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

The story of Experiential Education (EE) and later Adventure Therapy in Hungary began in the mid-nineties – in the outdoor training field and parallel with the international influence on the non-profit development of EE and the implementation of AT in Hungary.

Until 1989-90, Hungary was a part of the Eastern-Central European Socialist Block, behind the “iron curtain”, so it was more or less impossible (or at least forbidden), to implement or develop alternative, innovative, experience based pedagogical, psychological or development methods, in our schools. This means that, apart from the socialist way of providing education, all other teaching approaches such as: alternative pedagogy like Waldorf, Montessori, Rogers’s or other Experiential Education approaches (alternative therapeutic methods being used in other Western Countries) or even classical social concepts, did not exist in Hungary and were clearly not supported.

### **First entry of Experiential Education into the outdoor training sector and education system**

In the corporate outdoor sector, two sources are known as to how organizational development consultants became trained for outdoor training. One group was invited to General Motor’s Training Center in Valencia, Spain, where a high rope course based leadership training program was presented. The other source was a corporate skills training company, who invited a Belgian experiential organization development consultant. Both sources started to use high ropes courses in their work with corporates and provided various forms of outdoor training activities. Since then several Hungarian for-profit organizations provided outdoor trainings and programs in that sector, typically with the purpose of team-building.

In the field of Experiential Education in schools and the NGO sector, Hungarian history started at the start of the new millennium. In CEEu region, not in Hungary, but in Hungarian minority-inhabited territory of Romania, Transylvania, Outward Bound Romania - a non-profit organization - was founded in 1993 as an independent member of the internationally recognized Outward Bound International. Their primary programs included personal development courses for high school students, courses for educators, youth leadership courses, and courses aimed at orphans, troubled, and economically disadvantaged youth. Later, in the early years of the new millennium, many of the future Hungarian experiential educators and trainers, were educated here, in their native Hungarian language.

Today, probably one of the most successful Hungarian NGO's called "Bator Tabor" ("Brave Camp"), is organizing therapeutic recreation camps for seriously ill children and their families, as well as for families who lost their child due to a severe illness. Paul Newman, the world-famous actor, established a camp in Connecticut USA, in 1988, and it became the basis for the Serious Fun Children's Network, which the "Bator Tabor" has been a member of since 2007. While the professional background of their work comes from the United States, the free camping for children is funded by corporate and individual donations. In 1997 the first group of Hungarian children visited a therapeutic recreation camp in Ireland and in 2001 based on the foreign model "Bator Tabor" was created for the healing of children with cancer in Hungary.

The first school application of experiential education was realized in the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, by two Hungarian teachers (Sandor Banyai, Nikoletta Kovacs) trained by Pressley Ridge, Pittsburg, PA, USA. They participated in the first Hungarian Adventure Therapy conference in 2005 and were so inspired, that they started the first experiential education courses, (in Hungarian: "élménypedagógia"), for elementary school teachers. Since then, thousands of Hungarian teachers were trained in experiential education, but sadly, were drawn mainly from the Hungarian minority communities from countries around Hungary.

The “Elmenyakademia” (Academy of Experience) public benefit association, was founded in 2006 by 12 volunteers, who dedicated their professional life in establishing a Kurt Hahn approach using non-formal educational programs. Founder, Etelka Kovacs, after completing the trainer courses at Outward Bound Romania, she developed the bases of the association in cooperation with the leaders of OB Romania, which organization kept on being the parent establishment of Elmenyakademia and the trainer of their crew.

There are some other small non-profit organizations today working in the Experiential Education field – mainly focusing on short training sessions of school teachers, outdoor educators, sport teachers, facilitators and animators. For example: “Kalandok es Almok” (Adventures and Dreams) Association, “Holdfenyiliget” (Moonlight-Grove) Foundation and Experience-Zone and some others.

### **Implementation of Adventure Therapy**

The first Adventure Therapy (AT) program in Hungary was designed and realized in 2004 by Gabor T. Szabo, former leader of “keTTe” - Hungarian Foundation for Experiential Learning (founded in 2004) with psychiatric outpatients at the “Csanyik” Psychotherapeutic Centre of the St. Francis Hospital of the City Miskolc. Gabor T. Szabo was the first Hungarian psychologist, who officially studied EE/AT methods, during a 2-year long Outdoor Trainer/Adventure Therapy accredited course at Vienna University IOA Institution, bringing this methodology to Hungary.

The Csanyik Project consisted of a group of 10 patients participating in several week-long group process and individual process sessions, with psychologists and social workers. An interdisciplinary methodology treatment plan was carried out with a biblio-therapeutic frame and a three-day (two nights) expedition with low ropes modules and rock climbing. There was an impact analysis based on different tests which provided the base of a postgraduate thesis about the project.

The “keTTe” Foundation organized the first AT conferences in Hungary in 2005 and 2006 at the “Csanyik” Centre. Professionals inspired by these events (and trained by OB Romania) created the first residential adventure therapy program in a Psychiatric Hospital for Adolescents named “Vadaskert”. The program was running successfully for more than three years (2010-2013), using high and low ropes courses, expeditions and outdoor experiential team challenges.

The program was supported by non-governmental funds but was closed down in 2013. The leaders of this program later set up a 9 days' course called: "From EE to AT", which introduced the basic elements of this approach and which is still running successfully.

The "keTTe" Foundation has carried out several adventure and wilderness therapy programs since 2004, mainly for adolescents and young adults in state care, children living with disabilities and their families. The professionals of the foundation used adventure therapy in structural and systemic couples- and family therapy settings as well. They are probably the first outdoor practitioners to call their method "Wilderness-Adventure Therapy" (within the international meaning and setting) in Hungary.

Since Hungary's first regime change in 1989-90, new changes have been taking place with regards to democracy, and even more so when the Orban Government (Right-Conservative Wing) came into power in 2010. As a response to this, the "keTTe" Foundation decided to build up the Hungarian Experiential Education community to support the development of its own internal (and external) network. Therefore, after the organizations' first two AT Conferences, they set up an organization of new conferences: In 2015, the First Hungarian Conference for Experiential Learning was established and followed by the second one in 2016. Today there is a preparation going on for the third one in 2017. It is the intention of the organizers to set up a tradition of this forum, where all professionals who are interested or involved in the applications of experiential learning in the field of education, social work, therapy or organizational and leadership development, can network with others who are also working in this wide and diverse field.

It is hoped that the forum will provide an opportunity for practitioners to create a space for the growing community of experiential educators in Hungary and the CEEu region. Many members of the wider international EE/AT community, have supported such forums and conferences here in Hungary.

Networks and professional relationships have been formed by practitioners from “keTTe”'s being active participants in such events as well as being the Hungarian representatives in IATC / ATIC since 2002. Main support still comes from abroad - some international professionals (to name but a few), who have and will continue to attend and support the Hungarian EL/AT conferences and development of AT: Martin Ringer (NZ), Prof.Dr. Christine Norton (USA), Prof. Dr. Günter Amesberger (AU), Prof. Dr. Hartmut Paffrath (GER), Luk Peeters (BEL), Dr. Rüdiger Gilsdorf (GER), Prof. Dr. Denise Mitten (USA), Prof. Dr. Ray Handley (AUST), Prof. Dr. Werner Michl (GER), Prof. Dr. Michael Gass (USA), Ian Blackwell (UK), Frank J. Grant (UK), Markus Gutmann (AU), Dr. Stephan Natynczuk (UK), Ping-Huang Liao (Taiwan), Tony Dixon (USA), Katia Almeida (PORT).

Besides the conferences, “keTTe” Foundation, under the leadership of Natalia Rakar-Szabo and Gabor T. Szabo, started the first Hungarian 1+2 semester educational course for Experiential Trainers/Consultants with an Adventure Therapy Specialization in 2016. They started the course with the contribution of several international Adventure Therapy and Experiential Education academics and professionals (some of those named above).

The first Hungarian official academic research was started in 2015, focusing on the Impact of Wilderness-Adventure Therapy with Foster Care Adolescents (still ongoing under a PhD research). This research is led by Natalia Rakar-Szabo with background support of the Development Psychology Department of Doctoral Institution of Pecs University.

In Hungary the outdoor training sector is widely spread out, although in the last 6-7 years the popularity and demand has slightly decreased for these programs which were generally built and delivered on simple team building activities. There are at least 35-40 different for-profit companies, all providing different outdoor programs for organizations and for the private sector.

Since 2000, the Leisure Adventure Parks has been spreading out as well, but after 2009-2010 the popularity of these entertainment services also dropped, many of them even have closed in the last few years. Up until now (2016), there are no Hungarian Universities, higher Education Schools or Institutions, who are officially teaching Experiential or Outdoor Education, Adventure Therapy or anything similar. Only Pecs University has a small accredited course for students of pedagogy, as an optional, alternative course of 30-60 hours.

Today, there are approximately 10-12 non-profit Hungarian organizations implementing Experiential Education and/or Experiential-based Therapeutic Program Elements as methods into their mainstream programs. The number of them is rising year every year, and we do our very best to support this process.

## Authors

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