

Class Excursions for Transformative Learning in Spain and Estonia

Students Discover Inner Sustainability

As part of the Erasmus+ project “Transformative Learning in Real World Laboratories – Experiencing Inner and Outer Sustainability in Collaborative School Projects,” two field trips took place in April and May 2026 in the partner countries of Spain and Estonia. What made these trips special was that nature took center stage during the three- to four-day school trips. The destinations of these so-called “real-world laboratories” were nature schools located on the outskirts or in the middle of nature parks, just one to two hours away by bus from the respective schools.

For many students aged 14 to 16, immersive experiences with nature are not a given in everyday life. Consequently, the project began with questions such as: Can we manage without cell phones? What will we do out there? Exciting activities like kayaking, archery, and rock climbing made it easier for the students to get started. But there was more to it than that: The goal was for the young people not only to experience nature but also to discover inner and outer sustainability through nature.

The excursions were based on a shared educational concept that the project partners from Estonia, Germany, and Spain had developed during a workshop and subsequent digital meetings. The goal was to combine nature experiences, collaborative learning, and personal development.

The field trips were led by the respective local project partners and focused on different themes. In Catalonia, the emphasis was more on aspects of inner sustainability: self-awareness, empathy, creativity, emotional mindfulness, reflective thinking, and sustainable social relationships. In Estonia, the focus was more on external sustainability: ecological knowledge, environmental responsibility, place-based learning, and the conscious use of natural resources. The students explored nature, worked with natural and recycled materials, and put principles such as “Leave No Trace” into practice.

Particularly impressive in both countries was the construction of huts using natural materials that the students found on site. This involved not only craftsmanship but also collaboration, communication, problem-solving, and mutual support. The resulting huts were presented and celebrated with great pride.

The learning experiences also differed slightly: The Spanish students, in particular, developed a greater awareness of empathy, self-esteem, perspective-taking, and community. The Estonian students showed particular progress in ecological understanding, environmental responsibility, self-confidence, and navigating new social situations.

In the end, both groups agreed: Nature can be more than just a place of learning. It can be a space where young people rediscover themselves, others, and their environment. Or it can become a place of joyfully shared community, as the Spanish students put it: **Estem molt contents!**

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