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Youth Exchange
Promotion of youth social and civic participation
through activism and volunteering competences

E-BOOKLET



Between 26th and 30th August 2025

Alqueva (Portel), Portugal



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Introduction

The purpose of this e-booklet is to reflect on what was done during these wonderful days in Alqueva, Portugal (between 26th and 30th August 2025), within the scope of the youth exchange, an activity that was part of the Erasmus+ project, which also included the training course (between 12th and 17th August 2025, also in Alqueva). In inspiring others to participate more in youth exchanges Erasmus+ make memories to remind them in the future. Grow as people. Learn about other cultures and different perspectives of the world. Adventure, experience and connection are the three main words that describe our feeling about this youth exchange and that we want to share.

But, this e-booklet will begin in a first part, by making a synthesis of the youth exchange carried out, functioning as a framing part, mentioning and referring to the fundamental aspects related to it, for example framing the problem to which it intended to respond, the respective objectives, the relationship with the Erasmus+ Programme, the basic guiding principles, the generic aspects of the event held, the activities carried out during it, the results achieved and the expected impacts.

It should be noted that this YE is the aggregation of the two activities of the same that were approved to perform, whose authorization was granted by the National Agency Erasmus +, Youth/ Sport and European Corps of Solidarity, Portugal.

Then, there will be a second part, which was conceived and structured exclusively by the participants in YE (contemplating their points of view) and referring to the highlights for these of the working week, what they liked most (with the inclusion of some testimonies from them), the indication of participants (respective roles and entities), the indication of people to meet in Alqueva, such as locations in Alqueva and in Portel (headquarters of the municipality to which Alqueva belongs), etc.

Part 1

1. Problem to which the youth exchange aimed to respond

Young people play a vital role in shaping the future of our communities and across Europe.

Their voices, ideas and actions are powerful tools for change.

By engaging in activism and volunteering, young people can support important causes, raise awareness and contribute directly to building more inclusive and sustainable societies.

Thus, considering that the social inclusion of young people and their active participation in society are two major European priorities, it is urgent to prioritize actions that empower young people, empower them and increase awareness of the importance of actively acting in society (for a sustainable future). However, according to data available in EUROBAROMETER, the adherence of young people to traditional forms of participation, such as elections, is low (25%), with a high incidence in southern and eastern Europe, going thus for the general disinterest increasingly notorious on the part of young people in solidarity/ voluntary actions and/or activism.

We are thus faced with the existence of a problem - the demotivation and low adherence of young people to volunteering and activism, which are among the most enriching forms of participation, are inextricably linked to the widespread exclusion of young people from civic and social participation.

So, to promote and strengthen this participation of young people in society, it is essential to break with the traditionalist approaches of social and democratic participation and promote alternative opportunities for participation, such as volunteering or activism.

Based on this problem, it became evident the need to invest in an activity to encourage greater civic and social participation among young people, using diversified and flexible approaches such as volunteering and activism. And at the same time promote youth inclusion, ensuring that young people from rural and marginalized backgrounds also have access to meaningful opportunities for participation.

This YE aimed to respond to the following needs:

- a) Better understanding of the individual and collective benefits of volunteering and activism, including developing professionally useful skills and reducing social exclusion, to increase their motivation and acceptance;
- b) Develop the core values and skills for volunteering and activism in order to provide confidence in engaging in such activities;

- c) Use non-formal approaches to explore the specific ambitions of each young person, combining them with the local needs of each territory, so that volunteering and activism are useful for both parties;
- d) More knowledge about the opportunities available in the field of volunteering and activism in various geographical areas, to facilitate access to them.

2. Objectives

The objectives of this YE were as follows:

- General: Motivate and empower young Europeans to do volunteering and activism, as a motor of inclusion and social and civic participation.
- Specific:
 - Help young people identify and explore opportunities for civic engagement, from local community projects to initiatives at the European level;
 - Encourage mobility and intercultural exchanges, giving participants the opportunity to broaden their horizons while developing key skills such as teamwork, communication and problem solving. Ultimately, strengthening their sense of belonging and agency as active European citizens;
 - Create accessible ways of participation, adapted to the different profiles and realities of young people. This includes addressing the barriers faced by rural youth and those with fewer opportunities, and
 - Provide clear information on participation models, whether through volunteering or activism and highlight the personal and collective benefits of such.

3. Alignment with the EU Youth Strategy and the Erasmus+ Programme

The YE was fully in line with and supported the EU Youth Strategy, in particular the objectives for youth:

- #1 and #9: Participation and trust;
- #3: Inclusion;
- #6: Rural youth engagement;
- #8: Non-formal education.

This activity also aligned with the Erasmus+ Programme, the initiative enabled capacity building, promoted lifelong learning and strengthened active citizenship and a shared European identity.

4. Basic guiding principles

All YE activities were based on non-formal education methods, including group learning, team building and regular reflection.

Participants were involved in all stages of the process, from conception to evaluation, ensuring that their involvement was significant and not symbolic.

The project emphasized inclusion, diversity and sustainability.

Special attention was given to participants with fewer opportunities, ensuring an accessible and equitable participation for all.

In addition, sustainable practices such as green travel and the use of local food were integrated throughout the YE.

5. Youth exchange for training and skills development (YE)

- Entities/countries involved: all those that participate in YE: Associação Sementes de Esperança (Portugal), as a promoter entity and the partner entities LUMEN (Croatia), EKO- Zuerst and Social Economy Group (Greece), Tavo Europa (Lithuania), Proactive Future (Spain) and ATIC (Romania)

- Number of participants and their profile - total 37:

* 29 young people aged between 13 and 27 (5 from each entity, excluding the Croat, who only had 5), all of them with fewer opportunities;

* Six team leaders, one for each entity (the youngest with 23 years), and

- Two facilitators (26 and 33 years old, respectively).

5.1. Activities carried out

The activities started at 09:30 am and usually ended around 10:30 pm, being interspersed with breaks for morning and afternoon snacks, lunch and dinner. All activities were based on the informal work methodology, as already mentioned, having been dosed with icebreakers, energizers and other group dynamics. The young people, formed by groups reflected, exchanged ideas and worked with each other to know what is necessary to do volunteering and activism in their communities, demystifying concepts, identifying the individual and collective benefits of such practices, the skills required for this, such as the most priority areas for such and indicated the rights and duties inherent in such practices.

Thus, the young participants, through training in the thematic areas of YE, carrying out work and related practical activities, acquired and reinforced knowledge in these fields,

having in particular:

- Learned the concepts of volunteering and activism and the individual and collective benefits resulting from their practice;
- Presented and discussed proposals for intervention at the level of volunteering and/or activism, to heal or diminish the problems of their communities of origin, in which such proposals could make all the difference;
- Identified the values, rights and duties associated with the practice of volunteering and activism, but also built codes of conduct and ethics for such and what they need to know to do volunteering or activism;
- Conceived an e-booklet, a kind of synthesis document of what was done during the Youth Exchange, as an illustrative document of good practice in terms of information and motivation of young people, for a more incisive civic participation in society and at the same time as inclusion factor for them, to be a guide for young people on what they need to know about volunteering and activism in their community, in order to inform, motivate and guide them.

There were also visits to the river beach of Alqueva (in which the participants met and made some games and water activities) and Portel (peddy-paper and visits to some of the cultural spaces of the village) and still cultural afternoons, in which each participating entity from each country, shared with the group the historical, cultural features of gastronomy and others through videos, dances, online games (Kahoot) and tables with products to taste.

There were also daily individual and group reflections on the work carried out in the respective days (about what was learned, the difficulties encountered and how to overcome them, etc.) and on the last day, individual and group reflection on the entire event.

The young participants also developed and/or reinforced other skills, such as initiative, creativity, teamwork, practicing different languages, reflection and critical thinking, among others.

5.2. Expected results and impacts

The results were of 2 types:

- *Intangible* - development of learning and skills at the level of: communication in mother tongue, communication in foreign languages, and basic skills in science and technology, digital competence, learning to learn, social and civic skills, business skills, cultural sensitivity and creativity, ETC.

- *Tangible:*

Production of the following documents:

- Infopack of the activity YE; the document can be accessed through the following link:

<https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:EU:ed2ef468-0385-4f8c-a856-a5748b795f1d>

- E-booklet: this document, which provides an overview of the YE held, summarizes and illustrates the activities carried out in it, refers skills developed, results, includes the link to access publications of some of the participants, about their participation in the event, as well as what they liked most during the working week, indicates according to the point of view of these people to know in Alqueva, as well as spaces to visit in Alqueva and Portel

- The creation of a YE group in WhatsApp, for communication between its participants;

- Share the guiding aspects of the project and the infopack of YE with the partner entities of the project and with the participants in the event, via email and through the WhatsApp group created for YE, and

- Publications of the YE carried out in the social networks of the promoter, partner entities and also in those of the participants, besides the working documents, evaluations of the activity by the participants, which include opinions of the same.

The expected impacts are, among others, the following (predominantly for young people):

- More information on E+ (or other) opportunities and their relationship with the construction of the future and the European future;

- Motivation of young people to participate in future NFE activities that increase the acquisition of skills, experimentation and personal, social, environmental and/ or organizational development;

- Increased awareness of diversity and the importance of social inclusion and active participation of young people, by promoting alternative opportunities for participation such as volunteering and activism;

- Increased awareness and understanding of the individual and collective advantages of volunteering and activism and their role in reducing social exclusion;

- Development of basic values and skills for volunteering and activism;

- Better knowledge about the opportunities for volunteering and activism, at local, national and international levels, to access them more easily.

- Greater openness to networking, paying attention to the added value of mobility and focusing on young people;

- Increased awareness of the potential of European programmes to respond to common challenges;

But also for organisations: increasing their capacity to support young people, expanding their networks and broadening their reach through greater participation in local and transnational projects, including the European Solidarity Corps.

Part 2

This part was elaborated by the participants in YE, reflecting their points of view, opinions and reflections.

1. Highlights of the week of activities on the activities carried out (photos)



Icebreaker - Drawing of the participants' faces by all (the drawing of each one had the contribution of all), to promote the recognition of the group and the relationship between all



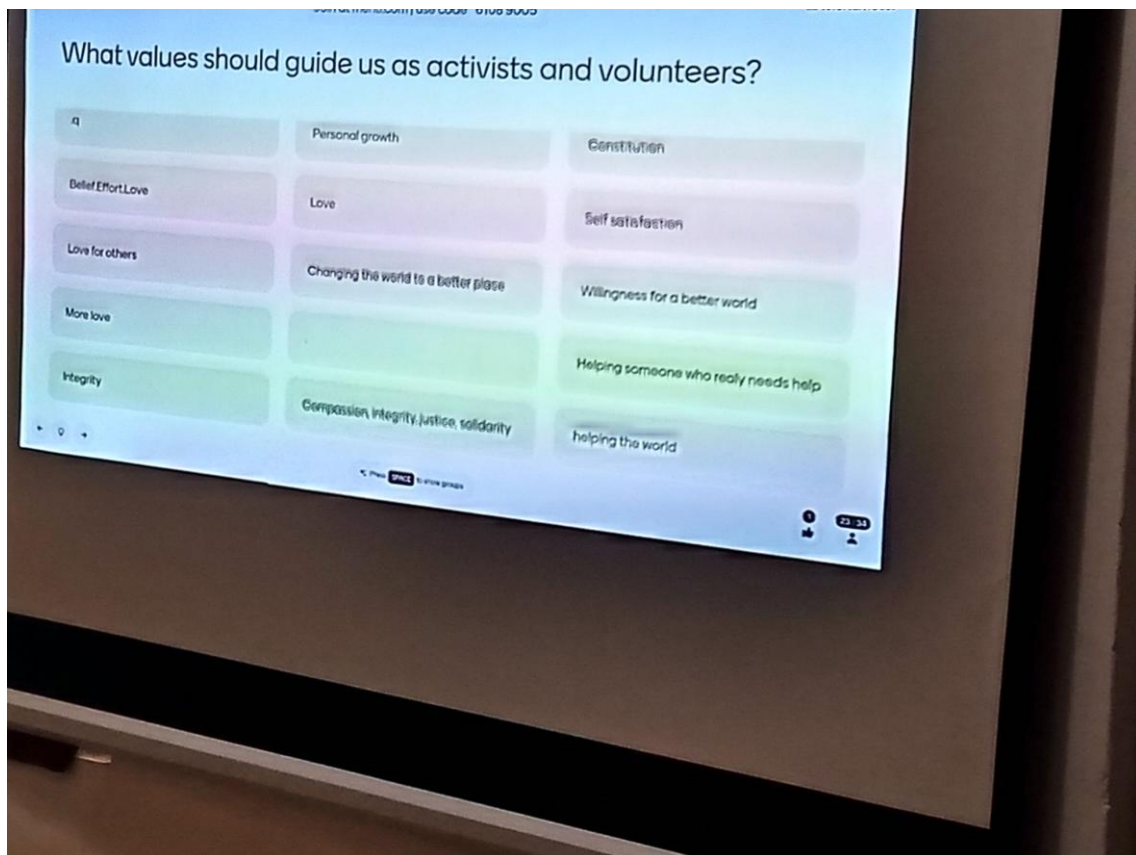
Realization of group work



Dynamics to strengthen the relationship in the group



Presentation of group work



Training in activism and volunteering



Training in activism and volunteering (continued)



Another group dynamic



Cultural afternoon of the spanish team



Cultural afternoon of the romanian team



Cultural afternoon of the portuguese team



Cultural afternoon of the lithuanian team



Cultural afternoon of the greek team



Cultural afternoon of the croatian team



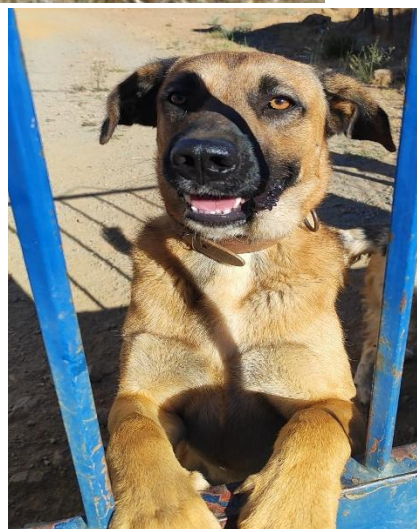
Another presentation of a group work

A group of young people, mostly women, posing for a photo indoors. They are wearing traditional Romanian folk costumes (mugeni) featuring white blouses with colorful embroidery. The setting includes a checkered floor, a table with food, and a large window showing a village view.



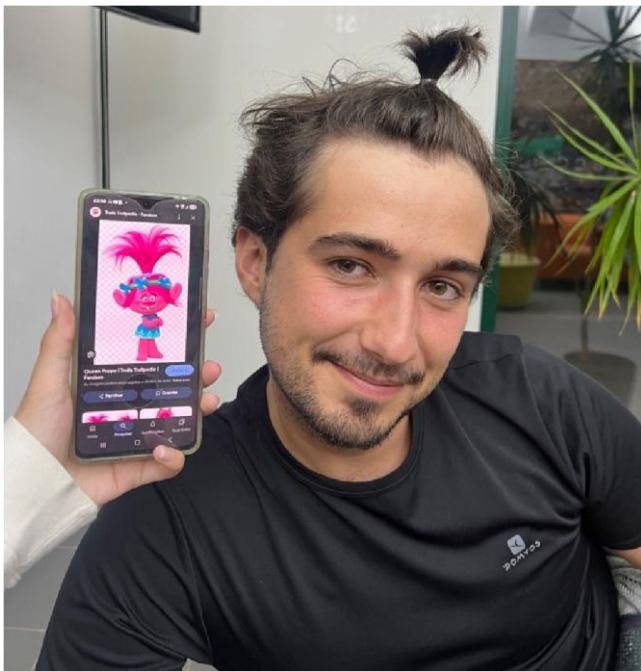
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- Local people, cooks and animals



"Nice people and cute kittens"

- New friendships and activities





*“New friends bring new adventures”
“Activities shared make memories made”*

3. List of participants

- Associação Sementes de Esperança: Isabel Mochila, Íris Rato, Janne Baronigg, Neele Baronigg and Rafael Mochila (young participants; Julio Brancas (team leader); Inês Abelha and Sandra Abelha (facilitators);
- LUMEN: Branka Rak, Dora Canji, Leo Sakac and Lucija Brzak (young participants); Aleksandar Kos (team leader);
- EKO – Entrepreneurship and Scoail Economy Group – Aglaia Boronikola, Alexios Karaolanios, Dimitrios Skoutas, Georgia Salaouni e Theodosia Apostolopoulou (jovens participantes); Ilias Katachanakis (líder de equipa);
- Tavo Europa: Aldas Gronskis, Austėja Kisieluitė, Domas Belickas, Dominikas Sivikis e Ula Rukaitė (jovens participantes); Paulina Smergelitė (líder de equipa);
- Proactive Future - Lucía García Caro, Lucía Gámiz Pérez, María Jiménez, Maite Oihane Garrofé and Marta Alcaide Fajardo (young participants); Carlos Estévez (team leader), and
- ATIC - Daria-Helena Protopopescu, Darios-Andrei Nistor, Mara-Terodora Iordache, Maria-Bianca Pricop and Teodora Olteanu; Anamaria Jalba (team leader).

At the following link you can access the publications on social networks of some participants, regarding their participation in youth exchange:

<https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:EU:5a2d01ca-50cb-4067-a241-25eea05abcdf>

4. People to meet in Alqueva

- Restaurante o Artur - Here you can meet Dona Rosa, the owner of the establishment, a woman full of life and love. Her food tastes like home;
- Pastelaria Farnel de São Lourenço - It is managed by António Jacinto and his wife, a very communicative couple that serves customers very well. It has very good regional products (cakes, bread, wine, cheeses, chorizos, etc.);
- Mercearia A Dade - Here you can meet Dade, the owner of the grocery store, very friendly person and always very attentive to customers;
- Alqueva Hostel - The staff of the hostel (Deolinda and Lucía) know how to welcome guests and provide important information about what is in Alqueva, and
- Dona Conceição - very friendly person who opens the parish church of Alqueva and the chapel of S. Lourenço (also from Alqueva), whenever she is asked to visit them, explaining during the visits some aspects about them.

All these people are important because they energize Alqueva, a small village where everyone knows each other, giving all the attention and affection to all the people who pass through here. Dona Rosa also provides work to the local inhabitants, such as the pastry Farnel de São Lourenço).

5. What to see in Alqueva

Church of São Lourenço (free entry with prior appointment)



It is located in the center of the town.

Of the primitive temple, probably dating from the thirteenth century, nothing remains. The current church is the result of a reconstruction carried out during the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century.

The interior space is composed of a latin cross plant, with deep chancel and nave of collateral chapels and blind arches, with cover in cradle dome in the various bodies.

Chapel of Santo António (free entry with prior appointment)



Chapel of Santo António, from where you can see the village

It is located at the highest point of the village of Alqueva. Climb the staircase and observe from here a unique view of the village of Alqueva and the Alentejo landscape around the village.

The chapel is probably dated to the seventeenth century, having served as an oratory for the religious of the Franciscan Third Order.

Others....



Escultura da Mãe



Snack park (located on the way to the river beach of Alqueva) and river beach of Alqueva (about 1.5 kms from Alqueva)

6. And to see in Portel (seat of the municipality to which it belongs Alqueva)

It is about 20 kms from Alqueva, and you can see:

Parochial church of Portel (free entry)



It is located practically in the center of the village.

Built between 1754 and 1766, the current came to replace the primitive mother church, of medieval foundation.

In the chancel there are paintings by the painter Maria Toscano Rico.

Guided tours by prior appointment.

Maria Fernanda Toscano Rico Museum (free entry)



It is located on street of Espírito Santo and is installed in the building of the old hospital. It offers a journey through time to the golden age of the 50s, 60s and 70s of the 20th century, exposing the estate of the painter from Portela, chronologically and according

to the various themes addressed in his painting, as if it were a journey through his life and work.

Hours: Tuesday to Sunday (10:00-13:00 and 14:30 -18:00 (closes on Monday)).

Casa do Castelo (free entry)



Cultural space in the heart of the village of Portel, located on the street of São Tiago. Brings together various artistic, cultural and heritage manifestations that the castle has made available over the years to the municipality of Portel (plastic arts, photography, cinematographic arts, video and

Hours: Monday to Friday 9:00-12:30 and 14:00-1730.

Closes: Municipal Holiday (Easter Monday), 1st May and 25th December.

Interpretation Centre of the Portel Castle (free entry)



Situated next to the walls of the castle of Portel, it is a space where you can discover the history of the castle of Portel and the enormous transformations that it has undergone since its construction.

The castle is under construction, so it is not possible to visit its interior).

Timetable: October to May - 09:00-12:30 and 14:00-17:30; June to September - 09:30-13:00 and 15:00-18:30.

Thematic pavilion "A Bolota" (free entry)



Located on the 1st of May street, it provides the discovery and interpretation of the landscape and local resources, through the five senses.

Integrates 4 thematic spaces and a commercial area - Crafts Room, Cork Room, Heritage Room and Senses Room.

Hours: Tuesday to Sunday (10:00-13:00 and 14:30 -18:00 (closes on Monday)).

7. Important conclusions (important things to remember and take away from this youth exchange)

The youth exchange took place in Alqueva, a rural area with very few inhabitants, which highlights the importance of bringing opportunities for youth participation outside large urban centers.

It has helped energize and revitalize a rural community, demonstrating that meaningful civic engagement and international cooperation can also flourish in less populated regions.

Involving young people, this event has demonstrated how non-formal education, volunteerism and activism can strengthen both personal growth and community development.

The initiative promoted inclusion, ensuring that rural youth and those with fewer opportunities had access to European-wide experiences.

He reinforced the idea that youth participation matters everywhere, not just in cities, linking local realities with broader European goals.

The project leaves a lasting impact: stronger networks of empowerment of young people, for the promotion of their social and civic participation and a more dynamic rural space with greater visibility in the European context.