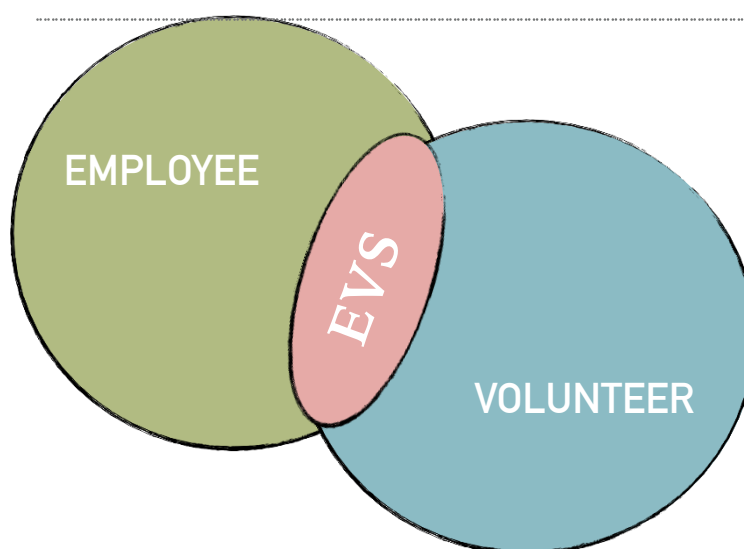


## MY EVS IN POLAND, OR THE PERKS OF BEING AN OCCASIONAL IN-BETWEENER

Throughout my childhood and student years, I would often find myself between two or even more different (if not opposite) groups not being able to classify myself as belonging to either of them. It's being born and raised in a post-communist Asian country that is striving to reach Western capitalist standards. It's being a Kazakh girl attending a Russian school in one of the most Russified cities in Kazakhstan. It's finishing an intellectually stimulating academic program that was dealing with abstract categories, fictional characters and no-longer-alive authors and suddenly throwing myself into a project aimed at helping actual people. And for the first time in my life it's dwelling in and exploring a new country not as a tourist or an Erasmus student, but as a sample of the species (to my utter regret soon to become extinct<sup>1</sup>) called [EVS volunteers](#).

### BEING AN EVS VOLUNTEER



Being an EVS volunteer is not being an employee with a fixed set of duties and responsibilities and, let's admit it, the burden of a 'person in charge'. Neither it is assisting as a volunteer coming and going whenever s/he likes. The EVS grey area is placed somewhere in between these two categories involving responsibility, autonomy and most importantly the opportunity to learn and gain new practical skills.

### BRAVE KIDS

I don't mean to seem sentimental and overemotional about it, but helping the Brave Kids team to make the project happen this year, namely helping with the organization of the festival and meeting 136 kids from all over the world, has shifted something deep inside of my fairly pragmatic personality.

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<sup>1</sup> Recent European Commission proposal discussed in September by the European Parliament decided to end the European Voluntary Service program that will be replaced by the European Solidarity Corps from January 2018.



It is probably direct contact with the kids (which was all about playing games, dancing together and using the body language extensively, rather than having the actual verbal communication) and the opportunity to see them exchange skills, cooperate and simply make friendships that encouraged me to become an ardent believer in the possibility of a better future for all of us. And yes, I still hear their voices and see their faces when I fall asleep, or get random flashbacks and other myriad fragments from the period of my life from June 18 to July 11, 2017.



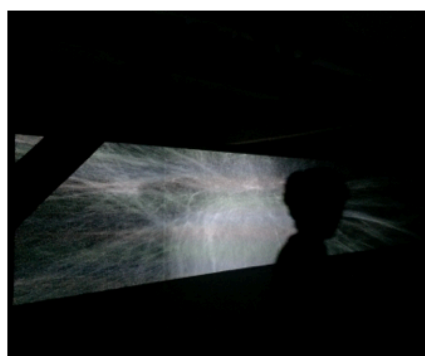
Also, how lucky can one be working in a former monastery on the very last floor with the picturesque view and becoming part of a small friendly team of truly enthusiastic and inspiring



people? I recently read that a teacher is the one who can show you the way to yourself, I would even add 'to a better version of yourself'. Following that, I would say that the Brave Kids team consists of great teachers who could see our potential and encourage us to develop our own projects within Brave Kids festival.

## EVS COMMUNITY

I can't help but feel deeply sad about saying goodbye to Sara, a dear friend of mine and a co-BraveKids-EVS-volunteer, with whom we spent so many hours tenaciously trying to decipher the contemporary (Polish) art, exploring the city and consuming unhealthy amounts of coffee and cakes together.



And how can I forget all these amazing moments spent with my wonderful EVS mentor, a real polymath (-glot) and just a sweet person Ania, and other EVS volunteers from all over Europe (and beyond!) cooking, traveling by train/Polski bus/on foot within and outside Poland, swimming in the freakishly cold Baltic sea, playing 'Seven Wonders', learning random expressions in their languages (e.g. '[que nos dan las uvas](#)' and '[katicabogár](#)'), dancing vigorously in Czarny Kot until dawn ... ?



## POLSKA

The particular charm of Poland for me partly comes from the sense of ‘in-betweenness’ of the country which I think affected every facet of my daily life here. Due to our shared Soviet past, Poland seems intimately familiar to me, but at the same time it is truly European in terms of the people’s thinking, art and the constantly evolving new social and civil rights movements.

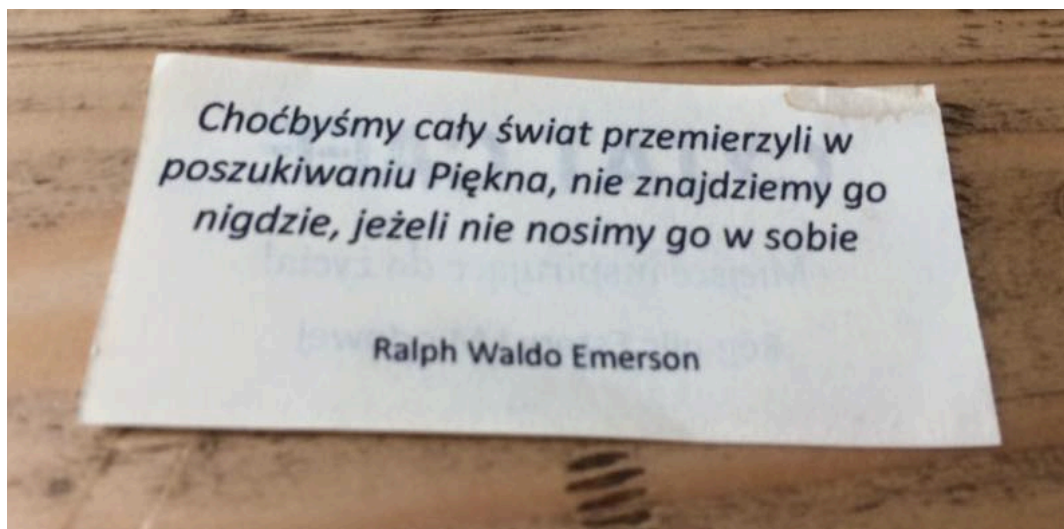
Perhaps because of the numerous changes, influences and shifts on both political and cultural levels, the originality and eclecticism of Polish culture notably affected their concept of national identity, theatre, art and music. One of the greatest revelations for me was discovering [Młoda Polska](#) after I remained speechless for a great deal of time by the startling stained glass windows designed by Stanisław Wyspiański in St Francis Church in Kraków.





So being an in-betweener here and there proved to be quite a challenging practice often similar to the one of an outsider. However, the perspectives the in-betweener can get of both (or more) opposed categories might give way to an amazingly wider understanding of the dichotomy and the innumerable ways to find beauty in one's experience. I think what I found in Poland is this exact realization. I hope the newly developed openness to the beautiful will stay with me and maybe even become part of my personality. As it says in this quote from Emerson (which was accidentally found in a coffeeshop in magnificent Kraków),

*"Though we travel the world over to find the beautiful, we must carry it with us or we find it not."*



Do zobaczenia, my beautiful Wrocław!

Malika

P.S. People who know me well can be surprised (if not confused) by such a soppy ending. However, my pragmatic and somewhat cynical self seems to be (temporarily?) defeated by the nostalgic sentiments I am experiencing at the moment. So pardonnez-moi! =)