

Geographers at NUI Galway Win International Funding to Explore How Young People Experience the Climate Crisis

A research team from the Discipline of Geography at NUI Galway is part of a consortium that have won a competitive international research funding award of €1.38 million under the JPI Climate SOLSTICE initiative to explore how young people across Europe experience the climate crisis.

Commencing in December 2020, the project, will comprise of research teams from the UK, Ireland, Finland and Italy. The researchers will work with young people, teachers, educational institutions and youth groups on the project, which aims to generate knowledge of how youth experience and make sense of climate complexity. The NUI Galway research team will draw on the vast interdisciplinary experience of the project team comprised of Dr Gary Goggins, Professor Frances Fahy and Dr Kathy Reilly from Geography.

Climate change is an existential threat that must be addressed through concerted action involving all of society. Recently, young people have put themselves at the forefront of these efforts through coordinated activities, such as school strikes. These call for greater attention and decisive action from governments and other powerful actors to mitigate climate change and protect people from its harmful effects.

At the same time, there is emerging consensus that lack of effective climate leadership, combined with institutional inertia and confused governance mechanisms, is resulting in widespread climate indifference or extremism. Increasing awareness of the impacts and effects of climate change, as well as the measures that can be taken to mitigate against it, is crucial in building an empowered and resilient climate-literate youth that can develop and support solutions now and in the future.

Dr Gary Goggins, who leads the research team in the Discipline of Geography at NUI Galway, said: “It is vital that we listen to young people and include their voices in our ongoing efforts to tackle climate change. Young people are the future, but they are also important in the present. Understanding how young people experience this rapidly changing world, and their place in it, is central to developing effective solutions to the common challenges we face.”

The research will co-create a framework that enables young people to express how growing up in their particular contexts and spaces (including formal education, relationships, communities and extracurricular spaces) plays a role in their worldview formation and openness to new ways of thinking and doing. This framework will support the development of practical tools for teaching and learning in participating schools and beyond.

Policy recommendations will consider social, political, cultural and economic contexts in each region under study, and local, national and international recommendations will be put forward and disseminated widely among policy-makers and other stakeholders. Best practice guidelines will enable knowledge exchange between participating countries and across a wider European context.

Dr Jonathan Derham, EPA, said “The Environmental Protection Agency welcomes the success of NUI Galway in a very competitive pan-European research call: this reflects the importance of this research area and the excellence of the University team. The huge success of the 2019 Youth Assembly on Climate and the resulting media engagement demonstrated the need for

more productive and enduring dialogue with young people in relation to concerns and solutions. It is expected that this research will assist in supporting delivery of these ambitions.”

The project is funded by the JPI Climate SOLSTICE initiative for three years (2020-2023) with a total project budget of €1.38 million. The funding organization for Ireland is the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

For more information contact gary.goggins@nuigalway.ie.

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Notes to Editors

1. SOLSTICE is a joint transnational call for proposals that address the societal impact of climate change. The projects will be financed by the SOLSTICE funding organisations, consisting of 10 European countries (Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Italy, Ireland, Latvia, Norway and the United Kingdom) who partnered to offer this opportunity.
2. The full project name is ‘Challenging the Climate Crisis: Children’s Agency to Tackle Policy Underpinned by Learning for Transformation’ (CCC-CATAPULT)