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ENGAGE EXTERNAL REVIEW

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INDEX

1. Introduction.....	2
1.1 Artifacts for Review.....	2
1.2 Method for Review.....	3
2. Project Management and Partner Meetings.....	4
2.1 Work Manual, Procedures and Templates, and Partner Communication.....	4
2.2 Partner TPM Meetings and Online Meetings.....	5
2.3 Achievement and Impact.....	7
3. ENGAGE Learning and Supporting Materials, Piloting and Learning Activities.....	7
3.1 ENGAGE Curriculum.....	8
3.1.1 Introduction.....	8
3.1.2 Curriculum Review.....	9
3.1.3 ENGAGE Handbook.....	10
3.2 Online Pupils’ Meetings.....	12
3.3 On-Site Teacher and Pupil Learning Activities.....	13
4. Impact.....	14
4.1 Pilot Diaries from All Four Participating Countries.....	14
4.2 Finnish Pupil Survey (modules 1 & 2) and Teacher Diaries During Piloting.....	19
4.3 Online Pupils’ Learning Meetings.....	22
4.3.1 Observer Feedback Forms from Pupil Meetings.....	22
4.3.2 Pupils’ Learning Visit in Iceland.....	24
5. Conclusion/Discussion.....	25
6. About the Reviewer.....	26

1. Introduction

Engaging Rural Youth (ENGAGE) was a 29-month project funded by the Erasmus+ education programme aiming at supporting rural youth getting involved with rural development. The project is lead by Landsbyggdarvinir, acronym FORD, a small NGO in Iceland operating for over 19 years and focusing on work with youth in rural communities across Iceland. Other partners are Montenova primary school in Sweden, Salas primary school in Latvia, Nesskoli in Iceland and The University of Eastern Finland.

ENGAGE's objective was to equip all 12-13 year old young people (7th graders) in rural communities in four European countries with the necessary tools, skills and competences for them to actively participate in future decision-making in their rural communities and have a meaningful engagement in the implementation of various actions related to local community development.

The ENGAGE learning course created during the project consists of a four-week learning learning with a set of weekly modules and lesson plans aimed at developing competences among pupils to actively participate in the future in decision- making procedures in their rural communities as well as skills and competences related to the development of innovative projects (entrepreneurship). During the project the ENGAGE learning course was piloted in the four participating countries. Based on feedback, the ENGAGE learning materials and methods for implementation were adapted.

1.1 Artifacts for Review

This external review of the Erasmus+ ENGAGE Project was conducted by analyzing the following documents:

- First TPM partner feedback survey (Iceland, Sept 2019), second TMP partner feedback survey (Finland, Oct 2021) and third TMP partner feedback survey (Iceland, March/April 2022).
- Pupil feedback from a learning visit to Iceland (March/April 2022)
- Pupil feedback from first, second and third online learning meetings (30/9 2020, 25/11 2020, 11/5 2021)
- Observer (partner experts) feedback on pupil meetings (23/11/2020; 11/5/2021)
- Teacher Learning Diaries following teaching on food sustainability and 11/5/2021 pupil meeting
- Teacher feedback from first online pupils' meeting (23/11/2020)
- Teacher Diaries from piloting of ENGAGE learning course from Latvia, Sweden, Finland and Iceland (Jan-April 2022)

- Pupils' survey in Finland (modules 1-2) during piloting of ENGAGE learning course (Jan-March 2022)
- Post Iceland TPM and LLT reflective conversation with participants (March/April 2022)
- ENGAGE Curriculum/Handbook and Lesson Plans, available on the project's Google Drive and on the project's website: <http://engageyouth.eu/>
- ENGAGE Project Manual and templates used for administration of project (ENGAGE Google Drive)
- Post Iceland TPM and LLT reflective conversation with participants (March/April 2022)
- Interview with the project manager of ENGAGE (April 2022)

1.2 Method for Review

Each of these documents was analyzed and then mapped against the stated learning goals of the ENGAGE Project (except for the TPM and student meeting surveys).

For the assessment of the outputs of ENGAGE, that is the ENGAGE Learning Course (curriculum) and Handbook (inclusive of learning materials and lesson plans) a grid of intended goals of the ENGAGE project was created using excel. Whenever a survey response or diary reflection indicated that a stated goal was met, a mark was made on that goal. This method allowed the external reviewer to get a holistic sense of which goals were reflected in the data across the various data collections in addition to reviewing the materials produced independently. When reviewing this report it is essential to take into account that the survey data and the diaries were not designed to specifically assess for each of the goals and therefore the absence of a sub-goal being reflected in the data does not indicate that it wasn't met, only that it wasn't mentioned in the data sets.

It is equally important to note that the data sets are not weighed in any way that can determine the depth or longevity of the impact. The pupil feedback survey data from the pupils gives a glimpse into the pupil experience and reflection, in their own words, following the online learning meetings (a total of three). Only Finland surveyed their pupils following the first and second modules during the piloting in January-March 2022 to assess their learning. Pupil surveys were not conducted after the pilot modules in other countries and so there is limited pupil reflective data to analyze. The teacher diaries from the piloting provided rich insight and teacher observations on pupil engagement and behavior, as well as critical feedback on the ENGAGE learning programme.

2. Project Management and Partner Meetings

The project foresaw an evaluation of the project management of ENGAGE, including organization of communication between partners, quality assurance mechanism and planning and implementation of Transnational Partner Meetings (TPM). For the project management, TPMs and teacher learning activities a review of documents was done as well as an interview (focus group) with partners towards end of project.

In an interview with the project manager and individual partners during their visit to Iceland on 1st April 2022, information was shared that the project has a very difficult start for the first six months due to lack of management competences on behalf of Landsbyggdarvinir, the project lead. Thus, it was not until a new project manager joined the project, some 6 months into the project's start, that the project came back on track. Soon thereafter, however, the Covid-19 pandemic hit upsetting the project's plan of activities very seriously. In total, five small learner training activities were planned during the project. Due to Covid-19 these could not be implemented as planned. The partnership, however, in order to keep the project's momentum and engaging pupils in international and intercultural relations with peer pupils in the other partner countries as promised, spent considerable time and effort in planning and implementing three online pupils' meetings, each with a particular theme related to the project's objective. Due to this some delays in the creation of the ENGAGE learning course and piloting of finalized material was experienced. Moreover, to give the pupils who participated in the pupils' meetings an opportunity to meet face-to-face, the partnership decided to plan a Pupils Learning and Training Activity (LTT) in Iceland 28 March- 4 April 2022 with participation of 39 pupils and 11 teachers. The planning of this activity took considerable time and effort from the partnership that was not foreseen in the initial planning.

2.1 Work Manual, Procedures and Templates and Partner Communication

A review of the managerial documents prepared by the partnership, particularly the ENGAGE Evaluation and Monitoring Plan, Dissemination Plan and minutes from partner meetings, was done comparing the goals and indicators set for the management of the project with realization of deliverables and assessment of project partner through review of the ENGAGE Project Manual and Dissemination Plan and communication between partners, as well as realization of meetings as indicated in minutes from TPM meetings and in a focus group organized with representatives from each partner towards the end of the project.

Overall, the project managed to deliver what it intended in regard to project management although 6-monthly evaluation reports were not produced. Instead, and due to external circumstances the partnership met 4-times more often online than indicated in the project's

proposal thus fostering a much stronger working relations and commitment between all partners. Templates created and used by partners supported the partners in carrying out tasks related to administration (finances, reporting and dissemination).

The results of the analysis of the set goals and indicators is provided in the table below.

Planned activities/outputs	How evaluated	Deliverables	Realization of deliverables
Project management plan # workplan with clear division of tasks and responsibilities and a time table # approved decision-making procedures # approved methods and tools of communication between partners # cooperation commitment from all partners # financial management plan # Project events (seminars, meetings, conferences); #Project management reports.	# Online questionnaires with feedback from partners # Feedback from the E+ NA on progress (interim report) # minutes from partner meetings # Quality reports Project events (seminars, meetings, conferences); Project management reports.	1. Two Internal quality and evaluation reports 2. An Evaluation and Monitoring Plan	1. No specific quality and evaluation reports were written but due to Covid-19 partners met every week, or every other week online for up to 2hrs to discuss project’s progress and development of intellectual outputs. Minutes from many of the online meetings are stored in the project’s Google Drive. Interim Report was approved without comments from the NA. 2. An Evaluation and Monitoring plan was created as well as a short Dissemination Plan.

2.2 Partner TPM Meetings and Online Meetings

The TPM meetings improved over time. The first TPM held in Iceland in September 2010 was given critical feedback by partners attending primarily concerning the organization of the meeting and communication about both the meeting and expectations about the project (data collected from all participants). The lead partner decided as a result to find a new project manager to lead the project. The new project manager got engaged in the project in March 2020.

The second TPM meeting held in Finland in October 2021 focused mostly on planning for the upcoming piloting of the ENGAGE learning course, as well as dissemination activities. It was well reviewed by the participants. Participants felt that at times that the schedule was tight, however,

that getting together to meet other educators from other countries was an incredibly enriching experience. Organization and logistics were both rated highly.

The final TMP meeting was held in Iceland at the end of March, beginning of April 2022 in conjunction with the final pupils' learning event. The pupil learning event was very well reviewed, by the partner organizations, and several comments were made about the importance of the pupils meeting each other, hearing and trying to speak different languages, seeing the landscape of a new country and learning that while there are differences there are more similarities among them. During this TPM focus was on finalization of the project, adaptation of learning material, translation into partner languages and final reporting.

Due to Covid-19 the face-to-face meetings could not be held as planned. Instead, the partners met online weekly or bi-weekly during the whole project period. While the partners did not keep records of all the online meetings (minutes), it is estimated that over 50 online meetings were held between partners during the project, period. Most will all partners present but some with fewer discussing certain implementation aspects, e.g. on pupils' learning activities, logistics for travel etc. From reading minutes from meetings and discussion with partners, it can be confidently assumed that objectives in regard to meetings and communication between partners was very well met during the project. This is so despite the obvious hick-up up in the project's lead during the first 6-months of the project, Covid-19 restrictions, and repeated problem with some of the board members of Landsbyggdarvinir (FORD) as reported by all the partners. In fact, the frequent communication which the partnership upheld throughout the project period, can be seen as exemplary.

Planned activities/outputs	How evaluated	Deliverables	Realization of deliverables
<p>Five transnational Partner Meetings (2 in Iceland, in Sweden, in Finland and in Latvia)</p> <p>Monthly online meetings</p>	<p>#Online questionnaire administered between partners following each transnational meeting</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Five TPMs realized 2. Results from online questionnaires every 6 months; implementation of follow-up activities required based on survey results. 3. Minutes from meetings 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Despite Covid-19 travel restrictions during 2/3 of the project period the partners managed to hold 3 TPMs. In addition, over 40 meetings were held online. 2. Participant online surveys on each TPM but were not done every 6 months. Follow-up activities implemented as needed.

			3. Minutes held for many of the online meetings. If no minutes follow-up was written in invitation for next meeting.
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2.3 Achievement and Impact

Goals regarding project management and meetings were overwhelmingly met. While some deviations from set deliverables for project management were observed these did not impact in any way the successful implementation and completion of the project, particularly given the difficult start of the project and the impact of Covid-19.

3. ENGAGE Learning and Supporting Materials, Piloting and Learning Activities

For the assessment of the outputs of ENGAGE, that is the ENGAGE Learning Course (curriculum) and Handbook (inclusive of learning materials and lesson plans) a grid of intended goals of the ENGAGE project was created using excel. Whenever a survey response or diary reflection indicated that a stated goal was met, a mark was made on that goal. This method allowed the external reviewer to get a holistic sense of which goals were reflected in the data across the various data collections in addition to reviewing the materials produced independently. When reviewing this report, it is essential to take into account that the survey data and the diaries were not designed to specifically assess for each of the goals and therefore the absence of a sub-goal being reflected in the data does not indicate that it wasn't met, only that it wasn't mentioned in the data sets. The table below lists the planned activities/outputs in this regard and realization.

Planned activities/outputs	How evaluated	Deliverables	Realization of deliverables
A 3-day Teachers' Training Activity	#Online questionnaire administered among participating teachers on quality of training	1. Teacher Training activity realized 2. Published ENGAGE Learning Course Handbook	1. A 2-day, not 3-day, teacher training activity was held in Finland in October 2021 (a year later than originally planned). Training was shortened due to ongoing Covid-19 restrictions. 2. ENGAGE Learning Course Handbook

				created in all partner languages and EN.
Four Pupils' Learning Activities	#Online questionnaire and self-assessment among pupils (prior to and following learning activities)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Four Pupils' Learning Activities realized Assessment of Activity (pupils and teachers's self-assessment) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Due to Covid-19 three of the pupils' learning activities took place online. A final event was held in Iceland 28/3-4/4 2022 with participation of 39 pupils and 11 teachers. Assessment was provided for all online activities by pupils and in the form of "observer" feedback from teachers. 	
ENGAGE 4-week Learning Course (curriculum – IO1) and Handbook (IO2)	#Review of ENGAGE materials, curriculum and Handbook, including all delivered lesson plans in English	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Creation of an ENGAGE 4-week learning course (curriculum and lesson plans) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> A full 4-week ENGAGE learning course was developed (curriculum) with a detailed Handbook and over 20 different lesson plans for each of the 4 course modules. 	
Piloting of IO1 and IO2 – ENGAGE Learning Course and ENGAGE Handbook	# Feedback from teachers and pupils prior to and following piloting	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Piloting of the 4-week ENGAGE Learning Course and updates on learning materials/Handbook based on feedback. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> A full 4-week piloting was realized Jan-March 2022 with feedback from teachers in the form of teaching diaries and feedback from some pupils (Finland). 	

3.1 ENGAGE Curriculum

3.1.1 Introduction

The ENGAGE curriculum is a pedagogical framework for a four-week learning course where learners discuss topics related to community development and the revitalization and sustainability of rural communities. During the course, learners, both individually and in groups, develop innovative ideas to strengthen their home communities. These ideas are presented at public meetings and to local community stakeholders at the end of the course. Following presentations, local decision makers and community stakeholders select ideas to develop further or implement directly in the community.

The ENGAGE curriculum provides a framework for the implementation of the ENGAGE Learning Course. This includes definition of course objectives, learning outcomes, themes, context, organization, outcome evaluation and assessment. The curriculum was developed in English and then adapted and translated to partner languages considering national and school curricula in each of the ENGAGE partner countries. The curriculum is an open educational resource that can be applied by primary schools and teachers outside the ENGAGE partnership and in different countries across Europe.

3.1.2 Curriculum Review

The ENGAGE Curriculum, published and available online, <http://engageyouth.eu/> thoughtfully lays out the pedagogical framework at play as well as the organizational structure of the course.

It clearly explains the different roles that are necessary for the implementation: Teacher as Trainer or Facilitator and other teachers or external stakeholders, e.g. community members as Coach or a Mentor. It also clearly defines the target group, pupils from the age of 12-14; and learning outcomes categorized into knowledge, skill and competence. Each of these categories defines a set of specific outcomes from the implementation of the course. The overall pedagogical approach is **problem-based** (phenomena), **cooperative** and **participatory learning** which provides an opportunity to actively involve and motivate learners by drawing upon their own experience, interests and skills in solving problems, using examples and situations of interest to them in their daily lives, and using a variety of new, enjoyable, and often visual teaching methods.

The course structure is such that each school works with some or all of the following themes during the 4-week course. These include:

- Sustainability;
- Innovation and entrepreneurship;
- Environmental affairs;
- Multiculturalism and multiliteracy;
- Creativity, cultural heritage and arts;
- Well-being, self-realization and regulation;
- Democratic participation, human rights, interaction and expression of own opinions and ideas;
- Working life competences and employment.

The course content can be combined with the teaching of core subjects such as, natural and social sciences, art, languages, history and math.

The curriculum allows for a fair amount of teacher autonomy in making choices, not only in content and integration, but also in the modules taught and the amount of teaching hours used. The ENGAGE training course is designed as **four modules** to be implemented in four weekly modules, each including 3-4 sessions (each 40-60 minutes long). Multiple lesson plans are available for each of the modules that teachers can mix and match in creating a comprehensive 4-week learning course. This approach can be considered innovative in the sense that the teacher is part of designing the course and can simultaneously apply different pedagogical methods.

The elements of the lesson design are as follows:

1. Presentation and discussion on identified course topics/themes and key concepts to enhance participants' knowledge and understanding in preparation of the development of their own solutions to a challenge or a problem in their own communities.
2. Individual work, each pupil defines an idea or a solution to a challenge or a problem for a community initiative.
3. Following the presentation of individual ideas, the class selects 3-5 ideas to work on in groups using public participatory approaches. Groups will then work with and develop these ideas into viable solutions which they will then present to local stakeholders and community leaders.
4. Following the completion of the group work (viable solution) the learners and their teachers will organize and facilitate a public event where they will present the outcome of their group work.

Finally, the curriculum discusses the course assessment plan through focus groups, online questionnaires, pupil feedback forms, and formal assessment of knowledge. The piloting and feedback were used to further develop and finalize the curriculum.

3.1.3 ENGAGE Handbook

Based upon the curriculum the ENGAGE project also developed a Handbook for Teachers which explains the background of the course, pedagogical strategy and methods for implementation (multiple lesson plans for each of the 4-weekly modules, assessment methods, and guidelines and activities related to discussion of themes, the development of innovative projects (entrepreneurial activities) and setting up youth decision-making bodies. The handbook includes:

The objective and background of the course; Pedagogical/didactic strategy; Tools for working with different themes. Each Module provides a description and then a breakdown of the knowledge, skills, competencies the pupils will gain at its completion. Within each Module there are several Lesson Plans provided, of various length (1-3 hours). Teachers can choose 1-3 Lessons within each Module depending on the time they had and their interest. Each Lesson is fully developed, including defined outcomes, learning activities, timing, and forms and templates for evaluation and assessment. In addition, lesson templates are provided for the teachers to use as necessary.

Module 1 ENGAGE My Community and the SDG Goals The aim of this module is that pupils acquire knowledge and understanding of different topics/themes related to the

operation/workings of their own rural community (economics, history, culture, governmental structure), on the concept of sustainability and sustainable lifestyles and how the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations apply to their own lives and to the developments of their communities. This module offers a total of five lessons from which the teachers can choose.

Module 2 Engage Idea Preparation The purpose of this module is that participants acquire knowledge and understanding of their community, enhance their communication skills, gather and analyze information on their community with the objective to develop an idea for a community project or change. This module offers 4 lessons from which the teacher can choose.

Module 3 Idea Development This module includes the organization of an idea workshop, where pupils learn to listen to and evaluate all individually developed ideas as well as organizing a vote on the presented projects/ideas. This process provides preparation for presenting selected ideas to municipalities for their decision-making processes. This module offers 7 lessons from which the teacher can choose.

Module 4 ENGAGE Idea Presentation The purpose of this module is that participants acquire skills setting up a process of public participation in community development and decision making. This includes setting up a youth parliament involving key stakeholders and decision makers. This module offers 4 lessons from which the teacher can choose. In further support of Module 4, the Finnish partner, developed and shared a [presentation](#), about Youth Democracy Practices and the methods by which to give youth a voice and platform for their thinking and collaborative decision-making.

Module Evaluation Based upon the skills/competences lists, module evaluation was conducted with/by:

- Online transnational focus group discussions of teachers organized by the partnership.
- Focus group discussions of pupils facilitated and documented by teachers.
- Self- and peer evaluation of pupils in open dialogue, diaries, or video logs.
- Online questionnaires for teachers and documented round discussions with pupils.
- Online module evaluation questionnaire filled out by pupils.

As seen from the above overview, the modules and lesson plans for the ENGAGE Project are well defined and clearly articulated for the use of the piloting teachers. The thorough approach to curriculum and lesson design was evident in each section of the Curriculum and Handbook, including the modules and their corresponding lessons. In addition, each module provided ample choice to the teachers to best incorporate the lessons into their existing schedules and content areas, while providing them with a strong framework and structure for the implementation of each module and its corresponding lessons. Finally, the thoughtful approach to a multilayered assessment, evaluation and reflection model was evident throughout.

3.2 Online Pupils' Meetings

Four face-to-face learning activities for pupils were planned for the ENGAGE project. Due to Covid-19 restrictions it became evident that this part of the project could not be implemented as planned. The partnership then decided, in order to give their learners an opportunity to meet pupils their ages from different countries to organize online learning meetings. According to the partners they had to spend a lot of time at the beginning to figure out which format to use for these meetings, from the online platform (experimented with Teams and other formats used in some of the partner countries) to themes and creating preparatory work and online activities. They could not access any templates to build on so all the preparatory documents and templates used in the three online pupils meetings are original to the ENGAGE project.

First Pupils' Meeting: The aim of the first pupils meeting on September 30, 2020 was to engage pupils from the partner schools in the ENGAGE project virtually while there were travel and visiting restrictions in effect in all partner countries due to Covid 19. The purpose of the first meeting was to give pupils the opportunity to introduce themselves to one another (who am I, how old, what are my hobbies and interests) and to present to pupils from other schools' general

information about their school, city and country.

Second Pupils' Meeting: The aim of the second pupils meeting on November 25, 2020 was to continue engaging pupils from the partner schools in the ENGAGE project virtually while there were travel and visiting restrictions in effect in all partner countries due to Covid 19. The purpose of the second meeting was to give pupils the opportunity to discuss some questions with each other and share the answers to others about the internet, their hobbies and what other things are important to be able to live a good life in the hometown.

Third Pupils' Meeting: The aim of the third pupils meeting on May 11, 2021 was to continue engaging pupils from the partner schools in the ENGAGE project virtually while there were travel and visiting restrictions in effect in all partner countries due to Covid 19. The purpose of the third meeting was to give pupils the opportunity to share thought and answers about food and to tell all pupils about food sustainability in the country or region, to discuss and find common things, different things, interesting and unusual things about food choice and sustainability in different countries.

After reviewing documents The ENGAGE Project Team worked carefully and thoroughly to provide the best possible inter-cultural exchange for the participants despite the restrictions and disappointments caused by COVID 19. The online meetings, their organization and their planning reflect a responsive team, working in close collaboration to keep their learners in the center of the learning experience.

3.3 On-site Teacher and Pupil Learning Activities

Teacher Learning Activity: In conjunction with a TMP, a teacher learning activity was held in Mikkeli, Finland in October 2021. Teachers from every partner school prepared an activity which demonstrated the idea of their lesson plans prepared for the piloting of the 4-week ENGAGE learning course. Following demonstration of each activity, the participants discussed how to realize the ENGAGE curricular aims during the piloting of the ENGAGE learning course foreseen for January-March 2022 by sharing their ideas for combining the different lesson plans for each of the 4 modules of the ENGAGE learning course. Participants were further introduced to different evaluation tools such as the "Six thinking hats."

Pupils' Learning Activity: At the beginning of 2022 a window finally opened to plan a face-to-face pupil learning meeting. The partnership decided to give all the pupils, who had participated in the ENGAGE project and initially piloted the ENGAGE learning course (2020), an opportunity to meet in Iceland from 28th March to 4th April. The visit to Iceland was hosted by Nesskoli Primary School in Neskaupstaður in the eastern fjords of Iceland and took place both in Neskaupstadur and in Reykjavik where it was hosted by Landsbyggðarvinir (FORD). A total of 39 pupils took part in the visit along with 11 teachers. The aim of the final training event was to share the experiences of participants in the ENGAGE learning course during the two-and-a-half-year period and to come up with new solutions to sustain the local communities of the partners. Each partner school prepared an exhibition of the solutions their pupils came up with during the piloting in their schools, which was then open to the public in Neskaupstaður in advance of the final ENGAGE

multiplier event held on 30th March. Nesskoli both exhibited solutions done in 2020 and in 2022. Each school also prepared presentations and brought delicacies from their hometowns and home countries to share during the exhibition. During the stay in Iceland, the pupils had the experience to work on creative tasks together, aimed at team-building and intercultural understanding. They also had the opportunity to speak publicly during the ENGAGE multiplier event on their experiences in participating in the ENGAGE project, what it meant for them to have their voices on issues of their local communities heard, and the competences and lasting multicultural friendships they gained during the project.

4. Impact

The review of the documents, website, piloting diaries and evaluation forms suggests that the stated goals of the program were overwhelmingly met through the online pupils learning meetings as well as the piloting of the ENGAGE 4-week learning course. Below are tables displaying the analysis of the pilot modules. The first section displays a table for all four countries. The second section shows a comparison on the first two Finnish modules and the student feedback survey on those two modules.

4.1 Pilot Diaries from all Four Participating Countries

Each teacher participating in the piloting in the four partner countries held a diary during the piloting. The partnership created an online format for the diaries and specific questions the piloting teachers had to answer. All diaries were thus stored in the same portal.

Below is a display table which shows which pilot diary reflected which sub-goal of the ENGAGE Project. It is affirming to see that the diaries reflected almost every single sub-goal. The only sub-

goal not reflected in any diary is marked in green, “Individual and group accountability, no one can “hitchhike” and performance needs to be assessed.”

Stated Goal	Latvian pilot	Swedish pilot	Finland pilot	Iceland pilot
Train and equip pupils to actively participate in decision-making and future development of their communities	x	x	x	x
Encourage the pupils to identify and work with local stakeholders	x		x	x
Participants will gain knowledge and understanding of:				
their communities, culture, history, economy, and environment	x	x	x	x
the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations to transform our world and how they can be applied to each community (sustainable development) and in our own lives (sustainable lifestyles)	x	x	x	x
the organizational structure for decision-making within their community while developing an understanding of at which decision-making level they are working	x		x	
the concept and methods of public participation and democratic citizenship concepts			x	
how our values and personal strengths influence our lives and decision making	x	x		x
identifying and building on their personal strengths and values		x		x
Participants will gain the following skills:				
analytical and critical thinking skills	x	x	x	x
listening and observing skills	x	x	x	x
co-operation and team-working skills	x	x	x	x
responsibility and civic-mindedness	x	x	x	x
communication and presentation skills	x	x	x	x

IT and multimedia skills	x	x	x	x
problem-solving skills	x	x	x	x
Participants will have acquired competences in applying the general knowledge and understanding, skills achieved to:				
become active democratic citizens ready to participate and contribute to public policies and actions		x	x	
understand how local policies and decision making relate and affect their own life and environment.		x		
engage in group dynamics and value the importance of empathy, understanding and active listening	x	x	x	x
take responsibility and execute civic-mindedness	x	x	x	x
use different information technology and new media and communicate their ideas, thoughts and solutions in an effective way	x	x	x	x
To solve challenges and issues related to ensuring the sustainability of their communities and practicing sustainable lifestyles	x	x	x	x
Problem-based learning (PBL) is a student-centered approach in which students learn about a subject by working in groups to solve an open-ended problem. This problem is what drives the motivation and the learning. PBL is often group oriented and students must:				
Examine and define the problem	x	x	x	x
Explore what they already know about underlying issues related to it.	x	x	x	x
Determine what they need to learn and where they can find information and tools necessary to solve the problem.	x		x	x
Identify and evaluate possible ways to solve the problem.	x	x	x	x
Select and apply the solution to the problem.	x	x		x

Report and review the findings.	x	x	x	x
The ENGAGE learning modules also build upon cooperative learning as the goal is to promote cooperation among students in working on their projects and goals. The five elements of cooperative learning are:				
Positive interdependence to work on a goal committing both to personal and group success.	x	x	x	x
Individual and group accountability, no one can “hitchhike” and performance need to be assessed.				
Social skills or promotive interaction, sharing of resources, encouraging and supporting one another to reach their mutual goal.	x	x	x	x
Interpersonal and small group skills, as group members need to know how to provide effective leadership, make decisions, build trust, communicate and manage conflict.	x	x	x	x
Group processing and reflection as members can communicate freely, express concerns and celebrate accomplishments.	x		x	x
Participatory learning is the key methodology in the ENGAGE learning modules that follow the 4 phases process of participatory learning (picture):				
Module focuses on presentation and discussion on United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and how they can be applied to pupils’ local communities	x		x	x
Module focuses on individual pupils working on defining community challenges in cooperation with stakeholders within their community.	x		x	
Module focuses on group work, selection of project ideas and developing possible solutions.	x	x	x	x
Module focuses on group project presentation, stakeholders’ feedback and selection of ideas to implement in the community.	x	x	x	x

The strongest results were present in the **skills** the learners got to practice, across all the countries:

analytical and critical thinking skills
listening and observing skills
co-operation and team-working skills
responsibility and civic-mindedness
communication and presentation skills
IT and multimedia skills
problem-solving skills

It is likely that many of the skills were especially challenged in an almost completely virtual environment and created a situation where the learners had to practice and strengthen their IT and multimedia skills, their listening and observing skills and their communication and presentation skills. The online meetings required the students to use and troubleshoot technology as they were preparing for and making their presentations. In addition, the students were all communicating in English, which isn't a native language in any of the participating countries. It must be acknowledged that careful listening, communication, and presentation skills were made significantly more difficult in another language in a virtual environment. It makes the success of this project and of the learner experience even more remarkable.

Problem-Based Learning goals were also met consistently across the countries during the piloting. Although with varying degrees of difficulty (some teacher reported a challenge in engaging the learners, or having them understand the subject and task) the learners had ample opportunity to practice:

Examine and define the problem
Explore what they already know about underlying issues related to it.
Determine what they need to learn and where they can find information and tools necessary to solve the problem.
Identify and evaluate possible ways to solve the problem.
Select and apply the solution to the problem.
Report and review the findings.

According to the pilot diary review, there were several goals that presented as the most challenging goals to meet. It should be noted that many of the educators reported needing more

time to work on some of the basic content and concepts and often found not having more time resulted in less understanding for the pupils. This is essential feedback from the pilot which will strengthen the program as the feedback is integrated into the work. It is suggested that these goals be looked at more carefully as the modules are reworked for future teaching and learning as they weren't reflected in the document review as strongly as desired.

- the organizational structure for decision-making within their community while developing an understanding of at which decision-making level they are working
- the concept and methods of public participation and democratic citizenship concepts

- understand how local policies and decision making relate and affect their own life and environment.
- become active democratic citizens ready to participate and contribute to public policies and actions
- identifying and building on their personal strengths and values
- Individual and group accountability, no one can “hitchhike” and performance need to be assessed.
- To solve challenges and issues related to ensuring the sustainability of their communities and practicing sustainable lifestyles
- Module focuses on individual pupils working on defining community challenges in cooperation with stakeholders within their community.

4.2 Finnish Pupil Survey (modules 1 & 2) and Teacher Diaries During Piloting

The Finnish pupils gave feedback on the piloting of modules 1 and 2. There was strong alignment between the pupil feedback and teacher diaries on modules 1 & 2. Almost every goal reflected in the diaries was also reflected in the pupils' feedback. Those sub-goals which weren't reflected were also not asked about directly. The table below shows only those goals which were reflected in either or both of the data sets. The cells marked in blue were the goals reflected in the first two modules in both the diaries and in the student feedback. The cells marked in green were reflected in the first two modules of the diaries and not in the student survey. The rest of the marks from the pilot diaries were reflected in the remaining modules. Out of a total of 36 sub-goals the Finnish diaries, for all of the modules, reflected back 31 sub-goals. The pupils survey, following only the first two modules, reflected back 7 of the 15 sub-goals. This survey did not ask the learners about every main objective and therefore it is unknown how the pupils thought about them. The survey did not ask learners about any of the sub-goals under Problem-Based Learning.

Goals	Finland pilot	Finnish survey 1-2
train and equip pupils to actively participate in decision-making and future development of their communities	x	

encourage the pupils to identify and work with local stakeholders	x	
Participants will gain knowledge and understanding of:		
their communities, culture, history, economy, and environment	x	x
the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations to transform our world and how they can be applied to each community (sustainable development) and in our own lives (sustainable lifestyles)	x	x
the organizational structure for decision-making within their community while developing an understanding of at which decision-making level they are working	x	
the concept and methods of public participation and democratic citizenship concepts	x	
Participants will gain the following skills:		
analytical and critical thinking skills	x	
listening and observing skills	x	x
co-operation and team-working skills	x	x
responsibility and civic mindedness	x	
communication and presentation skills	x	x
IT and multimedia skills	x	
problem-solving skills	x	x
Participants will have acquired competences in applying the general knowledge and understanding, skills achieved to:		
become active democratic citizens ready to participate and contribute to public policies and actions	x	
engage in group dynamics and value the importance of empathy, understanding and active listening	x	x
take responsibility and execute civic mindedness	x	
use different information technology and new media and communicate their ideas, thoughts and solutions in an effective way	x	
To solve challenges and issues related to ensuring the sustainability of their communities and practicing sustainable lifestyles	x	

Problem-based learning (PBL) is a student-centered approach in which students learn about a subject by working in groups to solve an open-ended problem. This problem is what drives the motivation and the learning. PBL is often group oriented and students must:		
Examine and define the problem	x	
Explore what they already know about underlying issues related to it.	x	
Determine what they need to learn and where they can find information and tools necessary to solve the problem.	x	
Identify and evaluate possible ways to solve the problem.	x	
Report and review the findings.	x	
The ENGAGE learning modules also build upon cooperative learning as the goal is to promote cooperation among students in working on their projects and goals. The five elements of cooperative learning are:		
Positive interdependence to work on a goal committing both to personal and group success.	x	
Social skills or promotive interaction, sharing of resources, encouraging and supporting one another to reach their mutual goal.	x	x
Interpersonal and small group skills, as group members need to know how to provide effective leadership, make decisions, build trust, communicate and manage conflict.	x	x
Group processing and reflection as members can communicate freely, express concerns and celebrate accomplishments.	x	
Participatory learning is the key methodology in the ENGAGE learning modules that follow the 4 phases process of participatory learning (picture):		
Module focuses on presentation and discussion on United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and how they can be applied to pupils' local communities	x	
Module focuses on individual pupils working on defining community challenges in cooperation with stakeholders within their community.	x	

Module focuses on group work, selection of project ideas and developing possible solutions.	x	
Module focuses on group project presentation, stakeholders' feedback and selection of ideas to implement in the community.	x	

4.3 Online Pupils' Learning Meetings

Due to Covid-19 many of the planned activities of the ENGAGE project, such as the pupil learning activities planned in each partner country, had to be delayed or canceled due to travel and visiting restrictions in effect in all partner countries. In order to engage children actively in the project, give them the opportunity to participate in an international partnership, and engage in a meaningful way with adolescents from other European countries, the partnership decided to prepare and host international online pupils' learning meetings.

Each of the online pupils' meetings had a theme that was directly related to the objectives of ENGAGE, as did the planned on-site learning activities in the partner countries as written in the Erasmus+ application. The themes from the application included sustainability (social, economic, and environmental), friendship, intercultural sensitivity, rural development, etc. The partnership prepared a detailed agenda for each of the online pupils meeting to ensure a smooth flow of each meeting. The partnership further created worksheets for participants with different roles to take during the meetings, e.g. Team leader, Time keeper, Secretary (pupils) and an Observer (one of the partner experts). Observers were guided to assess the performance of individual pupils during group work (see 2nd and 3rd pupils' meetings). Thematic details, questions, and preparatory work for pupils in advance of the meetings were also prepared.

4.3.1 Observer Feedback Forms from Pupils' Meetings

The partners divided tasks in overseeing group work as "observers" during the online pupils' meetings. For the second and third online meetings, specific observer forms were created. These Observer feedback forms provided by partners were looking at both content acquisition for each of the meetings as well as general skills such as listening actively, teamwork, effectively presenting their perspectives on a topic, working in English, and motivating others to participate in a conversation. In each* of these competencies there was an increase in the overall number of students receiving an A grade. *Communicating in English is the only competence, presented in this list, which didn't specifically improve. This is a reasonable outcome for language

acquisition and comfort from one meeting to the next and the challenge of communicating in a virtual environment.

Competence	A	B	C	D		A	B	C	D
(S) in active listening.	22	14	6	1	(S) in active listening.	27	7	4	
(S) in working effectively in a team.	9	10	7		(S) in working effectively in a team.	17	11	10	
(S) in effectively presenting their own perspective on the topic and the results of group discussions.	9	20	14		(S) in effectively presenting their own perspective on the topic and the results of group discussions.	18	9	10	1
(S) in communicating well in English.*	22	13	8		(S) in communicating effectively online in English.	20	10	8	
(C) to motivate others to contribute to a discussion.	2	19	14	8	(C) to motivate others to contribute to a discussion.	10	14	12	

The first pupils' meeting was held on 30th September 2020. The online meeting was hosted using Microsoft Teams and run as a plenary session with all attending pupils in the same room the whole time. The aim of the meeting was to give the pupils from the four participating countries, a total of 42 pupils, an opportunity to introduce themselves to one another (who I am, how old am I, what are my hobbies and interests) and to present to the others some information on their own rural community.

The second pupils' meeting was held on 25th November 2020. The online meeting was hosted using Microsoft Teams. The beginning was run as a plenary session with all attending pupils in the same room. Following introductions, the pupils were split into international groups of 4-5 pupils with a Team leader, Timekeeper and an Observer. The aim of the meeting was to give pupils an opportunity to discuss, in small groups, and then report the outcomes to a plenary about the internet and online activities (access to internet, time spent on internet, what do we do online/use the internet for). Following that they discussed in more depth what they thought, as young people living in a rural community, was important for the sustainability of their own community (things that are important for you to be able to live a good life in your hometown) and what was shared between them (had in common) despite living in different countries. During this meeting the pupils had an opportunity to get to know one another and also explore commonalities and differences.

The third pupils' meeting was held on 11th May, 2021. Covid-19 was still causing travel restrictions. Instead of canceling pupils' engagement with one another, the partnership decided to plan and host a third pupils' online meeting. This time the focus was on the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, particularly on Goal nr. 12 - Food sustainability and waste. In advance of the meeting, the pupils worked with their teachers, locally, on gathering knowledge and discussing food waste and food sustainability issues. A lesson plan was prepared for this meeting that could be used both for online and in-class sessions. During the online meeting, again hosted on Microsoft Teams, the pupils first discussed, in small groups of 5-6 pupils, questions

related to food (favorite food, food in school canteen, typical food for their own country, vegetarian and vegan diets, and farming in their own region/community). Participants also gave presentations in their groups on food sustainability within their communities and countries. During the second part of the meeting, pupils met back in plenary and the team leader and secretary of each group shared things the group members had identified during their discussion.

4.3.2 Pupils' Learning Visit in Iceland

At the beginning of 2022 a window finally opened to plan a face-to-face pupil training meeting. The partnership decided to give all the pupils who had participated in the ENGAGE project and piloted the ENGAGE learning course an opportunity to meet in Iceland from 28th March to 4th April. The visit to Iceland was hosted by Nesskoli Primary School in Neskaupstaður in the eastern fjords of Iceland and took place both in Neskaupstadur and in Reykjavik. A total of 39 pupils took part in the visit along with 11 teachers. The aim of the final training event was to share the experiences of participants in the ENGAGE learning course and come up with new solutions to sustain their local communities. Each partner school prepared an exhibition of the solutions their pupils came up with which were then open to the public in Neskaupstaður in advance of the final ENGAGE multiplier event. Each school also prepared presentations and brought delicacies from their home towns and home countries to share during the exhibition. During the stay in Iceland, the pupils experienced working on creative tasks together aimed at team-building and intercultural understanding. They also had the opportunity to speak publicly about their experiences in participating in the ENGAGE project, what it meant for them to have their voices on issues of their local communities heard, and the competences and lasting multicultural friendships they gained during the project. This conversation functioned as a reflection on both this meeting as well as an overall reflection on the entire project. The students reported being disappointed at times when the travel visits had to be canceled to COVID 19 and were incredibly excited to finally come together during this meeting. While the online meetings had their challenges, they agreed that it lay a good groundwork on which to build friendships once they

did come together at last. They spoke very highly of getting to see Iceland, eat the treats from each country and again to be reminded of all they actually share and have in common.

5. Conclusion/Discussion

The thorough analysis of the documentation provided by the partners for the purpose of this review indicate satisfactorily that the targets and impacts of the project were overwhelmingly met.

The following indicators for impact are listed in the ENGAGE Evaluation Plan:

- A positive and statistically significant change in the target groups
- The project milestones are reached on time.
- The project results are delivered on time and approved by the consortium, they comply with the project application, requirements of the Erasmus+ projects (see Erasmus+ Programme Guide), project guidelines and needs of target groups.
- Dissemination: Following the delivery of the project there is potential for multiple roll-outs throughout Iceland, and in the other partner countries.

In regards to project management, project milestones were met on time. While some deliverables were not produced, e.g. 6-monthly monitoring reports, it did not impact the implementation of the project. Due to external circumstances, and problems with the lead partner Landsbyggdarvinir, chairman of the board specifically, as reported by the partners, changes had to be made to the original implementation. It is the view of this reviewer that the fact that the partnership managed to change implementation structure and actively engage over 40 pupils, plus those 7th graders who piloted the ENGAGE learning module in 2022, over 40 pupils, during over two years and provide them with a meaningful learning experience through online meetings and then a face-to-face learning meeting, was an achievement not normally expected from a project like this. The partners spent considerably more time on ensuring this than the project's budget foresaw. In addition, the partnership delivered a high quality ENGAGE learning course (Curriculum and a Handbook) that can be strongly recommended for further roll-out in other schools across the partnership countries or transferred to other European countries. The Handbook and lesson plans provide good guidance for implementation, as reported by the piloting teachers, and the topics and aimed at competence building of the learning course, sustainability, democratic citizenship, decision-making participation, entrepreneurship and

creativity, are further very relevant for today's learning, not only in rural communities, but in any community.

The documentations reviewed did not provide evidence of change among target groups that can be shown statistically but the pupils' and teacher feedback all provide strong evidence of change in the target groups that will be sustained, thus indicating that the project was on target in estimating the needs of this group (youth 12-14 years). Similarly, the evidence suggests that the ENGAGE learning course meets a defined need of teachers for pedagogical approach and learning materials on entrepreneurship and creativity and the development of democratic citizenship.

About the Reviewer

Andrea R. C. Kasper, EdD., was hired contractually in January, 2022 to begin her external review of the ENGAGE Project. The review ran from January to end May 2022. In addition to her educational leadership training and experience, Andrea has extensive experience in curriculum design, review and implementation. She has worked with teachers to develop their pedagogical and professional skills and run teacher training workshops. During her time as Head of School in Connecticut, she developed the strategy, pedagogical vision and plan for a complete redesign of the school's educational philosophy and practice. During that time she presented on the method, supported in all curriculum development and assessment and trained teachers to take on a new methodology. She has written and presented about progressive modes of education and leadership. In addition, Andrea has lived in five countries and has over 20 years of classroom teaching experience teaching pupils ranging from 5-18 years of age. [LinkedIn](#)