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EXPERIENTIAL PEDAGOGY IN A LIGHTHOUSE ON A DESERT ISLAND

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The article is concerned with the social and experiential pedagogic effects of living in a lighthouse on a small desert island. Using the method of action research, we studied seven adolescents from juvenile institutions living in a small confined space for the duration of ten days. The main goal was to study the adolescents within the small confined social system of the island for the purpose of analyzing the resulting social changes and acquired social skills. Throughout the entire project, we observed the adolescents' behaviour, initiative and inventiveness, and taught them certain techniques and methods of surviving with limited means. Using different activities, we also succeeded in finding personal resources for empowering the individuals. We developed the group and made individuals more open to conformation. The socially interactive activities selected strengthened the group's cohesion, individual social competences and skills. The results have shown that a short period of time spent in an intensive group environment within a limited and specific setting can produce significant changes in an individual. The individuals gained valuable life experiences. Certain transferral discrepancies might represent obstacles, which is why we expect that prolonging the stay on the island would lead to even more pronounced changes and noticeable results upon returning home as well.

Key words: experiential pedagogy, children and adolescents with behavioural and emotional problems, island, action research

Introduction

The method of experiential pedagogy is making a name for itself in the system of educational assistance, standing on the shoulders of pedagogical giants, who with their personal approach have on integrated didactic meth-

ods outlined this concept of education. It presents an addition to educational forms and methods, as well as an alternative to educational assistance. Experiential pedagogy is based on an integrated approach and on a wide range of everyday activities – those educational fields where adolescents can confront themselves, realize their ability to achieve something, find their strong points, and together with suitable self-reflection and supportive relationships over a longer period of time develop their own relatively stable behavioural model. This is also why we consider it to be first and foremost an educational method. Many children and adolescents labelled as neglected, presenting behavioural or educational difficulties, are transferred from one educational institution to the next because no one can get to the bottom of things with them. Some such careers end in closed institutions.

The experiences these young people have with adults (uninterested or problematic parents, guardians, police officers etc.) and the rest of the world (norms and rules) can precipitate very negative views of the adult world. Most of them develop an untrusting distance or a significantly negative attitude towards everyone, from social pedagogues and psychologists to social workers etc., in short, towards everyone around them trying to instil norms or rules in them. In their classic study Redl and Winemmann (1984) write much the same: the biggest problem of these children is their tough and tenacious rebellion against any form of intervention – any approach or interference from adults. Until we overcome this resistance or until it works itself out, pedagogical work is not possible.

Experiential pedagogical principles implicitly indicate the idea of experiential pedagogy, its connection to nature and the specific logic of the activity:

Integration, as opposed to the predominating conditions and structures of learning and living, is the most important principle of experiential pedagogy. It seeks to present an alternative to the one-sided transference of knowledge, aimed solely at rationality and intellect, and to the fragmentation of life into separate spheres. Integration in experiential pedagogy encompasses a number of areas. In terms of the individual, it strives to achieve the joint participation of body, mind and spirit on each occasion.¹

In experiential pedagogy, the emotional, artistic, skill-oriented, social and cognitive educational elements are considered equal.²

¹ J. Ziegenspeck, *Erlebnispädagogik – eine neue Wissenschaftsdisziplin zwischen Theorie und Praxis, Tradition und Fortschritt, Affirmation und Innovation*, [in:] *Mesto in vloga doživljajske pedagogike*, Ljubljana 2005, p. 13-20.

² S. Priest, M.A. Gass, *Effective Leadership in Adventure Programming*, New Hampshire 1997.

Activity-oriented: contemporary culture, particularly in big cities and densely populated areas, severely restricts the possibility of movement in the natural world.³ Personal, direct experience has unavoidably been replaced by second hand experience: consumerism and over-stimulation instead of personal activity. We waste time with passive endeavours (the media). Second hand experiences like those mediated by television, for example, passively watching sports, cannot replace those that are acquired, conquered and intensely experienced by the self, and leave behind an 'unsatisfied dramatic need'. For this reason, experiential pedagogy aims at necessary personal activity, creating the conditions that prevent involvement that is solely passive. It must become clear to the participants that they can change the circumstances of their lives or learn something only through their own activity, so that they understand, on the basis of a simple, obvious and clearly marked field of activity, 'the here and now', the connection between effort and result. Physical strength can be meaningfully used for the everyday activities of life.⁴

Group-oriented: when it comes to methods, experiential pedagogy is directly linked to the form of group work. Group processes are also stimulated by the general circumstances of the project or activity. An experiential group often depends only upon itself and has barely any contact with the outside environment. In this way, a sort of 'everyday' is formulated, where various deviations from the otherwise familiar environment are absent. Because of a closed social space, it becomes apparent that the possibility of retreat from or avoidance of the actual flow of group dynamics is close to impossible. Activities are designed in such a way that adolescents are unconditionally dependent upon each other. Cooperation is crucial because otherwise the group does not move in the right direction; communication is crucial because group assignments need to be distributed and daily plans discussed.⁵

Joint decision-making and formation: with the term 'joint decision-making' we wish to direct attention to the modality of the relationships between the youths and the adults (educators, teachers). A positive step can be made by giving young people the feeling that it is all about them, 'their thing', already in the preparation stages, and motivating them to actively participate and create a good atmosphere. In a standardized and orderly environment, characterized by obscurely reached decisions which it is impossible to influence in any way, young people acquire barely any experi-

³ J. Ziegenspeck, *Erlebnispädagogik. Rückblick – Bestandsaufnahme – Ausblick*, Lüneburg 1992.

⁴ M. Krajncan, *Osnove doživljajske pedagogike*, Ljubljana 2007.

⁵ J. Ziegenspeck, *Erlebnispädagogik*.

ence, making it impossible to evaluate their participation at all.⁶ The organizers of experiential pedagogy know that good planning, even before they make their first steps with their group into the outside environment, is the main element of a safely and successfully of conducting such a project.⁷

The possibility of new relationships: the experiential group offers its organizers the possibility to change the existing relationships and role patterns, to establish new relationships between the adolescents as well as between them and the pedagogues. The external conditions of the experiential pedagogical process present new challenges for everyone involved, both in terms of their readiness and their abilities. New and unexpected assignments and situations can change relationships more significantly than is possible in a regulated institution.⁸

Orientated towards the needs of the young: during puberty and adolescence, a young person undergoes radical physical and psychical changes. The biological aspect includes sudden and significant physical changes caused by increased levels of hormones. Growth spurts call for more movement and activity. Tests of courage are organized to test strength and skill. When they approach their limits, young people can get to know their bodies and become more skilled at self-evaluation.⁹ From a sociological point of view, adolescence is the transitional period between childhood and adulthood, connected with extreme insecurity regarding one's status and role. The adolescent attempts to fight this insecurity with independent achievements. Various activities, a love of adventure, curiosity, experiments in physical and social areas are necessary for this phase of life, are an expression of looking for one's own self and an expression of searching for one's own identity. Based as it is on experiences and activities, the approach is very well suited to the needs of adolescents. A clear and structured framework offers many an opportunity to experience one's own self, to build up a social form of behaviour and to regulate one's system of values.¹⁰

Nature-oriented: often the world of adolescents is made up only of concrete and asphalt. Many natural processes are no longer experienced directly, but only through the media; because of this, a healthy attitude towards nature can only barely be formulated. Experiential pedagogy aims at leaving residential areas behind and by living in nature enables the adoles-

⁶ Ibidem.

⁷ M. Krajncan, *Osnove doživljajske pedagogike*.

⁸ J. Ziegenspeck, *Erlebnispädagogik*.

⁹ Ibidem; T. Fischer, *Erlebnispädagogik. Das Erlebnis in der Schule*, Frankfurt a.M 1999.

¹⁰ J. Ziegenspeck, *Erlebnispädagogik*.

cents to experience this contrast. 'Direct' sensory experience is facilitated both by the group and by nature. The power and authority of nature add to the educational purposes of the project.¹¹

Away from the ordinary: in contrast with the consumerism and monotony of everyday life, experiential pedagogy offers much variety, encouraging thought and enabling experiences: away from the flood of stimulants, in a life without the media, without traffic, without the hustle and bustle. It focuses on self-provision rather than excessive supply, on fulfilling various and unusual roles, on a relatively simple way of life instead of the technological saturation of transport, kitchens, pastimes etc., on improvisation and creativity instead of consumerism, on nature instead of concrete, on wind and weather instead of air-conditioning, on the natural rhythms of life instead of the school bell or the house order or waiting for a pedagogue's shift to start...¹² On making it happen where other education methods have failed. On offering what is not compulsory, even if it is perceived as something mundane and normal. One needs to fight and attempt to curtail the authority of consumerism, even if it means escaping to an unknown environment. Transparency, a life without fixed impulses or stimuli, offers new dimensions to social learning and working on yourself.¹³

The principles of experiential pedagogy provide us with the framework within which we can ensure professionalism with adequate competence. In this way, the principles also present a logical way of operating even in intense and demanding experiential pedagogical projects, such as on a lighthouse on a desert island.

An attractive, socially enclosed setting as a therapeutic instrument (the lighthouse as a specific social system)

We will present the theoretical premises connected with the specific characteristics of a small, enclosed and at the same time attractive social space. The lighthouse and the desert island present such a system.

¹¹ T. Fischer, *Informelle Pädagogik*, Hamburg 2003; A. Attarian, S. Priest, *The Relationship between Stages of Group Development and Styles of Outdoor Leadership*, *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Leadership*, 1994, 11/3, p. 13-19.

¹² J. Ziegenspeck, *Erlebnispädagogik*; T. Fischer, P.M. Mroczek, *Pädagogik und Therapie*, Hamburg 2004.

¹³ J. Ziegenspeck, *Erlebnispädagogik*; M. Krajncan, *Teoretske osnove doživljajsko pedagoškega dela*, *Doživljajska pedagogika*, 2006, 12/15, p. 13-48.

According to Parsons (1968), every system faces certain problems. These can include:

- adaptation,
- goal attainment,
- integration and
- latency or pattern maintenance.

Every social system must develop a specific problem-solving method so that it can take certain countermeasures, should external interference arise. Parsons's (1971) AGIL scheme is useful for effectual observation. In essence, the idea is to take four basic systems of problems and divide them into two dimensions: the system's efficiency in facing the environment, and the problems of ensuring the existence of the social system in question.

- Adaptation (adapting to the environment)

As a social system, the group aims to gather relevant resources and establish the conditions that enable it to suitably manipulate the environment.

- Goal attainment (realizing the objectives)

The group as a social system aims to perform suitable decision-making processes, to formulate goals and realize them. Its function is transferred onto political systems.

- Integration (the integration of system elements and the regulation of relationships)

As a social system, the group is oriented towards suitably structuring itself through the social realization of norms and values. Its function is transferred onto cultural systems.

- Latency or pattern maintenance (maintaining latent normative structures)

The group as a social system is oriented towards providing the necessary skills and abilities for maintaining the established roles and patterns of behaviour. Its function is transferred onto cultural system, as well as onto the family as a social system.¹⁴

The presented theoretical foundations are the basis for the further study of the closed space on the island and its sociological framework.

The characteristics of the lighthouse as a specific social system are defined in terms of¹⁵:

- a structural whole with a suitable interdependence between system elements,
- demarcation from other systems,

¹⁴ M. Zimmermann, *Sozialtherapeutische Segelfahrten als mögliche Alternative zur geschlossenen Unterbringung (Heimerziehung)*, Lüneburg 1983.

¹⁵ G., Grossmann *Soziales System Schiff. Praktische Soziologie an Bord*, Lüneburg 1987, p. 9.

- durability of interactive relationships, and
- specific established courses of action and relations, subject to interactive relationships.

In such a closed space, individual places and roles are structured, formalised and arranged in such a way that the functions set in advance can be fulfilled and lasting.

A set of internal system rules must be established. Every social system is, on the basis of its structure, defined as an open system, meaning that both internal influences (the members of the group) and external influences threaten its ability to function. This calls for constant adaptability. The internal network of relationships between members is responsible for the stability of the system structures and system processes.

In terms of social functioning, the group in the lighthouse fulfils four important social functions for its members.¹⁶

- For an individual as a social being, the group is indispensable. The need for sociability is an important human characteristic. In the lighthouse, separating from the group is practically impossible. This phenomenon supports human sociability.

- The group presents a link between the individual and society or other group formations and represents the possibility of participating in social living.

- The group represents a specific landmark function for social activity and behaviour, and gives a sense of social security to one's relationship with others. Therefore, it is important that when withdrawal is impossible, we internalize the need for solving conflicts. The longer such an opportunity lasts, the more time is available to transform this experience into a permanent behavioural pattern.

- The group has the potential to enable socialization processes. From the sociological perspective it is important to differentiate between identifying with the group and belonging to a group; in other words, between a group that an individual is a part of, and a group that an individual identifies with.

The social group in the lighthouse is one under special circumstances. The educational environment of the lighthouse or the boat has a significant impact on the individual. In order to be able to define it as a social group, certain conditions must be met. The following is a comprehensive presentation of the social group using specific aspects of the dynamics in such an environment:¹⁷

¹⁶ W. Michl, B. Heckmair, *Erleben und Lernen*, München 2004; W. Nickolai, F. Sperle, *Erlebnispädagogik mit Jugendlichen im Strafvollzug*, Caritas, 1987, p. 91-96.

¹⁷ W. Michl, B. Heckmair, *Erleben und Lernen*; J. Ziegenspeck, *Segeln auf dem Dreimast-Toppsegelschoner 'Thor Heyerdahl' - Ein Schiff als schwimmende Jugendbildungsstätte*, [in:] *Segeln*

- The members of the group have largely similar expectations, and this affects the group's interconnectedness and appeal. Group solidarity on the boats or in the lighthouse is nearly a tangible phenomenon. The lighthouse keeper or the captain has extreme significance, as he can offer the group unquestionable loyalty and solidarity required by such a restricted setting.

- The external signs of group coherence are often expressed by certain group symbols. As a rule, this leads to the development of group-specific norms. These signs can be various - names, sailor shirts, even tattoos. Compared with the situation on land, it is almost utopian to expect that these types of symbols of belonging would be expressed by co-workers in a company or members of other types of groups.

- The members of the group form close, structured relationships.

- The focus on goal achievement and the subsequent role differentiation is the next characteristic of a social group. Goal orientation on board the boat or on the island becomes apparent on two levels. On the first level, everyone confronts external difficulties (i.e. meteorological conditions) with maximal efficiency. On the second level on the list of priorities we have assignments, which are based on activities (people, cargo). On land it is of course the other way around - the second level becomes the first, and the first level is generally not very important. Only with cooperation and by acknowledging different roles can an individual on the island or the boat achieve 'social recognition'.

- The group is structured as a hierarchy. The unlimited competence of the captain or the lighthouse keeper generally does not raise doubts in the crew members. Often the negative connotation of the word hierarchy acquires positive meaning on the boat because the logical role differentiation signifies an important stabilization of activity and offers security. At the same time, the feeling of not just following instructions and orders is also important, which is why the instructions carry a personal note and allow for a certain amount of freedom in their execution, or because it is clear to the individual that it is required as his share.

- The members of the social group must be aware of taking on certain formal rights and obligations. By becoming crew members, we take on the rights and duties demanded and required for survival and safety.

- Specific group structures, recognizable group roles or specific interaction processes allow for the social group to differentiate outwards, which is

auf dem Dreimast-Toppsegelschoner 'Thor Heyerdahl' ed. J. Ziegenspeck, Lüneburg 1995, p. 10-26; J.L. Luckner, R.S. Nadler, *Processing the Experience. Strategies to Enhance and Generalize Learning*, Dubuque, Iowa 1997.

easier with boats as they come into contact with civilization, that is, with other people.

In terms of unifying social processes¹⁸ we can also highlight cooperation, which is based on the joint social activity of two or more people, and is oriented towards achieving desired goals. To achieve them we need: a common idea of what the goal is, a common recognition of the norms, and mutual support and cooperation.

One of the specifics of living on the island is dealing with frustration. Many adolescents who are being raised outside of a family environment often suffer from various identity problems. Redl and Wineman (1984) write about the inability to control aggression caused by frustration. In order to be able to help these young people in frustrating situations, we must not become the objects of that aggression as pedagogues. Because a sailboat or a lighthouse is uniquely dependant on the power of nature, the weather conditions can trigger such frustrations. These types of situations can come to pass, for example, when a certain wish cannot be realized because of the weather conditions; e.g. if the wind measures 9 on the Beaufort scale, it is nearly impossible to set sail. Material arguments are the ones setting the boundaries, which is why the participants do not see us as the cause of frustration. This is how we can help increase frustration tolerance.

The hierarchy is clear in terms of role-division and based on the actual, material nature of the work. While sailors often do not know how to deal with behavioural difficulties, at the same time, pedagogues do not know how to sail a boat. This synergy presents the adolescents with the various possibilities of and the logic behind social learning: they have daily insight into how adults cooperate and what kind of atmosphere this partnership creates. This type of attitude also affects the pedagogical relationships that we establish with the adolescents.¹⁹

Method

The purpose and the goals of the project

The purpose of the project is to follow and verify in a scientific manner the changes that occur during intensive experiential pedagogic work with

¹⁸ J. Ziegenspeck, T. Fischer, F. Bitz, *Abenteuer und Risiko. Zur Psychologie inszenierter Gefahr. Identifikation und Authentizität durch erlebnispädagogische Outdoor-Programme*, Lüneburg 2005.

¹⁹ T. Fischer, P.M. Mroczek, *Pädagogik und Therapie*; S. Priest, M.A. Gass, *Effective Leadership in Adventure Programming*, New Hampshire 1997; M. Krajncan, *Osnove doživljajske pedagogike*, Ljubljana 2007.

children and adolescents with behavioural and emotional problems. Closely following the progress of the group and the individuals, and taking into account the specific spatial setting and environmental psychological factors, as well as the selection and course of activities that have special significance on a small deserted island, present the focus and central subject matter of the analysis. The action research project consists of observing the struggles of the group on a social as well as an existential level, which in this specific context can be connected, for the period of ten days. The goal of the project is using an intensive strategy to enable adolescents to acquire important social and behavioural competence and skills, something that could only be achieved in the existing institutional practice after a longer period of adaptation. Within this frame, we are concerned with the following specific goals:

- the skills of self-organization and self-provision,
- empowerment through discovering one's own emotional, social and cognitive resources, and
- social learning (communication skills, adapting to a small intensive group, relational competence, learning how to control one's needs, emotions...)

Research questions

Can an action research project with an intensive small group in a specific environment and a short period of time lead to social changes in an individual?

Which changes will be noticeable in the children and adolescents?

Will the participants develop social competence?

What will be the course of development for the group and for those particular types of competence under observation: communication, relationships, mastery of emotions, ability to adjust?

Methodology

By implementing the action research method we have with participation in an intensive group achieved an important cohesion between the participants and the researches. Using the method of observation and joint evaluation of all the participants, especially the researchers, during the planning, the action, and the evaluation stages, we have enabled the verbalisation of the noticeable changes, which we then presented to the participants in the form of continuous feedback and reflection. Using different activities (living

in an intensive social group, survival skills, social skills training) we increased the level of participation and decision-making.

The group consisted of seven adolescents from juvenile educational facilities, aged between 13 and 16, and experiencing problems with social integration and particularly pressing difficulties concerning behaviour and emotions.

Results

The project group went through the following phases:

Preparation of the action field

The preparations were made with the cooperation of juvenile educational institutions, the implementation group, and Društvo za doživljajsko pedagogiko (Association for Experiential Pedagogy). After forming the group, we jointly decided on the goals of the project, as well as defined the basic premises of our stay in the lighthouse. Participation and cooperation, the equal contribution of each participant presented the main methodological foundation.

Analysis of individual sequences

The development / social functioning of the group

Social functioning is focused on a specific, concrete group. The group and the way it functions are directed toward transparent relationships, and toward assignments founded on their existential circumstances. The following are four important functions that influenced the development of the group:

1. In the lighthouse, spatial separation from the group is practically impossible (working environment = living environment). This phenomenon indirectly influences the sociability of an individual.

2. The group functions as a link between the individual and society, or other group formations (if possible influencing social participation). The lighthouse represents an intensive training course because it is impossible to imagine living together without active participation.

3. The group serves a specific guideline purpose for social functioning and behaviour by offering social security and interaction with others. The lighthouse presents a special environment because withdrawal is practically

impossible. The longer the situation lasts, the more internalized the experiences of social behaviour become.

4. The group also has significant value for enabling the processes of socialization. Existing as a group for a longer period of time offers the group a more stable identification, as well as a sense of belonging.

The characteristics of social situations where cooperation can be achieved calls for a high level of solidarity, integration and interconnectedness. Experience has shown that in many cases, the process of cooperation has to be re-discovered or happen anew, and the lighthouse is an ideal medium for this.

During our stay, we asked the participants the following questions: "What do you think is the most important thing for living in the lighthouse safely and without conflict?", which we repeated every third day.

We ascertained that the importance of a nice and furnished lighthouse was initially emphasized as very important, but in time became almost irrelevant. The weather was first considered important, then decreased in importance, and later became more important again because of bad weather. A well-organized and well-functioning team and the willingness to participate became increasingly important with every day.

	1 st day	3 rd day	6 th day	10 th day
a) A nice and furnished lighthouse?	45%	38%	24%	18%
b) Nice weather?	31%	11%	13%	14%
c) A well-organized and well-functioning team?	11%	24%	28%	26%
d) Willingness to participate?	23%	27%	35%	42%

The participants realized, from their own experiences as well as from the evaluations, how important the values of cooperation and organization are, which they also expressed in statements that will be presented later.

During the social adjustment process individuals did not display - in contrast with cooperation - any common goals or norms. This social process was, of course, most present in the first few days, especially since both the group and the environment were entirely new. On the one hand, the lighthouse presented an attractive prospect, and the thought of being alone on the island was also inviting; however, a great deal of scepticism was soon encountered. This is why the social adjustment process essentially strove to achieve cooperation, compromise and tolerance. Its purpose was solving or neutralizing conflicts within the group. Adjustment meant the achievement of a peaceful coexistence.

Likewise, discontent was immediately apparent, and enabled insight which helped in solving and resolving conflicts and misunderstandings. In this way, the process of assimilation enabled us to see that individuals strive to acquire behavioural patterns, norms and goals from each other. Therefore it can be said that the process of assimilation develops the process of integration in social systems and social groups. Self-organization, connected to basic existential needs, calls for self-provision, which in turn increases the need for efficient communication, division of labour, training in practical skills such as cooking, cleaning, laundry, gathering herbs and seafood, fishing, learning about the sea and seafaring (types of wind, weather), how to survive in the wild...

The intense social experiences showed that everyone was inexperienced and not very good at living in a small community. This situation poses the following research question: will this type of assistance in solving their difficulties with themselves and with society in general prove to be effective by first occurring within a small setting?

It is important for young people that an enclosed space is available in their environment, without the danger of complete isolation from others, or of perceiving their arrival to such a location as coercion and not a freely made decision. At the same time, it still enables the occurrence of many situations that are not removed from normal social reality.

Communication structure in the lighthouse

The observation of communication was based on Argyle's (1986, 2006) classification model of nonverbal communication using:

- physical contact,
- proximity,
- orientation,
- external signals,
- posture,
- body movement,
- facial expressions,
- gesticulation,
- looks,
- articulation and modulation.

Assessments were made during daily evaluations once the adolescents had gone to sleep. At first we made assessments individually, and then coordinated them based on argumentation and general consensus. The participants found (body) movement around the lighthouse to be the most fre-

quent form of nonverbal expression, followed by facial expressions, gesticulation and looks and glances as information carriers.

In the first few days, communication was largely verbal; it then decreased during the stay, while nonverbal communication increased: from 24% : 76% in favour of verbal communication to 62% : 38% in favour of non-verbal communication.

The impact of the limited space on communication resulted in the following characteristics:

- In direct communication, the communication partners are in direct personal contact (face to face). This enables instant feedback, aiding successful communication.

- In irregular situations (storms, food shortages) communication must be more efficient to achieve the proper coordination, reaction and adjustment.

- Many senseless problems of everyday life, often caused by misinterpretation or incorrect information, are remedied in an intensive social context, understood correctly and there is enough time for these types of situations to be properly considered.

- Any form of communication is doubtless an important instrument for intensifying interpersonal relationships.

The lighthouse represents an isolated place without contact with unknown people and so enables a stigmatized person not to have to deal with the prejudices and judgemental stares, which he interprets to his own detriment. The higher the intensity of the group, its integration, the more he is liberated from the established ways of seeing himself and consequently from the role he is familiar with. In the same way we have seen that they have been able to find their strong points by living on the island and through the activities, because they were successful, because they received approval and with the help of simultaneous reflection and daily evaluation, the participants began to believe in themselves. We can see this from the statements they made:

I didn't think I could cope on such a small piece of land.

This lighthouse is awesome, I learned more about myself than before in my entire life.

Hey man, I caught an octopus with my bare hands.

I made the best calamari.

I swam around the whole island.

These people became my best friends.

I would have run away if I could and I'd never know how good it is here. And we're all pirates and we rule!

Fish rule.

*In those games I felt like I could be an equal match for anyone.
I could barely get those Czechs off the island.
Who knew that there was so much stuff you can eat on the island.
I can't believe how much I've experienced here.
Will we still see each other?
I want to stay here, I think I'd survive.
I'd be like Štefan if I made a boat, but there's no Marjetka.
In the end we'd always sort stuff out, no problem.
Positive, positive. I'm surprised, I didn't expect it.
I learned how to listen, at first I'd get away if I could, but in the end I don't get it, how easy it is, how cool, I can't believe it.*

Other noticeable processes

After three days we noticed the so-called urban trauma due to the limitations set by nature, and some of the boys, due to the lack of transparency and not being able to predict how they would cope on the island or in the lighthouse for another week, expressed anxiety using negativism, smoke signals and waving in case a boat was passing by. Defiance, obstinacy, as well as excessive fearfulness and apathy were present, and in one moment also the loss of the sense of distance.

It was interesting to observe the attitudes to the lighthouse as a living space, a working space and when it came to free time. After the first two, in some cases three days of feeling lost and wandering around, experiencing certain activities such as diving, fishing, picking cacti, tidying up, cooking and baking bread as boring or absurd, they were soon accepted as completely logical. What is more, they even took charge of the sequence of activities and initiative upon themselves. They also showed a high level of interest when it came to the species of fish (particularly because we caught a sea spider, which is very poisonous and dangerous) and hunting an octopus, and this was later used for learning about saltwater fish. The periods of bad weather included more intensive activity for the whole group, more need for an emotionally friendly environment, which we used for a multitude of different workshops aimed at social skills training.

Conclusion

The activities were limited by the elements – water and wind. However, these limitations are at the same time acceptable and motivating: experiencing success, recognition within the group and the feeling that you are truly

accepted as a person and a useful team member, as well as fostering social competence, for example, an individual experiences himself in a new way and notices that there is more to him than he knew or thought, that it is possible to be supportive and encourage someone else to recognize their abilities, to take initiative and at the same time know when to accept another's authority, to help others and allow them to help you, to take responsibility and develop trust.

These are all desirable qualities which came into effect in a small closed social system, a lighthouse on a desert island. In particular, we can observe and note the following: the proximity and distance in social interaction / in terms of social situations (for living as a group to work, it depends on their cognitive evaluation of the conditions they find themselves in; here, voluntary participation plays an extremely significant role); their insight into how their own energy and mood affect the whole group; the specificity and intensity of an individual's problems; their level of knowledge; taking responsibility for themselves and others; how mutual competition and interactive work (more than one person doing one job) increase negative effects and create social conflicts; the significant role and influence of the social atmosphere in the group; the negative effects accompanying the idea of 'personal space' (how to designate it, how to protect it, can they even have it; each individual would find refuge in their 'own' space, from fishing, throwing stones, looking at the sea, observing boats, etc. In this way, they were able to defend their privacy and use verbal or nonverbal communication to show that they required some space). We can conclude based on the above argumentation that an active research project with an intensive small group in a specific environment for a short period of time can have a significant effect on the social integration of an individual.

The most noticeable changes in the participants are particularly improvement in communication, the ability to adapt to an intensive group in a small space where the possibility of withdrawal is relatively small, improvement in controlling excesses and solving conflicts, as well as improvement in inventiveness and practical skills that they can use in their everyday lives (gathering, food, cooking...).

With the help of the group of participants and researchers, the participants have increased their social competence as well as discovered many other resources. Certainly a big gap can appear when returning to the institution, where the intensive institutional culture can be a dominant influence and have a negative effect on the acquired experiences, discovered resources and newfound social competence.²⁰

²⁰ M. Brüngrer, *Dissoziale Jugendliche nach Sozialtherapeutischer Intervention*, Lüneburg 1993.

The successful development of different types of competence has shown that including intensive, socially isolated projects with appealing content or locations and skilled expert attendants in the educational assistance programme would be a useful strategy in future. We would also recommend such methods of assistance as a way of establishing a new group, for example, at the beginning of the school year, or as individual projects for people in critical situations.

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