

Strategic Priority 2

Adolescents – supporting their transition to adulthood



The World Organization of the Scout Movement



Working with Adolescents and Post-Adolescents

The Results

The outcomes are:

- Two separate programmes for the adolescent and post-adolescent age ranges (14-18 Pionniers, 18-22 Rovers), which are one of the main reasons for retaining and attracting young people.
- Membership of these two sections has been increasing since the early 80's and by the year 2000 it had reached almost 23,000. This represents 40.1% of the youth membership.
- Due to the experience and expertise gathered during these past years, we were able to present to the European Region our candidature to host the new European event for young people aged 16-22, "RoverWay2003". Our candidature was approved by the European Scout Committee and the Europe Committee WAGGGS.

The organisation of "RoverWay2003" is seen as a way of sharing our experience with this age range with other National Scout Organizations. The event offers everybody involved the chance to make a collective effort to improve programmes for adolescents. It also gives us an opportunity to introduce some new aspects into our own programme.

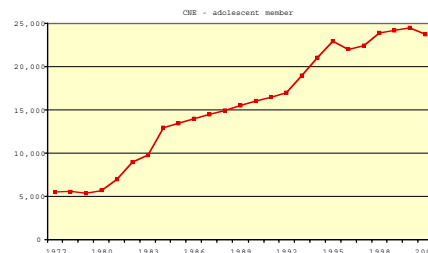


The Pioneer Section – new people, new experiences, new challenges

The Reasons

Until the late 70's, Corpo Nacional de Escutas (CNE) had only one Scout section (11-18) and one Rover section (18-25); only boys were allowed to be Scouts. After some political changes in Portugal, some winds of change began to blow and a more educationally oriented approach started to rise up in the association.

Coeducation was then introduced, opening all units to girls and boys, and a new section was created (Senior Scouts 14-18). This was due to the recognition



A graph of the dramatic rise in the adolescent membership

At a time when membership development in Scouting is one of the main challenges and we are all worrying about how to attract young people, we are convinced that this can be achieved only through having a good programme. The membership increase is one of the indicators that the programme we have developed seems to be relevant (for the situation in Portugal, of course).

The membership increase is also particularly relevant if we bear in mind that in Portugal the youth population in this age range (15-24) has decreased by almost 14% from 1985 until now.



Portugal: Corpo Nacional de Escutas

PROMISING PRACTICES

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that the interests and needs of young people aged 11-12 were quite different from the needs of 17-18 year olds.

But it wasn't until the mid 80's that real programmes for the two older sections started to be "built" and some local units were set up as pilot units.

Finally, by the end of the 80's, a programme was designed for the new Pioneer Section for young people aged 14-18. This was (and still is) focused on action, challenging activities, debate, friendship and solidarity, discovery and environment; all this being done using



The Rover Section – a new strong symbolic framework on the concept of the Journey

the fundamental elements of the Scout Method as well as the Project approach as a way of organizing all their big achievements.

But the Rover Section also faced big changes. In fact, until then there wasn't a real Rover programme; young people of that age could gather and do some activities together, mainly outdoor activities or service. There weren't any other concepts besides the ones of the "Brotherhood of the Open Air and Service"; the symbolic framework was the one of the Knights, which was felt to be inappropriate for young people who were about to face adulthood. Most of the time Rovers were put as leaders of younger sections, either because there was a lack of leaders or because there wasn't a real structured proposal adapted to their own needs and expectations.

There wasn't a clear educational awareness about the role of young people: "users" of Scouting education or "providers" of it to younger people. The association began to feel that there wasn't much sense in keeping people as Rovers until 25 if they started to play their full role in society sooner than that (gained their qualifications, found a regular job, started a family...).

Based on this strong opinion that the Rover Section should be organised like any other section (from the educational point of view), a new approach was then developed.

The Methods

The Pioneer Section programme was a completely new one and some difficulties arose since there wasn't anything already in place (except for some aspects of the previous Scout programme). Key elements of the Scout Method were kept: the Law and Promise, the patrol system, nature, and the "learning by doing" concept. A new symbolic framework was chosen, based on the Pioneer image: someone who is willing to discover new things and people, open to new experiences and to accept new challenges, ready to work alone but needing other people to share his/her achievements. A progressive scheme was also created and the role of the adult leader was defined. The newest element was the adoption of the project method as the main "tool" to organise the activities and to ensure the genuine participation of young people in decisions that concerned them and the things they did.

For the Rover Section programme, the main challenge was to reach a balance between the key elements of Rovering as defined by B.-P. and a new approach that could meet young people's expectations and be socially relevant. That's why we can now find in the Rover programme:

- A new and strong symbolic framework focused on the concept of the journey - a journey in which each individual can discover and collect tools or "life" experiences that will enhance personal progression and lead him/her to a "new self", a fully developed, active and caring person;
- A strong personal approach, even if teams are the basic groups in which young people interact. A personal development plan is one of the "tools" to focus on;
 - The "departure", a special ceremony which means that a young person has reached Scouting's educational objectives and is recognised as someone who is capable of playing an active role in society. This is supposed to be done before the age of 22;
 - A strong "group life" ruled by a charter created by the Rovers themselves;
 - An emphasis on nature and outdoors, service and local intervention, fraternity and solidarity;
 - The "project method", which enables teams of young people to choose, organise, live and evaluate their activities and long-term projects;
 - An adult leader who acts more like an adviser or facilitator but has an important role in supporting each young person on his/her "journey";
 - All the key elements of the Scout Method, adapted to this age range.

One particular aspect of the design phase of the Rover programme was that Rovers were invited to give their opinion and suggestions on the proposal made by the youth programme team. The final version incorporated these suggestions as well as the results obtained in some of the pilot units chosen to test this new approach.

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Our Learning

Some written materials were produced and the promotion and implementation of both programmes started with workshops for unit leaders in each of the districts. Our association's leader training scheme also had to be adapted to these changes.

During the last two years, very specific and intensive work has been done in the Rover Section, in order to encourage more involvement in all levels of the association. This is being done by:

- Establishing an informal network with leaders working with this section at district level and undertaking some specific work with them (namely providing them with "tools" that support their work);
- Undertaking some work and training sessions with Rover leaders at local level (to explain and experiment with particular aspects of programme implementation);
- Setting up an effective communication system with the help of an e-bulletin, a website and the association's magazine;
- Promoting and supporting some special activities for Rovers: National Moot (held in 2001), district gatherings, team leaders' weekends, seminars...;
- Set up a national Rover forum with representatives from all districts;
- Promoting specific programmes to enhance mobility and international awareness;
- Producing some support materials for all levels in the association working with Rovers.

All this is being done not only by the national team but also involving several groups of leaders from different parts of the country.

During recent years, surveys have been conducted among leaders and Rovers themselves to try to identify the strong points of the programmes as well as the weak ones. The results have been very encouraging and we believe that the core of the programmes remains useful and relevant.

This means that there are still ways of keeping Scouting attractive to adolescents and post-adolescents. And if you want to attract them you have to have something to offer (a programme). For the success of such a programme and its implementation we believe that some things are quite important and must be kept in mind:



Elements of success – fun, involvement, identity and a sense of belonging

- Involve the participants - they have to feel that they are a part of it and not only consuming it. The programme is theirs and they have to build their own activities and projects! If Scouting in general wants to enhance the full participation of young people (through the Scout Method), this objective really needs to be present when working with young adults;
- Facing their needs in several dimensions - the programme must be balanced and provide experiences that can "touch" the various dimensions of each individual: emotional, physical, intellectual, spiritual, social and character;

- Challenging and fun - the participants have to feel challenged by it (physically as well as intellectually, emotionally etc.) and have fun, even if they are dealing with the most serious issues; there can always be an attractive way of putting the questions;
- Contain a personal appeal and approach - treat each person as an individual; he/she must feel that he/she is important and has an irreplaceable role in the group life and projects;
- Provide progression (individual and group) - at the end of each experience (activity, project...), participants must have something more in their luggage: new knowledge, a new skill, another point of view, a new friend... They have to feel that it was worthwhile to 'live' the experience that Scouting can provide;
- Go into things in depth - young adults are not satisfied unless they can go into things in depth. Even if sometimes it seems that a "light approach" is enough, we cannot truly retain their full attention and involvement if we don't provide the opportunity of "diving deep". Besides, it's the only way to ensure that what they live in Scouting is really an educational experience;
- Be relevant - the programme has to be connected to young people's daily life (now or in the future). We believe that the educational process of Scouting helps young people enter into the "adult world" and to live there happily. That's a long-term vision and the point of view of the educator. For the young people it's also important to see that what they experience in Scouting can be really useful in their own daily lives (in a more short-term approach) and it's connected to their community or the world in general.

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One very important thing that we have learned is that we have to resist the temptation of taking young people out of Scouting's educational process before it ends. We must let young people reach adulthood and help them to get there. In doing this we are achieving our mission; moreover, some of these young people will be glad to join us as leaders and help others on their "journey"; and they will be much more mature. If we are patient enough the results obtained through having a long-term vision will be much better.

Another important thing is that they cannot be left on their own. This means that young people have to feel that there are leaders who are there for them if needed - leaders who care about them and are really keen to provide the programme because they believe in it.

Our Future Plans

Even if the results have been satisfactory, it is possible to identify some aspects that need to be adjusted and/or introduced. That's why we've started to work on the renewal of some aspects of the programme, namely the progressive scheme, and some details relating to the organisation of the units.

Also some new realities in Portuguese society have to be taken into account. One example is the fact that a lot of young people go to study in cities far from their homes and they have difficulties attending the regular activities. Other social and economic changes also have to be borne in mind.

One particular aspect that will be enhanced in the future will be the international dimension. We believe that the organisation of "RoverWay2003" will have a tremendous impact, not only in international awareness but also in some other ways of doing things. A good sign for the future is that most of the candidates who will work as camp staff are Rovers who are about to make their "departure".

"RoverWay2003" will, no doubt, be an excellent opportunity to exchange ideas and experiences on how to improve programmes for adolescents and to try some of them.

Government statistics predict that the Portuguese youth population (15-24) will continue to decrease until 2005 when a turning point will occur; they say that after 2005 the youth population will start to increase until 2020. With the adjustments in the programme and after making the most of the "RoverWay2003" experience, we believe that CNE will be in good shape to welcome even more young people.

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