**VSS39 Rural is the new black!, Veliki Gaj 12/08 – 25/08 ENVI/CULT/MANU/STUD 12 vols 18+**

**Project:** This workcamp is organized for the first time, and it is a part of the project “We DO it NOW - A project to strengthen the cooperation between youth volunteering organisations in the Danube region”, funded through “Baden-Württemberg Stiftung“. The project is bringing together countries of the Danube region, the second longest and one of the most important rivers in Europe. It’s historic, social and economic importance for the development of the continent can be followed centuries back.

The goal of the project is to bring together young people from the Danube region into an intercultural environment and to raise awareness of the richness and similarities, as well as of the diversity in the Danube region.

The aim of the camp is to increase active citizenship and participation in rural area where the camp is going to take place, by bringing an international group of young people to work together with the local youth on restauration of the Great Park, small nature protected area in the center of the village.

Workcamp is located in one of the poorest municipalities in Serbia, where presence of international group of volunteers and their contribution can make a big difference.

**Partner**: Young Researchers of Serbia is a non-profit, non-governmental organization founded in 1976, whose main aims are environmental protection, environmental education, youth exchange and work with young people, as well as the promotion of sustainable development, scientific creativity and voluntarism. Our volunteer exchange programme alone exists for 29 years, through which we exchange over 1000 volunteers yearly and coordinate informal network of 10 voluntary service organisations in Serbia.

**Work** : The work in the camp will be very interactive. Restauration of the Great Park, established in late 18th century, will be one of the main activities. Alongside, participants will organize promotional activities for the local community on issues related to sustainability, mostly regarding the reasonable use of water, which is one of the biggest challenges in Serbia, where citizens use too much water for the gardens in the summer, which often causes problems with the supply of fresh water in villages. Finally, the participants will have an opportunity to work on the renewal of the garden of Magnet House and think of the ideas for sustainable vegetable production within the youth center. All the ideas about permaculture, different plants, growing of vegetables in the cold areas are welcome and strongly encouraged!

**Study part:** The key difference between this camp and many others is its educational component. During the camp, participants will have an opportunity to take part in couple of workshops regarding the borders, migrations and growing nationalism in Europe today. As Veliki Gaj is located right on the border with Romania, there are frequent issues with migrants who are trying to cross borders on their way from war affected areas towards Western Europe. One of this routes goes through Serbia and Veliki Gaj has witnessed several incidents in the past. Therefore, we would like to offer opportunity and space to discuss this important topic, and invite locals to join in, while using workcamp as a tool not only for the education for the volunteers, but also for the local community.

**Accommodation and food:** Volunteers will be accommodated in Magnet House, a newly opened educational center located in Veliki Gaj. Magnet House is built within a reconstructed aristocratic house used by the count in the beginning of the century. There are still remains of the lake in the Great Park where the countess used to swim. Magnet House has rooms for 35 people, toilets and showers, great dinning room and training rooms. Food will be prepared by the local host and by the volunteers, who will be supporting the cook.

**Location and leisure:** Veliki Gaj is a small village with a bit less than 500 inhabitants. It is located in a remote area, and it is only possible to be reached by the bus or a car. First bigger town, Vrsac, is located 20 minutes away.

Leisure: Veliki Gaj is surrounded by fields, forests and goats. One of the first neighbors has over 300 goats and produces one of the best goat cheeses you have ever tried. He also will have several horses and hopefully a riding school by the time the camp will start. Apart from all the rural delights, participants will have a chance to visit Vrsac, the biggest town of the region and one of the pretiest towns in Serbia. One of the possibilities available in Vrsac is also hikking tour to Vrsacki breg, which is just above the city, and one of the most popular places for paragliding and mountainbiking in the Balkans.

**Languages:** English

**Airport:** Nearest airports are Belgrade (Nikola Tesla) and Timisoara (Traian Vuia).

**Train station:** The closest train station is Vrsac (30 km away from Veliki Gaj). Closest bus station is Plandiste.

It is possible to reach Veliki Gaj bus, but they are running very seldom in summer time.

**Accessibility:** Camp site is fully accesible for participants with dissabilities.

**Notes:** Meeting point for the volunteers is bus station in Plandiste.

**Special Remarks:** Travel costs can be partly reimbursed with 50% up to a limit of 100€ per volunteer. Therefor you need to keep all your original travel tickets, invoices etc.