My name is Touko Kinnunen. I am an alumnus of the Music Production and Songwriting program at Metropolia University of Applied Sciences in Helsinki. I participated in the House of Europe songwriting course in Vienna.

When we were informed about the travel grants, I learned that the grant for green travel was larger than the standard one. That immediately caught my attention. It was remarkable that the program actively encouraged environmentally friendly travel by making it more financially attractive.

In our daily lives, we constantly make choices that have ethical and environmental consequences. More often than not, making the greener choice means sacrificing a bit of our own comfort or convenience. Although that is a noble thing to do, it can become exhausting over time. It is frustrating to always have to choose the more difficult path. In that sense, the green travel grant was a genuinely refreshing initiative.

At first, I wasn't entirely sure whether green travel between Helsinki and Vienna would even be possible. There is a sea crossing and several thousand kilometers of land to cover. I almost gave up on the idea when I found out that traveling by ferry does not count as green transportation under the program's rules. However, I later learned that only the majority of the journey needs to be completed using green means of transport. At first, it also seemed that the trip would simply be too expensive. In the end, though, with the help of an Interrail pass and by combining different routes, I managed to create a travel plan that worked in every respect.

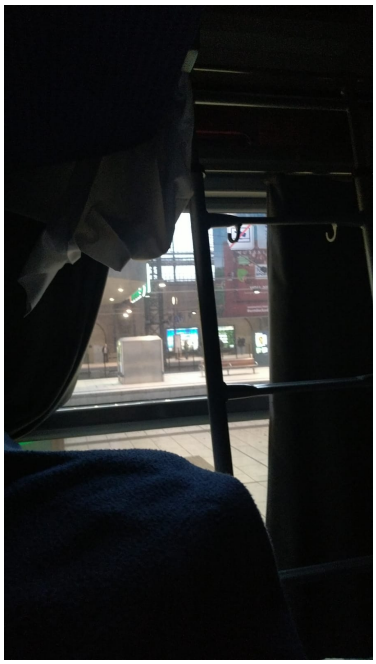
I am a relatively inexperienced traveler, and whenever I have traveled abroad before, I have always been with someone else. That is why I was determined to make this journey. It felt like a kind of coming-of-age experience. I asked a friend who had plenty of Interrail experience to help me buy the pass, plan the route, and book the hostels. From the very beginning, I knew that if I traveled to Vienna by train, I certainly wouldn't be taking the fastest route. We booked hostels so that I could spend one day exploring Stockholm and another discovering Berlin along the way.

I can honestly say that by the time I had crossed the sea to Sweden...

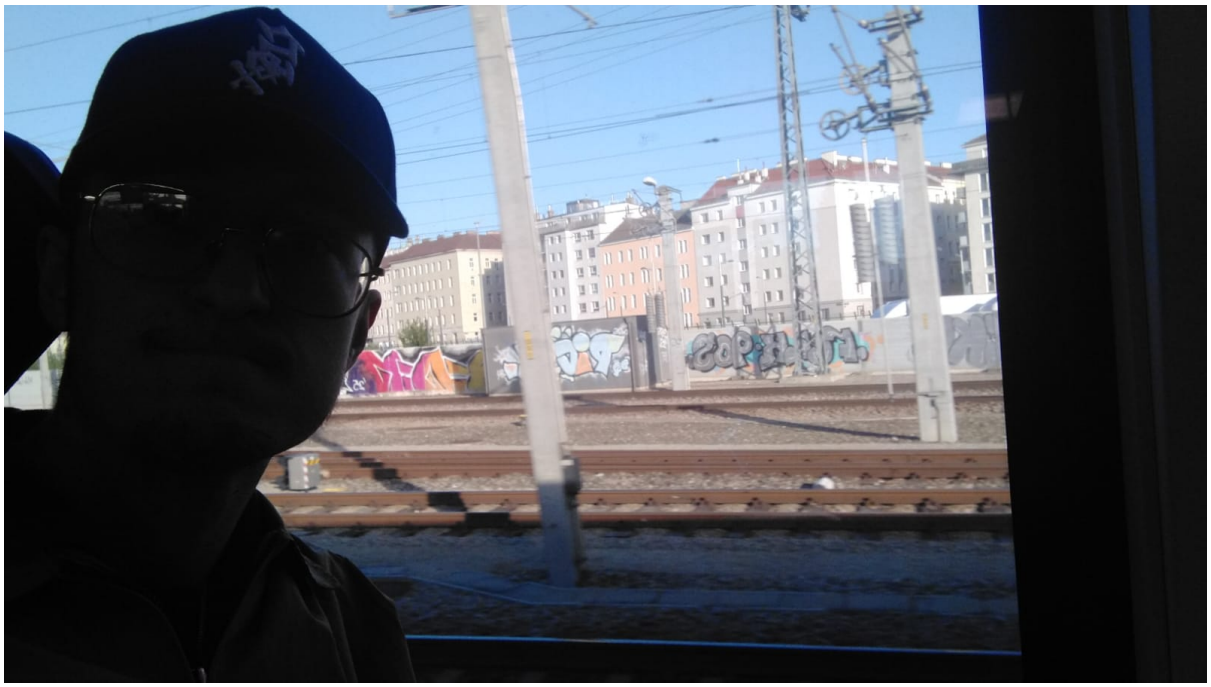
...walked through Stockholm's Old Town...

...traveled across the Öresund Bridge...

...slept on a train for nearly a thousand kilometers...



...and experienced Berlin in the spring...



...stepping off the train and seeing the sign that read "Wien Hauptbahnhof" felt almost magical. “Look, Mom. Without an airplane.”

I chose this way of traveling because the journey itself was unforgettable, the expenses were covered very generously, and it was genuinely refreshing to make an environmentally friendly choice that was also the most rewarding option for me personally.