

(1) The school Pintor Antonio López in Tres Cantos (Annika Steffen)

Tres Cantos is a small town in the north of Spain, about 20 minutes by car from Spain's capital. The town was created as a result of the plan to develop new towns around Madrid and was therefore only founded in 1976 and became independent in 1991. The fact that Tres Cantos is so "young" means that a large part of the population of around 50,000 inhabitants is made up of young people, what is also recognisable in the town itself. A huge green park with a lake, all kinds of sports facilities and playgrounds, several schools and lots of nature in general characterise the town. One of these schools is the Instituto Pintor Antonio López (PAL), our partner school, where we spent a lot of time during the Rota week. The school is located in the centre of Tres Cantos right next to the central park. It has four buildings with several types of facilities, such as a gym, an assembly hall, a library and chemistry, biology and physics labs, among others. PAL offers a wide range of languages, allowing students to decide whether they want to study bilingually with English, bilingually with French or non-bilingually.

Personally, I really enjoyed working at the Instituto PAL because everyone was very kind and interested in the project. In addition, the school has the perfect location for going to the park or the shopping centre in a short time.

(2) Opening night/meeting with the families (Lenja Borgmann)

When we arrived at the Pintor Antonio Lopez school in Tres Cantos in the afternoon, we were sent to the school's gym, where we were the second group to arrive, as the Dutch students were already there. At first, we set up the traditional German food we brought and so did the other students, so that in the end we had a buffet with specialties from all four countries. After everyone arrived, we were allowed to go to the neighbouring room, the assembly hall. Our host families painted pictures with things that described us, like our hobbies our favourite animals, and we were supposed to find our painting and sit down there, and then we finally met our host families. It was very exciting for all of us because we only chatted with them before, but of course never met them in person. Afterwards, we then had some time to get to know our exchange students and the families. After those interesting and exciting first talks, the Spanish principal as well as the coordinators of the project said some words about the following days. Then we went back to the gym and could try the different national specialties, and they were all delicious. In the meantime, we already had the opportunity to meet the first new people from the different countries. Later, we all went home to our families and saw our home for the next week. We spent some time with the families and then fell into bed tired from the long day, but very excited for the week and all the new experiences we were about to make.

(3) Feminism Workshop (Luisa Vollmer)

In a bid to foster gender equality and empower women, the ROTA project also offered a feminism workshop.

The workshop, led by three female Spanish teachers, gave insight into various aspects of feminism in the past and also today. Therefore, they learned about the significant achievements and milestones of feminist movements.

The participating students were engaged to share their point of views and individual work of important women in their home country. This way, the group was able to compare the different countries considering their achievements in feminism.

By the end of the week, the attendees worked on the final presentation about the feminism workshop for the ceremony. Doing so, they worked up a plan about the presentation and agreed on starting with a video including various clips of movies where the role of women in the last centuries was shown. Afterwards they wanted to explain why feminism is so important even though 44% of men in Spain think that it has got too far. They came to the conclusion that feminism is still important

to improve gender equality and social justice. Moreover, they agreed that it is important to name the Matilda effect which describes the systematic undervaluation and underrecognition of women's achievements and contributions, particularly in male-dominated fields such as science and technology (# no more Matildas).

Overall, it was a very interesting workshop, offering detailed insights into women's achievements in the past.

(4) Debate Workshop (Janis Lapan)

At the start of the debate workshop we watched a video about a group of people debating the question, if Ronaldo should earn as much as he earns, while teachers get way less. While everyone talked about Ronaldo, it was just a metaphor for social injustice as a whole. After that we got together in groups and thought about different injustices in society. The groups then got all together and tried to find solutions for the problems. On the second day our topic was democracy, we collected and grouped what we all individually thought the base of a stable democracy would be. This led to us having a long discussion about the differences between a direct and an indirect democracy. The majority favored an indirect democracy, while still acknowledging the benefits of a direct one. But we had way more topics, some bigger some smaller, from social injustice through a debate about obligated voting and even if statutes of bad people should be removed or not. In the end i can say that it was a great time, that was not physically, but mentally demanding.

(5) Body expression workshop (Adriana Andrzejewski)

In the body expression workshop we did a lot of different things. As the name already tells, the goal was to learn how to express feelings and moods better with our body. We learned typical dances from different countries, which was very funny. We had to listen to songs and draw what they reminded us of and even professional drummers came to show us another way of expressing feelings. At the end of the week, we had a farewell party where every workshop presented their results. We expressed a world with and without democracy. For that we used dramatic music and showed a chaotic life without communication, and all dressed in black and white. Then a completely different dressed person came to the stage, painted us to bring colour and democracy to our lives. We ended up voting and holding up letters that spelled out the word DEMOCRACY. All in all, we learned a lot about ways to express our feelings and even had the chance to practise it with our choreography at the end of the week.

(6) ROTA News Workshop (Christin Weber)

We, the Rota news workshop, designed and created a Newspaper for every participant to take home and look back at all the memories we created over the week. On the first day we formed pairs of two, each member was from a different country. We went to the different workshops, took pictures, observed their work, and interviewed them. The newspaper also contains articles about the different schools, their systems and all the activities we did during the week. Like visiting the Valle de los Caidos or the meeting with the mayor. We had lot fun in the process and learned a lot about writing, about the other participating countries and made a lot of new friends.

(7) Spanisch course (Paulina Schulze Schleithoff)

Before every workshop we had Spanish courses in which we learned sentences like "Me llamo..." and "Soy de Alemania". We learned how to introduce ourselves and now we can also talk about the weather in Spanish. But we did not only learn how to introduce ourselves and talk about the weather but we also learned how to describe a city and so we created posters on which we presented the city we live in. We got to know the specific vocabulary and in the end we all presented our posters. Therefore, we also got a tiny view of the city in Belgium and the city in the Netherlands. While the one Spanish course learned how to dance Salsa the other Spanish course sang Spanish songs. As it

was somebody's birthday, we sang happy birthday so now we know the Spanish version of "happy birthday". In our final course we learned how to sing a popular Spanish song to say goodbye. It's called "Adios con el Corazón". Another topic was food. We got to know the Spanish names of different food and pointed out which food is typical for Spain like Churros and Tortilla.

(8) Shadow theatre workshop (Minh Hanh Ma)

In the shadow theatre workshop we worked together towards the goal of being able to present a play telling a story with shadows.

On the first day, we had a warmup with the body expression workshop, in which we practiced using our body in different ways and for different purposes of expression. For instance, each one of us introduced themselves by saying their name while doing a movement that was supposed to be related to their personality and one thing they like or like to do.

After two hours of warmup activities, the two workshops split up and we, the shadow theatre workshop, went to the auditorium. At first, we were given cards with things we had to express with our shadows behind the screen, e.g. an elephant, a word, and a heart. After getting to know methods to express things with shadows, we started to create the storyline of our play.

During the four days of working in our workshop, we continued working on the storyline and the execution of our idea.

Aspects of our work were the use of light and colours, the selection of music, the use of props, the storytelling, and of course, the acting. During this process the teachers helped us by providing suggestions for improvements in presenting different details, as it was important to convey our story clearly and mainly by using light and shadows. We all cooperated well with each other and everyone gave their input.

Our play dealt with fairness, reflecting one's own behaviour and the importance of friendship within a society. We decided to demonstrate these topics by acting out two races, in which a person wins the first race by making someone else fall but regrets their action eventually and helps the person they made fall in the first race in the second race, which made both of them lose. It was about making the audience rethink their priorities and their definition of winning.

Although we sometimes had disagreements with the teachers, in the end we could find compromises and are content with our final product and presentation.

(9) Excursion to Madrid (Paula von Gahlen)

On Sunday, we went to Madrid. We got on the train at 9:30 am and arrived in Madrid at 10:00 am.

We immediately made our way to the Reina Sofía Museum where we saw several pieces by Dali, Picasso and other artists. The Spanish students had prepared presentations about several paintings and their historical significance. Especially Picasso's "Guernica" was a very impressive piece.

Afterwards we started our photo rally all across Madrid to see as many monuments and important places as possible. Since the groups were mix of students from every country, it was a great activity to get to know each other and start conversations. The Spanish were leading us through the city and at every stop we were challenged with a different pose for the photo. The final stop was the Plaza Major and the group that arrived first, won.

When every group had finally arrived, we had two hours free time where we could do whatever we wanted. Some people went shopping, others took another look around the city and some were using this time to rest a bit. Exploring the city was a lot of fun since Madrid is a very beautiful city with many mesmerizing buildings and big parks to spend time in.

At 4:30 pm we took the train back to Tres Cantos, where we all went back to our host families or hung out together for a little longer.

Even though it was a long and exhausting day, it was a wonderful experience and great first activity of the exchange.

(10) Visit to town hall and the mayor (Lily Bisping)

Another highlight of our week in Spain was the opportunity to visit the Townhall in Tres Cantos and to meet the mayor of the small city, Jesús Moreno García. He welcomed us warmly and shared insights into the political system of Spain and the city of Tres Cantos in general. He informed us that despite

the city being less than 50 years old, it has become very attractive for young families with approximately 50.000 people calling Tres Cantos their home, the number increasing still. With mentioning the number of 35.000 individuals that travel to the city daily for work, he underlined the importance of the city's industrial sector before telling us about upcoming projects and initiatives to enhance the quality of life for residents, the sustainability of the city and the community development. Moreover, he explained Spain's municipal system which gave us the understanding about the differences of political situations in democratic countries in Europe. Lastly, he gave us the chance to ask questions for more information about the governance and future of Tres Cantos.

(11) Picnic and team building activity (Luisa Rohde)

On the third day in the afternoon, we had a picnic and team-building activities. We all went from school to the large park and had lunch together. After regaining our strength, we were divided into groups with Spanish tour guides leading us to various stations where we engaged in different sports activities. At one station we played Spikeball, which was a really enjoyable game, and we shared many laughs. At another station, there was a slackline. Additionally, we played tennis, tag, and other funny games.

After these amazing games and activities, we were all tired, some of us watched the sunset at the lake while others went home.

(12) Valle de los Caídos (Jana Bilsing)

On Wednesday, March 12, 2024, we visited Valle de los Caídos, also known as the Valley of the Fallen, which was a meaningful experience. It's near Madrid, Spain, and has a big church and a huge cross, which is located in the mountains. They built it during a time when Francisco Franco was in charge, to remember people who died in a war. Inside the church, you'll see beautiful sculptures and art. The giant cross is more than 150 meters tall, and you can see it from far away. It stands as symbols of peace and remembrance. Moreover, you'll be amazed by the beautiful views all around, and especially the landscape is breathtaking! The place has an atmosphere filled with peace and calm. Many people still come to visit, to think about history and to honor the people who suffered. In summary, a visit to this place promises to be an unforgettable journey filled with inspiration and a deep appreciation for the past.

- <https://www.rtve.es/play/videos/lab-rtve/cuelgamuros-english-subtitles/6727032/>
- <https://www.travelbook.de/orte/skurrile-orte/valle-de-los-caidos-spanien>

(13) Visit of San Lorenzo del Escorial (Johannes Langer)

On the beautiful sunny Wednesday after our visit to Valle de los Caídos we went to the small town of San Lorenzo del Escorial and had free time. The groups could explore the beautiful narrow streets with lots of impressive houses. Some also entered the great looking monastery or relaxed in the park nearby.

(14) Final ceremony/ Farewell party (Lara Feldhausen)

On Thursday, our program ended with the final ceremony and the farewell party. It took place in the assembly hall, where we were greeted with music by the school band.

Afterwards, every workshop presented what they had worked on during the week, including a play by the shadow theatre workshop, a choreography by the body expression workshop and a lot of more amazing results.

The whole event was moderated by members of the ROTA news workshop, who later presented us a newspaper they had worked on. Every participant received a newspaper, filled with photos and stories of the week, facts about every school and lots of memories.

Then, the Spanish headteacher spoke to us. She thanked everyone for the week and handed the ROTA flag over to the next hosting school, our German school, which is a tradition in the ROTA project.

The day ended with the farewell party in the gym. Food, drinks and music were prepared, so we could say goodbye to everyone during a festive atmosphere.

(15) Stay with a host-family (Emilia Braß-Soester)

Staying in a host-family. Something I have never done before. One week in a different family and no idea of what to expect. At the beginning of the ROTA- project I was quite nervous about staying in a host-family, I was scared I might bother them or that we simply wouldn't get along. Luckily these worries were pretty unnecessary and the week with my host-family turned out to be one of the coolest things I have ever experienced.

Before we got to Spain we were given the contacts of our host-families so we could text them. When my host-mother answered my message, I was a bit surprised since she told me she could not speak English (I cannot speak Spanish 🇪🇸). But with the help of Deepl this communication problem was solved for now and I was able to get to know her and her family. She told me that she had two children, a girl who is 17 and a boy who is 14, and that she and her husband owned a restaurant. In addition, she also sent me pictures of her entire family. Now, that I knew more of what would be expecting me I was starting to relax and my anticipation increased. I was really looking forward to meeting them.

After our arrival in Tres Cantos and the opening ceremony on Saturday we were picked up by our host-families. Me and my family went straight to their apartment where we left my luggage and took off again because Gabriel, the 14-year-old boy, had a soccer game we watched. On our way there I got to know Amy better, she is the sister of Gabriel and the three of us really got along with each other. My worry of not being able to communicate with them quickly faded as I learned that Gaby and Amy both were fluent in English. After the soccer game we went back home and that was when I first experienced what it meant to have dinner in Spain. Amy told me that they were starting to prepare dinner and that I could unpack my suitcase if I wanted to. So that was what I did. But somehow I ended up falling asleep and Amy had to wake me up for dinner at 11:30 pm 😊. That was pretty embarrassing but they were very kind and changed their dinner time during my stay with them to 9 pm, which is much closer to my usual dinner time in Germany. Every morning we had breakfast together. It usually consisted of toasted bread with olive oil and tomato or jam. Afterwards Amy, Gaby and I went to school.

In the evenings we had dinner together, sometimes at their restaurant and sometimes at home, either way, it was always delicious and watched movies or played board games.

I always felt welcome in my host family and was able to form a close bond with them in just one week. Up until now we are staying in touch and I hope it stays that way!

Staying in a host family. An unforgettable experience I would recommend to everyone and that I am very grateful for. ❤️