



Funded by
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EUROPE FOR CITIZENS

*An Erasmus+
Booklet*



March 2024
Bansko, Bulgaria



About US

Association WalkTogether is a non-governmental organization (NGO) established in 2013 with a main focus in community-based projects. Working collaboratively with trainers and youth workers, we strive to integrate non-formal education into formal education systems. The Association actively engage with various European Union programs, where the team develops training initiatives, courses, youth exchanges, and other educational curricula centered around themes such as social-economic and technological advancements. Additionally, our programs cater to the specific interests of both young people and adult learners, including those facing cultural and social barriers, thereby creating opportunities for individuals with fewer privileges.



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About the Project



Embark on a dynamic journey of democratic exploration with our Erasmus + Youth Exchange program! Gain a solid knowledge of democratic principles, from the rule of law to human rights, fostering a deep understanding of civic participation. Take a global lens to democracy, engaging yourself in diverse systems and cultural nuances. Develop critical thinking skills to analyze political issues, coupled with effective communication abilities for impactful expression. Dive into community-based projects, improving your skills to promote democratic values and address local concerns.



Embrace open-mindedness, empathy, and a commitment to active citizenship, shaping yourself into a catalyst for positive change. Join us in creating informed, engaged, and globally-minded individuals ready to leave a lasting impact in the democratic landscape. This is more than a program – it's your gateway to becoming an influential force for democracy. Are you ready to shape the future of Europe?



About the **Participants**

YE Europe for citizens is an Erasmus+ project that took place in Bansko, Bulgaria from March 27 until April 4. The participants were a group of international active citizens that wanted to learn more about democracy, critical thinking and civic participation to better the future of their societies. Forty participants from five different countries and different walks of life embarked on this youth exchange program – from high-schoolers with zero youth exchange experience to adult professionals with countless Erasmus projects under their belts, our group had it all.

PHOTOS





MAIN TOPICS OF INTEREST

Principles of Democracy



Democracy is one of the most valuable and widely accepted forms of governance in our modern world. Grounded in human rights, freedoms, and the rule of law, democracy affects the lives of billions of people around the globe. The principles of democracy serve as its building blocks, shaping the foundational precepts necessary for its robust functioning.

Rule of Law stands as the cornerstone of democracy. This principle signifies that everyone, from high-ranking officials to ordinary citizens, is subject to the law and accountable for their actions. It ensures equality before the law and the binding nature of judicial decisions for all. This is crucial for the establishment of a just society where the law applies equally to everyone.

Individual Rights are also integral to democracy. In a democratic society, individuals enjoy fundamental freedoms such as freedom of speech, religion, assembly, and privacy. These rights empower individuals to freely express themselves, practice their beliefs, and voice their opinions. They contribute to the diversity and richness of society.

Civic Participation is essential for the vitality of democracy. This principle emphasizes that citizens are not mere spectators but active participants in the democratic process. Participation extends beyond voting to include community engagement, advocacy, and shared responsibility for the nation's well-being. It demonstrates that democracy thrives when citizens are actively involved in shaping their collective future.

Political Pluralism values diversity of thought and opinion. It acknowledges the presence of differing political perspectives and ideologies, fostering an environment where multiple viewpoints can be expressed. Debate and diversity enrich society and contribute to better decision-making processes.

Government Accountability ensures the credibility of democracy. This principle holds that governments must be accountable to the people they serve. Transparency in decision-making processes and accessibility to information are crucial for fostering trust and integrity in governance.

Transparent Governance is essential for democracy. It ensures that government processes are transparent and accessible to all citizens. Openness in governance promotes accountability and enables informed citizen participation in the democratic process.

Regular, Free, and Fair Elections are the heartbeat of democracy. This principle ensures that citizens have the right to participate in free and fair elections regularly. Elections provide an opportunity for citizens to choose their representatives and hold governments accountable.

Citizen Education is vital for sustaining democracy. This principle emphasizes the importance of educating citizens about the democratic process and their roles within it. Informed citizens are better equipped to participate effectively in democracy.

Civilian Control of the Military safeguards democracy. This principle ensures that the military remains subordinate to civilian authority. It prevents military intervention in politics and preserves democratic stability.

Respect for Minority Rights upholds democracy's integrity. This principle emphasizes the importance of protecting the rights of minorities. Recognizing and respecting minority rights is essential for fostering an inclusive and just society.

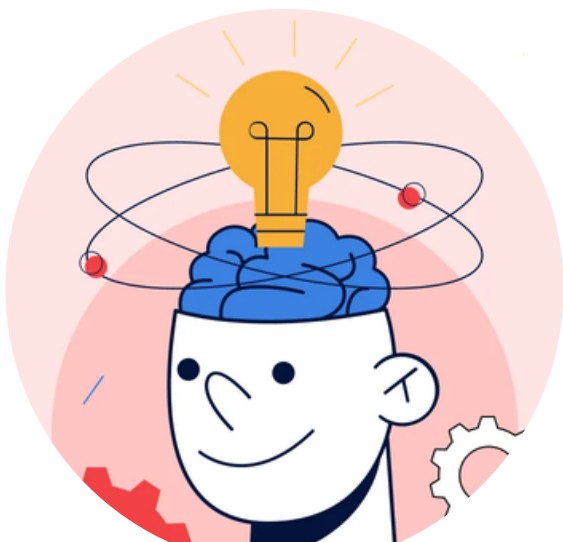


Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is a mental process used to think and evaluate consciously, logically, and objectively. This process involves analyzing information, evaluating it for accuracy and consistency, understanding different perspectives, and arriving at logical conclusions. Critical thinking helps individuals develop their approach to information, problem-solving, and decision-making skills.

Critical thinking is the process of questioning and verifying knowledge. When information is acquired about a subject, critical thinking skills allow individuals to question and evaluate its accuracy. Additionally, critical thinking enables individuals to recognize their own biases and assumptions and evaluate information objectively without ignoring them. Critical thinking finds application in countless areas of life beyond the academic world, from daily decisions to facing global challenges. It enhances organizational success in a constantly evolving environment by supporting effective leadership, innovation and problem solving in the workplace. In public discourse, it encourages civil discourse, mutual respect, and the search for common ground, which are essential components of a vibrant democracy. Critical thinking enhances the ability to understand and solve complex problems. When faced with a problem, critical thinking skills enable individuals to analyze the problem, evaluate alternative solutions, and find the most suitable solution. This process helps individuals make effective decisions and evaluate their consequences logically.

Critical thinking is the process of evaluating and interpreting information. When information is gathered from different sources about a subject, critical thinking skills allow individuals to analyze and evaluate its accuracy. Moreover, critical thinking enables individuals to understand different perspectives and interpret information by considering these perspectives



Propaganda

Propaganda, the deliberate spread of information to influence opinion or behavior, is a powerful tool with a long and complex history. It can take many forms, from seemingly objective facts to blatant lies. Here, we'll explore the different types of propaganda and how they can shape our world, along with the methods used to manipulate our perceptions.

Types of Propaganda:

- **White Propaganda:** Presents itself as neutral and truthful, using statistics and facts to support its agenda.
 - o Example: A public health campaign highlighting a vaccine's effectiveness rate with clear statistics.
- **Black Propaganda:** Spreads disinformation and lies, often disguised as coming from a neutral source
 - o Example: During WWII, Germany aired fake anti-Soviet radio broadcasts disguised as messages from within the USSR to sow discord and distrust.
- **Grey Propaganda:** Blurs the lines between fact and fiction, making it difficult to discern the truth.
 - o Example: Social media posts downplaying climate change while including some cherry-picked scientific data fall under grey propaganda.





Techniques of Propaganda:

Propaganda employs a variety of methods to influence our thoughts and actions. It can tug at our heartstrings by appealing to our emotions, like fear, hope, or patriotism. This can cloud our judgment and make us more susceptible to a particular message. Scare tactics are another common technique, exaggerating threats to manipulate our emotions and gain support for an agenda. Anti-smoking campaigns often use graphic imagery to scare viewers into quitting.

The bandwagon effect creates pressure to conform by implying "everyone else is doing it." Celebrity endorsements rely on this technique to influence consumer choices. Glittering generalities use positive but vague associations to make something seem appealing without providing specifics. Political slogans like "Make America Great Again" are prime examples of glittering generalities.

Propaganda can also resort to name-calling, attacking opponents with negative labels to discredit them. Labeling someone a "socialist" or a "radical" can be a form of name-calling.



HUMAN RIGHTS



Human Rights

The power of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the power of ideas to change the world. It inspires us to continue working to ensure all people can gain freedom, equality and dignity. A Universal Call to Justice "In the intricate tapestry of our global community, there exists a fundamental thread that binds us all: human rights. These rights, inherent to every individual by virtue of their humanity, are the cornerstone of a just and equitable society. They embody the principles of dignity, equality, and freedom, transcending borders, cultures, and ideologies. Throughout history, human rights have been championed by visionaries and activists, enshrined in documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Yet, despite the progress made, the struggle for human rights continues in the face of persistent challenges. Across the globe, authoritarian regimes silence dissent, trample on freedoms, and perpetrate grave atrocities against their own citizens. Discrimination and inequality still plague marginalized communities, denying them access to basic rights and opportunities. Conflict zones bear witness to unimaginable suffering, with civilians caught in the crossfire of violence and oppression. In the pursuit of justice, international institutions like the United Nations play a vital role, setting standards, monitoring compliance, and advocating for accountability. Civil society organizations and grassroots movements amplify voices, challenge injustices, and mobilize communities for change. However, upholding human rights is not solely the responsibility of governments or organizations—it is a collective endeavor that requires the active participation of every individual.

For more information you can watch this video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pRGhrYmUjU4>

Free and equal

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.



Freedom from discrimination

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.



Right to life

Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.



Freedom from slavery

No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.



Freedom from torture

No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.



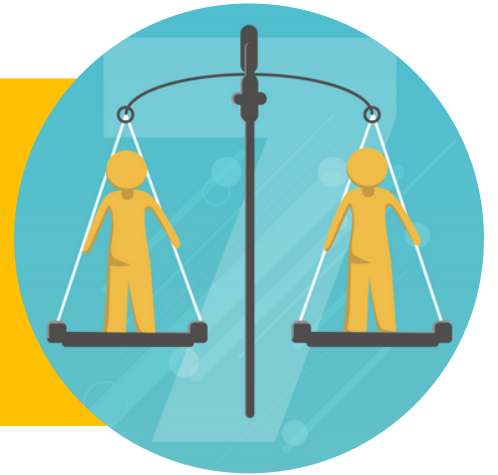


Right to recognition before the law

Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.

Right to equality before the law

All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.



Access to justice

Everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him by the constitution or by law.

Freedom from arbitrary detention

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.



Right to a fair trial

Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him

Right to privacy

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

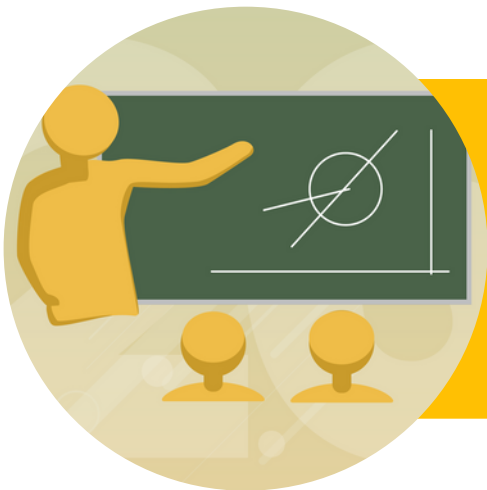


Freedom of movement

- 1) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State.
- 2) Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.

Freedom of Expression

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.



Right to education

Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

Right to leisure and rest

Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay.





THE DIFFERENT FORMS OF GOVERNANCE



Tribalism

Tribalism is a deeply ingrained aspect of human nature, rooted in our evolutionary history. Throughout history, humans have formed tribes as a means of survival, creating bonds with those who share similar characteristics or beliefs. These tribes provide a sense of identity, security, and belonging, fostering a strong community spirit. However, tribalism can also lead to exclusion, prejudice, and conflict when differences between tribes are emphasized over commonalities.

In today's world, tribalism manifests in various forms, from political affiliations to social groups and online communities. While tribalism can create a sense of solidarity and support, it can also breed hostility and division when taken to extremes. The "us versus them" mentality that often accompanies tribalism can hinder progress, perpetuate stereotypes, and fuel animosity between groups.

To combat the negative effects of tribalism, it's crucial to promote understanding, empathy, and respect for diversity. By acknowledging the common humanity that unites us all and celebrating the richness of different cultures and perspectives, we can transcend tribal boundaries and work towards a more inclusive and compassionate society. Embracing our shared humanity while appreciating the unique qualities of each tribe can pave the way for unity, cooperation, and mutual respect across all groups.

For more information you can check this link :

<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tribalism>

And also you can watch this video about Tribalism :

<https://youtu.be/Cx4GvzjRMx8?si=CDtPHYeExU76Mj7t>



Monarchy

A monarchy is a form of government in which a single ruler, usually a king or queen, holds supreme authority and power over a country or territory. Thus, the decision concerning the group are taken by the monarch alone.

In a monarchy, the position of the monarch is typically hereditary, meaning that the ruler's title and authority are passed down through generations within a royal family. The only way to dethrone the ruler is by a Coup d'État.

Alternatively, the ruler could also relinquish their throne.

Monarchies can be absolute, where the monarch has unlimited power and authority, or constitutional, where the monarch's powers are limited by a constitution or laws, and a system of checks and balances is in place.

Monarchies may also vary in their structure and functions, with some monarchs serving as ceremonial figureheads with limited political power, while others play a more active role in governing the country. Monarchies have existed throughout history and can be found in various forms in different countries around the world.



Representative Democracy

Representative democracy is a system of government in which citizens elect representatives to make decisions on their behalf, allowing for their participation in the political process through regular elections. Elected representatives are responsible for crafting laws, formulating policies, and representing the concerns of their voters. This form of democracy operates on the principle of majority rule tempered by protections for minority rights and the rule of law, offering a balance between direct democracy and more autocratic forms of governance. Widely practiced in countries around the world, representative democracy provides a framework for accountable and responsive government while ensuring citizen participation. This system offers a practical solution for governing large and diverse societies. Nevertheless, it is crucial to explore ways to improve transparency, citizen involvement, and accountability mechanisms within representative democracy. This effort aims to foster a more robust democratic system that effectively addresses the diverse interests and requirements of the population, ultimately ensuring that the voices of the people are not merely heard but genuinely represented in the decision-making process.

Links:

- https://books.google.bg/books?hl=It&lr=&id=NS8kxpl7t1kC&oi=fnd&pg=PP8&dq=+Representative+Democracy&ots=MjZsoj7aPa&sig=KkU0UTEWNeskVil615KNuZOqP_4&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=Representative%20Democracy&f=false
- <https://study.com/.../what-is-representative-democracy...>
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v9VERBPU6_c



1&2

March 27th & 28th 2024



We spent the first day getting to know each other through name games and other team building activities. By the end of the day, most of us had learned each other's names and gained our first insights into each other's lives. After several hours of getting to know each other, we were prepared to take on the first day of democracy-related activities together.



March 29h, 2024

Erasmus Job Shadowing and Internships:

Erasmus offers internships lasting 2 to 12 months and job shadowing experiences for students, recent graduates, and professionals seeking practical work experience and career development opportunities. Themes covered include professional development, career exploration, cross-cultural communication, and industry-specific skills. For example, an internship in a marketing firm may involve working on real-life campaigns, conducting market research, and analysing consumer behaviour. Job shadowing experiences may include observing professionals in action, attending meetings, and participating in project discussions. The program emphasises hands-on learning, with participants gaining valuable insights into their chosen field and developing relevant skills for future employment. Mentorship and feedback sessions provide guidance and support throughout the placement period.

What better way to start an Erasmus+ project than with an introduction to the program? Many of us had no idea just how massive the Erasmus enterprise is, but through a group activity, we learned the many different kinds of programs that Erasmus offers: Youth Exchanges, Training Seminars, Solidarity Corps, Young Entrepreneurs, and countless more.


Of course, we also had to talk about the Youthpass, the document that certifies our attendance and participation in each Erasmus project. We went over the eight key competences that Erasmus youth exchanges aim to develop in their participants.

Finally, we were given a difficult chair game to figure out together, with little to no input from the facilitators. The point was to push us to communicate, develop a strategy, and appoint a leader to take the charge in implementing our strategy. By the end of the activity, we had built trust and taken the first steps towards forming a mini-democratic society of our own.





March 30h, 2024

 White Hat Data, facts, information known or needed	 Red Hat Feelings, hunches, instinct and intuition
 Black Hat Difficulties, potential problems, why something may not work	 Yellow Hat Values and benefits, why something may work
 Blue Hat Manage process, next steps, action plans	 Green Hat Creativity, solutions, alternatives, new ideas

On the fourth day, the team leader of Romanian Group held a workshop on the topic of critical thinking. We worked in groups in order to generate our own definitions of critical thinking, and after an informative presentation, we worked on refining these definitions.

We followed this up with a practical exercise in critical thinking – The Six Thinking Hats. We were split into several groups, where each group member was assigned a position that they had to defend based on the color of their thinking hat. This exercise served to train participants in debating and entertaining novel perspectives, including ones they may not have necessarily agreed with.

Next, our critical thinking skills were put to the test with the Bridge Game. Groups were given several minutes to use any of the objects in or near the hotel to create a stable bridge-like structure. The task involved outside-the-box thinking and the participation of each group member.

Finally, we concluded the day with a cultural evening, immersing ourselves in the cultures of three different countries. After a few dances and a jolly feast, we ended the day on the most positive note yet.



March 31st 2024

Today has been an enriching and insightful day filled with a variety of activities aimed at enhancing our understanding of tribal decision-making, setting goals, exploring media and critical thinking, confronting propaganda, and delving into the basics of book and video editing. Additionally, we engaged in practicing and reflecting on "Democracy on Fire" through books and reels. Let's delve into the highlights of our day:

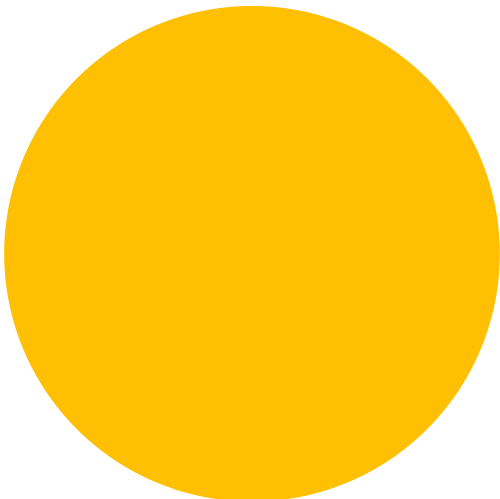
1. Energizers to Kickstart the Day:

Started our morning sessions with energizers to invigorate and prepare ourselves for the day ahead.

Created a lively atmosphere conducive to learning and engagement.

2. Tribal Decision Making + Setting Goals:

3. Facts, Media, and Critical Thinking:



4. Afternoon Workshops and Debates:

5. Book and Reels "Democracy on Fire" Practice:

Utilized a fun game to explore tribal decision-making processes. Participants assumed roles such as king, counselors, queen, and shaman, navigating through scenarios and setting communal goals.

Combined learning with interactive gameplay to foster understanding.

Explored the influence of media on shaping perceptions and narratives.

Fostered critical thinking skills through interactive workshops and discussions.

Equipped participants with tools to discern factual information from propaganda.

Engaged in a series of workshops and debates covering various topics.

Explored the psychological impact of propaganda and strategies for countering it.

Delved into the basics of book and video editing, gaining practical skills through hands-on activities.

Practiced the themes of "Democracy on Fire" through creative activities.



Sharing Our Cultural Heritage:

Created an e-book for children centered around the theme of democracy, fostering both creativity and understanding.

Encouraged participants to reflect on the significance of democracy in our society.

Gathered for a group reflection session to consolidate our learnings and insights.

Shared experiences, perspectives, and key takeaways from the day's activities.

Strengthened camaraderie and mutual understanding within the group.

Presented our country's history, landmarks, and cultural significance. Indulged in a gastronomic adventure, sampling delicious dishes that reflect the culinary traditions of Romania and Turkey.

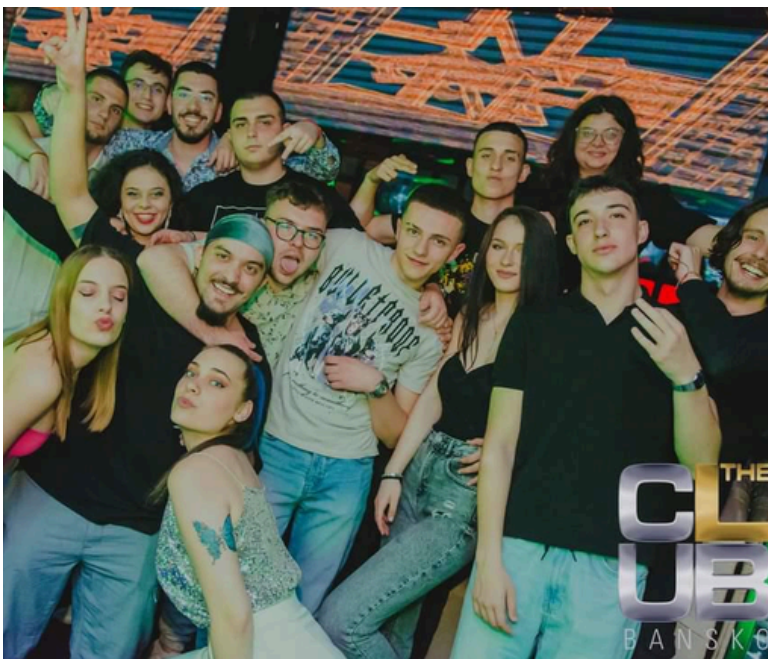
Danced to the beat of traditional music, experiencing the joy and vibrancy of Romanian and Turkish dance forms.

Engaged in friendly competitions and games, fostering camaraderie and cross-cultural understanding.





May 1st 2024





May 2nd, 2024



For the usual daily opening we again started with a group competition while doing the activity Top 10. Today's hot take was on Top 10 most visited countries in the world. The second funny energizer was a "Broken Telephone with Dance movements" during which we saw how easily information could be changed while being passed on. The day continued with learning about monarchy as a form of governance and the importance of human rights and democratic values for the rise of democracy. Day 7 of our project was marked with remarkable changes in the government, as Absurdistan became a kingdom after the terrible failure of the Tribal government elected only a day earlier! Appointed by God himself, we the people of Absurdistan all found ourself under the absolute reign of King Antonio The Funny and his Queen-Consort Rugileh The Faithful. Their rule however, was short and both faced a terrible faith due to a bloody Coup d'État organized by an opponent.

After a long and disastrous decade of royal bloodsheds and countless of slain Kings and Queens, our new King Boris The Handsome decided to grant the subjects of his kingdom more freedoms. He invited a messenger from a far away land of the North to talk about Humans Rights and Democratic Values, completely unaware that it would cause a Revolution. Viva la revolution! However, the monarchy is down and the country is left in an anarchic chaos!



ATTITUDE, SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

The people of Absurdistan managed to implement changes, improvements and through great communication, personal reflections and group interactions learned how to control their frustrations during arguments. The topic of active participation in democracy was raised through the last activity for the day, where we had to vote and submit our own community Democratic Chart with principles to follow in the real life.



SESSIONS TAKEAWAY

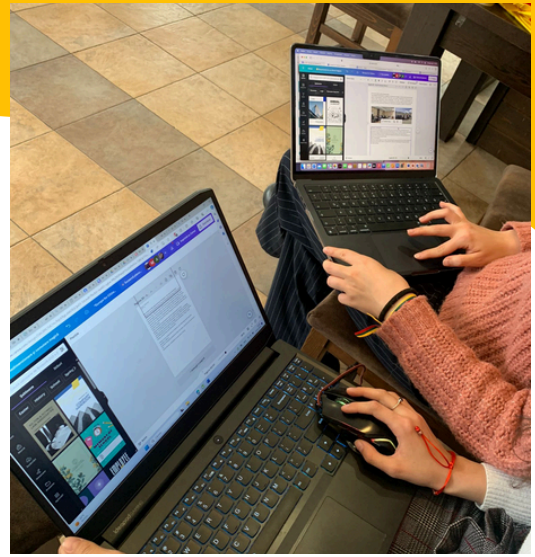
One of the key takeaways from the session was that democracy is the best form of government that is based on the active participation of the citizens. Human rights and democratic values are the building blocks for bettering our lives and living in a pluralistically diverse society. Interactive debates and decision-making activities can improve our communication skills.

UNTIL TOMORROW

Learning crucial things on our way of becoming more empowered and active citizens of Europe and the world. Check us tomorrow to read our final project through e-books and reels making.



May 3rd, 2024



Our project is fast approaching completion. We had presidential elections and we finished the e-book. We started this day of the project with a Top 10 activity, an energizer and recapitulated what we did the previous day. We also found out information about the next day, when we will meet in the morning, then all the participants will leave the hotel.

We learned new information about democracy and how elections are carried out in this form of government. We had 7 candidates who spoke in front of the voters about how they will govern and what benefits they will bring to society.

Then, the project participants had the opportunity to vote democratically and the votes were counted by an election committee. Today, our primary focus was finalizing the e-book. With the help of our democratically elected project managers, we split the workload as evenly and efficiently as we could - writing, article compilation, reels, social media, photo/video and editing team.

Thanks to our unique blend of talents, this seemingly daunting task became a walk in the park. Everybody played to their strengths, and the end result was a full-blown ebook, completed in just under 2 hours.





Acknowledgements

This book was made possible thanks to the **participants** in the project and the efforts of their facilitator , **Tihomira Naneva**.