



Everything in nature is interconnected

10 days
30 youthworkers
9 countries

How to be more connected with
ourselves? With each other?
With the nature?

How to support young people to
be more inclusive, open-
minded, resilient and proactive
in their personal and
professional lives?

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hosted by:**



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Erasmus+ Training course **Steps to Connection Booklet**

Stará Lesná, Slovakia
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An exploratory journey which
aimed to find answers to these
questions through community
and nature-based activities,
embodiment, rituals, authentic
and emotionally grown
approaches.





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WELCOME

Aim of the booklet

We would like this booklet to be a source of inspiration for youthworkers, youth, trainers, volunteers, people working with groups and working/living in communities, but also anyone else who finds it beneficial. May it be seen as an example of good practices for social connection, authenticity and inclusion of each and everyone, because everyone deserves to belong a be accepted and loved.

This booklet is co-creation of trainers and participants

With this booklet we would like to also bring you closer to the experience we had on the training course and share with you the impact it had on participants and their local environments - by pictures, leading principles, activities from the program, workshops from the participants and by follow-ups.





Community work

30 people from 9 countries shared the same place for almost 10 days and tried to co-live and co-created the space together. Community work was an important part of every day and also one of the ways how to connect, be more honest and authentic to oneself and to the others. Each day participants had chance to help with cooking by chopping the vegetables, washing dishes and cleaning the common space after each dish, to reflect on the day by reporting and noting down all of the activities,, to document the day by taking pictures or to take care and make the common areas more cosy. This was a place for the practice of authenticity, mindfulness and also, many times, emptiness.

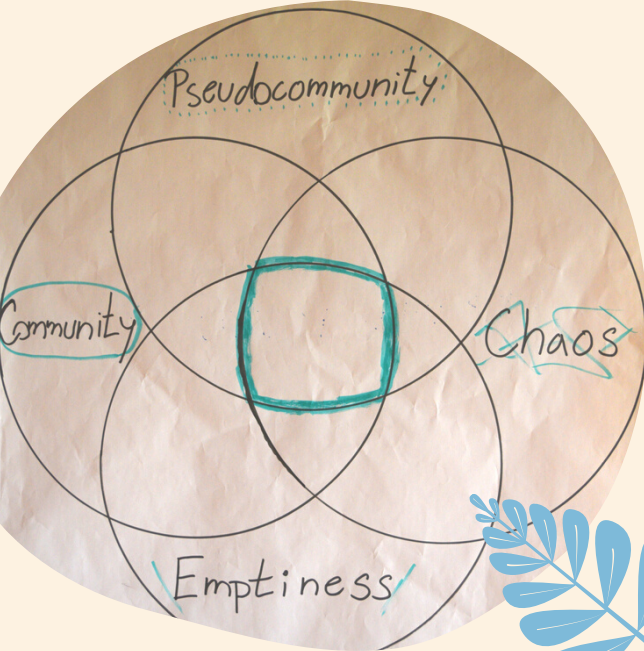
Connection and inclusion are necessary for social beings which humans are.

COMMUNITY & CONNECTION



The way of council

People have been meeting in circles for thousands of years for different reasons - to share stories, to make difficult decisions, to ask for help, to heal or to hear the wise wo/men speaking. In the Way of Council each and every member or the circle, has a chance to express in whatever way (speaking, singing, moving, staying silence) when given the talking stick. There may, or may not be a leading question. First evening we had one, concretely "What are you afraid of?" The leading principles are **Spontaneity, Listening from heart, Sharing from heart, Speaking the Essence** and using I language.



COMMUNITY & CONNECTION

Community building by M.S. Peck

According to the methodology developed by American psychiatrist Morgan Scott Peck, groups of people that live together or share the same values and direction and try to create communities, go through a specific stages in order to reach the state of true community. These stages are not stable, they are inter-changable and sometimes very fragile.

The 4 stages are:

Pseudocommunity - staying at the surface, avoiding conflict in the group, not being authentic and honest in front of other (usually due to fear)

Chaos - opening up, being vulnerable, speaking for oneself in I language, going into authenticity and confrontation

Emptiness - place in which silence prevails, respectful and tolerant environment is manifesting, people have clear minds without judgements

Community - a state of unconditional acceptance of myself and the others in the group

We went through all stages and went back to many of them repeatedly during the training course with a help of 11 communication guidelines and founding vision of M.S. Peck.

Fully accepting yourself and others is not always easy.



True authentic expression may be demanding due to our fear of rejection.

Authentic movement

Allowing oneself to be witnessed by another human being in movement, in nature, in silence.

Whole group was split in pairs. There were 2 roles- the observer and the mover. Mover was invited to move by listening to body, how it feels like, following the impulses that are coming from within. No music was used, movers' eyes were closed for the whole time of the authentic movement (18 minutes).

Observers' role was to keep the mover safe in case of immediate danger yet not interrupt the process of moving and to witness the beauty of one human being moving and giving trust to the partner.

Then participants had 2 minutes to discuss how the movement felt (mover shared), then the roles switched (pairs stayed the same).



AUTHENTICITY & INCLUSION

The honest feedback

With this activity, participants were encouraged to be fully authentic and share their feedback, the experience they had with each other after 3 days spent together while being witnessed by other people. They sat in 2 circles. In each circle one person went into the middle. The person in the middle, received feedback from all the other group members, who one by one shared their feedback towards the person in the middle, answering 2 sentences - What makes me close to you is.... What makes me far from you is....

Participants were asked to be as concrete and honest as possible, trying to avoid judgements, rather stay with the observation. The person in the middle was just receiving, there was not a place for discussion of the feedback. This could be done later, within reflection groups or community building circles.



Reflection groups

Everyday after the activities, participants had a safe space in small groups where they could share about their learnings, share how the day has been for them, what are their learning/ other needs and goals. Participants were asked particular questions each day to reflect on, and they were invited to find a way that works for the small groups - either going for a walk together, spending time outdoors, drinking tea, writing in journals or expressing their learning in some other creative way. After every reflection group messengers' meetings were happening, where team of trainers was available for the reflection groups messengers (1 per each group) to share feedback from their groups and also to hear, how the other groups are doing.





EMBODIMENT & MOVEMENT



Contact improvisation

Contact Improvisation is a form of modern dance based on spontaneous movement interaction. It was established 50 years ago in 1972 by Steve Paxton. The purpose of contact improvisation is research of physical contact with one's own body, with the environment, the earth, floor, the walls, the space, and usually with other dancers (participants) as well. It is not a classic pair dance and it does not teach the steps that the dancers follow, but rather let dancers authentically express themselves while being freely inspired by basic techniques such as weight transfer, working with boundaries, coming and going from contact, stretching, pushing, pulling, reaching, leading, following or scrolling. Participants worked with pressure, center, weight, dynamics, levels, together, in pairs, trios, larger groups or individually. They had the opportunity to explore movement in their body on different levels - from cells, bones, muscles, tendons, fascia to the skin.



Being in physical contact with ourselves and others is essential for our nervous system and good mental health



Pivot dance

A playful and creative way of interacting with a partner through stop-motion attention and gentle touch. In pairs one partner started with movement (dance, theatre etc.) and at the end froze in a position. Right after that the other person started another movement and they were switching the roles for some time, interacting only with each other in the first phase. In second phase the attention of the mover is shifted outside - on what's going on with the other couples. At third phase, movers from different couples may start interacting with each other, incorporating also touch and contact improvisation principles, though not losing the sense of where their own partner is. Finally, a movement/theatre-play by 6 couples was performed to music. Human statues were created which the rest of the couples were observing. Later the roles change. At the end of the activity participants shared in a circle one word describing how they felt.

EMBODIMENT & EMOTIONS

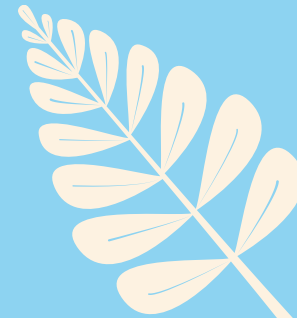
Playfight

PlayFight is technique by which participants have a chance to encounter their body moving freely on the playfulness - strength (fight) mode in a safe environment witnessed by others. The intention is to notice, accept, and express the motivations and emotions that appear during this encounter. Participants can be facing here situations where they have chance to be fully authentic, express emotions and needs, set boundaries, face confrontations or conflicts, find compromises or win-win solutions..

In this technique participants create a circle, which is a representation of the "walls" and safe space. It also serves as auditorium. One person goes in the middle of the circle and verbally expresses hers/ his intention (e.g. I would like to be playful, relaxed and roll a lot on the floor). Then a second person - partner for the playfight come to the middle and do the same. The first person can also dare someone from the group to join him/ her for a playfight. After intentions are set, the playfight starts. It is not allowed to stand up, participant can just be on their knees or on four. It is also forbidden to hit, scratch or slap. After the playfight the playfighters thanks to each other and share their feelings and current states. At the end the auditorium shares their impressions and observation in the way of "word showers".

Prior to the playfight activities involving giving weight, pushing away, pulling and relaxing.

Playfight had a big success and was repeated again during participants' workshops.



Suppressing any emotion (especially anger) is harmful to our body and may result in diseases.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

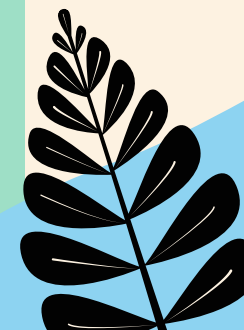


Different emotions

With this activity we started with a theory in a circle. The trainer expressed the bright and the dark side of the emotions using the 4 basic emotions - sadness - grief, happiness-joy, fear and anger. The emphasis was put on a fact, that all emotions are valid, but some of them are not socially accepted and we have difficulty in confronting them. All of them are welcomed, as long as we can deal with them and not letting them control us.

Then, groups of four were created standing in smaller circles. Trainer said an emotion and one member of each group had to play it and also to provoke it, by exaggerating it. Then the rest members of the group imitates it. Each member of the small group had a chance to show their understanding of each of the given emotions. The emotions suggested were disgust, anger, joy, fear, pride, passion, in love, pain and jealousy.

Each and every emotion is ok and has a meaning.



Being silly

On the way to full authenticity and acceptance of ourselves we had to get out of our comfort zones many times. Embracing and owning emotions was truly helpful with this process.

In this activity we were playful and childish and all the time we were speaking with our tongues out - trying to argue, be very strict, have normal debate or just being, while accepting the feelings of embarrassment, joy and connection.





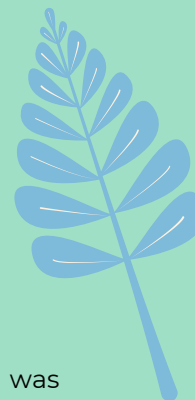
Mandala opening

In the opening of the training course, we were invited to walk in the forest alone, self-reflect and stay with the questions - What did I come here for? Why am I here? What flame do I want to ignite in me? What is my intention? What am I leaving behind or I want to leave behind for this week? What is blocking me from being fully present here/ not helping my flame to burn?

We should collected a natural object, that was symbolizing for us the answer/s and bring it to circle. We met afterwards together and each of us shared their answer to one or more of the questions, leaving a natural object on the ground, creating a mandala, which stayed untouched by human intervention till the end of the project where we had a closing sharing, collected the natural objects and gave it back to the nature.



NATURE & RITUALS



High Tatras

The whole training Steps to Connection was happening in a beautiful natural environment of the highest and oldest national park of Slovakia, High Tatra mountains (Tatras national park). All activities were happening under the close "supervision" of magnificent 2000+ metre high peaks, together with beautiful evergreen forests, meadows full of flowers, grass meadows, clearings, crystal clear water of the Cold creek and many natural beings including bees, sheep, bears, grasshoppers, rabbits, bats and many more. These beautiful surroundings welcomed us with open arms and was supporting us on our way, together with the weather, which was most of the time pleasant, but also showed its power by wind, thunder or rain. The nature around us was clearly nourishing our inner nature and helped us with answering many questions we can with and which arised during the training course.



BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE of Steps to Connection and the world :)



Pan

Yannis



Gemma



Antonio



Zoi



Vasia



Bella



Justyna



Sofiya



Darko



Hannah



Eva



Nefeli



Laine

BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE of Steps to Connection and the world :)

Nika



Umar



Alex



Paolina

Filip



Viktoriia



Diana



Ksenija



Borut



Deni



Anita



Pasquale

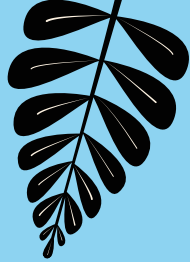
Maria



Eva



Ana

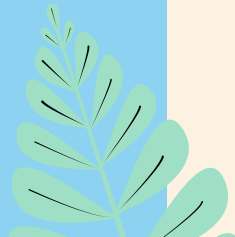


Flexible game by Pasquale

Participants should write down their biggest fear on a paper. After all the papers were put in a bowl and participants, now divided into 3 groups, selected one paper for group. They should have later performed this fear in a short theatre show for the other. They had to guess which fear it was.

Meditation and Yoga

Two guided sessions - one by Pasquale "Italian style" yoga mix on meadow and the second relaxing guided meditation by Justyna, inside.



WORKSHOPS by participants

Find your tree by Nefeli

In this activity participants worked in couples in which one is blindfolded and the other takes them the blinded one to a specific tree they had chosen for them and think would be fitting them. Blindfolded person has the time to touch the tree, connect with it and explore it and to remember all the details. Afterwards their partner takes them back in the starting place. The task of the person then is to find their tree, this time with eyes open.

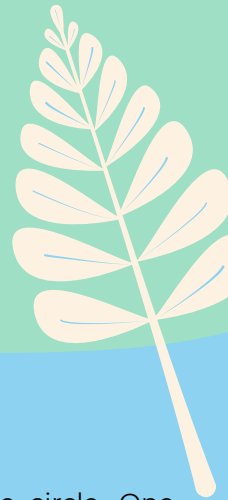
Natural elements by Diana

We were feeling 4 natural elements (earth, water, fire and air) by body movements with the help of music, one by one. After, at the end there was discussion about the four elements and how they can't exist without one another.

The topic of elements continued in the evening with

4 elements massage by Reinis

where we had a chance to work in couples and massage each other on 4 different songs, evoking the 4 elements, following the instructions by Reinis.



Psychiatrist by Ksenja

Participants were sitting in the circle. One person left and Ksenija explained the rules. The goal of the game was for the volunteer to find out, after coming back in the middle of the circle, what's going on with other participants, "the patients" by asking each one of them a question one by one. We had 4 rounds, with 4 rules and 4 volunteers. First rule: "Patients" answer to the question the person before them was asked, while not being obvious. Second rule: When a "patient" lies, he/she crosses her legs. When saying the truth this doesn't happen. Third Rule: "Patients" should answer with exact amount of words (5) to each question. Fourth Rule: "Patients" should answer the question, but imitate the movement the person on the other side of the room does.



FOLLOW-UPS

examples of dissemination



facebook post on Latvian participants' wall



workshops at german-ukrainian youth camp in Germany



guided meditation in Bulgaria



instagram stories from Bulgarian participant



workshop in partner NGO in Portugal



workshop at university in Germany



workshops at latvian-lithuanian youth camp in Latvia

FOLLOW-UPS

examples of dissemination



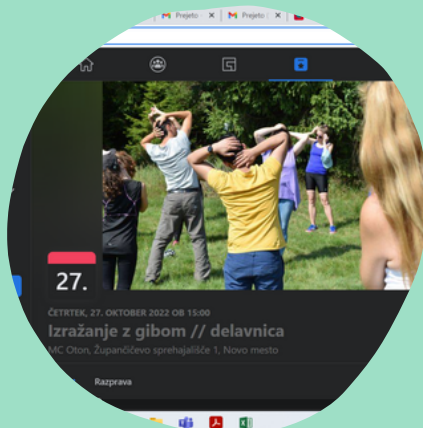
workshop in park in Greece



activities in kindergarten in Greece

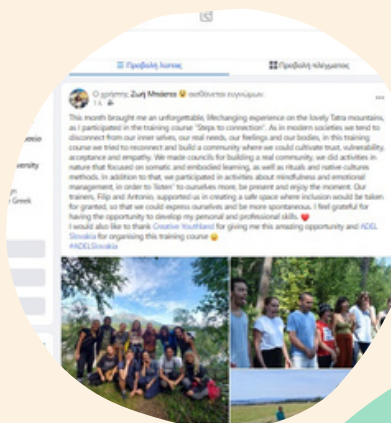


public workshop in Slovenia



facebook event for a workshop in Slovenia

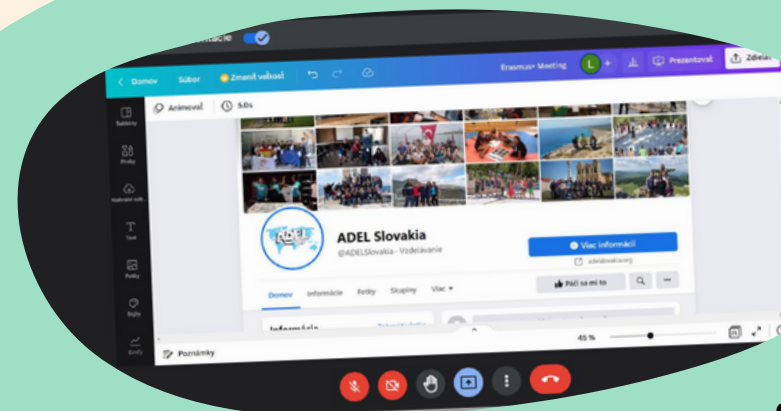
facebook post on Greek participants' wall



facebook video by Latvian participant



workshop in nature in Bulgaria



presentation for students in Slovakia



TESTIMONIALS & IMPACT

Testimonials

"I saw how important it is to create a safe space for people to open up and be vulnerable. I also got an insight into good practice from trainers on how to respond to the diversity of the group, how to adapt the activities according to their wishes and needs, how to ensure inclusiveness."

"I learned many exercises that they are combining the body and the nature at the same time. I felt like an ancestor man who is discovering his voice and his body all over again from the beginning using my emotions, my real voice and my physical strength in order to survive. I felt free to express myself without judging myself"

"Healthy skepticism, critical thinking and easiness from others is very important to test and check if one did not get lost in his/her beliefs and his/her view of true. I also found the inspiration in various methods and techniques which were represented and I can imagine to implement some of them to my life."



Most important learnings

"I am much stronger regarding to my inner strength than I thought am!"

"It helped me to center myself and make the decisions I wanted long time ago. And now I can communicate with people better."

"I can understand how I feel subconsciously through listening to my body."

"I can be very useful just by providing space and company in the group, for other individuals to have deeper self exploration."

"To be true to myself and to the others. To express myself with the way that makes me happy no matter what the other people are saying"

"I had the opportunity to release myself and to reconnect my body with my soul. I realized how much I value the contact with nature, conscious movement and coexistence. I made a huge step to overcome my fear of public speaking."

"Think before you (re)act!"

"From now on, I am observing and trying to deal with my defensive mechanism, that is activated when we are in a conversation and instead of concentrating on the words of the participants, I am preparing my own. Additionally, I found helpful the emphasis on the rules for speaking as "I" and not as "we". I profoundly felt the inner move of my body and since then I am listening to it, trusting it and feeling more connected with my needs and emotions. In general, I feel more calm and confident."

Implementation in daily realities

"Within my organisation I aim to replicate some of the sessions, but also within small working teams I would like to take a similar approach of the community building activities to enhance cooperation."

"I try to be emotionally present for my friends and family and if someone shares something I try to stop think about my own experiences or how I think about what's being said by the others."

"I'm trying to practice silence as much as possible with myself and others. Trying to avoid arguments that aren't necessary (in a family level)."

"I want to talk more about the essence like about the feelings. I want to connect with the people through communication and physical contact."

TEAM



Filip Kňážek

trainer
filip.knazek@gmail.com



Antonio Cargnello

trainer
antoniocargnello@gmail.com



Alexandra Špaková

logistical support
alex.spakova@gmail.com



Gemma Paganelli

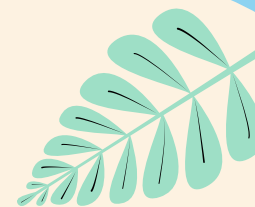
head chef
gemma.ac.apganelli@gmail.com

PARTNERS

Cyprus
Greece
Latvia
Portugal

Slovenia
Slovakia
Italy
Bulgaria
Germany

Youth Dynamic
Creative YOUTHland
Open Sense
Portuguese Red Cross – Local
Branch of Cucujães
Drustvo MOAVE
ADEL
Marga Pura
Association Walk Together
JUBUK



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NÁRODNÝ INŠTITÚT VZDELÁVANIA A MLÁDEŽE

