

Project summary FOCUS
(Future of Cities and Urban Spaces)
2019-2022



Our partnership entitled "Future of Cities and Urban Spaces - FOCUS", a cooperation between four secondary schools from Champagné (France), Santiago de Compostela, Warsaw and Bad Nenndorf (Germany), sought to analyze different challenges European cities - and eventually the whole continent - have to face in the 21st century and explore strategies to address them.

The issues we studied include land consumption due to growing demand by residents and businesses which forces communities to decide how to allocate land to different purposes and which kind of buildings ought to be built. The partners also examined the ever larger amounts of waste towns have to take care of and the traffic problems caused by the growing number of residents and commuters. All these questions are inextricably linked to the two major challenges of Western societies as they influence carbon dioxide emissions and have to be answered at a time when the well established processes of political decision making are increasingly coming under threat. As a consequence "FOCUS" raised students' awareness of these urgent problems in their European and global perspective and made them acquainted with different strategies to address these issues. In this way the partners encouraged critical thinking, wanted to incite sustainable behavior and to highlight the importance of active participation in political processes while improving learners' language skills.

The partnership mainly addressed students from the ages of twelve to sixteen from the participating schools. At each institution there was a core group of approximately 20 to 50 learners who took part in several activities related to the partnership, while a significantly higher number of pupils were involved more occasionally, usually during their regular lessons or the project days towards the end of "FOCUS". Besides, around 50 teachers across different departments from each school contributed to project related activities in some way.

The partnership's activities can be divided into four phases which all focus on one aspect of the topic, namely "Ecology", "Arts and Architecture", "Civics" as well as "History" with each phase lasting approximately six months. At every stage most of the work took place during regular lessons in a wide array of subjects, as students for example produced posters on carbon footprints, studied the decline of insect populations or compiled

presentations on New York as a "city of dreams". Some of these results were then used during the four short term exchange meetings which formed an integral part of each project phase. During these meetings, which were attended by teachers and pupils from all four schools, students learned more about each topic, for example by visiting a wind farm, Nantes' redeveloped port area or "Nowa Huta", a new town from Poland's Socialist era, but, more importantly, they participated in different multinational workshops. Here they had to find solutions for an urban problem studied before, for example by deciding how to allocate land for farming and/or residential development. In this process they could refer to findings from regular lessons and/or the visits during the meeting. These sessions were held as workshops aiming at producing different products like presentations, films, staged debates or role plays. Based on the outcome of these workshops the partners attempted to relay one suggestion for improvement to the respective town halls or other political representatives at the end of each meeting. In addition, the four schools organized project days in the summer of 2022 so a larger number of students (and teachers) could try out the activities developed during the exchange meetings and get a better understanding of the topics studied.

An educational manual with material to carry out a similar project, which is accompanied by a video with footage from the different workshops, is one the main results of the partnership while other products include a logo, an exhibition on famous buildings and their architects to be displayed at all four schools, a jointly created calendar with different visions of the city and an insect hotel apart from numerous other posters, presentations and texts produced during regular lessons. Especially by developing the workshops the project partners hope to achieve a long term impact on the schools as they can use the lesson plans thus produced to adapt (or implement) bilingual classes and to modify their curricula so as to encourage more interdisciplinary cooperation.