



International
Initiatives for
Cooperation

Community WorkGuide



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

This material has been funded with support from the European Commission.

The content of this material reflects the views only of the authors and the National Agency or the European Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information.

© Kostadinka Todorova, author

© David Raigal, author

© Rayna Belcheva, author

© Álvaro Rufino, author & designer

© International Initiatives for Cooperation Bulgaria

Razlog · 2020

Contents



- **About COOL Project**
- **Non-Formal Education at Yane Sandanski**
 - Yane Sandanski
 - Summer Youth Academy
- **Working with People with Disabilities**
 - MOGA and Rehabilitation Center
 - Home for kids
- **Kindergarten**
- **Working with Elderly People**
 - Elderly Center
- **Intercultural Nights**
- **Languages Classes**
- **Working with Youth**
- **Events**
- **Our Volunteers**

About COOL Project



The association “International Initiatives Cooperation” (IIC), Bulgaria had been implementing the Community Of Open Learners (COOL) project for 3 years. Over that period, the project hosted 24 youngsters from all over Europe, Caucasus and Middle East for the periods of six or twelve months. The project was implemented on the territory of the Municipality of Razlog. Thus, the group conformed by volunteers was dynamic and changed over the time, but it always remained rich in mixed cultures and nationalities. This was a great challenge for the volunteers and the IIC staff, but it had also resulted in a remarkable improvement of their adaptive skills.

The aim of the project was to provide opportunities to the volunteers to work with kids, pupils, youngsters and with representatives of the local community who could be interested to be involved in the interactive clubs and classes (language and culture classes, dance classes, art clubs, music classes, martial art clubs, yoga and aerobic classes, ecology education, etc.)

The task of the volunteers was to organize attractive activities for the school students, children and youngsters from the region using non-formal learning methods as well as interactive clubs and classes which have attracted representatives from the other part of the local community. As the voluntary service in Bulgaria is not so popular and EVS, the volunteers had also managed to promote and disseminate information about the volunteerism and the "Erasmus+" program among school students, youngsters and university students. The dissemination of the information was made using online methods and personal meetings. Our goal was to inform as many as possible potential volunteers and interested stakeholders about the opportunities which EVS and "Erasmus+" can provide. The volunteers had also acquired and enriched their knowledge to work with various software products, programs and information sources in the field of education and promotion.

The activities of the project aimed to help to develop a sense of initiative and social responsibility in the participants. The communication between the volunteers and the target groups, addressed by the project, changed their worldview and the way of thinking and it showed them the benefits of intercultural communication and enriched their knowledge on topics like social inclusion, peaceful co-existing, volunteering, accepting diversities and managing values. At the same time, the volunteers were satisfied that they managed to diversify the social life of the society in the town of Razlog and had influence on it in a positive way.

Through the participation in activities which had been organized by the volunteers the local community had a chance to achieve personal and professional development through continuing and shared learning.



Non-Formal Education at Yane Sandanski



Primary School “Yane Sandanski”, town of Razlog

“Yane Sandanski” Primary School is a long year partner of International Initiatives for Cooperation. The school has more than 400 students from 6 to 11 years from different ethnic groups. The school welcomed the IIC staff and volunteers and gave us the possibility to introduce non-formal education in the formal learning process. The results were incredible.

Some of the activities, methods and approaches used during the 5 years of cooperation are presented in this Community Workguide

Aims of the activities:

- To strengthen the interest and motivation of students in the educational process and volunteering through the use of non-formal and informal methods and approaches.
- To encourage the initiativeness, creativity and self-expression of students.
- To create preconditions for increasing the personal and professional development of students.
- To introduce topics such as: intercultural dialogue, peaceful coexistence between people from different countries and ethnicities, social inclusion, and promotion of European values, which will lead to more effective social and cultural European integration.
- To promote the essence of volunteering and all the opportunities that the Erasmus + program provides to young people.

Learning Outcomes:

The presence of the volunteers in the school had a very positive impact on the students. People generally feel comfortable when what surrounds them is familiar. The unknown normally produces aversion but the contact with the international “strangers” destroyed the wall of the unknown and the cultural frontiers. It made the students more curious, flexible and full of questions and expectations. Next, students became more open minded and accepted and showed interest in the “guests”.

They wanted to learn more about the volunteers, the places they came from, the reason they came to Bulgaria, which their hobbies are. . . So, finally, the “strangers” turned into good friends and the relationship with them was highly appreciated by the students.

During the three school years many different activities were used and a diverse range of non-formal educational methods. The topics such as intercultural dialogue, peaceful coexistence, teamwork and leadership, tolerance and respect between each other, human and European values, active civic participation and democracy, self-expression, confidence and assertiveness have been introduced through the organized activities. Early introduction and consideration of those important issues among students leads to more effective social and cultural European integration. COOL volunteers made the daily life of "Yane Sandanski" School more colourful and diverse.

Also, as time went by, a strong connection was created between the volunteers and the students. The volunteers were coming in with good vibes and the students felt that. It was the time to cut off the formal routine, have some fun and at the same time to learn new things. Through the non-formal methods, the interest and motivation of the kids to the non-formal educational process and volunteering have been strengthened. This unique energy spreader all over. And it did not leave the adults aloof. Whenever the teachers joined the mood, the activities were much more successful.

As a conclusion of the three-year work with students from “Yane Sandanski” Primary School it can be summed up that the most important thing for successful work with this age group is the strong motivation of both parties as well as the right approach. Children are thirsty for new, innovative methods of work that build them new skills and improve their abilities.

Tools:

The volunteers organized the activities in advance. They developed weekly plans with the topics and the different activities. Although the weekly topic was the same for all the students, the games and activities were adapted for the specific grade and classroom. As the kids' energy and interest was unpredictable, the volunteers had prepared in advance many options for each session, being always ready for plan B or improvisation.

The communication between the volunteers and the students had been quite challenging. The volunteers had to find the right approach to attract their attention and to study a lot of Bulgarian words to express themselves and explain the exercises. Very often a lot of mimics had been used in the explanations of the activities - an international language used all over the world. The volunteers had prepared in advance a description of activities in Bulgarian so the teacher had the rules of activities and could help. Nevertheless, this circumstance forces everyone to improve their body, listening and communication skills both in English and Bulgarian. It was also a great way to practice the Bulgarian or English respectively.

Each week was dedicated to a different topic. For example, science week with its experiments, environment, and materials recycling week, theater, dance, music, painting weeks with activities to encourage students to express themselves the way they are, ... Every time creativity, initiative and work in a team were of crucial importance for the success of the activity.

Some of the most successful activities and games:

❖ THE MUSICAL CHAIR

The Musical Chair has been one of the most successful energizers along the project. It is a simple elimination game which involves players, chairs and music. When the music stops whichever player fails to sit on a chair is eliminated, with a chair then being removed and the process repeated until only one player remains.

The students did not know this game and they enjoyed it a lot! Whenever the volunteers decided to play with the kids the “Musical Chair”, the kids were very happy.

The charm of the game was in the music. It was a good opportunity to get to know each other more deeply. The volunteers have chosen their favourite songs, the students as well. They sang together in all possible languages and danced every beat, shared very good moments and built so many memories :)



❖ THE BALLOON IN THE BOTTLE

This experiment can be done with kids between 6 and 15 years. It shows the science of the air pressure in a very visual way.

For the implementation of the experiment you need a plastic bottle, a balloon, a pin and some tape. First, stretch out the balloon. Once it's all stretched out, put the deflated balloon into the bottle and wrap the neck of the balloon around the bottle opening. Try blowing up the balloon. It doesn't blow up. What if we make a hole into the bottle? Now try to blow up the balloon, careful not to cover the hole. It inflates!

When the balloon is blown, quickly cover the hole with your finger, sealing with some tape. You'll see the balloon won't deflate even though the bottle is installed.

Now try this. Take the tape off and let the balloon deflate. Now put your mouth on the hole you made in the bottle and try to suck the air out. It inflates the balloon without even touching it. This happens because you're reducing the air pressure by sucking out the air, so the balloon expands to equalize the air pressure.

The volunteers give the students some examples of everyday products that are designed based on this knowledge so the students could understand the practicality of science. With every step the kids were impressed.



❖ INVISIBLE INK

This experiment can be done with kids between 6 and 15 years. For the implementation of the experiment you need some paper, some lemon juice, a brush and a candle. Write something with lemon juice on a paper. Afterwards, carefully hold a candle on the other side of the paper to heat the ink. Lemon contains sugar (fructose) and through the heat the sugar becomes caramel. The caramel will brownish and the ink will become visible. The children really enjoyed the experiment, everyone wanted to try it out, so it became an activity itself. Having fire in the classroom was risky, so the volunteers needed to double their vigilance which was worthy as the outcome was wide-open-mouth students.



❖ HOLOGRAMS

This experiment can be done with kids between 6 and 15 years. The hologram is a construction which creates a three-dimensional image from a video projection. Some technological visual effects were presented to the kids. The importance of the perspective was underlined and explained. For the implementation of the experiment you need a pyramid without the top, a phone, a video for hologram and some darkness in the room. The pyramid can be made as a handcraft and afterwards it is placed on the screen and the video is played. Thus, a three-dimensional element appeared in the middle of the pyramid. The volunteers consider the hologram one of the most successful activities because of the excitement that each of the students showed. They were elated!



❖ COLOURFUL MILK

This experiment can be done with kids between 6 and 11 years. For the implementation of the experiment you need a plate, some milk, some food colorant and some

dish soap. Fill the plate with milk and add food colourant (do not mix it). Then, add a bit of dish soap and wait. Milk contains water and fat. The dish soap wants to separate the fat from the milk, but the milk wants the fat to stay at its place. The conflict between the milk, fat and soap will get visible by separation of the colours. The children were amazed and had so much fun.



❖ CANDLE ELEVATOR

This experiment can be done with kids between 6 and 11 years. For the implementation of the experiment you need a glass, a plate, a candle and some water. The aim was to show the kids the air pressure behaviour and impress them with its consequences. To carry out the experiment, fill the plate with water, place the candle on the plate, lighten the candle and put a glass over it. Observe how the candle is burning out and water is flowing into the glass. This happens because the candle heats the air and burns the oxygen, the air expands and goes out of glass. When the candle uses up all the oxygen in the air, the flame goes out and the air in the glass cools down. Now the air is getting cold again and stops expanding. This creates a negative pressure and the water is pressed into the glass. The kids were shocked.



❖ WATER AND ROPE

This experiment can be done with kids between 6 and 11 years. For the implementation of the experiment two cups or glasses, some water and an absorbent cotton twine or string which needs to be thicker than thread are needed. It displays the special properties of water, more concretely, the ability to stick to itself (cohesiveness) and to other things (adhesiveness).



Cut a long segment of the string, fill one cup about halfway with water and soak the string in the water until it is soaked through. Put one end of the string into the cup with water and hold the other end above the empty cup. Hold the cup with water up, using your pointer finger to keep the string at the bottom of the rim as you turn it towards the empty cup. Pour the water slowly along the string. The water has the tension to bind with the rope molecules but still keeps the connection between the water molecules, so it clings to the string and drips off the end into the empty cup. The kids were really surprised to see what water was able to do when we poured it down a string.

❖ HOLE IN YOUR HAND

This visual trick can be done with kids between 6 to 11 years. It shows the imprecision of our senses and it is adequate because it questions basic knowledge. The only material needed is a paper sheet for each one. Roll up the paper and look through the tube. Hold the other hand up next to the tube. Slowly move it towards the rolled-up sheet. One eye is focused on looking through the tube while the other looks at the moving hand and the result is the illusion of having a hole in the moving hand. Through the eyes two images are sent to our brain and the brain puts these images together and produces the one we see. In this case the image seen through the tube and the image of your hand simulate an unreal reality. The kids were impressed and probably, for the very first time, they doubted what they had seen with their own eyes

❖ FROZEN SOAP BUBBLE

The trick itself is a popular winter science experiment when temperatures dip below freezing. It requires 200ml of water, 35ml of dish soap, 35ml of corn syrup, 2g sugar and a stick for the bubbles. Mix the ingredients, let the mixture cool down in the freezer for 15 minutes. Go outside, blow a soap bubble, gently plop it onto some snow or ice, and watch as crystals dance around on the film until the entire thing is a delicate ice ball. Dish soap makes the bubbles, corn syrup stabilizes the walls and sugar creates pretty crystal patterns. It was visually stunning. The kids really enjoyed the process and learned a lot about aggregation states of matter.

❖ FINGER AND HOLE

This energizer can be done with kids between 6 and 15 years. It is better if it is done with middle-sized groups and it does not require any material. Its goal is to spark the students up and work on their agility and coordination skills. Children stand in a circle, arms out to the side. They must put the left-hand palms up and the right-hand index fingers pointing down. The index finger should be touching their neighbour's outstretched palm. When the game master says "Go!", everyone does two things: tries to grab the finger in their left hand and tries to prevent their right finger from being grabbed. Suspense was added with false starts or whatever the game master wished. The kids had some fun and realized that, even simple, doing two things at once is not an easy task.

❖ SMALL TABLE FIREWORK

This experiment can be done with kids between 6 and 15 years. For its implementation orange or lemon peels, a candle and a lighter are needed. It teaches them about flammability, and it can introduce topics such as chemicals, risk, danger, survival. . . Light the candle. Hold the outside of the peel close to the flame and fold it so juice splashes into the flame. The oil in the peel burns in the flame of the candle and creates the firework. The children immediately approached and immediately walked away. Once again, we had to be careful, but the experiment was great to get everyone's attention and deal with the issue we were interested in risk and danger.

❖ DANCE BATTLE

This activity can be done with kids between 6 and 10 years old. The minimum number of participants are two kids and there is no maximum number of participants. The number of the groups can be unequal, and kids should dance together as a team. Just a speaker and some music are needed. The dance battle is expected to give the kids the courage to express themselves and the opportunity to respect the others. It requires great mastery of body movements, listening and communication skills.

Two teams compete against each other in a dance battle competition while the other teams (if any) look at them. Kids should dance according to the music rhythm and stop when the music stops (the music volume will go down little by little). At the end of each dance, the audience applauds the teams. Thus, according to the “clapometer”, the winner will be selected. The team with the most claps wins the dance battle.

The activity was very successful. Everyone had a good time and the volunteers could know the students more deeply and discover their other characteristics and skills.



❖ BIG FAT PONY

This energizer can be done with kids between 6 and 12 years old. It is better if it is done with middle- sized groups and it does not require any material. It works as an ice breaker and its aim is to be ridiculous enough to make all children lose their shame from the beginning. Everybody in a circle sing this song:

Here we go with the big fat pony,
here we go with the big fat pony,
here we go with the big fat pony,
early in the morning
Front, front, front, my baby,
back, back, back, my baby
side, side, side, my baby
early in the morning.

While singing, one person begins to dance around the circle and as the song progresses, s/he chooses a partner to dance with. Both dance and choose two others, etc. until everyone is dancing. It worked out very successfully. The children became active and lost their shame as we expected.



❖ HEALTHY AND UNHEALTHY FOOD

In most cases, children do not realize that they are eating harmful food. For this reason, the volunteers wanted to inform the children about general medical recommendations leading to healthy nutrition. The exercise intends to make the children responsible for what they eat. This activity can be done with children between 6 and 15 years. Photos of food are needed. Children are given different products and the task is to classify them as healthy or unhealthy. To make it more interesting it can be organized as a competition. The pictures of the food are arranged in the form of a food chain / pyramid with the help of all the students.



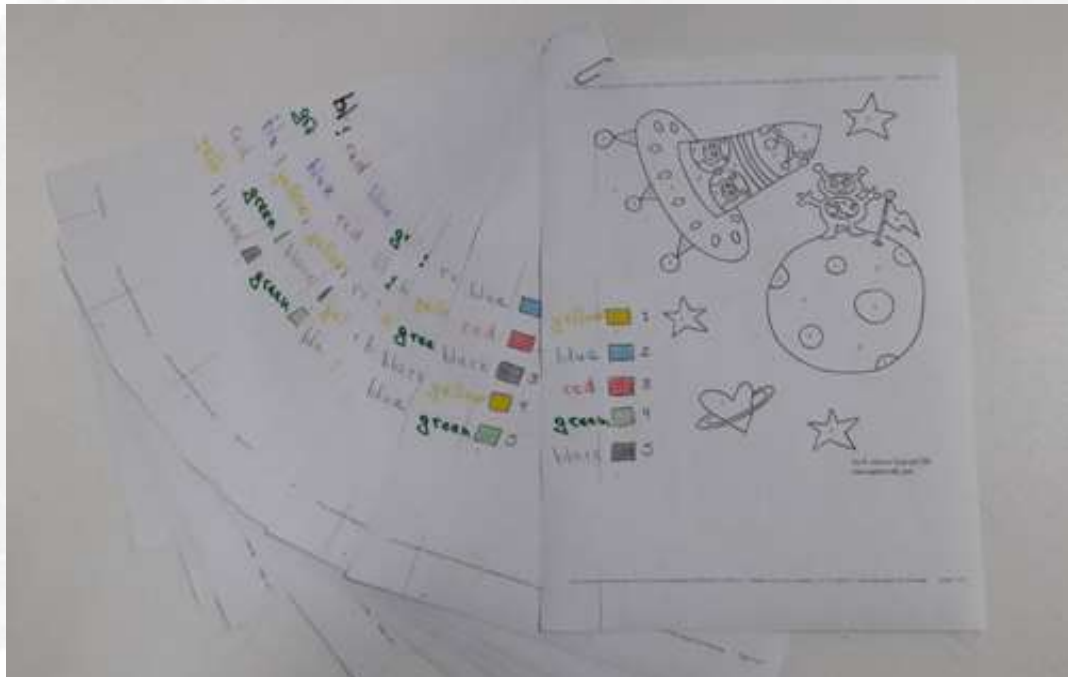
❖ ROBOT PORTRAIT

This flipping book can be done with kids between 6 and 10. Just white sheets and colouring material is needed and kids' creativity, sense of perspective and vision are expected to be developed. Three pages are divided in three parts each. Then faces are drawn on the pages. The face elements must be painted in the part that corresponds to it. Once finished, the pages are switched, and the operation is repeated. At the end, the pages will be combined, and a huge amount of faces will be created. Children were really committed to the activity. They were as focused as we had never seen them and created hilarious faces. Such a nice surprise!



❖ THE LEGEND

This is a simple activity which can be done with 1st and 2nd grade students. Drawings with colour legends should be prepared as material and some English vocabulary related to colours is expected to be taught. The drawings have numbers and each number is attached to a colour. Although the drawings were not very creative, the objective of learning some vocabulary was achieved.



❖ APPLE, BANANA, ORANGE

This game is suitable for elementary school children. It doesn't require any material and tests everyone's coordination. Students stand in a circle with their back to each other and hands put on the shoulder of the preceding one. When the facilitator shouts out 'apple' they jump forward, when s/he shouts out 'banana' - backward and when s/he shouts out 'orange' they jump half turn. After a while, when they got familiar with the commands, we changed the fruits and/or the rules to confuse them. It was a lot of fun and they showed they knew how to move as one.



❖ CADAVRE EXQUIS

This activity is appropriate for kids between 8 and 12 years old. It can be done with a minimum of 3 people. The materials we need are pencils/coloured pencils/pens and paper. The objective is to create a full body (human, animal, fictional or whatever) in cooperation. The paper is folded two times creating, therefore, three sections on the paper. There will be three turns - the first one being to paint the head, the second one for the body and the third part for the legs/ lower part of the body. It is important that at each turn, the participants only see the part of the paper in which they must draw (therefore it is recommended to bring the papers already folded in the proper way, in order to simplify it for the kid). Once they are finished with the head, they will give it to the volunteers, who will mix them and handle them randomly to the kids (the same will be done when everyone finishes drawing the second part). One essential part is that when they finish the head and the body respectively, they draw the end of the second or the third part of the paper, so the next person to draw can know from where to start drawing the body or the legs. It is recommended to tell the kids to write their names on their drawing, because, therefore, children that do not usually interact will have fun observing the weird body that they drew together.

The most important thing is to make sure that they understand where they have to draw (because if not it is possible that they draw the head in the body part, or backwards) and that they have to draw the little lines when they finish the head and body in order to let the next “painter” know the starting point. It is recommended to bring the folded papers in the correct way to simplify their understanding (+ writing the numbers, as it can be seen in the pic example). It is also important to bring one example, for them to see how the result will be.

The aim is to develop their drawing skills, creativity and patience skills. One other expected outcome is for the kids to interact with each other, even with the ones that they usually don't. We think it is a very good opportunity to reach this goal because they usually love the results, and if they draw the funny monster with someone they will certainly laugh and spend exciting moments together.



❖ HUMAN SHAPE

This game is played with a minimum of 4 children. It does not need any material. This game enhances children's creativity and is a very good example of teamwork. The game has a leader and s/he give instructions to them to make shapes. (eg: star, the Eiffel tower, a car, a fountain, a box. .) The participants should make the form in a limited time. (e.g. 10 seconds) Each team should focus on its own shape because there is no a perfect way to create it. Therefore, it should not be affected by the shapes the opposing team does. Participants should speak as little as possible. Everyone should be able to find its spot to create the shape.

Children learn that every shape can be created unexpectedly with this game and that everyone's contribution is important in creating the desired shape.



❖ LONELY ISLAND (IMPLEMENTED)

You will need a lot of things for this game, but these are things easy to find. (Examples: old blanket, toilet paper rolls, yarn, old plastic bottles...) This game is played with at least 10 kids. It is a great game example for developing dream worlds.

Create a story, for example, you are on a boat travelling to America. A huge storm is starting, the clouds hide the sunlight and the wind blows fast. Suddenly, a huge wave appears and covers the boat. You are forced to leave on your lifeboat. The only opportunity is to reach the nearest lonely island. You cannot escape. Now you must create your own city.

Giving tasks.

Example; once you are on the lonely island, you'll have to create a society. Divide in four groups. Every group has one specific task:

group 1: build a school;

group 2: find food and open a canteen;

group 3: build an hospital;

group 4: build a place to sleep.

After they have built the four buildings, the kids in every group have to assign tasks and role to the four components: for example, for the school they will have to assign teachers and students; for the hospital - a doctor, nurses and patients; for the canteen - a chef, some waiters and customers; and for the place to sleep - a housekeeper, a gardener, etc..

Present the society.

After they have built their institution and have found a job/ role in their society, they must present it. After each one briefly introduces himself and his building the groups join each other and form a community, e.g. teachers visit the canteen for eating, patients are going to school or students are going to the house to sleep at night.

This play contributes to children's creativity abilities and they also get conscious about the social responsibilities that each one bears. Team spirit and cooperation are other values that the students develop. Building a building with a blanket is a total creativity. It also contributes to physical development as they are constantly in motion. As it is an active game, children have fun and do not get bored.

There are many variations of the game and it can be adapted in accordance with the needs of the students and your learning objectives. You can give different tasks for example a) build a house; b) find food; c) build a new boat; d) find a way to make people see you and come to rescue you. You can also create characters, each one with a defined emotion such as happy, angry, hungry, sad, optimist, pessimist, passionate, etc.



❖ CHRISTMAS DECORATION

Making Christmas decorations can be done with children of any age. It is only important to choose the right topic for each age group. All kinds of materials can be used, and the goal is to stimulate the children's creativity, of course by guiding them. In our case, all kinds of creations were made snowmen, Christmas tree toys and Christmas cards. This is a happy period and children love to make masterpieces that they could take home or use to decorate the school...

❖ ISLAND AND BOAT

It is played with a minimum of 4 players. Hoops and random objects are needed. Random objects are needed to stimulate children's creativity. It is a very good game for teamwork. All the people stand inside the hoop. Some objects have been placed outside the hoop at various distances. The participants must take the objects outside the hoop, without stepping out of it. The only way to step outside the hoop is to make use of other hoops that have been given to them. In this way they can catch things which are far from them. You can diversify the activity: the hoop is the island while the space outside is the sea, so the other hoops they use to reach the further objects could be considered as boats.

Participants cooperate in order to bring the objects inside the hoop, for example, one participant wants to reach a ball which is very far from him, so he can grab another participant and get him closer to the ball. The activity helps in the development of teamwork and trust in the others. And it's a super creative game so kids think outside of the box.

❖ TRAIN GAME

The game can be played with at least two participants. If there are many children, the game becomes more fun. Children do not need any material. All the participants stand in a line. Only the first in the line has his eyes open, while all the others close the eyes and let the first in the line drive them in a circuit, where some small obstacles are prepared.

Train game is a game that allows children to trust each other by letting one of their mates drive you while your eyes are closed. Also, children develop coordination skills with this game because children need to be very coordinated to avoid the obstacles and not to break the train. Children had a lot of fun playing the game.



❖ BUILD A CASTLE

Hundreds of things can be done by reusing materials. In this case, a castle was made with rolls of toilet paper. This activity can be done with students from 6 to 10 years. For its implementation, rolls of toilet paper and some handicraft materials are needed. The goal is to build a castle. Students love crafts and the use of reusable materials is a great opportunity to consciously push their creativity. They can also be organized in small groups to encourage teamwork. The children are asked in advance to bring rolls of toilet paper so that they can reuse the material. Then in groups of 3 to 4 children they must build towers that come together to form a castle. The children were very creative. They used different materials and created original towers. They worked very well in groups of 4 people. They communicated with each other and built solid castles.



❖ BLIND RACE

It is a game which child play with fun. Two equal numbers of participants are required for this game. To start the game, you need to have 2 blindfolds, 2 cups, 2 recipients. Two teams are racing against each other. One after one, they must bring a cup of water to the recipient blindfolded. They are given a time limit to do the task. At the end, the winning team is the one that has the biggest amount of water. Only the kid behind the runner can give instructions.

It is definitely a game that entertains and develops children's senses. It is about cooperation and communication. The loss of the view forces them to communicate. Depending on the team, they cannot avoid speaking all together even if there is a rule.

❖ RUNNING BOTTLES

This game is a very good game for children to communicate with each other. It is played with at least 6 players. For this game, 2 hoops and 2 bottles are used. 2 teams composed of the same number of kids are arranged in two lines. The first kids from each team start with a bottle in their hands. They must run from point A to point B and put the bottle in the hoop. Once it is done, they bypass around the hoop and run to point A. The second person of each team must run to point B, grab the bottle and come back to point A. The third person takes the bottle, puts it in the hoop, bypasses it and comes back. And the game goes on. The winning team is the one that does it faster.

Children improve their coordination and cooperation skills to achieve the specific purpose. They also have a lot of fun because it is not a static game.

❖ BURNING BALL

It's a game that kids can play with fun and effort. A ball and hoops or mats (bases) and are the necessary materials. A game is played with at least 10 participants divided in two teams, one in the infield, the other outside. The field is marked by the bases. A player from the team in the outfield throws the ball into the infield and then runs from base to base. While this player is running, the opposing team tries to get the ball to assigned space as fast as possible.

If the ball is at this space and the runner is not at a base, s/he is “burned” and has to return to the starting point. If he has stayed safely at a base, he can continue running, when his other team members throw the ball and run themselves. Completing the course means one point for the team, completing it without interruption (running through all the bases with only one thrown ball) is worth two points. Only three players can stay on one base, otherwise the player standing on the base the longest will be burned. The teams switch after a certain amount of time (e.g. four minutes).

This game helps children improve their coordination and communication skills. It also enhances the cooperation between them, increases the team spirit and their self-confidence.

❖ THE FOX AND THE RABBIT

The game is played with a minimum of 5 people. The required materials are 2 or more balls. What is expected from the children in this game is to be active and to communicate. The group must form a circle. Two people on the opposite sides of the circle must hand the balls. Designate which ball is the fox and which one is the rabbit. Explain that each ball is like a hot potato and should not be held for more than one second. The aim of the game is for the fox to catch the rabbit. Both the fox and the rabbit move by being passed (not thrown) around the circle, in any direction. The person who holds the fox should pass the ball to the person next to him/ her, whomever is closer to the rabbit. Those players holding the rabbit should pass to someone far away from the fox. When the fox catches the rabbit, a new round is started. Children are actively involved in the activity and keep their attention alive. They also have a lot of fun.

Variation: if the group can't catch the rabbit, add extra balls to the game.



❖ TREASURE HUNT OF WORDS

This game is a game that will develop children in following the instructions. The game is played with at least 5 players and the necessary materials are papers with words and clues. Hide some papers, each one with a letter composing one word. The children must find the papers and compose the word. The word must be related to a value like curiosity, love, friendship, generosity, etc. The game can be played either by giving clues to kids, or simply hiding the papers somewhere and letting them find them. The children will enhance their teamwork skills and will get familiar with new words which represent important values. If there is enough time you can also discuss with the students, the meaning of each value.



❖ PANTOMIME

This game is played with at least 5 players and it needs some pictures. It is a very good choice for boosting children's creativity

Begin the game by giving one child a picture. The child then needs to act silently what s/he sees, and all other children need to try to guess what it is. Once the picture is guessed, choose another child and let them enjoy it by acting! If a child has difficulties in acting, then you can let the child try to make the sounds. Children gain self-confidence with this game and learn new English words if the game is played in English.



❖ ORIGAMI MOBILE INSTALLATION

This event is very good for hand and eye coordination. It is suitable for almost every age group. It depends on the number of wooden supports you get. Tables, origami paper (squared, 10 * 10cm and 15 * 15cm, coloured, decorated by you and the kids), wooden sticks, picked from the ground (don't break the trees), paints, threads, needle and scissors are needed.

With your colleagues, go find wooden sticks, then make them colourful with paint. Cut square pieces of paper, decorate them (around 50-70). Gather a huge amount of threads, some scissors and needles. Train for Origami download tutorials and don't forget the computer!! Bring some origami you had already made and spend 40 minutes to one hour with the kids to create. Then, let them go to the painted branches where some volunteers are waiting for them. Volunteers are in charge to pass the thread through the origami. (use the needle). Then let the kid link the threads to the stick he chose if he wants. The mobile art sculpture/ installation is ready.

Children exercise their dexterity, their focus, their patience and their creativity. It is also a great souvenir for them, and it raises their self-confidence about their manual skills. After minutes, we can see the kids that are patient and interested in craft art. There is no grey zone. Or it is super catchy, or they don't want to do the activity. As we have to respect the interests of each kid, we need to have a plan B for those who don't like it.



❖ COLOUR GAME

The game should be played with a minimum of 5 players to be fun. It does not need any special material. Colours from around them are used in this game. The aim is to teach English vocabulary. The players stand in a circle. The presenter commands: "Touch yellow, one, two, three!" Players as quickly as possible try to touch something yellow. It can be an object or clothing of the other participants in the circle). Who did not have time – out of the game. The presenter repeats the command again, but with a new colour. The last one left wins. Kids learn English in a way that they never forget colours. Their ability to think and decide quickly also improves.

❖ JEDI MIND TRICK

A fun game that can be played with no need for any materials. Students stand in a circle with one person in the middle. The game can be played with 7 or more children. The goal of the person in the centre is to take another participant's place in the circle. Members of the outer circle attempt to switch places without losing a spot in the circle by the person in the middle. To switch places, a participant on the outside makes eye contact with another member of the circle and then both members run across the circle and switch places. No talking or additional gestures can be used. Additional rule: Students must switch places with someone at least two spaces away, to prevent too much switching with the person next to them. This game contributes to children's cooperation skills. It is also a very useful game for children as it improves their non-verbal communication skills because they do not speak during the activity.

❖ CAPTURE THE FLAG

A minimum of 10 players are required as the game will be played with two groups. The material to use in the game is just a flag. The main purpose of the game is for children to make an active effort. The teams compete between themselves. 2 teams, one in front of the other, one person in the middle with the flag. Pacers in the teams are named with numbers, for example one, two, three, etc. The person in the middle has to call a number. The ones of the 2 teams with that number have to run to bring the flag to their team. The first one gains the point. With this game, the kids started thinking faster and they supported each other. As we played with English numbers, they learned simple English numbers and they had a lot of fun playing.



❖ ONE, TWO, THREE, START!

This game can be done with kids between 6 and 10. No material is needed, and it is useful to put in practice the balance of risk versus security. One participant is placed on one side of the space while the rest are in the opposite. The kid counts “one, two, three, start” while looking at a wall. The other children are racing to arrive first to the wall but when s/he finishes saying the sentence, they have to freeze and if the person turns to his/ her mates and sees anyone moving, that person has to go back and start again. The one reaching the wall first is the winner. Children didn’t know this game and they liked it a lot.



❖ BIRDS AND NEST

It is played with a minimum of 10 players and there is no need for any material. Participants are divided into birds and nests. The nests have to be in a couple and create a nest with their hands. For each nest, there is one bird inside. When we shout out “bird”, all the birds must exit from their nest and find a new one. When we shout out “nest”, all the couples have to separate and find a new partner to create a new nest. When we scream “all”, all the people have to move birds have to find a nest and nests have to create a new nest. This game helps kids focus on a certain issue and improve their concentration.



❖ WIZARD, GNOME, GIGANT

This fun game does not require any material. A great game can be played with a minimum of 8 participants. Divide the group into two teams and explain where the safe area is and the middle of the area. Children in the group should now decide what kind of gesture they want to do. You can add a sound to each character. It's even more fun.

The gesture:

Wizard: Do a circle with two hands.

Gnome: Builds a roof over your head.

Gigant: Poses as a bodybuilder.

Gigant wins Wizards, Wizards wins Gnome and Gnome wins Gigant.

Participants face each other in the middle of the field. The players make the gesture after you give a signal. When they are beaten, they run away to reach the safety area and when they win, they try to catch a member of the other team. If they reach the safe zone before being caught, they are safe, if not they will become a part of the other group. The aim of the game is to get more participants in your team and make it as big as possible. With this game children's strategic thinking and coordination skills are developed.

❖ ANIMAL CATCHING

It is a great game during which you can have fun with children without the need of any items or materials. It can be played with at least 5 participants. We recommend having more children if you want it to be much fun. One catcher tries to catch the children, who are running around. If the kid goes down and makes an animal noise before the catcher catches him/her, s/he is safe. The children must stay at the ground until another kid checks them and consequently, they can stand up and play again. If the catcher catches a kid, s/he becomes the catcher. The catcher will win, if everybody is on the ground as an animal, or catches another person who becomes the catcher. The children had a lot of fun. The game supported children's physical development and contributed to their imitation skills.

❖ FIRE, WATER, STORM, ICE

We need music for the game and this game is played with a minimum 4 kids. If you want more fun; you need more participants. The game starts when everyone is ready. As long the music is running the children run through the room. When the music stops the leader of the game says either Fire, Water, Storm or Ice and the kids have to make these tasks depending on the emerging “danger”.

Fire: Everyone should run into a corner of the room

Water: Everyone should step on something (for example a chair or a bench)

Storm: Everyone should lay on the floor

Ice: Everyone should freeze

After everyone does the task and is safe, the game continues again. It is possible to make this game as a competition, in this case the last person who makes one of the tasks is out of the game. Additionally, to the music the leader can clap the hands to get the attention of all the children.

Children express themselves in many creative ways. They practiced quick thinking as they had to understand the command quickly and try to act. While the game is being played, the children make different shapes and have fun. Also, during the game some English words can be introduced to make them enrich their vocabulary... You can't imagine what fun this game is!



❖ BANANA, STRAWBERRY AND LEMON

It is a great game that you can play with a minimum of 10 participants. Everyone stands in a circle, divided in three groups: Bananas, Strawberries and Lemons. One is in the middle of the circle and has to say out loud one of these three names. The group named has to stand up and run while sitting in another place, while the one who was in the middle will sit somewhere. The one who will remain without sitting will be the one in the middle for the next round, it is possible to name more than one group name per time. The children learned teamwork and responded instantly to the given instructions.

❖ FRUITY FLAVOURS

It is a game that children can trust their ears, unlike other games, and only names of fruits will be needed for this game. It is played with at least 8 children. Players pick a unique fruit according to their liking. In larger groups let everyone have a small sign in front of him, stating his or her fruit of choice but remove them once they know the game.

Players clap in rhythmic motion – two claps on the lap and twice snapping their fingers, one with their right hand, one with their left hand. The goal is to pass the rhythm by naming on the first ‘snap’ your own fruit, on the second ‘snap’ the fruit of another participant and react on time.

Example:

x = clapping lap delegate Apple: x x Apple Pear - delegate Pear: x x Pear Orange - delegate Orange: x x Orange Pear etc.

*Can be played with anything replacing fruits, for example animals.

The game taught children to follow rhythms. Moreover, it was much fun.

❖ KING KONG

King Kong is a very good game because you don't need any material and it is instructive. The game is played with at least 8 kids. The players stand up and start counting in a row. Whenever a number connected to the number three (e.g. 3, 9, 21, 27...) appears, the player instead says King. Same goes for numbers connected to 7 by saying Kong. After making a mistake the player is out and sits down. The last player to stand wins. T The game teaches the numbers in the multiplication state and It contributes to improving mathematical skills.

Aims of the activities:

- To strengthen the interest and motivation of young people to participate and learn through non-formal and informal educational activities.
- To encourage the initiativeness, creativity and self-expression of young people.
- To create preconditions for increasing the personal and professional development of young people.
- To introduce topics such as: intercultural dialogue, peaceful coexistence between people from different countries and ethnicities, social inclusion, and promotion of European values, which will lead to more effective social and cultural European integration.
- To promote the essence of volunteering and all the opportunities that the Erasmus + program provides to young people.

Outcomes:

The Summer Youth Academy was initiated by the Summer Youth Academy (SYA) Project and it was continued further by the COOL project volunteers during the three years of the project implementation. In this panel of activities, the volunteers met children and young people from the town of Razlog during the summer holidays, three times a week. Volunteers developed many interactive games and attractive workshops of various themes concerning music, singing, dancing, crafting, sports, ecology, environment, etc. The activities were designed to emphasise teamwork, respect and acceptance of others and took place mostly outside in the open air so the connection with nature was strengthened. Thus, participants learned a lot, had a lot of fun, made new friends and improved their English. The intensive contact with the volunteers provoked in children and youngsters' new ideas, concerns, a worldview change and also made them closer to non-formal education. In the same way, volunteers grew and were happy to take part in the children's daily life and diversify the local community of Razlog.

Activities:

As an introduction to the summer youth academy and for the children to get to know us, we organized an Indiana Jones Treasure Hunt. The material used and the activities were as follows:

First, we used a lot of threads (wool) to create a game that simulated infrared lasers. For the second stage we used chalk to simulate a deep lake. The way to cross it is to jump on the floating leaves. If you fall into the water, start again. The third step was to pass through the hoops without touching the edges. The fourth step was to jump with the right foot to the fifth step, from there jump with the left foot to the sixth step. The sixth test consisted of turning a stick 10 times to get dizzy and then go to the last step. We put up obstacles along the way.

The last step was to follow a line with holes that they should jump over with a balloon filled with water caught between the chin and the chest. To finish we gave them a cookie and a certificate for participating in the adventure. This activity was carried out as an introduction to what would be the summer school, so that the children and the volunteers get to know each other and begin to establish relationships based on trust, friendship and appreciation. It was a good way to break the ice.

❖ HUMAN KNOT

This exercise is suitable for all age groups, being fun in both small and large groups. It does not need any material. It breaks the barrier of personal space and pushes children to get closer to each other. It also stimulates them to think creatively and find solutions to any occurring problem. Participants need to stand in a circle, extend the hands to the middle and each one has to hold the hands of two other children who are not next to him/her. The result will be a big knot that they will have to undo without releasing their hands but jumping over, passing under, etc. It takes a while, but it is a very fun activity.



❖ DRIVER AND PASSENGER GAME

It is a game that can be played with at least two people since there must be a driver and a passenger. There must be 2 players and always an even number of players. (For example: 2,4,6. . .) It is an easy and fun game that does not require any materials. If there are too many participants, the participants are divided into pairs as in each one there is the driver and the passenger. The driver has his eyes open and drives the passenger, whose eyes are closed. The aim is not to get in a car accident with the other couple.

The game contributes to the coordination ability because the driver must be able to walk in order to avoid the other cars. And It develops the sense of trust between the two players.



❖ DRESS THE SCARECROW

This activity is appropriate for kids between 6 and 10 years old. Just a list of clothes and accessories (for example: red cap, white t-shirt, green shoes and sunglasses) is required as a material and it aims to develop children's social skills and creativity. Each team chooses a participant as a scarecrow. The list is delivered to them and the game is all about finding and dressing up the mate, the fastest team being the winner. Another version of the game is to have to dress up the scarecrow with as many clothes as possible. In this case, the team who dresses up the scarecrow with the most items of clothes is the winner. The volunteers tried both variations and both were successful. Everyone got involved and worked hard to achieve the common goal. They interacted with the local community to find some of the clothes. It was amazing to see the kids excited, motivated and having a good time.

❖ COUNTING GAME

This energizer is so simple that it turns out to be a lot of fun. It is appropriate for elementary students and works great in medium and large groups. It tests the group's non-verbal communication skills. Children must count as a team up to a present number (which, depending on the size of the group, will be higher or lower). For example, in a medium-sized group 15 can be a good number. Kids have to start counting without talking to each other or give any signals. One should say a number at a time. If two or more children speak at the same time, they all have to start from the beginning. The game continues until the group counts till the set number without making an error. It is a difficult exercise and requires a lot of concentration, strategic moves and intuition.

❖ ULTIMATE NINJA

This energizer can be done with kids between 6 and 11 years. It is better if it is done with middle-sized groups and it does not require any material. It demands concentration and equilibrium.

All players stand in a circle, facing each other. It is important that everyone remember their turn order. Turns go clockwise. Thus, a person should remember who was before and after him/her. The goal of the game is to be the last ninja standing. To stay in the game, you must not let anyone hit your hand. If s/he does, your hand gets unused and if both of your hands are touched, you are out and must leave the game. To begin, everyone says together “ultimate ninja!” And then everyone freezes in a ninja pose. Each player takes turns. On a player’s turn, one is allowed only one motion: one fast motion to attack another player, or one fast motion to move somewhere (to jump or take a large step in any direction). When attacking the player tries to hit the hand of the player on his/ her left side with one motion. When attacked the other player can make one motion to try to escape the attack, even if it is not their turn. The players must remain in those positions until their next turn.

The kids understood the game perfectly and it turned out to be a strategic exercise.



❖ ZOMBIE BALL

This game can be done with kids between 6 and 13 years and is more fun if it is done in big groups. The only material needed is a soft ball and it puts into practice student's agility, awareness of surroundings and coordination skills. There are no teams in this game, everyone plays for himself/herself. In the beginning, the ball is blindly thrown into the field by the game master. After that it is open for anyone. The goal is to hit the other players with the ball. Once a player is hit, s/he is out, until the one who threw the ball at him/her is sent out. Catching the ball thrown at one, sends the thrower out. The players can communicate from the outfield, who should be hit in order to send them back in again. It is a very dynamic game and so much fun.



❖ THE HYPNOTIST

This game is played with a maximum of 20 kids. There is no need for any material for the game. The main aim of the game is to develop the attention skill of children. Kids sit in a circle and appoint a volunteer who leaves the room or doesn't look at the circle then the rest decide who is the hypnotist. This kid has the power to make the others fall asleep in a twinkle. The volunteer comes back and has to find who the hypnotist is. Meanwhile, this magician has already made one of his/ her mates fall asleep.

The kid has three chances to discover who the hypnotist is, or s/he gets out again and a new hypnotist is chosen.

With this game, children observe and analyse the movements of the other children. They try to understand which child is a hypnotist by examining the movements of the children. They learn to make inferences by examining the occurrence and consequences of events. You can't imagine what a fun game it is.

❖ VÖLKERBALL

This game can be played with a minimum of 10 players and you will only need one ball. It is a very good game for children to improve their attention and move quickly. The group is divided into two teams. Both teams have to decide on a king. The king is located outside of the field. S/he can eliminate players from the other team by hitting them with a ball. When more than one person is hit, the first hit person has to leave the field. It does not count as being hit by the ball, when the ball is caught by the player. Eliminated players have to leave their play field. To get into the field again, their teammates have to hit players from the other team with the ball. All players are allowed to eliminate other players who are inside the field. When all players are eliminated, the king has to go inside the field. The object of the game is to defeat the opposing team by eliminating the king.

There are rules that are forbidden in the game such as hitting the head, crossing the outline of the field, stealing the ball out of the other's field. Children have fun and they are physically active. They can determine the strategy and do teamwork. They interact with each other constantly.

❖ BALLOON AND STICKS

2 sticks and a balloon for each group are needed as material. teams will line up in couples. each couple has to carry the balloon with the sticks until they reach the final point. couples run together back to the start line to deliver the material and the next group repeats. the team who finished first wins. another version is to carry the balloon, instead of using sticks, walking back to back.



❖ RUNNING HOOPS

Each group needs a hoop. The first kids from each team are standing inside a hoop and holding it with their hands. They have to run from point a to point b and come back to point a. Then, the second kid from each team joins the first inside the hoop. They run together to point b. When they arrive the first kid leaves the hoop. The second kid runs to point a and takes the third kid with him. They have to run to point b together. And so on, until every kid from the same team is moved to point b. The winning team is the one that moves first all participants to the other side (point b).



❖ TUNNEL BALL

Just a ball per group is needed for this game. Every team must be lined up. The children will form a tunnel by spreading their legs. The first kid in every team has to pass a ball through the other kid's legs. The last kid should catch the ball and run to the beginning of line and repeat the same action. The game is finished when all the kids have done this and the fastest team wins.



❖ TUNNEL GAME

No materials are needed. Every team creates a tunnel with their hands by lining up in two rows. The last two people of this tunnel walk through the tunnel and expand the tunnel in the front. The team that reaches the finish line first wins.



❖ PAPER BRIDGE

Every participant needs a paper sheet. The game objective is the team to cross an area without touching the ground, being able to step on the paper only. If one person in the team touches the floor the team has to start again. The fastest win.



❖ TRAIN RACE

No material is needed. The first children of each group are the engine and start. They have to run to a point and come backward to hook the first wagon, who will be the second child. They run to the point together and go backward to take the next wagon. The action is repeated till the train is full. The fastest group wins.

❖ TURTLE RACE

A carton box per group is needed. All teams have to line up behind the start line. The firsts in line have to carry a carton on their back to the finish point without touching the carton. The carton is not allowed to fall and if it does, the penalty is 5 seconds on your score. As the participant reaches the end, he can run together with the carton back to the start. Now it is the turn of the next one. The game finishes after everyone has had his/ her turn and, again, the fastest team wins.

❖ BASKET GAME

30 ping pong balls or paper balls per group are required. each team is lined up in a queue. they have to pass the balls from one to another and the last one has to collect the ball in the basket. the team with the highest number of scores at the end of the set time is the winner.

OLYMPIC GAMES

The Olympic games simulate the real Olympic games and they are a competition of a set of activities. In each game, and depending on the number of participants, the children are divided into groups. The groups must be composed of a minimum of 4 people (so that there are 2 teams of 2 people) and a maximum of 40 children (4 teams of 10 people). The games are structured in four rounds, each lasting approximately half an hour. The rounds are played consecutively, and not at the same time. But simultaneously, a play area can be carried out in which children who do not participate in the game can play, create some crafts, etc. Thus, several small games are held, and scores are awarded after each of them. At the end, a sum is made and the group with the most points is named the winner. At the end of all the rounds, an award ceremony can be organised, and little prizes can be awarded to the winners.

The Olympics are a popular activity among children ages 6 to 10. They are fun, highly energetic, require psychomotor skills and teamwork and winning and losing are also part of the game. In addition, new friendships are expected to develop with the mixing of the groups/ teams.

Materials and games:

❖ SACK RACE

One sack per group is needed as a material. The kids jump in a bag to the finish line or a turning point (for example, a cone), and then come back. They give the sack to the next child, who runs to the finish line, and so on, until the last participant finishes. The fastest team wins.

❖ OBSTACLE RUN

3 hoops, 1 wooden brick and 4 cones are needed per group. in case of not having, all kinds of objects are valid. the kids have to complete an obstacle path, made up of wooden bricks, hoops, cones, etc. they will have to jump over the brick, jump inside the hula-hoops, and slalom the cones. in each team, one child begins, completes the path, and only when s/he finishes, the second begins. and so, on. the fastest team wins.



❖ CARRY THE WATER

Version 1: water, a container and a plastic glass for each participant will be provided to every group. The kids will have to stand in a line with a cup in their hand and pass the water from one to the other through the glasses. The last kid in the line will have to fill the container with the water s/he gets. Every team has to try to fill the recipient with as much as they can.

Version 2: another version of the game, which we have played and is also a lot of fun, is to carry the water with a sponge. In this case each team has two recipients of water - one at the start and the other at a certain distance. Each player has to soak the sponge with water and try to transport as much quantity as possible to the second recipient and come back and pass the sponge to the next player. Every team has to try to fill the recipient with as much as they can. The game can be ended after a fixed time has passed or when a team has finished all resources. The teams that collect the most water wins.



❖ EGG AND SPOON

One tablespoon and one egg or one ping pong ball is required per group. It is about children carrying the egg or the ping-pong ball with the spoon in their mouth without using their hands to the finish line and back. Then, they will have to pass the egg/ ping-pong ball to the next child, spoon to spoon, without using their hands. And the race goes like that until all the participants complete the task.



MOGA and REHABILITATION CENTER

(Institutions for people with intellectual disabilities)

„A Small Community for a Large Asset“ is the name of the social enterprises which abbreviation in Bulgarian stands for MOGA meaning I CAN in English. It started as a project developed by Association “International Initiatives for Cooperation” in partnership with Association “Chance”. It is one of the first social enterprises in Bulgaria. After the project ended the enterprise started being managed by the Association “Chance”. Over the years Association IIC, its team and volunteers, have always worked in partnership to support the work of the social enterprise.

Rehabilitation center is a place where people with intellectual and physical disabilities receive different services – they work with social workers and physiologists. In the center people follow an educational programme that allows them to learn basic maths and reading and to acquire diverse skills. Users also do different art and crafts activities.

Aims:

- To improve the cooperation with social institutions in the region working with people with physical and mental disabilities.
- To provide opportunities for learning and personal development of people with disabilities which are representatives of the local community from Razlog Municipality.
- To create preconditions for increasing the well-being of the people from those institutions.
- To contribute to the inclusion and socialization of people with physical and intellectual disabilities in the public life of the community.

Outcomes:

The COOL project volunteers worked for three years with people with physical and intellectual disabilities. Their conscientious work proved that there are no limits to intercultural communication and that even if the same verbal language is not used for communication, there are many other methods. While working with this target group, the volunteers were always supported by the social workers working in the institution, they gave them guidelines for activities that are suitable for people with disabilities.

The volunteers (different teams of 3 people) visited the centre for people with physical and intellectual disabilities two days a week. Work sessions continued 40 minutes followed by 15 minutes of break, because people quickly lose concentration. One of the favorite activities was the music therapy and drawing classes, in which everyone could get involved and express themselves through art.

The volunteers help to make various art souvenirs, which were sold at the Easter and Christmas bazaars, which the social institution organizes every year. Sales revenue is used to purchase new materials for the social workshop.

When working with people with intellectual disabilities, you need to have a lot of patience and be willing to repeat the same thing many times. Do not give up, because you will see the result of your work. These people have a different perception of life and the reality around them, they are very sensitive and full of love. Be prepared for lots of hugs!

HOME FOR KIDS

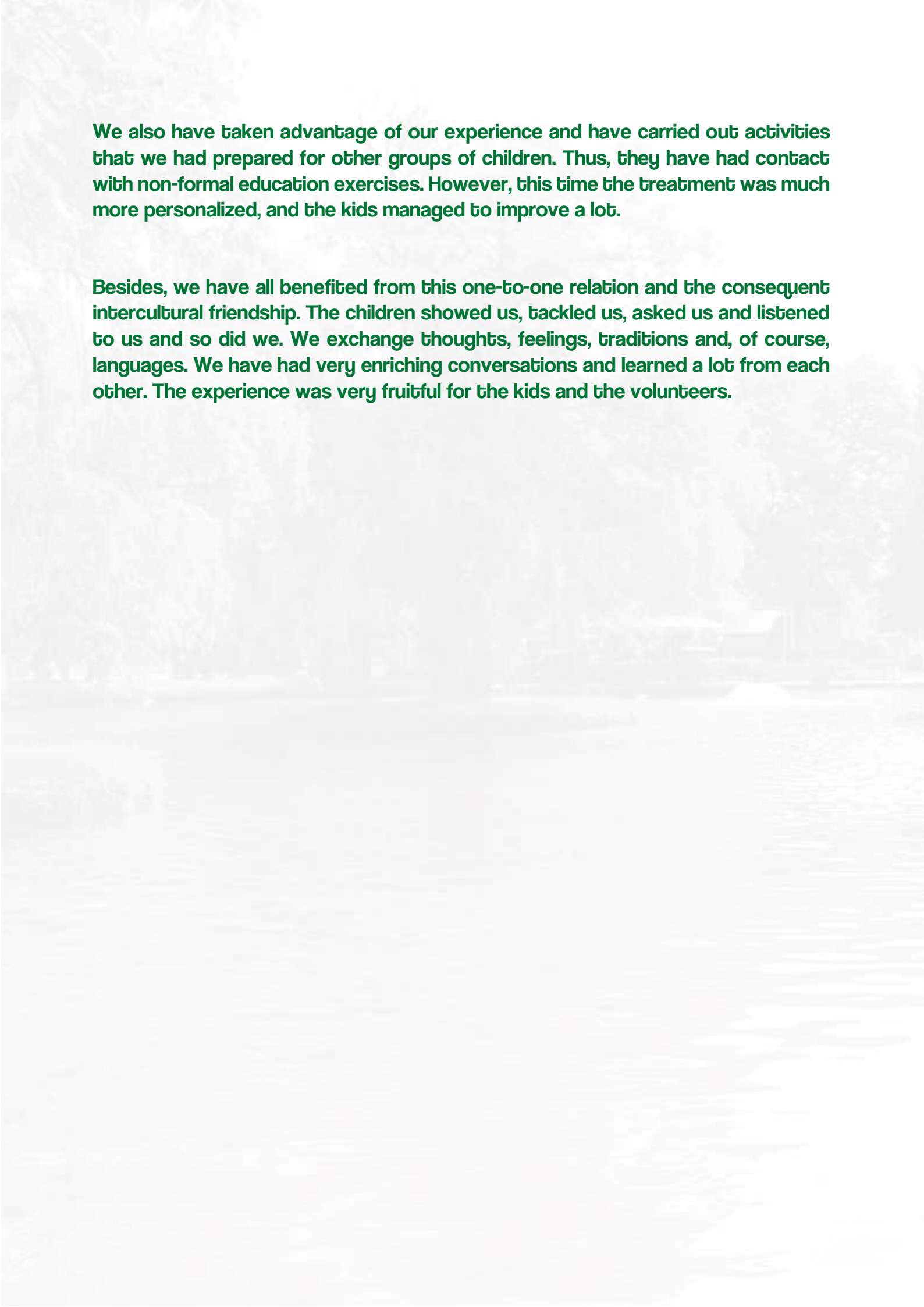
The full name of the institution is “Centre for Temporary Accommodation of Children Deprived of Parental Care” but we call it “Home for Kids”. This is a social institution which has been financed by the Municipality of Razlog. The Centre has the capacity to accommodate 10 kids at a time. During the three years we have been working with all of them. The kids there need care and attention. We made good friends with them.

Aims:

- To improve the cooperation with social institutions in the region working with people with special needs.
- To encourage the creativity of and to create preconditions for increasing the personal development of the kids from that institution.
- To strengthen the interest and motivation of young people to the educational process and volunteering through the use of informal methods and approaches.
- To provide educational and psychological support for kids with special needs from the local community from Razlog Municipality.
- To enhance their knowledge and experience with other European and neighbouring cultures and create a sense of appreciation and acceptance
- To promote the intercultural dialogue, peaceful coexistence between people from different countries and the European values, which will lead to more effective social and cultural European integration.

Activities outcomes:

During these 3 years, volunteers used to attend Home for Kids a few times a week. Our visits were mainly about keeping them some company and helping them do their homework. They are very energetic children who require a lot of attention. And in our company, they played, ran, moved, jumped and definitely enjoyed a lot. They are very creative children as well and together we carried out countless activities. We believe that by stimulating the development of children's skills and abilities through the planned activities, we boosted their potential.



We also have taken advantage of our experience and have carried out activities that we had prepared for other groups of children. Thus, they have had contact with non-formal education exercises. However, this time the treatment was much more personalized, and the kids managed to improve a lot.

Besides, we have all benefited from this one-to-one relation and the consequent intercultural friendship. The children showed us, tackled us, asked us and listened to us and so did we. We exchange thoughts, feelings, traditions and, of course, languages. We have had very enriching conversations and learned a lot from each other. The experience was very fruitful for the kids and the volunteers.

Kindergarten



Aims of the activities:

To encourage the active participation and creativity in children.

to introduce them to non-formal education

To help them learn basic words and concepts in English through games (learning by doing).

Activities Outcomes:

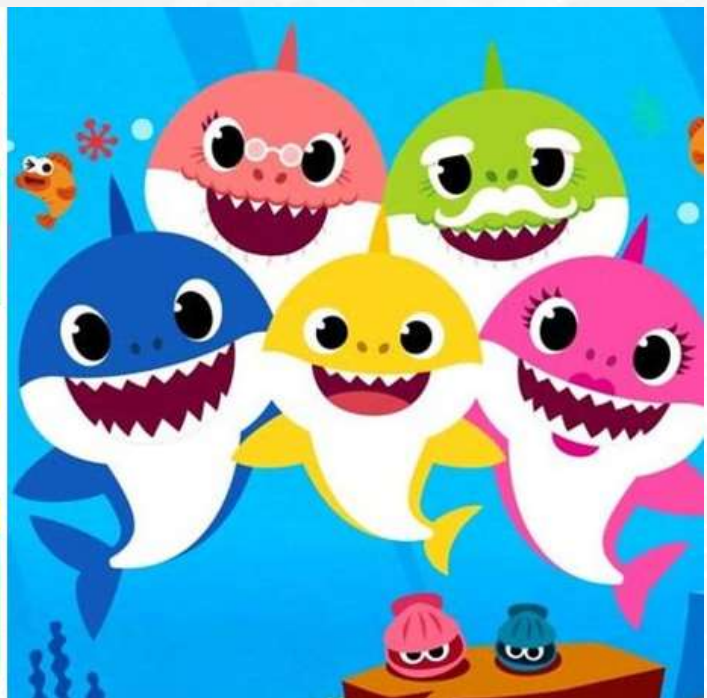
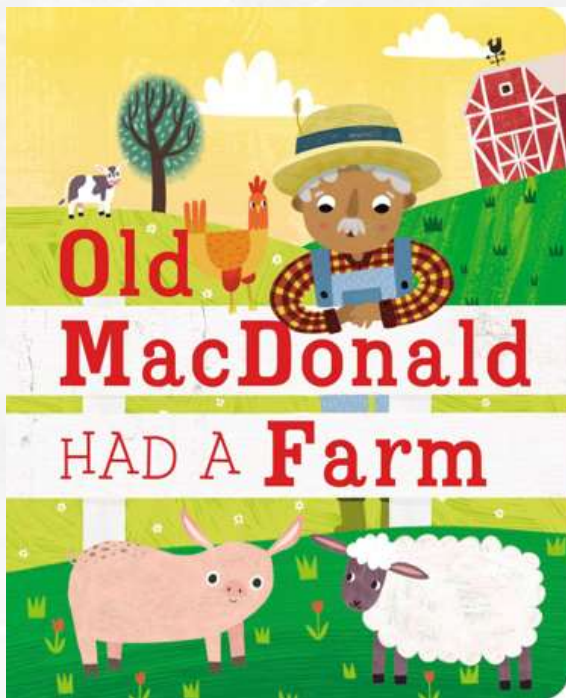
We worked with kids from 4 to 7 years old in a large group of 10-20 children, depending on the day. It is well known that children learn quickly. However, some children learn new knowledge faster than others. To compensate for the knowledge gap, the volunteers sought and applied different learning methods. Repeating the words and using flash cards was an effective method because the children associated the image of the flash card with the word. Singing popular children's songs was also a good approach to learning new words.

Another important aspect of working with children aged three to seven is finding engaging activities. Especially when working in large groups, children lose interest very quickly because they are distracted by each other. The children loved singing songs with dances as well as colouring. The key to teaching children is in visualizing the topic. Also, we noticed that children are happy if they know the topic. That's why we repeated some of the lessons, we just flavoured them with new songs and games.

Tools:

SONGS AND DANCES

We used songs to introduce some vocabulary to children. It is a very dynamic and fun way of teaching and learning new words. We also used dances or video clips to make the content visual and facilitate the vocabulary learning. This is a very popular method worldwide and there are millions of vocabulary teaching songs nowadays. The songs with movements that we used are: Baby Shark; Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes and Itsy Bitsy Spider while the songs with video we used are: Old McDonald Had a Farm; The Colour Song and The Alphabet Song. The effectiveness of the methods was proved, the children had a good time and as time went by, they learned a lot of English words.



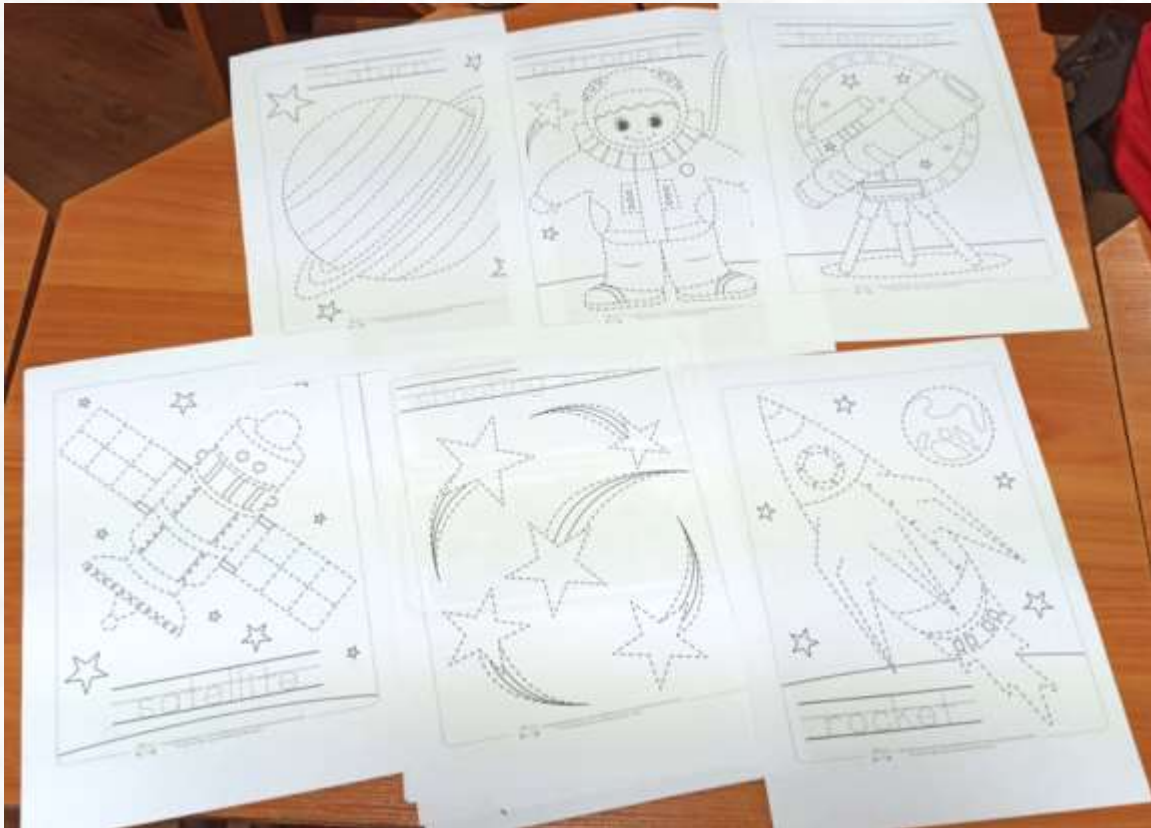
FLASHCARDS

We used flashcards for vocabulary teaching as well. Although it can be used for introducing new vocabulary, we generally used this approach to review content, so the kids integrate words more deeply. At first the flashcards were shown, and the words were repeated loud and then the cards were shown randomly, and the acquired vocabulary was tested. Although shy at first, they immediately lost their fear of failure, tried and guessed the words. By participating, they were the ones teaching the words to each other. It was very nice to see that by the third round; everyone was shouting out the words in chorus.



PAINTINGS

We used drawings to release the cognitive effort the kids had made. Children were provided with drawings related to the theme and they could colour them freely. While they were painting, the volunteers checked, stopped by and had a more personalized treat with each child. Congratulate them for their drawings, motivate them, practice some more English, etc.



DECORATING THE WALLS

For several months our more artistic volunteers were painting the Kindergarten walls. Paintings based on children's stories were done to make the entrance hall of the kindergarten more fun and joyful. All the materials used were provided by the Association "International Initiatives for Cooperation" and the volunteers chose the drawings that best suited the centre. The general objective of the activity is to make the common space more beautiful and for the children to enjoy the drawings by remembering children's stories and fairy tales.



ELDERLY CENTRE / DAY CENTER FOR ELDERLY

Amongst all the activities, one which we have welcomed with more affection, it was the work with the seniors from the Elderly Centre in Razlog.

Visiting the Elderly Centre started with an invitation from them, then it turned into a weekly activity.

We, the volunteers, have learned a lot about the Bulgarian culture and its customs and at the same time the seniors have learned interesting things about us and the countries we come from.

Over time, through different types of activities the seniors of the Elderly Centre have been able to develop a type of communication with us, the volunteers, that allowed them to enjoy the activities more as well as our presence and interaction with them. Most speak only their native language (Bulgarian) and of course the local dialect Razlozhki. To communicate effectively we used to apply the knowledge that we had in all languages including Bulgarian, we used the body language, we sang, and we laughed a lot.

We did a lot of activities that made us learn a lot, provoked our feelings, and made us remember the warmth of our grandparents' homes. We cooked and danced, we painted eggs for Easter and created handicrafts, we played games and talked about us.

The goals of these activities were to apply the intergenerational approach, to enhance the communication with the local community, to propose meaningful ways of spending the time, to provoke the intercultural learning and simply to enjoy the time together.

BAKING BANITZA

This activity was proposed by the seniors of the Centre and we were delighted to accept it. We had to make banitza step by step while the elderly people were leading us through the whole process.

Once the preparation and baking process was over, everyone tried the banitza. It was tasty and delicious.

With this activity we learned more about traditional Bulgarian food and how to prepare it while at the same time we found another effective means to interact and communicate with the elderly people.

An experience to repeat!



Banitza is a stuffed pastry that can be sweet or salty depending on the ingredients used.

PLAYING BACKGAMMON OR CHESS

It is always interesting how a duel of old generations against young generations would develop. In this activity fun was ensured.

We used to play board games with the elderly people. We were amazed with the skills which some of them had and their bright and clever mind. 😊

Some played chess, some played checkers, and others played backgammon.



Presentation of our countries.

We also wanted to bring our cultures closer to the seniors from the Elderly Centre in order to make them familiar with our countries, hometowns and traditions.

Every volunteer prepared a small interactive presentation about her/his country, in which they introduced some aspects of their culture, typical food, traditional dances, cities, most famous places and other interesting facts...

Each volunteer had 10 minutes for the presentation.

The elderly people enjoyed the activity a lot and learned much information about the different countries that the volunteers come from.

PAINTING EGGS FOR EASTER

Our friends from the day care centre for the elderly invited us to paint eggs together for Easter. They showed us several different techniques for painting eggs. Some of us saw this tradition for the first time and were quite curious how the eggs will be eaten afterwards. We got acquainted with another custom typical for Easter in Bulgaria.



Language Classes



Aims:

To enhance the personal development of the representatives of the local community.

To stimulate the intercultural dialogue and make cultures meet

To diversify the social and cultural life of the community and to offer its representatives space and opportunities to spend quality time.

Outcomes:

Language courses have been one of our main activities. We used them to access local people. Learning languages has always been said to open doors and with this resource we wanted to open our doors to the community. During the language classes the volunteers had the opportunity to introduce themselves to the local people with whom they were about to coexist for months and, in the same way, the community has welcomed its new members.

Besides, these dynamics were an excuse for people to be active, creative, and use their free time in a meaningful way. As time went through, all learnt about each other's background, language and culture. Thus, connections were built, and friendships grew. In most cases, people began to hang up and continue to exchange life experiences out of the classroom.

We offered language courses in all the languages that the volunteers spoke and that the locals were interested in learning: Spanish, Italian, French, English, Turkish, and German.

Tools:

Although the common goal of all language courses was for students to learn or improve their knowledge of a certain language, the teaching styles have been very diverse. Volunteers had to adapt the classes to the circumstances, the group size, its members, the objectives they wanted to achieve, the incoming level, etc. Tailor-made sessions were offered to the participants and this was appreciated by them...

There have been courses in which the subject was taught in a very informal way. The students asked for different themes. Imaginary excursions to the airport, in a restaurant, to the mountains, etc. have been organised. Role playing had also been carried out, and the typical and most representative songs of the language taught had been sung and danced. Others instead, have been carried out more formally. The content was explained, and the exercises done in a structured way. Regarding more advanced students, speaking classes had been executed. The groups met once a week to practice the language and enjoy the time.

In addition, as soon as the Covid-19 became a reality in Bulgaria, face-to-face classes turned into online classes, so the safety measures were respected. Some courses were also initiated for the people who found themselves locked up at home for so long.

Students feedback:

“ Thanks to Álvaro and his organization for the opportunity to learn Spanish from home. I enjoyed our lesson with him every time. He was very patient and interacting. The lessons permitted me to learn with people from different countries because of the online format. Alvaro made sure that all of us keep up together and was very understanding. Can't wait for more classes with him! ”

Mihaela Petrova

“ I was part of Álvaro's Spanish classes and I loved them. I always wanted to learn Spanish and they were the push I needed to do it. Alvaro is a great teacher, always patient, ready to answer questions and provide explanations. He did an amazing job making the classes fun, while covering a vast area of subjects. I made significant progress in just 3 months and I am very grateful I had the chance to participate in the classes. ”

Nadezhda Kodzheykova

“ It was helpful to learn with Álvaro. In the beginning it was hard to catch all the information but later I got used to it. The classes were interactive, and students felt free to talk and take a part in the lessons. I would recommend this online classes to all my friends who are starting with the Spanish. Álvaro is very friendly and communicative person. This quality is very important when it comes to teaching. ”

Georgi Karaangov

“ As I attend the Turkish classes every Wednesday and Saturday, I desire to say that it is such an interesting and worthwhile way to spend some spare time. Normally we decided to have vocabulary on Wednesday and grammar on the second chosen day. I learnt a vast number of new things for 2 months. The teacher is enjoyable and ready to explain any difficulty which occurs during the lesson. Thank you for everything. ”

Desislava Yankova

“ I am very pleased with the Turkish classes that are held by Sevda. We have classes every Wednesday and Saturday online. Sevda is a great teacher that provides the information clearly and understandably. The classes are not only interesting and helpful, but also quite entertaining! ”

Danislava Krancheva

“ Practicando español es uno de mis sueños y creo que ahora estoy cerca de lograrlo. Gracias a las quedadas yo he aprendido muchas cosas y ya no me preocupo cuando lo hablo. Me divertí mucho todo el tiempo. ¡Gracias por todo! ¡Lo echaré de menos! ¡Los amo! ”

Viktoria Malcheva

Intercultural Nights



Some of the most interesting and attractive events that had big success among the local community were the international cultural nights that we organised regularly during all this time. The aim of this activity was to introduce the volunteers' culture and country and to bring people together by making them aware of the specificity of the other's culture, mentality, behaviour, and lifestyle.

During an intercultural night the volunteers from the country presented used to prepare typical dishes and also share information about their country, region, town through videos, music, PowerPoint presentations and storytelling. Each intercultural night happened differently. Sometimes the event was organised in the office, other times we had the support of some restaurants in the city that provided us their place. In the latter case the clients on site, could enjoy a menu consisting of typical dishes and a small presentation of the country, a quiz, or a photo exhibition or all of that together.

It had the touch of each volunteer and bore the colour and the diversity of the culture. Very often the guests were invited to dance a typical dance from the country or sing a famous song. Representatives from the local community as well as the other volunteers learned a lot about each other. These types of events enhanced the appreciation towards another culture, increased the respect of values catered by the others, stimulated the intercultural dialogue, and created preconditions for strong friendships. The curiosity of the locals was provoked and many of them promised themselves to visit some of the hometowns or interesting places that our volunteers had presented.

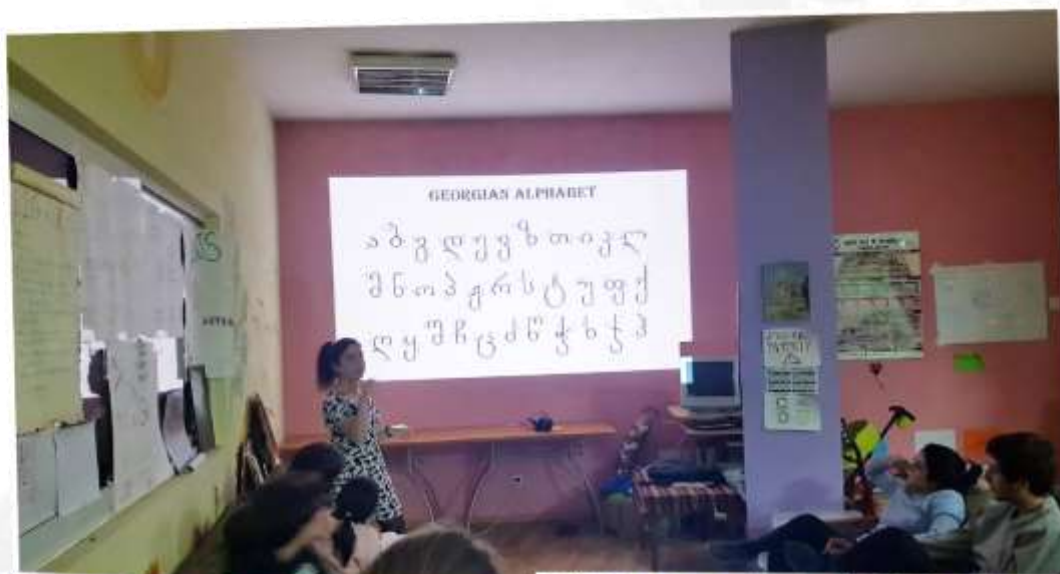
GEORGIAN NIGHT

On 24 October 2018, our volunteer Tamuna gave us a presentation of her country, in which she presented to us the most important cities in the country-Tbilisi, Akhaltsikhe, Batumi, Borjomi. She presented to us the Georgian nature, some hiking routes through the mountains, the black sea area, and information about the Georgian language. Georgian typical dishes vary a lot - from Khinkali to Badrijani Nigvzit.

After the presentation, our volunteer prepared traditional Georgian food with Georgian wine, which the people who came to the office, loved.

In the end, the public was quite interested as they asked many questions about the territories occupied by Russia and the nature of the country.





Belarusian and Ukrainian Night

At the beginning of December 2018 volunteers from Belarus and Ukraine (Hanna and Andrii) presented their culture and traditions to others. The presentation was held in the office of “International initiatives for Cooperation” (IIC), Razlog.



Nice presentations with pictures, videos and interesting facts were shown to introduce the unique identity of those countries. Because of Hanna (we called her Anya) now everyone knows that Belarusians barely use their national language, most of them are speaking Russian. Belarus is also a blue-eyed country full of lakes, ponds, and rivers. Most of the territory is covered by forests. Volunteers also knew more about the capital of the country Minsk - a nice post-soviet city full of Lenin statues.

The Ukrainian volunteer Andrii showed the traditional Ukrainian dance and food. Ukraine by the way is considered the biggest country in Europe. At the end of the presentations we tried traditional food from both countries, which is very common and simple to prepare -pancakes with cottage cheese, sirniki and big plates full of salami, cheese and salo. The evening was both interesting and delicious.



GERMAN NIGHT

The night was organised by three of our German volunteers at that time - Hanna, Janina and Simon, on 18 January 2019. The night started with a presentation of the history of Germany and its traditions. The volunteers introduced to us famous and important Germans, sightseeing spots, and their hometowns.

As soon as the presentation was over all guests got the chance to get to know how Germany tastes like. Our German volunteers put a lot of effort to fill the tables with traditional food, snacks, and drinks. We could taste Bavarian pretzel with butter, grey bread with German ham and prickles, radish, and vegan potato salad a la grandma.

For people with a sweet tooth, they served Herrencreme (vanilla-choco cream), Berliner (sweet dough filled with jam) and, of course, Kinder chocolate. The drinks they offered included apple juice, egg liquor and German beer.

In addition, the guests had nice German background music, which the volunteers had chosen before. The mix of music contained all kinds of genres, for example Kontra K (hip-hop), Sarah Connor (pop) and Scorpions (rock).

Finally, the night was a success. The people talked and laughed. They learned a lot and enjoyed it. And everyone left the office with a full stomach.

MISH-MASH NIGHTS

Those were one of the favourite nights of the whole team. We used to appoint a day when every volunteer or groups of volunteers from the same country would cook a traditional dish from their region or culture and then we all gathered in the office to have dinner together. We shared the food, listened to favourite music from our countries, told stories from our lives and got to know each other better. Those nights were common, and we used to organize them very often – at least once every two months. The place where we gathered was the office but sometimes, we gathered at the barbecue place of one of the volunteers' houses, or in the garden of the other house or at the place of some local friend. Those nights were amazing – everybody enjoyed a lot of the food but the best of the all the experience was that we used to know each other deeper and deeper and made friends for life.

Jordanian Night

On the 13th of March 2019, we organized another cultural night for the community in Razlog. This time it was about a new country from the Middle East - Jordan, the night was held in restaurant "Razlojka maaza" in the centre of Razlog and people from Razlog were invited. Our volunteers from Jordan with the help of their colleagues cooked a menu of 7 traditional Jordanian dishes. The food was prepared with a lot of love and was very delicious. They prepared the famous traditional Jordanian Mansaf alongside the tasty appetizers and sweets.



Maisam and Dima, our volunteers, started the night with a presentation about their country, they provided information about their history, traditions and some facts about their country and region. They also shared pictures and videos of the amazing sights of Jordan, and all the attendees were interacting and showed a big interest to know more about Jordan.

After dinner, great Jordanian desserts were served and of course we cannot end the night without trying the Jordanian way of partying. We danced the traditional Jordanian dance and enjoyed the Arabic music the whole night.



SPANISH NIGHT

The Spanish night was organised on 15 June 2019 by our volunteer Álvaro and David, our coordinator and project manager of the IIC organisation.



Many people came to the restaurant "Razloshka Maaza", the place where we held it. They were able to enjoy a presentation about different things that people had already heard about Spain such as football, Ibiza, the bull-fighting, the Siesta , flamenco ... So our volunteer prepared a presentation with part of the history, description of the territory, historical figures and some information on the industry and livestock. A lot of peculiarities about Spanish lifestyle were shared. Some of the guests had already lived in Spain, others had visited the country. Discussions were vivid and everybody could share diverse experiences.

Two days of preparation and cooking resulted in a 7-course menu. Customers were able to enjoy a magnificent paella, Spanish tortilla, magra con tomates (pork meat pieces with tomato sauce), squid in green sauce, gazpacho, Russian salad (Spanish version), fried milk as a dessert and the genuine and refreshing sangria. While people ate, different genres of Spanish music were played to cheer up the environment. The surprise of the night was that David prepared the paella in front of the customers. In that way they could see the whole process of preparation and enjoy the live presentation.



Working with Youth



Aims:

To work with youth as representatives of the local community on the territory of Razlog and develop their skills and abilities in diverse spheres .

To stimulate the cooperation in the field of youth policies between local and European organisations and institutions

To promote volunteering, mobility activities and all other opportunities that the Erasmus + program provides to young people.

Young people were in the focus of all the activities that Association "International Initiatives for Cooperation " had organised within the COOL project. They were invited and participated in all the events, trainings, activities that were held. Young people also supported us and volunteered in helping us organise some of the activities for kids, people with disabilities and elderly people. In this section we present some of the highlights from our work with the young people from Razlog Municipality.

LANGUAGE PRACTICE

Once a week, small groups of fifteen-year-olds met one of our volunteers and practiced French, German and Spanish. Students already knew the language and wanted to improve their speaking skills, so they had chats over different topics in which the native speaker used to correct them and taught them new expressions or vocabulary spontaneously. The students were from Razlog and Blagoevgrad. During the time of the lock down the chats were held online. Sometimes they talked openly and other times an activity was proposed to facilitate the speaking. Overall, the activity went well. Students immediately began to gain confidence and dare to express themselves, make mistakes and be corrected. As a result, they improved their speaking skills immensely.

READERS CLUB

To promote reading among the youth of the community, one day a week, Daniel - our Portuguese volunteer, organized a reading club, where they shared experiences and different opinions about the books read by each one. In each session a different topic was discussed, for example, the kind of literature that we each like, as well as books that may seem interesting to us, our favourite books, the book that has had the most impact on us, etc. This was a space in which youth could share culture and learn from each other. The club was not created to motivate young people to read books, but also served as motivation for improving their level of English, because the books read were discussed only in English. It also provoked their critical thinking and expanded their worldview. Each week a book was selected (sometimes only part of it) that had to be read and discussed at the next meeting.



HIP-HOP DANCES

The international language of music unites and removes all barriers. Through music and dances the intercultural relations are strengthened. Leila from Azerbaijan knew this from her previous experience as a hip-hop dancer. She chose as a personal project to organize hip-hop dance lessons for children and teenagers - twice a week. It was important to use all methods to attract more young people to the project activities and to diversify their free time. Everybody loved Layla. Kids became more plastic and enjoyed their free time in a different way. The activity was a great success both with children and teenagers. They were attending dance classes regularly and having a lot of fun.



DRAWING WORKSHOPS

These workshops were held with children and teenagers between the age of 7 and 14 in the office of the Association International Initiatives for Cooperation. One day of the week was set in the work programme for art and drawing lessons. The aim of the activity was to help the children relax in a friendly environment, to stimulate their creativity, to make them closer to the volunteers and to improve their drawing skills. New techniques were taught and acquired through practice. The high level of concentration required by the task made the participants focus and provided them with an unprecedented calm. The topics and materials used varied and there were interesting results at the end of each workshop.

PUBLIC SPEAKING WORKSHOP

Marlene from Germany worked very intensively with young people. She had prepared them for a long-term workshop for public speaking. It was very successful, and the youngsters enjoyed it a lot. It is important to share the result as someone else can implement it in another community.

Week 1

Topic: Introduction into rethorics

Activities: Discussion on the importance of speech, PowerPoint presentation of Aristotle's rhetorical triangle and the showing and telling method, role play "million dollars" to practice what we learned.

Outcome: The participants got an insight into the impact of speeches, they learned the basics of rhetoric and applied them in their speeches.

Week 2

Topic: Basic rules of Public Speaking and structuring of speech.

Activities: presentation, practicing holding short speeches on various topics.

Outcome: They improved their public speaking skills by gaining more confidence.

Week 3

Topic: Storytelling as a form of structure

Activities: Presentation on the story telling method to structure a speech, analysis of the four "PUMA"s.

Outcome: They got an insight into a different, uncommon way to structure speeches.

Week 4

Topic: introductions

Activities: Discussion and presentation about the aim of introductions and the different types of introductions, applying knowledge by making the introduction to various topics.

Outcome: They got a deeper understanding of the use of introductions and were able to apply the newly gained knowledge by making interesting introductions.

Week 5

Topic: Body language

Activities: “My name is Joe” song, analyzing different uses of body language and their meaning, exercise standing silently in front of the audience for one minute.

Outcome: They become more aware of how they can use body language to underline the importance of their speeches. They also grew more confident and asked for workshops on confidence.

Week 6

Topic: presentations

Activities: Everyone held a presentation on a chosen topic.

Outcome: They practiced what they learned in the prior weeks.

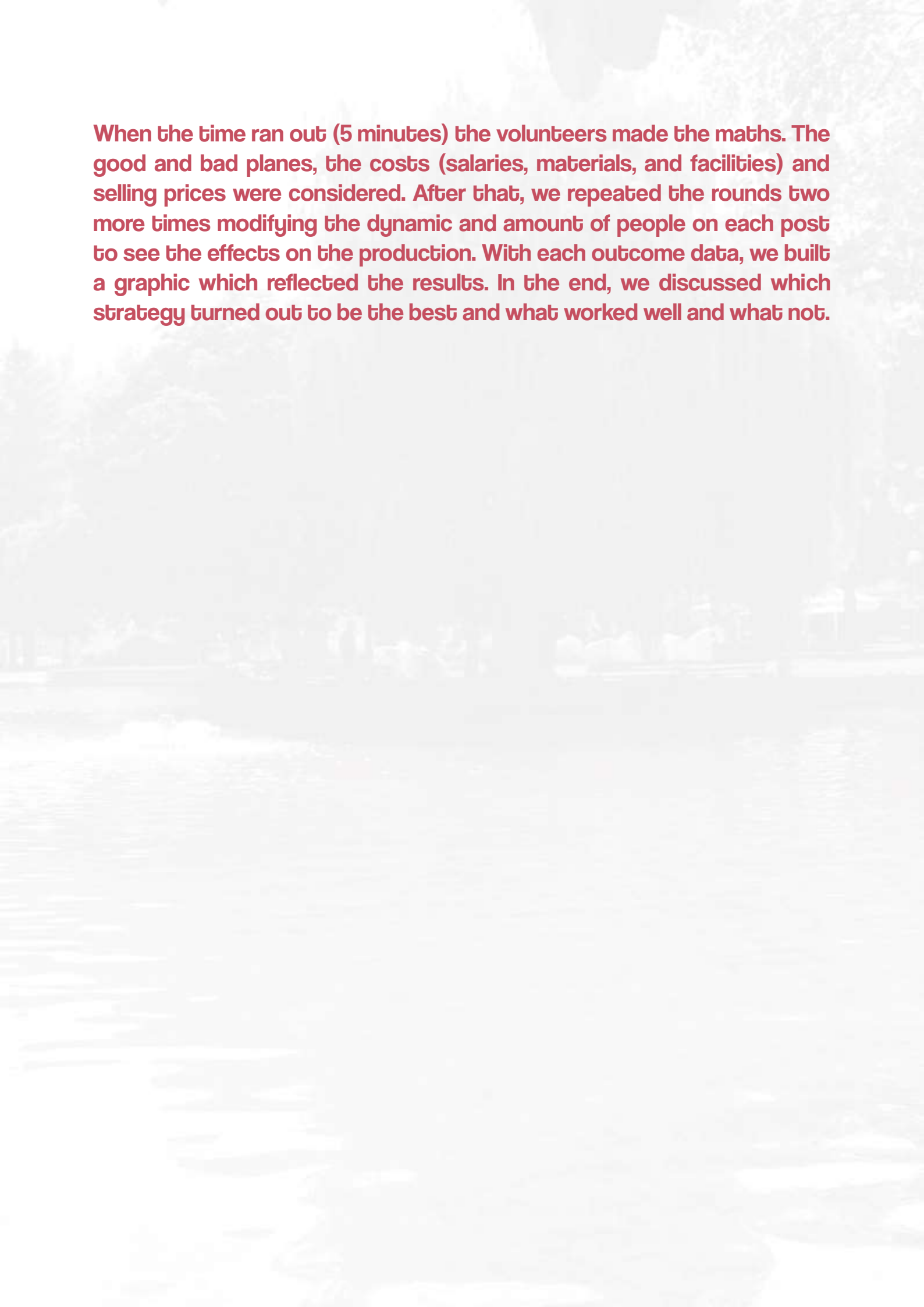
YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP

We visited the Vocational High School of Transport in the town of Razlog to promote volunteering among young people. We presented the students the available opportunities within the Erasmus + Programme and the European Solidarity Corps. The headmistress asked us to organize a couple of activities for students to help them learn some economic concepts through non-formal education. So, we prepared two activities for two different classes, grades, and target groups.

With the 8th grade we carried out “Micropolis”. It is a simplified society recreation in which real-life situations were simulated and economy was the main focus. We tried to reflect how the economy moves so each student was assigned a job such as a doctor, a police officer, a bank servant, etc. and asked them to role play accordingly. Students had to work to earn money and then spend it. Over time some trade deals were executed and after a while we asked everyone to stop. To sum up we had a little discussion. We talked about how the game went, we highlighted the monetary cycle that had been going on and asked about what they found hard to do and what they would like to change.

In the 12th grade, we did something similar. In this case, we simulated an airplane company and students had to perform chain work and build as many qualified paper planes as possible, trying to not lose money.

Students were divided in groups and took care of manufacturing, design and quality control posts respectively. First, the designing team created a paper plane model (with the badges of the company). Then the manufacturing post made the planes following that model. The designing team decorated the planes as the set model and all planes that the factory released passed a flying and design quality control; the good ones were saved apart and the malfunctioning ones were recycled or discarded (as per the decision of the quality team).



When the time ran out (5 minutes) the volunteers made the maths. The good and bad planes, the costs (salaries, materials, and facilities) and selling prices were considered. After that, we repeated the rounds two more times modifying the dynamic and amount of people on each post to see the effects on the production. With each outcome data, we built a graphic which reflected the results. In the end, we discussed which strategy turned out to be the best and what worked well and what not.

JOB MARKET

We received an invitation from the Vocational High School of Tourism and Food Technologies “Nikola Stoychev” in Razlog. This time the visit was about sharing with the students our personal experiences and preparing them for the job market. It was expected to be interesting for the students to meet young people who had recently gone through the future decision making and different selection processes to find a job. We wanted to support them to the maximum extent by guiding them through the process they were about to go through. Thus, we gave details about us, the steps we had made and at the same time we promoted the opportunities Erasmus + provides to young people. We also explained the application processes step by step. We also guided the students through the keys to execute a well-founded CV and motivational letters and all kinds of tricks to pass job interviews. The session was successful. Students attended with great interest what was reflected in the final discussions.

ECO WORKSHOP

The volunteers from the Community of Open Learners (COOL) project had many diverse interests and creative ideas also in the field of ecology. Therefore, they sought to inform as many people as possible about environmental problems and how to prevent them from occurring.

Hanna Vasilenka from Belarus organized an eco-workshop in the office of International Initiatives for Cooperation. She showed the young people how to make a purse from empty milk cans and plastic bags. It was interesting, fun, and practical.



Eco Wallet

Skills developed: Creativity, eye-hand coordination skills

Number of participants: As much as the materials allowed

Age of participants: 9-99

Material needed: Tetra pack, colored tape, stapler, paint or stickers to decorate, papers, scissors, glue, velcro.

Description:

- 1.Cut the upper and lower parts of the tetra pack. If you want to paste a paper to decorate it, do it now.**
- 2.Fold on the sides.**
- 3.At one end, cut the tongue that will close the wallet.**
- 4.Put the tape on the edges.**
- 5.Fold in half.**
- 6.Staple the halves together to make the pockets**
- 7.Glue / staple the velcro on the tongue to make the closure.**
- 8.Decorate**

HATE SPEECH

We decided to organize a workshop to raise awareness about hate speech, its risks, and the way to combat it both individually and collectively. We carried out three half-day training sessions to which the youth of Razlog was invited.

They started working with identity. An identity is who a person is or the qualities of a person or group that make them different from the others. To begin, volunteers prepared an exercise that helped each participant define their identity. They understood that individuals have multiple identity affiliations and that we are always at the intersection of multiple identities.

Finally, they were asked to think about and share cases when one (or more) of their identity dimension(s) had been hurt or attacked.

A brainstorming exercise on hate speech was organised. The participants were asked to draft their own definition of hate speech based on the results from the brainstorming. Existing definitions of hate speech and some examples were presented.

“Hate speech, as defined by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, covers all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, antisemitism, or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, as well as discrimination and hostility against minorities, migrants, and people of immigrant origins”



Hate speech is based on negative narratives, stereotypes, prejudices, discrimination, perceptions, beliefs, values, social issues, and conflicts. Moreover, these narratives often remain unchallenged, either because they have become commonplace, or because they are delivered in sophisticated ways. Students get acquainted with hate speech and its manifestation, but our common task was to make them recognise hate speech and find alternative and creative ways to combat it.

Nevertheless, counter, and alternative narratives combat hate speech by discrediting and deconstructing the narratives on which they are based. Thus, they are powerful tools to change and undermine hateful or extremist narratives and reinforce human rights-based narratives. They do so by challenging negative stereotypes, by discrediting violent messages, for example, through humour or other methods to show that another interpretation of reality exists. Hence, participants were asked to act and think about (alternative) narratives based on human rights and democratic values, such as openness, respect for difference, freedom, and equality.

Volunteers and the IIC team were delighted by the outcomes and results of the sessions. Young people had perfectly understood the purpose of the workshop and had applied their gained skills and knowledge in the final task - a role play, by providing alternative and accurate information, using humour and appealing to emotions on the issues involved, and accounting for different perspectives and views.

CLEANING KATARINO

On July 20th, 2018, kids from the community of Razlog took part in an environmentally friendly event. The activity was organised by the IIC team the volunteers. After a 45-minutes' walk through Razlog hills, we arrived at "Saint Katerina" church. We found a very dirty place full of plastic, cigarettes, glasses, and other kinds of rubbish.

Everyone participated in cleaning up this great place. Thanks to our positive energy to protect and save nature, we managed to fill up many bags of garbage.

To prepare for this activity, children drew on cardboards and wrote in English and in Bulgarian slogans such as "Save the planet", "Respect nature" "We live on the same planet". Their creations were then hung up around the "Saint Katerina" church area to awaken people's consciousness about our action on keeping this place clean. Slogans are still available and can be seen even today. The place is still clean. That is a signal that our action was very successful.





HALLOWEEN

From the 24 to the 31 of October 2018, our team organized and hosted a Halloween week. We facilitated crafting workshops, made a movie projection, organized a horror walk and ended the week with a nice party for the kids of Razlog.

The programme of this week was filled with emotions and creativity.

24 October 2019: Costumes and decorations crafting

25 October 2019: Costumes and decorations crafting

26 October 2019: Pumpkin carving

29 October 2019: Horror movie

30 October 2019: Horror walk and Halloween party

Improving creativity skills:

During this week, volunteers and kids challenged their creativity skills. We managed to craft all the decorations we needed for the office and we carved amazing pumpkins with the kids.

For the next years to come, all of us in the office and the kids will be able to rely on their abilities to craft and carve and then be a master of Halloween preparation wherever they will be.

This movie night was a way to entertain the kids the day before the party and a way to entertain the volunteers by scaring the hell out of the kids. This animated film is more fun than scaring. It is perfect to project to kids at the age of 10. It makes them laugh and a little anxious, but it doesn't freak them out.

Involving the kids to prepare their own party:

According to the spirit of non-formal education, we wanted to include the kids in the creative process of their own party and to empower them. Generally, we had around 10 kids and their parents during the workshops. Then, due to that participation, the mouth to ears method worked pretty well and we welcomed at least 20 kids for the final event : horror walk and party !

Great personal investment from the volunteers :

Beside their general work, volunteers invested a great amount of time and energy. Face painting, recycled decoration of every kind, pumpkin carving, planning of a horror movie and planning of a horror walk and a party. For one week, the office was in a Halloween mood. Everyone helped according to his/her skills.





INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEER DAY

For another year on 5 December 2018, “International Initiative for Cooperation” (IIC), celebrated the International Volunteer Day. This year the event was hosted by the Library in Razlog. What better place than the home of books and knowledge to gather volunteers of different ages, cultures, and social backgrounds. The event lasted for three hours and we had the pleasure to work with over 80 young people from Razlog. The door of non-formal education was open to them, now they had to decide whether they would go as Alice in Wonderland...“to come in and look”.



Presentations were prepared and delivered. It was explained that volunteerism is not a whim, but a devotion and people should really want to do this job without expecting anything in return. In addition, through these activities, the volunteer acquires a variety of skills and knowledge which would be useful for the rest of their lives. The main objectives of Erasmus + Programme and the European Solidarity Corps were shared.



The IIC team provided a variety of information about what it was like to volunteer in Razlog. They talked about the cultural differences they encountered in this town. All of them fell in love with Razlog - its nature, food, traditions. You could understand from the conversations of our volunteers that living here and volunteering here, in all respects, is a very different enriching experience.

Various workshops were organized. Artistic activities that would attract guests and intercultural experience workshops were held by the IIC team and our volunteers from different countries. Volunteers prepared for diverse workshops. We wanted our guests to spend this special day in a way they would not forget. Everyone was happy to be there as the events went through in an interactive way. This beautiful event ended with traditional folk dances. Folk dances were played with our young people covering the whole area.





BEE HOTEL

On 28th of May 2019 our volunteers implemented the “Be(e) Aware” workshop at “Yane Sandanski” Primary School.

The workshop informed the students about the bees, their importance for the environment and economy and the issues that cause the death of bees. All information was prepared and presented in an attractive and very understandable way by the volunteer Janina Makrutzki from Germany, who has been the leading figure in planning and implementation of the workshop.

After the informative part of the workshop followed the praxis. All students got to know how they can create out of bamboo and paper their own bee hotels.



At the end, after they crafted their own tiny bee house, they joined them to make a whole hotel complex for bees.





HOW TO DO IT:

Material

Version 1:

1 large metal can, cleaned

Bamboos

Saw

Sanding paper

Description:

Fill the can with bamboo sticks. The bamboo should not be able to fall out of the can.

Cut all the stalks into the length of the can. Sand the ends until they get smooth.

Your new bee hotel should be installed in a windproof place which faces into the direction of the south.

Version 2:

Large firewood, dry not freshly chopped

Drilling machine

Description:

Drill holes (between 3 to 8 mm) into the horizontal timber and sand the edges until they are smooth.

The best place to put your new hostel is a windproof place which faces into the direction of the south.

Bees are hungry too!

To provide insects with food is easier than you might think. Just plant some herbs like Rosemary, Thyme, Peppermint or Salbei on your balcony. You will always have some healthy fresh herbs around and your bees can eat as much as they can.

INTERCULTURAL DAY IN A PRIMARY SCHOOL

“ST.ST. KIRIL I METODII”

In June 2019, the volunteers visited “St.St. Kiril i Metodii” Primary School in Razlog to present to the school children their cultures through stories. Each volunteer shared a bit about their culture and a traditional fairy tale from their childhood. The kids had the opportunity to meet volunteers from Jordan, Portugal, Italy, Turkey, and Spain. The stories were told with a video to make it more interesting for the children. They recognized some of the characters because they knew the stories. As a reward, the children danced and sang especially for the volunteers. At the end, all of the kids received an attendance certificate for their participation in an activity as part of the Summer Youth Academy this week.



FAIRY TALES AROUND THE WORLD IN KINDERGARTEN

In February 2020, our volunteers, one from each country, went to Kindergarten to present fairy tales from their home country. The goal was to introduce to the children famous characters from their folklore through an intercultural session in which they heard stories told by our volunteers in their native language, so that they hear other languages and open their minds. The countries of origin of the participating volunteers were Spain, Italy, Germany, Turkey, and Portugal. The stories were as follows:

The Turkish fairy tale called "Nasreddenin hodja ye küküm ye" ("Nasreddenim Hodzha Eat My Fur Coat Eat"). It was surprising for the kids and all the Bulgarians to find out that the same character exists in the Bulgarian children's stories.

The lesser-known German fairy tale "Frau Holle" ("Mother Hulda").

The Spanish fairy tale "Platero y yo" ("Platero and I") by Juan Ramón Jiménez. It tells the story of the Platero donkey and its owner. The writer based the story on memories of his childhood in Andalusia.

"História da Carochinha" ("The story of the beetle") was the Portuguese story.

The Italian fairy tale was the famous "Pinocchio".

Accompanying the story, a video was put up with images related to the story so that the children could follow the story. And at the end they heard a summary of the stories in Bulgarian.



Team buildings and training activities



TEAM BUILDING AT THE YAVOROV HUT

On November 25, 2018, the IIC team organised team building activities for all the team (organisers and volunteers) at Yavorov hut. We walked together from the foot of the mountain till the Yavorov hut. It tooks around 2.30 hours. Once there we started to prepare our lunch, we cooked BBQ, salads, and some typical “meze” dishes for the mountain. We chopped wood as well and started the fire. For some volunteers it was the first-time cutting wood.

After lunch as part of the team building, we cleaned the area, even the terrain where the other visitors of the hut were using and raised awareness of the importance of taking care of our nature and environment.

We played many games altogether and creativity and love were in the air.



TEAM BUILDING VELINGRAD

On September 13, 2019, the IIC team organized a team building activity for the volunteers and for the team. The volunteers didn't know where and what they were going to go, just that they had to be at the train station at 6 a.m. It was still dark when we got on the train to go to Septemvri. The moment that we were off, curiosity substituted the sleepiness. Everybody was ready for the adventures to come.

During the trip, the IIC team explained to the volunteers that the Task of the activity is...

- To speak to locals and find out what they like about Bulgaria
- To find out which places in Velingrad we should visit
- To find information about the myth surrounding the creation of the Rhodope mountains.

To implement the task the volunteers were divided into 2 groups - Happy Unicorns and Pink Butterflies. They had to record the response of the people and then prepare a promotional video for each team.

One of the motivations for the volunteers to prepare the best material was that the winning team would be rewarded 3 free days to use it whenever they wanted.

The trip was not only educational, but also a lot of fun. The volunteers learned a lot about the different places of interest in Velingrad and a bit of the town's history.

If you visit our YouTube Channel, you can enjoy watching the video of the two teams - Happy Unicorns and Pink Butterflies.



COMMUNICATION WORKSHOP

In August 2018 IIC team organized a communication workshop for all the volunteers present in the organization and for some of the youngsters who expressed their motivation to participate. Communication is the basis for better understanding of personal and cultural values. It is very often that some silent or visible conflicts appear among people from different cultures coexisting together. In order to prevent those conflicts and to propose a way to manage them effectively when they appear, IIC team decided to deliver a workshop on communication. Getting your message across clearly and coherent is a critical skill in volunteers' professional and personal life. Volunteers learned to be better communicators by exploring the communication process. They also started appreciating the art of conversation through the role of speaker, listener, and observer. We discussed the way to create the best possible climate for communicating through empathy, asking the right questions, and understanding the person's viewpoint. Non-verbal communication and feedback are also an important part of the process. Apart from being such fun, the workshop was also very informative and beneficial for all the participants. The effect of the workshop could be noticed during the next days in the way they were communicating and cooperating together.



EXPLORING BULGARIA

In this section we present some of the trips that the volunteers have undertaken to explore the region and the country. Their stories express their impressions and emotions from the experience. The trips used to make the volunteers closer as they shared the time, the food, the accommodations, and the challenges that appeared on the way.

Bachevo:

We went to Bachevo to spend the day hiking. Bachevo is a village next to Razlog and it is famous for the horse stables and farms. Although we did not want to ride a horse, we went to explore the nature of the area. We walked from one farm to another, we visited the horses and more, we bathed in the freezing water of the river and, as we were not were not tired enough, we decided to continue and walk to Razlog. We ended up exhausted, but it was worthy as we visited the wonderful nature that is literally 3 minutes from home.



Damianitza hut:

We asked Kostadinka to show us some Bulgarian wonder on the weekend and she did. She picked us up early in the morning and we drove to the Bansko hillside. We hiked until we reached a nine-meter high waterfall and still with energy we continued to the hut. Up in the hut we improvised a picnic with everyone's lunches and once recovered, we went back down.

We passed by corners worthy of fairy tales, we enjoyed nature and the changing weather, and we tasted the Bulgarian fauna. As always, we asked millions of questions not to miss any local secret, history or custom. We all had a good time and although we were very grateful, I am pretty sure our guides still do not know how significant the expedition was for us.



Vihren/Kutelo/Koncheto:

Upon our arrival in Bulgaria, in the month of August, we really wanted to discover what this country could offer us. Thus, we decided to start with the Pirin mountains, since we are very close to it. We were lucky because Kostadinka had planned to go on the same day as us, and in this way, we set off together. We start the climb very early, from Vihren Hut and with a lot of energy we reach the top of the mountain at lunchtime. Along the way we enjoyed a spectacular landscape.

We headed for Kutelo Peak, when something unexpected happened to us: our partner Aitor broke his boots, first one sole was completely detached, and later the other, which prevented him from being able to walk well. We tried to fix them with bandages and laces, and he was able to continue the route with them.

At the beginning we were really worried about Aitor and scared how he would walk the way with broken shoes, but after being able to cross the difficult stretch of the Koncheto, it became a fun anecdote. The route was of medium difficulty, although in this part of Koncheto we had some vertigo and fear, but it was worth it, there were some very beautiful views. Half of the way we finished our water. We walked almost 4 hours under the hot sun without a drop of water. At around 7 p.m. we reached Yavorov Hut.

Finally, what we thought was going to be about 5 hours of route, became almost 12 hours walking up the mountain. We ended up exhausted, but we really enjoyed what the day gave us. It was an unforgettable experience.

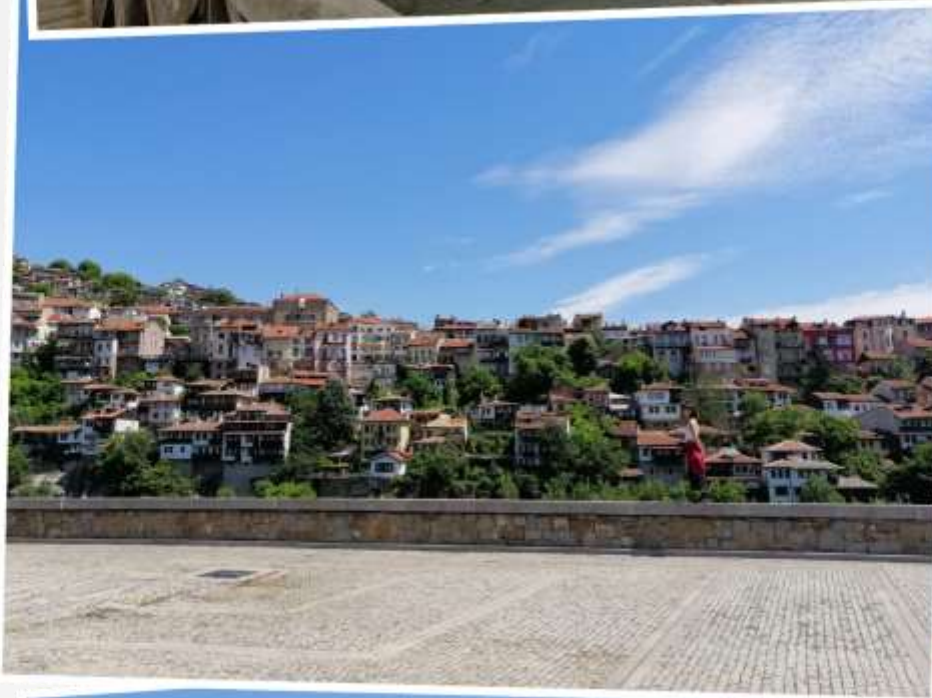


Veliko Tarnovo:

We went to Veliko Tarnovo to spend the weekend. We were told it was the most beautiful place in Bulgaria. As it was the capital of the second Bulgarian state from 1187-1393 and we thought it was a great opportunity to learn more about the Bulgarian culture as well. Veliko Tarnovo is just 221 km far from Razlog. We needed 3.5-4 hours to arrive by bus from Sofia. Before leaving, we asked Kostadinka and David for some information. Thus, we knew exactly where to go and what to see. There are many places in the city such as the Asen monument, Samovodska Charshia and its churches of different dates.

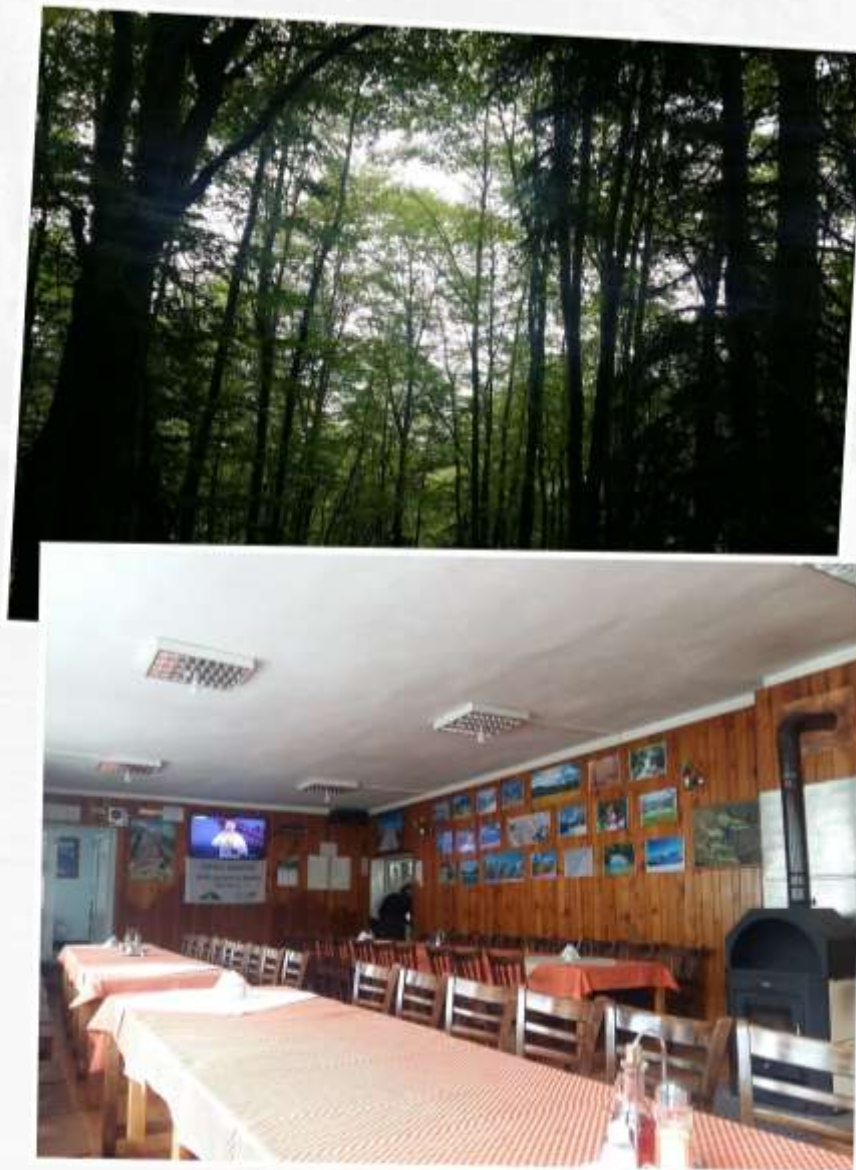
What impressed us the most was the magnificent castle rising on the hill of Tsarevets. The castle, which welcomes tourists in the morning, is famous for its light show in the evening. We watched the light show from a very nice place hidden in the mountain from where we had a magnificent view for free but we were not able to hear the music. The next day we decided to visit the castle and enjoy the old town. We loved the old streets so much!

We also turned our route to Arbanasi, which is 4 km from Veliko Tarnovo. We tried to hitchhike. But it was a catastrophe! Nobody stopped so we went all the way on foot. We did not even like Arbanasi. Probably because of our bad mood but we did not enjoy it. Despite this, we were glad we went. We had a lot of fun now when we remember!!



Yavorov Hut:

We went for a long walk among pine trees, where we found a lot of different animals at each step. The air was clear and pure, and our lungs filled with oxygen. Who would say that nature could be that beautiful? We were exhausted because of the steep hills so we rested every 10 minutes till we arrived at Yavorov Hut. This place is in the Northern Pirin, 8 km from Razlog. This Hut is considered one of the best in Bulgaria. We had a very nice day from which, again, we have very good memories.



PICKING APPLES AND GRAPES:

It has become a tradition for the IIC team to pick up grapes and apples in August and September in the region of Melnik and Sandanski every year. Different producers host us every year and provide us the opportunity to enjoy the tradition of picking up the crop, share time with locals, taste the fruits and the production from the previous years like home-made wine, rakia, juice and jam. After the day of picking up the crop, the next tradition is to explore the area – visit a place of interest like Melnik and its wineries, the Rozhen Monastery, the natural formations of Melnik pyramids, the central park of Sandanski or the locality of Rupite. All depend on the time that we have and the interest of the volunteers. And of course, the third tradition is to taste the local food in a typical restaurant. Those days are full of colours, smells, tastes, and emotions.



Trahana (Traen) Workshop

As the Bulgarians say, “Culture goes through the stomach”. In order to understand the culture, the mentality and the traditions in each region, it is important to explore the food and the eating habits. We organized for the volunteers a workshop for cooking trahana or traen as known in Razlog. Trahana is a local type of pasta cooked in milk or with meat and leek. It is a delicious and filthy breakfast dish for the winter days. The volunteers under the guidance of a local lady prepared 10 kg of trahana. First, they had to dry it and then cook it in the winter, but the preparation is done in the summer months. Local recipes were shared with the volunteers.

The IIC team also showed the volunteers how to cook basic Bulgarian dishes like banitsa and sandwiches- fast to prepare but tasty.



VOLUNTEERS AND THE IMPACT ON THEM

The impact that the project had on the volunteers' development was tremendous. It's a life-changing experience that could be lived in a multicultural, multiethnic and multidimensional context that provokes all their potential to thrive and boost for the purpose of improving the social environment.

The adaptive skills of volunteers have been improved. The knowledge of volunteers to work with various software products, programs, information sources in the field of community work and promotion have been acquired and enriched. Their communication skills improved a lot - both in their native language and in foreign languages. Their understanding of the importance and the meaning of non-verbal communication also improved a lot. They started being able to break down and overcome the language and communication barriers that prevented them building strong relations within the team and with the locals. Volunteers learned how to sustain the intercultural dialogue and thus to expand their perceptions of the world. Living and working together they became more tolerant, flexible and adaptive to any context or situation. They learned how to work in a context and reality which is different from the ones they know and at the same time to achieve sustainable results. They worked with diverse target groups and adopted methods and approaches on how to manage them. Most of the activities were based on using non-formal education as a means for personal and professional development and realisation. The volunteers managed to acquire a wide range of skills and instruments for planning and implementing a non-formal educational process among different target groups. Those skills would serve them in performing better in the workplace and developing their personal capacity. The work required also a lot of creativity and innovation to attract and keep the attention of kids, youngsters, adults and elderly and everytime the approach had to be tailor-made and personalised. A very important set of skills that the volunteers developed was to work with people with disabilities and to respect and appreciate their feelings and behaviour. That opened a new window through which they could see the world differently. The activities required that the volunteers had to take decisions, manage misunderstandings and conflict, manage time and develop team building skills by taking different roles in the team depending on the situation.

Alex Pérez:

I was looking forward to knowing the Bulgarian culture and working with its people.

Simon Schwab:

After finishing school, I joined the project to get new experiences and learn about the other cultures.

Maisam Ibdah:

What I consider most precious about my volunteering is the opportunity to experience and learn new things both about myself and the world around me and the chance to meet people from different backgrounds, and experiences.

Leyla Miralayeve:

The main reason for participating in the EVS project and coming to Bulgaria is to discover different cultures, lives and improve myself from different aspects...

Marlene Fritz:

Volunteering for IIC in Bulgaria after graduating school is the perfect opportunity for me to learn about myself and the people around me. Here I can meet a variety of people, visit new places and experience a different culture.

Claudia Pecoraro:

During my EVS in Bulgaria, I expect to learn as much as I can, gain new human and professional skills and help the local community.

Alex Moreno:

I came to Razlog to try volunteering because it was a culture that I liked and I wanted to try a new and different experience.

Hanna Hettinger:

After my graduation from school I wanted to go to another country to do a year of volunteering and to get to know another culture and new people, because I didn't know anything about this country and people.

Aitor Lobo:

Last year I had my first experience as a volunteer and I liked it so much that when I had the opportunity, I joined IIC to continue doing what I like most while I feel helpful with society.

Yesim Meleksah:

The biggest reason to be a volunteer was that I was closely following the activities of the organization.

Andrii Kapitanchuk:

I believe that I can make life around a little better, and the emotions that could be received in return are the best reward. It seems that one person cannot change much. But if we add up the minimum contribution of each volunteer who is involved in the project, the result is a great deal that we did for the small town of Razlog.

Raphaelle Kharoubi:

I chose this EVS project because it was related to education. I was also interested because of working with different people: kids, disabled people, adults, teenagers ...

Also I chose the project more than the city to be honest. But afterwards, I highly recommend the young people to volunteer in a small community rather than in a big city!

Our Volunteers:



**PIERRE-YVES
FRANCE**



**IVANA PILIŽOTA
CROATIA**



**RAPHAËLLE KHAROUBI
FRANCE**



**ANDRII KAPITANCHUK
UKRAINE**



**TAMUNA KHIKASHVILI
GEORGIA**



**HANNA HETTINGER
GERMANY**



**JANINA MAKRUTZKI
GERMANY**



**TAMARA SÁNCHEZ
SPAIN**



**ILAHA SALAMOVA
AZERBEIDJAN**



**HANNA VASILENKO
BELARUS**



**SIMON SCHWAB
GERMANY**



**FRANCESCA GNESUTTA
ITALY**



ALEX PÉREZ
SPAIN



LEYLA MIRALAYEVA
AZERBEIDJAN



DIMA NUSTAS
JORDAN



MAISAM IBDAH
JORDAN



CLAUDIA PECORARO
ITALY



YESIM MELEKSAH
TURKEY



DANIEL QUENTAL
PORTUGAL



ÁLVARO RUFINO
SPAIN



AITOR LOBO
SPAIN



MARLENE FRITZ
GERMANY



ALEX MORENO
SPAIN



Georgia

http://www.syc.ge/?fbclid=IwAR1Qro9Sqzz-l-hNbn1MI0f_9IbrucoCcGwBmZXcWMTtTR4uSICqHWJEJpE



Germany

<https://www.jugendwerk24.de/>



Turkey

<http://www.dogalyasamdernegi.org/tr/>



Portugal

<https://www.proatlantico.com/?fbclid=IwAR1kg3dpq3mBnoeopohjkiYP61MI-UCSa4mRUJxaZSBzE7yo-w88aQdldjE>



Croatia

<http://europski-dom-sb.hr/>



Spain

<https://www.facebook.com/IICL-International-Initiatives-for-Cooperation-Letur-195517967475242/>



Ukraine

<https://ngo-stella.org/>



Jordan

<http://www.youthspirit.net/>



France

<https://www.brest.fr/>



Belarus

<https://fialta.org/>



Azerbaijan

<http://csyo-az.org/>



Italy

<https://www.you-net.eu/>