A YEAR OF VOLUNTEERING IN OSIJEK

PROJECT INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY

EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS

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kolektiv

društveni atelje

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Nóra

The Excel Wizard



My name is Nóra, and I am from Budapest, Hungary. I studied biology in University, but after finishing my bachelor studies I felt a bit stuck in life. To decide on my future plans with a clearer mind, I thought of taking a gap year. That was when my sister, a former EVS volunteer, recommended ESC to me. I was immediately hung up on the idea of traveling to another country and volunteering there for a longer period of time! Since ESC is an opportunity for a maximum of 12 months, it perfectly aligned with my decision on a gap year too.

Now the question was: where to go and what to do?
On my list of topics of interest, community building had a high place and DKolektivs "Inclusive community" project seemed to be a great opportunity including this subject, next to social inclusion. It was also located in a neighboring country which pleased my family who wanted me to still be close, and since I heard people are nice in the region I decided on this project. And that is how I came to live in Osijek.

Why did you start ESC?

After finishing my bachelor studies I felt a bit stuck in life. To decide on my future plans with a clearer mind, I thought of taking a gap year.

- **I had the chance to move to an other country without having ties with anyone there**
- **There was an opportunity to try something new I never did before**
- **I wanted to get out of my comfort zone**



Adrià

The Ladies Man



My name is Adrià, I'm the spanish ESC volunteer of DKolektiv. My volunteering experience started in September 2022, lasting a whole year.
For some time, I had wanted to volunteer abroad but I never had the time to do it, so after finishing my Law degree and starting the Social Work degree online, which allowed me to study from anywhere in the world, I decided to make my dream come true. I knew about the ESC program, since I found it on the Internet a few years ago, so I decided to give it a try.
I had volunteered at home before, but I didn't know what to expect from volunteering outside of my comfort zone, that's why I spent a lot of time looking for a volunteer placement that would be suitable for me, a place where I could learn and have fun at the same time.
After a lot of searching I found this project in Osijek which caught my attention as it was related to social inclusion. I felt that the activities proposed by the organization would be ideal to develop new skills and learn more about my abilities.
Before coming, I didn't know much about Croatia, and even less about Osijek, so I had to do a little research about what life was like there. So after deep reflection, I decided that this project was the right one for me.

Why did you start ESC?

For some time, I had wanted to volunteer abroad but I never had the time to do it. After starting the Social Work degree online I decided to make my dream come true.

- **Because it's an opportunity to live abroad and meet new people from around the globe**
- **It allows me to develop new skills and abilities and improve my English**



The first thing I realized in Osijek was the lush greenery wherever I looked. The city found a place in my heart really fast, especially the Drava passing through the city, which reminds me of my own home in Budapest. It was a big difference from Budapest, a city with a population of 1.5 million people, to come to Osijek, which is a city with around 100 000 people. **However the change felt refreshing, as people didn't rush here as much, shops were always close and random walks to any direction brought something nice to see.**

Although some culture shock also came to me, when I realized that people smoke even inside coffee shops and go on bike truly just everywhere, or when I found myself staring at the locked door of a closed shop on a Sunday. Of course, I also learned that coffee should be properly enjoyed, rakija is not to be turned down and all headaches come from the southern winds.



FIRST IMPRESSIONS



When I arrived in Osijek, the first impression I had was of tranquility, in the streets there were people but there was a peaceful atmosphere. **I was also impressed by how welcoming the people were, and even though I did not speak their language, they helped me in everything I needed.** The language and the Balkan culture was also a big shock for me, as it was my first time interacting with the Slavic world, which I found quite enriching. It should be added that many stereotypes about Eastern Europe that I used to have were gradually dismantled as the days went by.

TRAININGS



We had two times when we got the chance to meet other ESC volunteers in a formal setting. One was the **on-arrival training**, where we learned more about ESC and volunteering in general, gained skills to handle situations, worked together in workshops and in general got a feeling of being part of a bigger network. We met people from all kinds of countries and backgrounds, from Egypt to Poland, age 18 to 28, it truly was a diverse group and a lot of fun!



The other one, the **mid-term evaluation** was more about reflection. Reflecting on the work we've done so far, all the knowledge we gained and planning ahead for the remaining time of our volunteering. Compared to the on-arrival, it felt more like a meeting of veterans and experts who already know their crafts and can relate more to the experiences of the others. We also talked about future plans after we finished with our projects here.

Having the opportunity to meet other volunteers in the same situation as me was a great experience. Sharing knowledge, experiences and concerns opened my eyes to how to live my volunteer year in the best way. Also, from these meetings I made new friendships, which have enhanced my experience here.





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TASKS & PROJECTS

In DKolektiv we had the chance to be part of different projects and workshops. That's how we got involved in the planning of **Društveni ateljes birthday party**, the conducting of the **Volunteer Awards Ceremony** and how we worked together with local volunteers to celebrate **Planet Earth Day**.

Promoting mobility projects was a task both of us shared, and what put us in many situations with stage fright.





Through a culture exchange, we participated in the panel discussion organized by American exchange students who came to Croatia.



Languages with Adrià







Spanish with Croatians and Ukrainians

I conducted weekly Spanish classes for a group of young people from Osijek and Ukrainian refugees, in which I taught them the basics of the Spanish language.

English speaking club

Among our workshops was the co-led English speaking club. This club was originally started for Ukrainian refugees and later got expanded with interested Croatians. By the end it became a nice international meeting time for people living here.

Spanish class with the pensioners

Once a week I had Spanish lessons with a group of pensioners, where, in addition to learning a little Spanish, we spent the afternoon playing games and exchanging cultural differences.

Cultural evening

With the intention of bringing the Erasmus students closer to the group of pensioners next doors, I organized an event in which young people of different nationalities presented songs and traditions of their respective countries.



Reusable bag workshop

The bag sewing workshop I had, aimed at teaching very basic sewing techniques to people through a simple project, in hopes that in the future more people will use reusable fabric bags.



Picture not found

Tie that knot!

An other handcraft type workshop I had was Tie that knot!, in which I showed people how to read patterns of and make friendship bracelets.



Handcrafts with Nóra

Oftentime in Društveni atelje we would have tasks related to local volunteers or our office. That is why I am proud to say, my excel skills improved significantly, while making new tables and bettering existing ones for the office. I also learned much while editing videos and making visuals for our workshops!

Failed successfully

One club that I tried to make, however ended up closing after a few meetings was a discussion club based on subjects brought up in TED Talks. While the participants seemed to enjoy the club, it was hard to keep the meetings regular and to bring in new people. It was a "failure" I learned a lot from, and which I'm motivated to retry after finishing with my volunteering.

In the nearest shelter many dogs wait daily for their due walk. Would recommend going there in your free time 100%.







We helped out in an other organization by taking care of the animals and helping out with other tasks.

IN LATE SPRING, WHEN THE WEATHER STARTED TO GET BETTER, WE HAD MORE CHANCES TO GO TO OUTSIDE LOCATIONS TO VOLUNTEER.

Eco Centre, but for culture exchange!



Interactive trivia game about Croatia and Hungary, where the more you know, the faster you can get to the goal.



Quiz about Spain, in which middle schoolers were able to learn about the history of Spain while demonstrating their general knowledge in a dynamic quiz.

OUR EFFECT

Wow!

After having worked with so many kinds of people during these 12 months, especially pensioners and displaced people from Ukraine, I am happy I was able to fulfill their free time and make their days more happy and entertaining, bringing them a little part of my country and culture closer.

Adrià

"Relaxed atmosphere, in every class a video about places, events or customs from Spain"

"The most interesting thing for me was getting to know the Spanish culture and customs through the personal stories of the lecturers. The insight into the current situation in Spain was especially useful for me, and I changed this knowledge in my work."

"I liked the creativity with which they designed meetings. The workshop had a variety of topics and it was more and more interesting to attend each time."

"Everything was interesting, I can't single out anything in particular"

"Adria and Nora were accommodating and cordial. They prepared various creative activities and tried to be at our service at every moment."

"It was especially useful for me that I got to know the culture and customs of Hungary and Ukraine, and I found it interesting that we shared our personal experiences and experiences from the past."

"I liked the interchange of opinions on the topics and I liked that it concerned TED talks"

"In just a couple of steps you can have your own bag. I didn't know it was that easy!"

Nóra

I believe my sewing workshop and discussion club helped people with similar interests meet and make connections, while our presentations about ESC could broaden young people's views on volunteering, helping and traveling. It was also nice to see people in risk of social exclusion participate and share their experience in multiple of our clubs.

WHAT ABOUT THE FUTURE?



After having finished my year as a volunteer in Croatia I will return home having grown as a person, having overcome old fears, having improved my skills and discovered strengths that I didn't know I had before. I feel like the change is going to be big because I already have created my own life here with my routine and habits, so I am ready to miss this great experience.

I finish my volunteering in Croatia at the end of September. It's been a long journey but it feels like I just arrived here. I would lie if I said the thought of leaving this place doesn't make me feel sentimental, though thinking of going home brings some excitement too. I spent a great time here, learned many things and experienced even more, found new friends and made lovely memories.

In the future I hope to use the knowledge I gained here to help my community in Budapest. I also plan to go on trainings to become a mentor for ESC volunteers coming to Hungary and will do my best to spread the word about international projects to Hungarian youths.



WISHING YOU A WONDERFUL VOLUNTEERING

ADRIÀ & NÓRA

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