

## Talkscapes, Our Erasmus Project

by Cristina Mihailescu, teacher

You may wonder what an Erasmus project is. In a nutshell, according to my students from class XI AT, it can be the most beautiful activity a student has ever taken part in during highschool days.

Our latest Erasmus project, "Talking about us and our European communities by talking about our landscapes", known as Talkscapes, began in 2019 as a project in which we talk about ourselves, starting from the mesmerizing landscapes in our area and finishing up with our inner sceneries.

The project's Italian coordinator resides in a school located in a Sicilian village, Villafrati, where the first meeting took place between the initial partners: the Bulgarians, the Polish, the Greeks, the Romanians and the Italians.

At the first meeting in Villafrati, the project coordinators from every country participated alongside the school managers of the respective schools, and the teachers responsible with communication between teams. They discussed at length about the future activities that were about to take place in the 5 participating countries in the course of the next two years. Sadly, immediately after that, the Covid-19 pandemic started and the Polish partner had to withdraw. All the places we wanted to see with our own eyes ended up as virtual activities which, nevertheless, managed to be quite enjoyable because of how nowadays students are way more casual behind a screen, resulting in everyone speaking freely about themselves and the area that we live in without being nervous.

The first virtual activity consisted in the students introducing themselves in English, thus succeeding in breaking the ice. As a second activity, every country hosted a logo creation contest that could represent our project.

The next activity was collecting photographs and postcards as old as possible featuring our lands, which amazed us with the way things have changed over the years. The most representative photographs are collected by the Italian coordinators on a virtual map, which will be the main product of the project. The map will not only have photos but also a lexicon explaining the landmarks in all the languages of the participating countries.

Due to the Covid restrictions, another activity took place only in October 2020, on the occasion of the Erasmus days, when the teams of every country participated in a virtual 3-day marathon, posting on the project's site photographs and short videos created by the students. Alongside the beautiful natural scenery, interesting photos and videos were shot at the historical monuments such as the Cefalu Diana ruins in Sicily, our Black Church or the cave paintings on the mountains of Targovishte in Bulgaria. The students also collected culinary recipes, sayings and local stories.

In March 2021, when we were supposed to travel to Bulgaria, our countries entered lockdown, so we ended up having to carry out the project online once again. But it wasn't a problem, we

virtually went sightseeing in the beautiful city of Targovishte, where our fellow colleagues from the High School Of Economic Informatics showcased historical monuments, modern architecture and the amazing lake park in the middle of the city. The case study was done on the Cyrillic alphabet, which had been invented in that zone, which is the reason why there are plenty of monuments dedicated to it.

The most interesting activity was the one where we learned how to write our name in the Cyrillic alphabet, and we also learned new words and important expressions in Bulgarian. We participated in a nocturnal festival recorded by Bulgarian students a year before the pandemic and we also virtually climbed the area's old mountains, bearers of ancient treasures, paintings and stone sculptures. However, by far the most fascinating moment was the one where we strolled along the cobbled streets of Nessebar, an old city on the sea shore, ready to take a virtual swim in the Black Sea.

A couple of months later, in November 2021, it was our turn to be the hosts to virtual activities in Brasov. The students decided to present to our friends the most stunning sceneries surrounding the city, as well as our truest sceneries in the heart of the city. We first started by presenting our school, the first school dedicated to commercial education in the Romanian language on our country's territory. Up next, since the case study was done on the old city center, we recounted the history of the city, with monuments referring to our past- the old citadel walls, the gates, the Black Church, the towers, the Schei neighborhood and the First Romanian School. We guided the guests through the area, from the fortified churches to the Peles Castle and the Fortress of Rasnov, but we also gave them a memorable experience of the Bran Castle. With songs and dances from the Romanian, Saxon and Hungarian regional folklore we delighted them, only because the real treat that spiced up their appetite was our traditional dishes!

After that, we hiked up on Mount Tampa so they could witness the gorgeous natural reservation of specific flowers and wildlife. We also made a virtual tour through Postavarul Massif and the Bucegi Mountains. At the end, because our students, class XI AT, visited Viscri during the practical training tourism classes, they presented to our guests this traditional village and made them understand why these places are loved by Prince Charles of Great Britain.

The next virtual activity was held in February of 2022 in Greece, in the village of Nea Aghialos, where their English teacher, really passionate about history, spoke to us about the way the specific area changed along history, from a fishermen's village to an area bustling with activities. The only shortcoming of these activities was its monotony at times, the fact that everything was presented by the teacher, because the Greek students were primary school kids. In spite of being very shy, they tried to teach us a few Greek words.

This April, our project competed against other wonderful projects that involved schools from Brasov county. We can proudly say that owing to our student, Daniel Fodore, and to his excellent English speaking skills, we received a special mention.

We are now looking forward to our first activity in person, a trip to Sicily in June. We hope to enjoy with our own eyes the natural beauty and the historical monuments, to listen to traditional music and have a taste of the renowned Sicilian dishes.

What did our students learn from this project? Firstly, that they are able to make friends with youngsters from any area, if they respect their mutual values. They improved their cultural level, and new horizons have opened up for them. They learned not only history and geography but also words and expressions in foreign languages. They felt completely relaxed communicating in English and they always took action as a team, working hard together in every stage of the project. And above all else, we all felt proud that we're from Brasov, Transilvania, and most importantly, Romanians. With great joy we loved showing our area, our history and our day-to-day life.

The Talkscapes project, under the aegis of Erasmus plus, has been for students and teachers a wonderful and unforgettable experience in which we have redrawn the beautiful sceneries of our souls.

## My thoughts on the Erasmus experience

In its essence, the Erasmus in which I have participated has been about an exchange of experiences via discovering the places where the schools that were a part of this project are situated, such as Palermo; unfortunately the only place we've gone to.

I can honestly affirm that said project has accomplished its goal with success despite the special circumstances which have lead to some setbacks. In addition, from a personal standpoint, the one week I've got the chance of spending abroad discovering the Italian city of Palermo and its culture has been the happiest time of my life yet!

The first of the whereabouts which contributed to my positive experience was the event itself. Being my first time in many aspects such as my first travel abroad, my first plane flight, my first time away from home which ultimately lead to my first moment of being alone in the World and having to face it head-on; for example, all the times when I had no choice but to exteriorise myself and meet-up with the many people I had the pleasure of getting to know.

Secondly, I'd like to talk about my favourite part of it all: The memories created with those around me. Whether it be a nice eating at a terrace in a warm night, a walk through a park full of palm trees lighted by the superb sunset, or just spending time at the hotel with my colleagues (now friends), all the moments of this sort have added up, making each day feel so full and enjoyable. Furthermore, it is these experiences that caused a massive change in my inner being; making me realise that it is I who makes things happen, who deems moments and interactions as *good* or *bad*, who ultimately decides what's going on with the life I'm living.

To sum it up, I am extremely grateful for the very existence of this project, of this **idea**, for all the time and effort that has been invested by the teachers (and by **you** primarily) into the realisation of the "Talkscapes" project, and all the life experiences resulting from it!

Thank you!! ...