

# The Actions and Good Practices Implemented by Educational Institutions to Promote Sustainability (Also in Synergy with Other Institutions/Bodies Involved).

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## ABSTRACT

In Italy, May 6, 2025, will be the so-called "Earth Overshoot Day", the day of national overshoot. This means that, from 6 May onwards, our country will have demanded more from the territory than ecosystems can provide over the entire year<sup>1</sup>. Year after year, the day when we witness the beginning of overexploitation of the land in our country is getting closer and closer. Suffice it to say that only last year, in 2024, the same day was remembered between 19 and 20 May. Going back again, in 2000, the overcoming took place on September 17. If we look closer, we will notice that the last time Italians exploited the resources that their land was able to provide them with during the entire year was in 1970. Not only in Italy, but all over the world, the situation is degenerating. What experts tend to recommend is a gradual change in one's daily habits, to achieve a social transformation that can heal the whole situation. According to the Global Footprint Network: "this process involves a greater knowledge of the key factors that can affect sustainability and the experimentation of new lifestyles to lower one's Ecological Footprint"<sup>2</sup>. Schools show themselves as the main tool capable of guaranteeing greater knowledge of the subject and, in fact, making sure that change is possible. For this reason, the actions carried out by any type of institution that, together with educational institutions, can guarantee awareness in future generations are fundamental. Fulco Pratesi was already clear about the situation when, in 1966, he founded WWF Italy, an organization whose main mission was to "conserve nature"<sup>3</sup> in its entirety. For this reason, the organization promotes the "Our Values" campaign, which focuses on the importance of the educational process for the protection of the world's ecosystem. "For the WWF, education is the common thread that unites every action to conserve biodiversity, every battle for the protection of ecosystems and every initiative aimed at ensuring a sustainable future. Only through the dissemination of a culture of sustainability can we lay the foundations for a greener, healthier and fairer world, where everyone can feel part of a global community capable of respecting and protecting the extraordinary richness of our planet"<sup>4</sup>. The initiative demonstrates the value that is given to proper sustainable education. Specifically, there are more and more teachers and citizens who propose the creation of ad hoc initiatives, which are functional to schools for the dissemination of greater environmental knowledge.

<sup>1</sup> cf. <https://overshoot.footprintnetwork.org/newsroom/country-overshoot-days/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://overshoot.footprintnetwork.org/newsroom/press-release-italian/>

<sup>3</sup> cf. <https://sostieni.wwf.it/chi-siamo/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.wwf.it/cosa-facciamo/educazione/>

Andrea Delmonego, former professor of agricultural sciences and rural management techniques, writes an article, in this regard, for the website by ASVIS (Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development<sup>5</sup>). The article reveals the personal desire of the author and the entire school system that surrounds him to bring pupils closer to the world of sustainability through various initiatives. We are in the "Felice and Gregorio Fontana" institute in Rovereto (TN), where the initiatives carried out by Professor Delmonego and his colleagues, in collaboration with ASViS, WWF Italy and with the Network of European Sustainable Schools, achieve enormous results.

Basically, in 2011 the institute launched an Environmental Sustainability Education Path that has several objectives, including: "promoting correct information on environmental issues to the school community and students' families; organize concrete initiatives on environmental sustainability practices within the school and in collaboration with bodies and administrations both at local, national and international level; promote training for teachers, non-teaching staff and students; carry out its activities in a manner that guarantees, in all circumstances, the safety and health of pupils and employees and that minimizes any negative effect on the environment..."<sup>6</sup>. From a practical point of view, all the school's consumption is recorded and a plan is studied to reduce it to the bare minimum; separate waste collection is promoted, in the correct way, with a study of the annual consumption of plastic and paper; participation in the "Do the right thing" fair in Trento on sustainable consumption is organized; environmental days are organized<sup>7</sup>.

Beyond the individual initiatives, promoted in specific institutes and not implemented in all schools in Italy, however, activities are emerging that are now spreading throughout the territory, coming to interest the Ministry of Education. An example is given by World Tree Day, recognized by art. 1 of Law no. 10<sup>8</sup> of 14 January 2013, which is celebrated every 21 November and aims to "promote the care and enhancement of trees and remember the essential role of forests and urban greenery for our ecosystem"<sup>9</sup>. More and more schools are promoting initiatives during this day. From kindergarten, activities such as: the reading of nursery rhymes and poems dedicated to trees are promoted; the staging of plays, in which the children themselves impersonate the trees; There are even institutes that choose to have pupils plant a tree during this day. This is the case of the State Comprehensive Institute "G. Calò- G. Deledda- S.G. Bosco" in Ginosa (TA). On the occasion of the 2023 festival of trees, in fact, the children of this institute went down to the courtyard and planted an apple tree, accompanied by bulbs of jasmine, daffodils and tulips<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> cf. <https://asvis.it/approfondimenti/22-23156/la-sostenibilita-ambientale-nella-scuola-tra-il-dire-e-il-si-puo-fare>

<sup>6</sup> <https://fgfontana.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Dichiarazione-ambientale-E-574-1-ISTITUTO-FONTANA.pdf>

p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 3-17 for information on the activities carried out.

<sup>8</sup> cf.

[https://www.isprambiente.gov.it/it/archivio/notizie-e-novita-normative/notizie-ispra/2024/11/giornata-nazionale-deg li-trees](https://www.isprambiente.gov.it/it/archivio/notizie-e-novita-normative/notizie-ispra/2024/11/giornata-nazionale-deg-li-trees)

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> cf. <https://www.scuolacalo.edu.it/viva-la-festa-dellalbero/>

As we have seen, therefore, it is not only national and international activities that are fundamental for environmental education, but also a single gesture, an apparently trivial local activity. The Ministry of Education encourages any type of action that can promote environmental education. In this regard, the Network of European Sustainable Schools plays a leading role, which in Italy is embodied in the "National Network of Green Schools", officially established on 5 December 2019 and born from the joint reflection of three Roman institutes (the Liceo Orazio, the Liceo Socrate and the IC L. Fontana)<sup>11</sup>. The ASViS website publishes from year to year the updated list of schools participating in the initiatives of the green school network by province, with the aim of encouraging the participation of schools in Italy. The pedagogical impact of the National Network of Green Schools has three objectives: "to increase environmental awareness among students, teachers and families; develop transversal skills, such as critical thinking, the ability to solve complex problems and active citizenship; promote sustainable behaviours that students can carry beyond the school environment, positively influencing their communities"<sup>12</sup>. Also in this case, separate waste collection is promoted, attention to the surrounding environment and to the territory. The desire is to promote reflections regarding the environment even during lesson hours which do not necessarily have to be those of science. For this reason, the development

of National Operational Programmes (NOPs) concerning the protection of the environment and which, for this reason, are defined as "green", is also encouraged. On December 27, 2021, a notice was published aimed at the creation of laboratories for ecological education. In the "Casagrande-Cesi" Technical, Economic and Professional Institute for Services in Terni, an environmental science laboratory has been created in which kits on the greenhouse effect have been prepared, which allow students to visualize the greenhouse effect produced by carbon dioxide and which bring them closer to awareness of the effects that human actions have on the world around us<sup>13</sup>. Within the laboratory, students are not only sensitized to respect for the environment and ecology issues but can acquire an analytical and scientific approach to the knowledge of the characteristics of ecosystems.

The PON FERS project, in a more generic way, embodies the possibility of giving rise to a "green conscience" in each student<sup>14</sup> and aims to spread the practice of "Outdoor Education" in Italy, a didactic-training approach that is developed in northern European countries such as Sweden, Norway or England. Here, the schools had meticulously followed John Dewey's model of "Learning by doing",

<sup>11</sup> cf. <https://www.orizzontescuola.it/la-rete-nazionale-scuole-green-in-italia-e-gli-elementi-chiave-e-la-creazione-di-una-c> environmental-science-in-the-young-generations-in-the-attachment-an-operational-project/

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> cf. <https://www.casagrandecesi.edu.it/pagine/modulo-pon-sostenibilit-ambientale>

<sup>14</sup>cf. <https://www.orizzontescuola.it/pon-grenne-unoccasione-da-non-poerdere-per-educare-i-piu-giovani-alla-sosten>

ibility-and-ensure-us-a-better-future/

that is, to learn by doing, which is based on "a conception of experience as a relationship between man and the environment, where man is not a passive spectator, but interacts with what surrounds him"<sup>15</sup>. In Italy, Outdoor Education includes different pedagogical experiences characterized by active teaching that takes place in environments outside the school and that is based on the characteristics of the territory and the social and cultural context in which the school is located.

The European Union recognises the importance of students of all ages being able to develop knowledge, skills and behaviours to live more sustainably, change consumption patterns and contribute to a greener future<sup>16</sup>. The Union's desire is to carry out the so-called "2030 Agenda" consisting of a program of 17 sustainable development goals to be completed by the year 2030. The agenda requires the involvement of all components of society, it is no longer a purely environmental plan. Also because, at this point, sustainability must no longer be considered a purely environmental fact<sup>17</sup>. Defeating individual selfishness, overcoming the stereotypes that have made environmental education a taboo in the past century, will help not only to make the world of tomorrow a pleasant place for future generations but will also lead individual citizens to increase and improve coexistence with other human beings. Sustainability is not only an environmental factor and men who want to improve the environment do not necessarily do so for nature as such, but because they have awakened from the illusion of a world in which it was believed that garbage would disintegrate once it entered a landfill, in which it was believed that the plastic bag thrown into the sea would disappear into the infinite blue, as if it were a black hole. If the current state of the planet is the negative consequence of the profound ignorance shown by previous generations towards the health of the world they have inhabited, today the awareness of being able to do something for those who will come after us must push us to put aside selfishness and to promote initiatives that can guarantee, if not the existence of a better world, at least the resistance of the world as we have already found it, with all its imperfections.

Analytical perspective and critical reflections While numerous initiatives have been implemented in Italian schools to promote sustainability, a critical analysis reveals both the strengths and limitations of current educational strategies. Projects such as the Environmental Sustainability Education Path at the Fontana Institute and the creation of ecological laboratories as part of the PON FERS demonstrate a growing commitment to environmental awareness. However, these efforts often remain localized and lack systemic integration at the

national level.

To ensure a broader impact, it is essential to develop a coordinated national strategy that supports the replication of successful practices. This includes standardized training for educators, consistent funding mechanisms, and the integration of sustainability into all curriculum areas, not just the sciences.

<sup>15</sup> <https://titoliminori.com/articoli/a-proposito-di-outdoor-education/>

<sup>16</sup> cf. <https://education.ec.europa.eu/it/focus-topics/green-education/about-green-education>

<sup>17</sup> cf. <https://www.agenziacoesione.gov.it/comunicazione/agenda-2030-per-lo-sviluppo-sostenibile/>

The establishment of the National Network of Green Schools is a promising step, but its reach and influence need to be expanded through political support and institutional collaboration.

Nevertheless, skepticism persists regarding the tangible impact of environmental education. Critics argue that without measurable results and long-term behavioral change, such initiatives risk becoming symbolic rather than transformative. In addition, the lack of rigorous evaluation tools makes it difficult to assess the effectiveness of these programs.

Addressing these concerns requires a two-pronged approach: strengthening the pedagogical foundations of sustainability education and implementing robust monitoring frameworks. Only by combining grassroots innovation with top-down policy alignment can educational institutions truly contribute to a sustainable future.

#### Enhanced Analytical Perspective and Policy Framework Analysis

Despite the proliferation of sustainability initiatives in schools, the national policy framework remains fragmented and inconsistently applied. While the Ministry of Education supports environmental education through programs like PON FERS and the National Network of Green Schools, there is a lack of unified strategic direction and long-term funding. The absence of binding national standards for sustainability education leads to disparities in implementation across regions.

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Italian Ministry of Education. (2025). National Guidelines for Environmental Education. Rome: MIM.UNESCO. (2023). Greening Education Partnership: A global initiative for climate action. Paris: UNESCO. However, some scholars and practitioners express skepticism about the actual impact of environmental education. They argue that without measurable outcomes, such programs risk becoming symbolic rather than transformative. Moreover, the lack of rigorous evaluation tools and longitudinal studies makes it difficult to assess the behavioral changes induced by these initiatives.

To enhance the practical impact of sustainability education, it is recommended that policymakers establish national benchmarks and monitoring systems. Schools should integrate sustainability across all subjects, not just science, and provide continuous professional development for teachers. Decision-makers must ensure equitable funding and foster partnerships with local communities and NGOs to support grassroots innovation.

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