SiS.net interviewed Agata Goździk, the coordinator of EDU-ARCTIC to learn more about the project’s valuable work.

**PROJECT DETAILS**

**Title:** Innovative educational program attracting young people to natural sciences and polar research

**Acronym:** EDU-ARCTIC

**Website:** https://edu-arctic.eu/

**Coordinator:** Dr. Agata Goździk, Institute of Geophysics, Polish Academy of Sciences (IG PAS)

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**Duration:** 01/05/2016 – 31/07/2019

**Partners:** 6 institutions from Faroe Islands, France, Iceland, Norway and Poland
**SiS.net: Can you tell us what EDU-ARCTIC was about?**

**Agata Goździk:** The basic idea of EDU-ARCTIC was to inspire youngsters for science, STEM and scientific careers in Arctic research. The idea for EDU-ARCTIC developed from a large educational programme, EDUSCIENCE, which we ran in Poland from 2011-2015. It offered a variety of activities for schools, such as online lessons, visits to geophysical observatories, or science picnics at schools. But it also featured two contests for young people that had the finalists travel to our Polish Polar Station Hornsund, which was received with great enthusiasm by Polish schools. Since the Arctic held an obvious fascination for both teachers and students, we wanted to take this idea to the European level, and this is how EDU-ARCTIC started. We invited collaborating polar stations to become part of the project to be able to cover the complete European sector of the Arctic. This included stations in Iceland, dedicated to observing the Aurora Borealis, the Faroe Islands, which conducts geological studies, and in the continental part of northern Norway beyond the Arctic Circle, which focuses on biological investigations. The Polish Polar Station Hornsund on Svalbard mainly performs geophysical research, but also some biological research during the summer period.

The ideas introduced in Poland in EDUSCIENCE developed further through our participation as observers in the INTERACT project, which provides transnational access to Arctic stations. We tried to convince them to include an educational package in their next proposal. Even though it was not possible to develop this idea fully within INTERACT’s framework, some partners came to us and expressed their interest, encouraging us to try our own proposal in another call. The final consortium was based on institutions with which we had collaborated before, but also included new partners that had been recommended to us. In the end, we found that the SwafS call was perfect for us. This is how EDU-ARCTIC was brought to life. We tried twice, as the call was very challenging. The first try was in 2014, and although we had very good scores, it did not get financed. We decided to try another time - and this time we contacted our NCP for Horizon 2020 in Poland, SwafS office, who helped us to polish the proposal. Thanks to this support, we scored an “excellent” in impact - so that was key to the success of the proposal.

**SiS.net: What were the main objectives of EDU-ARCTIC?**

**Agata Goździk:** Our main objective was to incite young people’s interest in STEM and make them think about a possible future career in scientific research. The Arctic is a very sensitive region which affects what happens in our latitudes, so, basically, we wanted to show the importance of the Arctic, and raise awareness within society of what is happening right now in this area.

**SiS.net: What motivated you personally to become involved in EDU-ARCTIC?**

**Agata Goździk:** After coordinating the EDUSCIENCE project in Poland, I was convinced that it is beneficial for researchers to have contact with students, and that Polish schools would be very happy to collaborate with researchers. I therefore wanted to bring this researchers-schools collaboration to the next level.

**SiS.net: What is the key achievement and the most lasting impact from the EDU-ARCTIC project?**

**Agata Goździk:** Firstly, the one that we are very proud of is that interest from Europe and beyond exceeded our expectations: we created a network of 1,300 teachers and educators from 60 countries. In the proposal we had intended to have 500 schools and 10 countries on board. At the end of the project, 5 continents were involved, and interest was much higher than anticipated.

The other thing, which will be the most lasting element of the project, is Polarpedia, an online encyclopedia about the Arctic region which explains polar phenomena and scientific terminology. In the proposal we had promised to develop the encyclopedia in six languages, and we fulfilled that promise.

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languages. It turned out, however, that teachers found Polarpedia so useful that they helped with translation in order to benefit other teachers in their countries. Today, Polarpedia is available in sixteen languages. That the end users are actively contributing to its development was a signal for us that Polarpedia is used and is useful.

Finally, we managed to raise awareness about the Arctic even in those countries which do not have direct geographical links or a major scientific interest in it. For example, our findings showed that Southern Europe was extremely active and engaged in the project. One of the activities of EDU-ARCTIC was the Polar competition, in which high school students could propose innovative projects dedicated to the polar region. In three editions of the competition, the sixteen best teams were sent to project stations, where they could have a full scientific experience. In this competition, we had a high number of applications from more than twenty countries, including great proposals from Spain and Greece, and much interest from the Balkan countries. It was a big surprise for us that Southern Europe was so interested in the Arctic and polar issues.

SiS.net: What were the biggest challenges you had to overcome in EDU-ARCTIC during the implementation of the project?

Agata Goździk: The partner institutions came from different backgrounds and cultures, and not all had experience in educational activities. The first challenge was therefore to show partners how to conduct activities and collaborate smoothly regardless of backgrounds.

Another issue was language-related, as the use of English for online courses proved difficult for many schools. This was why we launched some versions in national languages as well. A considerable number of lessons was done in Polish, since around 30 per cent of all teachers registered came from Poland. We also had some lessons in Faroese, as many schools from the Faroe Islands participated in the project. Thanks to colleagues who were fluent in other languages, we also had some lessons in Italian, Russian, Greek and Romanian. However, we were doing our best to have everything in English for the end users.
**SiS.net:** What are your plans for continuing activities now that the project is over?

**Agata Goździk:** Due to the very favourable evaluations of the impacts of the project, we were discussing possible opportunities in other Horizon 2020 calls. Since the call objectives did not allow us to continue what we started with EDU-ARCTIC, however, we instead tried to integrate educational aspects of EDU-ARCTIC in some other projects. What we are running at the moment is a Polish programme, which is not dedicated to schools but to the general public, and we also offer webinars, we are organising workshops for Third Age Universities and for children’s universities, and we are holding some open lectures. However, these are mainly nationally, and in Polish.

We also have another project, EDU-ARCTIC 2, funded through an EEA grant. It is a follow up, and we will offer educational packages and online lessons for schools in Poland and Norway. Schools from the EDU-ARCTIC network will be able to participate and will thus still be able to benefit from the network we created.

We also offered to the INTERACT consortium to organise some educational activities. In INTERACT 3, e.g., which started in January, we managed to include educational parts and are providing webinars from various polar stations. So, we are trying to find opportunities to continue our activities, especially because so many teachers have been involved. For instance, we invited some teachers from EDU-ARCTIC to participate as advisers in the ERASMUS+ project Polar Star, and it is wonderful to see familiar faces from our network active and engaged in polar topics again.

**SiS.net:** We all know next year Horizon Europe is starting, but as we know, SwafS is not a separate area within it. How is it going to influence, or have any impact on your activities?

**Agata Goździk:** In fact, we are very disappointed about it. We signed online petitions and supported our NCPs in spreading the word that SwafS has been an important part of Horizon 2020. I do not think that it will close all opportunities, but it will make them different. What is possible now, is to include projects such as ours into a bigger programme, and I have observed that quite many coordinators of other initiatives, such as scientific or infrastructure projects, are keen to include educational activities. This is how we can continue a little bit. **It would be much more beneficial for us and our partners to have a dedicated action,** however, not something that we have partially here and there. But, at least we have the opportunity to provide an educational part in other projects.

**THREE EDU-ARCTIC KEY MESSAGES:**

- Arctic topics can ignite a spark in **every single student regardless of gender, grades or origin,** also in regions not connected with polar regions.

- Both students and scientists can benefit from educational projects.

- Polar research has potential to **integrate people from various regions and different backgrounds** because they are interdisciplinary, relevant and awe-inspiring!