

## EXPLORE YOUR LIMITS

More than 20 people who are coming from different organisations from Europe gathered in Martinique in order to learn together about sport as a therapeutic tool in youth work. Our team from Germany, divided this dissemination document in three parts: the first one is the description of what we experienced in this project, the next one consists of what our team did with the experience back in our organisation with our colleagues and the last one is how this project did influence our work with youth.

### Description of our experience in the project “Explore your limits”

The arrival to the Caribbean island of Martinique was the first challenge for most of the members of the group. Since there were transport strikes in France, flights and trains were cancelled, which translated into numerous hours of exhausting travelling and into harder jet lags for many of the participants. Nonetheless, the majority of the participants managed to arrive on the first night of the 9th of march.

The welcome to the group was officially done the next day, when we gathered with the whole organisational team with a view to obtaining the main information about the whole project: structure, rules, discussion of expectation and fears, and individual and collective goals. This was done with the help of padlet app, what allowed us to share some of the information in an anonymous way. This was very useful to feel free, for instance, to share our fears with the whole group.

As some of the most interesting norms of the projects were “not to complain” and “no previous information about the daily activities was going to be provided”. Behind these rules, the goal was to focus on solutions for the whole collective, to follow instructions carefully and to test our own individual limits. How do I feel and how do I react to the unknown? In order to be ready for the unknown activities, every night we would receive the time we were expected to be ready in addition to what we would need for the day. These could be water, sun screen, sports clothing, a little backpack with a torch, a raincoat, snacks, among others. It was a challenge to get involved with the “not knowing”. It meant trusting the coordinators and giving up control.

The first two days took place in a green space in Fort de France. With a beautiful sea view, the group divided randomly into smaller groups that were called “families”. The families had to get to know each other, which was done through a round of sharing personal and professional information including the strengths and weaknesses of every member. Once every family shared these aspects, we had to choose a leader that would be in charge. How to decide? Which tasks will follow? Who should or could be the “best” leader for the family? Will it be for the whole time? ... It was another challenge to face these and other questions as a newly formed small group. We collected arguments without knowing what would come next. Challenge excepted!

Later we learned that the leaders were responsible for motivating their group or hearing the concerns of their family to convey them to the coordinators and that we are free to nominate every day new.

As a family we also had collective goals, such as running, swimming and other activities. The leaders were collecting all possible information about their group. A feedback was demanded from the coordinators and questions such as how is it to work with their families and the most liked activities were formulated. The goal of those days was to achieve a team building experience and getting to know each other better.

The next days were much more active and even included changes of accommodation to the northern region of Martinique. We were not staying at the relaxing hotel anymore, instead we were in a big and beautiful house in top of a hill. We could enjoy from all the balconies a nice view to the sea. The house did have everything we needed but it was a clear contrast from the hotel experience. The hikes we did there were the highlights of each day. Under the always shiny sun, surrounded by magnificent nature and views to admire, we had to cross multiple streams with our shoes on, we had to walk longly being careful with what the way was offering: obstacles, distracting beauty while talking and checking each other.

With attentive ears we did train our listening skills through active listening. The task was to share something personal that is bothering in our personal lives. In the next hike we discussed real life cases of violence against youth and exchanged knowledge and points of view on bullying, self-harming behaviour and signs of sexual violence in teenagers, among others. All this while walking long paths through beautiful rainforests. Everyday was physically very demanding. Limits were explored through many aspects, like different personalities, tight schedules and lack of information about the next experiences to come. Checking each other, sharing water, snacks or sun cream to keep everybody safe and realising that we have to be ready for everything, because we are very far away from the city but also from our place.

Some of the experiences were made to make us react under pressure. For instance, the last day we spent in the big house had an interesting twist. Our coordinator woke us up two hours earlier than planned. We had to get ready in 5 minutes to prepare our whole luggage to leave the place, to prepare our breakfast and clean up the house. We left once again without much instructions than getting ready to start a new hike. This time we just knew we had to hurry up, since the hike was going to be long and demanding. And they did not lie. The Mount Pelee received us with plenty of challenging walking paths, sometimes they were quite inclined, so much that we had to crawl in order to maintain the balance and to manage to keep going. It was a day full of mental and physical involvement, taking care of ourselves, staying focused on the way but at the same time being there for each other, without leaving anybody behind.

When we finished the hike, we all felt so happy that we made it. We truly felt the excitement of achieving an individual and collective goal together. Our bodies produced the right hormones to feel like happy kids, laughing the whole time but also appreciating each other for their company and support. With a medal of wood we received the recognition of the coordinators for successfully completing the trekking to the highest point of Martinique.

During this collective euphoria, we had to get into the cars to be driven for an hour to an unknown destination. When we arrived at the place, our eyes could not believe what we were seeing. We had arrived at a beautiful hotel, where we were going to celebrate our last accomplished goal. There were no more hikes planned but there were more pending workshops to continue the learning experience. The last three workshops were prepared by participants, which was very valuable for all of us. These activities took place in the hotel or close to the hotel, which was surrounded by beautiful beaches. It was clear that the project was coming to an end, so we made a round of feedback to the coordinators and we had the chance to connect emotionally to each other while having a round of sharing very personal experience to the whole group. Our last day had sports, beach and a last night together before getting all our baggage ready for the next day’s flights back to our cities.

### Back home. What did we do with all we experienced? Informational conversations with our colleagues

Our colleagues in Berlin were waiting for us. Parallely, while we were on our way back to our city, two of our colleagues and 6 of the 9 teens that live in our therapeutic residence had actually started their own experience with Erasmus+ also in Martinique. While they were there, we did have different conversations with each colleague and members of the management in our organisation, where we had the chance to share what we experienced in Martinique. First of all, we could spread the word about the existence of Erasmus+. The fact that none of our colleagues and not even ourselves knew that this initiative existed or that we could make use of these learning projects was very surprising but also exciting to discover.

### The goal of our conversations with our colleagues were:

- to share information to participate in future projects
- to show opportunities: we all can organise projects on our own
- What have we experienced, how? We give space for our perspective.
- to share information about the requirements: who and how may participate in an Erasmus+ project. Network, private contacts, or professional contact, Online search, writing applications and accepting conditions.
- what are the main topics of the project we attended: “sport as a diagnostic method for young people”, “explore your limits”. The topic can be also a search tool to find a new project to apply for.
- how can we know which projects are being offered at the moment? Through the contact to an organisation, their representation
- Important things to take into consideration: deadlines, costs, time. The latter must be discussed with our employe. Does the potential participant have educational leave days available? If not, do we use our vacation days to attend a project? Can we offer online work while we are in an Erasmus+ project?

With all of our colleagues we had conversations about what we did and learned in Martinique. When our colleagues came back from the youth project, we discussed the way that this experience impacted the girls and themselves. This gave us more motivation to work towards a change in the way we organise our activities out of the institution with the teenagers, since they showed their potential to participate in sport activities while discovering their own capacities to deal with difficulties and to also support each other.

### Back home. What did we do with all we experienced? Inclusion of sports and nature in the the calendar of the teenagers

Our team is aware of the need of sports and nature as a very helpful resource to support the girls to live out of their comfort zone and to push their own limits. Their bedrooms and their house are a protective space that allows the girls to feel safe, but the lack of movement and nature usually rises their anxiety and depression, what reduces their opportunities to see that they are much more capable that they think. Since a part of the group had the chance to go to Martinique and realise that they could go through scary and triggering situations like using a kayak or being exposed to water, some girls could see themselves that they are very capable to explore their limits or in other cases that they really need a therapist to process their traumas that they thought, they were not there anymore.

We truly want to support the whole group of girls to push their own limits to get to know themselves better as we did and as some of they also did. We want to encourage them to see their strength to rise their self trust. They can profit from achieving goals collectively, what it could also create a positive bond in the group. Since the girls live together and conflicts arise within the house, being on the road can offer a possibility to get into another form of contact and exchange. That is why both of us are assuming the responsibility of bringing at least two activities a month that will consist of excursions in the nature.

21.05.2023  
Activity #1  
Hike from Grunewald to Teufelsberg, Berlin.  
<https://www.teufelsberg-berlin.de/besuch/>

We will start this program at our therapeutic home with a visit to the highest point of Berlin. Although this point is not really high since it reaches only 120 metres, the idea of getting there symbolises the start of this initiative. The place in question is called Teufelsberg and includes an hour trekking, a beautiful view of the city from a former STASI listening station, the chance to enjoy the streetart that has been accumulating with the years in its walls and to conclude, a visit to the Lake located closeby called Teufelsee to celebrate the day with a swim. With this first activity we have listed the next points of the surrounding areas of Berlin that will also have the beauty of nature as a support but without visiting a high point. The idea then will be to do trekkings together that will allow the girls to organise themselves as individuals and as a collective to reach a determined number of kilometres with all they need in order to reach their goal.

In order to plan this activity, we will take into account the advice of our coordinators and we will previously visit the place on the 13.05. to have a general view of what this hiking offers, what we need to take with us and to get to know the path as possible to be able to prevent any situation that compromises the safety of the group.

Other activities in planing mode:

03.06.2023  
Activity #2  
Hike from Buch to Liepnitzsee

17.06.2023  
Activity #3  
Hike Spandauer Forst - Rundwanderweg (ca. 12 km, 3-4h Hike)  
<https://www.ich-geh-wandern.de/spandauer-forst-rundwanderung>