

Minutes of the 48th General Meeting Sherborne, April 11th – 14th, 2024

Partner towns present:

Agros, Altea, Asikkala, Bad Kötzting, Bundoran, Chojna, Granville, Holstebro, Houffalize, Judenburg, Köszeg, Marsaskala, Meerssen, Niederanven, Rokiškis, Rovinj/Rovigno, Sesimbra, Sherborne, Škofja Loka, Sušice, (Siret), Tryavna, Türi. (23).

Partner towns not present:

Bellagio, Preveza, Sigulda, Oxelösund, (Zvolen). (5).

The president of Douzelage, Mrs. Annigje Kruytbosch, thanks Sherborne from the bottom of her heart for organising the General Meeting (GM). Douzelage Sherborne has helped Douzelage very much by stepping in. We are all looking forward to a wonderful GM.

1. Opening of General Meeting

Mrs. Annigje Kruytbosch opens the GM and welcomes all delegations on behalf of herself and the vice presidents, Mette Grith Sørensen, Miha Ješe and Tibi Rotaru.

2. Approval of the Rovinj/Rovigno GM minutes

The minutes of the 2023 GM in Rovinj/Rovigno are unanimously approved.

3. Approval of the accounts 2023 (January 2023 - December 2023)

Mr. Harry Crombag presents the accounts of Douzelage for the year 2023.

Mr. Thorsten Wohleser (Judenburg) and Mr. Evelyn Koev (Tryavna) have served as auditors for the 2023 accounts. Mr. Wohleser and Mr. Koev propose to grant Mr. Crombag full discharge. The GM unanimously approves the accounts and grants full discharge.

Mrs. Josselyn de Vries (Niederanven) and mr. Jean Marc Juliën (Granville) will serve as auditors for the 2024 accounts.

4. Annual Douzelage membership

The presidency proposes to keep the annual fee for 2024 at € 350,-. The GM unanimously agrees. The invoices will be sent after the GM.

5. Social Media and PR

The president points at the Instagram page. To keep on publishing news, the page needs editors. Mr. Shane Smyth (Bundoran) publishes most of the news. If anyone is interested to join, please notify the secretariat of the presidency.

The link: <https://www.instagram.com/douzelage/>.

The same goes for the Facebook page. Mrs. Laura Gaul (Niederanven) will join as an editor.

To publish events on the Douzelage website, everyone is invited to send their reports on Douzelage events to the secretariat. Do not forget to include a few photos of the event, sent in high(er) digital quality.

6. **Past, ongoing and future projects/activities within our towns**

Bad Kötzing

In the town center of Bad Kötzing there are many vacant shops. These vacant shops have empty shopwindows that are free to use for Douzelage for promotion. There are four windows now adorned with posters of Douzelage.

Bundoran

St. Patricks Day was celebrated in Bundoran on March 17th 2024. Delegations from Granville, Meerssen and Škofja Loka joined in the celebrations. Laure and Jeff from Granville even carried the parade banner. The group also visited a number of tourist attractions local to Bundoran including the Gleniff Horseshoe, Mullaghmore Head and Glencar Waterfall.

Mr. Shane Smyth has taken the initiative to open a Spotify page for all countries in Douzelage. You can make a list of music that is produced in your country and open it for all interested. The link to these pages: <https://open.spotify.com/user/31z2ovfpwrchdh3hj6ussdb-jol5m?si=3CSfL1xHR-umxFXljjhrA>

Chojna

Projects by Chojna:

Career counselling, practical approach

Programme: Erasmus+ School Education

Coordinator: ZSP Chojna

Partners: Hungary (Köszeg), Poland, Romania (Siret), Slovenia, Turkey

Within this project materials are made for career counselling of students, teachers and parents. There is a toolkit for parents, a platform for all parties (teachers, students and companies) to offer lesson plans and to communicate and there are training videos published on Youtube on how to do job interviews, career counselling at home etc.

Internships without borders

Programme: Erasmus+ VET

Coordinator: ZSP Chojna

Partners: Malta (Marsaskala), Romania (Siret)

Students from technical universities, hotel management etc. are sent directly to companies to gain working experience. Our school in Chojna is probably the only one in Poland that sends students directly to companies. Students learn a lot more than only the working experience.

European Traineeships

Programme: Erasmus+ VET

Coordinator: ZSP Chojna

Partners: Italy, Malta (Marsaskala), Romania (Siret)

The above two projects run for more than 20 years, and we have sent more than 500 students to companies abroad.

Many thanks to Mr. Calleja (Marsaskala) and Mr. Rotaru (Siret) to make this possible.

My Job, my Future

Programme: Erasmus+ VET

Coordinator: ZSP Chojna

Partners: Hungary (Köszeg), Romania (Siret), Turkey

This project is also about exchange and career counselling.

Chojna has applied for two more big projects on Global Citizenship with the University of Bari (Italy) and one on Mythology with Köszeg (Hungary).

Mr. Cezary Salamonczyk (Chojna) encourages all towns to apply for projects under the Erasmus+ program.

Granville

- In March 2024 Granville participated in the Global Greening for St. Patrick's Day.
- The Carnaval Celebration in Granville is Unesco rated and one of the most musical and cultural events in Granville. In the past Sherborne has visited Granville's carnival and we would like to invite everyone to visit us during this event, especially Bundoran.
- Granville hosts more musical festivals. An example is the 40 years old Street music festival on June 21st.
- Granville has a large harbor that hosts more than 100 yachts. It is the number one Shellfish harbor of France. There is a museum on Christian Dior, and a festival called "Fishing on Foot" where shellfish are hunted on the beach.
- Granville organises a monthly video-meeting with a partner town. These sessions are called "Apéro Time". Granville invites more partner towns to join, and will send a paper in which towns can express their interest.
- Granville will celebrate Europe Day on May 9th. The Douzelage photos of the exhibition will be used there.

Judenburg

- Judenburg celebrates its 950th birthday on July 5th and 6th. Everybody is invited to join. Judenburg does not reimburse costs, but we can help to find accommodations.
- There will be an exhibition all over town on Youth in Europe. Member towns are invited to participate with their photos. Mr. Kerscher (Bad Kötzting) asks if the pictures are available afterwards. Mr. Wohleser (Judenburg) will send them digitally in a ZIP-file.
- On August 15th Judenburg organises the Puch-parade. Anything driving from the company Puch will do a 80km tour through the countryside. A few from Meerssen will attend.

Meerssen

Mrs. Irene Raedts (Meerssen) gives an overview of the past projects of Meerssen.

- A Douzelage Tree is planted in the Memorial Forest in Meerssen.
- On March 23rd the Benelux Meeting was held in Niederanven. Niederanven has erected a Douzelage Totem. The contacts between secondary schools in Niederanven, Houffalize and Meerssen are strengthened.
- The European flag is shown on Europe Day on May 9th.
- Mr. Herman Langenveld (Meerssen) shows a powerpoint presentation on the history of the project Via Douzelage, aimed at planning cycling tours around the towns of Douzelage. A delegation from Meerssen has visited Niederanven, Houffalize, Judenburg, Köszeg, Zvolen, Holstebro, Bad Kötzting, Rovinj and Škofja Loka over the years. Mr. Langenveld will end the project.
- Mr. Alexander Luns (Meerssen) shows a powerpoint on the youth project "Free Press under Pressure". 70 participants of 19 partner towns have discussed the subject of media literacy. A video of the project is shown. The partners in the project were United Nations University Maastricht, Studio Europa (Maastricht University), Europe Direct (Municipality of Maastricht), Fontys University of Applied Sciences (Pedagogics), Köszeg, Siret and the European program Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values. All information can be found on <https://fpup.douzelagemeerssen.nl>. The project was well received by the young adults that participated, and the EU called it "a very good project, in content as well as in reach".

The project taught us some lessons:

- The importance of involving young adults in Douzelage, letting them conduct their own process
- When involving Douzelage partner towns, translate their interest in a Letter of Intent
- Before finalizing your project, read the rules of the European Commission carefully, maybe involve a specialist.

- Meerssen will host a chess tournament in 2027. Everyone is invited to participate.

Niederanven

- Niederanven has a new mayor, Fréd Ternes and an organisation is being built to foster citizens participation. Citizens Teams around several subjects are able to develop ideas for the town of Niederanven. The organisation is shown on a powerpoint presentation. A whole new Douzelage Team is created.
- On March 23rd Niederanven hosted the Douzelage BeNeLux Meeting. During this meeting the new Douzelage Totem was revealed.
- Niederanven has made two Mercedes vans available for the project "Road to Ukraine". The handover of the vans is being planned for June 2024.

Sušice

- The Sušice Childrens Choir has visited Bad Kötzing and the Männer Chor from Bad Kötzing has given a joint concert with the Men's choir of Sušice in both towns.
- June 19th – 24th 2024 Sušice will organise the Young Musicians festival. At this moment 6 participants have registered: Rokiškis, Köszeg, Sesimbra, Zvolen, Sherborne and Holstebro. At the end of the festival an orchestra of all participants will do a concert. We have invited everyone. We would like to have the paper registrations complete, so please provide us with the necessary info if this has not been done yet.

Škofja Loka

- In Škofja Loka a new intercultural NGO centre is founded. All partner towns are invited to do an exhibition of their town there.
- The next Passion Play of Škofja Loka will be held in the Easter time in 2026. Everyone is invited to come.
- The Association of Elder People in Škofja Loka plans a visit for the members to one of the twinning towns, starting in Italy. In the future they may come to your town.

7. Presentations on the cultural and historical heritage of our towns

During the General Meeting in Rovinj/Rovigno all partner towns have given a powerpoint presentation of the preservation of their cultural and historical heritage. Rovinj/Rovigno has combined the presentations in a booklet, which is shown during this meeting. One can also download the pdf, which is on the Douzelage website: <https://douzelage.eu/2024/03/01/douzelage-cultural-and-historical/>

8. (Bus) project Road to Ukraine

Mrs. Annigje Kruytbosch introduces the Ukrainian town of Kamenets-Podolsky, which was visited by the presidency in 2023, under the guidance of Siret. The mayor of Kamenetz-Podolsky told us they mainly needed means of transport. There the project "Road to Ukraine" started. The presidency asked for donations within Douzelage to gather funds for small buses.

During the last GM in Rovinj/Rovigno an extra effort had been done. In all € 7.184,- was raised.

Niederanven, on top of that, brought in two Mercedes vans to donate to Kamenetz-Podolsky. An incredible gift, for which we are all very grateful. From June 12th to 18th a delegation from Meerssen, Niederanven, Sherborne, Bad Kötzing, Holstebro and Siret will drive the busses to Kamenetz-Podolsky for the handover. The money will be used for insurances, petrol, stickering of the busses etc.

What exactly will be done with the rest of the money will be decided upon in a later stage, when calculations are more definite.

Niederanven suggests to take medicines in the vans to Kamanetz-Podolsky. Meerssen has already a boxful of medicines for this purpose. The presidency thanks everyone who contributed, but with a special thanks to Niederanven for their enormous contribution.

9. **New candidate town from Slovakia**

As Zvolen has retreated from Douzelage, the presidency has been searching for a new Slovakian partner. The town of Senec is a strong candidate. Unfortunately they were not able to come to Sherborne. Instead, they are present in a Zoom-meeting. Present were Mr. Pavol Kvál, the mayor, and Mr. Gabor Klenovics, responsible for international relations in the municipality. Mr. Miha Ješe (Škofja Loka) gives a presentation on Senec. Senec has appr. 20.000 inhabitants. It is situated ca. 20km from Bratislava, therefore close to the borders of Hungary and Austria. It already has a town twinning connection with Köszeg. It has more than 20 restaurants and more than 70 pubs. There are also many hotels.

Mr. Klenovics tells about Senec, that it is a touristic area with lakes. The position is very good from a geographical standpoint. It has not so many historical buildings, although the town is 707 years old. He expresses his wish that Douzelage will welcome them, he looks forward to working together.

10. **Program for further meetings**

- 2025 Preveza (see point 11 on the agenda)
- 2026 Marsaskala, September 3rd to 6th. This meeting will be the 50th GM!
- 2027 Niederanven
- 2028 The town of Rokiškis volunteers to organise the GM! A warm applause from the GM.

11. **Presentation of Preveza and settling a date**

Unfortunately Preveza could not join the General Meeting. Mr. Leonidas Argiros, deputy mayor, is present via a Zoom-meeting. Preveza is one of the main touristic spots in the west of Greece. It is also one of the best preserved towns in Greece. Preveza would very much like to organise the GM of 2025.

The following is discussed:

- Preveza guarantees the GM of 2025 will be held in Preveza,
- It will be in autumn, the exact dates will be clear in about two weeks.
- A theme is not yet chosen, Preveza will send some suggestions to the presidency shortly.
- European funding is a council decision. If Preveza will apply for funding that will also be clear in a few weeks.

12. **Elections for a new presidency in 2024**

The new presidency will be elected during this meeting. The candidates have sent their letters of intent and a letter of recommendation drawn up by a town responsible (mayor), which are attached to the agenda of the GM. For every position there is only one candidate.

Mr. Shane Smyth (Bundoran, candidate for president) presents himself in a video and in words (Appendix I to the minutes). He is active as from 2014 and very much loves the spirit of Douzelage. He stands for the following pillars in a presidency: Transparency, Visibility and Sustainability.

Mrs. Maria Črnac Rocco (Rovinj/Rovigno, candidate for vice-president) has studied international diplomatic sciences and is a huge fan of the EU. She looks very much forward to contribute and bring energy to the presidency, she would be honored.

Mr. Evelyn Koev (Tryavna, candidate for vice-president) has a background in finances and accounting. He is young and enthusiastic and hopes to play a good role as vice-president.

Mr. Torsten Wohleser (Judenburg, candidate for vice-president) is a legal professional and vice mayor of Judenburg. He is looking forward to working on visibility and learning from each other and working together on solving problems.

The returning officer, Mr. Joe McNulty (Bundoran), received all votes from the towns present and gives the results:

Mr. Shane Smyth received 23 out of 23 votes and is therefore elected president of Douzelage.

Mrs. Maria Črnac Rocco received 23 out of 23 votes and is therefore elected vice-president of Douzelage.

Mr. Evelyn Koev received 21 out of 23 votes and is therefore elected vice-president of Douzelage.

Mr. Torsten Wohleser received 23 out of 23 votes and is therefore elected vice-president of Douzelage.

The General Meeting applauds for the new presidency. Mr. Shane Smyth thanks the General Meeting for their votes and support.

He thanks the team of Bundoran who have been very supportive. He is thrilled and honored to fulfil the role, together with his vice-presidents and all member towns. He also thanks the presidency, Mrs. Annigje Kruytbosch, Mr. Miha Ješe, Mrs. Mette Grith Sørensen, Mr. Tiberiu Rotaru for all the work done and the friendship, and also the people behind the scenes (Mr. Harry Crombag, treasurer, Mrs. Femie Kengen, secretary and Mr. Alexander Luns (Minutes, Webmaster)).

"Douzelage has given me my best friends and this illustrates how extraordinary this organisation is. Many thanks to team Sherborne who has, short on resources, done a fantastic job in organizing the GM."

13. **Any other business**

- Mrs. Agnes Lepold (Köszeg) points to the fact that the translation equipment costs money. Towns that organise a GM should anticipate on these costs. Mrs. Annigje Kruytbosch adds that the hosting town only pays for the translation booth, the presidency pays for the transport of the equipment, which is based in Köszeg.
- Mrs. Irene Raedts (Meerssen) reminds the GM that in 1993 Douzelage was awarded the Etoile d'Or in Brussels. She suggests to the new board to apply for a second time, as Douzelage has grown significantly and has set up many projects in Europe.

14. **Closing the General Meeting 2024**

The closing of this meeting is a special one for this presidency.

Mr. Miha Ješe thanks everyone for the past eight years. He has worked in the board in full spirit and mind and will be an active member in the future. He and Škofja Loka will support the new board in any way possible.

Mr. Tibi Rotaru states that it was a privilege to work for this board. We are not only partners in crime but also friends. He is also proud of the new board coming. If we can keep the Douzelage spirit alive there is a future for Europe.

Mrs. Mette Grith Sørensen thinks it is not a sad last day of the presidency. It has been six great years and two COVID years but enough is enough and she looks forward to a new presidency with younger ideas. It was a privilege to work as part of this team of friends.

Mrs. Annigje Kruytbosch is grateful for the years working with this great team. "It has taught me a lot and it was an honor to work hard and to keep Douzelage alive and kicking. Connecting to the younger generation is very important and it is of great value that we now have a younger generation in charge." She thanks everyone for the confidence and all the nice words that have been said these days.

"I have to thank Fay for the excellent translation work, the flower shop Castle Gardens, because of the beautiful plants, and all volunteers from Sherborne. I thank Harry for the hard and precise work on the finances, Femie for her support and Alexander for the minutes and Peter Rege for always taking care of the translation equipment."

Mr. Shane Smyth thanks the board on behalf of the incoming board and hands over a "Certificate of Appreciation" to each of the members. Then the outgoing board gives back a Certificate to all new members of the board.

Reports of all four workshops

Mr. Jeremy Barker (Sherborne) reports on the workshop on “Wellbeing through open spaces”. This workshop was meant for town councillors. The exchange of ideas was inspiring and this should actually be part of every GM in the future.

Mrs. Agnes Lepold (Köszeg) reports on the workshop on “Future projects within CERV and Erasmus+”. The participants shared their experiences and insights and what obstacles they had to overcome when writing their proposals. It was a very useful workshop. It was proposed that within Douzelage a group will support in writing projects.

Mr. Mike Balfour (Sherborne) reports on the workshop on “Future projects that do not require EU-funding”. This workshop focused on people and groups that travel. Why shouldn't they travel to Douzelage towns? All participants will try and motivate organisations who are interested in travelling to our towns and have an exchange. Sports teams, orchestras, choirs, special interest groups (history, art, drama). For the new board to consider, it may be an idea to organise a year of music, a year of sports, a year of drama so we can inform these groups two years in advance. It is the older groups that can afford to travel easier, but we should focus on younger groups as well. So we hope everyone will go back to their towns and try to motivate groups to participate. (See Appendix II)

Mr. Kevin Waterfall (Sherborne) reports on the workshop on “Wellbeing through nature”. “We had a very interesting keynote address, but also contributions from Sušice and Asikkala on what they do in their towns. It is important to have forms of funding and people across age groups who are willing to work on the ideas. In the UK there is no government funding, but a voluntary organisation called the University of the 3rd Age. There are many voluntary and community groups in Sherborne who work with seniors as well.”

Report on the 2024 Educational Meeting

Mrs. Riikka Penttilä (Asikkala), chair of the Educational Meeting, reports on the Educational Meeting 2024

Participants: 23 (representing 20 member towns)

Keynote speaker Joep Wolters: Well-being through nature and music from a neuropsychological perspective

The Education Meeting was opened by the keynote speaker Joep Wolters (Fontys University of Applied Sciences, Department of Pedagogy) from Meerssen, the Netherlands. He approached our topic, Well-being through nature and music, from a neuropsychological perspective. We were explained on the basis of strong scientific evidence how music affects and activates our brain, and is, in fact, strongly linked with well-being.

First, Mr. Wolters provided us with the framework and defined the notion of well-being. He explained us the PERMA model, which is a scientific theory of happiness by Seligman (2010). The model is based on the principle of five existing key elements to maintain happiness. These elements are positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment.

Wolters then explained the different ways music can be experienced. Listening to music activates the hedonic parts of our brain and dopamine is released as a response. When looking at the PERMA model, listening to music involves positive emotion, relationships and meaning. However, practicing and participation, in other words making music yourself, will also stimulate feelings of engagement and accomplishment in addition to positive emotion, relationships and meaning. All in all, music promotes well-being significantly.

Although the focus of the presentation was the neuropsychological impact of music on our brain, it was stated that also green environments are beneficial to children's neuropsychological development and mental health, and thus promote well-being according to various studies.

The presentation was followed by a conversation. It was discussed when and how music could be used at school to enhance learning. It was stated that in certain lessons music can be especially beneficial, e.g., PE lessons or language lessons where music can be used to make students or pupils feel more at ease. It was also discussed how to introduce classical music in class. Finally, we learned that homework can be done when listening to music, but it is advisable to choose instrumental music only.

Rachel Milestone: singing workshop

Rachel Milestone (Director of Music at Leweston School, PhD, MEd) introduced the theme of her workshop by citing her own article about the major role of music in children's academic success. She pointed out that music should not have to fight for its existence in school curricula as it has been proven many times scientifically that it is without any doubt essential for our well-being and learning. It is crucial that music education is seen as a necessity, not luxury. In conclusion, music for music's sake is important.

Rachel then presented an initiative that was set up in her school after the covid pandemic, called Leweston Lyrical Learner (Operation Singing!). The initiative was launched to restart singing after covid restrictions and to motivate youngsters who had not been singing together for a long time.

This program is aimed at those who wouldn't sing voluntarily, and it focuses on participation – Rachel's motto being 'loud and proud'. The program is aimed at pupils aged 9-13 and its main goal is to keep young people singing throughout their early teens. In the very heart of the program is the thought of music appreciation. In practice, Leweston Lyrical Learner means encouraging pupils to become active singers, for instance, contributing to the assemblies, Mass, and choosing singing ambassadors and singing in a choir (Cante-mus), which is compulsory for year 7 pupils. There is also a rewarding system in place to support pupils. The staff is also part of the singing community as they show an example. There are for example free singing lessons available for them as well as a choir for both staff and sixth-form students. The program is essentially based on music appreciation and participation.

Finally, Rachel demonstrated how her singing workshops are run in practice. The teachers' group enjoyed singing together very much and it was easy to see how music is a powerful tool in education.

Presentations by Douzelage member towns

The workshop was followed by presentations on good practices by the member towns.

- Škofja Loka: positive psychology for every teacher using the PERMA model as the framework of reference.
 - the presentation was about what determines the teachers' well-being (students' results, timetables, appreciation of teachers' time, lectures about stress, etc.)
 - motivation goes hand in hand with well-being; six aspects of psychological well-being; PERMA model => the hardest for the staff was 'accomplishment'
 - the teachers' group discussed whether the learning process is more important as an accomplishment than grades or winning a competition
- Bad Kötzing: several examples of good practices that promote well-being, e.g., a music party for children; wind instrument class; forest kindergarten; research class; beekeeping; literary picnic in the schoolgrounds
- Asikkala: a national Schools on the Move -program to increase physical activity during the school days; free snacks offered by a local bakery combined with the environmentally-friendly idea of reducing food waste; sports and activity tutors (pupils and students, volunteers)
- Türi: a campaign to collect rubbish; teaching outdoors is common; greenhouse project
- Niederaanven: promotion of well-being through a connection with nature and outdoor sciences; woodwork workshops; technology and science; science in kindergarten (bees, flower boxes); school garden, planting, harvesting and then cooking
- Tryavna: more and more outdoor activities according to students' preferences, bird-watching, fishing, climbing; local events (local community level) like marathons, music festivals, concerts, hiking, local clean-up events/campaigns

The presentations were shared with all the participants using Google Drive: Douzelage Sherborne Teachers' Meeting Presentations – Google Drive

Visit to Leweston 'Forest School'

In the afternoon, the teachers' group had the opportunity to take part in a guided tour at Leweston School. We were guided by Rachel and her daughter Lily, 9 years. The main aim was to learn about special forest school pedagogy used in Leweston School on a weekly basis. We were told that children are entitled to use the school forest every week to study outdoors. Lily was an excellent guide, and it was evident how beneficial it is to study outdoors. In addition to obvious health and well-being benefits, this pedagogical approach most definitely nourishes children's imagination and creativity and allows them to remain children as long as possible. During our visit in the school gardens, we were also told about the long history of Leweston School, originally a mansion, and about the school values, of which green values are among the most important.

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The Chair of Education, Riikka Penttilä, introduced a workshop for future co-operation. The teachers worked in small groups discussing and brainstorming looking into possibilities of organizing exchanges also without ErasmusPlus funding and partnerships as well as on-line meeting events. As a result, several interesting ideas were brought up. For instance, special needs teachers agreed on starting co-operation, which would mostly be co-working with the colleagues in different Douzelage towns as student mobilities might be more complicated to organise. In addition, a Teams-group was set up to facilitate co-operation after the EM in Sherborne. Rovinj suggested the possibility of organizing an annual meeting, so that different municipalities would in turns organise a meeting for one student and one teacher from each municipality. We also discussed the possible practical problems, mostly administrative, when planning exchanges or projects. In conclusion, we realized that we would need more time to plan and to get organised for co-operation, and therefore the conversation and planning will continue using Teams as soon as possible after this GM.

At the end of our meeting, we listened to Lonneke Frijns' report on a successful project called 'Free Press' in Meerssen, the Netherlands, which was a very inspiring experience for young Douzelage members especially.
Finally, Martine Defontaine from Granville, shared their Douzelage initiative 'Apéro-time' and invited teachers to join their distance meeting events where different Douzelage member towns are introduced to one another.

Report on the 2024 Youth Meeting

Mr. Zino Vreysen (Altea), president of the Youth Board, reports on the Youth Meeting 2023

Dear Douzelage Friends,

I am pleased to present the conclusions drawn from the YM workshops held during the 48th Douzelage General Meeting in Sherborne, United Kingdom. Our focus revolved around the theme of "Wellbeing through Nature and Music," addressing crucial aspects concerning the youth and their connection to these elements.

Expert Insights on Children's Wellbeing:

During our discussions, we had the privilege of engaging with Peter Littlewood, an expert on the theme. It was emphasized that prolonged indoor activities, such as excessive screen time and video gaming, contribute to heightened stress levels among children. In severe cases, this may even lead to the development of anger issues, manifesting in harmful behavior towards parents. However, Mr. Littlewood highlighted the significant positive impact of exposing children to nature. Outdoor activities not only alleviate stress but also foster social skills through collaborative tasks, such as building tents, necessitating communication and cooperation among peers. Despite these benefits, various barriers, including urban environments, limited green spaces, socioeconomic factors, and parental constraints, impede children's access to nature.

Insights from Youth Workshops (Ages 18-26):

Our workshops with young adults delved into diverse perspectives on nature and mental wellbeing. Key points raised include:

Nature's accessibility: Participants affirmed that nature is inherently accessible to most individuals, whether through forests, parks, or beaches, highlighting the importance of utilizing these resources.

Growing awareness of mental health: There is a gradual shift towards acknowledging the vital role of nature in promoting mental wellbeing, signaling a collective return to nature-driven lifestyles.

Acceptance of man-made interventions: While nature enthusiasts often prioritize natural environments, there is recognition that man-made enhancements can facilitate accessibility, prompting a more inclusive approach.

Impact of tourism on nature: Discussions underscored the significant influence of tourism on natural ecosystems, advocating for sustainable practices to preserve environmental integrity.

Influence of social media: Participants noted the pervasive consumer-oriented culture propagated by social media influencers, often neglecting the importance of nature and wellbeing in lifestyle promotion.

Interesting Facts from Member Towns:

As a delightful addition to our discussions, we shared two intriguing insights from our member towns:

Assikala, Finland: The town boasts an innovative app dedicated to nature and music, providing comprehensive information and organizing outdoor challenges to encourage community engagement and

Koszeg, Hungary: A weekly musical gathering in a designated area near Koszeg unites residents every Friday evening, fostering a sense of community through shared musical experiences.

In conclusion, the workshops underscored the intrinsic link between nature, music, and youth wellbeing. By addressing barriers and embracing collaborative solutions, we can cultivate environments that nurture the holistic development of our youth, fostering healthier communities.

Thank you for your attention, and we look forward to further collaboration towards our shared goals.

Appendix I

Words spoken by Shane Smyth as candidate President at the General Meeting of Douzelage, Friday April 12th 2024

Thank you Madam President, vice presidents, distinguished Douzelage colleagues and friends.

Never in the history of this organization have the values and ideals behind Europe and Douzelage been more important. The spirit of friendship, of unity, cooperation in the continent and in a world that is in turmoil. And it needs to remain the floor of what we do. Be it through projects, festivals, events, exchanges or even just delegates visiting delegates.

What we have built over the past 33 years in Douzelage is unique. Hundreds of people who have experienced different cultures of our different nations and both the spirit and application of this must continue seamlessly.

Douzelage has changed my life. It has given me some great opportunities to travel across Europe and experience different cultures. It has given me some of my greatest friends. It has given me my best friends. It has helped me to increase my knowledge of one European language and encouraged me to start to learn another one. It has made me appreciate the different opinions and views of different people. It has made me want to champion the values and mission of the organization to promote it more to make more people aware of it and to build on the legacy of our current board.

I am passionate about Douzelage and its simple idea to bring communities together from across the European Union, constantly welcoming new members in as the EU expands. As we move into the next three years of Douzelage life transparency, sustainability and communication will be paramount in the running of this organization, as well as the continual exchange of ideas and people through workshops, cultural events, sporting events and more.

I want to take a lead in progressing Douzelage, but while I do, I won't be able to do it on my own. There's an old Irish phrase or a "Seanfhocal" as we call it, that says "Ni Neart Go Cur Le Chéile", meaning there is strength in unity. Our unity in Douzelage is our strength of cooperation, our collaboration and our friendship in this wonderful organization. I am ready to go and I'm confident in my ability, along with that of my three vice presidents, to lead the organization for the next three years of its life. They say if you want, if you do something you love, then you'll never work a day in your life. I'm a proud Bundoran man, a proud Irish man and most of all a proud European who loves Douzelage, and I'm asking for your support to be President today.

Thank you.

Appendix II

Report by Mr. Mike Balfour on workshop 1: Future Projects that do not require EU funding

Present:

Sherborne:	Mike Balfour (Chair), Marcus Ainley
Bundoran:	Joe McNulty
Holstebro:	Mette Grith Sørensen, Tiahes Thiaharajah
Judenburg:	Thorsten Wohleser
Meerssen:	Herman Langeveld, Irene Raedts-Schreuder, Hub Eken
Niederanven:	Roberta Dario
Turi:	Aet Sarv

Reasons for Workshop:

1. At GMs we should always focus on projects.
2. We need to restore Douzelage to full activity following Covid.
3. Brexit has removed Sherborne's access to EU funding.

Background:

In the 33 years of the Douzelage, many projects have been successful when all the finance has been provided by the participants, their municipalities or a sponsor.

The Douzelage has helped to make connections between groups in partner towns, but their organisations have usually planned and administered these projects.

When there is no need to apply for EU funding, there is less bureaucracy and more certainty that the project will proceed.

Travelling Groups:

Musicians, sports teams, schools, youth clubs, service clubs and special interest groups sometimes travel to other countries to pursue their interests.

All these types of organisation have visited partner towns in the past. We should inform their current leaders about the opportunities and special welcome in the Douzelage. In doing so, we will raise the profile of the Douzelage in our towns.

Making Connection:

Many years ago the Douzelage attempted to compile lists for every town of all their organisations and their contact details. It was too large a task, for example Sherborne's list had over 100 entries and larger towns many more. Trying to keep details up to date was impossible.

With this in mind, our discussions concluded that we should focus on one type of organisation each year: Music, Sport, Art, History, or Hiking for example. Music would be a good first choice. This will need the involvement of the new Presidency team.

See Recommendations.

Retired People:

Many 'Seniors' have the free time and money to travel to partner towns, and are active in organisations. Towns with a U3A (University of the Third Age), a Rotary Club, a Lions Club or similar organisations should tell them about the Douzelage.

Face-to-face meetings are best; but online events, for chess and bridge for example, are also worthwhile.

Youth Projects:

Our young people are the future of the Douzelage so we must focus on them too. Finding sponsorship for youth projects is easier than for others.

We should ensure that schools and youth clubs are fully aware of the Douzelage.

Sherborne Douzelage has a Youth Travel Fund, from which grants are given to ensure youth projects are accessible to all families.

Please remember this and invite Sherborne's young people to your town.

Well-being Through Wine?

Some of our towns are in wine-producing areas. Please invite us to a wine festival or a wine-tasting tour: a group from one town or a small number from more towns.

SWIG (Sherborne Wine Interest Group) will be interested.

Sherborne:

Sherborne's walking groups request exchanges with Douzelage towns. Holstebro and Niederaanven will approach their walking groups.

Sherborne hopes to welcome the Köszeg Brass Band in May 2025 to stay and play.

Schools have Boarding House accommodation available for groups in their holidays.

Sherborne requests that towns leading EU funded projects consider their inclusion; Sherborne Douzelage may be able to finance their participation without EU funding.

Recommendations:

1. NEW PROJECTS

All towns to encourage clubs and groups to invite or visit other Douzelage towns.

2. MUSIC

- a) The Board to declares a year (2025, or from now to the next GM, perhaps) to be the year for towns to compile lists of their music groups, highlighting those who may be interested in travel to other towns, and also those interested in other Douzelage musicians visiting them.
- b) To circulate all this information to our music groups and help them to make connections with like-minded organisations in partner towns, so visits take place in the years to follow.
- c) A central communications point for 'the year of music' to be set up.
- d) The Board to recommend themes in later years, for GMs to approve.

3. SHERBORNE

All towns are asked to help Sherborne to participate in many projects.