

Nature-based coaching

Outdoors Coaching Methodologies

Research and Manual

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“Outdoors Coaching Methodologies Research and Manual”

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I. The .CATCH Project

In today's rapidly changing world, the ability to adapt, empower, and foster personal growth has become more critical than ever, especially for young people navigating complex social, educational, and professional landscapes. Recognizing this need, the project Creating Youth Work Training and Coaching Horizons (CATCH) was born. This collaborative initiative, funded under the Erasmus+ KA2 Youth program and implemented with the support of NIVAM - Slovak National Agency, brings together a consortium of experienced partners to empower youth workers with essential coaching competencies, advocate for the recognition of youth coaching as a transformative tool for social inclusion, and establish sustainable practices that empower disadvantaged youth to take ownership of their personal and group development: EduEra from Slovakia, Coobra – Cooperativa Braccianti from Austria, Oriel from Italy, Rescogita OÜ from Estonia, Praxis from Greece, Zemekoule ZS from Czech Republic.

The Erasmus+ KA2 Youth program provides the ideal framework for CATCH. As a European Union initiative, Erasmus+ KA2 supports strategic partnerships in the field of youth, fostering innovation, collaboration, and the exchange of good practices. It enables organizations to address shared challenges, enhance the quality of youth work, and develop tools that can be adapted and replicated across diverse contexts. Within this framework, CATCH aims to bridge the gap between coaching methodologies and youth work practices, making a tangible difference in the lives of young people and the educators who support them.

EduEra and .Catch

As the applicant of the CATCH initiative is EduEra, a Slovak-based NGO dedicated to fostering educational opportunities and community engagement. EduEra's expertise lies in creating innovative educational methodologies and tools that resonate with youth and educators alike. With a history of recognized achievements—including being named Best Practice NGO of 2018 in Slovakia and earning accolades for best practice projects in 2018 and 2022—EduEra brings a wealth of experience to this initiative. Its commitment to nonformal education, youth coaching, and project management ensures that CATCH is rooted in practical, impactful methodologies. For EduEra, the topic of youth coaching is particularly significant. In the face of challenges such as social exclusion, limited career opportunities, and systemic barriers faced by disadvantaged youth, coaching offers a structured yet flexible approach to empower individuals. By equipping youth workers with coaching skills, EduEra and its partners aim to create a ripple effect, enabling young people to build resilience, embrace solution-oriented mindsets, and confidently navigate their life paths.

The Vision and Objectives of CATCH

CATCH is an international project designed to address critical needs in youth work and coaching. Its primary objectives are:

1. **Empowering Youth Workers with Coaching Competencies:** The project equips youth workers with essential coaching tools and techniques, enabling them to foster personal growth, resilience, and self-efficacy among young people.
2. **Advocating for Youth Coaching:** By promoting the recognition and validation of youth coaching as a method for social inclusion, CATCH seeks to position coaching as a vital component of youth work.
3. **Establishing Sustainable Practices:** CATCH aims to create sustainable coaching practices that empower disadvantaged youth, encouraging them to develop solution-oriented mindsets and take ownership of their personal and collective development.
4. **Local Impact:** Through local activities in partner regions, the project enhances career choices and pathways for young people, addressing systemic barriers and supporting marginalized groups.

The Target Groups

CATCH is designed to benefit a diverse array of participants and stakeholders, including:

- **Educators:** Teachers, trainers, facilitators, mentors, tutors, and other educational support staff who are directly engaged in youth development.
- **Individuals:** Young people, especially those from marginalized or disadvantaged backgrounds, who participate directly in the project's activities.
- **Local Learners:** Groups targeted through Local Action initiatives, including learners and students from the Ruthenian minority, Ukrainian displaced people, refugees, asylum seekers, community organizers, and green startupper.
- **Local Institutions:** Schools, universities, youth centers, NGOs, and other organizations involved in youth and adult education.

Key Activities and Outputs

The CATCH project comprises a series of well-structured activities designed to maximize impact and ensure sustainability:

1. **International Trainings:** Three in-person and three virtual international training sessions will equip 20 coaches with advanced coaching skills.
2. **Local Piloting Activities:** These activities will deliver coaching to disadvantaged youth groups, directly reaching 150 local participants.
3. **Educational Outputs:** The project will produce two comprehensive manuals, one research study, and a documentary, all aimed at documenting and disseminating best practices in youth coaching.

4. Capacity Building: The trained coaches will, in turn, train at least 50 additional individuals in coaching tools and methodologies.

By the conclusion of the CATCH project, the following outcomes will be achieved:

- **20 Internationally Trained Coaches:** These individuals will possess the skills and knowledge to implement coaching practices effectively within their communities.
- **Impact on 150 Local Participants:** Through direct coaching, marginalized youth will gain access to tools and support that foster growth and inclusion.
- **Sustainability Through Training:** A further 50 individuals will be trained in coaching tools, creating a multiplier effect that extends the project's reach and impact.

CATCH represents a comprehensive, innovative approach to youth coaching and empowerment. By bridging the gap between coaching methodologies and youth work, the project addresses systemic barriers, fosters inclusion, and creates sustainable pathways for personal and professional growth. Through collaboration, creativity, and commitment, CATCH is setting a new standard for youth work, ensuring that no young person is left behind.

II. For Whom is This Manual

This manual is written to meet the needs of a broad and diverse audience engaged in youth work, education, and community development. It serves as a practical, user-friendly resource tailored to various stakeholders who are striving to create meaningful, positive changes in the lives of young people.

Youth Workers and Coaches:

This manual is a valuable tool for professionals working directly with young people in roles such as youth workers, life coaches, and career advisors. It provides practical coaching methodologies and tools to enhance their work, enabling them to better support young people in overcoming challenges, setting goals, and fostering self-awareness. Whether seasoned professionals or those new to coaching, this manual serves as a guide to incorporating holistic and nature-based approaches into their practice.

Educators and Trainers:

Teachers, facilitators, mentors, and trainers who aim to empower their students and participants will find this manual especially beneficial. It offers insights into fostering solution-oriented mindsets and equipping learners with personal growth tools. By blending coaching practices with traditional teaching methods, educators can help individuals uncover their potential, strengthen their resilience, and navigate life's challenges with confidence.

NGOs and Community Organizations:

Non-governmental organizations, youth centers, and community initiatives that engage with marginalized or disadvantaged youth can use this manual to embed coaching practices into their programs. It provides actionable guidance for designing and delivering impactful interventions that promote inclusion, empowerment, and personal development, particularly for youth from diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.

Policy Makers and Advocates:

This manual is an essential resource for those advocating for the recognition and validation of youth coaching as a transformative approach to social inclusion and personal development. Policy makers, institutional leaders, and youth advocacy organizations can leverage its content to design strategies, promote best practices, and foster sustainable coaching practices within their local and national contexts.

Students and Learners:

Young people themselves are a crucial audience for this manual. Whether they are directly participating in coaching sessions or independently exploring coaching principles, students and learners will gain tools to better understand themselves, set achievable goals, and develop proactive mindsets. This manual invites them to actively engage in their personal development journey, using nature-based methods to connect with their surroundings and inner strengths.

Why This Manual Matters

Traditional support systems often fall short in equipping youth with the tools they need to build resilience, develop self-awareness, and foster their potential. This manual seeks to address these gaps by introducing nature-based coaching as a holistic, innovative approach to youth work—one that reconnects individuals with themselves, their communities, and the environment.

What sets this manual apart is its emphasis on integrating the principles of nature-based coaching into youth work. By drawing inspiration from the natural world, it promotes a deeper connection between individuals and their surroundings. This connection is not only grounding but also transformative, offering young people a way to reflect, learn, and grow in harmony with the world around them. This approach fosters a sense of belonging, which is especially crucial for marginalized or disadvantaged youth who often feel disconnected or excluded.

This manual bridges the gap between theory and practice by offering practical, easy-to-implement coaching tools and methodologies. Whether you are a youth worker looking for ways to motivate young people, an educator seeking innovative teaching strategies, or a community leader aiming to empower local youth, this manual provides actionable solutions tailored to diverse settings. The tools are adaptable, ensuring they meet the unique needs of individuals and communities while maintaining their relevance across cultures and contexts. At its core, this manual is about empowering young people, especially those from marginalized or disadvantaged backgrounds, to take ownership of their lives and futures. It highlights coaching as a powerful method for social inclusion, enabling young people to recognize their own strengths, set meaningful goals, and navigate challenges with confidence. By equipping youth workers and educators with these techniques, the manual fosters a ripple effect—helping not just individuals, but entire communities, move toward growth and inclusion.

This manual doesn't just aim to equip professionals and young people with tools for immediate use; it also seeks to establish sustainable coaching practices. By grounding its methods in nature-based principles, it advocates for long-term, environmentally conscious approaches to youth development. It reminds readers that personal growth and environmental stewardship are interconnected, encouraging a mindset that values sustainability in both personal and collective endeavors.

Why this manual matters extends beyond its content; it represents a collective effort to redefine how we support young people in their journeys. By bringing together insights from diverse stakeholders—youth workers, educators, policy makers, and young people themselves—it offers a shared vision for a future where coaching is not just a tool but a way of fostering meaningful, lasting change. This manual matters because it inspires action. It equips its readers to be catalysts of transformation, using coaching not only to support young people but to create a world where they can thrive—one that values connection, inclusion, and sustainability.

III. About the Authors

Petra Papierníková

Petra Papierníková is a dedicated youth coach, psychotherapist, educator, and expert in nonformal education with over a decade of experience empowering young people and youth workers across Europe. As the founder of EduEra, Petra has led numerous initiatives promoting social inclusion, personal growth, and innovative educational methodologies. Her deep connection to nature and passion for coaching inspired the development of this manual, which blends her expertise in systemic psychotherapy, eco-coaching, and youth work. Petra's holistic approach emphasizes empowering individuals and communities to thrive through self-awareness, resilience, and sustainability.

Lorenzo Nava

With two decades of progressive experience as a youth worker and trainer at local and international level, as well as a certified coach, presently CEO of Rescogita OU in Estonia. Lorenzo is among the pioneers in creating the eco-coaching approach and ecopsychology-based growth and development activities as an innovative pathway towards nature and community based learning methodologies. Already co-authored a series of articles and publications on the topic of eco-coaching, nature guidance and ecopsychology. Today this methodology is applied to Ecopsychology based coaching, facilitation and youth work; and its approach piloted in the design of young NEET Profiling methodologies within the EU programme EU4youth.

IV. Acknowledgements

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1. Introduction to Ecopsychology, the grounds for Ecocoaching

Ecopsychology takes a holistic approach to understanding the interplay between human psychology and the environment, emphasizing the profound ways our inner worlds and the natural world shape each other. The field encourages us to move beyond the notion of nature as a backdrop for human life, recognizing instead that our mental and emotional states are deeply tied to the health and vitality of the ecosystems we inhabit. One of the key tenets of ecopsychology is that our sense of well-being can be significantly enhanced through direct, meaningful engagement with the natural environment. This connection can manifest in everyday experiences, such as feeling a sense of awe when witnessing a sunrise, finding calm while walking in a forest, or gaining perspective on personal challenges by observing the resilience of plants growing through cracks in urban concrete. Such moments of connection remind us that we are not isolated individuals but part of a larger ecological web.

The field also explores how psychological disconnection from nature contributes to environmental degradation. For example, when people see the natural world as a resource to be exploited rather than as something they are part of, it becomes easier to justify harmful behaviors like overconsumption or pollution. Ecopsychology works to repair this disconnect by fostering empathy for the environment and cultivating practices that encourage care and stewardship.

Examples of ecopsychology in action

Ecopsychology provides a lens through which we can explore the profound ways nature impacts human well-being and how, in turn, our actions influence the environment. By emphasizing practical applications, ecopsychology not only deepens our understanding of the human-nature relationship but also offers tangible tools to improve mental health, foster community, and promote sustainability. Below are some real-world examples that showcase ecopsychology's transformative potential.

a) Healing trauma through nature

Nature-based therapy programs have been highly effective in supporting individuals recovering from trauma, particularly veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Activities like forest bathing, hiking, and kayaking are combined with counseling to create an environment where participants can process their emotions in a calming, non-judgmental space. For instance, a group of veterans participating in a wilderness therapy program found significant reductions in anxiety and hypervigilance by spending several days immersed in natural surroundings. The rhythmic sound of water during kayaking or the stillness of a forest hike helps them feel grounded and connected, creating a powerful counterbalance to their often-heightened states of stress.

b) Rewilding urban spaces

In bustling cities, where concrete and steel dominate the landscape, initiatives to "rewild" spaces have become increasingly popular. Community gardens allow residents to grow their own vegetables and herbs while fostering a sense of purpose and connection. For example, a rewilded park in the heart of Berlin transformed a disused industrial site into a thriving natural habitat where locals can observe wildlife, host outdoor yoga classes, or simply relax. Green roofs on buildings not only reduce urban heat but also offer rooftop oases where people can escape from daily pressures and reconnect with natural cycles, even in highly urbanized areas.

c) Environmental advocacy through personal storytelling

Personal stories often resonate more deeply than facts alone. Ecopsychology taps into this by encouraging individuals to share how their relationship with nature has positively impacted their lives. For instance, a young woman who overcame depression by routinely hiking in the mountains began sharing her experiences through a blog and social media. Her heartfelt accounts inspired readers to explore outdoor activities and adopt environmentally friendly habits, creating a ripple effect of increased awareness and advocacy. By framing environmental responsibility as deeply personal and rewarding, storytelling becomes a catalyst for collective change.

d) Nature-inspired problem solving

Natural settings can inspire creativity and foster collaboration in ways traditional environments cannot. Companies and educational institutions have begun incorporating ecopsychological principles into their practices by organizing workshops and team-building activities outdoors. For instance, a tech startup held a strategy retreat in a remote woodland area, where the team engaged in creative problem-solving exercises inspired by nature, such as observing patterns in tree growth or stream flow. The result was not only innovative solutions but also a stronger sense of camaraderie and mutual respect among team members.

These examples demonstrate the diverse ways ecopsychology can be integrated into daily life, benefiting individuals, communities, and the environment alike. Whether through personal healing, urban revitalization, storytelling, or collaborative innovation, ecopsychology opens the door to a more harmonious relationship between humans and nature.

The Foundations of Ecopsychology

Ecopsychology applies ecological and psychological theories to explore how humans and nature interact. According to Palmer (2014), the discipline focuses on well-being, recognizing that our mental, emotional, and physical health is deeply intertwined with the health of the planet. The field also draws from positive psychology, a branch of psychology dedicated to understanding human flourishing and building thriving individuals and communities (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

The origins of ecopsychology can be traced back to 1989 when a group of academics from Berkeley, including Robert Greenway, Elan Shapiro, Alan Kanner, and Mary Gomes, began exploring how psychology could address the ecological crisis. Cultural historian Theodore Roszak further developed the field by emphasizing the need to view humans and nature as interconnected. In 1996, Fritjof Capra popularized ecopsychology in his book *The Network of Life*, highlighting its relevance to contemporary ecological challenges.

Why Ecopsychology Matters

Ecopsychology is more than a field of study; it is a call to action for individuals and societies to realign their relationship with the natural world. By understanding the intrinsic connection between human well-being and the environment, ecopsychology provides a framework for addressing some of the most pressing challenges of our time—mental health crises, environmental degradation, and societal disconnection.

The central idea of ecopsychology is that the well-being of humans and the environment are inseparably linked. For example:

- **Mental health and nature:** Studies have shown that spending time in nature reduces stress, improves mood, and enhances cognitive function. Activities like forest bathing, gardening, or simply walking in green spaces can have profound psychological benefits.

The connection between nature and mental health is profound and well-documented. Time spent in natural environments has been shown to lower cortisol levels, reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression, and improve overall emotional resilience. For instance, exposure to natural settings has been used as part of treatment for individuals with attention deficit disorders, allowing them to focus and self-regulate more effectively. Beyond therapeutic contexts, everyday activities like tending a garden or walking in a park provide subtle yet impactful psychological benefits, enhancing creativity, improving problem-solving skills, and fostering a sense of calm.

- **Alienation from nature:** Many modern lifestyles disconnect individuals from the natural world, leading to feelings of isolation and disorientation. Ecopsychology seeks to remedy this alienation by fostering a sense of belonging and stewardship for the environment.

In an age of rapid urbanization and technological dependency, many individuals experience a profound disconnection from the natural world. This alienation can manifest as feelings of isolation, restlessness, or even existential despair. Ecopsychology addresses this disconnection by promoting practices that re-establish a sense of belonging to the Earth. For example, community programs that involve tree planting, beach cleanups, or nature-based workshops not only reconnect participants with their environment but also foster a sense of shared purpose and collective care. These experiences help individuals rediscover their role within the greater ecological web, restoring a sense of grounding and perspective.

- **Sustainability and Responsibility:** By understanding our place within the larger ecological system, we can develop behaviors and lifestyles that are more harmonious with nature, addressing issues like climate change and habitat destruction.

At its core, ecopsychology is about understanding that human actions are deeply intertwined with the health of the planet. This awareness fosters a sense of responsibility and accountability for ecological sustainability. For instance, educational initiatives rooted in ecopsychological principles often incorporate experiential learning—such as observing ecosystems firsthand or engaging in permaculture projects—to help participants internalize the importance of sustainable practices. By emphasizing our interdependence with nature, ecopsychology encourages lifestyle changes that benefit not just the individual but the planet as a whole, such as reducing waste, conserving resources, and advocating for environmental protection policies.

Ecopsychology is not just a theoretical concept; it is actively applied in various fields:

1. **Ecotherapy:** Also known as nature therapy, this approach integrates nature-based activities into psychological treatment, helping individuals reconnect with the environment while addressing issues like anxiety, depression, or trauma.
2. **Environmental Education:** Programs inspired by ecopsychology teach young people not only about ecosystems but also about their emotional and ethical connections to the natural world, fostering both knowledge and care for the environment.
3. **Community Practices:** Urban gardening, wilderness retreats, and eco-villages are examples of collective efforts to apply ecopsychological principles, enhancing communal well-being and ecological awareness.

A Holistic view of humanity and nature

Ecopsychology invites us to fundamentally reimagine our relationship with the world. Rather than perceiving humanity as distinct from nature, it encourages us to embrace the understanding that we are deeply woven into the intricate web of life. This shift in perspective has profound implications—not only for how we view ourselves but also for how we interact with the environment and each other.

When we recognize ourselves as an integral part of the natural world, our attitudes and behaviors begin to change. We no longer see nature as a resource to be exploited but as a partner to be nurtured and respected. This interconnected view fosters a sense of empathy and care, promoting actions that align with the health of the planet. Simple acts, such as conserving water, reducing waste, or planting a garden, are no longer seen as chores but as contributions to a larger system in which we all have a stake. By merging the insights of psychology and ecology, ecopsychology provides a framework for healing both individuals and the planet. Psychology helps us understand the inner workings of the human mind—our fears, aspirations, and behaviors—while ecology reveals the dynamics of the natural systems that sustain us. Together, these disciplines create a powerful synergy, guiding us toward solutions that address the well-being of people and the environment simultaneously.

For example, programs that combine ecological restoration with therapeutic practices offer dual benefits: they help participants overcome personal challenges while actively contributing to environmental health. A group planting trees in a deforested area might find the act of nurturing new life therapeutic, experiencing a renewed sense of purpose and belonging. Similarly, community-based clean-up projects not only improve local ecosystems but also strengthen social bonds and inspire collective responsibility.

Caring for the environment, therefore, is not merely an ethical or moral duty—it is an essential aspect of caring for ourselves. Our physical, mental, and spiritual health are deeply tied to the well-being of the planet. When we breathe clean air, drink pure water, and experience the beauty of thriving ecosystems, we flourish. Conversely, when the environment suffers, so do we.

Ecopsychology serves as a reminder of this profound truth: healing our relationship with nature is key to healing ourselves. It urges us to move beyond individualism and adopt a holistic perspective, where the health of humanity and the Earth are seen as inseparable. In doing so, we create a path not only for sustainable living but also for a more compassionate and fulfilling existence.

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2. The 11 Principles of Ecopsychology

In our journey to deepen the understanding of ecopsychology, the ReCalibur project served as both a foundation and an inspiration. ReCalibur—an Erasmus+ project focused on collective creativity in youth work—provided a unique opportunity to explore the intersection of personal growth, environmental sustainability, and innovative methodologies. Running from June 2021 to June 2023, this collaborative initiative brought together experts, trainers, and youth workers to develop tools and methods that address contemporary challenges through a holistic lens. One of the key outcomes of ReCalibur was the development of the **11 Principles of Ecopsychology**. These principles were born from a combination of ReCalibur research, practical experimentation, and the lived experiences of those involved in the project. By bridging theoretical insights with real-world applications, we aimed to create a framework that is both accessible and transformative—offering guidance for individuals, educators, and organizations seeking to foster a deeper connection between humanity and the natural world. The ReCalibur project was guided by the belief that the well-being of individuals and the community are deeply interconnected. Through workshops, training sessions, and collaborative discussions, the project delved into how ecopsychological principles could empower youth workers and communities to embrace sustainable practices, enhance personal resilience, and nurture collective creativity.

The **11 Principles of Ecopsychology** provide a roadmap for integrating ecopsychological concepts into everyday life and work. These principles emphasize interconnectedness, mutual respect between humans and nature, and the transformative potential of aligning personal growth with environmental stewardship. For example, one principle may focus on fostering a sense of wonder and awe in natural settings, encouraging individuals to see the environment not as a backdrop but as an active participant in their lives. Another principle might emphasize the importance of reciprocity—cultivating a mindset where taking from the Earth is balanced by giving back, whether through conservation efforts, community engagement, or simply appreciating the beauty around us. These principles are not rigid rules but guiding values that invite exploration and adaptation. Whether you are a youth worker designing a workshop, a teacher integrating sustainability into your curriculum, or an individual seeking greater harmony with nature, the 11 Principles offer a foundation for growth and connection.

These are the 11 criteria that should define a ecopsychology based activity, when designing either training sessions or activities, that either involve engagement and participation in nature and in the more-than-human-world and/or with human ecosystems and communities. Should an activity, either in non-formal education eco-trainings or eco-coaching processes match most of these parameters then it can be defined as eco-psychology based and grounded activity.

1) **Competition removal** - it is important that when the participant or client engages with the experiential activity there is not a spirit of competition, like running a track as fast as possible or endurance, as well as to reduce technology and outer world distractions as much as possible (limited use of mobile phones, earplugs to listen to music etc...) The spirit of the activity should have more attitudes towards self-awareness, self-discovery, consciousness, and understanding, an inner quest carried out through outer means.

2) **Seek Partnership and Cooperation** - The purpose is that the attitude of the participant or client towards either the outdoors or community activity is that of partnership and cooperation, should feel that they are engaging with either for the purpose of mutual benefit, and it is not something to be looked up to nor down to, rather as an equal partner

3) **Reciprocate Mutual Exchange (with nature/community)** - give back or pay forward. Both participants and clients will receive something from the engagement with the community and/or the natural world, therefore it is important to acknowledge this and recognise what they gained and received by reciprocation, by either giving something back to the community or place in nature that helped their learning and awareness, or by paying it forward, by doing something of equal importance and relevance for someone else or something else in the natural world.

4) **Can be context free (you are providing guidance)** - no need to expertise on the topic, nor to have the client/participant express verbally their reflections, although its not a must. It is important to debrief the experience, for both clients and participants, nonetheless the trainer and coach do not necessarily need to know the content of the experience, and have the client or participant express it verbally, observing the physiology of the person can be enough to understand in which direction it is going, and sharing of course can happen and the participant client need to understand that this is optional and not a must, for the learning and awareness to happen.

5) **Cycles of experience (repeated experiences)** with the purpose of deepening focus and topic. In both contexts of training and coaching the same cycle of experience can be repeated multiple times, with the goal of deepening the focus on the matter at hand, by repeating the same experience and guiding each time the client / participant to dive and dig deeper as necessary.

6) **Allow freedom of the learner in choosing the level of challenge to be faced, and shared ownership** (trainer/coach and client/participant decide together, no surprises or rabbits from the hat) Participants and clients are involved in the decision-making process, especially when it comes to the level of challenge to face, whether the activity engages communities and/or the natural world, therefore the trainers and coaches should not use the element of surprise in designing the activities.

7) **Ritualistic and Rites of Passage elements, stressing the importance and gestalt** (meaning making) of the experience participants/clients are going through. In both ecocoaching and ecotraining activities involve rituals (ritualised activities that mark the importance of the experience about to start "Separation - Transformation - Return") and some can also take the form of rites of passage, for example from the end of one stage of life and entering the next one, making the client or participant aware that this is happening and/or can happen and be a result of the experience.

8) **Promote and foster independence on using the tools by themselves** (mostly in eco-coaching) . Especially and not exclusively in ecocoaching, can also be applied in eco-training, the clients or participants can be equipped and encouraged to use the tools gained on themselves and take ownership, however not to use on others unless untrained, can be used for self-guidance yet not to be guides.

9) **Freedom of choice in self-expression** of the state they are going through or just experienced, feeling, learning, reciprocation of the experience. For example if they want to use a song, a dance, a composition, whatever works. It is important full ownership of the experience and learning, as well as how to express it, by stressing the parameter that it is not a must to be shared verbally so that the trainer or coach understand, it is still important to express it in whatever way the client or participant wants, can be artistic, musical, poetic, other creative forms of expression, and this expression of learning and acknowledgement of the experience does not necessarily have to happen in the presence of the coach or trainer, can also happen when alone in that chosen space in nature for example.

10) **Methods and Tools should allow participants/clients to both gain the bigger picture (take a step above) and to go to the root of the issue (take a step below)** . Meaning if they are facing personal or community challenges, the experience will allow them to get to the root of the problem, or to be able to put it in a context of a larger picture. The whole purpose and goal of these activities are not just to reflect and consider ongoing thoughts and feelings whether in general or on a specific topic, it is necessary that through these tools the participant or client can gain the larger picture where the topic/issue is placed understanding where it fits in the

larger scheme of things, as well as to understanding the roots, what are the deeper origins of the topic/issue at hand.

11) Activities for either eco-training or eco-coaching must have **components of active/deep imagination**. <https://www.animas.org/events/deep-imagination-march-2020/> Here you can find a description

The 11 Principles of Ecopsychology are more than just theoretical concepts—they are tools for action and transformation. As you explore these principles, we invite you to reflect on your own relationship with nature and consider how these ideas can inspire meaningful change in your personal life, your community, and the broader world. For more information about the ecopsychology and ecocoaching in youthwork, please visit: <https://recalibur.eduera.sk/> .

3. The Meaning of Nature, The Meaning of Connection

What does "Nature" mean?

"An adaptive mechanism of evolution without natural selection is theoretically possible, and may play a significant role in evolution...evolution is not necessary for living, it just happens."

K.Kull

In the movie "The 7 mountains" there is a scene where some city dwellers hiking on the Alps, stopped by a hut to get some rest and meet a local inhabitant, in the conversation they had a girl ask the local "How is it to live so close to nature?" the man looked back at her surprised. "Nature is a word that makes sense for you city people, for us it means nothing; what makes sense to us is the slope up there, or this trail, those peaks, the pasture land there to the south." leaving the girl speechless. This exposes us to the naked truth that interventions such as eco-coaching mostly target urban inhabitants, those who are most at-risk of suffering from the nature-deficit-disorder, due to our distance from the rest of the biosphere. It is also true that according to UN statistics about 70% of humanity now lives in urban centres. Fortunately in the last few years we have seen an increase in programmes and projects that aim at sustainability, regeneration, and that aim at "reconnecting" humans with "nature", which is of course great, and something that our species needs urgently. Nonetheless, there are some pitfalls and dangers, both "nature" and "connection" are extremely subjective terms, regarding "connection" we will try in this manual to use as much as possible the term "affiliation" instead, as more appropriate to define what we actually do; as when it comes to "nature" in this chapter we will clarify what this actually means and how to efficiently apply the correct terminology to our eco-coaching context.

Four Types of Nature (K.Kull)

It is possible that Tartu (EE) University's Biology Professor Kalevi Kull came across the same questions, "what is nature?" and came up with a definition, diving nature into four types and categories:

- **Nature Zero:** the wild and uncontaminated nature.
- **First Nature:** Nature how we perceived and interpret it
- **Second Nature:** Nature modified by humans
- **Third Nature:** A theoretical or an artistic view of nature, such as nature in movies or in science.

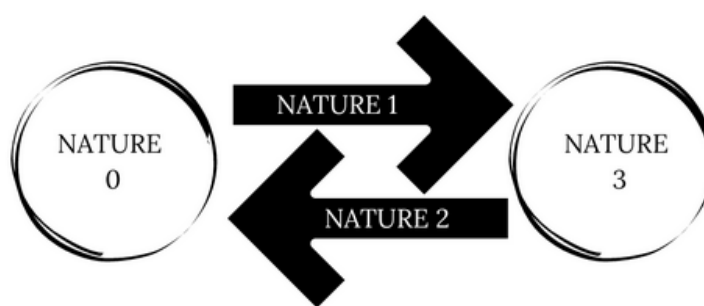
1* Richard Louv "The last Child in the Woods". 2010. Nature-deficit disorder is the idea that human beings, especially children, are spending less time outdoors than they have in the past, and the belief that this change results in a wide range of behavior

2* Ecopsychology Revisited, Jorge-Conesa Sevilla 2019

3* Connection refers to a bond, link, or association between people, ideas, or entities. It is often personal and can be emotional, intellectual, or physical. Affiliation refers to a formal or recognized association with a group, organization, or institution. It implies membership, support, or allegiance.

All 4 types of nature are interconnected, the 1st Nature shows our direct interpretation of the wilds, and the 3rd nature is a completely theoretical and constructed representation.

"The First Nature is the nature filtered through the human semiosis, through the interpretation in our social and personal conscience. This is the categorised nature. The Second Nature changes as a result of material processes, and once more, this is a material translation in the shape of a real semiotic translation, because this interconnects the Zero and the First (or Third), controlling Nature Zero on the grounds of imaginary nature. The Third Nature is purely theoretical or artistic, non-natural nature, building on the grounds of the First or even Third natures with the help of the Second Nature." (Kalevi Kull)



In the above model we see how the pure and wild nature (Nature 0) feeds through our interpretation (Nature 1) into idealisation (Nature 3) which generates the Altered environment (Nature 2) to imitate the pure and wild (Nature 0).

In simple words, nature can be understood as a semiotic process, meaning that we can consider it a complex system of signs, meanings and communication processes; these implies the presence of biological processes that are not merely mechanical and chemical ones, but also semiotic once, involving the production and interpretation of signs by all living organisms, including us.

This brings us briefly into the field of Ecosemiotics; that is the study of how organisms (humans included) interpret and respond to the signs in their environment, and how this interpretation influences both the ecological balance and evolution itself. Without considering semiotic processes it is not possible to fully understand ecology, because all living organisms interact physically with their environment, interpret it and give meanings, and this influences their behaviour and interactions. We can then see how ecosystems bring together energetic and material relations as a network of communication, meanings and interpretation; which resulted in the classification of nature into 4 aspects based on our perception.

^{4*} Roepstorff Andreas, Bubandt Nils, Kull Kalevi (eds.) 2003. *Imagining Nature: Practices of Cosmology and Identity*. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press.



Natura-Naturans - Nature as an autonomous entity and as a creator. The nature that acts, evolves and changes independently from human actions. An active and dynamic force that follows its own rules and processes. At a semiological level this is an ensemble of primary semiotic processes, where organisms interact among themselves and the environment in ways that are not mediated by humans.



Natura-Naturata: Nature as it is perceived by humans, a static and already shaped entity, viewed as an end product, a reality that can be observed, studied and described. Perceived as an object of contemplation or use by humans. At a semiological level this nature is where human perception and cultural interpretation give meaning to nature. A result of how the human mind codifies and interprets the natural world.



Natura Denaturata: Nature altered by human interventions, the outcome of human activities that transform the natural environment into something different, often for economic or practical purposes. This includes agriculture, cities and other environments modified by humans. At a semiological level, the signs and meanings given to nature are strongly influenced by culture and technology. This is a testimony of the human semiotic processes to re-interpret and transform the natural world according to human needs and desires.



Type 3 - Natura-Natura: Nature as uncontaminated and primitive, idealised as a state of original purity and untouched by human influence. A romantic vision of nature as a paradise lost or source of harmony and beauty. Or as an object to analyse, research, study. Two processes that imply detachment from reality for scientific or artistic purposes. At a semiological level this reflects an idealisation, something existing in the human minds, projecting human needs and fears towards an imagined uncontaminated world.

What does this imply?

We cannot separate nature from the cultural semiotic interpretations. We interact with the natural environment and interpret it, and we model it through both signs and meanings. This means that proposing support and coaching methodologies that involve nature must consider both ecological and semiotic/cultural processes. The differences we see between the four types of nature shows us that we need to re-evaluate both our perception and interaction with the natural world. As we may believe that we are fostering belonging and affiliation to the uncontaminated and pure nature (Type 0) we actually can't break out (and should not) from the psychological and cultural factors that foster our own perception of nature (Type 1), whereas we are surrounded by altered nature (type 2) through agricultural land, city parks and other alterations, then we can be led towards developing a detached view (Type 3) of nature through the arts, imagining an Arcadia, a Garden of Eden of goddess and plenty; or a scientific god-like view on the perfect interaction of parts and particles of living organisms, distorting and detaching from nature's true nature.

The outcome is that the eco-coach mostly operates around Type 1 and Type 3, facilitating and mediating the understanding, contemplation, interpretation (semiosis) of nature; while considering the empirical and science-based aspects of biochemistry, and seeking active imagination as a means for inner communication, understanding, growth and development of the client.

Interaction with the Inside-Out World

We often hear as an explanation to events or behaviours “it’s human nature” or more broadly “it’s in their nature” understood as something that is permanent and fixed, and nothing can be done about it, but what does “our nature” actually mean? Here is important to understand how organisms (including us) perceive and interact with the surrounding world, as elaborated by biology professor Von Uexküll, who described these perceptions and interactions with three words - Umwelt, Eigenwelt, Innenwelt, which mean:

Umwelt: is the subjective environmental reality of an organism, how we perceive the world through our senses; a dog has a different perception than humans because of the developed sense of smell, the dog’s Umwelt is full of scents that we are not able to perceive.

Eigenwelt: This is the internal world, how an organism perceives itself. This includes our awareness, consciousness, emotions, thoughts, if we think about how we feel we are exploring the Eigenwelt.

Innenwelt: The biological structures that support the perception of the world, like our neural system and its interpretation of the outside world, seeing a light and interpreting it as colours and shapes, Innenwelt.

The Umwelt is how we perceive the outside world, the Eigenwelt is how we perceive ourselves and the Innenwelt is how our bodies are configured to understand the world. All living organisms live in a subjective reality based on their perception capacities and internal structures. The world perception of a tick is based on heat signs and butyric acid, limited but perfect for its survival.

The Functional Cycle

The functional cycle is the relation between stimulus and response, which is how organisms interact with their world. This is how organisms perceive and respond to signals from the environment:

1. **The perceptive network** (what it perceives)
2. **The effective network** (what the organism does in response to the perception)

There is a structured relationship between organisms and their world, organisms are perfectly adapted to their surrounding environment, this adaptation is modelled through sensory and motor capabilities. All parts of an organism have a purpose, so every biological function aims towards the realisation of the

5* Von Uexküll “A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans: With a Theory of Meaning” (2010)

organisms' purposes. This helps us understand that all organisms are reactive and all interpret the signs of their Umwelt and act based on those meanings; making meanings to the elements of their Umwelt based on their needs and capacities. For a human a flower is attractive, for a bee its food.

This model proves that organisms are not mere machines driven by the laws of physics and chemistry, this offers a holistic vision where organisms construct their world through interactions and perceptions, making organisms integrated units operative within their Umwelt.

Life in Every Form

Now we take a small step into biosemiotics, fathered by biologist Hoffmeyer, who explored how to understand life, and how life uses signs, symbols and significance to communicate, organise and evolve. Life itself is connected to processes of meaning-making. Living organisms are biological beings and semiotic entities that use signs and signals to interact with their environment and among themselves. All beings, from cells to complex ecosystems use signs to communicate; from the obvious signs used by animals up to the chemical and genetic signals inside the organisms. Communication is not limited to visible behaviours, it happens at every level of biological organisation. Look at the DNA, this is not just a genetic code that determines the construction of proteins, it is also a semiotic code, directing growth and development of an organism, mediating the interactions with the environment, making interpretation and response to internal and external signs an essential part of life.

So if every organism lives in a subjective world of signs and meaning that is unique to their species, this is built by the perceptions and interpretations of that very organism. Subjectivity is the capacity of interpreting the environment in a unique way. All life interacts with the world combining signs and meanings according to their biology and Umwelt. This is why in our line of work you will see often the term biosphere, and semiosphere, which is the whole environment where all the processes of meaning-making happen. This also describes the cultural space of our species' communication, showing how our planet is a huge communication network where all organisms contribute with their flow of information. The semiosphere includes all organisms and their communication processes. Concluding that all life evolves, not only through natural selection, but also through the evolution of signs and meanings systems. Evolution is more than physical adaptation, this happens through interaction and the coevolution of sign systems. Species adapt to their physical environment and coevolve in sharing signs and signals that go beyond classic physical and chemical mechanisms. This includes informative processes that guide the organisation and behaviours of all organisms.

6* *Signs of Meaning in the Universe (Advances in Semiotics)* by Jesper Hoffmeyer (1997-02-22)

7* "Semiosphere" Jurij Mihajlovic Lotman. 2022

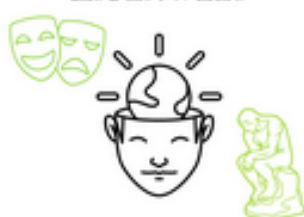
Concluding

UMWELT



The surrounding world and outer environment experienced and lived by an organism and its interactions. All creatures have a unique Umwelt based on the senses, capabilities and needs, determined by perceptive processes; this concerns sensorial and practical interaction with the outside world; everything we can perceive and touch in our physical environment.

EIGENWELT



The internal individual perception, the inside subjective world, how creatures perceive and interpret themselves, thoughts, emotions, states; consciousness, self-awareness and self-reflection, including identity. The subjective world of experiences and meanings that individuals give to these experiences. As humans this includes questioning emotions and thoughts and finding meaning in being.

INNENWELT



The physiological internal world of an organism, how the body works internally. Including the biological and neurological processes that happen inside an organism, and influence perception and interaction with the environment. For example hunger, pain, thirst, as part of the Innenwelt. This includes functions like physical stimulation, body reactions and survival mechanisms, concerning internal processes that influence our behaviours connected to physical stimulation.

se these perceptions and create a sense of belonging to nature, and the Innenwelt can be our physical and biological interaction with nature.

Those 3 worlds are intertwined and interact to shape the global experience of all organisms. The **Umwelt** offers sensory stimulations from the outside, interpreted at a subjective level in the **Eigenwelt**, and the **Innenwelt** with its physical processes influence both perception of the outer world and how we feel internally. When hungry (Innenwelt) we may change how we perceive food around us (Umwelt) and that influences our mental state (Eigenwelt).

This allows us to understand how individuals perceive and interact with the inner and outer world, exploring how we give meaning to our existence through interactions with our environment, the inner world and self-consciousness. Moreover, this shows the affiliation between Self and the Natural Environment; the human Umwelt can include a perception of the biosphere that reflects ecological values, while the Elgenwelt represents how we interiorise these perceptions and create a sense of belonging to nature, and the Innenwelt can be our physical and biological interaction with nature.

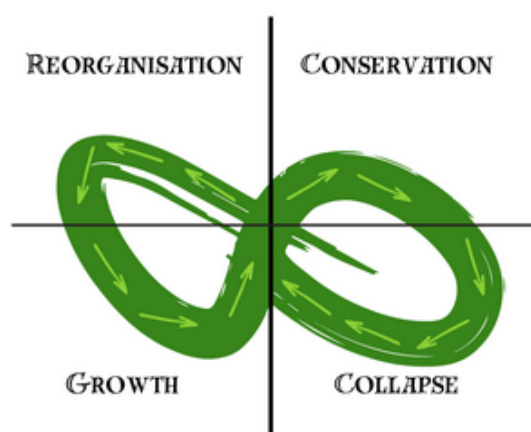
4. Nature's Governance - Panarchy

"To overcome the dualism between the psyche and nature is really to remember that the human mind isn't limited to a human bubble but rather reaches outside the human world to connect with the entire cosmos."

Andy Fisher

The Ecological Panarchy is a model that aims at explaining how every social and natural system is interconnected, as well as how these change and adapt over time. The name originates from the Greek God Pan, who symbolises nature and unpredictable change. The idea is that we are unable to fully understand a system, such as a community or an ecosystem from a single point of view or on a simple time-space scale. To be able to fully understand it we need to look at how this works on different scales, and to understand how they influence and impact each other.

The Adaptive Cycles



The main idea of panarchy is that every system goes through 4 main phases, forming the adaptive cycle:

1. **Growth:** The system grows rapidly by using resources and opportunities.
2. **Conservation:** The system reaches stability, resources are stored.
3. **Collapse:** The system becomes too rigid and can't sustain itself anymore, here many things start to fall apart.
4. **Reorganisation:** The system reorganises, finding new ways to function and create opportunities.

Interconnected Scales:

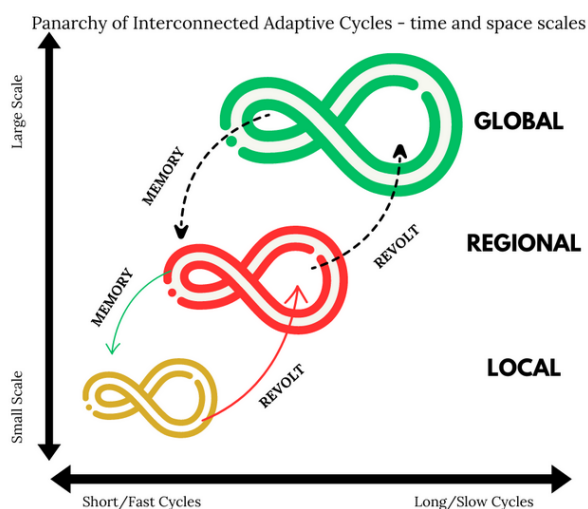
Panarchy tells how these adapting cycles don't happen alone, rather they are connected on different scales, both in time and space; for example:

A forest goes through a cycle of **growth, stability, collapse**, then comes along a wildfire then followed by **reorganisation**, which could be the growth of new trees. Within that same forest we have small scales, for example a single tree, with its own adaptive cycle; and at the same time the tree is part of a larger scale, the landscape, which can be a forest, and even larger, within a mountain range, which goes through slower adaptive cycles as the scale increases.

Connecting Cycles and Scales

2 basic concepts explain the mutual influence of adaptive cycles on different scales.

1. **Revolt:** The smaller systems, such as a small range of trees, experience change, and this impacts the larger scale, destabilising the whole system (*the forest*).
2. **Memory:** The larger system (*forest, mountains*) keeps a “memory” of the structures and rules that worked before. This helps smaller systems to reorganise after the collapse, ensuring a return to stability (*for example after a fire*).



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The Importance of Change

Change is inevitable and it is part of the nature of any system. Sometimes systems do need to collapse to allow new growth and innovation. The process of destruction and renewal is crucial for the resilience of systems and the capacity for survival and long-term prosperity.

Applying Panarchy

This theory was mainly developed to understand how ecosystems function, nonetheless it has already found its way into economics, social studies and politics. After all, human communities are also ecosystems. For example, in politics, changes that take place locally, like by a municipality, can influence decisions at national level. In economics, small enterprises who try out new goods successfully can influence the whole market. Regardless of where the panarchy principle is applied, the key word here is resilience - the capacity of a system to adapt and reorganise after a crisis. This can help to understand how natural, social and even personal systems can respond to turbulence, and how to regenerate.

To understand and manage complex systems, we need to look at how they interact on different scales, in time and space. These systems go through cycles of growth, stability, collapse and reorganisation, and their resilience strongly depends on how these phases interact on different levels. The ecological panarchy gives us a useful framework for the sustainable management of many aspects of life.

EXAMPLE - The Forest

In all forests there are natural cycles that include the growth of trees, the stabilisation of the ecosystem, disturbance events (such as wildfires) and regeneration. These cycles of growth and destruction are not isolated, they happen on different scales: small groups of trees, the entire forest, or even the whole landscape. At the level of a single group of trees, the adaptation cycle follows the phases of tree growth, consolidation of resources (such as the quality of the soil) , a potential fire that destroys vegetation, and a reorganisation with new trees growing. The smaller the scale the faster the cycle. While at a larger level, the whole forest or mountain range, the adaptive cycle is slower, as the forest as a whole may remain stable for a long time, but a large-scale event, a large wildfire or parasite infestation, can destabilise the whole system.

Should a fire take place in some part of the forest (small scale) this may have limited effects on the rest of the ecosystem. However, if the small fires grow or become more frequent, they could destabilise the whole forest, bringing about a wider collapse (revolt). On the other hand, after a large-scale wildfire, the memory of the ecosystem (seeds that are fire-resistant, species that support regeneration, etc.) help the forest to reorganise and recover, returning the system to a similar state as before the fire (memory).

Through the panarchy model we can find prevention strategies, if we use the example of the forest, this can help us understand that small periodical fires can have a positive impact, and how it is important to get rid of excess flammable materials to prevent more destructive cycles taking place. Or to plan long term interventions on a large scale that consider the climate crisis and the natural cycle of a forest, fostering resilience.

EXAMPLE - A human life

The model is also applicable to a single human life, and this is where this becomes relevant for the purposes of eco-coaching.

Personal Life

All people go through different phases of personal life that reflect the adaptive cycles of panarchy: growth, stability, crisis and reorganisations, which happen on different time scales, on the fast-and-slow cycles, from days or weeks until months or years.

Imagine a person who is starting a new job and how at the beginning of that professional pathway is learning many new skills, is gaining experience, is growing as a person and as professional while gaining competencies, and perhaps coming up with innovative ideas. Then comes stability and accomplishment, the person starts to consolidate the job position, competencies are affirmed, and the tasks start to become more stable and predictable, moreover, the stable salary gives opportunities for some savings as well as long-term planning. But, here comes the crisis, maybe the job is lost, or life priorities have changed, or stagnation and being stuck in a role, the old stable structure starts to break down. Once the crisis is over, that person can have opportunities for reinvention, looking for opportunities, upskill, changing fields, initiating a new growth phase.

Changes in personal life are not isolated, rather they influence and are influenced by bigger levels such as the social context; the professional crisis above can definitely impact family dynamics; changes in routine, stress, new possibilities, which may be tackled through interventions addressing the fast cycle, rapid interventions; and this can bring the person towards inactivity, long-term unemployment, diminished resources and potentially poverty, which can be tackled through interventions that address the slow cycle, long-term interventions.

A small personal change, which may be the decision to resign from a job, can trigger bigger changes and impacts in a person's social life, affecting the lifestyle, or even leading the person to move elsewhere. Whereas, that person's experiences, such as the social network developed, or the gained capabilities can influence the reorganisation phase, helping to use what available opportunities exist to find new solutions, using past experiences as a starting ground.

The principles of panarchy are at the very heart of this eco-coaching manual, as this model was created to understand nature's intrinsic order, only to realise that we ourselves are part of nature, and this system applies to trees, oceans, fungi, just as much as it applied to us, individuals and communities, our own ecosystems; which are connected to all the other existing ones.

5. Active Imagination, The Use of Narratives

"What we need now are new stories to share with each other, new tales to live into the world, which is to say, stories to make real by living our own versions of them." Bill Plotkin

Narratives in coaching are extremely important, as they encourage clients to recall personal stories, to invent them and to share them out loud; this is one of the most powerful approaches to apply to any support profession. A story shared by your client can be very revealing, in both content (what is told) and process (how it is told).

Content	Process
• Impressions and feelings on current or past experiences. • Language patterns, use of specific verbs. • Symbols and metaphors the client adopts. • Content of the story that can be explored through question-structures.	• Choosing what story is chosen to be told and shared. • How the story is told and told, paying attention to the body language and tone. • Expression of emotional and rational patterns.

For all of the above there are of course specific techniques and methodologies that a coach can use to encourage and empower the client to share stories, and that is what we are going to explore in this chapter.

1. What tools you can use to facilitate storytelling during your coaching sessions.
2. How to navigate and explore feelings, impressions, thoughts and identify patterns.
3. To spot the symbols and metaphors the client adopts and the language patterns.
4. Paying attention to the non-verbal language and signs.

Just remember that storytelling is the first and most ancient learning method used by humans, embedded in our cultures since the very beginning of our species. Stories allowed learning, development of values, sharing and therefore survival, thanks to their teachings, warnings, morality, as well as celebration and identity. Allowing to share vital information to let the early communities live and thrive with each other and with the world around them and pass on the stories to the next generations..

KAVKi

Have you read Harry Potter? Do you know why this saga is popular all over the world regardless of cultural background, and languages? After all, it is such a classic British story about a typical boarding school, plus magic. There is one tiny secret in these sorcery infused pages; It is called KAVKi; which is an acronym for; Kinaesthetic, Auditive, Visual, Kinaesthetic Internal. This model is mostly applied to learning, stating that each one of us has one or two preferred or most used learning styles:

8* Bill Plotkin, *Nature and the Human Soul: Cultivating Wholeness and Community in a Fragmented World*

Kinaesthetic : Learns by feeling; either emotional attachment to learning, or hands-on learning by doing.

Auditive: Learn from listening and hearing explanations and information from others.

Visual: Learns from watching, this may be reading, or observing how something is done.

Kinaesthetic Internal: Learns through an internal dialogue, self-explanation, metaphor.

Of course we are all able to use all 4 styles, yet there are usually two special ones; the first is our favourite one, the one that is easiest for us to access; the second one is the most used, the style we were mostly trained to us since childhood; quite often visual or auditory due to formal education. How is this helpful in a coaching context? Well, our learning styles also reflect our language and way we speak, and the unconscious choice of verbs we use in our everyday interactions and conversation can reveal to a very attentive coach what our styles are, which can be of great to support to the coach to assign tasks, to adapt the language to the clients' one and thus improve rapport, and to identify language patterns.

For example, if a client says "I hear this voice telling me to take that step forward" (Kinaesthetic Internal/Auditive) a social and eco-coach replying with a question "How do you see that step?" (Visual) may cause some difficulties for the client to fully describe their view, as the coach used a visual verb; instead the coach could ask "How do you feel when you hear this voice?" (Kinaesthetic/Auditive) already closer to the clients' internal model, and making it easier for the client to answer.

Just keep in mind that as parts of the human species we all have the KAVKi, and are of course able to understand, express and learn through each one of those styles, often combining them. And to consider that there are preferred and most-used systems empowers and encourages us to share our stories, and here is where this is a most useful background tool for a coach to use. Below are some examples:

Kinaesthetic		Auditive	
Client	Coach	Client	Coach
"I felt..."	<i>Can you describe those feelings?</i>	I heard...	<i>And how did that sound to you?</i>
"I tackled..."	<i>What did that feel like?</i>	I listened...	<i>How would you reply to that?</i>
"I was exploring..."	<i>And what did you find?</i>	Sounded like...	<i>Was it a loud or a low sound?</i>
Visual		Kinaesthetic Internal ^{9*}	
"I saw..."	<i>What did it look like?</i>	"I thought"	<i>"From where was that thought born?"</i>
"I watched..."	<i>What did you observe?</i>	"Said to myself..."	<i>How was the flow of the conversation?</i>

^{9*} Keep in mind that Kinaesthetic Internal very seldomly comes up alone, this is almost always combined with another style. (often the most-used).

Remember that coaches are not telepaths, and part of the verbal patterns will be often wild guesses, this takes a lot of test-and-trial until you get it right; the best way to grasp your clients' preferred and most used styles is to let them speak as much as possible, and to fully invest in your active listening coaching competence, to spot, identify and understand those verbal patterns and to try to match them the best you can with your questions and in your conversation with the client, to make the session and process as constructive, positive and comfortable for your client. Which takes us to Storytelling.. \

Fairy Tales

One of the most ancient forms of teaching youths, especially children, were myths, legends and of course fairy tales for the younger ones, an ancestral formula to teach values, ethics, morality, justice and other virtues. As well as something that has become a fairly powerful coaching tool when it comes to empowering clients to tell their stories. So, let's explore what are the benefits of using fairy tales.

1. By nature fairy tales contain a lesson to be learnt, a moral teaching, it may be about justice, fairness, triumph of good over evil, bravery etc.
2. Find their roots somewhere in the past and have a happy ending.
3. Contain archetypes coming from our background and cultures.

Sometimes a client may not want to share something that could be very private or has difficulties to describe, in that case you can ask the client to transform that event, story, experience into a fairy tale and to actually write it down (or tell it out loud, or draw), this will be of great support to detach and dissociate from that event and to express it metaphorically, therefore guaranteeing safety and privacy, while enabling the creation of a simple story rooted in the past and with a happy ending, even if the situation is not over yet, the client will have to imagine a possible way that ends well. Then the client will be able to share the story with the coach. This story can well be completely out of context, as the coach will have no idea what a "dragon" or "castle" symbolise and are metaphors for, and yet still structure the questions and conversation around exploring those elements without actually revealing their true significance, which anyways will make sense for the client, which is what truly matters.

Here you can use different types of props if your client is not exactly the creative type, or you want to gamify the process a bit, and adopt some cards like the ones below, or borrow them from one of the many storytelling board and card games.



Above are just some examples, of course you are more than welcome to create your own deck of cards, and add as many elements as you wish from your own cultural myths, legends and tales. You can either ask the client to choose up to 3 cards to insert in the story they will create, or to gamify it even further to give them a random selection, to foster even further their capacity to create metaphors and connections.

Instructions:

1. Start with "Once upon a time" and finish with "and lived happily ever after."
2. Choose/use 3 elements from the deck of "Fairy Tale Cards"
3. Make sure that there is a protagonist of the story and an antagonist
4. Introduce an element of struggle between the two opposing sides
5. Ensure that there is a moral to the story and teaching.

These are the basics, if you want to go more advanced, depending on your client's styles and preferences you can also add to include a specific symbolic number (like the 7 dwarves, the 9 rings etc.) to include minimum 2 fairy tale characters, 1 landscape, and 1 magical object that are essential to the story, the limits to the possible variations are infinite and up to your flow and process with your client. Moreover, the client can choose if to write it down, to draw, or simply make it up by speaking out loud, the choice is always theirs; and then use all the coaching techniques at your disposal to support the client in extracting learnings, new discoveries, awareness from the story they have just told, and this can be completely context free, as it does not really matter if you understand or not what is the topic at hand.

The Monomyth

"Imagination may be the most essential, uniquely human capacity - creating both the dead-end crises of our time and the doorway through them." Bill Plotkin

What if we told you that almost every story, myth, legend and tale ever told and shared across time and space by our species is following pretty much the same structure? This was the discovery of Joseph Campbell, well explained in his book "A hero with a thousand faces". His theories were groundbreaking and served as a base for novels and movies from the 1960s onwards. One may wonder why a saga like Star Wars is so popular across so many countries and cultures in the world, that is because George Lucas did study the works of Campbell and applied it to his stories, thus making them relevant and somewhat familiar to any human culture. Until today, as Campbell's theory, The Monomyth, entered the world of coaching.

At the beginning of this chapter we promised to go deeper into the importance of narratives and storytelling in coaching, and decided to leave this model as the last one to present here, as the monomyth will become one of the main and strongest tools in your eco-coach toolbox.



We are looking at a circular model, a cycle divided into two parts, an upper part, described as the Known World, and a lower part, the Unknown world, divided into two by the Threshold, and then are the twelve steps that every character in every story takes, until the story is completed and now we are going to explore each one.

1. **The Known World:** This is the comfort zone, the known world, the comfortable or at least habitual daily life where the main character dwells and is very well acquainted with.
2. **The Unknown World:** This is a challenging zone, a world that operates with different rules and challenges the habits and what was known and worked well in the known world.
3. **The Threshold:** The invisible line that separates the two worlds, and marks the border between known and unknown, marking the character's step into the adventure.
4. **Call for Adventure:** The character receives a call for adventure, an opportunity, something that needs to be done, the right thing to do, pushing the character to leave it all and go on a quest.
5. **Refusal of the Call:** The initial reaction of the character is to refuse the call, not wanting to abandon the comfort zone of the known world for something unknown, therefore, rejects.
6. **Mentor:** However, a mentor comes along to guide the character into accepting the adventure, find the confidence and courage to set off into the unknown world and begin the quest.
7. **Crossing the Threshold:** The character takes the conscious step to go into the unknown.
8. **Friends and Foes:** At the very start the main character is tested and meets the first friends and the first foes, overcoming new challenges and familiarising with this new world.
9. **Temptation:** At some point there comes the temptation to leave and abandon the quest, fear, uncertainty, loss of motivation, the character risks a change of heart.
10. **The Dark Cave:** Nonetheless the character steps into the dark cave, the main challenge and reason why this adventure started in the first place and faces the main foe of this mission.
11. **The Reward:** Overcoming the dark cave, the character finds a prize and is rewarded for the accomplished victory and honoured.
12. **The Journey Back:** At some point the character needs to take the decision to return, might not want to, now that this world has become familiar and perhaps vanquished.
13. **Crossing the Threshold:** The quest needs to be completed and the threshold once more crossed.
14. **Welcome Home:** The character is gloriously welcomed to the known world, as a victor, although now the concept of the known world has expanded into what once was the unknown world.
15. **Sharing the Gift:** The reward, the reason for going onto a quest is shared with the rest in the known world, who also benefit and enjoy the accomplishments of the main character.



This can be applied to almost any story or legend ever told; from Homer's Iliad to Lord of the Rings; from the Gold of the Nibelungen saga to Narnia, all share and follow this structure, oftentimes each character in the story have their own Monomyth-structured story within the wider tale.

By now you can already see the potential for coaching in the Monomyth structure, and how this can be applied into promoting the use of narratives and storytelling during the sessions, and as a matter of fact, the model can easily be applied also to the fairy tales approach we just saw above. It is enough to ask the client, concerning their goals and purpose of the session, where do they stand now in the monomyth circle, then the coach, through powerful questions, can encourage the unveiling of the story of how the client reached that stage, and what awaits them further into the journey.

6. Body and Senses Connection

"Other animals are in a constant and mostly unmediated relation with their sensory surroundings, think with the whole of their bodies."

David Abram

Most members of our species have unlearned learning from our senses and bodies, although these can be tremendous means for learning, growth and development. This is where embodiment coaching comes into play; a standalone format and style of coaching with plenty of literature and materials on this topic, here we will try to keep it short.

Our cultures do not know how to communicate with our senses and bodies, which is a part of our recent distancing from natural processes and cycles, and overly estimating the importance of our logical and rational mind over everything. Nonetheless, as members of the animal kingdom we of course possess all senses and obviously physical bodies; these are great sources of information, fantastic tools for learning and developing, and something we need to be whole, if only we can re-learn how to be more complete, able to rely on our rational mind and not only.

Embodiment coaching, as suggested by the name, connects clients to their bodies, thus increasing the access to awareness and their possibilities to experience and learn, by exploring, studying and feeling the body signals and communication, understanding what is being told to us and how, through our physiology, senses and bodies. This is something that has been very underestimated in educational and support processes until now but it is gradually becoming more supported and acknowledged by different support professions and practices, this type of coaching guides clients towards balance by integrating emotions and feelings as well as bodily sensations into setting and reaching goals. Most people are disconnected from their bodies, and this connection is something that needs work and cultivation towards gradually building trust towards the body's signals, language and messages.

Our bodies are wise, have evolved their structure, rhythms and functions since hundreds of thousands of years, developing their own internal language and communication for the benefit of our life and survival, by holding a natural blueprint of what our wholeness should look like, in terms of health, happiness and safety. Through embodiment coaching we can offer more reconnection, wholeness and increase the clients' capabilities for self-exploration, awareness and resources to reach their desired future.

We all had at some point of our lives intuitions, gut feelings, sixth senses, sometimes right sometimes not and yet we all have them, and often dismissed them as they did not make any sense, or simply were irrational. If only we allowed some time to explore those sensations and analyse how that impacted our breathing pattern at that specific time, the speed of the heart beat, the body's heat or cold, we would be able to learn a lot about how we operate and function, and what exactly the body is trying to tell us, and to learn to give meanings to something as simple as our inhaling and exhaling, heart pace, body posture and physiology, how much this can tell us. As fear, desire, hope, joy manifest themselves in our minds as much as in our physiology. Just run a small test. "Gradually tighten your muscles starting from your feet and slowly climb up your body, through your ankles, knees, thighs, buttocks, abdomen, back, arms, hands, neck... until every muscle is tight, and let your face look upwards, repeating in your mind "yes, yes, yes", as you are in this posture, try to have a negative thought.

Embodiment coaching is a new branch that combines body-work and mindfulness, and there isn't yet a unified definition, however, it is agreed that this format operates by being present with the sensations in your body. Here the client is presented with the existing feelings within their bodies and what thoughts emerge through that exploration, and then coaching tools are applied to go deeper into the thoughts and feelings the client presents. Embodiment means to be present with the bodily sensations, and applicable to many fields. To give you one more evidence of the benefits this can bring, consider how engaging the senses impacts our psychology and neurology:

Touch - Creation of bonds, Tranquility, Reduce Stress, Heart Regulation

Taste - motional-Neural connection, mechanisms of award and aversion, reduce anxiety

Listen - Attention Restoration, Attachment and Linkage, Stress recovery, relaxation

Smell - Impact on mood, behavior, and cognition, calmness and alertness, internal verbalisation

Look - Reduce anxiety, reduce stress, increase attention,

7. Rituals and Rites of Passage

Across cultures and centuries, rituals and rites of passage have been fundamental to human existence, reflecting our need to navigate life's inevitable transitions with intention and meaning. These ceremonies—whether grand or simple, sacred or secular—serve as guideposts, marking the moments when individuals move from one stage of life to another. Births, coming-of-age, marriage, and death, among others, have been universally recognized through ritualized practices that connect the individual to their community, their identity, and the world around them. A significant figure in the study of rites of passage, illuminated the structure underlying these transformative ceremonies. In his groundbreaking work, *The Rites of Passage* (1909), he identified a three-stage process inherent in these rituals: **Separation**, **Transformation**, and **Return**. These stages are more than a sequence; they are a psychological and social framework that facilitates growth, change, and integration.

The Three Stages of Rites of Passage

1. Separation: Letting go of the old self

The journey begins with the individual being removed from their everyday environment, signaling the start of a transformative process, stepping away from the familiar—whether physically, socially, or symbolically. It is a departure from the known and a conscious act of leaving behind old identities, roles, or ways of being. For instance, a young person moving out of their childhood home to attend university undergoes a modern form of separation. Or in Indigenous cultures, adolescents may leave their homes to undertake a vision quest, entering the wilderness alone to seek spiritual guidance and clarity. By stepping away from the familiar, the individual creates the psychological space necessary for transformation to occur.

2. Transformation: Facing challenges and embracing change

This is the core of the rite, the individual is no longer who they were but has not yet become who they will be. This is the stage of challenges and growth, where obstacles must be confronted and overcome. It is in this crucible of change that transformation occurs. The obstacles faced often require courage, resilience, and introspection, fostering personal growth and a sense of accomplishment. Traditional examples include initiation rituals or solitary retreats, while modern equivalents might include demanding training programs or personal growth experiences. Outdoor education programs, such as those practiced in the United States, challenge young participants with tasks like navigating wilderness terrain or surviving in nature. These activities are not merely physical but also mental, encouraging participants to confront fears and limitations.

Transformation is the moment of change—where the old self is left behind, and the new self begins to emerge.

3. Return: Integrating the new self into the community

The final stage marks the individual's return to their community, transformed and ready to embrace a new role or status. The crucial part is the individual's acceptance into a new role or identity. This reintegration often involves a celebration or acknowledgment of the individual's growth, affirming their place in the social structure. Examples range from ancient tribal ceremonies welcoming a new hunter to contemporary milestones like weddings or retirement celebrations: After completing their wilderness challenges, participants return to their families and communities, often with a sense of pride and maturity, recognized now as adults.

The return phase solidifies the transformation, allowing the individual to apply their newfound insights and strengths within a social context.

Why rites of passage matter

Rites of passage are more than symbolic markers; they are structured responses to life's challenges and transitions. Without them, individuals can feel unmoored during times of significant change, leading to confusion, resistance, or a failure to fully embrace their new roles. Through these rituals, cultures provide individuals with tools to process the complexity of change, offering a sense of purpose and clarity. Rites of passage historically served as markers of social order, delineating roles and expectations within a community. By clearly defining transitions—such as childhood to adulthood, or singlehood to marriage—these rituals helped maintain stability and cohesion. For instance, a boy returning from his first hunt was formally recognized as a man, with all the responsibilities and privileges that entailed. From a psychological perspective, rites of passage provide a structured way to process change. Life transitions often involve uncertainty, fear, or loss. By incorporating challenges and rituals, these rites offer individuals a sense of agency and purpose, helping them navigate difficult periods with clarity. They also serve as a communal acknowledgment of personal growth, reinforcing self-worth and belonging.

What makes rituals and rites of passage remarkable is their universality. While the specifics vary dramatically across cultures—ranging from Indigenous ceremonies like vision quests to contemporary practices such as graduation ceremonies—they all serve a similar purpose: helping individuals and communities navigate transformation. Whether spiritual, emotional, or practical, these ceremonies tap into a shared human need to mark the passage of time and meaningfully engage with change.

Modern Context: What's Missing?

While remnants of rites of passage exist today—such as graduation ceremonies, weddings, or milestone birthdays—they often lack the depth and transformative elements of traditional practices. Celebrations, like high school graduations or weddings, may focus more on external pomp than the internal journey of separation, challenge, and renewal. Van Gennep's insights remind us of the profound psychological and social importance of these stages. Without consciously acknowledging and embracing them, we risk losing an essential tool for navigating life's transitions, leaving individuals unprepared for the responsibilities and challenges of their next phase: A stag or hen night, while a communal marker of transition to marriage, often lacks the symbolic or reflective challenges that might prepare individuals emotionally for their new roles. Without clear markers of separation and transformation, individuals may struggle to fully let go of outdated roles or attitudes. This can lead to challenges in adulthood, where unprocessed behaviors or mindsets from previous life stages persist.

In a fast-paced, ever-changing world, rituals and rites of passage offer a counterbalance—a moment to pause, reflect, and reconnect. They remind us that transitions are not merely events to endure but opportunities to grow. By revisiting and reviving the transformative potential of these practices, we can reclaim their power to guide individuals and communities through the complexities of modern life. This framework by van Gennep is more than an academic observation; it is a roadmap for making life's changes meaningful, purposeful, and deeply connected to both the individual and their society.

PART 2 Eco-coaching Tools

We are excited to introduce you to 9 tools designed to help you begin practicing your eco-coaching approach. While these tools may seem simple and intuitive at first glance, they hold the potential to resonate deeply, touching on profound emotions and experiences. For this reason, it is essential to use them with care, mindfulness, and self-awareness.

Before offering any of these techniques to a client, it is crucial that you first try them on yourself—preferably multiple times and in a variety of contexts. This will not only deepen your understanding of how they work but also prepare you for what your clients might experience when they engage with these methods. Some of these tools come as complete, ready-to-use scripts that can be easily implemented, while others provide guidelines, leaving room for adaptation to your unique style, pace, and the needs of your clients.

It is important to emphasize that using these tools requires a foundation in coaching, therapy, counseling, or a similar support profession. If you have not undergone at least basic or intermediate training in these fields, we strongly advise against using these tools with clients. However, you are welcome to explore them for your personal growth and self-reflection. Remember, these tools can uncover deep wounds, and their impact must be understood and managed responsibly.

Lastly, for outdoor activities involving these tools, ensure that participants sign a **Release and Waiver of Liability for Outdoor Activities Agreement**. This step protects both you and your clients, setting a professional standard and maintaining ethical boundaries.

Above all, approach these tools with wisdom and caution. Use them at the right time, with the right clients, and only after ensuring that you are fully prepared to guide the process responsibly.

We are going to introduce you these methods:

1. Find your place in Nature (A place that speaks to me!)
2. Mandala
3. The Medicine walk (Intermediate level)
4. Monomyth in Coaching (Intermediate level)
5. Multisensorial Walks (Beginner level)
6. Rituals and Rites of Passage
7. The Heroic Journey (Difficult)
8. Embodiment (Intermediate/Difficult)
9. Ecological Panarchy (Intermediate)
10. OUTDOORS DISCLAIMER

Tool 1: Find your place in Nature (A place that speaks to me!)

"Nature composes some of her loveliest poems for the microscope and the telescope." Theodore Roszak

In our busy modern lives, it's easy to lose touch with the natural world. Many of us spend our days surrounded by buildings, screens, and schedules, disconnected from the calm and wisdom that nature can offer. The method "Find Your Place in Nature" is a gentle and simple activity that helps individuals reconnect with the natural world—not as something to be observed from a distance, but as something to be experienced and felt on a deep, personal level.

This exercise is about building a meaningful relationship with nature, treating it as a partner rather than just a backdrop to our lives. It encourages participants to slow down, listen to their surroundings, and find a spot in nature that resonates with them. This process can bring clarity, peace, or simply a sense of grounding. Whether you're searching for answers to a specific question or just looking for a moment of stillness, this activity can open the door to insights and emotions you might not expect. Even if you don't consider yourself a "nature person," this method is for everyone. It's not about knowing the names of plants or animals—it's about being open to what nature has to say to you in its own way.

Step-by-Step:

1. Preparing for the Activity

Before you begin, it's important to set the right tone:

Explain the Purpose: Share with participants that the activity is about finding a connection with nature. Emphasize that there's no right or wrong way to do it. This is a personal experience, and each person will take away something unique.

Encourage Simplicity: Ask participants to leave behind distractions like phones, watches, or even their expectations. The goal is to be present in the moment.

Set Expectations: Let participants know that the process might feel unfamiliar at first, and that's okay. This is about exploration, not perfection.

2. Beginning the Activity

Take participants to an outdoor space. It doesn't have to be a forest or a remote wilderness—any natural environment, like a park or a quiet field, will work. Once there:

- Ask participants to walk slowly and notice their surroundings. Encourage them to tune into their senses: the sounds, smells, textures, and sights around them.
- Guide them to look for a specific place that "calls" to them. This might be a tree, a rock, a patch of grass, or even a spot with a certain view. There's no need to overthink it—just let their intuition guide them.

3. Finding and Connecting with the Place

Once participants find their place, invite them to:

- Sit down, stand, or simply be present in that spot.
- Reflect on why they were drawn to it. They might silently ask themselves:
 1. "Why did this place call to me?"
 2. "What does it want to tell me?"
 3. "How do I feel being here?"
- Encourage them to listen, not just with their ears but with their whole being. What thoughts, feelings, or sensations arise? There's no need to force answers—just be open to whatever comes.

4. Showing Gratitude to the Place

When participants feel ready to leave, ask them to take a moment to thank the place. This could be done silently or out loud, in their own words. Gratitude helps to honor the experience and acknowledge the connection they've made.

- Suggest they leave a small gift for the place as a token of appreciation. This could be something simple, like a pebble, a flower, or even a heartfelt word spoken to the space.

5. Returning to the Group

On the way back, encourage participants to walk mindfully, reflecting on their experience.

Debriefing

Once everyone has returned, hold a group discussion to help participants process and share their experiences:

- Let participants know that sharing is completely voluntary. If they do share, they can focus on their feelings or the overall experience, without revealing any private details of their dialogue with the place.

- Use broad, open-ended questions to guide the discussion, such as:

"How did you feel during the activity?"

"How easy or hard was it to find your place?"

"How did you know it was the right place?"

"What did you notice on your way back?"

- Emphasize that there are no wrong answers. Each person's experience is valid and valuable.

Potential emotional reactions and sensitivities

This activity, while simple on the surface, can evoke deep feelings. For some participants, the stillness and connection with nature might stir emotions they didn't expect. For example:

Feeling Overwhelmed: Some might feel a strong emotional reaction—grief, joy, or even relief—especially if they've been carrying unprocessed feelings.

Self-Doubt: Others might worry that they didn't "do it right" or that their experience wasn't as profound as others'. Reassure them that the value of the activity lies in simply showing up and being present.

Memories and Insights: The quiet and solitude might bring up old memories or surprising insights. Let participants know this is normal and can be a part of their personal growth. As a facilitator, be ready to support anyone who feels unsettled or needs extra time to process. Remind them that the purpose of the activity is not to fix anything or force conclusions, but to open a space for connection and reflection.

"Find Your Place in Nature" is more than just a walk in the park. It's an invitation to pause, listen, and reconnect—with nature, with yourself, and with something larger than yourself. Whether participants find answers to deep questions or simply enjoy a moment of peace, this activity offers a unique and meaningful way to experience the natural world. It teaches us that nature is not just a backdrop to our lives but a partner in our journey, always ready to guide and support us if we take the time to listen.

Tool 2: The Mandala

"Change the prevailing mode of consciousness and you change the world." Theodore Roszak

The mandala is a rich and symbolic artistic tool with roots in many cultures and traditions, often representing balance, unity, and harmony. The word "mandala" itself comes from the ancient Sanskrit language, meaning "circle" or "center," signifying wholeness and the interconnectedness of life. Mandalas are not only visually striking but also deeply meditative, offering individuals an opportunity to slow down and focus inward. When crafted using natural materials, mandalas take on an even more profound meaning. By engaging with elements from the natural world—such as leaves, flowers, stones, or bark—participants create an art piece that reflects the rhythms and beauty of nature itself. This process transforms the mandala into a bridge between the individual and their environment, fostering a meaningful connection to the earth, enhancing mindfulness, and encouraging creative self-expression.

Ecopsychology explores the relationship between human beings and the natural world, emphasizing how a deeper connection to nature can support mental well-being, emotional growth, and a sense of belonging. Mandalas, when created in nature, align seamlessly with ecopsychology by facilitating an immersive experience with the environment. Through the deliberate gathering of natural objects and their arrangement into a harmonious design, participants engage in a therapeutic act that celebrates the natural world while fostering a sense of balance within themselves.

In the context of **youth work**, mandalas serve as an accessible and impactful tool to:

Encourage Self-Discovery: Young people can explore their feelings and ideas through the creative process.

Develop Mindfulness: The repetitive and intentional act of creating a mandala helps participants focus on the present moment, reducing stress and anxiety.

Promote Environmental Awareness: Working with natural materials fosters a sense of respect and appreciation for the environment.

Build Resilience and Emotional Regulation: The activity provides a calm space for reflection, helping participants navigate their emotions.

Foster a Sense of Community: Mandalas can also be a group activity, encouraging collaboration and shared experiences.

Benefits of creating Mandalas with natural materials

Young people today face numerous challenges, from digital overload to environmental crises and mental health struggles. Mandala-making is an approachable, nonjudgmental activity that provides a space for reflection and growth. It allows youth to step away from screens and distractions, connect with nature, and explore their creative potential.

1. Deep Connection with Nature:

Gathering natural materials invites participants to observe their surroundings closely, noticing details they may have overlooked. This awareness deepens their connection to the environment and cultivates gratitude for the natural world. Mandala inspires young people to take action in preserving and respecting the environment, fostering eco-consciousness and sustainability.

2. Enhanced Mindfulness and Presence:

The slow, intentional process of creating a mandala focuses the mind on the here and now, promoting a state of calm and clarity. Participants learn to appreciate the small, beautiful details of life, fostering a mindful attitude they can carry beyond the activity. Mandala encourages participants to explore their inner world while developing an outward awareness of their role in the natural environment.

3. Creative Expression:

Mandalas allow for individual creativity and self-expression without the pressure of creating "perfect" art. Each design is unique and personal, reflecting the participant's inner world and their relationship with their surroundings.

4. Symbolic Learning:

The circular form of a mandala symbolizes wholeness, cycles, and interconnection—valuable concepts for youth to explore as they navigate personal growth and relationships.

5. Emotional Balance and Resilience:

The symmetry and order of a mandala can evoke a sense of balance and stability, providing comfort and a constructive outlet for processing emotions. Mandala provides a meditative activity that can improve focus and reduce stress, which are essential skills for personal and academic success.

6. Community Building:

When created in groups, mandala-making fosters collaboration and mutual inspiration. Participants can share their creations, stories, and experiences, strengthening their bonds with each other.

Preparation for the Mandala activity

This guide is designed to help you facilitate a meaningful and engaging activity centered around creating mandalas using natural materials. The process emphasizes exploration, creativity, and connection with the surrounding environment, making it an excellent tool for fostering mindfulness and self-expression. Whether you're working with a group of youth or individuals seeking a deeper bond with nature, this activity offers an accessible way to engage with the natural world and promote a sense of balance and harmony. By preparing thoughtfully and creating an inviting atmosphere, you can ensure participants have a fulfilling and inspiring experience.

1. Familiarize yourself with Mandalas

Research the concept of mandalas if you are new to them. A mandala is a circular design that represents wholeness, often used in spiritual and meditative practices. Nature mandalas are created by arranging natural materials in symmetrical patterns. Reflect on how mandalas can inspire mindfulness, creativity, and a deeper connection to the environment.

2. Create examples for inspiration

Before the session, make a simple nature mandala near the activity area using materials like leaves, flower petals, stones, or bark. This example will help participants understand the concept and spark their creativity.

3. Gather materials

While participants will collect their materials during the activity, you may want to bring a small assortment of natural objects (leaves, stones, shells) as backups in case the environment has limited resources.

4. Choose the right setting

The ideal location is an outdoor area with access to natural materials, such as a park, forest, beach, or garden. If indoors, you can bring natural elements to simulate the experience.

Objectives and impact of the activity

- **Connection with nature:** Deepen participants' appreciation for the natural world by engaging with it directly. Participants become more attuned to the details and beauty of the natural world.
- **Mindfulness:** Encourage participants to slow down and focus on the present moment. The act of gathering materials and arranging them promotes a state of calm and focus.

- **Creativity:** Provide a platform for artistic self-expression using accessible, natural materials. By crafting mandalas, participants tap into their creative potential in a low-pressure, enjoyable way.
- **Sense of accomplishment:** Boost participants' confidence through the creation of something beautiful and unique. Completing a mandala can foster a sense of pride and accomplishment.
- **Community and reflection:** Foster a shared experience while celebrating individual creativity. Sharing the experience with others builds a sense of community and mutual inspiration.

Step by step

1. Introduction

- Gather participants and introduce the concept of mandalas, explaining their symbolic meaning and purpose.
- Emphasize that the activity is about mindfulness and creativity, not perfection.

2. Collecting materials

- Invite participants to explore the surrounding area to gather natural objects for their mandalas. Encourage them to look for materials with interesting textures, colors, or shapes, such as leaves, petals, bark, stones, and berries.

3. Choosing a spot

- Ask participants to find a location that feels comfortable and inspiring to them. This spot will serve as their workspace.

4. Creating the mandala

- Participants begin by choosing a central object that will act as the focal point of their mandala.
- Guide them to arrange additional materials in concentric circles around the central object, experimenting with patterns, symmetry, and colors. Encourage them to follow their instincts and be playful with the design.

5. Sharing the mandalas (Optional)

- If participants feel comfortable, invite them to share their creations with the group.
- This can be done as a "gallery walk," where the group tours the various mandalas, or participants can explain their designs and the process behind them.

Reflection and debriefing

The reflection and debriefing process is a crucial step in ensuring that participants can internalize and articulate the deeper meaning and benefits of the mandala activity. It creates space for self-awareness, group sharing, and a sense of closure, enhancing the overall impact of the experience. Here's how to facilitate this stage effectively:

Setting the tone

Gather participants in a calm and comfortable circle, either at the site of their mandalas or in a nearby location. Ensure the atmosphere remains nonjudgmental, supportive, and open, emphasizing that sharing is voluntary and the focus is on their experience, not the aesthetic quality of their mandala.

Suggested reflection questions

Use the following prompts to guide participants in their reflections. Allow time for them to think about each question before responding:

1. What was the experience of creating a mandala like for you?

Encourage participants to describe their emotional and physical responses. Did they feel a sense of flow, relaxation, or connection? This question helps them explore their internal state during the activity.

2. Did you notice anything new about the natural materials or environment?

Invite participants to reflect on how closely they observed their surroundings and whether they discovered details they had previously overlooked. This question helps highlight mindfulness and attentiveness to nature.

3. How did you feel during the process—calm, focused, inspired?

Encourage them to identify the emotions they experienced while gathering materials and arranging them into a mandala. This can help them recognize the meditative and grounding aspects of the activity.

4. Did your mandala carry any personal symbolism or meaning?

Allow participants to share their interpretation of their creation if they feel comfortable. They might connect specific materials, patterns, or colors to personal emotions, memories, or aspirations.

Encouraging symbolism and meaning

For participants willing to share, encourage them to speak about the stories or meanings they associate with their mandalas. This can include:

- The reasons they chose certain materials.
- The inspiration behind their design.
- Any messages or feelings the mandala conveys to them.

Highlighting the Collective Experience

Optionally, facilitate a brief group discussion on the shared experience:

- **What did you observe about how others approached the activity?**
- **Were there any similarities or differences in how mandalas were created?**

This encourages participants to appreciate the diversity of expression while fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose.

Optional group walkthrough

If participants are comfortable, invite the group to walk around and observe each mandala. Remind everyone to do so respectfully, appreciating the creations without offering critique. This can foster a sense of celebration and collective accomplishment.

Closing the reflection

End the session by thanking participants for their openness and creativity. You can close with a grounding exercise, such as taking a moment of silence to appreciate the natural setting, or by inviting participants to leave a parting thought or word that summarizes their experience.

Reflection and debriefing not only help participants consolidate their learning but also deepen their connection with nature, themselves, and each other. Through this process, the mandala activity becomes a meaningful and transformative experience

Considerations

- **Flexibility:** Remind participants that there's no "right" way to create a mandala. They are free to interpret the activity in their own way.
- **Inclusivity:** Ensure the environment is safe and accessible for all participants.
- **Respect for Nature:** Encourage participants to collect materials responsibly, avoiding any harm to living plants or ecosystems.

Whether in a serene forest, a bustling park, or an indoor space, this activity invites participants to pause, observe, and create. The simple yet profound act of arranging natural materials into a mandala opens pathways to mindfulness, creativity, and a deeper appreciation for the world around us.

Tool 3: The Medicine Walk (Intermediate)

"It is hard to follow one great vision in this world of darkness and of many changing shadows. Among those men get lost." Black Elk

This powerful method and approach was created by Meredith Little and Steven Foster at the School of Lost Borders. At first glance it looks like a simple walk in the woods, however, just like many eco-coaching tools it is in its simplicity a very deep activity. This can be done individually, coach with client, or in group, coach with a group of clients, and it foresees a slow mindful walk into the wild, ideally woods or forest, where the client or clients walk in silence as the coach presents some guiding question that the client reflects in silence as they walk, and learn. This activity contains different elements that we will explore one by one and then we will offer you the guidelines on how to create your own medicine walk.

Ritual: As we saw in the chapters above, introducing ritualistic elements in coaching sessions and processes can be extremely powerful and effective. Before going onto this mindful walk, it is important to mark the points of departure and return with an opening and closing ritual; which can be anything, from breaking a twig to lighting a candle upon returning to the starting point to mark a period of reflection and harvesting of new learnings and awareness.

Night: This method is particularly efficient at night, alternatively can also be carried out during the thresholds of the day cycle (sunrise or sunset) the idea of having it at night involves the darkness and this brings multiple benefits; (1) less distractions as the eyesight can only reach so far, and of course any forms of light is not allowed. (2) the clients' eyes adapt to the darkness and gradually become able to see. (3) reliance on other senses fosters a multi sensorial activity and more wholeness. (4) walking in the dark in a forest may bring up elements of fear and discomfort, which can be a gate-opener for other emotions to arise. (5) limited eye-sight can support concentration on the questions presented by the coach and introspection.

Slow Walk: The activity is mindful therefore should not be physically challenging on harsh terrains (with the risk of harming oneself) so that the clients can focus on the questions rather than on the hardships of the path. Moreover, slow walking fosters slow thinking.

Cycle: The Medicine Walk has a point of departure and a point of return, which coincide, by the end of the walk the client/s should be back to where they started and have the closing ritual there. This follows the principles of cycles and non-linearity which is a distinguishing factor of eco-coaching activities.

10* <https://schooloflostborders.org/>

Access the 4 Sides of the Self: According to Carl Jung, the psyche, “the totality of all psychic processes, conscious as well as unconscious” in other words our wholeness, is made of four integrated and interconnected parts that operate together, and their interaction shapes our mind and identity. One of the main goals of eco-coaching is wholeness, and the Medicine Walk can be a strong introductory activity to explore these four aspects; namely:

- **Thinking:** The analytical and logical reasoning that focuses on facts and principles, which helps us to evaluate and make decisions based on objective criteria, for example data and evidence.
- **Feeling:** Evaluation is based on values, emotions and interpersonal aspects; by helping making decisions that are aligned with personal or social values.
- **Sensation:** Focusing on direct sensorial experiences and practical and concrete details, helping us to perceive the world through our senses and to be in the present moment. Such as colour, smells, textures etc.
- **Intuition:** Focusing on abstract patterns, possibilities and future-oriented thinking; helps us perceive underlying meanings and connections that go beyond sensory inputs. For example, hunches or insights.

A few tips:

- Make sure you choose a terrain and path you know quite well (you don't want to get lost in dark forest with your client 😊)
- Design the activity to last between 1 or maximum 2 hours.
- The client/s should remain in silence for the whole time as you recite or read the script out loud for them.
- Be prepared to adopt your coaching mindset, tools and techniques once the closing ritual is completed and if necessary support the client with whatever came up during the walk.
- This activity can also be reflected/presented jointly with the monomyth theory and combined with the tool below.
- Try not to have one fixed script to use everywhere as one-size-fits-all, rather adapt to the needs and specifics of your client/s.
- Keep in mind that eco-coaching is a very holistic, non-linear process that may or may not strike some deep chords into your client, which makes it a very strong approach and an unpredictable one too, and encourages to go even more than usual with the flow and process.

Creating your own script:

Step One - The Script itself	When preparing the script make sure that you address the 4 sides of the self, best if through metaphors, and make sure that the client accesses and explores these aspects of their wholeness. Some examples can use seasonal metaphors or archetypes: <table><tr><th>Thinking</th><th>Feeling</th><th>Sensation</th><th>Intuition</th></tr><tr><td>North</td><td>South</td><td>West</td><td>East</td></tr><tr><td>The Parent</td><td>The Child</td><td>The Artist</td><td>The Wise</td></tr></table> These are just ideas, you can use any metaphor you wish in your script, as long as there are four, and each describes the qualities and functions of each of the 4 parts. The order presented above works quite well as it begins with “Thinking” which is one of the functions we are most used to, and ends with “Intuition” which is one of least used or at least more under-estimated. An example can be:	Thinking	Feeling	Sensation	Intuition	North	South	West	East	The Parent	The Child	The Artist	The Wise
Thinking	Feeling	Sensation	Intuition										
North	South	West	East										
The Parent	The Child	The Artist	The Wise										
Step 1	“You are now in the North phase of your life, the cold and darkness demand that you put together your rationality and objectivity to live and thrive in this environment, what lessons can you learn from the North phases of your life that can support you today.” It is most important that the script kick-starts and internal dialogue with each of the four aspects, and encourages support to the client’s dreams and goals from each side of their psyche.												
Step Two - The Start	<i>(make sure the client is aware of the purpose and goals of this exercise and what the process will look like)</i> At the very beginning start with a ritual, does not have to be something complex, can be a gesture, a sound, or something more elaborate, it is entirely up to you, as long as it marks the beginning of the activity. In order to get into the mood and pace, the very first part of the Medicine Walk can involve a client-coach dialogue (in case of groups among clients) concerning the goal and purpose they want to reach by doing this activity, which can be done walking and talking until the path is reached.												
Step Three - Pausing	Once you are on the path, inform the client/s that from now on there will be only silence, and from time to time you will read out loud some guiding questions for them to reflect internally in an inner self-dialogue. This walk will have four pauses (one per each aspect of the self) where the questions will be spoken and then the walk is resumed. Calculate approximately 15–30 minutes in between the questions.												
Step Four - Returning	Usually question 3 and 4 of your script will be done already on the way back, returning to the starting point, alternatively circling back.												
Step Five - Closing	Once back to the starting point, plan a closing ritual, better if this ritual involves time for self-reflection, the client probably had quite an intense self-dialogue and introspection in this Medicine Walk experience, and now, out of the woods, it will be good to have a moment to reflect and harvest the new learnings and awareness that were gained in this activity; at their own pace, as a coach just be present as a silent and supportive figure.												
Step Six - Intervention	Observe your client’s physiology and state during the closing part, and be around, as there probably will be plenty of material for a strong and deep coaching session as an outcome of this experience.												

Summarising, in the script include:

- An explanation of the exercise
- Opening ritual and formula to elicit a goal or purpose
- Questions and metaphors that allow the client to explore the four aspects of the self
- A closing ritual.

Tool 4: Monomyth in Coaching (Intermediate)

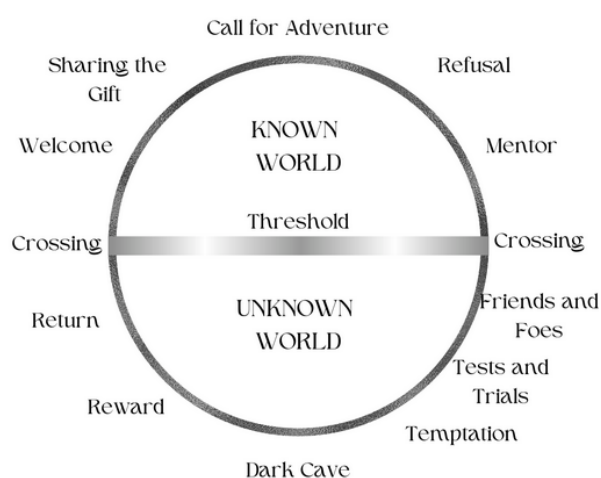
"Understanding, meaning and significance (sema) are part of the nature of the body (soma), and not aspects that can be outsourced to a locality in the brain or to the psyche. Whatever the psyche is, he posits here, it is also body – although not a 'body' in the common scientific understanding of the word, but a semiotic body" Jesper Hoffmeyer

The monomyth is a very efficient model to develop coaching techniques and tools, especially if we wish to encourage storytelling from our clients, then this is the best possible approach. One important aspect is that this is one of the very few coaching techniques that deal also with the past; in eco-coaching this you will see quite a lot, as this approach uses a cyclical and circular approach to time rather than a linear one, therefore the concepts of past, present and future are very relative. As a reminder let's look at the model once more.

There are 12 Steps (or stages) and will be useful to present the model to your client, in order to:

1. Define at which stage of the cycle is your client concerning aims and goals, or life in general.
2. Start by exploring the current stage your client expressed (using the present tense)
3. Explore the previous stage (using questions in the past tense)
4. Navigate the next two stages (using the future tense)

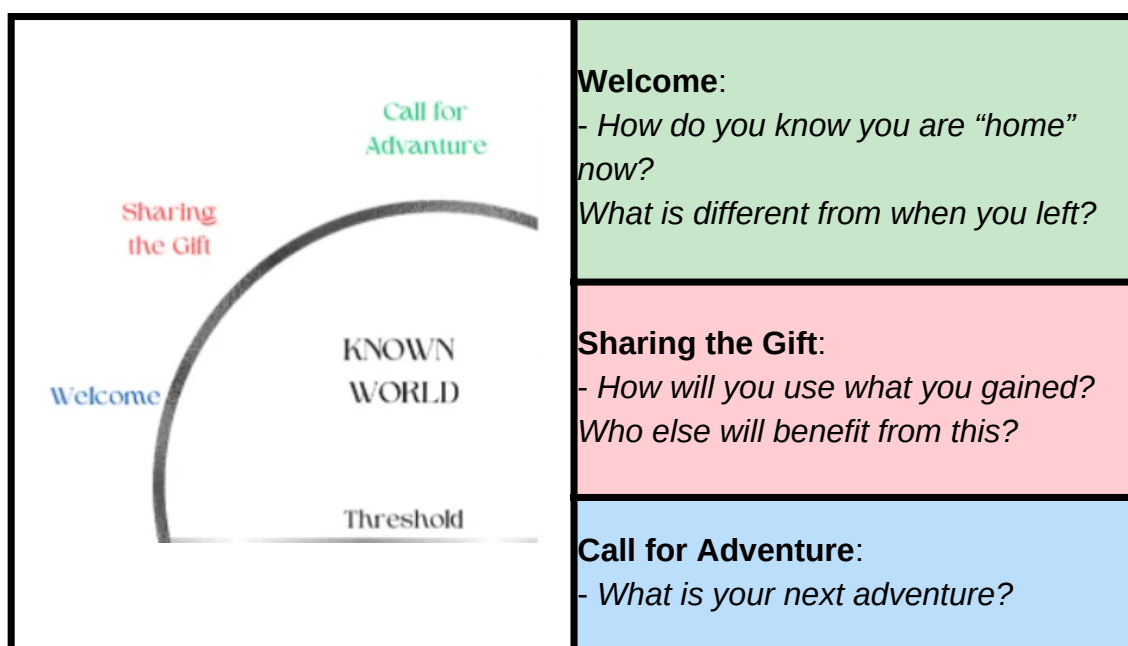
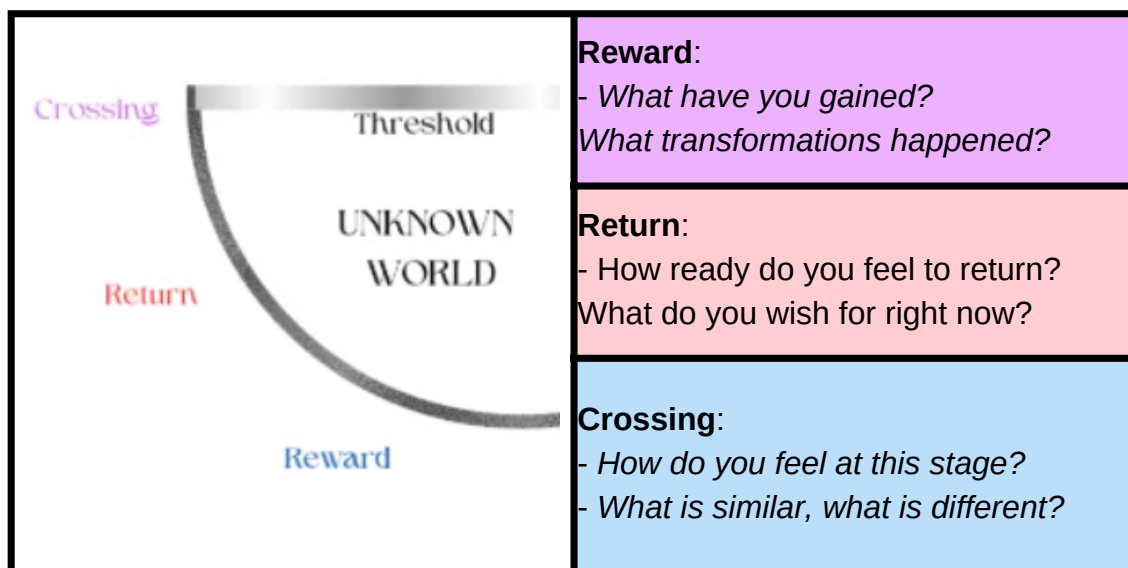
For example the client feels in the "Crossing the Threshold" into the Unknown World stage (explored with the present tense), then investigate on the "Mentor" and support received into "Crossing the Threshold" (past tense), and finally, explore the upcoming two stages "Friends and Foes" and "Tests and Trials" as what is expected, hoped for, feared and resources necessary.



As there are 12 stages in the Monomyth Model, it may be useful to divide it into 4 touchpoint stages per coaching session, not to overwhelm the client and allow time for exploration, awareness and discoveries. Below is an example of how this may look like.

	Call for Adventure: - How is this adventure calling to you? - What will you gain by accepting the call?
	Refusal: - What will happen if you refuse the call? - What thoughts/feelings are you facing?
	Mentor: - What support would you need now? - What can help you to move forward?
	Crossing: - How do you feel at this stage? - What is similar, what is different?

	Friends and Foes: - What is supporting and helping you here? - What seems to be a challenge here?
	Tests and Trials: - How do you know you are learning now? - What can help you grow here?
	Temptation: - What choices are you facing now? - What do you need to move from here?
	The Dark Cave: - What experiences are supporting you? - What strengths are helping you now?



Depending on your clients’ stage you can formulate the questions in the past, present or future tenses.

N.B. Once the cycle is complete you may use the “Fairy Tale” format in the chapters above to let your client tell the whole story through the monomyth model.

Tool 5: Multisensorial Walks (Easy)

"The first task of Umwelt research is to identify each animal's perceptual cues among all the stimuli in its environment and to build up the animal's specific world with them."

Jacob Von Uexkull

As we explored in the previous chapters, much of nature-based coaching, or eco-coaching revolves around wholeness, in the sense of being able to access all of our senses and to once again learn the plethora of information they can offer us, reminding us that there is more than just sight and hearing. And what better place is there than to be in the outdoors to regain a full multisensorial re-access to ourselves and our bodies.

As we explored before, engaging our senses has proven neurological and psychological effect, here is a reminder:

Touching: Creation of Bonds, Tranquility, Reduce Stress, Heart Regulation

Tasting: Emotional-Neural connection, mechanisms of award and aversion, reduce anxiety

Listening: Attention Restoration, Attachment and Linkage, Stress recovery, relaxation

Smelling: Impact on mood, behavior, and cognition, calmness and alertness, internal verbalisation

Looking: Reduce anxiety, reduce stress, increase attention.

Imagination: we add this new "sense" here, there is a process called "tinkering" that combines and modifies stored perceptual information and concepts leading to the creation of novel "mental objects" that are shaped by the subject's peculiar inner world.

This exercise has two aims, the first one is to reawaken the habit of using the senses, the second one is to gain all the benefits listed above before addressing a specific topic or tool with your client. Through the use of perceptions and imaginations. It is divided into 3 parts:

Part 1

First of all prepare a script to guide your client through the outdoors experience they are about to carry out. Then ask your client if they are ok to do an activity outdoors that involves a short walk where the different senses will be accessed and their imagination will be used. If they agree, then give them some time to think and ponder once more about their goal, the purpose why they chose to have a coach.

Part 2 Experience

Walk together into the outdoors, and envisage 5 stops, can be on a trail in the woods with five stations of your choosing, or randomly stop when you feel like it, consider a stay of 10-15 minutes at each stop, and 10-20 minutes walk in between the stops. At each stop you will use parts of your script to guide your client through the experience.

1st Stop: Touching; Invite your client to experience the natural world around them through their sense of touch, and ask them to speak out loud about how this feels and what they are learning about what they are interacting with (touching the soil, earth, tree, leaf etc.) only through touch.

2nd Stop: Tasting; Invite your client to experience the world around them through their sense of taste, unless there is a spring of fresh water around the suggestion is to feel the taste of the air, describing it and what they are learning from tasting the air. Only through taste.

3rd Stop: Listening; Invite your client to come to a complete standstill and stay in complete silence, and when they feel like it to begin capturing the sounds around them, then to describe those sounds out loud and what they are learning about the surrounding environment from listening. Only through hearing.

4th Stop: Smelling; Invite your client to wander, and when they feel like it to begin to capture the smells around them, and then to describe those smells out loud and what they are learning about the surrounding environment from its scents. Only through smelling.

5th Stop: Looking; Ask your client to wander until they feel attracted to a specific place, and when they feel like it to start observing and watching the nature around through their sight, then to say out loud how the landscape looks like and what they are learning about it through their sight. Only through looking.

The purpose of speaking out loud is to make the verbalisation of the sensation more real and tangible, and strengthen that connection.

Part 3 Imagination and Mutuality

In this part you will be returning to the starting point, by stopping in the same places where you have stopped before, and this time the clients will have to dissociate and to use their imagination to explore how they may be perceived by the surrounding natural environment; raising awareness about one's own place in nature, and at the same time activating imagination and the "tinkering" process and its benefits to the mind.

1st Stop: Looking; Ask your client to imagine how the surrounding view and landscape perceives their presence there, how do they look in the “eyes” of the surrounding environment, and how is their presence right there in that moment seen by the surrounding ecosystem, biosphere and its organisms. And what can the environment learn about them from what they look like.

2nd Stop: Smelling; Ask your client to imagine how the surrounding ecosystem perceives their presence there, how do they smell and what is their scent, how is this perceived by the surrounding environment and organisms, and what can the surrounding biosphere learn about them through their scent .

3rd Stop: Listening; Ask your client to imagine how the surrounding environment perceives their sounds right there, what sounds are they making, and how the ecosystem and biosphere around perceives their sounds and through those sounds what can they learn about them.

4th Stop: Tasting; Ask your client to imagine how the air that enters and exits their bodies (or water if there is a clean spring) perceives how they taste like, and what it can learn about them by how they taste.

5th Stop: Touching; Ask your client to repeat their previous action (touch the soil, a tree, bush etc.) and this time to imagine how that element feels like by being touched by the client, and what can this element learn about them by being touched by your clients.

Upon returning, let your client return to the goal and purpose they had before starting the multisensorial walk and to take notes on any insights, inspirations, and new ideas that they can come up with. Usually this experience, through the psychological and neurological benefits it brings, will help them gain clarity, insight and positivity.

Tool 6: Rituals and Rites of Passage

Behind all the worlds created by Him, there lies concealed, eternally beyond the reach of knowledge, the subject - Nature.” Jacob Von Uexkull

Rituals and rites of passage are deeply rooted in human culture, serving as transformative moments that mark transitions in life, identity, or personal growth. These practices often include symbolic actions that connect individuals with their community, inner selves, and the natural world. In ecopsychology, rituals are seen as a way to rekindle humanity's relationship with nature, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all life. By engaging in meaningful rituals in natural settings, participants can deepen their sense of belonging, reflect on personal growth, and strengthen their relationship with the environment. This connection supports mindfulness, self-awareness, and emotional healing, making the activity a powerful tool in youth work and personal development.

Objectives and impact of the activity

1. **Foster self-awareness and reflection:** Help participants explore and mark personal transitions or intentions. Participants may gain clarity about personal transitions or challenges.
2. **Reconnect with nature:** Encourage participants to see themselves as part of the natural world through symbolic acts. Participants often report feeling more grounded and connected to the earth.
3. **Build a sense of community:** Create shared experiences that strengthen group bonds. Shared rituals foster empathy, trust, and a sense of belonging.
4. **Promote emotional resilience:** Offer a safe space to process changes, challenges, or aspirations. Symbolic acts can provide closure, hope, or a sense of renewal.
5. **Develop mindfulness:** Encourage being present in the moment through ritualistic practices. The structured and intentional nature of rituals encourages focus and presence.

Considerations when working with participants

Cultural sensitivity

Acknowledge diversity: Recognize that participants may come from different cultural, spiritual, or religious backgrounds that shape their understanding of rituals and symbolic actions. Avoid imposing a specific framework or interpretation.

Inclusive design: Design the ritual to be universal in its themes and actions, focusing on concepts like growth, transition, or connection, which resonate across cultures.

Open dialogue: Encourage participants to share their perspectives on rituals and incorporate any personal or cultural elements they feel comfortable contributing.

Avoid appropriation: Be cautious not to use elements from specific cultural traditions (e.g., smudging or chanting) unless they are integral to the participants' backgrounds or you have explicit permission and understanding of their significance.

Emotional triggers

Expect emotional responses: Transitions, reflections, and symbolic actions can evoke unexpected emotions, such as grief, joy, or anxiety. Be prepared to hold space for these reactions.

Supportive presence: Ensure that facilitators are approachable and empathetic, creating a safe and non-judgmental space for participants to process their feelings.

Have resources available: Consider having a trained counselor or peer support system available during or after the ritual to assist participants who may need deeper support.

Allow opt-outs: Let participants know they can step back or take a break if the ritual feels overwhelming. Provide an alternative way for them to engage if they wish.

Clarity of purpose

Define objectives clearly: Before beginning, explain the ritual's purpose, whether it's to reflect on personal growth, celebrate an achievement, or let go of a challenge. Clear communication helps participants understand the context and connect with the activity meaningfully.

Set boundaries: Outline what the ritual will and will not involve, ensuring participants feel informed and comfortable. For example, clarify if sharing personal experiences is optional.

Simplify the process: Avoid overly complex or ambiguous instructions that might confuse or alienate participants. Focus on clear and straightforward actions.

Manage expectations: Emphasize that the ritual is about personal meaning, and there are no "right" or "wrong" ways to participate.

Safety

Physical safety: Assess the environment for potential hazards, such as uneven terrain, sharp objects, or weather conditions, especially in outdoor settings.

Fire safety: If using candles, bonfires, or incense, ensure you follow local regulations and have appropriate safety measures (e.g., water or fire extinguishers) on hand.

Environmental safety: Encourage participants to engage with nature respectfully, avoiding harm to living plants or wildlife. Leave no trace after the ritual.

Emotional safety: Foster a supportive and confidential space where participants feel safe sharing or processing emotions without judgment or pressure.

Accessibility: Ensure the ritual setting and activities are accessible to all participants, including those with mobility or sensory challenges. For instance, provide seating or visual cues if needed.

By carefully addressing these considerations, you create an inclusive, respectful, and meaningful experience that ensures participants feel safe, supported, and empowered to engage fully in the activity.

Step-by-Step

1. Preparation

Select a Theme: Choose a focus that resonates with the group's needs or the activity's purpose. Some examples include:

- Letting go of the past.
- Setting intentions for the future.
- Celebrating a transition (e.g., coming of age, new job, end of a chapter).

Example Questions to Consider:

What is the goal of this ritual?

What emotions or reflections do you want participants to explore?

Choose a Setting: Opt for a natural, serene location that encourages reflection. Examples:

- A forest clearing for grounding.
- A beach for themes of flow and release.
- A garden for growth and renewal. Ensure the setting is safe, accessible, and free from major distractions.

Gather Materials: Depending on the ritual, you may need symbolic items like candles, stones, leaves, or water vessels. Prepare items that align with the theme:

- Letting Go: Biodegradable paper, pens, and access to water or fire (if safe).
- Setting Intentions: Seeds, soil, small pots, or a planting area.
- Marking Transitions: Candles, stones, leaves, or items to represent a journey. Bring backup materials and ensure environmentally friendly choices.

2. Introduction

a. Welcome participants

Start by gathering the group in a circle or seated area.

Explain the purpose of the ritual and its connection to nature, self-growth, or the chosen theme.

Example Introduction Script:

"Today, we will engage in a ritual that allows us to connect deeply with nature and ourselves. This is a time to reflect, release, and embrace the changes or intentions we carry. Remember, there is no right or wrong way to experience this—it is your personal journey."

b. Set guidelines for participation

Emphasize the following:

- Respect for others' experiences.
- Confidentiality—what is shared stays within the group.
- Openness to the process, even if it feels unfamiliar.

Encourage participants to adapt the ritual as needed for their comfort.

3. Guided Reflection

a. Create a reflective space

Ask participants to close their eyes or focus on a natural element around them. Use a calm tone to guide their thoughts.

b. Reflection prompts

Ask questions relevant to the theme. Pause after each for quiet reflection:

"Think of something in your life that you are ready to let go of. What is it, and how has it served you until now?"

"What intention or goal would you like to set for your future? Imagine it clearly in your mind."

"Reflect on a transition or change you are going through. What lessons have you learned from it?"

c. Optional Guided Visualization

For example:

"Picture yourself standing at the edge of a river. Imagine holding the weight of what you want to release. Feel its shape, size, and texture. When you're ready, see yourself placing it in the river, watching it float away, leaving you lighter and freer."

4. Ritual Execution

Provide Clear Instructions

Clearly explain the symbolic act participants will perform. Examples:

Letting Go:

- Give participants biodegradable paper and pens.
- Ask them to write down what they want to release.
- Lead them to a river or safe fire pit and invite them to release the paper.
- Script: "Take your paper and write down what you want to let go of. When you're ready, release it into the water or fire, imagining it leaving your life for good."

Setting Intentions:

- Provide seeds, soil, and small pots or access to planting areas.
- Invite participants to plant the seed, visualizing their intention growing alongside it.
- Script: "Hold your seed and think about your intention. As you plant it, imagine nurturing this goal and watching it grow into something meaningful."

Marking Transitions:

- Create a symbolic path using stones, candles, or leaves.
- Ask participants to walk the path slowly, reflecting on their journey.
- Script: "As you walk this path, think of the steps you've taken in your journey. Each step represents growth, learning, and strength."

b. Encourage Presence

Remind participants to take their time and focus on the symbolic meaning of their actions.

5. Gratitude and Closure

a. Express Gratitude

- Invite participants to thank the space, themselves, and the group. Example Script:
"Take a moment to silently thank this space for holding us, thank yourself for showing up, and thank the group for sharing this journey."

b. Collective Closing Act

Options include:

- Forming a circle and holding hands for a moment of silence.
- Sharing one word or thought about the experience (optional).
- Taking a collective breath or bow to mark the closure.

Reflection and Debriefing

Facilitation Tips:

- Create a calm and inclusive space for reflection.
- Use open-ended questions to invite sharing without pressure.

Reflection Questions:

1. What was the experience of participating in the ritual like for you?
2. Did you notice any emotions or thoughts during the process?
3. How did the natural setting influence your experience?
4. Did you gain any insights or clarity about the theme?
5. How do you feel now compared to before the activity?

Sharing Options:

Allow participants to share individually or in small groups, depending on their comfort levels.

Emphasize that sharing is optional and that all experiences are valid.

Alternative Options and Adaptations

- Individual vs. Group Rituals: Offer the option for participants to perform rituals alone if they prefer solitude.
- Indoor Adaptation: If outdoors isn't feasible, simulate nature using elements like plants, water bowls, and natural materials.
- Creative Variations:
 - Use art (drawing, painting) as a ritual expression.
 - Incorporate movement or dance to symbolize transitions.
 - Introduce guided meditations or storytelling to deepen the experience.
- Cultural Integration: Invite participants to adapt the ritual based on their cultural traditions or personal beliefs.

By facilitating rituals and rites of passage, you offer participants a meaningful way to connect with themselves, their community, and the natural world. This transformative experience can leave a lasting impact, fostering resilience, mindfulness, and a sense of purpose.

Tool 7: The Heroic Journey (Difficult)

"Breathing involves a continuous oscillation between exhaling and inhaling, offering ourselves to the world at one moment and drawing the world into ourselves at the next..."
David Abram

Background:

This is an activity created by the School of Lost Borders, widely adopted in training, coaching, therapy and counselling, and recently a very popular activity conducted to the benefit of high school students after their final year exam as a rite of passage into adulthood.

Preface:

This is likely the strongest and most difficult tool to use in eco-coaching, also known as Vision-Fast, it foresees a short-to-long period in full isolation in the natural world, which can range from 1 hour to 72 hours. The idea is to have a mindful and contemplative experience in nature, along, distant from all sorts of comforts and technological aid of modern life, to have quality truly self-time and explore a question, an issue, a goal or search for answers through self interaction. This is a very demanding activity, physically and mentally, with potential risks of opening pandora's boxes for many people. To this end it is strongly advised that before offering this to a client you do this experience on yourself for at least two or three times.

Moreover, this activity requires quite some time to prepare (yourself and the client) as you, the coach will be the guide of this whole process. Pay attention to the preparation phases and do not miss any of them, and please do not underestimate the power of this approach. Before we dive into the methodology itself, remember it is not a must to use this, only if you believe a client can truly need or benefit from doing this activity.

Mental Preparation:

First of all you need to check the client's readiness to participate in this activity, you can run a guided meditation, by asking them to access/imagine the Four Aspect of the Self (if you have already done the Medicine Walk with them - strongly advised - you can use the same metaphors) Thinking, Feeling, Sensation, Intuition. Here you can create your own script, make sure your client is in a relaxed and comfortable position then one by one ask them to imagine/evoke an animal that embeds the qualities of each of the four aspects of the Self, for example "intuition" can be a wise, all-seeing, contemplative animal (and let them imagine that animal do not make any suggestions). For each of the animals, through your script foster some interaction. At first guide a sensorial perception, how it looks like, the sounds it makes, how it feels to touch, making sure that the imagination is complete. Secondly, ask them to interact with this specific animal, asking about what this animal has to teach and show to the client, what the client can learn from this animal's qualities, and allow the clients to conduct an inner dialogue with the animal. Then you can ask the client to move into the animal's body and look at themselves through the animal's eyes, and then to return to themselves. The interaction is completed with a moment of gratitude where the client thanks the animal for the suggestions, and presents that animal with a gift. This is repeated for each one of the 4 sides of the Self. If you want in between you can ask the client to change body posture to facilitate the removal of the past animal from the imagination and make space for the new one. This whole guided meditation should not take longer than 30/40 minutes, just make sure you speak slowly and allow enough silence to allow the dialogue and interaction between the animal and the client.

Once this is completed, and the client returns from this journey, do not enquire on what animals were evoked or what they meant, the key question here are:

- Did you manage to evoke all four animals?
- How did their presence feel?
- Did you feel supported by the animal/s you evoked?

Remind the client that in the coming experience in the outdoors these animals will be their resources and support that they can access anytime they wish and need help, advice and suggestions. Which translates as the part of the self they are most in touch and familiar with, and can support them in the process.

If the client was: (a) unable to evoke any animal. (b) felt threatened by the animal/s and/or scared. These can be signs that perhaps it is better not to do the outdoors "Heroic Journey" activity, as this might be a sign that the person may be disconnected or in conflict with one or more parts of the self, or unable to access them; risking having quite a negative and potentially destructive experience. This is definitely a mindread, coaches are not mental health professionals, therefore, take it as just an alarm bell for the safety of your client, and yours too. (Something important for all coaching processes, and here more than anywhere, is to know whether the client is currently seeing a mental health practitioner - in this case, to let the professional supporter know about the coaching process and envisaged activities and get a green light; as well as if the client is abusing any substances; which may seriously harm the process of this experience.)

This can take place on the same day of the offered Heroic Journey, maximum 7 days before,

Physical Preparation

This is an outdoor activity, and physical preparation activities are an essential part of the process, do not skip any of these steps: Approximately 30 minutes.

1. Let the client know essential information about the surrounding fauna and flora, what they can expect to find and see.
2. The minimum essential to bring along is paper, a pencil, water, a charged mobile phone in case of emergency (to put on flight-mode during the whole experience).
3. The client can choose the level of challenge, meaning up to them if to have food along with them, or fast on that day, or those hours, including the amount and warmth of clothes. In general make sure that the clothing is appropriate for the season and terrain.
4. Be aware of any possible medical or allergy needs the client may have and that you, the coach, might need to know.
5. Ideally the first times you offer this experience, you can make it last 2-5 hours for your client.

Preparation Prior to Departure

It is time to begin the heroic journey, it is essential you give your client this information and instructions. Approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour.

1. Set a goal for going on this Journey, what is the purpose and what do you wish to find and discover?
2. Create a ritual that marks the beginning and the end of the Journey (this will help to mark and give specific importance to the experience that is about to happen).
3. Do interrupt the Journey if: (1) your feelings or thoughts brought you into a "bad" place. (2) you need to take a break. (3) you have reached your desired goal.
4. Keep your phone on silent mode and avoid distractions. Should you accidentally run into someone you can acknowledge their presence and move on further.
5. Anything that attracts your attention, a specific flower, a meadow, a stone, anything at all that calls strongly to you, needs to be explored and metaphorically carries a meaning for you worthy of exploring, trust your senses and intuition.
6. Set up a base-camp for the Departure and Return.
7. Remind the support guiding animals that were evoked.

Departure

Start walking with your client until a preset point of departure, the departure point is also the basecamp where you will be waiting for your client's return, this is very important that you are the last and first person they see. (if you do this on yourself, make sure you inform a friend or a close person of where you will be, and that you see this friendly and close person upon your departure and return). Stay at the basecamp and have with you water and food for the client if need be, a thermos if the season is not warm; as the client might return before the set time.

Return

The client carries out the closing ritual and returns to basecamp, at first the coach does a quick check-up on the client's state and feeling, and then can offer a closing guided meditation; here you can prepare your own script based on the one used for evoking the guiding animals. The purpose of this script is to harvest all the learnings gained through Thinking, Feeling, Sensing and Intuition (through the metaphors you created), reinforce the awareness that these resources will always be with them, and allow the client to express their deep gratitude to each of the 4 animals.

Debriefing

This experience may result in a very strong one that needs time to digest, for many of your clients this may result in a rite of passage of sorts, that greatly helps them to transition from one stage of life to the next. Before going into the coaching process, it may be helpful here to use the "Fairy Tale" method, shown in the above chapter on Coaching and Narratives, allowing the client to retell the story of what happened in the shape of a metaphorical fairy tale; which you can use in your coaching process to explore learnings, discoveries and new awareness, navigating the fairy tale metaphors should the client wish not to share the specific context.

At a later stage you can use the Monomyth or Panarchy coaching techniques and tools to explore and debrief the experience and it brought to the client.

Keep in mind that this is a very strong tool to handle with care, and do it on yourself a few times before presenting this to a client.

Tool 8: Embodiment (Intermediate/Difficult)

"I feel at peace, content. My questions have been answered. I can accept my alone-life, knowing its purpose. Interaction, love, is the purpose and the core..." Steven Foster

By Dita Palascakova

It is very interesting that all organisms in the animal kingdom naturally learn from their senses and their bodies. It seems that humans are the only ones who have unlearned to do so, so this exercise is the perfect tool to reawaken this ancient source of learning from our species that we seem to have forgotten.

The Body Statue/Metaphor exercise will help you to explore the present situation the client is facing and the desired future state through physical representation. You will use body postures to express feelings and situations, by making the intangible tangible. This exercise typically should take around 60-90 minutes total. You can always adjust the timing based on client needs and responses.

Safety First

As in all coaching exercises the client can stop at any time they wish and need, and here it is the task of the coach to make sure that the client is physically comfortable; perhaps can kick off the session with some breathing exercises or very light muscle warmup. Needless to say, always maintain professional boundaries and ensure client's comfort throughout the process.

Just keep in mind the following safety guidelines:

Physical: Maintain proper distance, ensure stable positions, watch for discomfort, allow free movement, respect limitations.

Emotional: Maintain boundaries, observe reactions, offer support, allow silence, respect resistance.

Here is a script for you to use the body-metaphor technique with your client:

Step 1: Current State Position (10 minutes)	
Instructions to the Client	Coaching Questions
1. Stand up when you are ready	• What does this position tell you? • Where do you feel tension? • What emotions arise? • What does this posture represent? • How comfortable is this position?
2. Think about your current situation/ challenge.	
3. Let your body naturally respond to these thoughts	
4. Create a pose that represents how you feel now	
5. Hold this position briefly	

Step 2: Exploration (10 minutes)	
Instructions to the Client	Ask the Client To
1. Body position details	• Notice physical sensations • Identify emotional connections • Describe their experience • Reflect on meaning • Connect to their situation
2. Facial expression	
3. Areas of tension	
4. Client's descriptions	
5. Emotional responses	

Step 3: Desired State Position(10-15 minutes)	
Guide the Client	Exploration Questions
1. Now think about your ideal situation	• What feels different? • Where do you feel strength? • What emotions emerge? • What possibilities open up? • How does this position empower you?
2. Create a new pose representing this state	
3. Allow your body to show success	
4. Notice the differences	
5. Hold this position	

Step 4: Transition Exploration(15-20 minutes)	
Facilitate Movement	Key Questions
1.Return to current state	• What supports this movement? • Where do you feel resistance? • What helps you to move forward? • What resources do you need? • What insights emerge?
2.Slowly move to the desired state	
3.Notice the transition points	
4.Identify the barriers	
5.Discover the necessary resources	

Step 5: Integration (10-15 minutes)	
Guide Reflection	Discussion Points
1.Seated Discussion	• Key discoveries • Physical insights • Emotional awareness • Action Possibilities • Support needed
2.Capture insights	
3.Identify action steps	
4.Document learning	
5.Plan the next steps	

Step 6: Action Planning (10minutes)
Help the Client To...
Define specific actions
Set a timeline and deadlines
Identify resources
Plan the first steps
Schedule a follow-up

When guiding this process it is very important for the coach to actively listen and pay attention to many aspects of what the client does and behaves; first of all the coach needs to attentively observe the body language, as this can be very revealing of some internal states the client is having, as well as displaying information that the client and the coach can explore at a later stage. Part of the body language are also the facial expression, is there a display of joy, of satisfaction, anguish or anxiety, these are all mind-reads of course, something the coach should avoid, to make conclusions and assumptions based on subjective observation, and nonetheless, it can still provide materials to deepen further discussions and dialogue. One of the most visible as well as unconscious body language messages come from breathing patterns, this is something we can do inadvertently without really noticing, but something the coach can easily spot, if breathing becomes deeper, slower, or faster in specific moments or postures which has a significance and meaning that the client-coach partnership can explore together. Generally speaking the body can showcase energy shifts and emotional indicators if you observe carefully enough, just not to stare too long and uncomfortably at your client remember to use peripheral vision.

Some common challenges in running this technique, and therefore to watch out for, are that clients may get stuck in overthinking loops becoming visibly blocked in thought patterns (as this exercise focuses very much on body postures, feelings and sensations, whereas rationality and thinking are for many people the comfort zone). This can also lead to physical discomfort, especially if expressing a state or physiology that is uncomfortable at a physical level and the client may want to untangle from that as fast as possible. Another common element is emotional resistance, as quite a few of us are almost completely disconnected from our bodies and learnt how to limit the access to our emotions and expressing them, which is something very important for the effectiveness of this exercise. Quite often it has also occurred that clients for all or some of the reasons above may want to rush the process and be done with it, possibly because of the discomfort that this can cause.

Therefore it is very important to remember, to provide supportive and gentle guidance of the process, always respecting the pace and boundaries of the client, and allow things to flow naturally resisting the urge to control the process. As coaching competencies go, active listening, suspension of judgement and maintaining presence are some of the most applied coaching capabilities when running this activity, in order to provide the necessary full support of the process' exploration and facilitate the new discoveries.

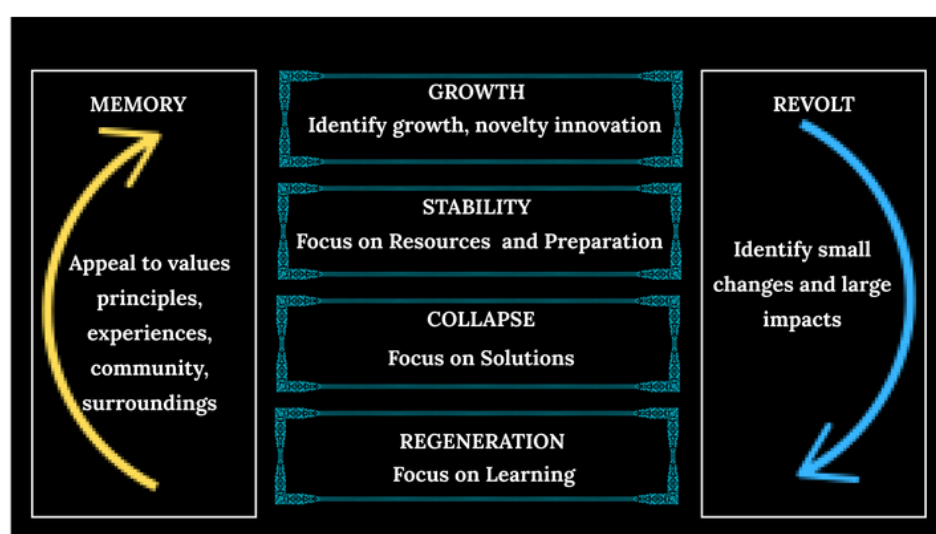
Tool 9: Ecological Panarchy (Intermediate)

"Science, in broad outline, can be divided into three parts: the study of the vast, the study of the tiny, and the study of life which... acts as an audience to both the vast and the tiny." Theodore Roszak

Adopting the Ecological Panarchy to a coaching process can make you look a bit like a fortune-teller or someone who may predict the future. As the Panarchy model goes, every living organism from the planet itself all the way to microorganisms, all go through 4 different phases, as a reminder (1) growth. (2) stability. (3) collapse. (4) Regeneration. Keeping in mind that this is divided into "Short-Fast Cycles" that occur on the small scale; and "Long-Slow Cycles" that happen on a large scale. And that this is accompanied by 2 processes: (a) Revolt - when a smaller system is experiencing change that is destabilising and can have a large scale effect and (b) Memory - where the system stores the memory of stability and helps the system regenerate and return to its original state.

To apply the Ecological Panarchy model applied to coaching may resemble the eco-coaching equivalent of the GROW or ARROW model, with the main difference that it is non-linear and rather cyclical, and set on a number of questions that revolve around the current state (where is the client on the panarchy model right now, explore the effects of the previous phase; and preparedness for the coming phase. By evoking the presence of the processes of Revolt and Memory and how these impact the movement on the panarchy cycle.

Part I : You can evoke in your client a picture of a tree going through the 4 seasons: Growing in spring; stabilising in late spring and summer; beginning to collapse in autumn and winter; regenerating in early spring. Then ask your client, metaphorically which of these 4 states better represents their life right now; this will help you to guide the questions using the model below:



If your client is going through Growth , identify the elements of this growth, what are the novelties and innovation, what is the source of energy and future outlook (**Growth**), understanding what happened before (**Regeneration**) and where will this growth lead to (**Stability**). Exploring what small changes are taking place that may have greater impact (**Revolt**); exploring how their principles, values, past experiences, community of belonging and surrounding environment can support this growth phase, or recalling past experiences of growth. (**Memory**).

If your client is going through Stability, identify the elements of this stability, what resources is the client intaking, what are the perspectives and characteristics of this phase (**Stability**); recalling what happened before that led here (**Growth**) and the preparedness for what is coming (**Collapse**). Identifying small changes occurring that could have a greater impact (**Revolt**); and guidance they can gain from their principles, values, past experiences, community, surroundings in supporting the stability and preparedness, recalling past experiences of stability (**Memory**)

If your client is going through Collapse, identify the elements that demonstrate that it is a phase of collapse (not too long, the focus needs to be on solutions here). (**Collapse**); recalling what happened before this phase (**Stability**) - and how the resources accumulated through the stability phase can support them now; and preparedness for what is coming (**Regeneration**). Identify the small changes and disruptions that led to this (**Revolt**) and conclude (and focus) on the guidance they can gain through values, principles, community and surroundings, recalling past experiences of Collapse and how Regeneration occurred back then. (**Memory**).

If your client is going through Regeneration, the focus should be on learning and can also be about healing; identify the elements that show that they are right here (**Regeneration**); recall what happened before this phase (**Collapse**) and this process was transformed into a regenerative one, as well as their readiness for the coming phase (**Growth**). Explore the small changes here at this stage of their life that can have a large impact (**Revolt**); and conclude on the guidance they can gain through values, principles, community and surroundings to reach the growth phase, recalling past experiences of regeneration, and how they grew after that. (**Memory**).

Below you can find an example of what questions you can adopt to navigate the Panarchy model in your coaching sessions.

Panarchy's Guiding Questions		
MEMORY: -What principles and values guide your decisions in the past? -How does your culture and surrounding environment influence your choices and decisions? -What larger system do you feel belonging to? -How can your surrounding environment support you in accomplishing your wishes? -How can your values and principles guide you in your decisions today?	GROWTH -Do you feel as if you are at the startline of something new? How can you tell? -What innovations do you feel motivated to bring to your life? -What will happen when this initial phase of growth is over? -How does this phase help you to prepare for the coming stability?	REVOLT -What small changes in your life can bring a wider effect on your whole life? -Has it ever happened to you that something small modified your whole life and worldview? -What little changes can you bring today and in the near future that can impact your life as a whole? -What do you find destabilising in your life today?
	STABILITY -Do you feel as if you have reached some sort of stability in your life? How can you tell? -Now that you are at a stable point in your life, what do you think will come next? What is the next phase? -Since you are in a stable place right now, what resources are you harvesting and collecting for the future? -How can this phase support you in preparing for a potential coming phase of crisis?	
	COLLAPSE -Does it feel right now as if you lost your stability and things seem falling apart? -What resources from the previous stage of your life can you adopt and use now? -What can you do now to prepare yourself for the next phase of regeneration that awaits you?	
	REGENERATION -Do you feel as if you just got out of a crisis? -What are the lessons you brought along from that crisis? -How are you regenerating from what you went through? -What can you do now, so that after your regeneration is through you can once more grow and thrive?	

OUTDOORS DISCLAIMER

This is not really a tool, rather something you should always keep in mind when engaging clients in outdoors and nature-based activities, for your own protection as well as awareness of the client about engaging with nature.

RELEASE AND WAIVER OF LIABILITY FOR OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES AGREEMENT

I acknowledge that I have voluntarily chosen to participate in the following activities at (place/area) with a focus on eco-coaching involving hiking and nature-based activities on uneven terrain, into wild and semi-wild places other outdoor experiential activities such as isolation in the local ecosystem and use of the surrounding natural world for learning purposes. Potential hazards include but are not limited to: trips and falls on uneven terrain or holes in the ground with potential ankle sprains and fractures, scratches and bruises, eye injuries from branches, head injuries from falls or hits to the head, bee stings, skin irritations, anxiety attack, random wild animal encounters/attacks, ticks: Lyme disease, dehydration, heat stroke and accidental drowning. If you know you are allergic to insect stings you are responsible to carry your own epi pen when outdoors.

I am aware that these activities are potentially hazardous and that I can be seriously harmed. I am voluntarily participating in these activities with knowledge of the danger involved and agree to assume any and all risks of bodily injury, harm or property damage, whether those risks are known or unknown.

By signing this document, I verify this statement and that I am about to partake in outdoor activities that include potential hazards. The above list of perceived dangers exists and is made available to notice of possible hazards and aware so to proceed with caution and keep safety first in mind while adhering to the rules of the parks and natural areas foreseen to use: No Fires or Flames No Breaking Through The Hedges No venturing in forbidden/limited areas. Yes, to participate in these activities and use of said premises/facilities, to always carry a battery-charged phone with available data for emergency contact, I forever release (name of the coach), and their affiliated organizations, and their respective directors, officers, employees, volunteers, agents, contractors, and representatives (collectively "Releases") from any and all actions, claims, or demands that I, my assignees, heirs, distributes, guardians, next of kin, spouse and legal representatives now have, or may have in the future, for injury, death, or property damage, related to (i) my participation in these activities, (ii) the negligence or other acts, whether directly connected to these activities or not, and however caused, by any Releasee, or (iii) the condition of the premises where these activities occur, whether or not I am then participating in the activities. I also agree that I/we, my assignees, heirs, guardians, next of kin, spouse and legal representatives will not make a claim against, sue, or attach the property of any Releasee in connection with any of the matters covered by the foregoing release.

I have carefully read this agreement and fully understand its contents. I am aware that this is a release of liability and contract, and sign it of my own free will.

Signature

I verify that the dangers of the activities and the significance of this Release and Waiver were explained to the Client(s) and that the Client(s) understood them.

Signature (The Coach)



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Final Words

To all the readers, trainers, facilitators, and educators who have journeyed through this manual: thank you. Thank you for your commitment to not only fostering individual growth but also seeking to build a sense of community and creating safe, inclusive spaces for your participants, students, and colleagues. Your dedication to empowering others while embracing the principles of connection, mindfulness, and respect for nature is a testament to the power of education as a force for transformation.

By incorporating ecopsychological approaches into your work, you are not only enriching your practice but also nurturing the well-being of the communities you serve. These methods are more than tools; they are pathways to deeper connections—with oneself, with others, and with the natural world.

If you are inspired to learn more about ecopsychology and how to integrate this approach into youth work or education, we invite you to explore the ReCalibur project webpage: <https://recalibur.eduera.sk/>. There, you will find a wealth of additional resources, including innovative methods, instructional videos, and even board games designed to engage and empower your participants. These tools are here to support you in continuing to inspire and create positive change.

Thank you for your efforts, your passion, and your openness to new ways of thinking and working. Together, we are building a world where growth and connection thrive—for individuals, communities, and the planet.

Bibliography



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CAMPBELL



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ABRAM



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KULL



ANDY FISHER



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STEVEN FOSTER



THEODORE
ROSZAK



BILL
PLOTKIN



JESPER
HOFFMEYER



BLACK
ELK



JACOB VON
UEXKÜLL