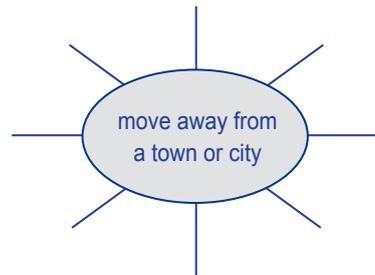
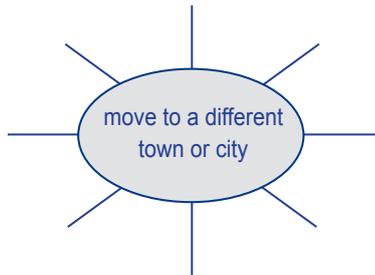


German city offers workers a free one-month stay

Level 2 • Upper intermediate

1 Warmer

With a partner, briefly discuss what might motivate people to do each of the following things. Write your ideas onto the mind maps.



Compare your mind maps with other students.

2 Key words

Match the key words with the definitions. Then find them in the article to read them in context. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

facelift	trend	gem	intention	remote	issue
nativist	preserved	promising	extremes	quaint	revive

- when a place or a building is looked after so that it is not damaged or destroyed _____ (para 3)
- something that is special or beautiful in some way _____ (para 3)
- interesting or attractive in a slightly strange and old-fashioned way _____ (para 3)
- a gradual change or development that produces a particular result _____ (para 5)
- likely to be successful _____ (para 6)
- from a distance _____ (para 6)
- a plan or the reason to do something _____ (para 10)
- make something become active, successful or popular again _____ (para 10)
- a subject that people discuss or argue about, especially relating to society, politics etc _____ (para 11)
- protecting the interests of people who were born in a country or have lived there for a long time and not the interests of more recent immigrants _____ (para 12)
- work that is done to make something look newer or more attractive _____ (para 13)
- opinions that are as different from each other as it is possible to be _____ (para 14)

German city offers workers a free one-month stay

Level 2 • Upper intermediate

Try before you buy: German city offers workers a free one-month stay

David Lepaska

25 September, 2019

- 1 In 2018, Eva Bodenmüller read that a town in eastern Germany was inviting people to live there for a month for free. She and her partner, Carsten Borck, an artist, knew they had to leave their flat in Italy soon and didn't want to move back to their home city, Berlin.
- 2 "I thought: 'Why not Görlitz?'" said Bodenmüller, a freelance journalist.
- 3 Görlitz, Germany's easternmost town, is a well-preserved gem that has played the part of quaint central-European towns in Hollywood films, including *The Grand Budapest Hotel* and *The Reader*. But its old town, which attracts 140,000 tourists a year, hides a darker reality.
- 4 The town has Germany's lowest wages and one of the country's highest proportions of far-right voters. After the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, easterners moved to the west in large numbers. By 2013, Görlitz's population had fallen more than 25% to 54,000.
- 5 Town officials decided they needed to do something to reverse this trend. They had the idea of offering a free one-month stay, no strings attached.
- 6 Other cities had already been experimenting with the idea of trying to attract new residents by offering free housing. Detroit was the first big city to try it. They started a programme of paying promising young professionals to live and work in the city for a year. Today the idea is being used everywhere from the Greek island of Antikythera to Candela, Italy, and Tulsa, Oklahoma, which offers \$10,000 to remote workers to move there for a year.
- 7 The number of people who work remotely is growing. Already, millions of people spend much of their adult lives moving from one place to another. The people behind Görlitz's programme realized it could both attract some of those nomadic workers and, at the same time, teach them some lessons on how to reverse its population decline.
- 8 The Görlitz Testing the City project received more than 150 applications. Two-thirds were from larger cities, and several came from outside Germany, including from Hungary, the Czech Republic, the US and the UK.
- 9 The 54 individuals and groups taking part in the project are singles, couples and families from their 20s to 60s. They include digital entrepreneurs, a film-maker, a model, visual artists and musicians. Each is given a flat and offered free use of a work space.
- 10 Though the town hopes that some will permanently move to Görlitz, the main intention is to get information from participants that could help to revive Germany's smaller towns. "Our aim is to learn more about what people need, and if they decide to move, what their motivation is," said project head Robert Knippschild.
- 11 Görlitz has around 7,000 vacant flats, and unemployment is a third higher than the national average. This is one reason why Görlitz has taken in 1,200 refugees. But surveys have shown immigration to be the most urgent issue for residents of eastern Germany, where the far-right political parties are strong.
- 12 Görlitz has been called "the living room" of the nativist Alternative for Germany (AfD) party. In 2019, the AfD came out on top in Görlitz in the European Parliament elections and the state election on 1 September, though the Christian Democratic Union candidate, Octavian Ursu, beat the AfD to become mayor in June.
- 13 "It was a tough campaign," said Ursu, a Romanian immigrant who played lead trumpet in the local philharmonic orchestra before moving into politics. He sees Testing the City as part of a plan to revive the town, which includes a new data-analysis centre employing 120 scientists and engineers, a Siemens hydrogen technologies innovation campus, which will employ another 100, and a €36m facelift for the art nouveau municipal hall.
- 14 Bodenmüller and Borck said they spent a lot of time during their stay in Görlitz talking to locals and found a town of extremes. "In other places, you generally have people from different groups talking to each other," said Bodenmüller, who has lived in Berlin, Munich and several smaller cities. "But here there is no centre – there are just the two sides."
- 15 With the project about halfway through, four participants have already decided to move to

German city offers workers a free one-month stay

Level 2 • Upper intermediate

Görlitz, including German-Finnish poet Mark Mallon and his wife, Finnish artist Venla Saalo. The couple decided to leave Berlin because of its traffic, pollution and high rents. "Görlitz feels like a lively town with a lot of young people, students, opportunities, empty spaces and, on the other hand, peace and remoteness," they said. "It is a great combination for creative work."

16 Borck and Bodenmüller like the cheap rents and large number of organic grocery shops and vegetarian restaurants but wish Görlitz had better regional transport and more open-mindedness. They also wished they had more time there.

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First published in *The Guardian*, 25/09/19

3 Comprehension check

Are these statements true (T) or false (F) according to the article? Correct any that are false.

1. Görlitz is in central Germany, just west of Berlin.
2. Many big films have been filmed in Görlitz.
3. There are 54,000 empty flats in Görlitz.
4. Many voters in Görlitz do not want to welcome immigrants into their town.
5. Through the project, the town is hoping to find out what makes a place attractive to people who might think about moving there.
6. Eva and Carsten were able to move to Görlitz because they can both work from home and so wouldn't have to find new jobs.
7. Workers in Görlitz get paid more money than workers in most of the rest of Germany.
8. Görlitz is the first town in the world to run this kind of temporary free-housing project.

4 A useful phrase

a. Find and underline this phrase in the article.

no strings attached

b. What does it mean?

1. You do not have to take anybody with you.
2. There are no special conditions that limit or restrict an offer.
3. You do not have to pay any money.

d. Use the phrase in two sentences of your own – one about the article and one about something else.

5 Questions – pair work

a. Choose one of the following tasks.

1. You find the project interesting. Write five questions you would like to ask a couple who have recently completed the month-long project.
2. You are thinking about taking part in the project. Write five questions you would like to ask the project managers before you decide to live in Görlitz for a month.

b. Compare your questions with other pairs who chose the same task. Which questions are the clearest? Which are not completely clear? Improve any questions that are not completely clear.

German city offers workers a free one-month stay

Level 2 • Upper intermediate

6 Discussion

- Why do you think people sign up to be part of the Testing the City project?
- Would you ever consider taking part in a project of this kind – in Germany, the USA, Italy, Greece or elsewhere? Why? Why not?
- If you could live anywhere in the world, rent-free for a month, where would it be?

7 Webquest

- Find out more about the town of Görlitz.
 - What would you like to see there?
 - Why is it sometimes called Görlwood?
 - How could you get there from where you are now?

German city offers workers a free one-month stay

Level 2 • Upper intermediate

KEY

2 Key words

1. preserved
2. gem
3. quaint
4. trend
5. promising
6. remote
7. intention
8. revive
9. issue
10. nativist
11. facelift
12. extremes

4 A useful phrase

- b.
- 2

3 Comprehension check

1. F – It is the easternmost town in Germany.
2. T
3. F – There are about 7,000 empty flat in Görlitz.
4. T
5. T
6. T
7. F – Wages there are the lowest in Germany.
8. F – Detroit in the US was the first city to offer free accommodation to encourage people to live and work there.