

A handbook on how to dig rural life out of the cowpath

RURALYMPIANS UNITE



Edition 2019 - 21 international volunteers from 18 different countries

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INTRODUCTION LETTER

Young people tend to feel life in the countryside is boring - there is much work to do around the households and spaces where they could have fun, relax or explore their potentials are few to none. That was the case for our rural commune of Izvoarele, Prahova as well. BUT this summer things took a turn in a tight curve, first one as you climb the main road, entering Izvoarele village. There's an old house there, hosting Curba de Cultura Youth Center, that offered a roof and a hand to 21 young volunteers, coming from all around Europe and wider, hosting the Village Life and Fun volunteering project, supported by the European Solidarity Corps programme. The two months project resulted in two big public events with and for the rural youth and a series of periodic activities,

promoting youthful initiatives and bringing many chances to socialize, learn and have fun in the middle of the countryside. We dare hoping that it was just one of many upcoming summers, where local and international youth joins forces in creating a friendly and inspiring atmosphere in their local communities, which is much needed for the young people generally and so much more in disadvantaged areas like the countryside of Romania. As the local community benefitted from fresh international forces, volunteers themselves experienced amazing bits of authentic local reality. Flip the pages further to discover how this volunteering experience was mutually fruitful and satisfying for everyone involved.

VILLAGE VOLUNTEERS



My favourite part of Romania is the hospitality that people around show us. Our neighbors in particular are wonderful. They help us out, they share food with us, even home-made alcohol... We get along really well even though we don't speak the same language. When we are together, all the communication barriers disappear. I really love them. That, for me, is the best part of rural Romania.



Yeah, I love mint man, it's better than anywhere else. Actually we have a garden in our house and I really love it. We have flowers, we have potatoes, carrots, spices and herbs in our garden. It's awesome. It allows us to save money. Sustainable living man.



The most beautiful impression I have of Romania is that people are always smiling and waving at you. This is not usual from the place I come from in Europe. It was really pleasant to see caring people and the smile is then passed on to my face. The children are also wonderful. They are very excited to see us and to help us make good work.



So ... mmm... I don't like spiders, there are a lot of spiders. Oh... have to speak about something that I like. NIIICE. I like walking across a home-made bridge everytime it rains. That is the best part about Romania. It tends to make you both proactive and creative.



I took a walk in Schiulești once. I met this old lady; she hugged me and invited me to her house. First we went through where the chickens and the hens live. Then through the cage where her dogs were and finally we arrived in her garden. She invited me to sit down. We tried to communicate but it was difficult. We still had a nice time and laughed a lot though. She ended up giving me jam and allowing me to leave. It was quite a strange yet yet wonderful and unforgettable experience.



I really appreciate how friendly the dogs are here. They bring life to the streets and really brighten up your day. Many of us volunteers have actually adopted some of these dogs and brought them back to our home countries. They are definitely one of my favorite parts of rural Romania.



I used to live in the city where everyone was constantly stressed and weary of having to get to where they need to be. Here, in the village, people are relaxed and there is always time to stop and have a chat or help someone out. It's a really nice change. Also, I love that when you are living in a rural area, you stop taking basic things for granted. You realize that there is not always running water and that it is actually pretty difficult to heat up the house. For some people this might seem scary, but for me, I think being conscious of such things is very important.



I enjoy working in this rural area very much even though it is not something new for me. The scenery is outstanding and the work is very rewarding.



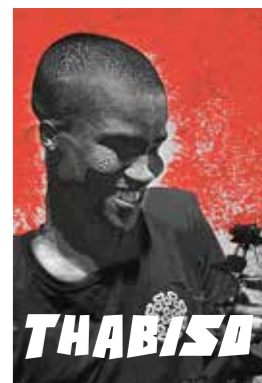
It's about a bear in the forest. We were hiking and by the river there was a bear drinking by the river. Some people were excited while others were scared. I turned around a few minutes later and there it was looking at me. I ran away but it was still a wonderful unique rural experience.



I was not used to rural life. But I have come to love it. It is extremely peaceful. Just short walks can bring you to wonderful places with tremendous views. So niiiice. There is so much peace of mind away from the hustle and bustle of the city. You can lay in your hammock after a day's work or go for a short walk to the top of the hill and you're just chillin, it's amazing, I love rural life in Romania.



It is so beautiful to be living so close to each other. You always bump into someone you know and have big parties that you can simply join. There is a very friendly, open and inclusive atmosphere in this village which is such a contrast to the closed circles of city life.



A particularly rural experience for me was when one of our neighbours invited me to help them with their work up in the fields. We traveled in their tractor and then they invited me for a lunch of of mămăligă and sarmale. We had drinks and good conversation as some of them spoke english. It was a nice exchange, we talked about our families and many other topics. It was genuinely quite an amazing experience for me.

BRAVE BUDGETEER - BARBARA -



To prepare for the Ruralympics budget wise, we had to be in contact with all the other teams. We checked the prices of the materials required and made a shopping list to make sure everything is bought on time. I learnt a lot about teamwork; there was a

great deal of information coming our way and we had to figure out how to divide the tasks fairly between us. I also learnt how to organize myself better, which is useful for everyday life.

The biggest challenge we encountered was that teams were giving us the same information more than once so we had to be really careful not to overbuy, which would have been a huge waste. Though budgeting was time consuming, it was still very enjoyable and fairly simple.

I believe that the local youth were

very happy to have entertainment at this festival which they don't always get in the village. They had the opportunity to come in contact with international youth which is always fun and exciting.

RURAL COMPETITIONS



RURATHLON

Duration : 1h
Participants : no limit
Age : 12+
Materials : 3 tires, 3 wheelbarrows, 3 sacks, 2.5 metres of rope
Location : a slope or hilly location

A rural obstacle race. Before reaching the finish line, participants need to crawl under the rope, roll tires up the hills, push a wheelbarrow, do a jump race in a potato sack.

MAMALIGA MASTER CHEF

Duration : 2h
Participants : 2-12
Age : 12+
Materials : a portable cooker for every participant, electricity, cauldron for every participant, cornflour, salt, water source, cooking supplies
Location : somewhere with around 4 square meters of flat ground

This cooking competition can be adapted to any local food, as long as it is simple and fast to prepare. Participants have to cook following the same recipe with the same ingredients. A jury will taste their cooking and declare the winner.

COW MILKING CONTEST

Duration : 5 mins per participant
Participants : 5 per cow
Age : 13+
Materials : Cows, milk buckets, cow milking stools, glass jugs with measuring units, stopwatch, some fresh water for the cow
Location : Flat area where the cows can be attached

The aim of the competition is to get as much milk as fast as possible. Each participant has five minutes to milk the cow. Whoever manages to get the most milk from the cow in those five minutes wins.

RURAL COMPETITIONS



COWPAT CHALLENGE

Duration : 2h

Participants : 2-12

Age : 12+

Materials : 3 sacks of cow or horse dung, plastic gloves, spray paint

Location : somewhere with trees

Use spray paint to draw the targets on the trees. One by one, participants have to wear gloves and throw a handful of fresh poop on the target of their choice. Each of them gets 3 tries: hitting the target will give from 1 to 10 points, depending on the distance. The person who collects more points wins.

SPEED VEGETABLE PEELING

Duration : around 15 minutes per round

Participants : 2-20

Age : 12+

Materials : all sort of vegetables that can be peeled (carrot, cucumber, onion...), cutters, knives, bowls, 2 tables, min 5 chairs
Location : anywhere flat enough for the table to stand

Each participant receives an equal number of vegetable pieces, a cutting board and a knife. The aim of the contest is to peel and prepare the vegetables for cooking. The one who finish first wins.

RUSSIAN EGG ROULETTE

Duration : 20 minutes

Participants : 2+

Age : 10+

Materials : out-of-date eggs
Location : any place that can get dirty

Competitors sit facing each other with a tray of five hard-boiled eggs and one fresh egg. The toss winner decides who will go first. Players take their turn in selecting an egg and smashing it on their forehead of the opponent, until one player finds the fresh egg and loses the contest. The contest continues until a champion is found! Only out-of-date eggs are used in this activity in order not to waste food.

PROMOTION PRO

- LINA -



We did all sorts of promotion. offline, online, a lot of street promotion so as to get to as many different people as possible. I participated in the creation of the flyers, the poster and the banner.

I was able to learn the basics of Photoshop, design and illustrating from my team mates.

We really learnt from my team-mates. I was taught about communication and the best times to post on social media to get the maximum views. I also learnt some Romanian as offline promotion required us to communicate with the locals. I had the opportunity to write an article which allowed me to develop my writing skills greatly.

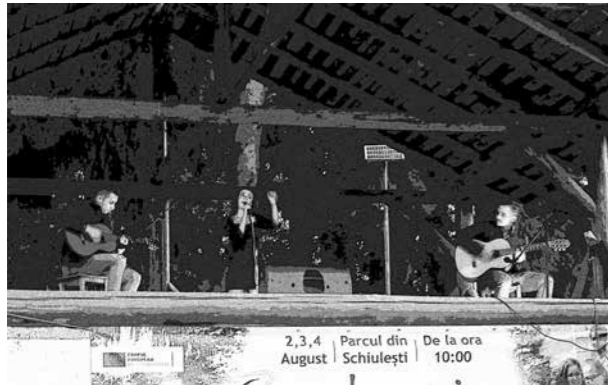
The biggest challenge was the time, the fight against the clock. We had very little time to recruit the audience that we wanted for our event.

I hope that the rural youth were able to gain from this festival as well. They had the

opportunity to have a lot of fun. Some activities were basic for them, such as cow milking. However having the reward at the end showed the activity in a new light. They saw that what they thought was a basic every day life activity was actually a skill that some people (aka: international volunteers) did not have. It was something they could take pride in.

This was the first time I was part of a team organizing a large scale event. Though it was a lot of work, it ended up being a lot of fun and very rewarding.

YOUNG VOICES



OPEN MIC

Duration : 1 hour
Participants : performers and public
Age : 10+
Materials : microphone and speakers
Location : a stage

The open mic is an opportunity for everyone to perform and show their talent. Participants are invited to sign up in advance, but it is possible that after seeing their neighbours and acquaintances on the stage, some people who were feeling shy will want to participate too. Keep it flexible! You can also have your own performance ready to spice up the show.

OPPORTUNITIES FAIR

Duration : half a day
Participants : no limit
Age : 16-30
Materials : flyers and handouts with information about opportunities such as volunteering, trainings, internships and so on, a few tables, some paper for a few attractive looking posters

It involves putting together stands with informative materials (flyers and various handouts) regarding opportunities for young people such as volunteering, internships, trainings, etc. Good hosting is of vital importance - you would be looking for a resourceful person that can pass the information forward and inspire people, such as a devoted volunteer with a first-hand experience in the field.

CONCERT

Duration : 2 hours
Participants : no limit
Age : no limit
Materials : speakers, stage light, mixing table, microphones, electric cables, extension cords
Location : on the stage

A concert is a good occasion to bring people together in front of the stage, after a full day of activities. The choice of the group and the music genre is of course up to you, but involving a local music group will definitely raise interest among the local community as well as help the group to promote their work in local environment - double win!

TREASURE HUNT

- YOUTH GOALS -

This treasure hunt is meant to raise awareness of the European Youth Goals as defined by the young people all over Europe in the past few years.

Connecting EU with youth

Equality of all genders

Inclusive societies

Information and constructive dialogue

Mental health and wellbeing

Moving rural youth forward

Quality employment for all

Quality learning

Space and participation for all

Sustainable green Europe

Youth organizations and European programmes

The participants have to solve a series of tasks in order to collect stamps on their card. When they complete all of them they get a prize.

TASK 1

Draw on the map of your village/town the infrastructure (roads, public transport routes, airports...) that your ideal city would have. (Inclusive societies, Moving rural youth forward, Space and participation for all)

Materials: a map of the local area, pens

TASK 2

Find 7 aspects on which inequalities can be based. Discuss in the group and find 2 ways in which you can personally fight against inequalities. (Equality of all genders, Inclusive societies)

TASK 3

List 5 stereotypes for young people and 5 about elders.

TASK 4

Read a list of headlines and identify which are real and which are fake news. (Information and constructive dialogue, Quality learning)

Materials: printed headlines, some fake some real

TASK 5

Identify 5 countries in a blank map of Europe (Connecting EU with youth, Inclusive societies, Quality learning)

Materials: a political map of Europe with no text

TASK 4

Build a filter with the materials you are given to clean the dirty water. (Sustainable green Europe)

Materials: plastic bottles, stones, gravel, sand, grass, dirty water

TASK 7

Make a research and short presentation on EU programs and the organization behind this event (Youth organizations and European programmes)

Materials: mobile device with internet connection

WHOLESOME HOSTS - EMILIE -



As hosts, we started by making a schedule in which we could fit all the activities that we had thought of within the three day festival time frame. Once that was done, we split into smaller groups each allocated to specific activities. We organized each activity in detail and made sure we had very specific

descriptions and set rules. We communicated it with other teams (promotion, logistics and budget) to make sure we would have efficient promotion and all the materials needed and in time.

One of my biggest challenges was trying to build a maze. We had an original large scale plan but because of the rain we were unable to make it. However we still ended up finding a fun alternative and we saw many people enjoying this smaller scale version. From toddlers to aunties.

I learnt a lot about being a part of a large team. It was very hard at the beginning to make decisions in such

a big group. However, through cooperation and understanding we managed to get stuff done. It was a learning process. Furthermore, even if sometimes during the activities young participants went wild and difficult to control, it was one hundred percent worth it.

In three words I would describe the hosting role as tiring, amazing and competitive. I hope the local youth experienced and appreciated rural entertainment and that they got inspired to create such events themselves.

Mini GAMES



SHOOTING NAILS

Duration : 10 minutes
Participants : 20 persons max
Age : 15 +
Materials : Wood log, 40 nails at least 5 cm long, 8 hammers

It is a simple one-on-one challenge. Competitors simultaneously hit the nail into the piece of wood. The first one who puts the nail all the way in the wood board wins.

MUSICAL CHAIRS

Duration : 30 min
Participants : 30 people max
Age : mixed (everybody can participate)
Materials : laptop or phone and speakers, wood logs

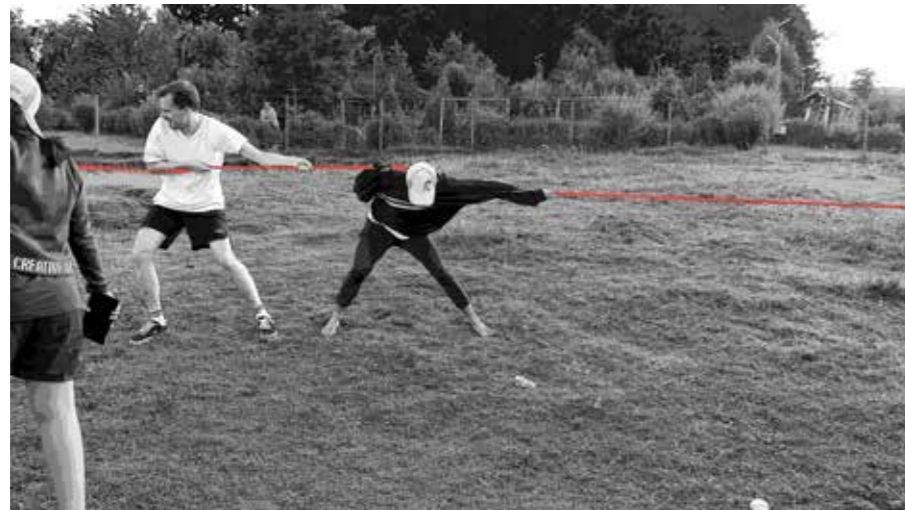
A classic and ever-fun game! Arrange the pieces of wood in a circle for all the participants except for one. Play some lively music while the participants walk in a circle around the logs. When the music stops, they will have to race to find a seat on the logs. The person who is left without a seat is out. Take out one log each round and continue until you have a winner.

APPLE BOBBING

Duration : 10 minutes
Participants : 2-how many apple you can gather
Age : 5 +
Materials : apples, a fairly large bucket with water

People can come and go to the stand with apples bobbing in the water. They have to take the apple from the water using only their mouths. Whoever does it the fastest wins.

Mini GAMES



POOPING NAILS

Duration : less than 5 minutes

Participants : 1-4

Age : 8+

Materials : bottles, yarn, nails

Each nail is tied to a piece of yarn. Participants attach the yarn to their belt or waistband so that the nail is dangling behind them like a tail. They then need to get the nail into the bottle without using their hands.

10 PASSES GAME

Duration : 30 min

Participants : 4 teams max (5 to 10 persons per team)

Age : 8 +

Materials : 1 ball, 40 trash bags (10 of each colors to make teams)

The goal of each team is to pass the ball 10 times to each other inside the team, but the other teams have the same goal and so they have to steal the ball when it is being passed.

TUG OF WAR

Duration : 10 minutes

Participants : no limit

Age : mixed (everybody can participate)

Materials : 5 m of rope
Location : large outdoor space

The participants divide into two teams, one for each end of the rope. A mark is made on the ground equivalent to the middle of the rope. Each team has to pull the rope towards their side to make the other team step over the mark and loose the game.

FANTASTIC LOGISTICS - SONA -



As logistics, for the preparation, we had to get all the materials ready for each individual activity. We were divided into pairs. Each pair was allocated to a set number of activities and we just concentrated on the materials for this. We designed maps for the event and created direction panels pointing to the locations of the activities.

if I had to choose three words to describe working in the logistics team I would firstly say it was tiring because of the heavy lifting and having to run from one place to the next with all the materials. Secondly, I would say that the greatest thing about the experience was the solidarity within the logistics team, everyone helped each other out without being asked and that was really great. It gave me back my faith in humanity. Thirdly and probably most importantly it was generally a lot of fun. I had a great team, we all got along really well and it made the experience particularly positive. What I gained from this event... Some muscle and

the key to genuinely good human relations. Our biggest challenges were the terrain and the weather. The field was hilly and it rained a lot which meant that the grass was slippery and muddy which made it hard to walk without falling, especially when carrying heavy loads. However, we got through it by going slowly and helping each other out. I hope that the rural youth was inspired by this event. I hope they will perhaps consider volunteering and also that they will see that the skills that they use everyday such as vegetable peeling and cooking mamaliga are artistryes to be proud of.

TIPS & TRICKS

LOGISTICS

- Get the information for the materials from budget & activities teams as soon as possible
- Be sure you know from the host how to set the space for the activities
- Ask questions if it's not clear
- Help your team-mates even if it's not planned
- Be sure you know where the materials is for the activities
- Be sure to communicate well with everyone else involved in the activities
- Be prepared of hard work
- Put the materials together in a bag with a tag for each activity
- Be ready to work in rainy conditions
- Be sure you know where the materials for the activities are
- Be ready to have dirty clothes and plan rain boots
- Be nice with coordinators, it's easier to divide the roles
- Find a place to rest, but be sure you can be found easily

BUDGET

- Make a checklist for the coordination team and have them check the materials before the event
- Make sure the information is not doubled
- Create a shared document to gather all the information from everybody
- Have a shopping schedule

HOSTS

- Don't rely on the free time of people to come help, make a schedule from the beginning
- Set activities close to each other in the space
- Be very communicative with the logistics team for the materials
- Be kind and communicative with your colleagues
- Be aware of preparation time for the activities
- Be prepared for any possible difficulties
- Get along with people
- Learn how to use Excel for planings
- Accept criticism
- Make a checklist of everything you need to do
- Think of everything when you are preparing the activity: for who, how, where,... And have a plan B
- Try to make something fun also for yourself not only for the participants

PROMOTION

- Have a brainstorming at the beginning
- Try new things even if you don't know how to
- Be brave
- Make street promotion and don't be scared of the face-to-face contact with people when inviting them
- Make sure you have good communication in the team - take time to discuss
- Check the rules on how to use the logos, sometimes there are restrictions or demands on their position)
- Do not change ideas in the middle of the project

RURALYMPICS

The first rural youth festival of Romania



Ruralympics

Whether they are singing on X Factor, computing integrals at the Mathematical Olympiad, or gaming at the Fortnite World Cup, young people have all kinds of opportunities to get recognition for their skills. But what about those young people who are extremely skilled at mowing grass, or milking cows, or digging ditches? There is not much visibility for typically rural skills.

This is the idea behind Ruralympics: a festival where young villagers compete and are rewarded for the abilities they have developed in their daily life.

The first edition of Ruralympics took place from the 2nd to the 4th of August 2019, in the Romanian village of Schiulesti.

In the same park that is the main (if not the only) hang-out spot for local teens, locals and internationals braved the unstable summer weather together to celebrate village life and take part in fun activities. Everything in perfect Ruralympian spirit.

Sure, the apple bobbing competition was cut short because the horses ate all the fruit. But Puşa the cow was accommodating enough to let a bunch of strangers take milk from her.

Cowpath was thrown and the aim was true. Visitors all went home with a prize, a bracelet, or a story to tell.

Some activities were met with some puzzlement. Old ladies wondered what was the point of cooking polenta for a competition, when it is such a normal, everyday thing to do.

It is hard sometimes being the salmon swimming upstream. There will be doubts within ourselves and there will be resistance from outside, there will be bears ready to chomp and dung flowing in the river. But in the end, it will be worth it.

INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DAY



The theme of the International Youth Day 2019 is "Transforming Education". Here, at Curba de Cultura that is exactly what we strive to do. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development states that their goal is to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all".

On the 12th of August, our project focused on bringing fair, inclusive and contextual education to the rural youth through providing management, vlogging and improvisation workshops, open mic session and many other activities which allow teenagers to both learn new skills and show their existing ones.

International volunteers from around Europe helped organizing this event as the point of this day is also for it to have major contributions by young people themselves. To give them a voice. These young people use their knowledge and experience and transfer it to people of their age. In return, these international young people are also learning a lot about the young people in the rural area. There is an artistry and skill sharing which is very fruitful and inspiring for everyone involved.

The place where one may learn the most about the international youth's experiences of being integrated into different cultures is the living library with the theme "Learning abroad". Young people are retelling their stories of living abroad to whoever wishes to learn some more about culture shock as well as gaining knowledge and consciousness from it.

Young people also have the opportunity to learn the basics of vlogging, a modern and popular social media attraction. It can be a way for them to see that they are able to journal their life here in rural Romania which is something a lot of people coming to projects here would enjoy and be interested in seeing. It's a way for us to help them modernize their life in the countryside. A way for us to show that it is something attractive and with potential despite what they may think.

We wish for this day to be repercussed in the following years as though it is a worldwide initiative, there is not a lot of focus on the European rural youth. Hopefully, by working together we can bring about this change.

CONCLUSION LETTER

Now that we've dug a little under the cowpath, do you see that rural life was never really dead, it was simply dormant. We hope this handbook on our project in rural Romania has inspired you to start your own initiative in finding the best ways to wake up the country side sleepers.

Whether you're coming from the city or countryside, you see an indescribable potential in the people working around you in your small village. We have faith that, through these lines, we have showed you that rural life is making it's greatest come back and though the progress may be slow, we're not giving up yet.

Rural living is not "just" milking a cow or "just"

digging up vegetables. It's a skill made up of life-long learning, it's a business, an enterprise which requires creativity, will power and hard work.

In the last few years it has been pushed down the drainpipe causing it to appear unattractive to teenagers and young adults. Society doesn't encourage multiple different views of the "ideal" life and if they did, agrarian lifestyles would definitely not be top of the list.

The initiative started here in Curba de Cultură to encourage young people to enjoy, appreciate and become a part of the place they come from is only the beginning of the ruralympian movement.

From russian egg roulette to cowpat

challenges to young people creating rural shows with singing and dancing. With a little help and motivation from the local people, it should be possible to go from a dying community to an area filled with joy, entertainment and people recognized for their skills and talent.

If the testimonials in here have motivated you and the activity ideas encouraged you, then please go out and spread the word. From a simple activity can grow a whole festival such as the Ruralympics. Thank you for coming on this journey with us and don't hesitate to jump on the bandwagon. Rural living awaits you.

THANKS

Thank you to all these wonderful people and their help in making this rural dream become a rural reality.

*Cosmin Catană
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Kristina Piškur
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