

REPORT FROM THE ITALIAN GROUP

ERASMUS PROJECT + *BOOMERANG* 21ST-29TH OCTOBER 2021, HOPELAND, ARGOLIDA, GREECE

“Throw the Boomerang and catch it when it flies back” this was the key metaphor of the project: an invitation to carry out concrete and targeted actions towards our needs and desires, paying sincere attention to reality as it is, in order to always be ready to catch and recognize the consequences of our actions... and then act again, so that the game can continue!

A NECESSARY PROJECT

Boomerang was a project which involved about thirty young people of different European nationalities for about ten days in Greece, in an eco-village called *Hopeland*: a headquarter where to learn to believe in their own life vision and desires, but in a concrete, responsible and strategic way.

We were a group of young people between 18 and 30 years old, with different life stories but brought together by a project that set itself **a strong goal - strong as it is necessary for people our age: to shed light on today's world of employment and on each person's qualities through an empirical approach – games.**

In fact, the comparison among us highlighted how today's work reality feels cramped to many young people and how difficult it is to reach self actualization once they leave school. Many of us are discouraged either because we do not find a job that fulfills and represents us either because - by accepting many compromises - we have lost sight of our real needs and desires.

For example, during an activity of the program we were faced with a challenge: in the space of an hour, we had to devise an NGO capable of solving the problem of youth unemployment in Italy (a problem which, as emerged from the comparison, is common in several European countries). By sharing ideas and using well guided logic, we shaped more creative solutions to stem the problem, at least ideally.

In response to this and to other societal shortcomings, **Boomerang proved to be a duly necessary project, capable of offering each participant new perspectives as well as useful, long-lasting and potentially decisive tools.**

What were the elements that distinguished Boomerang, making it such an effective project, as well as necessary?

INGREDIENTS

Boomerang was a project constituting of several ingredients carefully chosen which, when mixed together, made the experience pleasantly tasty!

The conductors demonstrated their skills in the best possible way putting themselves at the service of the project and the participants. One of the most important ingredients was in fact **the method** that the conductors offered us during the development of the entire project: a method **based on the**

alternation of playful group activities, simulations, moments of shared reflection facilitated by diagrams, and moments of free socialization or individual reflection.

Life in *Hopeland* was marked by a rhythmic and dynamic schedule, although it was peaceful and pleasant at the same time.

Another important ingredient was **Hopeland itself**: living here required gumption and a willingness to participate. **Everyone was invited to carry out daily tasks for the sake of the new community.**

The tasks included: cleaning the common spaces, keeping them tidy, cleaning the bathrooms, helping in the kitchen and saving on the use of water and electricity (since it was generated by solar panels and it often rained). Moreover, in *Hopeland* we could give our contribution in the fields, among the olive trees or in the buildings, and in return the place gave us protection, peace, contact with nature and authentic inspirations.

We also met the founder of the eco-village, who told us her story, showing us how a vision can become reality.

The variety of **people**, their willingness to leave their comfort zone to open up to others and to new experiences was perhaps one of the most precious ingredients. **A friendly, participatory and simple human environment emerged in the group as it was devoid of judgment.** Each participant put themselves to the test by offering the group their qualities and sometimes even their weaknesses. Every morning, before starting the activities of the program, we gathered in a circle, and one at a time we shared our impressions, the good intentions for the day, the immediate needs or constructive criticism, certain to find in the group listening and the necessary help.

Games and activities were often aimed at putting team spirit into practice through **cooperation**, in order to complete missions in the most functional, inclusive and fun way possible! **We have learned that being cooperative can be a functional long-term strategy for growing both collectively and individually.** By working in a group you can find help and support to be able to achieve your personal goals and at the same time create something meaningful that can enrich and make joyful your own life as well as that of others.

One of the conductors said "*when some people are together there's always a Boomerang in the air*", a statement that reminds us that in the relationship with others something can always arise - an action, a vital impulse that invites us to participate and take part in the game of life, catching opportunities and offering new ones to those around us!

The reality of work can be like a game: it is an environment that has established a large variety of rules that are useful to recognize in order to develop strategic plans and therefore carry out actions that bring us closer to the realization of our goals.

This teaching emerged especially during one of the most significant games of the entire project - *The Game of Life* - a day-long game in which seven hours corresponded to seven years of our life. In this period of time each participant had to find or invent contractually recognizable jobs in order to earn money to survive, to achieve their goals and to live a satisfying life. Each participant started with a personal initial budget and had to actively challenge themselves to be able to get to the evening in the best possible way. The outcomes of this game were various, unique and very instructive.

After testing ourselves in the activities proposed by the conductors, we were given tools to learn how to invent educational games. So we divided ourselves into groups of different thematic interest related to work or personal growth and shared the new game proposals with the whole group. In fact, **gamification** was one of the main ingredients of *Boomerang*, together with **an interest in**

sharing methods of developing collective activities even with people outside the project so that the experience can last once back home.

THROWING THE BOOMERAG FROM HOME

The continuation of the project beyond the time shared in Greece is a fundamental ingredient which makes *Boomerang* more than a beautiful ten-day experience, **something that is a useful and concrete tool which will always remain available to us in supporting our path of growth and life balance.**

Once returned home, the schemes, theories and insights encountered during the process were shared online among all the participants.

We were given information about the Erasmus Project's opportunities and the references to apply for Youth Pass.

We kept in touch online using social networks and shared our photos to keep the images of this bright experience always alive within us!

We were invited to offer activities inspired by the project to our local communities, to pass the *Boomerang* so that it always remains in flight!

We learned that by carrying out heart-felt and well planned actions, that are aware of the reality in which we find ourselves, we can concretely approach the realization of our goals.

Remember to never stop playing, throwing, acting, because it is in the throw that the possibilities are manifested and reality takes shape.

FEEDBACKS FROM THE ITALIAN GROUP

"I've tried to throw the boomerang as far as I could, and the result was extraordinarily satisfying.. I finally discovered my value!" Giorgio

"It was very strong as a project: not the usual Erasmus +. At first you are blown away by the somewhat "unusual" (unfortunately for us) way of life (cold showers, sharing cleaning responsibilities among groups, limited electricity, shared sleeping spaces). Then you start living it all and you end up not wanting to leave. You don't mind waking up and using a flashlight as there is no light in the bathroom. People give you the energy to ignore the stupid things that we consider important in everyday life.

You don't mind waiting until 1pm to eat. You don't mind cleaning the bathroom. You don't mind eating soup for both dinner and lunch. You don't mind being cold.

People shape the way you see things. Nature is more important than ever.

I am quite astonished by the impact this Exchange has had on me." Simona

"I needed to live an experience that helped me understand which direction to take, something that gave me a compass. It gave me a Boomerang and the best thing is that now I am the one who can choose in which direction to throw it!" Maria