

REPORT

The mobility in Varna is the 3rd Short-term exchange of students as part of the Erasmus + KA 2 project “Geoparks of Europe”. As the partners established already good working relationships, the program was designed and developed in a manner as to address the main topic of the visit, which was “Flora and Fauna of the Geopark”. Additionally, the main approach was to assure the implementation of a non-formal educational approach, which serves to adhere to the Erasmus + guidelines and the project objectives while making learning and exploring fun and accessible.

DAY 1: 04.06.2019:

- On the first day of the exchange the activities took place in the town of Byala, the southern town of the Varna region as to show the variety of geological phenomenon of our lands. The activities started in the **Byala Cultural Center & Museum**, where after a warm welcome from the mayor of Byala, the participants started their work and presentations on the chosen topic for the mobility, namely “Flora and Fauna”. Each country presented the prepared presentation on the flora and fauna found in their geopark. Followed by a visit of the Museum and its archaeological exposition has as its theme center the Late Antiquity Fortress of Cape St. Atanas. The ethnographic exhibition presents marine culture as a way of life, traditions and livelihoods. Although newly founded, the Museum progressively reaffirms its presence in the cultural life of the town and the region.
- **"White Rocks"** –Located next to the town of Byala, second place in the world where are found evidence from giant cosmic cataclysm of the Cretaceous-Tertiary boundary, led to the end of the dinosaurs and gave a chance for the development of mammals. The students enjoyed exploring the site and examining from close distance the fossils.
- In the afternoon program the students had a walked guided visit around the **“Late Antique Fortress at Cape St. Atanas”** in Byala. In order to experience the authentic way of living in the oldern days where manual work was part of everyday life, they had a demonstration from a craftman on ceramic making. Each student had the chance to make her/his own product and take it as a souvenir. The practical artistic workshop was entitled **“Experience the past”**.

DAY 2: 05.06.2019

1. **The Second day started with a guided visit at Aladja Monastery** near Varna, medieval Orthodox Christian cave monastery complex in northeastern Bulgaria, 17 km north of

central Varna in a protected forest area adjacent to the Golden Sands Nature Park. The monastery caves were hewn into a 25-m high vertical karst cliff near the upper edge of the Franga plateau on several levels. The complex includes two small nearby catacombs. The visit was aimed to showcase the historical and cultural value of this geological phenomenon.

- 2. Visit to the Balchik Palace and Botanical Gardens:** The palace is in Balchik, which is 40 km from Varna. It was constructed between 1926 and 1937, during the Romanian control of the region, for the needs of Queen Marie of Romania. The Balchik Botanical Garden was established at the place of the palace's park. It has an area of 65,000 square metres (700,000 sq ft) and accommodates 2000 plant species belonging to 85 families and 200 genera. One of the garden's main attractions is the collection of large-sized cactus species arranged outdoors on 1,000 square metres (11,000 sq ft), the second of its kind in Europe after the one in Monaco.

- 3. Seminar: "Entrepreneurship in the ecological sector"**

The seminar focused on the importance to use ecologically friendly business ideas and develop strategies and business plans that involve the management of eco products. The lecturer used the examples from the University botanical gardens as to present ideas for planting and growing flower bulbs and crops as to resell them afterwards. The ideas to plant trees and bulbs depending on the seasonal needs is very important for the preservation of the environment, while creating profit and ways of living for the people.

The students also learned about the different types of roses and plants. They also visited the braille language garden where blind people can touch, learn and enjoy specific spices and plants.

- 4. Discussions and observations of the Balchik Botanical gardens**

The botanical gardens are an example of how historical, cultural and ecological heritage can be preserved and used as a teaching tool in non formal education.

The University Botanic Garden is divided in three different parts, historically and functionally, which students and teachers visited and explored in detail:

- **The landscape park** shaped at the time of Queen Marie of Romania that is now an ensemble cultural heritage – a monument and park art. The participants were able to see the different type of roses.
- **A garden adapted** for the people with limited abilities. Spreading on an area of 0.7 ha, it shows visitors the beauty of seasonal flower compositions, Alpine spots, water areas, cacti and succulents in typical stone beds cut in Balchik rocks. The network of alleys is built in compliance with the requirements for accessible environment for all. In special spot visually impaired visitors can touch different botanic species described with Braille.

- **Protected area:** In 2005 the territory of the Botanic Garden was declared Protected Area – ‘an idiosyncratic landscape created in harmonious co-existence of man and nature.’ The students and teachers observed the natural ecosystems and appreciated the rich biodiversity of the region.

The biggest attraction in the Botanic Garden is the outdoor exposition of large-size cacti and succulents. The project participants managed to see unique plants – the ancient Ginkgo, the meta-sequoia (a tree with such dimensions and age outside of its natural aerial can be seen only in the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew in London), the Japanese raisin tree (*Hovenia dulcis*) and the rubber tree, the holm oak, the evergreen magnolia *Grandiflora* etc.

5. Rehabilitation Center Tuzlata – Open Air Mad Bath

The visit at the mud baths shows to portray the healing features of the soils and the mud. As an officially recognised medically effective methods to heal various illnesses, the center is located in the Tuzlata area, near Balchik. It is an additional example on how to create an entrepreneurship opportunity in the ecological sector and as in this case crossing over with the medical application.

6. **Workshops on the beach:** The workshop included outdoor group activities on the beach of Tuzlata. The activities were specifically designed as for improving strength, tolerance and constructive dialogue between the participants. The workshop was divided in two parts:
1. **Find your fossil:** Students were asked to look for three fossils that they can find on the beach which most speak to them and associate with something they would like to keep and reminds them of the past while inspiring them for the future.
 2. **“Ship the ship”:** a teambuilding activity that involved each country to construct a ship with their bodies, requiring each participant to touch with each hand someone else. The constructed ship has to go from the starting point to the finish line without losing its structure.

DAY 3:

The final day of the program included separate activities in the morning for students and teachers:

STUDENTS: Geoworld Art Recycle workshop

Students took part in a workshop on using art as a tool for activism, ecological preservation and art making. Using recycled materials, they created art forms and installations, which afterwards were showcased and displayed in the open air exhibition around the National Planetarium of Varna “Nikolai Koopernik”. The workshop and display were also part of the preparation of a Eco performance showcase in Varna, which was later on displayed and was part of a Global Water Dance Event 2019 done in 180 countries at the same day for ecological awareness.

TEACHERS: Teachers had their official project meeting, where each country presented their progress on the project activities, achieved results and discussed the next topic in Hungary will be Geotourism, and the topic for France will be Culture.

TEACHERS AND STUDENTS: The Final preparations for Geoworld project clip presentation! The video was a compilation of students video clips shot throughout the course of the program activities and each student sent at the end of the 2nd day of the activities. The combined video art form aimed to unite the participants in creating a product with mutual effort.

The official part of the program concluded with an official ceremony giving of the certificates in Stone Forest, a natural geological phenomenon near Varna, where in a unique setting students and teachers experience the symbiosis of formal activities in a non-formal environment.

The end of the program concluded with an official ceremony giving of the certificates in Stone Forest, a natural geological phenomenon near Varna, where in a unique setting students and teachers experience the symbiosis of formal activities in a non-formal environment. The evening concluded in a cultural night and dinner for final cultural exchange of songs and dances, fun and laughter.

Methodology and Result:

The activities in Varna use a non-formal educational approach by combining various methods such a group work in “Art recycled workshop”, seminars (“Entrepreneurship in the ecological sector”), workshops “Ship the Ship”, presentations on “Flaura and Fauna”, hand-on practical learning in the craft individual lessons on ceramic making. By motivating the students to be initiative, the methodology aimed at provoking them to come up with their own ideas and interpretations on the ecological importance of geology, flaura and fauna. It is the reason why each had to create and send a video clip.

Results:

- Ceramic piece created by each of the participants
- 10min video “My view of Varna and ecology”
- 20 pieces of art form created by recycled materials
- 1 open air exhibition
- 1 Seminar (“Entrepreneurship in the ecological sector”)
- 3 Workshops “Art recycled workshop”, “Experience the past” and “Ship the Ship”
- Presentations on “Flaura and Fauna”
- Museum visits and Geological phenomenons.

In total more than 35 people took part in the activities in Varna, including students and teachers, volunteers.

1. How did the participation in this activity benefit the involved participants

The designed and organized activities during the mobility in Bulgaria were aimed to improve the personal development, skills, intercultural dialogue and communication abilities of the participants. By using various methods and approaches, the activities in Bulgaria managed to increase the participants:

- cultural awareness for the Bulgarian heritage in the Varna region;
- to develop their intercultural competences and communication;
- to improve their language skills, particularly in English, the main language of the project;
- to develop their desire to learn about archeological and geological phenomenons;
- to improve their ecological awareness and practical implementation of environmental preservation.
- to gain a better grasp on how non-formal education is applied in practice.

The above mentioned benefits refer to all the participants. Additionally, the students we specifically targeted to gain the following benefits.

Benefits for Students:

- a.** The participating students managed to learn about geology and the specific rock phenomenon in Byala through direct observation and visit of the actual fossil beach. The hands-on approach was applied in the process and after the lecture in the museum about the theoretical part they had the opportunity to visit the site.
- b.** The experiential approach was also used in the practical craft workshop of creating their own ceramic object. Each student had the opportunity to observe and have a one-on-one practice with a professional in ceramics.
- c.** The cultural heritage visits in Byala and Balchic Botanical Gardens and Palace improved the students' knowledge of flora and the seminar "Entrepreneurship in the ecological sector" gave them practical guidelines and ideas on how to start their own business in the ecological sector, with particular focus on flora and the various ways to produce crops and bulbs.
- d.** The ecological theme was continued throughout the various workshops and seminars and students managed to realize the importance to be creative with

alternative methods, to preserve the environment for future sustainability and to use knowledge wisely.

- e. Participating students learned about ways to use their creative skills in group work during the Geoworld Art Recycle workshop. They also enhanced their creative site in displaying their works in an open air exhibition.
- f. Students learn to pay attention to details in the task given at the beginning of the activities in providing video clips of their best Varna experience, which served as a preparation for Geoworld project clip presentation.
- g. The workshops conducted in the mobility were designed to motivate participants' as to become more independent in searching for solutions and ways of thinking, to use creativity in their day to day activities and studies.

Benefits for Teachers:

1. The mobility promoted further collaboration between the teachers of the partner countries.
2. The non-formal educational approach was discussed and used as a primary guiding line.
3. Teachers, who were new to Erasmus + were welcomed and learned about the program and its objectives.
4. There was an exchange of methodologies and ideas about the upcoming tasks and activities in Hungary.
5. Each country presented their up to date progress during the project activities that they carry on.
6. The cultural awareness was also raised for all participants.
7. Teachers got to experience a dynamic, full of activities program, which nevertheless had moments for relaxation and reflection, an essential part of a good project.