known obstacle to responsible action is scarcity of knowledge. Furthermore, teaching should reveal the interdependence and variety of attitudes and values, and bring out different views on the reasons and solutions for environmental problems so that students are able to make justified value judgements.

Teaching resources

Special attention has to be paid to ensure there are resources of education for sustainable development. Essential issues are:

• Teaching material: The school should ensure that there is up-to-date teaching material for general SD issues and for different subjects, and that teachers are aware of and able to use it.
• Skills and knowledge of the teaching staff: The school should ensure that the teachers have up-to-date skills and knowledge on SD and that they master the central sustainability issues related to their own teaching subject.
• Co-operation: The school should reserve time for internal co-operation in SD issues, which makes it possible, e.g., to discuss and define common values between different professions and teaching subjects. Also other staff should participate in environmental co-operation. The school should co-operate with external interest groups that can provide assistance in SD education (e.g., parents, authorities, non-governmental organisations, companies).

Evaluation is a basis for improving

When aiming at a systematic implementation of education for sustainable development, evaluation and development of education become key issues. Whether a school is starting to consider SD or has it well established, it is important to review provisions from time to time and to consider the extent to which the main ideas of SD are being consolidated. There are two main contexts on which the review might focus: the whole-school context and the classroom context.
Constructing the SUSDE Programme

The following steps are designed to help Principals, Teachers and other staff to construct a SUSDE (sustainable development) Programme for the school. It encompasses all the school functions; management, teaching and maintenance activities such as energy, waste, catering, purchases and transportation, use of materials, health and social care, safety and co-operation and communication with interest groups.

Figure 6: Steps for constructing the SUSDE Programme.

**STEP 1: Organising the development work**

The first step in constructing the SUSDE programme is ORGANISATION, which includes management’s commitment, definition of necessary resources, organisation of the work and participation and informing of the staff and students.

**Resources**

It is essential to get management’s decision about the building of the programme. The management must establish the human and financial resources needed to complete the development process. If the organisa-
tion does not have qualified human resources, it is possible to use external consultants. However, the successful implementation of the programme requires strong participation of the organisation members and interest groups.

**Organisation of the work**

The construction, management and development of the SUSDE Programme requires defined internal organisation with clear responsibilities. Each individual worker shares the responsibility for the realisation of the targets and actions included in the programme as far as his/her own work is concerned. A common way to organise the development work is that one teacher is appointed as the Co-ordinator of the programme. The Co-ordinator acts as a kind of internal change agent or a developer.

The educational institution should nominate a SUSDE Team to help the work of the Co-ordinator. The team should consist of employees responsible for different activities of the educational establishment, such as teachers, and the people in charge of estate management and maintenance, catering, purchases and transportation, use of materials, health and social care, safety and co-operation and communication with interest groups. A representative of the management should also belong to the SUSDE Team. This ensures that the management is constantly aware of the progress of the work and is able to deal with the sustainability issues as a part of normal management.

![Figure 7: Organisation of the development work.](image-url)

**SUSDE TEAM**
- Representatives of the school management, teaching staff, other school staff and students

**SUSDE COORDINATOR**

**ACADEMIC TEAM**
- Planning, implementation and assessment of teaching

**SUPPORTING FUNCTIONS TEAM**
- Estate management and maintenance
- Catering services
- Office

**INTEREST GROUPS**
- Parents
- Authorities
- NGO’s
- Decision makers
- Etc.
Internal and external communication

It is important to make sustainable development a positive thing and give opportunities for participation and influencing in common issues.

In order to create projects with sustainable effects, it is important from the point of view of planning and action, that the projects are not based on a “linear” structure in which each idea is pursued to the exclusion of other ideas. Rather, the various themes or ideas in the project should be interlinked. As a result, activities in the project require inclusion of a variety of perspectives and will involve a variety of players, both internal and external. For example, to illustrate a social model of sustainability, there can be seen to be four “levels” which can be integrated in any planned projects (such as Fair Trading). These four levels are:

- The school level, at which pupils, teachers and other staff are involved with school concerns.
- The community level where the school interacts with the community in which the school is placed.
- The national level where regions and regional government play their parts
- The global level at which the nations of the world participate.

One-World-Projects, often built in cooperation with a partner school abroad, shall include aspects and actors from the closer and further surrounding field to achieve sustainable development. Foreign pupils and their families, who become actors both on the inter-school level and on the local level, have to be included in such a project.

For example, fair trade can be favoured in procurements at school level. Pupils, who convince their parents to change their shopping habits may have indirect impact on the local variety of goods. This can have influence on the import of fair trade products, thus resulting in global level changes in production towards socially and ecologically sustainable cultivation.

Figure 8: Work for sustainable development is something that everyone at school can participate in – you only have to make in the right way!

Figure 9: One-World Project.
STEP 2: Initial review

The second step of the process is the review on sustainable development in the school. The review encompasses all the functions in the school; i.e., management, teaching, supporting functions, and internal and external communication.

Goals of the review
- To get an overall picture of the implementation of sustainable development in the school
- To list the sustainability aspects of the different school functions with observed needs of improvement
- To provide a basis for the SUSDE Programme: goals, means of implementation and instructions required

Implementation of the review
The school functions will systematically be identified and studied in order to recognise those aspects related to ecological, social, cultural and economic sustainability. A common practice is to use readymade checklists in order to more easily get an overall idea of the current state, weaknesses and strengths of the organisation. The checklists can be modified depending on the goal and purpose of the review as well as the organisation to be reviewed. The review can be done by the SUSDE Team. It is also recommendable to participate other teachers, students and school staff in the review, e.g., using work shops.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUSTAINABILITY ASPECTS AND QUESTIONS</th>
<th>YES/NO</th>
<th>COMMENTS, EXAMPLES, IDENTIFIED PROBLEMS, NEEDS OF IMPROVEMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. ASPECT: CURRICULUM, TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Aspect: Curriculum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are there discussions on different cultures, religious and ethnic groups?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are there special persons who can be addressed for sustainability aspects in curriculum at school?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Aspect: Teaching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are the sustainability aspects of human activities identified during teaching?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are students taught to recognise the sustainability aspects of their own activities?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 10: Example of a sustainability checklist.
STEP 3: Prioritisation of the sustainability aspects

The third step of the process is to summarise and prioritise the sustainability aspects identified in the initial review. As a result, 3 to 5 of the most significant aspects will be chosen to form the basis for the SUSDE Programme. Based on the review, the necessary instructions and responsibilities will also be defined.

Prioritisation of aspects

The sustainability aspects recognised in the review and workshops are prioritised according to the school’s priorities. It is essential to understand that there is no definitive model for doing this. The best end result of the prioritisation can be achieved by combining the opinions of several people who are working within the organisation in different functions. Therefore the prioritisation should be done as a SUSDE teamwork exercise in the school.

Prioritisation could be done as follows:

- Gather together the sustainability aspects identified in the review and workshops
- Choose the criteria on which the aspects will be prioritised, e.g.:
  - Values and working principles of the school
  - Environmental impact
  - Laws or other external regulations
  - Other criteria; view of interests groups, environmental education
- Discuss and prioritise the aspects in the SUSDE team according to the chosen criteria

Choice of targets and actions

The objectives of the school will be derived from the prioritised aspects. The most important aspects are used to set the targets of school’s SUSDE Policy and Programme. Potential areas for improvement are identified from the initial review, e.g., improvement in teaching, estate management and maintenance, catering, purchases and transportation, use of materials, health and social care, safety. Those improvement potentials which will help to achieve the targets, or which are cost effective to implement, should be chosen.
**STEP 4: SUSDE Policy and Programme**

*Based on the results of the initial review, the school can now construct its policy and development programme on sustainable development. The SUSDE Policy can be a separate statement or a part of the school’s operational policy or principles and values.*

**The SUSDE Policy**

SUSDE Policy is the statement made by the school of its intentions and principles relating to sustainable development. It is also the management’s commitment to the continuous improvement of the organisation’s performance in relation to sustainable development. Publishing the policy means that the organisation recognises its responsibility for the impacts that the school has on the physical and social environment.

SUSDE Policy has a direct connection to the values of the school. Construction of the policy implies that the school recognises sustainable development as one of its core values. It should give answer to the question “What is the significance of sustainable development for our organisation?” Thus, it is also an important message to the teachers, staff and pupils as well as external interest groups such as parents, authorities, NGO’s and companies.

**The SUSDE Programme**

School’s objectives of sustainable development are defined based on the significant sustainability aspects found in the initial review, and possible other viewpoints that arise from the policy. Each of the objectives is then put into a practical form with one or more preferably measurable targets, and the SUSDE Programme is constructed to ensure the achievement of the targets.

The SUSDE Programme defines:
- Means of implementation by which the organisation can reach the targets and realise the SUSDE Policy
- Responsibilities, resources, timetable and follow-up to ensure that the targets will be met

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**SUSDE Policy**

- Message to the staff and students about the importance of sustainable development
- Message to the external interest groups to help establish confidence and co-operation

**Figure 12: The SUSDE Policy is an important message to internal and external groups.**
STEP 5: Resources and instructions

The fifth step of the process is establishing of resources, responsibilities and instructions. The SUSDE Programme should be an integrated part of annual planning and daily working life.

![Diagram](image)

The SUSDE Programme should be part of organisation’s annual (economy and action) planning. It would be ideal that the needs of improvement, and suggestions for means of implementation arise from the staff. Management then can accept appropriate suggestions and define resources for actions. With this kind of management style, the personnel can be better engaged in the implementation of the SUSDE Programme.

Documentation of responsibilities and necessary instructions is vital to ensure the participation of teachers, other staff and pupils.

Figure 13: The SUSDE Programme should be part of annual planning to ensure the required resources for the implementation.

STEP 6: Training and communication

The sixth step of the process is to plan training and communication for teachers, pupils, other staff and interest groups.

Training and communication is needed to raise sustainability awareness among teachers, other staff and pupils as well as the interest groups of the school. Additional training for teachers and other staff may be needed to ensure the adequate knowledge and skills in sustainability issues. It is also important to make staff and pupils aware of their role and responsibilities concerning the school’s SUSDE Policy and Programme, and the importance of their own behaviour. External communication increases co-operation and trust outside the school, to the advantage of the image.

The staff and pupils should also be provided with genuine opportunities for participation in the planning and implementation of the SUSDE Programme. This is the key to engage them in the programme and to find suitable means of implementation. Furthermore, when the staff and pupils are given the opportunity to influence their own work, they are also better motivated to develop it.
STEP 7: Assessment and Follow-up

The seventh step of the process is follow-up, assessment and continuous improvement. This introduces tools for assessing the results of the implementation programme and provides suggestions for the further development of the SUSDE Programme and management system.

The SUSDE Programme has to be reviewed and updated at certain intervals. The aim is to assess the extent to which the targets have been achieved. It is also important to pay attention to the appropriateness of instructions and responsibilities as well as needs of further training for staff in sustainability issues. This can be done e.g., by using self-assessment in which the management, staff and pupils participate. The information gathered should be discussed together to identify needs for improvement and good practices that could be disseminated throughout the organisation. To ensure the continuous improvement of the SUSDE Programme, the self-assessment should have a direct link to school's management and planning systems.

The school should pay attention to the following questions:
- How the review and update of the SUSDE programme can be done in our school?
- Who should participate in the process?
- How could we integrate assessment of the SUSDE Programme into existing management and planning systems?
- How can we take care of continuous improvement?
Partner information

**Hyvinkää-Riihimäki Vocational Adult Education Centre (HRVAEC)**
HRVAEC is a pioneer of environmental training in Finland. It was the first educational institute in Finland to receive an environmental certificate (ISO 14 001). Since 1993, HRVAEC has trained more than 300 enterprises, educational institutes and other public organisations in building up their own environmental management systems. HRVAEC is also involved in developing vocational qualifications in the environmental field. In Finland, SUSDE project has been implemented in cooperation with City of Hyvinkää and National Board of Education.

**SYKLI Environmental School of Finland**
SYKLI Environmental School of Finland is a new special vocational training institute. SYKLI continues Hyvinkää-Riihimäki Vocational Adult Education Centre’s tradition of environmental training and projects. SYKLI is specialised in vocational training for adults in the fields of waste management, and environmental and quality management systems. Part of the training courses lead to vocational qualification in waste management. In the field of environmental and quality management, SYKLI provides tailored, additional training and consulting for industrial and public organisations.

**The People’s College**
The People’s College is a regional education and training college offering provision in a broad range of industrial and commercial spheres. People’s College is responding to the UK government’s plans for sustainable development in colleges and universities with an action group established in the college. The college has participated in ADAPT project “Eco-management”, Leonardo projects “Eco - professionals” and “Eco - Man Net” and in an Objective 2 project, “Environmental Management on the Internet”. ISO 14001 is also being pursued.

**Zentrum für Erwachsenenbildung Stephansstift**
Zentrum für Erwachsenenbildung Stephansstift is a Lutheran educational, study and meeting centre recognized by the state. The centre has worked for several years in the field of Agenda 21 and training for communities, municipalities, schools, church communities, NGO’s, etc. It organises courses for adults of all ages and from all social segments. Special emphasis has been put on education in social subjects. The centre has also offered seminars on the subject of ecology for many years.

**Co-operative ECO-ONE**
ECO-ONE is a pioneer of environmental management training and consulting in Finland. Its customers are companies from service sector and public organisations such as municipalities and educational establishments. Eco-One has active international co-operation with several EU countries.
Hyvinkää-Riihimäki Vocational Adult Education Centre
Reija Järvinen
Torikatu 18
FI-05800 Hyvinkää, Finland
Tel: +358 19 7782 447
E-mail: reija.jarvinen@hrakk.fi
www.hrakk.fi

SYKLI Environmental School of Finland
Laura Manninen
Malminkaari 5
00700 Helsinki, Finland
Tel. +358 19 764 200
E-mail: laura.manninen@sykli.net
www.sykli.net

The People's College
David Barton
Maid Marian Way
Nottingham NG1 6AB, UK
Tel: +44 115 912 3444
E-mail: david_barton@peoples.ac.uk
www.peoples.ac.uk

Zentrum für Erwachsenenbildung Stephansstift
Jürgen Klaassen
Kirchröder Str. 44
30625 Hannover, Germany
Tel: +49 511 5353-308
E-mail: klaassen@zeb.stephansstift.de
www.zeb.stephansstift.de

ECO-ONE
Risto Tenhunen
Huhtamäentie 35
FI-02970 Espoo, Finland
Tel: +358 400 946612
E-mail: risto.tenhunen@eco-one.fi
SUSDE Project

SUSDE: Sustainable development – an educational package for schools was a three-year international project, which received co-finance from Comenius Programme of the European Commission. The aim of the project was to create an educational package for schools to help them incorporate sustainable development in all their activities; including management, teaching and maintenance. The emphasis was put on the definition of social, cultural and economic dimensions of sustainable development in the school context, which have been discussed less than the ecological dimension.

The coordinator of the project was Hyvinkää-Riihimäki Vocational Adult Education Centre (Finland). The partners were Zentrum für Erwachsenenbildung Stephansstift (Germany) and Peoples College (United Kingdom). Eco-One (Finland) operated as a subcontractor in the project.

This booklet is a short version of the educational package published in the Internet :
www.hrakk.fi/susde (Finland)
www.peoples.ac.uk/susdev/home (UK)
www.zeb.stephansstift.de/projekte/nachhaltigkeit-schule/index.htm (Germany)