



STUDY VISIT REPORT



2025

Justification

The decision to hold the study visit in St. Maarten was based on both strategic and thematic considerations, closely aligned with the core objectives of the “Beyond Tokenism: Youth Leading Inclusion” project. St. Maarten, as part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and a representative of the Caribbean region, provides a unique and highly relevant setting for exploring issues of diversity, inclusion, and tokenism within youth work. St. Maarten’s demographic and cultural context is marked by high levels of diversity, with a mix of ethnic, racial, and linguistic backgrounds, as well as a significant presence of youth with fewer opportunities. This makes it an ideal location for examining how issues of tokenism and genuine inclusion manifest in practice, especially in communities that are both multicultural and often underrepresented in European projects. The local challenges faced such as the aftermath of natural disasters, migration, and persistent social inequalities offer real-life learning opportunities for participants to understand inclusion beyond a European or theoretical perspective. The Caribbean Education and Culture Foundation (CECF), one of the project’s key partners, is based in St. Maarten and has a long-standing record of working with marginalized youth, promoting volunteering, and building intercultural dialogue. Their cooperation with the University of St. Maarten further enriches the experience, allowing participants access to local expertise, community projects, and non-formal education practices that have proven effective in fostering genuine inclusion. Organizing the study visit in St. Maarten enables the project consortium to directly engage with best practices developed by CECF and its local partners, and to observe firsthand the specific strategies used to move beyond tokenistic approaches to inclusion. Conducting the visit outside continental Europe serves an important symbolic and practical purpose. It underlines the project’s commitment to inclusion in its broadest sense embracing not just diversity within Europe, but also engaging the EU’s outermost regions and Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs). This approach is fully in line with Erasmus+ policy priorities to strengthen cooperation between the EU and its overseas territories, promoting intercultural learning and extending the reach of European youth work. St. Maarten provides a relevant and inspiring backdrop for reflecting on the broader implications of tokenism in youth inclusion policies, offering both challenges and innovative local solutions. By organizing the study visit here, the project creates a learning environment where participants can critically reflect on their own contexts, exchange perspectives with Caribbean peers, and co-create new approaches for promoting genuine inclusion in their organizations back home.

Agenda

4-Day Study Visit Agenda – St. Maarten

Location: St. Maarten, The Netherlands

Host: Caribbean Education and Culture Foundation

Dates: 14-17 May 2025.

Agenda

Day 1: 14 May

Location: University of St. Martin ([USM](#))

- **09:00–09:30** | Welcome & Registration
- **9:30–10:30** | Opening Remarks (CECF & USM Leadership)
- **10:30–12:00** | Introduction to St. Maarten's Youth Sector and the Role of USM
- **12:00–13:00** | Campus Tour and Informal Networking
- **13:00–14:00** | Lunch
- **14:00–16:00** | Partnership Meeting: CECF and Project Partners
- **16:00–16:30** | Reflection & Wrap-up

Day 2: 15 May

Locations: [Freegan Food Foundation](#) & [Leaders for Change](#)

- **09:00–12:00** | Visit to Freegan Food Foundation
 - ☐ Welcome and introduction to the Foundation
 - ☐ Presentation: Food Security, Social Entrepreneurship, and Volunteer Engagement
 - ☐ Guided tour and discussion with staff/volunteers
 - ☐ Hands-on participation in a local community initiative
- **12:00–13:00** | Lunch with Freegan Food Foundation volunteers and youth participants
- **13:00–16:00** | Meeting with Leaders for Change
 - ☐ Introduction to Leaders for Change and their mission
 - ☐ Exchange of youth leadership program methodologies
 - ☐ Presentation of local impact stories and interactive discussion
- **16:00–16:30** | Group Reflection & Wrap-up
 - ☐ Joint feedback session, lessons learned, and ideas for further collaboration

Day 3: 16 May

Locations: [Equipex](#) & [Freedom Fighters SXM](#)

- **09:00–11:30** | Visit to Equipex
 - ☐ Tech for Good: Empowering Youth through Innovation
 - ☐ Demonstration of youth-led digital tools and discussion
- **12:00–13:00** | Lunch
- **13:30–16:30** | Visit to Freedom Fighters SXM
 - ☐ Social Justice, Civic Engagement, and Music as a Tool for Change
 - ☐ Dialogue with community leaders and young activists
- **16:30–17:00** | Reflection & Documentation

Day 4: 17 May

Locations: [St. Maarten Academy](#) & CECF

- **09:00–13:30** | Visit to St. Maarten Academy
 - ☐ Observing inclusive educational practices
 - ☐ **Volunteer Action with Local Youth:** Joint volunteering activity supporting the school or local community, fostering collaboration and inclusion
- **13:30–14:30** | Lunch
- **14:30–16:00** | CECF Partnership Meeting
 - ☐ Review of partnership goals, achievements, and next steps
 - ☐ Meeting with CECF volunteers: Sharing best practices in volunteer management
 - ☐ Joint Action Planning: Transferring Lessons Learned to Europe

Links:

<https://www.usm.sx/>; <https://www.freeganfoodfoundation.com/>;
<https://web.facebook.com/LeadersforchangeLFC/?rdc=1&rdc#>; <https://www.myequipex.com/about-us/>;
<https://freedomfighterssxm.com/>; <https://www.stmaartenacademy.com/>

REPORT

1. University of St. Martin

Dr. Antonio Carmona Báez, Ph.D., President of the University of St. Martin (USM)

Introduction

On our recent study visit to St. Maarten, we engaged in a meaningful dialogue with Dr. Antonio Carmona Báez, Ph.D., President of the University of St. Martin (USM). The discussion revolved primarily around the concept of tokenism and strategies the University uses to ensure genuine inclusion of diverse and marginalized youth within their academic and community settings.

Background of USM

The University of St. Martin is a central educational institution on the island of St. Maarten, currently serving approximately 300 students. Demographically, the student population consists predominantly of women (90%), with an overwhelming majority identifying as Black (approximately 98%). Classes are strategically scheduled in the afternoons, acknowledging the realities of many students who are employed single mothers. Over half the student body are migrants from other Caribbean islands such as Jamaica and Haiti, and most students come from low-income backgrounds, emphasizing the institution's critical role in offering higher education to marginalized groups.

Current Inclusion Practices and Policies

USM is actively implementing several inclusive practices tailored to their unique demographic. These include scheduling flexibility to accommodate working students and single mothers. Furthermore, the university has identified a pronounced gender imbalance, as male students often gravitate towards vocational education (VET), and thus is actively campaigning to increase male student enrollment. USM organizes regular professional development for their academic staff, particularly in areas of inclusivity, diversity, and identifying tokenistic behaviors and practices. Faculty members participate in structured educational sessions to enhance their awareness of subtle forms of tokenism, thereby equipping them to foster genuinely inclusive classroom environments. In efforts to practically address educational barriers, USM previously introduced childcare services to support single mothers who otherwise might not have had the opportunity to continue their studies.

Challenges Encountered

Dr. Báez highlighted several key challenges in achieving meaningful inclusion at USM. Primarily, the lack of adequate infrastructure for students with disabilities severely limits their accessibility; currently, only one student with a disability attends the university.

Homophobia and social prejudices regarding sexual orientation remain significant issues, creating barriers to full inclusion for LGBTQ+ students. Additionally, although the university attempted to employ a person on the autism spectrum as a demonstration of genuine inclusivity rather than tokenism, financial limitations and resource constraints unfortunately made this employment brief. Another significant social and systemic challenge is linked to parental attitudes towards higher education, particularly within low-income or migrant communities. Educating parents about the benefits of higher education and encouraging them to support their children in pursuing university-level studies is an ongoing effort at USM.

Experiences and Reflections on Tokenism

Dr. Báez shared a personal account of his experience with tokenism when he worked as one of only two Black professors at a university in the continental Netherlands. This scenario highlighted the superficiality that can underlie seemingly inclusive practices, emphasizing that genuine inclusion must be deeper and broader than merely representation. USM recognizes that scholarship programs aimed explicitly at Black students sometimes contain elements of tokenism, although these opportunities can simultaneously represent meaningful advancement for individual students. USM offers a special 10-month preparatory program designed to educate students about Dutch education systems and raise awareness about potential tokenistic situations they might encounter abroad.

Broader Educational Context in St. Maarten

The island's unique educational landscape complicates inclusion efforts, with five distinct educational systems operating simultaneously: Dutch, French, Caribbean, American, and Canadian. Moreover, economic disparities between the French and Dutch sides of the island create additional barriers. On the French side, restrictive language policies and employment practices by French businesses significantly impact local residents, particularly migrants or undocumented persons, often forcing families to seek education and employment opportunities on the Dutch side of the island.

Institutional Structure

At the administrative level, USM's board consists of three members two men and one woman with a woman serving as chairperson. Reflective of the student body, the teaching faculty is predominantly female. USM is committed to increasing gender diversity, not only among its students but within its organizational structure as well.

Conclusion and Insights on Tokenism for Project Implementation

Our interaction with Dr. Antonio Carmona Báez at USM provided significant insights into how institutions can identify and counteract tokenistic practices effectively. Several actionable lessons have emerged from this dialogue that can directly inform our project's development of outputs aimed at combating tokenism:

1. Proactive education about tokenism is essential not only for beneficiaries but also for educators and administrators. We should integrate explicit educational modules that highlight subtle forms of tokenism, empowering educators and youth workers to recognize and combat these effectively.
2. Genuine inclusion requires adequate physical infrastructure and targeted resources. Recognizing and highlighting the importance of infrastructure investments for disability inclusion should form part of our toolkit.
3. Inclusivity must acknowledge intersecting identities (gender, socioeconomic status, disability, race, and sexuality). Our outputs should stress the need for multifaceted, intersectional approaches to inclusivity and address challenges such as homophobia and gender imbalance directly.
4. Symbolic inclusion or representation without structural support leads to tokenism. Practical resources must include guidelines on ensuring meaningful representation through comprehensive policies and adequate funding, as demonstrated in the unsuccessful attempt to employ a person on the autism spectrum at USM.
5. Educating the broader community particularly parents about inclusion's importance is vital. Our toolkit and other outputs should provide guidance on community outreach and educational strategies, highlighting the role of family and community attitudes in facilitating genuine inclusivity.
6. Open discussions and reflections on experiences of tokenism, both personal and organizational, are crucial. Outputs should advocate for regular institutional reflections and transparent dialogue to recognize and dismantle tokenistic practices continually.

USM's experiences reinforce that genuine inclusion is multidimensional, requiring comprehensive education, structural support, ongoing community engagement, and consistent reflection. These insights will be instrumental in shaping our project's outputs, ensuring they genuinely equip youth organizations to recognize, prevent, and address tokenism effectively.

Photos



2. Freegan Food Foundation

Joost de Jong, Founder and Managing Director

Introduction

As part of our recent study visit to St. Maarten, we engaged in an insightful discussion with representatives of the Freegan Food Foundation (FFF). The conversation focused on their community-driven approach to combating food waste, alleviating poverty, promoting inclusion, and addressing tokenism within their activities. This meeting provided valuable insights into the realities of humanitarian and inclusive practices in challenging socio-economic contexts.

Background and Establishment

The Freegan Food Foundation began informally in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Irma in 2017. Recognizing urgent community needs, the founders initiated relief efforts by distributing essential food packages across the island. This spontaneous action evolved into a structured charity, initially operating a social food pantry designed to support vulnerable community members. Understanding the deeper dynamics of food insecurity and dependency, FFF subsequently developed a social store model. Beneficiaries receive food vouchers valued at 50 euros, requiring a 10% personal contribution. This system successfully prevents excessive consumption and instills dignity among beneficiaries, reinforcing the idea that the support they receive is cooperative rather than strictly charitable.

Current Inclusive Practices and Initiatives

Central to the Foundation's philosophy is reducing food waste through innovative and sustainable practices. Every day, the founders personally prepare and provide vegan meals from surplus food nearing expiration, aligned with their personal values and commitment to environmental sustainability. FFF extensively engages local volunteers, ensuring that the Foundation's initiatives remain deeply rooted in the local community. Their workforce and volunteer base prioritize vulnerable individuals, notably older persons and individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds, thus embedding genuine inclusivity into their operations. FFF also closely collaborates with other community organizations to broaden their impact, targeting various marginalized and excluded groups. The primary beneficiaries include undocumented migrants, single mothers, low-income families, and individuals facing discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Challenges Faced by the Foundation

Despite their admirable objectives and significant community contributions, FFF faces notable challenges. One profound obstacle is the widespread discrimination and homophobia on the island. As openly homosexual individuals, the founders frequently experience social prejudice, threats, and exclusion. Another critical barrier involves their relationship with local government authorities. Despite occasionally showcasing FFF's work to portray the island positively on international stages, the government offers no tangible financial or infrastructural support. This superficial use of the Foundation's image is a clear manifestation of tokenism, complicating FFF's relationship with local institutions. Furthermore, they have faced tokenistic collaboration from local businesses. Initially, certain local enterprises, including volunteer accounting services, cooperated with FFF primarily to leverage their association with Dutch nationals for marketing purposes, gaining new clients through perceived international connections. Once these businesses had achieved their promotional aims, they ended cooperation abruptly, further complicating sustainable community partnerships. Additionally, poverty remains a taboo subject on the island, rarely discussed openly. This cultural reluctance severely hampers transparent and progressive dialogue regarding poverty alleviation and hinders efforts to generate broader social awareness and systemic change.

Reflections and Experiences on Tokenism

The Foundation representatives candidly shared their personal experiences of tokenism. They acknowledged that international donors, especially those from mainland Netherlands, often utilize their work as symbolic gestures to demonstrate corporate or organizational social responsibility. Yet, FFF pragmatically accepts such arrangements if tangible support for their community-focused efforts accompanies these partnerships. Internally, FFF maintains a reflective stance regarding tokenism, continually assessing their activities to ensure that their practices prioritize genuine inclusion rather than symbolic representation. Their approach to employment, actively targeting marginalized demographics, underlines their conscious effort to reject superficial inclusion and embrace substantial change.

Youth Participation and Decision-Making Processes

Youth volunteers play a crucial role within FFF, significantly influencing the development and execution of community initiatives. Their active involvement ensures that youth perspectives directly shape organizational policies and activities. The Foundation ensures genuine participation through regular dialogue, fostering an inclusive environment where young people's contributions are valued and implemented.

Additional Support Needed

Despite significant achievements, FFF emphasized an ongoing need for enhanced support, including:

- Sustained institutional and financial backing from local government bodies.
- Increased societal awareness about the realities and consequences of poverty on the island.
- Educational campaigns targeting stigma reduction surrounding marginalized groups.
- Long-term, reliable financial assistance enabling consistent program development and infrastructural enhancement.

Broader Community Impact

FFF currently serves as a vital lifeline for the community. Their approach extends beyond basic humanitarian relief, explicitly promoting sustainable environmental practices, social responsibility, and comprehensive community empowerment. They successfully balance immediate aid with strategic, dignity-focused programs, emphasizing community ownership and sustainability.

Conclusion and Insights on Tokenism for Project Implementation

The interaction with the Freegan Food Foundation provided crucial insights into understanding tokenism, highlighting both its detrimental aspects and opportunities to leverage such situations positively. Key lessons from this dialogue that can directly inform our project's outputs include:

1. The model employed by FFF such as partial contribution schemes is highly effective in preserving individual dignity, reducing dependency, and promoting personal responsibility. Our materials should recommend similar approaches to ensure beneficiaries are active participants rather than passive recipients.
2. Transparency in recognizing and openly discussing tokenistic practices proved crucial. Our outputs should include guidelines on identifying tokenism, managing relationships transparently, and negotiating beneficial terms clearly to ensure partnerships yield genuine, mutual benefits.
3. The explicit consideration of intersectionality (race, sexuality, socioeconomic status, migration status) highlighted by FFF should be central in our toolkit. Outputs should address these intersecting identities explicitly, providing practical methods to foster inclusive environments genuinely.
4. Active youth participation and decision-making practices exemplified by FFF can guide our approach to youth involvement. Our outputs should stress meaningful youth participation and provide practical methods for including diverse youth voices effectively.
5. The cultural reluctance to openly address poverty illustrates the need for increased educational and awareness-raising efforts. Our outputs should offer methods and

resources for effective community education and advocacy strategies to break societal taboos.

Freegan Food Foundation's experiences significantly inform our understanding of tokenism. Their approach demonstrates that, although tokenism can initially appear entirely negative, strategic management and transparent acknowledgment can transform these scenarios into opportunities for meaningful, sustainable community impact and genuine inclusion.

Photos



3. Leaders for Change

Ashma Berkel, founder

Introduction

During our study visit to St. Maarten, we engaged in a meaningful exchange with representatives from Leaders for Change, an organization deeply committed to assisting the homeless, roofless sleepers, and marginalized individuals on the island. The primary focus of our conversation was their community-driven initiatives, inclusive practices, and experiences related to tokenism, highlighting their ongoing efforts and the challenges they face in promoting genuine inclusion and support within vulnerable communities.

Background and Establishment

Leaders for Change was established in response to the significant and often unrecognized issue of homelessness and roofless sleepers on St. Maarten. With a clear mission to provide essential care and empowerment, they actively assist approximately 97 roofless individuals and support numerous marginalized community members, including undocumented migrants, individuals with mental illnesses, and children from abusive environments. A significant aspect of their work is carried out through an extensive network of 91 local organizations spanning both the Dutch and French sides of the island, reflecting their inclusive and collaborative approach.

Current Inclusive Practices and Initiatives

The organization prioritizes dignity, empowerment, and skill-building through practical workshops and training sessions tailored directly to the needs expressed by their beneficiaries. They offer diverse activities such as sewing classes, digital skills training (e.g., Canva workshops), and other relevant vocational and life-skill-building sessions aimed at enhancing the autonomy and employability of their users. Leaders for Change actively practice inclusive policy programming, having established transparent, non-discriminatory criteria for accessing their services. Notably, their services unofficially extend beyond the Dutch side to the French side of the island, demonstrating their unwavering commitment to inclusivity irrespective of administrative barriers. Their inclusive approach specifically addresses the often ignored reality of mental health conditions among the homeless population, an area broadly neglected due to societal stigma and lack of governmental acknowledgment.

Challenges Faced by the Organization

Leaders for Change operates under challenging conditions due to limited governmental recognition and support. The organization highlighted several pressing challenges:

- **Mental Health Crisis:** A major yet taboo topic on the island, mental health issues remain largely unaddressed publicly, compounding the difficulties faced by the homeless and roofless populations.
- **Lack of Shelters and Resources:** The only existing homeless refuge was shut down due to government budget constraints and a lack of awareness or acknowledgment regarding the severity of homelessness as a social issue.
- **Undocumented Migrants:** The island hosts a significant number of illegal migrants lacking documentation, consequently having no formal access to rights or governmental support, leaving them exceptionally vulnerable.
- **Substance Abuse:** Increasing substance abuse, particularly among younger individuals, has driven a significant rise in homelessness rates over the last two years, adding complexity to the organization's support efforts.
- **Long-term Homelessness:** Some individuals have been living on the streets for as long as 15 years, signifying deeply entrenched systemic issues that have yet to be adequately addressed.

Collaboration and Community Impact

Despite systemic barriers, Leaders for Change maintains extensive collaboration with a broad network of organizations. Notably, they have established a strict confidentiality policy, refraining from sharing user information with governmental authorities. This practice underscores their unwavering commitment to protecting the rights, privacy, and dignity of their beneficiaries. Most financial and material support for Leaders for Change comes from organizations and donors in the Netherlands, reflecting international recognition and backing of their mission and activities. They notably provide care to individuals across all demographics, with more men than women among the homeless population, and their youngest beneficiary is only three years old, underscoring the severity and breadth of homelessness as an urgent social problem.

Reflections and Experiences on Tokenism

Leaders for Change is acutely aware of the dynamics of tokenism, especially considering their delicate relationship with the local government and other stakeholders. While they consistently receive support from Dutch entities, they have experienced situations where their work or presence was used symbolically rather than supported substantially. Specifically, the government's previous closure of the island's only refuge for homeless individuals due to a supposed lack of funds, despite occasionally showcasing Leaders for Change in international or diplomatic contexts, exemplifies overt tokenistic practices. This symbolic association with the organization's inclusive efforts, without genuine institutional support or meaningful acknowledgment, epitomizes tokenistic utilization. Despite these experiences, Leaders for Change maintains transparency, clearly communicating the nature of their work and seeking sustainable partnerships that align with their authentic humanitarian and inclusive goals.

Youth Participation and Decision-Making Processes

Leaders for Change places significant importance on youth engagement and active participation. They regularly consult their community and beneficiaries directly about their needs, using this feedback to structure and refine programs effectively. Their youth-focused interventions prioritize support for young individuals affected by abuse, neglect, and drug-related issues, providing tailored and sensitive interventions to ensure effective and meaningful engagement.

Additional Support Needed

The organization identified several areas requiring additional support. A critical need remains the reopening or establishment of homeless shelters, especially facilities equipped to manage individuals with mental health challenges. Initiatives addressing societal stigma towards mental illness, homelessness, and substance abuse are urgently needed, advocating a change in public perception and governmental awareness. Advocacy efforts aimed at achieving formal acknowledgment, and support from local government entities are necessary for sustainable growth and impact. Ensuring financial stability and consistent operational funding remains a continuous challenge, particularly given the rising demand for their services.

Conclusion and Insights on Tokenism for Project Implementation

Our meeting with Leaders for Change provided crucial insights into addressing tokenism within humanitarian and community support contexts, highlighting several actionable lessons for our project's outputs:

1. Protecting user privacy and sensitive information, especially when dealing with marginalized groups like undocumented migrants or individuals with mental health issues, is paramount. Our outputs should emphasize methods to protect vulnerable groups from exploitation or tokenistic practices.
2. Clear guidelines and strategies must be developed for recognizing and managing tokenistic scenarios, particularly with institutional or governmental bodies. We should advocate transparency, accountability, and authentic support rather than superficial representation.
3. Leaders for Change's direct consultation and responsiveness to community needs represent exemplary practice. Our resources should include practical methods and tools for conducting effective and respectful community needs assessments.
4. Addressing the intersection of mental health and homelessness requires explicit acknowledgment and education. Our toolkit should explicitly address mental health stigma, provide strategies for supportive intervention, and recommend policy-level advocacy.
5. The Foundation's success in building extensive cross-sectoral collaborations, even without governmental cooperation, demonstrates valuable resilience strategies. Our outputs should advocate the benefits and methodologies of creating strong, non-governmental collaborative networks.

Leaders for Change's work vividly illustrates the complexities surrounding tokenism and genuine inclusion in humanitarian aid. Their experiences offer crucial insights into maintaining dignity, integrity, and effective advocacy for vulnerable populations, enriching our project's understanding and potential responses to tokenistic practices.

PHOTOS



4. Equipex

Loudahila Brill, founder

Introduction

During our study visit to St. Maarten, we had the pleasure of meeting with representatives from **Equipex**, an innovative social enterprise in digital marketing. Founded by women for women, this startup prioritizes meaningful social impact alongside entrepreneurial success. Our discussion explored their inclusive employment strategies, training initiatives for single mothers, participation in Erasmus+, and reflections on tokenism within the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Background and Establishment

Equipex was recently established by an inspiring female entrepreneur motivated by her experiences in the Erasmus+ program. Driven by a passion to support other women, especially single mothers, the founder envisioned Equipex as more than just a digital marketing firm; she sought to create a sustainable business model with profound social benefits. Her Erasmus+ experience significantly shaped her perspective, emphasizing social entrepreneurship and community engagement, ultimately leading to the company's establishment.

Mission and Inclusive Approach

The core mission of Equipex revolves around empowering women, notably single mothers, by providing stable employment opportunities and comprehensive digital skill training. They believe firmly that economic empowerment through digital literacy can dramatically enhance women's quality of life, self-sufficiency, and long-term career prospects. The company currently employs four staff members and has expanded its inclusivity further by hosting three interns from Guadeloupe, an overseas region of France. These internships represent Equipex's commitment to intercultural learning and practical skill development, enhancing diversity within the company.

Programs and Community Initiatives

Equipex regularly organizes inclusive community events focused on identifying motivated individuals from marginalized backgrounds interested in digital careers. These events provide an accessible gateway for community members to learn more about digital marketing opportunities and receive preliminary training in valuable digital tools such as Canva, social media management, and digital strategy. In addition to these community events, Equipex has established structured digital training programs specifically tailored for single mothers. Through practical workshops, mentoring, and professional development

sessions, they effectively equip women with marketable skills necessary for modern employment. Recognizing the barriers single mothers face, these programs are intentionally designed to be flexible and accessible, ensuring participation without compromising their childcare responsibilities.

Collaboration and Networking

Recognizing the importance of collaboration, Equipex maintains strong partnerships with local NGOs, women's groups, and educational institutions across the island. These partnerships facilitate effective outreach, enable the identification of potential candidates for employment and training, and provide essential support networks for beneficiaries. Equipex has also leveraged its Erasmus+ experience, regularly collaborating with international partners on various Erasmus+ projects. These collaborations have enhanced their capabilities in social entrepreneurship, digital innovation, and inclusivity.

Challenges Encountered

Despite its noble objectives and initial successes, Equipex faces several critical challenges, including:

- **Financial Sustainability:** As a young enterprise prioritizing social outcomes, securing consistent funding and clients remains challenging, especially given limited resources on the island.
- **Cultural Barriers:** Persistent stigma surrounding single motherhood and women's roles in technology and entrepreneurship presents ongoing challenges that Equipex continuously works to overcome through community education.
- **Infrastructure Limitations:** Limited technological infrastructure on the island sometimes hampers the delivery of comprehensive digital skills training, particularly to marginalized or remote communities.

Experiences and Reflections on Tokenism

The founder openly shared experiences regarding tokenism encountered during Equipex's establishment phase. Initially, certain local business networks and investors expressed superficial support for Equipex, primarily leveraging the narrative of a "female-founded enterprise" without providing tangible investment or partnership opportunities. Equipex quickly recognized these tokenistic gestures, shifting focus toward authentic and supportive networks that genuinely align with their mission. However, Equipex also acknowledged pragmatic aspects of tokenism. Occasionally, symbolic recognition has led to increased visibility and networking opportunities, allowing them to promote their genuine inclusivity efforts and secure meaningful partnerships. Thus, while consciously resisting purely symbolic engagements, Equipex strategically navigates these scenarios to maximize positive community outcomes.

Youth and Community Participation

Equipex deeply values youth and community participation, frequently involving young people, especially women from marginalized backgrounds, in decision-making processes. They actively solicit feedback through regular community dialogues, ensuring their programs remain relevant, effective, and responsive to actual community needs.

Additional Support Needed

To enhance their long-term impact, Equipex identified several areas requiring additional support. Enhanced financial backing through local or international grants, social investment, and consistent client engagements. Improvements in digital infrastructure and access to advanced technological tools to broaden training capabilities. Expanded outreach and public education to shift cultural attitudes about single motherhood, women in tech, and social entrepreneurship.

Broader Impact

Since its establishment, Equipex has made significant strides in shifting societal perceptions and creating concrete opportunities for women, particularly single mothers. Their programs have already yielded tangible results, with several beneficiaries successfully securing employment or launching entrepreneurial ventures. The company's model has sparked increased awareness and appreciation of socially responsible businesses on the island.

Conclusion – Lessons Learned on Tokenism for Project Outputs

Our discussion with Equipex provided vital insights on effectively managing tokenism within entrepreneurial and inclusive employment contexts. The lessons learned relevant to our project outputs include:

1. **Navigating Symbolic Support Strategically:**

Equipex's experiences illustrate the importance of distinguishing genuine support from symbolic gestures. Our outputs should provide clear guidelines for identifying tokenistic behaviors and strategies for leveraging symbolic opportunities effectively to further genuine inclusion.

2. **Targeted and Responsive Training Programs:**

The effectiveness of Equipex's tailored training for single mothers reinforces the necessity of specific, responsive training programs in our toolkit, highlighting flexible and accessible approaches to skill-building and empowerment.

3. **Intercultural Exchange and Inclusivity:**

Equipex's internship program from Guadeloupe demonstrates the benefits of intercultural inclusivity. Our outputs should encourage inclusive hiring and internship strategies, promoting intercultural dialogue and diversity as valuable assets.

4. **Community-based Decision Making:**

Actively involving beneficiaries and local communities in program development ensures relevance and effectiveness. Our resources should include practical methods for genuine community engagement and feedback mechanisms.

5. **Public Education and Advocacy:**

Addressing persistent stigmas surrounding single motherhood, female entrepreneurship, and women in tech requires consistent public awareness initiatives. Our outputs must advocate for robust educational and awareness-raising strategies targeting harmful stereotypes and promoting social enterprise.

Equipex's experiences offer invaluable practical examples for combating tokenism and ensuring genuine inclusivity, providing substantial guidance for shaping our project's comprehensive and effective outputs.

PHOTOS



5. Freedom Fighters SXM

Roland Joe, founder

Introduction

During our study visit to St. Maarten, we engaged with the **Freedom Fighters Foundation**, a grassroots organization rooted in Rastafarian principles, dedicated to promoting cultural awareness, sustainable agriculture, and community empowerment. Our visit included volunteering activities, allowing us to experience firsthand their commitment to community development and social inclusion.

Background and Establishment

Founded in the early 2000s, the Freedom Fighters Foundation began as a Rastafarian musical reggae band and evolved into a multifaceted organization focusing on cultural, agricultural, and musical initiatives. Located at Bush Road #7 in Philipsburg, the foundation operates under the leadership of President Roland "Bushman" Joe and Secretary Byron Isebia.

Mission and Inclusive Approach

The foundation's mission is to uplift the community through the promotion of Rastafarian values, emphasizing unity, self-reliance, and conscious living. Their inclusive approach encompasses:

- Organizing events and programs that celebrate and educate about Rastafarian culture and heritage.
- Hosting musical events and workshops to engage youth and promote positive messages through reggae music.
- Encouraging organic farming practices and healthy lifestyles within the community.

Programs and Community Initiatives

One of the foundation's notable initiatives is the Ital Shack, a vegan/Ital restaurant that serves as both a community hub and a practical example of sustainable living. Operating for over 20 years, the Ital Shack offers farm-to-table cuisine, promoting health and wellness aligned with Rastafarian dietary principles. During our visit, we participated in volunteer activities that included assisting with reparation of facilities for community events. These hands-on experiences highlighted the foundation's commitment to engaging community members in meaningful and educational activities.

Challenges Encountered

Despite their impactful work, the Freedom Fighters Foundation faces several challenges:

- Limited funding hampers the expansion of their programs and the maintenance of facilities.

- Misunderstandings about Rastafarian culture can lead to societal marginalization and reduced support.
- Inadequate resources affect the scalability of their agricultural and cultural initiatives.

Reflections and Experiences on Tokenism

The foundation has experienced instances where their cultural identity and community work were superficially acknowledged without substantial support, reflecting tokenistic practices. For example, while their initiatives are sometimes showcased in promotional materials, they often do not receive corresponding financial or institutional backing. However, the Freedom Fighters Foundation remains steadfast in their mission, focusing on genuine community engagement and resisting superficial partnerships that do not align with their values.

Youth Participation and Decision-Making Processes

Youth engagement is central to the foundation's activities. They provide platforms for young people to participate in cultural events, music workshops, and agricultural projects, fostering leadership skills and community involvement. Decisions within the organization are made collaboratively, ensuring that youth voices are heard and considered in program development.

Additional Support Needed

To enhance their impact, the Freedom Fighters Foundation identifies the following needs:

- Increased Funding: To expand programs and improve facilities.
- Community Education: Initiatives to raise awareness and understanding of Rastafarian culture.
- Infrastructure Development: Resources to build and maintain sustainable agricultural projects and community spaces.

Broader Impact

The foundation's work significantly contributes to cultural preservation, youth empowerment, and the promotion of sustainable lifestyles in St. Maarten. Their holistic approach addresses various community needs, fostering a sense of unity and purpose among participants.

Conclusion – Lessons Learned on Tokenism for Project Outputs

Our engagement with the Freedom Fighters Foundation offers valuable insights into addressing tokenism:

1. The importance of partnerships that provide tangible support rather than superficial recognition.
2. Understanding and valuing cultural identities to avoid misrepresentation and marginalization.
3. Developing programs that are rooted in the community's needs and values ensures sustainability and genuine impact.

Incorporating these lessons into our project outputs will enhance our strategies for promoting genuine inclusion and combating tokenism in community development initiatives.

PHOTOS



6. St. Maarten Academy

Lucas Felix, coordinator

Introduction

During our recent study visit to St. Maarten, we engaged in a valuable exchange with representatives from St. Maarten Academy, a prominent secondary educational institution recognized for its commitment to academic excellence, community involvement, and inclusive education. Our visit coincided with their annual Open Door Festival, which provided an excellent opportunity for our group to participate actively in a volunteer project specifically painting classrooms alongside students, teachers, and local community members.

Background and Establishment

Established in 1974, St. Maarten Academy is a private secondary school under the administration of the Foundation for Academic and Vocational Education (FAVE). The school is located in the Cul de Sac area of Sint Maarten and provides comprehensive educational programs aimed at nurturing student excellence, civic responsibility, and holistic personal growth. St. Maarten Academy operates through two primary educational streams: an academic track, preparing students for Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) certifications, and a vocational track provided by the Vocational Business Campus (VBC). The school further offers Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE) programs that lead to associate degrees, equipping students for higher education and the professional workforce.

Current Inclusive Practices and Initiatives

The Academy maintains a strong commitment to fostering an inclusive and supportive educational environment. Key inclusive practices include robust mentoring and guidance programs designed to assist students with diverse academic and personal needs. The institution emphasizes respect, community engagement, and student empowerment through various student-led initiatives and clubs. A notable feature of our visit the Open Door Festival exemplified their inclusive community engagement approach. This event welcomed diverse stakeholders including students, teachers, families, and external volunteers to collaboratively enhance school facilities, creating an inclusive space for collective action and community bonding. The school also actively supports student-led governance structures, such as the Student Government Association (SGA), encouraging students to voice their opinions and participate directly in school decisions, reinforcing meaningful student engagement and democratic values.

Community Engagement and Extracurricular Activities

St. Maarten Academy actively promotes community involvement through various extracurricular and service-oriented activities. Their participation in initiatives like the "PEACE

IS" Foundation highlights the school's commitment to broader community issues, such as peacebuilding and social cohesion. Our group's direct participation in the volunteer classroom-painting project during the Open Door Festival demonstrated the school's practical approach to community engagement. This activity not only improved the school's physical environment but also provided meaningful opportunities for cross-cultural exchange and teamwork among students, staff, and visitors.

Challenges Encountered

Despite its positive community impact and inclusive educational approach, St. Maarten Academy faces certain challenges:

- **Resource Limitations:** Like many schools in the region, they experience financial and resource constraints affecting infrastructural improvements and program expansions.
- **Inclusivity in Education:** The broader educational sector in St. Maarten still lacks comprehensive policies and sufficient infrastructure for special-needs students, making truly inclusive education challenging to implement effectively.

Reflections and Experiences on Tokenism

During our interactions, representatives shared insights into how tokenism can manifest within educational settings. St. Maarten Academy consciously strives to avoid superficial representation by ensuring authentic participation of all students in meaningful projects and decision-making processes. Their initiatives, such as student governance and active volunteer events, illustrate their proactive stance against tokenism. The Academy's representatives acknowledged occasional pressures to publicly showcase diversity and inclusion superficially for external audiences or authorities. Nonetheless, their commitment to genuine inclusivity and direct engagement with students and community members clearly delineates their authentic approach, effectively mitigating the risk of tokenistic practices.

Youth Participation and Decision-Making Processes

Student involvement at St. Maarten Academy is robust and meaningful. Through structured governance bodies like the Student Government Association, students regularly influence school policies, events, and activities. Students actively participate in extracurricular activities, community projects, and strategic school improvement initiatives, reflecting a culture of genuine youth empowerment.

Additional Support Needed

St. Maarten Academy identified several key areas requiring additional support:

- **Financial Stability:** Securing long-term financial resources remains essential to sustain and enhance their inclusive educational programs.
- **Special Needs Education:** Development and improvement of infrastructure and resources specifically dedicated to students with special educational needs, facilitating genuinely inclusive education.

- Community Awareness Initiatives: Expanded campaigns and public education initiatives aimed at enhancing community engagement and awareness of the benefits of inclusive education and youth participation.

Broader Impact

Through its inclusive educational practices and active community engagement, St. Maarten Academy significantly contributes to student empowerment and community cohesion. Their emphasis on participatory governance and extracurricular activities effectively prepares students for civic engagement and active citizenship. The Academy's Open Door Festival exemplifies practical community-building efforts, fostering a supportive school environment and reinforcing community solidarity.

Conclusion – Lessons Learned on Tokenism for Project Outputs

Our interaction with St. Maarten Academy provided insightful perspectives on genuine inclusion and strategies to effectively address tokenism within educational settings. The following lessons can directly inform our project outputs:

1. Active and meaningful student involvement in governance and decision-making significantly reduces tokenism. Our outputs should emphasize structured approaches for empowering youth to authentically shape organizational practices.
2. Events like the Open Door Festival demonstrate effective models of inclusive community engagement. Encouraging similar hands-on, collaborative projects can serve as a powerful example in our project materials.
3. Highlighting effective student governance structures, such as SGA, provides practical guidance for involving youth voices authentically in organizational processes and decision-making.
4. Our toolkit should explicitly address the importance of creating policies and infrastructure that genuinely support students with special needs, advocating for comprehensive approaches to inclusivity.
5. Proactively educating stakeholders about recognizing and addressing tokenistic practices ensures authenticity in representation and inclusivity efforts. Our materials should include tools and methods for recognizing, managing, and eliminating tokenism.

The experiences and practices of St. Maarten Academy effectively demonstrate the benefits of genuine inclusivity and authentic community engagement, providing valuable insights for addressing tokenism effectively in our project's outputs.

PHOTOS



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CONCLUSION

The study visit to St. Maarten served as a powerful and transformative learning experience within the framework of our “Beyond Tokenism: Youth Leading Inclusion” project. Through direct engagement with local organizations including the University of St. Martin, Freegan Food Foundation, Leaders for Change, Equipex, Freedom Fighters SXM, and St. Maarten Academy participants were exposed to a wide spectrum of inclusive practices, challenges, and instances of tokenism that go far beyond theoretical definitions. Each organization presented concrete examples of how youth inclusion, social entrepreneurship, community empowerment, and cultural integrity can be promoted authentically in settings where resources are often limited and systemic barriers remain significant.

Crucially, these insights allowed us to see how tokenism often manifests subtly not only through exclusion, but also through symbolic gestures that mask deeper inequalities or unmet needs. We learned that meaningful inclusion requires more than representation; it demands structural change, financial and institutional support, and space for marginalized voices to shape decision-making. The visit underscored the necessity of approaching inclusion through intersectional lenses considering gender, socioeconomic status, disability, race, sexual orientation, and migration background and highlighted the importance of embedding such understanding into youth work practices across Europe and beyond.

The voluntary engagement activities, especially the joint classroom renovation at St. Maarten Academy and the community work with Freedom Fighters SXM, reinforced the importance of practical, hands-on collaboration in building mutual understanding and breaking down symbolic inclusion. Across all organizations, youth were not only beneficiaries but active participants in shaping initiatives a principle we aim to center in our project’s final outputs.



BEYOND TOKENISM:
YOUTH LEADING INCLUSION
BETYLI

ST. MAARTEN

PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS

Caribbean Education and Culture Foundation (CECF)
Asociación Pilcrow
Youth Power
Udruga Zaželi

DATES

14.-17. MAY 2025



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