



**CULTURAL
STORYTELLERS
PROJECT**

ADDICTED TO GREEN LIFE



STEPS FOR A RESILIENT LIFESTYLE

**BASED ON THE MOBILITY ORGANISED IN SCHAIJK,
THE NETHERLANDS ON MARCH 4-13, 2025**



**Funded by
the European Union**



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INTRODUCTION

This booklet is a collection of voices. It was created as part of the project "Cultural Storytelling Canvas: Crafting Narratives for Inclusion, Democracy, and the Environment," a youth exchange funded by the Erasmus+ Programme. The following material is a result of the implemented activities during the 4th and 5th day of this project, when we had open discussions with the participants about the topic.

During the project, young people from five different countries - Greece, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Spain, and Türkiye - came together to explore complex social and environmental issues through creative collaboration. One of the key tools we used was podcasting.

In small groups, participants designed and recorded podcasts on topics that mattered to them. These were not scripted productions. They were raw, real conversations shaped by personal stories, lived experiences, and the unique process of non-formal education.

This booklet builds on those podcasts. Each one of them draws from the recordings, combining together direct quotes, shared reflections, and collective insights around themes such as fast fashion, water use, mental health, gender equality, intercultural learning, and sustainability.

You won't find polished solutions here. What you'll find are honest attempts to understand the world differently—and to imagine how we might live in it more consciously, more fairly, and more connected.

These pages are both a record of learning and an invitation: to listen more deeply, to reflect more openly, and to be part of the change we need.



FASHION AND THE COST OF FAST TRENDS



"Fast fashion isn't just about cheap clothes," one of us said during the podcast recording. "It's about everything that happens before that price tag ends up on the hanger."

This episode started with an open question that caught us all: How often do we buy something knowing it won't last the season? For many of us, the answer was unsettling. And yet, until we started looking into it, most of us hadn't truly understood how much was at stake when it comes to the clothes we wear.

We come from different countries, different walks of life, but the patterns are the same everywhere. High street brands flood our cities with trend-driven, low-cost clothing, encouraging us to buy more and more, faster and faster. But behind every garment lies a chain of environmental damage and human exploitation that's easy to ignore when you're just picking out a t-shirt.

We learned, through research and reflection, that fast fashion relies heavily on low-wage labor, often sourced from regions where working conditions are unsafe and rights are overlooked. "Women work in these factories for long hours in unsafe conditions, and they get paid almost nothing," one participant noted. "All of that suffering, for a shirt that will be in a landfill by next year."



THE CULTURAL STORYTELLERS PROJECT

The human cost shocked us, but the environmental toll was equally disturbing. Clothing production is one of the most resource-intensive industries globally. Polyester, one of the most common fabrics in fast fashion, sheds microplastics into our oceans with every wash. The water used to produce just one cotton t-shirt could sustain a person's drinking needs for over two years.

There was a moment of silence when we talked about how the fashion industry is projected to account for more than a quarter of global carbon emissions by 2050. Not just because it's an overwhelming number, but because it's something so close to us—what we wear, how we shop, what we post on social media—and yet so many of us had never thought about it deeply.

But this wasn't about guilt. It was about awareness. The idea that what we do—what we choose—matters.



During our exchange, we shared ideas and solutions that felt both empowering and doable. It wasn't about giving up fashion. It was about reimagining our relationship with it.

"Buy less, but better," someone said. That line stayed with many of us. Buying fewer pieces of higher quality means clothes that last longer, are worn more, and carry more meaning. Some of us had already started to make changes—choosing thrift shops, upcycling old clothes, repairing instead of replacing.

Others mentioned trying to understand where their clothes come from. "Transparency matters," one participant said. "Look for brands that are open about how they make their clothes, that pay their workers fairly, that use sustainable materials. And if they're not talking about it at all—that tells you something."

We also talked about washing habits. Washing clothes in cold water, avoiding dryers, and air-drying them when possible extends their life and reduces energy use. Small things, but when multiplied by millions of people, they matter.



AND THEN...



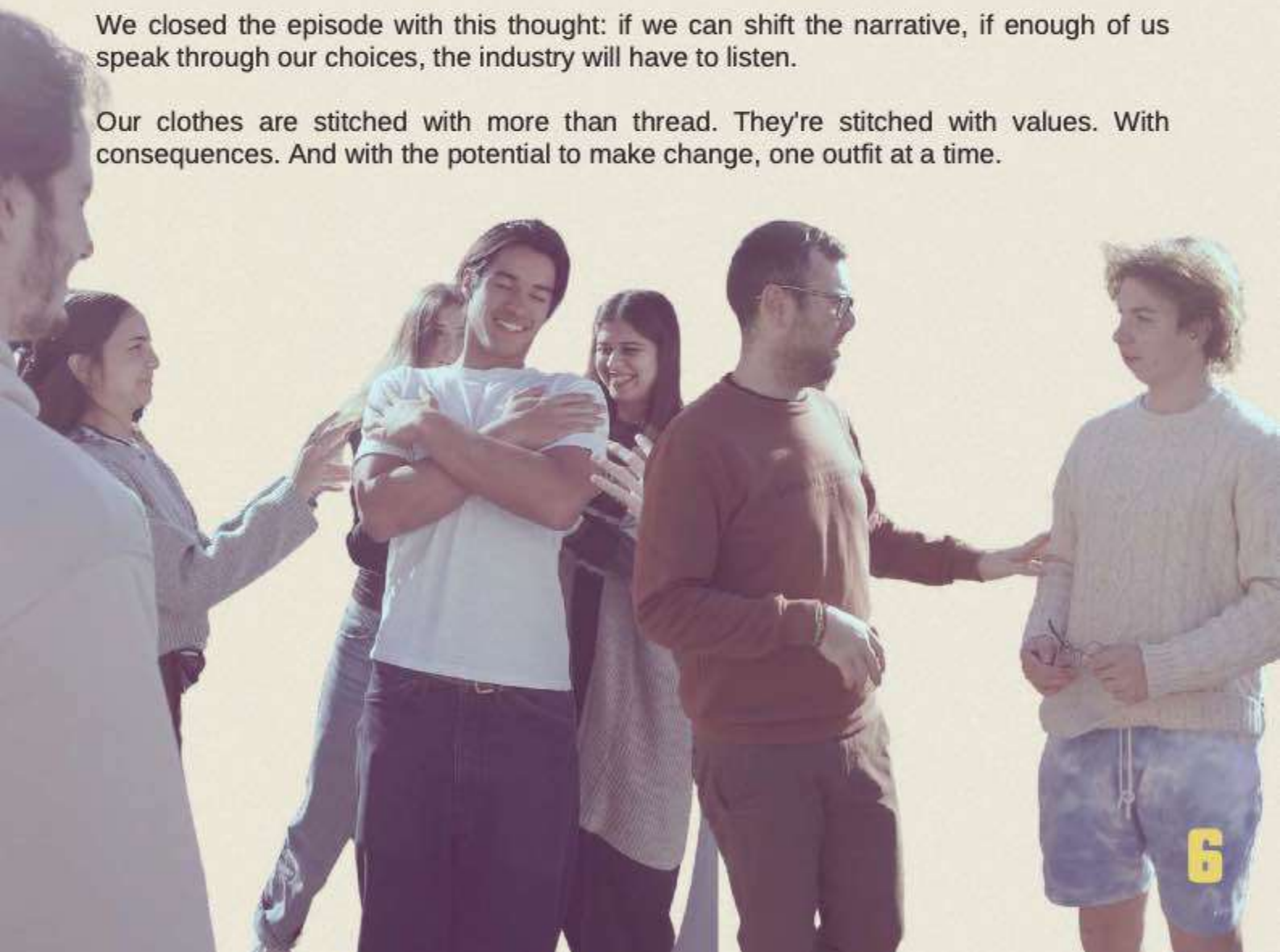
And then came the topic of renting clothes. Some had tried it; some were intrigued. Renting instead of buying for special occasions was a simple way to reduce consumption. "You don't need to own everything," one of us said. "You just need it for the moment."

What we discovered during this podcast wasn't a new truth, but a realization that change begins with small choices. Fashion is personal, expressive, cultural. It's part of how we tell the world who we are. And that's why it has to mean more than disposable trends and overstuffed closets.

We can choose what stories our clothes tell. We can choose brands that respect people and the planet. We can repair, thrift, rent, share, swap. These aren't sacrifices—they're acts of responsibility and creativity.

We closed the episode with this thought: if we can shift the narrative, if enough of us speak through our choices, the industry will have to listen.

Our clothes are stitched with more than thread. They're stitched with values. With consequences. And with the potential to make change, one outfit at a time.



WATER IS LIFE

We laughed a lot during this podcast. Maybe it was the made-up characters—Nisa the scientist, Asude the water expert—or the surprising suggestion to shower with your partner to save water. But beneath the lightness, something important was flowing through the conversation: water is everywhere, and we're using it like it never ends.

This episode was born out of our shared feeling that water, so basic and so constant in our lives, is something we take for granted. We open the tap, and it's there. We shower, we clean, we water the plants, we rinse, we forget. But during our exchange, through storytelling and jokes and spontaneous dialogue, we started to see the depth behind the simplicity.

"Water is the biggest part of our bodies. The biggest part of our planet. How can we not protect it?" one of us asked.

And so we started listing our own habits. The long showers, the taps running while we brushed our teeth, the automatic way we wash dishes under a full stream. We realized that water is present in almost everything we do. Not just in our homes, but in how we produce electricity, in how we grow food, in how we manufacture goods.

We shared tips—funny, personal, honest. Like turning off the water while applying soap or shampoo. "It's so easy, but so often we don't think to do it," someone admitted. "And if you're not showering alone, maybe it's more efficient—and more romantic," another added, laughing.

We talked about how these small, conscious choices can add up to something bigger. "We don't need to wait for governments to make big policies. We can start with our own hands," one participant said.



There was a strong feeling that water is a bridge. Between environmental awareness and everyday life. Between individual action and global need. Between what we take and what we give back. And there was also a sense of urgency. As Nisa said in character, "Water is not infinite. We must be careful with it." It was a simple sentence, but it carried weight. We all knew that in some parts of the world, water is already scarce. People walk miles to fetch it. Crops fail because of droughts. Rivers run dry. And yet, in our parts of the world, we barely blink. We discussed how different our perceptions are depending on where we live. Some of us come from countries where water is strictly controlled and awareness is taught early. Others grew up with seemingly endless supply. But all of us agreed: the time to change our habits is now. The conversation moved from daily tips to broader reflections. "Water is life. Literally. And we use it without thinking. We waste it every day, and then act surprised when the planet pushes back."



EQUALITY IS NOT AN OPINION

"Equality is not a question. It's a basic expectation." That was one of the first things someone said during this episode, and it became something of a mantra throughout the conversation.

In this podcast, our group turned its attention to something deeply personal yet broadly systemic: the way gender shapes our lives, our opportunities, our safety, and our voices. What started as a reflection on feminism quickly became a wider conversation about inclusion, respect, and the kind of society we all want to live in.

Most of us admitted that we hadn't thought about feminism in detail before this project. For some, the word came with baggage. For others, it was a quiet belief never openly discussed. But through dialogue and non-formal learning activities, we began to unpack the layers. We came to see feminism not as an ideology of confrontation, but as a movement grounded in fairness. It's about choices, rights, and recognition.

"People often misunderstand feminism," one of us said. "They think it's about hating men or wanting special treatment. But it's really about being treated equally, with dignity, no matter your gender."

The stories came quickly. Moments of being overlooked in classrooms. Comments that felt harmless but carried centuries of bias. The lack of women in leadership, in textbooks, in decision-making roles. One participant mentioned how often women's achievements are minimized, while their appearance or emotions are scrutinized. "Why is it that when a man speaks with passion, he's powerful—but when a woman does, she's 'emotional'?"

Others pointed out how social expectations shape how we behave. "We're told how to dress, how to speak, what's too much, what's not enough." These expectations aren't just limiting—they're exhausting.

We also talked about safety. About how many girls carry keys in their fists at night, avoid certain streets, or stay silent to avoid escalation. These aren't just habits; they are strategies for survival. And they shouldn't have to be.

For many of us, the project marked the first time we could talk openly about these experiences, and feel heard—truly heard—by a mixed group of peers. Boys in the group shared their reflections, too. Some spoke about the pressure to always appear strong, emotionless, competitive. Others admitted that listening to their female friends' stories was eye-opening. "I never realized how much you had to think about your safety. I never had to think like that."

The goal wasn't blame. It was awareness. And through awareness, change.

We reflected on the role of education, of families, of social media, of representation. Who we see as heroes. Who we listen to. Who gets to be complex, flawed, human. We acknowledged how many identities intersect—gender, race, sexuality, ability—and how inequality compounds in those intersections.

There was hope, too. Hope in the way young people are leading movements, calling out injustice, demanding better. Hope in the conversations we had—uncomfortable at times, but necessary. "This project helped me find my voice," one participant shared. "Not because someone gave it to me, but because others finally listened."

We closed with a reminder that equality isn't a box you tick or a speech you give. It's a practice. A daily commitment to see others fully, to challenge assumptions, and to create spaces where everyone belongs—not just in theory, but in reality.

Equality isn't a special topic. It's the foundation of any society worth building. And it starts here. With us. Talking, listening, questioning—and acting.

LABELS DON'T DEFINE US



"We are all different—but why does difference have to mean division?" That question sparked one of our most powerful discussions during the project.

This episode began with personal stories. Some of us shared moments when we were judged—not for what we said or did, but for where we were from, how we looked, or the language we spoke. Others recalled times when they were the ones who assumed, without realizing. It was raw, emotional, and at times uncomfortable. But it was also honest.

We talked about stereotypes—how they form, how they stick, how they shape how people see us before we even speak. "People hear my accent and assume I'm uneducated," one participant said. "They don't listen to the words—just the sound."

Others reflected on the way nationality can act like a label, both externally and internally. "You start to feel like you have to prove something all the time. Like you're representing your whole country, or community. And it's exhausting."



Some stereotypes were subtle, hidden in compliments that didn't feel like compliments. Others were blunt. But in every case, the message was the same: you're not seen as fully you. You're seen as a version of someone else's idea of you.

We talked about how stereotypes come from ignorance, but also from repetition—from media, from history, from simplified narratives that reduce people to symbols. "When you grow up only seeing your country as a joke in foreign films, you start to internalize that image," someone said. "It's hard to feel proud of who you are when the world tells you it's something to hide."

But this wasn't just a space for pain. It was also a space for resistance—and for redefinition.



We shared stories of reclaiming identity, of learning our histories from our families, of speaking our languages with pride. We celebrated culture not as a burden but as a source of richness. "I used to be embarrassed about my name. Now I correct people when they say it wrong, because it matters."

The podcast became a space to speak the truths we often keep quiet. We talked about how non-formal education—projects like this one—create opportunities for empathy. When you cook together, share rooms, create podcasts as a team, your understanding of others changes. You stop seeing "them" and start seeing people. Real, complex, funny, thoughtful people.



One participant said it best: "We can't change the world overnight. But we can stop repeating the same lazy ideas about each other. We can choose curiosity over judgement."

We also acknowledged that unlearning stereotypes takes effort. It means listening more than speaking. It means admitting when we've been wrong, and being open enough to grow. "Everyone is biased in some way," one voice said. "But we don't have to stay that way."



In the end, what we shared was not just stories—it was a commitment. A commitment to challenge the labels. To define ourselves on our own terms. To ask questions, to listen with care, and to remind others—and ourselves—that dignity is not earned by fitting in, but by being true to who we are.

This episode reminded us that stereotypes shrink the world. But empathy expands it. And we all deserve space to be more than a label.





IT'S OKAY TO NOT BE OKAY

No music. No script. Just voices, a microphone, and a topic that's often hard to start: how we really feel. In this episode, we opened up about something that connects all of us, even if we hide it—mental health. And while the phrase “mental health” can sound technical or clinical, what we were really talking about was the everyday struggle of feeling overwhelmed, unsure, anxious, or simply not okay. It wasn't an easy conversation, but it was real. One of the first things someone said was, “Why do we have to pretend we're fine all the time? Why is that the default?” That moment set the tone for everything that followed.

We talked about pressure. From school, from family, from social media, from ourselves. The need to succeed, to be strong, to always smile—even when you feel like you're falling apart. “Sometimes you wake up and feel like everything is too much, but you still go on because you don't want to disappoint anyone,” someone shared. “But pretending is tiring.”

There was a quiet pause after that. Not awkward. Just honest. Because we've all been there in our own way.

This project gave us space not just to talk, but to listen. We discovered how often we experience the same things in silence. One participant said, “I used to think I was the only one who felt like this. Now I know I'm not alone.”

And that's what made this episode different. We weren't giving advice or quoting experts. We were just telling the truth. About anxiety that sits in your chest. About days that feel empty. About the courage it takes to say, “I need help.”

One of the most powerful moments came when someone said, “Being vulnerable isn't weakness. It's human. And sometimes, it's the strongest thing you can do.”

We also reflected on how much expectations can hurt us. The expectation to always be productive. To have everything figured out. To stay positive, even when life is heavy. “Sometimes, the best thing you can do is stop pretending. Just say it out loud. And let that be enough for now.”

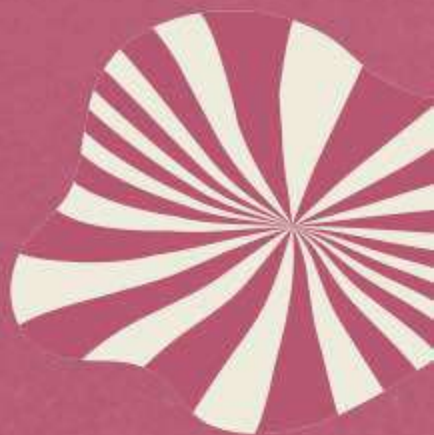
Music, writing, walking, talking to someone—these were the small lifelines that many of us mentioned. Not solutions, but ways to stay afloat. And that's okay. It's okay not to have it all together.

We also talked about how different cultures approach mental health. In some places, the topic is invisible. In others, it's whispered. But everywhere, the stigma makes it harder to speak. “We need to stop acting like mental health is a problem only when it becomes a crisis,” one voice said. “It's part of our everyday life, and we should treat it with the same care as physical health.”

And that includes asking for help. Seeing a therapist. Taking a break. Saying no. These aren't signs of failure—they're signs of knowing what you need.



LIVING WITH THE EARTH, NOT AGAINST IT



"YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE PERFECT. YOU JUST HAVE TO CARE ENOUGH TO TRY."

That sentence stayed with us long after the microphones were off. This episode took shape through a series of reflections—simple stories, personal habits, cultural insights—shared between us as young people trying to live more sustainably in a world that doesn't always make it easy. We didn't start with a grand theory of climate change. We started with the things we do, or wish we did better. Someone spoke about using reusable water bottles. Another mentioned trying to avoid plastic bags when shopping. Small things, maybe. But as we spoke, we realized just how powerful these habits can be—not only for the planet, but for ourselves.

"WE ALWAYS THINK THAT ONE PERSON CAN'T MAKE A DIFFERENCE," SOMEONE SAID. "BUT IF EVERYONE THINKS THAT, NOTHING WILL CHANGE. AND IF EVERYONE STARTS TRYING, EVEN A LITTLE BIT, IT ADDS UP."

We talked about recycling, composting, using bikes or walking instead of cars when possible. Not just as environmental acts, but as lifestyle choices. We're not waiting for the perfect law or perfect system. We're trying to live better now.

And that effort is not always easy. One of us said: "Where I live, there's no recycling system. Even if I sort my waste, it all ends up in the same truck." The frustration was real. But so was the determination to keep trying, to keep pushing, to talk to local authorities, to raise awareness. For many of us, this project made us think differently about our consumption. We reflected on the energy it takes to produce what we use—how water, electricity, and labor are often invisible behind the products we buy.



NOT AGAINST IT!



There was a strong sense that sustainability is not just about what we consume, but about how we live. How we value time, relationships, space. "When we rush through life, we don't notice what we waste," someone shared. "Slow living is not just a trend—it's a way to pay attention." We talked about traditions, too. How some of our grandparents lived in ways that were naturally sustainable—growing food, reusing, repairing instead of throwing away. "They didn't call it 'green.' They called it life," someone said, and we all nodded.

This chapter of our podcast was about reconnecting—not just with nature, but with ourselves. Realizing that living sustainably isn't about sacrifice. It's about intention. It's about deciding that the future matters enough to act in the present.

And it's about community. Sharing knowledge, inspiring each other, holding each other accountable. "You can't do it all alone," someone said. "But you don't have to. That's the beauty of it."

In a world overwhelmed by climate news, statistics, and warnings, we found something quiet but strong in this conversation: hope grounded in action. We know the problems. We hear them every day. But we also know the solutions begin with us.

Not perfect. Not heroic. Just people, trying.



WHAT WE LEARN WHEN WE LIVE TOGETHER

"It's not just about what we learned. It's about how we learned it—by living together, by sharing a room, a table, a laugh." This podcast wasn't a typical discussion. It was a reflection. On the experience of being here, together. Different backgrounds, different habits, different languages—under one roof.

For many of us, this was the first time living with people we didn't know, from cultures we hadn't encountered deeply before. It was exciting, but also full of moments that tested our patience, our adaptability, and ultimately, our ability to listen.

"I didn't expect to be so aware of my own habits," one of us said. "You think the way you do things is just normal. Then you realize, it's just what you're used to."

We noticed everything. The time people woke up. How they ate, how they cleaned, how they joked. Small things that usually pass unnoticed became the basis for conversations—and sometimes, for misunderstandings.



But this is where the learning happened. Not in the workshops or activities—though those were important—but in the everyday moments. In the bathroom queues. In the shared kitchen. In the sleepy, late-night talks before the lights went off.

One moment that stood out was when someone cooked a dish from their home country. The spices were unfamiliar to some, too strong for others, but the act of cooking and sharing—it connected us. “Food is the fastest way to break a wall,” someone joked. “Even when you can’t speak the same language, you can still say ‘try this.’”

We spoke about stereotypes we had walked in with—and how quickly they were challenged. “I thought people from your country would be loud and aggressive,” one person admitted. “But you’re one of the calmest people I’ve met.” We laughed, but we knew that kind of honesty only comes in safe spaces. And that’s what we had created.



There were also moments of conflict. Disagreements over cleanliness, over punctuality, over how group tasks should be done. But even these moments became learning opportunities. “You learn more about people when something goes wrong than when everything is smooth,” someone said.

We talked about how important it is to be able to say, “I didn’t know that. Thank you for telling me.” To apologize. To explain. To try again. These soft skills—empathy, patience, open-mindedness—they’re hard to teach in a classroom. But in shared living, they become essential.



By the end of the week, something had shifted. We weren't just coexisting. We were adapting, joking in each other's languages, making plans for visits. We started asking deeper questions—not just "Where are you from?" but "What's something you miss from home?" "What was school like for you?" "What scares you about the future?"

That's what this project gave us: not just information, but perspective. Not just tolerance, but connection.

In this discussion, we didn't offer answers. We offered reflections. And what we saw was clear: intercultural learning isn't about becoming the same. It's about understanding how to live together with care and curiosity...

...AND MAYBE THAT'S THE BIGGEST LESSON OF ALL.



FURTHER INFORMATION



ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

"Addicted to Green Life" is more than a title—it's a mindset. It reflects our collective effort to reduce, rethink, and reimagine the way we live, connect, and take responsibility for our shared world. This booklet brings together reflections from young people across Europe who met through the project "Cultural Storytelling Canvas: Crafting Narratives for Inclusion, Democracy, and the Environment."

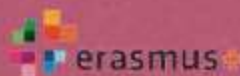
Through podcasts, shared living, creative collaboration, and countless conversations, participants explored themes that matter deeply: sustainability, equality, mental health, identity, and intercultural understanding. These pages capture not just what was said—but how it felt to listen, to learn, and to grow together.

The texts you'll find here are not official statements. They are lived experiences, opinions shaped by dialogue, vulnerability, and the unique space that non-formal education makes possible. This project was approved by the Dutch National Agency and funded by the European Union through the Erasmus+ Programme (KA152-YOU – Mobility of Young People). The support of Erasmus+ made it possible for young people from the Netherlands, Greece, Spain, Slovakia, and Türkiye to come together and create something lasting—not just in paper and audio, but in perspective and connection.

**As you read, we invite you to listen closely. To question. To reflect. And to carry these voices with you.
Because change begins not with answers, but with awareness.**



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