

EU connect roadshow in Flanders

An innovative information and promotion project which combined Virtual Reality (VR) and social media influencers to raise awareness among young people about European projects in their region.

EAFRD-funded projects

Location: Belgium

Programming period: 2014-2020

Measures: M20 – Technical Assistance

Funding:

Total budget	102 363.90 (EUR)
EAFRD	14 960.65 (EUR)
National/Regional	14 960.65 (EUR)
Other ERDF29	29 921.30 (EUR)
ESF	29 921.30 (EUR)
DG REGIO	12 000.00 (EUR)
EU4BE	600.00 (EUR)

Timeframe: 2021 to 2022

Project promoter: Vlaams Ruraal Network

Email: Ariane.vandensteen@lv.vlaanderen.be

Website: www.ruraalnetwerk.be

Lessons & Recommendations

Innovative communication tools -in this case VR- and the use of 'influencers' are an important enabler in reaching young audiences.

As this was a project for young people, it was important that they were able to shape the development of the project, for example in selecting content for and determining the storyline of the VR video.

Context

When European citizens are asked if they are aware of European projects in their region, Belgium invariably scores poorly. For several years the Flemish National Rural Network (NRN) has been trying to change this through close cooperation with the four European funds operating in Flanders.

In cooperation with the Europe Direct centres in Flanders, it was found that existing teaching material about the EU is mainly limited to brochures focussing on European political decision-making and the impact of the EU across Europe overall.

In 2022, the NRN focused its activities on young people in support of the 'European Year of Youth'. The Belgian federal government intends to allow young people from the age of 16 to vote in the next European elections in 2024. Thus, it is vital to demonstrate to young people how Europe contributes to their daily life.

Summary

The Flemish National Rural Network (NRN) found a unique and innovative way to inform young people about what Europe means for their own region and living environment. In collaboration with four different European funds and DG Regio, the NRN used VR for the promotion of EU-supported projects and involved social media influencers to reach a large and diverse group of young people.

Project results

9 210 young people watched the VR video at the 19 schools that were visited by the EUconnect roadshow. the roadshow reached a diverse group of youngsters, with 53 % being in technical or vocational training.

The involvement of host and influencer Elias, as well as another four micro-influencers, enabled the project to reach some 88 128 young people online.



Objectives

The NRN set up the EUconnect roadshow to introduce young people to innovative -rural- European projects in a fun way. The EUconnect roadshow aimed to reach between 7 000 and 10 000 young people physically and between 80 000 and 100 000 young people online. In addition, the roadshow aimed to connect with a broad and diverse range of young people: not only those receiving general and higher academic education.

Activities

In November 2021, the NRN met with representatives of four European funds (EAFRD, EMFF, ERDF and ESF) to decide on promotional actions for 2022. The group decided to focus on young people using VR. The NRN also contacted DG Regio in order to see how the new project could be a part of the 'EU in my School' umbrella project.

In February 2022, a consultation took place in which young people were given the opportunity to assist the NRN select which European projects they would incorporate into a VR video. Almost 350 youngsters from all over Flanders participated in the consultation. For EAFRD, the project Koeweidehof (an innovative arable and dairy farm run by a young farmer) in Flemish Brabant was chosen. The NRN then organised a brainstorming session which included a focus group of high school students. Thus, the overall content and look of the VR video was determined in a collaborative way.

In March 2022, the scenario for the VR video was finalised and approved. The well-known influencer Elias Verwilt, who has more than 600 000 followers on TikTok and more than 55 000 followers on Instagram (IG), was appointed as national ambassador for the campaign.

The VR video was shot in two days at five locations. Approximately 60 schools were contacted in search of host venues for the EUconnect roadshow and 19 of these were selected.

In April 2022, after feedback and testing, the VR video was finalised and approved. The roadshow was announced online by Elias and on a new IG channel (@euconnects)

In May 2022, the EUconnect roadshow presented the VR video to 19 schools throughout Flanders.

Main results

In total, 9 210 young people watched the VR video at the 19 schools visited by the EUconnect roadshow. 1 153 of them also completed a fun quiz to learn more about the projects featured in the video. 53 % of the young people reached by the project are in technical or vocational training. Thus, the roadshow managed to reach a diverse group of youngsters.

A survey of 189 youngsters was conducted to measure impact. 100 % agreed that the VR experience and roadshow is a fun way to learn about Europe; 94 % that they had learned something about what 'Europe' is doing and 81 % would like to learn more.

Through the involvement of host and influencer Elias and another four micro-influencers, the project reached 88 128 young people online. Due to its success, the EUconnect roadshow will be continued in autumn 2022 with a visit from EU commissioner Elisa Ferreira. There is a lot of interest from other EU member states to do something similar. DG Regio is currently promoting the roadshow across Europe as an example of best practice.





Key lessons

Innovative communication tools are an important enabler in reaching young audiences. The use of VR to show EU-supported actions, and the use of social media 'influencers' to promote EU-related events were very successful. In addition, all the examples shared in the VR video are innovative projects themselves that embrace and deploy modern technology.

As this was a project aimed for young people, it was important that they had an input in its development. This was achieved by actively involving them in the different phases of the project, including selection of the actions to show-case and determining the storyline for the VR video.

"I really enjoyed learning about Europe in a completely different way than usual" - reaction of a participant

Additional information:

-  [@euconnects](https://www.instagram.com/euconnects)
-  www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100067236526857
-  www.vimeo.com/yondr/review/705320022/18c7ff2e2f
-  www.youtube.be/UDwpBovG-BE



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