



## FROM LOCAL TO GLOBAL: PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE VALUES THROUGH COLLABORATIVE LEARNING IN A PRIMARY SCHOOL ERASMUS+ PROJECT

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### Abstract:

This article presents the implementation and impact of a short-term Erasmus+ KA201-SCH-061945 project entitled “Act Local, Think Global”, conducted in a Greek primary school with 4th-grade pupils. The program focused on promoting environmental awareness and sustainable behaviors through collaborative learning, intercultural exchange, and digital tools. Through partnerships with schools from Finland, Spain and Wales, students explored topics related to plastic pollution, circular economy, and everyday ecological actions. Activities included virtual exchange, co-creation of e-books, art-based expression, and participation in an international eTwinning campaign. The methodological approach emphasized project-based learning, constructivist principles, and the use of digital platforms such as Twinspace, Canva, and Padlet. Results showed increased student engagement, development of key competences, enhanced cultural understanding, and long-term impact on the school culture. The article reflects on challenges, findings, and recommendations for other schools aiming to integrate Erasmus+ opportunities into their everyday educational practice.

**Keywords:** Erasmus+, collaborative learning, primary education, environmental awareness, international partnership

### 1. Introduction

In recent years, European Union educational policies have strongly promoted inclusive, innovative, and sustainable learning environments across member states. One of the most dynamic tools supporting this transformation in schools is the Erasmus+ programme, which encourages cross-border collaboration, intercultural awareness, and the development of key competences for lifelong learning. Especially in the context of primary education, where foundational skills and attitudes are formed, Erasmus+ offers

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opportunities for young learners to engage in experiential, socially meaningful, and cooperative projects.

This article presents the case of a short-term Erasmus+ KA201-SCH-061945 project titled “Act Local, Think Global”, implemented in a Greek public primary school with the active involvement of fourth-grade pupils and teachers. The project addressed critical environmental issues such as plastic pollution and the circular economy, embedding them within a broader pedagogical framework that emphasized sustainability, active citizenship, and European identity.

The global environmental crisis and the European Green Deal have amplified the need for educational action that empowers students to understand and address real-world challenges. Within this context, the project aimed to cultivate environmental responsibility and critical thinking through collaborative learning experiences and digital tools. It sought to connect children from diverse cultural backgrounds and enable them to co-create solutions for a more sustainable future.

Furthermore, the school’s participation in Erasmus+ was part of a broader effort to internationalize its curriculum, enhance digital pedagogical practices, and involve the wider school community. The outcomes of the project, both cognitive and affective, are of particular interest to educators seeking to align classroom practices with 21st-century competences and global educational priorities.

This article explores how the implementation of this Erasmus+ initiative served as a catalyst for pedagogical innovation, intercultural learning, and student empowerment. It examines the teaching strategies applied, the tools employed, the learning outcomes observed, and the overall impact on school culture and teacher development.

## 2. Literature Review

The Erasmus+ programme, as part of the European Union’s strategic framework for education and training, is widely acknowledged for its role in fostering innovation, inclusion, and transnational cooperation in schools (European Commission, 2020). Research has highlighted that participation in international school partnerships enhances not only pupils’ intercultural competence but also contributes to teacher professional development and school improvement (Kirkwood-Tucker, 2012; Redecker, 2017). These benefits are even more profound when the programme is implemented through collaborative and project-based learning approaches, especially in primary education.

Collaborative learning, a pedagogical model rooted in social constructivism, posits that learners construct knowledge actively and meaningfully through interaction with others (Vygotsky, 1978; Dillenbourg, 1999). In a classroom environment enriched by peer collaboration and shared goals, students become co-constructors of knowledge. This dynamic is especially relevant in international Erasmus+ projects, where learners not only work with peers from different classrooms but also from different countries and cultures, enhancing both cognitive and socio-emotional learning (Johnson & Johnson, 2009).

Equally important is the role of education for sustainable development (ESD) in today's curriculum. UNESCO (2017) emphasizes that ESD must empower learners of all ages to make informed decisions and take responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability, and social justice. Embedding sustainability into cross-curricular learning, especially at the primary level, nurtures eco-literacy and citizenship from an early age. Research supports the view that when sustainability is taught through real-life projects and active participation, children internalize values and behaviors more effectively (Brundiers *et al.*, 2010; Tilbury, 2011).

Furthermore, the integration of digital technologies in Erasmus+ projects has been recognized as a key enabler of meaningful communication, creativity, and inclusion (Redecker, 2017). Platforms like Twinspace, Canva, and Padlet support asynchronous and synchronous collaboration, enabling even young learners to engage in multilingual, multimedia, and multimodal communication. Digital storytelling, for instance, has proven to enhance students' engagement and expressive abilities across linguistic and cultural boundaries (Robin, 2008).

Finally, the literature stresses the importance of teacher agency and whole-school involvement in maximizing the impact of international projects. Projects are more effective when teachers are empowered as facilitators of learning, when school leadership supports innovation, and when the entire school community (students, staff, parents) is involved in a shared educational vision (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Burns, 2016).

This literature review, therefore, underlines the conceptual and pedagogical pillars upon which the presented Erasmus+ project was designed: collaborative learning, sustainability education, digital pedagogy, and internationalization of school practices.

### **3. Material and Methods**

#### **3.1 Project Partners and Scope**

The Erasmus+ project "Act Local, Think Global" was implemented during the 2023–2024 school year in a public primary school in Livadia, Greece. The project was funded under the KA201-SCH-061945, which allowed for flexible design and implementation of activities tailored to the school's needs and vision. The primary target group included 24 fourth-grade students (ages 9–10), while the teaching team consisted of three classroom teachers, an ICT specialist, and the school principal acting as project coordinator. The Greek school collaborated with three partner schools from Finland, Spain and Wales. These schools were selected based on shared interest in environmental education and collaborative digital practices. The joint project aimed to foster eco-awareness, civic responsibility, and intercultural understanding, while also enhancing key transversal competences such as creativity, digital literacy, and teamwork.

All partners agreed on a common pedagogical framework and co-designed a shared activity calendar that aligned with national curricula and school timetables. Although physical mobilities were not included due to funding constraints, virtual exchanges and online collaborative tasks formed the backbone of the project.

### 3.2 Learning Methodology

The project was grounded in Project-Based Learning (PBL) and Collaborative Learning principles. Activities were designed to encourage student autonomy, peer interaction, and real-world relevance. The learning model followed the five-phase PBL cycle: project launch, inquiry and research, co-creation, reflection, and dissemination. Each phase included both in-class work and cross-border collaboration.

Throughout the project, the constructivist approach was evident: students co-created knowledge by solving authentic problems, making decisions collectively, and reflecting on their learning. The pedagogical design emphasized inclusion and differentiation, allowing students of diverse learning profiles to contribute meaningfully.

### 3.3 Tools and Resources

A wide range of digital tools and platforms supported the project's implementation:

- **Twinspace (eTwinning):** the main hub for collaboration, communication, and publication of student work.
- **Canva:** used for poster creation, infographics, and collaborative visual storytelling.
- **Padlet:** for brainstorming, sharing reflections, and documenting activities in real time.
- **Google Docs & Slides:** for co-writing tasks and interactive group work.
- **Wordwall & Kahoot:** for formative assessment and gamified learning.

Offline resources included eco-friendly materials (recycled paper, natural dyes), local environmental data, and children's literature related to nature and sustainability.

### 3.4 Activities Overview

Key project activities included:

- A "Plastic-Free Week Challenge" with daily eco-tasks and reflection journals.
- Joint creation of a digital storybook: *"The Journey of a Plastic Bottle"*.
- A virtual exhibition of recycling art and eco-messages in multiple languages.
- Live online sessions with international peers to share outcomes and cultural experiences.
- A final dissemination event involving parents, local stakeholders, and community representatives.

Students were organized into mixed-ability teams, and roles were rotated to ensure equity and engagement. Teachers facilitated learning rather than directed it, acting as co-learners and mediators.

### 3.5 Ethical Considerations

All necessary consents were obtained from parents/guardians for the participation of minors in the project and the publication of anonymized work. Students' privacy and safety were prioritized during all online activities, in accordance with school and Erasmus+ data protection guidelines.

## 4. Results and Discussion

The implementation of the Erasmus+ project “Act Local, Think Global” yielded rich educational outcomes across cognitive, emotional, social, and behavioral domains. The results, drawn from teacher observations, student self-reflections, collaborative artifacts, and informal feedback from families, suggest a positive and multidimensional impact on the entire school community.

### 4.1 Student Learning Outcomes

One of the most significant outcomes was the increase in environmental literacy and awareness among students. By engaging with real-world issues such as plastic waste and sustainable consumption, pupils developed a concrete understanding of environmental challenges and solutions. For example, during the “Plastic-Free Week Challenge,” students demonstrated initiative by suggesting eco-friendly alternatives at home and sharing their findings with peers from partner schools.

Equally important was the development of collaborative competences. Students learned to communicate effectively, negotiate roles, and work in diverse teams. In the joint creation of the digital storybook “*The Journey of a Plastic Bottle*,” pupils practiced not only storytelling and artistic expression, but also negotiation, responsibility-sharing, and problem-solving — key elements of successful collaborative learning (Dillenbourg, 1999; Johnson & Johnson, 2009).

Moreover, the project enhanced digital literacy and media skills. Children became familiar with online tools, practiced safe and ethical digital behavior, and expressed themselves creatively through multimedia. For many students, this was their first exposure to cross-border digital collaboration, and it built confidence in using technology for authentic purposes beyond the classroom.

### 4.2 Teacher Development and School Culture

Teachers involved in the project reported a renewed sense of professional motivation and pedagogical experimentation. The opportunity to design interdisciplinary tasks, experiment with student-centered strategies, and connect with colleagues abroad served as a form of informal professional learning. As Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) argue, meaningful change in schools often begins with teacher agency and collaborative innovation, conditions clearly cultivated during this project.

At the school level, the project functioned as a catalyst for cultural transformation. Classroom walls became digital windows to Europe, and students began to perceive themselves not just as Greek pupils, but as active European citizens with shared responsibilities and values. The final dissemination event, which included presentations to parents and local stakeholders, reinforced the sense of collective pride and ownership over the learning process.

### 4.3 Family and Community Engagement

The program also succeeded in bridging the gap between school and home. Parents reported that children discussed project topics at home and even initiated sustainable actions, such as starting recycling stations or proposing eco-friendly shopping. This aligns with the findings of Brundiers *et al.* (2010), who note that real-world sustainability projects can extend their impact beyond classroom boundaries.

### 4.4 Challenges and Reflections

Despite the many strengths, some challenges emerged. Language barriers required scaffolding, especially in virtual exchanges. Teachers had to dedicate extra time to planning and coordinating across schools and time zones. Technical limitations, such as internet connectivity or familiarity with platforms, occasionally interrupted activities. However, these obstacles were addressed through peer support and flexibility, turning challenges into learning opportunities.

### 4.5 Comparison with Previous Studies

The findings of this project align with existing research that highlights the transformative potential of Erasmus+ in primary education. Similar to what has been reported in other European case studies (Kirkwood-Tucker, 2012; Redecker, 2017), the combination of collaborative learning, sustainability, and digital pedagogy proved highly effective in engaging young learners and building essential competences for the 21st century.

## 5. Recommendations

Based on the implementation and outcomes of the “Act Local, Think Global” Erasmus+ project, a number of recommendations can be offered for educators, school leaders, and policymakers seeking to integrate international collaborative projects into primary education. These recommendations address both pedagogical practice and system-level strategies.

### 5.1 For Classroom Practice

- **Embed sustainability in everyday teaching:** Environmental education should not be treated as an isolated subject. Teachers are encouraged to integrate sustainability themes across subjects — from language arts and science to mathematics and art — using cross-curricular projects that reflect real-world challenges.
- **Foster student voice and agency:** Children should not be passive recipients of content but active contributors to the learning process. Allowing students to shape project tasks, select tools, and reflect on outcomes empowers them as learners and citizens.
- **Use collaborative digital tools meaningfully:** Platforms like Twinspace, Canva, and Padlet offer powerful opportunities for cooperation, but their use should be

purposeful and tied to clear learning outcomes. Simple but structured activities (e.g., co-writing, idea boards, online galleries) are often more effective than complex technical setups.

- **Provide scaffolding for language and inclusion:** In multilingual, multicultural Erasmus+ contexts, it is vital to offer differentiated materials, visual support, and peer assistance. All learners — regardless of ability or background — must have access to meaningful participation.

## 5.2 For School Leadership and Development

- **Integrate Erasmus+ into the School Development Plan:** International projects should be aligned with the school's vision, annual planning, and teacher training goals. This ensures continuity, institutional support, and sustainability beyond the duration of individual projects.
- **Promote whole-school involvement:** Success is greater when Erasmus+ is not a "teacher's project" but a school-wide endeavor, involving colleagues from different disciplines, non-teaching staff, and the broader community. Dissemination events, exhibitions, and open lessons can strengthen this culture.
- **Establish peer-learning networks:** Schools new to Erasmus+ can benefit greatly from collaboration with more experienced ones. National support services and platforms like eTwinning can serve as hubs for mentoring and capacity-building among educators.

## 5.3 For Educational Policy and Research

- **Recognize Erasmus+ as a tool for teacher professional learning:** Policymakers should acknowledge the transformative potential of Erasmus+ not only for students, but also for teachers. Participation should count as part of formal or informal professional development and be supported institutionally.
- **Encourage research on student outcomes in international projects:** While teacher benefits are well documented, further empirical research is needed to measure the impact of Erasmus+ on primary pupils' values, skills, and attitudes, particularly in relation to sustainability and citizenship.
- **Bridge national curriculum goals with European priorities:** Educational reforms should seek synergies between national learning outcomes and European strategies (e.g., SDGs, Green Deal, Digital Education Action Plan), using Erasmus+ as a practical framework for implementation.

## 6. Conclusion

The Erasmus+ project "Act Local, Think Global" provided compelling evidence that even short-term international collaborations can serve as powerful catalysts for pedagogical renewal, environmental awareness, and intercultural understanding in primary education. By engaging fourth-grade pupils in meaningful, real-world learning

experiences across national borders, the project not only enriched their cognitive and social development but also laid the groundwork for a more participatory and globally minded school culture.

Central to the success of the initiative was the use of collaborative learning methodologies, which allowed students to work in teams, co-create knowledge, and develop empathy through dialogue with their European peers. The constructivist foundation of the project enabled learners to become agents of change in their own contexts, proposing solutions, leading activities, and reflecting critically on their roles as young citizens.

Moreover, the integration of digital tools provided access, inclusivity, and creative expression, transforming classrooms into dynamic spaces of virtual connection and co-production. The project reaffirmed that digital media, when used thoughtfully, can bridge distances and democratize learning.

Teachers, too, experienced professional growth, discovering new ways to engage learners and expand their pedagogical toolkit. The collaborative planning, reflection, and innovation embedded in the Erasmus+ process revitalized their practice and reinforced the school's commitment to continuous improvement.

While challenges related to language, logistics, and infrastructure were present, they were met with flexibility, peer support, and a shared sense of purpose. These challenges, in turn, became opportunities for deeper learning and resilience.

In conclusion, this case study illustrates how Erasmus+ can be leveraged not merely as a mobility programme, but as a strategic framework for educational transformation. It calls upon schools, policymakers, and stakeholders to embrace international cooperation as an integral part of 21st-century education — one that is sustainable, inclusive, and profoundly human.

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Theodoros Kartsoukis is an experienced educator with 20 years of teaching primary education. He holds a Bachelor's Degree in Primary Education. He is excelling in teaching and communication, fostering positive interactions with students. His expertise extends to classroom management and educational organization, and he adapts easily to diverse educational programs and teaching methodologies, always committed to achieving



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