

THE 'KAMIEŃ' EDUCATIONAL PAVILION IN WARSAW AS A PLACE OF PRO-ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVATION OF THE URBAN COMMUNITY

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Abstract

Actions aimed at environmental education are crucial for raising the awareness of city dwellers in terms of their life and functioning in a sustainable way. The aim of the article was to identify events organised in 2022 (after the period of the covid-19 pandemic) in the 'Kamień' (Stone) Educational Pavilion in Warsaw – a place of modern education and local activity in the field of popularising knowledge about nature, counteracting climate change, strengthening awareness and good pro-environmental habits among the city's inhabitants. Based on the analysis of data collected from Facebook, completed events were identified (65), and then those related to nature conservation, urban greenery and gardening (37) were distinguished to determine social preferences in the field of environmental education. The largest number of events concerned those classified in the category of educational workshops (23), and the largest number of people interested on Facebook were educational walks and picnics organised in the open air. The obtained results indicate the great needs of the inhabitants of Warsaw in terms of expanding both their theoretical knowledge to raise ecological awareness, and acquiring practical skills useful to support their pro-environmental activities in the city.

Key words: environmental education, educational centre, sustainable society, sustainable city, Warsaw

Introduction

The intensive development of technology and civilisation causes many threats to the natural environment, which translates directly into the deteriorating living conditions of city dwellers. At the same time, cities are perceived as key centres of thinking and acting in the field of pro-environmental education and expanding knowledge about sustainable development. Unfortunately, social awareness regarding the possibility of joining the process of counteracting these negative changes is insufficient. Therefore, initiatives aimed at creating ecological societies should be undertaken. Education and learning are essential tools to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, shape more sustainable cities and more inclusive communities (Education for Sustainable Development Goals, 2017; Kimic, Ostrysz, 2021).

Environmental education is a concept of educating and rising society in the spirit of respect for the natural environment. It covers a wide spectrum of teaching activities whose task is to prepare the society to solve practical environmental problems. It serves to shape a pro-environmental system of values by increasing the activity of society in order to protect nature (Sobczyk, 2003). There is also a direct link between the quality of education and improving the quality of the environment. At the same time, the educational community has a special role to play – instilling pro-environmental attitudes in the next generation of citizens. Environmental education is therefore crucial to creating solutions for a better, more sustainable future (Paul et al., 2015).

In many cities, activities in the field of environmental education are undertaken to raise public awareness of saving the environment and its resources (Potyrała, Walosik, 2005). The 'Kamień' Educational Pavilion, opened in 2020, is a centre of modern ecological education and local activity in the field of nature protection, established on the initiative of the Green Board of the Capital City of Warsaw (Poland). Located in the Natura 2000 area in the vicinity of the Vistula River, it functions as a space for debates, meetings, exchange of experiences and green initiatives. The educational offer is addressed to residents of Warsaw of all ages. The activities focus on strengthening awareness and good pro-environmental habits, popularising knowledge about the Vistula riverside nature, promoting the idea of protecting Natura 2000 area, supporting biodiversity and counteracting climate change. Events are organised both inside and outside the building (Pawilon edukacyjny 'Kamień', 2022). The aim of the study was to identify events related to nature carried out in the 'Kamień' Educational Pavilion in Warsaw in 2022 to determine the interest of city residents in environmental education.

Material and methods

Research on the identification of events carried out in the 'Kamień' Educational Pavilion in Warsaw was based on analysis of data collected from the organisation's Facebook website. As a publicly available and popular communication tool in the age of digitalization (Prensky, 2001; Kimic et al., 2019), this platform allows reaching a wide audience, and at the same time allows website users to exchange information and declare interest in the event. The study was conducted in the period from 15 January to 31 December 2022, and this year was selected as a key year for the activation of the city's residents after the end of the covid-19 pandemic. Information such as date, location of events and their detailed description was collected. Among all identified events, those related to ecological education focused on environmental protection, urban greenery and gardening were distinguished. Each of them was assigned to one of 5 categories: workshop, educational walk, lecture, picnic and recycling. The number of events in each category and their leading topics were taken into account. The number of people interested in the events was determined in order to know their preferences in the field of environmental education, as well as to assess the popularity of individual events.

Results

In 2022, the 'Kamień' Educational Pavilion in Warsaw hosted 65 events that were free and open to the public. More than half of them (37) were related to ecological education focused on environmental protection, urban greenery and gardening. Their division into 5 categories along with a list of leading topics and the number of people who expressed interest in the events on Facebook is presented in Tab. 1.

Tab. 1: Ecological events organised in the 'Kamień' Educational Pavilion in Warsaw in 2022

Category	Number of events [total]	Main topic	Number of editions	Number of inhabitants interested in events on Facebook	
				Event	Category [total]
Workshop	23	- monotyping using tree leaves	3	69	711
		- water retention	2	90	
		- pollinators	2	77	
		- indoor plants	2	75	
		- composting	2	58	
		- functioning of the forest	2	47	
		- biodiversity	2	31	
		- flowering balcony plants	1	59	
		- designing perennial plantings	1	54	
		- herb gardens	1	54	
		- useful plants for the balcony	1	50	
		- trees and shrubs for the garden	1	38	
		- protection of amphibians	1	9	
Educational walk	7	- ornithological walks - observation of birds in their natural environment	4	670	786
		- dendrological walks - observation of trees in their natural environment	3	116	

Lecture	3	- synanthropization of wild animals in the city	2	71	133
		- flower beds in the city	1	62	
Picnic	3	- Warsaw in Flowers - lectures, field games, competitions	1	519	777
		- Ecological Picnic – a campaign for the development of bicycle traffic, competition	1	163	
		- Warsaw Tree Day - lectures, workshops, competitions	1	95	
Recycling	1	- reuse of flowers from urban space	1	401	401

The largest number of events (23) concerned the workshop category – activities held in the building and its immediate surroundings. A total of 771 people declared interest in them on Facebook. The leading topic concerned learning the monotype technique using tree leaves, with three editions carried out. Workshops focused on expanding theoretical knowledge about pollinators, biodiversity, water retention, composting, forest functioning, and gaining practical skills in the selection of plants for interiors were popular, with two editions carried out. This shows that initiatives enabling broadening of general knowledge in the field of ecology and sustainable development enjoy great public interest. Single editions of the workshops were devoted to the design and care of plants in home gardens (trees, shrubs, perennials) and on balconies (useful and ornamental plants). The advantage in this case was the opportunity to gain not only theoretical knowledge, but also to participate in practical classes. The least interest concerned workshops on the protection of amphibians (9 people).

Significantly fewer events fell into the other four categories. Educational walks covered 7 editions - ornithological walks were organised 4 times and attracted a total of 670 people, while dendrological ones took place 3 times and attracted 116 people. Lecture and picnic events were held 3 times. The lecture on the synanthropisation of wild animals in the city was repeated and interested 71 people, and the lecture on flower beds was held only once and interested 62 people. This shows that even a stationary form of acquiring knowledge can be considered attractive. Picnics organised by the 'Kamień' Educational Pavilion were the most popular on Facebook – three events organised in the summer season attracted a total of 777 people. This may be due to the fact that picnics were held outdoors in a natural environment and were related to the results of thematic competitions ('Warsaw in Flowers', 'Warsaw Tree Day' and 'Bicycles – ecology and safety'), and also enabled participation in accompanying activities such as workshops and lectures. An event in the recycling category was held only once, but it was also very popular with as many as 401 people.

Discussion

Shaping pro-environmental attitudes in modern society requires a change in both thinking and mobilisation to act. In order to become more involved in issues related to ecology and sustainable development, both individuals and the entire community must become creators of positive change (Education for Sustainable Development Goals, 2017). The participation of a fairly large number of people in the events organised by the 'Kamień' Educational Pavilion in Warsaw is in line with this trend (Wals et al., 2008). This confirms the willingness of the city's inhabitants to broaden their theoretical knowledge and their need to engage in nature conservation, as well as to acquire new practical skills in the above-mentioned scope. In addition, the activity of this institution made it possible to identify and highlight local environmental problems related to e.g. water retention, biodiversity, selection of plants for urban conditions, protection of animals, with which the city's inhabitants particularly identify (McKenzie, 2000) and look for ways to solve them. Taking up key topics for the local community is one of the important aspects of its direct connection with a place and justification for the success of joint ecological initiatives. At the same time, it allows event participants to increase their self-awareness and positively affects their personal development based on environmental sensitivity and respect for nature (Martin, Leberman, 2005).

Conclusions

The results of the study based on data from Facebook show that Warsaw residents are generally very interested in pro-environmental events proposed by the 'Kamień' Educational Pavilion. This proves the legitimacy of their organisation, which can be considered a success. Particularly valuable is the openness of this institution to the transfer of theoretical knowledge focused on environmental protection in the city, as well as enabling the acquisition of practical skills through participation in workshops, educational walks and picnics. Information about events posted on Facebook allows to reach a wide range of people, and the diverse offer helps to choose the subject and type of event in accordance with individual expectations of city inhabitants, which contributes to raising their environmental awareness. These observations can serve as guidelines for further activities in the field of pro-environmental education carried out by the 'Kamień' Educational Pavilion, as well as by other organisations operating in Warsaw.

It should also be noted that although social networking systems such as Facebook have not been designed specifically for the organisation of educational activities, they can support their initiation, expand access to information and encourage participants to join various pro-environmental activities that increase their knowledge and raise competences.

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Souhrn

Akce zaměřené na environmentální výchovu mají zásadní význam pro zvyšování povědomí obyvatel měst o jejich životě a udržitelném fungování. Cílem článku bylo identifikovat akce pořádané v roce 2022 (po období pandemie covid-19) ve varšavském vzdělávacím pavilonu "Kamień" (Kámen) - místě moderního vzdělávání a místních aktivit v oblasti popularizace znalostí o přírodě, boje proti klimatickým změnám, posilování povědomí a dobrých proenvironmentálních návyků obyvatel města. Na základě analýzy dat získaných z Facebooku byly identifikovány dokončené události (65) a následně byly rozlišeny ty, které se týkaly ochrany přírody, městské zeleně a zahradničení (37), aby bylo možné určit sociální preference v oblasti environmentální výchovy. Největší počet akcí se týkal těch, které byly zařazeny do kategorie vzdělávacích workshopů (23), a největší počet zájemců na Facebooku byly vzdělávací vycházky a pikniky pořádané v přírodě. Získané výsledky ukazují na velké potřeby obyvatel Varšavy, pokud jde o rozšíření jak teoretických znalostí pro zvýšení ekologického

povědomí, tak o získání praktických dovedností užitečných pro podporu jejich proenvironmentálních aktivit ve městě.

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