

Öresundsklassrummet (The Öresund Classroom)

– young people's participation in the sustainable society of the future



INTRODUCTION

The main aims of the project Öresundsklassrummet are to promote everyday integration in the Öresund region and to engage students and teachers in envisioning a new learning process for a sustainable society. This is made possible by using innovative methods of learning and interaction, incorporating participation and communication as well as increased transparency inside and outside the classroom.

The five partners of Öresundsklassrummet are: City of Malmö (Environment Department: lead partner), Lund University, Malmö University (all three belonging to RCE Skåne), City of Lund (BSF Lund City and BSF Lund East, Child and Education Committees) and City of Copenhagen (The Children and Youth Administration). Through collaborative learning processes the partners aim to deepen their knowledge about democratic and multi-disciplinary approaches in teaching, and to increase the sharing of pedagogic resources between the partners across Öresund. The project is co-funded by the European Regional Development Fund through Interreg IVA Öresund-Kattegat-Skagerrak and has a total budget of approximately 2 million euro.

The main components of the project are: 1) a cross-border collaboration between students in the age of 13-15 across the Öresund, 2) learning circles, where teachers and researchers together can reflect on teaching and learning processes and 3) development of new methods and concepts of education for sustainable development.

Around 25 teachers and 300 students from eight elementary schools in Lund, Malmö and Copenhagen are directly involved in the project, increasing the students' participation in planning their education. By involving the students in current challenges within sustainable development and urban planning, the project aims to support young people to develop the action competence needed to participate in the formation of a future sustainable society. This action competence is built on knowledge, ability and motivation.

PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

The project design was made by the involved partners, elaborated during several years. It relates to existing initiatives and objectives of the three cities. To implement the project, an organization consisting of a steering group, a project group and a working group have been established. The project period is 2010-2013. In the autumn of 2010 the collaboration between students across the Öresund started and learning circles for teachers were initiated.

Cross-boundary student collaboration

Öresundsklassrummet has created several forums for the involved students to be able to meet and communicate with each other across the Öresund. Each class has a "friend class" at the opposite side of Öresund which they meet several times during each semester to work together on themes related to the project. Social activities are also on the agenda, since they effectively contribute to the mutual understanding and affinity. The friend classes communicate online, using an internal web platform and other internet based channels.



Two of four “EduCamps” have been held, when all the 300 students meet during a day filled with workshops, games, cultural and social activities. During the EduCamps the students get to know each other better and are able to meet on their own terms within a given framework related to the themes of the project.



From autumn 2010 until summer holidays 2011 the students have been working with the two themes of Green Mobility and Green Technology. During the theme of Green Mobility the classes focused on detail planning of the local area surrounding their schools. The work included building models of landscapes and resulted in well-attended exhibitions. A delegation of students from the project got to work directly with architects and city planners to influence the detail planning of the new district “Nordhavnen” in Copenhagen, with special focus on the planning of the new school. In the theme of Green Technology the students have designed their own sustainable innovations and proposals around energy production and waste management.

The students have contacted city planning offices, politicians and media to get feedback on their ideas and to be able to influence city planning with their proposals. Through the themes of green mobility and green technology students trained in various skills such as interview techniques, statistics, the political system, compilation of information, presentation skills, teamwork, creativity, inventive processes, constructing scale drawings, taking a stand on environmental issues and contacting media and local politicians.

Learning circles for teachers and researchers

The project has three trans-nationally mixed learning circles, led by mentors from the Lund University, Malmö University and The University College UCC in Copenhagen. The two stakeholders from RCE Skåne: Malmö University and Lund University planned the learning circles from the beginning and invited to a kick-off in the start of the project. The teachers are now divided into three groups, where teachers from the respective friend classes are in the same group. The learning circles are a cross-boundary platform for reflection and innovation, a place where discussions about the everyday situation for the teachers can be lifted to a higher level and new knowledge can be produced, by the teachers as well as the researchers. A common literature base is used by the learning circles and the content thereof is then connected to the teachers’ experiences and to exploratory research questions, such as: How do we look at the roles of the students in this project? Do the students participate enough in the planning process of their education and how can we make such participation possible?

Öresundsklassrummet is also providing opportunities for all the teachers in the project to meet in joint teaching seminars. The first one, out of four seminars, took place in Lund in November 2010 and it was a good opportunity for exchanging experiences and achieving a common understanding of the project.

Information to the public about Öresundsklassrummet is provided by a website connected to a Wordpress-blog, newsletters, participation in conferences, the partners’ websites, media coverage, exhibitions, brochures, etc.





OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION OF THE INITIATIVE

In Öresundsklassrummet new knowledge is produced continuously. While working with the teachers in the project find that the confidence of the students is rising and action competence and ownership of the project are increasing. The students gained a deepened reality-based knowledge about the themes of green mobility and technology, an insight into productions of goods and environmental consequences thereof and also a deeper understanding of how decisions are made and implemented in a municipality.

The learning circles are highly appreciated by the teachers as a new and much needed opportunity of reflecting on their own working situation. The learning circles benefit from mutual understanding of learning processes as well as exchange and development of pedagogical practices for education for a sustainable future.

The challenges in Öresundsklassrummet so far have been differences in language, communication and work cultures, issues that are continuously addressed on all levels of the project. There is an ongoing process of evaluation of Öresundsklassrummet, taking place in the learning circles, seminars, in all the schools and on the meetings of the project group. These processes lead to continuous adjustments of the courses of action within the project. During a conference half way in the project – an extensive evaluation will take place about the teachers and learners work and aims in the project.

Öresundsklassrummet will run for two more years and the collected experiences from the project will result in teaching material, a mobile science center, exhibitions and a common book or catalogue. Included in the project is also the formation of a new method for involving children and youth in city planning, called Urban X Öresund.

SUMMARY

Öresundsklassrummet creates a cross-boundary added value on a structural level as well as on a personal level through collaborative learning, cultural exchange and affinity for all participating individuals. The project encourages everyday integration and the formation of new meeting places. Teachers, students, public administrators and researchers need to meet across borders to find common approaches on education for sustainable development in the region of Öresund.

By giving the students possibilities to influence their own education and involving them in current challenges within sustainable development and urban planning, Öresundsklassrummet is providing the action competence needed to participate in the formation of a future sustainable society. Öresundsklassrummet is a model project, intended to spread its concepts and methods to other schools in the region.

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