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## PRESS RELEASE

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### German-Croatian exchange with forest experiences and plenty of knowledge

#### European youth exchange on World Heritage Beech Forests

8 pupils from Angermünde, Germany and Starigrad-Paklenica, Croatia experienced several exciting days in Angermünde and the surrounding woods. From September 27th to October 2nd the young Germans and Croatians learned about the UNESCO World Heritage Site “Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe”. This is what connects the two groups: both live near World Heritage sites. Two of the 94 Beech Forests of the UNESCO World Heritage sites lie within their municipal areas, namely the Grumsin Beech Forest close to Angermünde and the Paklenica National Park in Starigrad-Paklenica. The ‘Beech Academy 2021’ exchange, which was about the Beech Forest and its importance to humans, had a key purpose:

„With this meeting we’d like to give young people an international experience, where they can get to know people from different backgrounds, develop an interest in new languages and encounter a positive approach to diversity. The youth exchange is part of a town twinning we are striving for between the two World Heritage municipalities. In line with this, the exchange should take place regularly following this trial run.“

Maren Michaelsen  
Exchange organiser from Angermünde

The programme was developed by Maren Michaelsen as well as Nadja Erdmann from the Naturwacht Brandenburg. It kicked off on Monday with a reception from mayor Frederik Beyer in Haus Uckermark. He was pleased that the exchange could take place despite the pandemic and that Angermünde was hosting such an exciting and informative event. He emphasised how special this international World Heritage Site is; it forms an extraordinary natural phenomenon throughout Europe, connecting people across national borders.

#### Experiencing the forest

After some short presentations, the Croatians were able to discover Angermünde through a town rally organised by participating pupils from the Freie Schule Angermünde. The next day, they went on a hike from the Geopark-Centre in Groß Ziethen, past Grumsin Forest to Altkünkendorf, where they visited the info-point about the World Heritage Site and the lookout from the village church.

Following a trip to Berlin, an especially unmissable experience for the Croatians, everyone drove to the Angermünde Municipal Forest with the World Heritage bus. Here the pupils learned about the state of the forest and forest management firsthand. Forestry service providers Peter Specht and Rafael Eckmann, responsible on the town council for the forest and tree inspection, brought the woods to the pupils’ doorsteps and brought them closer



to forest life with a guided hike. A joint tree planting initiative completed the forest experience. After that everyone enjoyed game sausages straight from the grill at the Adlerquelle.

From there the group drove to the NABU wildlife centre Blumberger Mühle, where a ranger greeted them. In the evening they celebrated with pizza from a clay stove. On Friday they had a farewell dinner organised by the parents at the Freie Schule Angermünde. On Saturday it was time to say goodbye to the Croatian pupils, but they will hopefully meet again at a reunion in Croatia where, with the help of Frederik Bewer, pupils will get to know the local Beech Forest area and build connections for a future town twinning and further student exchange programmes. Unfortunately the Croatian reunion planned for October was cancelled due to Covid restrictions. More information on the new date will follow.

### **A successful exchange**

Despite some struggles and lost sleep, the week was well-received by the young people from Angermünde and Starigrad-Paklenica. They found the new environment and people particularly exciting. They are also taking plenty of knowledge about the forest and nature home with them.



## Background: The BEECH POWER project

The UNESCO World Heritage (WH) Site ‘Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe’ represents the most complex transnational serial natural site in the UNESCO portfolio - comprising 94 component parts in 18 countries. The programme area shares almost 25% of the components parts distributed in 5 countries (AT, DE, HR, SK and SI). While local management units of the component parts face similar challenges, i.e. concerning buffer zone management, the respective environmental and socio-economic contexts differ considerably on local and national level. The main project objective is to improve management quality and effectiveness of the WH site to safeguard the ecosystem integrity of the single component parts by improving capacities and active participation possibilities of relevant stakeholders.

The project takes an ecosystem-based and participatory approach working on different administrative levels to anchor the WH site in sustainable regional development and produce replicable and innovative models for WH beech forests and their local surroundings (i.e. WH Beech Communities, sustainable buffer zone management, Beech Forest Quality Standard). The main outputs are guidelines and strategies for stakeholder participation and regional development, a handbook for buffer zone management, recommendations for visitor management, a communication concept and a Beech Forest Quality Standard that support protected area administrations, public authorities and actors from civil society in their daily work. The results will be applicable for other WH component parts outside the programme area. The transnational cooperation responds to the challenges of a transnational WH site, as comprehensive solutions must reflect the heterogeneity of the single component parts. Further, it ensures the establishment of a WH-wide learning network between different stakeholders that would not be possible on national level.

For more information on the project: <https://www.interreg-central.eu/Content.Node/BEECH-POWER.html>

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