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Abstract:

This article presents an open schooling landscape education paradigm implemented in secondary education in Greece. Although Geography is the core subject addressing Environment and Sustainability Education (ESE) in the national curriculum, it remains significantly marginalized within the educational system. The article identifies and discusses the key dimensions of this systemic marginalization in order to inform the international academic community. Likewise, ESE as a whole is undervalued and insufficiently integrated into educational practice, a condition that is largely attributable to the diminished status of Geography itself. The paper argues that Geography matters and that it can be revitalized through landscape-based open schooling. Within this framework, landscape is introduced as a central geographical concept that enables a holistic, experiential, and applied understanding of space and environment. Twenty-eight students participated in this participatory qualitative research, employing methods including brain-storming, flipped classroom, collaborative group work, and project-based learning. Students were actively engaged both in classroom dialogue and as "young researchers" in the field, generating proposals for sustainable rural landscape management. Building on this framework, the study explores how open schooling landscape education, can cultivate scientific literacy, enhance environmental awareness, and strengthen student's engagement with sustainability through experiential, place-based, and problem-oriented learning. The landscape concept served as a multidisciplinary entry point, bridging geography, science, and education. Findings show that the approach promotes both theoretical and practical learning, nurtures key skills and attitudes, strengthens collaboration among schools and communities, and supports the science capital and spatial awareness. It further lays the groundwork for active citizenship and more responsible human-landscape relations. Integrating open schooling landscape education into the formal curriculum is strongly advocated.

Table 1. 12 Key-dimensions of the systemic marginalization of geography in environmental education

12-Key-dimensions-of-the-systemic-marginalization-of-geography-in-environmental-education

	Dimension of marginalization	Description	Impact on Geography's role
1	Limited Teaching Hours	Only 1 h/week in Grades 5–6 (Primary) and 1 h/week in Grades 1–2 (Gymnasium), in a 30–34 h schedule.	Minimizes students' exposure to geographical thinking and spatial-environmental issues.
2	Lack of Geography in Senior Secondary	Geography is not offered at all in Upper Secondary Education (ages 15–18).	Students lose structured engagement with spatial/environmental issues during critical developmental years.
3	Misleading Course Title (Geology-Geography)	Although the "Geology-Geography" course primarily covers geographical content –with a significant focus on Human Geography, especially in the second grade – this is not reflected in the course title, where Geology is mentioned first.	Reinforces the misconception that Geography plays a secondary role, obscuring its interdisciplinary scope while undermining its disciplinary identity and visibility, thus contributing to its marginalization and misrecognition within the curriculum.
4	Misclassification under Natural Sciences and Merged with Geology	Geography is bundled with Geology and treated as a natural science subject (strictly belonging to geosciences)	Undermines Geography's interdisciplinary nature and social science dimensions, limiting holistic teaching.
5	Non-specialist Teaching and Staffing Based on Availability, Not Expertise	Over 95% of Geography classes are taught by non-specialists (geologists, physicists, chemists, and biologists) with no formal training in Geography, prioritizing staffing needs over subject expertise.	Leads to poor epistemological and pedagogical quality, confusion and inefficiency—especially in human geography, geopolitics, sustainability—and devalues Geography as a core discipline.
6	Overrepresentation of Geologists as first-specialty teachers in the teaching of Geography	More than 80% of teachers in "Geology-Geography" are Geologists, although the content they teach is primarily geographical.	Suggests strong lobbying by geologists (natural scientists), not aligned with the subject content or with educational needs (social and natural). This imbalance risks narrowing the scope of sustainability education, limiting students' exposure to socio-environmental perspectives crucial for developing holistic understanding and action.
7	Exclusion from Examinations and from Remedial Education Program	Geography is not included in final exams at any stage. In addition, although the Remedial Education Program supports key subjects essential for academic success, it does not currently provide targeted assistance in Geography.	Perceived as a "second-class" subject, lowering student motivation, prioritization and learning outcomes.
8	Curriculum Authoring Exclusion	National curriculum written exclusively by geologists with no input from geographers.	Raises questions of scientific and pedagogical adequacy, and accuracy; reinforcing disciplinary bias, since Geography and Geology are two distinct disciplines
9	Absence of geographer-consultant in Institute of Educational Policy	No geographer is employed as a consultant at the Institute of Educational Policy, where Environment and Sustainability policies are shaped, to represent the discipline.	The lack of geographers in the Institute of Educational Policy undermines informed policy formation and hinders effective management of the subject, leading to decisions that overlook Geography's educational value and distinct disciplinary perspective.
10	Advisory Group Omission	No geographer is included in the 23-member Working Group on Environment and Sustainability educational reform	Ignores Geography's relevance to environmental and sustainability education and policy and reflects institutional disregard for the discipline in shaping national sustainability education policy.
11	Voluntary nature of Environmental Programs	Optional Environmental Education programs are extracurricular, with no formal incentives.	Limits institutional support and systematic integration of environmental literacy and systematic, curriculum-based environmental learning remains sidelined.
12	Sectoral bias in Institutional Decisions & Low Institutional Prestige of Geography	Geography is consistently overlooked despite alignment with spatial justice, climate change, sustainability goals and is treated as a second-class subject, not aligned with core life skills or SDGs.	Weakens Geography's institutional role and broader contributions to critical citizenship, spatial justice, sustainability, and environmental literacy.