Funded by
the European Union

RE-TASTY

A citizen science project on school food systems in The Netherlands

RE-TASTY stands for **R**esearch-**T**ransformative **A**ctions for **S**ustainability **T**ogether with **Y**outh. Its goal is to help secondary schools in The Netherlands embrace the innovative idea of changing their school food system to a healthier and a more sustainable one, together with the young people (students). The core team consists of Maria Neocleous Maliotou as the coordinator, Dr. Valentina Tassone from the Education and Learning Sciences Group of Wageningen University as a project advisor and Ester Klein Hesselink, an expert in outdoor education. Prof. Arjen Wals from Wageningen University also contributed with his knowledge to this project.

RE-TASTY combines the Whole School Approach with citizen science. The Whole School Approach is adapted to focus on healthy and sustainable food and education, hence the Whole School Food Approach (Fig. 1), a framework which students as citizen scientists use to holistically research their school food system.

The creation of the project's website (www.retasty.nl) at the beginning was important in introducing it to interested stakeholders and spreading the approach of citizen science in secondary schools. The website is used not only as a communication tool but also as a source of knowledge and information on the different elements of the project.

Figure 1. The Whole School Food Approach (adapted from the Whole School Approach as described in Wals and Matthie, 2022)

The project was implemented by students of the Green Teams of five secondary schools in Amsterdam and Zoetermeer. Students were involved in data collection by carrying out interviews of various school-related stakeholders: school management, teachers, fellow students, school canteen staff, residents and food businesses within the school's neighbourhood. With some students, a more collaborative citizen science approach is used, as the students are involved from the initial steps of the research process, i.e., thinking about sub-research questions, developing data collection tools (Fig. 2).

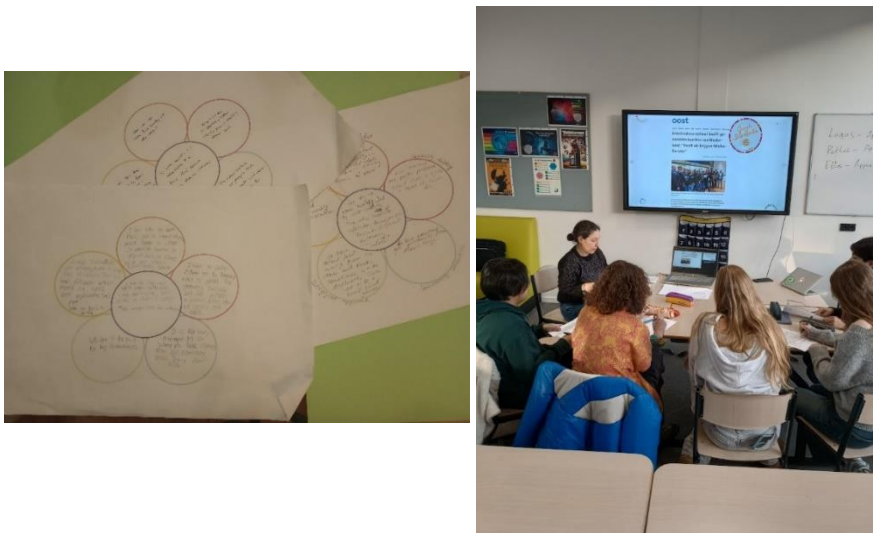
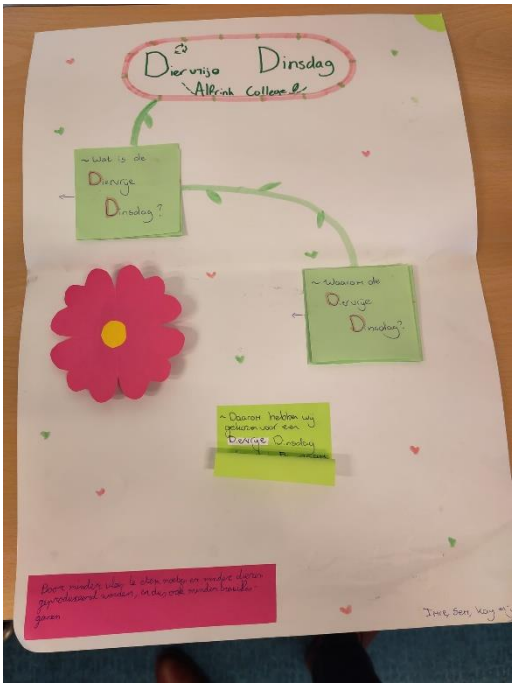


Figure. 2: Photos from the co-creation phase during implementation of RE-TASTY

After data collection, students are guided to analyse their collected data and prepare actions for making their school food system healthier and more sustainable (Fig. 3).



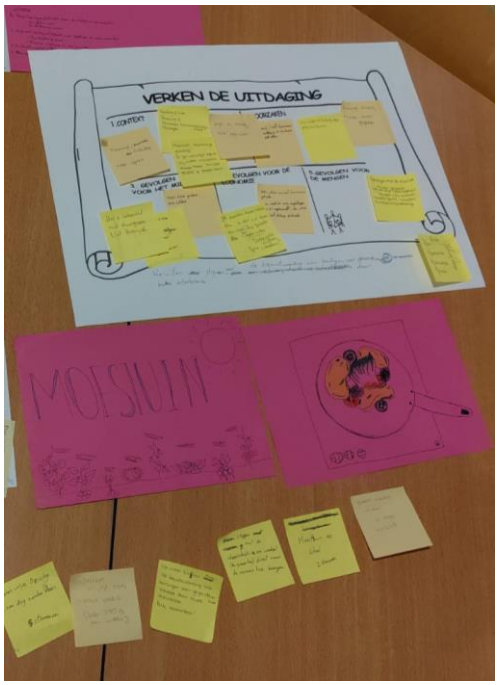


Figure. 3: Photos of ideation for action

A school can carry out the project annually or every two years and use the collected data over time to monitor/introduce changes in its school food environment. Furthermore, data collected from different schools will be compiled to be used towards science and policy making.

RE-TASTY is important because students, as citizen scientists within their school environment, work towards having an impact both in science, by producing knowledge, as well as in policy for a more sustainable and healthier school and society. Furthermore, they learn and improve their skills by carrying out research themselves using a holistic approach. This is reflected in the following comment of a teacher who facilitates the implementation of RE-TASTY in a school in Amsterdam:

"The RE-TASTY program is important because students learn skills and they learn how they can do real research to make their school more sustainable." Trine Lindström, Teacher and Sustainability Coordinator, DENISE De Nieuwe Internationale School Esprit, Amsterdam.

RE-TASTY would not be possible without IMPETUS that not only supported it financially but also gave us the first basic citizen science knowledge, tools and mentoring needed to set up this Kickstarter project. Through these first pilots, we gained a lot of knowledge and experience that we can now use to develop RE-TASTY further. We are looking for further funding as well as additional collaborations in The Netherlands and beyond to sustain RE-TASTY and take it forward.

References

Wals, A.E.J., Mathie, R. G., 2022. Whole school responses to climate urgency and related sustainability challenges – A perspective from Northern Europe. Encyclopedia of Educational Innovation, p. 1-8. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-2262-4_263-2