



Project Documentation of the Youth Exchange  
„Once upon today...in Europe- (Y)our 1989!“  
written for CertiLingua®

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## 1. Introduction

My project, „Once upon today in Europe- (Y)our 1989“, took place from Sunday, 29th of September to Friday, 4th of October 2019 in Krzyzowa/Kreisau Poland at the International Youth Meeting Center Krzyzowa. The Krzyzowa- Initiative is supported by the German-Polish Youth Office, by Erasmus + and other donors. It was founded in 1989 by East and West Berliners who aimed towards building a Europe of democracy, openness and solidarity. They organize youth meetings, workshops, conferences and seminars. Krzyzowa is a historical site, as it was the meeting place of the resistance group known as “Kreisauer Kreis” (in English “Kreisau Circle”) in the years 1942/43. The “Kreisau Circle” was a group of about 25 people led by Helmuth James von Moltke, great-grandnephew of Field Marshal Helmuth von Moltke who bought the estate in the 19th century, which was then the site for the group’s secret meetings. The group’s main objective was to develop plans for the future of Germany and Europe after the defeat of the Nazi regime. However, the Gestapo worked to suffocate these plans and the activities of the “Kreisau Circle” were discovered, which led to many members of the Circle being executed in 1944/1945. In 1989, the former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and the first democratically elected Polish president Tadeusz Mazowiecki met in Krzyzowa. This marks another historical moment for the site. In 1990, the Newly established Krzyzowa began purchasing the former Krzyzowa Estate and in 1994, the first part of the International Youth Meeting Centre was rebuilt until the doors of the whole venue were finally officially reopened in 1998.

The central aspect of the international youth meeting is the chance to meet people coming from six different countries (Estonia, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Ukraine and Germany), interested in history and in Europe. It focuses on personal stories related to 1989 as well as the general historical events and encourages its participants to deal with personal and their national but also with European history. It is also meant to promote tolerance for other cultures, teaches to listen to other stories and connects young European people with each other through history and mutual understanding. Moreover, it brings together different perspectives on the same historical event and develops critical thinking and awareness for the existence of more than one truth.

In 2019 Europe celebrated its 30th anniversary of the end of the Cold War and of the beginning of new democratic values. This gave the project even more reason to take place in

this particular year, to remember the year of 1989, as it still has an impact on our lives today. Furthermore, 30 years also is the transition between two generations, which makes an encounter of young people from different countries, discussing the same event and their stories about it, even though they were not the generation to experience it, even more interesting.

## **2. Motivation and Preparation**

I was approached by my former history teacher in school one day with the question of participating in a youth exchange program. As I was interested in meeting new people, gaining new experiences and learning about myself and others, I was really excited about this opportunity. Furthermore, I learned that I would be able to obtain a certificate, the Certi-Lingua, a label of Excellence for Multilingual, European and International competences, that would allow me to improve my English skills as well as teach me a lot about Europe and International relations, which is a big field of interest of mine.

### **2.1 My Motivation**

As I mentioned, I am interested in European politics as well as international relations and I also grew up multilingual, so I fortunately did not have big language barriers. I grew up speaking German at home with my parents but French in school as I visited the Lycée Français Saint Louis in Stockholm as well as the Lycée in Santo Domingo, where I also learned Spanish. Knowing how fortunate and lucky I am to grow up that way and not having to learn most of these languages at school I decided to improve my English skills by visiting a high school in Canada for half a year in tenth grade. When I came back from Nova Scotia, Canada, in the middle of tenth grade my English had substantially improved and as I did not want to waste this improvement I thought about opportunities to maintain my English skills and maybe even improve them. This opportunity was given to me, obviously by my English classes in school, but especially by the chance of participating in an international exchange program that would take place in English and on top of that treat topics I am interested in. So, I was really grateful for this learning opportunity and hoped to develop personal connections, learn about history in my own country but especially in other countries in Europe and to develop critical thinking. Other than that, I did not have much knowledge about Eastern

Europe and the countries involved in the project, such as for example Romania, Estonia or Moldova and was really looking forward to learning more about them. Additionally, I thought that it was really interesting to discuss the year of 1989 from different points of view as it shaped our lives today. Finally, I also appreciated the chance to obtain a certificate that might give me the chance to study in my fields of interest such as European politics and economy, international relations, human rights (which is also a concern of the Krzyzowa initiative) and languages.

## **2.2 Preparation for the project and my research question**

When I was approached to participate in the project „Once upon today...in Europe-(Y)our 1989!“ I was in the middle of running for president of our student council and we did not have much time between deciding to participate in the project and actually leaving for Poland, so we did not have much time for preparation and on top of that, I was already stressed because of the elections I was participating in. We did not have a meeting with the other participants or the group leaders before leaving for the Project but I did some research and thinking on my own. I started researching about the year 1989 in Germany, but also in the East of Europe, on top of what we had already learned in school and talked to my parents about it a little. My research revealed how little I knew about the time and especially about the events in Eastern Europe during that time. I knew that 1989 was the year of the fall of the Berlin Wall, as it is a topic widely discussed in Germany, which also marked the end of the Iron Curtain and communism. During my research I noticed that the East of Europe had a really different perspective on the historical events which left me even more excited to learn more about it and meet people from Eastern European countries. For example, I was not aware of the violence taking place in the Romanian revolution in December of 1989. During the revolution, there was civil unrest that led to the execution of Communist Party leader Nicolae Ceaușescu and ultimately it ended 42 years of communist rule in Romania. I also learned more on that topic later during the project. My parents told me a bit more about the time when Germany was separated and how they experienced the fall of the wall. My father was not in Germany at the time, he was living in Brazil, where he watched the end of a long separation, between East and West, on TV. My mother was also abroad. She was in Israel in a kibbutz for a year where she experienced the events mostly via newspapers, because she did

not have access to a TV. She told me that Israel saw the fall of the wall mostly as something dangerous because they feared that Germany might regain a lot of power and become a threat as it was during World War II, which I found to be really interesting as it is a contradictory perspective to the German one.

After doing some research on the topic of 1989, I started thinking about my research question. I knew I wanted it to involve something I did not know much about, so I would really have the chance to learn something new. As I had already been confronted with 1989 and the German unification in school and the other countries in the program were Eastern European countries, I decided to formulate a question involving the East. My main research question was: What happened in Eastern countries in 1989, how did they end communism and form new political structures? Other than that I also asked myself: How did they conceive the events going on in Germany and how were they affected? Did revolutions take place and if they did, were they violent or peaceful? What is their knowledge of our country and ours of theirs? How are their English skills compared to ours?

With all these questions in mind I started the project.

### **2.3 Connection to my school life and curriculum**

The school's curriculum provides a large amount of information about the time between World War One and Two as well as much information about 1945 to 1990. As I am graduating with the "AbiBac", which combines the German „Abitur“ and the French „Baccalauréat“ my history classes are especially focused on the relationship between France and Germany and not so much on the countries in the East. So, before the project I had already learned about 1870/71 and the Franco-Prussian War but as the project was at the beginning of the school year we had not gotten much further in the curriculum. As 1989 and the fall of the Berlin Wall is a big subject in Germany we had already talked about the events a little in earlier years. I was really interested in learning more about other countries perspectives, especially countries in the East as we often focus more on the Western point of view in school.

After the project we discussed the First World War and the Weimar Republic and then finally the Cold War and the year 1989. The project helped me a lot in class as I had already learned about the revolutions which ended communism in the Eastern countries, it gave me a

good perspective and allowed me to have a bigger picture of the situation as a whole. Again, our focus in class was especially on Germany, France and the US but knowing about the former Soviet States really helped to understand their perspective. In my opinion that is often not pointed out enough in school as we learn more about the Western perspective on things and often the Soviet Union is presented as the enemy. In light of that, knowing the battles many countries in the East had to fight and learning about how they freed themselves from authoritarian regimes broadened my horizon. It was for example enlightening to see that the fall of the Berlin Wall was a big step towards reunification in Germany and was mostly seen as a positive event, meanwhile countries like Poland were rather critical as they feared that Germany would regain too much power.

#### **2.4 Personal outlook and expectations**

When I first heard about the chance to participate in the project I was really interested in taking the opportunity. I am always interested in learning something new and especially this project targeted a completely new topic and point of view for me, which I enjoyed. So, I took this chance of an intercultural experience. My expectations for the project were not specifically concrete. I was expecting open minded personalities, new experiences, an interesting city, enough free time but also a well-structured day and new perspectives as well as new stories. I was a little scared it would be a lot like school, so, just listening to a teacher and not much social interaction or activities. Beside the learning experience I was of course also hoping to have fun and enjoy the experience.

Before leaving for the project I was really excited. I had never been to Poland before and it was the most eastern country I had been to up to that point in time. I was interested in meeting new people, learning about new cultures and languages as well as broadening my horizon and learning about history. I had talked to my parents and grandparents about it, as my grandparents had fled from Silesia in the 1930s, which is now Poland. I was also hoping to improve my English skills. What really appealed to me as well was the international aspect, as I would like to study and work in an international context later. I believe that the best way to learn is by making experiences and by getting in touch with people from around the world, which this project gave me a perfect chance to do. To conclude, I was looking

forward to the project and hoped to have a good time while learning and developing new skills.

### **3. Implementation**

The project was from Sunday to Friday, six days in total. Sunday and Friday were travel days so we did not have any activities or workshops on those days, except for a „getting to know each other“ gathering on Sunday night after the arrival. In general the project was very diverse, multicultural and full of activities.

#### **3.1 Explanation and course of the Project**

We left Bonn Sunday, September 29th. The first part of our trip was the train from Bonn to Düsseldorf where we then boarded the plane to Wrocław. It was a really exciting experience to be able to fly as a group and for one of us it was even the first time flying which made it even more exciting. As we were in the middle of the elections for student body president we also filmed a video at the airport in order to send it back to Germany as a presentation video of our team and election programs. From the Airport in Wrocław we then took a bus to the city. In order to do so we had to change our money from Euro to Zloty, the Polish currency. In Wrocław we had a couple hours before the bus for Krzyżowa was leaving. We walked around the city a little, which was really interesting and then sat down to eat. I noticed that, as in many countries in Europe, the Polish knew English, which we used to communicate with them, as we did not have any knowledge of their national language at all. Compared to other countries such as Germany or the Netherlands the English of most people in Poland was not always fluent which also led to some communication problems. To my surprise some people we met spoke German almost fluently, which helped with the communication. After we had finished eating, the shuttle bus to Krzyżowa had finally arrived to pick us and the participants from the other countries up. The bus ride was about an hour long and we already started to talk to some Polish guys a little on the bus. They were 19 years old, really funny and open minded and we made some jokes with them. Also, I listened to conversations from some Estonian people and was really confused as I did not understand a single word of their language. For me, learning about the difference between other countries



English skills and my own, as well as their national languages, was part of my research question, so making this experience was interesting.

We arrived at the Youth Meeting Centre at around 6pm. First, we were shown our rooms and the location. We were not put together with people from the other countries so I shared a room with two friends who were part of the German group. After walking around and exploring the location everyone got together for dinner. At dinner every country had its own table so we did not talk much with other participants, which I thought was a pity. After everyone finished eating we got together in the multifunctional room to get to know each other. We played some games and everyone presented themselves by saying their name and some information about themselves. Every country had seven participants between the age of 14 and 20 and one teacher to accompany the group. The participating countries were Estonia, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Ukraine and my group from Germany. As it took place in Poland the Polish participants were the most outgoing at first. After the welcoming and the first „getting to know each other“-game everyone was pretty tired and we went to bed.

The next day, Monday September 30th was the first actual day of the project with the title „Getting started“. After breakfast at 8am our program started at 9:30am with some „Ice-Breaking exercises“ as a group of only students, so without the teachers and group leaders. Following up to that we had our first workshop called „Flowers of Identity“, which was a



mixed workshop of individual and group work. Firstly, we worked individually and painted flowers. In every leaf and bloom of the flower we noted what makes us who we are and what we think is important for our identity and then we presented our individual results to the group. I focused on my personal identity as a person and my past but also on my identity in relation to Germany and its history. After two hours of workshop everyone was a little exhausted and at 1pm we had lunch. In order to spend some free time we had two hours in between lunch and the next activity so I decided to visit the little shop that they had told us about with some friends. It was a tiny supermarket five minutes

away from the meeting centre where we bought some snacks for our free time. Following up to lunch the next part of the day was a workshop about Krzyzowa and it was called „a place and its stories“. We had a guided tour and they presented different perspectives on Krzyzowa’s history. After a short coffee break, we then had a group work with all the participants of the project. It was called „Borders change - Memory stays“. Then we had dinner and following up later at night we spent some free time with other participants in the cafe.

The next day, Tuesday was under the subject „Once upon today...in my country“ and started at 10 o’clock after a little warm up and breakfast. We had a quiz about 1989 to find out what we already knew about the topic. After learning about ourselves, our perspective on the event and what we already knew about it, we had a workshop called „Same event, different stories“. It was a group work that focused on the individual but also national stories of the participants and was meant to teach us about other countries perspectives and widen our horizon. The workshop lasted for the entire day, starting at 11:30am and ending at 5pm. When everyone had finished dinner, at around 8pm we started a story-telling evening. Every group, so, every country had the chance to present their story on an open stage. Many had a PowerPoint or other form of presentation in order to present their countries perspective on the events of 1989. We showed a video of the fall of the Berlin Wall and then gave a short presentation on the events in Germany and some shared personal stories of their families.

Then, Wednesday October 2nd, we went to Wroclaw for the entire day. We had breakfast at 8am and also prepared some lunch boxes to take with us for the excursion. We left Krzyzowa at 9am by bus and arrived about an hour later in the city. From 11am to 1pm we participated in a guided tour through the city and then we ate lunch. We were free to eat where we wanted so I went to a restaurant with the German group. Then we met again with the other participants and the group leaders had prepared a scavenger hunt in the city centre. The topic of the hunt was the city’s history and its relevance for the project’s topic. Each group had to find



specific historical places in the city and then take a picture of them. Some places were also more just for fun and of less historical importance. When we were done and had taken all the pictures, we met with the other groups at a meeting point and as my group was the first group to be done, we won the scavenger hunt. We then had some free time which I spent buying some souvenirs and a postcard for my grandparents, as they were originally from Silesia. At 6pm we left Breslau and took the bus back to Krzyzowa. After eating dinner, we had free time and went to our rooms with some of the Polish participants as we had connected with them a little during the workshops. They taught us some words in Polish and we had a good time together.

The last day was under the motto „A European museum of history“ and it started by reflecting on Wroclaw with the other participants in the multifunctional room and was followed by a workshop that lasted all day called „European Museum of History of 1989“. As I had gotten sick the day before, after coming back from Wroclaw, I stayed in bed on Thursday but the program provided a division of the Workshop into three parts. First, from 11am to lunch break the others worked in groups and told me that they had to prepare a presentation that would show the different perspectives on the events around the year of 1989. After lunch each group presented their results to the others and they all reflected on the project and the new insights they had gained. Everyone also had the chance to give feedback to the group leaders in order to improve the project. At night, after dinner, there was a „Farewell Party“, which I unfortunately could not go to either, as I was sick and in bed.

The last day, Friday October 4th, was only a travel day. We left Krzyzowa at 8am and then traveled by bus to Wroclaw where we took a bus to Berlin and then went back to Bonn by train.

### **3.2 Answers to my questions and personal experiences**

My research question was: „What happened in Eastern countries in 1989, how did they end communism and form new political structures?“ and furthermore I was interested in learning about the others countries’s languages and comparing their English skills to ours, but also getting to know their perspective on the German part of history. My expectations were not so specific but I was hoping for a good mix between workshops and free time and hoped the implementation would not only be like school classes but involve

participation by the participants. I was also hoping for open minded, outgoing personalities.

The aspect that was the easiest to notice was the difference in the English skills. In Germany English is usually taught really early in school and it plays a big role as it is important in order to communicate internationally. What I became aware of, was that most participants were not on the same English level as we were. Especially the participants from Romania were rather quiet and it was sometimes hard to communicate with them during workshops as their English was not as fluent. It was also really unequal between participants from the same country. For example, one girl from Moldova was really fluent in English. She told me she had lived in various different countries with her parents and for them learning English was always of big importance. On the other hand, another girl, also from Moldova, had to communicate with me via their teacher or other participants in her national language as she could not speak English almost at all. The guys from Poland that we spent some time with were much more fluent and communication was easier with them. They were also already older so maybe that could be an explanation for that.

Another aspect, which to me was a little disappointing, was that many participants were rather shy and did not speak much, especially in the beginning it was really hard to start a discussion because they would barely talk at all. I think that goes hand in hand with the language issues as it is hard to be outgoing when there is a language barrier. To give an example, in some workshops I had to do presentations all by myself or with one of the Polish guys because the participants from Romania did not understand the task or my explanation. I think that was a pity because I was hoping to connect more with them but that way it was really hard. Adding to that, it was surprising to me that, when each group had to present their country and their stories, some groups did not say much and instead their teacher presented the country instead of the young participants. I believe that an explanation for that is the language barrier but maybe also that the school system works differently in other countries. In Germany we are taught that we need to be able to present topics on our own and freely and we practice that lots in school. I had the impression that it was much less the case for other participants. In that sense I hope they could learn from us.

What I really liked was how our days were structured. As one of my concerns was that we would not have enough free time, or, on the contrary, we wouldn't learn enough, I was really happy with the workshops and the overall program. I liked the approach that we worked on one event but from different perspectives and I also enjoyed that we had group works and lots of room for creativity during the workshops. I am thankful for the chance to meet so many people with such different points of view. Furthermore, I loved the day we had in Wroclaw and especially that day had lots of room for fun and free time in a new city we had the chance to explore.

Concerning my research questions, I also widened my horizon and found some answers. I learned that many of the eastern countries had revolutions around the year of 1989 and I was surprised how little it is taught in school. I was especially shocked about the violence during the Romanian Revolution of 1989. During the presentations every country held, the participants told us their personal but especially their national story of that revolution which I had no knowledge about. While in Germany, Poland or Hungary the first democratic values and structures were put in place the Romanian dictator did not want any reformations in his country. As the population was unhappy with that and wanted to end the dictatorship, they started a revolution in order to get more freedom and independence. During this revolution over 1000 people were killed, which I thought was really frightening as the year 1989 in Germany is mostly seen as a really positive and freeing year with the fall of the Berlin Wall. I was almost upset about how little I knew about Romania and was truly grateful for the chance to learn about it thanks to the project and its Romanian participants. In contrary to the violence in Romania at the time, I was amazed by the stories of the Estonian participants as they told us how peaceful everything went down in their country. The indigenous people in Estonia formed a human chain by holding hands with about two million people from Lithuania and Latvia. The chain was about 600km long and is called the Baltic Way. With that peaceful sign they asked for freedom and independence from the Soviet Union. I had no knowledge of that either and was moved when they told us about it. They also explained the importance of singing and dancing in their country which I thought was also beautiful and peaceful.

The intercultural experience I had thanks to the project „Once upon today...in Europe- (y)our 1989!“ , gave me many answers to my questions as I learned about the

events in the other participant's countries as well as their way to end communism and dictatorship, both in peaceful and in violent ways. The only question I did not so much get an answer to is how they see Germany and their perspective on our events. But with all the new perspectives I gained and my knowledge I brought home from the project I am sure I can find an answer to that question in history class or by further projects and participation in intercultural programs.

#### **4. Reflection**

Overall, I am really glad I participated in the project and had this intercultural experience. When I started the project, the more I invested in the project and the more I researched I noticed how little I actually knew about the year of 1989 and its events in all of Europe. Then I thought about my research question and I discussed some aspects with my parents. First, my questions were too general and not specific enough so I did some more thinking in order to formulate more concrete questions that I could find answers to and was interested in. When I had found them, I wrote them all down and went into the project with rather unspecific expectations but hoping to find answers and get some new insights as well as refreshing perspectives.

We left Bonn and I was excited to get to Krzywowa and meet all the other participants. When they presented the program, I was really glad as I thought that all the workshops were interesting and I was especially enthusiastic for the excursion to Wroclaw. And I was glad that my fear of the project being too similar to my classes in school was not justified. Once we started with the workshops and I got to meet the other participants I noticed that some communication issues might occur and there was a language barrier for some. That made me a little critical at first because I was scared that I was not going to be able to communicate and as a result of that, not be able to learn from others. But, as soon as we started to get deeper into the point in question, that fear and critical view disappeared because through the creative process we had in many workshops many of us had the chance to express themselves in creative ways. Especially after the story telling evening when every country presented their story, I had no more doubts because I had learned so much about so many countries and participants. I wish I had had the chance to form some more lasting relationships with more people but I think due to the short time of only four full days and the language barrier with

some participants that was really difficult. The two Polish guys we spent some time with are the only ones my friends and I are still following on Instagram and occasionally texting with, but other than that I unfortunately did not form new connections. Nevertheless, I still believe that the intercultural exchange I had with the girl from Moldova for example and also the stories from the Estonian and Romanian group widened my horizon and enabled me to have a better understanding of the historical events in the year of 1989 in all of Europe. Also, it wakened my interest for Eastern European countries in general in addition to my already present interest in international relations. I would love to get the chance to visit some of the countries, for example Estonia and also Poland again and it gave me the chance to use my knowledge in history class. Since the project I have also had a lot of interesting discussions with my father who works in some of the Eastern European countries. I could even imagine focusing more on Eastern Europe during my studies.

To conclude, the intercultural exchange has given me new insights, new opportunities and new fields of interest that I hope to be able to invest more time in and learn more about during my time after school, at university, but also in my free time by traveling the countries I had the chance to learn so much about.

## 5. Appendix

### Declaration of independent work

All project documentations need to be produced by the applicants themselves who have to declare this with the following statement.

“I hereby declare that I have written the project documentation on my own and only used the listed references and aids.”

### Permission for anonymous publication

It is planned to make the project documentations available for scientific research and for the CertiLingua network by publishing examples of best practice on the CertiLingua website. This will be done anonymously. The author’s consent is nevertheless necessary.

I hereby authorise the anonymous publication of my project documentation.

I hereby deny the anonymous publication of my project documentation.



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Emily Hanke, Bonn, March 28th, 2021