Protocols for Ecological Practices

Echo-Logic Project: Youth facing the challenge of leading sustainability and the fight against climate change

Index

Introduction

This document provides a guide to protocols for ecological best practices for organizations in general, especially youth organizations, covering key aspects from internal management to community engagement. The aim is to offer a reference framework to strengthen environmental practices that preserve and protect the natural environment.

General Framework for Youth Sustainability

This section highlights some common principles linked to sustainability and environmental preservation:

- **Decarbonization:** reduction of emissions through sustainable mobility, digitalization, and slow tourism.

- **Land stewardship:** active participation in conservation, sustainable agriculture, and rural revitalization.

- **Circular economy:** focused on the so-called "four Rs": reduce, reuse, repair, and recycle.

- **Environmental education:** continuous training, youth participation, and territorial awareness-raising.

- **Green innovation:** digitalization and technologies for water management and regenerative agriculture.

These protocols aim not only to reduce the environmental impact of youth organizations, but also to rejuvenate environmental entities by adapting them to the languages, dynamics, rhythms, and forms of participation of new generations:

- **Participation:** primarily in decision-making processes, not merely as occasional volunteer support.

- **Language:** clear, visual, and digital, adapted to social networks and collaborative platforms.

- **Organizational flexibility:** combining in-person activities with online formats.

- **Spaces for experimentation:** essential so that young people can propose, test, and lead initiatives.

- **Recognition:** learning also has a "non-formal" dimension, consisting of acknowledging competencies acquired through practice.

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Sustainable Digitalization Protocol

The purpose of this protocol is to reduce, as much as possible, the administrative and communicative environmental impact of organizations through actions focused on sustainable digitalization:

- Integrate the organizations' technological resources by managing connected data centers to store files, run applications, and access IT services.

- Adopt cloud storage systems with data centers that use renewable energy and implement active emission-reduction policies.

- Replace physical files with shared digital repositories such as Drive, Nextcloud, SharePoint, or other platforms.

- Apply cybersecurity and data protection protocols to safeguard information.

- Prioritize the use of digital resources for posters, manuals, dossiers, invitations, certificates, registration documents, and displays.

- Focus on dissemination through social media to minimize the need for physical materials (Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, Telegram, etc.).

- Promote digital collaborative tools for workshops and joint work.

- Reduce travel by holding operational meetings, internal assemblies, and working groups in hybrid formats through tools such as Zoom, Meet, and Teams.

- Avoid pollution during essential travel by using carpooling, public transport, and bicycles.

Sustainable and Local Food Protocol (KM-0)

Sustainable food systems are key to reducing CO_2 emissions and therefore must be incorporated into the agendas of organizations committed to environmental preservation. In this regard, several simple and concrete actions can be adopted:

- Prioritize short supply chains, meaning reducing the distance food travels, which significantly lowers CO_2 emissions associated with transportation.

- Promote direct relationships between producers and consumers, encouraging fair pricing.

- Support the circular economy, avoiding the productive concentration of large logistics hubs.

- Prioritize organic agriculture and livestock farming: organic production avoids synthetic chemical products, promotes animal welfare, and supports natural cycles that enhance soil fertility and biodiversity, resulting in healthier food and contributing to CO_2 reduction. In addition, organic livestock farming facilitates landscape management—especially through extensive grazing—which helps keep natural areas open and prevents forest fires.

- Eliminate single-use plastics by banning disposable bottles, cups, plates, and cutlery at all activities, and using reusable or certified compostable tableware when reuse is not possible.

- Promote sustainable food practices through participatory activities and training workshops.

- Use the organization's own communication channels to promote local businesses and sustainable food options.

Territorial Environmental Education Protocol

The purpose of this protocol is to connect young people with their territory so they can explore their sense of belonging, learn about the local environment, and raise awareness of the need to protect this cultural and natural setting. To this end, the following actions are proposed:

- Organize guided visits to rural and natural environments, adapted to different levels of difficulty.

- Prioritize mindful hiking, encouraging landscape observation, silence, active listening, and respect for ecosystems.

- Design thematic routes focused on water, forests, agriculture, wildfires, biodiversity, and historical memory.

- Avoid motorized activities in order to reduce the carbon footprint.

- Collaborate with schools and educational institutions to develop field trips to the territory, taking into account the following elements:

    o Design age-appropriate activities that combine play, exploration, and learning.

    o Engage students in participatory dynamics such as species identification, collective mapping, and digital field notebooks.

    o Link the content of the walks to the educational curriculum (science, geography, history, environmental education).

    o Incorporate local biodiversity content, including flora, fauna, ecosystems, and protected species.

- Explore the cultural and social history of the territory: traditional land uses, agriculture, livestock farming, rural architecture, and community memory.

- Work with the concept of lived geography: relief, watersheds, historical paths, and natural and human boundaries.

- Encourage understanding of the territory as a living system in constant transformation.

- Promote the role of guides, facilitators, or route storytellers among young people.

- Use geolocation tools while limiting the use of physical maps and other printed resources.

- Promote peer learning and the democratic creation of content.

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Sustainable Youth Tourism Protocol

This protocol aims to promote alternatives to mass tourism through youth-led initiatives that encourage slow, responsible, and territory-respectful tourism, contributing to environmental conservation, social cohesion, and the revitalization of rural and peripheral areas. The following actions are highlighted:

- Promote cartography projects for the tracing and restoration of trails, prioritizing routes outside overcrowded tourist circuits.

- Document routes using open digital tools such as GPS, collaborative maps, and open-source applications.

- Integrate cultural, environmental, and historical perspectives into all activities.

- Respect traditional paths and land stewardship practices.

- Support the tourism recovery of underused or declining territories.

- Linger in observation, walking, listening, and shared living, rather than engaging in fast consumption of destinations.

- Encourage the use of local accommodation and nearby services.

- Organize educational itineraries that combine walking with collective reflection.

- Facilitate encounters with local residents and experts to help recover a culture of the commons.

- Revalue and integrate new youth languages, including digital storytelling, short-form video, photography, podcasts, and social media.

Sustainable Water Management Protocol

Water is currently a critical resource due to reduced rainfall, rising temperatures, and other consequences of climate change. Optimizing water use is essential to ensure the continuity of agricultural activity, the conservation of ecosystems, and the future of rural communities. The following actions are highlighted:

- Promote precision irrigation systems (drip irrigation, micro-sprinkling), which reduce losses from evaporation and runoff typical of traditional irrigation systems.

- Adjust water inputs to the actual needs of each crop, avoiding unnecessary irrigation.

- Encourage soil water retention through measures such as vegetative cover and increased organic matter.

- Promote solutions for areas with greater vulnerability to drought.

- Incorporate remote irrigation control technologies that allow water use to be scheduled and monitored remotely, using soil moisture sensors connected to weather stations to determine when and how much to irrigate.

- Facilitate young farmers' access to simple digital tools, innovative techniques, and best practices related to the water–energy–climate change nexus.

- Integrate and store data collected during fieldwork to support learning and the accumulation of collective experience.

- Promote and integrate renewable energy sources (solar and wind) for water pumping and distribution, reducing energy consumption and CO_2 emissions associated with irrigation.

- Support rural energy communities to lower costs, increase access, and reduce water consumption within organizations.

- Strengthen the concept of territorial resilience by incorporating simulations for long-term planning and climate scenarios.

Territorial Management, Wildfire Prevention, and Rural Stewardship Protocol

The abandonment of agricultural and livestock land has increased the continuity of vegetative fuel, leading to greater intensity and frequency of wildfires. Restoring balanced land management not only helps prevent environmental disasters but also supports biodiversity, carbon sequestration, and the revitalization of rural areas. The following actions are highlighted:
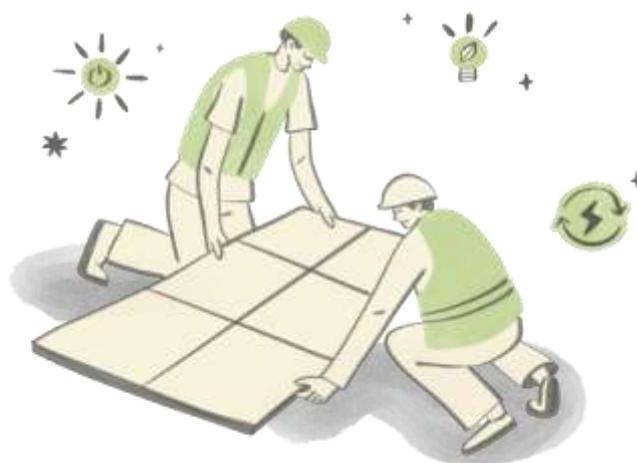
- Promote a balance between agricultural areas, grazing land, and forest spaces—characteristic of traditional farming and livestock practices—as a way to reduce the continuity of dense vegetation.

- Create natural firebreaks through the recovery of strategically located farmland and the maintenance of open agricultural spaces that limit fire spread.

- Highlight the agroforestry mosaic as a wildfire prevention tool by integrating territorial planning and landscape criteria into youth-led projects.

- Encourage grazing and extensive livestock farming as natural methods for controlling plant biomass and managing the landscape.

- Promote the recovery of abandoned land as an opportunity for green youth employment, through public or community land banks and the management of plots with no identifiable owner.

- Protect traditional olive groves as agricultural systems with high ecological value—as carbon sinks—and strong cultural significance, as a central element of the Mediterranean identity landscape.

- Foster a culture of environmental monitoring and shared civic responsibility through participatory strategies in projects that strengthen territorial cohesion and enable periodic assessments of environmental and agricultural impact.

Energy Efficiency Protocol

Energy consumption is one of the main sources of greenhouse gas emissions. Improving efficiency and changing the origin of energy make it possible to reduce environmental impact immediately, generate economic savings, and raise awareness among young people about their role in the energy transition. To this end, the following actions are highlighted:

- Promote the use of LED lighting to reduce electricity consumption and extend the lifespan of equipment.

- Install motion sensors and timers in common areas to prevent unnecessary consumption and encourage responsible habits such as switching off equipment and using heating and cooling systems efficiently.

- Make the most of natural light by adapting schedules and spaces to maximize its efficient use and reduce consumption peaks.

- Encourage organizations to participate in local energy communities, especially in rural settings, and to install small-scale renewable solutions (photovoltaics, shared self-consumption) with the aim of achieving 100% energy autonomy whenever possible.

- Conduct annual energy audits to identify areas for improvement and measure progress and turn them into an educational—not only technical—tool by involving young people in data analysis and in proposing solutions that link energy, climate, and environmental justice.

- Organize workshops and training sessions on energy efficiency and a fair energy transition and popularize simple tools for monitoring electricity consumption among young people.

- Promote teams of youth "energy champions" within organizations and recognize the skills acquired as non-formal learning, using visual and digital languages to explain energy consumption and savings.

Integrated Solid Waste Management Protocol

Waste generation is one of the most visible environmental impacts of everyday activities. Poor management increases CO_2 emissions, soil and water pollution, and pressure on landfills and incinerators. Youth organizations, due to their educational and mobilizing capacity, are strategic spaces for normalizing responsible and sustainable habits. In this regard, the following actions are highlighted:

- Implement selective waste separation systems in all spaces and activities, sorting: organic waste, light packaging, paper and cardboard, glass, WEEE (waste electrical and electronic equipment), and hazardous waste (batteries, accumulators, toner cartridges, chemical products).

- Turn permanent recycling points into visible and educational spaces, using clear, visual signage adapted to youth-oriented language.

- Pay special attention to waste generated at events, gatherings, and outdoor activities. It is essential to ensure the availability of sufficient collection points, adapt collection times to the size and duration of the activity, and guarantee proper removal and subsequent management of waste. Promote youth sustainability teams for events.

- Encourage the use of reusable containers in youth activities instead of single-use bottles, cups, and tableware. Reduce unnecessary packaging in purchases and supplies. Coordinate with municipal cleaning and recycling services to ensure proper management.

- Make use of public environmental initiatives (informational materials, training courses, special collections) and channel them into awareness-raising campaigns on recycling and the circular economy aimed at young people.
- Enable young people to understand the full recycling cycle, the routes followed by each type of waste, and the nature of the managing institutions. It is important to request that local entities promote explanatory tours of each step, integrating waste management with educational and awareness-raising activities through participatory dynamics and gamification.

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Biodiversity Conservation and Agri Eco-Schemes Protocol

Biodiversity conservation cannot be separated from agricultural and territorial management. Agri eco-schemes offer a key tool to reconcile production, conservation, and youth participation, turning young people into active agents of environmental protection in both natural and agricultural spaces. To this end, the following actions are highlighted:

- Promote the identification of protected, endemic, or community-interest species present in each territory. This action should be complemented by disseminating information on sensitive habitats, breeding seasons, and ecological corridors, integrating this knowledge into agricultural, educational, and recreational activities.

- Encourage practices that support local ecosystems by integrating flora and fauna. These include living ground covers, flower margins and biodiversity fallows, crop rotations, mowing and farming practices that respect biological cycles, and extensive grazing.

- Promote activities aimed at monitoring natural pollinators among young people, as well as analyzing wind patterns and soil-decompacting organisms that facilitate plant reproduction and the formation of fruits and seeds, such as bees, butterflies, worms, flies, bats, and hummingbirds.

- Promote clear and shared environmental codes of conduct. This includes avoiding actions that degrade soils, waterways, or areas of high ecological value, and explicitly prohibiting the capture, collection, or alteration of protected species and habitats in all youth activities.

- Support young farmers in the practical implementation of biodiversity measures, strengthening their identity as land stewards and increasing their employability through non-formal learning. As in other protocols, this involves using simple citizen science methodologies and open digital tools, and encouraging collaboration with schools, universities, and scientific organizations.

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Circular Economy Protocol for Activities and Events

When in-person activities and events are held, materials, energy, and food are consumed. The following actions are highlighted to make events more sustainable:

- Plan infrastructure from the outset using waste-prevention criteria. This involves prioritizing lightweight, modular, and reusable elements; using recycled or recyclable materials for stages, stands, and furniture; and avoiding single-use items in decoration, signage, and logistics.

- Use furniture and equipment that can be reused across different events. This means opting for creative, low–environmental-impact solutions, creating community-managed material banks (tents, platforms, signage), encouraging the shared use of resources among organizations, and prioritizing local, seasonal catering.

- Manage waste recovery efficiently by implementing clear separation systems and visible recycling points, avoiding single-use packaging, promoting reusable tableware, minimizing waste generation, and ensuring proper collection and subsequent treatment of waste.

- Involve young people in the design and implementation of sustainable events. This means turning the event into an educational and transformative experience, and an opportunity to build stable sustainability or circular economy groups, using creative, visual, and digital languages to communicate impact.

Protocol to Encourage Youth Participation

Youth participation is key to ensuring a more sustainable future that preserves and respects the environment. The thematic protocols developed so far are all aimed at promoting actions that encourage youth involvement across a wide range of spaces. What follows is a summary of their shared principles:

- Participation in organizations with an intersectional approach, addressing gender, territory, functional diversity, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, in order to achieve sufficient scale and secure adequate budgets.

- Establish youth councils supported by institutions. These are consultative and/or decision-making bodies with defined roles, regular meeting schedules, and mechanisms for influence, designed as spaces for active listening and continuous feedback.

- Foster behaviors and language that support continuity and inclusion. Wherever possible, use welcoming and safe physical and virtual spaces; employ clear, accessible, and non-paternalistic language; and develop respect protocols with zero tolerance for harassment and discrimination.

- Combine territorial and digital youth networks. This involves promoting collaboration with schools, universities, collectives, and youth organizations, and developing the use of social media—short, visual, and participatory formats—as a strategic pillar of communication.