

Chapter 6

Sustainability checklist

Youth and Environment Europe (YEE) is a platform of European youth organisations aiming to encourage young people to be involved in environmental protection. The following tools are used for supporting sustainability in the daily life of the organisation:

- ▶ a sustainability policy: guiding rules on how the network should organise the activities in the most environmental way, available at <https://bit.ly/2CSgWRd>;
 - ▶ eco-mapping the office: a self-evaluation tool to analyse and manage the environmental performance of the organisation, involving all employees in the office;
 - ▶ internal audit: a tool to review the work of the organisation (for example the work of the secretariat and the board) and monitor if the organisation follows environmental principles and sustainable policies.
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This chapter is about how to be sustainable while learning about sustainability. Whether you are running a youth club, leading a local project, or organising an international youth event, this checklist will help you to keep in mind some practical steps for sustainability in youth activities.

The tips and suggestions have been divided into three different sections:

- ▶ management and working practices;
- ▶ office and youth space management;
- ▶ local and international youth gatherings, exchanges and other projects.

You can use these sections as a checklist at different stages of planning and running your projects or actions.

The sources used for this chapter were Smart CSOs (2011) and DARE Greener.

MANAGEMENT AND WORKING PRACTICES

- ▶ talk about your organisation's values. Strive to cultivate and endorse intrinsic values: values which are important in themselves, like co-operation, equality or a sense of community;
- ▶ be mindful about the learning processes inside your organisation. Do they involve everyone equally? Do people feel empowered? Do they feel safe?;
- ▶ practise consensus and democratic decision making;
- ▶ create an inspiring shared vision for your organisation about the future of society. Communicating the group's hopes for a more equal, happier, less resource-hungry world will strengthen the culture of sustainability in your organisation;
- ▶ evaluate and reflect on your group's sustainability achievements based on targets you have agreed upon;
- ▶ choose an ethical bank for your organisational account, which does not invest in ecologically or socially irresponsible businesses;
- ▶ collaborate with other organisations and groups. Be aware of existing structures or institutions which encourage competition and fragmentation. Build networks and be part of a global movement for sustainability;
- ▶ when seeking funding, particularly from private companies, check that the company or source of funds is ethically and environmentally responsible.

MANAGEMENT OF OFFICE AND YOUTH SPACE

Office stationery and materials

- ▶ purchase office material from socially and environmentally responsible local companies;
- ▶ choose pens with no plastic, use refillable or eco-friendly markers, stamps, glue, tape, etc.;
- ▶ choose fair-trade and organic cotton T-shirts and bags for campaigning purposes.

Setting up a youth space

- ▶ look for green alternatives when furnishing a youth space: use second-hand or locally made eco-sourced furniture;
- ▶ make your own furniture, rugs, mugs, etc. using natural or recycled materials: explore techniques with participants, organise a skills workshop, get in touch with local craftsmen or recycling groups;
- ▶ if you have to buy new furniture, search for products with the FSC label (Forest Stewardship Council) or equivalent certification, to indicate wood from forests with sustainable forest management;
- ▶ for cooking, you could build a slow cooker or outdoor wood burning oven. This will develop new skills and expertise, and save on electricity or gas;
- ▶ grow your own food by establishing a vegetable plot, or growing vegetables in pots around the youth centre. You can arrange to collect rainwater from the building and use it in the garden;
- ▶ make a compost heap and compost your kitchen waste, to be used in the garden;
- ▶ use water-saving toilet tanks;
- ▶ support smaller organisations by providing office space if you have extra space in your office: advertise it as a communal space for like-minded organisations;
- ▶ if you share your venue/office with other organisations, fix a day where the whole house makes a “sustainability boost”, e.g. by setting up recycling bins, digging or planting the garden, or doing an audit of energy use;
- ▶ take part in local Earth Days and environmental days by offering your space for community programmes.

Information and technology

- ▶ chose a green internet provider if available, or look for a company that has an ethical policy or a record of supporting social projects;
- ▶ if you buy new equipment, look for a high energy efficiency rating; check that the companies you buy from are not involved in activities which damage the environment or local communities (e.g. mining);
- ▶ make sure that computers are always turned off if not being used (e.g. overnight);
- ▶ use open-source software on your computers;
- ▶ use Creative Commons to share your work and make it accessible;
- ▶ be socially and environmentally aware in online communication; promote solidarity and sustainability wherever possible.

Water use

- ▶ use a sink for washing dishes, rather than buying a dishwasher;
- ▶ use a plug for the sink while washing up;
- ▶ look at toilet flushing: is there an option to do a half flush?;
- ▶ in summer, store tap water in bottles in the fridge; avoid running the tap to get cold water.

Energy use

- ▶ if you have a choice of energy providers, look into those which use the largest proportion of renewable sources;
- ▶ use low-energy light bulbs;
- ▶ before using any electronic items, weigh up whether they are really needed;

- ▶ use air conditioning only when necessary;
- ▶ avoid unnecessary heating of meeting rooms or other spaces: consider putting on warmer clothes instead! Set room temperature a little lower, if possible;
- ▶ use the light economically and intelligently. There is no need to light the whole room if you only work in one corner. Use daylight instead of electric light wherever possible;
- ▶ block up any draughts and make sure the building and the rooms are properly insulated. This can save a huge amount of energy!

Waste management and recycling

- ▶ try to avoid throwing things into waste (landfill). Use reusable mugs, plates, bowls and cutlery instead of plastic ones;
- ▶ choose items with less packaging;
- ▶ reuse and mend anything you can;
- ▶ separate all the waste you can recycle, including organic waste;
- ▶ put up signs to help visitors and new staff learn the “recycling rules”.

Paper use

- ▶ try not to print unless really necessary;
- ▶ for printing anything non-official, use scrap paper, and print double-sided;
- ▶ for official letters, contracts, etc. print double-sided;
- ▶ any paper which is printed on one side only should be reused as scrap or for the next time you print. You can also use single-sided letters you receive from outside sources;
- ▶ reuse envelopes by labelling over the old address;
- ▶ edit documents before printing to decrease the number of pages (cut any unnecessary text, make thinner margins, use a smaller font, etc.).

Cleaning

- ▶ use environmentally friendly products for cleaning and washing up. Look into making your own cleaning products, e.g. use vinegar, lemons or baking soda;
- ▶ if the building is cleaned through a company, try to negotiate the products they use;
- ▶ instead of using unhealthy air freshener in toilets, make a natural air freshener by mixing water with some alcohol and essential oils in an empty spray bottle;
- ▶ make sure that cleaning responsibilities are shared by everyone in the group.

MEETINGS AND GATHERINGS

Travelling and transportation

- ▶ encourage participants to reduce flights, avoid connecting flights and take long-distance coaches or trains instead;
- ▶ when budgeting for travel costs, allow for a higher price limit for train and coach travel;
- ▶ use telephone and/or video conferences instead of travelling to long-distance meetings whenever possible;
- ▶ if you are travelling with the group, use public transport, bicycles or walking for short distances;
- ▶ discourage travelling by car. Encourage car sharing if a car is the only available option;
- ▶ organise car pick-up and car share for participants if public transport is not available to the venue.

Choosing venues

- ▶ try to choose venues which have an ecological approach to energy, water and catering;
- ▶ look at transport links: will participants be able to arrive and get around using public transport?;

- ▶ support eco-villages and sustainable communities by bringing projects there;
- ▶ look for possible links to the local community, involve local people in your project, and use local resources: experts, food and services;
- ▶ make sure that all participants understand and follow the guidelines for energy, water and use of resources.

During the meeting

- ▶ agree with participants beforehand about the principles you want to guide work at the meeting. This might cover behaviour, use of resources, etc.;
- ▶ be conscious of the “cost” of your work to the environment: use flip charts economically, writing on both sides, and limit the use of projector and laptops, turning them off when not in use;
- ▶ consider having your meeting outdoors if the weather allows;
- ▶ try to ensure that the local community benefits economically, socially and environmentally both during and after the meeting;
- ▶ reduce paper use as far as possible. Instead of printing copies for everyone, put all general information up in a visible place, in large print, or point participants to electronic versions of the information;
- ▶ use paper tape and write the names of participants on it with a marker, instead of using plastic name tags;
- ▶ encourage participants to bring their own pens, writing pads and mugs.

Catering food and drinks

- ▶ provide healthy, local, seasonal food, cooked at the venue, if possible;
- ▶ source food locally: support fresh, organic, small-scale, local agriculture holdings and avoid processed, packaged food;
- ▶ provide mainly vegetarian food, with vegan options;
- ▶ as snacks, provide local, seasonal fruits, nuts or baked goods. Avoid snacks made by multinational corporations;
- ▶ choose fair-trade tea and coffee, local herbal and fruit tea, or cereal coffee;
- ▶ order food quantities carefully to avoid leftovers;
- ▶ choose tap water or locally made herbal tea and lemonade instead of bottled water or beverages;
- ▶ avoid buying food or drinks packaged in tins, cans and combined material packaging;
- ▶ for an evening out, choose a restaurant based on its social and environmental policies;
- ▶ do not use throw-away plastic cups.

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