

ŠKAKLJIKAŠ
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SOFTEN OUR STEPS

Youth Exchange
21-30th July 2018
Latinovac, Croatia
Eko centar Latinovac



SOFTEN OUR STEPS

In the period from July 21st to July 30th, it was a pleasure to organize Youth Exchange for 30 young participants from 6 countries (Italy, Portugal, Spain, Poland, Germany, and Croatia).

One of the most important topics of Youth Exchange was the exchange of everyday sustainable practices.

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GERMANY

Our experience in the project “Soften Our Steps” was really amazing. I, Jannatul Ferdous, along with my team members Soliman, Victoria, Predrag, and Jess had been part of this awesome journey. After getting introduced with all of them, we recognize that most of us are city dweller who wants to experience something new.

The day started with some ice-breaking game, name game, and a team building game. The starkest feature of Latinovac is nature. It is a small village of Eastern Croatia and home of 60 native inhabitants.

Our projects primary objective was the promotion and peacebuilding in the community. We roamed around all the area, saw the spiral garden, vegetable garden with fountain, Well and some new things.





GERMANY

On the 5th day of the project, there was a daylong workshop on life without water, electricity and mobile network. On that day, we were divided into several working groups. Some of us were on the cooking team, food collection, shelter, and water. Through these activities, we came to know how to work in a team and the importance of team building.

Some interesting feature of the group work was that the water team went to the fountain to collect water which is far away from our house, food collector team also felt depressed when they can't collect enough food. There was huge pressure for the cooking team because they have to communicate with the fire team and food collector. Then we came to realize we are indispensable to each other just like the parts of the body.





GERMANY

Then at the evening, we have a barbecue party with corn and potatoes, we enjoyed some music and slept that night on tents.

After that day, we felt that we are really blessed by almighty with his love and affection. Without electricity and water, our life became weird and also we couldn't communicate with each other with the mobile phone.

Day 6th and 7th day, we made a sustainable community design, share our experience and learn different tools. Then the 8th day, we had intercultural nights, we prepared our presentation about German culture and also we cooked food, chocolate for entertainment and it was really full of fun.





GERMANY

Last day, was the farewell evening, we can also call it "Pizza Day" too. Because Irene welcomed us with her delicious vegetarian pizza, which was really wonderful. On that day, we met a German lady Dana; she entertained us with her whole heart. Then we feel how simple is village people, how hospitable they are.

But after the project, we came to know, vegetarian food is really tasty if you can cook properly. So, overall speaking, our time in Latinovac was very interesting and I'd like to thank all the organizers who put forward an amazing workshop in the heart of the Balkans.





CROATIA

Our (inter-)national team is represented by people from Croatia (Lina, Matija and Neva), Turkey (Emre) and Spain (Marina). Different backgrounds, experiences, expectations but yet one same destination: Eko centar Latinovac. We were looking forward to experience a sustainable lifestyle in terms of mindful diet, working together, softening our steps, have a simple life, and other healthy practices.

Prior to the youth exchange, some of us never heard about permaculture before, while others already knew the project and wanted to be a part of it. We were welcomed with big smiles and open arms to a peaceful and beautiful environment. All the participants were friendly and enthusiastic about meeting new people and we soon started with the team-building activities.





CROATIA

The whole organization was very well planned and the facilitators were very reactive, familiar and natural. They built a comfortable atmosphere from the very first day.

During the past 10 days, we really appreciated the experience of having a rich and delicious vegetarian diet as part of a sustainable lifestyle (eating local and seasonal food). We also learned basic information about permaculture and how to actively apply these concepts in everyday life, whether it's in urban or rural areas. By working together with people from so many cultures, we gained perspective of different realities. We even had the opportunity to interact with the local population, by helping them in the garden, organizing an international evening and they even invited us for lunch!





CROATIA

Furthermore, through non-formal education methods, we learnt from each other and shared our knowledge. For instance, we simulated an « Apocalypse Day », where no mobile phones were allowed. We had to manage ourselves to collect enough water and food, cook it and even create our shelter for all of the 30 participants! It was very exciting and controversial since not everyone was able to deal with these extreme conditions. However, it really strengthened our bonds, made us realize the current global environmental as well as social situation and face the consequences of our attitudes and behaviors.





CROATIA

This youth exchange was a great opportunity to meet new people with similar interests, increasing our professional and personal networks; to get inspired to implement workshops about specific topics (i.e. food waste, community living, natural gardening, etc) and learn about ourselves (how to identify our strengths and weaknesses). Most of the activities involved team work, so we developed our active listening skills, tolerance and patience considering other people's opinions and suggestions and involving everyone in the decision-making despite the language barrier.

We leave this powerful place full with memories, optimism, ideas and, of course, friends. By respecting and supporting each other, we went from "I" to "We", building our own community.

It is the last day, but this is not the end, it's a beginning.



ITALY

Latinovac...what to say? SIMPLICITY, KINDNESS, COMMUNITY, and PEACE are the best words to describe this incredible experience. But they are not enough to complete the picture of the little piece of paradise that we found in here.

Wanting to escape from the everyday city life and technology, we decided to take part to this project.

Where to start? Environment, permaculture or connections? We experienced a mix of all this at the same time, during the entire week. The one couldn't exist without the other. We discovered a totally new lifestyle.

From the breakfast to the dinner, we had just local and fresh food with no waste. Even though someone could be scared to eat just vegetarian, thanks to the cook the food was simply amazing... a perfect balance between taste and health.





ITALY

The communication and coordination between the staff gave us the opportunity to do both theoretical and practical activities. They taught us how to cooperate with each other to achieve a better result than just working alone. We had the chance to improve our sense of belonging, even if far away from our home. Here we have found a family and a second home.

The community welcomed us in the warmest way. Always smiling and interested in knowing new people. Open in sharing their experiences and their lives. The obstacle of the language turned out to be a way to enrich ourselves and our knowledge. We had even the chance to learn some basic words in few days.





ITALY

The community welcomed us in the warmest way. Always smiling and interested in knowing new people. Open in sharing their experiences and their lives. The obstacle of the language turned out to be a way to enrich ourselves and our knowledge. We had even the chance to learn some basic words in a few days.

We had an intercultural dinner with the villagers, in which we shared our traditions and typical dishes. Such a wonderful evening!

One of the best experiences of this project has been the day in which we had to live without water, electricity, and phones. Going out from our comfort zone was totally worth it!





ITALY

We learned that the limits we impose to ourselves actually can be easily overpassed by challenging ourselves.

It has been incredible to see that “old and pure” values of life still exist. It’s a place that everybody should visit! It’s a place where you discover how to live in a simple way, without the interference of globalization.

Come here if you want to find yourself and peace in this chaotic world!





POLAND

As a polish group member, I started my journey on Friday the 20th day of July 2018. Our group had some struggles during the travel but easily we overcame them. We arrive on Saturday the 21st and the feeling that broke into our hearts was indescribable. As we come from a small town it wasn't really something new but the atmosphere of this place was diametrically different. We unpacked our luggage and started to get to know new people immediately. All the people were really kind and welcome so thanks to that it was easier to get to know them.

On the second day, we started our daily activities and workshops connected with the topic of permaculture. The workshops developed our knowledge about permaculture and teamwork, an alternative way of thinking skills.





POLAND

Throughout the whole week in this place we gained knowledge about many countries like for example Portugal and Croatia. I've tasted food from foreign countries thanks to The International Evening when we presented our countries. As I am Slavik it was easier to me to communicate with local people and my Croatian language skill improved. To thank some local people for everything they did for us I tried to help them with some activities like gathering plums. To sum everything up I am glad I came here as it's my first Youth Exchange (and surely not last) and I think I found some place on Earth that I would love to come back. Now I am writing this article at my favorite spot where I got to know the most people.

Don't be afraid to do something new, to change something and get out of your comfort zone. Live for now and enjoy every moment in your life.



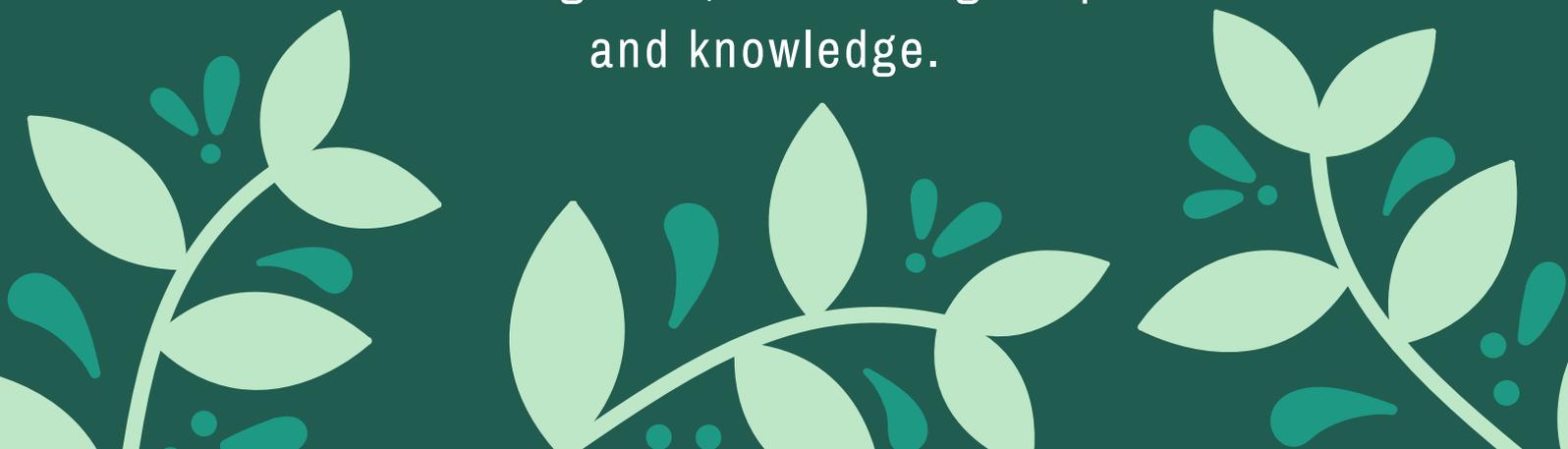


PORTUGAL

Our experience has been peculiar, to say at least. Our journey through Croatian lands began 3 days before the project, when we met at the airport, ready for this adventure. After 3 days, getting to know the Croatian Coast and 10 hours of travel, we finally arrived at Latinovac.

From early on we realized that we would be in total isolation, with nature lining us. It was already night when we arrived, and a warm breath persisted on the air. It was time to sleep and prepare for the next day.

It was a new day, a new place but above all new people. And that would be what we would take with us. From Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, Croatian, Polish, German, making a leap to Bangladesh, Turkey, Ghana, and Palestine. We learn to live together, to exchange experiences and knowledge.





PORTUGAL

But it was not without difficulties that our experience passed. Many things have failed from the point of the organization but I hope it has been a learning experience for everyone, not just for the participants. With that being said, it was a memorable experience that will surely remain in our memory.





SPAIN

We could have never guessed what life in Latinovac would really be like. We knew the basics: ordinary youth exchange, Croatia, permaculture (whatever that was), and an eco-friendly lifestyle. However, the final result has been nothing but ordinary.

After the first night of crawling into bed in the darkness, surrounded by strangers in that huge bedroom upstairs, we woke up a bit shaken. It was soon fixed by playing one game after another and memorizing names. Somehow, it feels easier to be yourself when you are surrounded by strangers, and that is why this experience has meant so much to every one of us: for one week there have been no prejudices, no social norms, no mask.



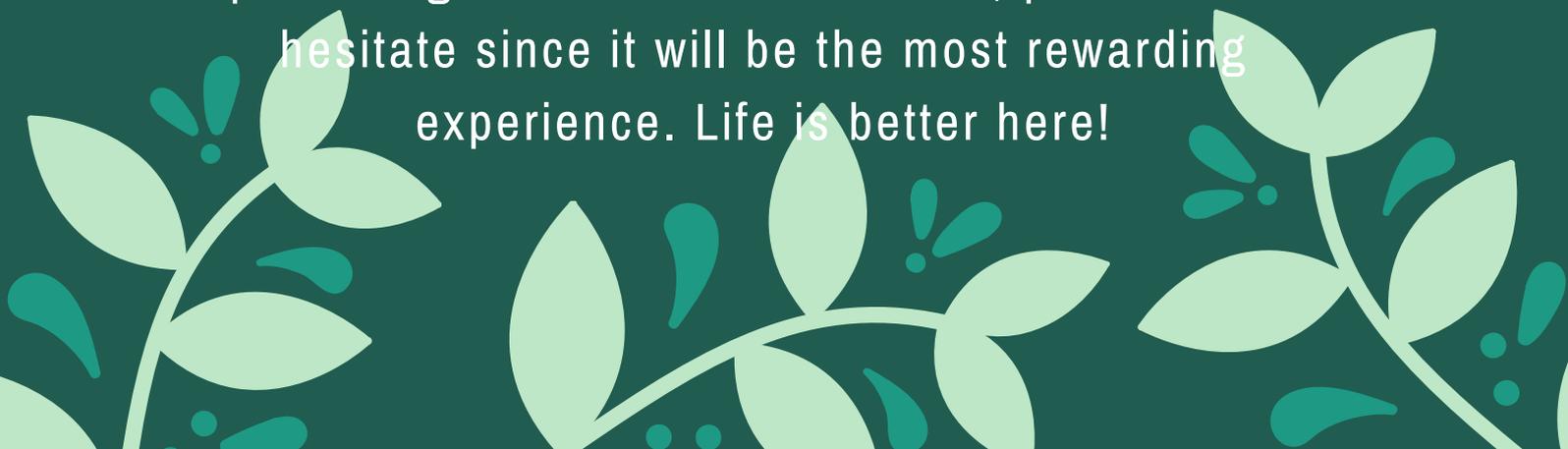


SPAIN

Skills-wise, we have discovered not only how to enjoy a more community-focused life, but also experienced what we can achieve with the right motivation to do so. Here we are, both country and city people taking cold showers, cooking on a self-started fireplace, baking bread on an outdoors oven and eating vegetarian 24/7, and enjoying every second of it.

After only one week, we are leaving with a completely changed mindset: we know now that it can be done. Eating healthy at home can be done; sharing a room with 20 people can be enjoyed. Cold showers can be taken. Vegetarian food can be a masterpiece.

And the people, what not to admire about every single person here! YOU ARE LEGENDS. Spanish team would forever be grateful for your help, patience and good spirits. And to anyone pondering whether to come or not, please don't hesitate since it will be the most rewarding experience. Life is better here!





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