

Internship Report

BSc. Global Responsibility & Leadership
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Preface

The time leading up to my internship was a hectic one. Initially, I was accepted for the exchange opportunity in Medellín, Colombia but decided not to go when it became clear that in person classes would not be possible due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Fortunately, I quickly found an alternative that turned out to be a great opportunity. From fellow student Max Eisenbart, I came into contact with Heleentje Swart, program director of SPARK the Movement. In our first call, I told her why an internship at SPARK would be interesting to me, which was my interest in education. This interest in education started during the Introduction to Global Health project with local primary schools and during my position as student assistant for the same course a year later. Heleentje said that she had plenty of projects for me to work on and we agreed that I would do an internship at SPARK with her supervision. After a further exploration of our interests and needs, it was agreed that I would work on an assessment of the state of sustainability in education in Friesland. From SPARK, this assignment was suitable because Heleentje wanted a new point of reference for SPARK's activities and the state of integration of sustainability in education. This is because SPARK is at the eve of turning over a new leaf, becoming part of RCE Fryslân and changing its organizational structure. From my side, this topic was interesting because it allowed me to focus on education on a broad scale, while at the same time having a clear lens through which to approach the research. I have greatly enjoyed my time at SPARK, and I am grateful to everyone at Association Circular Friesland for the opportunity.



the movement

*Working together
on Sustainable Development
in Education*

FIRE

TO

SPARKS

FROM

Tomas van Hermon

**12 february 2022
Leeuwarden,
the Netherlands**

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Introduction

My internship started on August 31st, 2021, ending officially on February 4th, 2022. The internship was extended one week to February 11th as I was still involved in hosting the conference that took place on the 8th and 9th of February. My internship was with Association Circular Friesland, specifically at their initiative SPARK the Movement (hereafter: SPARK), which aims to build for a sustainable and circular future by stimulating education.

During my internship, my primary task was to compile a report on the state of the integration of education for sustainable development in Friesland. My direct colleagues were Helena Swart, my internship supervisor and program director of SPARK the Movement; Lennie Qiu, content creator of SPARK; and Max Eisenbart, fellow student, and intern at SPARK the movement.

In this internship report, I will first provide a detailed description of the internship organization. Then, an overview of my internship tasks will be given, followed by my evaluation of the internship as a whole.

Description of the internship organization¹

Origins of SPARK the Movement

SPARK was initiated after the publication of the Pearls without a Chain in 2017. During a meeting of regional leaders, the results of this report were brought to the attention of Association Circular Friesland, an association of companies, local governments and educational institutions who are working towards a circular economy in Fryslân. They wanted to involve education much more closely and structurally in this circular transition. During that time, Helena Swart worked at Nordwin College (now Aeres) for several years as coordinator for sustainable innovation. Nordwin College was also mentioned in the 2017 report as an example of good practice. Because of this, Swart was asked to develop a programme, including all education in Friesland, from primary school to university. Not to establish a single project or to develop a learning plan, but to create a movement for circular talent; a transition to embed learning for a circular economy and a sustainable society at all educational levels, to make sure that all pupils and students in the Frisian region develop the knowledge and the skills to behave sustainably. During several co-creating sessions with teachers, entrepreneurs, students, and people from the Province of Fryslân the program was given shape. The name SPARK the Movement was the result of a brainstorm session with youths. When a plan was formulated, it was adopted and funded in about two weeks by entrepreneurs and the Province of Fryslân, indicative of the demand for such action. From then, the website was developed to showcase the sparks that existed in the region. Sparks could be added by the initiators themselves; in this phase the role of SPARK was primarily to appreciate initiatives of teachers and students, and thus to inspire others. A jury chose the SPARK of the Month to put emphasis on a particular good practice and generate attention. After about a year and a half, SPARK began to focus more on the connection between business, local governments, NGOs, and education. Building an ecosystem for 'circular learning' is still one of the main priorities. Ultimately, the aim of SPARK the Movement is to embed Education For Sustainable Development (ESD) structurally into the whole education system – not only into the curriculum, but also in how children learn, where they learn and from whom and with whom they learn. SPARK the Movement now consists of programme leader Swart (0,8 fte) and content creator Lennie Qiu (0,6 fte), and together with trainees they stimulate schools to move from individual initiatives to cooperative projects with other schools and other partners in the region.

Membership of SPARK the Movement

During the start-up phase, SPARK the Movement never formally worked with members, nor did schools have to pay for its services. Instead, during the first two years, every small or more impactful initiative was appreciated and paid attention to. The online 'wall of fame', on which every school can upload their sparks played an important role in getting insight into which schools were active in the field of ESD and which schools were not. While promoting the movement among the frontrunners, SPARK also made constant efforts to outreach to e.g., boards, principals, and team leaders to convince them to start working on ESD. The fact

¹ This section was also used in my report for SPARK the Movement, for more information on the topics discussed here, see the link to the final report in the references.

that SPARK was financed and thus supported in its ambitions by the Province of Fryslân, two major educational institutes (Nordwin College (now Aeres), and NHL Stenden), and several companies such as Omrin, FB Oranjewoud and the Rabobank, helped to start the movement. The ambitions of these partners were clearly formulated: the Frisian region belonging to Europe's frontrunners concerning the establishment of a circular economy and a sustainable society. After a year and a half, the initial funding was exhausted. It was then renewed and financed by all Frisian VET-centres and (applied) universities. During this second phase many different people, organisations and institutions were involved in one way or the other, thus becoming part of the regional eco-systemic network. Swart: 'We choose not to work with members or membership-fees, as until now our focus was mainly upon creating awareness and the intrinsic motivation of partners to join us in a collective movement. However, we might decide to work with a membership-system in the near future as by now our focus shifts to upgrade the quality of ESD among the partners.'

The approach of SPARK the Movement

"The Blue Delta is our home. A wide strip of beautiful islands, wetlands, agricultural clay- and peat landscapes and wooded sandy areas along the north-western European coast. Over centuries, we have adapted our lives and livelihoods to be one with the water and the landscape, forming a deep relationship that drives our culture, our industry, and our lives. The Blue Delta is not only the land we live on, but a mindset. For more than 2 million people on the delta the need to act for the future is now. Given the increased effects of ecological hazards like climate change, soil degradation and biodiversity-loss, and social challenges related to demographic, democratic and economic change we feel an urgency to learn how we can meet these challenges and how we can achieve broad prosperity by 2030." (<http://www.bluedelta.world>; used in the RCE SPARK Fryslân Application Form, 2020)

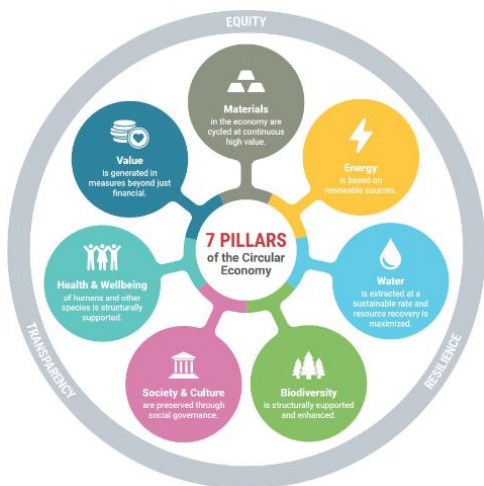
A growing number of organisations in the Blue Delta region, which encompasses the Northern Netherlands, is working together on the above-mentioned challenges within the set timeframe. Vereniging Circulair Friesland is addressing this from an economic point of view. With over 100 members, this association aims to belong to Europe's frontrunners in a circular economy in 2030. Therefore, circular learning is one of their five focus themes. Many brainstorm and cocreation sessions with many different employees have been held to find out how to approach this difficult and multifaceted task. These sessions brought up a lot of questions: how to evaluate progress, how to align visions and how to think about future avenues? And how to organize a successful and rewarding cooperation between entrepreneurs, teachers and students in light of a sustainable future? To achieve this, the dynamics of business life have to connect fruitfully to the energy of the education sector. As of the writing of this evaluation, this collaboration is often still done next to business as usual, and in the form of temporary projects or challenges. The focus of SPARK is therefore to find ways to structurally anchor this collaboration and make it part of business as usual. Swart: 'Looking at the 21st century, it should be absolutely normal for children of any age, in any course and on any level to develop the skills and the knowledge to work for a thriving future, together with students at other schools, and together with regional partners that strive for the same goals.' In this pursuit, SPARK uses several tools in communicating ESD to third parties who might not be knowledgeable on this topic.

Firstly, and perhaps most prominently, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals are promoted as an international language to talk about sustainability. The SDGs are an umbrella under which every activity can be sorted, and through which the topic of sustainability can be directly connected to the topic at hand. The SDGs are communicated through for example the SPARK SDG Compass, see figure 1 below.



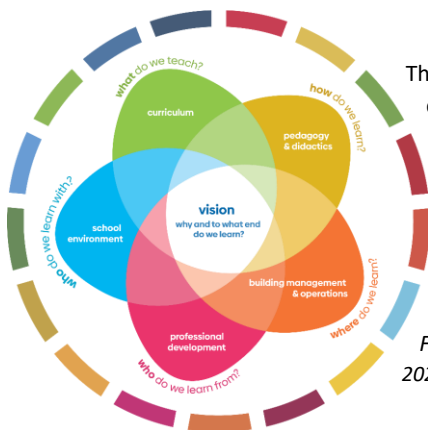
Figure 1. SPARK the Movement

The second tool used by SPARK consist of the seven circular design pillars of Vereniging Circulair Friesland and Metabolic (Figure 3). These principles are inspired by the SDGs, the Donut Economy according to Kate Raworth, the theoretical assumptions from Cradle to Cradle and the characteristics of a circular economy from the thinktank Metabolic (VCF, 2021).



Together these seven pillars, described below, form an exemplar of the circular economy. In an ideal world, all products and services comply with these pillars. We are working towards this ideal step by step." - Vereniging Circulair Friesland, 2022.

Figure 2. Metabolic, 2022



The final major concept used by SPARK to communicate ESD is the Whole School Approach to sustainability. The WSA is the primary tool used in The Netherlands when communicating the envisioned structural change for ESD. It forms the basis of additional tools that can be used by schools or other organizations and is continuously built upon.

Figure 3. WSA Core Document, *Leren voor Morgen*, 2021

A way to follow the structural integration of sustainability in education is to distinguish different phases of integration, and this method is often used by SPARK. These phases have found their way into the Green Compass, deriving them from their origin in the Auditing Instrument for Sustainability in Higher Education (AISHE) and the European Framework for Quality Management.

In the Green Compass, five phases are distinguished. The first phase is the phase in which one works 'activity oriented' towards sustainability. In the most complicated phase, a close collaboration exists between the school, the business sector, students, delivering schools, alumni, and societal organisations. Practical experience shows that the transition from phase 2 to phase 3 is the most difficult step, but also that at phase 3, sustainability is already robustly embedded. See figure 6 for a more complete overview. Due pride is justified when an educational team fulfils the criteria of phase 3 (and phase 2 and 1!).

Het Groene Kompas, 2016; translated and adapted from Dutch

These five phases are still used when talking about embedding ESD in education. To keep it simple, SPARK usually focuses on the first three phases, keeping in mind that making the leap from phase 2 to phase 3 requires a system change and is therefore challenges the people and the organisations with whom SPARK works the most. Phases 4 and 5 will follow easily after phase 3 is established.

Explanation of the phases				
1 Activity oriented	2 Process oriented	3 System oriented	4 Chain oriented	5 Society oriented
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ad hoc • Implicit: not identified as sustainability, not recorded in any documents • Dependent on individual initiative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project based • Explicit: identified as sustainability and recorded in documents • Sustainability next to 'business as usual' • Sustainability is still mostly limited to management or a separate group of teachers within the school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainability is interwoven with what previously existed • Sustainable thinking and doing is natural within the education programme • Students and employees are actively contributing • Sustainability can be felt in the building and with the people • Goals are set, evaluated and adapted • Work is done according to the PDCA cycle: Plan-Do-Check-Act 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secondary vocational education (MBO), green higher vocational training (HBO) and regional businesses are involved. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The educational programme is actively involved in society. • Society is actively involved in the programme • The programme sets an example for the region and outside, and is known for her expertise in the field of sustainability.

(Figure 4. [Het Groene Kompas, 2021](#))

Met opmerkingen [TvH1]: aangezien ik deze info direct van de site heb, en ik deze informatie nog dit jaar heb gekeken, is de apa guideline om dat jaar neer te zetten.

As discussed previously, SPARK focuses on the movement that is needed for the overall educational transition to make ESD a common practice in all schools in the region. The model of Geels and Kemp (Figure 5.) helps to understand the work of SPARK, as they lift the initiatives on micro-level to the meso-level, and from there searches how to embed ESD into the macro-level or educational landscape. Recent developments, as for instance the formation of the Educational Agreement Friesland, show the first steps for achieving this ambition.

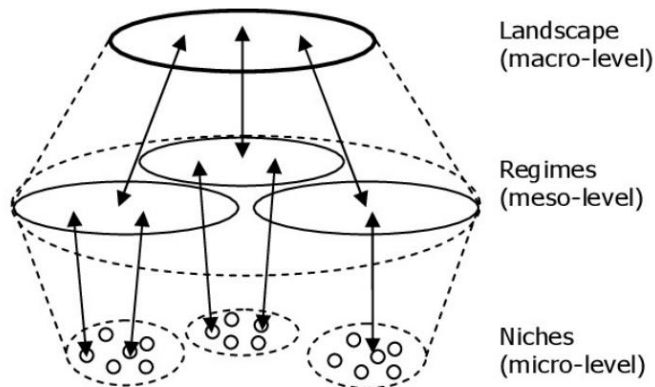


Figure 5. Van Geels & Kemp, 2000

This makes clear why, in general, SPARK does not initiate projects on its own. There are however numerous projects that SPARK has enabled, aided, featured, or otherwise contributed to. For the purposes of this report, it would not be useful to write down an enormous list, but an overview of more than 400 projects on micro and meso-level can be found on the SPARK website.

Description of the internship tasks

Report 'From SPARKS to Fire'

In the first weeks of my internship, my supervisor and I thought about what would be the product that I would deliver. In the end, we agreed that I would write an evaluation of the state of the integration of sustainability in education in Friesland. This report is to reflect the work of SPARK in the region and provide a reference point now that SPARK is part of RCE Fryslân.

The research consisted of a mixed methods approach. Mainly based on qualitative interviews, with literature and other auxiliary documents for support. The international RCE-network offers a self-evaluation tool for individual local RCEs. This evaluation comprises six **different discussions**. Together, these discussions form an extensive evaluation of the RCE to help reflect on their processes and output. Outcomes of the discussions can be recorded in for example a report or a set of recommendations. These discussions can also be adapted to fit particular circumstances or needs. Because of this versatility, I used these discussions as the structure for evaluating the current impact of SPARK the Movement in the region. But, as SPARK the Movement has only been acknowledged as a RCE since 2021, the evaluating questions in this RCE tool were slightly modified as to suit its specific situation and history.

The final report had following structure:

- **Where are we now?** An introduction to the RCE Evaluation tool and the structure of the report.

- **Chapter 1. Discussion 1 on Networking and coordination.** An evaluation focused on assessing the core elements of the RCEs – governance and networking, key strategies and activities – all seen in dynamic development. This discussion is based on interviews with SPARK founders Helena Swart and Sander Bos.
- **Chapter 2. Discussion 2 on Activities and their effects.** A developmental review looking on the one hand, on the activities and their effects and, on the other hand, exploring possible regional collaboration. For this discussion, interviews were held with a variety of stakeholders in and around education.
- **Chapter 3. Discussion 3 on Processes and their impact.** A review of the effects of multi-stakeholder work from the perspective of transformation and sustainability. In this discussion, a particular region will be highlighted and discussed, based on interviews with local stakeholders.
- **Chapter 4. Discussion 4 on Learning strategies and its impact.** An exploration of what has been done and the way it has been done. Next, this chapter discusses what has been learned within the RCE to improve learning and the effectiveness of such initiatives and exploring new areas. This discussion is based on interviews with Helena Swart and on insights gained during the internship period.
- **Chapter 5. Discussion 5 on Networking with other national, European, and global RCEs and the RCE Service Centre.** Covering the appreciation of networking activities with the Service Centre and other regional RCEs. This discussion is based on interviews with Helena Swart, Max Eisenbart and on insights gained during the internship period.
- **Chapter 6. Discussion 6 on Value creation.** Open discussion about the insights gained in the report. This final discussion will form a conclusion, reflecting on the report and the internship as a whole.

Other tasks

In addition to compiling this report, I had several other tasks at SPARK the Movement. I assisted Heleentje with administrative tasks, such as keeping an attendance list for a RCE networking event. I was also asked to participate and think along in many different meetings. Some were relevant for my understanding of how SPARK operates and thus for my report, others were meetings where my perspective would add something.

I also contributed to two smaller projects. One project being the guidance of two high school students who did their high school project on improving education at their school. I assisted in helping them orient with regards to their research question and gave feedback on their written products during several Teams online meetings.

The other project, which I am still involved with, is a collaboration between SPARK the Movement and the Deloitte Foundation. Initially, the project was about running a pilot of an app about climate adaptation for primary school children. However, after the first meetings, SPARK found some issues in the design of the app, and the project is now re-evaluating its approach. In this effort, an employee of Deloitte and I handled the logistics of scheduling

meetings and sending out emails, as well as giving input in meetings. In March 2022, a workshop will be hosted to brainstorm new ideas for an application.

Evaluation

In my internship application, I formulated my goals as follows:

As per the GRL Assessment Plan: A3,4,5; B1,2,3; C1,2,3; D1,2,3,4 With a focus on A5, due to the local scope and focus on the SDGs of the internship and C1&2, as a consequence of the focus on impact assessment of new forms of education.

Personally, I hope to improve in the areas of independence and working outside of a rigid structure academically now that I have the chance to have my own project where I will have freedom to work how I want and there is a stake to this. I also hope to become familiar with a new type of scholarship. Due to the practical nature of the internship, my research and conclusion can be applied to the real world, and the research itself will not be strictly theoretical either. I have become very interested in education, and I am very excited to put my efforts on improving it through this internship. Of course, I am also curious to see how working in a professional organization will be, especially since my Living Lab was almost exclusively online due to the pandemic.

Learning outcomes

For the sake of conciseness, I will detail my achievement of the learning outcomes I put a focus on in my application, as well as a general overview of my experiences at SPARK the Movement.

Outcome A5

Evaluate the interrelation of regional developments and research areas and global challenges as specified in the SDGs.

This learning outcome seamlessly covers my work at SPARK the movement. As discussed in the internship organization description, SPARK works a lot with the SDGs, and they form a goal that Association Circular Friesland is working towards. Especially when relating the findings of my report to the RCE, and recounting them to the international community, I was actively working on this learning outcome. Given my feedback during those moments, I think I have become quite adept at doing so.

Outcome C1

Assess issues, objects, or works through the collection, organisation and analysis of evidence.

This learning outcome I also directly practices while writing my report. In my report I assessed the issue of ESD integration in the Dutch education system, as well as short assessments of individual projects related to ESD in education. This was done through analysing reports and other publications, but also through many interviews with local stakeholders. Due to the extent of these activities, I have made strides in my ability to achieve this learning outcome.

Outcome C2

Independently construct and articulate relevant questions and sound arguments about social

issues and current events, in both academic and non-academic settings.

In my report, I develop arguments explaining the current issue of ESD integration in Friesland. Although my report is not meant for academic circles, I do consider it an academic setting. Articulating relevant questions is also something I practiced a lot during my internship. Often, the other intern at SPARK, Max Eisenbart, and I were asked to participate in meetings and give our input on certain topics. For example during meetings of the SDG Netwurk Fryslân, or during brainstorm sessions with the Association Circular Friesland staff. Asking questions and making arguments I think has always been a strong suit of mine, and this internship helped me pose such questions and arguments in non-academic, professional and semi-professional settings.

Skills

During my internship, there were both skills that I improved in, and skills that I brought with me. In the writing of my report, my academic skills gained during my time at Campus Fryslân were very useful. My broad knowledge of global challenges also aided me in putting things into context and providing new perspectives to my colleagues at SPARK. From my internship experience, I gained a greater understanding of how professional environments function and how to behave within them. I also gained some practical skills, such as being more comfortable and flexible in conducting interviews, how to organize a much busier email inbox and how to host a Zoom meeting. Next to these practical skills, I think I also improved in soft skills such as confident speaking, taking initiative, etc.

Conclusion

Overall, I can conclude that I achieved most of my goals. What I did not achieve, or not sufficiently, is also partly attributable to the pandemic and the consequent toll on my mental health. I was not able to work on location as much as I would have wanted, and a large part of the meetings held were also moved online. Mental health, exacerbated by semi-lockdowns and the general situation had quite a big impact on my motivation, leading me to enjoy working independently less than I normally would have. However, I want to remember what I *was* able to do, what I learnt, and all the connections I have made.

Future career prospects

My internship has only reinforced my interest in the field of education. I remain convinced of its crucial role in the transition to a sustainable society and find the new developments in the field of ESD to be very fascinating. However, even though I talked to many people with many different functions in the educational field, I do still not know if I would want to work in education myself. While it seems an exciting field, I do not know what specific role I would want to contribute to. Perhaps I will first continue with a master, or a second bachelor in the pedagogical direction, but I have not decided on this either. In any case, I have made many connections through my internship, and should I decide to go work in this field, I have many people I could reach out to. I am thankful for my time at SPARK the Movement and I wish them all the best in their future endeavours.

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² This report will be published in the near future, and can be found at www.sparkthemovement.nl