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The article is devoted to the Croatian students' experience of participation in the Erasmus+ program. It tells about the history and national symbols of Croatia, about the historical and cultural connection between Croatia and Ukraine. Students share their learning experience and give advice to future program participants.

During whole our education period teachers tell us about importance of meeting with new cultures and acceptance of different opinion. Through the meeting with new and different cultures we can build our personality, learn how to respect others who are different than us and in the same time we should learn to appreciate things we have at our homes or country. Thanks to the participation in the European project called Interreg, we meet a lot of our colleagues, future architects and civil engineers, who spend few semesters at University of Pecs within the Erasmus+ program. Work with colleagues from Spain, Portugal, Hungary, Pakistan and Turkmenistan encouraged us to try something similar. As students of University North we had an opportunity to attend on *Erasmus+ open doors days* in university center Varaždin where we could hear basic information about Erasmus+ program. We heard what Erasmus+ program is, which are its aims, who can take a part in program, how is it organized and which resources and tools Erasmus+ program use to make Erasmus life easier for participants. Erasmus+ is EU's program to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe. Total budget of program is about €14.7 billion for over 4 million Europeans to study, train, and gain experience. It last from 2014 to 2020. It is a part of Europe 2020 strategy, EU's strategic framework for education and training. The main aim of Strategy is to improve the quality and efficiency of education and training and promote equity, social cohesion, and active citizenship. Some aims of Erasmus+ program are reducing unemployment, promoting adult learning, encouraging young people to take part in European democracy, supporting innovation, cooperation and reform, reducing early school leaving and promoting cooperation and mobility with the EU's partner countries. Both, individuals and

organizations can take part in this program. Their eligibility depends on the country in which they are based. Eligible countries are divided into two groups: Program countries and Partners countries. Our country, Croatia, is one of Program countries. The whole project is managed by the European Commission (the EU's executive body), the Education, Audiovisual, and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), a series of National Agencies in Program countries, and a series of National Offices in some Partner countries. They use Program guide, distances calculator, supporting documents, online linguistic support, platforms and networks and participant portal as tools which can be used by participants. We started our Erasmus+ trip with few aims on our mind. The aims include comprehend different ways of learning, meeting with new culture, making new acquaintances and friendships and presentation of our country, our city and our university.

The full name of our country is Republic of Croatia. This is a country on the crossroads of Central and Southeast Europe and it lays on the Adriatic Sea coast. Because of many wars in the past, Croatia has specific shape. One artist said that Croatia looks like dragon. Istrian peninsula represents a head of dragon, sea cost body and tail and northern and eastern part of country represent dragon's wings. Croatia covers area of 56 594 square kilometers and has population of 4,3 million. The most of citizens are Croats and Roman Catholics. The first record of Croatian name was on charter of Duke Trpimir from year 852. From this year to today, on territory of Republic of Croatia changed many kingdoms, unions and countries. Republic of Croatia became independent country on 25th June 1991. In July 2013, Croatia became full member of European Union. The flag of Republic is one of the main national symbols. It consists of three horizontal stripes; red, white and blue and coat of arms in the middle of flag. Coat of arms consist of two main parts; the main shield called checkerboard and crown which consist of five small shields which represents five different historical regions of Croatia. The checkerboard consists of 13 red and 12 white fields. Checkerboard first appears in 15th century (pic.1a).



Pic. 1: a - The flag of Republic of Croatia,  
b - Croatian currency "Kuna".

The national anthem of Croatia is called “Lijepa naša domovino” (“Our beautiful homeland”). The original lyrics were written by Antun Mihanović and first published under the title “Horvatska domovina” (“Croatian homeland”) in 1835. In 1846, the music amateur Josip Runjanin composed the music for “Horvatska domovina”. The national animal is marten. After marten is named Croatian currency (“Kuna”) (pic.1b). The national flower of Croatia is *Iris croatica*, and national tree is Slavonian Oak which appears on coin of 5 lipa.



Pic. 2 Croatian coin of 5 lipa

Saint Joseph is named as Saint patron of Republic. The Croatian wattle is an important pattern of medieval Croatian culture. In the past, Croatian wattle is used as decoration on monuments, tables and clothing. Glagolitic script is one of historical scripts and special square form of Glagolitic script is developed in Croatia. Croatia is world famous by nature beauty. Croatia has more than 1000 islands, eight national parks, eleven nature parks and 2 strict reserves. The biggest city in country, Zagreb is also the capital of country. Zagreb covered area of 641 square kilometers and has population about 1 million. It is located in the northwest of the country, along the Sava river, at the southern slopes of the Medvednica mountain. The most important transport hub in Croatia where Central Europe, the Mediterranean and Southeast Europe meet, making the Zagreb area the center of the road, rail and air networks of Croatia. Zagreb is cultural, educational and business center of whole country. High education in Croatia is divided in universities (and their constituents - faculties and academies of arts), polytechnics and colleges. Currently there are 119 higher education institutions in Croatia, namely: 8 public universities, 2 private universities, 68 faculties and art academies and 1 university center at public universities, 4 private polytechnics, 11 public polytechnics, 22 private colleges, and 3 public colleges. The first step in the reform of higher education in the Republic of Croatia was made in 2005 by harmonizing undergraduate, graduate and professional studies with Bologna process. the main guiding document of the Bologna process is the Bologna declaration. It was adopted by ministers of education of 29 European countries at their meeting in Bologna in 1999.

European higher education institutions, for their part, have accepted the challenge and taken up a main role in constructing the European area of higher education, also in the wake of the fundamental principles laid down in the Bologna Magna Charta University of 1988. The principal aims of Bologna process are adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees, adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate, adoption of ECTS system, promotion of mobility and promoting European cooperation. ECTS means European Credit Transfer System. An important element of the Bologna process, meant to help international students make the most of their study abroad experience. Initially, the ECTS was directed towards Erasmus students, as a tool for acknowledging courses and programmes they studied while abroad. The European Credit Transfer System measures and compares learning achievements and helps students easily transfer credits from one institution to another. It makes degree programmes and student performance more transparent and comparable all across European Union countries. Our University is located in Varaždin, city located on northwest part of Croatia near river Drava. It covers area of 59,45 square kilometers and has population of 47 000. Varaždin is an important historical, cultural, educational, economic, sports and tourist point of Croatia. In Varaždin's architecture visitor can feel powerful influence Austro-Hungarian architecture. In the fact, Varaždin's architecture is mixture of classicism, baroque, rococo and gothic architecture. Because of that, Varaždin is called „Little Wien“. In Varaždin is located the most beautiful cemetery in Europe which is UNESCO's monument of park architecture and it is designed by Hermal Haller. The most important cultural festivals in Varaždin are “Varaždinske barokne večeri” (Varaždin's baroque evenings), Špancirfest and Trash film festival. As representatives of high education in Varaždin there operate three universities: University of Zagreb with Faculty of Geotechnics, Faculty of Textile and Faculty of Organization and Informatics, University of Osijek with Faculty of Accounting and University North. University North is the youngest public university in the Republic of Croatia. It became the eighth public university in Croatia on 29 May 2015. It consists of two university centers, Varaždin and Koprivnica and it has 14 departments. Departments are divided in technical, social and natural fields. Department of Civil engineering has undergraduate and graduate level. Undergraduate level lasts six semesters and final number of ECTS points is 180. It has directions of studying, Construction (Building) Engineering and Civil (Structural) Engineering. After finishing undergraduate level of civil engineering attendant get title baccalaureus/baccalaurean engineer (bacc. ing. aedif.). Graduate level lasts

four semesters and there is possible to get 120 ECTS points. After finishing undergraduate level of civil engineering attendant get title master engineer (mag. ing. aedif.). The Mission of University North is the education of competent professional personnel for the needs of the real economy and the health care system in the region of north-western Croatia through quality realization of professional and university studies according to the requirements of the Bologna Declaration. The Vision of University North is to be the leading educational, scientific, professional and socially responsible higher education institution for the education of personnel in the field of technical, biomedical and biotechnical sciences in north-western Croatia and the region. University North is very active on international cooperation. It is active member of Erasmus+ community.

Our Erasmus+ experience started at 1st of March 2019. We had big support from our teachers to go in Ukraine to achieve mobility. Our hosts from Odessa State Academy of Civil Engineering and Architecture are really hospitable, and after a while we managed how to overcome the language barriers. One of reason of choosing Odessa as city in which we will achieve our Erasmus+ mobility is hard connection with Varaždin in the past. The Austrian architects Ferdinand Fellner and Hermann Helmer designed both Varaždin National Theatre and Odessa National Academic Opera and Ballet Theater. Other connection is Vatroslav Jagić, famous linguist, who worked as professor in Odessa. He was born in Varaždin.

It was a bit difficult for us in the beginning of mobility because we are first Erasmus+ students at the Odessa State Academy of Civil Engineering and Architecture, but now, almost in the end of our trip we can tell that we don't regret coming in Odessa to take part of Erasmus+ program.

**Conclusions.** In the end we want tell to everyone who have dilemma about joining Erasmus+ community, what Anthony Bourdain said about travelling: "Travel isn't always pretty. It isn't always comfortable. Sometimes it hurts, it even breaks your heart. But that's okay. The journey changes you; it should change you. It leaves marks on your memory, on your consciousness, on your heart, and on your body. You take something with you. Hopefully, you leave something good behind."