



NEXT STOP

Episode 2: Discover EU

Title: "Discover the EU" w/ Lucy Allan & Vincent-Immanuel Herr

Host – Teemu Karhapaa, CoR trainee

Guest 1 - Lucy Allan, Winner of the Discover EU competition 2019

Guest 2 - Vincent-Immanuel Herr, Free Interrail Advocate & Public Speaker

Opening soundtrack

INTRODUCTION

All aboard to your new weekly favourite podcast “Next Station” where you will find out all there is to know about trains! 2021 is the European Year of Rail - a year to remind us that the journey is as important as the destination. My name is Teemu and this is “Next Stop”, a podcast by the Spring 2021 trainees at the European Committee of the Regions.

HOST

Did you know that in the Czech Republic, each station had its own signature bell toll related to the town or city? Imagine that you arrive in Prague and hear “Vltava”, a national classic, while at Brno you would hear a song about a romantic evening in the city. Lately, hopefully enough, The Czech national railway has been phasing them out. We will see how the situation develops.

Transition soundtrack

HOST

Trains are a great way to truly get to know Europe! You discover new villages, new languages and dialects, meet new people and through your window you will see Europe's amazing landscape amazing: the forests, rivers, castles and modern cities. Travelling through Europe by train is an adventure that appeals to people of all ages - but to those 18 years old's out there listening we want to present you the Discover EU Interrail pass competition. That is right – if you win, you can travel through Europe for free. While in 2020 there were no application rounds, well, for obvious reasons, the 2021 competition is likely to open up soon, if the health situation in EU allows, of course. And this time it's even better! They will distribute 60,000 passes, instead of the normal 30,000. To participate you must be 18 years old EU citizen. You can read more about this competition in the European Youth Portal website by searching for

"Discover EU. Personally, I would be very excited for this opportunity if I was 18, but don't just take my word for it. Let's hear what our guests have to say about it.

Transition soundtrack

HOST

Joining us from Scotland is Lucy Allen. Lucy is a YouTube blogger who won the "Discover EU" competition and a free Interrail pass in 2019. Lucy, you won the "Discover EU" competition in 2019! First of all, congratulations. I'm sure you had a great time railing. Where did you hear about the competition? What attracted you to it and how did you apply?

GUEST 1

Thank you for having me. This is an honor. I actually heard about the "Discovery EU" competition for Facebook advertising, and at first, I thought it was maybe too good to be true. A free interrail ticket. I wasn't sure I believed it, but I clicked on the advert and I read a little bit into it and I figured, yeah, this is the real deal. And the reason I was attracted to it is because I actually interrailed the year before, in 2018, I travelled for six and a half weeks through Europe and through all the big cities. And it was really the best time of my life. So when I saw that I had the possibility to travel again and potentially win a free ticket, I signed straight up. And so I applied for the Facebook advertising.

HOST

That's great, Lucy. And how was your experience? For how long were you travelling? What cities did you visit? And maybe, if you could decide again today, what cities would you have visited?

GUEST 1

I had the most amazing experience. It was a very diversified trip. I actually woke up at 4 a.m. two days after Christmas and left my apartment in Glasgow to take a 4 a.m. train to Rotterdam from Glasgow. And that was my first stop. I travelled there solo. I spent a couple of days in Rotterdam. I met some incredible people and this was my first city out of the others. And then I went to Berlin, where I spent I think four days with my best friend. And I don't know if anyone is aware, but Berlin has an incredible New Year's party. So that was a really big bucket list moment for me to actually be there physically to celebrate the new decade. Then we went down to Luxembourg for a couple of days and I'd always really been intrigued by Luxembourg because of the languages there and the architecture has always been really interesting to me. I went further down a couple of days later to Bern in Switzerland and this was maybe my highlight of the trip. I had such a wonderful time in Bern. The views were incredible. It snowed a little bit, which is everything you would want from a winter trip. And we went over to Salzburg in Austria for a couple of days. And this was such a lovely city because you had a real big city, but to your right, there were incredible mountains. I really enjoyed Salzburg. I would love to go back. Then we went over to Bratislava in Slovakia, which was possibly the biggest surprise of the trip because I wasn't expecting too much. It was originally just a city in between Salzburg and Budapest. But I had the most amazing time. It was, again, maybe another favorite of mine from the trip. And we finished off in Budapest, in Hungary for four days, which was a lovely end to the trip. If I had to choose today different cities, I honestly don't know if I would. I do think I would love to do another summer Interrail just because I really enjoy the business of hostels during summer. The weather's always a bit better in the summer than in the winter and you can pack a bit lighter. I remember finding it very hard to pack for

my winter gear, so if I was to choose different cities, I wouldn't, but I would choose a different season.

HOST

That sounds fantastic, Lucy, you have so many great destinations that you visited and you made an excellent point that visit the same place in different seasons, it really makes a big difference. Now, I've watched a couple of your videos. And by the way, for the listeners, I highly recommend everyone to check out Lucy's videos from YouTube. And while you had many great tips, one of them really struck me to take a nap around 4:00 p.m. while interrailing or traveling. I've noticed in my own travels that since traveling can be so exhausting sometimes taking a nap around that time really helps to stay energetic. And, you know, after a long morning and afternoon of walking and exploring, it just feels heavenly to take a little rest. Is that the case for you as well? Or why do you recommend taking a nap?

GUEST 1

Oh, I would 100% recommend a 4:00 p.m. nap. And I say 4:00 p.m. specifically because when you're interrailing, you tend to want to wake up really early in the morning. You want to wake up around sunrise to sort of get your day started early and you want to beat the crowds. So I would always wake up early and doing that for a long time, maybe three weeks to six weeks can get extremely tiring because interval is extremely fast-paced and you're only in a city for maybe three days at a time. So it can be easy to feel a little bit overwhelmed, but I found that around 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., nothing incredible will happen. So you should just take that time for yourself to go for a nap and to reset. And if you nap at 4:00 p.m., it means you can stay up a bit later and have fun in your hostels. So I would say that everybody should try a 4 p.m. nap when traveling for long periods of time.

HOST

I would agree with that, Lucy, and I would recommend that for other people, too. Would you like to share any last message to encourage young people to apply for the "Discover EU" scheme?

GUEST 1

Yes, I would say that applying to the "Discover EU" scheme is a real triple win. First of all, when we're young and we're 18 and graduating from high school, a lot of us will say, I've done really well, I'm so proud of myself, so I'm going to treat myself. And people tend to treat themselves with shopping sprees or trips to somewhere new. But imagine being able to treat yourself on an unbelievable trip where you can hop off, hop on a train from one city, hop off in the center of a brand new city in maybe even a different country. And knowing that the train you're taking is going to help to lower the CO2 emissions compared to taking other forms of transport. And plus, with the "Discover EU" scheme, you can win a ticket for free. So it's really a triple win and it's a no-brainer. If I were 18 again, I would be applying on the site right now.

HOST

And that's Lucy Allan from Scotland. Lucy, thank you so much for joining us.

GUEST 1

Thank you for having me. It's a pleasure.

Transition soundtrack

HOST

Joining us today from Germany is Vincent Immanuel Herr. Vincent is a German activist, involved in several projects and has been working with different institutions such as Mercator foundation and UN Women in Germany. He co-founded the consultancy Herr und Speer, which is committed to empower young people to change the world. Vincent, thank you for joining our podcast! How are you doing?

GUEST 2

Thank you so much, I'm doing very well. Thank you so much for having me on, I appreciate, I think this is a great project you are doing and I'm happy to help out.

HOST

Great. Vincent, have you ever done Interrail yourself? Do you have any stories to share with us?

GUEST 2

Yes, I'm actually very big Interrail fan – I have done a total of three interrail trips. One in 2014, then in 2019, and one in early 2020, right before the Covid pandemic restricted travel so we just got back a few weeks or a couple of weeks really before travelling became impossible. There is a lot of stories I could tell so this might be too much for the scope of your podcast, but I think I can definitely share an overall sense of what interrail does with you and that is that travelling interrail is really quite different from other international kind of travel, particularly, in comparison to flying. I think when you really visit several European countries, and I think I have probably been to between 15 and 20 European countries via interrail, you really get a sense of how Europe is connected, how people are connected and how also these differences that you see, how they really are such a beautiful part of the European experience. I can honestly say that Interrail travel has made me a true European. What we sometimes say, has turned us from European in theory to European out of experience. And so I really think that this kind of travel, train travel, slow travel, if you will, where you get to meet more people, get to see more through the windows of the train is extremely important to understanding the diversity of Europe and I really hope that more people get to do that.

HOST

Wonderful. I'm an active traveller myself so I can definitely relate to your stories. I really appreciate that. Alright. You have been a strong advocate of Free Interrail passes for young people, together with Martin Speer. Your idea was picked up by the European Parliament, and it led to the creation of the European Commission's pilot project in 2017/2018. What was your main motivation behind this endeavour?

GUEST 2

I mean as I just started to talk about how train travel and interrail, in particular, really shows the beauty of the diversity of Europe when Martin and I did these interrail trips, particularly the first one in 2014, we realised how meaningful this trip was for the building of our own sense of European identity. At the same time, we also realized that there is a lot of young people who get to travel very little, some of them have never left their own country, so there is a big mobility gap in Europe. I think almost 40% of European citizens have never left their home country. You know, in some countries it's much more than in others, but overall, there is a big gap between people like me, maybe like some of you on the podcast here, who have travelled a lot, and those people who travelled very little or none at all. And this mobility gap is not just

unfortunate, I think it is a big problem for Europe because Europe lives on diversity. So if you cannot experience this diversity then it is really hard to really understand, and appreciate, and support the European project. So that's really the idea behind free Interrail. European Union would profit incredibly by offering all 18 year olds, or future generation of Europeans the opportunity to get to explore Europe for themselves. So we really see free interrail as a European integration program. As a program to promote building of the shared sense of European identity. And we would really, at the same time I think what we are also seeing is that there are existing integration programs for young people such as Erasmus+ and that is a great program, but since its inception in 1997, or around that time, I think less than 2% of all EU citizens have actually participated in this program. So again we see a big mobility gap: Erasmus is a great program, but it's only accessible for a very small number of people. Free interrail tries to fill in this gap and to kind of create a basic program of minimum mobility, I guess you could call it, to enable all Europeans, all young Europeans, to travel at least once in their life and get to have this international experience that is so incredibly important. That is really at the gist of it. I think you could say that the European Union only has a future if it enables all its citizens to be part of its diversity, right now we are not doing that and I think that's a problem and so that's why that's what we hope of a program or an idea such as free interrail can fill that gap.

HOST

Perfect. I think that was very clearly explained. I believe you are now promoting the idea of free passes for all 18 year olds! Could you give us more details of this current campaign and how can young people engage? And beyond that, if you have ever thought about it, I would be very interested to hear if you have any concrete proposals on how to structure the plan and raise funding for it.

GUEST 2

Let's do a quick overview here. In 2014 Martin and I travelled interrail and we had this kind of epiphany or this idea, actually, in Vienna, we thought of this idea what would happen if all 18 year olds got free interrail ticket. In 2015 we started writing articles about this and approaching European politicians, particularly in the European Parliament, of different party groups. And in 2017 the European Commission launched the first pilot project which was not exactly what we intended. It was also very much criticized by the media. But then in 2018, what is now called "Discover EU" was launched and "Discover EU" has now benefited 70,000 18 year olds to travel between 2018 and 2020. So we see how this idea has already turned and became reality for 70,000 people. However, our initial idea was a little bigger. Our initial idea, as I mentioned, was that not 70,000 people get this interrail ticket, but every young European at the age of 18. After the UK having left, I think there are roughly 4,5 million people turning 18 every year, so from 70,000 to 4,5 million a year there is still some gap that we need to fill. So this is kind of the current state of things. This pilot project enabled 70,000 people, now "Discover EU" has been made part of the Erasmus program, so the numbers will likely increase in the next few years, but the European Commission is also right now at the point where they have to figure out exactly what this program will look like. So this year is actually going to be a big year to figure out how will free interrail work, or they call it "Discover EU" work, and how many people can benefit from it. And I think this is a part of the second question, right? Where could the money come from partially? I mean part of the funding has been secured, it is part of the MFF, another multi-annual financial framework, but I think something of we have always thought so for the European Commission, or the European Union has directly or indirectly supported or subsidized international flying operations. They have subsidized local airports and there is only one EU country that is actually taxing kerosene - the fuel for airplanes and

this kind of things. So the EU, through some ways is actually putting a lot of money into airplane travel. So our proposal partially is why not to take some of that money and indirectly or directly out of the funding, and fostering, and support of the plane travel and put it into train travel. That is one idea that we are having and I think that another one is that, it's a big discussion, of course, the European Common Agricultural Policy is the biggest part of the European Union's budget. You could also argue that we don't really need 1/3 of the EU's budget to really go into agricultural policy and I know there will be a big debate about that, but I also think there could be some money that could go into free interrail. At the end of the day, for interrail or "Discover EU" it's not even that expensive. There is no exact number because it is kind of hard to guess exactly how expensive that would be, but the number we have sometimes heard from the European Commission is that they assume, even if you gave a ticket to every 18 year old it might be roughly 1 billion euros a year, which sounds like a lot, but at the same time the European Union also has a very, very big budget and this is not just a fun project, it's not just a little gimmick, it really is an integral part that would foster the European identity and we just have to ask ourselves is it important to us to foster the European identity. Are we willing to spend some money on that? And, luckily, or fortunately, the European Union has decided to put more money into this, which I'm very grateful for and I think more people are recognizing the potential of this. But that is kind of where we are right now, so now the program is growing, but we are not there yet, where every 18 years old get this ticket, so we will try to keep pushing for that. But we also are very grateful for this big milestone, that it is not just a pilot project anymore – it's an official part of Erasmus+ and with that, it will benefit a lot of young people in the next seven years and that is something. We are extremely excited about that.

HOST

Sounds good. So t you a Phineas idiom – you have kind of pushed the snowball downhill and now it's growing and becoming larger and larger and maybe one day, hopefully, we will see it happening.

GUEST 2

I like that, that's a nice idiom. I appreciate that. I think so, I think the idea has really caught on, I think a lot of people got excited. We have seen with the pilot project that the European 18 year olds are extremely excited about that program. As I said, 70,000 tickets have been issued, but the number of applicants has been significantly higher, so I think there were about 360,000 18 year olds applying, which is a serious share of the population of 18 year olds. In some countries, particularly we heard this in Portugal and in Spain, when we were travelling there in 2019 and 2020, we visited the offices of the European Commission, of the European Parliament and we asked them what is the reaction to "Discover EU"? And they told us that the only problem with it is that we don't have more tickets. So there is this strong sense of that this is a program that young people are extremely excited about and when you look at what they do with this ticket they really make the most of it: they travel to countries they have never been to before, they make local friends, some of these friendships lasts, some of the participants have never left their home countries, so we see a positive effect. So I genuinely believe that this will continue, as you say, to be a snowball that keeps growing bigger and going downhill and turning into a very positive avalanche, maybe, at some point, to really benefit all Europeans. Even though I know avalanches are not as positive necessarily, but you get it. I'm not from Finland so my snow references are not quite as on point as yours, I guess.

HOST

Sounds good. There is currently a worrying skills gap in the railway sector and in order to keep the sector alive and dynamic it is very important to attract new employees. Do you see any scope to link the "Discover EU" scheme to the promotion of rail sector careers?

GUEST 2

It is an interesting question, I'm going to be very honest. This is not my expertise so with the rail sector as such I had some points of contact in our work to promote free interrail, but I'm not an expert on the rail sector. However, what I can say, is what we have seen with the pilot project is that particularly a lot of young people were surprised to find out that you can even use trains for international travel. So for a lot of young people, international travel means using the airplane. So for a lot of them this was maybe the first time that they have used the train in order to leave the home country and get into another country. And what we have also seen is that when we talked to participants of "Discover EU" is that they are positively excited about the train travel and they say that this is much better than I thought it would be, this is much more exciting, and a lot of them say they will do it again in the future. So we see this kind of mentality building effect where it's not just that you do "Discover EU" for three or four weeks, but maybe this experience also changes how you think about train travel in general, and you get more excited and you use more train in the future. My hope would be, and you know, again, I'm not an expert, but maybe this also is an opportunity for the rail sector to kind of present itself a new way and to have more young people be interested in it again because they do train travel again and they not all just hop on some cheap flights, but they use trains again. So maybe some of the "Discover EU" participants will get so excited that they decide to do career in the rail sector. That would be a hope of mine, but I think we definitely see an increase and interest in the international train travel and I would urge the rail sector to make use of that, to really recognise that there is a lot of young people travelling right now, so that also means that the rail sector needs to make it easy for them. You know, I mean if it's a very complicated experience they will likely not do it again in the future. So right now you have all these 18 year olds who will travel so the rail sector should kind of be open, be ready for them. You know, tickets should be sold digitally, international route planning should be easier than it is right now, accessibility to train should be promoted, all this kind of things I think there is a lot of things that the rail sector could do right now to make sure that young people really have a positive experience and that positive experience will enable them to come back, travel again, and maybe even seek out career somewhere in that sector.

HOST

My own little brother is 18 years old currently, so hopefully he will be able to take advantage of this opportunity and he is also, you know, as many people of that age there are hardly thinking of their future career, so hopefully this would be an opportunity for him as well. Vincent, do you have any last message to encourage young people to engage in the European Year of Rail?

GUEST 2

Yes, I mean, I'm sure you have noticed I'm a big fan of rail travel or train travel, so I would encourage young people whether through the "Discover EU" or on their own to do rail travel. Particularly international. I know it's not always super easy, you know, international connections there is definitely something that needs to be improved, particularly when it comes to like really travelling through many countries, it's sometimes easier to switch trains and systems, you can't always book all the way through all this kind of things. But to figure it out and to do it is so much fun. These interrail trips that I've done they have been life changing

experiences for me. So I can really strongly recommend using train travel. Of course, you can participate in "Discover EU", but you can also buy an interrail ticket on your own. It is not exactly cheap, but depending on which ticket you want between 300 and 500 euros. So maybe that is something you want to do next summer. Maybe this year is a good year to do this anyway, because I hope, as I said, that the rail companies take this year as an opportunity to really keep improving their system. Go and travel, use trains and explore Europe. I think that is wonderful.

HOST

That's Vincent Herr. By the way for the listeners, if you are interested, you can watch his wonderful TED Talk on YouTube, where he talks about the same subject. Vincent, thank you so much for joining us.

GUEST 2

Of course, thank you so much for the good questions and good luck with your project.

HOST

Thank you Vincent.

Transition soundtrack

POP WAGON

Speakers - Jose Llopiz Ortiz, Mila Coric and Xavi Miro, CoR trainees

All speakers

Szdravo! Hola! Hola!

Mila

We are Jose, Mila and Xavi and we are back to share with you our passions for trains.

Jose

We know you have been waiting for a long time, but don't despair!! The Pop Wagon is again on the track!!

Xavi

Today we bring another interesting selection of culture and history with the trains as an essential element.

All speakers

LET'S GO!!

Sound of a train whistle

Xavi

Talking about the old times reminds me of an interesting historical story.

Mila

Another related to the execution of a different emperor?

Xavi

No, no, no, this one is less dramatic. Did you know that the world's first travel agency started thanks to a train trip?

Jose

You have all my attention.

Transition sound

Jose

Ey, why are you so happy?

Mila

There is one song that I have been listening to recently and I can't take it out of my head.

Jose

Ok, but concentrate please, we are here to talk about trains, not music.

Mila

But actually I am talking about trains too. Do you know "Waiting for a Train"? It is a song composed by Jimmie Rodgers in 1928, and it became popular just one year later. After the Wall Street Crash, many people felt identified by these lyrics about a working-class man who is unemployed and takes the rails to live the hobo lifestyle.

Jose

Yes, I knew it. Amazing song, right?

Mila

Yeah, I love when they play it in clubs.

Xavi

But Mila is right...Songs associated with trains are always cool, even stylish. This is probably because trains have actually been very often associated with jazz, swing, blues, folk, etc. Many great songs have been dedicated to the allegory of the locomotive. Railroads symbolized freedom and opportunity such as *Choo Choo Ch'Boogie* by Louis Jordan or *Take the A-Train* by Duke Ellington.

Transition sound

Xavi

In 1841, Thomas Cook, a Baptist minister, organized a train excursion for 540 parishioners to attend an anti-alcoholism meeting in London. Cook negotiated a set fare for passengers, including tickets and a meal. The trip was so successful that he expanded his operations, first within the United Kingdom and then to the United States and Europe, providing passengers with packages including transportation, accommodations and even meals.

Mila

Smart guy this Thomas. I am sure if he were alive today, he would be a great promoter of the "Discover EU" programme!

Transition sound

Xavi

What is sure is that the next youngster awarded with the "Discover EU" pass should use it to visit the next museum we are going to recommend.

Mila

Yeap, it is very easy to reach Spain by Interrail. And there, they can find the Railway Museum of Madrid (el Museo del Ferrocarril). It holds one of the largest historic railroad

collections in Europe. But what is more interesting is that it is housed in an old monumental station. So it is a unique opportunity to visit the characteristic iron architecture of that time.

Jose

Ok, ok, I don't need to listen more. I want to get my "Discover EU" pass also!

Xavi

Well... but you can't.

Jose

Who said that?

Xavi

Mmmm, did you listen to the podcast? You must be 18 years old to participate.

Jose

Party pooper...

Mila

Dear railway lovers, thank you very much for accompanying us till this point!!

All speakers

Adeu! Doviđenja! Adios!

Transition song

CLOSURE

And with our Pop Wagon we come to the end of another episode of your weekly favourite "Next Stop". Don't forget to check out the Discovery EU competition in the European Youth for a website. We also recommend you to follow European Youth social media channels for similar competitions and programs. You can find them on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook as simply European Youth. "Discover EU" also has an official Facebook group that anyone can join. You also find our Y-factor team on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. And we hope that you will connect with us for more information and tips like this. We are certain to see you in the "Next Stop"! My name is Teemu Karhapaa. Thank you for listening.

Closing soundtrack