

# GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESS

This e-booklet is a product of Erasmus+ youth exchange “Gross National Happiness”, which took place in Kaunas, Lithuania on 7-13 May, 2016. Six countries were participating with each sending six participants. The e-booklet focuses on the topic of happiness in education. It is based on the ideas and real life experience of participants and the organisers of the said youth exchange.

E-booklet on  
happiness in  
education



Erasmus+

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Please note that the contents of this e-booklet represents only the views of its authors (see last section) and not those of the European Commission, Erasmus+ or related European bodies/institutions.

## Introduction

Erasmus+ youth exchange **Gross National Happiness** (acronym GNH) took place in Kaunas, Lithuania on 7-13 May of 2016.

The project was aiming to promote alternative view to success measurement in personal life, education and society and governance. Our belief was that by paying more attention to happiness and quality of living, we could achieve much more than by rating everything in terms of revenues or by gains in gross domestic product (GDP).



## Inspiration

Such view was inspired by actual real world example in the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan. This tiny country since 1970s has adopted a system of a similar name as this project (Gross National Happiness – GNH). The idea was that income/economy is not the only goal and other factors should be considered while taking decisions. These include: 1) work-life balance; 2) nature/environment; 3) community links; 4) culture; 5) health & psychological wellbeing, etc. Read more about it here: <http://www.grossnationalhappiness.com/>.

We have also taken a lot of inspiration from education systems in Scandinavia (Denmark and Finland in particular). The countries top the global happiness ladder (<http://worldhappiness.report/>), as well as their students score the most in OECD's (Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development) standardised tests. For that reason, we have analysed their unique approach to schooling (Danish Hojskole for Denmark & no-homework for Finland) and discussed viable implementation elsewhere in the EU. The e-booklet focuses on the latter (see next section).

## Participants

There were 36 participants in total, coming from 6 different countries (Lithuania, Italy, Spain, Poland, UK and Bulgaria – 6 people each). It was a very diverse group of people, coming from a range of backgrounds. Such a sample contributed to the results (see below) of the project, as various views and opinions were included. After all, Erasmus+ youth exchanges are mostly about sharing knowledge with one another (trainers included).

## E-booklet

The main intention of this e-booklet is to provide insights on to how education could be more effective by focusing on students' happiness rather than hard studying. As stated in the introduction (see above), there are real-life examples, that indeed show the benefits of such approach. To give an all-around overview on it, the booklet relies on:

- The afore mentioned examples;
- Workshops created and delivered by the participants of GNH;

### Real-life examples: happiness in education

It is worth mentioning that there could be more and better examples than Danish hojskole (DH) (in English: folk high school). For instance, the whole education system of Finland is another case of alternative approach to teaching and studying. Yet, for simplicity, only the former will be looked at extensively.

From <http://www.danishfolkhighschools.com>:

*“Danish folk high schools offer non-formal adult education. Most students are between 18 and 24 years old and the length of a typical stay is 4 months. You sleep, eat, study and spend your spare time at the school. There are no academic requirements for admittance and there are no exams - but you will get a diploma as a proof of your attendance.”*

For those more involved with Erasmus+ programme and its key actions (KA) (especially, KA1 and KA3) (further referred to as E+), the definition of DH should look familiar (except for the fact that E+ duration is much shorter, ranging from 5 to 14 days on average). For those, who are not, the key elements of E+ are listed below:

- Non-formal education;
- Focus on interaction of participants;
- Trainer and trainees are at the same level;
- Activities involve everyone;
- No tests/exams;
- Education process matters, just as much as the results.

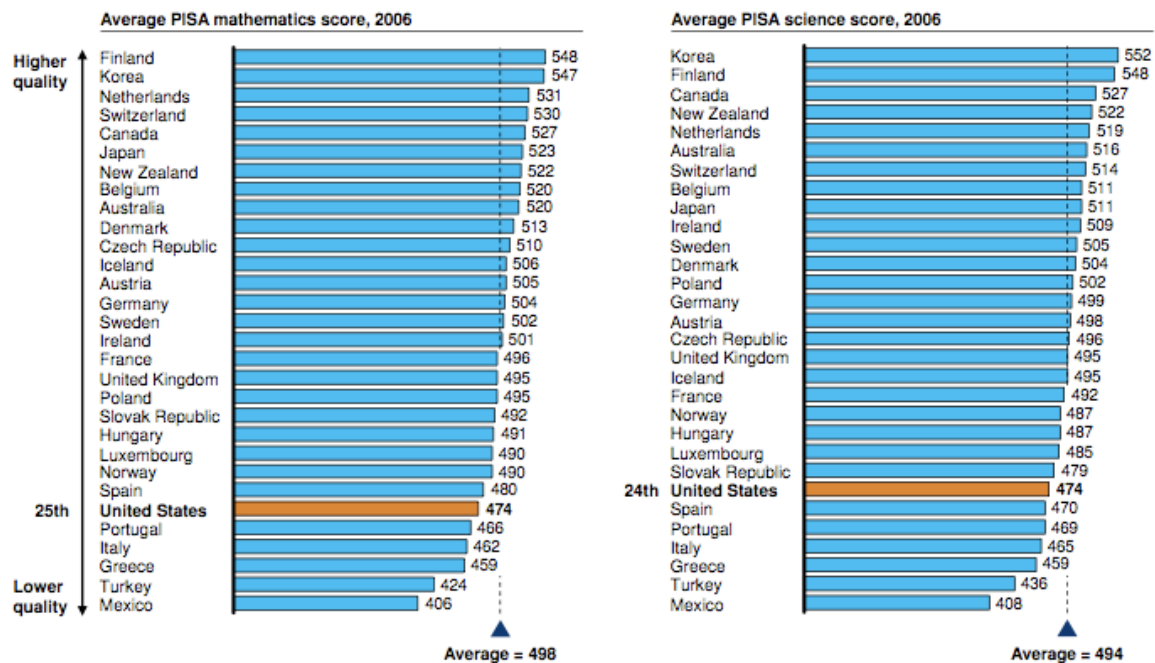
Such approach to education is in more general terms dubbed as non-formal education (NFE). It is clear that the whole idea of it is very different from what is usually seen in the classrooms around Europe. However, the results in real-life are evident. Finnish (who rely on NFE) vs American (or indeed any other European nation) PISA standardised tests (more here: <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/>) on science and maths results may be seen in the figure 1.

The graph clearly shows that NFE beats more standard education even in such hard subjects as maths and science. This allows to make the first conclusion:

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*NFE produces results that are similar or better than standard education. Furthermore, it is much less detrimental to students' happiness in the process.*

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Note: Results for OECD countries; OECD partner countries not included; differences may not be statistically significant.  
 Note: The United States scores relatively better on international tests in the early years (TIMSS) for fourth and eighth graders

SOURCE: OECD

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Figure 1: PISA standardised tests results

### GNH workshops

GNH was made a test ground for the idea that happiness is necessary in education. Of course, the participants have mutually agreed to that beforehand.

Firstly, they were briefed on DH and E+ and how they work. Afterwards, they were divided into five teams according to their interests/hobbies. The list of those are given below:

1. Singing / playing music
2. Quizzes
3. Filming / photography
4. Entertaining
5. Team sports / exercise
6. Meditating / yoga
7. Crafts (e.g. origami)
8. Painting / drawing
9. Dancing
10. Theatre
11. Performing magic (e.g. card tricks)
12. Politics / debating
13. Something else – open choice

Through a process of finding matching interests, 5 teams were created. Each consisted of 6-7 participants, representing at least 3 different countries. Gender balance was also monitored – with a requirement of at least two females or males per group.

These freshly created groups then were given two days to create workshops on their mutual hobby. The idea was that not only a lot could be learned by doing so, but also that this should

bring happiness to everyone involved. After all, the participants were making workshops/activities on things/topics they like.

The workshops created were as following:

- X-factor: workshop during which the participants were taught the basics of performing on the stage (more on it below);
- Quiz: activity with a number of different quizzes on the topic;
- Sports' day: workshop on how to make a fun and interesting competition (in style of Olympics) of sports for kids/youngsters;
- Salsa class: activity to learn how to dance basic salsa;
- Basic theatre: fun workshop for the participants to make a short play.

After all of these took place, the participants of the youth exchange were asked to evaluate the workshops and give their feedback on those. The best rated one was: X-factor. Therefore, we are providing more detailed accounts on that one in the section below. The description is based on the answers (to standard questions from the organisers) of the participants who created the workshop. This allows us to see their own perspective and how they felt about the activity.

*Please note that the answers and questions are not edited.*

#### X-factor workshop

##### **How did your team come up with the idea for workshop?**

we all had in common the passion for music and we wanted to create a healthy competition between the groups to push them to do their best.

##### **Please describe step by step what was done in the workshop, so that other can understand what it was:**

1. First of all, we taught people how to warm-up the most important things for a good performance: breathing, voice, facial muscles and body muscles;
2. Secondly we created groups and assigned a song to each group with some specific dance moves that they had to fill in the choreography;
3. In the end we gave the groups time to get ready with acting/singing/dancing and outfits and we had the competition in the same way as the real one: judges and audience and a lot of fun for everybody.

##### **What the others have learned from your workshop:**

Some of us are singers ourselves and we think we were able to transmit some knowledge on how singing and performing is different from what it seems. We taught them how to breathe properly with the diaphragm to be able to tone a note, exercises on how to warm up the vocal cords and how to stretch the facial muscles and some yoga poses to get the muscles ready to dance.

##### **What you have learned/felt during the creation phase and while giving the workshop:**

We were so excited to be able to share our biggest passion with strangers. It's been really fulfilling and really satisfying being them putting so much effort and create such great performances. Moreover, we could try ourselves as teachers and that was really amazing too.

**Do you think school children or youngsters in colleges should be give more voice when creating the curriculum? What are your thoughts – how should this be done?**

- We think it's necessary to discipline children as much as it's very important to leave their creativity flow and grow, especially if directed in the right way. In Italy there is not a chance to choose subjects until you are in university and this makes us dream about a school system where we can decide for ourselves, but at the same time we think it's very important to have some general knowledge also about the subjects you don't like or you are not good at.
- Yes, because at the end the curriculum must represent the personality of a student and if it's too stiff, it might become bothersome for the student.

**Would you like to add something about the topic (happiness in education)?**

Important role in happiness in education is the freedom given to students, which need to allow them to develop their mind and allow the imagination and creativity make their lives better.

**Your thoughts on the youth exchange?**

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*The project was so good that I wouldn't change a thing. Thank you so much for everything!!! :)*

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Figure 2: participants of GNH

## Results

Even though the project action has ended, result dissemination continues. The press-releases both in Lithuanian and English have been already shared on numerous sources:

- <http://activeyouth.lt/en/2016/05/24/gross-national-happiness-erasmus/>
- Lithuanian: <http://activeyouth.lt/2016/07/29/bendrasis-valstybes-laimes-indeksas-kas-tai/>

Various videos and other material on happiness in individuals, education and societies, as well as innovative solutions to boost these can be found in the project's webpage:

<http://activeyouth.lt/en/gross-national-happiness/>.

However, the biggest impact of the project is felt on the participants and partner organisations:

1) Project photos (especially, the [photo-wall](#)) created were shared or are/have been used as their profile pictures on social networks (some using the official hashtag of the project: #B.L.U.P.I.S. (meaning Bulgaria, Lithuania, United Kingdom, Poland, Italy, Spain); 2) Facebook chat and [group](#) created during the action is still alive and full of ideas for further work. To show that the project was inspirational and incentivised the youth to work for its goals, selected quotes of the participants are provided below:

*“Yes it was nice. I liked it a lot. You can lead people and be a person who will change something in their thinking. I like that I could make people happier.”*

*“I had awesome time in my workshop, I felt so good to be able to make people happy and teach them a little of the thing I love”*

### Project evaluation

The increase of participating youngsters' knowledge on the topic was a key objective of the youth exchange. At the same time, it was necessary to ensure that they are enjoying the process. This way it was expected that the results would be the best.

On the last day, the participants were asked (among other things) to anonymously grade (from 1 to 10) their satisfaction, fun, interest and gained knowledge. The result was outstanding and has shown an average grade of **8.96 out of 10**.

Such result is so far the best ever achieved by Asociacija “Aktyvus jaunimas” in any of its Erasmus+ actions, of which there were many (12 as of July, 2016). It is likely due to an alternative approach to learning – focusing on the participants' happiness. Surely, it was also achieved by a mix of good management and sensible activities of the project, *all of which may be found below*.

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*Result of GNH is so far the best ever achieved by Asociacija “Aktyvus jaunimas” in any of its Erasmus+ actions, of which there were many.*

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### Concept & schedule

In general, GNH had the following goals: 1a) **identify** what mostly contributes & what is the most detrimental to happiness and quality of life; 1b) **try** the Scandinavian approach to education; 2) **come up** with guidelines that best describe the 'good' and 'bad' individual

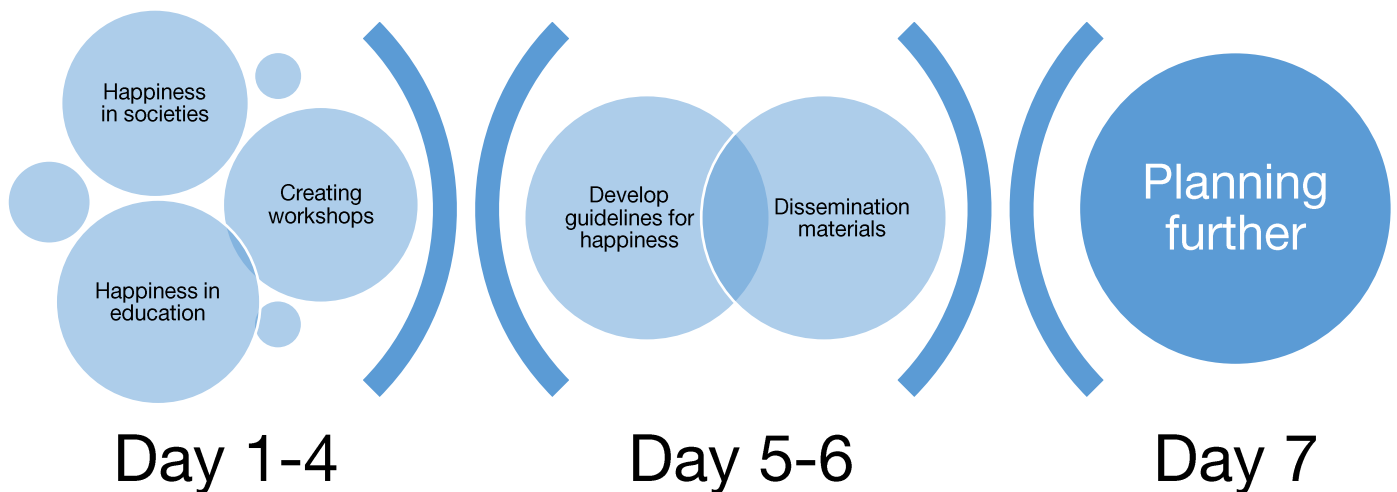


decisions or common policies; 3) **develop** an ‘impact-on-happiness’ measurement system for various decisions; 4) **promote** them further for the wider public across Europe.

To achieve these objectives, the action was divided into three parts:

- Day 1 through 4 – first two objectives (identify what contributes & what is detrimental to happiness, find out about happiness in societies & education); as well as creating workshops based on hobbies/interests (testing how happiness impacts education/results);
- Day 5 and 6 –develop guidelines for happiness; and subsequently, create dissemination materials for them (such as videos);
- Day 7 – closure

To get a better picture, an explanatory diagram and the project’s schedule are given below:



Youth exchange’s schedule (most of the activities may be found in the sub-section below)

#### Activities & Educational material

1. Teambuilding game, where one has to complete certain fun small tasks with different people;
2. The rules and list of topics for discussions in non-formal environment (World Café method);
3. An interactive workshop on happiness in education and grouping activity according to people’s hobbies/interests;
4. With the help of this engaging workshop, the participants are able understand how Gross National Happiness is measured and also give advice (on how to boost happiness) for their peers in other countries;
  - a. Templates for standardised basic happiness measurement survey (to be used for above workshop);
5. Wheel of life – a helpful resource for personal coaching – shows how far is one in certain areas of life;
6. Information session on gross national happiness; combines the creation and subsequent application of happiness measurement ‘systems’;

7. Session to introduce video creation for beginners by beginners (includes an Erasmus+ example).
8. Fill-in template for the e-booklet;
9. Information for the preparation of 20,000 EUR challenge (contest to create the best idea/plan/initiative for the local neighborhood, that would boost its happiness the most) pitch;
  - a. Corresponding presentation;
10. Team-building activity for a group to create their own political party (which will further participate in the 20,000 EUR challenge (mentioned above)). It includes a few different tasks aimed to test the creativity and imagination of the participating youngsters;
11. Fun team quiz created for the evening activities of the youth exchange (could be used in any other similar project).

## About Organisers

“Active Youth” Association (Asociacija “Aktyvus jaunimas”) is a non-profit organization based in Kaunas that unites young leaders from Lithuania willing to work on a voluntary basis to facilitate an intercultural dialogue and



# Active Youth

*Erasmus+ projects*

enhance competence of the European youth. We cooperate with organizations of similar profile from all over Europe (more than 50 partnerships) to organize events and trainings using non-formal education as a powerful instrument to encourage youth to take an active part in a society. By doing this we help young people to improve their skills and social awareness, share experiences and ideas, integrate them within the multinational environment of the EU, facilitate cooperation, create new joint initiatives, increase their social awareness, and promote healthy lifestyle. In particular, we concentrate on youth (18-30 years old) that have fewer opportunities and/or disadvantaged backgrounds.

Generally, our aims are to: (1) enhance entrepreneurial, social, leadership, communication skills, self-esteem, as well as multilingualism of youth through non-formal education; (2) help youth increase their social awareness, be tolerant towards others, be aware of the persisting social and environmental problems and help solve them; (3) educate youth workers and youth on how to join volunteering initiatives, cooperate with each other, and get employed more easily; (4) organize joint campaigns, projects and activities, where young people and youth workers can get involved in an intercultural dialogue, be a part of the decision making process, develop the spirit of volunteerism, facilitate youth cooperation and social values; (5) raise awareness about EU citizenship among young people, educate about social responsibility and work towards reducing youth unemployment in the EU; (6) organize youth seminars, exchanges, trainings for youth workers, conferences and discussions on relevant social topics, promote healthy, active, and ecologically friendly lifestyle in order to increase the well-being of youth. Inform about similar actions organized by others in Europe; (7) defend and promote human rights, universal values of tolerance, active citizenship, democracy, equal opportunities and work towards the elimination of discrimination in order to build a better integrated society; (8) organise Erasmus+ projects and spread information about the opportunities that lie behind it in order to further facilitate youth development.

Apart from other activities, we have also hosted Erasmus+ youth exchanges and youth worker mobility projects in Lithuania addressing key social topics for youth. Firstly, we organised a youth exchange on tolerance for minorities ("Let's Turn Discrimination into Tolerance"), where young people gathered to help the minorities across Europe integrate easier to the society and get better opportunities both in social and work life. Secondly, we have organised both youth worker mobility and a youth exchange on the topic of Social Entrepreneurship ("More than Money: Social Entrepreneurship Heroes"). Since then we have hosted 7 more Erasmus+ projects (as of July 2016).

More on us: <http://activeyouth.lt/en> or <https://facebook.com/activeyouthlt>