

Your Europe

Training Course

As our tiny charter flight was approaching the – presumably only – runway at Chisinau Airport, I remember feeling a mild sense of disbelief. I must have had some preconceptions about going on a training course in Moldova, but that did not prepare me for the culture shock that followed. Frankly, it was difficult to decide whether the airport building was being renovated or about to be knocked down. Inside, no one seemed to speak any English, so my elementary Russian would come in handy. One of my travel companions' luggage had been lost, so it is safe to say that our outlook for the week ahead was less than optimistic. We could not have been more wrong.



Things took a turn for the better as soon as we left the airport building and headed for

the location of the camp. We were instructed to hail a taxi, since the forty minute ride would not cost more than 300 lei, about 15 euros. This was the first time



we encountered the flexible nature of prices in Moldova. Drivers instantly swooped in to offer their services and the first one to arrive suggested that he take us for 25 euros. This was swiftly negotiated down to 15 – my first successful bargaining endeavour during the trip with many more to come. The journey took us through small villages along bumpy roads and we finally arrived in Vadul lui Voda, our home for the next ten days.

Your Europe was an Erasmus+ training programme organised by the Danish NGO InterCollege for youth leaders from twelve current and prospective EU member states.

This being my very first Erasmus+ experience, I did not know what to expect. All I knew beforehand was that we'd participate in something called non-formal education, with workshops focusing on European citizenship. And this is what we did, but the course offered so much more than that. Our two trainers, Lilla and Ana were fantastic at getting all 23 of us



involved in activities and making us arrive on conclusions by ourselves. The first couple of days flew by with lively conversation and various activities centring on democracy and active citizenship. Ones that stand out were simulation games, such as representing pressure groups in the city council of a fictive town. Participating in negotiations as the Foreign Minister for an EU country with an aim to solve the ongoing migrant crisis was also a fun and challenging task.

While the first part of the week focused mainly on training for skills, such as negotiating, public speaking and group work, the second half of the course

involved exercises that put us in the shoes of trainers. We had to devise our own non-formal education sessions on the topic of European values which would engage the rest of the group for 20 minutes. Easy as it may sound, a well built-up and effective 20 minute session was quite tricky to prepare. Apart from staying within the time frame and coming up with creative tasks, we also had to make sure that the five participants leading the session were in sync and were clear on what comes next. As with every activity, our facilitators were there for us every step of the way, offering guidance and giving feedback at the end.

Although our schedule was rather intense, our time in Moldova was studded with opportunities to explore the surrounding area and get to know the locals. Since we were staying in a riverside resort, we could go for a run by the unspoilt shore of the



Dniester, with Transnistria right on the other side. We also ventured into Chisinau, exploring its streets and parks, as well as its nightlife. To be perfectly honest, one of

the most memorable aspects of the whole course was the amazing company, with everyone eager to hang out together and



experience the Moldavian lifestyle. This included their amazing cuisine, wines and music, as well as curiosities such a student bar with a safety guard holding a Kalashnikov on standby. We also wandered by the Parliament, where we were warmly welcomed and offered tea by

people protesting against the current regime. As part of the course, we also visited a local NGO for adults with disabilities, which was also a heart-warming and unforgettable experience.

It is incredibly difficult to sum up ten days of such intensity. This short account is a feeble attempt at reminiscing about an experience of a lifetime. We all came away with a million stories to tell, knowledge to share and friendships to cherish. I hope that this was not the last time I could take part in a programme like this, and I couldn't be more grateful to the Institute for Cultural Relations Policy for their support and for making it possible for me to participate.

■ **Zsófia Nagy**

