

# LUDVIT



## WE ARE OUR FUTURE!

### PROJECT'S SUMMARY

In the times of globalisation, rapid technology development and stressful lifestyle, we are well aware of the fact that steady ways of teaching are not always sufficient for the success of young people in the future. A general wish for the professional development of the educational staff, expanding the students' horizons and international exchange of good practices were the main reasons for our collaboration in Erasmus+ project. The project targeted the students at the age of fourteen and fifteen as in many countries this age marks the end of a cycle and implies a choice of professional or academic studies.

The seven participating countries in the project ***We are our future! How to equip our students for adulthood and citizenship – a comparative study of autonomy, curricula and communication*** (with EC 2016-1-FR01-kA219-023916\_1) were Greece, Poland, Bulgaria, The Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia and France, which was also the coordinator.

The vision of the project '***We are our Future!***' was to bring up competent, flexible, responsible, self-confident, satisfied, healthy and successful individuals that will be able to cope with the challenges in the future. For attaining such highly set goals, competent and quality educators as well as the school management open for changes are indispensable. For coping with new challenges, it takes courage, hard work, stepping out of one's comfort zone, but above all, collaboration among all the participants in the educational process (educational staff – students – parents) as well as understanding one's impact and influence in a local and global community, cultivating empathy and taking positive action.

The project work started with the collaborative planning at Collège Joseph Durand in Montpezat-sous-Bauzon, France in November 2016. The project coordinators from all seven countries gathered to come up with a mutual plan of action. The main goals of the project work were equipping the students for the rapidly changing circumstances of life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which means helping them to become responsible and autonomous in their schooling and in everyday life. The students stayed with the host families, in order to gain more self-confidence, build new friendships, and practise their communication skills and to learn about the lifestyle in different countries.

When planning different activities, our main objectives were as following:

- **enriched school programmes, experienced and skilled teachers,**
- **new international friendships,**
- **European approach to teaching and learning** (*innovative and efficient methods that deal with students' individual needs and constraints*),

- increased autonomy in the students' study methods and making choices regarding their work orientation,
- students with well-developed **cross-cultural, social, communicative** (interpersonal and digital), **collaborative** and **research skills**,
- **autonomous, responsible, confident** and **flexible** students and teachers,
- **global awareness, teamwork** and the feeling of **citizenship, solidarity** and fellowship,
- improved **level of English** with students and among teaching staff,
- **cooperation** with socially active **organisations**, local politicians and NGOs.

As there were many goals set, the project was divided into three legs. Towards the end of the first year, we noticed that there was a need for another leg, so we added it. We agreed to deal with separate legs on the student mobilities, so we planned four. As there was a problem of hosting so many people at once, we decided on planning parallel mobilities.

Before each mobility, the partner schools had to prepare different materials and carry out surveys and activities, which the students then presented or worked on with other countries at the mobilities. Each mobility also included an activity or topic that was carried out by the teachers only. All the partner schools also carried out a survey on the participants' expectations about the project, which included teachers, students and the parents.

In February 2017, we executed a parallel mobility in France and Greece. The main theme of the first mobility were the school systems. There were also other sub-topics, like getting to know other countries and schools better, the comparison of the school systems, teachers' work and students' study habits. All the students collaborated to look for solutions to the problems they have come across in the survey results. The students prepared materials to present their countries, regions with their culture and history as well as their schools. We did a video conference between the teams working in both countries to select a logo for the project. During both mobilities we performed many team building activities and learned a lot about the countries' history, culture and habits.

In May 2017, we executed a mobility in Portugal. The main themes were the impact of ICT at school and at home and also the level of English language among different countries. Before the mobility, the students kept a Logbook on ICT usage at schools as well as in their everyday lives. They also thought about the advantages and disadvantages of ICT usage and gathered their findings, which the students later presented on the mobility and tried to come up with various ideas on more effective and safer ICT usage with their peers from cross Europe. The teams also took part in some talks and workshops on the internet safety. They compared their levels of English while communicating and learned different skills on how to overcome language barriers in personal communication. The teachers also exchanged good practices by observing different lessons at the hosting school and discussing different approaches and methods of teaching. The students learned a lot about Portuguese culture, history and habits. The teachers also found time to have an intermediate Transnational meeting to evaluate the progress of the project.

In October, we executed a parallel mobility in Slovenia and Bulgaria. The main themes were career guidance programmes and skills needed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The students from different countries presented different professions, their school career guidance programmes, took part in different career planning workshops, thought about ways of improving these programmes, and make the career choice easier for the students. The

students assessed the skills and knowledge that young people will need in the 21st century in order to lead a successful and fulfilling life. They participated in many self-awareness, sports and teambuilding games and learned about the countries' history, culture and habits. The teachers and students were given a chance to present their countries and project work to students at the hosting school by performing lessons. In this way, the students practised public speaking skills and the teachers had to share their ideas and teach in a foreign language. The teachers exchanged good practices on how to help the students on their career choice path. They also discussed the problem with the brain drain, which is present in Slovenia, Greece and Portugal.

In February and March 2018, we executed the mobility in the Netherlands and Poland. The main theme was a healthy lifestyle. The students presented their eating habits at school and compared local ingredients and traditional recipes. They presented their regional or national sports and compared the ways P.E. lessons are carried out in different schools across Europe. They also compared traditional dances and tried out different traditional games. They took part in many teambuilding activities and learned about the history, culture and habits of both countries.

In May 2018, project coordinators from all seven counties gathered in Greece to analyse and evaluate the results of the project.

We can ascertain that the members of educational staff that were directly involved in the project became aware of their strengths, skills and excellence and are thus taking part in new activities that demand new approaches more self-confidently. They also understand the need for teaching methods and techniques that foster responsibility and autonomy in students, wherein one should not neglect the fact that the teachers will have to engage in using new information- communication technologies and new teaching methods.

The students have proofed that they are autonomous, responsible, reliable, and most importantly able of great collaboration. They can be very creative and innovative if they are given a chance. They stressed out that while taking part in the project, they learned a lot about themselves, which is a commonly neglected field in schools and should be given more attention in the future. They also gave different propositions on what should be introduced or changed at different schools across Europe. They gained intercultural and multilingual competences , working habits and social skills which will enable them to cope successfully with different life situations that await them in the future (continuing their education, choosing a profession, looking for a job and building satisfying relationships on different levels).

The project has brought about many long-term benefits. While participating in it, the schools from different countries became aware that despite the fact that various countries and teachers are facing similar or completely different problems in educational and other fields, the students are teenagers with the same basic problems. However, their perspectives for the future may differ among some countries. We could notice a changed school climate at some schools, which included more teamwork, more self-awareness, more appreciation of the work done, more collaboration, better rapport between teachers and students. The schools are also taking part in different projects and activities that will include the ideas we came up during the projects, some of them also include NGO and other organizations. Some schools are also going to use the ideas and methods they learned during the exchanges in mobilities. Moreover, the coordinators are going to stay in

touch and will cooperate in the future in connection to planning some of their school activities, such as treasure hunt, the use of tablets and career guidance activities.

## **DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT**

The students were encouraged to form collaborative teams, explore different points of view and to express ideas effectively through varied means of investigation, presentation, discussion and comparison on numerous topics, for example, on their own study habits, career guidance, ICT use or eating habits at school. They shared their knowledge, resources, experiences and ideas in order to reflect on and evaluate certain aspects of their schooling and choices they may have never reflected over before. They were investigating real-world situations and realised they can influence and change their situation by seeing other circumstances in partner countries. In connection to the topics discussed, the students applied various research skills and selected appropriate tools to assemble, evaluate and utilize information. They used technology to collaborate and solve authentic problems. They came up with innovative ideas and solutions for their own school as well as schools in Europe. They recognized their own strengths and weaknesses, emotional, social as well as physical. They became more self-aware by learning about similarities and differences among the participating countries, which brought about their personal growth. Given the opportunity to travel without parents and across borders, as well as communicating in authentic settings with the host families, the students developed their cross-cultural, social and communicative skills. Moreover, they built new international friendships and deepened the already existing fellowships with their peers at home. We should not neglect the fact that the students learned to be proud of their own country, history and culture as well.

The teachers that worked on the project collaborated with teachers from other countries, supporting and learning from one another while creating different opportunities for the students to develop and demonstrate different skills. During mobilities, the teachers exchanged ideas, materials and good practices by the means of discussion, mutual planning of activities and observing one another's work in and outside the classrooms. They also became aware of different possibilities of the collaboration with different national NGO organizations.

All the planned objectives were met; moreover, we strongly believe that the real impact will be seen in the years to come, since many teachers, parents and children gained precious experiences, ideas, and skills, most of all, they gained confidence and awareness about the importance and value of the work done. In the future, one can expect more collaboration in similar projects, the upgrade of existing school projects and most importantly, more open school climate and different approaches and methods used in the classrooms. In this way, the impact of the project will be spread throughout the whole schools.

## **THE IMPACT OF THE PROJECT**

In the project, learners, teachers, schools, the local communities as well as participating European countries achieved all the planned goals and therefore, many impacts can be observed on different levels.

## LEARNERS:

The learners reached a higher level of autonomy and responsibility. They are interested in the global issues more and are very optimistic about the changes for the better in the future. This can be seen from taking more initiative in group work, willingness to work hard in other projects, collaborating with the teachers, organizing school events on their own, paying more attention to school and homework, taking the national exams more seriously and less lessons skipping. More learners are also interested in joining international projects. Moreover, the number of conflicts with the parents in order to solve problems in the name of their children is decreasing. Consequently, there are less conflicts and stress between teachers, learners and parents, which leads to better communication and better quality of work.

The learners are aware of their strengths, skills and abilities, which helps them, cope with new challenges more confidently. They are less afraid to take risks in new situations and see new opportunities as challenges that will help them expand their abilities. Consequently, there are less consultations about different issues with the school counsellor.

When it comes to career guidance, for example, they became more aware of the correlation between their dream jobs and studies, motivation and skills needed. Many students became more involved in their future career and made appointments with career counsellors and some even organized extra, unprogrammed work experience and went to visit schools and workplaces they would have not done were it not for the project work inciting them to do it. So, they have less problems and insecurities when choosing their future education and profession.

Working on the ICTs, students became more aware of the actual time spent on social networks, the dangers of the internet and facing unreliable news. However, they also realised how it can be used for learning.

The learners overcame many of their own inner fears about collaborating with learners from abroad. They improved their English and gained public speaking skills, which can be observed during the lessons and school activities. There are less reserved and shy learners and they are less afraid to take up new tasks and cope with challenges. We can observe that in their final reports, teachers' reports, their participation in school events and other activities and events outside the school. Unfortunately, with some students at school that were not necessarily directly involved in the project, we can still notice the increase of psychological problems, in connection with depression, anxieties and psychosomatic problems. There are many students with self-confidence problems and this could be a topic for the projects to come.

The relationship among learners of different ages changed as well. They wish for more activities that include intergenerational collaboration. There are more friendships and more cooperation on different levels.

## TEACHERS:

The teachers gained a broader perspective of different school systems, which made them aware of what is going on in other countries. The teachers grew professionally. They have expanded their view of other European schools and had a deeper look into the global

situation in the education field. They concluded that the change in teaching approach, didactics and methodology is inevitable. They are more ready to try new ways they have not tried before, such as teaching with social media or replacing textbooks with tablets. They exchanged good practices, got new ideas, learnt how to solve different problems on mobilities, learnt about the cultural differences, history, culture of various countries which made them more experienced teachers and they will be able to use their newly gained knowledge with teaching their own subjects. They are going to change and improve some of their methods of teaching and give emphasis on developing different skills and abilities rather than explicitly sticking to teaching facts. They will be creating more opportunities for the learners to become more self-directed, collaborate more and apply more activities that will foster project work, critical thinking and problem solving. They will work on their own as well as on the students' digital literacy.

The collaboration among the schoolteachers also improved. The teachers had to cooperate a lot and solve different problems together. They take more initiative in different new projects, they apply to speak about their experiences or perform workshops at different international conferences, they write articles for different professional magazines and they wish to expand their skills by applying to different educational programmes. They also gained a lot of self-confidence about their work.

The teachers became aware of the fact that they will have to keep learning in order to adapt to new ways and new technology that keeps emerging. These new perspective motivated other teachers to join other projects as well as to upgrade their already existing projects and activities.

#### PARENTS:

The involvement of the parents in the project changed their attitude to schoolwork, which had a great impact on other parents that were not directly involved in the project as well. Consequently, there are fewer complaints and less parent-teacher meetings. More parents offer to collaborate with the school and want to take initiative to help in other school projects and events. By seeing collaboration with the parents in other countries, such as preparing traditional foods, travelling with students, having speeches and presenting professions, the schools will be more open to new ways of engaging parents into the school life.

They also found out a lot about their children's strengths and trust them more. Fewer parents want to supervise every step of their children.

#### ICT USE:

All the participants in the project can use more ICT than earlier. They have a better overall picture of the benefits and drawbacks of the usage of it. Slovenia has bought a set of tablets and is going to use them in their classrooms in the future.

During the project, we came to some other conclusions that exceeded the initial expectations:

#### LANGUAGES:

By collaborating with different countries, we also realized that Slavic languages have a lot in common, for example, the language, cuisine, culture, music, school systems and similar. That was an interesting experience, because Slovenian, Polish and Bulgarian

people could also partly communicate in their mother tongues. An unusual experience was also finding out about different meanings of the same words (or the pronunciation of them) in different languages.

#### CULTURE AND VALUES:

While participating in different mobilities, everyone learnt a lot about other countries' culture and history. However, everyone gained much more than that. By observing the respect, different values and pride some nations take in their traditions, hospitality, history and culture, some teachers and students also changed their view on their own traditions and culture, paying them more respect and attention in the future.

### WE TRIED TO BE INNOVATIVE

Participating in the project was new for Greece and Slovenia, but it was a new experience for everyone since we had to deal with seven countries, instead of two or three.

The project was innovative in the way that the coordinators planned the main themes of the project, but did not engage into the specific planning of the topics. They carried out a pre-project survey among the students in order to get an idea of their interests and expectations of the project. That is why, the project was very student focused, because the students decided on the topics they wanted to work on while collaborating during the mobilities. In this way, we created opportunities for experimenting and creating with the students designing new ideas and solutions.

At the beginning, we also executed a survey among the parents, teachers and students about their expectations about the effects of the project on the students, parents and teachers. In this way, we could plan the activities in such way to meet their expectations. All the activities were connected to the project's main aims.

We really fostered communication and fellowship during the project, so using English language was vital for the students to be able to communicate with each other, host families and teachers. After a week of spending time abroad with foreign people, the students' communicative skills and the level of English improved a lot. Moreover, they became much more self-aware and self-confident. Constant team-building games, doing sports, organizing video conferences and exchanging contacts really contributed to creating new friendships that will hopefully last for a long time.

### THE METHODOLOGY

The Slovenian team applied different methodology when planning the project activities. The team of students worked together in a form of a school club, called English Club Erasmus+. The students created many videos, for example, about their school, the city, P. E. lessons. The team of teachers created different questionnaires that were later used for comparative studies and evaluation. While preparing pre- and mobility tasks, the students worked with their mentor (coordinator) to produce different presentations and materials that they later worked on during the mobilities and after. Some of the activities that were used at the mobility in Slovenia were created by the coordinator of the project in collaboration with the school team. While working on the project, the school collaborated with other school clubs and NGO organizations in order to improve and upgrade the activities and projects that were already running at school (Tourist project, Research project, Healthy food scheme, Folk dance group, activity days ...).

Some of the mainly used strategies were brainstorming, collaborative learning in groups, Gardner's 6 thinking hats, collaborative problem solving learning, Gardner's multiple



intelligence theory, discussions, social activities fostering fellowship, implementing technology (online tools for creating questionnaires and analysing, video cameras, forming leaflets, video editing, doing online tests about your ideal job, tasks executed on Viber, video conferences over Skype), intergenerational learning, practising public speaking skills, analysing data, self-awareness activities, writing essays on advantages and disadvantages, writing research papers, creating a city treasure hunt and a quiz, investigating facts about one's country, trying out journalism, writing articles about the project for the school newspaper paper and the annual school book on Erasmus project in English, translating articles into English, working with the parents on describing their profession, organizing school events and school parties, using different artistic techniques, photography ...

## THE CONTRIBUTION OF SLOVENIAN TEAM TO THE PROJECT

Although Slovenia participated in Erasmus+ project for the first time, they put a lot of time and effort in the project work. They stayed in touch with other partner countries at all times and kept the terms agreed on. They collaborated on the school level to incorporate as many as possible ongoing school activities into the project work. In doing so, they brought their school projects on a new level and gave them a lot more worth. At the same time, they shared their experiences gained with other school projects with other European countries. The attribute of the Slovenian school is good collaboration among the teachers and the students and constant linking of the younger and older students in different projects (6 to 15 years old).

The Slovenian team contributed many ideas, as for creating a school system analysis in a form of a PowerPoint, they presented other countries their well-developed career guidance programme and different communicative and collaborative activities that foster self-awareness and help students choose the profession that suits them. They presented their country in a different way, by creating a big wooden jig-saw puzzle in a form of Slovenia, where each puzzle piece represented a certain topic (cuisine, legends, sports...). Their hometown and its history were presented by means of a city treasure hunt. They presented their healthy food scheme with healthy snacks and two to four healthy meals a day. The Slovenian team of students were also very talkative and good at using English. They used the theme of the project to publish a schoolbook to commemorate the 145th anniversary of the school existence, gathering all the information about the project work with their ongoing activities at school. The book was written by the students, teachers, former students and translated by Erasmus+ team of the students and the coordinator of the project.

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