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[in collaboration with Johan Hovelynck and Luk Peeters]

Historical background of Adventure Therapy in Belgium

Outdoor programs and experiential education started with the first courses of the Dutch Outward Bound School (in Zeeland, The Netherlands) in the summer of 1961 based on the pedagogical principles of **Kurt Hahn** (who started the Outward Bound School in Wales 20 years earlier). During the **1960s** these Dutch OBS instructors developed an approach that was very different from the British model, which was the base for a **typical Dutch-Belgian tradition in experiential education**. It was more process-oriented, more based on the ideas derived from humanistic therapy directions (including Fromm (1962) and Rogers (1961) but also Perls and the Gestalt Therapy (1951)) and from the T-group tradition (inspired by Kurt Lewin). There was also more emphasis on ‘the here-and-now’, ‘feedback’, the emergent program design and the role of the instructor evolved more towards process facilitator. Johan Hovelynck labeled it as being **more “process-experiential”** (1998, 2000). He also referred to it as a **“lowlands approach”** at a few occasions (e.g. 1995), suggesting that the absence of rugged nature in our region stimulated local adventure educators to further develop the quality of facilitation: “letting the mountains speak for themselves” wasn’t much of an option...

In 1977 Outward Bound Belgium (OBB) was established as a first provider of outdoor training and education in Belgium (trainers were trained by the OB school in the Netherlands, according to this renewed concept on experiential education). The model evolved in Belgium even further, inspired by the ideas of **experiential therapy** (see e.g. Greenberg, Rice & Elliot, 1993) and by insights in organizational development and organizational learning (see e.g. Argyris & Schön). The latter tradition inspired the term **‘reflection-in-action’** for the local approach to facilitation (Hovelynck, 1998; 2000).

The methodology of adventure education spread in the first place through OBB trainers, some of whom started their own organizations, be it within youth work, higher education or training organizations. In the **end of the 1980s** a bigger 'market' grew for everything concerning adventure: "team-building" but also **therapists working with outdoor activities**. A big step forward in spreading out the methodology of adventure education was the support and funding of the 'Koning Boudewijnstichting' that researched and published the effects of adventure education programs for so-called youth-at risk and stimulated the development of outdoor adventure education programs. There were also influences from methodologies coming from the USA. The origins of Adventure Therapy programs in Belgium were probably in working with **youth-at-risk** (e.g. the work of Luk Peeters in the '80-ies, see e.g. Peeters, 1990; 1995) and in the process-experiential approach that seemed characteristic for all local outdoor programs at the time. The latter point results in a fine line between **process-experiential adventure education** and **adventure therapy**. In 1996 the organization NATURE was established as another provider of outdoor training and education programs in Belgium as well as adventure therapy programs for youth at risk.

The specificity of Adventure Therapy in Belgium is nowadays breaking through, with current programs for participants challenging existential questions, eating disorders, cancer, depression, etc. More and more programs are emerging and the representatives of a process-experiential approach are trying to make the **Adventure Therapy approach** more explicit in order to differentiate it from other approaches (also Peeters, 1995; 1997b, 42).

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