

# Volunteering for Heritage: Study visit to Pori, Finland



Since 2017 we have been organizing international workshops in collaboration with European Heritage Volunteers and local partners in Croatia. These planning workshops were targeting specific challenges related to cultural heritage preservation, valorization, interpretation, or management in different communities. Having this experience, we were invited to become partners of the Erasmus+ project “Volunteering for Heritage: Best practice exchange” led by Foundation Chronic Dobro, Krakow, and apart from Poland and Croatia, involving partners from Finland and England. The aim of the project is to exchange knowledge when it comes to volunteering for heritage. It consists of study visits in all of the partner countries during which representatives of partner organizations get the opportunity to “go deep” into the past and ongoing volunteering programs with the main goal to replicate some of the existing models and solutions in other contexts.

The first study trip was organized to Pori, Finland, hosted by the Satakunta Museum in Pori. Hana, Kristina and Marina as the core team participated in the visit, and here's how it went.



Upon our arrival in Pori, the first meeting place was the Satakunta Museum. The museum, located in the old part of the city of Pori, near the river Kokemäenjoki, is a museum of cultural history showing the great history of that part of Finland from the Iron Age to the 1900s. During our first encounter, we were given an insightful presentation about the museum and its work with volunteers. Namely, the museum has a special volunteering scheme: besides the group of professional staff working at the museum and taking care of the collections, the museum supports other smaller local museums run by volunteers throughout the whole region. These local initiatives are normally run by the Local Heritage Society members consisted of experienced and motivated locals who value and appreciate their heritage wishing to preserve it for future generations. These local grassroots organizations are extremely valuable for safeguarding heritage and with the help and of the Satakunta Museum they manage to operate, get professional assistance, and keep the spirit of Finland's past.

The rest of our schedule was packed with wonderful visits to many of these smaller local museums where we got to personally meet the volunteers and hear their stories about the places they are taking care of, including two UNESCO sites.





All of these different local museums offered us an insight into the former everyday life in Finland in the region around Pori. Naturally, there were many similarities between these local sites, but each had its own charm and story. Muina Homestead Museum is one such example of a traditional Finnish courtyard with wooden houses in the rural environment allowing the full experience of rural lifestyle in Finland.

Hinnerjoki Local History Museum, located near the town Eura, has another impressive collection from everyday life including items that belonged to hunters and shoemakers. What was particularly splendid was the collection of 1500 coffee cups given to the museum as a donation. The collection is a tangible example of the love that Finland has towards coffee that we also experienced firsthand, as each of these visits started with the welcome coffee ritual that we gladly respected. In the small town of Eurajoki, we visited the Museum of Agriculture and School Museum in the actual former school. It evoked the feeling of being in school chairs again recalling some of our own memories from the classroom. What is generally impressive about all of these places and museums is how the everyday items used are very well preserved and carefully presented, accompanied with the story.



Besides the preservation of these houses or smaller museums, it is important to also share knowledge related to the traditional wooden houses. Renovation Center Toivo is an example of a family home with a big courtyard showcasing life in Pori from the 1820s to the 1950s. The house has many layers which enable the visitor to understand the exact phases of renovation throughout the years, illustrating the methods and materials used. Therefore, the great value of the center is that it offers expert advice on preserving the historical value of these kinds of traditional Finnish wooden houses.

In all of the sites visited, we had the opportunity to recognize the genuine love, dedication, and care for heritage which can be felt from the volunteers that each day invest their time in heritage preservation. One of the main challenges is, however, to transmit this dedication to the younger generation and motivate them to continue their work.





Finally, we've had the pleasure of visiting two UNSECO sites: the Old Rauma historical center and the Sammallahdenmäki site. The Rauma historical center is a splendid example of an old Nordic wooden town that shows how different spheres of more urban life came together in a functioning unit. Beautiful wooden houses are very well preserved and show how an old historical center can be used as a still-functioning center and a valued heritage site. We've also visited the Bronze Age Burial Site of Sammallahdenmäki. It shows an interesting example of Nordic religious practices and how they organized burial places in stone clusters of all shapes and sizes. What is also impressive is the nature around the burial places, filled with pine and spruce trees, a striking agricultural landscape.

Having seen all these noteworthy places, what is most striking is the will and love the locals have for these heritage sites and how as volunteers they are willing to give their time and share their stories with us. This very specific collaboration that the museum has with local smaller museums and their work with the volunteers' society has certainly given us a broader insight into different ways of preserving the heritage, as well as about the importance of volunteering and transmitting it to future generations.