

Exploring Europe Report

16/2/21

Despite interference from the Coronavirus our international project at Midleton CBS prevails. Having hosted our friends from far afield last December, all travel ceased and that scuppered our plans to visit them in Bulgaria, Greece, Finland and Germany last year. Still technology has meant that we can meet our friends virtually and not only that, but collaborate and work on our topics in a new and interesting way.

Last Monday 8th February, we joined forces online. We had 40 students and 10 teachers from each of the 5 countries present for 3 hours a day over 3 days. We had explored a variety of subjects, Economy, Gender, Nationalism, Digital Technology and the Environment. This latest venture we would learn from each other about Climate change and the environment.

Finland began, they are the only school in the project not in current lockdown. Masked up they led us on a journey through the forests of Finland teaching us about the flora and fauna of the native forests. Students were asked to go outdoors and take a photo of their immediate landscape. It was fascinating to see the contrast, while Germany and Finland were experiencing extreme temperatures of -20oC, it was 16oC in Bulgaria and Greece with students wearing t-shirts. Through the use of different apps students were able to take part and voice their opinion using Mentimeter, Padlet, Actionbound, Ourboox and Kahoot.

Ireland hosted next and shared our experiences of a beach clean up down in Roscarbery late last Dec. We had picked up a lot of fishing nets and got in touch with the local county council to pick them up. Following this we had a Zoom meeting with Catherine Barrett, a local who works for Bord Iasca Mhara and is involved in Fishing For Litter, a project whereby fishermen gather any waste they find at sea and deliver it to specially sited skips on piers all around the country. The boys relayed this information via slides to the other students and produced a game for all to play, multiple choice questions on how long various items take to decompose. Adam Hennessy, who featured this year in the Young Scientist Exhibition, gave a brief synopsis of his project entitled 'Global Warming'. A few other boys put together a presentation on the important work of Butterflies in pollination and biodiversity. We again played a game to reinforce what we had learned and participants were able to upload photos of butterflies and ideas of ways to encourage our pollinators for the future.

Germany hosted a very challenging day for us, we were asked to consider the European Green Deal. We looked at a video about what aspects of life are influenced by the EU. We were introduced to a political scientist who told us how the EU works. Next by organising 'break out' groups each group had to study a card with different political interests and summarise the points. When the groups came back together students were asked to simulate a EU parliamentary debate on the subject of the Climate Agreement, here our guest speaker played the role of President von der Leyen. Each activity brought the students into mixed international groups where they had to collaborate and get to know each other.

On the last day students from Greece and Bulgaria shared quizzes with us on sounds from nature and animals in their countries. We reacted to a song and video by an artist about the harm humans do to the planet. Students in Bulgaria told us about their campaign to protect local 'Wonder Rocks' from graffiti and litter and their success on social media and the press. Students then wrote poems in groups and these will later have music and song put to them. Finally all the students had a tutorial on a photobook app and spent some time making their

own memories of the few days we had together. It was not all work, students enjoyed the few days and shared emails and Instagram accounts with each other!

So even though travel is not permitted Irish students are very patient and understanding and still see this international experience as a fulfilling one. We are very grateful to Erasmus Plus and Leargas for allowing us the ability to use this time to continue our project and we hope to do another event like this before May when the project Exploring Europe comes to an end. For Midleton CBS it is only the beginning.