

Smiling Zanda from land which sings

Zanda Brikmane spends one year in Ajdovščina in programme European Voluntary Service (EVS).

Association of friends of youth Ajdovščina is the first and for now the only association of friends of youth in Slovenia, hosting an EVS volunteer in programme "Youth in action" financed by European commission, coordinator of this action is slovene national agency Movit NA Mladina. EVS enables young people from 18. to 30. years additional non-formal education and interesting experiences in international environment. 22-year old volunteer, a journalist by profession from Latvian Saulkrasti, which can be translated as "the coast of sun" came to Ajdovščina in July 2009 and works in project "Free time of children and youth in Ajdovščina."

This project is about "Free time of children and youth in Ajdovscina". At our association we try to promote healthy and qualitative spending of free time. What is qualitative spending of free time for you and how do you spend it? Comparison of free time of Slovenian and Latvian children- do you think both have enough opportunities for good free time, are there any differences?

For me qualitative spending of my free time is when I either learn something new or improve some skills or knowledge's I already have, either some physical (especially outdoor) activities. In high school I was very active – I was singing in two choirs, finished art school, playing basketball and volleyball all around Latvia...and then we also managed (with some schoolmates) to open a youth center in our town – we did everything: wrote a project, found a place, renovated it, chose furniture, made all opening ceremonies and after I was active participant and volunteer in youth center (wrote several more projects, made lots of free-time activities for children and youth...). That's also why I really don't like when young people have no will to do anything...because of being an active part of society already when you are teenager gives you lots of experience and you just simply learn not to be lazy!

I think that either in Slovenia and Latvia children have enough possibilities to spend their free time qualitative. In Latvia we have also these 'professional' circles which children and youth can take after school – they are about different topics and everyone can chose something what they are interested in. Also it's good for parents, because of children spend their time in these circles and parents can come after work to pick them up + they learn really a lot – starting from panting and some creative stuff, photography, multimedia, fashion, dance...till plane modeling and lots of technical things for guys. Once I went buy one of these professional schools in Riga – it was amazing how beautiful and interesting bicycles they have made!

In 2 months and half your EVS project will end. What do you think about your EVS experience and about your staying in Slovenia? What will you remember the most?

We have this saying in Latvia – 'tabby like and Easter egg!' That I would say also about my experience in Slovenia and EVS. I really like it here and I don't regret (and won't regret) that I came here. It gave quite lot for me in many ways. There have been moments when I just wanted to disappear form here, but it was mostly at the beginning (till middle of my staying here). Now I have less than 3 months left and I still want to do lots of things, so I don't have so much time to think about home and

some things I maybe miss. I just want to finish this as good as possible. And then maybe one day I will come back ☺ .

I am that kind of person who forgets some bad things quite fast. So I will remember all these good things and good people I have met here. And I will miss them in Latvia. Also I will really miss mountains...I like to be in the nature and mountains is something what we don't have in Latvia. If I could, I would take them with me ☺...together with a bunch of people from here. Maybe I should buy bigger suit-case.

During your stay you have met a lot of interesting people, volunteers, among this is of course your compatriot Alina Asberga Nabergoj, who lives and works in Vipava. What was the feeling when you go to foreign country where no one speaks your language and you met there someone from your country? What do you often talk about, what are your visits like? Do you plan to work on some project together?

To be honest, I was really happy when I heard that here is one more Latvian around. And I am also always very happy to meet Alina – it's good that there is someone who understands you and encourages you to do more and more. I am not calling too often with my parents and friends (with my friends we are more just writing some messages, because of I don't want to be near computer too much...and it's also easier – when you have time, you can just send a short message or mail), so I am also happy to talk Latvian with Alina. When we meet we talk about different stuff – of course about how it is going here, what are the plans like and so on. But then I remember once we were walking and talking about Latvian food for more than an hour! And then I went home for Christmas and said to my mum – I really need to prepare this for me! ☺ Alina is from time to time helping us in MDPM – in autumn we were going to schools around and presented our country to children. I guess this all just proves that a person from your country can be very important for you if you meet in some other country far away from home. It's giving you this...feeling of home a bit. Feeling of not being alone ☺ (Paldies!)

At our association we organized literary competition "A letter to Zanda" and painting competition. You daily receive letters from our pupils who try to present you our country in the best way. How would you present your country to readers of Zoja magazine, how would you tempt them to visit Latvia? Why "a land who sings"?

First of all, it's really great to receive these letters from children and some of them gave me an idea which place in Slovenia I still need to visit! Thanks for that!

I have been presenting my country a lot during these nine months here and I hope people now know much more about it and I hope it was interesting for them. Also, with every presentation I just started to love my country more – when you are away, you can see the true beauty of it (maybe also because of you are not involved any more in all these political and social problems). I would just say to readers of 'Zoja' that – you have to come and see it! If you like cities, then you know that our capital city Riga is really beautiful place – it's a pearl of the Baltic Sea. If you like nature – you are also very welcome! It is sometimes said that Latvia is like one big natural park – lots of rivers, lakes, forest, meadows...and sea. You can get everything there...except high mountains ☺.

About our slogan 'A land who sings'...it is coming from the past – ancient Latvians had a song for every thing they did in their everyday life, in celebrations...everywhere. They were always singing. And we still are – more than 20 000 people in Latvia are singing in choirs and National Song and

Dance festival is like the highest peak of this mountain called 'song' – it's really worth seeing and experiencing the feeling when 20 000 people are singing – you can feel different kinds of emotions just by being there. Atmosphere is incredible. Also now in Slovenia I sing quite often – just by myself, silently...but still. It is like relaxation.

You are a journalist by profession. And got some opportunities to write about Slovenian school system and itineraries here in Latvian newspapers. What are your other plans after finishing EVS in Slovenia? How will you realize your knowledge, skills, experience you achieved through EVS?

After finishing my EVS here, I will try to study again – I would like to go for Master degree in communication and also I would like to improve my photographer skills – I have found already some opportunities for the summer (workshops and seminars about photography) and now I just hope I will be able to realize it. Also I will need to find job, hopefully in my profession. That's more or less the plan now 😊.

All this year around I have been working a lot with children and youth and I have been already talking with leader of our youth center about doing some activities there – who knows, maybe one day we will also take some EVS volunteer, maybe from Slovenia... 😊.

Interviewer: Urška Brežnjak, coordinator of European Voluntary Service at MDPM Ajdovščina