



Education and Culture DG

'Youth in Action' Programme



YOUTH EXCHANGE FINDING YOURSELF IN EUROPE

Banská Štiavnica, Slovakia
From 16th until 24th of September 2013



First line (from top and left to right): Matiss, Giancarlo, Spyros, Eleni, Dimitrios, Peter, Tomas.

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WHAT IS A YOUTH EXCHANGE?

A Youth Exchange is the action 1.2 registered in the Youth in Action programme of the European Union. It consists on bringing together youngsters from different cultural backgrounds in order to share opinions about a specific topic and it can also involve creating a project together or having some positive outcome.

The methodology used in this kind of actions is normally labeled as a non-formal and informal education. This means that sessions are under the form of debates, brainstorming, workshops and so on, where the participants normally reach a conclusion by conversation and exchanging of ideas.

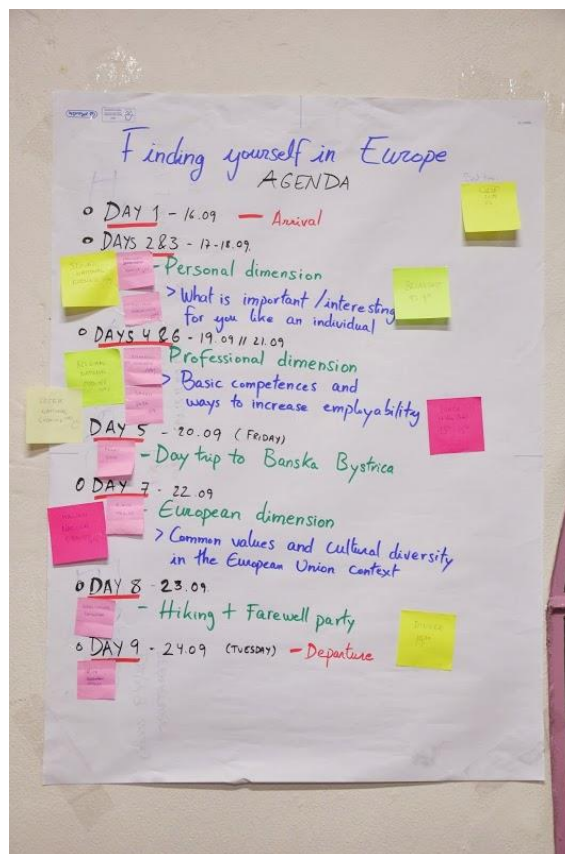
In this kind of educational formats, there are no right or wrong answers, just variety of perspectives and a great opportunity to broaden participant's mind. People who take part in these activities raise their cultural awareness and, in general, become more tolerant and conscious in a kind of 'invisible' learning. Plus, their communication skills improve since they need to express themselves actively within the participation of the sessions.

Following with this philosophy, at the end of the project the participants are given a Youthpass, which is a document that reflects what they have learnt. Because each experience is unique and each individual takes from it a different outcome, this certificate is filled by themselves, according to their personal gains. Basically it works like a self-evaluation diploma regarding their individual learning.

FINDING YOURSELF IN EUROPE: INTRODUCTION

Finding Yourself in Europe gathered together 17 participants from 4 different countries –Belgium, Greece, Italy and Slovakia, in the Unesco Heritage old town of Banska Stiavnica (in Slovakia), from the 16th until the 24th of September, 2013.

The idea for this project rose due to the necessity of taking another approach to a current issue of youth unemployment. Whereas media and society insist on the dark side of the financial crisis across Europe, we wanted to switch the point of view at the topic to a more **positive and inspiring perspective** which needed to be built for the directly affected population: the young people.



1. Finding yourself in Europe Agenda. Day 1: Arrival. Day 2&3: Personal Dimension. Day 4&6: Professional Dimension. Day 5: Trip to Banska Bystrica. Day 7: European Dimension. Day 8: Hiking + Farewell party. Day 9: Departure.

We elaborated a three-dimensional plan, going from the inner individual core to the greater outside context. Therefore, as you can see in our agenda, the first step was to enter the personal dimension, to discover each individual interests, skills and talents. After this, we introduced the professional dimension, in order to try to connect the first part outcome with the labor market –encouraging entrepreneurship when needed. The last part was the European dimension, when we reviewed the different possibilities within the European Union framework like Youth in Action programme.

Going further in the planning of the project and with the wish of actively involved different national teams equally, we arranged in the advanced planning visit the division of different tasks. This implied that national leaders needed to prepare, together with their group, some study parts and their national presentations, besides each one of them had been assigned the introduction of one of the three dimensions.

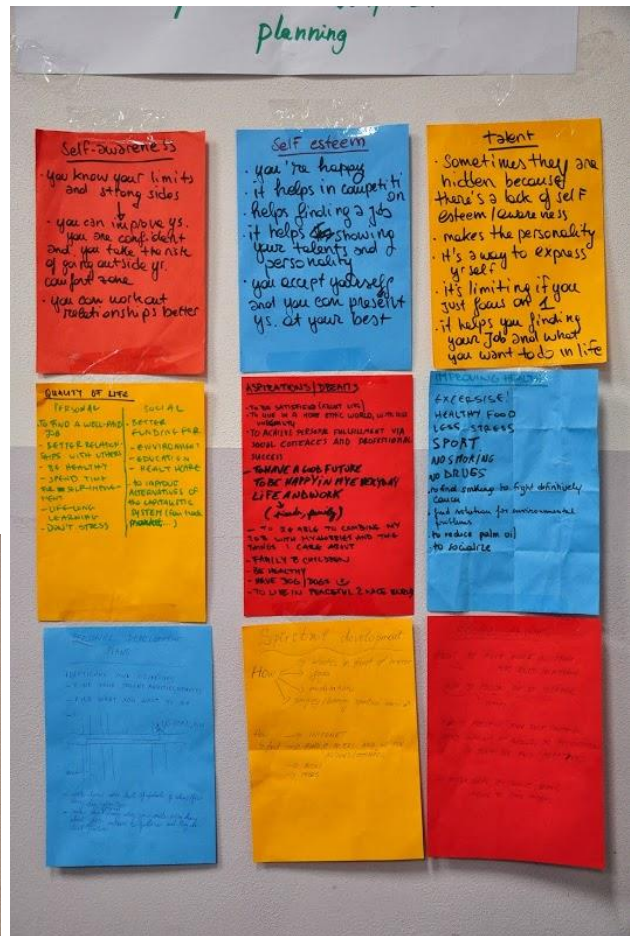
THE PERSONAL DIMENSION

This dimension was aimed at the development of personal skills, time management, possibilities to learn, acknowledgment of their talents and what the participant wants to do in the future regarding his/her skills, interests and knowledge.

The Greek team was in charge of the **introduction** of the topic, which turned out in a session in which Spyros -the national leader- shared his own **example of personal**

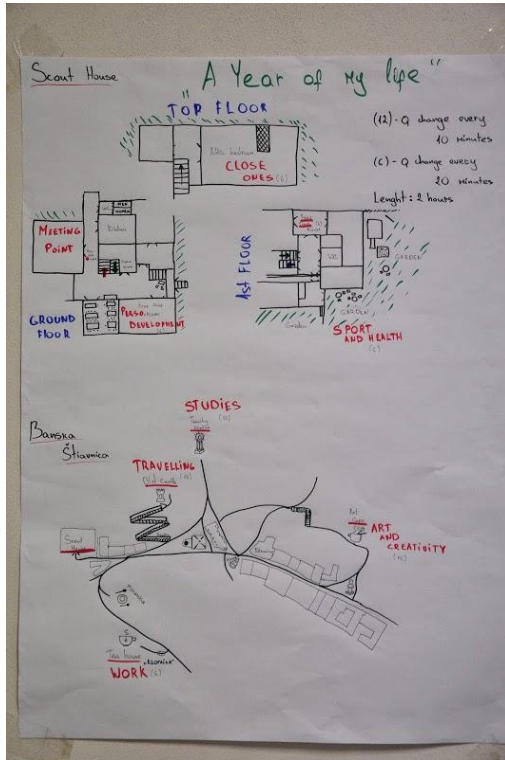
development: his work within an NGO, the financial system of fundraising and the use of social networks in these contexts.

Due to the wideness of the topic, we had a lot of diversity in the different sessions. Besides one that was specifically meant for talking **about personal development planning** and the different activities that this concept includes, we had sessions regarding **education** - different paths to develop ourselves, the fish theory, and **communication** -to understand that it starts with an internal process and all the different elements that influence its understanding (this session was led by Rita, Italian leader).



Perhaps one of the most interesting sessions was a practical game about time management - '**Year of my life**'. We simulated a compression of one year time in two hours and set different stations around the Scout House, the place we were staying in, and around the town of Banska Stiavnica. Ten minutes meant a month and they had 2 hours to choose which stations they wanted to visit and complete -by filling a related question or doing a task. From outside it would look like people running around the city and the accommodation place with pen and paper in their hands, quite funny.

Each national leader had prepared the questions/tasks for 2 different stations, which means that everybody participated in the organization of this activity. In the debriefing we discussed about the stress they felt, the lack of time and how it applies also in real life -and therefore, the necessity to prioritize and organize our activities. It was a practical game to show about the importance of **time management** and to learn how to prioritize, and in this sense being more aware of personal interests.

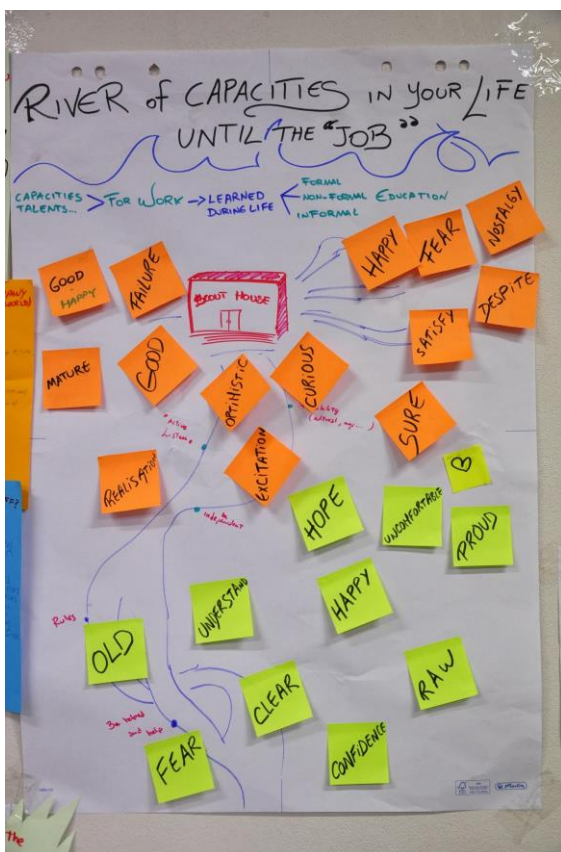


Since it was only the first couple of days, we also had an open space and several games to remember our names and get to know each other better. Connected with one of the parts of personal development, we also organized a **'Talent Show'** night, when either individually or in a group, our participants presented their wonderful faculties.

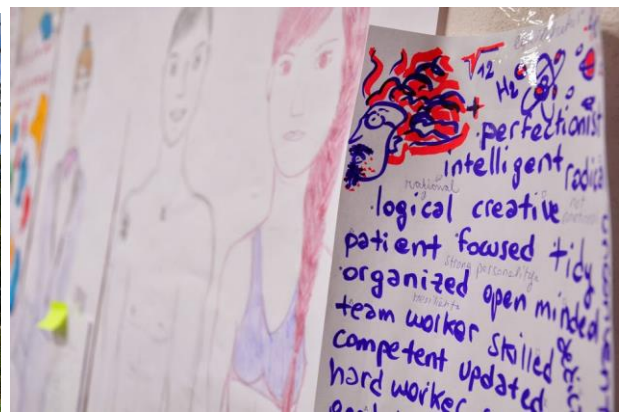
THE PROFESSIONAL DIMENSION

The professional development was focused on the growth of overall skills required in the labor market, combined with a basic instruction about entrepreneurship. Plus, during these days we visited a Mining museum in Banska Stiavnica which gave them a perspective of miner hard life and the work conditions back in the old days.

The **introduction** of this dimension was lead by the Belgian team. After providing us with some facts about the economical and labor situation nowadays, they prepared a more individual exercise in which they invited us to reflect about the **capacities** we've learnt throughout our life, and which other competences will be necessary to develop in order to achieve our dream job. Then we shared our experience in couples and finally talked over collectively about the importance of boosting our employability.



In the following sessions, we started with finding the qualities and skills of a **“perfect” employee** (in different fields) according to the participants. Based on this, we afterwards built the rest of the dimension. Moreover, the participants learnt about **public speaking**, **creativity**. Also about **entrepreneurship** which was led by the Belgian team who, by ambiguous images, made us realize about the enriching phenomenon of different perspectives.



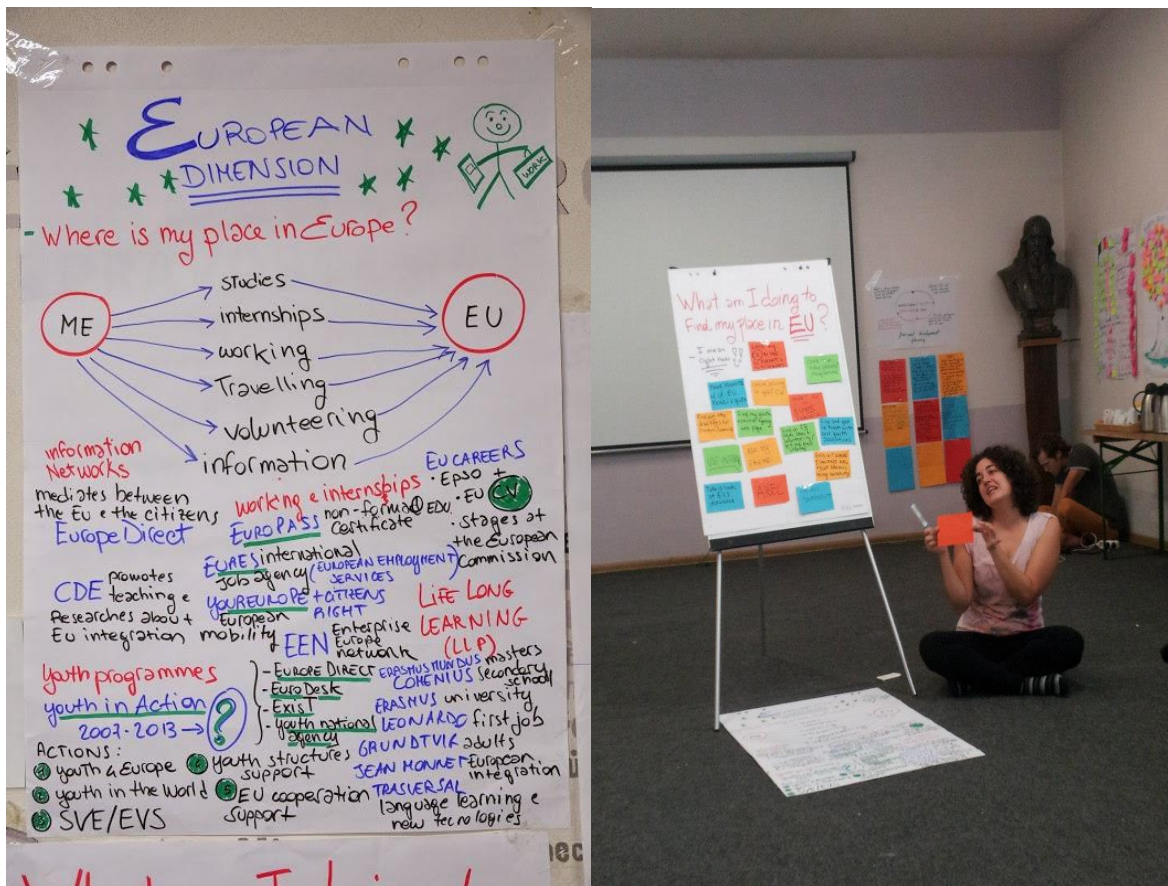
THE EUROPEAN DIMENSION

Regarding this dimension, we wanted to share specific information about the advantages of being part of the European Union, and all the different possibilities they might not be aware of back then.

Rita, the Italian national leader, prepared an **introduction** with useful information about different **opportunities offered to European citizens** - information networks, internships, youth programs. There was a second part of the session when we were discussing what could we do in the very moment to find our place in the EU.

The participants seemed really motivated in this activity. Especially in the second part since we were talking about **concrete actions** they could start taking almost immediately to change their future. After the project, in the private Facebook group we created for the participants and coordinators, they have been sharing their efforts and activities, which inspire them to keep active and motivated.

We also had other study parts to bring them closer to this dimension. **Improvisation theater activity**, in which they had to represent different historical periods in Europe and a session with **tips when traveling** or moving abroad – with both the practical perspective and the psychological one, the kind of attitude that you should adopt.



During this day we had the visit from Sarah Crisci, INEX Messenger, who presented her **workshop about European Citizenship**. There was a quiz to test their knowledge about EU, a debate to compare opinions about different values and a closing part when they wrote a letter to themselves about their learning outcome from this session. It was very interesting for Sarah to apply



her workshop in a context where everybody was a European citizen, since before she had made it in international workcamps for people from other continents. In any case, the diversity and wide range of perspectives was still visible in between Europeans – if they managed to find common agreements and values.



Regarding the demands of the national leaders, last days we skipped some planned activities in order to give the participants a bit more free time. This meant moving some activities among days, so we had a session on **how to improve your creativity**, scheduled in the professional dimension during the European dimension days.

Plus, as part of the European dimension, we introduced the **Youth in Action programme** very briefly since the expected programme changes will cause a change in the conditions to apply as a participant for e.g. European Voluntary Service. Nevertheless, they seemed quite interested in this session, looking forward to further opportunities of developing themselves.

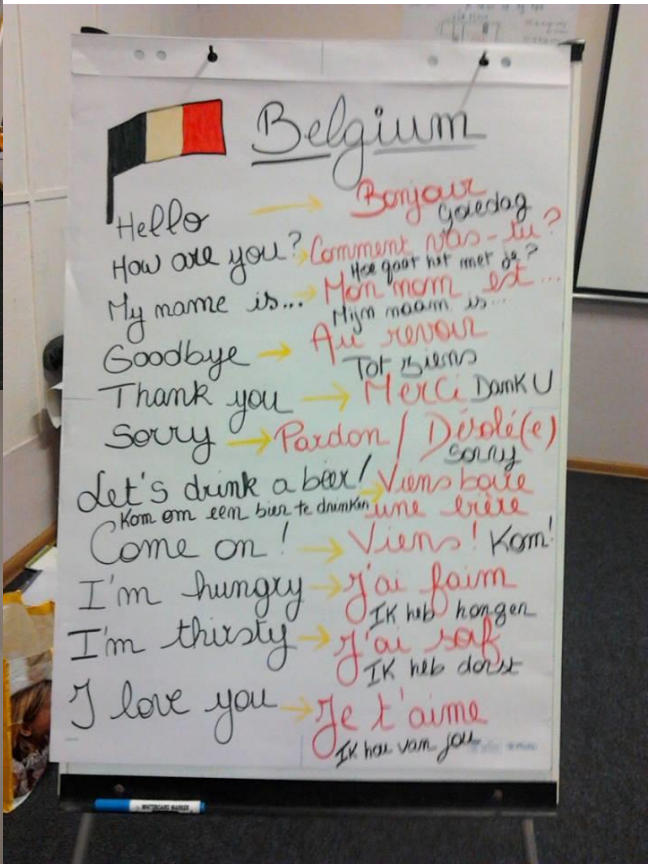


NATIONAL EVENINGS

As a part of the cultural daily exchange, we had four evenings when the participants presented their countries to the rest of the group. Since we had a truly creative group, each of the presentations combined different elements, like PowerPoint presentations for basic information, also songs and dances as a complement, quizzes, theater or language basics lesson are just other sample of formats they chose. Then again, nothing better for gaining charm than a taste of the country, which every group managed to bring back from home and some of them prepared it on the spot.

This was a great chance to learn about each other and to erase stereotypes even when sometimes it was funny just to play with them or to see how accurate some of them are. It also helped them to develop as a

group, as at the end of the project we felt like a newborn family. That's why the last day, for the farewell party, and thanks for the participants who arranged it themselves, we had a moment to interchange private messages to read back home and remember those great moments spent together.



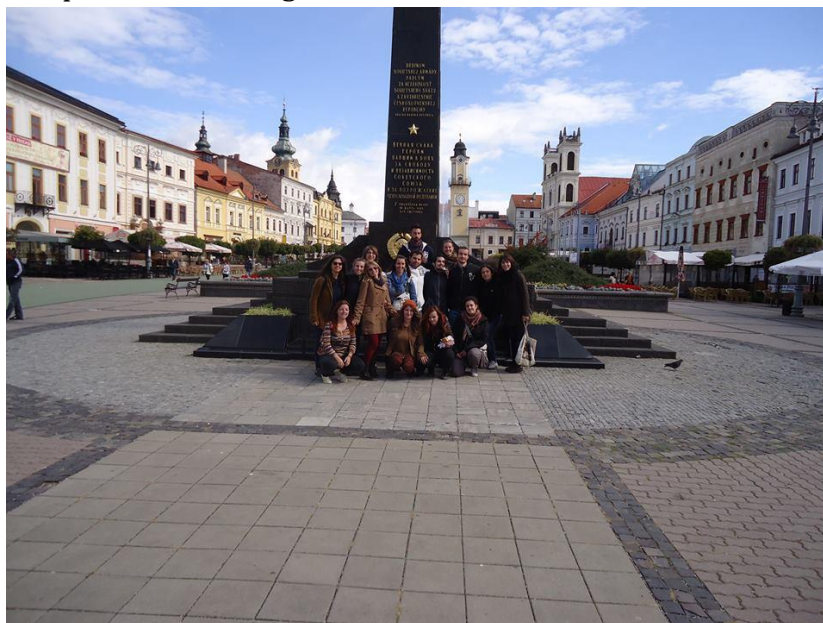
BANSKA STIAVNICA AND OTHER VISITS IN SLOVAKIA

In addition to the sessions and the national evenings, and taking advantage of the geographical situation, we decided to plan some cultural visits around.

The project took place in the town of **Banska Stiavnica**, proclaimed to be a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. It's a beautiful medieval town which richness came from the several mines of gold and silver, among other metals. Consequently, one of our first stops was the **Mining Museum**, with a tour provided in a real mine.



Close to this location there is the city of **Banska Bystrica**, where we also stopped by. Here we visited museum of the **Slovak National Uprising** with an open-air part with the machinery used in that time. We had some free time in the main square and visited some souvenir shops before coming back to Stiavnica.



Besides, back in Stiaavnica we had two other visits. First one was to the **Kalvaria**, a system of churches and chapels built on a mountain. From the top we could appreciate a complete view from the town. Furthermore, we had even a better view from the second one, the **Paradise Peak** where we organized a hike because of its nearby location.



Youth Exchange "Finding yourself in EU" INEX Slovakia

RESULTS AND FOLLOW UP

The Youth Exchange 'Finding Yourself in Europe' has raised awareness of 17 young people from Europe about improving individual employability and different ways of making it possible.

The project was a way for the participants to develop communication and language skills, to learn how to work in an international team and to gain experience abroad. They learned to think and act in possible ways of learning and how to use their free time more wisely. The participation in the YE helped for their self-development and for being more open minded.

Long term results were achieved through the actions of the participants, who coming back in their countries will spread the information they gathered during the project in their families, among friends and in organization where they are active members. We motivated the participants to spread their knowledge about the Youth in Action programme too. This way more people will get to know about the opportunities the programme gives to young people.

Also, this brochure is a summary of what participants experienced in the exchange, while provides some information and methods that we hope can inspire and get into action to every possible reader. It was created by Alicia and Matiss, coordinators of the project.

ABOUT INEX SLOVAKIA

The hosting organization of this project was INEX Slovakia. INEX Sk is a non-profit, non-governmental organization founded in 1993. Its main aim is to play an active role within the international youth exchange that promotes international understanding, intercultural learning and tolerance.

INEX Slovakia organizes activities that are focused on youth mobility and non-formal education and international volunteering. We organize different voluntary activities like international voluntary workcamps, trainings, seminars, various activities on national level, regular meetings of non-formal groups, workshops, activities for children with difficult background etc. We are a sending and hosting organization within European Voluntary Service. These activities provide an opportunity for young people of different national and cultural background to live and work together; facilitate personal growth and a personal responsibility.

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