

## Exemplary Traineeship Programme Against Youth Unemployment



Town twinning

The town of Mórahalom implemented its project under the *Europe for Citizens* programme with the involvement of a number of twin towns. Our most important goal was to develop and launch a joint traineeship programme which could set an example all over Europe, as traineeship is a widely accepted tool that facilitates the transition from the educational system to the world of work. Coordinator Zsolt Berta told us about the project.

### *Why did you think you should tackle this issue?*

Since the mid-90s, improving the employment has become a key priority for the EU; however, youth unemployment still presents a great challenge for the European Union. In terms of labour market, the greatest losers of the prolonged financial and economic crisis were young people: there are still 5.5 million unemployed youth in the EU, which corresponds to a youth unemployment rate of 23%. The main reasons are the low demand for labour, the qualifications not matching market needs, as well as the moderate level of mobility within the country and working while

studying. These problems affect all our partners. Mórahalom organises meetings for the youth of its twin towns every year. There they focus on the European Union and its priority issues, and the programmes are organised accordingly. Following and continuing the topics of former European Years – the European Year of Citizens, the European Year of Volunteering –, as well as those of the previous year's twin town meetings, it was obvious that we should tackle this issue.

### *Which are the twin towns of Mórahalom?*

Sânmartin, Romania, Temerin, Serbia and Uniejów, Poland, have long been the twin towns of Mórahalom, but we also have twin towns in Germany and Italy. Due to former agreements, we have effectively cooperated in the fields of education, culture, agriculture and rural development, as well as public relations.

### *What were the criteria of choosing your twinned towns?*

The primary schools of Mórahalom and Sânmartin concluded a partnership agreement in 1995. The teachers of the two schools exchange teaching resources



and methodological materials and organise exchange visits, joint training courses and study trips together. We have implemented twin town projects together since 2003. The partners mutually ensure and encourage establishing direct contacts between the institutions and civil organisations of the towns and promote cooperation between business, trade organisations and entrepreneurs. So our twinned towns were an obvious choice.

### *What could the Europe for Citizens programme add to such a complex issue as youth unemployment?*

The programme was a great opportunity to continue the former meetings and face these young European people with questions which really affect them and which are about their common concerns. At the meeting, the institutions of the twin towns joined forces to try and adapt training opportunities to young people's needs, and encourage more of them to take

advantage of EU grants to study or train in another country.

### ***What events and activities were implemented in the project?***

The main events of the project were the professional programmes: informative videos about the European Years themes, a series of presentations on employment in the EU, career counselling or team competitions called ‚EU Heptathlon‘. The young people visited the largest employers of Mórahalom, including St. Elizabeth Spa of Mórahalom and the enterprises operated within Homokhát Regional Agricultural and Industrial Park. Besides the various working methods requiring serious work – presentations, workshops, visits to institutions, volunteering, team work – it was very important that the meeting should also include programmes allowing relaxation, getting to know each other and physical activity, so the date of the meeting was adjusted to two events, ‚Homokhát Sokadalom‘ and the ‚South Great Plain Strudel Festival‘, so the young people can learn about each other’s culture and national diversity.

### ***What are the most important achievements of the project?***

Our most important goal was to start to develop a joint twin town traineeship programme. After the meeting we began to compile a database of the companies and employers who could host students

coming from the twin towns to gain practical experience. The locations will be chosen to meet young people’s needs as widely as possible. The companies and organisations involved are engaged, for example, in tourism, catering, trade, agriculture, environmental protection and the social sector. The joint traineeship programme can ensure further sustainable cooperation between the twin towns and their educational institutions.

### ***How did the project benefit from the fact that it was implemented within a European partnership?***

The programme seeks to develop and enhance the idea of European citizenship in the participants, and to show them the opportunities the European Union offers them in terms of learning, studies, volunteering, rights and employment. During our project the participants got in direct contact with a number of organisations, institutions, volunteers and exemplary programmes, and therefore they had a chance to travel and try what it’s like to live and work abroad, and to help others.

### ***How did the young participants benefit from the project?***

The various tasks allowed them to learn while playing and experiencing. We encouraged them to engage in various volunteering activities in the future and assume a role in their communities. Besides gaining practical experience, they also had

an opportunity to learn to accept others, to stand up for something and to learn how a working community works and what responsibility feels like.

I think the implementation of our project is an important step on the way to solving the problem of youth unemployment. The traineeship programme to be developed in cooperation with our twin towns could set an example all over Europe, as traineeship is a widely accepted tool that facilitates the transition from the educational system to the world of work. All these help us to prepare future generations to face new challenges and to enhance European identity. •

*Interview: PATRIK ANDÓ*