

Project Title

“Unveiling the Cosmos, Unveiling Ourselves”

Project Coordinator

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Project Information

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Project Summary

Summary

"Unveiling the Cosmos, Unveiling Ourselves" is a Youth Exchange Project taking place in the Scout's Shelter of Chortiatis, a mountainous forest area just outside Thessaloniki. The program aims to promote mental health significance and cultural understanding, as well as to ignite curiosity and foster scientific knowledge among young people. The project will bring together 6 people from 5 countries hailing from diverse backgrounds to engage in hands-on activities, workshops, non-formal learning, experiments, meditative sessions and discussions centered around cosmic themes, while expanding on the pressing issues of mental health and the improvement thereof. The program also consists of a guided tour of Thessaloniki, as well as a substantive visit to the Planetarium of the Noesis Science Center. In addition, this program will introduce the participants to means of influencing and being influenced by the fascinating world of space science research, by means of citizen science projects (CSPs).

Background

It is becoming more evident, over the years, that mental health issues have been plaguing the youth demographic. We find the truth of the above statement potentially disturbing and thus have made great efforts to battle this plague with this project. According to the definition of the WHO, mental health is not only the absence of a mental disorder but includes a state of well-being in which each person realizes his potential, works productively, has opportunities to contribute to their community, and successfully copes with everyday stress.

At the same time, it's essential to present the importance of mental wellness to young people in a way that is engaging, creative and impactful. There needs to be a dynamic approach to delivering mental health lessons – one that captures the youth's hearts, sparks their imagination, and equips them with the tools to spread positive change. In this context, this project drives its promise home through the world of space science.

The project, while dealing with the exploration of oneself, presents an exceptional opportunity to work alongside the exploration of space. In our program, we draw parallels between the understanding of scientific issues to ones regarding the human psyche. More specifically, we use these non-formal thematic approaches to educate the youth on the importance of self-discovery and betterment. Furthermore, we have crafted meaningful activities, that are complemented by aspects of astronomy, physics and other hard sciences, with the aim of improving the participants' well-being.

Space science is a multidisciplinary field that encompasses the study of celestial bodies, the exploration of the universe, and the understanding of the fundamental laws of physics governing the cosmos. It plays a crucial role in expanding our knowledge of the universe and advancing technological innovations that benefit various sectors of society. By exposing and educating youth in space science, we can enhance their well-being and equip them with valuable tools and skills that will propel them forward in their personal lives, careers, and beyond.

The study of space science is a means of developing various competences. It promotes critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and an appreciation for evidence-based reasoning. Moreover, it encourages interdisciplinary learning, as it encompasses aspects of physics, astronomy, astrophysics, space exploration, space technology, cosmology, astrobiology, and engineering.

The digital age presents unprecedented opportunities for enhancing mental wellness awareness through space science education. Technological advancements enable the use of virtual simulations, online collaborations, and remote access to space-related data, making it easier for students and youth to engage with space science content. What's more, international cooperation and collaboration can leverage diverse perspectives, resources, and expertise to enrich space science avocation and occupation.

Erasmus+ is an ideal framework for promoting mental health improvement and space science pursuits by facilitating international mobility, collaboration, and knowledge exchange.

Objectives

Through creative acts of expression, engaging workshops, immersive role-playing games and more unique activities, young people will come closer to a better version of themselves. Striving for boosted mental health and overall better individual well-being, the participants will be more aptly equipped to tackle life's challenges. Moreover, participants will engage in activities that reduce stress and promote positive emotions, such as stargazing and nature-based experiences, which foster self-reflection and a sense of awe.

The project also emphasizes intercultural dialogue, tolerance, and understanding among participants from different countries. Through shared experiences, collaborative activities, and exploration of cultural aspects linked to space science, participants will gain a deeper appreciation for diverse cultures, strengthen tolerance, and embrace inclusivity.

By facilitating interactive, fun, and exciting non-formal methods of education and training, participants will also develop a strong foundation in space science concepts. This will enable them to think critically, analyze data, and solve space exploration-related problems, enhancing their understanding of scientific methodologies and cultivating essential analytical skills.

In addition, by working in teams to design and construct model rockets, telescopes, and conduct experiments, participants will enhance their teamwork and collaboration skills, including effective communication, delegation, problem-solving, and conflict resolution.

Lastly, the project aims to promote active citizenship and raise awareness about the importance of scientific research. The youth will interact with authentic scientific equipment and tools, igniting curiosity and appreciation for empirical sciences. Concurrently, they will be met with researchers, scientists, and experts, through our visit to the Planetarium. Finally, they will be encouraged to consider their roles as responsible global citizens and explore ways to contribute to the sustainable development of space exploration and research, especially by means of CSPs.

Activities

1. Advanced Planning Visit

An advanced planning visit is instrumental for the preparation and implementation of our project. Firstly, the APV will enable us to familiarize ourselves with the project site and assess its suitability for our activities. This assessment will help us determine any necessary logistical arrangements, such as room allocations, equipment needs, safety measures and so on. Secondly, a crucial aspect of the APV is detailed planning. Through the visit, we will gather essential information to refine our project plans and make any necessary adjustments. Lastly, the APV will provide an opportunity for engagement and briefing with the group leaders. There, we will discuss transport, insurance of participants, cultural and linguistic preparation of youth, safety rules and other notable subjects that may arise.

In addition, the leaders will be given pointers on how to keep their groups organized, interested and included throughout the project. Through this responsibility, they will develop their leading skills and they will help the facilitators conduct a timely and well-structured program. More than that, the leaders will be advised to encourage their teams to provide feedback, express their ideas and concerns, as well as propose activities to be ran in parallel to the project, like "secret friend" or themed nights (karaoke night/ board game night/ etc.). Lastly, the leaders will be given digital tools and guidance on how to incorporate them within the various pursuits in the duration of the project. That would include means to produce research, make creative presentations, create and share artwork, and more, with the goal of providing substantial ways for the groups to work together and engage in the project's activities. Last but not least, the leaders will be given crash courses on crisis management and conflict resolution, should the need for them arise. They will be better equipped to deal with difficult participants or young people that are going through struggles due to various socio-economic issues, thus strengthening the accepting and inclusive nature of the project.

2. Youth Exchange

We have carefully designed a diverse range of activities that cater to the interests and learning styles of the participants. These activities will include empirical experiments, workshops, discussions, internal expression opportunities, feedback sessions, nature-oriented activities and non-formal learning. Each activity will be aligned with the project's objectives and designed to be interactive, engaging, and inclusive.

For starters, the schedule consists of various creative activities relating to self-exploration and mental health betterment. By linking the characteristics of celestial bodies to human lives ("radiance" workshop), drawing parallels between orbital mechanics and social mechanics ("our personal solar system" workshop), the striving for more energy occupation to each person's ambitions ("the Kardashev scale" activity), and many more astronomical aspects to many more human ones, we will create an incredible opportunity for the youth to expand their self- knowledge, understand their inner struggles and eventually overcome them. Additionally, we take inspiration from psychotherapy methods (psychodrama and ACT sessions) to implement self-betterment approaches. Our vision is utilizing the space science theme in efforts to refine and enhance the participants' mentality for better well- being.

Moreover, we will provide opportunities for participants to engage in fascinating hands-on experiments - something rarely conducted on Erasmus+ projects, making it a special kind of activity - related to space science (model rockets, spectroscopy workshop, night sky observation and study, and more). By actively participating in these experiments, participants will gain a deeper understanding of scientific concepts and develop practical skills and social cohesion. Additionally, we will organize intuitive workshops introducing cognitive exploration and betterment through various topics such as the life cycle of stars ("through the entropy" workshop), planetary exploration ("moving out" workshop), the search for extraterrestrial life ("our cosmic neighbors" workshop) and other interesting themes. Additionally, non-formal education methods, such as world café, role-playing, puzzles, and interactive presentations, will be employed to encourage active learning and knowledge exchange.

Alongside the above-mentioned activities, we will incorporate cultural exchange elements on intercultural nights. This cultural exchange will foster mutual respect, appreciation, and a broader understanding of different cultural perspectives related to the self and the cosmos. Furthermore, throughout the youth exchange, we will encourage participants to reflect on their experiences, insights, and learning outcomes. Reflection sessions will provide a platform for participants to share their thoughts, ask questions, and connect their experiences to real-world contexts.

Moreover, there will take place a visit to the magnificent Planetarium of Thessaloniki. There, the participants will be given the opportunity to expand their scientific intuition, make further discoveries of the wonders within the world of space science and meet and interact with significant people in the fields of astronomy, astrophysics, and so on.

Near the conclusion of the youth exchange, we will organize a showcase or exhibition where participants can share their accomplishments. This could include displaying their project outcomes, performing artistic interpretations of their experiences, producing sketches or plays, or delivering presentations. The showcase will celebrate the participants' achievements and provide a platform to inspire others for mental health awareness.

To maintain the momentum and impact of the youth exchange, we will establish channels (e.g. alumni network) for ongoing engagement and continued learning. This will involve digital pathways that allow participants to stay connected to scientific progress, as well as to contribute to it themselves (CSP introduction). A Youthpass Ceremony will follow to reinforce their European values and shape a better future for all aspects of their lives.

Throughout the project, we will be sharing our creations, findings, and experiences mainly in online media, thus communicating appreciation for mental well-being, spreading awareness about science education and inviting other communities and individuals to walk towards meaningful paths, similar to ours.

By implementing these activities with careful planning, a supportive facilitation team, and a focus on cultural understanding, this Youth Exchange will provide a transformative experience for participants.

3. Evaluation and Dissemination

With the Youth Exchange week coming to a close, we task the participants to provide genuine feedback about their experiences and to share the results of the project with the world.

The facilitating team will prepare digital questionnaires, that are thorough but engaging, to establish concrete results of the participants thoughts and feelings on facilities, food, transportation, activities and workshops, and everyday life during the project. To complement these forms, more creative ways to express the youths' ideas will be implemented. For example, a playlist with songs associated with the participants' feelings for the project will be created. On top of that, they will be asked to describe their thoughts on the project in at most two words, where the collected words will be used to generate various banners/posters to be kept or shared online. These and more novel ways to present the evaluation will reveal the projects' impact on the young participants and the overall success of the Youth Exchange.

Finally, using the various tools they were introduced to, the participants will create social media posts and articles to showcase their achievements, lessons learned, and personal stories related to the program. By actively sharing the project's results and encouraging broader participation in mental health awareness and space science education, the dissemination phase will ensure that the Youth Exchange's influence extends far beyond the duration of the program itself.

Impact

The "Unveiling the Cosmos, Unveiling Ourselves" Youth Exchange project holds significant potential for creating a lasting impact on the participants and the broader community. Firstly, this project has the capacity to empower young minds, develop their insight into mental health issues and provide them with the necessary tools to combat these struggles. Using celestial metaphors for personal and social development, participants will also gain fresh perspectives on their lives and social circles, fostering self-awareness and improving interpersonal relationships. On top of that, the youth exchange will bring together participants from different countries, ensuring the establishment of international connections and friendships. In addition to that, the program will facilitate cultural appreciation, global citizenship, improvement of communication skills and social cohesion.

At the same time, the project aims to ignite curiosity among young people about the wonders of space science. The youth exchange will provide participants with a solid foundation of scientific knowledge related to space science and its encompassing fields, while also presenting participants with opportunities to develop essential scientific skills.

Lastly, the "Unveiling the Cosmos, Unveiling Ourselves" project is envisioned as a starting point for long-term collaboration and follow-up initiatives. By nurturing ongoing connections, such as through online platforms and alumni networks, participants can continue to support and inspire each other in their mentality, scientific or otherwise pursuits. This sustained collaboration fosters a community of young like-minded individuals who can contribute to mental health outreach efforts and scientific advancements in the future.