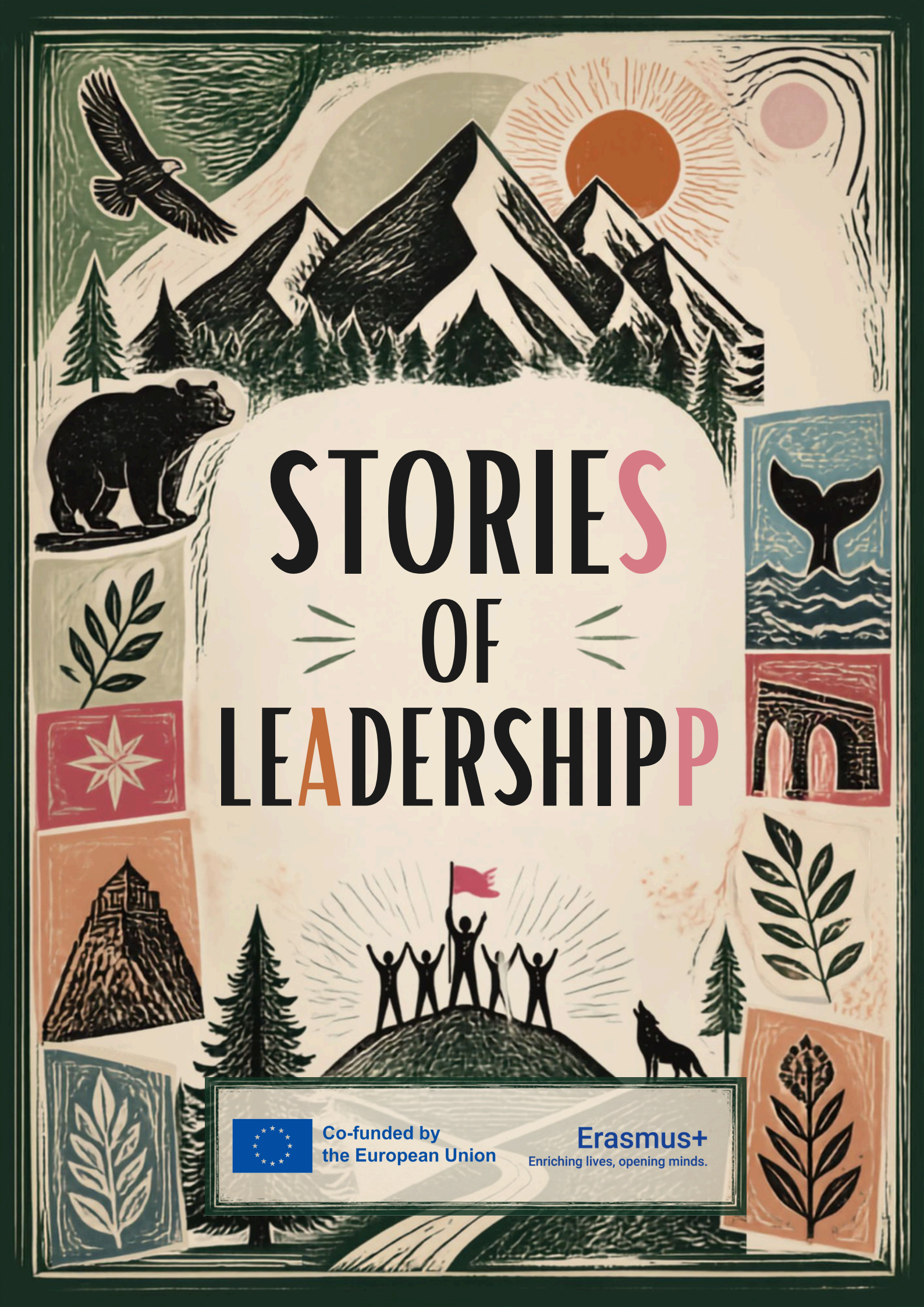




STORIES OF LEADERSHIP



Co-funded by
the European Union

Erasmus+

Enriching lives, opening minds.



About the Project

Carve Your Path was an Erasmus+ youth exchange that brought together 42 young people and group leaders from six countries: Croatia, Türkiye, Ukraine, the Republic of North Macedonia, Romania and Greece; for nine days at the mountain lodge Omanovac, near Pakrac, Croatia.

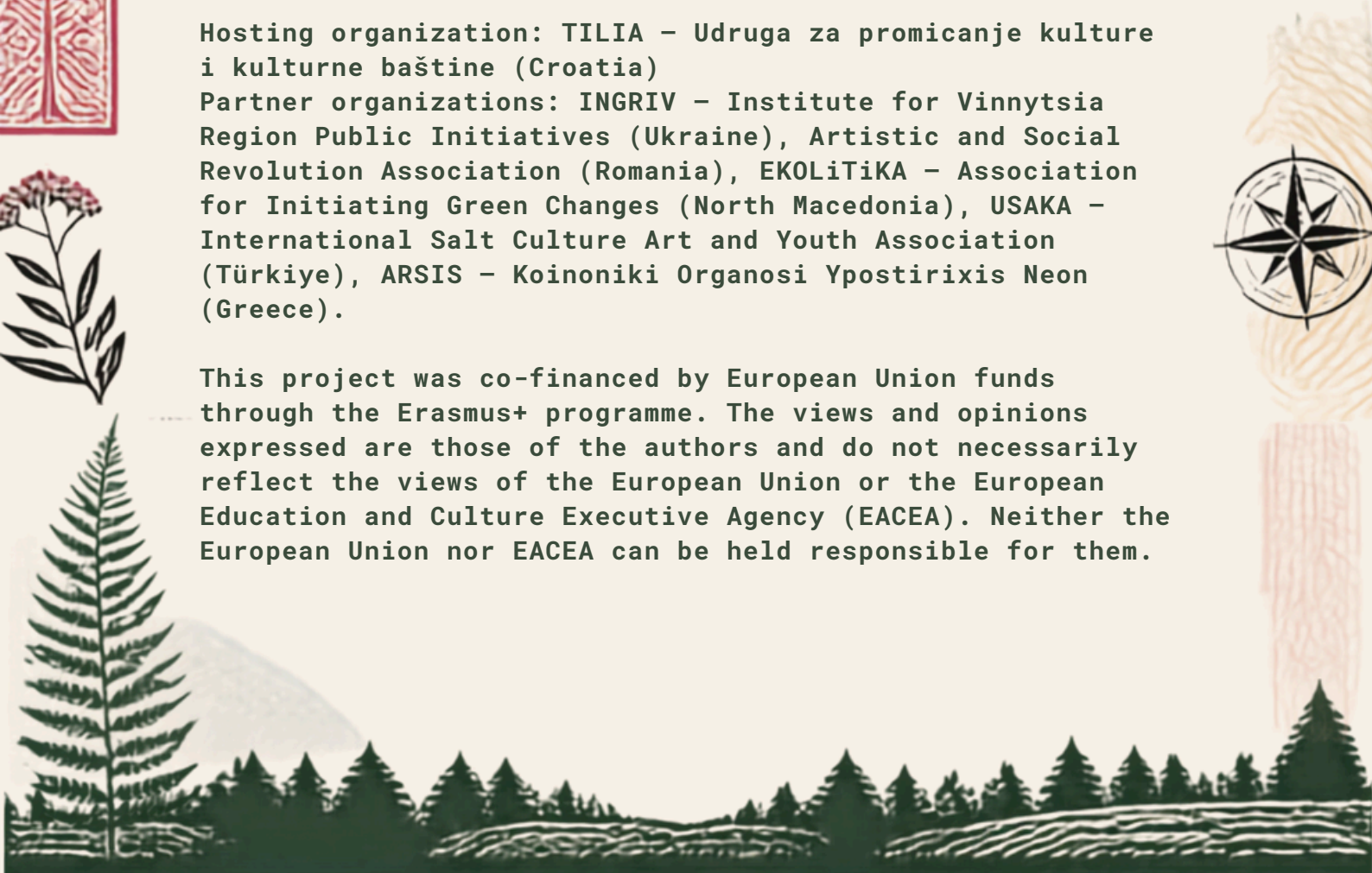
The exchange explored leadership not as a title, but as something lived and felt, through the head, the heart and the hands. Participants questioned what beliefs hold them back, what values guide them, and what vision they're building toward, while also picking up the linocut technique: a slow, deliberate way of shaping something meaningful out of raw material. Every evening, a different country opened its culture to the group, filling Omanovac with food, music and stories.

What the group learned became the foundation for the Youth Festival "Carve Your Path", held in Lipik on 13 September 2026 and designed entirely by the participants – inviting the local community into games, interviews and the making of Croatia's largest collaborative linocut, followed by a 10-day exhibition of the artwork.

Hosting organization: TILIA – Udruga za promicanje kulture i kulturne baštine (Croatia)

Partner organizations: INGRIV – Institute for Vinnytsia Region Public Initiatives (Ukraine), Artistic and Social Revolution Association (Romania), EKOLiTiKA – Association for Initiating Green Changes (North Macedonia), USAKA – International Salt Culture Art and Youth Association (Türkiye), ARSIS – Koinoniki Organosi Ypostirixis Neon (Greece).

This project was co-financed by European Union funds through the Erasmus+ programme. The views and opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.





LEARNING TO LEAD MYSELF

MIHAELA FROM CROATIA

One of the most meaningful things I learned during this youth exchange was that leadership can start with learning how to lead yourself.

Being in a new environment, surrounded by people with different backgrounds and perspectives, pushed me outside my comfort zone.

At times, I felt insecure. I caught myself overthinking how other people perceived me and wondering whether I was doing things the "right" way.

Instead of trying to control everything around me, I decided to trust myself more and stay present. I started taking responsibility for my own reactions, emotions and choices. I allowed myself to speak, participate and make mistakes without constantly judging myself for them. Slowly, I became more open, more confident and more comfortable with not knowing exactly what would happen next.

That changed the way I think about leadership. I used to connect leadership mostly with confidence, taking charge and guiding other people. Now I see that it can begin much earlier, with self-awareness, self-trust and the ability to manage your own thoughts and emotions. My linocut represents that journey. The waves remind me that I cannot always control what is happening around me, but I can learn how to move with it. The lines represent different thoughts and experiences, while the sun represents moments of clarity.

Together, they remind me that self-leadership is not about having everything under control. It is about choosing how I respond and continuing to move forward, even when the path is uncertain.



CARVING ORDER OUT OF CHAOS

EVA FROM CROATIA

We were planning a linocut workshop for the youth festival, and my group merged with workshops group so our activities would fit together.

The brainstorming felt good at first, ideas kept coming, we even connected linocut with a watercolor workshop – but underneath it we had nothing concrete.

Too many people, too many possibilities, no structure. We started adding ideas for the sake of adding them, drifting from the actual point: making a linocut. I could feel the gaps – who, how many, where, why – questions nobody had answered yet.

That's when I called for a split. I asked my department to separate from the workshops group so we could work on our own part and reassemble later.

It wasn't easy – everyone carried their own picture of how it should look, and giving equal weight to every detail felt impossible.

But once we divided we could finally sit with one idea until it was settled, hear each other, and move forward. We were working on the actual linocut again.

What I understood was simple: too many ideas without structure create chaos, and a group becomes productive once it breaks into parts that build separately and come together as one.

My linocut reminds me of this: you don't get a clear picture until you carve away what is excess.



LEARNING TO ADAPT

ANA FROM CROATIA

One moment when I experienced leadership was during an activity where we wanted to introduce young people to Erasmus+ exchanges.

Our original idea was to set up a station where people would answer questions from a questionnaire and then pick a random prize.



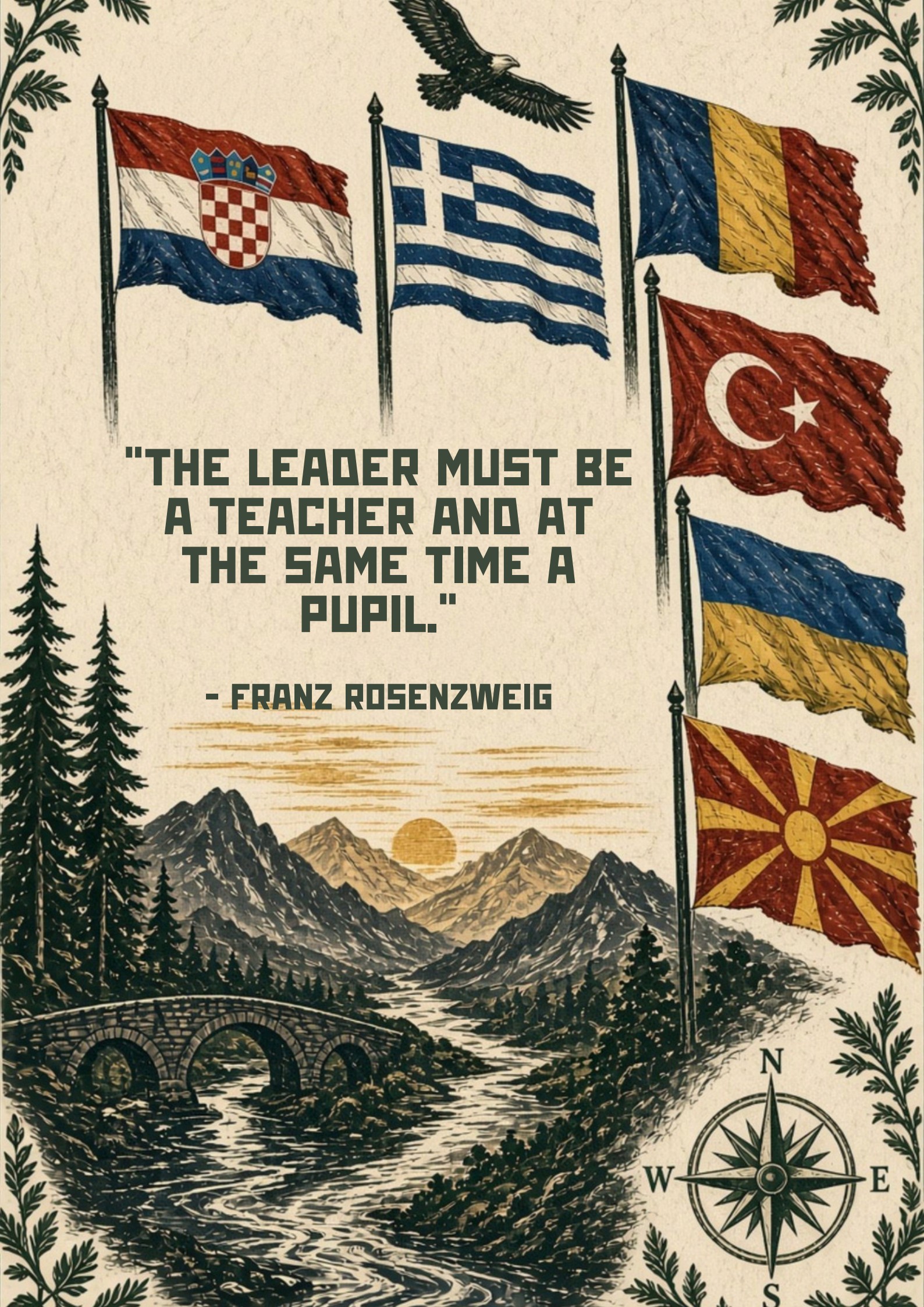
My role was to ask the questions, especially because I was one of the Croatian speakers.

However, it quickly became clear that many teenagers felt awkward and hesitant about approaching us. I felt a bit awkward and confused too, because I could not immediately gather my whole team to analyse the situation together.

Instead, I decided we needed to change the approach. Rather than waiting for them to come to us, we started approaching them with a small thank-you gift, sometimes even more than one, to motivate them to participate and, more importantly, to actually teach them something rather than simply test them.

After taking action, I saw that Dorotea or I had spoken to probably every young person in the room. I felt content and proud, especially because we reached more people and started more conversations about Erasmus+ and exchanges.

This experience taught me that leadership is not only about having a plan, but knowing when to adapt it. My linocut shows a cat, a quick and adaptable creature, representing the quality I want to develop in myself.



**"THE LEADER MUST BE
A TEACHER AND AT
THE SAME TIME A
PUPIL."**

- FRANZ ROSENZWEIG

FINDING MY OWN DIRECTION

DOROTEJA FROM CROATIA

During the Youth Festival, my group had prepared a quiz about Erasmus+ for the visitors.

The original plan was that we would take turns running it. Somehow, that did not happen, and I ended up running the quiz alone for an hour and a half.

At first, I was a little angry. We had created the activity together, and I had not expected to be responsible for it by myself for so long.

But people kept coming, so I simply continued. I explained the quiz, talked to the visitors and saw that they genuinely enjoyed participating.

By the end, my frustration had turned into pride. I realized that I was the person who had brought Erasmus+ closer to those visitors through something simple and interactive.

This experience showed me that leadership does not always start with deciding to lead. Sometimes circumstances put you in a position where you simply continue, adapt and take responsibility.

During the linocut workshop, I created a frame for my group's work using separate pieces of linoleum. For me, those different pieces coming together represent leadership.

It is not one perfect piece or one person doing everything, but different contributions becoming part of something bigger.



MY LEADERSHIP MOMENT

PAULA FROM CROATIA

One specific moment that taught me something about leadership was when we had to create a poster using our linocut prints within a limited time frame.

We had to gather people, organise and distribute the materials, and make sure everything was done on time.

At that moment, I was already very tired, so having a strict time frame and seeing that only a few people were joining quickly became overwhelming and stressful. I had expected more people to show up and take responsibility, and I found it difficult to stay calm instead of becoming frustrated or passive-aggressive.

What I learned from that situation was that as a leader, I cannot control how much other people participate, but I can control how I react. In the end, some people who had not joined took responsibility for their absence, apologised and reflected on what happened. After that, I noticed more engagement from the group.

It made me realise that leadership can appear in a million small situations, not only when someone officially puts you in charge. Sometimes leadership means taking things step by step, with yourself first and then with others. I don't have to carry everything on my own. I can ask for help, distribute responsibility and trust people to take their part.

My linocut represents this experience because I struggled with the lack of time and stress so much that I temporarily lost my inspiration. For me, this connects to burnout in leadership. When you put too much pressure on yourself and feel responsible for everything, even something creative can become a source of stress instead of inspiration. It reminded me that being a good leader also means knowing your limits, staying grounded and making space for others to contribute.



LEADERSHIP LEAVES A MARK

ANA-MARIA, THE TEAM LEADER FROM CROATIA

One moment during this youth exchange that really taught me about leadership was when our group had to deal with a difficult situation and decide to remove one person from the project.

As this was my first time being a group leader, it was stressful and unexpected.



I had always tried to be someone my group could rely on, but suddenly leadership felt much more serious. I knew our decision could affect everyone, so I tried to stay calm, listen to different opinions and help us reach the best decision possible.

I realised that leadership is not always about easy or fun moments. Sometimes, it means having difficult conversations and taking responsibility when you would rather avoid them.

What helped me most was having a supportive team around me. We communicated, supported each other and handled the situation together.

I learned that a leader does not have to solve every problem alone. Sometimes, leadership means creating space for others to speak, listening and knowing when to rely on your team.

My linocut represents this experience because, like leadership, it involves pressure, patience and choices that leave a mark. But you do not have to make every mark alone. The final picture is created through all those small moments together.



THE HEART OF OUR SHARED STEPS

GIORGOS FROM GREECE

During a privilege walk game on our Erasmus+ youth exchange, we stepped forward whenever a question applied to us.

Watching the group spread across the room, I felt confused at first as the physical distance between us grew.

Seeing this gap made me realize how vastly different our backgrounds were. I stepped into the role of an observer who listens deeply, processing the silent stories of the group.

The sudden vulnerability in the room felt unexpected and heavy, making me doubt how we could bridge such a wide divide. Yet, as I looked at everyone, I decided to lean into empathy.

I began speaking openly about my own background during the reflection, encouraging others to share their truths too. This vulnerability changed the group dynamic, replacing the physical distance with deep trust.

I now understand that leadership does not require a specific background; it only requires the right mindset and a leader's heart. This experience connects perfectly to my linocut.

While every person's artwork was completely different, they all came together to create something beautiful and cohesive. We are diverse individuals, but with the right heart, we can work together to achieve any goal.

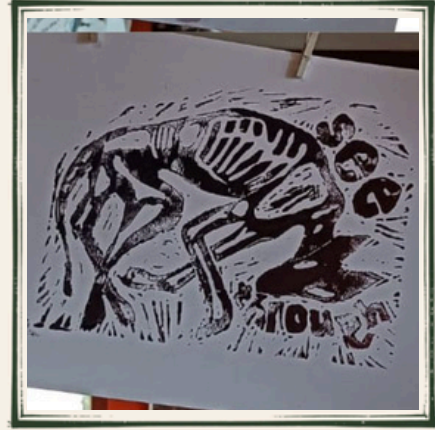


FINDING PEACE WITHIN MYSELF

NIOVI FROM GREECE

During a quiet moment watching the sunset, a deep sense of peace washed over me, and I realized that leadership is not about power.

It is about inner peace and being the leader of your own body.



I did not say anything.

I simply relaxed, felt good about existence, and took responsibility for my past actions while deciding to move forward without regret.

Inside, I felt true happiness, completely unbothered by other problems. My biggest challenge was controlling my emotions and preventing bad thoughts from taking over.

Unexpectedly, it proved easy because I felt firmly in control of myself.

That moment transformed how I see things and how I intend to treat myself and others from now on.

Before this exchange, I thought I would never feel peace in my heart, but this experience taught me that being at peace with myself is reachable and that I am getting closer to it every day.

My linocut of a transparent wolf with visible bones speaks directly to this moment: it shows an emotion that is completely transparent, hiding nothing, and simply being its true self.

SMALL BEETLE, BIG STRENGTH

SOTIRIA FROM GREECE

During a workshop, we were asked to create a short scenario involving roles such as "challenger", "creator" and "coach."

I feel awkward and sense a missed opportunity, as the topic feels a little simplistic.



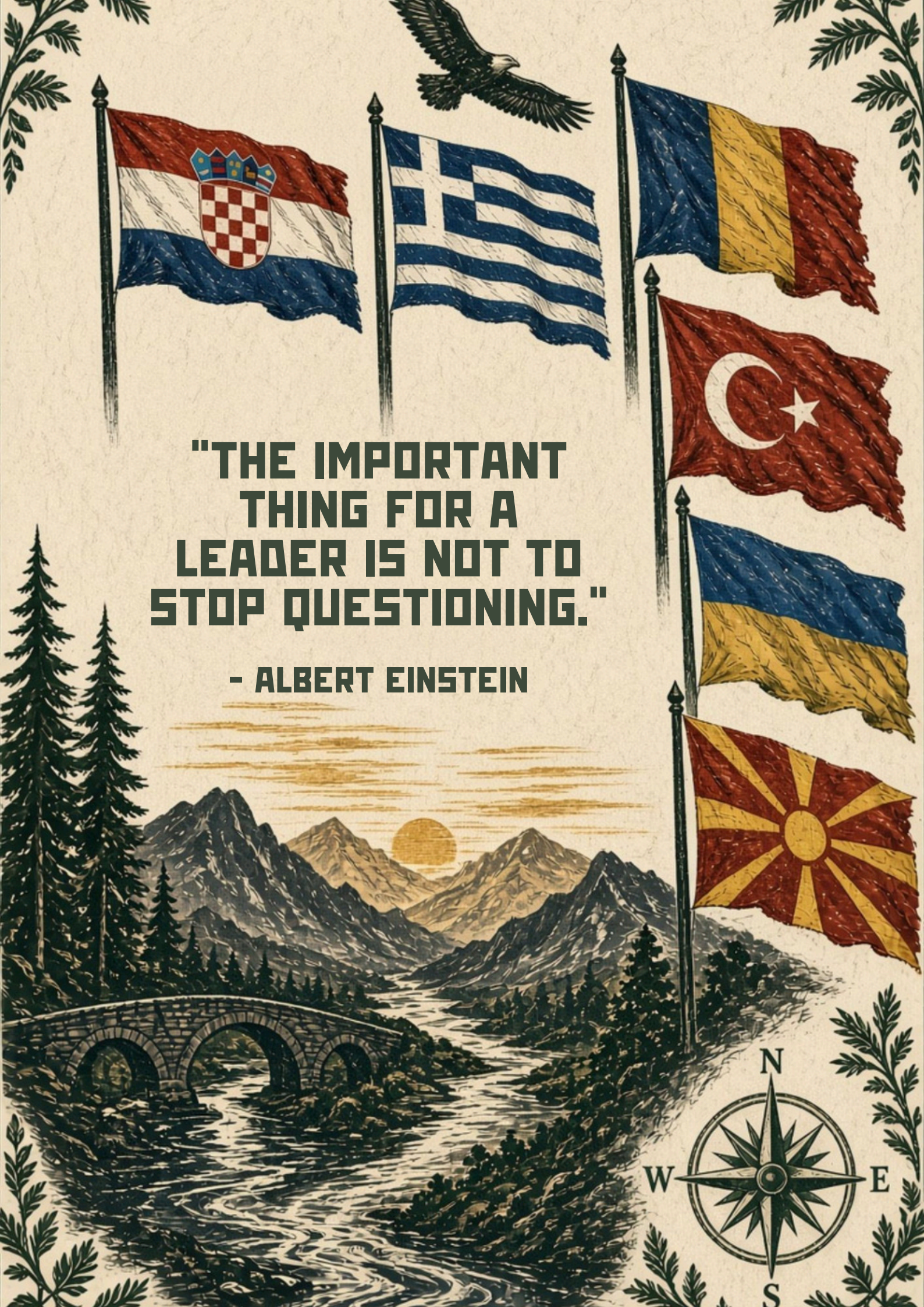
To be honest, I am starting to get bored and find it hard to take the activity seriously. However, instead of leaving, I choose to stay and participate in every activity.

The real challenge is maintaining a positive attitude and managing my inner frustration—as well as my annoyance that the workshops are held indoors rather than out in nature, which is truly stunning.

The Greek team, along with everyone else I've met, are good-natured; thanks to their humor, I'm beginning to relax and have fun.

This experience taught me that leadership begins with oneself and entails learning to handle demanding or awkward situations with responsibility, respect, and humor.

My beetle embodies exactly that. It is small yet remarkably resilient, capable of lifting far more than its own body weight. It is adorned with small designs representing values. Its vibrant magenta color serves as a reminder that true strength lies in resilience and adaptability.



**"THE IMPORTANT
THING FOR A
LEADER IS NOT TO
STOP QUESTIONING."**

- ALBERT EINSTEIN

FROM HELPING TO LEADING

GIORGOS FROM GREECE

One moment that made me think differently about leadership was when we welcomed the guests to the festival and took them through the different workshops.

I was part of the linocut team, but my role was more of an all-around helper.



I handed out pieces of linoleum, prepared and passed around the tools, and hung finished works up to dry.

What stood out to me was watching people who had never done linocut before. At first, some of them looked lost and unsure about what they were supposed to do. After we explained the activity and helped them get started, they slowly began creating their own work. Seeing that change was satisfying because it showed me that sometimes leadership is simply helping someone understand what they are capable of doing.

The festival itself went smoothly, which I think was mainly because of good planning. There were no major difficulties or unexpected problems. I felt happy throughout the day because the people around me were happy too. There was a cheerful atmosphere, with people even playing the piano.

This experience taught me that leadership does not always mean being the person in charge.

My linocut represents that idea: helping provide the tools and guidance, then giving others the space to create something of their own.



EVERYONE LEADS DIFFERENTLY

MARIA, THE TEAM LEADER FROM GREECE

I discovered during this exchange that everyone was a leader in their own way. Different styles, different outcomes. I noticed this especially from my position in the press team, where I was recording almost everything: people enjoying the activities at the festival, and those surprised looks when they realised they were actually good at linocut.



At times, I felt overstimulated and overwhelmed, but I was also happy to be there and capture what was happening. My phone almost exploded from constantly filming.

With so many things happening at the same time, I struggled to decide what to capture and what to miss. I couldn't record everything, no matter how much I wanted to.

Still, being there made me realise that my role mattered. Even though our team was supposed to capture every joyful moment of the festival, I hope some of the activities visitors experienced would not have been on camera if I hadn't taken the initiative to be there and record them.

This experience taught me something simple about myself: I am good at taking initiative. My linocut reflects that in a different way. It is made of things I like: stars, cats, hearts and spirals.

Maybe it represents something nice or spiritual: a collection of small things that, together, become something of my own.



CARVING OUT SPACE TO BE SEEN

SUDE FROM TÜRKIYE

We sat together in a circle of reflection, answering intimate questions about our fears and wants.

The guidelines were simple: speak from your heart, listen with your heart, talk spontaneously, and keep it lean.



Though there were no assigned leaders among us, I took the responsibility of going first and answering into the quiet room.

Speaking first left me feeling intensely vulnerable, but it opened up a deep sense of connection. As others shared, the weight of the circle shifted. It was difficult to confront the reality that while we all carry wounds, some battles are unimaginably heavier than others. While I was wrestling with anxiety about choosing my career path, other participants feared for their own lives and the safety of loved ones living through war.

I do not know if my opening words changed anything, but I listened with the intention of making others feel seen in their struggles and wants.

True leadership, I realized, is not just about leading or organizing. It is about recognizing everyone's needs and conditions, ensuring they feel understood. Much like carving my linocut, every cut and groove mirrors the fears, joys, and struggles that shape us—each mark necessary to reveal the complete artwork we are.



FINDING MY OWN VOICE

HAZAL FROM TÜRKIYE

At the beginning of the exchange, I thought leadership might mean being confident enough to take the lead, speak first and make decisions.

However, spending time with people from different countries made me see it differently.

I was in a completely new environment, communicating in English all day, and at first I was nervous about expressing myself or making mistakes.

Instead of waiting until I felt completely confident, I started participating more, sharing my ideas and listening to other people. I realised that I did not have to be the loudest person in the group to contribute.

Sometimes, simply being willing to communicate, cooperate and take responsibility was enough to make me feel like an active part of the group.

The experience also changed the way I see my own abilities. I became more comfortable speaking and expressing myself, even when I was unsure of my English. More importantly, I understood that leadership is not always about controlling a situation. It can be about listening, supporting others and creating space for different ideas.

I see the same idea in my linocut. I created something personal from an unfamiliar experience, and it represents what I am taking away from this exchange: the courage to participate, connect and leave my own mark.



A SMALL SCENE, A NEW RESPONSIBILITY

ENES FROM TÜRKİYE

During the youth exchange, one moment made me see leadership differently.

We created a short scene with three characters inspired by Muhteşem Yüzyıl: Sultan Süleyman, Hürrem Sultan and İbrahim from Parga.



They represented the creator, coach and challenger. I played Sultan Süleyman, the creator.

We had a scenario, but we did not stick completely to the script. While acting, I shared my opinions with my friends and changed some important parts, including some sentences. The group adopted my changes, and this made me feel a sense of direction and responsibility. For a moment, I felt a little like a team leader because my decisions affected how the scene developed.

Acting in front of people was exciting. I was worried that I might not be professional or funny enough, but I became more comfortable than I expected. Seeing that people liked our little scene made me feel that taking responsibility does not always mean having everything planned perfectly.

I learned that leadership can also mean being willing to make decisions, adapt to the situation and trust yourself when the original plan changes. My linocut represents this experience for me: taking an idea, shaping it with my own decisions, and accepting that the final result can become something different—and better—than the original plan.

THE PRIMITIVE ART OF LETTING GO

RANA FROM TÜRKIYE

On day three, during the heart of the leader sharing circle, we looked into a mirror. I was deeply confused, overwhelmed by the project and the last few months.

I realized that reading the room too much makes me an anxious leader who constantly tries to fix everyone's problems.

While walking in the forest, I accepted how exhausting it is to always find commonalities. Because of my personality, I naturally feel all the emotions in the room, unable to help myself or differentiate my own feelings from those of the people around me.

Internally, I was terrified. My raw feelings completely clashed with my life vision and smart goals, yet I didn't even understand what I was actually scared of.

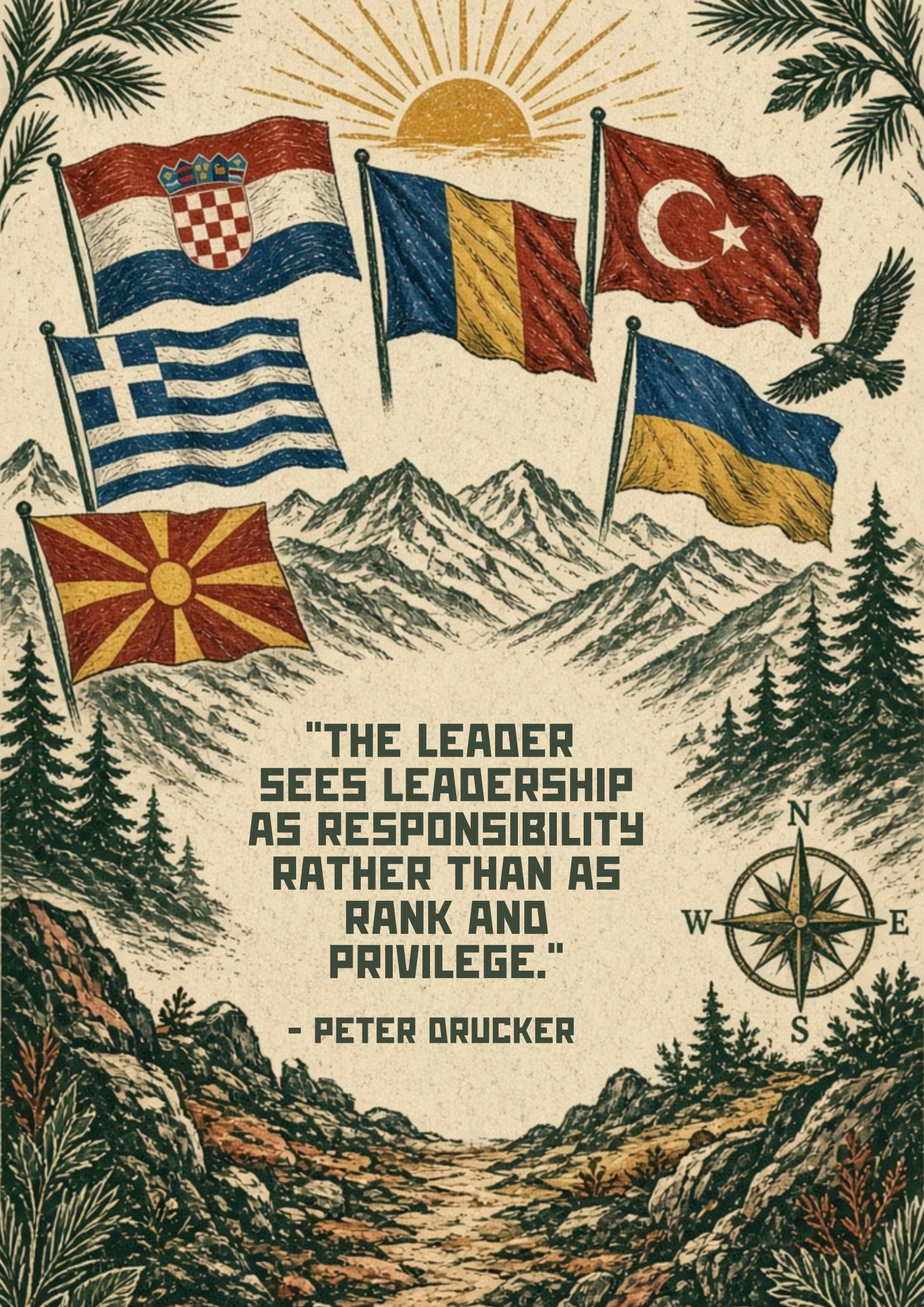
Instead of fighting this dilemma, I took responsibility to simply listen to myself. I cried in front of the group, letting my body release the buildup.

In response, people shifted into a supportive position, which allowed me to open up and welcome my true inner self.

This taught me the empowerment triangle: I must create, co-operate, and support myself regularly, taking actionable steps rather than overthinking the roots of my thoughts.

My primitive linocut mirrors this experience perfectly. Lacking fine motor skills, I made something that didn't even look like an artwork; it was confused and shattered, exactly like my thoughts had been.





**"THE LEADER
SEES LEADERSHIP
AS RESPONSIBILITY
RATHER THAN AS
RANK AND
PRIVILEGE."**

- PETER DRUCKER

THE PERSON BEHIND THE SILENCE

MELIS FROM TÜRKIYE

During the youth exchange, I noticed that one person in our group was very quiet.

They rarely spoke during activities, and at first, I thought they might simply be shy or not interested in joining the group.



One day, I decided to approach them privately and talk to them. I did not want to pressure them, so I simply gave them space to speak if they wanted to.

During our conversation, I learned that they were going through a very difficult personal situation. This was unexpected because I had completely misunderstood their silence. I realized that there could be reasons behind someone's behaviour that we cannot see from the outside.

I mostly listened and tried to be supportive without judging or trying to solve their problem. After that conversation, I looked at them differently, but I also became more careful about judging other people.

This experience taught me that leadership is not always about being the loudest person or taking control.

Sometimes, leadership means noticing someone, listening to them and giving them a safe space to be heard.

My linocut was not directly connected to this experience, but this moment became something I will remember from the exchange.



LEADERSHIP IS ABOUT BEING PRESENT

ASLI FROM TÜRKIYE

During the Erasmus+ exchange, I started to understand leadership as something much more personal than I had imagined. One of the activities that affected me most was exploring the Drama Triangle and the Empowerment Triangle. We looked at Victim, Aggressor and Hero, and how these roles can transform into Creator, Challenger and Coach.



What fascinated me was that these roles were not fixed. How can one person be a Hero, Aggressor or Victim full-time? We can move between them depending on the situation, and sometimes the difference between helping and rescuing, or challenging and blaming, can be very small. This made me question what being a leader actually means.

I realized that leadership does not have to look the same for everyone. It is not only about business, authority or being the person who gives directions. For me, it is more about being present. Anyone can simply exist in a space, but there is a difference between being there and making your presence meaningful. A leader does not necessarily have to be the loudest or the person in charge. Different people can lead in completely different ways. The eight key competences also showed me that leadership can grow through communication, social learning, cultural awareness, entrepreneurship and other everyday skills.

Finally, the linocut workshop brought these ideas into my hands. Through taking initiative, patience, sharing and learning by doing, I created something of my own. My linocut reminds me that, just like leadership, it does not have to be perfect or look like anyone else's. What matters is the meaning and presence we create through it.

A BUTTERFLY CAN LEAD

ARDA, THE TEAM LEADER FROM TÜRKIYE

This project made me realize that leadership is not only about leading a group.

It is also about respecting people's opinions and choices, protecting their boundaries, caring about their safety and personal needs, and guiding them when they need you.



During the project, there was a moment when an issue made many participants, especially people from my team, feel uncomfortable. Instead of staying silent, I decided to speak clearly about it and take the initiative to make sure something was done. But inside, I kept asking myself: How much should I just be Arda, and how much should I be a coach? When should I step in, and when should I step back?

The hardest part was the conversation with my own conscience. Even when my logic told me I was one hundred percent right, I still wondered whether I was doing the right thing.

During my workshop, seeing people have fun while going through an experiential learning process from beginning to end made me feel really good. And seeing people feel safer and more comfortable after I acted was meaningful to me.

I learned that leadership cannot look the same everywhere. Communication, action and timing all need to adapt.

That is why my linocut is a butterfly: flowing, colorful and full of emotion, able to change and adapt while still knowing when to give direction.



LEADERSHIP IN OUR OWN WAY

ANASTASIYKA FROM UKRAINE

During the Erasmust+ youth exchange, we faced the task of making a model and a dress which should represent a leader. Standing there with everyone, I realized that we are all leaders there, but in our own way.



At first, we all had some ideas of our own, which felt a bit scattered and overwhelming with so many different directions. But instead of pushing just one vision, we gathered these diverse ideas into one shared creation.

Inside, I was happy that we had a lot of ideas and made something creative and incredible together. We combined our perspectives, listened to each other, and blended our unique thoughts into the final dress and model.

This experience taught me that leadership isn't about one person taking total control or having every single answer.

True leadership happens when a group brings their distinct voices together, trusting each other's creativity to build something greater than any of us could manage alone.

If my linocut could speak, it would talk about this exact harmony—how different carved lines and individual marks come together on the block to form a single, powerful picture, proving that we lead best when we create side by side.

TRUST, NOT JUST FOLLOWING

RUSLANA FROM UKRAINE

I have often found myself taking the lead at school and university. One example was organizing a charity fair. I was responsible for bringing people together, creating workshops and interesting locations, making sure we had everything we needed, arranging the time and place, and spreading information about the event.



At times, I was angry because I felt that if I did not take responsibility, nobody else would. Many people wanted the fair to happen, but they were afraid of taking responsibility, so I felt like I was the only person capable of making it work.

It was not always easy. Some people cancelled on the last day or did not complete what they had agreed to do. We also had conflicts about how the fair should look. Others wanted to make it easier, while I wanted to make it really good.

I learned to deal with these conflicts by listening to other people's ideas and thinking about how we could improve or combine them so everyone could be satisfied. Usually, it worked. That experience changed my understanding of leadership. A leader is not simply someone people follow. A leader is someone people trust with their ideas and believe can transform them for the better.

My linocut looks like a planet, a symbol of the world. For me, it represents the idea that leadership can open the whole world to you—if you know how to handle it.

THE FIRST STEP WE SHARED

ANASTASIIA FROM UKRAINE

One of the first tasks of the project was to design clothes around the theme of leadership. For the first time, I found myself in a team made entirely of foreigners, and I was not sure what to expect.

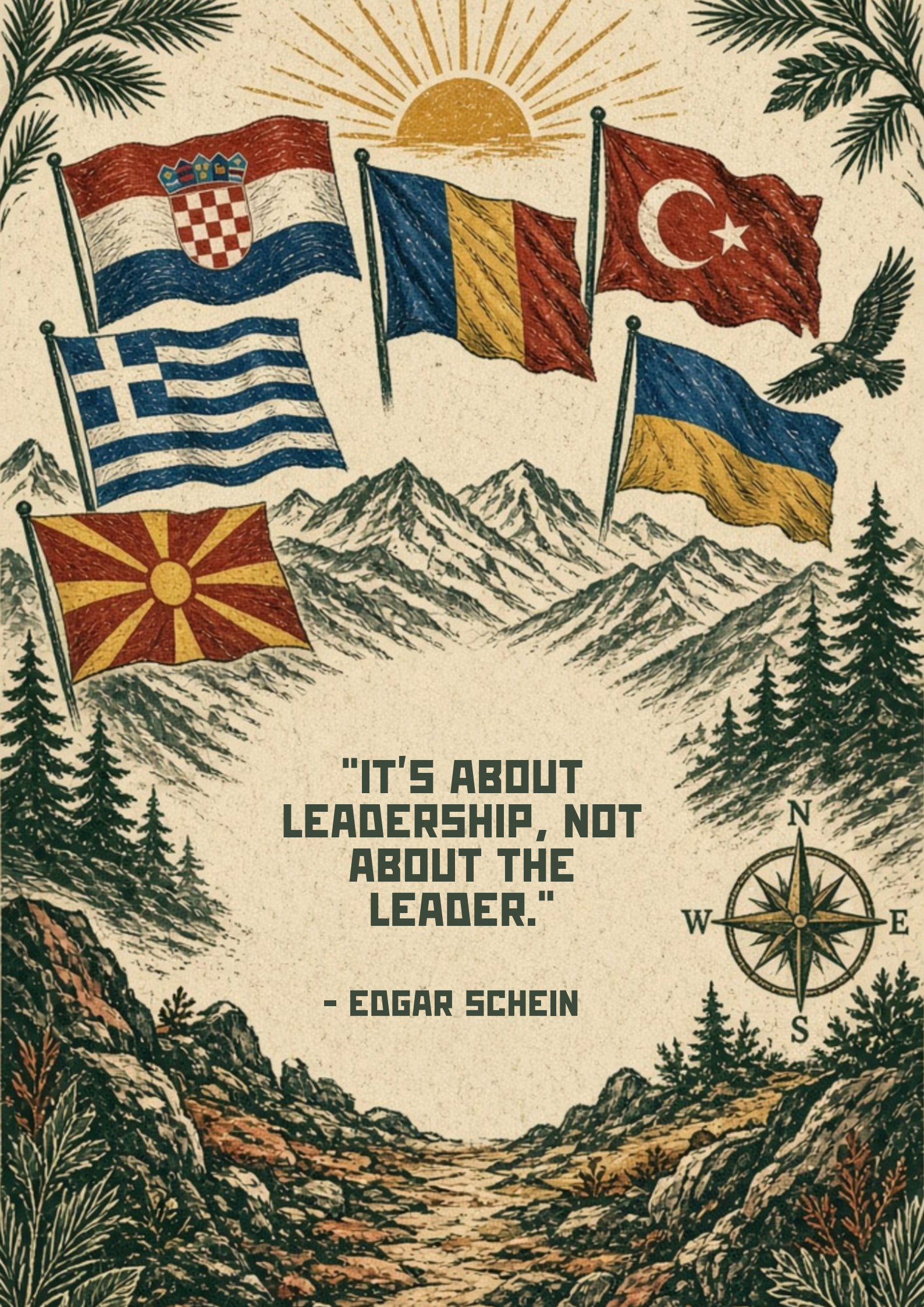


I was stressed and a little lost because I did not fully understand the task or how to communicate my ideas.

I decided to simply start throwing out different ideas, almost jokingly. Then something unexpected happened: the others picked them up and developed them further. Step by step, we found our way to an image, a slogan and a story for the dress we were creating.

The difficult part was not only understanding each other, but also finding quick solutions when something did not work, while making sure I did not take everything on myself. We were all confused at first, but soon we were working with inspiration and joy. I remember thinking, "Wow, we are such a good team." Everyone found their place, and I was happy to find mine too.

I learned that leadership is not about being the one in charge. Sometimes it is simply taking the first step and giving others space to add their own. My linocut feels the same: one shared language, countless ideas, many details coming together to create something whole.



**"IT'S ABOUT
LEADERSHIP, NOT
ABOUT THE
LEADER."**

- EDGAR SCHEIN

LEARNING THAT LEADERSHIP MEANS SPEAKING UP

SOFIA FROM UKRAINE

During this Erasmus+ youth exchange, one situation made me think differently about leadership. We were working as a team, but I noticed that some people were not very active or involved in the activities.

In the end, most of the work was done by only a few people in the team.

Of course, this was not easy for us. We wanted everyone to participate and contribute, so we felt disappointed when this did not happen. At the same time, we decided not to say anything. We did not want to create conflict or make the situation uncomfortable for anyone. Instead, we simply took on more responsibility and continued working.

At that moment, I thought that avoiding a difficult conversation might be the easiest way to keep the team together. But looking back, I understand that leadership is not only about doing your own part or taking responsibility when something goes wrong. It is also about being able to speak honestly when something is not working.

This experience showed me that silence does not always protect a team from conflict. Sometimes, an open conversation can help people understand their responsibilities better.

My linocut now represents this experience for me: leadership is not about doing everything yourself, but about creating space for everyone to take part.

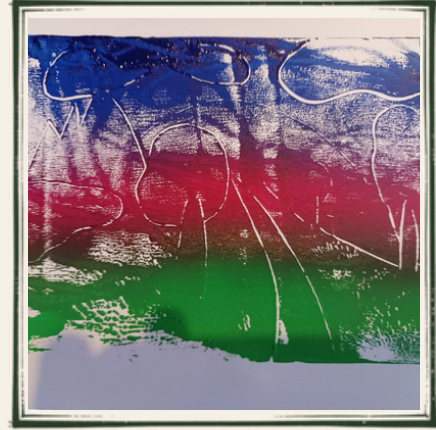


A SMALLER TEAM, BETTER ORGANIZED

ARTEM FROM UKRAINE

During the festival, I was part of the support team responsible for making sure everything was running smoothly.

At some point, I noticed that several people in our team were not really doing anything, while the rest of us were handling most of the work.



It became clear that we needed to organize ourselves better and manage the festival with fewer active people. I helped redistribute the responsibilities between the people who were actually involved and focused on making sure the important tasks were covered.

At first, I felt frustrated because the situation seemed unfair, and I was not sure whether we would manage everything with a smaller team. But I realized that complaining about the situation would not solve it. We had to adapt and work with what we had.

In the end, we managed to provide the support the festival needed. This experience changed how I understand leadership. I learned that leadership is not about doing everything yourself or simply having more people. It is about recognizing the situation, taking responsibility and helping the group work effectively.

I see the same idea in my linocut: separate elements can create one strong result when they are connected and organized. For me, it represents how a group can achieve more when everyone who is involved contributes to the common goal.



THE MOMENT I LET SOMEONE LEAD

MARYNA FROM UKRAINE

During one of our activities, we were creating costumes together. Ana suggested a really good idea, and everyone supported it.

Then she took the initiative and divided the tasks between us, deciding who would do what.

In that moment, I saw her becoming a leader—not because someone gave her permission, but because she had an idea and was ready to take responsibility for it.

My role was first to support her and help with the process. Later, I also took on a leadership role when I presented why we had chosen a particular colour and why we had created the design in that way.

I felt inspired because I saw someone next to me developing and confidently taking the role of a leader.

One challenge was making sure that the whole team was involved. Supporting Ana helped her stay motivated, and she also encouraged others to participate in the work.

This experience taught me that I do not always have to be the leader. Sometimes, leadership means stepping back and giving someone else the space to lead.

Our linocut represents the same idea. One picture was divided into six parts, and each person created their own piece. For me, it shows that a strong project is made of many small, strong parts.



LEADING THROUGH THE CHAOS

ARTEM, THE TEAM LEADER FROM UKRAINE

During the youth exchange, I discovered an unusual side of leadership: guiding my team in sending controversial messages to our Ukrainian Telegram group, where our coordinator could see them, wonder what was happening in the project, and hopefully get a bit shocked.



My role was to help the team choose our content carefully. We wanted to confuse the coordinator, but there was a fine line between being ridiculous and going too far. I enjoyed the process, especially because the team shared my feelings.

Still, I had no idea how our coordinator would react. Would she laugh, or would she scream at us? We also had our doubts about which visual content should we send, and spent a lot of time discussing what should we blur or not, having true team-building and brainstorming activity.

So far, we had not crossed the line, since we were working together on it. And something changed within our team. We became more open, and the group dynamic significantly improved. We became true friends that were not afraid to discuss our wildest fantasies and to share them among ourselves.

And I learned something about managing people: you need to feel the group dynamic, and guide it to the needed direction. Going against the group will not help you lead it.

My linocut reminds me of this experience. It says that even a mystical beast can be a beautiful and real creature. Perhaps leadership is like that too: something unexpected, strange, and genuine.



LEADERSHIP IS A TEAM EFFORT

DARIA FROM ROMANIA

During the youth exchange, the workshops helped me understand myself and become more confident. One moment that stayed in my mind was during the workshop we spent in the park, where we had to work together with other participants and share our ideas about solving some tasks.



At first, I was a little shy because I was afraid that my ideas might not be good enough. I usually preferred to listen rather than speak. However, the workshop encouraged everyone to participate, so I decided to speak and share my opinion on maybe solving the problems more easily. I also listened carefully to what the other people in my group were saying, we were also time pressed.

As we continued working together, I realized that everyone had something valuable to contribute. I felt more comfortable and started communicating more with the group i was in. I understood that I didn't have to be the loudest person or be in charge to be a leader. I saw leadership as more of a team work , a participative leadership. We were taught about it during the academy

This experience taught me that leadership is also about listening, supporting others, communicating, and having the courage to share your ideas. This workshop has helped me become more confident and showed me that I can make a positive contribution to a group.

When I think about this experience now, I see leadership differently. A leader is not someone who simply tells others what to do. A true leader contributes with everyone around him.

EVEN LEADERS MAKE MISTAKES

DURI FROM ROMANIA

Once upon a time, there was a youth exchange, one that taught the participants how to become leaders and guided them about leadership.

Today, we will see a moment from this exchange that changed someone's perspective for the better. He is the Joker Duri, one idiot participant who likes to make fun of himself.



One day, Duri went to a youth festival, where he needed to play the guitar with one of his teammates, Princess Daria. They prepared two songs and went for the show.

But somehow, Joker Duri made some mistakes during the performance, and then he was embarrassed. He left the room so disappointed in himself, so uncertain of his performance.

Princess Daria and Queen Cristina came with him to talk to him, but he was ashamed.

Then, he was reminded by Queen Cristina of something: that wasn't a failure. It sounded beautiful, even if Duri knew his mistakes.

After that, our Joker remembered one important lesson: in life, even if you fail, a leader should stay strong and somehow go through every obstacle possible. Some mistakes don't change your role or your knowledge.

After that, they played the second song, and everything went well.

And they lived happily ever after.

SPEAKING FROM THE HEART TO LEAD

ALEX FROM ROMANIA

During an Erasmus+ reflection workshop, tension hung heavy in the room.

Everyone was arguing about project roles, trying to sound composed while masking their rising frustration. As the group turned to me for direction, my chest tightened.



A quiet voice inside seemed to whisper, what's your name? – reminding me that beneath all the formal roles, I was just a human being trying to connect. Taking a deep breath, I decided to stop managing the surface and simply speak from my heart.

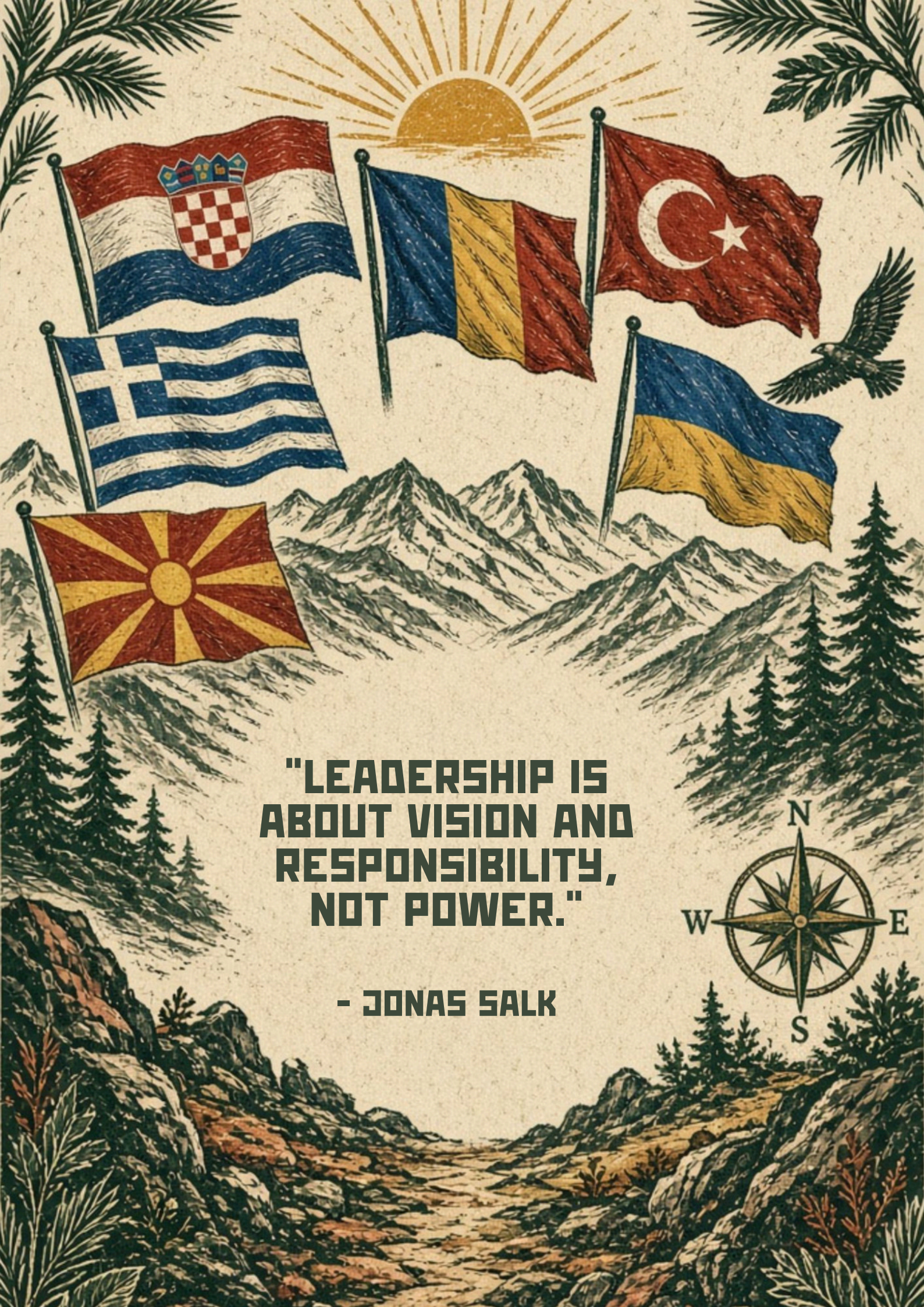
I dropped the formal tone, let my voice tremble slightly, and openly expressed my genuine feelings: my fatigue, my fear of failing the team, and my deep desire for us to connect. I let my emotions be visible instead of hiding them behind a brave face.

The shift was immediate. The room softened, and one by one, others dropped their guards to share their own feelings.

By allowing myself to be vulnerable, I unlocked a deeper layer of trust across the entire group. This moment taught me that leadership isn't about possessing all the answers or maintaining emotional distance; it is about having the courage to lead with heartfelt honesty.

My linocut, with its raw, carved cuts revealing light beneath the dark surface, speaks this exact truth: real strength comes when you dare to expose what is inside.





**"LEADERSHIP IS
ABOUT VISION AND
RESPONSIBILITY,
NOT POWER."**

- JONAS SALK

BOUND BY LOVE, ROOTED IN CONNECTION

ANA FROM ROMANIA

During this Erasmus+ youth exchange, I stepped into leadership not by taking control, but by opening my heart completely.

Being surrounded by new people in an unfamiliar environment was deeply moving, yet I took on the responsibility of bringing us together, creating space for authentic connections, and helping everyone feel seen.

Inside, my heart was overflowing with gratitude and a profound sense of warmth as I watched strangers slowly transform into lifelong friends.

The main challenge was navigating the unknown—putting myself out there, bridging different backgrounds, and trusting that vulnerability would lead to trust.

By choosing to lead with empathy and openness, the dynamic around me shifted entirely.

The atmosphere grew warmer, barriers dissolved, and our shared moments became unforgettable memories.

This experience taught me that true leadership isn't about giving orders; it is about leading with love, fostering genuine connection, and leaving a lasting impact on others' lives.

If my linocut could speak, it would point to its stitched heart and deep roots, saying that leadership is about holding people together and letting love anchor every action you take.



FROM KNOWLEDGE TO LEADERSHIP

FABIAN FROM ROMANIA

When I started posting trading videos on YouTube, I slowly built a community of people who followed me because they wanted to learn how to become profitable traders.

For the first time, I found myself in the position of being their mentor, with the responsibility of teaching them how to read the market and showing them a possible path forward.

I felt confident because I already had a lot of experience in trading. What was difficult, however, was understanding how to actually be a leader.

In the beginning, I didn't really know how to speak like a leader or how to behave like one.

I had the knowledge, but I had to learn how to communicate it and guide other people effectively.

As I gained experience, that changed. I became more aware of the responsibility that comes with influencing other people's decisions and progress.

I realized that leadership is not simply about knowing the way yourself.

When you want to guide someone, you need to understand exactly where they are starting from and exactly where they want to go. Otherwise, you cannot truly help them.

My linocut represents this journey: going from A to B, from zero to one hundred. For me, it represents not only progress, but the path of helping someone move forward.



LEADERSHIP IS NOT ABOUT SELF

CHRISTINA, THE TEAM LEADER FROM ROMANIA

Leadership is a state of mind—a space I sometimes step into to help others fulfill their tasks or realize their potential.

I truly discovered this while facilitating a workshop.



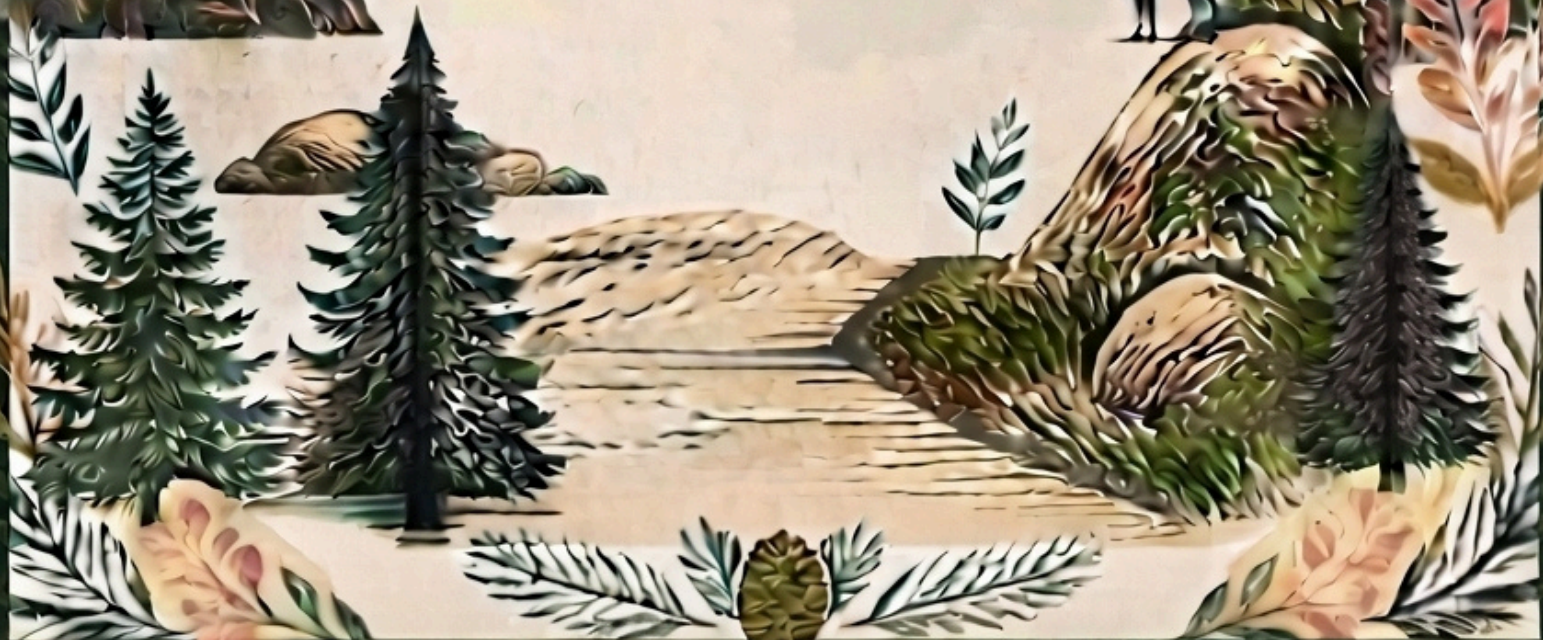
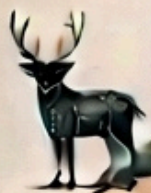
At first, I felt a bit anxious, even though the focus was on leading from the heart, which is something that comes naturally to me.

Perhaps the hardest part was the vulnerability of expressing my feelings in front of everyone. To my surprise, it wasn't difficult at all; the crowd was incredibly receptive.

This experience shifted the children's perception of me, and it taught me that leadership, for me, means being gentle and completely authentic.

I also realized that I don't need to have all the answers or control every moment to create a meaningful experience.

Sometimes, simply being present and trusting the people around me is enough to move things forward. If my intuition could speak, it would say that, ultimately, a leader is the biggest heart in the room—someone who creates the space and the path for others to join.



CREATIVITY BECAME MY LEADERSHIP

KRISTINA FROM NORTH MACEDONIA

During the Youth Festival, I found myself in a situation where I could use something very natural to me: creativity.

I was painting faces, one after another, and connecting with people through art.



It was a simple activity, but it made me think differently about leadership.

My role was not to stand in front of everyone and tell them what to do. Instead, I took responsibility for what I could bring to the festival. I used my skills as an artist and contributed in my own way.

Painting so many faces meant being present with many different people, adapting my creativity each time and continuing to give my energy to the activity.

This experience showed me that leadership does not always have to be loud or obvious. Sometimes it can be about recognizing what you can offer and actually offering it. I could contribute through something I know well, while still being part of a much bigger experience shared with others.

My linocut connects naturally to this moment. It shows me surrounded by nature, almost becoming part of it. For me, it represents being present in the experience while still remaining myself.

At the festival, I did the same thing: I entered a shared space and brought my own creativity into it.

A SMALL ACT, A BIG IMPACT

MIRO FROM NORTH MACEDONIA

One of the moments that stayed with me during this Erasmus+ youth exchange was when I showed kids how to make a linocut.

I taught them how to use the small knives safely and guided them through the process of creating something themselves.



I took the role of a mentor and leader, being the person in charge and helping them whenever they needed it.

At first, I was uncertain about how much the kids would enjoy linocut. I wondered whether they would find it interesting or difficult. But as they started working, I could see the pleasure on their faces.

They became happier and happier as they accomplished something new, exciting, and challenging. Seeing their reactions made me feel happiness, pleasure, and enjoyment. I also kept thinking about how much impact I could have on these kids simply by showing them something new.

This experience taught me that leadership does not always require something big. Simple actions can have a big impact on young minds.

Sometimes, being a leader means giving someone the opportunity to discover their creativity and express their feelings.

My linocut represents that feeling. If it could speak, it would say that it is as happy as I am because it helped young people express their feelings and creativity.



LEADING BAREFOOT

ANGIE FROM NORTH MACEDONIA

One of the moments when I experienced leadership during this exchange was during the barefoot walking session. I decided to walk barefoot, and somehow that simple choice motivated other people.

By being myself and bringing my own energy, I made most of the people feel comfortable with themselves and more willing to take part.

Inside, I was shocked and excited. I felt like a butterfly – free and appreciative. After everything we had experienced during the previous days, I also felt that the rest was something we needed.

What surprised me was how little I actually had to do. I did not need to tell people what to do or take control of the group.

My own interest and energy were enough to make people feel comfortable, motivated and inspired.

That experience taught me that if you have a real interest in something, you can do it with just a little courage. Sometimes leadership can begin with simply being brave enough to do what feels meaningful to you.

My linocut connects directly to this feeling. Nature gives me movement and inspiration. It makes me feel free, but it also reminds me to observe everything around me, be careful and take risks.

As someone who is brave and a nature lover, I somehow see myself leading in the forest – even while walking barefoot.





**"THE MANAGER
ACCEPTS THE STATUS
QUO; THE LEADER
CHALLENGES IT."**

- WARREN BENNIS

LEADING WITHOUT TAKING CONTROL

DAVID FROM NORTH MACEDONIA

Miro showed me that leadership does not always mean being the loudest person in the room.

During the Erasmus+ exchange, I noticed the way he approached people and the group, especially when something needed direction.

Instead of simply telling everyone what to do, he created space for people to participate and made the situation feel more organised.

Watching him made me think about my own understanding of leadership. I used to connect leadership mainly with taking control and making decisions for others. With Miro, I started to see it differently.

A leader can guide people without making everything about themselves. Sometimes it is more important to listen, notice what the group needs and help people move forward together.

What stayed with me was how leadership could influence the atmosphere of the whole group. It made me pay more attention to the small actions that can make people feel included and comfortable.

My linocut represents this experience because it is my way of turning that lesson into something visual.

For me, it represents leadership as guidance rather than control—a person helping others find their direction while still allowing them to choose their own path.



SEEING LEADERSHIP DIFFERENTLY

ANGELINA FROM NORTH MACEDONIA

During one of the activities, I noticed that leadership did not necessarily mean being in charge or delegating tasks.

While others were already taking action, I stayed more on the side and observed.

I am more of a "think first, act second" person, so I wanted to understand the situation before deciding what I should do.

At first, I felt shy and a little embarrassed. Most people were taking action before thinking too much about it, and I wondered if my approach would make me stand out. I was also uncertain whether what I was doing was actually right. Still, I kept observing and tried to look at the situation from different angles rather than immediately reacting.

In the end, nothing specifically changed because of what I did. Everyone contributed in their own way, and that became part of what I learned. Leadership is not always about one person taking control. Sometimes it means stepping back, paying attention, and recognizing that other people can lead too. A leader is not only someone who leads, but also someone who can find leaders in others.

My linocut shows an eye with a path inside it. For me, the eye represents how I observe and see the world, while the path represents my vision of the future and the direction I am learning to see.



LEADING WITH A MOCK INTERVIEW

BORJAN, THE TEAM LEADER FROM N. MACEDONIA

In Lipik, this small, ridiculously sweet town, I ran our video interview crew for the festival.

We split into two teams, one asking visitors what they expected before they came in, one catching them on the way out to see what actually stuck.

We needed a technical team for cameras and mics, interviewers who could work in English, backups in Croatian for anyone who'd rather not. And I pushed for one extra thing, stitching the microphones onto our linocut designs, so even the gear looked like it belonged there.

Part of me kept thinking this town deserved even more, but I let that go and just leaned into the day, face painting and wax-dipped eggs and quiz wins, while visitors stayed shyer than I braced for, so we let the festival do the talking first.

Then I volunteered to go first in an unrecorded mock interview, saying some genuinely uncomfortable, honest stuff, and after that nobody on the team seemed scared to ask a stranger a question again.

What stuck with me is that leadership isn't the person with the best slides or the fanciest title, it's whoever actually shows up and does the thing.

And my linocut, that semicolon hiding in a forest with a path curving up into the sun, says the same thing: not an ending, just a pause before you figure out which way you're walking.





A HUMAN BOOK, MADE TOGETHER



Every story in this e-book is completely human, lived and written by 42 young people from six countries during this Erasmus+ exchange and festival in Lipik.

We used AI to help assemble this e-book, not to create it. It helped connect 42 voices into one polished publication, but the stories, lessons and linocuts are entirely theirs.

What you carry with you now are their real reflections, not generated ones.

Thank you for reading them with the same care they were written with.





**EVERY STEP
YOU TAKE IS YOURS
TO CARVE YOUR PATH.**

