

Participant report

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Project information: <https://naturalchangehungary.wordpress.com/>

About the project:

“The Natural Change Project is a process of personal transformation and reflection through nature-based workshops, disseminated through a unique website blog, which invites the wider world to experience the personal journeys of the participants.

The Natural Change Project is a new and innovative response to the environmental and cultural pressures we face. It is a response to the growing evidence that while current environmental campaigns have been successful in raising awareness and concern about environmental issues, they have not resulted in the depth of behaviour change necessary to address these issues.

The current state of the global environment is not a comforting picture. Impoverishment of ecosystems and cultures continues. The self-stabilising and seemingly rational ‘invisible hand’ that governs global markets has evaporated into thin air and climate change clouds any picture of a healthy future.

Despite overall growth in material prosperity in our corner of the world, issues of mental and physical well-being are increasingly urgent and are being linked to the health of nature.

It is well recognised that a large-scale change in public and private behaviours is required.

While ‘pro-environmental behaviour change’ has been on governmental and non-governmental organisation agendas for several years, there is often no understanding of the connections between the economic and the environmental, or the psychological and the physical dimensions of the problem. Both the terms ‘climate change’ and ‘sustainability’ risk being so overused and loaded with injunctions that they could do more harm than good.

Typical mainstream approaches to persuading people to make changes in their lives tend to focus on mass marketing campaigns to insulate lofts, buy energy saving bulbs, or change modes of transport. All these things need to happen. However, it isn’t clear that an external exhortation, no matter how well communicated, will do the job of motivating sustained and sustaining lifestyle choices. Recent

research shows that providing information on the state of the planet and expecting people to respond consistently with 'pro-environmental behaviour' is based on flawed logic. We are complex beings with

values, attitudes, identities and emotions and while these are not always internally consistent, we will act when all these facets are appealed to. This further implies that campaigns focusing on practical changes without revealing the deeper reasons why people should adopt these practices are less effective. What is more, these campaigns will be more successful if they suggest positive reasons for change: increased well-being, a healthier sense of self, more cohesive community, rather than impositions on our lives to prevent future disaster.

An exploration of what 'sustainability' means helps place change in a broader and more positive light. An ecological (or systems) viewpoint – seeing the relationships between things and events – shows that economic, social, psychological and environmental issues are linked. At the centre of this approach is the understanding that the ultimate basis of economics is ecology, and that people cannot be healthy on a sick planet. Thus a change in our 'frame of mind' or our 'frame of being' is at the heart of movement towards healthier people and planet, and 'joins the dots' between sets of issues creating widespread effects.

Seeing sustainability as the opportunity to be healthier psychologically and physically, and living in a community which has long-term viability, presents a view which encourages commitment. These considerations build up a picture that demands a radically different approach towards change.

Natural Change is one model based on these insights, and has its roots in various educational and therapeutic methodologies:

- Ecopsychology
- Outdoor learning
- Action Research

A combination of these approaches is used in the Natural Change Project. There are further elements in the mix:

considerable research suggests that 'significant life experiences' can trigger personal transformation towards

ecological awareness. These can include outdoor experiences XIV described as 'peak' or 'flow,' or sometimes as 'spiritual'. Also involved here is a style of learning which engages the whole group in working towards practical outcomes, an ecological understanding of the problem of sustainability,

and a method of differentiating between healthy and unhealthy ways of satisfying our needs.”

From the 2009 WWF Natural Change Report

source: <https://naturalchangehungary.wordpress.com/project/>

Methods learned:

- solo day in nature guidance for youth (solo preparation, calming activities including guided visualisation, solo practicals)
- reflexive methods (circle reflexion – story telling and story mirrors, creative expression and self reflection/analyses)

Skills gained:

- language skills (communication and experience/sensual expression in English)
- self reflection and assistance
- circle work in the group

Training course structure:

- arrival and getting known each other
 - solo day preparation (guided visualisation in 4 directions, slow and slower walk...)
 - solo day (in a safe place in the forest, fasten in or not)
 - solo day reflection (group and personal – circle speech, mirroring, self reflection, creative reflection)
 - collective reflection with the spirals of knowledge, reflection in pairs
 - farewell party
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