

Final Report Paula Gehrs European Voluntary Service

name, prename: **Gehrs, Paula** time: **01/09/18 – 31/08/19**
working place: **two primary schools and one youth centre** in **Nagyvázsony, Hungary**
hosting organisation: **Fekete Sereg Ifjúsági Egyesület** more info: paulasblog.de

MY FAREWELL

I enjoyed a lot the last two months, July and August, of my voluntary service. From the middle of June on were summer holidays in school, so I only worked in the youth centre in the afternoon during the last weeks. But also here were fewer kids because some of them worked or were on holiday. Due to the tourism peak season a lot of events took place in Nagyvázsony and its surrounding e.g. village days in the region's villages in which I played with the orchestra, the street music festival in Veszprém, the famous "Valley of arts" festival in Kapolcs and a team of horses competition. Together with the staff of Fekete Sereg we visited these festivals.



While I lived together with two Portuguese, two Estonian, one Finnish and one Italian volunteer during May until the end of June, there arrived four new volunteers in July with whom I got along very well. With them it was a very amicable atmosphere in the flat and we became friends.



Because of our close relationship within the shared flat it was not easy to see the other volunteers off. It was also not easy to farewell the teacher, the staff of Fekete Sereg, my mentor, Viola, and the youngsters from the choir and orchestra but at the same time I looked forward to coming home. As it is the tradition of my hosting organisation, we volunteers were invited to a see-you-soon dinner together with my mentor and the teachers. During the last days I met for the last time some teachers, our neighbours and

my Hungarian friends to say goodbye before Viola took me to the train station on the departure day.

COUNTRY AND PEOPLE

I felt at home in Hungary and in Nagyvázsony. I did not experienced any "culture clash" as in my opinion the everyday habits in Hungary are not that different from the German ones. Of course there are some cultural differences for example in which way old traditions and customs are remembered. It was interesting for me to attend all the national days and traditional events because coming from North Germany I am not used to this great consciousness of traditions.

Something I couldn't accept so easily was the meat consume or rather the mentality behind it. As a vegetarian it does not bother me if somebody likes to eat meat but in Hungary I was shocked that the Hungarians just know so little about the meat production, its conditions and courses. In my opinion,

the reason for that is the lacking ability of the Hungarians to question and to scrutinise. For example, the students in school do not study in any subject how to form an own opinion which is why they often do not have any. As a person who is fond of discussion I found it difficult to accept this general lack of opinion.

Nevertheless, I am content choosing an EVS project in Hungary. In my opinion it has more value to live in a rather “unpopular” country because there you learn more new things and reduce prejudices and stereotypes. Once the language barrier is a bit overcome the Hungarians are incredibly welcoming and generous which I miss a little bit back in Germany.

As I mentioned, the language is very important for integrating into a new culture. In the beginning, I didn't think that I will ever be able to speak Hungarian one day but thanks to the support of my hosting organisation and my participation in the orchestra, the choir and the ukulele club I could practice a lot and – more important – could make new contacts with Hungarian people. In contrary to experiences of former volunteers I had a lot contact with locals and I even became friends with some Hungarian youngsters.

MY WORKING PLACE

I liked my work and especially the variety between the youth centre and the two primary schools because of that my tasks were very various which I liked. Besides, I appreciated a lot the flexibility of my boss and the teachers. It was never a problem for me taking holidays even if I announced it quite late.

I think my work in school was meaningful and the teachers as well as the students profited from it. On the one hand, some students used the opportunity to get to know a German native speaker very well and I hope I could motivate them to continue learning German. But on the other hand there were also a few teachers who didn't include that much me in their lessons so that the students couldn't benefit from my presence.

In the youth centre I could help a lot at events and welcomes for guests e.g. at the yearly Advents Sundays or the visit of a roma community from East-Hungary. In addition, I helped with organisational tasks such as creating posters and info packs or with administrative tasks which was interesting and useful because I got an insight into the work of a NGO.

Regarding the future of this project it would be good if the communication between Fekete Sereg and the teachers of the school would be better. Often I had to explain what exactly I was doing in the youth centre or the schools whereby I had not always the feeling to be understood. For the future volunteers it is easier if the teacher and the staff of Fekete Sereg would know beforehand what my task in the other working place (school or youth centre) are.

Furthermore the info page about my project was not up to date but a bit out of date. For example my info page said that the volunteer's work would include language clubs or working in Veszprém but this was not the case. In addition, I wasn't informed beforehand that the volunteers have to pay the WIFI and the gas for the oven in the house. For me it's fine and I agree on paying money for internet but it would be better if future volunteers know this before they start their volunteer service.

Due to the language barrier it was difficult to communicate with the kids and youngsters in the youth centre. Moreover I came with different expectations on the youth centre to Hungary. While my idea of a youth centre in Germany is a place where different activities and trips are offered to young people this was not the case at Fekete Sereg's youth centre. Mainly, there were only a few youngster coming

to the youth centre and if they came they just wanted to play computer and use the WIFI. Besides, there were no activities in the youth centre for kids or teenager during my stay but rather for adults as for example the study visit *MY EARTH* from South America. It was the task of the volunteers to organise something for the youngsters in the youth centre and we had ideas and plans but they failed because of lacking interest from the Hungarian youngsters. Despite I have to say that we volunteers never really tried to implement our ideas so it was also our fault. The youngsters from the youth centre, almost all of them were boys, were nice and open minded to us but especially as a girl it was very difficult to reach them.

It is important for me to stress out that I do not name all the improvable things because I want to denigrate my project. I name them with the intention that they will be improved in the future and the next volunteers will have less to worry about. 😊

HOW IT WILL CONTINUE

Next to my personal development, my EVS and especially my participation in the „Kick-off meeting of the European Solidarity Corps” in Brussels, where I cofounded the *European Solidarity Network* (EuSN) helped my with the decision of a study course. Before my EVS I didn't know what to study but now I would like to devote myself to European topics as well as culture and politics. Therefore I will study “European Studies Major” at the University of Passau from October on. But before I will attend the training course of the EuroPeers because I am convinced that far to less young people know about the opportunity of an EVS which I would like to improve towards the opposite.



The experience to life abroad, learn about a new culture, learn a new language, life for the first time outside of the parent's house, work one year as a teacher, meet people from all over Europe and become friends, work on a European network, life in an international shared flat, work in the youth centre, briefly speaking: my EVS experiences were very enriching. I learned a lot what school neither university can teach and I broadened my horizon. In addition, I learned to see social, political and cultural topics from a wider angle and because of this I would really recommend to do an EVS.