Background

La main à la pâte has developed its international relations and activities in four stages.

First stage:
The experimentations carried out by Leon Ledermann in Chicago, together with the French tradition of active pedagogy and scientific teaching, were the trigger for the La main à la pâte programme in the 90s. Meanwhile, international scientific community networks contributed significantly to the spread of new ideas about the ways to reform science teaching in primary school. These ideas were progressively adapted to different contexts by La main à la pâte representatives. The notion that having a basic scientific culture and reasoning is necessary for individuals to become accomplished citizens, was swiftly acknowledged as key when training young people.
Second stage:
Various experiments were conducted at the end of the 90s (in particular in the United States, Sweden, England, and France). Together with the work carried out during the first stage, these tests led to discussions about methods, strategies and evaluation processes and to a shared and solid definition of Inquiry-Based Science Education (IBSE).

Third stage:
During the third phase, interest in La main à la pâte's work grew abroad, in particular in emerging countries such as Brazil or China. These countries wished to get acquainted with La main à la pâte's methods and experiences in order to reform their own scientific education. They contacted the French programme, which operated on a non-commercial basis - it shared its resources for free - and was attentive to differences in implementation due to specific cultural and institutional contexts.

Fourth stage:
Through projects supported by the European Commission, European networks were set up. As a result, science education issues gradually became an important topic for European stakeholders in research and education. The Rocard report (Science Education Now: a renewed pedagogy for the future of Europe, 2007) was a milestone in that process. At the same time, La main à la pâte members participated actively in projects involving international organisations, such as InterAcademy Panel on international issues, OECD and UNESCO, which also helped to put science education on the international agenda.