

CREATIVE COOPERATIONS IN A FEW WORDS

What is „Creative Cooperations“?

Creative Cooperations is a European network of youth arts projects. A total of 22 organizations from 15 European countries, 17 of them from EU member states, have joined together and since 1996 agreed on a programme of concerted action.

Objectives

Creative Cooperations offers an opportunity for disadvantaged teenagers and young adults in particular to gather European experience in artistic and creative community work and to obtain training.

Shared priorities

The institutions and initiatives belonging to Creative Cooperations undertake many different types of work in diverse areas. But all projects rest on the following principles:

- Youth arts work begins with artistic experience and production
- Youth arts work demands and encourages active participation and creative expression
- Youth arts work is focused on areas of social concern
- Youth arts work is community work and plays an important part in solving the problems of our times.

European Voluntary Service

Creative Cooperations offers young people between the ages of 18 and 25 a chance to join in the new European Voluntary Service programme. There are two cycles per year in which young Europeans can learn, try things out, make discoveries, gather European experience and develop their skills in a partner project.

Main target group

Creative Cooperations is aimed specifically at young people who are in danger of becoming marginalized, who have an interest in arts but have not had a chance to discover the opportunities offered by international voluntary work for themselves.

Creative Cooperations has documented and published at length the experience it has gained in networking and in integrating disadvantaged young people. Representatives of the network have taken part in numerous national and international conferences, working parties and trainings.

AIMS OF CREATIVE COOPERATIONS AND EUROPEAN VOLUNTARY SERVICE

School for life

Creative training and aesthetic education are to develop in every respect the young adults' abilities to

- perceive through their senses
- understand through their senses and through concepts
- and to depict their perceptions, impressions, feelings and knowledge.

Youth arts and culture work is to be conducted as a school for life.

Educational and training objectives in brief:

- teaching of basic and key skills
- linguistic competence
- an explorative sense of inquiry
- empathy
- a sense of purpose
- self-organization

- thinking in project contexts
- development of a social and personal identity resting on reflection and of an ability to cope with disappointments

Against poverty and discrimination

Particular efforts are to be targeted on the disadvantaged young people and the focuses of social concern in the respective communities. The aim is to involve in European Voluntary Service particularly such young adults as are in danger of becoming marginalized.

Intercultural work in the communities is designed to combat xenophobia and racism.

The "compensatory" and sociocultural aims in brief:

- development of strategies to reach disadvantaged teenagers and young adults
- combination of creative training with vocationally based programmes and development of occupational skills
- art as a third place for inter- and transcultural encounters
- improvement of the sociocultural image and climate at focuses of social concern

Intercultural European experience

The European Voluntary Service exchange programme is designed to confront the young people with the challenge of coping with a new language and culture, a new community and a new institution and to help them rise to this challenge through care, training and support, and to learn from it. It is hoped that in this way the young people will no longer see their own cultures and lives as the only possible forms and start to reflect on them.

The aims of European intercultural education in brief:

- openness and tolerance
- respect for and a liberal attitude towards traditions
- an ability to cope with conflicts
- creativity in the development of new forms of cultural depiction, communication and organization
- knowledge of foreign languages and the countries where they are spoken
- flexibility and mobility

Synergy effects between participating institutions

The presence of European volunteers in the work of the various institutions is intended to further the development of these institutions themselves.

In close, ongoing cooperation with one another, the projects are to develop standards, forms of work and communication and democratic, transparent domains for volunteer activities which may legitimately be labelled "European".

Development aims in brief:

- intensive exchange on practical, conceptual and evaluative work
- Europe as a local experience
- work which is sensitive to the cultural and educational policy situation in Europe, and to the European labour market

THE SEMINARS AND THEIR METHOD

The Creative Cooperations seminars are the second way in which the European volunteers get trained. They describe their experience and pass it on to others (transmission).

The training of the "new" volunteers overlaps with the follow-up process for the "old" volunteers in the seminars.

- The "old" volunteers discuss their assignments in one-to-one talks (with the instructors), presentations and group discussions
- and work out, with the assistance of team leaders, ways in which they can describe their experience to the new volunteers (second part of the seminar).
- The new volunteers confront their preliminary experiences in a similar manner and describe their expectations and fears, what they want out of their voluntary service and their questions.
- The seminar instructors inform those present once again about the institutional framework and their rights and duties as participants in European Voluntary Service youth exchange programmes.
- The "old" volunteers describe and discuss their assignments with the new ones in a brief multimedia presentation prepared in advance.
- These talks are continued in the informal and personal setting of a jointly prepared meal followed by a party.

The seminars are documented as fully as possible in pictures and especially in sound. This documentation - together with other data - provides the basis for evaluation by the network and the projects involved.

THE YOUTH PANEL – VOLUNTEERS REPORT TO A YOUTHFUL AUDIENCE

In May 1999 the European volunteers from the Creative Cooperations network held a major YOUTH INFORMATION SESSION in Berlin: the YOUTH PANEL POINT MELTING POT.

The volunteers presented their perspective on European Voluntary Service and their work in the various projects to other young people from the city who are interested in artistic and cultural work and European youth exchange.

In this way the PANEL builds directly on the forms of presentation developed in the seminar. But the audience this time are young people outside the network. This entails higher formal demands on the presentation.

But first and foremost this act of "going public" opens up a different perspective for the young volunteers:

- It is no longer a question merely of their own personal experience in European youth exchange
- but of the point of European exchange as such: gathering creative and instructive experience in the European area and - in the opposite direction - making Europe something which can be experienced in specific places
- and presenting the respective sociocultural role which each of the institutions affiliated to Creative Cooperations plays at its location.

The significance of this change of perspective for the young volunteers cannot be overstated.

For their audience of peers they become competent and critical representatives of the underlying ideas and the practices of Creative Cooperations and its affiliated projects:

- turning Europe into an arena of experience and
- furthering the skills development of young people and the sociocultural development of the places where the projects are based - notably at focuses of social concern - through artistic and creative work in the community.

This makes the YOUTH PANEL a third form of Training und Transmission which is to round off each cycle.

The most important principles of Creative Cooperations

I. Inclusion

The young people are not seen as belonging to a stigmatised group (disadvantaged), which has to be helped and integrated.

They are seen as partners in a common / shared process and production. They are asked for their capacities and seen as resource people to contribute to the work.

The field of community art projects allow great possibilities to discover each other as partners and equal participators.

This applies for the local participants in the projects as much as for the EVS-volunteers – they are invited to participate and to discover.

Inclusion can happen best in the context of an active participation in a concrete working together in a project.

(attention to the profile and working fields of partners in a network are important to allow this context of active participation).

The goal inclusion as such without concrete context can sometimes be a contraproductive label.

II. Connection and Transmission

The activities of the young people should gather to an experience (instead of staying a row of events) – this succeeds if different activities are connected and results and energie is passed on.

The participants experience comes to be alive and awakes their energy, if it is connected to something personal and understandable of them – standing up for the cause.

Connection and transmission between different fields of experience (network of experiences) on different levels:

biographically (the volunteer), in projects of the work, the partners in the community, partner in the network as a whole.

reports, the method of the seminars, the youth panel train and reflect on these fields of connection and transmission.

III. Continuity and History

Continuity and connection to (own) history (to put life into words) are important results of a transmission – developing the energy of existing organism rather than producing always new ones.

IV. Quality

The measuring of quality is linked to the success of connecting (more than to a success in a single activity).

The partners in the network undertake an ongoing training and exchange about the methods of connecting and including. They are evaluating different approaches in a common field of praxis (community art work).

A common practice in other European cooperations (other programs) enlarges trust and experience.

Different cooperations help to keep and develop the energy of an existing organism – instead of formulating always new ones.

