

ERASMUS+ Project KA2 "How it is to Live, Study and Work in a Foreign EU Country"

Azpeitia, Basque Countries

19-25 November 2017

Day 1: Departure from Rovigo by coach at 9:30 towards Venice airport. The group is formed by two teachers, Prof. Milanato Matteo, referent for the project, Prof. Agnoletto Silvia and five students: Anna Boldrini, Chiara Rebuschi, Claudia Bolzoni, Carla Veronese and Gaia Rossi. After two flights from Venice airport to Munich and from Munich to Bilbao, the group has reached Azpeitia by coach at 19:00. While teachers were accommodated at Loiola Hotel, three students were based in Zestoa and two in Azpeitia, hosted by local families.

Day 2: All groups from the nine countries collaborating in the project met at Urola Ikastola BHI, the hosting school in Azpeitia which organized the present mobility. The former referent Rafa Sanchez welcomed the groups and introduced the Principal of the School, Mrs Miren Zubizarreta and the two new collaborators and teachers of that same school, Maitere Arotzena and Asier Alzelai. A presentation on the geographical aspects, regional organization and languages spoken in the Basque Countries was delivered focusing on the main features of the Basque language, geography and traditions.

Students were then involved in "ice-breaking" activities, simple games played in the local gym hall where they were divided in teams by making them wear T-shirts of four different colours with the logo of the Project itself. The T-shirts were offered by the Urola school together with a folder containing the programme of the event and a blue bag.

At 11:30 the participants were welcomed by Mr Eneko Etxeberria, Mayor of Azpeitia, at the Town Hall. After a short speech, some of the Basque students gave presentations about their school and the educational system in the Basque Countries. Shortly after those involved in the previous mobilities nicely illustrated their personal experiences by showing pictures of the places they had been to and moments of particular significance to them.

Lunch was kindly offered to all the participants by the local authorities in the Town Hall premises.

In the afternoon the whole group was taken on a visit to the breathtaking bays of the Basque region of Gipuzkoa : the beach of Zumaia with its characteristic Flysches (result of geological layering and upheaval of the soil) and the beach of Zarautz. Both sites are important tourist resorts known all over the world as important economic resources of the Basque Tourist Industry.

Day 3: After meeting at school, the whole group formed by students and their teachers was lead to the local weekly food market, called "Azoka". There local farmers sell their vegetables and fruit while retailers sell typical products of the region. Although few stalls were present there, the visitor has a thorough view of the local varieties: pimiento, bacalao, local sheep and goat cheese (Idiazabal), pulses and chorizos.

After a short walk we were taken to **Mondragon Headquarters**, an important example of co-operative organization of the local economy. This type of management attracts businessmen and companies from all over the world for its efficiency. Born out of an idea of a local priest, Arizmendiarieta, who founded a Vocational School back in 1943, this economic model initially gathered several manufacturing and retail companies and firms from different sectors, from the food field to the provision of workforce, in line with the initial idea. The co-operative model included also a bank for the management of the co-operative budget.

In the spring 1956, the co-operative organization included companies from four different areas: Finance, Industry, Business and Knowledge.

Participation, solidarity and technological innovation have become the key words of the company philosophy in order to face the increasingly demanding globalized economy. At the core there is the idea that worker=owner=member. 85% of all the workers are also owners as well as members. Owners do not focus just on selling their products but also on creating good quality jobs. The cooperative provides an initial financial support to those companies or individual firms which want to enter the co-operative net. It also supports those companies that experience economic crisis by offering financial support through the co-operative bank, the Kutxa Bank, and when any attempts prove inappropriate, the cooperative tries to revamp the business itself.

There's a Chairman at the head of the co-operative organization, who is also its President, and workers are the members with the right to vote and be elected.

As regards salaries the ratio between the minimum and the maximum salary of different categories of workers is comprised between 1 to 6 while in non-cooperative companies the gap varies from 1 to 70 and even 100. A member of the Mondragon cooperative system gets no real salary but the advanced payment of what he/she deserves. Part of it will be then paid at retirement age and part of it will be reinvested in the company the worker belongs to. Part of the general profit is also invested in the organization of courses in training centres linked to the activities of the cooperating companies. It's a synergy in which processes and best practices are important, not only profit.

The visit to Mondragon Centre included a presentation by Mrs Itziar Durañona illustrating the activities of **IK4 – IKERLAN**, the Technological Research Center linked to Mondragon Headquarter. The centre, a co-operative since 1974, focuses on the specific needs that companies might have trying to solve them and sometimes foresees them. The technological support is given in collaboration with the local companies and the University of Mondragon.

Three are the fields of expertise: Electronic, Information and Communication Technology, Energy and Power Management, Advanced Manufacturing. It includes over 300 qualified people, 160 are members of the co-operative. The total income of 20m/euro is reinvested in the companies for the amount of 11m while the rest is invested in research projects and new strategic plans relating to Energy and Power Electronics. Some reference laboratories collaborate with them as well as the universities in the Basque Countries, Spain, and abroad in Wien (Austria) and the MIT in the USA.

Prestigious partners like Airbus, Ulma, Orona rely on the IK4 expertise in various projects and new technological solutions. They are generally environmentally friendly like, for example, lifts with energy storage systems included, trams with no overhead powerline needed, smart sensors for wind turbines remotely controlled.

The rest of the day was dedicated to the visit to another tourist attraction: the Caves of Arrikutz in Araotz, another relevant evidence of the interesting geological history of the area. Students and teachers had the chance of walking through a long track, built inside a part of the galleries, carved by the erosion of water.

Day 4: Trip to Bilbao: the Project group was hosted by the **Erkoreka Consultores Agency** which organized a workshop illustrating educational opportunities at **Basque Universities** such as Bilbao University - Deusto University - the University of San Sebastian and the University of Mondragon or the University of Cataluña. Graduated students spoke about their experiences and described the types of courses offered by

these universities in collaboration with other EU faculties. The fields of interest vary from Medical Studies to New Biologies, Social and Human Studies, Law, Psychology and Education, Electrical and Electronic Appliances and Utilities, Business Administration. They all offer multicultural environments, welcoming students from every part of the world, mainly EU, Asia and Latin America. As a matter of fact, the universities of said nations have started forms of collaboration with the Basque Universities. These universities are characterized by powerful alumni networks, high employment rates made possible by the efficient intersection of supply and demand in terms of workforce, experts and scholars.

On the same occasion the agency invited some teachers of local schools which organize **Vocational Training Courses** run in collaboration with local companies and city councils. The branches covered by these courses are: Metal Working (main field), Electricity and Electronics, Trade and Marketing, Security and Environment, Sanity.

There are two different types of VTC tracks: ETHAZI and HEZIBI. **Ethazi** is the name of High Performance VTCs based on cooperative learning, projects and the use of the Moodle platform. **Hezibi** corresponds to the traditional solution of the Dual education System existing in Spain: first, a theoretical preparatory course at school and then a practical course that takes place both at school and at a local company. Students get an employment contract (grant or wage).

Most of these educational experiences are offered by Jesuit Institutions. It must not be forgotten that Azpeitia itself is the town where Saint Ignatius of Loyola was born. He was the founder of the Society of Jesus, a religious company dedicated also to education in schools all over the world.

All speakers insisted on the importance for students of taking up study experiences that lead a person outside one's own country, living in a multicultural dimension where the knowledge of foreign languages and adaptability are the essential features together with high motivation to study and work. By listening to former students' and researchers' experiences students have certainly understood the importance of moving from place to place and the value of knowing and confronting different people and cultures.

The visit to Bilbao then included a visit at the local football Stadium of San Mames. A guided tour that gave us the chance of moving through the same rooms, corridors, locker rooms up to the soccer pitch walked by important footballers, coaches, managers and journalists. An occasion to feel at one with players and a part of the history of the Basque Football.

The afternoon was dedicated to a walk through the city of Bilbao: towards the Guggenheim Museum and the Puppy as far as the city centre.

On **day 5** the group visited the **Donostia International Physics Centre** with a presentation of the activities taking place at the centre, followed by three different guided visits at the Chemistry Laboratory, Testing Lab, Nanoscience Lab and Computer Lab of the Centre. Students were directly involved in simple hands-on activities that were highly successful at arousing their curiosity.

The Centre operates in four different fields: Chemistry, Physics, Biology and Engineering. It collaborates with other universities and offers a double degree thanks to Erasmus+ projects.

In the afternoon the group was taken to "Galarreta" Basque pelota Jai-Alai court. There it was possible to step onto a real pelota pitch and an expert local player explained the main rules of this sport. Students and teachers then were able to experiment some tries, wearing the typical curved straw basket tied around

their wrists, to throw the ball against a specially marked wall. Afterwards a real match between local teams took place and the Erasmus KA2 group mixed with the local supporters and the betting leaders.

In the evening the students were invited to a "Pintxo pote" and tapas dinner, thus experiencing local culinary tradition (pintxos , bocadillos, croquetas and tortillas) different from those they had already had in their hosting families.

Day 6 – The day started at Urola Ikastola in Azpeitia where teachers and students filled in evaluation questionnaires on the experience. Then, for some groups this was the last day of the Project, a day particularly fruitful because of the interesting messages delivered by the speakers of the Conference in Soreasu theatre. It started at 11:00 and here is the list of speakers:

- Eneko Etxeberria (Mayor of Azpeitia, Professor Faculty of Law of The University of the Basque Country)
- Josu Juaristi (MEP)
- Begoña Beobide (Iraurgi Berritzen)
- Joxerramon Bengoetxea (Professor Faculty of Law of The University of the Basque Country, former judge in the Court of Justice of the EU, former Deputy Minister of the Department of Labour of the Basque Government.
- Sergio Fidalgo (Ikaslan-Teknika Association apprenticeship in Vocational Training)
- Oskar Arantzabal (Economist, expert in International Trade and participant in Erasmus experiences)

Mrs Beobide illustrated the socio-economic situation in Urola Herdia, which is formed by six municipalities. She explained how after a critical economic period of seven years in which there was a decrease of industry jobs, local authorities are now trying to transform the region by collaborating with commercial organizations, tourism state agencies, industrial companies, entrepreneurs and educational centres.

She said: "The six axes for the future are: strategy alignment, industry competitiveness, promotion of innovation, promotion of employment, development of tourism activities and transformation of educational opportunities with a special attention to vocational education."

A particularly meaningful message was then delivered by Mr Bengoetxea. He underlined the importance of the opportunity that the EU has always granted its citizens since its foundation, that is the free movement of goods and people around it. The recent negative echoes of Brexit should make us think about the fact that this freedom should not be taken for granted. "It is a fundamental principle we should care about." He continued by saying that "nowadays for younger generations work is no longer for life. Everybody is going to have more than a job, with different expectations and different contracts. Someone might be setting up a company of his/her own. **Europe is the framework where all this is possible. Better educational skills, better training and better understanding of what EU is about should be at the basis of each individual's knowledge. And Brexit shows us how all this can end in a flash.**"

These important messages were confirmed by the words of two Finnish students, in Azpeitia for a three-week-Erasmus project on VET, who were invited to talk about their working experiences on the stage.

At the end of the conference all activities came to an end.

For our group there was an extra activity on **Day 7**, a visit to the Sanctuary of Saint Ignatius of Loyola in Azpeitia. Prof. Milanato guided the Italian group on a visit at the Sanctuary and at St. Ignatius's house. It was a good chance to understand the religious journey of St. Ignatius and also the important role of the Jesuits in the education system of that region and in the world.

In the afternoon the group left at 15:30 by coach towards Bilbao airport. We flew from there to Frankfurt airport and a second flight took us to Venice. Another coach picked us up outside Venice airport and we finally arrived in Rovigo on time, according to Prof. Milanato's schedule: 00:20 on 26th November 2017.

During their stay, students have constantly collected their experiences and impressions in a daily report that will certainly offer their personal vision of the events. Looking forward to reading it!