



Wellbeing and nature-connection

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Wellbeing and nature-connection are essential capacities for living on this planet. Human beings are born with them and for millennia have been transformed through them. We are instinctively guided towards connection in order to create and support our wellbeing. We seek to establish links, relations, communications, sharings, kinship and friendship, propitiating environments for growth and flourishing, constantly enhancing our lives!

As grown up people it is our responsibility to cultivate these capacities in our lives and to share them with our youth in any ways possible, in the real spacetimes in which we live. It is our wish for Youth Work in Europe to cultivate and perform these two nature's given capacities: connection and wellbeing.

In our understanding as trainers, *Nature-connection* refers to a type of awareness that is attentive and receptive to natural cycles, ecological dynamics and flows of energy and information. Curious, full of wonder and love for the miracle of life. This awareness allows humans to belong to a place in deep communication with their surroundings, which include different environments: the wilder spaces, our social constructions and our personal relationships with whom we share a common place, including the animals, the plants and all the other forms of life.

Actually, what humans have been losing through the process of industrialization and expansion of urban ways of life, is this type of attentiveness to the wild and living world of nature. It is the slumber and potential atrophy of such awareness which has been described as *Nature deficit disorder* (Louve, 2005)¹. Thus, many of us who were born and raised in big cities and techno entertaining enclosures, are losing track and forgetting how to perform and cultivate *wellbeing in tune with nature*, feeling therefore disconnected and clueless about how nature works in supporting our terrestrial lives.

Furthermore, *Wellbeing* has been described as a mental and physical state of health and balance, a state of vitality and inner joy that "*encompasses quality of life and the ability of people and societies to contribute to the world with a sense of meaning and purpose*" (WHO, *Promoting wellbeing*)². We suggest that we could approach *wellbeing* as the capacity/ability/competence

¹ Richard Louve, "The last child in the woods", 2005.

² <https://www.who.int/activities/promoting-well-being#:~:text=Well%2Dbeing%20encompasses%20quality%20of,resources%2C%20overall%20thriving%20and%20sustainability>.





to perform actions that promote and foster lifestyles and quality of life that contribute to the world at large, what we call the Earth community, which is necessarily more-than-human.

And remember, nature-connection is an awareness inherent to all of us, just for being from the Earth, an awareness developed through thousands of years. So it is not about learning it, but re-awakening it if it has been put to sleep or activating it in a more holistic and conscious manner so it can support our wellbeing for the sake of thriving life.

Therefore, we would like to propose some ways to remember, awake and cultivate these terrestrial and evolutionary capacities in our daily lives, so they can have a beneficial influence in the Earth community to which we belong. In this way, communities can become resilient and enduring in their endeavors for thriving life and renovating their human cultures, fostering collective and ecological wellbeing!

Remember, the kingdoms of nature are not only the nurturing ground of our biophysical existence, they are also the fertile soils and landscapes of the soul that allow humans to dream, to make sense of things and events, to wish and to grow to the fulfillment of their capacities as conscious beings.

Indeed, outdoor nature has been the best playground, toolkit and wonder box for children and young people as natural creatures embedded in the web of life.

At the same time, nature nourishes the soul with the games and surprises of wildlife and the multiform variety of impressions and stimuli (communications) that feed human psyche and imagination: colors, smells, sounds, textures, shadows and lights, seasons, rain, moon, stars, birds fly... are the material of stories and collective wisdom, our mythical and symbolic heritage.

Can we find ways to be more attentive to our connections with nature and how they influence our wellbeing?

