

# “LET’S MAKE OUR SCHOOL A GROWING PLACE” PROJECT OF SANTHIÀ



Addressed SDGs:



Image: Enrica Ardissino

## > OBJECTIVES

*Let's make our school a growing place!* is the name of a project in Santhià, Italy, which took place in 2020 with the intention of resuming it again in late 2021. During that time, six green walls were constructed inside a school yard in collaboration with teachers and students. The aim of this project is to educate pupils on the importance of biodiversity and nature-based solutions by raising awareness and offering knowledge on caring for and respecting nature. The goal is to help students understand the relevance and multiple benefits of nature-based solutions in responding to sustainability challenges the city faces, such as climate change impacts, biodiversity loss, deteriorating environmental quality. At the same time, they also learn how nature-based solutions offer economic opportunities and foster social well-being.

## > DESCRIPTION

In close collaboration with the Ministry of Education, the project was funded for developing the vertical gardens by the municipality of Santhià for developing vertical gardens, in a primary school (Collodi Primary school) with close collaboration of the Ministry of Education. The estimated funding obtained for the project was about 5000 Euros, out of which some money will be also used to create other green areas in some other neighbourhood schools of Istituto Comprensivo Sant'Ignazio da Santhià, in the

neighbourhood. Santhià being a small city, Santhià saw close and effective collaboration with local authorities, especially the education department. The school has good contacts and relationships with the authorities and they have been quite supportive in the implementation of the project. The education department is keen on tackling the issues of climate change and nature conservation as well as understands the importance of early education for children in this field. The project was initiated by a call from European SchoolNet, in which some local teachers from the schools were invited to design learning scenarios for including nature-based solutions in the school curriculum.

Through this project, the 8 year old pupils could learn about the concept of sustainable development, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the importance of urban greening for citizens living in cities as well as the meaning of nature-based solutions. Even at this early age, the students began to comprehend the relatively complex issues around sustainability and understand the significant role of plants for all living organisms. Several interactive methods to engage the students such as field experimentation, observation and comparison between peers. The teaching materials were designed to be compelling and motivating, helping to build a curious and conscious attitude in the students towards nature. However, due to ongoing restrictions during the COVID pandemic, many of the activities were carried out

at home using online platforms for communication. The citizens in general and especially the parents of the school students were highly interested in the topic of nature-based solutions and actively participated in the educational proposal and the initiative itself. A feedback mechanism was put in place to gather inputs and feedback from the parents incorporate it in the initiative. Thereafter, the learning scenarios were presented in the Piedmont regional school, encouraging them to take on some good practices and lessons learnt and implement the learning scenarios in their school as well.

### > CHALLENGES

The restrictions applied during the COVID pandemic led to all school education activities being moved to virtual learning platforms. Clearly, the project would have been much more effective if the pupils could have actively engaged in setting up the green walls at the school themselves instead of learning about the multiple benefits of nature-based solutions such as green walls from their homes.

### > OPPORTUNITIES

There was a huge turnout and active engagement of many citizens, especially teachers, parents and relatives - in total more than 1000 residents of the city of the size of 9000 inhabitants. The school is considered an important institution for the community and the support gathered by the citizens proved that.

### > LESSONS LEARNED

The project lead Ardissino said that "it is important to reach out and collaborate with local authorities, colleagues and all school staff because the collaboration and participation of all in the nature-based solutions theme is indispensable for moving forward towards a conscious attitude towards the environment." She also suggested the need to propose and use captivating and engaging activities for young pupils to get inspired and apply a 'learning by doing' approach to create authentic and effective learning.

### > INSPIRATION FOR OTHERS

The learning Scenarios can also be employed in other schools as well and with a small budget the provision of nature-based solutions teaching and practical experimentation can be put into practice to help students of all ages to learn about the role of nature in our daily lives and its importance for society. Learning scenarios can be highly inspirational for any school in any country to adopt to teach and encourage students of all age groups to learn about sustainability and the underlying importance of nature in our surroundings.



Image: Enrica Ardissino

### FURTHER INFORMATION

All fact sheets were produced from questionnaires and interviews conducted by the ICLEI team. Contact ICLEI Europe for more information or access it on NetworkNature <https://networknature.eu/product/22217>

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