

## STEPS FORWARD – NEW APPROACHES TO ESD IN THE CARPATHIANS AND BEYOND

### *Concept and Call for Contributions for the Educational Festival*

**Overview:** Human values and morality, the complexity and interconnectedness of the world, along with the uncertainty in an ever-changing environment, are challenges we all face today. How we understand and apply these themes in education and everyday life will significantly shape the world in which our children will live. As the Red Queen says in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*: "It takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place." The Red Queen reminds us how important it is to constantly adapt and learn to keep pace with the dynamics of the modern world.

#### Steps Forward Educational Festival

At the **Steps Forward educational festival**, we will focus on how to understand this world, live in it, and advance in ways that make Earth a good place for both humans and other living beings. Participants will have the opportunity to listen to keynote speeches from thought leaders who have their fingers on the pulse of our times.

At the same time, practically focused workshops and interactive activities will familiarize participants with useful educational practices. Our compass will be *GreenComp*, the European reference framework that defines the knowledge, skills (see below), and attitudes necessary for individuals to contribute to sustainability.

**We are currently open for contributions to the educational festival, including presentations and workshops. See below for thematic areas and instructions for [submitting a request](#) by 16 September.**

**Date and location** November 12-14 in Košice | November 12-13 at the Kasárne/Kulturpak and November 14 at Pavol Jozef Šafárik University.

**Participants** The event is intended for environmental education workers from NGOs and public institutions, educators, university students, young professionals, and youth. We also expect and invite active participation from members of the Carpathian Education for Sustainable Development Expert Network (CESDEN).

**Format** Participants will be able to choose from various sessions they wish to attend between two formats:

1. **Reflection:** Lectures, presentations, and discussions from experts and thought leaders on various aspects of sustainability and sustainability education.
2. **Taster Sessions:** Interactive workshops and activities focused on practical tools and methodologies for developing environmental education and sustainability learning.

## About GreenComp

GreenComp is the [European sustainability competence framework](#) defines the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that individuals should develop to contribute to a sustainable way of life and environmental protection. It can be applied in various educational contexts – both formal and informal. This framework contributes to a common understanding of what sustainability as a competence entails.

The framework was created in response to the growing need for and support of sustainability education. It is the result of international consultations with experts and stakeholders and was developed as part of the European Green Deal, which emphasizes the importance of education in the transition to a sustainable and climate-neutral society. GreenComp was inspired by similar European frameworks such as [DigiComp](#) (for digital competencies) and [EntreComp](#) (for entrepreneurial competencies), both developed by the European Commission, which now guide the creation of educational programs.

GreenComp consists of 12 competencies, divided into 4 areas. The first area focuses on value orientations toward sustainability, the second on accepting the complexity of the world, the third on anticipating the future, and the fourth on personal, collective, and civic engagement. The thematic blocks of the festival are organized according to these four areas and twelve competencies.

## About CESDEN

The Carpathian Education for Sustainable Development Expert Network (CESDEN) was symbolically launched on December 11, 2023, on International Mountain Day. Its mission is to promote ESD-focused networking and collaborations that aim to improve the quality of life, strengthen local economies and communities, and protect the natural and cultural heritage in the Carpathians. Members of this network include representatives of protected areas, environmental education organizations, and academics, united by a shared vision of a prosperous and interconnected Carpathian region.

CESDEN was established under the Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians (the Carpathian Convention), whose signatories are the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Ukraine, and the Slovak Republic. The secretariat of the Carpathian Convention is located at the United Nations Environment Programme's Vienna International Centre.

## Organizers

The main organizers of the event are the Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention and Špirála – a network of environmental education organizations, which was founded in 2001 as a non-governmental, non-profit organization established as an interest group of legal entities. It is a member of the international Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE).

**What kind of contributions are we looking for?**

The following topics are grounded in the structure of the GreenComp framework, the European reference framework for sustainability competencies. We envision contributions relevant for each area below, which reflect key aspects of GreenComp, to ensure that the presentations and discussions contribute to a holistic understanding of sustainability and provide practical tools for addressing environmental, social, and economic challenges in an interconnected world.

**We are seeking presentations and/or workshops on:****VALUES**

**Reflecting on Personal Values:** encourage participants to reflect on their personal values and their relationship to sustainability. In this context, values are seen as a metacompetence—rather than teaching specific values; the aim is to guide participants to understand that values are shaped by social and cultural contexts. The contribution should lead participants to recognize that values are constructs they can reflect on and actively choose to prioritize in their lives.

**Promoting Justice:** explore the connection between environmental issues and social justice. The contribution could outline how improving the environment can help reduce social and economic inequalities. It may also highlight how emphasizing justice in environmental policies can address historical and systemic inequalities, contributing to sustainable and inclusive development.

**Respecting Nature:** deepen participants' relationship with the natural world by fostering empathy and profound respect for it. The presentation should emphasize that sustainability extends beyond human benefit and includes a moral and ethical responsibility to protect the rights and well-being of all living creatures.

**COMPLEXITY**

**Applying Systems Thinking:** demonstrate how systems thinking helps understand the complex relationships and interconnections between different elements of social and natural systems. The contribution could illustrate how changes in one part of a system can affect others and stress the importance of a holistic approach to addressing sustainability challenges. It should encourage participants to think in broader contexts, considering different temporal and spatial factors. The presentation may also highlight the risks of addressing problems in isolation, which can lead to unforeseen and negative consequences.

**Critical Thinking:** foster the development of critical thinking skills, helping participants analyse information, evaluate arguments, and identify assumptions behind established approaches. Critical thinking is essential for recognizing misinformation and rethinking conventional approaches to sustainability. The presentation should demonstrate how critical thinking can contribute to a deeper

understanding of environmental issues and help make informed, evidence-based decisions.

**Framing Problems:** help participants effectively identify, structure, and define problems related to sustainability. The goal is to enable participants to clearly understand the nature of the problem, determine who it affects, and identify the necessary steps to address it. The presentation should show how properly framing a problem within its broader context leads to more effective and systematic solutions, avoiding the oversimplification of sustainability challenges.

## FUTURES

**Futures Literacy:** help participants understand the future as a spectrum of possible scenarios and alternatives. The goal is to develop the ability to anticipate global megatrends, identify opportunities and risks, and create realistic visions for a sustainable future. The presentation could also lead participants to reflect on the kind of future they want and offer practical steps for realizing that vision.

**Utilizing Interdisciplinary Thinking:** demonstrate how interdisciplinary collaboration can lead to effective and innovative solutions that integrate knowledge from various fields and reflect the complexity of environmental and societal challenges. Emphasis should be placed not only on the coordination of expert knowledge and approaches from different disciplines, but also on fostering exploratory thinking, which allows for the exploration of new perspectives and the experimentation with innovative approaches.

**Dealing with Uncertainty:** highlight how to manage uncertainty and ambiguity when making decisions about the future, particularly in the context of sustainable development. The presentation should show how to make informed decisions even in situations where there are no clear answers, and how to weigh compromises between environmental, social, and economic goals.

## ACTION

**Civic Engagement:** showcase successful examples of civic engagement leading to systemic changes in sustainability. It could also demonstrate how civic participation can shape social norms, influence legislative processes and policies, and contribute to the implementation of effective and long-term environmental policies. Emphasis should be placed on how active civic movements can mobilize the public and advocate for changes that reflect ecological and societal needs.

**Collective Action:** highlight the crucial role of collaboration between diverse stakeholders in addressing complex sustainability challenges. It could show how effective coordination among groups with different interests and expertise leads to sustainable solutions and how to successfully manage the challenges of aligning different goals. Emphasis should be placed on the process of creating synergies and shared solutions.



**Personal Initiative:** demonstrate how individuals, through personal initiative and creativity, contribute to addressing environmental and societal challenges. The presentation should showcase diverse stories of entrepreneurial individuals who, with their innovative approaches, create solutions that support sustainability.

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**How to Submit a Request for a Contribution?**

Please [submit your interest in attending and/or actively contributing to the Steps Forward educational festival by completing this spreadsheet](#). There are separate columns for expressing interest in attending, delivering a presentation, and/or co-organizing a workshop. **Please submit your requests by September 16.**

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**How is the event financed?**

The event is supported by the Open Society Foundation Bratislava within the Stronger Roots for Civil Society Program. The program's goal is to increase the resilience of civil society organizations and their collaborating partners, strengthen their social capital, and integrate them into the communities and societies in which they operate. The project is funded by the European Union under the Citizenship, Equality, Rights, and Values Program.

The participation of experts from the Carpathian countries is made possible thanks to the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Cyprus, which supports the establishment of the CESDEN network and the sharing of good practices in sustainability education between Cyprus and the Carpathian countries.