



Internationalisation  
in Higher Education  
for Society

# >>> Global witnesses of climate change

#IHES project

"Global witnesses of climate change" is a new activity developed for the IHES project, disseminating internationalisation values. It is organised and run by the Department of Political and Social Sciences of the Faculty of Law, Palacky University. The core of the activity is talks with students of regional secondary schools in Olomouc County (Olomoucký kraj) focusing on sustainable development in relation to human rights, environmental and energy security, discourse and framing, trade, and multilevel governance. The project meets several Sustainable Development Goals, especially those directly linked to the environment, climate action, education, responsible consumption, and peace and justice. The first run of the activity was carried out during the first semester of the academic year 2022-23.

## 1 WHAT IS THE GOAL OR REASON FOR IMPLEMENTING THE PROJECT?

The main goals are to explore the concept of sustainable development and its linkage to human rights, equality, and justice. The project also enhances the consciousness about environmental and energy security. On a broader scale, the project wants to support the development of critical thinking about global issues and changes, increase students' sensibility to global environmental issues and develop a deeper understanding of other people's reality. The main impact expected for the students is an increased awareness of salient global issues and active citizenship. In a wider societal context, the project spread the values of internationalisation into secondary education.

## 2 WHO ARE THE BENEFICIARIES?

The target group are students in secondary schools in the city of Olomouc and the wider region of Olomouc County (Olomoucký kraj). The IHES project enriches the curriculum of secondary schools as it moves beyond the classes dedicated to environmental education and places the topics in the wider context of other courses, such as history, geography, and civic education. The topics are covered by academics who specialise in them; therefore, they can substantially deepen students' knowledge. The project also has clear expectations for the Law Faculty: it should lead to an increased impact on the internationalisation of the curriculum and in the area of activities planned by faculty for secondary education. It also strengthens the role of the university and its societal impact by disseminating knowledge and skills.



## 3 WHO ARE THE PARTNERS IN YOUR UNIVERSITY?

The partner group in this project are outgoing academics, i.e., instructors with experience in teaching and researching abroad, willing to transfer their knowledge to wider society. Their main task is identifying interesting and relevant aspects and sub-topics for talks, preparing them and carrying out lectures. Another of their responsibilities is to ensure the reflection of SDG's goals in their activity within the project.

## 4 HOW DID YOU REALISE THIS PROJECT?

A total of five lectures took place at secondary schools in Olomouc - the Hejčín Gymnasium and the Čajkovský Gymnasium. Both schools are attended by students from Olomouc and its surroundings. At Hejčín Gymnasium, the school administration offered lectures to junior and senior students as part of their additional seminar classes in history and geography attended by students who plan to graduate in these areas. At Čajkovského Gymnasium, the lectures were given in civic education classes. Students were aged from 15 to 17. All lectures lasted 45 minutes of standard class time. We used a PowerPoint presentation to present the main topics (e.g., environmental problems in the Czech Republic and on a global scale). The presentations were followed by a discussion with the students (e.g., on possible changes). We used case studies and examples. Online questionnaires provided feedback. Students were interested in the environmental issues presented, some of whom were hearing about them for the first time.

## 5 WHAT ARE THE MOST RELEVANT ENABLERS OF THIS PROJECT AND HOW DID YOU CONVINC THEM TO PARTICIPATE?

Important enablers were the secondary schools which showed interest in enriching their curriculum with lectures on environmental topics with social impacts. In this project, we contacted the secondary schools through Palacky university alumni who work there. They then arranged the consent of the relevant class teachers and the school administration. In the case of Čajkovského Gymnasium, personal contacts were used to convince the school management of the usefulness of the event. Another channel that could be utilised to reach secondary schools was a cooperation network established several years ago by the Faculty of Law.



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## WHAT WERE THE MAIN OBSTACLES YOU ENCOUNTERED AND HOW DID YOU OVERCOME THEM?

The project's implementation depended mainly on the consent of the teachers teaching the particular class and the school management. At Hejčín Gymnasium, there were no substantial obstacles to the organisation of the cooperation, but at Čajkovského Gymnasium, more persuasion was required. Most probably, the openness to participate varies according to the high school management and individual teachers' openness to altered education. Secondary schools in the Czech Republic suffer from voluminous education plans on the one hand and a low allocation of time to social sciences on the other. As a result, teachers of social sciences at secondary schools are under pressure to keep the plan. Another obstacle may be the financial situation of each school. For example, at the Čajkovského Gymnasium, the teacher of the respective class in which the talk was realised suffered a salary cut because his class was taught not by himself but by a guest speaker. Such a measure can significantly reduce a teacher's motivation. In view of this fact, future projects should reflect on the remuneration of secondary school teachers and/or agreement on this aspect with the school management.

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## WHAT WERE THE KEY "DO'S AND DON'T'S" THAT YOU LEARNED WHILE SETTING UP AND RUNNING THIS PROJECT?

On the part of "Do's", close personal contact must be established and maintained between those responsible for the activities on the part of the university/faculty and the secondary school. Losing personal contacts often leads to the termination of such activity. Teaching should be based on the maximum active involvement of students. Compared with, for example, senior citizens, younger students expect from additional classes a proactive approach of the teacher as they seem less motivated in direct interaction with the presenter unless directly asked to do so. Some pre-class activities can be useful to engage them more in the topic. Also, the 45 minutes format is very challenging as there is no comfort for the lecturer to develop the issue in greater detail. The pace of the class is faster and requires increased interactivity to keep students' attention. A PowerPoint presentation with pictures is a good background, but it is necessary to help students to draw some conclusions/recommendations based on the information presented. In secondary school, students seemed to require a more "advisory" approach than university students, who are more independent and capable of critical and analytical thinking.