DK-Proposal 34
Submitted by
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European Polar Outreach (EPO)
or “How to bring cool science into hot classrooms”

Disciplines:
Community outreach

Motivation:
The vision is to establish an educational programme, where teachers participate along researchers in projects within natural and social sciences and the humanities in the Polar areas. By working closely with e.g. biologists, glaciologists, archaeologists, sociologists or historians the teachers will achieve new knowledge, which can be disseminated to European school children as well as bring inspiration and improved skills into the European classrooms. Side effects of this approach include more information conscious scientists, and will also result in a more visible and transparent appearance of Polar science and Polar affairs in the ordinary European’s mind. The coming International Polar Year should be used as a lever for the programme, thereby providing maximum public impact for the IPY and Polar science in general.

Rationale:
Polar regions produce spectacular science stories not only because of the extraordinary beauty and harshness of the areas, but also because some of the serious problems facing Earth are extremely exposed here. Bringing teachers and scientists together during polar research projects will raise the skills, motivation and understanding of the teachers. This improvement will be felt directly by the millions of European school children, who will experience more motivated and engaged teachers giving more exciting and resourceful lessons. Having been there, tried to make the instruments work in a hostile environment and ultimately harvest the success is a second-to-none experience, which the skilled and motivated teacher will understand to communicate to his audience. Science journalists as well as ordinary tourists will be encouraged to visit selected projects either in special visitors centres or, where possible, in the field. Additionally the scientists will get a unique opportunity to show the public and politicians that instead of keeping the abstract scientific results within a narrow scientific community, the knowledge is disseminated by professionals to a wide audience from school children to interested citizens. Scientists will gain a direct benefit, as this information aspect can be used when applying for project funding. On the long term this approach will secure new recruits to the science profession. The school children of today are the scientists of tomorrow.

Institutional set-up and implementation:
The initiative will need an overall coordinating body with responsibility of logistics, development of researcher/teacher cooperation within existing research projects, establishing of networks and facilities etc. Learning programmes should be developed by consortia or adapted by individual European countries according to their learning traditions.

Kangerlussuaq as the Gateway to the Ice The programme platform is based on Kangerlussuaq’s unique position in central West Greenland. With its international
airport and direct and relatively cheap flights from a number of European cities Kangerlussuaq provides a unique entry point for exploring the region as well as being the gateway to the Ice Cap. From Kangerlussuaq it is easy for the visiting teachers to get their hands on real ice. Furthermore, plans are under way for establishing an educational facility in Kangerlussuaq. This facility will build heavily on local participation. The intention with this facility is to give the numerous travellers passing through Kangerlussuaq (e.g. Greenlanders, tourists, scientists) an opportunity to learn more about landscape processes, glaciology, global change issues, living conditions for flora, fauna and people as well as weather and climate – and the research in these topics. A number of activities will be based on this logistical platform.

- **Teaching topics**
  A closer cooperation between teachers and researchers will develop the topics to be brought into the classrooms. Multi-disciplinary topics like climate change has the possibility of bringing several professions together, thereby giving the school children an opportunity to discover the broad spectrum of interdependencies and consequences.

- **Dissemination of information and media coverage**
  The second best thing to being on the ice is to be in direct contact with your teacher … on the ice. A computer network connecting the institutions in Europe with Greenland will make direct learning and exchange of information possible. It is also envisaged, that the Polar Outreach Programme will attract public interest from an overall European level to a regional level. Therefore, providing media with information on the programme is vital.

- **Coordination and synergy with US initiatives**
  In order to exchange experiences and optimize the use of resources a close cooperation should be established with US outreach programmes.

**The Polar Studio**
When the programme is running, European film, TV and radio networks can be invited to use the topics, locations and facilities for productions, thereby bringing the Arctic directly into the European living rooms.