

*Alexander Rose & Natalia Ruiz de Cortázar Gracia – Asociación Experiencia (Spain)*

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

### **Introduction**

To get a clear picture of Adventure Therapy in Spain, we must recall some specific and differentiating milestones regarding the historical background of non-formal and outdoor education in Spain.

### **“Animación sociocultural” and Experiential Education**

Traditionally, non-formal educative interventions in Spain are mostly designed and programmed using French patterns. Due to the dictatorial regime in Spain (1939-1975) few educational innovative approaches merged during that time (Trilla, 1997). Commonly researchers and intellectuals migrated to France and were trained in *Animación sociocultural* (translated sometimes as Socio-cultural Animation), bringing back this model to Spain and adopting it further (Senent, 1998). In Spain it is commonly included as a variant of Experiential Education, but as opposed to experiential models. This approach places more emphasis on community education, improving the level of social welfare and has goals that are more focused on creating group dynamics through cultural and art activities (Trilla, 1997). The most similar intervention model to Experiential Learning, is the subtype of “Free/Leisure time pedagogy” (*Pedagogía del tiempo libre*), with stress on developing individual capabilities through group activities in natural settings (Martínez Rico, 1998; 2003), used predominantly in Scouts or other Youth groups.

### **Adventure/Outdoor Education – Personal enhancement**

The model of *Animación sociocultural* has been perpetuated in training in outdoor schools, vocational trainings and in most of the interventions addressed to non-formal education.

Therefore, the mid and northern European Experiential Education's (thus, Experiential Learning-) approach was unusual until the nineties, when outdoor training and experiential teambuilding was introduced in sports and business environments (Anglada, 2007). In the last ten years, users of active tourism have increased and slowly educational institutions are coming closer to this experiential approach, although only from a recreational point of view (Anglada, 2007). An attempt to introduce Adventure Learning both in corporate and in learning settings (formal and non-formal) was with the foundation of Outward Bound Spain around 2003, but after less than a decade the company closed.

### **Adventure Therapy**

Regarding research and divulgation of AT in Spain (*'terapia a través de la aventura'* – *'terapia de aventura'*), few references appear in Spanish (Kraft, 1990; Fonseca Agosto, 2010; Rose, 2012), and only a dozen papers were presented in international and national conferences in Spain. There is no previous information or references in Spain about other AT practitioners or programs.

In the year 2015, *Asociación Experientia* was founded thanks to the previous work of Alexander Rose, having visited several Adventure and Wilderness Therapy programs in the USA and in Europe and having researched and published about it since 2008. Also from 2008, Spain has been a member of the Adventure Therapy International Committee, also represented by Alexander Rose.

2015 has also been the year where the first Adventure Therapy program has been launched in Spain. David Fernández Oñate, member of Experientia, designed and developed *Abriendo vía*, a specific indoor climbing program with patients presenting paranoid schizophrenia, with history of using toxics and behavioural difficulties during adolescence.

In 2015 as well, Natalia Ruiz de Cortázar, Lydia Yusta Bermúdez de Castro, Jano Morcillo Forés, and Alexander Rose, have developed *Azimuth*, a specific program for youth at risk (adolescents with ADD/ADHD symptoms).

As we speak, the Clinical team of Experientia is also developing specific Adventure Therapy programs for adolescents affected by HIV/AIDS, for selective prevention for adolescents presenting drug abuse, youth in Foster care, etc.

2016 has brought some new milestones: Experientia has taken part in a Pilot program for selective prevention of drug abuse, and has also won the 2016 *Psicofundación* Award for Young Psychologists with an AT program in hands of Natalia Ruiz de Cortázar and Lydia Yusta Bermúdez de Castro.

Despite other adventure and/or outdoor interventions in the fields of psychotherapy, rehabilitation, re-education and psycho-educational in Spain, Adventure Therapy as a specific methodology is still an unknown and innovative approach in Spain.

Painting a broader picture and using the Spanish language countries as a frame, there is a need to mention the efforts to introduce Adventure Therapy in Latin America. Practitioners are developing their own programs there, influenced by the proximity to the US; and also several US Adventure Therapy programs are opening venues in South and Central America. The recent celebration of AEE (Association of Experiential Education) conferences in Mexico and Colombia, in 2001 and 2012 respectively, are helping to establish a network.

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