



INSPIRING CHANGE

The story of NaturKultur



NaturKultur was founded in 2011 by the then 20 years old Svenja Oltmanns, who had just returned from a European Voluntary Service(EVS) experience in Slovakia. After returning to her home village of Wiefelstede (near Oldenburg), Svenja was very inspired and decided to organize her very first youth exchange in her village. Many people helped organize that project – her parents and family, the local bakery and Italian restaurant, the local supermarkets and so on. After realizing that there are no EVS or youth exchange opportunities in this part of Germany, she decided to create a new organization that would do just that – provide international youth mobilities for young people. She discovered how learning can be really fun by meeting new people and discussing concepts like environmental topics or human rights through non-formal education, but also how these projects can have an impact on the whole community, on the young people and how it can change the lives of many people.

A decade later, NaturKultur has become one of the high quality providers of international youth opportunities in Germany and in Europe.

Through organising and sending hundreds of young people to many youth exchanges on various topics every year, hosting European volunteers and helping other organisations around Bremen to host them too, and through cooperation with a variety of institutions such as youth centers, youth houses, local youth services and different youth fairs, we are making an impact in our local communities in Lower Saxony and Bremen, and on youth from all around Europe.

However, NaturKultur e.V. is not only for the young people. We are dedicated to sharing our know-how with the youth work community and creating innovative projects, creating new capacities and developments that will not only provide better experiences for our young people, but also better working environment to all youth workers and trainers.

In 2017, we founded KulturHaus, which is a youth house that is a tailor made venue for youth projects and where all of our mobilities take place. As a social enterprise, it provides space for the young people to discover and develop their talents and abilities, but also for other youth organizations and NGOs to find a suitable place for their projects at the lowest possible price.

In 2020, we launched the Trainers

library which is an online platform where, together with our partner organizations, we have created more than 350 articles on 1500 pages with educational materials for self-development of the trainers and youth workers working all over Europe.

We regularly organize training courses, where we share our knowledge and experience with other organizations and professionals, but we also create new methods, tools and curricula and develop new abilities and competences. We regularly attend European level events where our team can learn about the new trends, and where we establish new networks and create new co-operations.

Our team has grown in the last years and we have passionate and dedicated colleagues who share their integrity and values with the young people. We hope to attract new colleagues and young people who will join our team and contribute with their talents and energy to provide more quality opportunities for young people and an even better working environment for the team.

Our activities do not finish here. We are looking forward to a future, where our financial sustainability will be strengthened by diversifying our donors and the programs in which we take part. We are working diligently

so that our work will be more readily recognized by the local authorities, the young people and the donors of public funding, which would consequently increase our capacity. We are initiating several new innovative projects that should make an impact on the youth field and provide more meaningful experiences for the young people.

We hope that this booklet will trigger your curiosity to explore more and join our activities or maybe to support us in a different way.

Warm regards,

Darko Mitevski

President

NaturKultur e.V.

Darko Mitevski



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About NaturKultur e.V.

NaturKultur e.V. is a youth association that was founded in North-West Germany and is now located in Bremen, Wiefelstede/Oldenburg and Osterholz-Scharmbeck.

The name Natur (nature) represents the physical world including all living things as well as the land and the oceans. Kultur (culture) is the totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought. As an organization, we aim towards being the synergy between these two terms in all that we do.

Our main aims:

1. To create and provide international projects for young people in Germany.
2. To encourage young people to participate in international projects and to support them when they do. We also aim to encourage other organizations and NGOs to host young people from all over Europe and the World and to send their members abroad.
3. To provide opportunities for young people that will help them become more civically engaged in their local societies.
4. To create community-based projects and activities, where young people are empowered to address issues that are relevant in our local societies.
5. To share and promote tolerance, diversity, and understanding among the different cultures in Europe, in our local societies and beyond.



Our Team

We are an international team who came together from all parts of the world to nurture our passion for making a positive change in our society. At NaturKultur e.V., we are co-creating a lifelong learning environment with and for everybody involved. We like working together and love what we do, which, with the common values that we share, makes it a perfect mix

Darko Mitevski

Darko is the president of NaturKultur e.V. and has prime responsibility for KulturHaus. At the age of 19, he started doing youth projects in AIESEC. Since then, he has brought hundreds of successful youth projects in Europe and Africa to life. He is an organizational developer in charge of development of both NaturKultur e.V. and KulturHaus, managing the teams, responsible for key projects and activities and relations with external partners and donors. In the past, he has been a University assistant and lecturer in Strategic Management and Leadership, a consultant for development of small and medium enterprises in Europe and Africa, and an entrepreneur. His focus is on the strategy and development of organizations, training and development of leaders and trainers, and the creation of systems that will bring sustainability to the organizations that are organizing youth and educational programs in Europe.

Žiga Magjar

Žiga shares the presidential role in NaturKultur e.V. and is currently co-managing KulturHaus, a social enterprise run by NaturKultur e.V., where he is also responsible for logistics on NaturKultur e.V.'s projects. Žiga enrolled in the international youth leadership organization AIESEC, where he got the experience of organizing, co-organizing, and leading learning events and conferences while being responsible for recruiting, preparing, and sending students for their traineeship abroad. In the past 10 years, he has been exploring the field of online marketing and sales in four different companies.

Andrei Matalyha

Andrei is responsible for creating photo and video content for NaturKultur e.V., such as documentaries, tutorials, and “looking back” movies for projects. Andrei graduated from the Baltic Film School and worked in professional film sets in a variety of commercials and corporate videos. He excels at directing, camera work and video editing.

Aleksandar Čičković

Aleksandar is responsible for coordinating all youth exchanges and training courses that NaturKultur hosts. He is vice president and co-founder of NGO Ocean Znanja. Aleksandar has been actively doing youth work since 2013 and has since participated, organized or worked as a trainer on more than 60 projects in Erasmus+/Youth in Action. He is facilitating and leading

international workshops in Germany, Croatia, and other countries. After getting his master degree in marketing, he worked in big companies such as Booking.com and IPSOS. His main focus is on team building, teamwork and development of an entrepreneurial way of thinking.

Irma Franz

Irma is responsible for the coordination of our European Solidarity Corps (ESC) projects, as well as the sending coordination for all international project to which NaturKultur e.V. sends participants, such as youth exchanges and training courses. As European Solidarity Corps Coordinator, she takes care of the volunteers we send abroad, and those who we host across different institutions and initiatives in Bremen. Irma spent her 12 months of EVS in Zugdidi and Tbilisi, Georgia, in 2015/2016, where she discovered her passion for different educational philosophies and methods. In 2019, she graduated with a BA in Education and English from the University of Cambridge, UK.

Svenja Oltmanns

Svenja founded NaturKultur e.V. with the aim to bring young people from different cultures together. She has organized many projects within the Erasmus+ program, Youth in Action and EVS, as well as with other institutions since 2010. As a drama educator (BA Theatre in social contexts Ottersberg, Dramaturgy at FDU Skopje), her main focus is on creating a new way of communication and mutual understanding through performing arts that bring people from different backgrounds closer together and make them more open-minded towards things that are different from their everyday environment.

Branimir Suk

Branimir is a trainer, who has consistently been a great support on different projects in many different ways, from writing, facilitation and training, to coordination and logistics. He co-founded the NGO Ocean Znanja in Croatia in early 2014 and has been working on youth mobility projects since then, writing applications and delivering workshops. Branimir started working with NaturKultur e.V. in 2016 as logistic support and cook on projects. He has a degree in German and Ukranian language studies and in Ethnology and Cultural anthropology from the Faculty of Humanities and social sciences of the University of Zagreb.

Cecilia Marshal

Cecilia works with migrants and refugees, primarily youth, in theater and provides creative performance art as a mechanism for voice, empowerment, and community building. Cecilia graduated with both a journalism and international studies degree from the University of Arizona and moved to Cambodia in 2013, where she worked as a reporter for three years before beginning her master's degree in Migration and Intercultural Relations. In her masters, she specialized in Applied Theater with youth refugees and has given talks on the subject at various conferences around Europe. Her passion for theater has taken her around the world, where she has worked with various groups in theater, film, and performance as well as directed productions in schools and theater groups.

Hans-Gerd Hauber

Hans-Gerd has a central role in the management of KulturHaus. His responsibilities vary from taking care of the groups in KulturHaus, the maintenance of the house, and external communication with customers. Hans-Gerd has a great deal of life experience ranging from working for an insurance company to co-running a nursing home, and is full of passion for life and passing it on to the younger generation. He loves motor-bikes and dreams about living in Florida.

Dagna Gmitrowicz

Dagna Gmitrowicz is our expert trainer who works on our training courses and on the Trainers library. She is a senior trainer in the field of non-formal education, conducting international and national training and facilitating conferences since 2001. She is the creator of innovative educational tools and curriculum such as; Academy of Nonformal Education (PAJP), TOSCA training cycle, learning cycle in BECC Bridge to Cultural Centres, Colours and Needs cards, amongst others. She is also a member of several international trainers' pools (It's up to Me, TOSCA, European Solidarity Corps Polish NA pool and more), as well as a member of the International Society for Self-Directed Learning after giving a lecture during SSDL Symposium 2020 in Florida, USA. On top of all this, Dagna Gmitrowicz is also a professional painter and performer, actively participating in the cultural scenes of Germany and Poland, and actively supporting cultural events and projects.

Aleksandar Dimovski

Aleksandar Dimovski is our webmaster and IT administrator, taking care of the platforms that we manage and the safety of our computer network. He developed and is maintaining our websites of NaturKultur, Train the trainers - Its up to me, KulturHaus and the Trainers library. Aleksandar has many years of experience in the IT sector working for a variety of companies in many different countries. He specializes in web design and development, visual design, user experience (UX), user interface (UI) and branding.

Tomas Main

Tomas was on his ESC in NaturKultur e.V. from September 2019 until September 2020, helping with establishing more connections with local NGOs and groups that will increase the impact and the reach of our activities. He comes from Cyprus and loves doing sports (taekwondo and football are his favourites). He really enjoys theatre too, and produced and starred in two theatre productions at his high school in Cyprus. His favourite books are Alice in Wonderland and the Kreutzer Sonata.

Juraj Tomljanović

Juraj is currently working as part of our logistics team, helping to bring the best possible balanced culinary experience for our participants and the team during our Youth Exchanges and Training Courses. His biggest passions are cooking, traveling and photography, which he loves to share with everybody. He is currently running his own environmental Solidarity Project with his group in Zagreb, Croatia.

Slobodan Djurović

Slobodan is working as a facilitator on some of NaturKultur's projects that are closely connected to European politics. He is also supporting remotely with other types of project and organizational work. He co-founded an NGO in Montenegro in 2019 called Forum for Individual Transformation, which is focused on the empowerment of individuals. Slobodan has been involved with NaturKultur e.V. already since 2016 as the organization's first Erasmus+ intern. He has a degree in Administration and European Studies and he teaches German language. He is passionate about astrology.

Nico Gemio

Nico is managing the Facebook communities on two pages of NaturKultur e.V. – ‘Trainers Library’ and ‘It’s up to me’. He studies Politics & Philosophy and has been involved in party politics and direct democracy workgroups in Spain. Nico is passionate about communication and innovation and has collaborated with different youth and environmental organizations, training and doing media work. He is also an amateur gardener and public speaker. He will contribute to the organic garden of KulturHaus.

Kübranur Patir

Kübra was doing her long term ESC in NaturKultur e.V. from October 2019 until October 2020. She was a part of our projects and local activities, and captured all the magic that is happening there and behind the scenes on camera for our social media platforms. She comes from Turkey and loves mountaineering, creating videos, theatre plays and enjoys basically everything creative. Oh, and she loves to experience the world through travelling.

Board of Advisors/Supporters:

Frank and Uta Oltmanns
Jürgen and Kerstin Stephan

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Our Values & Beliefs

Our values and beliefs shape how we approach our work, how we guide our decisions and behaviours in our everyday world. They are deeply embedded in all of us, and we gladly share them through young people and partners we work with on a daily basis.

Development of young people

We are providing a platform for young people to make a positive impact and change the world while they are developing themselves. Special emphasis is put on including young people with fewer opportunities, such as young people with disabilities, those who live in rural areas, belong to different ethnic minorities, are refugees, or have learning difficulties.

Environment and sustainability

We deeply care, educate, develop, support, protect and enjoy the surrounding environment. We care about sustainability in our work in terms of ecological footprint, waste management and recycling, efficient use of resources, and energy.



Healthy lifestyle

We are continuously educating ourselves and getting aware of what we cook and eat, we regularly do sport and exercise, we learn about our emotional and mental health, and we educate others about these matters.

Human rights

We actively advocate, promote, develop and create activities that strive for better gender equality, conflict resolution and peace building and integration of refugees and young people from different backgrounds. We also advocate for freedom of expression and media.

Culture and diversity

All of our activities are done in an international context. We believe that the diversity of cultures, traditions, food, dances, languages, music and other features of multicultural environments enrich our local societies and contribute to the open-mindedness of young people from an early age.



Our Work

Our biggest impact is done through activities that channel our values and beliefs through our multicultural and diverse team, which is transmitting that passion for creating and providing great learning experiences for young people in Germany and beyond.

Our activities consist of:

Youth exchanges are implemented as international mobility projects in Germany and abroad for between 4-20 days on relevant topics in society, where young people can learn a variety of skills through non-formal education methods.

Training and networking courses are our method of sharing the know-how, information and contacts with our partner organizations, and develop new and better opportunities for youth.

Short and long term volunteering projects enable us to send and host volunteers who work on international community-based projects from 1 to 12 months that are financed by the European Solidarity Corps Programme.

Opportunities to work and develop are provided by us to young people, as they can take an active role in organizing projects and youth mobilities and learn many kinds of skills, such as languages, teamwork, project management, other soft skills by taking part in our activities.

Community-based projects are our tool to enhance cooperation with the local municipalities, other organizations that have a local impact on the young people, but also on the community itself.

Workshops and activities for youth are organized by our volunteers or other members to share skills and knowledge, such as learning how to paint, theater classes and education, photography, outdoor workshops, poetry writing and presentations, cultural activities, working with people with disabilities..

ERASMUS+

YOUTH EXCHANGES

We organise between 10-15 exchanges per year in Germany and send over 50 young people abroad to youth exchanges on a yearly basis. The following pages show some examples of exchanges we have hosted over the last nine years.

What is an Erasmus+ youth exchange?

A Youth Exchange brings together young people from many different countries to work on a topic which is interesting or important for them for a period of 1-2 weeks.

The topics are usually current challenges for European society and youth, such as intercultural communication, inclusion, sport, tolerance, environmental awareness, and diversity.

On youth exchanges, young people get to experience a lot of non-formal education methods, such as interactive workshops, simulation games, outdoor activities, excursions and much more. In other words, they get to have fun while learning!

Youth exchanges give youngsters a chance to exchange ideas, views and experiences with other young people from various backgrounds, thus creating a great environment for dialogue and creativity.

On these exchanges, all costs for accommodation, food and activities are covered by the programme, and travel costs are reimbursed up to a certain amount depending on the origin and destination of travel.

Participants need to be between 13 and 30 years old in order to participate on an Erasmus+ youth exchange and must also be a legal resident of one of the participating countries



A BRIEF HISTORY OF **OUR YOUTH EXCHANGES**

We've hosted dozens of exchanges over the years. In the next pages you have an overview of just a few of our many projects. We find these ones to be important parts of our story thus far...



Nature Vs Media

Erasmus+ Youth Exchange



Nature VS Media was a youth exchange that was organized in Garnholt, Germany from 20th to 27th of August 2011, where 25 participants from Germany, Turkey, Romania, Slovakia and Italy attended. It was a crucially important project as it was the first youth exchange that we hosted!

“Nature vs. Media” was a project which had the goal to bring back young people to the nature. The reality that many young people

nowadays are addicted to any kind of modern media like internet and TV without really thinking about the real world outside was concerning to us...

So, while staying one week in a cottage in the countryside without any connection to internet, TV or mobile phones, we worked in the nature with creative workshops about nature and arts like pottery, making music instruments or geo catching.



Some nights were spent under the sky in tents, we hiked in the wilderness and made our food in the open. These types of activities were really grounding for us and for the participants.

In the intercultural evenings, every group cooked their national dishes for the other participants and had a presentation. Some participants also took it upon themselves to play music for our entertainment.

We also organized a nature themed summer festival for people living in the local community, where we presented the project's results and our ideas and thoughts. Amongst the project results was the realisation from the participants that they wanted to have more experiences like this, because otherwise they were truly forgetting the value and beauty of nature.

Don't Look Away

Erasmus+ Youth Exchange



After successfully hosting a number of exchanges, we decided we wanted to implement a project that would truly bring out the Erasmus+ programmes' ability to help those most in need. We did this with the exchange "Don't Look Away". This youth exchange was hosted in Diepenau, Germany, between the dates 27.08.2013 - 03.09.2013. It hosted 24 young people, 12 from North Macedonia and 12 from Germany.

The participants were young people from Friedehorst in Germany and TAV Macedonia, both of which are support and rehabilitation centres

for people with disabilities, and the exchange was also sponsored by Wizz Air. These young people with special needs missed out on a lot, due to societal exclusion and prejudices, and we wanted to somehow change this, to whatever degree possible.

So in this youth exchange the young people with disabilities were brought together to participate in workshops that would help them have more opportunities, by developing various skills, like speaking, moving, self-expression and, learning about different cultures, geography and so on.



The project had its difficulties as many of the participants didn't speak a mutual language due to learning difficulties, most communication between participants was done through translators.

The language barriers didn't stop the young people at all though, as they still communicated fruitfully. Indeed, there was even one girl who hadn't spoken for a year that spoke to a German friend.

The participants had lots of fun while learning throughout the week as they participated in activities such as artistic therapy, theatrical-pedagogical, and some basic do it yourself handy-work workshops, like making clay sculptures. They also got to dress up, paint their faces, play music and enjoy fun evening programmes.

Amongst other things done in the evening programmes, the participants got to watch short theatre plays performed by the facilitators and enjoy cultural nights, where their various cultures were presented to the whole group.

Make Music. Not War.

Erasmus+ Youth Exchange



Music is a uniting power that promotes peace in the world. Young people from conflict countries feel helpless because they don't know how to stop the war. One of the most powerful things they can do for peace is to make music and spread hope. This was the thought process that brought together 46 young musicians, journalists and filmmakers from 9 conflict countries to "Make music. Not war.", in our most ambitious project up to this point.

"Make Music. Not War." was a youth exchange hosted in North-West Germany, in April 2017 which brought

together young people from many conflicting countries, and gave them the opportunity to bond, empathise with each other, and create music together. The participants came from Palestine, Israel, Greece, Kosovo, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Germany. The young musicians from each country rehearsed and performed songs from their culture together, and the whole group also played international peace songs like One Love by Bob Marley. There was also an original song produced during this exchange by the participants, all about peace, unity, and tolerance.



The participants came from all sorts of places, and some of them didn't often find the opportunity to play music where they lived, so they truly relished the opportunity to be with other musicians and play as much as they wanted.

During the exchange the participants were able to record the song they wrote at a music studio in Bremen, as well as some others. Now all the songs recorded can be found on the NaturKultur e.V. Youtube channel.

There was also a performance for the public, at the Bremen Marktplatz and a bar in Bremen, where they sang all of the songs they worked on during the exchange for all to hear. This was the first time performing in public for many. This meant that they had to leave their comfort zone, which meant a lot to many, as after this first push some were able to go on and frequently perform in public with confidence.



Scan here to watch videos related to this exchange on Youtube!

Active Change Makers

Erasmus+ Youth Exchange



Active change makers was a project that was implemented as a result of co-operation between NaturKultur and Jugendtreff Kael (the youth-house of the town hosting the project), in July & August 2018. Throughout the years, we made many great partners, with whom we started to plan projects that crossed borders, through international co-operation. This is a great example of one of those projects!

The project was made up of two youth exchanges, one hosted in Luxembourg, in the public park of Kael, the other Garlstedt, Germany. The exchanges hosted participants from Luxembourg, Spain, North Macedo-

nia, Cyprus, Germany and Croatia. The exchanges aimed to show the participants how they can make a true impact in their local communities.

It did this by giving the youngsters the opportunity to facilitate their own workshops, which national teams prepared before arriving and visiting local good example NGOs. They gained confidence in giving workshops, enabling them to host further workshops when they returned home. The main theme of many of these workshops were hot problems in society and everyone's local communities, and how these problems can be tackled.



There was a lot of fun to be had while in Luxembourg. The youngsters were taken to one of the best go-karting tracks in all of Europe, to see who the best racer amongst them was, in three separate races.

The participants got to go on multiple excursions. They went to Luxembourg city and saw the historic sites and also the museums. They also went on a walking excursion in the red-rock district, on a route which ended at the old Luxembourgish steel mines which led to so much wealth for that nation.

There was a lot of fun within the campsite too. There were water fights, football matches and dancing until everyone was too tired to continue, amongst other fun and games.

While in Germany the fun was by no means decreased as the youngsters got to go to play laser tag in Bremen. They also went to a climbing forest where they got to zipline too.

They also visited Bremen twice, once to explore the city and the other time to visit NGOs that have good practices and make a positive impact.

They also had a barbeque party with the locals in Garlstedt after going through and cleaning a majority of the village's street signs.

Breaking Bread - Breaking Barriers

Erasmus+ Youth Exchange



One of the most significant aspects of many cultures in Europe and indeed around the world, is cuisine. So as great lovers of food, we thought there could be no better way to encourage young people from different countries (Romania, Italy, Turkey, Croatia, Greece, North Macedonia and Germany) to learn about each other's culture, than through food.

Another upside of cooking is of course that it can be extremely fun, which you can see from the smiles on the faces' of the participants!

This exchange, which was held in March 2019, aimed to break down the mental barriers which were present between some of the youngsters and their countries, as well as promoting tolerance and open-minded thinking. There were many workshops about these topics, but a lot of the time was spent in the kitchen. Throughout the exchange the young people were teaching each other different recipes from each other's cultures and then eating said recipes at the same tables.



The youngsters also got to present their cuisine and cultures to local German people twice, once at Küche für Alle, which is an open kitchen project in Bremen, and once at Küchen Tenne, which is a cooking studio in Oldenburg. The locals were extremely happy to get to try all the wonderful food on offer, and also to tell the youngsters a bit about their own food culture

On top of this, there was also a recipe book, with a recipe which was shared from each culture. This was developed after the exchange, as we didn't want to lose all of these amazing recipes and we also wanted to be able to continue sharing them with more people. For that reason we distribute these books at some fairs and presentations that we are present at.

Healthy Lifestyle

Erasmus+ Youth Exchange



As mentioned previously, one of our core values is healthy living. Thus, we have a lot of knowledge on the topic which we wanted to share with youngsters effectively, by implementing this project. We felt the need to do this because, in modern, high-speed daily life it's apparent that many people have adapted to some bad habits in order to fit with the social expectations placed on them in our current society. Habits such as checking their phone as soon as they wake up to see if they have any new followers, or procrastinating all day so much so that they don't do any physical exercise in their daily life.

These are just a couple of examples of modern teenage struggles, and we wanted to help this group of teenagers cope with these struggles. We wanted to remind them that despite all the good sides of technology, they are sometimes forgetting to look after their mental, physical and spiritual health.

So how did we go about this? We brought together young people from Croatia, Spain, North Macedonia and Germany between 23.04-03.05.2019, introduced them to the benefits of a healthy lifestyle, and the various activities they could do in order to live this healthy lifestyle.



There were yoga classes, talks from fitness experts, meditation sessions, lots and lots of outdoor activities, and very little time to use electronic devices. There were also lots of workshops which were focused on reflecting on daily life and realising the effects that certain habits have on us.

On top of all this there was also emphasis on diets and eating habits. On all of our exchanges, we cook healthy and nutritious food for participants, but on this one we shone a light on why we put this effort in, and showed participants what nutrients should be present in a healthy diet.

There were also artistic workshops on this exchange, which were included in order to show how creativity can have a great positive role in our daily lives and spiritual wellbeing.

United in Nature & Humanity

Erasmus+ Youth Exchange



Love and conservation of nature is one of our core values at NaturKultur, so naturally we host many youth exchanges where we can help youngsters connect to nature and realise its value. Some of the best examples of these are our camping projects, which have had two editions so far, and will have a third soon.

The exchange “United in Nature and Humanity”, which was the second of our camping project series, was hosted in August 2019 at the camping park in Berne. As

mentioned above it aimed to help young people spend time in nature, in order to connect with it and find out how we can live in peaceful balance with it.

48 young people from North Macedonia, Tunisia, Croatia, Belarus, Lebanon and Germany came together to spend 10 days away from their phone and laptop screens, and away from stuffy buildings. They did workshops and held discussions that helped them become more harmonious as humans with the natural world.



The participants stayed in shared tents for the duration of their stay, which meant they had to adapt to not having certain amenities and comforts that they enjoy at their homes.

All of the workshops were also held outside and many involved a lot of physical activity.

During the exchange the participants got to do lots of fun outdoor activities too. They went canoeing in a nearby river as well as going on a beautiful long bike ride through the Bremen Blocklands. They also went to a climbing forest located close to the camp site, where they got to swing through the trees and zipline over a small lake.



“QR Camping” image, and text
“Scan here to watch a video
about this exchange!”

The Stage is Yours

Erasmus+ Youth Exchange



Another one of our core values is the promotion, retention and active participation in cultural activities. The youth exchange “The Stage is Yours” was created exactly with this value in mind. Between 25th November and 4th December 2019 the exchange brought together 36 participants from international partner organizations from Greece, Germany, Croatia, and Spain and enabled participants to address issues of xenophobia, racism and

otherness in their home society and increase understanding and inclusion between each other.

The workshops included an introduction to theatre including improvisation, non-verbal expression, character and story development. The week also introduced theatrical techniques found in Theatre of the Oppressed, Forum theatre, playback theatre and scene building.



There was also workshops on concepts of xenophobia and racism in society, how and where it transpires and discussions about counter-acting these ideas in society.

Creative writing was also a useful tool for participants to structure reflections and thoughts based on the specific topics about home, belonging, exclusion, racism, otherness, etc.

This supported the work towards producing a small theatrical play, scene, or short film during the week. At the conclusion of the exchange, the participants' work was exhibited in the form of a theatrical and film showcase held at the exchange venue where community members were invited to attend.

You can watch all short films that were made on the NaturKultur youtube channel!



Scan here to access our
Youtube Channel

Tolerance Above All

Erasmus+ Youth Exchange



The youth exchange Tolerance Above All was hosted in KulturHaus in Garlstedt and was organised in cooperation with Jugendhaus am Pumpelberg, and the school “Lernhaus am Campus Osterholz-Scharmbeck”. It brought together young people between the age of 15-18 from 4 countries; Spain, Ukraine, Poland, and Germany, with all the German participants being pupils from the school. The youth house has a tradition of doing international exchanges on a yearly basis, and for their 2019 exchange, which took place in December, we worked together to ensure it took place just like every other year.

The theme of this exchange was to bring together a large group of young people from various countries with quite different cultures, and to provide them with a space to communicate, form friendships, do sports together, and most importantly have fun!

All of this was encouraged so that the young people were able to see beyond their cultural differences and realise that they can have fun with anyone as long as they are tolerant, and that they value this tolerance above all else.



Workshops focusing on intercultural communication and developing empathy were held to encourage the communication and friendship mentioned above.

The youngsters also got to go ice-skating in Bremen, to play football in the Jugendhaus am Pumpelberg and to do a graffiti workshop, spelling out the word "Solidarity", in the Jugendhaus which is the local youth centre of Osterholz-Scharmbeck.

The German youngsters also showed the other nationalities what a traditional German Christmas meal looks like, as the exchange was so close to Christmas.

The closeness to Christmas also meant that the youngsters from abroad got to see the famous German Christmas markets! This also led to lots of discussions and comparisons of how Christmas is celebrated in the other countries from which participants came.

EU in Good Times & Bad

Erasmus+ Youth Exchange



This youth exchange was an exchange that took place between 13-23rd February 2020. The exchange, which was the third of a series, aimed to show young people from various EU countries a new perspective of the EU by showing some of the ups and downs of the European Union, and also by encouraging discussion through workshops. The countries involved were Germany, Italy, Spain, Poland, Hungary and Lithuania, with 8 participants from each country.

During the exchange some young people gained a new understanding of politics which they never previ-

ously had, while others were able to understand the benefit of a united Europe which works in harmony.

During the project the participants visited the European Parliament and the European Commission in Brussels. There was also a visit from local politicians to the project venue. The young people were able to discuss and debate about different topics with these politicians, in order to better understand what motivates them, what their biggest concerns are in the current political landscape, and to learn better political and democratic practices, amongst other things.



The youngsters were in Brussels for 3 days, during which they got in depth explanations about how the Parliament and Commission work while visiting those places.

They visited the Parliamentarium Museum and they got to watch a commission session live.

They were also able to speak in depth about their political questions to German politicians from the Lower Saxony area.

The visit from the politicians in which they were able to ask these questions was hosted in KulturHaus. This meant the youngsters were almost one to one with politicians, so it felt like real, personal conversations.



Scan here to read a media report about this exchange!

ERASMUS+ TRAINING COURSES

We host 2-4 training courses per year, some of which are in their 7th instalment. We also send German youth workers to many courses on a yearly basis. In the following pages you can read about some of the training courses we have hosted down the years

What is an Erasmus+ Training Course

Training Courses are organized for active youth workers who are curious to learn more about a certain topic and enhance their skills. This type of course normally lasts 1-2 weeks and brings together up to 50 motivated youth workers around topics that are a challenge to our societies. The activities are led by experienced trainers using non-formal education methods, like interactive workshops, games, outdoor activities and much more.

All costs for accommodation, food and activities are covered by the Erasmus+ program, and travel costs are reimbursed up to a certain amount though there is often a participation fee between 20-45 Euros. Participants must be 18 years old or older. We help youth workers in finding a suitable project or a suitable organization and answer any questions they have.



Be Part of the Solution

Conflict Resolution Training Course



We believe that one of the most amazing abilities of youth work and non-formal education, is the ability to bring together people regardless of their backgrounds. That is why we implemented the training course “Be part of the solution” which was a conflict resolution training that was held in the small city of Braunlage in Central Germany from the 1-7th of December 2015. There were 45 youngsters and youth workers that came to learn how to build peace between each other, how to organize projects and activities that will bring the young people from the conflict

countries together, to learn which tools are there to solve the problems between the youth. The participants were all from conflict countries: Israel, Palestine, Russia, Ukraine, Kosovo, Serbia, Croatia, North Macedonia, Greece, Kosovo, Cyprus and the host Germany.

With the non-formal methods of education (simulations, working groups, task-oriented workshops) they learned how to assess, evaluate, handle conflict situations between the youth, and how to facilitate a peaceful, loving, safe atmosphere in various projects.

Train the trainers - Its up to me

Erasmus+ Training Course



Train the trainers - Its up to me is a highly successful training course which has had 7 implementations so far. The first course was in 2013 and it aimed to train the future trainers. For that course the main activity was held in Diepenau and it lasted for 8 days. During these 8 days the participants learnt what it is like to be a trainer, which skills do they need to learn to be good trainers, and to finally step up to the role of a trainer. During these 8 days the participants had a lot of hands on learning as the main method of training – they de-

veloped their presentation skills, public speaking, self-expression and listening skills amongst other soft skills, and also how to create group dynamics, how to prepare for a workshop or how to make creative workshops.

With each year we have built on the previous year to provide an ever-improving experience and in recent implementations we have also added specified topics that were concentrated on, such as green youth work or incorporating artistic flow into workshops.



Scan here to hear about some of the learning outcomes from Train the Trainers down the years

In each implementation we include as many different types of workshops as possible in order to cover all bases. For example we have given surprise workshops about crisis management, the surprise element being crucial as it meant the trainers were able to see how the participants would really react in these situations, and then could build on those reactions.

The latest implementation of the training course is made up of two activities, about six months apart, and which are seven days each. In the first activity the youth workers learn about methods and workshops they can use when implementing their own projects, as well as developing some of the necessary skills and mindset to be an effective youth worker:

Between the two activities the participants are encouraged to implement their own activity of some sort. Each participant has a mentor from the trainers team which helps them in this process with advice, support and reflection. Then in the second activity the participants reflect on their activity and through various workshops learn how they can improve the activity or develop more similar ones.

Act Non-Formal

Erasmus+ Training Course



Act Non-formal was a training course which was implemented twice in 2016 and 2017, and which aimed to provide new innovative methods and skills for youth workers to include marginalized youth into the society and provide opportunities for them to develop their non-formal education skills. This training course wanted to bring youth workers from different cultures closer together, and help them to express and reflect their opinion, gain self-confidence and take active part in society.

The methods that the youth workers learned during this project will help them to work in their local communities to foster cultural diversity, understanding, and implementation of common European values, such as tolerance and respect of human rights.

The participants were introduced to basics of drama education that can be used for all target groups of young people. Non-verbal expression can be very useful working with young people that have language barriers and lack of self-confidence.



The trainers introduced the tools for creating scenes that deal with relevant topics (refugees, migration, etc.) to make local youth aware of the problem and help them to express their opinion.

They also used Creative writing as a method; it helps young people to structure their thoughts and feelings about specific topics and to reflect and eventually express them.

Recognition of Youth Work

Erasmus+ Training Course



Recognition of youth work/ers was more than a training course and networking seminar. This project that had only 5 working days had a big mission. 35 youth workers with different backgrounds and level of experience came together to start the process of changing International Youth work and getting the youth worker profession recognized on a European level.

The course started by checking how important and well represented youth work is in each country and all of the organizations found similarities concerning the lack of

recognition of this important profession.

They also learnt how to advocate and lobby for a new occupation on the national and on the European level. This was followed by brainstorming about the needs and requirements necessary for high quality work.

The most important activity was the development of the White paper, a document with recommendations that were delivered to the European Commission, Erasmus+ program, Salto Youth, National agencies and other relevant stakeholders.



Once the White paper was completed, the focus shifted to the topics of refugees, radicalized youth and how to include these groups in the Erasmus+ programme more. There was even an expert joining us online via Skype call to explain the process of radicalization and where the participants could educate themselves more.

The participants were also introduced to tools and other know-how for dealing with crisis situations on youth projects

One of the topics that was worked on in the form of debate was nationalism and the aftermath of Brexit. The youth workers present were introduced into the domination paradigm and how it is being used to convince people to blindly follow one idea.

This project addressed so many important issues and topics and it is just the start of an important process of recognition of youth work and youth workers.

Europeers go Europe

Erasmus+ Training Course



Europeers are young people, that already took part in a youth exchange, youth initiative or a youth democracy project, or EVS/ESC volunteering project within the youth in action program, and that now want to inform other young people about the opportunities to go abroad through information events and to tell about their own experiences.

On this training, 24 motivated young people between the ages of 18 and 30 participated, all of whom wanted to become Europeers. Participants

for this project came from Turkey, Croatia, Poland, Sweden and Spain.

This was the first international Europeers training and also the first Europeers training that was organized by Europeers themselves.

The training course focused on teaching these young people that were so keen and passionate about spreading the word about European youth initiatives, the necessary skills and knowledge to spread it, thus giving them the ability to utilise this passion.



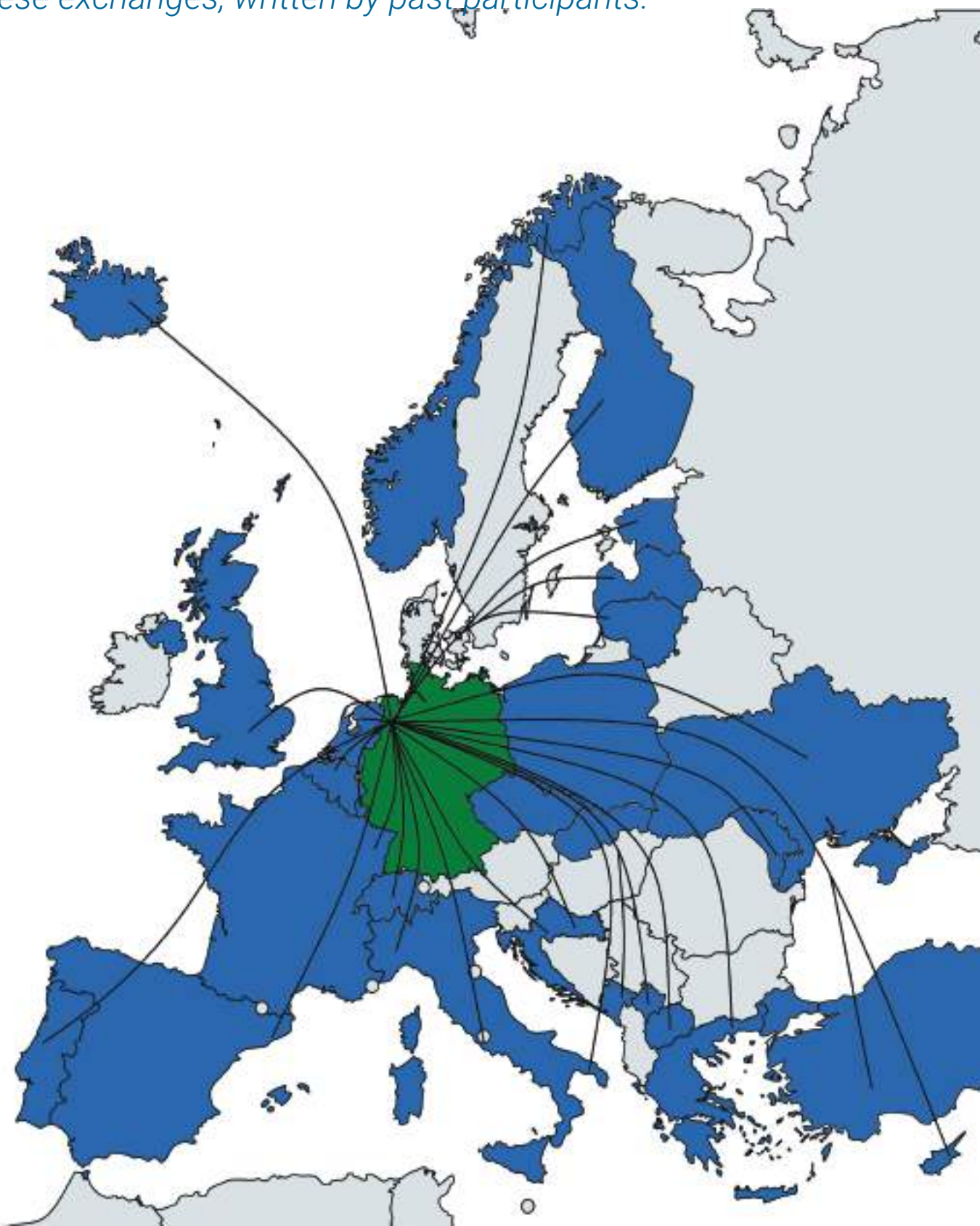
This project turned out to be very successful in that the participants felt equipped with the tools to spread the word about Youth in Action and Erasmus+.

Immediately after the project, some participants acted quickly and went to school fairs to talk about the Erasmus+ opportunities for young people. For others it might've taken longer but all of the young peers carried the knowledge from this experience further and informed many curious youngsters.

All in all, this training course, and the success it yielded, set the precedent for many further Europeans training courses, which would help the international Europeans network strengthen and enable the young peers to do their work better than ever before.

Sending Young People Abroad

Since just September 2011 we have sent more than 400 young people abroad on Erasmus+ projects in 11 different countries. The following pages are reports from some of these exchanges, written by past participants.



Say No to Discrimination

Erasmus+ YE – In the words of a participant



Words cannot even describe what we have experienced in a small village in Croatia called Fužine.

The big and cosy guesthouse was brought to life by 35 young and motivated people. All participants came from seven different countries - Croatia, Germany, Greece, Lithuania, Romania, Spain and Turkey.

Every individual or even group of people carry with them certain assumptions, attitudes, beliefs, prejudices, stereotypes and values that have been shaped in the cultural environment in which they have been socialized.

Our motivation to participate in the project was to get a better intercultural understanding towards

other cultures. In fact, we wanted to get empowered on how to fight against discrimination. The youth exchange dealt with the topic "Say no to discrimination".

With Erasmus+ projects we get access to cultural diversity which is in our opinion the most valuable outcome. We learn to be international, moreover showing respect for others. Learning about people and their cultures makes us more open - it's a way of education.

During the first workshops we got an introduction on the topic of anti-biased approach. We worked in our national teams to prepare an overview on current news topics. There are many ways to inform people about anything. We tried out different approaches. The aim of our project was to be creative and to include art. That was done by using strong images and wording for social media. Second, preparing video and theatre performance. And third, to actually present our results to a group of young people.

This youth exchange was a great pleasure for us. We would like to thank Ocean Znanja and Naturkultur e.V. for making this unique experience possible.

In Nature We Trust

Erasmus+ YE – In the words of a participant



“In Nature We Trust” - this was the motto under which we, Juliette, Ann-Kathrin, Jacob, Stela and Malte spent 7 days in the marvellous Villa Diana close to Lecce, South Italy, along with 30 other young people from Estonia, Poland, Spain, Italy, Germany and Greece. A combination of mindfulness and meditation with nature-based methods was awaiting us. The food - vegetarian, also, no drugs (alcohol and tobacco counts) - it sounded more like a retreat than a typical youth-exchange to be honest. We all went in with quite different expectations, coming from diverse backgrounds. Yet one thing united us: the

willingness and curiosity to go after the question of what it means to live our lives more mindfully and what role nature is playing in that quest. Other than that, we wanted to reflect on how we handle technology.

There were about to be 7 unforgettable days that exceeded our expectations. Our group leaders and facilitators cultivated an atmosphere rich in open heartedness, mutual respect and inclusion. Nobody was left behind, there was no indifferent attitude and no one shut themselves off from the others. It wasn't the first exchange for most of us, but through the special vibe we shared, it became a unique



experience. Our days consisted of various workshops and group activities - which were settled in a wide spectrum going from playful painting and theatre improv, to zero waste living and creative cooking. We learned how to meditate, walk, listen and eat mindfully. We explored our 5 senses in midst of nature and moved a little closer to ourselves.

We left Villa Diana at the end of our exchange with a bouquet of enriching

experiences, new friendships and a fulfilled spirit, and did so with a pinch of melancholy. Each one had learned his/her own lessons, but we certainly shared one special insight: If we trust other people, across cultural and linguistic borders, independent from their beliefs and opinions, and if we really engage with them, wonderful things can happen.

Photos taken by Malte Stein.



No Hate Speech

Erasmus+ YE – In the words of a participant

The focus of the project was on on-line and offline hate speech. In order to raise awareness about the topic, there were applied different activities and methods, such as: group presentations, debates, living libraries, community guest speakers, etc. During the project, each group had to elaborate one specific topic related to hate speech. The different topics were: stereotypes, prejudice, social exclusion, integration, discrimination, marginalized groups, prevention, conflict management, problem solving, mass media, peaceful communication, speaking up.

The first day in Braga for us was enriching and impressive. It was good to see people from different cultures and get to know them and see, how similar we are when we get closer.

We would like to emphasize the social aspect as a highlight of this encounter; group dynamics, openness, communication and interculturality are just some of the features that have made this experience so valuable to us.

Of course, the topic of the seminar is very relevant and up-to-date, so the inputs, the methods and the reflections were very important for all of us. The different social, cultural and individual backgrounds have contributed to the development of new perspectives for all of us.

We also found the team building activities very exciting. The simulation of different everyday challenges in the team through simple methods, presents everything differently than thought: The dynamics of the problem, the different solutions, the own responsibility in everything we do and above all the empathy, as a very important medium in any conflict situation.

Then I would like to end my thoughts with : These encounters are important milestones into tomorrow's peace, freedom and international understanding. Thank you for making this possible for us!

- Osama and Blerta.

ESC VOLUNTEERING

We are an ESC organization and offer the opportunity to young people living in Germany to volunteer in different countries across Europe and the world. We also currently have 11 volunteering placements in Bremen for young European residents. In the next few pages you can read about ex-volunteers' experiences and what volunteers do in Bremen.

What is ESC?

The European Solidarity Corps (ESC) is an initiative from the EU which provides opportunities for young people to volunteer or work on projects that benefit communities and people around Europe, and thus also for organisations to host international volunteers.

Young people between the ages of 18-30 years old and from anywhere in Europe can benefit from the programme. The Corps gives people with various different levels of experience and people with less opportunities the opportunity to volunteer abroad. Since 2018, the programme also includes traineeships and jobs, though so far, we are focussing on implementing volunteering projects only.

What is ESC volunteering like?

ESC volunteers work around 30 hours per week at organisations that

in some way make a positive impact on local communities. The work can range a lot, from cultural associations to schools, from youth houses to animal shelters, the variety is quite huge.

The European Commission pays the accommodation, health insurance, food and pocket money, transport costs and language courses of the volunteers, meaning there are no costs for volunteers nor for the organisations.

How do we help?

We can help young people find a project they are interested in, and in any way we will support them on their volunteering path.

Additionally, as a coordinating organisation we support our ESC partners, which are local organisations in and around Bremen who make a positive impact, to host a European volunteer. We begin by helping with the application and then support in any way necessary until the volunteer leaves.

Our ESC Partners in Bremen



Deutsches Tanzfilminstitut

The Deutsches TanzfilmInstitut was founded in 1988 by Heide-Marie Maertel as a non-profit organisation to gather and archive videos of dance performances from all around Germany. It is now the largest dance archive in all of Europe.



Westfluegel in Syke

The aim of Westfluegel has always been to ensure the inclusion of people with learning difficulties by teaching them ways to express themselves artistically and teaching them some skills, like carpentry for example. All in all, Westfluegel provides full-time support for those who need it, as well as inspiration regarding how they can express themselves artistically.



Telihabe Friedehorst

Friedehorst was formed by Dr. Eldon Burke as a facility to help those with physical traumas/disabilities. Friedehorst now acts as a care home for the elderly, and for people with disabilities, as well as a rehabilitation centre for people with severe injuries.



Tobias Schule

Tobias Schule is a Waldorf pedagogical school in Bremen. It has small classes which include special needs children. The Waldorf education method is one that strives to develop its pupils artistic, intellectual and practical skills using an integrated and holistic approach.



Theater 11

Theater 11 is a professional inclusive theatre group, which also teaches theatre to kids and young people to the standard of the Moscow University of Arts. Many of the actors and actresses at the theatre have a migration background, which gives the theatre an inclusive theme. It produces plays in German and Russian.

Tanzbar Bremen



Tanzbar is a mixed team of dancers, choreographers and cultural professionals with different skillsets. The focus of their work is to strengthen contemporary dance through an inclusive principle through the joint development, presentation and implementation of dance productions for the stage and public space performances, and for workshop and festival formats.

Social Media Changemakers

ESC Hosting Project



The project “Social Media Changemakers” was developed in 2018 and implemented between April 2019 and October 2020.

The project hosted 5 volunteers for a one year period, one volunteer was hosted directly by us, and the other four were hosted by our partners in Bremen.

The volunteers who took part in this project were responsible for photographing and filming the activities of their hosting organisations, and also for managing and producing content for their social media accounts and websites.

The aim of this project was on one hand to help the organisations gain more recognition. The organisa-

tions are doing work which has a major positive impact on their communities but did not always have the capacity to disseminate their activities. Through this project we hoped to give them the means to show off their work and hopefully inspire others to do similar work.

On the other hand, we wanted to give young people from all around Europe the opportunity to develop their social media skills, which could be crucial for them in an age where social media is by far the most consumed form of media. Through developing their skills on this project these young people get the opportunity to improve their employability while making a difference in a German community.

Think Global, Work Local

ESC Hosting Project

This project, which owes its origins to a youth exchange in 2018, and was implemented between September 2019 and September 2020, was all about showing young people how they can make a change.

The project also hosted 5 volunteers, one of which was with us and the others in different organisations around Bremen, for 1 year. The organisations were selected due to them actively participating in activities which benefit their community, for example through inclusive theatre or alternative schooling methods.

The volunteers who were hosted through this project had the overall job of becoming another part of the working team of these organisations, with varying job descriptions. Through closely working with their organisations and team members they were able to pick up methods and experiences which allowed them to make a larger impact when they returned to their communities. They were also responsible for organising a personal project during their time which improved their ability to organise activities.

On top of the daily tasks, the volunteers also had one larger task which brought them all together. The task

was to co-operate in order to create two larger events which had the topic “Volunteering”. The aim of this task was both to encourage a culture of volunteering and solidarity activities in Bremen, but also to teach teamwork and intercultural communication. The volunteers had to overcome language barriers and clashing work schedules, to organise the events.

They were successful in these feats, and had organised a “Volunteering party”, which would bring together volunteers from all sorts of different programmes in order to celebrate volunteering. There was also going to be opportunities for non-volunteers to learn about the different volunteering possibilities, and space for volunteers to reflect together. Unfortunately the event had to be cancelled due to the COVID-19 crisis.



“Scan here to see what ESC volunteering in Bremen is like!”

Where we host our volunteers

We manage three houses in Bremen that act as accommodation for the ESC volunteers. Between these three houses there is a total of 13 bedrooms.

The Party House

Named so due to its famous lack of partying, the party house accommodates three of the volunteers. It has a large private terrace which is available only to the volunteers and a big entry room ideal for storing stuff (as well as the necessary basics such as a kitchen and toilet of course).

The EVS House

This house was the first house which we started managing, thus the name EVS which is the old name for ESC. This house has three floors which have a total of 5 bedrooms, one of which has an en-suite bathroom. It also has a sitting room, a garden and 2 (!!) kitchens.

Schwarzer Weg House

This is the newest addition to the NaturKultur houses. Due to this it is yet to have a nickname... This house, which seems way bigger on the inside than it looks on the outside, also has 5 bedrooms. It also has a large terrace and a brand new kitchen.



Global Change Makers

ESC International Partnership

The aim of the project “Global Change Makers” was to plant seeds for social change in five communities across Italy, Spain, Jordan, Lebanon and Greece. By working on topics that are burning issues across all European societies, such as social inclusion and multiculturalism, and with target groups that are at the core of ongoing debates, such as migrants, refugees and youth, the volunteers involved in this project had the chance to have a real impact on individuals and communities.

The project was developed with regards to the needs of specific youngsters who contacted us with the wish to improve concrete skills, explore a specific country and culture, and challenge themselves in a different environment. Esther, Juliette, Hanno, Emal, Luca and Lea were the young people we sent abroad and the first big sending project coordinated by our organization. We were happy to have the support of our partners abroad, who welcomed the volunteers in their teams.

Esther and Lea went to volunteer with “TES - HIENET” on the Greek island of Chios. They worked with

young people, focusing particularly on providing workshops on a variety of digital and IT skills in combination with activities related to culture, education and sport on the rural island.

The activity in Spain was hosted by Ayuntamiento de San Justo Desvern, where the volunteer Emal was involved in the local workshops and activities for young people, which particularly focused on arts and culture.

Juliette joined the Rinascita Sociale Salam House in Naples, Italy, an organization that works with youngsters and children in a disadvantaged area of their city. The organisation works with a variety of age groups and immigrant families, offering a variety of opportunities for the selected volunteer to add her expertise and knowledge while learning from the community.

For the first time, we were also able to cooperate within the framework of the European Solidarity Corps with Lebanon and Jordan. As Hanno was looking for a voluntary service in an Arabic speaking country and youthwork with sport and music, Chabibeh

Sporting Club in Beirut, Lebanon, was the ideal match. This organisation works with young people, providing a variety of outdoor activities and sport activities for them. As the Corona pandemic started, Hanno returned to Germany and continued to volunteer online for Chabibeh Club and us, as well as offline for a variety of initiatives and campaigns in Northern Germany.

Luca joined i-Dare in Amman, Jordan, an organization that provides a creative space for young people aiming to increase their employability and entrepreneur-

ship skills through workshops in the areas of music, theatre, writing and video production. Though cut short by the Corona pandemic, Luca continued his voluntary service partly online for i-Dare and partly in his village in Germany.

Our “Global Change Makers” planted small seeds of change, initiatives and ideas within the communities that hosted the volunteers. Equally, the volunteers went through a learning process, acquiring new skills and understanding of different cultures and returning home with a suitcase of memories and experiences.

“By getting the chance to support the local schools, it is fairly easy to get a direct connection to the local community. The frequent contact with kids, parents and teachers enables me to have a daily cultural exchange with them. Despite the fact that the language barrier was a challenge for me, my work with the kids goes smoothly. By playing with the kids, I usually learn Greek words very quickly.”

-Esther (on her experience in Chios)

“I definitely recommend to do an ESC to everyone. I can see how much it influenced me and others who were doing their ESC as well. We all are happy that we’ve got that opportunity to learn lessons even for your whole life. Also you might change your mindset because of understanding how things work outside of your comfort zone, out of your country or your small village. I am more than grateful that I got this possibility for myself. I recommend this volunteering program to everyone who is ready to experience something new and inspiring.”

-Juliette (talking about her time in Naples)

Voices

ESC Sending Project - In the words of the volunteer



It is surprising how fast the unknown can become known and a foreign land become home. And how fast time runs sometimes. It seems just now that two strangers picked me up at the airport and now I'm already saying goodbye to them as good friends. I was in Skopje, North-Macedonia for 9 months to do my European Voluntary Service.

On my second day I got already thrown into the middle of everything. The yearly NGO fair in Skopje took place, organised by my host organisation Volunteers Centre Skopje (VCS).

Instead of arriving slowly, sitting in an office I had to carry crates and boxes and chairs and right off the bat got to know thousands of people. Getting up on the morning of the fair, I was fairly grumpy and felt like going home.

“What am I doing here, why do I have to work here, for people I barely know, for a purpose I don't know.” Yet, at the end of the day, things felt all in place again. I was happy. I had gotten to know many great people, everybody had been really friendly and open and my coordinators and colleagues regularly asked how I felt and whether I needed something.

This voluntary service was to a large extent a personal learning journey. New people, new country, new life. The main project I worked on was the youth magazine VOICES, where I, with the other volunteers, wrote and designed articles and managed the whole magazine. That was quite interesting as it gave us a lot of freedom for our own ideas and for taking initiative. On the other hand we were involved in all other aspects of the work of VCS. We organised workshops at high schools as well as various events such as language karaoke and movie nights. For a while I also gave German conversation classes for the public.

The biggest challenge for me was a youth exchange to which I went as an assistant and also facilitated a few workshops. I had trouble fitting into my role as part of the trainer/facilitator team. Additionally, there was a noticeable age difference and often a language barrier which made it difficult to become part of the group. After a week I was quite worn out. But I also had learned a fair bit and grown as a person. I realised for example that I am able and content to teach people, in formal as well as informal ways. I think that is one of the best things of a voluntary service, that it throws you into all kinds of unexpected and sometimes challenging situations, forcing you to find solutions. Not everything was easy but everything helped me learn and grow.

On the other hand, I did not experience all that much of a culture shock. Except maybe in the airport lines which taught me that people in Macedonia have a very different understanding of personal space and distance than I do. But in the country, people were so friendly and welcoming that it was easy to overlook and accept some of

the less inviting aspects of Skopje, such as the omnipresent trash and the smog. Those latter two, and the general treatment of the environment were, then again, things that made me realise how many things actually do work in Germany and how grateful I can be to have been born here.

Talking with the locals was quite eye opening. I realised that as a volunteer with a paid for accommodation and some pocket money I can live well in this country while on the other hand many people have to work two or three jobs just to make ends-meet. In that sense it was also a humbling experience, which made me appreciate much more the opportunities I have by grace of being born in a rich European Union country.

These encounters with people, be it locals or other volunteers are what made my stay the most memorable. Some were unique and will rest only in my heart as precious memories, others will, as friendships stay for hopefully a long time.

-Text and photos by Mathis Gilsbach



LOCAL PROJECTS

NaturKultur has recently created a local actions team which implements solidarity projects and helps the communities of Bremen and Osterholz-Scharmbeck. We also carry out workshops in these communities.

What is a Solidarity Project?

The way we define solidarity projects is; any activity based on solidarity, that impacts their community in a positive way. Through the aforementioned ESC programme, groups of young people between the ages of 18-30 can get funding of up to 500 Euros per month to implement such projects. Our local action group hopes to use this funding to make such projects, so in the future many of their projects will hopefully be ESC Solidarity Projects.

How does this team work?

The team, which is made up of motivated young people living in and about Bremen, meet twice per month to discuss ideas and brainstorm about how they can help the local communities. Then they implement two local actions per month. The size and topics of the projects vary a lot as the local action group is very dynamic and international.

Local Workshops

Our youth facilitators have a very wide range of skillsets and are very experienced at giving workshops from all of their work on youth exchanges. We use this experience to offer local workshops to the people in our target group, that are living either in or near to Bremen.

Youth Exchange Activities

Many of our youth exchanges have tangible outcomes such as theatre plays and art expeditions. Whenever we have such an activity we present and perform them locally at a variety of places.

Spreading the Word about European Opportunities

We have one ESC volunteer who has the responsibility to spread the word about all of the opportunities we offer to young people in the region. The volunteer attends fairs at universities and schools with stands and does presentations at schools and youth houses.



INNOVATION

Using Erasmus+ funding we have had multiple European-wide projects which have focused on innovation and recognition in the field of youthwork across Europe.

How does Erasmus+ fund innovation?

Within the Erasmus+ programme there are multiple different key actions, each of which focuses on a different area of youth mobility. The key action which funds innovation is Key Action 2, which is explained like so on the EU website;

“The actions under KA2 make it possible for organisations from different participating countries to work together, to develop, share and transfer best practices and innovative approaches in the fields of education, training and youth.”

There are multiple actions for which the funding can be used, these are;

- **Sector Skills Alliances** ensuring cooperation between education and employment in tackling skills gaps with regard to one or more occupational profiles in a specific sector;
- **Knowledge Alliances cooperation** between higher education institutions and enterprises;
- **Capacity Building in the field of youth** supporting cooperation with Partner Countries;
- **Capacity Building in the field of higher education** supporting cooperation with Partner Countries.

By coordinating and cooperating in such actions we hope to contribute on the overall improvement of youthwork throughout the whole of Europe, so that young Europeans can have fun, learn, develop themselves, receive help and live by good human values, no matter what their background is.

The following pages show and explain the innovations we have taken charge and taken part of as NaturKultur e.V.

The Trainers Library

Erasmus+ KA2 Project

Background



The idea for an online resource centre came during the training course “Train the Trainers - It’s up to me 4” that was held in 2017 in Germany. During the previous four implementations of this training course, we were collecting learning materials for the participants from various sources – books that we had read, videos that we had seen, guides that we had developed. However, the participants’ needs for learning materials which were concrete and consistent were much larger than what we were able to provide. Several years of materials collected on a Google Drive, and materials that were scattered here and there were obviously pointing towards a need for a more structured and well-organized resource centre which trainers could refer to in order to develop their own skills and competences.

During the project “Bridges for Trainers” in Vienna in 2017, the “European Trainers Strategy - Competence Model for Trainers” was presented. This model provided a structure – a strategic key framework which would allow tools and resources that

address trainers’ competences to be built upon it. This and the many eye-opening debates, which made it clear that all trainers are facing the same challenge, gave us the final push to follow up an idea that was already in the back of our minds. We would create a library that would be based on the competence model and that would be easy to use, structured, up to date, relevant, labelled and organized in a straightforward way. We assembled the team which developed and applied for an Erasmus+ KA2 – Innovation in youth work project – the “Trainers Library”.

The library needed a team of motivated experts and partner organizations in different fields. We wanted to work with experienced trainers who could enrich the library with their knowledge. We ended up with a team which had trainers that are psychologists and visual artists, environmental activists, organizational and business developers, designers of educational materials, or experts on emotional intelligence. This blend of backgrounds made the team well balanced and diverse, in many ways.

The Process

We set an ambitious goal. Each of the 7 trainers was to be responsible to create 50 articles each that would provide short and concise content, supported by exercises and reflection questions, all placed within the context of youth work. Each one of us was supported by our own team of researchers, contributors and other trainers, who wrote or co-created some of the articles. Hundreds of books and articles, pieces of research, presentations, workshops and seminars, educational experts, sources, and audio books

were used and consulted while writing the 350 articles that fill up 1500 pages.

After 30 months of work and dedication, we were ready to launch the library. We see the Trainers Library as a community of learners who not only benefit from the materials, but also contribute to its development and continuous organic growth. Where we stand right now, we have barely scratched the surface. The Trainers Library has much bigger potential...

Search our Archive, Build your Knowledge





Editors Choice



New and innovative ways of youth participation in decision making processes

Traditional forms of youth participation come with conventionalities but a much narrower range of activities to characterise traditional or conventional youth participation that is lacking

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Reflectly

Why did I choose this tool? Reflectly is a very easy to use and also kind of a fun way to reflect on the day

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Openness and acceptance

Why did I choose this tool? I chose to construct this tool in a way that several approaches to openness would be covered as openness

[Bookmark\(0\)](#)

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The Vision

We expect the library to continue to grow with further contributions from the international community of trainers. We are well aware that we just started this project and there is need for additional contributions. We envision that every six months, additional articles are going to be added to the library, filling all the gaps that exist, adding to the variety of tools and approaches, extending the reach of our various self-directed learning resources. We want to encourage as many innovative and varying resources and materials as possible to be added to the library, by the whole community.

We also want to translate the library into many languages. Thus, this library would make a big impact on the youth workers and trainers who live in rural areas, who don't speak English very well (or at all), who are not so aware of the international trends and developments in youth work in other parts of the world.

We know that it is not easy to read 1500 pages of information that require careful contemplation, reflection, try-outs, debates and discussions. Therefore, we have envisioned different forms of media that will further disseminate the learning. We

plan to create hundreds of podcasts, that can be downloaded onto any device and taken along literally anywhere, as well as educational videos that will be available online on the Trainers Library YouTube channel. So far, we have created 6 videos and 6 podcasts in order to have a sample to test this approach and further research its impact. These samples should tell us if there is a need to create multimedia versions of all articles, and in which direction the library should develop.

We expect the development of a community of trainers. The Library provides the opportunity for creation of forums for debates, editorial policies, Q&As, and different kind of support groups. The library has the potential to develop a community of learners who will continue to innovate, develop and spread the knowledge within said community and even further.

Finally, we will be continuously testing the Trainers library for its usefulness, impact and learning outcomes. This will allow us to steer its development, learn from the mistakes and continuously improve and keep the information relevant and up to date.

Sparkcatcher

Erasmus+ KA2 Project

The Process

The SPARK CATCHER is a project that aims to develop the understanding, tools, and methods necessary for youth workers to work with young people with fewer opportunities and promote entrepreneurship. There are many young people who – due to various social, economic, health, and educational obstacles – have either lost their purpose in life, been prevented from taking action, or have become paralyzed when making decisions. However, we believe that this apparent challenge has the potential to become enormous power!

To make this shift, we have focused on the process in which a young person might be facilitated to get successfully empowered. All of this is done so that young people could wake up within themselves and take the initiative to build up their own future.

Our research has shown that young people with fewer opportunities are not aware of their talents. Therefore they are not looking into developing and utilizing those talents. With SPARKCATCHER, we intend to shine a light onto those talents, so that the young people can eventually shine even brighter than the light that guided them.



How does it work?

Our main aim was to develop an innovative curriculum consisting of two main parts:

SPARK – a set of pedagogical tools leading a learner through different learning paths to the final result, which is the strategic plan for one’s own initiative;



CATCHER – result of the international research bringing powerful stories of young people and youth workers as well as links to resources and institutions supporting youth in their entrepreneurial initiatives.



Step Between

Erasmus+ KA2 Project

A step between what?

The project was developed based on the conclusions and recommendations of the “White paper on Youth Work” published in September 2018 by NaturKultur e.V. The White Paper clearly outlines the need for improving the work conditions and well-being of youth workers and their lack of representation in front of the relevant European institutions and policy makers.

This project’s main goal was to be the “step between” two major projects – “Recognition of Youth Work” and “Youth Work Eco-systems”. A step between was an exploratory research project about the EU’s decision and policy making processes, and which aimed to assess and map out the EU’s political landscape related to youth workers. The reports are going to provide us with relevant information on the relevant institutions, organizations, legislation, and policies, and on the other hand, will provide information on the youth workers well-being and needs. The reports were focusing on 3 different topics: “Legislation pinpointing for youth work” by Go Green – Skopje, “Youth

work eco-systems” by NaturKultur e.V. and, “Well-being of youth workers” by Ocean Znanja.

This information served as the basis for a larger follow up project that we have applied with to the German National Agency which will aim to address 5 basic systems of youthwork that need to be developed – representation, research and development, organizational models, education, and the safety and well-being of youth workers. “A Step Between” symbolically communicates the need to gather all this information and create the critical group of youth workers, experts and policy makers relevant for making positive change.

The project is innovative at its core, because there is no similar approach to addressing this issue, this is a process coming from grass roots organizations, which is based on firm research and white paper, and where all three organizations are leading a team. This project will bring us one step closer to a holistic, inclusive process of youth workers’ representation in Brussels.

Appendix

Our Activity Partners, Our Funding Partners, Links and Contact

Thanks to those who fund our activities:

JUGEND FÜR EUROPA:

Jugend für Europa is the German National Agency, meaning they are responsible for allocating all of the funding from the German pool of Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps budgets, as well as checking and ensuring that the quality of the approved projects is high enough.
www.jugendfuereuropa.de



ARBEITSKREIS DEUTSCHE BILDUNGSTÄTTE:

The AdB is an association made up of approximately 170 continuing education centres throughout Germany with various profiles - youth education centres, adult education centres, academies, Europe centres, educational centres of party-related foundations and international encounter centres.
www.adb.de



ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME:

Erasmus+ is the EU's programme to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe. Its budget of €14.7 billion provides opportunities for over 4 million Europeans to study, train, and gain experience abroad.
ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/about_en



THANKS TO OUR MANY PARTNER ORGANISATIONS:

Ocean Znanja (Croatia), Moby Dick (Italy), Amazonas (Croatia), Globers Association (Spain), Vulcanicamente (Italy), Blanes Botanical Gardens (Spain), I-Participate Paranesti (Greece), Hellenic Youth Participation (Greece), OTI Cyprus, OTI United Kingdom, Youth For Future (Portugal), Mano Europa (Lithuania), VCS (North Macedonia), Big Boss Projects (France), Salvaj (Italy), Jugendtreff Kael (Luxembourg), Jugendhaus am Pumpelburg (Germany), Arte Ego (Poland/Germany), Go Green (North Macedonia), Dinamik Gelisim Dernegi (Turkey), The Development Crew (Lithuania), The Replay Network (Italy), TES – HIENET (Greece), Ayuntamiento de San Justo Desvern (Spain), Rinascita Sociale Salam House (Italy), Chabibeh Sporting Club (Lebanon), i-Dare (Jordan), LGN (Norway), We Live (Spain), Dorea Educational Instutue (Cyprus), Annata Foundation (The Netherlands), Fides (Spain), Esprominho (Portugal), Townhall Villabilla (Spain), Cyprus Youth Council, Georgian Youth for Europe, NGO THY (Kosovo), SPFM (Moldova), Art of the Box (Belgium).

LINKS AND CONTACT:

Our Webiste:
naturkultur.eu

Youtube Channel:
[NaturKultur e.V.](https://www.youtube.com/NaturKultur_e.V)

Facebook Page:
[NaturKultur e.V.](https://www.facebook.com/NaturKultur_e.V)



info@naturkultur.eu
NaturKultur (Bremen office)
Pappelstraße 90/92
28199 Bremen





NATUR**KULTUR** E.V.