

School pupils work for sustainable landscapes

Science LinX to coordinate SUSTAIN, an Erasmus+ network

The new European SUSTAIN network has been awarded a EUR 449,900 grant by Erasmus+, the EU programme for education, training, youth and sport. The network will be coordinated by Science LinX, the science centre of the University of Groningen (UG) Faculty of Science and Engineering. SUSTAIN aims to engage pupils and their families in research projects – what is known as citizen science – on bird migration and water management. The 12 partners will develop e-learning modules on ‘sustainable landscapes’ and research in Spain, Cyprus and the Netherlands, linking learning inside and outside the classroom.

For SUSTAIN, the million-dollar question is how society can use landscapes for industry, housing, agriculture and recreation without hampering biodiversity. This is a major issue for future generations, and young people must therefore be included in the discussion.

The project members – researchers, school teachers, science education providers and experts in science communication – will form a community of learners (CoL) and will develop e-learning modules on a topic relevant to the region. These will be made available to other schools in the third and final year of the project. At the end of the project, each of the three countries will host a science festival to reach a wide audience. The Polibienestar Research Institute of the Universitat de Valencia (Spain) will develop protocols to evaluate the project and provide feedback to support peer-learning within the regional networks. Dissemination of the project’s activities will be facilitated by Eusea – the European Science Events Association.

Maaïke de Heij, project leader at Science LinX, will coordinate SUSTAIN. She is proud that the Science LinX team will once again lead a European project, ‘SUSTAIN is very much in line with previous projects, like IRRESISTIBLE, which was successfully wrapped up last year.’ IRRESISTIBLE also delivered a number of valuable teaching modules on current science topics. De Heij continues, ‘this reflects how Science LinX works. We bring our Faculty to the forefront of teacher training and school work, so pupils learn to appreciate the value of science education’.

Researchers from the UG, Universitat Politècnica de Valencia (UPV) and the University of Nicosia (UNic) have state of the art expertise on sustainable landscapes. The UG’s Sustainable Landscapes Competence Centre, which is part of the Groningen Institute for Evolutionary Life Sciences (GELIFES), aims to translate evolutionary ecology research into practical applications for sustainable landscape planning and nature conservation.

The project is indebted to Theunis Piersma, Professor of Global Flyway Ecology (UG) and Wadden Sea biologist at the Royal Netherlands Institute for Sea Research (NIOZ). In 2014, Piersma won the Spinoza Prize, the most prestigious science award in the Netherlands. He also initiated the King of the Meadows programme, which focuses on agricultural landscapes and, with a combined approach of science, citizen science and art performances, aims to create space for farmers, citizens and a biodiverse landscape. The project will foster engagement and serve as an example of a citizen science initiative that others can follow.

The Dutch city of Leeuwarden will be European Capital of Culture in 2018. Regional nature and culture together with engaged citizenship (*Iepen mienskip* in the local Frisian language) will be the main themes of this event. As these themes are closely connected to SUSTAIN, the Leeuwarden-Fryslân 2018 Foundation is an associated partner of the SUSTAIN project and the Province of Friesland a full partner, thus providing a great opportunity to use regional support to bring together science, nature and culture.

More information:

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Full list of participants:

University of Groningen, Provincie Fryslân, RSG De Borgen, Piter Jelles Leeuwarder Lyceum, Universitat de Valencia – Polibienestar, Universitat Politecnica de Valencia, CIPFP Misericordia, IES EL Saler, University of Nicosia, the Heritage Private School, Forum Private Greek School and Eusea.

About Science LinX:

The Science LinX science centre belongs to the Undergraduate School of Science and Engineering, and coordinates the outreach and engagement programme for pupils, teachers, civil society and the general public. By providing a stage for the scientific community, it sparks interest in science and engineering at the UG. With its fresh and tailor-made approach, it facilitates continuous learning across the borders of science, education, work and civil society.

