

My experience at the Youth Environment education Congress - Erasmus funded Trip

By Omar Moallim



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Hi, my name is Omar. I'm a Year 11 JLT Member and Captain, and a proud eco-warrior. I'd like to thank **Erasmus**, who has funded this trip for us and gave me this opportunity to be part of an incredible experience. I'd like to abundantly thank my teachers too; Mr Muhibul, Mr Roe, Ms Adenuga and Mr Audifferen for selecting me to take part, along with the Reading International Solidarity Centre for helping us organise this. I've never really had opportunities like this growing up; neither have my family members - it was a huge privilege to be able to represent Barking Abbey, and the UK. Erasmus has allowed me to live my dream.

Having only joined the Eco-Team this year, I've been able to take part in numerous things that have not only contributed positively to the environment around us, but also to my own self-development. We've only started taking off a few months ago - yet I can say that we've progressed immensely in achieving our environmental goals. We have an incredible amount planned for the future; and I personally can't wait to contribute to reach all our goals, whether they're big or small.



The first thing I thought of, when I was informed about my participation at the Youth Environmental Education Congress was opportunity - opportunity to learn,

opportunity to grow, opportunity to reflect; not just for myself, but for Barking Abbey School. I didn't realise the magnitude of my voice and my power to speak for change, until I arrived at YEEC. It felt relieving to communicate with others about the topics that are passionate to me. Seeing so many young people at one place, with everyone sharing the same goal (to stop climate change) has inspired me personally, to do better and take action immediately.

I couldn't have imagined the scale and intensity of every single event. From 9am to 7pm, Sunday to Wednesday - we all took part in numerous events that promoted community cohesion, collaboration and unity.

Initially on Sunday, the main focus was to introduce the congress and its main goal - to promote environmental education in a society where it isn't prioritised. We participated in icebreaker activities, including a bingo game where we had to find out unique information about young people's aspirations. After, we began to view presentations from policy makers and people in positions of power and influence, on their plans to tackle the wide gaps in knowledge when it comes to environmental education. After a break, young people participating in the congress presented their topics and activities that they currently take part in. Zach, a fellow colleague and friend of mine, wonderfully presented on how Barking Abbey is working to implement environmental education in many aspects of the school. I can only say that I was incredibly proud of him for putting us on the map and speaking



wonderfully, and happy for Barking Abbey; for all that they've done so far.

Monday was an incredibly insightful day, where I learnt about things I previously had no interest in. The day began with an environmental fair - different people from all walks of life had the opportunity to display their achievements and projects

based on environmental education or public affairs. Many of these stands were incredibly unique; I even visited a stand based on how art can influence activism! Afterwards, we all split into side events. I had an amazing opportunity to visit Prague's theatre academy, particularly the department of alternative theatre. The whole event definitely opened my eyes on how theatre influences modern day society.



On Tuesday, the events were based at the gargantuan Old Astronomical Clock Tower. We initially viewed a panel presentation on “education and participation in times of climate urgency”. We had the opportunity to ask questions to a group of experienced educators. Afterwards, we split into groups in order to answer given questions about solving and improving environmental education, and how we’ll present this to educational leaders at the World Environmental Education Congress. I was a part of the “Speak Out” group, where we had to summarise all the groups’ work and their opinions, viewpoints and perspectives on the key topic at hand.



Wednesday was an insightful and eventful day, for the whole congress. Before presenting our messages, we first split up into our side events. My workshop was lead by Generation Earth's Nathan Spees - as a group, we worked together to define what activism means and how we can empower ourselves and others to bring change. It was an amazing opportunity where I could learn about others whilst exploring who I was, and ways I could empower myself. Afterwards, we made out way over to the mesmerising Prague Congress Centre - where the WEEC was based. For a portion of the evening, many YEEC participants had the opportunity to present their embodiments of work through arts, theatre, videos and speeches. A moment that definitely brought a smile onto my face was seeing one of my closest friends, Aliya, moderating the YEEC presentations in a humorous and heartening way - her words of encouragement and support really made the experience better. Finally, for a celebration of the progress and achievements we as a cohort achieved; we all attended a special dinner at the heart of Prague - and enjoyed some delicious vegan food!

Thursday was the final day of the congress; yet it felt like being separated from family, since it was time for us to go home. After some wonderful feedback was given on yesterday's events; we reflected on the progress we've made, the friends we've met and the support we've received.



I'm incredibly thankful to have experienced this once in a lifetime opportunity; I've learnt so much about protecting the environment; preserving our atmosphere and educating others on what's most important - preserving our beautiful Earth. I hope we can use the connections we've gained the knowledge we've consumed to better Barking Abbey's environmental stance. Most importantly though, I've learnt more about myself than anything else; from self-improvement to self-empowerment, I've really left this event a better person.

Thank you to everyone who has made this the success it was; it has been an incredible experience. Finally, thank you to RISC and Erasmus, without their support for younger people, this would never have been possible.

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