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## **Historical background of Adventure Therapy in Germany**

The history of Adventure Therapy („Erlebnistherapie“) in Germany builds on the development and rediscovery of Experiential Education („Erlebnispädagogik“). While the philosophical approach of ‘learning by doing’ reaches far back, Kurt Hahn (1886-1974) directed the modern progressive education towards Experiential Education. The schools and programs he developed first in Salem, Germany and later in Scotland aimed at character building through group experiences in the outdoors. Through expeditions and community service projects the youth learned to take on responsibility and ownership for their actions. He founded the Outward Bound School, which expanded to a worldwide organization offering outdoor programs for youth and young adults aiming at personal development (Michl, 2009). Only after the second world war, Experiential Education started to grow more in Germany and the modern understanding started to evolve in the 1960s (Baig-Schneider, 2007).

The methodology of using experiences to foster learning and personality development, using the outdoors, the perception of risk and challenge and the power of a peer group, was adapted to different goals and populations and by different disciplines, resulting in a big variety of programs and formats. The biggest area was the youth service sector, where social workers work with youth at-risk, foster kids and delinquent youth. On the other side the approach was also adapted to the regular school setting and used in physical education classes or school projects. It is also used for team building and management courses with adults in so called Outdoor Trainings. The approach has also been adapted to the clinical field – as an adjunctive to the treatment of diabetes, obesity or coronary diseases and for psychotherapy (Gilsdorf, 2004).

The German concept of ‘Erlebnistherapie’ differs from the North-American understanding of Adventure Therapy. Mainly, the adventure is only seen as one way amongst others to facilitate a meaningful experience for the participants (Gilsdorf, 2004). A new concept of the modern Experiential Education in Germany is social learning through interaction. In this, a group is presented with an artificial, challenging situation that can only be solved by working together (Baig-Schneider, 2007).

With the growing popularity and different formats there was a need to create a common understanding of Experiential Education. In 1992 the now called „Bundesverband für Individual- und

Erlebnispädagogik" organization was founded, which works on unifying topics like a common definition, standards for staff formation, programs etc. to support the professionalization of the field ([www.bundesverband-erlebnispaedagogik.de](http://www.bundesverband-erlebnispaedagogik.de)).

In 1996 and 1998 mental health professionals gathered to discuss the use of experience based methods in psychotherapy in the psychosomatic clinic Fontane-Klinik, in Motzen. A first research on the effectiveness was presented, but no other German conference or gathering happened in the years to come. The idea was taken on and followed through by some individuals, so that there are many experiential-based methods used in addition to general psychotherapy. Some psychiatry settings or addiction recovery clinics offer rock climbing (in a gym) and low or high ropes courses (Klinik Wollmarshöhe, Fontane-Klinik). While in the mental health field the programs always add to the normal offer and are not paid by regular health insurance or the government, this is different for youth services.

For youth who are not able to stay in foster care or other youth services because of their problematic behavior, the government offers individual pedagogic interventions, which can be travel projects abroad or on-site projects (Boeger, Dörfler, & Schut-Ansteeg, 2006). In each case the youth worker builds a one-on-one relationship with the youngster and growth is aimed for through the use of experiential methods and the contrast to their day to day environment (Klawe, 2014). Living together in a country or on a sailing ship without speaking the language naturally strengthens the interdependence of youth and staff, offers challenging situations and therefore the opportunity to learn new behaviors and ways to deal with difficult situations. Through the positive relationship youngsters can learn to take on responsibility for their own life and still get the support that is needed in the process of growing in their personality (Klawe, 2013).

Another specific development is the Systemic Nature Therapy, mainly shaped by Planoalto and elaborated through Kreszmeier. It focuses especially on self-awareness during the experience in nature and the therapists work with a systemic approach using creative techniques, scenic play and rituals (Kreszmeier, 2008).

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