



Energy efficiency on site

Tackling climate change

 Education | **Information** | Participation

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Project information

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Innovative climate action projects

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Project leader

Deutsche Gesellschaft e.V., eingetragener Verein zur Förderung politischer, kultureller und sozialer Beziehungen in Europa

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Tangible climate efforts

The media reports almost daily on climate policy in Germany and the rest of Europe. Yet the subject itself remains often abstract – young people, in particular, see no tangible connection with their lives. Only a few young people know what climate action means in practice and that climate solutions are already being implemented in terms of energy efficiency on their own doorsteps.

At a glance

The Deutsche Gesellschaft e.V., an association for the promotion of social, political and cultural relations in Europe, wanted to do something about this deficiency with their latest project 'Energy efficiency on site'. The project involved sending speakers to schools for a day to talk to young people about the causes and consequences of climate change in terms they can relate to and discuss possible countermeasures with them. They also introduced them to some of the goals and programmes of German and European climate policy. In the afternoon, the classes visited successful energy efficiency projects (or related topics) in their region together with the experts. In this way, the students were able to understand global connections, national initiatives and also the local possibilities and effects in relation to each other and internalise what they had learnt.



Participants at the event in Aue



Countering political disenchantment

Media reports on climate change and the energy transition focus mainly on the dangers of global warming, droughts, floods, the problems of the international climate negotiations and the challenges of implementing climate change targets. In contrast to these reports, the project took a positive look at past successes and the opportunities of climate change policies.

This was helped especially by visiting regional flagship projects that have been made possible by funding programmes. Seeing these real-life examples gave the children an insight into the situation on their own doorsteps. The selected examples of exciting and successful activities made it vividly clear in concrete terms that climate objectives can be achieved (and how). It helped the students to better understand what effective climate policy means in real-world terms, and that the different levels – European, Federal and regional – can only be fully effective if they work in combination with each other.

What were the project goals?

- To educate 1,500 pupils about climate change policy and projects in the region during ‘climate action days’;
- To indirectly reach another 15,000 people via public relations work and press articles;
- To establish a network of schools and project partners which will remain active even after the project has finished.

Bringing schools together with regional partners

The discussion of energy and climate issues in the classroom frequently fails to include any concrete references to activities at a local level. Often, even the teachers are not aware of the activities going on in the region and how they can be integrated in the classroom. With this in mind, the project brought

teachers and students in contact with local enterprises. These projects were dedicated to energy efficiency or related topics. In a nationwide campaign, interested schools registered to take part. The project team then provided these schools with a contact at an appropriate project or business in the region. Where the Deutsche Gesellschaft e.V. already had contact with companies or interesting projects, the project team looked for schools in the region that might be interested in visiting a company or project.

Realistic and lively lessons

A total of 50 one-day events were held. These followed a standardised pattern and were divided into two parts. In the morning, the speakers of the project team came into the respective school and presented content on the challenges of climate action and climate policy measures. They placed particular emphasis on exemplary climate and energy projects that have been funded at the European or the German level. The youngsters were able to ask the speakers questions, for instance, about the origins and the consequences of climate change, and discuss the role of their own behaviour. In other elements, such as movies, quizzes or group work, current topics were discussed in a lively and interesting manner.

During the group work, the pupils were asked to write, for example, a press release about a current event from different perspectives or they developed a climate action plan for their own school.

The excursion followed in the afternoon. The Martin Luther School in Herten, for instance, visited the EnergyLab in the Gelsenkirchen Science Park and what was once the world’s largest solar plant in the climate-friendly housing estate of Gelsenkirchen-Ückendorf. The pupils of the Drei-Burgen School in Felsberg near Kassel visited SMA Solar Technology AG, a manufacturer of photovoltaic systems technology.



What did the project achieve?

- 1,038 students from 50 educational institutions took part in the activity days and excursions to 50 sample projects;
- More than 15,000 people have been reached via the press and public relations work;
- Individual schools and project partners are still in contact and jointly realise other projects;
- 22 percent of the project partners involved have agreed to offer internships for the participants in the aftermath of the excursions.

Highlighting career prospects

One important aim of the excursions was to show young people that climate action not only means additional work, but rather that climate action measures also offer opportunities for businesses – for example, new and interesting jobs. The protestant school in Neuruppin learned, for example, about ecological house construction in Brandenburg at the company Opitz Holzbau GmbH & Co., and the vocational school for nursing assistants in Aue learned more about how to save energy by changing light sources while visiting the municipal building department in their city. The project days were held at both general and vocational schools.

The project provided yet another added benefit, especially for the young people who were close to graduating: the students got to know some new professions and made contact with the relevant companies. After the project days, some of them were able to gain even deeper insights into the professional fields through internships. In many cases, the connection between the school and project was retained. The Fulda Cathedral Grammar School, for example, independently visited Biothan GmbH, a producer of biogas, in an excursion after the conclusion of the project.

Long-term effects

To find out whether the project was successful and what could be improved, the project team asked participants to provide assessments immediately after the events, and again after six months. Immediately after the events, the overall impression was good – both the content and the methods were received well by the youngsters. But what was particularly impressive was that six months later, 65 percent of those questioned still expressed a long-term interest in the climate issues that they had learnt about in the workshops. The personal knowledge level was better than before participation in the project in 50 percent of those surveyed. 77 percent of respondents said that the workshop had reinforced the feeling that they can contribute something to climate action with their behaviour.

What happened next?

- Some schools and project partners are implementing further joint activities;
- The two presentations on climate change and funding policy can be downloaded from the project website.

Permanent contacts

Excursions to supported local businesses initiated contacts that the schools – but also the companies themselves – were also able to utilise after the end of the project. The students received information on contact persons and partners for possible internships, the teachers on project partners for additional excursions or to realise other collaborations.

In some cases, collaboration beyond the end of the project has already taken place, showing that these contacts are now being used over the long term. The project also intended to establish a long-term network between schools and companies.



Contribution to climate action

Due to the nature of the project, the Deutsche Gesellschaft e.V. is not able to make any quantitative statement on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions caused by the project itself. Nevertheless, the project has reinforced the willingness of students to make climate-friendly changes to their behaviour. According to the post-project questionnaires, 39 percent of participants have been consistently saving on heating energy and electricity by lowering their room temperature or avoiding the use of standby modes. 32 percent of respondents said that they voluntarily skipped meat at least once a week. 24 percent were trying to motivate others through a personal commitment.

Lessons learned

The idea of bringing schools together with regional partners to collaborate on the subject of climate change policy is generally not difficult to implement. However, organizers should bear certain points in mind.

Consider the framework conditions

The approach requires close coordination between all participants and consideration of important dates in the school and company calendars. These include school holidays, vacation periods and exam dates. The companies must be able to integrate the excursion into their operational flow and provide personnel. Overall, fewer students took part in the events than planned, as the groups usually did not reach the expected number of 30 participants. For future events, organisers should generally plan for a smaller group size.

Professional preparation

Organisers should make enquiries to ascertain the levels of the students' existing knowledge when planning. This ensures that the speakers can tailor the

content and methods to the young people's requirements. To facilitate this, teachers should be provided with preparatory information for use in the classroom. This information should be also forwarded to the contact partners at the companies so that they can focus on the young people's needs and expectations.

Checklist for success

- Coordinate the dates so that they match established routines and timetables at the schools and companies;
- Query the knowledge and interests of the students;
- Inform the project partners of expectations in advance;
- Base the content and topics on the interests of young people;
- Include current issues and the school itself as a reference area in the practical exercises;
- Design a standardised but flexible offering to take account of the specific situations at the participating school or company.

Consider the young person's perspective

During the preplanning, those actively involved in the organisation should already have the interests and career visions of the young people in mind. This will allow the project to better connect with the everyday life and the environment of the participants. It will ease their way into the issue, and help them to use what they have learned to relate the consequences of climate change and also the effects of climate policy to their own lives. When children and young adults learn that climate change is not an unalterable fact and that they have the possibility to make their own contribution, they are also more motivated to invest more in the issue. The project also systematically noted the questions put to the speakers and used these as an inspiration for designing other modules.



Lively teaching methods

Approaches that actively involve students help with learning. Because the students all have different strengths and personalities, many different methods should be used. Keeping the practical relevance as high as possible allows young people to try out things for themselves. Current climate policy issues or events can be integrated, for example, with group activities, movies, or a quiz. Also, the school itself – the building itself or as a place where many people come together – can offer opportunities for practical exercises. For example, environmental protection concepts can be developed, or an in-school climate action award offers an ideal starting point for a small competition.

Standardised yet flexible offerings

To make sure that teachers make the most of external offers, it is important to provide a clear process sequence which can be integrated into lessons without too much additional workload. Prepared materials and presentations facilitate this. Nevertheless, the offering should be flexible enough to take into account the situation at the school and in the region. Most schools conducted the event over a single day, with the excursion taking place in the afternoon. As this procedure is not possible at all schools or companies it is also important to react flexibly to scheduling restrictions and split the action over two days if necessary.

Climate action needs your initiative

Since its launch in 2008, the National Climate Initiative (NCI) of the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety (BMUB) has been supporting numerous projects that contribute to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Funding has been given to a broad range of activities, from developing long-term strategies to providing practical assistance and investment aid. With a focus on advancing climate action on the ground, the Initiative benefits consumers, municipalities, businesses and educational institutions.

Legal information

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