

Participant's point of view



An active discovery of EVS

Tuesday morning, I am running to catch the metro and the mobile rang. I answer and this is Faïza from Avicenne, my organisation announcing me that I have been accepted to attend the SALTO Youth EuroMedTraining Course held in Venice! "Great!", my response is. "Fabulous!!", I should have said now that I know what the Training Course was like.

Less than two weeks later, I landed in Venice and spent a week with 25 participants representing 16 nationalities on the whole.

Hadn't Venice started this way? With hordes of people landing and settling in different areas of the "Serenissima" whose renowned grandeur is celebrated in more than one instance? One only needs to go for an "active discovery" through the Calli and the Campi fairly named after their first settlers... and he/she can take a guess!!

As a formal language teacher within an academic institution and a non-formal educator inside AVICENNE, being fed by a multilingual culture, I am building up a strong belief that languages are an open window to the larger world. They express our thoughts and feelings, mirror our ways and habits and convey strong evidences about who we are and where we belong. When treasured in books and stored in different material that resist time, they are meant to tell our offsprings how great people we were and how strong we believe it important for them to know it! The culture we live and dwell in daily is the civilisation we build even though no clear and conscious choice is made. In this respect I consider that languages can give those who master them a better insight into the specificities of the components that make the larger human civilisation.

To learn/ teach languages does not only concern transferring a better knowledge about them. It is a matter also of raising awareness about the diversity that surrounds us. Instead of a forlorn will to delete differences and break frontiers, we should help effectively stepping into them. In terms of education today, this constitutes a basic issue. In terms of youth policies across Europe and around it, EVS is a way to open larger opportunities for youth mobility to be as much useful as successful in a world of overlapping frontiers.



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And this is partly what the training course was about. One of its basic objectives was to "reflect on the influence of civilisation in the educational systems and on the necessary conditions for implementing a qualitative voluntary service project (Action 2) within the Euro-Mediterranean co-operation." (SALTO) During eight full and intensive days, we went through a rich and diversified programme. We produced testimonies about the respective educative systems in our countries, tried to sum up our civilisation in one single and "carriable" object - albeit the huge definition the word civilisation itself entails!! - shared thoughts, obtained clarifications about mat-



ters and issues that permitted our gathering. The link that threaded all along these days was that the EVS would be an instance of how a volunteer can indulge into a culture that is not his, and feel comfortable in both environments, provided that he/she is granted the support and regular company of reliable partners from both sides. Whether the learning experience, that stemmed from it, is suc-

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successful or not is another issue. While simulating an EVS project, we understood clearly how vital communication, reliability and task identification are.

This is part of the technical knowledge I gained from the training course. On a larger scheme, I discovered the new provisions of widening perspectives set by the agenda of the "Youth in Action" programme 2007-2013.

On a personal level, it was the opportunity for me to learn how to be part of a (new) group, to integrate in the various dynamics offered through the workshops, to pay sheer attention to the enormous diversity we dived in and feel most comprehensive towards it.

The methodology that allowed a smooth progression into the content of the training course was one that put emphasis on and stressed interaction, commitment and participation.

How can it be possible to head for a laguna in anything else than a boat?

Upon arrival then, we were asked to build our own boat, be as much creative as permitted using all available material. Yet, had we known the purpose behind the task, we could have managed to produce safer wrecks!

The daily reflection we were required to make through moving the boats inside the blue seas of the laguna was a means for me as for each participant to spot the evolution through the programme settled and evaluate how close we were or felt to be. Plus, it reminded us that instead of leaving the boat stuck in the middle of the laguna or wreck-like underneath it, a



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safe harbour was always provided through clear and firm instructions from the trainers' team.

The training course supplied me with a complementary understanding of how "good practices" can and should be transferred from/to all educative situations. It strengthened my conviction about the necessity to disseminate them and open as large as possible the frontiers existing between various learning experiences.

Regarding the impact on my understanding of the EVS and at a larger scale the Euromed Youth programme, the training course could not fit better in the agenda. As upon my return, I had to prepare a group of volunteers to an Action 1 project taking place in Crete about "Mass media and European democra-

cy". I endeavoured to abide as much as it was possible to me by the basic recommendations I came up with at the end of the training course. I felt more confident and sure about the group commitment to the tasks once these latter were clearly defined and entrusted.

I was able to top up the list of potential partners eager to conduct effective and immediate partnerships with my organisation. On the local level, I came up with fundamental guidelines concerning a portfolio we are planning to realise within Avicenne containing some basic rules and recommendations dedicated to a less-experienced youth public embarking in the "large seas" of Euromed.

As an immediate retrospective, less narrative than reflective, this article was meant to give an overview of the event stressing on its outcome. The diversity of our cultural, linguistic, geographical and social backgrounds is something we are in dire need of celebrating. A good quality EVS is more than an opportunity to highlight the positive dimension of such richness. Implementing it properly will help go beyond individual and space limits.



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