



Co-funded by the  
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**„Work in Progress-  
students managing public relations projects“**

**setting up a panel discussion:**

**Young People and Political Participation**

**Finland 18.02.-24.02.2018**

## Sunday, February 18th

For us Germans the Sunday was our travel day. We met at 11:15 at the airport in Stuttgart to check in to the flight to Munich.

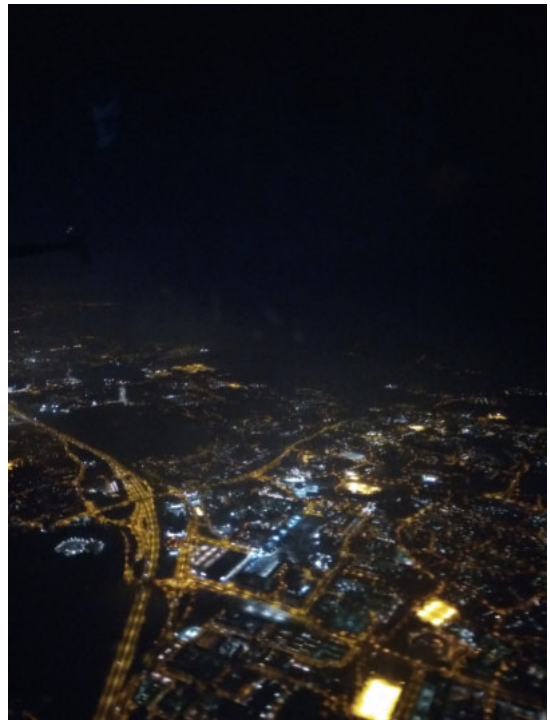
At 13:10 our plane to Munich left in Stuttgart and after half an hour we arrived there.

At 14:55 our next plane to Helsinki finally left Germany. When we arrived at Helsinki Airport we met all the other Erasmus participants, except our Finnish hosts, for the first time. We took a bus all together to Sastamala where we arrived at Vammalan Lukio at about 22:00. Our hosts were waiting for us and welcomed us with open arms. It felt awesome to see the Finnish guys, who were in Germany for our project, again, after about three months.

With my host, Ellinoora, I went to her house and we just sat in the kitchen, had some tea and talked before we went to bed to get enough sleep to be fit the next day.



Somewhere over Germany



Helsinki at Night

## Monday, February 19th

Monday was our day at school. We met at 8:00 there and got a short overview of our programme by Antti, the Finnish teacher and were welcomed by the headmistress Leeni as well.

At 9:00 we had a thirty minute break with some coffee and buns and then got a school tour, divided into four groups and planned by some Finnish students who showed us everything. The most surprising thing here was for me, that all the students of Vammalan Lukio have to have own Laptops so that they can work anytime with them. According to that, the school has its own WiFi. Different from Germany, students are working with Google docs online at anytime and not with Microsoft Word. Another fact which is kind of strange for us Germans is that the Finns are using their first names to call their teachers. That was quite impressive for me but I really like the idea.

At 10:00 we got some Finnish lessons to not just improve our English skills during the visit. I learned that Finnish is a beautiful sounding language where words are pronounced as they are written, it is just difficult for other Europeans to read them. Reasons for that are those many vowels and many same letters in a row so that it looks difficult to pronounce and most time it is. But I also found out words that are similar to the German ones, e.g. auto and sauna.

Our lunch break started at 11:00 which was quite early for us Germans.

After lunch we got divided in our project teams by counting to five. Each team had a Finnish guy as team leader to help us preparing a person for the panel discussion on friday. My team members were Mirja as our team leader from Finland, Eraldo from Italy, Breagha from Scotland, Anita from Estonia and Sarah and me from Germany. In this team we got a short info about panel discussions.

Our first steps for preparing the discussion were:

- Deciding who of our team will be speaking at the panel discussion on friday: Anita
- figuring out our goals for the panel discussion, which were:
  - showing the differences between the participating countries in voting ages and participation of the young generation
  - showing the problems with the decreasing voting number of young people and reasons why young people should vote / taking part in politics
- thinking about questions which could be interesting to answer at the discussion:
  - What is the voting age in your country?
  - How has it changed throughout history?
  - What is the attitude towards voting of young people?
  - How are / Are there politics included in school lessons?
- project plan:
  - gathering information on our trip to Helsinki (Tuesday)
  - doing some research about voting and young people in Estonia (Thursday)
  - answering the questions for the panel discussion (Thursday)
  - writing an opening statement for the discussion (Friday)
  - thinking about how the audience could be included (Friday)
- Constraints:
  - Missunderstanding
  - Problems with speaking at the discussion
  - too less time / information for a good preparation

At 14:00 after school I went back home with Ellinoora and had something to eat and then played some Uno with her and her little sister. Later a friend of her came for a visit and brought some Finnish candies. We talked and ate these until we had to leave for the welcome party.

The party started at 19:00 at Aarikkaranta which was a hut where we had dinner all together and listened to some music. This was the first evening where we tried to get to know all participants better and having fun with them. The highlight of the evening was playing some limbo where most people joined.

But we already left at around 21:00 because we had to get up early the next day for our trip to Helsinki.



Found in a classroom while the school tour



Some Finnish candy

## Tuesday, February 20th

We met really early at 6:40 at school this morning, where a bus waited for us to get us to Helsinki.

At 9:30 we had a meeting at the Parliament of Finland. We got a guided tour and got to know some facts about its history and how it is connected with the democracy of Finland:

The parliament house of Finland was completed in 1931 and designed by the architect Johan Sigfrid Siren. It is an example of the 1920s classicism and is based on harmonious thoughts which can be seen in the symmetrical way it is built.

In 1905 was a parliamentary reform where the diet of the four estates became one unicameral parliament. This new parliament was unstable but WWI and the Russian Revolution made it easier for Finland to become independent. Since the following civil war the Finns have a republican constitution.

For this reason the parliament is a monument to Finland's independence and democracy.

After our tour we met Arto Satonen, a member of the Finnish Parliament. He told us about the democracy of Finland which is now over 100 years old and that Finland was the first country where people had the right to vote.

He explained that voting works by directly voting for the candidates and not for the parties here. All the votes of the candidates of one party are then the number of seats the one party gets in the parliament. This direct voting requires politicians to stay at the place, where they want to get votes as well as having contact to their voters.

According to him, the Finnish system leads to stability in the society but has also the disadvantage that if people want to have some changes with their votings, they often get the feeling that nothing changes that much.

He also pointed out all the good things Finland reached during their independence in the last 100 years as, e.g., a very good health care system, financial help for poor people, safety and caring about women's rights.

But he also told us about a problem which is needed to be solved as good as possible:

The best students in Finland are even better than a few years ago, which is good but at the same time the students who aren't that good are getting worse compared to the situation a few years ago.

After his speech we had the chance to ask him some questions about his work and the political situation also connected to the voting age and the political participation of young people.

As answer for the question of the activity of young people and how it could be increased he told us that especially young parliamentarians are needed and that there are quite many young people in younger parties but nearly none in the old parties. He said that, in his opinion, the problem is not the political activity and interest of young people themselves but the challenge is to get the young people into the parties and not "just" voting.

He also answered the question if the voting age should be lowered to 16. He explained that for him the age to vote and the age which is needed to become a parliamentarian should be the same and that the age of 18 would be right for him. But he also mentioned that young people can become young counsellors and connected to that the right to speech in the local parliaments. This role is important so that politicians who want to see how the laws or new decisions work or how it worked before can ask them and get the information from young people who are still too young to vote.

At 12:00 we went to the shopping mall “kamppi” for having lunch and then got back into our project teams to take some pictures with the sights of Helsinki. Our team should take pictures with the Finnish Parliament and the National Museum of Finland. The photos were sent, together with a description of the sights and their role they have had in the development / history of democracy in Finland, to the brochure team.

The history of Finland and its democracy can be seen all around the city as old statues and sights which are all connected with that.

All in all the city is a big mixture of everything. Old houses in a romantic style next to those which look like some medieval buildings next to modern architecture.

After finishing those tasks we had our freetime in Helsinki which we used to explore the city. We visited the Helsinki Cathedral and then went back to kamppi for some shopping. Before driving back to Sastamala we visited Kiasma, a Museum for modern art.



The Finnish Parliament



Arto Satonen



Helsinki Cathedral



## Wednesday, 21st February

This day was our winter fun day. We met at 8:00 at Ellivuori, a winter resort. We got divided in six teams and then went through different stations which were all lots of fun.

For my team bowling was the first activity which wasn't that special but we had fun.

Our next station was football outside in the snow. The ball we should use was a really big red one but it broke when the team before us played with it. So we had to use a normal football which was white and therefore really difficult to see in the snow. We all had warm clothes with us so that the temperatures of about -20°C didn't feel that cold and while playing we started sweating because it was exhausting to play with lots of heavy clothes and a white ball in deep snow.

After playing football we went skiing. For me it was the first time on skis and pretty difficult at the beginning. We didn't use normal down hill or cross country skis but a mixture of both. Our little route included some hills upward and downward so that we knew at least a little how it worked. Although I fell down right at the beginning and struggled with walking sometimes it was amazing and we had lots of fun.

My personal highlight was the fatbike riding. The bikes we used had bigger wheels so that it was possible to ride them in the snow without slipping. This time we drove through the forest where everything was white and the sun shone beautifully. And the sun was the reason for the whole place seeming like a fairytale story in a glittering and sparkling world.

Because of all the activities we were hungry and so went to a little hut where a Scottish, an Italian and the Finnish teacher made pancakes and fried sausages. They both were delicious.

The last activity at Ellivuori was also really fun. We were sledging down a hill until we could reach a frozen lake. And then just enjoyed the snow and the sun, making snow angels and feeling like a child in a winter wonderland.

All in all this day was gorgeous, it was so exciting to have "real" winter there with all the activities we did.

At around 13:00 we went back home again and then I joined Elli going to the library. We stayed there for around an hour, just reading different books and I finally took an English one with me which she is going to bring back the next time.

Back home we packed our stuff for our evening at Levo. We met in the house at 18:00 and then tried the original Finnish sauna. We stayed for some time in the sauna, talking and sweating and then ran out in the snow, rolling around and then as fast as possible back into the warmth, getting warm again until it was too warm and then back into the snow. After repeating this a few times we finally put on our clothes and then went back to the hut to the others. The feeling after we had the sauna was amazing. I felt really relaxed and tired but at the same time awake and fit.

After having our dinner, another highlight was the traditional singing. Each country was supposed to prepare a song and then sang this song for all the other Erasmus participants. It was a lot of fun to see their singing skills and how much fun the people had while singing. Our German group chose "Hejo Spann den Wagen an" and we tried to sing it as a canon which worked surprising well.

## Thursday, 22nd February

This day we met again at 8:00 at vammalan Lukio. There we got two presentations about the history and the Finnish democracy with some information that could be useful for our discussion.

We had enough time to prepare our panelist Anita. First we answered as good as possible the following questions and thought about points which were important for us to discuss.

1. Has any of you taken part Politically in your own home country and if so then how?
  - I have been part of political conversations but I have never taken part in a political event.
2. What is the attitude toward voting with young people?
  - Young people don't want to vote, or they're just not interested in it.
3. ( What do you think will happen if nothing changes? )
  - Because democracy works only if people participate and if we have a generation ignorant to politics, our democracy won't work. The extremist parties will be taking advantage of that. For example the far right. People need to bring awareness to their own issues. If their only one specific group taking action then only their point of view is heard and represented by the government.
4. Why do you think young people aren't voting that much nowadays?
  - It's not only that young people are lazy and don't want to vote. Young people can be insecure about their political understanding; belief that nothing will change.
5. What methods do you think would be the most effective in increasing participation?
  - Introducing the political parties and what they stand for because when young people reach the voting age they can be really confused on what they should vote for.
  - bringing the political scene closer to young people
  - making sure that young people know what the parties represent
6. How much is politics talked about in school?
  - not enough.
7. What is the voting age in your country?
  - In Estonia you can vote in local elections when you are 16, but for presidential and parliamentary and other elections the voting age is 18
8. How has the voting age changed in your country throughout history?
  - 1920 voting age was 20, 1938 age was 22, and during the soviet occupation it was 18 and it is like that now (not including local elections)
9. At which age did you get interested in politics and how?
  - Maybe 15 years old
10. How would you improve political participation in daily life?
  - Watching news and talking about politics in school, with friends, family...
11. Why is it important for young people to be interested in politics?
  - democracy, different opinions, democracy should work in the future. Taking part in politics now will determine our future.



Our team worked quite well but we had some problems with the structure of the discussion. Because none of us knew exactly how the discussion will work it was difficult to prepare more than the questions and the opening statement. We thought about some hand-raise questions for the audience as well but if any of those would be asked on Friday was Anita's choice.

At 11:00 we finished and then got our lunch.

Because my host was ill this day I was staying together with Katja and Henriette. After school we went to a cafe eating buns and drinking some hot chocolate and then visited a small but beautiful book museum. At the book shop we went next, Elli and her father picked me up and we drove back home to get ready for our afternoon activity.

In the afternoon we drove to Ella where we met Katja and Henriette and some others and went sledging all together. Because there was a frozen lake nearby we were walking on it and enjoyed all the snow and the sun which shone the whole day and then went down in a beautiful sunset. After our sledging trip we all went back to Ella and drank some hot tea to become warm again.

Later Elli's father picked me up again and we drove back home.



At the cafe



Enjoying the stairs at the book museum



Watching the sunset, standing on the frozen lake

## Friday, 23rd February

We met again at 8:00 at school and then had another hour to finish the preparation for the discussion. We tried to do a rehearsal for Anita but it was difficult to manage without exactly knowing the questions the moderators would use.

At 9:30 the panel discussion started. Anita did her job well but there were some problems with responding and reacting to the other panelists in general. That's why our discussion was just asking questions by the moderators and then getting the answers of each of the panelists. The interaction between the panelists was missing which I think was sad because it had been interesting to see some (more) discussion points.

Then we had lunch and after that we went back to the gym, answering the Google forms feedback sheet and writing some comments for our German evaluation and article for the school website.

When we finished that we all were taught some Scottish dancing by the Scottish girls which was hard but a lot of fun and a great thing we could do together as a last activity.

Back home from school Elli and me had some time and then drove to Katja's to pick up Henriette (Katja was ill). Together with her we drove on to Elli's grandparents who had a snow mobile. This snow mobile was our reason for coming. Elli, Henriette and me sat on the back and Elli's father drove us around with a speed up to 80 km/h. All in all this snow mobile tour was lots of fun but very scary as well according to the speed without any helmets or seat belts.

Back to the grandparents' house we had some hot chocolate and buns while watching Olympia and talking with them a little (Elli translated).

On our way back home we picked Katja up and then drove with Katja and Henriette home. Henriette had her suitcase and everything with her because she and Katja were going to sleep at Elli's.

At 19:00 we all met for a farewell dinner in a restaurant and ate there. After finishing our meal we went downstairs in an Irish pub and sang some karaoke songs until 21:00.

The last day ended with having a sauna at Elli's and then going to sleep.



The panelists



Ready for the snow mobile tour

## Saturday, 24th February

In the morning Henriette and me got our stuff packed and then drove with Katja and Elli to Vammalan Lukio for the last time. Our bus was already waiting for us and all the other participants from the other countries. We finally had to say goodbye to the Finns fast so that the bus was in time and then drove all together to Helsinki.

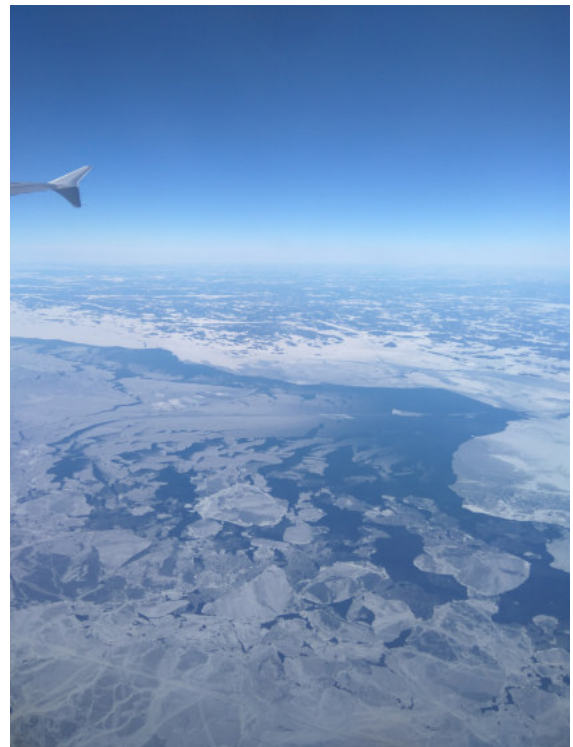
Saying goodbye to the Finns was the hardest part of saying goodbye for me, because I knew them just better than I knew them after the project week in Germany.

The Estonians had to leave the bus at the harbour in Helsinki where the ferry would bring them back to Estonia. The rest of us was finally saying goodbye at the airport when we Germans had to go to our gate to catch the flight.

We arrived back in Stuttgart at 18:00 after taking a flight from Helsinki to Frankfurt and then taking the train to Stuttgart.



Bye Finns



Bye Finland

All in all I had a gorgeous time with all the others together and enjoyed the winter as much as possible. Although the project was our reason for meeting, this one week was not just preparing and discussing but a lot of fun and making unforgettable experiences and memories for all of us. I am very thankful that I could be part of the project. Finally I wish I could stay there longer or at least be sure that I will meet this amazing people again some time.