

Taylor Bozich

**The Power of Dialogue
by Taylor Bozich**

Here at the International Summer School, the student body is comprised of several hundreds of students, and together we represent nearly 100 different countries. It is truly a unique and beautiful opportunity. Throughout our classes, afternoon ice cream outings, midday study sessions, late night games, and weekend island trips, there exists a constant thread of dialogue in which there is a genuine exchange of life stories, worldviews, and beliefs between people from all over the planet. Prior to our arrival to Oslo, we spent five days at the Nansen Dialogue Center in Lillehammer, and I think we can all agree that it was a life-changing experience that we will never forget.

Lillehammer's Dialogue Center was established when the small city hosted the Winter Olympics in 1994. Sarajevo, a former host city of the Olympics, was under siege during this time due to the increasing tension and warfare in the Western Balkans. Lillehammer had a close relationship with many people directly involved in the conflict because of its partnership with Sarajevo in planning the Winter Olympics. As the conflict grew and ethnic tensions increased, a network of Nansen Dialogue Centers were established throughout the former Yugoslavia in places like Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia Herzegovina, and a few other locations. "Nansen" is the name of a famous Norwegian polar explorer who was known for his incredible humanitarian work later in his life (I highly recommend looking him up, he's a very interesting man!). The Nansen Dialogue Centers have since been important leaders in conducting inter-ethnic dialogue sessions for young politicians, teachers, students, etc. in the Balkan countries and other conflict regions. Essentially, they're all about engaging in thoughtful and intentional dialogue with the other in order to break down "otherness" and establish meaningful relationships. It is not about debating or mediation, but rather listening to others' stories to better understand their situations.

There were a total of 36 of us in Lillehammer: approximately 12 students from the US, about 16-18 students from the Balkans, and four or five students from Ukraine. There were also a few Norwegian students and a woman from Portugal. Our week was spent engaging in various forms of dialogue with other students. For example, we learned about the conflict in Ukraine from the perspective of Ukrainian students. It was really interesting to be able to compare their views to what has been propagated in the US media, which we were then able to compare with how the conflict has been propagated in the media of the Balkan regions. Needless to say, it was one of the most interesting conversations I've ever had. This kind of dialogue went on for several days, and while some of it was often facilitated by one of the Nansen Dialogue Center teachers, the most enriching conversations happened over a cup of coffee or while walking through the cobblestoned streets of this quaint little town. I learned a lot during my time in Lillehammer, but above all else, I learned that dialogue is a tool that can build lasting friendships, overcome adversity when needed, and create a framework for developing genuine understanding and peace.

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