

ISLI – A Once In A Lifetime Experience

Sunday, 26th of February, in Oberwesel, Germany, opening ceremony in the main hall of the youth hostel: About a hundred students without a single idea what awaits them, listening to speeches about the week that will follow. They're being told that "this week will change you, you'll grow without noticing it" and that "time goes by differently at ISLI". Most of the students don't believe it to be true. But ISLI would prove them wrong

The International Student Leadership Institute – where to start? On the first day, when no one knew what it even was, we would be doing there exactly? The moment we met people our age from another country and started talking to them like one would with their friends at school? Or perhaps when we were pushed out of comfort zones without a warning? In truth, I have no intention of going through every single day, listing the program and every leadership skill that we were taught. But I will try my best to give an impression of the week!



A lot of the time we spent in the main hall during the day, listening to presentations on leadership, how you're able to not only perform well on tasks yourself but also how to help others and empower them to be better themselves. Our truly amazing regents gave us a whole toolbox to use in situations where a strong leader is required, so that we will be able to be precisely that. In the presentations there would always be a time in which we would go to the room of our color group, which you're assigned to at the beginning, and work on tasks there. The exercises always backed up the topic we were told about beforehand. After the group work, we had to present our results to the participants, teachers and regents. In the course of the week presenting and speaking in front of so many people became more and more natural,

and we all started being less embarrassed of ourselves, even when what we presented wasn't exactly an exceptionally good result.

But ISLI is much more than that. We had free time to get to know the people around us and sufficiently exchange highlights of our own cultures. There were other amazing activities like interest groups or the Olympics (a fun evening of competing against each other in sporty games). Every day was filled to the top with new experiences and when we had some minutes to ourselves, we sat together in the cafeteria and talked for instance. There was also the possibility of going to the music hall after lunch where we sat together every day and played each other songs, danced, recited poems, and often simply sang our hearts out altogether.

Looking back, the thing that had the greatest impact on me was the atmosphere we created there. It is something so entirely different to what you experience at school and you won't fully comprehend the feeling if you have not experienced it yourself! But to give an idea of it, it is an atmosphere of support, empowerment, cheering and for everyone and also relying on them. I always knew that absolutely no one was judging me, that I could always put myself out there, and it was welcomed and wanted. I got to know so many talented, creative, inspiring and interesting people. It was amazing to see that we created such a loving and cheerful environment during this week, which made everything afterwards feel boring and dull at first.

Thursday, 2nd of March, back in the main hall for the closing ceremony: I sat there, a smile on my face, content and tired from the week, and talked with my friend about how we had changed and we hadn't really noticed before. I realized how I had grown, how much I learned, and how dearly I would miss this week. We got pushed into cold water and greeted afterwards with the warm embrace of our very own community. We pushed our own limits, embarrassed ourselves to the point of it not being awkward anymore, laughed, sang, screamed, danced, and hung out together. Saying our goodbyes Friday morning, we cried in each other's arms over having to say goodbye to the friends we made along the way.

Amrei Falk, Jg. 12
05/2023