

Strategic Partnership (ERASMUS+)

A group of seven european organizations developed and wrote an application for a Strategic Partnership Program (ERASMUS+) to work, create, evaluate and find a common attitude in **ADVENTURE THERAPY** together.

We hope that we can start with the partnership in November 2015.

Mental health amongst youngsters is a tremendous challenge for our society. The number of youngsters dealing with socio-emotional problems like depression or anxiousness and other related mental troubles has reached an alarming level, resulting in a most dramatic number of suicides amongst youngsters.

Youthwork associations, sporting clubs and schools can no longer assume that this situation needs to be addressed in specialized therapeutic or psychiatric hospitals only. It is our duty to assure the mental and physical well-being of youngsters and young adults the best we can.

Through non-formal learning and experiential education programs in their free-time these youngsters could benefit from some of the same aspects as they would in therapy. When youngsters are able to experience, in a group and on a voluntary basis, what it is like to go for a simple walk in the woods, play a game together or even cook with their peers, we strongly believe that these non-formal education activities have therapeutic values in it.

Also, youngsters dealing with mental troubles often miss out the opportunity to develop basic skills to be active in their daily environment and therefore have less chances of succeeding, often ending up dropping out of school, being

unemployed or hospitalized later on in their lives. In this account, we would like to point out two major elements that in our opinion and based on our experience may be key factors in facilitating the recovery process of normal youngsters suffering mental challenges.

Besides what is dysfunctional on daily bases, it's obvious that they also have competences, talents and qualities that in some cases need more specific approaches to support their personal growth. It is not surprising to expect that especially those aspects of their personalities, might very well help to overcome their mental issues. So it makes quite sense to help youngsters to acquire an in-depth understanding of their qualities, just as it makes sense to have a clear and complete image of the troubles they are suffering from. This appreciative point of view is in our opinion an important added value that youth work and non-formal education can offer. Adventurous outdoor activities might very well suit this purpose, as they often provide youngsters and young adults a feeling of an extraordinary achievement when participants f.e. attain the summit of a difficult rock climb.

This is why we think **"Adventure Therapy"** (AT) could be an effective method to address the needs of these youngsters. It isn't therapy 'as such', but a way in which experiential outdoor programs can help young people on a voluntary basis, in their free-time, to overcome some of their problems.

It is a way of working with youngsters that has already extensively been practiced and researched in the US, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. In Europe however, there are some individual practitioners already using this new and innovative approach, each on their "island", but there's not yet a network of Adventure Therapy professionals with almost no research conducted and there is not really that much going on yet in this field.