



cottage

Of

Cultures

A JOURNEY TO  
REMEMBER

2023–2025

AllianSSin  
nyorisovaihto



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# Welcome to the Final Cottage of Cultures Event

Welcome to the grand finale of our beloved Cottage of Cultures series — a journey that has brought together people from all over the world to celebrate diversity, share stories, and build community.

Over the past months, these ESC Solidarity Projects have served as a vibrant platform where international and local youth have connected through cultural exchange, creative workshops, meaningful discussions, and shared meals. From exploring the traditions and environmental challenges of different countries to diving deep into themes of sustainability, solidarity, and self-expression, each event has been a unique opportunity to learn, grow, and foster understanding.

Tonight, as we gather one last time, let's take a moment to reflect on everything we've experienced together — the friendships made, the knowledge gained, and the spirit of unity that has defined every gathering.



# what is a European Solidarity Corps

## SOLIDARITY PROJECT

Youth-led solidarity actions initiated, developed and organised by a group of young people themselves.

An opportunity to do good and make a change in your community and the world at large.

You can apply as an informal youth group or with the support of an organisation.

Extra support available for covering costs from the participation of young people with fewer opportunities.

Next application deadline 1.10.2025 for projects starting between 1.1.-31.5.2026

Group of at least 5 young people

18 to 30 years old

2 - 12 months

630 € / month

Coaching



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# our international EVENTS

Over the course of our Cottage of Cultures projects, we've had the incredible privilege of traveling the world — without ever leaving our meeting space. Each edition has spotlighted a different country or theme, offering a rich tapestry of cultural insight, environmental awareness, and community engagement.

- Poland & Environmental Practices: We explored Poland's rich history, traditional pierogi making, and environmental initiatives promoting sustainability and care for our planet.
- Ukraine: Delved into Ukrainian folklore, learned traditional dances like the Hopak, and enjoyed iconic dishes such as borshch and varenyky while discussing the ecological challenges Ukraine faces today.
- Greece: Celebrated Greek mythology, dance, and cuisine, along with inspiring presentations on strengthening our bond with nature through Finnish environmental efforts.
- Slovenia & Sustainable Tourism: Examined the impact of mass tourism and brainstormed eco-friendly travel alternatives while savoring traditional mushroom soup.
- Italy & Air Pollution: Highlighted the air quality challenges in Italy and globally, followed by creative group problem-solving and tasting vegetarian lasagne and vegan tiramisu.









# What We've Learned

Over the many editions of Cottage of Cultures, we didn't just celebrate traditions and taste international dishes—we grew. Every session brought a meaningful lesson, deepened our perspectives, and empowered us in different ways. Here's what we've collectively learned:

## Intercultural Awareness & Empathy

By exploring over a dozen countries and cultures, we broke down stereotypes and built up understanding. We learned to see the world through others' eyes—how values, traditions, and struggles differ and connect us at the same time. Personal stories from volunteers brought abstract global issues closer to home and fostered a sense of global citizenship.

## Creativity & Expression

From cooking to dancing, podcasting to vision boards, the events nurtured our creative sides. We practiced public speaking, storytelling, performance, and artistic expression through diverse workshops. Even those who thought they weren't "creative" discovered a space where they could try, learn, and shine.

## Sustainability & Environmental Awareness

Many events tackled urgent issues like fast fashion, microplastics, deforestation, mass tourism, air pollution, and climate disasters. We learned practical ways to reduce our impact—like traveling sustainably, consuming mindfully, and embracing plant-based food. Our commitment to vegan meals reflected our values and sparked conversations on food justice and environmental care.

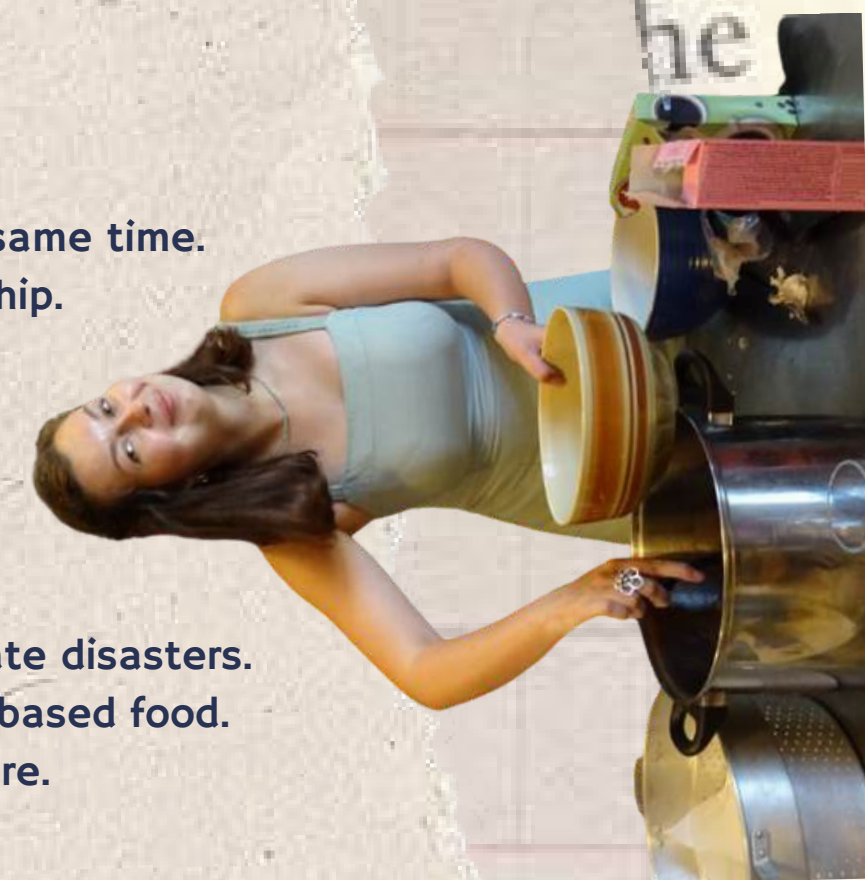
## Solidarity & Inclusion

The project highlighted the power of community. Whether from Helsinki or halfway across the globe, everyone was welcome. We learned how to create safer spaces where voices could be heard, experiences validated, and support offered. Through shared meals, games, and storytelling, we built friendships and found belonging.

## Skills for Life

Many left with new tools: podcasting and radio production, DIY crafts, theatre improvisation, sustainability practices, language basics, and intercultural communication.

Volunteers gained leadership, teamwork, facilitation, and project planning experience—all key skills for youth work, activism, and beyond.





# what we Learned

Over nearly two years of Cottage of Cultures, we didn't just explore different countries—we grew as individuals, as a team, and as a community. Here's what we discovered along the way:

## Diversity is a Strength, Not a Barrier

Each edition reminded us how much we can learn from one another. Whether we were discovering Ukrainian dance, Spanish climate issues, or Slovenian soup, we saw how diverse stories bring us closer rather than apart. We learned to listen without judgment, to celebrate differences, and to find unexpected connections between our experiences.

## Volunteering Changes Lives

From the voices of ESC volunteers to long-term local organizers, we learned how volunteering opens hearts and minds.

It builds confidence, teaches new skills, expands networks, and most importantly, gives meaning to action. Through every edition, volunteers became role models for others to take initiative and make an impact.

## Sharing Stories Builds Empathy

When people shared personal experiences—about migration, activism, identity, or home—it allowed others to see the world through a new lens.

We learned that storytelling isn't just about information—it's about connection, healing, and recognition.

## Small Actions Matter

Whether it was making a plant-based meal, talking about sustainable tourism, upcycling old materials, or swapping ideas about greener travel, we saw how small, mindful choices ripple outward.

Every conversation, every game, every bite of vegan food contributed to shifting perspectives.



# HOW TO TIPS

Start on time

Have a plan and a backup plan and a backup backup plan. And then be ready to improvise when all plans fail.

Say your idea out loud, even if it's stupid - you might brainstorm it to amth cool and big





# Why These Events Matter



Cottage of Cultures wasn't just a monthly event—it became a space of transformation, connection, and meaning. Here's why these gatherings have made such a lasting impact on individuals, our community, and beyond:

## Creating a Sense of Belonging

For many, especially newcomers to Finland, Cottage of Cultures was a first step into a welcoming community. It provided a safe and inclusive space to be seen, heard, and appreciated for who we are—beyond borders and backgrounds. Sharing stories, food, and laughter helped break isolation and built friendships that continue outside the event.

## Amplifying Youth Voices

Each edition empowered young people to step into leadership roles—designing workshops, leading discussions, and sharing their experiences. Volunteers became facilitators, educators, chefs, performers—and changemakers. Participants were not passive attendees, but active co-creators of the event's atmosphere and direction.

## Building a Culture of Care

Whether through conversations about climate, inclusion, or mental health, the events encouraged a deep sense of care: Care for the planet 🌍 Care for others 🤝 Care for ourselves ❤️ These conversations helped us reflect on how to live more consciously, responsibly, and compassionately.

## Promoting Global Citizenship

With every country and issue presented, we connected local realities with global challenges. We explored how we can act in solidarity—whether by raising awareness, changing habits, or supporting international initiatives. The events reminded us that while we come from different places, we share a common world.

## Celebrating Diversity Through Joy

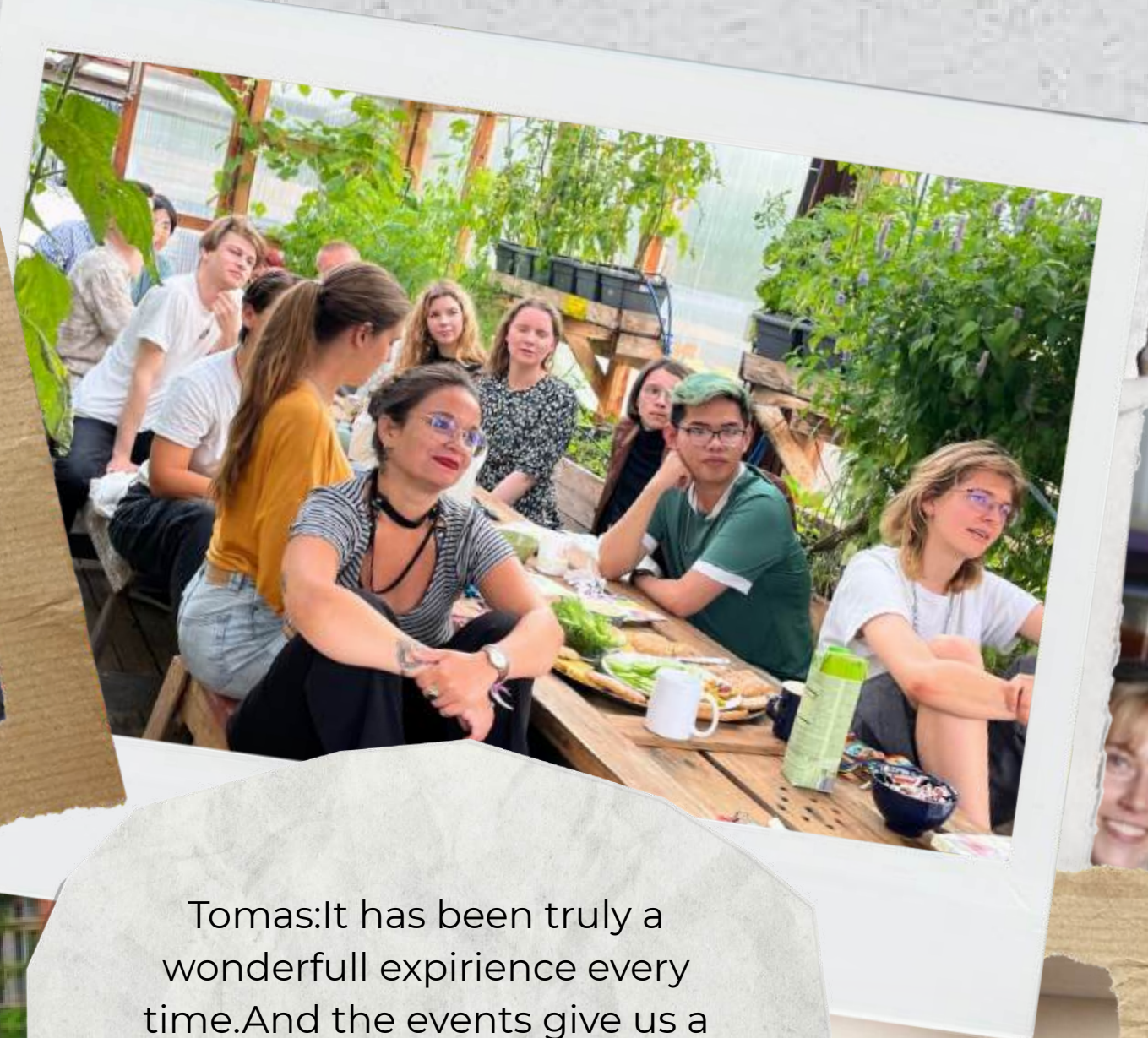
Culture was not just discussed, it was experienced—through food, dance, music, art, and humor. These joyful moments are powerful. They bring down walls, build bridges, and make us feel human together. Cottage of Cultures showed that celebrating diversity can be fun, meaningful, and healing.







Nicole: The workshops and the presentations have been super helpfull and the opportunity to meet young international people is very important



Tomas: It has been truly a wonderfull exipience every time. And the events give us a good space to interact with other volunteers even if we cant regularly meet



Elena: I love coming here this is my safe space. I always enjoy the workshops and the way they connect me with people

Sophie: The workshops have been very interesting and in topics that i would normaly not be interested in. I love meeting new people ,it gives me so much social energy !





# Final Thoughts & Gratitude

As we close this incredible chapter of Cottage of Cultures, we pause to reflect on the journey we've taken together. What began as a series of monthly events grew into something so much more—an ever-evolving, living community that embodies the values of solidarity, inclusion, sustainability, and creative expression.

## A Celebration of Diversity

Cottage of Cultures reminded us that every culture, every voice, and every story adds something vital to the collective whole. By listening to one another, trying each other's food, learning each other's dances and histories—we became closer, kinder, and more aware of the world around us.

## A Seed for Future Growth

The project may be wrapping up, but the impact will continue. The connections made, the perspectives shared, and the lessons learned have planted seeds—seeds of curiosity, compassion, and civic action that will grow wherever we go next.

## A Shared Effort

None of this would have been possible without the heart and hard work of our volunteers, partners, guests, and every single person who walked through the door and chose to engage. You made this real. You made this meaningful.



## A Thank You, From the Heart

To all the cooks, facilitators, artists, presenters, dancers, thinkers, and dreamers who made these evenings unforgettable: thank you. Your presence mattered. Your energy lit up the room. Your stories moved us.





## **What Comes Next?**

**The spirit of Cottage of Cultures lives on—in your future projects, your communities, your friendships.**

**Keep creating, questioning, welcoming, and dancing. This is only the beginning.**

**And remember: wherever you go, you carry the Cottage with you.**

**With warmth and endless gratitude,  
The Cottage of Cultures Team**



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