

Teaching Sustainability: The "Let Waste Not Be Just Waste" Project in Velenje

It's always inspiring to connect with local organizations that are making a real impact on our community and our youth. Recently, I had the opportunity to catch up with one such stakeholder, The Friends of Youth Association Velenje, and learn about their long-standing project, "Let Waste Not Be Just Waste." Since 1996, this initiative has been a powerful educational program for local 6th and 7th-grade students, sparking awareness and action for environmental sustainability in the Šalek Valley.

The project offers a variety of learning experiences, each one designed to engage students and help them see waste from a fresh, constructive perspective. Here's a breakdown of the program and its impact on our local community.

Every year, the project kicks off with an interactive lecture covering the essentials of waste management. Students learn about what waste is, the different types of waste, and how waste management has evolved over time. They explore the history of waste in the Šalek Valley and discuss its current state, comparing local practices with those in Slovenia and other EU countries. This session is crucial in building a foundation, helping students understand the importance of sustainable waste management for their community and beyond.

Next, students visit the Re-use Centre in Velenje, an eye-opening experience for many. At the centre, they see a wide range of household items that have been collected, refurbished, and made available for reuse. This visit not only demonstrates the benefits of reusing materials but also highlights how simple, everyday items can have an extended life with a little creativity and effort. It's a practical look at circular economy principles in action, showing students the positive impact of reusing instead of discarding.



Lake Škale provides a unique outdoor classroom where students learn about the ecological impacts of human activity. They observe surface subsidence caused by underground coal mining and discuss how these changes have affected local water bodies. This experience helps them connect waste management with larger ecological issues, fostering a deepened awareness of the importance of environmental preservation. It's a hands-on lesson in the interconnectedness of our actions and their long-term effects on the environment.



After exploring Lake Škale, students move on to the Velenje Collection Centre nearby, where they get a behind-the-scenes look at the waste collection system in the Šalek Valley. They see how waste is categorized, managed, and prepared for recycling or disposal, learning about the efforts and infrastructure involved in effective waste management. This experience not only highlights the challenges involved but also reinforces the importance of reducing waste from the start.



The program wraps up with an exciting, creative activity that encourages students to think outside the box: a waste-to-art competition. Using old waste materials, students are tasked with creating something new and functional, showing them firsthand how waste can be transformed into something of value. The best three creations are awarded, inspiring students to take pride in their creativity and resourcefulness. This activity is a highlight, reinforcing the lesson that "waste" can indeed be more than just waste.



For nearly two decades, "Let Waste Not Be Just Waste" has empowered young minds in Velenje to think critically about their environment and take responsibility for its future. By blending education, creativity, and local history, this project has become an invaluable part of our community's efforts to promote sustainable living. It's inspiring to see our youth engaged in meaningful activities that instill environmental responsibility, and projects like this remind us all that our everyday choices can indeed make a difference.

As we look ahead, it's heartening to know that programs like this continue to educate and inspire the next generation to value sustainability, creativity, and innovation.



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