

Regional education and Europe



Geo Circle



ivn



Erasmus+

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Geo Circle: regional education and Europe

Introduction

Regional education and Europe: in the Erasmus+-project Geo Circle (2017-2020) eight schools for secondary education worked together and also in their region in sustainability projects about circular economy. On a regional level clients from the circular economy sector provided real life assignments for the students in various Geo Circle projects. Internationally, the students from schools in Germany, the Netherlands and Czech Republic supported each other in finding solutions for these challenges/problems.

This brochure describes how schools can create a regional network with businesses, governments (local/regional) and organizations (profit/non-profit) to cooperate in school projects. It highlights the benefits for young people, schools and teachers, and the regional partners in this innovative and creative method of education.

It also describes the importance of international collaboration between schools to broaden the horizon for their students. Connections and exchanges can have a positive impact for the future, as Europe is heading towards a circular economy. For all young people nowadays, circular economy will be a certainty in their everyday life.

Background

The idea of the Geo Circle project was to establish a regional network of associated partners (government, organizations, businesses) and also participate in an international setting. To explore this approach, IVN organized a multiplier event in June 2018 Leeuwarden, Friesland (The Netherlands) for government, educational organizations and schools.

During this the regional Frisian Secretary of education, Mr Sander de Rouwe, stated that in the near future 'every student should be international competent'. Our fast changing economy makes it important, that students can speak more languages and have relevant knowledge, attitude and competences concerning other cultures. The Frisian economy already has strong international sectors, like water technology, tourism and the agrofood industry. De Rouwe: 'in ten years' time the whole regional economy will be international connected'. In his opinion there is not much focus in education on this topic; 'there is no common goal'. He encourages every step to stimulate internationalization in education.

Also Mr Robert Coelen of the Stenden University Research Group Internationalization of Higher Education, added that it is 'vital to make young people world citizens'. This means also learn to respect other cultures, be able to cooperate with foreigners and be ready for the world of tomorrow. The 21th Century skills are essential to develop these competences. From an educational point of view, Mr Coelen made clear that a pupil/student visits a school – primary, secondary and higher education – only for a short period of time. After a school period a pupil/student is 'handed over' to another level of education. And in most cases the didactics on each educational level are not adjusted to other levels, certainly not when it comes to internationalization.

It is vital that teachers of different school levels learn to use the same 'language' and use the same concepts regarding internationalization. In this way the education system really can be improved and made future-proof.

In her contribution Mrs Susanne Feiertag (Nuffic) also emphasized the importance of world citizenship for students. Nuffic aims to stimulate bi-lingual education in more schools on all education levels. And of course, stated Mrs Feiertag, it is crucial to stimulate international exchanges among students.

In Friesland the outcomes of this event triggered the forming of a working group of teachers from different school levels (primary, secondary and higher education), including teachers with Geo Circle experience. The group explored the possibilities of regional and international cooperation. In 2019 they organized an international meeting with regional representatives of schools from Poland, Czech Republic, Slovenia and Friesland, the Netherlands. This cooperation will lead to a new Erasmus+ application in 2021, focussing on regional development and education in Europe.



A. Building a regional network

Schools which organize projects using the Geo Circle method will need a regional network of associated partners. In Geo Circle projects students work on an assignments for a real client. This client can be a company, a government or an organization in your region. During the project the students also might want to consult other experts on the project topic and your regional network could help. How do you create such a regional network?

It is important to understand what your network of businesses, governments and organizations would gain in participating:

- a. The innovation, inspiration and creativity of students (young people) can lead to unexpected solutions for the work of your organization
- b. Direct communication with young people; you can present you organization and explain (the importance of) your work; they (and their parents!) will get to know you better
- c. Raising interest among young people for future jobs in your organization (given future employment difficulties all around Europe). Some students might choose a study related to the work of your organization.

Why is it interesting for schools to invest in regional cooperations:

- a. Working on assignments for real clients will give your students extra motivation and unique learning experiences outside the classroom
- b. During these projects students can develop other talents (e.g. autonomous research, digital competences, cooperation with other students, questioning experts, presentation for external clients)
- c. Students will learn about society and societal dilemma's
- d. Students learn about the work of companies, organizations and governments in your region
- e. It connects your school with society (in your own region)

How to connect with organizations in your region

In order to carry out school projects with the Geo Circle method, you have to connect with external partner in your region. This can be a business, a government (local/regional) or an organization. It could also be a combination of these partners.

Most secondary schools do not have a connection to companies, because the educational system does not require this. When you are a vocational school, you probably know more companies for internships for your students.

How can you connect to **companies/businesses** in your region:

- Choose your sustainable topic (such as circular economy); search for companies in your region
- Contact their communication department (or 'external affairs') and ask if they would be willing to cooperate
- Try to find the right person within the company to help you (this can be an expert or manager)
- Explain the way you will carry out your school project and which important role the company has in the project

- Make clear what they can expect as results from your students; be sure they do not have too high expectations
- Very important is that you exactly describe the (limited) amount of time the representative of the company has to spend in this cooperation
- Also point out that this is an unique opportunity to present the company to (local) young people
- Make clear arrangements about the project planning and communication between school and company

How can you connect to **governments** in your region:

- Look at the political agenda related to these topics; at a local level (municipality) and/or at a regional level
- Contact their communication department (or 'external affairs') and ask if they would be willing to cooperate
- Try to find the right person within the government to help you (this can be an expert, councillor, alderman)
- Explain the way you will carry out your school project and which important role the government has in the project
- Make clear what they can expect as results from your students; be sure they do not have too high expectations
- Very important is that you exactly describe the (limited) amount of time the representative of the government has to spend in this cooperation
- Also point out that this is an unique opportunity to present the government to (local) young people
- Make clear arrangements about the project planning and communication between school and government

For connecting to **organizations** in your region, you can take similar steps as above.

And there are also other possibilities to get in touch:

- your school director might know certain companies/organizations and certain politicians
- or the parents of your students may work in a certain company or for your local government; they could help you find the right person to contact.

Positive reaction

How do businesses, governments or organizations react to a request of a school. The experience of the Geo Circle schools (and also for many more years IVN has worked in this way) is that possible external partners react in a positive way. Most are interested and will want to cooperate.

But there could always be reasons that this cooperation is not successful. The common reason for that is time: external partners are busy and have tight agenda's which not always suit your school project agenda. When you contact your external partner in time (better months before you start your project than days) you have a better chance of cooperation.

Sometimes you cannot cooperate this school year, but you can always ask for possibilities in the next school year.

Another important point is that you need to be (time) flexible with your students (classes) when it comes to visiting your partner or planning your presentations. Therefore it is crucial, that you inform your school manager about your project period and your cooperation. It might be necessary to adjust your class schedule, so you need confirmation of your manager and some colleagues.

How to maintain your regional network

Creating your regional network is the first step. Maintaining contact with your network is very important.

What you can do to maintain your network:

- Carry out (small or large) projects every year and use your contacts. Not only 'use' them, but also ask for their input for future cooperations (what could be the topic next year?).
- Explore new contacts each year. You can use new contacts as an expert first and later as a client for your school project.
- Make a regular (digital) newsletter for your network about your school, your school work and school projects.

Regular communication is vital in a good relationship. Explore the possibilities with your network for sponsoring new projects.

Build a regional network in education

A special dimension in your regional network can be the connection with other educational institutions (schools). You can do that on the same level (primary/secondary/higher education), but you can also start cooperating with other levels.

For example: secondary students prepare lessons for a primary school nearby. Great opportunity for students to learn new skills ('Maybe I want to become a teacher?'). University students could give guest lectures in secondary schools about specific topics as part of a school project.

This would be a great experience for both sides; they learn from each other.

And it gives children and students ideas about their future education. What could be their next school? Which future study is interesting?

B. International setting

You can even broaden the horizon of your students by organizing international exchanges. Till 2027 there are possibilities for student exchanges in the European Erasmus+ programme.

A cooperation with schools in other European countries would give an extra dimension to your regional school projects. Keep in mind that the sustainability issues Europe faces have to be dealt with in all countries, sometimes in a slightly different way. That makes it even more interesting for students to exchange knowledge and experiences.

In short:

- a. In school projects students investigate solutions and research worldwide (using internet). This leads to innovative, inspirational and creative ideas, which they can use for their assignments. In this way they bring 'foreign' ideas to their country.
- b. Students exchanges for international cooperation between schools working on sustainability topics. This can be done during real exchanges; visiting another school in Europe. And also during virtual exchanges using virtual conference techniques. Students will learn from each other ('how do you do this in your country?'). They broaden their horizon: they gain knowledge and share knowledge.

Conclusion

Based on our experiences during the Geo Circle project we recommend all schools in Europe to consider working with a regional network of businesses, governments and organizations and also connect to other schools in Europe.

These experiences will benefit your pupils and students. And also your school staff! It really creates 'internationally competent' students and raises awareness about sustainability issues all over Europe.

More information

Visit the Geo Circle website for more information and examples of school project working with a regional network

www.geo-circle.eu



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