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## New models of theoretical and practical education in urban environment (On example of experience-based pedagogy in Slovak Towns)

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### Abstract

This paper focuses on education process in children that attend primary and secondary schools, university students and also adults in the field of alternative farming in urban environment, taking as an example theoretical education and practical work. It is experience-based teaching and further education that focuses on new trends in farming (growing food) in urban environment, extending knowledge of alternative means of farming, food protection and ecological thinking. People that participate in such activities get direct experience that should provide them with information and practice. Educational process is realized not only through theoretical teaching, but also practical work outside the school, where children acquire practical work experience, get the idea of working habits, learn to look at land with respect, think ecologically and construct their value ladder.

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### 1. Introduction

We focus in this paper on possibilities for new forms and models of environmental teaching, taking as an example the process of education in primary and secondary school pupils, university students and further education targeted on general public. Education in this field is a largely alternative form of education that is being implemented into

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educational process quite slowly and is often based on voluntary participation, especially in higher forms of education. Education targeted on general public is chiefly a voluntary activity that brings especially ideas for a somewhat healthier approach to growing food and awareness of a more ecological approach to life.

The objective of the paper is the insight into the problem of absence of and the gradual integration of teaching aimed at raising awareness of alternative economy, food policy and environmental sciences in the learning process in the education system as a whole. It is also important to focus on the break in continuity of teaching in this regard and the efforts of its establishing and revitalization. Research on the issue was carried out mostly on the territory of the Slovak capital Bratislava. Therefore it focuses on projects and activities that occur in the examined area and do not reflect a comprehensive view of environmental education in the Slovak Republic. The paper aims to show the current positive influence of examined type of education. This is a newly emerging phenomenon and a critical view on this issue may be brought only after its adequate implementation in the educational process and the practice.

The process of education in this field in Slovakia cannot be seen as systematic. Until 1989 (before the political changes) primary school curricula included a subject called “practical education” (as well as some alternatives). Pupils learned how to work in school fields; they learned about plants, grew vegetables or looked after trees in school orchards. After 1989 came some great changes in the education process, these subjects disappeared and together with them disappeared also school orchards and fields – places where the practical education was performed. Presently, this is a marginal subject and primary schools only teach theory rather than practical education. We can also say that there is a lack of a more complex attitude here.

The form of educational process that we are concentrating on in this paper means a new trend or revival of the idea of ecological education that originally started in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as teaching through theoretical and practical work. It is one of the ways that lead to a more ecology-based thinking, respecting food and importantly, growing food in urban environment. This paper focuses on new trends in farming and various projects that favour education in the field of alternative farming and growing food in urban environment.

The aspects that we are studying can be understood, in terms of possibilities for education in alternative forms of farming, as a kind of experience-based pedagogy. People who participate in these activities get a direct feeling that is meant to bring information and practical experience.

Experience-based pedagogy is described as an active means of education in in-group activities with the goal of acquiring skills and competences. This kind of teaching incorporates aspects of cooperation, communication, problem solving, adaptation to changed conditions, adjusting one’s approach, integration in groups and similar. (Hlásna, 2013:70). According to Balogová (2004) and Siroťová (2010), the ideal distribution rate is 30 percent of theory and 70 percent of interactive experience-based activities. Using various methods that experience-based pedagogy offers, students learn the skills and values that are based on their own and direct experience. Kopšová (2008) states that the basis of experience-based pedagogy lies in one’s own activity that brings experience. This method requires full engagement – physical, intellectual and emotional, including feelings and senses, previous experience and further processing of the fresh experience. This leads us to a conclusion that the gained experience is not a product of mere activity, but is influenced also by reflection and further consolidation of acquired knowledge and experience.

This approach can be applied in the whole spectrum that is linked with alternative farming, ecological thinking and similar activities. We may say that the relation between man and nature is greatly impaired now. People living in urban areas often do not know how to grow plants and cultivate land. Therefore education in this field is very important and should start from early age. We do not see this as return to self-sufficient living, but as an effort to bring further education, revival of the man-nature bond and turn to home-grown products.

## **2. Education in primary and secondary schools**

In the era of modern technologies and consume-oriented society we see a decline in the link between food and growing food, often children do not know how food is produced and only see food in supermarkets. In urban areas children frequently have few possibilities to watch (or even help) people cultivating land, growing arable crops and looking after plants. The main idea behind environmental education in schools is to make pupils realise relationship with the nature, teach them be responsible towards environment and growing crops. On the other hand however, there is also a link that leads to other subjects that can be taught in gardens.

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