

Welcome to the 7th blog post on the effects of international volunteering projects that are being written regularly by the researcher Jonathan Robertson from Scotland in the frame of the research, which has started in March 2017 and will continue until November 2018. In the frame of his research, Jonathan is following volunteers participating in different volunteering activities all over Europe and finding out how volunteering is changing their lives and helping them in building a career and in personal development. Apart from volunteers, we are also following the work of their hosting organisations. We are interested in how they see the added value of volunteering projects for their organisation and how international youth work has changed their local communities.

Reading this blog will take you: 5 minutes

BLOG #7

Erasmus+ Volunteering Activities as 'future-oriented activities' – NAV, Møre Og Romsdal, Norway

“We are a bit excited because two of our volunteers are travelling today to Slovenia”. Behind the north European understatement, Ole Kristian Myrbostad's enthusiasm is palpable. The two young people leaving for a 2-month Erasmus+ Volunteering Activity in Slovenia are the first sent by NAV (the Norwegian employment office) in the county of Møre og Romsdal.

Back in 2017, Ole Kristian and his colleague Tove Gustad were participants at a conference in Gothenburg on Volunteering Activities. It was here that inspiration from the example of the work of ITER made them decide to bring the idea to Møre og Romsdal. “The results are so good that we have to try this back in our county.”

The majority of organisations active in Volunteering Activities are NGOs. I was really curious to hear why this innovative employment office had chosen to send young people directly on Erasmus+ Volunteering Activities and how they saw the connection with employability.

Ole Kristian explains that “in our county, we have a challenge in finding measures that meet the needs of those young people who have been outside of work and education for a long time”. Tove explains how the employment office decided that Volunteering Activities could provide something to the young people that they had been missing. “We wanted to try the Volunteering Activities to see if we could get actually *a change* in young people. Our colleagues in the public employment service have been struggling to find a future-oriented activity.”

Tove continues, “because of their experience so far in life, they don't have so much self-confidence about their own possibilities. And there are many reasons for that.” One of the reasons that they highlight is mental health issues. “We see on a national level that of the young people not in employment, education or training 60-70% of them have mental health issues.”

What did they and their colleagues think that Volunteering Activities could bring to these young people? For Tove, the aim is “to move them onto a different track than they have been on before, so they see they have possibilities, they can gain confidence, they can gain

knowledge about themselves that they haven't learned from other experiences that they have had so far. To give them a tool within themselves to look at opportunities in a new way.”

What is special about Erasmus+ Volunteering Activities compared to anything else? “Because they are in a new country with a new language, with new people, doing new things – everything is new. They are far from home, far from family, friends – positive things, negative things – basically on their own two feet. They have to manage themselves – with support of course. That we see as very valuable and an important thing to go through.”

One of the things that helped them implement this idea was collaborating with young staff members. Ole Kristian explains, “it is very easy for us to sell Volunteering Activities to the offices, particularly where there are a lot of young people working in the offices, because they themselves have personal experience in working abroad or taking part of their education abroad.”

Tove goes on to highlight the impact introducing Volunteering Activities to their organisation has had. “It is broadening the horizons of our colleagues to see new opportunities to help the young people become job-seekers out in society. That is a different method, not just the traditional ones that they might have heard of before.”

So for them, what is the link between Volunteering Activities and employability? Tove argues that “it's not that you do a training specifically, but it's what you gain through all the activities, all the co-operation, the flexibility that you have. Everything you contribute is giving you these competences that you can put down on your CV, which is a valuable thing.”

“The companies hiring people are getting more and more international”, Ole Kristian continues, “so having this international experience and understanding a taste of how different cultures work is a really important thing to put on a CV and might be an eye-opener for the companies.”

I catch up with Tove a few months later to hear how the 2 volunteers who went to Slovenia got on. “Both of the volunteers learned a great deal about themselves and their own strength. They learned about how to interact with people from other cultures, in a foreign language”. She continues, “in my opinion I think the focus during 8 weeks enables the volunteers in a larger degree to form positive thoughts about their own future and possibilities. We only have experience with 2 candidates so far and are excited about the future possibilities for other volunteers.”

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Written by Jonathan Robertson, freelance researcher and youth work trainer, currently working on a research project on how Erasmus+ volunteering activities contribute to the employability of young people.



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