



**connat**

restoring resilience  
connecting to nature and self

# Reference frame

The reference frame was developed within the project

**CONNAT "Restoring Resilience – Connecting to Nature and Self".**

The project is supported by Erasmus+ Key Action 2, Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices,  
contract no. 2016-1-HU01-KA204-022911.

This report reflects only the authors' views and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use of information in this document.

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**2017**

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# 1. Introduction and aims

Resilience is the ability of an individual, a community or a country to cope, adapt and quickly recover from stress and shocks caused by a disaster, violence or conflict. It reduces vulnerabilities and contributes to building human capacities so that people can cope better with shocks. This ability may be a vital adaptability tool in these turbulent times.

Our strong conviction is that nature provides the fastest way to access our humanity, providing inspiration for sustainable and meaningful solutions that take into consideration the whole ecosystem.

In addition, in this project we would like to address the development of people's digital skills. The Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) shows that Croatia, Italy and Hungary (the three partner countries) all score below the EU average.

The project has four objectives:

- to build resilience to the crises that affect the European Union at the present time,
- to experience nature as a guide,
- to create an individual and collective meaning, opening ourselves to the meaning of life today, and to our human purpose, and collectively discover a shared meaning, getting inspiration from nature,
- to help raise the awareness of self (self-awareness) tapping into the deeper levels of our humanity.

Our two target groups are men and women already with an established existence but who have fears and questions, and their trainers and counsellors.

The main goals of the project are to develop the Intellectual Outputs: a reference frame, a MOOC frame and MOOC contents about re-connecting to nature and self in order to increase resilience in times of crisis. Outputs are developed through local (home-based) work, online meetings, as well as discussions in transnational meetings.

The content of the MOOC will be based on the reference framework presented in this document. Once MOOC has been developed, learners and trainers will be recruited to participate in the pilot MOOC. From that recruitment, four participants per each country will participate in the

face to face course in Calabria. Their evaluation and findings will be used for improvement of the MOOC, after which MOOC will be finalized and exploited. The main texts and all the video subtitles will be translated into three relevant national languages.

During all the activities, the monitoring, evaluation and dissemination will be organized, as well as two multiplication events per country: there will be a stakeholder meeting and a practice resource dissemination workshop in all of the three partner countries: Hungary, Italy and Croatia.

The three partners on the project are Rogers Foundation, Aura Association and the company Isoropia; a foundation, an association and a small enterprise, all working in the area of development and improvement of people as individuals and organizations.

## 2. National reports

As a first step in the reference frame construction, a series of interviews were performed at the end of 2016. The questions for the semi structured interviews were:

1. What is nature to you and how does it influence the way you deal with difficult moments in your life?
2. Share a personal story when you have overcome a life challenge. (How did you look to nature for relief, help, etc.)
3. What are your clients needs (competencies) in order to overcome life challenges?
4. What do you need, as a professional, to help people to overcome crises in their lives?

The interviewees were chosen from different kinds of helping professionals: therapist fields (yoga instructor, body workout instructor, masseur, psycho therapist and homeopathic doctor, managerial coach, psycho cybernetics therapist, reflexologist, natural holistic therapist) as well as from experienced trainers and coaches of outdoor activities including environmental education, trekking, nordic walking, mountaineering, mountain cave walking and alpinism. University professors, teachers, teacher for disabled children, youth leaders, social and refugee workers were also included in the survey.

These people all work with adults in different settings and therefore are suitable members of our two target groups.

In all three countries 51 professionals were interviewed in total. Their analyses and conclusions are summed up in three national reports, prepared by Elena Franzini (IT), Zsuzsa Vastag (H) and Goran Hudec (CRO). The national reports are in the appendixes of this report.

**The shortest summary of all the interviews is presented as follows:**

**I. What is nature to you and how does it influence your way you deal with difficult moments in your life?**

Reading 51 interviews it was interesting to see how nature is perceived from different points of view. The answers could be classified, which is a necessary step in the analysis but one conclusion is straightforward: RESPECT. No matter how nature is described by the participants, respect is a common quality.

**II. Share a personal story when you have overcome a life challenge. (How did you look to nature for relief, help, etc.)**

The personal stories as a result of this question, lead to a dispersion of answers. We have different problems, and nature offers different ways of helping. A conclusion could be offered, a DIVERSITY OF INTERACTIONS is possible within humans and nature which heals us.

**III. What are your client's needs (competencies) in order to overcome life challenges?**

Some of the competencies mentioned in the interviews were – in a broader sense – survival skills in nature including physical fitness. This is of course important because it opens up a wider choice of interactions with nature. However, within this project we shall not deal with physical fitness programs.

Within the CONNAT project, we will build a course with an aim to enabling recognition of someone's needs, her/his readiness to search for a possible fulfilment of those needs through interaction with nature as a prerequisite for wellbeing. Development of this set of competencies, presented later, is the core of our course.

#### IV. What do you need, as a professional, to help people to overcome crises in their lives?

A support NETWORK and exchange of good practices with other professionals should be developed (informal and formal associations) on raising the awareness of people about the benefits of being active in nature. Networking was mentioned as an important factor in the success of this project.

### 3. Focus groups

National reports were the basis for the focus groups analysis. Three focus groups, one per project partners' country, provided further insights into resilience as a complex skills composition.

Similarly, as for the interviews, the focus groups consisted of members two target groups: trainees as well as trainers and counsellors.

In the focus group of Aura Association main topic was what skills should be included in CONNAT course. As a most important competencies of wellbeing are underlined, such as the readiness to fulfil ones needs and readiness to interact with nature. This could be accomplished by applying connection to nature as a learning process. Interaction with a nature is a core skill to be embedded in CONNAT course as a prerequisite for nourishing wellbeing skills.

Aura focus group also proposed to include the digital competence as a competence that should be developed.

In the first part of their discussion Rogers Foundation concentrate on identifying resilience skills and got a great variety of responses. Those skills range from self-knowledge and connected skills to a more holistic lifestyle. Based on the discussion a list of competences was suggested to be included in a course.

About suggested eight competencies, different aspects of realisation such as list of games and techniques to play at the in-nature training to strengthen resilience were under scope. To grab the essence of resilience: „I continue, whatever happens”.

In addition, a structure of MOOC course, exercises and length of modules were discussed.

In the first part of discussion, Isoropia's focus group was concentrated on a list of skills proposed in reference frame draft. After discussion, skills were ranged by importance according to Focus group opinion. Self-reflection, Self-confidence, Openness and Slowing down were underlined as the most important skills.

The second part of discussion was about organization of the MOOC course. Opinion prevailed that with 1,5 to 5 hours weekly workload and that length of course should be at least 4 weeks.

In the last part, activities with a longer stay in direct contact with nature, like campus in nature, or projects like building a turf houses are solutions for developing "in nature" communities.

The focus group national reports, prepared by Zsuzsa Vastag, Elena Franzini and Goran Hudec, are in appendixes of this report.

## 4. Theoretical background

Living in nature, being at the mercy of it belonged to humans all through history. However the last century brought about a change: a great part of humanity left the natural environment. People living in the country, especially those working on the fields still consider nature as an integral part of their life. They don't work in wild nature anymore, but they still do have a close connection with natural forces like plants, animals, water, rivers, sun, wind, etc. A city at the same time consists of mainly stone and iron.

The population in cities continuously grows. According to World Urbanization United Nations Prospects today the 73% of the population of Europe lives in towns, by 2050 approximately the 66% of the world population will live in cities. In Hungary this rate will be 82%. (UN, 2014)

Urbanization have an impact on natural environment, on society and on the individual as well. In this article we focus mainly on the effects on individuals. Mental problems appear on the following areas:

- lack of mindfulness due to the „runaway phenomenon” of the intentional cognitive processes
- the decreasing sense of community based partly on the break-up of the traditional family and community models,
- the alienation from nature. Due to our distance from the natural environment, we do not feel as part of the nature anymore.

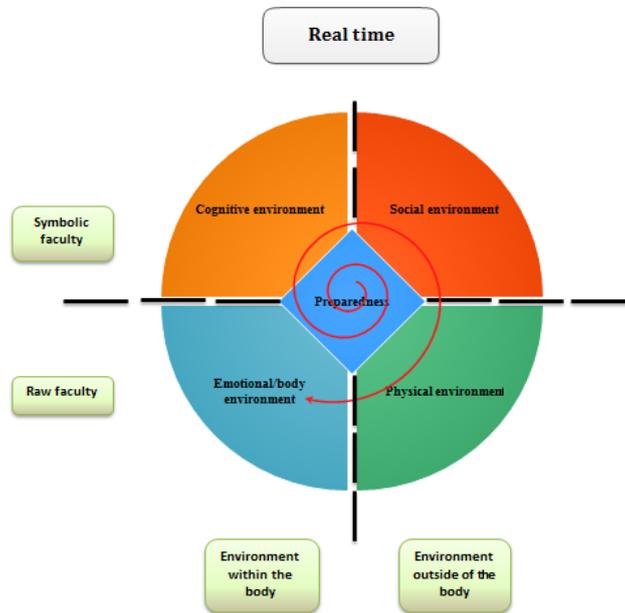
In the following pages we are having a look at the theoretical background of these processes, as a theoretical introduction to the Reference Frame.

### THE ECOSYSTEM OF THE INDIVIDUAL

#### I. Sensing the present

Though only parts of cognition can be searched, we have to keep in mind that the individual is a complex system. When a helping professional works with a client as a person, he or she will work with the whole person even if his/her work effects on special areas only. Man is a complex ecosystem in its body and mind, too – an embodied mind.

Man lives in the “here and now”. (Maturana, 1995) At the same time, living in the present is effected by his being an embodied mind and by his/her embeddedness in the surrounding natural and social-communal ecosystem.



The actual environment sensed by the individual

*Source: Suhajda (2011): System theoretic approach of learning, dissertation manuscript, pp.50*

We are talking about four areas: The first two are to experience directly: our body and the physical environment. The other two are symbolic: our experiences and the features of the community area. These four areas do not exist without each other. (Suhajda, 2011) The actual sense of problems can't be grabbed out of time. Timely connections between or within the areas continuously effect sensing.

## II. Lack of mindfulness

Bateson says that the main problem of Man is that we do not see: we are a complex ecosystem and a part of a bigger one (Bateson, 2000). The evolutionary processes of a complex ecosystem are characterized by the efforts to find balance between cooperation and competition. This psychic balance can be created by the consciously made harmony of the physical and cognitive

areas. Unfortunately the cognition has “run away” – we spend too much more time with rational learning and problem solving than with emotional or physical processes. Think of school and work.

If the ecosystem disintegrates, it causes the destruction of the body and the environment. (psychosomatic illnesses). The psychological cure comes about when steps are made in the psychic sphere, too.

For positive present state Seligman finds peaceful serenity as needed and optimism for the future (Seligman, 2007). Others call savouring the state when we have positive feelings and we know about them (Bryant és Veroff 2006). Yet we can't call this the state of mindfulness because – though we are conscious about ourselves - we focus on positive feelings instead of accepting the moment (with its incidental unpleasantness). Csíkszentmihályi's Flow theory is different from mindfulness, too. In flow we unconsciously focus on one special thing (Csíkszentmihályi, 2001). Mindfulness is the state when we consciously sense the present.

### III. Lack of belonging to a community

Man is a social being and many researchers consider social connections as vital for the evolution of humans (social brain: Dunbar, 1998; mirror neurons: Goleman, 1997).

In social interactions the individual connects with others. Communities are important both for the individual and for the society. Communities give safety to its members, give sense to their life, help them to be effective and help their personal growth. When we lack community, society disintegrates. It means it can't synchronize individual interests anymore. (Hankiss, 1983)

In history, due to successful cooperation life security grew, and as a consequence, so did the number of people. The separated groups had their own beliefs, habits, culture and everyone in the group accepted these as eternal – they knew no other schemes. Loyalty to group norms were so strong that personal interests were often put aside (Csíkszentmihályi, 2010). When the number of groups started to grow, bigger and bigger unities were formed (Diamond, 2010). Parallely, the natural communities of the individual got reduced: tribes to clans, clans to big families, big families to nuclear families and then to one-member groups. (Csányi, 2006).

In the one-member group system, the individual personally decides how to live, what to do, and what to believe in. He/she has got to choose from lots of values and check them from time to time. He/she also lost the roots: he/she can't make use of the old learning of ancestors anymore. Traditions, tales, stories do not give solutions anymore. (Boldizsár, 2010)

He/she also can decide how long a connection is good for him or her. Connections then become more and more superficial – no time for listening to each other.

A kind of solution is offered by Carl Rogers, who – being a psychologist – found five basic values: empathy, congruence, open communication, trust and unconditional positive regard. If we keep to them, we may find meaningful connections again (Rogers, 2004)

#### IV. Connecting to nature

In our world with electronic letters and digital happiness, only regular meeting with (touchable) natural things (e.g. soil, sky etc.) can help us orientate among the lots of dimensions of our life. If we want to reach mental and physical harmony, the dominance of our symbolic world must be balanced with the connection with the touchable physical world (Abram, 1996).

When we developed our writing-systems, we started to lose the connection with nature. Writing got separated from the speaker, was structured linearly and restructured the mind too (Ong, 2010). In written texts nature appeared as an object, a mean or a source. Man was seen as one on the top of hierarchy, where he started to use nature.

Louv calls the lack of connection with nature a „nature deficit syndrome” (Louv, 2008). Though this syndrome is not an illness, it's effects can cause illnesses (attention disorder, overweight, mental disorders). The monotony of the urban environment is in sharp contrast with the great variation of the natural environment.

The connection with nature could be curing. Higher level of concentration, better achievements, less aggression, less stress, better adaptability – just some of the benefits (Louv, 2008; Kuo-Sullivan, 2001). Walking in the forest, spending some time in wild nature, animal assisted therapy, a greener environment have great relaxing effects. Studies have proved that criminality amongst young people were much higher in urban areas.

## 5. Competencies

A core of Resilience competencies to be developed in the CONNAT project is recognized in the sets of skills and competences already documented in previous researches. Those competencies fit within **RF4 Digital competence**, **RF5 Learning to learn**, **RF6 Social competences** and **RF7 Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship** competencies according to Key Competences 4LLL\_EU Reference Framework classifications.

*Competence / EU competence frame*

**SELF-CONFIDENCE / (nro 5) Learning to learn**

*Reasoning why it is important*

Personal courage to take on and accept challenges.

*Learning outcomes, specific learning goals*

Confidence that you can overcome challenges.

Conflict management skill.

Making use of guidance, making use of self-organisation.

*Activities*

Peer coaching exercise followed by reflection

Activity (reflections/sharing) on the seasonal development in nature, step by step, slowly and not all at once, nor at one time.

Engaging in communities and networks (for supporting this competence)

Engage learner to build on prior learning

*Competence / EU competence frame*

**BALANCE WITHIN ONESELF / (nro6) Social and civic competences**

*Reasoning why it is important*

To find balance within oneself, but also with one's wider surroundings, this includes other people, animals, nature, universe, etc. If one can control oneself, one can better understand what is happening around and become more resilient.

*Learning outcomes, specific learning goals*

Self-control – as one of life-organizing skills.

Recognize collaboration in nature.

Learning in a group

Participative learning

*Activities*

Experience beautiful natural surroundings.

The different elements of nature (multicultural identity of nature).

Followed by a group sharing of personal experiences.

*Competence / EU competence frame*

**SELF-REFLECTION / (nro6) Social and civic competences**

*Reasoning why it is important*

It is the core to create a stable personality.

### *Learning outcomes, specific learning goals*

Self-awareness

Knowing one's boundaries.

Be aware of one's own strengths.

Recognize one's own weaknesses

### *Activities*

Personal journaling, sharing in pairs.

Visualisations and work with symbols.

Walking in nature to develop inner peace, include moments of silence and mindfulness.

### *Competence / EU competence frame*

**SELF-DEVELOPMENT / (nr06) Social and civic competences**

### *Reasoning why it is important*

Self-development is the best way to face new challenges in life. This is an important part of good and healthy relations with other people. This is the way to become a stable personality, to dare to trust others.

### *Learning outcomes, specific learning goals*

Empathy.

Trust.

The ability to slow down.

The power to change perspective and see the world as other people do.

Managing emotions, self-reflection and appreciation of beauty.

## *Activities*

Experience nature as a guide.

Experience nature's wisdom.

Walking in nature in pairs, followed by sharing.

## *Competence / EU competence frame*

**DIVERSITY / (nr06) Social and civic competences**

## *Reasoning why it is important*

Nature is complex. It is necessary to learn how to change points of view to understand diversity and accept a situation as it is.

## *Learning outcomes, specific learning goals*

The appreciation of differences, both in humans and in the natural world.

It can also be taken to spiritual areas – we are different and we create our own world – so let's create a good one.

## *Activities*

Find your personal plant.

Explore, find unexpected things in nature.

Walking and reflecting in a natural landscape.

Journaling about all the different elements and the integrity of each element, with no discrimination.

*Competence / EU competence frame*

**CREATIVITY / (nro. 7) Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship**

*Reasoning why it is important*

Creativity is the ability to think outside of the box, to solve unexpected problems or to find new solutions to old ones.

*Learning outcomes, specific learning goals*

To recognize new categories of problems.

To come up with original ideas.

*Activities*

“Solve a problem” challenges in nature.

Exercising diversity thinking.

Showing video clips of a forest or seascape. Constructive participation: create a short theatre performance, in small groups, expressing the biodiversity in nature and how to value the differences.

*Competence / EU competence frame*

**DIGITAL COMPETENCE / (nro 4) digital competence**

*Reasoning why it is important*

Competence of lifelong learning nro 4

*Learning outcomes, specific learning goals*

Being active in forums and developing networks, being active and engaged in self paced learning.

### *Activities*

participate actively in MOOC forums, participate in coaching cycles

## 6. Preliminary draft of course curriculum

Resilience competencies and skills could be developed in six course modules:

### Module 1: The need for being connected.

“Be in the flow”. Your awareness of time and scope.

Resilience and needs for resilience.

**Skills:** *Self-reflection, Balance with oneself, Self-confidence*

### Module 2: Connection to nature as a learning process.

Help of nature in personal adult development.

**Skills:** *Life Organization, Creativity*

### Module 3: Connection to knowledge of our ancestors.

Learning from stories and tales - connecting to the knowledge of our ancestors

**Skills:** *Self-development, Openness, Slowing down*

### Module 4: Connection to our own lives.

The seasons of life and transformation: create your story (your fairy tale), storytelling

**Skills:** *Diversity, Proactivity*

### Module 5: Connections to other people.

Helping relationships (healing connections)

**Skills:** *Empathy, Trust*

### Module 6: Ceremonies for connections.

Create your personal ceremony

**Skills:** *Self-development, Personal Efficiency*

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