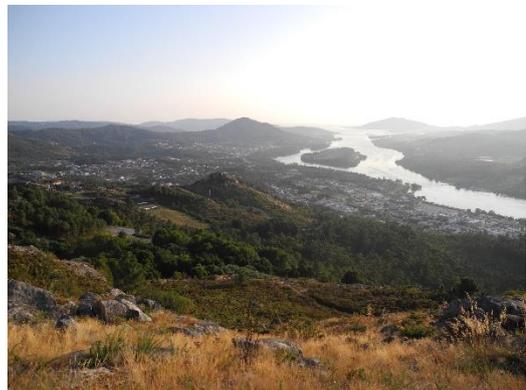


Servas Youth Summer Camp 2018 in Vila Nova de Cerveira, Portugal



During the last week of August, I had the pleasure to take part in the Servas Youth Summer Camp in Vila Nova de Cerveira, Portugal where more than forty youngsters and young at heart shared a wonderful week together. We visited the historical city, the Bienal of Arts and other museums, walked at the riverside, shared our experiences with Servas, went to the beach, talked about environment protection, human rights and cultural differences, sang and ate, had water balloon fights and enjoyed the beautiful summer weather. But first of all, we had a lot of fun together and talked a lot – about the camp, our life at home, the world, politics, our dreams – in English, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, with hands and feet.

On the one hand, for me it was a wonderful week of summer holidays with wonderful people at a wonderful place: Vila Nova de Cerveira in the extreme north of Portugal right next to the Spanish border, with a romantic city centre and full of arts. But most particularly, during this week we experienced what represents for me the core idea of Servas. The camp was a place where people from ten different countries met free of prejudice, encounters where the nationalities didn't matter and the unifying element was our similarities, the fun of being together and the shared activities. In that way, this week also inspired me to dream. Dreams about a world where communication, exchange, laughter and friendship exist across national borders and people meet independently of their skin or passport colour as what we actually are: human beings that are looking for quite the same things in life. This idea was also reflected in the place that was chosen for the camp. Vila Nova de Cerveira, separated from Spain just by the Minho river which I crossed one morning by walking over the 'bridge of friendship' and suddenly found myself in another country. Crossing the border just took me five minutes and on the other side of the river everything looked quite the same. As Europeans we cannot appreciate this freedom enough. I hope that one day it will be just as easy to overcome the barriers between people of different nationalities that are in our minds as to cross the borders in the Schengen area. If we build border crossing bridges of friendship we will notice that, on the other side, it





doesn't look so different, that we meet people who have almost the same dreams, hopes and fears as we do. At the same time, the experience of the symbolic border crossing made me think. There were youngsters from some countries that were not able to attend the camp because they did not get visas. Political and ideological

boundaries that were painfully felt externally.

All these experiences, the peace and the good vibes between the participants, the new friendships and the experience that it just takes an open heart and mind to meet kind and impressive people, will be with me for a long time. At this point I would like to thank all the people who made this camp possible. Especially Claudina, Carla and Simao from Servas Portugal: you were wonderful, deeply heartwarming and generous hosts in a wonderful country where I want to return as soon as possible.

Muitíssimo obrigado! I would also like to sincerely thank all the organizers and volunteers who have planned, prepared and conducted this camp with an incredible effort of time, energy and love. Special thanks on behalf of all participants to the Municipio of Vila Nova de Cerveira, who welcomed us with open arms and financed many of our activities. Finally, I would also like to thank the Servas hosts Elena and Rómulo, who picked me up at the airport and without hesitation drove me to the 100 km far Vila Nova at 2 AM in the morning. May all Servas hosts be full of this loving kindness. Looking forward to a wonderful Servas Youth Summer Camp 2019!

