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Increasing spiritual health through outdoor and experiential education

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Connection of winter outdoor course to the trauma papers?

- Pain, suffering, uncertainty as a kind of personal sacrifice





Changes in the way of experiencing

- ***From reality into virtuality***, more time with media than in school; up to 11 hours per day (Inchley et al., 2016; Strasburger, Jordan, & Donnerstein, 2012)
- ***Sedentary behaviour*** produces obesity, the most serious global pandemic, shortens the life span and increases mortality (Keating, Backholer, & Peeters, 2014; Roth, Qiang, Marban, Redelt, & Lowell, 2004; Whitlock et al., 2009)
- “gaming widows”: 84% of computer ***game-players*** are men, gender can be a factor influencing lower marital satisfaction (Ahlstrom, Lundberg, Zabriskie, Eggett, & Lindsay, 2012)
- Virtuality is connected also to watching ***pornography*** encouraging sex without intimacy, decreasing self-confidence in sexual relationships, increasing sexual anorexia and sexual dysfunction (Tylka, 2015; Zimbardo, Wilson, & Coulombe, 2016)



How to overcome this problem? Education in nature!

- Outdoor education (Teo, Yasim, & Wee, 2011; Turcova, Martin, & Neuman, 2005)
- Adventure education (Hattie & et al., 1997; Sibthorp & Richmond, 2016)
- Experiential education (Andrews, 1999; Wojcikiewicz & Mural, 2010).
 - activities to pose a risk, to include danger and to provide challenges to overcome (i.e., adventure or challenge education), as well as a preference for nature as an environment for educational processes (i.e., outdoor or wilderness education); is characterized by direct experiences that can help us gain a deeper understanding of ourselves, other people, nature, and the world





Educational goals that should serve as a potential rite of passage

- Such a programme is sufficiently demanding and exacting and can help participants meet their own boundaries, even meet a symbol of death;
- The activities usually involve pain and suffering, which can help participants overcome and transcend obstacles;
- The experience of nature is risky, unsafe, and dangerous;
- The programme must place demands on participants' decision-making and increase their responsibility for their own lives;
- The course must be prepared not only for one individual but also for a social group that can make every member stronger



An example: two weeks peregrination and camping in winter nature

Programme

- Several days in a natural environment, without civilization's achievements and comforts
- An intense challenge involving painful and unsafe situations
- Leading participants to test their limits, to provoke necessary decision-making and to encourage group cohesion
- The period spent in a harsh winter landscape and the physically demanding activities associated with it (enduring pain, gusts of wind, and freezing cold) is a traditional means of outdoor and experiential education

Social conditions

- We are not trained to live in uncomfortable conditions, to take opportunities to live on the edge and to be active
- Our reality is more virtual than real, given that the majority of the population sits in front of screens, becoming obese
- We are losing our ability to establish social relationships because we prefer to be alone with our technical devices.
- How many of these people have ever spent a winter's day outside? Not only a day but also a night in a tent? And not only one or two nights, but two weeks?
- Such a task is difficult, risky, unsafe, and painful for our ordinary, lifestyle; such an experience is very developmental, transcendental, and educational





Methods

- Interviews and focus groups (Jirásek & Svoboda, 2015)
- Sociometric techniques (Jirásek & Dvořáčková, 2016)
- Prague's questionnaire of spirituality (Jirásek, Veselský, & Poslt, 2017)
- Participants' mind maps (Jirásek, Plevová, Jirásková, & Dvořáčková, 2016)
- Systemic constellations (Jirásek, Jirásková, Majewská, & Bolcková, 2017)



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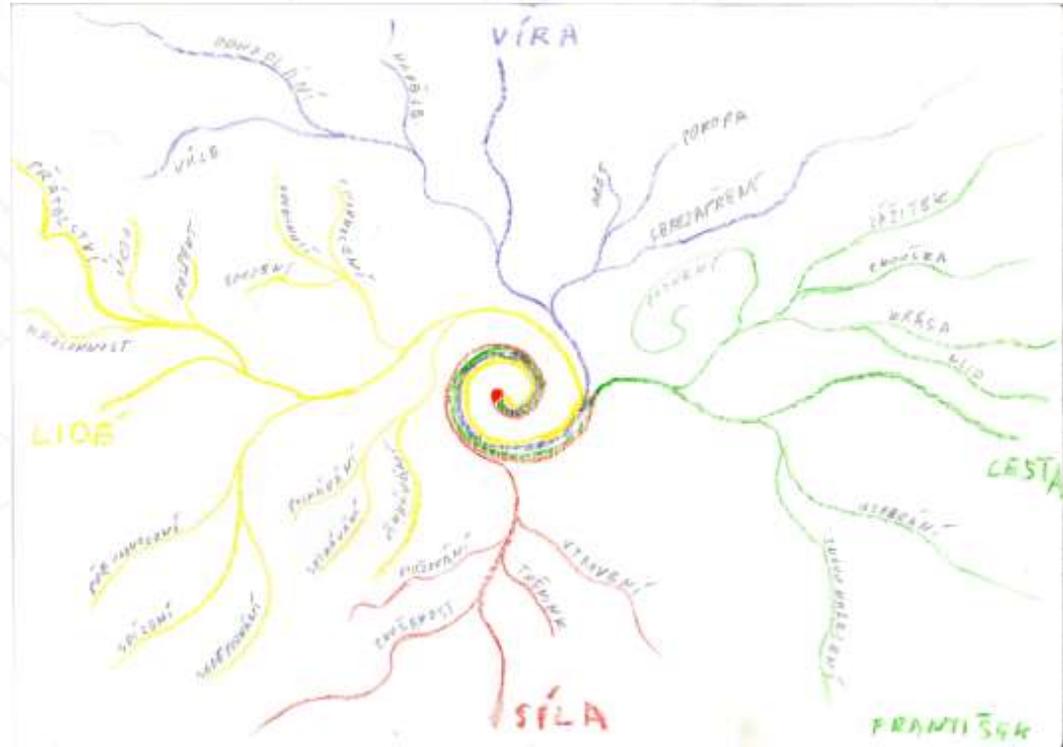
Mind mapping examples

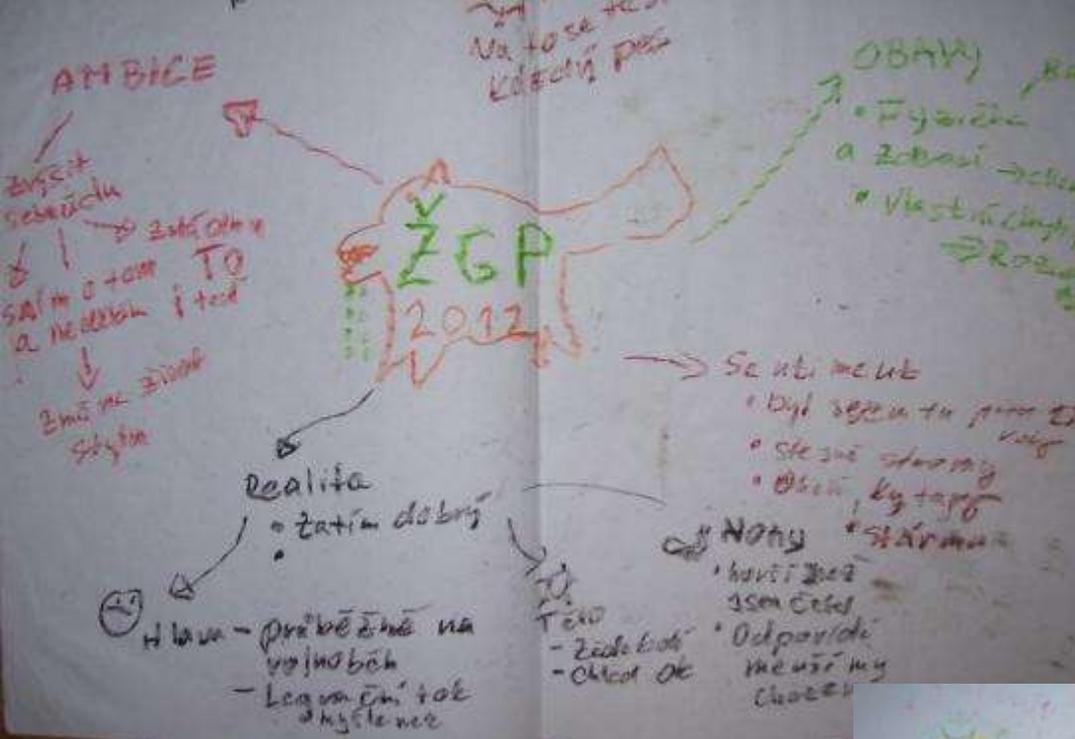




- Specificity
- Childishly naive impression
- Mere 2 colors
- Not transcendence

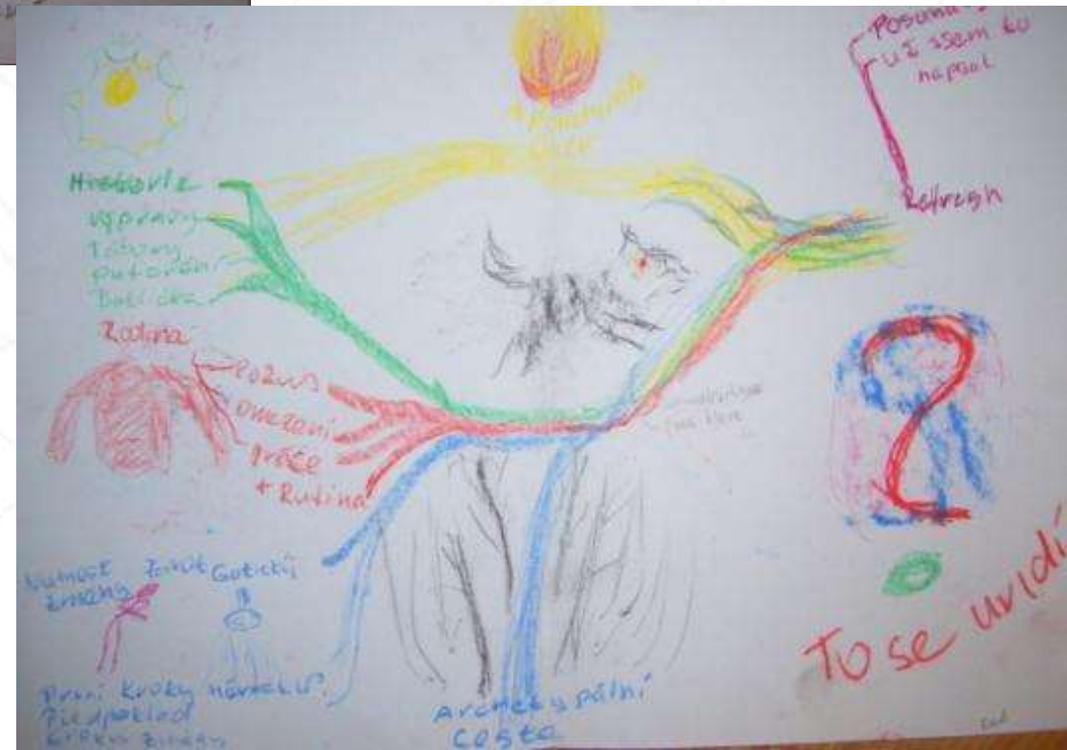
- From center to spirals
- People, power, path, faith
- Spiral: **symbol of death and rebirth, transformation of life**





- „pushes“ fears, ambitions, reality and sentiment
- Dog baring teeth with green saliva

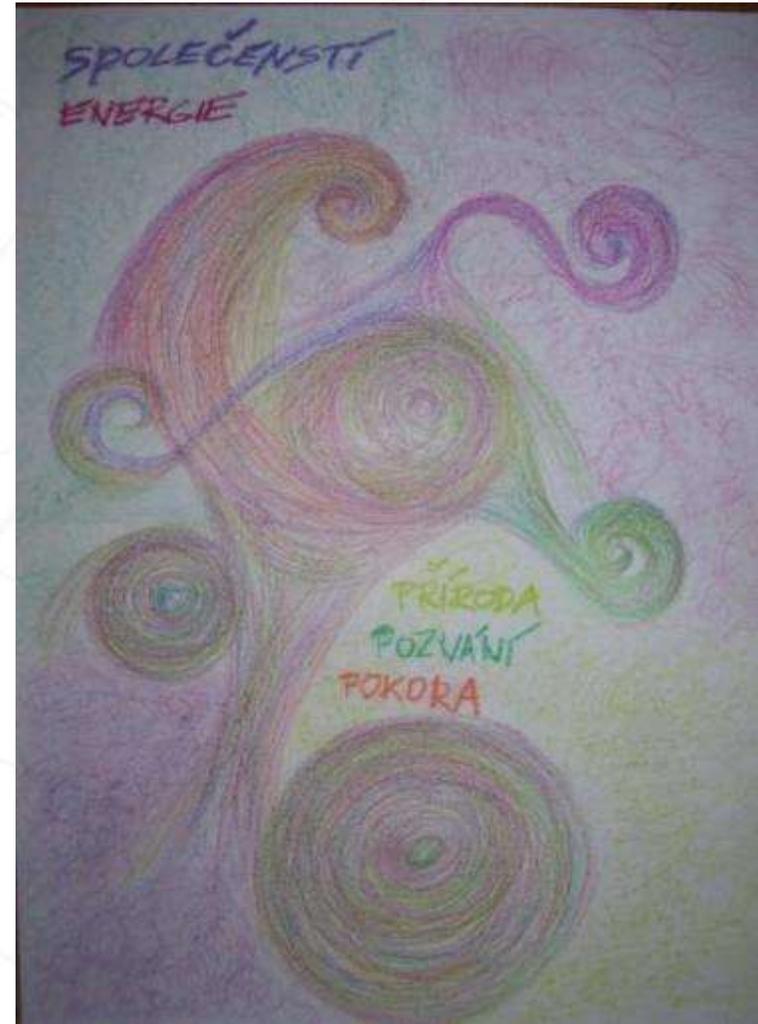
- Future: „we‘ll see“
- Rather cheerful dog
- Colors are again blended into coherent flow
- Archetypal fire and archetypal path





- „tree of knowledge“ – bipolarity
- Roots = night (ground, water, man)
- Crown = day and light (air, serenity, sky, animals, team...)

- Harmonious spiral shapes (**renewal and transformation**)
- Predominant purple
- Humility, knowledge, nature, energy, community
- Circle: unity and perfection, motion (**origin and death**)





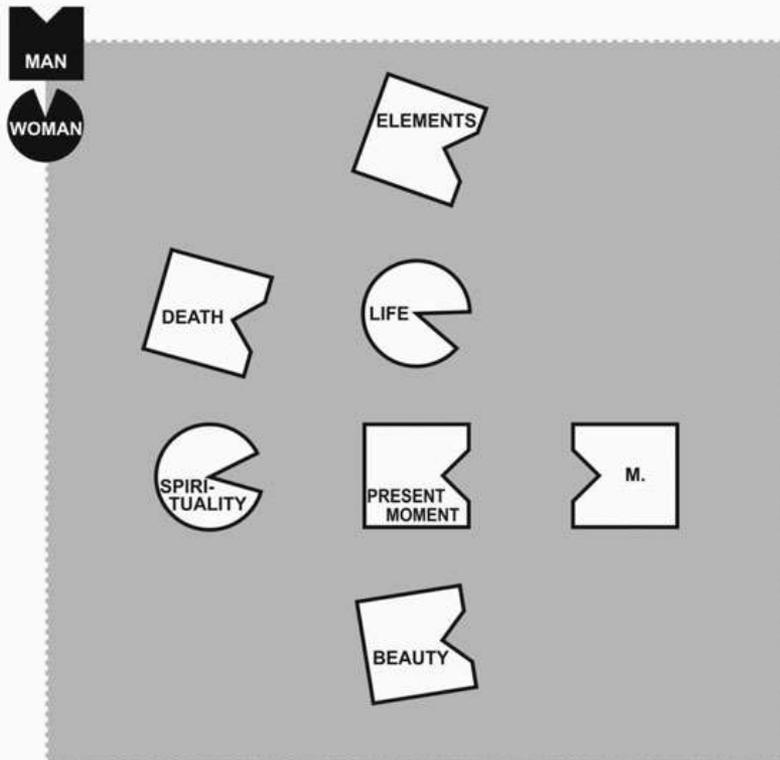
Mind mapping results

- From vague fears and inaccurate expectations of self-overcoming to acceptance of one's self and higher self-confidence
- From polarity to a holistically perceived reality with emphasis on energy and dynamics, movement and transformation, simultaneously conditioned by an order
- From concepts to colorful visual symbolism (with emphasis on the symbols of the elements, particularly fire, or a journey, including the purpose of one's life journey and mission), from concrete phenomena to their abstraction
- From focus on the past (winter, stability, firmness) to open acceptance of the future (fire, sun, energy, dynamic change)
- From the respondent's personality to community
- From the bodily, physical dimension of experiencing to the **spiritual or holistic level in the meaning of the experience.**

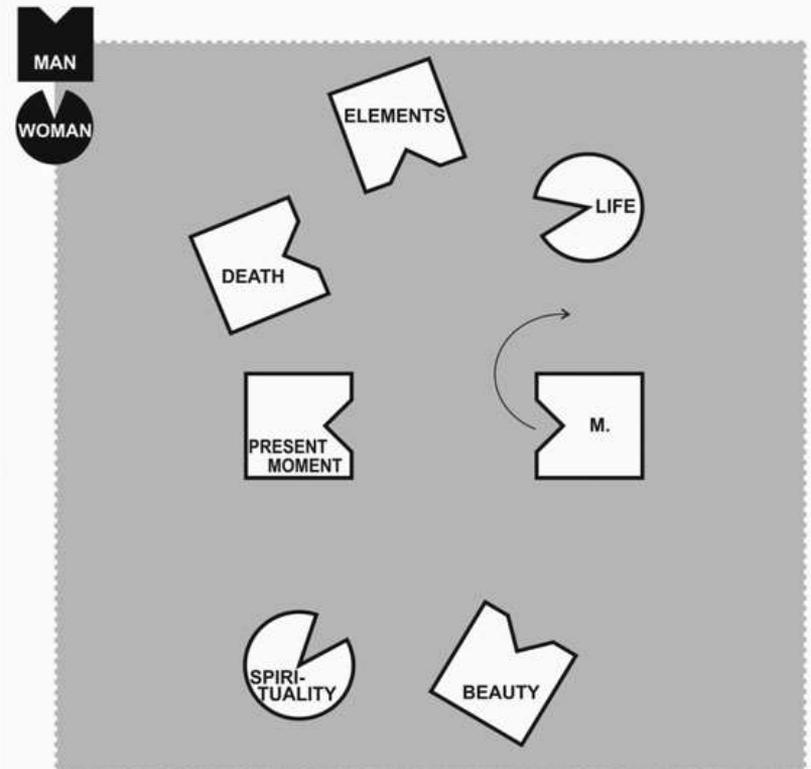


Systemic constellation: life, the present moment, beauty, death, the elements and spirituality

Initial position



Final position





Systemic constellation – results

- Fact that certain forms of experiences acquired in a completely **non-religious environment**, namely, during a winter expedition on snowshoes in the mountain landscape, may be regarded as spiritual
- The participants' statements reveal a **spiritual dimension to their experiences** during the course, in some **(quite rare) cases even a religious one**



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Spiritual experience in non-religious environment?





Another respondents' examples

– From virtuality back to reality

- “You touch the earth, it really is wet or mossy; you taste what you can, and suddenly you perceive Nature as living.” (Jirásek, Jirásková, et al., 2017, p. 134)

– Natural elements – fire

- “Since the fire was always there when all the participants stood together, and the fire roared, warmed us, one of the elements, a magical moment, and this community was even stronger there.” (Jirásek, Veselský, et al., 2017, p. 12).

– Social support and group cohesion

- “I also had a crisis, but the fact that the people around me were functioning, that gave me support, and it wasn't that bad after all” (Jirásek & Svoboda, 2015, p. 103; Jirásek & Svoboda, 2016, p. 99)

– Spiritual experience

- “The forest was like a temple to me; it was almost a religious experience” (Jirásek, Jirásková, et al., 2017, p. 133).





Thank you for your attention

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- Jirásek, I., Plevová, I., Jirásková, M., & Dvořáčková, A. (2016). Experiential and outdoor education: the participant experience shared through mind maps. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 38(3), 334-354.