

North of Portugal

Learning for the Planet: Nature and Board Games in Northern Portugal

Course Duration: one week, from Monday to Saturday, 30 hours

Location: Northern Portugal

Number of Participants: Min. 6 – Max. 20



COURSE DESCRIPTION

This Erasmus+ course invites educators to explore the powerful intersection between environmental education and modern board games, using the rich natural landscapes of Northern Portugal as an open-air classroom.

Throughout the course, participants engage in hands-on learning activities in protected natural areas such as the Peneda-Gerês National Park and Lagoas de Bertandos, while also exploring how analog games can support the development of transversal skills such as critical thinking, cooperation, systems thinking, and problem-solving.

Games serve as both tools for interpretation and reflection. Their mechanics and themes help participants connect emotionally and cognitively with ecological issues such as biodiversity loss, sustainability, ecosystems, or interdependence. Through play, nature observation, and storytelling, educators will experience a unique and transferable learning model.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Participants to the course will learn to:

- Understand key concepts in environmental and sustainability education
- Use board games as tools to teach ecological and scientific thinking
- Connect game mechanics with natural systems (e.g., competition, cooperation, balance)
- Develop place-based educational strategies using local biodiversity and landscapes
- Design and facilitate interactive learning experiences in natural settings
- Reflect on the role of play and imagination in transformative learning

North of Portugal

Learning for the Planet: Nature and Board Games in Northern Portugal



Pedagogical
Innovation
Centre

Course Duration: one week, from Monday to Saturday, 30 hours

Location: Northern Portugal

Number of Participants: Min. 6 – Max. 20

Day 1 – Welcome to Nature-Based Learning

Location: Northern Portugal (e.g., Gerês or Lagoas de Bertandos)

Arrival and Welcome Circle: Introductions, course overview, and exchange of expectations. Presentation of the educational approach combining environmental awareness, experiential learning, and playful pedagogy.

Exploration Walk: Guided walk through the surrounding landscape to observe biodiversity, ecosystems, and human interaction with nature. Participants are invited to engage their senses and reflect on nature as a learning space.

Workshop: Nature as a Pedagogical Tool: Group discussion on how natural environments can support learning across subjects. Reflection on existing practices and possibilities for using outdoor settings in education.

Optional Playful Moment: A selection of board games is available as an open invitation to explore how play can spark curiosity, introduce key environmental themes, and serve as an entry point for discussion and learning.

Day 2 – Exploring Biodiversity Through Experience

Location: Natural Park or Protected Area (e.g., Peneda-Gerês, Lagoas de Bertandos)

Field Immersion: Observing Biodiversity in Context: Guided walk focused on local ecosystems, flora and fauna, and the importance of conservation. Participants engage in observation tasks and sensory exploration to better understand the complexity of natural systems.

Workshop: From Ecosystem to Classroom: Reflection and group work on how to transform natural observations into educational content. Participants brainstorm cross-curricular connections and discuss how to adapt what they've learned to different age groups or teaching contexts.

Creative Session: Translating Nature into Learning Challenges: Participants explore strategies to design small learning activities based on the morning's experience—such as storytelling, drawing, or creating small inquiry-based challenges.

Optional Game Exploration: Selected board games are available as a resource to explore how environmental topics (like ecosystems, food chains, sustainability, etc.) can be introduced or reinforced through playful mechanics and collaborative tasks.

Day 3 – Human-Nature Connections and Ecological Challenges

Location: Rural Landscape or Protected Area in Northern Portugal (e.g., Serra d'Arga, Ponte de Lima, or similar)

Guided Exploration: Traces of Coexistence: Interpretive walk focused on how human activity—past and present—shapes and interacts with the natural environment. The group observes agricultural patterns, water use, land management, and traditional practices.

Storytelling and Reflection Along the Trail: Participants are invited to reflect on themes such as local ecological knowledge, rural heritage, and environmental responsibility, using short storytelling prompts and peer discussion.

Collaborative Session: Turning Place into Pedagogy: Group work to design simple educational activities or discussion frameworks based on what was experienced during the day—focusing on human-environment relations and community resilience.

Optional Game Exploration: Board games that touch on similar themes (e.g., sustainability, natural resource management, social cooperation) are made available as optional inspiration for those who wish to explore analog approaches to these topics.

Day 4 – Exploring Cultural Heritage Through Play and Discovery

Exploring Cultural Heritage: Participants engage with the region's tangible and intangible heritage — from architecture and food to traditions and landscapes — as sources of educational inspiration.

Guided Field Experiences: The day includes immersive visits that highlight local identity, memory, and community connections, encouraging reflection through real-world contexts.

Creative & Playful Approaches: Participants experiment with creative tools and playful methods, including optional board game-inspired challenges, to deepen engagement and spark new ideas.

Day 5 – Living the City: Urban Heritage & Final Reflections

Discovering Porto's Urban Heritage: Participants explore the historical and cultural layers of Porto on a guided walk, uncovering architecture, public spaces, traditions, and stories that reflect the city's unique identity.

Reflection & Sharing: In an informal setting, participants are invited to share ideas, classroom applications, or board game prototypes developed during the week.

Closing Celebration: The course concludes with a certificate ceremony and a celebratory toast, marking the end of a shared journey of learning and connection.

Day 6 – Cruising the River: Porto's Culture & Celebration

Seven Bridges Cruise on the Douro: Participants unwind with a scenic Rabelo boat cruise along the Douro River, passing under Porto's iconic bridges while reflecting on the week's experiences.

Port Wine & Cultural Heritage: The journey ends with a guided Port wine tasting, offering insight into one of Portugal's most iconic traditions and its deep historical ties to the region.