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with support from
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ALL HANDS ON DECK !

SPORT CONTACT-MAKING SEMINAR ON A SAILING SHIP

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► *First orders for the seminar*

It was a stormy night when 28 people from 13 European countries arrived in Harligen harbour in the northern Netherlands. They all knew that it was the European Year for Education through Sports and that the seminar aimed to bring potential project partners together, establish new partnerships and develop new sports projects under the YOUTH programme.

They were all aware that sport is a good tool for bringing (young) people together, getting them to co-operate and increasing mutual understanding.

While they knew that there were surprises in store for them, they did have some information already. During the seminar, they would be full members of the crew of the 100-year-old sailing ship "Iselmar", hoisting the sails, cleaning the deck, (not) feeding the ship's cat and other duties that would be assigned to them every morning in the "Captain's orders". The trainers for the seminar, Nienke Dijkstra from the Netherlands and Jarkko Soininen from Finland, assisted by Peter Barendse from the National Agency of the Netherlands, knew that there would also be sessions concentrating on learning through sports, exchanges of experiences and concrete co-operation.

On the first night, they found out that the participants in the contact-making seminar were actively involved in work with young people as youth workers, as sports community workers or in sports organisations. It was nice to discover that many of the participants were planning to set up international youth projects using sports, or with sport as a theme. The participants also had an active and sporty attitude, and it was really important that they were all able to swim!

► *The ship*

The Iselmar is a beautiful, hundred-year-old lady. Go to www.rederij-vooruit.nl for more information about her.

► *Learning through sports and active sailing*

The seminar was based on learning by doing, with the sailing being used as an active part of the seminar. The only crew on board were the captain and her shipmate, so everybody else had the pleasure of taking part in sailing the ship.





The focus of the seminar was how to use sport as a tool for learning. During the seminar, the participants also had the opportunity to share experiences about their work with young people and to see how to transfer their experiences of sailing to the reality of their everyday work with young people.

We found out that learning through sports is not a simple matter. It is clear that learning is something that happens all the time. When Swedish and Spanish youth organisations put on events based on football, it can be said that the young people concerned will learn a lot. While that is true, as youth workers, it is important to be able to define the different learning aspects. That is a vital part of a quality youth project. In sport, the talk is often about the action. While it is the very lifeblood of sport, from the point of view of youth workers, facilitating learning has the same function.

► **Contact making through sports and sailing**

The ship offered an ideal environment for making contacts. As one participant said, it was 24-hour co-operation and teambuilding. Limited space created intimacy among the group, while also meaning that respect was required for living together on board.

The balance between sessions and active sailing provided an opportunity to process all the information. As one participant put it, "Sailing was a break for my brains and work for my hands." The sailing spirit was a special feature of the seminar. It gave the whole event a unique feeling. One participant said that respect for nature (wind and sea) had taught them to be patient and flexible. A lot of flexibility was indeed required, as the weather was determined to play a big role. On the first sailing day, we had to stay in port because of a storm. In that kind of environment of constant changes, the meaning of teamwork took on crucial significance.

► **At sea, example of one day**

The first day we stayed in port. We would all have liked to go out to sea from the very beginning of the seminar. All the same, it was good to start the seminar in port and concentrate on getting to know one another and the work that people were doing. In the evening, Peter Barendse

gave a very clear and informative presentation of the Youth Programme, especially from the point of view of the programme and sports projects.

The second morning started with high expectations: "Are we going to sail today? Is the wind still too strong? What is the weather forecast like?" The trainers went to have a meeting with the captain. She was still a bit worried, but the decision was taken: we would set sail. The timetable for the whole seminar was determined by the tides. Every breakfast started with low tide. It was 20 August 2004 and breakfast was at 8.15 am. Every evening, the participants were divided into small groups and each group was assigned different tasks for the next day. One group had to get up earlier and prepare breakfast. After breakfast, the "Captain's orders" were posted on deck at 9 am. We were happy and relieved to see the programme for the day. Yes, we were going to sail! The theme of the day was "Learning through sport". Before setting sail in the morning, we had a guest speaker from an organisation called Tukker in the Netherlands. He gave a presentation on the work they do with young people from criminal backgrounds and how they use sports, in particular sailing, as tools for learning and rehabilitation. Even though we were talking a lot about sailing, the focus was constantly on the elements of sports that could be used as tools for learning.

After the presentation, the captain came out and ordered everybody to the upper deck to prepare the ship for sailing. Some time later, the ship was ready and we set off for the islands in the Waddenzee. A few hours were taken up by the sailing itself. The participants were divided into small groups, each of which had different responsibilities. Individual groups took care of the front sail, the middle sail and other duties. After a while, we called all the groups together and gave them more tasks. In the individual groups, the participants were asked to discuss the Tukker presentation, experiences of the actual sailing and the Youth Programme presentation. On the basis of these examples, we wanted them to share experiences and ideas about how they used or would like to use sport as a learning tool with young people. We asked them also to think about what kind of added value the Youth Programme could bring to their everyday work. As one of the outcomes of the discussions, we asked them to compile various learning aspects they had identified in sport.

After a few hours' sailing, we arrived at one of the islands in the Waddenzee. The island had nice dunes to which we quickly headed and where we carried on with the group work. All of the groups had already identified many learning aspects in sport. Now was the time to put the ideas into practice. Each group had to choose one learning aspect and devise a game that included it. Later on, we played some fun games on the beach. In the evening, we had dinner on the ship. The rest of the evening was spent reflecting on the day's events and sharing more examples from the participants' actual experiences.

► **Feedback from the participants**

As it was a contact-making seminar, it was good to see that many participants really did make new contacts. A large number of participants also found partners for joint projects. One big issue mentioned in the evaluation phase was the motivation, inspiration and confidence that the seminar gave rise to. Some participants mentioned that they sometimes felt lonely in their particular fields, but had gained a sense of support from the seminar. The participants also found out a lot about the Youth Programme and how it could bring added value to their work. Peter Barendse's Youth Programme presentation and the fact that he was on the ship answering questions concerning the programme was mentioned as a very positive element.

Many participants indicated that they would set up new projects with the contacts established during the seminar. Youth exchanges were mentioned most often, followed by EVS. One of the participants is planning to go volunteering herself. For some people, the seminar was a starting point for introducing international youth activities into their own work. Concrete outcomes of the seminar have included the

approval of projects between Spanish and Scandinavian organisations and also a project presented by the Romanian participant. A great deal of information has been swapped through the e-mail group since the seminar and ideas for more projects have also been put forward. As the seminar on a sailing ship proved so successful, the organiser is planning to repeat the exercise with a different theme.

Some participants found the methods used during the seminar particularly interesting and plan to use them in their work with young people. The Tukker presentation and the metaphors of sailing and life gave other participants "food for thought."

The experience of being a participant instead of a youth leader or trainer was mentioned as having been very positive, as it put the participants' daily work into perspective. One of the participants mentioned the personal experience as part of a team on a sailing ship and the meaning of it to their life. Some participants would have preferred to have more time for informal discussions, as the programme was intensive and the days were long.

► **Last orders from the captain**

It was a really special seminar. The ship was an ideal place for contact making, especially in the context of learning through sports. It created a special atmosphere among those taking part. There was no need to generate enthusiasm for the work. The ship did that for us.

Provided there is a bit of imagination and people who are willing to try out something new, innovations of this kind are truly to be welcomed as part of the training activities under the Youth Programme.

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