

## ERASMUS+ 'SEE & ACT' 2016-2019 project

What actually led us to start an Erasmus+ project like 'SEE & ACT' along with six other European schools was the fact that extremism, racism and terrorist attacks have been on the increase across Europe over the last decade, threatening the safety of European citizens and the fundamental values of freedom, democracy, equality and respect for the rule of law. In response to these threats, and in order to support fundamental values that lie at the heart of reliable institutions like our Jesuit educational network, the Catholic Church and the European Union welfare policy, our European schools' partnership aimed at promoting democratic citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education to make our future world a better place.

Our multilateral project "**SEE & ACT – Active Citizens Together**" has aimed at encouraging secondary school students to see and experience democracy in social and political life on different levels: **democracy in our lives**, in our own local communities and in European institutions, thus, promoting active citizenship. However, we have also seen and experienced threats or challenges to democracy, like the influence of mafia and radical fundamentalism, the welcome and inclusion of refugees and migrant population, as well as how gender inequality hinders social harmony in our democratic society. A special zoom on **Brexit** and how it impacts on local communities and on an international level has also become an exciting issue of on-going observation since the kick-off of the project.

Our project started in Barcelona in October 2016, where through the '**Arrupe Experience**' we all experienced that CLEAR AIMS THROUGH CHRISTIAN VALUES like CO-OPERATION, RESPECT AND TRUST LEAD TO SUCCESS. In Berlin (December 2016 and January 2019) we were able to develop our negotiating skills in order to reach consensus while performing GLOMUN conferences, inspired by the most celebrated *Fall of the Wall* historical achievement back in November 1989, concluding that if the world lived in the concern of one another, justice and thus world peace would be guaranteed. In March 2017, Flensburg (Northern Germany) attracted our interest to live through a hands-on experience of how social minorities are respected and preserved; more specifically, the Danish speaking group in Schleswig-Holstein, who hold their regional parliamentary representation in Kiel. The German speaking minority in southern Denmark is also treated with due consideration.

An approach to the threats to democratic institutions, like mafia or discriminating policies for migrant people, motivated our following trip to Sicily (Catania and Palermo) in March 2018. Once there, we soon realised that power abuse of any kind (not only corruption) creates social injustice and political discomfort, easily leading to economic decline, armed conflict and human rights vulnerability. Listening and talking to some refugees whose personal stories of endurance and struggle to overcome a miserable life helped to develop both compassion and commitment! *La Locanda del Samaritano*, run by some Catholic priests, nuns and lay volunteering, has been a safe home to many whose hope is kept up for

ten years now. A geographical symbol of the social concern we could feel was signified by the snowy summit of Mount Etna, whose frequent eruptions need monitoring by a team of dedicated experts. Such is the life of many Sicilians...

The '*Brexit Experience*' also meant a lot to us in terms of what a real challenge is. Our sixth international meeting was held in London last November, coinciding with Guy Fawkes' Night days. Division and uncertainty were evident as two or more different and opposing currents of opinion are putting democratic systems to the test. We could come to the conclusion that biased information and promoting social and institutional mistrust undermine democracy and may, therefore, jeopardise the future of a once 'promise land' Europe. Our visit to Hampton Court Royal Palace outside Kingston-upon-Thames and all the history written there was also a clever allegory to our present eye and ear witness of Brexit.

Umea is almost three thousand kilometres far north from Barcelona, near the North Polar Circle. Icy Sweden gave our other six Erasmus+ teams a warm welcome only last February. We worked on how relevant the principle of **gender equality** is to consolidate democratic institutions, but it was so interesting to see how diverse the realities of gender equality can get to be within our democratic countries due to our idiosyncrasies (traditions)... Avant-guard Umea hospital features first-rate nationwide maternity medical care, whereas the percentage of university graduated men in the area timidly reaches a 37%. The *Samii* culture and their way of life taught us a lesson in terms of **environmental friendliness**.

In conclusion, a respectful, inclusive and nature-oriented lifestyles laid upon our 4Cs target values of consciousness, competence, compassion and commitment may be very valuable tips to make our democratic environments sustainable and long-lasting.

We feel proud of having taken part in this humanising project, and we are happy to thank the families, schools and institutions and organisations where we have been to for living through such an enriching and unforgettable life experience.

*'SEE & ACT' team at JG Kostka*

*(Erasmus+ programmes are an attempt of the European Commission to promote European and global citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education).*