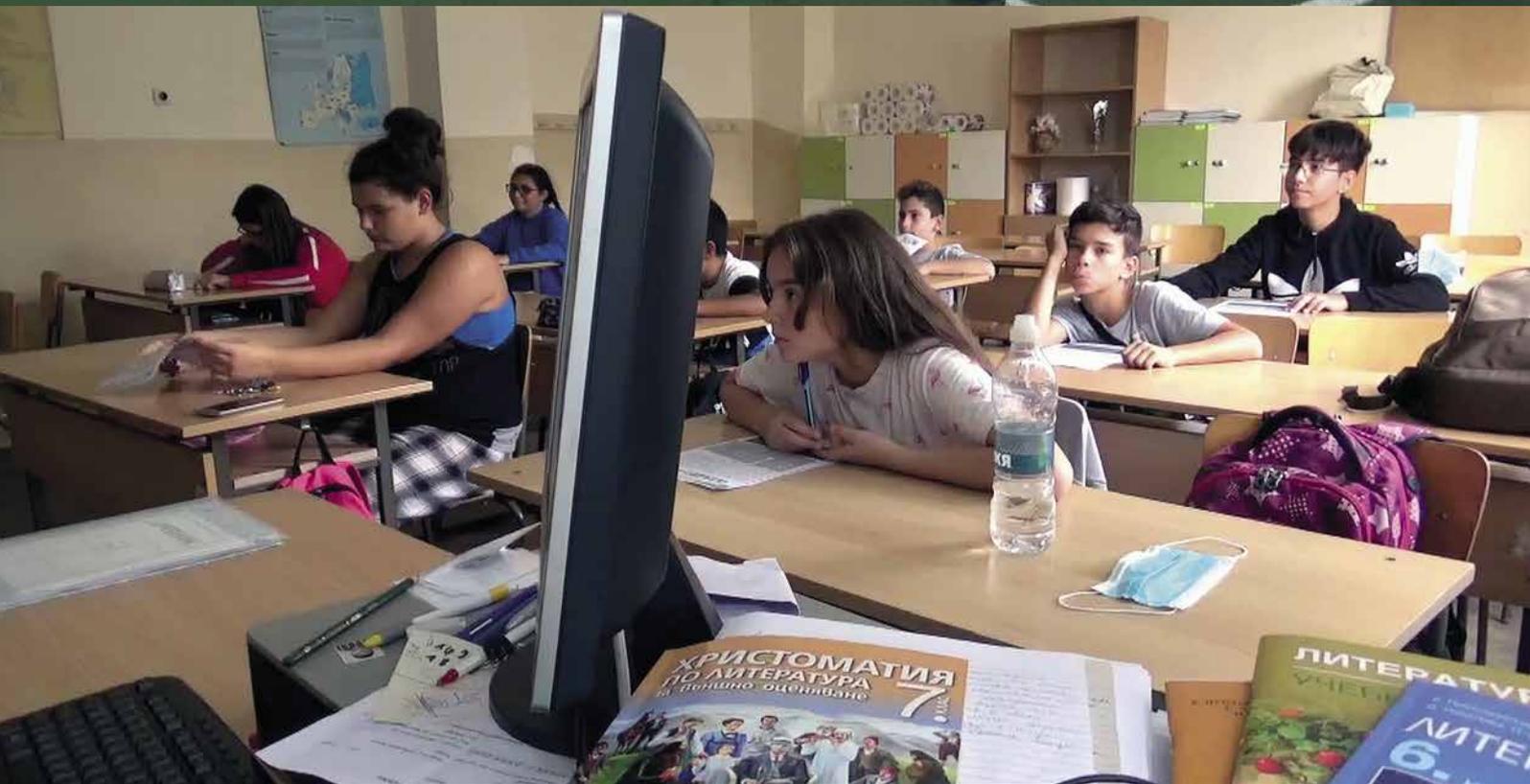


# PRACTITIONERS' GUIDE FOR IMPLEMENTERS OF A SPORTS & LEARNING PROGRAM

**GUARANTEE** – Guaranteeing the Right to Education for Roma Children in Selected European Cities  
Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme of the European Union



# Practitioners' Guide for Implementers of a Sports & Learning Program

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*When you walk through a storm  
Hold your head up high  
And don't be afraid of the dark  
At the end of a storm  
There's a golden sky  
And the sweet silver song of a lark  
Walk on through the wind  
Walk on through the rain  
Though your dreams be tossed and blown  
Walk on, walk on  
With hope in your heart  
And you'll never walk alone  
You'll never walk alone  
Walk on, walk on  
With hope in your heart  
And you'll never walk alone  
You'll never walk alone!<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> „You'll Never Walk Alone“ is the text from a piece of music by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein. It is the finale of the Broadway musical Carousel, which premiered in 1945. The lyrics are about looking to the future with confidence. The song is also the stadium anthem that can be heard before every game at Liverpool FC, online available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OV5\\_LQArLa0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OV5_LQArLa0)

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## SPORTS AS A MEANS FOR THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION



Learning processes can be boosted by play and joy. Sports provides both. Sports is furthermore a universal language that can strengthen togetherness regardless of gender, origin or ethnicity. Sports can enable children and young people to have positive learning experiences and return to the educational system or stay within it.

Sports can establish connections beyond societal boundaries and serve as a means of desegregation. On a *football pitch* or on the *dancefloor* the focus is not on where you come from or if your family is rich or poor. Sports creates a special kind of equality often lost in marginalized people's daily lives. Sports is a great means of motivation for learning in difficult times and circumstances. Furthermore, sports is a great tool for non-formal education.

The key to motivating young people often lies in the immediate surroundings, in an area for which many young people already feel enthusiasm. Sports is a source of enthusiasm. Even better, team sports can, in our opinion, be an essential key to reaching, activating, and enabling young people to complete their education and, thus, strengthen all kinds of effort regarding the Right to Education. Sports in combination with education provides a valuable learning field in which winning, losing, trust, fairness, de-escalation, communication, language, team spirit, democratic processes, and many other skills can be trained. Prerequisites for this are good guidance, enthusiasm, and an inclusive and respectful framework. Therefore, sports can be used to develop skills and abilities necessary for the defense of Human Rights.

Group affiliation and trust are key elements of youth work. In education too, they are core aspects when working on matters of discrimination, desegregation, or poverty. A combined sports and learning program can deliver ingredients for powerful Human Rights work.

Starting with a theoretical overview from cognitive research, we provide readers in this manual with valuable tools for the practical implementation of sports and learning programs with marginalized youth. In addition, this manual is intended to provide motivation and a basis to argue for the use of sports in order to *guarantee the Right to Education*.

## CONTEXT INFORMATION



Within the project GUARANTEE<sup>2</sup> we were aiming at encouraging, guiding, and strengthening sports and learning programs with marginalized youth in Plovdiv / Bulgaria and Dortmund / Germany.

*The main objective of the GUARANTEE project is to promote the children's right to education by:*

1. *Preventing school dropout and promote transition to secondary/vocational schools*
2. *Supporting the deconstruction of harmful stereotypes and supporting a mutual understanding between Roma and non-Roma youth*
3. *Facilitating knowledge transfer and peer-to-peer training of professionals through mutual learning and exchange of good practices*
4. *Conducting action research, analyze, collect, and disseminate lessons learned and best practices*

In spring 2020 the GUARANTEE project started (among other activities) *sports and learning programs* for structurally marginalized children and young people in Plovdiv / Bulgaria and Dortmund / Germany. The sports and learning activities were carried out by the *organizations Foundation ROMA in Plovdiv and GrünBau GmbH in Dortmund.*

With our sports and learning guide we want to give insights on how to realize sports and learning programs with marginalized children and youth. We also want to show how these initiatives can tackle discrimination and strengthen the Right to Education. One of the main goals of the initiatives was to create access to long-term educational structures.

Target groups of the GUARANTEE measures were different marginalized groups as well as members of the majority society. One particular focus (especially in Bulgaria) was put on the desegregation of Roma children and youth through joint sports and learning activities.

<sup>2</sup> GUARANTEE - Guaranteeing the Right to Education for Roma Children in Selected European Cities; Co-Funded by the EC DG Justice, REC-RDIS-DISC-AG-2018; Project 848688.

With regard to the focus on Roma, we want to state that Roma populations in Europe are very diverse and that not everyone accepts this umbrella term. Many people who are looked at as “Roma” or define themselves as such face discrimination and high levels of poverty. The situation in Plovdiv is characterized by multilingualism in the Roma communities: Turkish and to a lesser degree Romani are used within the community, whereas Bulgarian is mainly a language for communication with the “outside” world (in schools, at the workplace, with administration, in the health system, etc.). A majority of people living in the “Roma” neighborhoods define themselves as ethnic Turks and don’t speak the Romani language. All of them are Bulgarian by nationality. In Germany, the Roma from Bulgaria and Romania are only one of many groups of immigrants and so, the distinction between Roma and non-Roma is less dominant. People rather define themselves as Romanians, Bulgarians, or Turks, rarely as Roma.

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**TIP:** Within our sports and learning program we tried not to highlight national or ethnic identity. Instead, we focused on common identities such as pizza lovers, dancers, or swimmers. A central goal was also to bring people of different societal backgrounds together and promote desegregation.

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As there are many groups (migrants, ethnic minorities, etc.) within all European countries which face similar challenges, this manual can also be applied beyond the specific context of Roma communities.

Trainers and teachers in Dortmund and Plovdiv were prepared for the program in a local three-day peer-to-peer training course by the authors of this booklet. The aim of the courses was on the one hand to impart theoretical knowledge and on the other practical knowledge, in order to offer methods and, above all, to show the connection of all three focal points, namely sports, learning, and Human Rights and to develop common attitudes towards education and learning with sports. Both authors of this booklet have been working as inclusive sports trainers for many years, especially in the framework of the integrative project “SIQ! - Sports Integration Qualification” conducted by the Caritas of the diocese of Graz-Seckau / Austria. Both authors have spent many years working with marginalized youth in educational and sports projects.

Because of the GUARANTEE sports and learning program, children and young people received the space to playfully activate their own motivation through joint sports and learning activities and to gain self-confidence beyond the common learning settings of local education systems. The central element of the project’s approach is to give children and young people the chance to actively deal with their educational and professional future and to not prematurely drop out of school due to external circumstances. The tools to reach this goal are sports and learning activities.

Children and adolescents belonging to minorities affected by discrimination and racism have often experienced an education system that does not fit their individual needs. Linguistic diversity, their living circumstances, and living environment/lived experience are not sufficiently considered in the existing frameworks. In addition, negative and derogatory attitudes towards their groups of origin still determine the everyday learning routine of many children who do not belong to the respective majority society.

In this context, the GUARANTEE sports and learning program started at four levels:

- 1) *Sports as a motivational engine*
- 2) *Stabilization and orientation of young people through low-threshold access social work*
- 3) *Training the basic skills and areas of interest of children and adolescents through targeted learning support.*
- 4) *Human Rights education as a permanent part of the sports and learning program*

All measures pursue the goal of strengthening the Right to Education for marginalized youth through a combination of sports and learning activities.

This Practitioner's Guide was developed within the GUARANTEE project. It is based on the experience drawn from activities done with Roma and non-Roma youth in Plovdiv, Dortmund and Graz. Teachers and trainers from these three European cities have contributed the experiences and insights they obtained during the courses and activities. Therefore, we want to give special thanks to all the trainers and educators who participated in the GUARANTEE project and thus contributed their practice and experience to this Practitioner's Guide. Their practices provided valuable insights in order to develop this booklet. We want to thank Yasmin Yusif, Steffen Moor, Maximilian Busch, Thomas Rothstein, Miriam Bettahar (GUARANTEE implementers in DORTMUND) and Genika Baycheva, Andreas Kunz, Julia Atanasova (GUARANTEE implementers in PLOVDIV) in particular, who offered us a lot of their time by sharing their perceptions, experiences, and practice in sports and learning activities.

## CORONA CHALLENGE



The Covid-19 Pandemic school and sports facilities lockdowns 2020/2021 limited our planned activities. Those lockdowns pose a great threat and challenge to pursue the Right to Education as marginalized groups often lose contact with educational institutions due to limited access to online teaching (lack of hardware and/or internet connection) and other resources. During the pandemic, our project found some answers to overcome some of these circumstances. Many sports and learning activities were conducted despite the limitations of physical distancing. Many solutions were developed in spite of the pandemic. Therefore, we also provide an adjusted section about different ways that sports and learning activities can be realized during a pandemic.

## WHY IS IT NECESSARY

*“Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. Sport can create hope where once there was only despair. It is more powerful than governments in breaking down racial barriers. It laughs in the face of all types of discrimination.”<sup>3</sup>*

Education is a human right. Children and young people must be able to participate in national educational systems without discrimination or disadvantages.

How is it possible to (re)integrate disadvantaged children and young people into the educational system? How can we *guarantee* equal opportunities beyond social and ethnic backgrounds? How can we guarantee the Right to Education despite unequal starting positions within different sectors of society? Sports can play a key role here in addressing children and young people who are not or not adequately addressed or even excluded by conventional educational concepts.



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<sup>3</sup> Nelson Mandela, Laureus World Sports Awards 2000, Monaco [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GdopyAFP0DI&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GdopyAFP0DI&feature=emb_logo)

## BENEFITS OF A SPORTS AND LEARNING PROJECT



*“Everything that leads to an improvement in people’s ability to relate is good for the brain and good for the community in which these people live. Everything that restricts and prevents, undermines people’s ability to relate is bad for the brain and bad for the community.”<sup>4</sup>*

### Individual benefit of the sports and learning combination

Exercise and sports - in a healthy measure and always tailored to the respective person – have substantially positive effects on individuals:

There is no biological system that is not influenced in a positive way by physical exercise. It is nowadays well known that more mitochondria (“energy powerhouses” of the cells) are produced through exercise or muscle building. Thus, a better oxygen uptake and conversion is made possible. Bones become more compact and denser, the cardiovascular system pumps more blood through the body, and the blood vessels remain elastic. The heart also becomes stronger. The lack of movement in our societies causes restrictions for fruitful thoughts and brain activity. It was not without reason that Aristotle and his students strolled through the Lyceum of Athens while philosophizing. Movement gets our thoughts flowing and awakens our spirit - apparently this was already recognized in ancient Greece. Research shows that brain cells interconnect among themselves more effectively through movement - the brain’s own growth factors are stimulated.

<sup>4</sup> Gerald Hüther ([https://www.spielundzukunft.de/de-de/de\\_DE/content/blog-5014504/gerald-huether-so-lernen-kinder-8946](https://www.spielundzukunft.de/de-de/de_DE/content/blog-5014504/gerald-huether-so-lernen-kinder-8946))

## Economic and social benefit

The Covid-19 crisis has made the phenomenon of youth unemployment a leading topic across Europe. Youth unemployment is indeed a phenomenon that existed before the pandemic but has increasingly been fueled since the beginning of 2020.

Children and young people, whose parents are labor migrants within Europe, are often excluded from educational opportunities. Lack of language skills and different curricula in member states lead to early dropouts when kids and youth cannot follow their classes. Learning support is needed. Nowadays schools are usually not designed to function in a world of increased social and geographical mobility. At the same time, there is an acute shortage of skilled workers in many regions of Europe. Cost of dropout and unemployment affects national economies and causes a great deal of social upheaval and polarization within Europe's democracies.

Young people without prospects and a lack of educational qualifications represent one of the greatest social problems in our societies. People who migrated during adolescence or marginalized groups, such as many Roma in Bulgaria, are particularly affected by this problem. If they do not finish their educational career they risk getting stuck in a cycle of dependency on governmental subsidies and stigmatizing social programs.

Inclusive sports and learning activities have the potential to challenge these developments. Studies in the field of education suggest that every Euro invested in the education of marginalized groups of our populations pays itself back several times. If we strengthen education through sports and learning, we strengthen national economies of the future.

## Juridical benefit - compliance with Human Rights

The legal core for the implementation of the GUARANTEE integrated sports and learning program is strongly connected to the Right to Education. It is a legal obligation of governments to guarantee this right for every individual and especially for the younger generations.

One key for guaranteeing the right and access to education can often be found when there is already *enthusiasm*. Inclusive sports, even better inclusive team sports, can be a very important key element to reaching disadvantaged young people, activating them, and finally getting them back into the educational system or keeping them successfully inside.

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**TIP:** Human Rights legislation obliges local governments to provide resources to your project. Take this argument into account during negotiations for public funding. The Right to Education, as enshrined in article 14 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, as well as Article 28 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (ratified by all EU Member States), guarantees all children access to quality education without discrimination

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Regarding Human Rights Education, especially *battle-oriented team sports like soccer* can provide learning grounds for issues like discrimination, fair play, prejudice, and violence. What exactly does it need to convert a battle-oriented game like soccer into a tool for inclusiveness or into a means for individual learning and personal development? This booklet will provide implementers with inspiring insights in order to continue to work with battle-oriented team sports that includes a strong Human Rights perspective.

## **Democratic benefit - working against alienation and extremism**

Young marginalized people are in some cases susceptible to extremist views. They also often show a certain alienation from local/national entities and institutions. In our work, we noticed a frequent lack of affiliation to their countries of residence, often caused by racism, exclusion and discrimination on the part of the country's institutions and majority population. The marginalized majority population is also prone to extremism. Relationship building beyond ethnic and social boundaries is in our view one of the most powerful weapons against extremism and alienation. Sports, and in particular team sports, offer communal experience and a certain level of cohesion. Managing to get through challenging situations together is a very relevant, relationship-building, and bonding factor offered by sports activities. Stereotype research has found that the main basis to reach this goal is the opportunity to follow common aims with a group of different origin or social background. (see. Gremel 2018:) Thus, sports projects offer an ideal setting to overcome stereotypes.

## **LIMITATIONS**

### **Limitations on participants**

Not everyone loves sports. You will not reach all youth through sports. But you will reach many.

### **Limitations on poverty**

Inclusive sports cannot end poverty. You will encounter situations that you alone or your project cannot change. Moreover, a sports and learning project works mostly on the individual level and does not provide a means for structural change. However, it can make individuals stronger and more resilient. It can create consciousness and enthusiasm for individual rights and strengthen the social capital of marginalized youth and their families.

### **Limitations on racism**

Even the best sports and learning initiative cannot eliminate all racist or sexist attitudes within the educational staff of the institutions, society, and the marginalized group itself. Sports cannot change institutional racism but it can strengthen participants' self-consciousness and make them aware of their rights.

## FOUNDATION

Before going into more detail about the practical implementation of a sports and learning program, two questions need to be answered that, in our opinion, are extremely relevant and fundamental for all further considerations.

- *With what basic needs or basic impulses do human beings come into the world? /*
- *What is the best way to learn?*

Answering these two questions is essential and shows which parameters have to be fulfilled so that the project is and becomes successful. In current brain research we find the answer to these two fundamental questions.

### BASIC IMPULSES!

In this context, the German neuroscientist Gerald Hüther distinguishes the basic impulses that all people are born with: *connectedness* and the *spirit of discovery or the desire to create*.



Figuratively speaking, you can imagine connectedness and the spirit of discovery using the example of a tree. A tree is strongly rooted (connected) in the ground, always developing and growing upwards, meaning towards the light. A person who does not experience connectedness, i.e. a tree without roots, has a much more difficult life than a tree that is deeply rooted. A tree with strong roots is also more able to withstand storms (for humans, unpleasant life situations) and makes it even stronger - it even needs them to become stronger, more powerful, and viable in the first place. The tree cannot help but grow; it is the same for humans. We come into this world curious starting from the ground upward and have the need to be creators ourselves. In the best case, this joy of discovery and creative desire is never lost. As a basis for all considerations with children and young people, we recommend putting the satisfaction of the basic impulses in the foreground. Do I consider that the training / learning content I offer creates a sense of connection? Do I plan my program in such a way that the children's natural joy of discovery and creative

desire can be acted out, or that the children are invited, inspired, and encouraged to (re)discover this? The experience of exclusion limits the basic impulses of connectedness and a spirit of discovery. For this very reason, combined sports and learning opportunities are needed to reach the basic impulses in a playful way and to enable children and young people to have the most positive experiences possible of themselves, their fellow human beings, and the world. It is essential to experience belonging.

To be an important participant of the group and be able to contribute to ongoing activities brings along self-efficacy and makes people grow and more self-confident.

Therefore, learning is most efficient when the basic impulses are addressed (in the best case playfully) and enthusiasm is added. Enthusiasm is like a “watering can with fertilizer” for the mind.

## **Recognition as a learning factor**

Giving a child recognition triples the willingness to perform. However, ignoring the child and its work result is just as demotivating as destroying the child's work result. Brain research, in particular neuroscientist Prof. Dr. Gerald Hüther, shows that learning must be meaningful, get under the skin and make sense to oneself.

## **CONDUCT A NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

Starting from any initial idea (...it would be great to have some sports and learning activities for the marginalized youth in a certain area) we recommend a proper needs assessment or if this is not possible, taking data and references from former activities within your planned field of activity. Gather ideas, feedback, and adjust your initial approach accordingly.

## **INVOLVE STAKEHOLDERS**

Contact NGOs/political/educational/community representatives. Find out about the educational needs and sports interests of your target groups. Find out why they might not use existing services/programs/locations or use only some, but not others. Ask what would make the services more accessible to them. Approach local players and institutions and discuss how they can address the expressed needs. Avoid the creation of new organizations / services but employ existing ones with the necessary expertise and try to incorporate your idea therein. Include experts where needed, e.g. if more research is needed you might join forces with the local university.

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**TIP:** Stakeholders will be important partners and collaborators in your daily work during the ongoing project. Try to get to know important stakeholders in your area and try to find out which ones can serve as collaborative partners. This should be already done during the needs assessment and planning process.

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**GUARANTEE EXPERIENCE:** The City of Plovdiv was the Cultural Capital of Europe in 2019. During this year, several projects and studies in the Stolipinovo neighborhood have been realized among and together with civil society and minority organizations. The GUARANTEE project used this data and experience to design its local sports and learning measures. Contacts and data established in 2019 helped to engage in a dialogue with stakeholders. Together we identified local needs and shortcomings of existing measures to create the GUARANTEE project.

The Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), EU-MIDIS II, 2016) shows that segregation, school dropout, and leaving school early are the reality for many Roma children in Europe. In the case of *Plovdiv/Bulgaria* many successful desegregation initiatives of schools in the Stolipinovo area have been stopped recently. Dropout rates among minorities (including Roma) continue being high. There is a need for action. An initiative combining sports and learning would provide motivation and new perspectives among its participants. Teachers and headmasters in two very engaged schools in the neighborhood of Stolipinovo (eastern district of Plovdiv) agreed to collaborate in an integrated sports and learning project sponsored by the GUARANTEE project. A very valuable partner was found for the Foundation ROMA-Plovdiv and the *GUARANTEE* Project.

## STAFF REQUIREMENTS

Research shows that staff is the most relevant and important parameter in education, which means that a lot depends on the individual teacher (cf. Hasel 2019: 163). This is an important factor for working with sports and educational programs.

Enthusiasm is the fertilizer in the brains of the participating children and young people. Besides common professional skills, enthusiasm can be an important element leading to a successful project. If a trainer or teacher is enthusiastic and can invite, encourage, and inspire the participants to join in and design a unit in such a way that everyone feels like an important part of the group or team, then the usual professional background often stays in the background.

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**TIP:** The sports trainer teams should be experienced in the field of youth work and their sports disciplines. It is not 100% required, but it is an advantage if sports trainers have a professional sports background, so that youth and children have experienced counterparts they can look up to.

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Experienced *social workers* and *learning supporters* are equally important because your youth work will take place in a setting full of social challenges. *Educators* and *teachers* within the project need to have teaching experience and be firm in non-formal learning methods. Also, *language skills* in the target groups specific language can be useful as communication is facilitated and language is also a means of trust. We think that enthusiasm and professionalism are more important than origin or gender but, if possible, staff from similar social and ethnic backgrounds as the target group should be included in the teams. This is relevant not only in terms of accompanying young people, but also as a matter of trust within local communities.

If your project offers mixed settings, it is best that your staff consists of an equal number of women and men. However, if the setting is homogenous, it can sometimes be useful to only engage women or men

so that the work in general benefits from this. We find it very difficult to determine a rule concerning this question. Single gender settings are worth trying as they often provide a more intense atmosphere of trust, and trust, as we argue so often in this guide, is essential.

*We understand trust as the result of a relational process where people feel that they are taken seriously and noticed and can be who they are.*

*Communication in this case is characterized by respect, honesty, and openness.*

---

**TIP:** We highly recommend looking out for enthusiasm and professionalism while choosing your team members!

Our experience with sports and learning projects is, that often during the recruitment process, enthusiasm and professional skills are not considered enough. In particular, the work with marginalized children and youth demands highly motivated and professional project staff.

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## FINDING THE RIGHT ATTITUDE

### Ambiguity-tolerance

We all have images in our heads about the people we work with. It is important to critically question these images. In addition, working with children and young people involves several challenges that constantly force us to find new ways and solutions according to the respective context. We call the attitude to deal with this “*ambiguity tolerance*”. Answers are not always clear and predetermined. Determinate knowledge about certain target groups often does not help us. We refuse to put Roma, refugees, or certain religions into boxes. Things that may have been learned in training or acquired by media consumption are not true in every situation.

### Continuous promotion of non-racist attitudes and fair play in sports

The strength of a team is closely related to the level of good interaction and trust among the players. Cooperation as well as the handling of different needs, disagreements, conflicts, and aggression are vital in sports (especially team sports). Thus, training of social skills and promoting an inclusive and fair setting will improve team spirit and strengthen the learning process of participants.

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**TIP:** There are several publications and material available. For example:  
REINBERG Nikolaus, VIAREGG Martin „Teamsport and Courage“  
[https://www.graz.at/cms/dokumente/10319072\\_7745490/65744c0a/Englisch.pdf](https://www.graz.at/cms/dokumente/10319072_7745490/65744c0a/Englisch.pdf)  
Graz 2012

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## FINDING THE RIGHT PLACE & SPATIAL EQUIPMENT

Learning space should create a good (learning) atmosphere that appeals to the young people and motivates them to come. What learning material is required depends very much on the specific needs of the relevant young people. In any case, the available material must significantly exceed what is already known by the young people from the regular school. This includes offers from the realm of new media and material appealing to the senses that have a highly attractive character.

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**TIP:** Invest enough money and/or time in finding the right places for your activities. Collaborate with educational institutions and public entities. Many social projects do not adequately take the question of space into account due to a lack of resources. A good learning environment is essential for success in the educational process. In particular for a sports and learning project, most sports facilities should be close to learning spaces.

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Could schools offer space or are there any other (maybe adult) educational spaces available? Are there learning materials available in libraries or can you get special funding through specific funds or foundations? You will probably work with smaller groups than school classes.

**GUARANTEE EXPERIENCE:** In Plovdiv schools provided their sports grounds, classrooms, and even an indoor swimming pool for the GUARANTEE activities (soccer, dancing, swimming etc.). As local alternatives are rare (there is no youth or cultural center in Stolipinovo), the schools in the neighborhood are a center of social activities beyond usual educational everyday life, where pupils also spend a lot of their free time.

Many kids and youth enjoy the possibility of having a space to study without family members making noise. They also enjoy the direct approach and availability of learning supporters and getting to know them in different settings.

Also use public facilities (libraries, museums, community halls, town halls) for learning events with your participants. *Sports facilities* depend very much on the kind of sports you are doing. It is desirable to have barrier-free access to the changing rooms and sanitary rooms and to separate them by gender. A sports hall should be available, especially for the winter months to ensure a continuous training process.

*Schools and school facilities* usually provide such spaces in the afternoon. The advantage of schools is that these are places where parents let their kids and youth go whereas adults (parents or other family) must first be made familiar with new places. Maybe you can share a sports facility with a sports association? Some clubs are happy to share spaces and receive some money from your project budget. If possible, also use public spaces – or maybe arrange an agreement with your city or regional government to use public spaces for a certain amount of time or period.

Sometimes *religious groups offer spaces for social activities*. In some Mosques praying halls are used as leisure sports grounds for kids. Churchyards sometimes have installed football pitches. Always ensure that the use of such places is not a barrier for certain groups. Religious spaces can be exclusive and at the

same time they provide space for desegregation and encounters between participants of different origins or religious backgrounds.

Furthermore, good accessibility (central location, good connections) for children and adolescents must be guaranteed.

**GUARANTEE EXPERIENCE:** On the one hand, *distance to training grounds* can have benefits. In *Dortmund and in Plovdiv*, the GUARANTEE sports and learning project used locations far from the participants' residential area. Trainers decided to travel with the participants to the training on public transport. They really had good talks during the journey to the sports venues, established trust, and could teach participants how to behave on public transport.

On the other hand, *proximity to participants residences* is also very important. The *Dortmund and Plovdiv* learning facilities are in the same neighborhood as the participants' residential areas and were used in several community orientated projects prior to the GUARANTEE sports and learning program. This significantly facilitates participation.

## FINDING THE RIGHT PARTNERS / NETWORKING

### Sports networking

In a sports and learning project, important partners could be local sports associations. If your participants really get into a type of sports, it might be good to know where they could continue to pursue their talents. Usually, sports clubs also have a good connection to local government officials and can support your project far beyond the actual sports activity. They have access to sports locations, sponsors and can perhaps help you find the right staff for your training. Having been part of a sports club can help to find further educational or labor opportunities because in a sports club people network and thereby strengthen their social capital.

### Educational networking

Most important partners should be schools or school-like institutions. If your staff knows the challenges and contents your participants are dealing with in school, you better know what you can offer them, especially regarding learning support.

**GUARANTEE EXPERIENCE:** In Plovdiv a huge part of the GUARANTEE sports and learning program was carried out by teachers from the local schools. This provides many advantages as children get to know their teachers in a different setting. Teachers also know some of the kids already in advance and can adapt their contents to the school's educational necessities and incorporate educational subjects (e.g. math, language, political education) into the sports activities.

You might not have enough resources to work individually with your participants. In our work we often had great success by establishing systems of volunteers, who helped to prepare for exams, especially for older youth.

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**TIP:** If you work with volunteers, make sure that they are qualified for their tasks. It is important not to hand over too many responsibilities too soon, but rather to gradually introduce them to their tasks.

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It is important to get an overview of further local educational offers/projects that go beyond the traditional school system.

### **Social and professional networking**

Working with marginalized youth will make you encounter social and mental challenges that need specialized support that your staff might not be able to offer to your participants.

*Post-traumatic stress disorders or a non-transparent system for the payment of social benefits* are some examples for seeking qualified support.

**GUARANTEE EXPERIENCE:** In Dortmund, a counselling center for Eastern European migrants was available to the GUARANTEE project team in this context and provided help when social questions occurred. The reasons for this availability were the proximity, as the project spots were in the same building, and the good networking of the project coordinators. Also, in Plovdiv social workers from a local Roma NGO were involved and available and easy to reach at their office close to one of the schools.

### **Local funding - local governmental institutions**

Even though your project might be fully sponsored by the EU or another fund, we recommend working with local and governmental entities to establish new structures of sustainability, use local resources, and raise awareness about your work and its importance among officials.

### **Dealing with basic needs<sup>5</sup>**

The more you get to know the participants, the more you will be confronted with often difficult social circumstances. If there is a lack of housing or other basic needs in the participants daily life, all intentions of continuous training and learning might be useless. Try to think in advance what you can do in these situations. If basic needs are not fulfilled, the learning process might be severely challenged. Try to get an overview of how to deal with such situations in your region.

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**TIP:** Experienced local social workers can usually provide answers to questions regarding basic needs.

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<sup>5</sup> Basic needs in this sense define the absolute minimum resources necessary for long-term physical well-being, usually in terms of consumption goods.

## DAILY WORK

In this chapter we describe important aspects of an on-going program and core principles for the successful implementation of a sports and learning project.

### CONTINUITY, TIME, AND FREQUENCY OF THE TRAININGS – ESTABLISHING TRUST

Working regularly with a group strengthens trust. Trust is a key factor of successful social and educational work. Trust needs time. If you carry out a sports and learning program take your time. You can offer space and action. If youth and children like what you propose, they will come back. Do not worry if your participants do not attend a training sometimes or arrive late. When they come back, address this issue and try to find ways together with them to establish some regularity.

Therefore, we highly recommend time and continuity as basic resources for a successful project.



### BASIC ATTITUDES FOR DAILY WORK

#### Invite

We want to invite our participants to walk a path with us. This path is not determined by our wishes and concerns but is oriented towards the needs, visions, and ideas of our participants.

#### Encourage

Every person has potential. Every person deserves to feel that we believe in him or her. It is an essential attitude to see in the other person someone who deserves our appreciation. We have made so many valuable discoveries in the course of our work together with our participants. Believing in the potential of children and young people is of great value and for us, it is a fundamental attitude for a sports and learning program.

## Inspire

We try to create spaces and impulses that inspire. Creating spaces to try something new, and sometimes leave your comfort zone, can boost the learning process. It is of great importance to ignite enthusiasm. This attitude is another cornerstone of successful work with young people.

## Setting and keeping clear rules

Right at the beginning, it is very important to develop a clear framework that all participants have to adhere to. Establishing rules should be an ongoing process before and during the sports and learning program. It is important for children to have a clear framework for their activity.

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**TIP:** In the best case, this framework is developed together with the participants and the process is accompanied in such a way that the children themselves establish the rules that are important for spending time together.

It has proven to be extremely practical and profitable to write down this framework on a poster and have it signed by all participants and involved individuals. This way, the common rules are not only always visible, but can also be referred to and relied upon.

Furthermore, new participants can be informed about the framework by “old hands”, which again increases self-efficacy. The process of developing rules together is also a perfect example of living Human Rights Education and learning democracy.

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## ADVERTISING THE ACTIVITIES TO THE TARGET GROUP

Organize public events like sports tournaments, invite neighbors to your locations, and go to public parks for open sports activities. Maybe conduct interviews on sports in the residential area you want to work. Try to engage in conversations with the target group. Our experience is that if there is a proper needs assessment and a sports and learning offer that fits, participants will come when they become aware of the possibilities and resources provided by your initiative.

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**TIP:** Start advertising with sports. The topic of sports offers a space for connecting without pressure. In particular, successful learning support needs trust and time.

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If spaces and contents of your program fit their needs, members of the target group will spread the word. If they don't, try to find out why and, if necessary, adopt your program or change the space. As mentioned above, spread information about your program via stakeholders that already have established good contacts with the target group (schools, social institutions, self-organized minority associations among others).

**GUARANTEE EXPERIENCE:** In Dortmund, our project partner GrünBau gGmbH has long-term experience in community work in the so called “Nordstadt” neighborhood where immigrants form a majority of the population. The same applies to our partner in Plovdiv, the ROMA foundation, which has been active in Stolipinovo since the early 1990ies and has carried out dozens of projects with youths. So, contacts with the target group were already established before we started the sports and learning program. Similar previous projects provided contacts and (if it was a successful project) already ensured a great amount of trust.

The most important parameter for whether participants show up weekly for the project, apart from personal circumstances that could be an obstacle (travel, etc.), is that it must make sense for the children and young people. They need to have a personal benefit from it. This benefit can be individual and multi-layered: having fun, meeting/getting to know friends, learning something new, being part of a group, etc. Direct contact with the target group is the best advertising. Networking and advertising at schools, clubs, and other organizations is recommended, because many children and young people would otherwise not get the necessary information.

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**TIP:** In almost every community there is someone who tries to set up or organize projects for the community. These people are the best contacts to promote a project and reach as many families as possible. Often this person also accompanies you to the first sessions of your sports program.

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Even if there are only a few participants at the beginning of a project, it is important to keep going and to focus on the children, young people, and families who are already part of the program. No matter how many participants, they should get the full attention they need to feel valued and taken care of. If the participants spend time together with a positive feeling and go home with this feeling, then the probability is extremely high, that they will not only come back themselves, but also tell their friends about the project.

The biggest challenge is the initial contact with unknown families. As we mentioned earlier, it makes a lot of sense to network with schools, organizations, associations, and social workers, who advertise the project in their circles and, in the best case, also come along to the first sessions to keep the inhibition threshold as low as possible. There is no one-size-fits-all solution to reach “every” family, but we see trust as the key point. If you manage to establish trust with the respective family and community, then you have overcome the biggest obstacle.

Often the reason why people resist and fear something new is ignorance or preconceived ideas. It is important to transform these anxieties and limitations into openness and curiosity through friendly and easily understandable educational work. It is definitely advantageous to prepare the relevant information in the parents’ mother tongue in order to prevent possible misunderstandings due to language barriers.

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**TIP:** In order to create a basis of trust, it is important to provide clear information to the families. Answering the following questions is recommended here:

What kind of project is this and what is happening?

Who is running the project?

Where does it take place?

For how long?

What is the benefit for the participants?

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## **EDUCATIONAL BASICS**

The learning support and social work interventions should be demand-oriented and as informal as possible. Since the young people may have negative previous experiences with the local school system, informal access is often preferable to a classic school setting.

A wide variety of methods and offers, including individual and group work, workshops, excursions, interdisciplinary projects, creative offers, experience-based offers, or individual free work, should provide the participants with an interesting and motivating learning environment.

In addition to fixed weekly appointments, the coach / social worker can also take part in sports or leisure activities. Based on regular relationship work, a relationship of trust should be created with the coach / social worker.

## **SPORTS BASICS**

Sports activities should include learning components. In this sense an important element of sports activities (as already mentioned above) is dealing with team-related topics and content, such as team spirit, fairness, dealing with losing/winning, respect, or competitive behavior.

The setting of your training should be very inclusive even though some sports are exclusive. Cooperation should be more important than competition even though many sports are highly competitive. Playing with each other should be more important than playing against each other, even though some sports might be regarded as ritualized war.

During training units, a round table should be arranged regularly and led by the trainers. To raise the young people's ambition, tournaments, competitions, and friendly games can be organized. The sports program sees itself as the motivational tool for the project. "Group feeling", the strengthening of one's self-confidence and the fun of movement should be placed in the foreground. Different kinds of sports (depending on local needs and wishes) will be offered. Team sports and team spirit are an essential part of the offer. Children and adolescents should also be given the opportunity to try out their favorite sports in competition or at joint events.

Most sports need communication. That makes sports a great resource to improve one's language skills – even though it has happened that youth acquired a great amount of swear words or cursing skills in the languages of their team mates with a different mother tongue. In the first section of this chapter, we will put an overview on several sports and their opportunities for education and learning.

**TIP:** Use sports & physical exercise during your learning sessions. At the same time use education and non-formal learning during training and sports activities. The boundaries between sports and education are fluent. Try to work on individual skills necessary for education, personal development, and learning during the sports program. Include Human Rights issues into all activities, such as the Right to Health, the Right to Non-Discrimination, etc., an example is the election of a team captain in an accompanying democratic process.

## WHICH KIND OF SPORTS DO FIT FOR SPORTS AND LEARNING PROGRAMS?

In general, all kinds of sports can be used. However, we offer limitations in this section and present the sports that we think fit best for a sports and learning project. The suggestions and ideas presented in this section might help project coordinators to decide on what to focus on in their practice.

Some sports can be quite expensive. So, if you have a low budget focus take that into account. Sports like dancing, soccer, or parkour do not need many (financial) resources and can be done in many places, whereas ice hockey, paragliding, tennis, or skiing needs an adequate budget.

In this section competitive team sports and dancing will receive broader attention because those sports offer a great number of opportunities for education and communal experience.

### Battle-oriented team sports

Team sports as soccer, handball, basketball, or rugby offer a great deal of learning opportunities. Soccer is by far the type of sports that attracts the most different groups of people, but there are many similar alternatives.

**TIP:** Especially soccer is a low budget possibility. It can be played in very small groups almost everywhere. If a team is established, participants usually benefit beyond the funding period, as soccer is easily organized and can be played with nothing more than a ball. Friendships and connections are established in a team.

### Battle-oriented team sports as an inclusive space

Everyone has experienced exclusion. Many people have experienced it in team sports events. The goal of our training should be the creation of a space that is inclusive and protected (unlike in the park or at the club). Team sports give every player the opportunity to be involved. However, this is unfortunately not always possible in soccer. But it still can be achieved, in particular when trust and mutual respect grow or have grown through continuous training.

### Battle-oriented team sports as a way to feel oneself

In a time of omnipresent social media, permanent multimedia influence, “couch potatoes”, and all-night gamers, exercise, community, and sports are more important than ever. We propose training sessions where young people, who might spend a lot of time in front of consoles and who have little structure in their everyday lives, can feel their bodies and fight and scream out loud under pedagogical guidance. It is great

to experience an exhausting training, to fight within a system of rules, and to work out your body, to get rid of frustrating experiences by hard shots, fast running, and by measuring strength dueling in a ritualized way. All these aspects are missing for young people in many places all over Europe.

### **Battle-oriented team sports as a practice to overcome difficult situations**

Soccer (for example) can hurt. Fouls are as much part of the game as disappointment or frustration. If something goes wrong (and things will go wrong for players from time to time), use this as a training to deal with frustration or to deal with pain. There is nothing better than overcoming a bad or difficult situation. A soccer pitch brings people in such situations and, therefore, offers opportunities to overcome them in a game. The next minute can be different. Each training offers space for practicing how to overcome bad situations.

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**TIP:** Take special care of individuals that have not practiced sports for a long time; create space to start slowly; do not put pressure on them.

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### **The team as a place of cohesion**

Socially cemented hierarchies dissolve in most team sports. Diverse young people come together on one level as players. Following Victor Turner's concept of "communitas", the form of solidarity that prevails among soccer players is in our view comparable to that of war veterans after a war or hunter and gatherer youths after a "rite de passage". The anthropologist Victor Turner studied the cohesion of ancient human communities. He found that in many groups, young people came together in rituals, often intoxicated in a rush. Those moments beyond regularity, beyond hierarchy, create cohesion. Soccer is such a rush ritual; the rush of the game creates cohesion and community within players. (Cf. Turner 1998)

### **Battle-oriented team sports as social learning**

We strongly recommend the incorporation of *social learning* and *cooperation* elements into the training. There are many ways of playing soccer without a winner or a loser. Maintaining the ball in the air, reaching a common goal, or creating a network of passes are only a few exercises of cooperation and awareness one can use during a training.

### **Battle-oriented team sports as political education**

Battle-oriented team sports as a kind of "ritualized fight" offers a lot of talking ground for political and historical issues and conflicts, especially when nations play against each other. The rigors and challenges of the sports serve hereby as a resource. Conflicts, disagreements, discriminatory remarks, and even injuries from fouls can be used to discuss and learn from these events during and after the trainings.

Battle-oriented team sports can be a tool to implement Human Rights Education, political education, and social learning with a target group that is otherwise difficult to reach in this context. Insults during training or a game are a resource. However, they should not be the norm, but even in very respectful settings they will happen sometimes.

### **Battle-oriented team sports as a place of perspectives**

We recommend keeping team sports open to friends of your participants. Youth' peers might bring along valuable knowledge or educational experience, especially when they are already in an apprenticeship or successful in secondary education. Peers are sometimes the best teachers for children and youth at risk of dropping out of education or without education. Especially peer youth with a similar history can show how to enter and stay in the educational system, despite many disadvantages. Wherever young people meet and share their perspectives, educational counseling and mutual learning happens. The coaching team accompanies players in this collaborative process.

## Dancing



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*“Dance can help restore joy and stability in troubled lives and ease the tensions in schools that are disrupted by violence and bullying”<sup>6</sup>*

Dancing is known everywhere in the world. There is a bit of a gender tendency towards females as participants, but you never know. In our view, dancing is one of the best activities for a sports and learning program. The circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic have made this even more visible, which we will illustrate further below. Dancing brings people from anywhere together. It can be done alone or as a group.

In the GUARANTEE dancing classes, we could continue the training and even create a choreography during the lockdown. Dancing was part of the sports and learning programs in Plovdiv, as well as in Dortmund. The dance module in Dortmund will now be discussed in more detail as a best-practice example.

**GUARANTEE EXPERIENCE:** GUARANTEE Dortmund launched the dance module. Right from the start, the program was met with a great response not only from the children and young people taking part, but also from their parents. They accompanied their children to the course and asked the lead trainer if they could also watch. The dance trainer (and here the decisive role of the trainer/teacher becomes apparent) first asked for the children’s consent and then made the decision whether the parents could watch. This approach shows appreciation and makes it possible for all participants to meet at eye level: the children have equal rights and are taken 100% seriously – and the parents are also being heard. This creates a bond that can be decisive as a basis for everything else. Human Rights Education came into play.

<sup>6</sup> Sir Ken Robinson (<https://ideas.ted.com/why-dance-is-just-as-important-as-math-in-school/>)

After some time, parents who watched their children play at first, started to participate themselves and after a short time, created their own dance-group.

The feedback after several sessions was that both the children and the parents did not have to think about anything else during the dance module and could be completely involved - all worries were gone for a moment; and that simply felt good. After a while, due to the high number of participants, a second age-homogeneous group emerged. Parents organized carpools after a few training units. New friendships were made both in the children's groups, as well as among the adults.

The dance training was not only about dancing, but also about other things. For example, at the beginning of each session, there was a talking round taking place. Regular talking rounds had the goal to find new communalities among the participants. They served as a means for desegregation as ethnical identity layers came in the background and new group belongings were found beyond their origin.

Due to the arrival of the coronavirus, the children were no longer allowed to attend the class because of the lockdown. The trainer moved the dance sessions to online training via video calls, and the training could continue in a different way, even if not together in the same room. Communication and information exchange continued to take place via group chats on cell phones. The connection to the learning program continued in the sense that the respective dates for the sports and learning offer were clearly communicated by the trainers and teachers and the times of the offer were adjusted so that the participants could take part.

### **Case history:**

A girl who had rather bad grades in school was eager to go dancing. Permission from her mother went hand in hand with an improvement of her grades. The adjunct learning program made the mother change her mind and she was finally convinced to watch the daughter dance and learn so that she could see how motivated she was and how much effort the girl was putting in. The mother eventually joined the parents' group and while she herself dances, the daughter learns additionally for school in a safe environment, without distractions.

### **Exceptional sports (often expensive sports)**

Sports like climbing, swimming, or ice skating are not very common among Eastern European Roma. They offer new contacts, challenges, and new areas of interest. Exceptional sports can be a good means of desegregation. The spirit of exploring fosters learning. Offering these sports should be done with care because often a lack of financial resources does not permit participants to continue doing these sports after the project. Nevertheless, they should not be deprived of the option of getting to know them if possible. In the case of swimming the knowledge of this type of sports can be important for survival under certain circumstances. But that is not all. Some kids feel ashamed not knowing how to swim, to ski, or to skate on ice. Given the chance to acquire basic skills in these sports can be very self-empowering.

**GUARANTEE EXPERIENCE:** GUARANTEE Plovdiv organized a one-week journey to the black sea which was open for all the participants and several accompanying parents. During the trip, participants had the opportunity to establish trust and get to know their teachers in a different setting. They also met participants from other schools and explored a part of their country most of them did not know before. Some kids visited the seaside for the first time. Enthusiasm came along with this exceptional excursion and offered a solid ground for further educational process. Children participated in everyday swimming, dancing, and arts courses that continued in Plovdiv after the group had returned to their homes.

GUARANTEE Dortmund offered a climbing course. Climbing is especially challenging but can be learned easily. It is a mental challenge for individuals and groups that creates cohesion and a feeling of strength if done with passion. One can set his/her goals in climbing individually and reach a little further during every training session. Climbing is not very competitive and does not need a long training in advance (like football). There is also a desegregation element: as a new type of sports for many marginalized kids and youth, it offers new spaces and contacts beyond one's own social fields. In Dortmund, the way to the climbing location involved a long journey with public transport. So, participants became acquainted to using tramways and busses they did not know before. During the journey educational games were played and there was time to get to know each other better or talk about educational perspectives. Travelling time to sports locations can be used for non-formal education.



## Self-defense and fighting techniques

Intense and challenging work is guaranteed within these sports. Self-defense is a great way to learn self-control and respect. Compared to soccer it is very safe and if the trainer is professionally and socially engaged, it can become a great passion and learning tool for participants. Self-defense offers a great deal of social learning. Issues like respect, violence, and de-escalation can be dealt with at first-hand during the training.

## E-sports and gaming

E-sports often turn around roles and make competences of participants visible. How? Many kids and youth are e-sports experts and most trainers are not. So, teachers often become the students' pupils. These changes of roles and competences can boost participants' self-confidence and trust.

**GUARANTEE EXPERIENCE:** In Dortmund for example trainers used e-sports for a combined learning platform. The Dortmund module was called Alpha Play. Participants could play e-sports (FIFA and other PlayStation Games) and found support for their schoolwork. This very simple setting facilitated contact and helped getting to know each other and offered a pulling goodie for participants.

## Strategic games like chess or backgammon

Chess is known worldwide as a great training for the brain and a type of challenging sports. It is easy to set up and you will be surprised how youths can get into it. In our projects, we use chess as an additional opportunity during learning pauses or in times of regeneration. Chess also offers a great opportunity to get to talk face-to-face and can equally be played online during a pandemic or in times of limited physical contact.

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**TIP:** Listen to the participants – what new game/sports might be useful?

In addition to this we highly recommend listening to the youth' ideas and enthusiasm during the project. Certain sports might not work. If this is the case try something else or try it differently. Always try to make the decision building process with participants a tool for Human Rights Education.

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## GIRL POWER



The times when sports activities and sports facilities were only for men should be over. Nevertheless, in most EU countries there are still more men than women actively engaged in sports clubs. Girls and young women keep encountering difficulties. Unfortunately, there are still attitudes that completely deny girls the practice of sports in public places. There are still coaches who think that football is not for girls. There are still parents who don't want their daughters to play in a team with boys.

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**TIP:** Make discrimination of girls in sports an issue. Use the consequent debates and discussions for Human Rights Education. Find strategies together and goals to challenge discrimination in your area.

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### How to find girls for a sports and learning project?

Girls and young women can usually persuade their families to play sports and negotiate compromises. It is important to liberate ourselves from traditional images of women, according to which girls simply must be passive and beautiful like princesses. There are many ways to do this. Some girls deliberately wear a headscarf when playing sports in public places to show their parents that playing sports does not contradict any cultural or religious traditions. Let the girls choose their clothes for sports (keeping in mind not to use clothes that are dangerous and can get themselves hurt).

One central task of a good sports and learning program is to encourage girls to take part in sports in general and, with the help of this, promote community and belonging among the girls. We have also made the experience that it takes time for families to change their way of thinking and for girls to be allowed to gain a foothold in the male domain of football, for example. Until then, we can support girls through “girls only” offers and maintain contact by keeping up a good relationship with them.

## **Girls only!**

“Girls only” offers are also a possibility for your project to address girls who have had bad experiences with boys or whose parents are skeptical. However, they require a lot of personnel effort. It often happens that girls meet very ambitious or aggressive young men in sports.

For most of the girls, the focus is on having fun and enjoying sports, the community, and the sense of belonging. According to one of our female trainer colleagues, one of the most beautiful experiences girls have is the feeling of belonging in a team or group, no matter what origin, nationality, or culture they belong to. On the pitch or on the dancefloor, we are a team, and we belong together.

With regard to language and slogans, sensitivity is required of the coaches. “Let’s go boys!” will not appeal to everyone in a mixed team. Further, if a female coach always behaves as a “role model” and represents a strong woman who both practices sports and is “feminine”, then she is an important person of trust and reference for young female players in search of themselves. This could create stability, especially in the difficult time of adolescence when many girls turn their back on sports.

## **A GOOD WAY TO DEAL WITH DIVERSITY**

Diversity is part of everyday life in Europe: different habits, different experiences, different abilities, different opinions, and different needs are normal, not the exception. Usually, we have more in common than what separates us. Top coaches in competitive sports have long recognized this and work successfully with diverse teams and different personalities all over the world. If fear, entrenched images, and mistrust determine the way we deal with each other, good cooperation is doomed to failure, in particular in sports. Therefore, racism and other forms of exclusion have no place on the sports field (or anywhere else). It is all about good teamwork and joint strength.

When for example problems arise with continuity and punctuality, it is important to find out what is at the bottom of it all. If somebody is often late, easily reacts in an aggressive manner, or tends to verbally abuse other team members, the causes may vary but are usually manifold. Asking for the reasons and becoming properly informed about the situation are the first steps of problem resolution. Jumping into hasty conclusions or blaming the situation on a different cultural background are inappropriate and do not improve the situation.

Statements such as “You can’t react differently because of your culture!” or “It is in your genes!” deny the person’s ability to change and the right to personal development. Such statements do not contribute to a solution, but rather have the opposite effect. Naturally, it is important to demand compliant behavior within the team, but it is equally important to gain an understanding of the real causes of the misconduct to solve the problem and be prepared to effectively act in any future challenge.

There is strength in diversity! If everyone in the project feels respected and part of the whole, then the project is a strong project. A strong team needs clear communication between all those involved. Staff members and participants need to develop a common team culture. This process should be given time. To be fully involved, however, it is also necessary to be able to address personal concerns and questions and to help shape them. This requires good communication and the wish for mutual understanding. It will not be easy to do so. As different needs and ideas will always be present. But the process of negotiating differences is essential for all kinds of human enterprise.

## WORKING WITH PARENTS AND LEGAL GUARDIANS OF YOUR PARTICIPANTS

Cooperation with the participants family system is particularly important. Parents, children's adult persons of reference, and relatives should have the opportunity to participate in activities of the project. The families should be invited to events in the sports and learning program. Family systems should be well considered in the project. Social workers, trainers, and learning support should have regular exchanges with parents or legal guardians.

If parents directly experience that the offer has positive effects on the children, then the probability is very high that the parents will (continue to) allow their children to participate in the program. Bringing parents on board and allowing them to participate in the project and program can sometimes be the decisive factor whether children and young people are allowed to take part in the project at all. This requires sensitivity and, above all, an individual approach to the respective family situation.

It is important to build trust. This is best achieved when children and young people arrive home after the program's activities in a happy and more balanced mood.

**GUARANTEE EXPERIENCE:** In Plovdiv some parents accompanied the group to an excursion to the Black Sea. Parents were invited to participate in all activities (swimming, arts and dancing). For many parents it was easier to allow their children to participate in the project and the excursion as they already knew most of the persons involved: for example, the trainers were mainly regular teachers from school.

## WORKING WITH EVENTS AND EXCURSIONS

Spending one week on an excursion with a group of youth, is often worth more than an entire year of regular training. Organizing a sports event and taking part in an event within a team is a huge learning process for everyone. It strengthens the group. We strongly recommend organizing events or taking part in events during a sports and learning program.

If there is solidarity in the group and the "group rules" are understood in the group, then excursions and participation in various events can be a highlight for everyone.

It is important that the participants have already developed the necessary skills and trust in advance so that the excursion / event can also be joyfully attended by them.

## **SUSTAINABILITY & FOLLOW UP**

As we live in a situation of short-term projects, sustainability is a key question. How can your project gain sustainability and have results that remain beyond funding deadlines?

### **INDIVIDUAL SUSTAINABILITY**

#### **Empowerment**

Foster self-organization of kids and youth. Engage with existing structures that do not depend on your projects funding. Create contacts of your participants beyond your target group. Develop social capital among participants and try to find local role models that work with youth.

#### **Every moment counts**

Everything you do with your participants, all the contacts and conversations we have, make something with us and them. Small experiences of solidarity, success or new role models can have a lifelong impact. Never forget that.

#### **Create new relationships with institutional teaching staff and make education opportunities a continuous issue**

If you work together with the regular school systems, contacts with teachers might get participants to know them beyond formal school settings and establish trust and a good base to continue in the regular framework. Teachers will often continue to work with the youths even if your project is not funded anymore. Many kids or youths do not know about educational opportunities. Try to work on career orientation during your project. Establish contacts with career counselling organizations. Let your participants know where to go if they reach out for educational opportunities.

### **STRUCTURAL SUSTAINABILITY**

#### **Conquer new spaces**

There are often spaces and places within the participants' reach that have not been used yet. Maybe there is space for learning or sports available that will be accessed after your project ends or your organization can make use of it in another project.

Perhaps a particular area in a park can be used sustainably for sports and will continue to be available after the project ends. Good and close cooperation and transparency with partners (school, municipality, etc.) increases the likelihood of using new places and spaces sustainably.

#### **Open up traditional sports associations and use their resources**

Traditional sports clubs offer a long-lasting training possibility. Sports clubs also usually offer a great deal of contacts and social capital. The challenge is that most sports clubs are very performance-orientated. Some sports associations (like UEFA for example) do a lot of project funding and dispose of great amounts of money. If you work together with sports associations, you will have a better chance of positive press reports as sports is esteemed widely and has good reputations in all parts of society.

## **Create alliances against racism**

Create alliances against racism during your project period. NGOs as well as advocacy groups can get in touch with your participants. Establish trust towards these structures and discuss the basic concepts of racism with your group. So that participants can make use of these contacts when they need it. Keep contact with antidiscrimination institutions and help your participants in case they suffer discrimination. Maybe you can also organize further funding through these contacts. There are many anti-discrimination agencies or governmental counseling bodies. There is an Ombud for Equal Treatment in every EU member country.

## **Evaluation and Impact assessment**

Try to monitor and evaluate the impact of your measures from the beginning of the project. Good project management includes evaluation and monitoring from the first moment on. Try to develop your concept throughout the duration of the project. Your organization or other initiatives might use our data and reports to create something new or a follow up. Apply professional project management.

## **Public Relations**

Establish public relations work within your project. Make your project known to a wider circle of people and possible donors. Try to invite press to your events and make your project known to officials and politicians. If you do good media work - political funding is more likely and project sustainability is boosted.

## KEY FACTORS OF SUCCESS

### KEY FACTORS RELATED TO ATTITUDE AND INDIVIDUALS

#### Enthusiasm and motivation

Whether dancing, soccer, self-defense, or e-sports: when enthusiasm and motivation come together, learning processes are dynamized.

#### Voluntariness, participation, and self-efficacy

When enthusiasm, motivation, relationship, and trust find each other, the basis for working successfully is created. Then young people see future perspectives and get ready to work on their opportunities and to accept our support in this process. Kids and young people should freely decide in what kinds of activities they want to participate and to what extent, so they are challenged in their self-organization. In sports, young people not only experience a positive team experience, but also self-efficacy when they achieve success together and perceive themselves as a valuable part of the team.

#### Bring different people together and create common goals

Stereotype research has shown that different people can overcome their mutual prejudices by aiming at a common goal. Create situations that make that possible. There is hardly any better means for such an undertaking than sports.

#### Do not highlight participants' ethnic, religious or social background

Backgrounds should stay in the background. Many groups of people are used to being stigmatized. The stigma of poverty among other stereotypes can be very harmful to kids and adolescents.

**GUARANTEE EXPERIENCE:** The Pizza Principle. Try to find common interests among your participants. If everybody likes Pizza for example – get some Pizza and create a common “pizza lover identity”. In a diverse society we should put our focus on common interests and create a common identity instead of highlighting differences like many interculturalists and politicians do. (also see Rathje: 2015:39-59)

## **STRUCTURAL KEY FACTORS**

### **Continuity and time**

Long term projects that establish trust with time among participants and with their families are more effective than short time “happenings.”

### **Spaces close to the residential areas of participants**

Spaces that are close to where youths live can easily become part of their daily routines and are more accessible.

### **Keep your group settings small**

If possible, try to look after each participant individually or in smaller groups. Everybody has special virtues and needs. Especially when participants are used to systems that see them as mere numbers without individual attention this factor gains importance.

### **Find the right places and spaces**

A good space to meet invites participants to come to the trainings and learn.

### **Stay in touch with schools**

If you know what participants do in their daily school or educational courses, it is easier to adapt sports and learning contents to the needs of your participants.

## RESOURCES AND EXAMPLES

### ESTABLISHED SPORTS AND/OR LEARNING INITIATIVES:

#### **SEEDS UNITED Graz /Austria**

In Graz/Austria a sports and learning project gathered different youth that had dropped out the education system in a soccer team to strengthen their motivation for personal development.

<https://www.facebook.com/seedsunited/>

#### **Homeless World Cup / Worldwide**

The Homeless World Cup works with Street Football Partners to improve on the work they do and positively impact the lives of homeless people around the globe. Some of its projects are aimed at the development and improvement of football programs across the world, while others focus on developing the skills of those participating in such projects.

<https://homelessworldcup.org/our-work/>

#### **Caritas SIQ /Graz /Austria**

Caritas SIQ is a Sports and Integration Project.

<https://www.caritas-steiermark.at/hilfe-angebote/migrantinnen-fluechtlinge/integration/siq-sport-integration-qualifikation/>

#### **GrünBau Dortmund / Germany**

GrünBau offers a great deal of educational programs, work initiatives, and community orientated social work in Dortmund

<https://www.gruenbau-dortmund.de/>

#### **Opens Schools in Plovdiv/Bulgaria**

The Plovdiv open school project offers non-formal education to children, youth, and adults in the city district Stolipinovo of PLOVDIV.

<http://discovered-spaces.org/en/>

#### **Balkanbiro Fact Sheet “Stolipinovo”**

<http://balkanbiro.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/bb-Analysen-1.pdf>

## **ADJUSTMENT: LESSONS LEARNED WITH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

- The Covid-19-related lockdown was a great challenge for everyone involved in the project. However, the physical distance also creates new channels of communication and a special familiarity.
- A variety of channels can be used for communication. Online training and meetings can continue to provide structure in everyday life, but do not replace real meetings.
- During a lockdown, many previous “analogue” offers can be replaced by new contactless “digital worlds”.
- Learning support, especially for older youths, can also be carried out online. The app Kahoot is often used in this context.
- Online training has worked particularly well with dancing at GUARANTEE. In our experience, other sports proved to be more limited when done online.
- Individual training worked better, either documented by video or communicated via a short direct report to the trainers and rewarded with prizes.
- In an Austrian project, it was particularly great that the young people could be provided with online training materials. In addition, there were video tutorials on how to use them, which were created by the team of trainers and sometimes also by the young people.
- In these challenging times, it is especially important to have the opportunity for individual counselling in crisis situations that often arise.
- It is important to raise awareness about the state of emergency surrounding the Covid-19 crisis. This can be done through information campaigns by public agencies that particularly address the relevant target group. Very often governmental information does not reach target groups properly. Trust and contact established during the project can overcome this disruption.
- In such a situation, it is important to raise awareness about the state of emergency surrounding the Covid-19 crisis. Our experience shows that self-dramatization via video chats in online group activities is rejected by many young people.
- The greatest “sustainability factor” is the immense trust that the young people gained during the lockdown. Sometimes trainers and teachers were the only remaining contact “to the outside world”. And especially the crisis talks, which were often fraught with fear but always clarifying, were in retrospect a strong basis for the subsequently so positive course of the project.

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**GUARANTEE promotes the children's right to education by:**

- Preventing school dropout and promote transition to secondary/vocational schools
- Supporting the deconstruction of harmful stereotypes and mutual understanding between youth from different backgrounds
- Facilitating knowledge transfer and peer-to-peer training of professionals through mutual learning and exchange of good practices
- Conducting action research, analyze, collect and disseminate lessons learnt and best practices Activities

GUARANTEE - Guaranteeing the Right to Education for Roma Children in Selected European Cities  
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