

european geography association for students and young geographers



**EGEA COMMITTEE FOR ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS'**  
**EXCHANGE ORGANISATION MANUAL**

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## EGEA STUDENT EXCHANGES

EGEA student exchanges are one way of communication between EGEA entities. Exchanges are organised quite often, relatively cheap and simple. Entities (usually two or even more) visit each other, the host entity being responsible for the programme and accommodation. The travelling costs are paid by the visitors, while the food, stay and programme are taken care of by the organisers from the hosting entity. During the programme, which usually takes a week, faculties of geography in the guest city are visited, geographical excursions are organised, the city and surrounding are informally introduced and parties take place which introduce you to the other geography students. While the number of exchange participants and the length of the programme isn't fixed, but depending on the agreement of entities, the organisers should make sure that the group isn't too large (up to 25 participants) to operate with.

Student exchanges are the best way of exploring other European countries, towns and cities, their cultural and natural heritage, students and their way of life. As it has already been mentioned, students exchanges are probably most frequent and successful of all EGEA activities.

Framework for exchange organisation:

- arranging an exchange
- exchange coordinator:
  - tasks of the exchange coordinator:
    - forming an exchange team
    - division of tasks among organisers
- creating an exchange programme
- drafting the financial structure (the exchange budget)
  - applications for fundraising and sponsorships
- Pre-exchange communication
- Exchange realisation
  - Hospitality
  - Communication (internal and interentity)
  - Implementation of the programme
- Post-exchange tasks
  - Reports and misc.

## **Arranging an exchange:**

Exchanges are arranged in two steps: exchange negotiations and exchange confirmation. Group of Egeans interested in organising an exchange should primarily define period of exchange, exchange partner and approximate number of participants. Contact between entities is established either on EGEA events or by other means of communication between entities through entity contact persons. The final step in arranging an EGEA exchange is the exchange confirmation after entity meetings at both entities where the exchange coordinators are selected, and exchange duration, number of participants and the time period are agreed. Further communication between exchanging entities is a task of elected coordinator.

## **Exchange coordinator**

Exchange coordinator is usually a person with the initial idea for the exchange. However, official coordinator should be confirmed at entity meeting concerning the exchange.

Person who would like to organise an exchange should have answers to following questions in the start:

- What? - What exchange would he like to make – with which EGEA entity/region?
- When? – When should the exchange take place?
- Who? - Which group of people would participate in the exchange?
- How? - How should the exchange look like?
- Where? - Where would the exchange take place - concerning the programme ?
- How much? - How much would it cost?

## **Tasks of the exchange coordinator**

There are two initial tasks of exchange coordinator after being elected at the entity meeting: forming an exchange team and dividing the organising tasks between exchange participants. Coordinator should gather a group of interested Egeans from his entity by announcing the exchange proposal through standard entity communication (message board, mailing lists, web sites, EGEA entity page...). At the exchange meeting he forms an exchange team consisting of pre-arranged number of participants.

Next task is dividing the organising tasks among members of the team based on competence and affinities of participants. Exchange coordinator also forms hierarchical structure of organisers to distribute the complexity of tasks according to positions in the hierarchy (it is important to mention that the coordinator should not do all the work by himself, but should take care of the main tasks vital for the exchange). All the organisational work is done by all participants of the

exchange, but hierarchical division is set for better team work, cohesion and informing of the entire team as well as faster decision making and greater responsibility of participants.

### **Coordinator**

### **Supervisor 1**

### **Supervisor 2**

### **Participant 4 Participant 5 Participant 6 Participant 7 Participant 8 Participant 9**

After forming a team, duties of coordinator before the exchange become:

- convenes exchange meetings
- Giving ideas for the programme framework and coordinating the programme finalising
- Leading the creation of financial structure
- Distributing sponsorship and fundraising tasks
- Communication with the partner entity and EGEA
- Announcing the exchange at the Activities section of EGEA forum as well as starting a forum thread
- Team building activities through formal and informal gatherings of participants in order of better group cohesion
- Having the complete overview of completed tasks and those still to be done

### **Creating an exchange programme**

As it has already been said, student exchanges are the best way of exploring other European countries, towns and cities, their cultural and natural heritage, students and their way of life. Therefore the programme of the exchange is very important and should contain more than just sightseeing tour around a city and several parties. It's important for the reputation of EGEA that its student exchanges keep a certain quality. It is up to organisers what to include into the programme. It is very good if a host group can contact with guests before they exchange what they would like to see. It is nice from host that tries to adapt programme to the group that comes. Of course people can express a wish to see some places in the country but mostly the organising group chooses the places and makes up the programme in the way they think it would be the best. It is up to the organising group if they consider those wishes or not - mostly because of difficulties connected with changing the programme. A proposal of some main points which a good exchange programme should contain is given here:

1. informal sightseeing tour around hosting town given by the participants of the exchange from hosting entity – it should contain a short description of every sight visited during the tour, also a small geographical introduction

- of development of town and its characteristics. It's also possible to arrange the tour in a form of game or a contest where participants visit all important sights while completing the tasks given by the organisers of a tour
2. geographical lecture about country of hosting entity, which could be given by an exchange participant or assistant/professor from the Geography department. This point is very important for the participants to get to know the country and get a geographical overview of it before the excursions of the exchange.
  3. visiting Department of geography of hosting entity – important for students to see how geography is taught in other countries/towns
  4. a meal in a student restaurant, which should be a part of student exchange, is important for the participants to get an impression of students' standard in hosting country/town
  5. at least one party for all participants of exchange – very important for cohesion of the group
  6. at least one longer excursion/field trip or two smaller, half-day excursions – it's important for participants to get to know the country they are visiting (not just the town of the hosting entity), and a good exchange should provide a certain geographical programme in which hosts represent their country with some main sights – places of interest for geographers. During excursions, it's important to give an introduction and basic information about location, also to explain processes and development of the area in comparison to other parts of country which they have visited during the exchange or will visit.
  7. recovering day or a free afternoon when your guests have time to buy some souvenirs or explore the city by themselves
  8. propaganda material, leaflets of tourist organisations, brochures, geographical papers and editions (if it's possible to get a donation), magazines... It's also very important to provide a booklet in which you'll give basic information about country and town, a geographical overview and background of the programme (including information about all the locations visited during the exchange), some maps, exchange programme in points and contacts of participants from hosting entity. This booklet is unique material, prepared only for this exchange.
  9. public transport tickets – all exchange costs are provided by participants from the hosting entity, therefore it's very important to provide tickets for public transport to all participants to avoid any inconveniences

Optional:

- T-shirts of an exchange - participants can decide if they want to make T-shirts of an exchange for their part of the exchange, in that case every participants should get one T-shirt
- Drinks in pubs – usually all the drinks except the first one (welcoming drink) and the last one (departure drink) are paid by

visiting participants. However, it's optional for the hosting entity to pay also for their drinks in pubs, clubs, at the parties...

- CDs with traditional music and other materials

In following text is given an example of programme for student exchange:

1<sup>st</sup> day – Welcoming day: Arrival of participants to railway/bus station or some other meeting point– usually entities think of some original way of welcoming the guests (banner with WELCOME sign or something similar)

- meeting of all participants, getting to know each other
- leaving stuff at host's house, dinner, meeting others in town centre and going to a 'get-to-know-each-other' drink in a café or a pub (first drink is paid by participants from hosting entity), going back home

2<sup>nd</sup> day – University day : breakfast at host's home, meeting at the Department of geography for a tour around Department (one of the hosting participants should prepare a small introduction about Department and geography in hosting participants' country) , attending a lecture/lectures by participants of exchange or assistants/professors from the Department and receiving brochures from tourist organisations, booklet of an exchange and other gifts from participants of hosting entity (T-shirts of exchange (if entity decided to make some) or some other symbol of exchange, souvenirs, CDs etc. ). After the lecture it would be best if the group could have a meal in one of the students' restaurants. After the meal group starts with sightseeing tour. Sightseeing can be organised either with the same guide for entire tour, or two or more participants can talk about different sights. It's also possible that every member of organising team has at least one sight to talk about. One more possibility is to organise a contest where all the participants have to visit different sights completing the tasks given by the organisers (which could include getting to know something about the sight, performing something at the sight, singing, etc.). If it's possible, group finishes the sightseeing tour during this afternoon – if not, they can do it the day after. Group splits after sightseeing and participants go home for dinner and then meet again in the evening to go to a club or again a pub.

3<sup>rd</sup> day – Excursion day – breakfast at host's home, meeting at the meeting point and going for an excursion, either by public transport or by minibus, van or cars of the organisers. It's up to organisers whether it will be in the mountains, seaside, nature park or another town. Exploring the location of excursion whole day, hiking or sight seeing most of the day – organisers should be well prepared and introduce guests to this area, giving them the basic information and geographical background of landscape (geomorphology, demogeography, history etc.); arriving at the hostel or mountain hut (or any other accommodation facility) for dinner, party and sleep over. For this day organisers should organise a lunch somewhere or provide lunch packages for the guests.

4<sup>th</sup> day – Excursion day - breakfast at the sleeping place prepared by organisers, continuing the excursion (sight seeing, hiking... - again it is necessary that the organisers are well prepared

), driving back home, dinner at host's home, meeting in the evening with the rest of participants and going to a club or a pub

5<sup>th</sup> day – Recovering day – this day is a bit easier and exchange organisers should give at least half of day of free time to the participants for individual programme. In the afternoon group meets and visits some sights in the town which haven't been visited during the city tour or some sights in the surroundings of city.

This shouldn't take more than couple of hours (3-4). In the evening, after the dinner, whole group meets in a pub or a club.

6<sup>th</sup> day – Excursion day – After breakfast at host's home, participants meet at the meeting point and go to a final excursion. This excursion shouldn't be too far – it should be close enough for participants to go there and come back in one day. Surroundings of the city are the best solution and every city has some interesting location in the vicinity which could be worth visiting. Again the organisers should prepare a geographical introduction of area and give basic information. Also, they should organise lunch or prepare lunch packages. In the evening whole exchange team meets for the final party either in a club or at home of one of the organisers.

7<sup>th</sup> day – Departure – after breakfast at host's home, participants should again have some free time for individual programme. In the afternoon is departure time and the end of exchange. Whole group meets for a final drink, after that guests leave late in the afternoon.

This programme offers enough for the guests to see and explore the country – it provides one big excursion (two days) and two smaller (one whole day and one half day) excursions, a city tour, visit to Department of geography, lecture at the Departure, several parties and enough free time for guests. Organisers should divide the tasks equally among all of them, especially when giving an introduction to areas visited during the excursions. This programme could sound expensive, but it's possible to lower the costs with fundraising and donations, or by finding cheaper solutions for accommodation (maybe someone of the organisers can offer free accommodation, or group can return home for a sleep over), transport... Tips for fundraising are given in the text below.

### **Drafting the financial structure (the exchange budget)**

Once the program has been detailed, the detailed financial structure should be drafted, too. While the program is detailed according to the general agreement on the cost (per participant) of the exchange, the exchange budget should be an



overview of all expenses, for all the participants of the exchange, bringing the exact figures.

It is recommended that the drafting of the budget starts with the biggest and unavoidable expenses (accommodation, travel, rentals, etc...), then descending to smaller or even optional ones. It is very useful to try to make more than one version of the budget (f.e. the 'cheaper' and the 'more expensive' version), depending on the amount of received sponsorships and funds.

Usually, budget is being detailed and drafted by the organisers in the top of the hierarchy (the exchange coordinator and supervisors). Once that the programme and the budget have been drafted and written, it is possible to create a project that is applicable for grants and sponsorships, which is very useful in organising the exchange, as it can lower the costs paid by the organisers dramatically.

The organisers should, in search of sponsorships, look for the companies that can provide them with their products that could be used (food, drinks, etc.), which would otherwise had to be bought.

### **Pre-exchange communication**

One of the tasks of the coordinator is also to keep the communication between two entities, which is essential part of preparation of the exchange. Through communication with exchange coordinator from entity - exchange partner coordinator get all the information necessary for good organisation, first: when exactly will exchange take place, which entity will organise the first part, how many people from each entity can join the exchange... and after this has been discussed coordinator get to know also more specific informations like full names of participants, vegetarian status, T-shirt size (if organisers decide to make T-shirts), contact data and mobile phone numbers of participants, when will a group arrive and where exactly (railway station, bus station or somewhere else), when are they leaving, is anyone staying a bit longer etc. Also, exchange coordinator should provide informations for the guests – what to bring with them (hiking shoes? sleeping bag? warm clothes? etc.) and give at least some points of programme to the participants. Coordinator also announces the exchange at EGEA forum activities section by filling in the information about dates of the exchange, number of participants, entities that are organising an exchange, contact details and short description of the programme. Coordinator also opens a forum thread about the exchange and keeps the communication between participants alive.

### **Exchange realisation**

The exchange realisation is, logically, the culmination of the organisational work and the essence of the entire process. It consists not only the presentation of the previous, but also of number of details that create the atmosphere of the exchange, which is of key importance. Good atmosphere is created by giving the

guests participants the welcome feeling, avoiding tensions between participants or the organisers and a number of details that will be mentioned later.

So, to conclude, good exchange realisation depends on a number of details, some of which explained in the following text :

### **Hospitality:**

Good hospitality is a basic thing in making the guest participant feel welcomed and pleasant on the exchange, The host should make sure that his guest doesn't have conditions worse than himself, that the guest feels like "at home". The host's duty is to provide the guest with an adequate sleeping place, enough food when eating at home and also making sure it is agreeable to the guest – very important when having a vegetarian or guests that dislike or are allergic to certain food (should be asked in polite manner in the begging of the exchange, or before in the pre-exchange communication), taking care that the guest has enough time and conditions for his hygienic needs, taking care of guest's tiredness when going out (but also making sure of not staying too long if the next day's programme requires an early start), waking up the guest early enough to have enough time to prepare before departures (it is useful to agree on the time with the guest) and generally, taking special care of him during the course of the exchange. Communication with the guest is crucial – waking ups and departures should be agreed by both the exchange host and guest, making it more enjoyable exchange for both. Also, it would be very useful to arrange that the host and the guest are people of simmlar or complementing characters or even friends.

### **Communication (internal and interentity):**

Another key part in making a good exchange is the communication. Internal communication between the organisers, but also the communication towards the guest participants.

Good communication between the organisers on the exchange is a continuation of good communication before the exchange. The organising team, as it was mentioned before, should function as a team. Therefore, all of the organisers should be informed of a detailed plan of the program. Communication in case of some unpredicted problems should be discreet and the decisionmaking should be lead by the coordinator. In that case, it would be useful, if possible, to have 'crisis meetings' away from guest participants in order to sort the problems out fast as possible. However, the guest participants should be entertained with some program in that case.

Communication between entities in the exchange lays on two simple rules: use of language and politeness. The hosts should take care to minimise the amount of communication between themselves in their native language, or in the language

different than that agreed as an official language of an exchange. Secondly, the communication should be polite – avoiding 'giving orders' to guests when implementing the programme.

### **Implementation of the programme**

There are several things that ease the realisation of the exchange. Two of most important are good leading of the groups and fluid programme realisation.

#### **Leading the group:**

Whether it is leading the group for city sightseeing or going for a hike, the group should be more or less compact. As the guest participants are a responsibility of the organisers the group when going for city sightseeing should be compact and it should be taken care that all the guest participants are close enough to hear the information given during the stops in the sightseeing tours. When going hiking, it should be made sure that all the participants have adequate hiking shoes and that the tempo of the group is adjusted to the slowest hiker in the group. The organisers should make sure that the group doesn't start 'losing' hikers, putting one of the more experienced hikers from the organisers in the rear of the group, who'll help the slowest hikers. Also, it should be taken care that the group has enough water and food stops and that in case of food stops, the group is compact as visible.

#### **Fluid programme realisation:**

Making the programme run 'smooth' is easy, but takes dedication from all the organisers that implement it. The key thing is being informed – all organiser should have a short draft of the programme with the timeline on paper and should be informed of other parts of the programme other than their own.

### **Post-exchange tasks**

Post-exchange tasks are mostly tasks of the coordinator. Firstly, he has to keep the communication between entities alive. He is also responsible for reports about exchange realisation for the entity and the rest of EGEA (forum thread etc.). In his report to the entity coordinator should give financial report and short description of programme realisation, problems that occurred and solutions for these problems. Reports should be kept in archives of entity for future organisers.

Coordinator is also responsible for communication with the sponsors - for certificates and gifts to sponsors, also for publishing the logo of the sponsor at the web-pages of entity and a magazine, if entity publishes a magazine. Also, the coordinator is responsible for team spirit of his exchange team – this means that coordinator should also keep the communication within the group after the exchange.

## **In the end:**

Be careful not to

- have too much programme
- forget people's cultural background
- have a guest without a host
- have not enough active people
- have not enough sleep or rest-moments, an exchange can be too tiring
- have a bad organisation and planning

And it is good if

- your programme shows something about the real life in a country, not only touristic sites
- people get to know people in an other country/culture and have international friendships
- you show your guests special places or things
- your exchange is an exchange of knowledge but also a cultural exchange, you can also think of showing or giving national products
- you have some excursions in your programme, do not only show your city
- your programme is kind of flexible (concerning the weather, time, etc), if you have a plan B

Some ideas were used from the Exchanges workshop, EGEA Annual congress 2004, Baarlo, Netherlands:

[http://egea.geog.uu.nl/congress/seminar/egea\\_d.htm](http://egea.geog.uu.nl/congress/seminar/egea_d.htm)