

Theoretical Foundations of Ecological Arts Therapies

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Abstract

This article examines the key presumptions and theoretical foundation of ecological, or earth-based creative arts therapies, a branch of contemporary ecotherapy. It is considered from the perspective of the eco-human multi-disciplinary approach defining the human being in a relation to the living environment, and seeking to reveal one's own subjectivity and to shape the world in order to fill one's needs and take care of environmental well-being. Such key concepts of ecological expressive therapies as ecological, eco-human perspective on health and illness, personality, eco-identity formation, nature as the third part in the therapeutic relations, environmental and ecopsychology perception of the therapeutic setting, the role of the arts in providing meaningful human connection to nature are explained. This helps to understand ecological arts therapies as providing both public and environmental health and establishing more harmonious relations of humans with nature.

Keywords: *Arts Therapies; Eco-Human Approach; Ecopsychology; Ecotherapy; Ecopoiesis; Poiesis; Environment; Eco-Human Approach*

Introduction

Ecological arts therapies represent an emerging therapeutic approach which is based on the new understanding of the role of the arts in providing public and environmental health and establishing more harmonious relations of humans with nature. These forms of therapy belong to an established group of mental health professions or specialized therapeutic approaches, such as art therapy, music therapy, dramatherapy, dance-movement therapy and expressive arts therapy. These disciplines focus on the therapeutic use of creative/expressive processes of clients and their relationship with the therapist. Ecological arts therapies are characterized by a new perspective on health issues and the role of arts in providing public and planetary health and well-being. They are supported by such scientific approaches as environmental and ecopsychology and ecophilosophy and demonstrate a new perspective on our understanding of the therapeutic role of human bonds and forms of environmental activity with nature.

The spectrum of expressive forms, used as environmental creative responses embraced in these therapies is broad and includes visual art, drama and rituals, music, dance and movement, creative writing as well as practices integrating expressive arts and interacting with animals and plants, wilderness journeys, contemplative presence in nature etc. Ecological or earth-based arts therapies together with ecotherapy, environmental philosophy, environmental education as well as the contemporary environmental arts support the emerging eco-human doctrine, the eco-human approach and the growing field of constructive innovations that can be applied in education, medicine, the wider social context in order to counteract the environmental crisis and enable a more harmonious co-evolution of human beings and the more-than-human world.

Creative acts can involve the embedment in the ecosystem and attunement to various environmental phenomena and forms of life by which certain aspects of human experience, in particular, those related to our biological history and our 'ecological unconscious' according to Theodore Roszak [1] could be actualized and brought to the conscious mind, to provide health and well-being and support our perception of ourselves as 'ecological subjects', our eco-identity [2,3].

The original and main points of ecological or earth-based arts therapies could be summarized in the following way. They usually include either outdoor or indoor activities that involve direct interaction with the environment, or natural materials and often lead to their perception as forms of life and appropriate ethical position. These activities can be a series of exercises providing awakening sensory awareness through relaxation, breathing, exploratory mindful walks, body scanning, journaling and some other assignments which help to develop receptive, diffuse and focused attention and embedment in the living environment.

Basic theoretical assumptions of ecological arts therapies (eco-arts therapies)

Ecological or earth-based arts therapies (eco-arts therapies) mean something more than just a set of innovative creative activities and ideas that can be implemented in the already established expressive/creative arts therapeutic approaches. It is a new set of empirical forms of therapeutic and health-promoting work supported by a constellation of theoretical ideas which have a certain distinctive quality. Ecological arts therapies strive to bring the arts and nature together to provide beneficial effects both for human and nonhuman worlds.

Together with environmental psychology, ecopsychology, eco-health, deep ecology and some other established scientific fields or forms of social activism, ecotherapy and eco-arts therapies belong to the environmental movement. This movement challenges the basic foundations of the current civilization and can even be considered as related to the paradigm shift, since the paradigm, in Kuhn's [4] view, is not simply the theory, but the entire worldview in which it exists, and all of the implications which come with it. A significant aspect of the environmental movement is concerned with a radical change in personal beliefs, complex systems or organizations, replacing the former way of thinking or organizing with a radically different way of thinking or organizing structure of social life and human psychology.

According to Brown [5], "ecopsychology addresses the problem of effective communication with the general public, that will have to meet the demands of the environmental revolution. However, the issue it raises amounts to more than a matter of public relations and personal therapy. There is an underlying philosophical issue. It has to do with our understanding of human nature, or, if you will, the nature of the soul" (p. xiv). He also emphasized that it brings a new perspective on our understanding of health and pathology and ways how personal and collective insanity could be cured, since "at its most ambitious, ecopsychology seeks to redefine sanity within an environmental context. It contends that seeking to heal the soul without reference to the ecological system of which we are an integral part is a form of self-destructive blindness. Ecopsychologists are drawing upon the ecological sciences to reexamine the human psyche as an integral part of the web of nature ([5], p. xvi).

The eco-human approach as a new multi-professional theoretical framework defining human relationships to the environment

According to the eco-human approach [6], the individual is considered in a relation to the living environment, and seeking to reveal one's own subjectivity and to shape the world in order to fill one's needs and take care of environmental well-being. The eco-human approach is aimed at overcoming the environmental crisis and the crisis in the humanities, by strengthening the links of the humanities with environmental knowledge and ecology. This implies the task to develop ecological consciousness and sustainable lifestyles that characterize "environmental subjects," individuals with an "ecological identity" [2,3].

This approach postulates a poietic nature (ancient Greek word - "ποιέω" - I create; "ποίησις" - creativity) of humans, that is their ability to shape the world around themselves and that humans exist in the mode of possibility; they can choose to shape the world and themselves in a way that is not yet actual but that is contained potentially in what is already given" [7]. Poesis is related to love, Eros. From

the perspective of the eco-human approach, a person's ability to love can be represented as a property of the human beings in their acts of co-creation with nature. Poiesis is an old philosophical concept which was initially explained by Plato and further developed by others.

According to Levine, poiesis [8,9] possess "the basic capacity... to shape their worlds. The human being is distinct from other creatures in that it is not pre-adapted to a particular environment. Instead it has the ability to build radically different worlds suitable (or not) to life in a wide diversity of surroundings. In building its world, the human shapes the environment, and as it does so, it shapes itself. World building is self-building" ([9], p. 23-24).

Based on the idea of poiesis, the concept of ecopoiesis (from the Greek words. "Οἶκος" - home, housing, and ποίησι - creativity) as an important part of the eco-human approach, supporting the idea of humans as "environmental subjects" is introduced [6]. This concept is designed to provide the foundations necessary to consider humans in their relations with the living environment as willing and able to take care of their "earthly home," guided not only by their needs, but also by the desire to maintain biodiversity and ecological balance.

Ecopoiesis is a quality and mechanism of the co-evolution of the human being and nature, a conscious and responsible co-creation of humankind with the natural world, based on its physical, emotional and spiritual connection with it. Through ecopoiesis, the human being, together with nature and as part of it continues, learns and generates not only itself and its meanings, but also various forms and meanings of earthly life. Creative acts as perceived from the ecopoiesis perspective are rooted not so much in the need of individual creative self-expression in the traditional sense of this word, but in the motivation to support and serve nature and life and achieve non-duality, a balance between natural and cultural milieu by embracing the transpersonal center of being. Ecopoiesis cannot be achieved without love for the Earth and for the beings that inhabit it, including our own selves.

Ecopoiesis as a creative environmental function and one of the functions of eco-identity is expressed through one's initiatives to care for and respect the environment, and see ecosystems and local green spaces as a source of health and well-being for oneself and others who belong to both human and beyond the human worlds. Doing something meaningful and healing both for ourselves and world around together with nature, according to ecopoietic function of the human being, means various things, such as gardening, animal encounters, simply spending more time in ecologically healthy settings, making love in and with nature, or more actively working on maintaining and restoring eco-health, and can be regarded as types of environmental action which are characteristic of a person with an established eco-identity.

Ecopoietic environmental function is expressed through one's initiatives to care for and respect the environment and see local green spaces as a source of health and well-being for oneself and others who belong to both human and more-than-human worlds. Eco-identity with its ecopoietic function often makes one socio-politically active, able to engage further in eco-health promotion and become an agent of change in educative, public health and environmental spheres.

As a constructive component of the eco-humanities, eco-human technologies were identified and defined as methods of transforming the human being with its attitude to the environment and itself. Eco-human technologies can be used in the field of pedagogy, psychology, medicine and other fields, in a wide cultural domain, forming environmental awareness and values, contributing to preserving and developing human and natural resources of the planet [6].

The notion of eco-identity in the framework of the eco-human approach assumes a greater significance as related to the human ability to do arts as meaningful environmental action and even as a form of co-creation, in which human beings can participate, together with other living forms that establish a wider 'community of subjects'. Doing arts in and with nature, together with many other activities typical for ecotherapy, such as gardening, animal encounters, simply spending more time in ecologically healthy settings, or more actively working on maintaining and restoring eco-health, can be regarded as types of environmental action with a strong self-regulating function related to coping skills and adaptivity.

Creative environmental function, as one of the core functions of eco-identity is expressed through one's initiatives to care for and respect the environment and see local green spaces as a source of health and well-being for oneself and others who belong to both human and more-than-human worlds. Eco-Identity often makes one socio-politically active, able to engage further in eco-health promotion and become an agent of change in educative, public health and environmental spheres.

Ecological, eco-human perspective on health and illness

The eco-human approach recognized synergy between human health and well-being and environmental integrity. It emphasized a new perspective on our understanding of health and pathology and ways how personal and collective insanity could be cured, since this approach seeks to redefine sanity within an environmental context. It contends that seeking to heal the soul and the body without reference to the ecological system of which we are an integral part is a form of self-destructive blindness. The eco-human approach is drawing upon the ecological sciences to reexamine human health and well-being as an integral part of the web of nature. If we are embedded in the wide web of nature we somehow feel, what happens 'out there', in the wider web of life of which we are a mindful part and respond to the deteriorating global situation deep in our body, mind and psyche. Ecopsychology recognizes and seeks to address how the pain of the ecological world shows up as pain within and between human beings.

Ecopsychology together with environmental philosophy has come to understanding that ecosystems can be healthy or unhealthy and their condition is in synergy with their constituent parts, humanity, in particular. From the eco-human point of view "health" is characterized by mutual augmenting of the whole community and the component communities of each other at multiple levels, facilitating their continued successful functioning, their resilience in response to new situations and stress, and for ongoing change and development to maximize developmental options.

Climate change is currently the great issue of planetary health together with other complex issues which we respond to deep in our body, mind and psyche. However, we suffer even more, both individually and collectively, when we find ourselves unable to respond to the situation around us, when our creative response to reality is restricted and we experience ourselves as being in a helpless situation. The work of the change agent in our ecological arts therapeutic mission, then, is to restore and develop our capacity for ecopoietic creative action that we as individuals or communities are often missing.

Environmental and ecopsychology perspective on personality formation

Examining human relationships to nature, the living environment establishes the core of the eco-human approach and all eco-human technologies that are developed on its basis including ecological arts therapies. Whereas in most conventional therapies the categories of nature and the living environment are simply ignored, or considered to be secondary with regard to one's relation to the human world, primary caregivers (parental figures) and other people with whom significant relations can be established throughout the lifespan, one's relations with the more-than-human world, the living environment as a form of life and even a subject, assumes the significance in the eco-human approach.

According to environmentally or ecologically grounded personality theory one's relationship with nature assumes a special role, being considered as a vital factor of healthy personality formation, establishing eco-identity having the same significance as one's relations with people. Emotional bonds with nature and attachment of human beings to nature, together with their bonds with people, serve as a vital factor of healthy personality formation beginning with the early developmental stage and ending with the final stage of the human lifespan.

Barrows [10] points out that Piaget, Stern, Fordham and others whose theories inform our work now may serve as a bridge to a more ecologically based understanding of child development. "The place where transitional phenomena occur, then (to use Winnicott as a sort

of bridge to a new formulation), might be understood, in this new paradigm of the self, to be the permeable membrane that suggests or delineates but does not divide us from the medium in which we exist. It is in this realm that distinctions between subjective and objective begin to blur and intersubjectivity is possible" (p. 106-107).

According to an eco-human perspective, personality development takes place within a wider matrix of being and relationships that enables the formation of eco-identity. The notion of an eco-identity can be preeminent for the fields of ecopsychology and ecotherapy and challenges most 'conventional' personality theories. It can be defined as the interiorized dynamical structure of relationship with nature that embraces both human and more-than-human worlds and serves as one of significant foundations for self-perception and self-concept. This is a kind of self-perception and self-understanding that is linked to one's mutually sustaining relationship with nature and implies one's responsibility and care for nature. Ethical and aesthetic perception of the natural environment and some practical action aimed at its preservation and cultivation serve as important factors of one's own health and well-being.

Eco-identity is considered to be opposed to a "consumer false self" [11], "an ideal that is taken to heart as part of a person's identity... The consumer false self is false because it arises from a merciless distortion of authentic human needs and desires" (p. 83).

Nature as the third part in the therapeutic relations

Ecotherapy is sometimes believed to be 'radical' in regard to most modern therapies due to its different perception of conditions, goals and therapeutic relationship involved. Ecotherapy as most other therapies is based on relational theories of therapeutic action, with their focus "on the larger relational system established by the client and the therapists, within which psychological phenomena crystallize and in which experience is continually and mutually shaped in a dialogue of the client and the therapist" ([12], p. 292). However, while the main parties in this relational system in most therapies are client and therapist, nature assumes the role of the third party in ecotherapy and ecological arts therapies. Within this relational system the crucial role is given to affective attachment both to the therapist and nature in the process of therapeutic change.

Nature is perceived here as a subject of a kind and requires environmental ethics that include emotional and subjective elements built on a relationship of care between humans and more than human world, different subjects of the living environment, an eco-system. Ecotherapy invites clients to get involved in the relationship with nature as a significant factor of therapeutic action. Clinebell [13] postulated that ecotherapy is characterized by the three-way relationship of person, therapist and nature, in which nature is considered to be a kind of a co-therapist or educator.

Understanding nature as the third party in therapeutic relationships implies specific psychological, moral and existential attitudes towards nature. Perceiving nature as Subject with which some affective bond can be established is also possible as a result of intensified human-nature relationships typical within ecotherapy. Our perennial experience of interaction with the natural environment as a source of life, protection and nurture, enables this effect. Corbett and Milton [14] even emphasize that therapeutically, the natural world could bring another dimension into the transference relationship. Further exploration would be required to develop this, for example drawing on the work of various attachment, personality and object relations theorists. If we recognize that nature cared for human beings for millions of years and perhaps still does, so our affective bond and attachment to the natural environment is possible, though its quality can vary depending on the developmental circumstances of the particular individual.

It should be recognized however that ecotherapy and eco-arts therapies as one of its forms, like any other therapy requires appropriately structured and accompanied therapeutic process. The presence of the therapist throughout a whole course of eco-arts therapeutic work provides the client with the sense of safety, containment, order and comprehensibility and helps her/him to shape and crystallize experience.

Environmental and ecopsychology perception of the therapeutic setting

According to the traditional clinical model of the arts therapy setting it is both “an environment conducive to creativity” ([15], p. 80) and a container for powerful and unregulated experiences [16], “the space in which the relationship between therapist and client develops” ([17], p. 19). The need for a client to reach a certain state of mind necessary to provide symbol formation in the atmosphere of the arts therapy setting, is emphasized. Symbol formation as a means of effective therapeutic communication and the main focus for the analytical discourse is given importance in clinical arts psychotherapy. It is believed that “visual imagery - the quintessential stuff of symbolism - is the raw material of art therapy” ([18], p. 40) which then can materialize through art making. Since the symbol is defined as a representational object that can be evoked in the absence of an immediate stimulus, the therapeutic environment is arranged to evoke symbol formation based on the client’s immersion in her/his inner realm rather than in the outer reality and to help the client to begin using images as a reflection of her/his inner world based on the concept of ‘drawing from within’ ([15], p. 56).

In arts therapies a clients’ relations to the outer environment is sometimes discussed to offer them additional opportunities for connecting to their inner worlds. As Case and Dalley [17] explained, “The outer environment in which the institution is set will also directly and indirectly impinge upon and influence the sessions as clients make use of the content of the rooms and whatever is offered by the external environment (for instance, offering clients views of the outside world can evoke memories, feelings and fantasies” (p. 32).

However, “it is unusual for most arts therapists especially those following a psychodynamic orientation, to consider environmental factors implied in socio-cultural and natural surroundings as having much significance in the therapeutic process (action). The emphasis is made on interpersonal therapeutic interaction and psychological exploration of the arts product as a reflection of the client’s symptoms and her/his inner dynamics connected to therapeutic relations with minimum or no attention given to immediate environmental stimuli. A client’s connection to the wider environment and crossing the therapeutic boundaries was usually considered to be less significant and even counterproductive” ([19], p. 7).

The eco-human approach, in particular, environmental ecopsychology together with socially-sensitive approaches in arts therapies and in contemporary therapies in general, expanded our understanding of the therapeutic setting and therapeutic environment. Modern meanings of the term “therapeutic environment” often embrace not only factors necessary for facilitating therapy, but healthcare facilities and ‘therapeutic team’ as well as community. The therapeutic environment is designed and applied not only to support and facilitate state-of-the-art medicine and technology, patient safety, and quality patient care, but to also embrace the patients’ family, and caregivers in a psycho-socially supportive therapeutic space. It is believed that the characteristics of the physical, social and psychological environment in which a patient receives care affects patient outcomes, patient satisfaction and safety, staff efficiency and satisfaction as well as organizational outcomes. Ecopsychology and ecotherapy seem to be congruent with this modern idea of the therapeutic environment, but give even more importance to natural environmental factors.

Since both ecopsychology and ecotherapy recognize synergy between human health and well-being and the health and ecological integrity of the natural environment, eco-therapeutic practices usually take place within natural environments or in other ways somehow related to nature. Though some ecotherapy practices, at least during certain parts of the session, can take place indoors, special significance is given to participants’ involvement in certain activities outdoors. Outdoor spaces used throughout these activities can vary considerably.

The wide continuum of environments used in nature-based or eco-arts therapies can embrace spaces with prevailing natural objects and characterized by greater biodiversity, on the one hand, and those with mostly built objects, on the other hand. The answer to the question “How much nature is needed in order to practice eco-arts therapies?” would be a wide variety of environments in which nature is present in one or another form. It could be the garden in a mental hospital or a public school, or more distant wilderness areas, “as long as the setting is maintained as a central reference to the process and its conduction” ([20], p. 240).

The Green Studio model was introduced [19] to define a special place where eco-arts therapeutic sessions can take place. The Green Studio/Eco-Studio can be characterized as a therapeutic indoor or outdoor space with certain abundance of natural living forms and materials, possibly some natural landscape, a part of the natural environment that can be chosen, maintained, and personalized by the client or community. Sometimes it cannot be as permanent as the traditional therapeutic setting and is characterized by a unique equilibrium of static and dynamic qualities. Its dynamic qualities are dependent on greater transparency of its boundaries, and natural processes involved.

As we defined it ([19], p. 20), The Green Studio can be created as an accessible green area, a part of the institution (hospital, rehabilitation center, shelter, residential home etc.), or aligned to a private practitioner's office. It can also be a kind of a 'portable studio' [21,22] arranged in the municipal (park, garden, beach etc.) or in the 'wild' environment. But even in this case a sense of order, permanence and comprehensibility for the client is possible as a result of her/his relationship with the therapist and various activities which give her/him a possibility to personalize a natural space.

The Green Studio can be perceived as the space, in which the human function of ecopoiesis can be materialized. It is possible and even necessary to perceive The Green Studio as providing a two-pronged system to achieve both individual health (at the micro level) and public and environmental health outcomes (at the macro level) [23].

The role of the arts in providing meaningful human connection to nature

The arts possess their own means of solving the problems facing the planet. In many cases, the artist's role is not, however, to provide definitive answers to these problems. "Unlike the scientist, who must follow established scientific methods, the artist is free to question and redefine anything or everything at any stage, to be wide-ranging and open to all possibilities... As a result, artistic projects are able to withstand a far higher level of risk than typical scientific experiments, which often come with expectations of tangible results or even profit for their funders. They can engage local communities and garner broad support in ways that science alone can rarely do. They can offer tools for reflection, discussion, awareness and action that lead to new ways of thinking about and of being in the world. And they can bring about real change - sometimes deliberately, sometimes unintentionally - that has lasting benefit, whether to the few or to the many' ([24], p. 8).

A spectrum of engagement with nature through the arts is wide and embraces different positions from objective observer to active interventionist in order to provide positive effects on the environment and our behavior. As far as ecological arts therapies are concerned, the following functions of the arts that can be relevant for ecotherapy goals can be outlined:

- 1. The arts as a meaningful action leading to the changed perception of the natural environment:** Study of the cultural history of humankind helps us to recognize that doing arts brings new meaning to human relations with nature; raise consciousness of our place in the natural world and our interdependence; encourage people to transcend their own personal problems and develop a sense of being part of a bigger whole, thus allowing the spiritual awareness of a relationship with the natural world; develop the self-directed need to be caring and preserve and respect natural world and develop lifestyles that will aid this position [13]. Doing arts with and in nature also helps to reach such goals of ecotherapy as to facilitate healing and accomplish well-being as an inner state of wellness, including a physical, mental and emotional state of consonance which exists in a healthy environment and is based on a harmonious connection with that ecology.

According to environmental psychology, meaningful action is the opportunity to make a useful contribution to a genuine problem. It may involve being effective at a large scale (e.g. the choice of livelihood, a life-long struggle for environmental justice or food security), but perhaps more often it involves actions at a more modest level (e.g. participating in a stewardship activity, community involvement, voting). The meaningfulness experienced is less about the scale of the effort and more about deriving

a sense of making a difference, being listened to and respected, and feeling that we have a secure place within our social group. Reasonable behavior is more likely when people feel that they are needed and that their participation matters. A number of studies indicate that doing something judged worthwhile or making a difference in the long run are primary motives underlying voluntary environmental stewardship behavior [25,26]. In these studies, the notion of meaningful action emerged as one of the most significant sources of satisfaction.

One of the significant effects of doing arts with and in nature is that arts give natural landscapes and objects some kind of 'distinctive meaning, relevance and status' ([27], p. 28). Doing arts as a form of environmental activity can help people to recognize the meaningfulness and beauty of nature even if they initially didn't recognize such qualities. Following this idea, we can recognize that if the person is focused even on the most depressed, sad and colorless environment and starts looking beneath the superficial exterior of things or places using arts she/he will often see some spark of life, unique, individual aspects that characterize those objects or places.

- 2. The arts as an authentic expression of human positive connection to and care for nature:** The human inclination to do arts as a form of environmental practice supporting physical, emotional and spiritual bonds with nature, can be considered as an expression of the human instinct of mutually supportive relationships with nature and healthy resonance with many living forms abundant in the natural world. Doing arts with nature and in nature can be an authentic expression of human care for nature which doesn't require specific talents and professional competences related to the arts. This necessarily requires however "turning ourselves inside out, with the heart as the site of reconnection" [28] in order to be able to dissolve through 'the art of biophilia' [19] the psychological barriers that characterize the history of our progressive alienation from the land and fuel the environmental crisis.
- 3. The arts help people to feel in control of the environment and participate in its management and restoration:** Since the goal of ecotherapy is to facilitate people's interaction with the environment in order to achieve not only health-promoting effects on an individual level (the micro level), but also public and environmental health outcomes (the macro level), the arts can be used to promote clients' active position in their relationship with the environment and develop their perception of themselves as those who are able to exert a certain amount of influence on it. Environmental psychology supports the idea of participation and strives to enhance citizen involvement in environmental design, management and restoration efforts. Environmental, nature-based arts can support achieving these goals. This can be a result of people's better understanding of environmental issues and their relation to personal and community agendas.

Being involved in environmental expressive/creative activities, doing arts in nature and with nature, people can 'personalize' and appropriate the environment. This can also be a significant factor of their feeling safe and in control of the space. The controlling function of the arts can be especially important in ecotherapy activities, when the client perceives the environment as lacking control (which is natural for most outdoor activities) and evoking anxiety. Being able to leave certain personal markers through doing arts in the environment can help the people feel more safety and control of the situation. The arts mediate one's interaction with the space and help to provide equilibrium between the dynamic quality of the natural environment and more static nature of artworks.

The active stance in clients' relationship to nature is the main characteristics of 'contemporary ecotherapy' [23] and a significant factor of mutuality can support collective behavioral change. According to Halpern and Bates [29] behavioral interventions tend to be more successful where there is an equal relationship between the influencer and the influenced and where both parties stand to gain from the outcome (p. 25). In public mental health, such mutuality can be seen in the relationships between practitioners and service users, where the latter assume greater responsibility.

For Burls [23], “In ecotherapeutic approaches, there seems to be a further level of mutuality: the role of the influencer is adopted by people who would normally be classed as the influenced. In benefiting from personal lifestyle changes and associated recovery, the service users help to develop a framework for reciprocity towards the environment and the community. In doing so, the community is influenced to care for and respect the environment and, in addition, to see their local green spaces as a source of health and well-being” (p. 35).

- 4. The arts as a form of ecological personalization and subjectification:** Our perception of the constructive human interaction with the natural environment through the arts can be enriched by a concept such as personalization of space/environment [30,31] as related to psychosocial aspects expressed through territoriality as well as through people’s need to maintain a sense of belonging, ownership and control over their space. Personalization can also be understood as a human behavior aimed at bringing about distinctive features of an individual to the environment. Personalization provides people with a greater sense of ownership and control over the space and helps to establish and maintain a sense of individuality (identity). As a result of personalization of the space not only existing ego-structures can be brought forward and expressed in the environment, but further development of the personality and appropriation of new, positive characteristics of their identity, eco-identity, in particular, become possible. Environmental arts can be understood as an ecological form of personalization based on the sustainable and supportive human interaction with the natural world.

Personalization of the environment through the arts usually means that people leave certain physical personalized marks of their presence in the environment. Moreover, projecting certain personal or group qualities onto the environment and establishing some meaningful inner bond with it can be characterized as powerful psychological mechanism to personalize the space even without leaving any physical markers of one’s presence in the environment. Creative personalization of the environment implies symbolic or ritual acts through which certain exchange of information, energy and matter between human beings and the environment through organized symbolic forms of the arts can take place. Through acts of creative personalization of the environment people select objects or scenery and combine them in some cohesive constructions (like parks and other environmental creations), frame and mark them, create their narratives and internalize certain parts of the environment as significant inner markers of their identity.

As far as therapeutic and rehabilitative practice with the use of environmental and ecological expressive arts therapies is concerned, acts of creative personalization based on a client’s interaction with space can not only promote an environmental ethic, harmonious human-nature relationship and more active participatory position in people’s relationship with the world around, but also support self-esteem and empowerment, help to overcome feelings of helplessness and lack of privacy.

Personalization of the environment and natural objects can also be considered as their subjectification, i.e. their perception as having their own subjectivity, able of thinking, feeling, acting. Subjectification plays a crucial role in the process of developing human relationship to natural environments and objects and enables an ethical perception of nature to be established. At the same time, the endowment of natural objects with subjectivity can be viewed from different perspectives. One of the positions, thoroughly described and investigated by Sergey Deryabo [32], is associated with the recognition of natural objects as a means of reflecting human subjectivity; the self of the individual. “The basis of the subjectification of natural objects is the human desire for “subjective expansion” of one’s subjectivity onto other beings. It is manifestation of a person’s profound need to “appropriate the world” (p. 4).

According to Deryabo [32], the process of human subjectification of natural objects has the following basic functions: a) to provide persons with an experience of their own personal dynamics, b) to act as an intermediary in a person’s relationship with the world, and c) to act as a subject of joint activity and communication. However, this type of subjectification described by Deryabo

is based on the human tendency to project one's subjective qualities onto external objects. In this case, the subjectivity experienced in natural objects is nothing more than a reflected subjectivity of human beings.

Ecopsychology ([33], p. 13) describes a type of interaction between humans and their environments that differs from Deryabo's perspective and is associated with the concept of subject-generating interaction. Subject-generating interaction is considered to be a process whereby the psyche takes on actual existence, passing from "being in possibility" to "being in reality" through the human interaction with the environment. In this case, the psyche embraces both human and environmental parts in order to produce a new aggregated quality: "...the psyche appears as the emerging quality (property) embracing the whole "human-environmental" system, which (since it is systemic) is not reduced to the actual properties of either "human" or "environmental" as components of the specified system, but is determined by both of them. This means that the formation of psychic reality as a quality of this specified system occurs in the functional range, the limits of which are set by the relevant properties of its components, that is, an individual and the environment" ([33], p. 14).

5. Doing environmental arts supports mindfulness and a sense of physical presence in the environment, connecting symbolic forms of the arts and language to the immediate physical experience of the natural world (the life process). Some environmental arts-based activities can be considered as a way to develop somatic awareness and embodied sense of self in one's relation to the environment. This effect is more obvious as a result of environmental arts-based activities which balance time between mindfulness and creative expression, when emphasis is placed on meditative journeys or path-working (walkabouts) as a form of mini-pilgrimages in the 'green area' accompanied or followed with participants' involvement in doing arts (drawing, taking photographs, making environmental constructions, botanical arrangements, etc.). Other expressive forms such as dance and movement, ritual, music improvisation, narrative-construction in order to express and integrate complex experiences, can expand the scope of expressive/creative arts therapeutic techniques.

Embodiment effects can be easily facilitated through mindful horticultural activities, or meditative journeys in search for certain areas or objects in the environment, followed with taking photographs or drawing the scenery or with creating environmental art constructions like 'green mandalas' or 'homes in nature' etc. Through such assignments, participants become physically more active and feel more embedded in the environment. Often, the projective nature of the arts enables one's identification with natural objects and environments on a physical level and projecting one's perception of the body or its parts onto natural processes and environments. Through this process symbolization of somatic phenomena and processes is possible.

Mindfulness-based arts therapeutic techniques can be integrated into ecotherapy practices. In this way body-mind-environment focused activities can support the goals of ecotherapy by fostering reconnection and returning to experiencing ourselves in the here and now as an embodied being. This requires attention to physical sensations in their relation to mind states evoked by one's presence and interaction with the environment. It should be emphasized that the curative powers of nature are enhanced by the degree of mindfulness and mental focus one brings to these interactions. Participants can immerse in "quiet fascination" ([34], p. 103) and a state of presence in the environment throughout different parts of the session.

Participants can be encouraged to use different arts and instrumental media like photography to explore experiential awareness and practice mindful attention by documenting responses to sensory stimuli. For instance, participants can be asked to take pictures of what they move toward as pleasant and to also photograph what they experience as unpleasant as it was used in new mindfulness-based art therapy intervention [35] which can be an example of palliative environmental program.

Whichever particular expressive arts being used, participants can be encouraged to immerse themselves in a kind of meditation with their absorption in physical and emotional processes, on the one hand, and being attentive to the environmental stimuli, on the other

hand. They can walk or act mindfully keeping a sense of their presence in the environment with immediate experience here and now, appreciating their physical contact with the natural objects and sensory qualities of the 'green space' with its 'field effects'.

Mindfulness-based environmental expressive arts therapies programs can include an introduction with mindfulness instruction and emphasis on the role of attention in health. Warming-up activities involving breathing and relaxation and exploratory walkabouts in certain environment can be introduced as helping to provide deeper effects [36,37].

Conclusion

Due to the developing fields of community and social action therapies, including creative/expressive arts therapies professionals' interest in exploring new ways of therapeutic work with environments was growing in the last decades. Ecological arts therapies tend to constitute an increasingly significant part of the spectrum of contemporary ecotherapeutic methods characterized by the active stance in clients' relationship to the environment. The status of this new approach is however ambiguous. It is still unclear for most therapists, whether it constitutes a new therapeutic model and even a paradigm with underlying philosophical or 'meta-psychological' assumptions together with distinctive forms of therapeutic interventions, or just a set of innovative creative activities and ideas that can be implemented in the already established models of therapy. It is also unclear for most therapists whose professional identity and competences were established within the more traditional ideas and forms of practice what nature brings to the therapeutic process and how it impacts therapeutic relations, clients' perception of themselves, expressive media used, quality and meaning of their creative endeavors and even goals of therapy.

The key presumptions and theoretical foundation of ecological, or earth-based creative arts therapies, a branch of contemporary ecotherapy, have been presented in the article. Though these forms of therapy belong to an established group of mental health professions or specialized therapeutic approaches, they are characterized by a new perspective on health issues and the role of the arts in providing public and planetary health and well-being. Ecological arts therapies have been presented as supported by such scientific approaches as ecopsychology and ecophilosophy and demonstrate a new perspective on our understanding of the therapeutic role of human bonds and forms of environmental activity with nature.

Together with ecotherapy, environmental philosophy, environmental education as well as the contemporary environmental arts, ecological arts therapies are aligned with the emerging eco-human multi-disciplinary approach and the growing field of constructive innovations that can be applied in education, medicine, the wider social context in order to counteract the environmental crisis and enable a more harmonious co-evolution of human beings and the more-than-human world. The eco-human multi-disciplinary approach can be seen as a worldview and a system of eco-human constructive innovations that recognize a synergy between human well-being and the health and ecological integrity of the natural environment. This is a perennial idea that has gained new currency and a sense of urgency in the modern environmental movement, particularly in its "deep ecology" wing.

Such key concepts of ecological expressive therapies as human health and illness, eco-identity formation, nature as the third part in the therapeutic relations, the therapeutic setting, and the role of the arts in providing meaningful human connection to nature have been considered in the article from the eco-human perspective inviting mental health professionals to explore new vision of sustainable future and their role in bringing it into fruition. The eco-human approach maintains a rich network of researchers and practitioners who share the goals of creating durable behavior change at multiple levels, promoting an environmental ethic and maintaining harmonious human-nature relationships. Today this approach as well as the fields of environmental psychology, conservation psychology and ecopsychology are helping society to form an affirmative response to emerging environmental and natural resource constraints. This is a grand challenge since the response must plan for, motivate and maintain environmental stewardship behavior through a period of significant energy and resource descent.

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