

Learning can be a lot of fun

Travelling has been a big part of my life. Ever since I was six years old, I have visited a foreign country every year. At least that's what my memory tells me.

I started my travelling journey when my mother put me in a folk dancing group. That gave me many opportunities for going abroad. We took part in some dancing festivals almost every year. At the age of 17 I was a participant in a youth exchange for the first time. Wow, what an experience! New people, new cultures, new food, everything was new and different. It was very educational and for the first time, I was thinking that learning can be a lot of fun. Some of the topics we discussed about environment were probably the same that at school. BUT, I discovered the way of learning through games, team building activities and learning by doing. This was the first time I learned the phrase non-formal learning. Probably most students don't even have a clue what it means. So didn't I, until I was given the opportunity to experience it.

So it started. Going to a youth exchange is like taking the first crisp from the bag – once you take one, it is not possible to finish before the bag is empty. For me it has been the same with these projects. I continued with looking for more possibilities to attend more exchanges, both abroad and also in Estonia. Since the first time, I have every year taken part in at least one exchange, sometimes even 2 or 3. I can't get enough of them. That's why I chose to do my EVS (European Voluntary Service) with an organisation that has the same interests as I do.

So, I started with being a participant and what happened? After taking part in around 4 exchanges, I was given the trust, by my lovely organisation HeadEst, to be a groupleader. What a change. Although as a leader I am still able to get the full experience, there is also the being responsible part. I wouldn't say there has been a huge difference, but still as a leader you start thinking more about the others. I always want my participants to get the full youth exchange experience, specially because for most of them it is usually the first one to attend. Since I started being a groupleader I have felt more excited and happy about others growing during the exchange days than about my own growth, but still from every exchange I come back more clever and motivated to continue. It has become visible to me how much 10 days of non-formal education and collaborating with different cultures can change a persons way of thinking.

As a leader I also started to understand how running a youth camp works. How much sweat the organisers need to put into their work. So ever since, I have this small or big? dream to write my own project one day. Or to start with, be a part of creating an environment for youngsters to experience the magic of non-formal learning.

Long story short, I believe I owe my travelling experience to my mother who took me to the first dancing class and to one incredible woman who has introduced me to several opportunities. Also to Erasmus+, which is the best program that has ever been invented.

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