

RESPECT FOR RESOURCES **OR TOWARDS A NEW PARADIGM IN EDUCATION** **IN ROMANIA**

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ABSTRACT. In a world dominated, on the one hand, by the polysemantism of the notion of crisis, and on the other, by the irrational consumption of resources, in the frantic rush for material well-being, the introduction in some schools in Romania and the Republic of Moldova of the optional course *Respect for resources* aims to break new ground in the awareness of the role of sustainable development, both for current and future generations. From one year to the next, the propagation, among young people, of the 17 objectives of sustainable development (OSDs), will, in the long term, have a major influence in the transformation of mentalities at society level, going, this time, from the educable to the other age groups (adults and the elderly, respectively). The present study aims to highlight, in a critical but constructive manner, the steps followed in the establishment of this new integrated discipline, the specific competencies and operational objectives, the organization of the contents and their relevance, the growing impact on school communities in our country and the perspectives of implementation at school unit level in Romania and the Republic of Moldova. The success of the project depends, to an overwhelming extent, on the teacher's awareness and knowledge to convince the decision-making factors of the school of the need to integrate such an optional course in the School Decision Curriculum or in the Local Development Curriculum, both at secondary school and at high school level.

Keywords: crisis, school decision curriculum, sustainable development, respect, resources, sustainability.

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG. In einer Welt, die einerseits vom polysemantischen Begriff der *Krise* und andererseits vom irrationalen Verbrauch von Ressourcen im rasenden Streben nach materiellem Reichtum beherrscht wird, soll die Einführung des fakultativen Unterrichtsfachs *Respekt vor den Ressourcen* an einigen Schulen in Rumänien und der Republik Moldau neue Wege im Hinblick auf die Sensibilisierung für die Rolle der nachhaltigen Entwicklung sowohl für die heutigen als auch für die künftigen Generationen eröffnen. Die Verbreitung der 17 Ziele für nachhaltige Entwicklung (Ziele für nachhaltige Entwicklung - Sustainable Development Goals, SDGs) unter jungen Menschen wird langfristig einen großen Einfluss auf den Mentalitätswandel in der gesamten Gesellschaft haben, dieses Mal von den Gebildeten zu den anderen Altersgruppen (Erwachsene, bzw. ältere Menschen). Die vorliegende Studie soll - manchmal auf kritische, aber konstruktive Weise - die Schritte aufzeigen, die bei der Einführung dieses neuen integrierten Fachs unternommen wurden, die spezifischen Kompetenzen und operativen Ziele, die Organisation der Inhalte und ihre Relevanz, die zunehmende Auswirkung auf die Schulgemeinschaften in unserem Land und die Aussichten auf eine Umsetzung in möglichst vielen Schulen in Rumänien und der Republik Moldau. Der Erfolg des Projekts hängt in hohem Maße von dem Bewusstsein und den Kenntnissen der Lehrkraft ab, der die Entscheidungsträger der Schule von der Notwendigkeit der Integration eines solchen Wahlfachs in den Lehrplan auf der Grundlage eines Schulbeschlusses oder in den Lehrplan für die lokale Entwicklung sowohl in der Sekundarstufe als auch in der Oberstufe überzeugen muss.

Stichworte: Krise, Lehrplan durch Schulentcheidung, nachhaltige Entwicklung, Respekt, Ressourcen, Nachhaltigkeit.

1. Introduction

In the history of humanity, periods of crisis were good opportunities to act. Intelligent actions, based on understanding the causes and the regional and global context of manifestation, ensured the resilience of the social system, in particular, but also of the geosystem, as a whole. In the face of the major changes taking place at planetary level, the most appropriate strategy is that of sustainable development, realized and applied, day by day, by as many citizens as possible, responsible not only for their own destiny, but also for the entire planet. Now is a good time for creating a better world. Schools represent the ideal environment where young people can understand the problems that humanity is facing (*climate change, food waste, waste management, consumption behaviours* etc.).

They, along with their mentors, can find viable solutions to these issues, applicable both in the short term as well as in the medium and long term.

2. The genesis of ideas

In order not to remain a form without a foundation, the concept of sustainability, beyond the need to be known and understood at community level, needs a wider and permanent framework for implementation, and this could be identified, initially, at pre-university educational institution level in our country and in schools in the Republic of Moldova.

The optional course *Respect for resources* was created by two NGOs from Cluj: Food Waste Combat and Clujul Sustenabil, being supported by Raiffeisen Bank, as the main sponsor, and by LIDL Romania (<https://foodwastecombat.com/proiecte/>).

Since the team involved in the development of the *Respect for resources* project was not a large one, thus being unable to support trainings in all schools in Romania, what seemed as the best course of action was the creation of an educational guide, which could have a major impact in the long-term by providing quality information both to students and parents, as well as to teachers and other people interested in ecological issues.

Also, the textbook can be a credible and accessible source for the development of desirable skills, attitudes and behaviors in a society still focused on the excessive and irrational consumption of resources. In this sense, activities such as: *soil health and compost, practicing a new consumption habit for students to practice for 21 days, reducing food waste, the selective waste collection guide, the ecological footprint of food, fast fashion or slow fashion* etc.

3. The materialization of the project and the impact on school communities in our country and in the Republic of Moldova

The Cluj Regional Food Bank Association entered the *Respect for resources* project in September 2020 in the Raiffeisen Communities funding competition, in which over 100 projects participated. Of these, only 11 were winners, including *Respect for resources*, thus increasing the chances that the project will materialize and reach as many students as possible. Both organizations aimed to create a framework for non-formal education, and the jury appreciated, in particular, the social impact that this project can have at the level of each community, not only by caring for the environment, but also by developing skills which aim both

to preserve and value resources and to acquire the status of an active citizen (<https://ambasadasustenabilitatii.ro/respect-pentru-resurse-despre-materia-care-schimba-relatia-elevilor-cu-sustenabilitatea/>).

The 2021-2022 school year marks a first in Romanian pre-university education, with 400 students from 5 towns in our country being the direct beneficiaries of the *Respect for resources project*, under the guidance of ten teaching staff. Of these, 3 taught the optional course in the form of the School Decision Curriculum (SDC), and 7 included different topics of the optional course in the leadership classes.

Compared to the previous school year, in 2022-2023, the number of students studying, fully or partially, the contents of the optional *Respect for resources* course increased almost 3 times, reaching over 1100. Also, the number of towns in the schools to which this optional has reached is currently 17, both from Romania and from the Republic of Moldova. With regard to the number of teachers involved, this too experienced an increase of almost 3 times, out of the 29, 13 teaching the optional, this school year, in the form of the School Decision Curriculum or the Local Development Curriculum (LDC).

To the extent that the pace of implementation of the respective project will be maintained, at least at the current level, it can be estimated that, in the next 3 years, *Respect for resources* will be present in over 450 towns/villages in our country and in the Republic of Moldova, involving over 29,000 students and almost 800 teachers (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Evolution and prognosis for 2021-2026

School year	Number of towns/villages	Number of students	Number of teachers
2021-2022	5	400	10
2022-2023	17	1100	29
2025-2026*	469	29 700	783

Source (for 2021-2022 and 2022-2023): -Georgescu, A. – RPR - respect pentru resurse <respectpenturesurse@gmail.com>

4. Specific competencies and operational objectives

According to *The Guidelines for Developing, Updating and Assessing the National Curriculum* competencies are organized sets of knowledge and skills acquired through learning, allowing the identification and solving in various contexts of problems specific to a sphere of interest (https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/DPC_31.10.19_consultare.pdf).

For the *Respect for resources* optional course, no general competences have been established, but only specific competences, as the contents are to be presented at the level of a single year of study, although they could be organized and reorganized, so that they can be adapted, gradually, from the 5th grade to the 12th grade. Therefore, we consider it absolutely necessary to establish the general competences from which the specific competences can later be derived.

The authors of the *Respect for resources* optional course with the subtitle: *A different education for sustainability guide*, structured the specific competences by referring to the four components of the cognitive and socio-emotional development of students: knowledge/information (*What should they know?*), skills (*What should they be able to do?*), attitudes (*How should they feel?*) and behaviors (*How should they behave? / What habits to have?*), correlating them with the operational objectives circumscribed to each lesson. Unfortunately, their wording and content are sometimes inaccurate, as they do not express observable and measurable behaviors (examples from the Teacher's Guide, Călin, D., Ciobanu, N., Georgescu, A., Gui, C., Moldovan, C., & Perneș, I., 2021b: *to have knowledge about the different types of climate, to know what the water cycle is in nature, to know how humanity uses resources of water, value water consumption* etc.). It is necessary to radically revise them, at the level of each lesson, to be truly useful in the evaluative strategies chosen by the teachers who teach this optional.

In other words, the operational objectives aim at a qualitative change, and not just a quantitative one, embodied in the student's ability to prove that he or she has learned a new logical operation, a new concept or another learning algorithm. Also, the operational objectives must contain the observable behavior, specified by an active verb, that targets the learning outcomes (*What?*), the level of performance considered sufficient for the student to demonstrate the observable behavior (*How much?*), as well as the conditions under which the behavior can be demonstrated (*How?*). On the other hand, the operational objectives in the affective sphere cannot be expressed, most of them, in operational terms, not allowing the measurement of performance after a learning situation (examples from the Teacher's Guide, Călin, D., Ciobanu, N., Georgescu, A., Gui, C., Moldovan, C., & Perneș, I., 2021b: *to feel intrigued by the complexity of the factors that influence the carbon cycle, to want to know more about air quality, be surprised by the properties of methane and the contribution to the greenhouse effect* etc.).

5. The contents of the optional course

The *Respect for resources* optional course is organized into: 7 chapters, 28 lessons and 6 assessments, being designed in such a way that experiential learning constitutes the framework for carrying out the teaching-learning-assessment activity. The concrete experience thus represents the starting point in the exploration of new contents, followed by observations and reflections on the evoked experience, the formation of new concepts, based on the observations and reflections previously analyzed, and the last stage is the testing of the new concepts, through the transfer and their application (a new action plan). In detail, the structure of the optional course is as follows (**Table 2**):

Table 2. The contents of the optional course

Chapters	Lessons	Assessments
1. The planet and about sustainable development	Introduction to caring for our natural resources	
	Sustainability and sustainable development	
	Climate	
2. Air and water – vital elements	The carbon cycle – a deregulated natural process	
	The carbon cycle – how we restore the balance	
	The methane cycle	
	The water cycle in nature	
3. The riches of nature	The planet's water resources	<i>1. The objectives of sustainable development (OSDs) on our street</i>
	Soil – Black gold	
	Soil health and compost	
	Soil biodiversity	
	Aquatic and terrestrial biodiversity	
4. How do we protect what we have?	Ecosystems in the service of humanity	<i>2. All stages count!</i>
	Dependence of human society on the environment	
	Migration of populations	
	The air pollution	
	Water pollution	
	Soil pollution	
	Biodiversity reduction – Anthropogenic impact	
Biodiversity reduction – The impact of climate change		
5. A new balance	Degradation of the natural environment and human health	<i>3. Fast fashion or slow fashion?</i>
	Dependence of the economy on the environment	
	How we reduce waste	
	Food waste	
	The ecological footprint of food	

Chapters	Lessons	Assessments
6. Hello? The human-nature connection	The economy of the future, the economy of systemic balance	
	12 characters at the dawn of the Climate Crisis	
	Urban gardening or indoor gardening?	
7. Experience-Learning		4. <i>With the documentary in the analysis</i>
		5. <i>A picture of sustainability</i>
		6. <i>Letter to you</i>

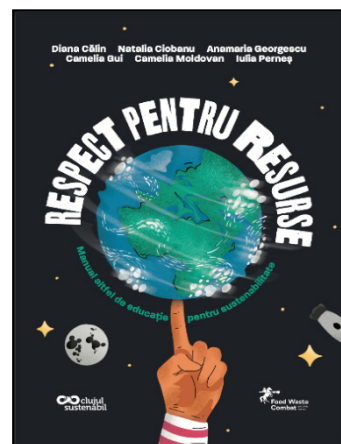
Source:-Călin, D., Ciobanu, N., Georgescu, A., Gui, C., Moldovan, C., & Perneș, I. (2021a)

It can be observed that the teaching of the contents calls for an interdisciplinary approach, the sphere of geography frequently interfering with biology, ecology, economics and chemistry. Since the optional is offered from the 5th to the 12th grade, we believe that a rethinking of the organization of the contents would be welcome for the following years, so that there is a correlation between them and the cognitive and procedural acquisitions from the compulsory subjects.

6. Conclusions

The *Respect for resources* optional, to which more than 1100 students from 17 towns and villages in Romania and the Republic of Moldova have access in the 2022-2023 school year, under the guidance of 29 teachers, aims at both the interdisciplinary approach to the contents and the stimulation of curiosity, of critical and lateral thinking, but also of collaborative activities among students. At the same time, it is a pioneering activity regarding the introduction into the school curriculum in Romania and the Republic of Moldova of the notion of sustainability, associated with that of sustainable development (already present in the contents of the 10th and 11th grades from the Geography discipline in Romanian education).

In other words, the course is a source of information and education for the public interested in new concepts and actions related to



the management of resources and the increasingly complex interactions between the environment, economy and society.

Equally, it is part of the trend of a transdisciplinary approach to the ecological perspective in education observed at a global level, the activities within the school can be correlated and supplemented with extracurricular activities and thematic camps, with the declared aim not only to understand the concept of sustainable development, but also the application of the principles that govern sustainability, as Camelia Moldovan, the project coordinator, claims: *The RPR (Respect for resources) Manual creates a space for discussion and reflection on how we relate to nature's resources and our actions. I believe that this space is vital to be part of the education system, because these educational discussions have the power to produce a paradigm shift. One to remind us how important our relationship with nature is and to invest more in it* (<https://ziarulfaclia.ro/respect-pentru-resurse-manual-de-educatie-pentru-sustenabilitate-realizat-de-doua-ong-uri-clujene/>).

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