

REFLECTIONS

Visit to Valenciennes 25 September - 2 October 2022

We set out to visit the secondary school Lycée de l'Escaut in Valenciennes with 5 teachers and 5 students. The aim for the students was to get information about the student organisations of the French school. The five members of the student team are all members of the DÖK (Student Government) in Lovassy, so they were interested in the possible similarities and differences of the organisations in the other country.

The teachers were on a study trip to gain experience about the French education system, to visit lessons and have discussions about the experiences in different fields of studies and also to discuss the opportunities of further cooperations.

We started our journey on **Sunday 25 September** and visited Brussels on that day before arriving in Valenciennes to our host families. We spent a bright and sunny afternoon in the capital of Belgium visiting the most typical sights and enjoying the Belgian cultural attractions. Some of us visited museums, others walked around, I think we could make the most of the short time we designated for the Brussels visit. The transfer arrived on time and we got to Valenciennes at about 7:30 pm. We all met our host families and got settled before the first day of work.



The students were all hosted by members of the CVL, one of the student organisations of the school so they all had a lot of opportunities to gather information concerning their projects all week long. The teachers were hosted by members of the French teacher team, they all made sure that we felt comfortable during our stay.

Monday morning was a perfect project start: we got the plan for the whole week, we introduced ourselves and we received a warm welcome from the whole secondary school. Our guides showed us all the important places and talked about the educational system of the school so we got pretty much familiarised with the situation and the background of the school.

The schedule for the week seemed - and later proved to be - perfect, with enough free time to look around and find time for self-reflections, and also with versatile programs that were all appealing both for students and teachers. We had different timetables depending on our interests that had been previously surveyed. Lunch was provided by the canteen of the school for the satisfaction of all Hungarian students and teachers who envied the spacious canteen and the selection of choices on offer for the students. We can agree that this aspect of l'Escaut is definitely one we would like to have in our school.



From 18:00 we had an official reception with the headmaster and host families present. There, the students had the opportunity to introduce themselves and Lovassy to the hosts and our project officially started.



The mornings were generally scheduled around visiting different classes: Maths, sciences, history, geopolitics, English and Spanish. Each of us enjoyed being part of the international experience we provided for the random classes that were chosen for our visit. We met a lot of teachers and students and we all had experiences where we could actually feel the importance of being ambassadors of international relationships. We often felt how powerful it is when students realise that language knowledge is actually important and that knowing and using a language can open doors and it is fun to speak to people who seem to be very different and distant. Students were involved in a lot of international exchanges and the teachers also had the opportunity to be engaged in meaningful activities.



On **Tuesday** afternoon we had a guided visit of Valenciennes where we heard a lot about the history of the town. It was very useful to understand the background of the region and the school and to understand how different the situation of the students is in this area of France. We visited places that defined the past of the town - it used to be an area where mining was the employment and after closing down the mines, people have been struggling to find employment in other sectors of the economy. Compared to our region in Hungary, students and their families generally have to face more problems and challenges.



At 17:30 we were received officially at the city hall by the representative of the mayor, with the principal and vice principal of the school present. It was a nice gesture from the local government to respect the international efforts of the secondary school.



On **Wednesday** morning, besides visiting classes, we had the chance to talk about the future possibilities of cooperation. The afternoon was free, so the students and the teachers had programs organised by their hosts. The teachers generally went sightseeing in Valenciennes, while the students were invited to have a programme together with all the hosts.



On **Thursday** morning the students could listen to an interesting presentation about the CVL, one of the student organisations, and the international group could exchange experiences about the challenges they have to face in their student communities. The discussion made a great impact on the kids on both sides. Meanwhile, some of the teachers had their usual classroom visits, with long-lasting experiences.

In the afternoon, the whole group travelled to Lille and we had a great time in the beautiful city, which was the European Cultural Capital in 2005. The city was awesome and we enjoyed the jovial guidance of Alexandre, one of the English teachers accompanying us during the whole week.

In the evening the school invited all the students and teachers involved in the project to a nice restaurant, where we really had a great time although we had some struggles with the portions of food and sweets.



Friday morning was devoted to the evaluation of the visit, and giving feedback and reflections about all the experiences. The atmosphere was really laid-back as the whole programme was combined with a French breakfast provided by our hosts.

We also had a very fruitful conversation about future projects with English teachers: we would like to have some projects in language improvement.

Late afternoon we visited the university of Valenciennes and listened to an interesting presentation about the international opportunities the institution has to offer to foreign students.



On **Saturday** morning we met the two teachers who are involved in the upcoming project of visiting Hungary between 13-19 November. We discussed the basic ideas about the project and agreed on the most important details. Then, we met the 12 French students involved in the project to make them feel more comfortable about their visit by letting them meet us and talk to them about what they can expect.

In the afternoon the teachers visited Gent in Belgium, and we said farewell to all our hosts.



Our plane was due at 8:50 on **Sunday** morning, instead, it only took off at 12:40, so we waited more than 7 hours at the airport. Despite the inconvenience we could spend the time efficiently, students preparing for the next week, teachers writing their reflections, everybody sleeping here and there. Most of us arrived home late in the afternoon, but I'm sure we can all agree that this was a wonderful week with a lot of unforgettable experiences.

