

THE EVS *ADVENTURES* OF VLATKO



(OR, HOW IT IS TO BE AN EVS VOLUNTEER IN YEE)



This publication was created by Youth and Environment Europe.

Youth and Environment Europe (YEE) is a network of 41 youth non-governmental organisations coming from 26 European countries. YEE's activities aim to promote sustainable development, environmental protection and nature conservation. All our activities are organised and carried out by and with the involvement of young people under the age of 30.

More info: www.yeenet.eu



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INTRODUCTION

Hello, my name is Vladimir and this is my YEE EVS story. Well, most of it. I guess this should be a sort of an introduction, a teaser what you all should expect in the next pages.

First, about the motivation for making this little EVS diary. One of my mantras is that EVS is all about new experiences and I figured that this would be the right opportunity to put my experiences on paper. Well, in this case online, but you get my point. The reason for this is to make a sort of a testament of my time in YEE and also to serve as a preview for people who are planning to take on similar adventures.

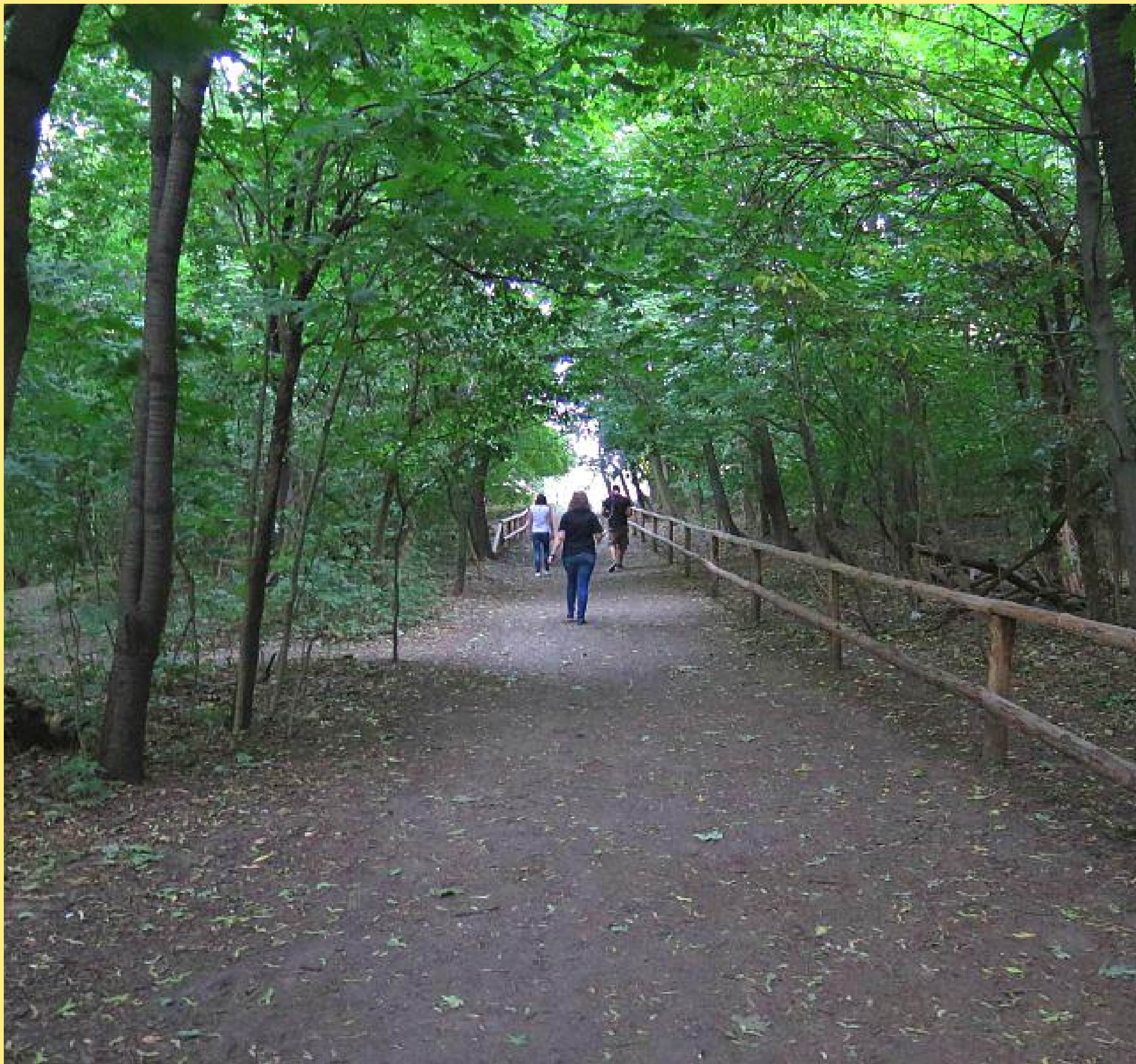
So, buckle up and read about my EVS adventure that started once upon a time, on 12 April 2015.

YET

YOUTH AND
ENVIRONMENT
PEOPLE

THE OFFICE

WHAT HAPPENED THERE



THE ARRIVAL

I remember the excitement when I first arrived in Prague, my plane landing at Vaclav Havel airport. It was my first time in the Czech Republic and I immediately had a feeling that I will like it. The reason for this? The difference in the air. Yeah, I know I was at an airport where the air is not the cleanest, but there was something in it that night, like in Phil Collins song. Maybe it was just something psychological but nevertheless, it was a nice fresh feeling, a sort of a preview of the upcoming months.

When it comes to the first day in the office, it was as pleasant and smooth as I expected it to be. Everything was ready for me and the other volunteers' welcome, including a list of tips of former EVS volunteers' favorite places and activities in Prague.



HUMANS OF YEE OFFICE

Working in YEE's office means working in an international environment and this was my first such experience. During my EVS life, the office consisted of Mercedes, Natasha, Gosia and from October also Roxana. The rest of the people were the EVS volunteers, me and Judit. Each one of the office crew had a unique approach to their tasks and seeing them work up close made me also get inspired and learn many new things. Also, each one of them made my stay as pleasant as possible and were always there for support or talk, especially during my first days when they introduced us carefully to the new world.

One peculiar thing about all the people employed in YEE is that they are all former EVS volunteers. Including the current volunteers, and board, while I was in the organisation, there were in total six generations of EVS being a part of it. I think this speaks volumes about the nature and potential outcomes of the European Voluntary Service, right?

Not to forget, even though the section's name contains the word 'human' I must also mention the office cat, Knedlik, who gave a unique spin to the office environment, especially to a person like me who likes cats.



GETTING IN TOUCH WITH LOCALS

One of the reasons for the existence of EVS, as far as I can tell, is the cultural exchange which is a huge aspect of every volunteer's experience.

When I say cultural exchange I don't mean just learning language. I also mean learning typical customs and tradition, typical food and interaction with locals.

As an EVS volunteer working in an international environment, where there was no Czech person employed, I tried as much as I can to interact with the local community. The best way to do this was volunteering in the organisation Botic, also located in the ecological centre Toulcuv Dvur. These activities are part of the EVS in YEE and for me their importance was immense not only because of the whole local aspect, but because it also strengthened my skills of working with people.



FOOD

Another exciting dimension of working in YEE is the cooking. Respecting the concept of sustainability and making things more interesting, the people in the office take turns every day and cook lunch for each other. Naturally, the food must be vegetarian in order for us to reduce the impact on the environment.

For me this was an interesting take on the office eating dynamics. First of all, everyone has his or her own style and preference of cooking, so things never got boring. Ok, maybe they did when I was cooking because I mostly did pasta. It's not that I didn't know what else to do or can't search internet for recipes, but I didn't want to risk it and made the rest starve. Still, this was a valuable lesson for me because it made me more responsible and also it introduced me to some new vegetarian dishes.



TAMJDEM

Tamjdem is a non-governmental organisation that operates in the field of Czech and international volunteering by organising volunteering days and weekends, workcamps, book bazars etc. More info about the organisation on tamjdem.cz.

The Tamjdem volunteering day was my first event as a part of YEE. Traditionally, the organisations's representation was done by the EVS volunteers, and therefore this was also my first more responsible task. Not being a fan of public speaking, and gathering attention (back then), I was also curious to see how it will all end up. Surprisingly, and fortunately, the day went amazing and I had the chance to make my small contribution to the local community. Even more, since the volunteering activities were done in Toulcuv Dvur, the ecological center where YEE is located, it also helped me get in touch more with my working surroundings.



THE RIGHT TO BE(E)

The Right to Be(e) is YEE's grassroots campaign that is happening every year in spring. It is designed to help the survival of bees and to raise awareness about the issue.

In year 2015 the campaign involved planting actions all over Europe. For me, this was a fresh take on tackling a problem that I knew can have great implications. It not only made me more aware about the issue, but it gave me the sense that I can contribute, as little or as much as possible to the cause. Furthermore, by being in touch with interested people from all over Europe, this campaign gave an interactive and dynamic element to the office routine.



THE PROJECTS

Before coming to YEE, I have participated in only one Training Course and immediately fell in love with the concept of having young people from all over Europe come together and learn together something new, while at the same time learning something new from each other. Thus, when I came to YEE I was eager to see how they organise projects, starting from the conception, then the complex project application process and of course, the execution.

Being able to witness up close the organisation of two Training Courses and one Youth Exchange and how much effort goes into it, I now appreciate even more the stages of a project. Furthermore, it is something I am currently very passionate about and hopefully, in future, I will be able to put these learning outcomes into practice and contribute to the world around me by making such projects. Naturally, I must also say thanks to the European Union who is making such positive things happen.



ANNUAL MEETING

The Annual Meeting is one of the most important YEE events every year. During the 3 day-long meeting, many things regarding the network's future are decided, for example new projects are approved, the new Board is elected and new member organisations join. Since YEE is also a network organisation that caters to its members, the meeting is also an opportunity for these organisations to meet and find a way to cooperate.

The Annual Meeting 2015 happened in July. I will remember the meeting as a really good inside look of how an NGO and its structures function, something I'm willing to get into more in future. I will also remember the various things I learned from the participants coming from all over Europe, who all brought something to the table.

Last but definitely not least, another exciting dimension of the meeting is that I was the Chair of it. Being responsible for taking care that the sessions and the voting are in order, it was a valuable lesson in public speaking and representation.



CHILDREN WORKSHOPS

Again on the topic of working with people, the various workshops held in Toulcuv Dvur by the organisation Botic, for me were a perfect way to work with a category of people that I considered one of the trickiest. Yes, I'm talking about children.

This was my first experience working with the youngest and now, from this distance, I can say that not only I didn't have any problem with it, but I also fully enjoyed it. Furthermore, I realized I am actually quite good at it and wouldn't mind going in this area even deeper and more professional in future. Even with the language barrier, which sometimes really made things difficult, I always managed to get my point across and offer some interesting activities to the young ones. Therefore, I am happy that my EVS project included this dimension.



CLIMATE CAMPAIGN WORKSHOP

In 2015 YEE started its Climate Campaign, focused on the perils of global warming and on inspiring people to get involved in the fight against this issue. At the same time, other purpose of the campaign is to raise awareness about the fact that every one of us can make a difference, regardless of its magnitude. As a part of the campaign, there were local workshops organised all over Europe, and of course, one that YEE did in Prague.

During my 12 months in YEE, the work I did on this campaign was one of the most responsible ones and by that challenging. Firstly, it was my first foray into the world of designing, Luckily, the online platform canva.com (it sounds as an ad, but honest word is not) made things quite easy and therefore I was more or less satisfied with the end result.

Secondly, since the office decided to give me and Judit more autonomy in creating our local event, each one of us chose one workshop and combined them together. I decided to do a screening of a movie and with the help of a few exchanged e-mails managed to secure a copy from the distributor. Also, we were happy to do the workshop in one of our favorite cafes, V Lese.

On a more personal note, I can say that I was happy with the outcome. Even though some moments prior to the workshop were stressful and I had some doubts in my abilities to execute such task, at the end I believe that this was an enriching experience that made me more in touch with my organisational skills and also made me learn how it is to cooperate with people from different profiles.



PHYSICAL BOARD MEETINGS

There were three Physical Board meetings during my stay in YEE and I attended all of them. During these days, the Board and Office gather to discuss about the future of the organisation.

For every EVS volunteer in YEE I think that these meetings are a valuable experience and a good way to get acquainted with how the organisation functions. Furthermore, the people from the Board during my EVS were all very professional and nice to talk to, so for me was always a pleasure to meet them and witness their dedication to the organisation.



A PART OF CZECH TRADITION

First of all, yeah, that's me in the photo above. For me it was probably the scariest and the most nerve-racking thing that I had to do during the EVS. The photo was taken at Toulcuv Dvur's Masopust, a day of celebration dedicated to the arrival of spring.

Traditionally, the EVS volunteers participated in the event and got dressed as one of the traditional Czech characters: Judit as the groom and me as the bride. The mask, more scary than pretty, was a compromise put into play because I was ashamed to have my own face out there. I've never been fond of making a joke/fool of myself, especially when I have to do it in front of many people, and thus at first I was very uncomfortable underneath the mask. Yet, as the ceremony went on and with the small help of a nice Czech refreshments, I started enjoying more and now I can say that this is one of my most memorable experiences in Toulcuv Dvur. I don't want to sound like a broken record, but getting out of my comfort zone is something that I really needed and mastered during my EVS.



POSITIVE CHANGES

Couple of moments ago, I mentioned something called ability to work with people. This ability was reinforced in a huge deal during my EVS and was something that I was not very comfortable with previously.

The reason I say the now famous mantra *EVS is all about new experiences* is that it's true, at least in my case. Before I took on this adventure, I was always the nervous, shy and stage-frightened person when it comes to public speaking and working with people, especially many people at the same place in the same time. After these months, I can honestly and happily say that there has been an enormous change in this department of my abilities. Furthermore, I will take these new skills and use them in future, in my professional but also personal life.

GROWING UP

THE PERSONAL SIDE OF EVS





THE ON-ARRIVAL AND MID-TERM

EVS volunteers have several trainings related to their volunteering period: pre-departure, on-arrival, mid-term evaluation meeting and final evaluation. By definition, the on-arrival training is a several-day event designed to help the new volunteers get acquainted with the new host country, its culture and language. In addition, the training helps the volunteer prepare for the service and to learn more about how to expand his/her skills. Last but not least, the on-arrival is the perfect networking opportunity for meeting fellow volunteers from all over Europe. The mid-term evaluation meeting is scheduled to be in the middle of the EVS, as the name suggests, so that volunteers can exchange their experiences and also consult with trainers about their future responsibilities.

I believe that these meetings are one of the most important for every EVS volunteer. The on-arrival training not only equips the volunteers with necessary and practical information about the world of EVS, but it also connects them with each other. The cultural exchange is just the cherry at the top.

I can't stress enough how important were the on-arrival and mid-term to me. Here I met many wonderful people who became part of my EVS daily life, friends for life, and also influenced me in many ways other. Which leads me to the next page...



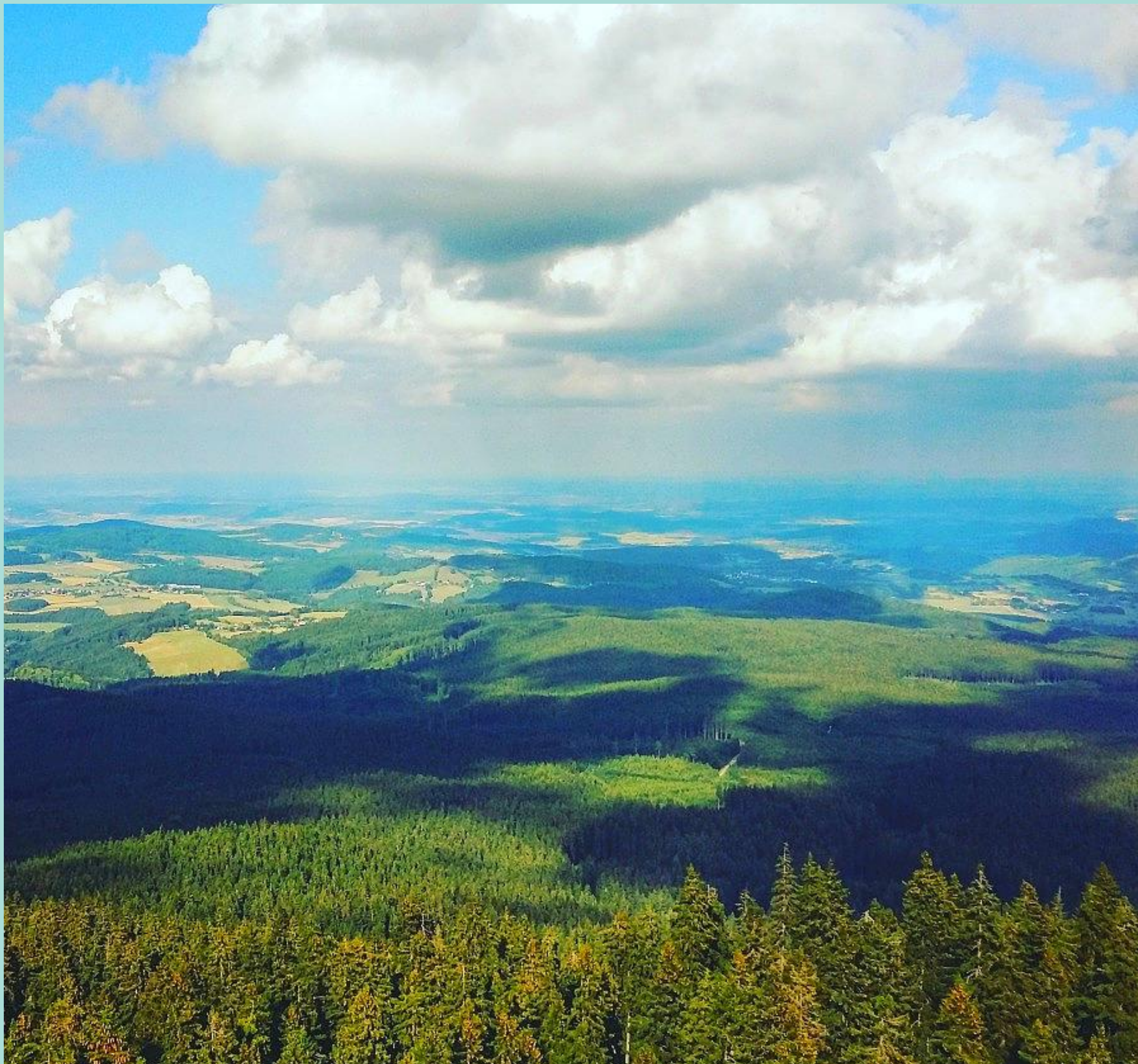
POMALITO

In Czech 'pomalu' means 'slow down' and the suffix '-ito' is a Spanish one, said in broader terms. Since the big part of the people I hang out here were Spanish, my EVS had a little Latin dimension which led to improvement of my small Spanish language knowledge.

When it comes to the people, honestly the EVS adventure exceeded my expectations when it comes to making friendships and interpersonal relationships in general. Here I met so many good people and each of them has made its mark on me. Regardless whether these people were participants in some project of the organisation, friends of friends, Couchsurfers (yeah, I also got very much into that) or fellow EVS volunteers.

Still, I must mention the people who made my Czech family and that I can call friends for life. Alejandro, Dusko, Manon, Alex, Judit, and more. Even though in future we probably won't be living in the same place, I don't think that ending EVS means ending the close friendship. On the contrary, I think it means exploring what the rest of the world has to offer together. If it wasn't for these people, my stay in Czech Republic would not have been the same and I am happy that these amazing people influenced me so much and from every single one of them I can take something for the rest of my life.

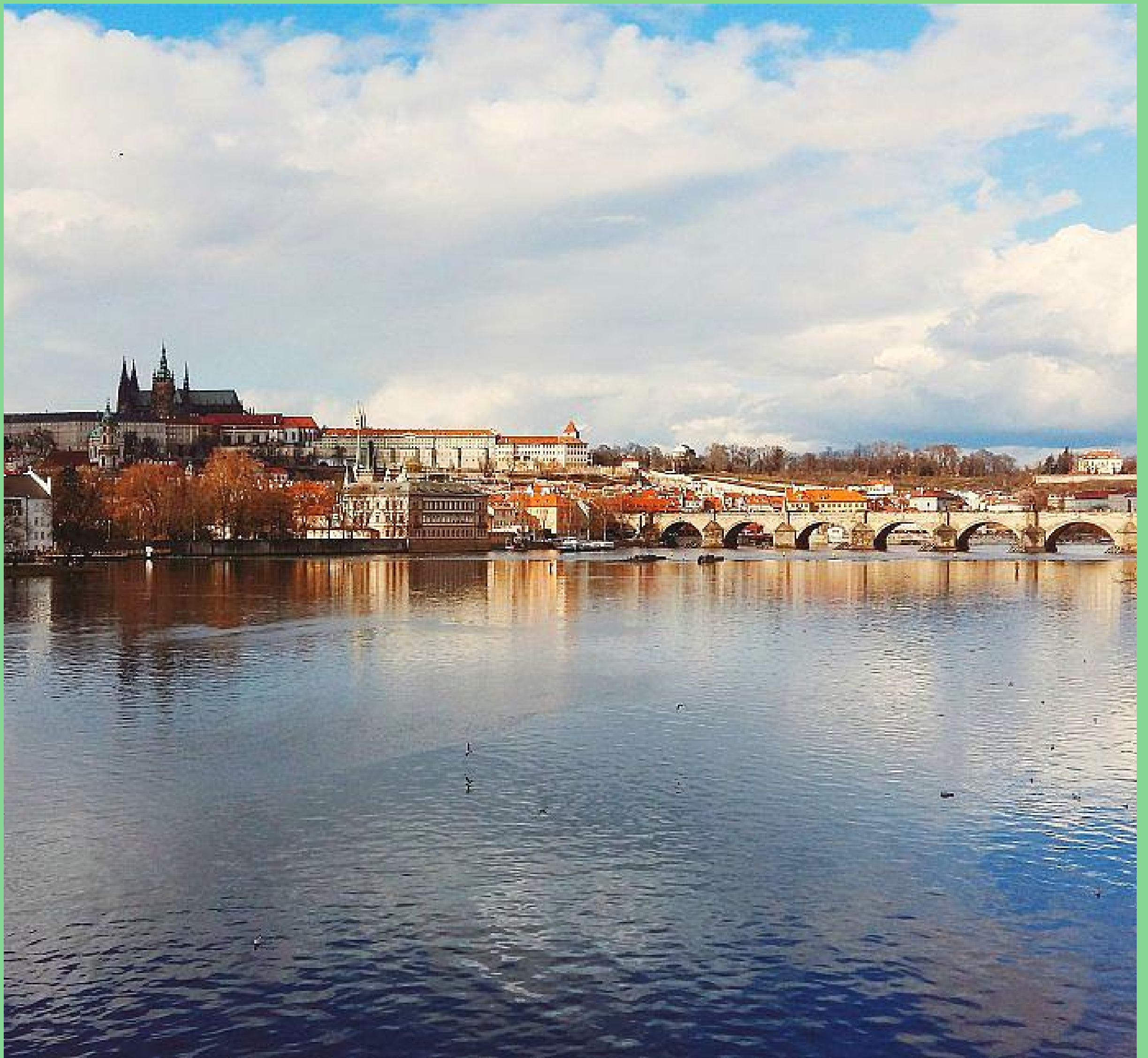
Gracias for everything!



NATURE APPRECIATION

One of the benefits of working in an environmental NGO is that you get to explore the world of, well, the environment and the problems it faces. You also get to learn how to look for solutions.

For me, the work was not just that, but it was also an eye-opening process that made me consider and reconsider many of my habits when it comes to protecting the environment. After living my entire life in Macedonia, one of the most polluted countries in Europe, I realised what it means to care for nature and all of its elements, regardless whether it's a tree in a park or a bee flying around you. If/ when I return to Macedonia, I will try to get involved in this field as much as possible and contribute to making positive changes in my surrounding because in YEE I realised that each individual has a responsibility and a chance to make things better.

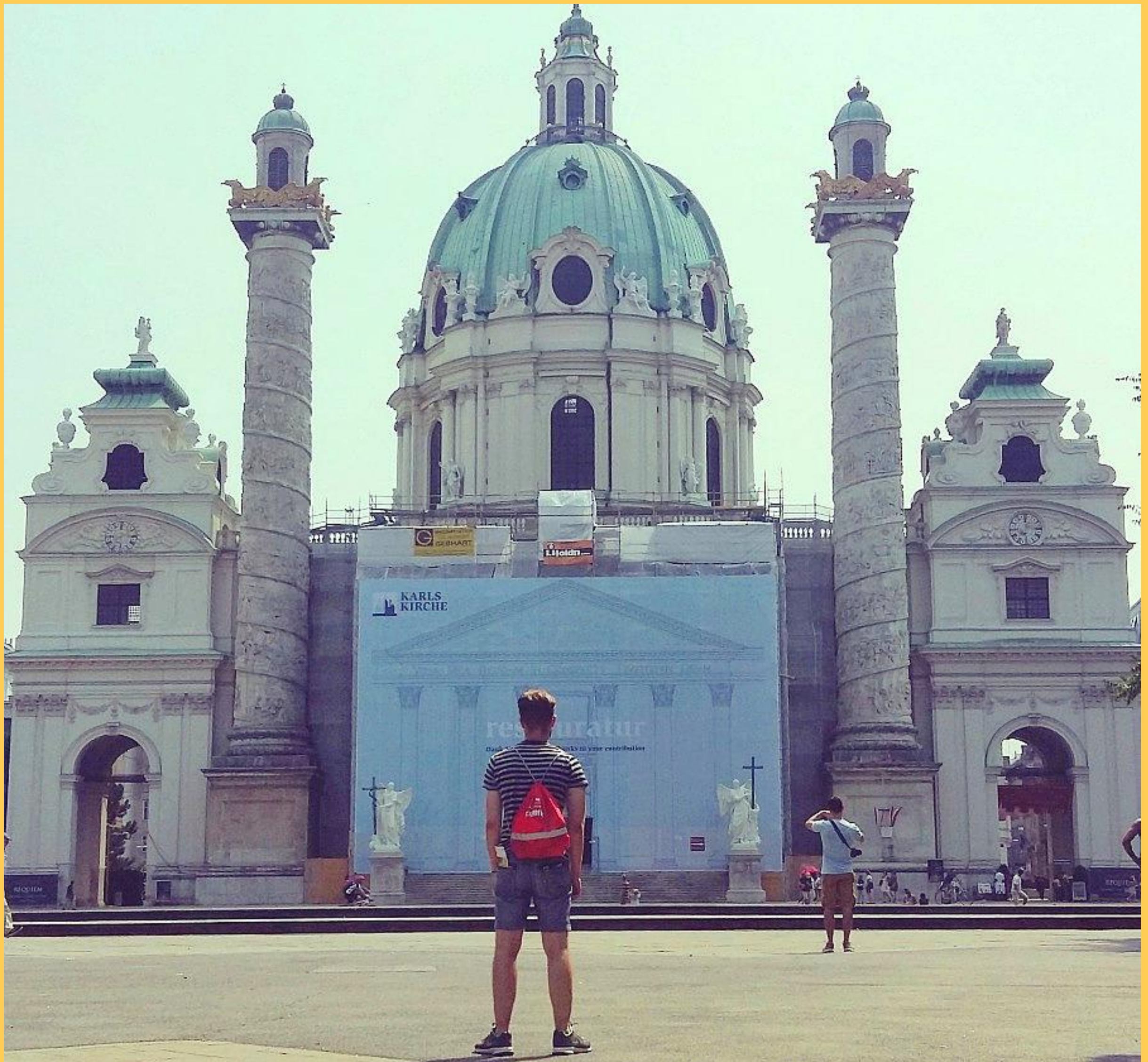


PRAGUE!

What can I say that hasn't already been said about one of the world's most beautiful places?

I already wrote about the "special feeling" that I felt when I landed at the Prague airport. This feeling, whatever that was, remained the entire year. I feel in love with Prague immediately and felt the city as the home I never had. I can state my favorite places, bars and parks here, but I won't since I will need a lot of time and space, and because honestly I don't think I can find the right words, in any language.

I might not live in Prague after my EVS, or maybe I will, but regardless, I will always have a special place and emotions in my heart for the city and everything that it offered. Its vividness and openness made my volunteering even more awesome and for that I am truly grateful.

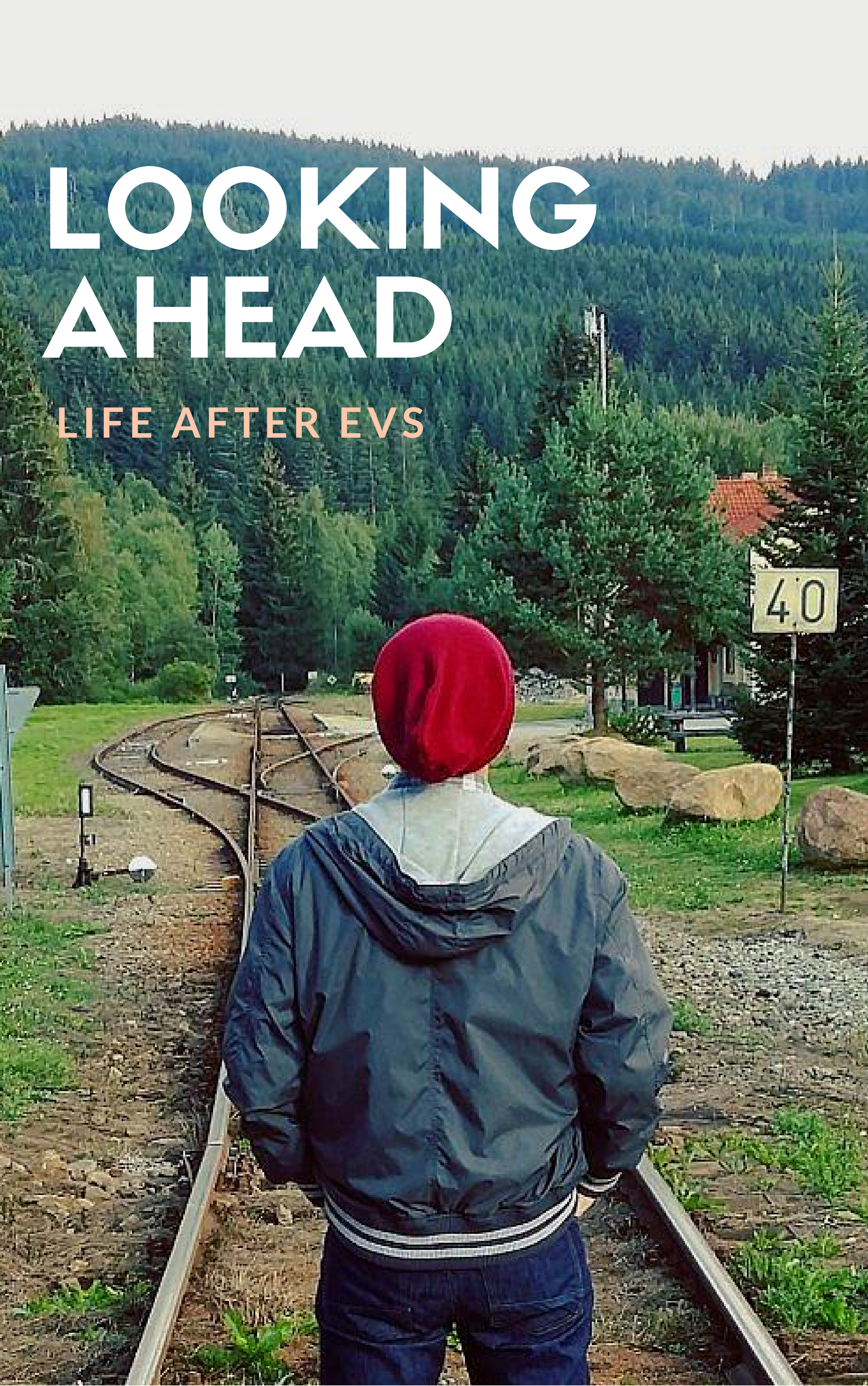


TRAVEL

They say that If you ask a Czech person (I haven't asked) in what part of Europe is their country located, they will say Central Europe, even though most of the world considers it an Eastern-European country.

Living here for a year, I felt how suitable is to live in the center of Europe, surrounded by many beautiful countries. In other words, I tried to travel as much as possible and to get to know Europe better. I can't say I visited everything that I wanted, but time is a limited concept and sometimes the responsibilities didn't allow me. Still, in one year I traveled more than I have in the past five and that is also another aspect of the EVS that I cherish.

Just a small advice to future EVS volunteers: plan your schedule better and don't leave things and destinations for 'better times'.



LOOKING AHEAD

LIFE AFTER EVS



THE END(?)

So, I guess this is it.

It is an impossible task to talk about everything that happened in these twelve months as an EVS volunteer and also put all the feelings into words. Yet, I hope I managed to give you a brief idea about my volunteering life in YEE.

For me this was a life-changing experience and a chance to grow up as a person, and I wish and urge anyone to take on this adventure and reap the benefits.

Therefore, as a goodbye, I will simply say thank you to YEE, my colleagues, my friends here, and the European Union.

Thank you for reading.