



BEST PRACTICE IN ADULT EDUCATION FOR A JUST TRANSITION

“Energy Superheroes”
Mural at “Josif Pančić” Elementary
School in Belgrade

JULY 2024



Co-funded by
the European Union

“Energy Superheroes”

– Mural at “Josif Pančić” Elementary School in Belgrade

Context and Initiative Details

Name of the initiative	<u>“Energy Superheroes” – mural painted at Josif Pančić school in Belgrade</u>
Geographical scope	Local
Sources of funding	European Climate Foundation
Duration of the initiative	Started in 2022. Josif Pančić initiative is over, however there is currently another project in progress, where the work is done with highschool students in Lazarevac.
Target audience	Local community (especially from towns dependant on coal mining), schools, teachers, parents and children
Social justice focus area	Just Transition
Goals of the initiative	Serbia, heavily affected by air pollution, needs to set concrete targets and action plans to move away from coal towards renewable energy sources. A mural depicts transition from dirty fossil fuels to reliable, safe and clean renewable energy sources. The “Energy Superheroes” Coaly, Sunny and Windy in the mural come to life thanks to augmented reality mobile phone app. The goal of the initiative is to involve the local community, primarily young people, with the complex topic of coal phaseout via and fun and interactive activity such as mural painting. In this way they are inspired to actively engage with the vision of their own ‘green’ future, and as such ensure a just energy transition.

Good Practices Description

Stakeholder engagement in the process

The driving force of the interactive mural is the informal group of artists and environmental activists ‘1+1=3’. The group was initially contracted by the Brussels based NGO coalition Climate Action Network (CAN) Europe to depict a just energy transition via a comic which explains how coal phaseout could happen until 2050, the date by which Serbia and other regional countries committed to decarbonise. Together artists, partners and schools proposed an engaging and simple way to introduce citizens with the opportunities that a just energy transition to renewables can offer. The comic gave birth to the Energy Superheroes, which were then brought to the community via three air-cleaning interactive murals: 1. Josif Pančić elementary school in Belgrade (2022), 2. Rudovci elementary school in Rudovci (2023) and 3. Lazarevac Gymnasium secondary school in Lazarevac (2024).

Methodology used (if available)

The mural absorbs air pollution (using specific paint Boysen KnoxOut) and promotes discussions among students, teachers and parents about energy transition from fossil fuels to renewable energies. The mural, painted by local artists and pupils at Josif Pančić elementary school in Belgrade, depicts the transition through superhero characters that come to life thanks to an Augmented Reality mobile app. Just Transition is symbolized by the bridge over the river depicted on the mural. Years marked on the bridge represent the stages of the energy transition process towards a cleaner and safer future. The painted surface covers 73 square meters of the school wall, and absorbs the same amount of smog particles (nitrogen oxides) as 73 trees (using a special type of wall paint). While painting the mural, the children and teachers talked about the causes of air pollution, decarbonization and transition to renewable energy sources. The story in the mural, inspired by the “Energy Superheroes” comic book, shows Sunny charging a phone with solar panels, Windy supplying light to a building, and Coaly turning into a diamond when he stays in the ground. In a simple and fun way, the mural conveys that the transition to renewable energies must be fair, supporting the most vulnerable people, and involving the local community, especially from towns that depend on coal mining, such as Lazarevac, Smederevo and Obrenovac in Serbia.

Teaching approaches (if available)

- Using participatory learning approach by making children, artists, teachers and partners active in creating and intervening in the public space.
- Prompting discussions between teachers, parents, children and the community on just transition, which was part of mural creation process.
- Using different media (comic books and mobile app) to make learning about just transition more interactive, fun and engaging for children and the local community.

Challenges and outcomes

Key factors contributing to success

- The initiative is adjusted to the needs of local communities in coal mining areas, by developing a mural which is contextualized and relevant to the community where coal mining is dominant source of income. Additionally, the initiative targets national problems and global goals. Towns throughout Serbia are often at the top of the list of the most polluted places, yet Serbia continues to source 80% of electricity from coal thermal power plants. The state hasn't set clear goals to map out the next steps of the energy transition towards 100% renewables. At the same time, global goals related to Just Transition framework are addressed. This initiative is a way to raise awareness within the local communities on the national and global issues, and to inform of the current stages of development, but in a way adjusted to local communities' needs.
- Participatory approach which empowers children, parents, teachers and communities to be active agents of change intervening directly in the public space that surrounds them.

Encountered difficulties and challenges

Coal phaseout is a complex topic both politically and socially. In 2020 CAN Europe initiated research on local perspectives and attitudes on the subject. The research was the base for initiating a communications campaign in Lazarevac, the administrative and production centre of coal production in Serbia. In 2020 CAN Europe, together with its member Belgrade Open School attempted to present research findings in Lazarevac, and to open up a debate on the topic, introducing the just transition concept. This was not possible to achieve at the time due to political narrative which still hang on to coal as the energy source of the future. This is why the first mural was painted in a Belgrade school, which was open to feature the, at the time, 'controversial' topic. It was a pilot that later paved the way to Rudocvi, the cradle of coal mining in Serbia, and then Lazarevac. Challenges that the artists encountered when painting the mural mainly relate to the weather. It's also challenging to manage large amounts of excited children, who all want to be involved and use spray graffiti to leave their name on the wall. This means that mural painting is not the usual process for artists who simply paint. It's an interactive activity that took more time and energy than we initially expected. The pilot mural at Josif Pančić was a learning curve for the future murals. Giving a designated space for the children to leave their mark on the wall, either via stencils, painting or graffiti, is the solution to also ensuring that the actual mural is not damaged.

Recommendations

At the micro level, creating and intervening in public spaces and relying on participatory approach can in itself serve as a civic education initiative. It raises awareness on certain issues, and empowers those involved to take action and contribute to changing their environments.

At the meso level, it is important to form partnerships between schools and NGO's which allows institutions to identify the needs of the specific community and consider how ALE can be used to address these needs, sending messages important to the specific community.

At the macro level, CSO's can put pressure on governments by using public spaces to raise awareness on the issue of just transition, indicating what is the current stage of national development, and what issues still need to be addressed.

Impact

Impact is achieved directly on the quality of air as the mural itself absorbs dangerous materials, but also more broadly through raising their awareness on the issues of just transition, enabling participation, and empowering community members to become agents of change in their own environment.

