

A group of young people are sitting in a circle on a grassy field in a forest. In the background, there are several tents and a dense forest of tall trees. The scene is set in a natural, outdoor environment.

YOUTH EXCHANGE

UPDATE

Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park, Georgia

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UPDATE | 2018





ABOUT THE YOUTH EXCHANGE

UPDATE – Unfold Personal Development through Adventure Training & Education – was 8 day Youth Exchange under Erasmus+ KA1 Programme, which took place in Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park, Georgia. Project gathered 30 youngsters from 5 different countries: Norway, Croatia, Finland, Ukraine and Georgia.

The programme included 5 days of outdoor and 3 days of indoor activities, where participants were given the floor to manage the whole camp in untouched wild nature. The project aimed to support young people's personal development and make positive impact on their life choices by equipping them with set of soft and hard skills and relevant attitudes for supporting their self-realization.

This booklet is one of the tangible outcomes of the project, which contains the thoughts, experiences and reflections of participants, description of the whole process and tips for beginner outdoor explorers.

NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

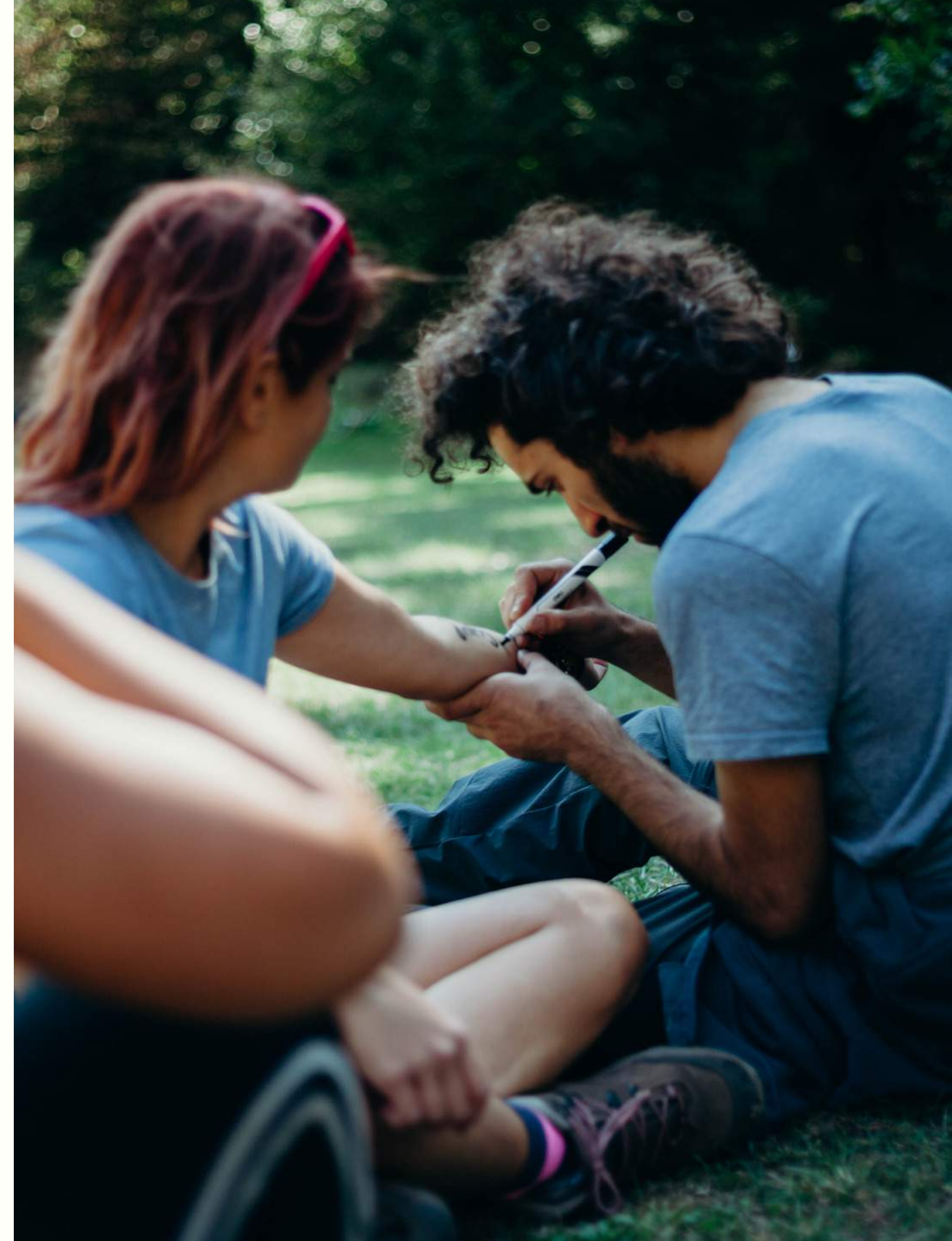
To give you the idea of which methodologies team used for the UPDATE, Non-formal education principles should be mentioned.

Non-formal education is a purposeful but voluntary educational process that takes place in diverse settings where learning is not necessarily the only activity. These settings may be anything from classroom to forest and the activities may be lead by youth workers, facilitators and trainers.

The activities are planned, but may not be organized according to conventional curricula. As long as the non-formal education is learners oriented and flexible to the needs of the target group.

They often address specific groups. They document and assess learning achievements in non-conventional ways. Non-formal educational activities can be characterized as:

- voluntary;
- accessible to everyone (ideally);
- organised processes with educational objectives;
- participatory and learner-centered;
- learning life skills and preparing for active citizenship;
- based on involving both individual and group learning with a collective approach;
- holistic and process-orientated.



Non-formal education aims giving the competences to young people. The competences are the combination of Attitudes, Skills and Knowledge.

The process of assessing the competencies gained during the non-formal educational activities is often done through different types of reflection. It can be individual, pair or group, verbal, non-verbal or written.

ATTITUDES
WHO WE ARE

SKILLS

WHAT WE CAN DO

KNOWLEDGE

WHAT WE KNOW

"If you are a good/active listener (attitude). You can start to reflect on what you do when you are listening. How do you behave? Through this reflection you will discover the skills that you are unconsciously using. Realizing this will give you the tips, hints and other theory of active listening and create the knowledge."

Outdoor as a tool

For our Youth Exchange we used Outdoor as a setting.

Outdoor education programs involve residential or journey wilderness-based experiences in which participants take part in a variety of adventurous challenges and outdoor activities such as hiking, climbing, canoeing, ropes courses and group games. Outdoor education draws upon the philosophy, theory, and practices of experiential education and environmental education.

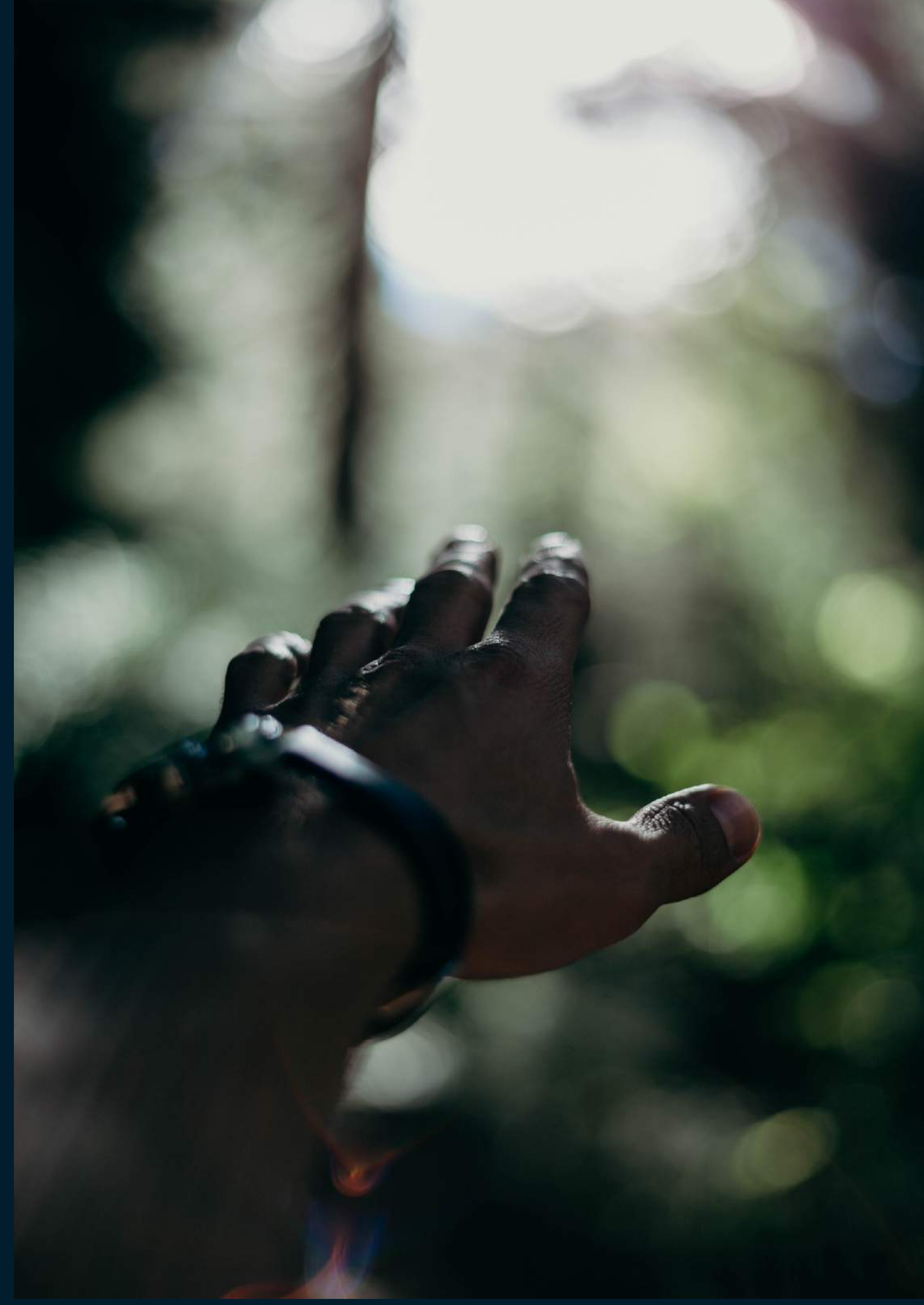
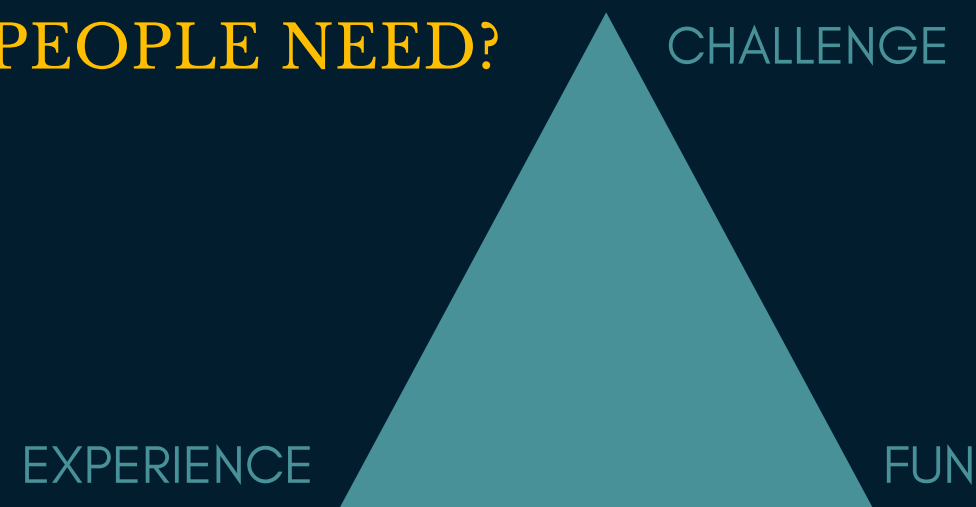
You cannot escape from nature, you show who you are !

While being outdoor, people observe the:

1. Relationship with THE SELF through meeting of challenge;
2. Relationship with OTHERS through group experiences and the sharing of decision making;
3. Relationship with the NATURAL ENVIRONMENT through direct experience of it.

SO WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE NEED?

**EXPERIENCE
is a KEY word!**





Experiential Learning

What I hear - I forget, What I see - I remember, What I do - I know!

The specific methodology on our that was used to carry out the activities and exercises were based on Experiential Learning Cycle that was created by D.Kolb.

This concept includes:

Knowledge, Activity and Reflection.

Knowledge is acquired information, facts, concepts, details, whereas Activity puts this knowledge into the action, combination of these two gives the material to reflect on.



HOW DID WE DO IT?

With the programme of the UPDATE the project team tried to stick to the Kolb's cycle as much as possible to give the maximum experience to the participants. The project agenda was divided into few blocks:

- Intro of the project, methodology, programme, team/trust building;
- Hiking trip; (Experience)
- 2-day outdoor camp and reflection on the previous experience; (Reflect)
- Theoretical inputs on Group Dynamics, Leadership Styles, Communication Styles and some hard-skills workshops; (Conceptualize)
- Wrapping up! (Maybe Try/Experiment again?!)



DAY 1 - THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM

Hiking can be difficult at times but it's all worth the effort in the end. It's the whole package: the beginning, the journey and the destination all make it one of the best things ever.

Once everyone had finally arrived and found their respective teams we had the first official meeting for the project where we laid down some basic rules and got down to team building. It was pretty straight forward, although it did take us awhile to start trusting total strangers whom we met a few hours earlier. The weather was nice and bright, and people were enjoying themselves and learning to trust in the team.

At lunch some of us decided to take a walk to the city centre of Bakuriani and we managed to get back to the hotel just in time for the start of the next exercise, which involved a little walk into the forest and then we were split into 2 groups, the first task for my group was balancing in pairs on a slack-line. This enabled us to let go of control and trust our partners a lot more. At the end of the exercise none of us made it to the end but all of us did far better than we had anticipated.

The second exercise involved the whole group being put through some loops from one side to the other and this really showed how the group dynamic worked. After some initial chaos people started listening and trusting each other and we did manage to finish the task in overtime.

Everyone was jubilant about the fact that both groups had succeeded, and we made our way back to the hotel and to dinner.

The euphoria didn't last long as we found out from the group leaders that the whole hike had to be planned and managed by us, as a team, and that we had one night to do it.

People divided themselves into 3 primary teams, Food, Material and Planning.

The planning team had the most on their head as they had to plan the route without much information. There was confusion as some people had never hiked before and it was evident it was going to be a very tricky situation to handle. But one thing we had learned to do over the day was to trust each other and it was evident that the lesson had rubbed on each and everyone of us. It was going to be a challenge but we were prepared to face it, together.

"THE FISHERMEN KNOW THAT THE SEA IS DANGEROUS AND THE STORM TERRIBLE, BUT THEY HAVE NEVER FOUND THESE DANGERS SUFFICIENT REASON TO REMAIN ASHORE."

- Vincent Van Gogh

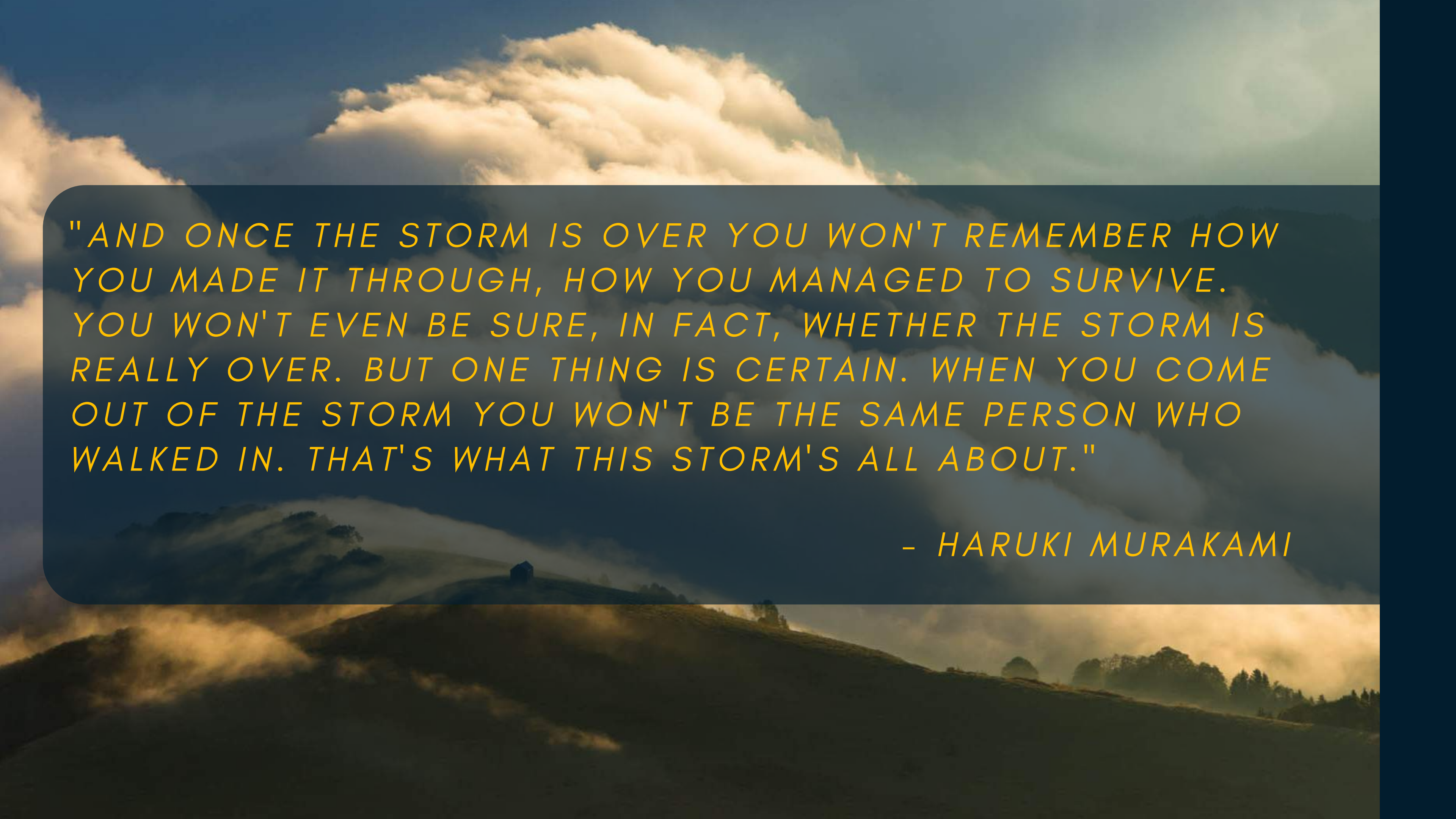
DAY 2 - THE STORM

Most of the group didn't know what to expect, some even made their first hiking steps. From Bakuriani to Likani and new life. The planning was made, food prepared, material gathered, surprise untold.

Thirty participants headed on uphill in Borjomi-Kharagauli NP through pine forest with the company of a small drizzle. The 15km trail was a proper challenge for the most, first realizations of how physically unequal we are started to develop and situation tensed. Group motivation was going up and down, the weather was also changing quickly and the fear of not reaching the top till darkness was raising. But at the end the beautiful scenery and enough breaks were what led us forward to our destination, Lomismta Shelter.

No one expected it to be easy, but no one ever told it would be this hard. It was a real storming moment in the group and group dynamics.

Exhausted, hungry, a bit disorganized but happy and fulfilled. The group set up a camp, prepared a warm dinner, got together and started reminiscing while watching the cozy, red and orange flame licks under a starry night blanket.

The background image is a dramatic landscape. The sky is filled with large, billowing white and yellow clouds, suggesting a storm or late afternoon light. Below the sky, a dark, silhouetted hill rises. On the crest of the hill, a small, dark, square-shaped house is visible. The foreground shows more rolling hills, also in silhouette, with some trees visible on the right side. The overall mood is somber and contemplative.

"AND ONCE THE STORM IS OVER YOU WON'T REMEMBER HOW YOU MADE IT THROUGH, HOW YOU MANAGED TO SURVIVE. YOU WON'T EVEN BE SURE, IN FACT, WHETHER THE STORM IS REALLY OVER. BUT ONE THING IS CERTAIN. WHEN YOU COME OUT OF THE STORM YOU WON'T BE THE SAME PERSON WHO WALKED IN. THAT'S WHAT THIS STORM'S ALL ABOUT."

- HARUKI MURAKAMI

DAY 3 – DO YOU BELIEVE IN LIFE AFTER HIKE?!



The day before was very stressful and tiring, as most of us did not have all the necessary skills for long and difficult hike. The mood and spirit in the group was changing rapidly. The day was started with the reflection on the mistakes we've done, the lesson we learnt. We asked each other the questions we needed the answers on, but we left them not responded and took an hour silent walk, which gave us enough time and private space to find answers on our own and decide how to continue following days.

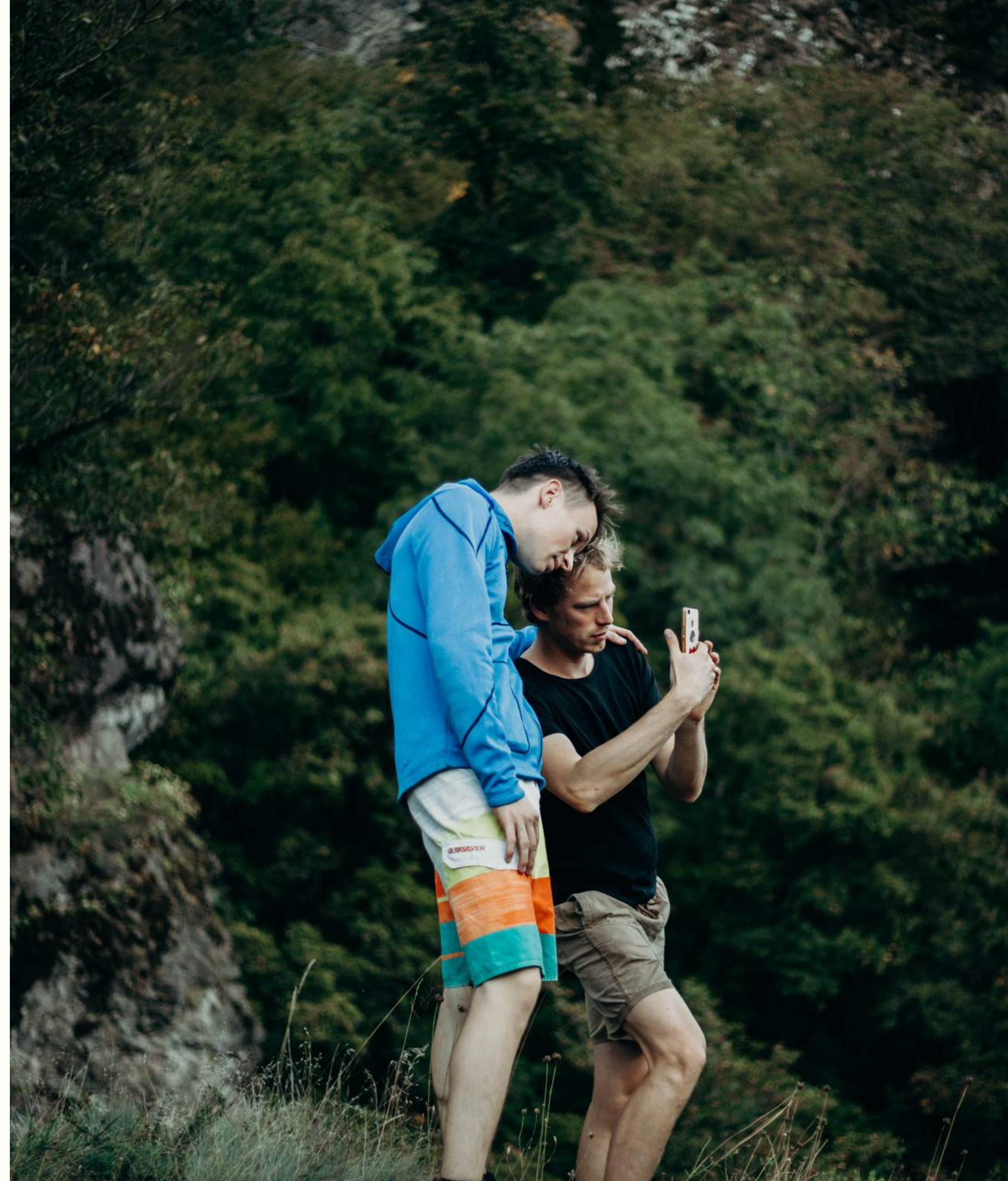
For a split second in the morning I thought there was no life after hike. But after reflection and a walk to our next destination, we quietly built stronger team and fulfilled the Mission Impossible task in the evening. Everyone was impressed how efficient the team had become in very short amount of time.

DAY 4

This day started with a bit more ease than the previous days. We all knew that we would soon be at our goal, and that when we packed down the camp, it would be the last time before putting it up in a less temporary space.

Doing this together. We got the choice of going back the same way we came two days before, or continue down the very steep parts that was our original plan. Each one of us agreed and the group feeling just grew from here. It was the first time we stood together, and our motto Life is HIKE really became a thing. Everyone helped to build up the camp for one last time, some got wood and started cooking, others fixed the tents and got water. The team-spirit was just growing.

In the evening, we gathered around the fire and got an optional task; the solo night. Spending an hour in the forest, alone, reflecting on experience: a bit frightening. But laying relatively close to one another and having time to focus on the question “Where am I, and what to I want to leave behind me and continue the life without?”, had a surprisingly calming effect. Laying there in silence and darkness, in a national park in Georgia. It was a strange and relieving feeling, and the hour went by more quickly than I would ever imagine. It was an eye-opener and a very nice end of the day.





DAY 5 - DEAR OLD ME!

"It was a long way!

Even though it all started 4 days ago it feels like a lot, maybe because I discovered a lot about myself maybe even more than in previous months and years. To be honest it was a hard work. Only the fifth day is a bit chilly and I finally have time to stay with myself and reflect on everything I have done with team and myself.

Sometimes it's hard to realize your actions, leave the body and look at oneself from other perspective, but I think I did it today and saw my true self.

Some people went on rafting, I preferred to stay. After 3 days of hiking, finally i'm laying on the grass, getting sunburn and enjoying lovely pint tea. We have open space activities planned in afternoon, we will do Yoga and hike to the nearby church to enjoy the sunset!

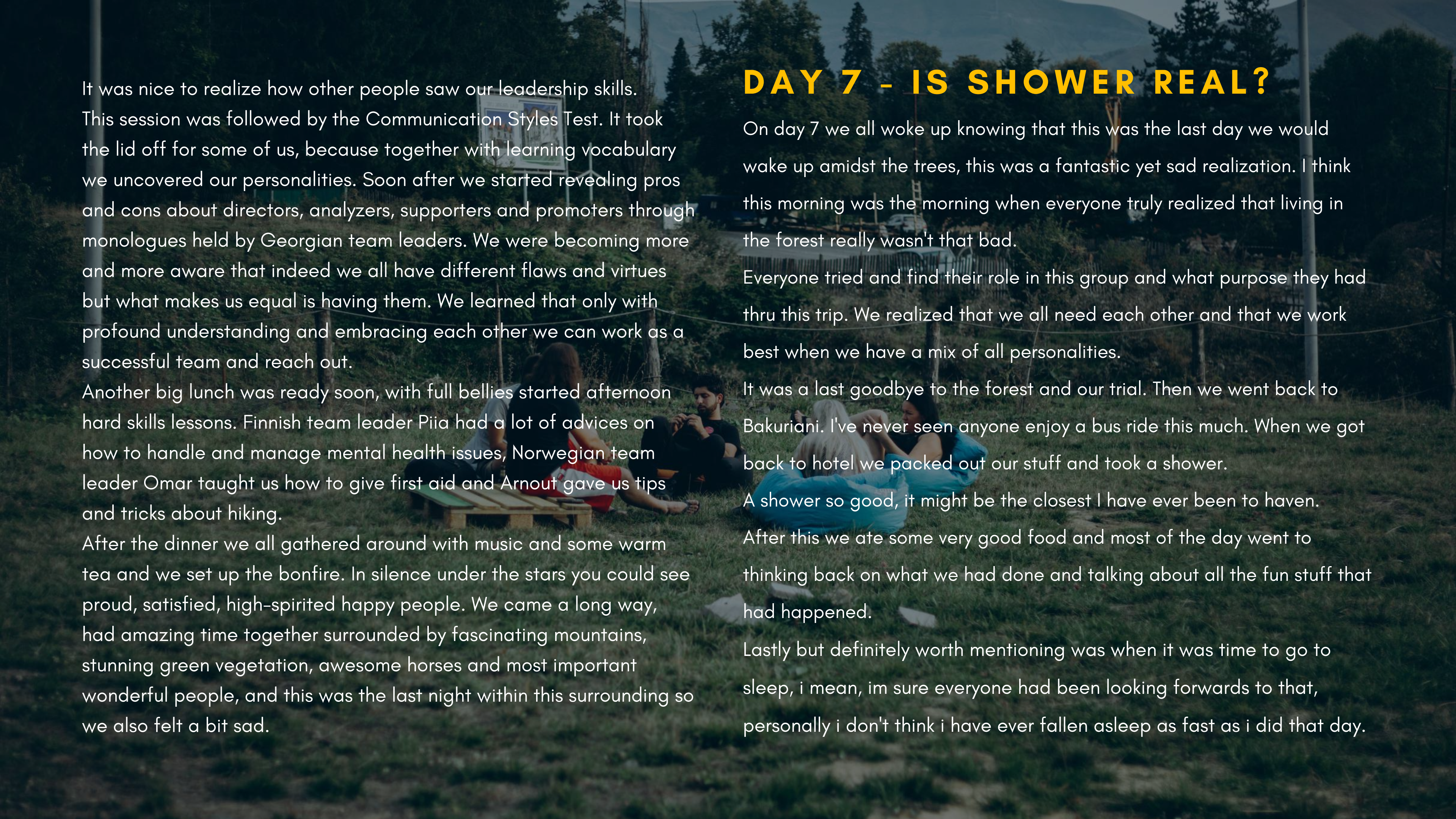
I believe you would also love it, sorry that I left you behind!

New me!"

DAY 6 - ALL DIFFERENT, ALL EQUAL

Day of rest was great and necessary and on the day 6 we were ready for some action.

First session was about leadership styles and right after we had group work. He came up with the idea for each of us to label 3 people as a Laissez-faire, a democratic or an authoritative leader. Even though it seemed both uncomfortable to label people with a heart shaped sticker, we did it after few smiles and confused looks.



It was nice to realize how other people saw our leadership skills. This session was followed by the Communication Styles Test. It took the lid off for some of us, because together with learning vocabulary we uncovered our personalities. Soon after we started revealing pros and cons about directors, analyzers, supporters and promoters through monologues held by Georgian team leaders. We were becoming more and more aware that indeed we all have different flaws and virtues but what makes us equal is having them. We learned that only with profound understanding and embracing each other we can work as a successful team and reach out.

Another big lunch was ready soon, with full bellies started afternoon hard skills lessons. Finnish team leader Piia had a lot of advices on how to handle and manage mental health issues, Norwegian team leader Omar taught us how to give first aid and Arnout gave us tips and tricks about hiking.

After the dinner we all gathered around with music and some warm tea and we set up the bonfire. In silence under the stars you could see proud, satisfied, high-spirited happy people. We came a long way, had amazing time together surrounded by fascinating mountains, stunning green vegetation, awesome horses and most important wonderful people, and this was the last night within this surrounding so we also felt a bit sad.

DAY 7 - IS SHOWER REAL?

On day 7 we all woke up knowing that this was the last day we would wake up amidst the trees, this was a fantastic yet sad realization. I think this morning was the morning when everyone truly realized that living in the forest really wasn't that bad.

Everyone tried and find their role in this group and what purpose they had thru this trip. We realized that we all need each other and that we work best when we have a mix of all personalities.

It was a last goodbye to the forest and our trial. Then we went back to Bakuriani. I've never seen anyone enjoy a bus ride this much. When we got back to hotel we packed out our stuff and took a shower.

A shower so good, it might be the closest I have ever been to haven.

After this we ate some very good food and most of the day went to thinking back on what we had done and talking about all the fun stuff that had happened.

Lastly but definitely worth mentioning was when it was time to go to sleep, i mean, im sure everyone had been looking forwards to that, personally i don't think i have ever fallen asleep as fast as i did that day.

DAY 8

**“ARE WE GONNA PLAN OUR OWN
PROJECTS OR WHAT?”**

Last day in Bakuriani started as usual. We got to know more about the Erasmus+ program: What Erasmus+ Youth Programme aims ? How we can apply for a project, structure, organization etc. Throughout the day we were working on the ideas of various projects that we would like to implement together in the future. The topics were: outdoor education, experiential learning, sustainable living and self-development.

Everything was so usual we forgot it was project's last day... Those 8 days of adventures made us closer than anyone could imagine, for those days we were hiking, cooking, eating together, supporting each-other, sharing tents and memories and now time had come to say goodbye to all the participants.

And keep the motivation to implement the common project together to multiply the results of our project!



TIPS FOR GOING OUTDOORS



THE MOUNTAIN CODE:

Stay safe by following these simple rules of thumb.

1. Plan your trip and inform others about the route(s).
2. Adapt the planned routes according to ability and conditions.
3. Pay attention to the weather.
4. Be prepared for bad & cold weather, even on short trips.
5. Bring the necessary equipment so you can help yourself and others.
6. Choose safe routes.
7. Use a map and a compass, so you always know where you are.
8. Don't be ashamed to turn around and head back.
9. Conserve your energy and seek shelter if necessary.

CLOTHING:

- wool, part wool or synthetic underwear
- wool socks/stockings
- wind jacket/anorak or all-weather jacket
- mountain trousers
- shirt or light sweater of wool or fleece
- hiking shoes
- backpack
- gloves/mittens
- rain jacket / trousers
- extra clothes
- Other essential gear:
- Binoculars
- camera.

FOR TENT CAMPING YOU ALSO NEED

- sleeping bag
- sleeping pad
- cook set and fuel
- food & emergency rations
- cup, plate and cutlery
- tent / hammock / tarp
- toiletries & toilet paper;

**PACK LIGHT
AND
DON'T TAKE TOO
MUCH!**

HOW TO SLEEP COMFORTABLE IN A TENT?

- Exercise before bed – get warmed up, create enough body heat to warm up the bag (but NOT too much – sweat is not wanted!!!)
- Add a hot water bottle
- Lay near another person/dog?!
- Use a sleeping bag liner
- Use socks, gloves and a hat as most heat get lost through those places.
- Do not put TOO many clothes on, as sweating in the sleeping bag will only make you cold.
- Chose for wool underwear instead of synthetics.
- Use a thick insulation pad
- Go to the toilet before heading bed!!!

Avoid overdressing before you hop into your bag. Wearing bulky clothing inside a bag can actually reduce the bag's ability to efficiently trap body heat. Instead, drape items such as a jacket on the outside of your bag for an extra layer of insulation. Or bring an old comforter from home to serve as an extra layer when car camping.





Erasmus+



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