Adventurers' adventures: Can they relaunch outdoor activities after Covid?

Werther Giannini
Università degli Studi di Modena e Reggio-Emilia

Abstract

In this article, I highlight how the lockdowns during the pandemic in Italy favoured the emergence of a higher indoorisation for Generation Z. I underline the fact that the most recent post-pandemic studies in Italy highlight the difficulties for a part of adolescents to resume experiential activities in outdoors. The latest research states that some teenagers do not find the stimuli to get out of the virtual bubble after the end of the pandemic. Some scholars of outdoor education in Italy have started a debate on whether it is enough to give adolescents the opportunity to resume outdoor experiential activities for a real re-start, or whether the adventurers' adventures can be an example to follow. The scientific literature in outdoor adventure education has not yet explored the positive relationship that can be established between pupil and adventurer in order to promote more place-based micro-adventures.

In questo articolo, sottolineo come i *lockdowns* durante la pandemia in Italia abbiano favorito l'emergere di stili di vita legati *all'indoorisation* per la Generazione Z. Sottolineo il fatto che i più recenti studi post-pandemia in Italia mettono in luce la difficoltà di una parte degli adolescenti a riprendere le attività esperienziali all'aperto. Le ultime ricerche affermano che alcuni adolescenti non trovano gli stimoli per uscire dalla bolla virtuale, dopo la fine della pandemia. Alcuni studiosi di *outdoor education* in Italia hanno avviato un dibattito se sia sufficiente dare agli adolescenti l'opportunità di riprendere le attività esperienziali all'aperto per un vero e proprio re-start, o se le avventure degli avventurieri possano essere un esempio da seguire. La letteratura scientifica *sull'outdoor adventure education* non ha ancora esplorato la relazione positiva che si può instaurare tra l'allievo e l'avventuriero per promuovere più micro-avventure basate sul luogo.

Keywords: post-Covid; Italy; outdoor adventure education; adventurers' adventures; revive outdoor activities; place-based pedagogy

Parole chiave: post-Covid; Italia; educazione avventurosa all'aperto; le avventure degli avventurieri; riprendere le attività all'aperto; pedagogie place-based

1. Introduction. Outdoor Education in Italy: What is the state of the situation?

Outdoor education grasped the principles of Dewey's (1916) educational philosophy in providing outdoor experiential activities accompanied by a form of reflection in which learners, often with the assistance of an instructor, teacher or facilitator, attempt to make sense of their experiences. Dewey (1916) states that through reflection, learners construct their own understanding of the meaning of their experiences. In the case of outdoor education, the space of experience is in the open air, possibly in contact with nature. These pedagogical practices have never taken hold in Italian schools in a structural way as it is not present in national curricula (Farné, 2014, 2018; Bortolotti, 2019). There are few empirical studies related to outdoor education in Italy linked to public schools (Bortolotti, 2019) and often limited to the 3-6 years 6-10 years age group (Schenetti, Salvaterra & Rossini, 2015; Bortolotti, 2019). An effective and constant continuity in this educational field has never been realised in Italy: what are the reasons that have not permitted the development of OE in Italy? According to the thesis of Alessandro Bortolotti (2019), "the reasons are many, but above all they are to be found in the socio-cultural context and certainly not in the climatic one" (p.174, auth. trans.). In the Scandinavian Udeskoles, children are taken outdoors in temperatures that are not always spring-like, using the scout-derived motto "I's not cold or bad weather, use more appropriate equipment!" As a partial explanation for this failure to develop OE in Italy, school places defined as risk sanitised (Russel, 2007; Farné, 2014), have proliferated and have even taken over the gardens of some elementary schools in the Bologna area, as reported by professors Roberto Farné and Francesca Agostini in their book Outdoor Education: education takes care of itself outdoors (2014). The concept of risk that these children would have run referred to the roots of the trees in the garden that could have been "a source of falls", so they had to be uprooted (Farné & Agostini, 2014, p. 15, auth. trans.). As much as the picture so far does not appear idyllic, in this post-Covid phase of change, it is conceivable that fertile ground for the establishment of OE will emerge even in countries like Italy. The post-pandemic context pushes towards new educational paradigms, considering the consequences on mental health suffered by Italian students, now more 'trapped' than before in virtual contexts that has seen psychiatrist Recalcati (2021a; 2021b) hypothesise a form of 'digital autism'. In addition, enclosed places have never been the safest, as the Italian scholar Bortolotti (2018; 2019) states, in which to leave one's children, but in this post-Covid phase, it is possible that a new awareness arises that outdoor spaces are the healthiest and safest to use for place-based experiential activities (Wattchow & Brown, 2011). Taking the pre-Covid period into consideration, it can be stated that today there is little OE-related culture in Italian schools, but this does not mean that various place-based experiential activities carried out in nature that can be traced back to OE principles and values have not existed in Italy. At the same time, they have not been supported by Italian educational institutions, but rather thanks to locally based associations such as the Scouts (Bortolotti, 2019) and not by national authorities and state educational institutions (Farné, 1991, 2018). Camps organised by local parishes multiplied, as did the considerable activism of the Scouts (Bertolini, 1988; Farné, 1991) or similar organisations whose aim was to provide an opportunity, even a first time in nature, which could be fundamental, as well as the Sunday outings proposed by families through which people began to discover their own territory, history and traditions, which were always rooted and very different depending on where they were in Italy (Bertolini, 1988). As a characteristic feature of popular culture in Italy from the mid-1950s onwards (as a result of economic growth and the development of mass affluence), numerous outdoor sports activities began to be undertaken by various organisations, which after the Second World War were seen as useful for acquiring healthy habits in order to approach a healthy lifestyle, thanks also to the way sport was then regarded (Bortolotti, 2019). It is plausible that the pandemic has created favourable conditions for the development of a culture more closely linked to activities close to the values and principles of OE also in Italian schools. The post-Covid phase can favour a rediscovery of those

experiential activities in nature that were already present in Italian popular culture, through a rediscovery of one's own territory thanks to experiences that can be place-based in places that allow for experiential activities that can become meaningful for the participants and repeatable over time (Wattchow & Brown, 2011; Hill & Brown, 2014). These types of experiences can be drawn from local history and craft production activities related to local food, which in Italy are strongly rooted in the territory; often this food is produced sustainably and in defence of biodiversity because it is linked to local traditions, as in the case of Slow-Food Presidia[1]. These are special places where food is produced on a small scale following the transformation processes of raw materials as farmers did before the pre-industrial era in a sustainable way, respecting their territory and defending biodiversity (Petrini, 2016, 2023). These places are present fairly uniformly throughout Italy and also aim to carry on traditions that follow a sometimes centuries-old processing procedure, without the objective of increasing production because this must be in balance with the surrounding environment that cannot be modified because it is part of the processing of that typical product linked only to that territory for centuries (Petrini, 2016). These places can serve as examples of where to carry out experiential activities with students to deepen the concepts of sustainability and biodiversity (Petrini, 2023).

2. The semi-confinement at home of Italian students during the pandemic

In this part of the paper, I report how during a recent national outdoor education conference which took place in Italy on 2 December 2023, several scholars initiated a debate on the difficulties that emerged for adolescents in resuming experiential activities in outdoors spaces[2]. Nevertheless, I highlight at this stage the events that occurred in Italy during the pandemic. Italian students, since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, have had to attend school classes from home in alternating phases for almost two years and this condition has had consequences on their psycho-physical well-being[3] (Esposito et al., 2021; Mascheroni & coll., 2021; Recalcati, 2021a, 2021b; D'Elia, 2022, 2023). The earliest psycho-physical difficulties, on the part of the students, manifested themselves during the four months from February 2020 to May as a consequence of school lessons being followed 100% remotely for all students at all levels (Esposito et al., 2021). This condition continued until the period coinciding with the outbreak of the Omicron variant in November 2021 and the subsequent reintroduction of remote lessons in several schools. Distance learning classes peaked at 50 per cent in some regions for a few weeks of the regionally detected pandemic curve until the end of the year 2022, depriving students of both in-presence socialisation and outdoor experiential activities[4]. This pandemic state meant that students were often hyper-connected to computers or devices, highlighting that a part of them spent more time in virtual realities rather than in outdoors (D'Elia, 2022; Volpi, 2021)[5]. The pandemic context and the restrictions imposed by the Italian government on the travel of those who were in Italy at that time (Bull, 2021) may have accentuated the fact that students residing in Italy struggled to find the stimuli and motivation to resume more outdoor experiential activity once the pandemic ended (Crepet, 2023). It is possible to hypothesise that the commitment and focus of Italian students today is different, compared to the pre-Covid period. The condition of life lived at home, which characterised many students, fosters the emergence of a question: how can our students find the stimuli and motivation to see outdoor environments as ideal places to engage in experiential activities in their own territory rather than in the virtual world? The article suggests how the adventurers' narration of their adventures in presence at school, through the power of place-based stories, can be a good example for students to follow in order for them to find stimuli to get out of the house and rethink outdoor spaces as those privileged places to do micro-adventures close to home through direct, place-based experiences (Wattchow & Brown 2011; Beames & Brown, 2014). These places should have relevance for students as they are connected to their everyday outdoor activities so that connections are drawn between people and places (Hill & Brown, 2014). Furthermore,

such adventurous experiences should have the possibility of being repeatable over time, if the adventure places are close to their homes (Wattchow & Brown 2011). The figure of the adventurer and his or her adventures recounted in presence can play an important role in making students feel inspired to spend more time outdoors and get out of the virtual bubble in which many seem not to find the stimuli to get out.

3. The condition of Generation Z in Italy in relation to the virtual world before and during the pandemic

The pandemic that occurred in February 2020 has further highlighted what was a concern existing before Covid-19: the excessive indoorisation tendency of the new generations (Van Bottenbourg & Lotte, 2010), as well as the tendency to take refuge in virtual realities (Boyd, 2014; Spitzer, 2016; Ricci, 2017; Lavenia, 2018) instead of engaging in experiential activities outside the four walls of schools or home (Farné, 2014, 2018). New generations spend less time outdoors with a drastic decrease in playful-motor experience (Rivkin, 2000; Farné, 2018; Bortolotti, 2019). The consequent danger signals already saw the presence of an extensive scientific literature also in Italy on this issue, before the pandemic. Biolcati and Pani (2006) claimed that adolescents lie about the time spent on the Internet; this leads to constant excessive fatigue, sleep-wake alterations, school problems, decreased time spent with friends, disobedience and rebellion to the rules set by adults. Adolescents' addiction to the Internet and social media leads them to estrangement from the real world and subsequent isolation (Spitzer, 2016; Ricci, 2017; Volpi, 2021). Spending even more than two hours a day on the computer can lead to behavioural problems or outright digital dementia, as German scholar Spitzer (2016) states in his research. The excessive use of the Internet and social media can also lead to an increased likelihood of self-harming behaviour and suicide attempts. In addition, Spitzer (2016) argues that excessive use of digital media can lead to insomnia, depression and eating disorders in adolescents. Adolescents' addiction to the Internet and social media, leads the new generation to estrangement from the real world and consequent isolation (Spitzer, 2016; Ricci, 2017; Volpi, 202). The reasons related to the decline of experiential activities in outdoors (in the pre-Covid era) therefore have multiple motivations, depending on the countries being considered, however there are roots that accumulate the younger generations of all nations, namely the emergence of social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and, not least, Tik Tok (Boyd, 2014; Ricci, 2017; Lavenia, 2018, Volpi, 2021). As far as Italy is concerned, a further motivation linked to the phenomenon of indoorisation consists in the parental overprotection massively demonstrated by the studies conducted on the Italian territory thanks to professors Farné and Agostini (2014) of the Alma Mater Studiorum of Bologna; empirical research that took place in particular on the Emilia-Romagna territory (Schenetti, Salvaterra & Rossini, 2015). The episodes of youth malaise that took place in Italy during the winters of 2020-21 and 2021-22 culminating in first appointments on social networks, later used to organise clashes outside, highlight the negative effects of lockdowns that reverberate especially on the younger generations. In particular, this has happened to students who were forced to attend school lessons at a distance because they were deprived of socialising in the presence of school, causing them to become further detached from reality and phagocytised by the virtual world (Aristeidou & Cross, 2021; Crepet, 2023). It is possible to hypothesise that the pandemic context in Italy has fuelled the phenomenon of young people defined as hikikomori and re-appropriating habits and spaces linked to the outdoors will take time and for some of them even specific interventions so that they find the stimuli and motivation to do so (Volpi, 2021; Crepet, 2023).

4. Countries that have introduced Outdoor Education into their national curricula

In the hope that Italian educational institutions will be able to grasp the change taking place due to the post-Covid context, we can have a look at those countries that have already developed a long tradition related to the

pedagogical philosophy of OE and have introduced this subject matter in their national curricula. These countries can be a reference point from which to design new outdoor education programmes in Italy. Starting from one's own territory, taking into account its peculiarities, while maintaining a pedagogical vision open to change that promotes new connections and care between us and the places where we live (Hill & Brown, 2014). A pedagogy of place (Wattchow & Brown, 2011) appears to be the most suitable pedagogical approach because it is place-responsive and allows us to create connections and care with the territory where we live. A pedagogy of place is an appropriate response to what is seen as a looming environmental crisis, recognised as such for several years by numerous scholars (Cosgriff, Legge, Brown, Boyes, Zink & Irwin, 2012). Such experiential journeys, some better known as Outdoor Journeys, from a methodological point of view are articulated and comprehensive due to the juxtaposition of many different characteristics (Bortolotti, 2019). They are experiential, place-based and semi-structured journeys, but at the same time open to variations, modulated in work phases that can also alternate between indoor and outdoor phases. In addition, they combine concrete activities (learning by doing) with theoretical investigation once the children and educators have returned to the classroom with the intention of creating new connections between what took place outdoors and the school subjects attended in the classroom (Bortolotti, 2019). The characteristics of the location are the basis for inspiration on the type of activity that will be carried out by educators and children (Hill & Brown, 2014). This is also done to facilitate learning that has not been intentionally planned (Joplin, 1995). Place-based experiential activities facilitate, in this sense, what is called an occasional event to unleash pupils' creativity (Cagliari et al., 2016; Fraser, 2012). For this to happen, the environment must be considered as a third educator and it is also important for educator-teachers to develop the pedagogy of listening, which requires everyone to slow down the pace when implementing place-based experiences (Hill & Brown, 2014). This slow approach can encourage listening to children's expressed ideas, insights and comments as Fyfe (2011, pp. 273-291) points out. As a result, the countries that have introduced OE into their national curricula have developed feedback from their experiential activities, thus elaborating on their know-how, skills and knowledge in this specific subject area, resulting in a reference literature on outdoor adventure education (OAE) thanks to scholars such as Mike Brown (2008b, 2009, 2010; Wattchow & Brown, 2011). In the countries mentioned before, there is a different approach towards this curricular subject (Bortolotti, 2019). OE educational pathways begin with an outdoor experience, then there is reflection on the experience with the hope that these are transformative of self and society towards more sustainable behaviour (Nicol et al., 2012). An experiential activity based on a specific place can also develop affectivity towards that place, developing what may be an affection for those places because we have been able to create a strong bond with them by having visited them several times, rather than behaving like inattentive visitors who make a quick foray, perhaps only once, into a place they will never see again (Hill & Brown, 2014). This can easily occur if that place is familiar to us, if it becomes frequent over time with friends and family. Northern European societies, plus other Anglo-Saxon countries, have more developed a tradition linked to adventure as an experiential activity through which to escape from daily routine, but also from which to learn through experiences lived in nature, but above all, it is the very idea of adventure in nature that sparks people to try new experiences (Beames, Mackie, & Atencio, 2019). A relevant debate that places Italy far from the countries where Outdoor Adventure Education is part of the national curricula, as well as a sore point as pointed out by the scholar Bortolotti (2019), is that the latter will not take hold until there is a culture on OE on the part of those who in various capacities are in contact with the education of learners: educators, teachers, researchers, and teachers of all levels. Up to this point, the article has focused on Outdoor Adventure Education as a school subject and the scientific literature developed most in the countries mentioned above. These arguments further highlight the existing contradiction that Italy, both because of its climate in some parts of the country that is

often mild throughout the year, and because of the many places where productive human activities are sustainable, small-scale and in defence of biodiversity as in the case of the Slow-Food Presidia (Petrini, 2009, 2016), can be a nation that has the potential to develop its own place-based pedagogical pathways that foster more sustainability-conscious behaviour and awareness of biodiversity. Italy can develop its own path towards outdoor education based on its remarkable and diverse territorial characteristics. The Italian peninsula sees the presence of seas, hills and mountains often only a few kilometres apart; these places would facilitate various place-based experiential activities (Wattchow & Brown, 2011) aimed at developing a greater awareness of the importance of biodiversity (Petrini, 2009, 2023). The outdoor environment, depending on its territorial morphology (marine, hilly, mountainous plus others), offers infinitely more experiential potential than the four walls of a classroom because the stimuli would be almost infinite (Beames, Higgins & Nicol, 2012). This reflection stems from the observation that the trend towards standardisation and regulation continues to pervade educational systems around the world. Teaching and learning have been deprived of creativity, choice and relevance in the real world as a result of neo-liberal policies that have also affected the field of OE as argued by Loynes (1996, 1998) following the rationalisation principle proposed in Ritzer's (1998) studies, taken up by Bryman (2004) and applied to education, so as to arrive at a school system that supports the achievement of standardised outcomes that can be measured in student performance (Beames & Brown, 2014). Most teachers are eager to improve their practice but feel constrained by the institutional structures within which they work. By building on adventure and its inherent pedagogical value (Beames, 2010), teachers can become more capable of designing and delivering engaging programmes that are underpinned by sound pedagogical principles and capable of developing deeper and lasting meaning for their students (Beames & Brown, 2016). Having affirmed this, in the immediate future, in order to facilitate the resumption of experiential activities by Italian children after two years of stop-and-go and semi-confinement, without having to wait for hoped-for chimerical reforms of national curricula by the Italian authorities, it is useful to ask the question: who and what can help children resume outdoor activities now? Where can they find the stimuli and motivation to relate to the outdoors as privileged places to have experiences? The figure of the adventurer has been present in the Italian collective imagination thanks to the novels of Emilio Salgari, an extraordinarily prolific author, remembered above all for having created the adventurous sagas of the Indo-Malay cycle (or "Malayan pirate cycle", in which his most famous character, Sandokan, is the protagonist) and the corsairs of the West Indies (in which the character of the Black Corsair stands out). However, the theme of adventure no longer seems to be so recurrent in Italian popular culture; the wind has changed with the advent of social media, but the figure of the adventurer can still play a fundamental role in this pandemic context. The power of stories narrated in the presence of adventurers can have the function of sparking the imagination of students who can identify with these characters and dream of possible future adventures to be had close to home. Interacting with the adventurers, deciding together where to go on adventures with them, can be a strong stimulus for children to resume seeing the outdoors as a place to do experiential activities instead of the virtual world (Volpi, 2021; Crepet, 2023). The points of contact that can be found between the adventurers' adventures and the challenges students face on a daily basis are numerous: the uncertainty associated with school life, the need to prepare oneself before each test, the efforts needed to achieve one's goals and planned plans that will always undergo unexpected events that will require the ability to adapt, change and react. The adventurers who participated in the OAE doctoral project held in Rimini, Italy, and who covered the aforementioned topics are Andrea Di Giorgio, Davide Ugolini and Stefano Gregoretti (Di Giorgio, 2015, 2021; Gregoretti, 2019). These athletes, although they have made adventures all over the world, have maintained a strong bond with their home territory, Romagna (Italy), the place where they prepare their adventures to always return to, because the bond with the territory, for these people, is deep (Gregoretti, 2019). Adventurers can

become a point of reference for students who during the pandemic have spent more time at home and in virtual realities, rather than in the outdoor places of their daily lives, so that a part of our young people does not fall definitively and forever into the grey area of the hikikomori phenomenon (Spitzer, 2016; Ricci, 2017; Lavenia, 2018).

5. New educational paradigms inspired by the wilderness experiences of adventurers and athletes

"The brain is happy when it listens to nature", says science journalist Florence Williams, author of the book *The Nature Fix* (2017). Journalist Alain Elkann interviewed her colleague in the Italian national newspaper La Stampa in August 2020:

> "Do you think we are quite in touch with nature today? If we have lost this relationship, what can we do to recover it?". Florence Williams: "We have never been so disconnected from the natural world as we are today. We live in the midst of the largest mass migration in history, which is the migration to the interior spaces. Since both adults and our children live disconnected, it is difficult to recover this situation. The connection is broken". Alain Elkann: "Do you have evidence, as you write in your book The Nature Fix, that pine trees are beneficial for the immune system and that listening to birdsong has a calming effect?". (Elkann, 2020).

Florence Williams reports during the interview on the findings of Japanese immunologist Dr Qing Li. In Japan, Dr. Qing Li (2018), discovered that Natural Killer cells, part of our body's immune system, increase in the presence of antifungal compounds released from trees. The Japanese immunologist claims that birdsong and falling water can lower blood pressure and make us feel calmer and mentally clearer. Having reported on the benefits of spending more time in contact with nature, in the educational sphere, what types of new educational pathways and what new educational figures could act as catalysts to get children to resume more experiential activity in nature? An open debate on OE in the countries bordering the Mediterranean concerns reference points, who to take as an example in the area to inspire and thus draw new experiential paths based on places related to nature expeditions or sports in close contact with nature. We can start from the assumption that:

> "An ounce of experience is better than a ton of theory, simply because it is only in experience that a theory can have a vital and verifiable meaning. An experience, a very humble experience, is capable of generating and containing any amount of theory (or intellectual content), but a theory outside of experience cannot even be grasped as theory". (Dewey, 2005, p. 169)

In order to be consistently inspired and achieve social change as a response to the pandemic, it is necessary to look for reference points in those who have already had experiences in nature and achieved change in their own lives. The Italian writer Tiziano Terzani argued that moving away from nature was not good for our psycho-physical well-being. One of his reflections on the relationship between man and nature, from his book *Un'idea di destino* (2014), helps to better understand our times. In addition to celebrating the planet's biodiversity, the author denounces man's estrangement from nature:

> "What a mistake it was to turn away from nature! In its variety, in its beauty, in its cruelty, in its infinite, incomparable greatness there is the whole meaning of life. If you ever miss it, as was happening to me, return here, to nature, to the origins of everything, to the tree from which we jumped down yesterday, my men dressed in courage and grey pinstripes. The inevitable consequence is a loss of meaning, a shattering of existence, which prevents man from finding the profound meaning of life". (2014, p. 253, auth. trans.)

6. Seeking new benchmarks in adventurers' adventures

The adventurers mentioned in this paper have shaped a philosophy of life based on the essentials, the memory of their experiences and the sacredness of the adventure location (Di Giorgio, 2015, 2021; Gregoretti, 2019). In addition, they took part in the doctoral project of outdoor adventure education held at a middle school in Rimini.

> "When we explained to Mr. Jimenez, that was his name, who we were and what we were doing, he didn't even have that classic expression (...) but you are crazy. Without too much ceremony he let us into his house to show us (...). Where he lived there was no electricity, there were no cell phones and the only contact with reality was that little battery-powered radio that gave essential information. When we were about to leave, my attention was caught by a detail. The man had a watch on his wrist, a model very similar to the one my grandfather wore (...). I approached and was able to look at the hands. They were still, motionless, that watch did not work. Another question arose spontaneously: Mr. Jimenez, I asked him, how old are you? He stared at me, hinting at a smile. I don't know! He answered without particular emphasis". (Gregoretti, 2019, p. 60, auth. trans.)

> "This enterprise was born by letting my imagination run wild, loosening the reins of the imagination, coloring with my eyes a map open on the PC screen. Joining East and West of Northern Italy, about 1200 km, a distance never faced; same way as always ... my legs. The Alps: running from Tarvisio to Courmayeur (...) Me, Liso, the mountains, the slow flow of time...the absence of borders. Liso is him, the cart, baptized after this rebirth with a name that for me has a double meaning: to ideally unite the adventure with Lisa, my girlfriend (the cart is male) and to describe the structural condition of the cart, actually a bit...Liso (consumed in italian), after so many adventures". (Di Giorgio A., 2015, p. 18, auth. trans.)

Reference points can be the adventurers' adventures of the present and the past, which are examples of people who have learnt from their experiences that took place in close contact with nature and have grown into a community that becomes an example for raising awareness of environmental and sustainability issues (Beames, Mackie, Atencio, 2019). Adventurers' experiences are positive examples to be inspired by with the aim of creating new experiential pathways that can be place-based, aimed at exploring one's own territory through micro-adventures close to one's homes or schools (Wattchow & Brown, 2011; Beames, Mackie & Atencio, 2019). The important role that the adventurer can play within the OAE has not yet been developed, in fact there are no consistent traces of this in the scientific literature referring to the OAE. Lyng (1990) focused on how meticulous adventure athletes are and how they carefully assess situations to ensure that they remain in control. These people are able to cope with challenges and have the ability to exercise agency, so they are not naïve and can be examples of people who know how to deal with adventurous contexts and learn lessons to apply to future adventures. In conclusion, adventurers can play an important role in educating children to resume outdoor experiential activities. Given the post-pandemic context, the goal is to fire curiosity about the outdoors in one's local area, stimulating pupils to seek new outdoor experiences, rather than preferring a visit to a shopping mall. In order to better understand the type of educational expeditions that could be proposed within the framework of OAE, we can ask the following question:

> "Do expeditions develop character? I would answer with a qualified yes. On a micro level, meaningful and ethical work is done during an expedition. However, only time will tell whether these new

realisations, beliefs and understandings will turn into habitual virtues and thus ultimately develop character". (Beames, 2010, pp. 21-22)

Although this statement does not give certainty about the results, it is certain that outdoor experiences have been realised. Another source of inspiration are some non-competitive sports rooted in the territory that see the use of the bicycle as a sustainable means of experience to discover and reconnect with the outdoors of our surroundings, but for some it is a true philosophy of life, such as for the figure of the cyclo-traveller (Bernardi, 2015; Gregoretti, 2019, Di Giorgio, 2023). With the bicycle, it is possible to have a different approach to the adventure to be had, which is to have a shared experience with friends, putting aside the performance aspect (Pani & Biolcati, 2006: Colamedici & Gancitano, 2018), instead elevating conviviality and the goliardic spirit as a point of reference. It is the spirit of the *Eroica* in Tuscany that sees the use of only old bicycles (they must date back to 1978 and one must dress in old period clothing, although the regulations leave room for more) with the objective of participating in an event that is deeply rooted in the territory, an event that was born in Tuscany and must take place there because it has become part of the local non-competitive sports tradition. L'*Eroica*:

"wants to encourage an experience to be had with friends in a convivial atmosphere, where one can joke and make fun of oneself, drinking only Chianti wine and eating only local food, where the first to arrive in the race is mocked... and ill-considered (you arrived first, you didn't enjoy yourself, you were in a hurry... why? The spirit of the experience was different". (Rubino, 2012, p. 56, auth. trans.)

7. The figure of the adventurer in the scientific literature related to OAE

The figure of the adventurer has been investigated by a group of scholars. Lyng, for example (1990), states that adventurers or athletes who engage in adventurous practices are extremely meticulous in their preparation and do not take risks considered unnecessary for the purpose of their adventure. According to Krein (2007) and Brymer (2010), adventure athletes do not seem to have the goal of maximising risk; on the contrary, they seek a type of control that derives from the experience levels of other adventure experiences gained over time. However, recalling earlier assertions (Krein, 2007; Brymer, 2010), some scholars such as Brymer, Downey and Gray (2009) have noted how adventure athletes initially gained a reputation for being risk- and adrenaline-focused, even though this does not correspond to the reality of the situation. This viewpoint has obscured the place of the natural world, making it appear that extreme athletes seek to conquer, compete with or defeat natural forces. In contrast, Brymer, Downey and Gray (2009) suggest that adventure sports practitioners can initiate a positive change in the relationship between participants in outdoor activities and the natural world. Adventurers report that, through the activity, they have become more aware of the fact that humanity is connected to the natural world. This connection manifests itself in the experience of being one with the natural world and being part of a powerful positive energy. Consequently, some adventurers have described how they came to care more about the natural world and protect it (Brymer, Downey & Gray, 2009). Adventurers describe themselves as one with the natural world or as connected to nature through a positive energy that enhances their perception of life if they engage in environmentally friendly adventurous practices. These feelings described by adventurous athletes, as pointed out by Brymer, Downey and Gray (2009), can reinforce a sense of connection with nature and lead to a desire to care for the natural world, contributing to reflection on the implementation of more environmentally sustainable outdoor practices. Being 'at one' with the natural world was the dominant theme that could be extracted from the interviews with the adventurers in this study (Brymer, Downey & Gray, 2009). Reconnecting with the thoughts of some of the adventurers, Brymer (2010) points out that adventure athletes

are often reckless and take unacceptable risks for the sole purpose of experiencing the maximum adrenalin rush. Lyng (1990), Krein (2007) and Brymer (2010) state that adventure athletes seek a high degree of control over what they do. Whereas, as adventurers such as Gregoretti (2019) and Di Giorgio (2023) state, going beyond one's physical capabilities leads to a lack of lucidity and, in certain extreme situations, this condition of not being fully aware of the circumstances one is experiencing can lead to making wrong choices that, in extreme environments, can be fatal. Thus, the ultimate goal for many adventurers is to complete the adventure, taking the necessary risks without exceeding certain limits determined by the circumstances of those places at those times, since returning home and recounting the experience are also part of the adventure (Gregoretti, 2019; Di Giorgio, 2023). In the literature review on outdoor adventure education, the figure of the adventurer and his interaction with students have not been extensively studied or are absent, especially in the context of outdoor education. That being said, in the post-pandemic context, particularly in Italy, one wonders what themes might motivate some students to leave the virtual world into which they have fallen during lockdowns (Crepet, 2023), to resume experiential activities in naturalistic contexts close to their homes or schools (Wattchow & Brown, 2011).

8. Concluding thoughts

The pandemic that began in February 2020 brought about a brutal change in the habits of Italian students and teachers because Italy was the first country to be hit in the west by the Covid and to implement the first national lockdown for four months (Bull, 2021) sometimes provoking misunderstandings as to why certain choices by the Italian government were made by world public opinion. The misunderstandings vanished after it was realised that a pandemic had broken out that would change the habits of most of the planet's inhabitants. The students were the ones who paid the highest price for this experience, because during the first lockdown only those who had a job or had to buy food were allowed to leave their homes. Students evidently did not fit into these categories and spent the entire period confined to their homes, often abandoned because their parents had to go to work D'Elia, 2022; Crepet, 2023). In order to compensate for not being present at school and thus in the classroom, several schools managed to set up distance learning lessons, which seemed to be a good solution in those dramatic moments. This also happened in some middle schools such as the Istituto E. Fermi in Rimini, which from March 2020 managed to activate this mode of distance learning lessons (as did the Alma Mater Studiorum in Bologna). In this post-pandemic context, it is clearly emerging in Italy that distance learning has produced strong disorientation and even discomfort linked to an excessive daily hyperconnection that has distanced pupils from reality and deprived them of stimuli and motivation to resume outdoor experiential activities (Recalcati, 2021a, 2021b; D'Elia, 2022; Crepet, 2023). The Hikikomori phenomenon, which was already present in Italy before Covid (Spitzer, 2016, Ricci, 2017; Lavenia, 2018), might understandably have seen an increase in the phenomenon after the pandemic (D'Elia, 2022; Crepet, 2023).

What strategies could be adopted to stimulate children to re-appropriate outdoor places where they can have experiences without waiting for school reforms related to Outdoor Education?

Is it possible to take an example from those who have experienced the outdoors to the full and can narrate their own adventures so that they can be a point of reference for Italian children who have had to endure a semi-confinement for almost two years?

Could these examples to follow be the adventurers who narrate their adventures in presence in order to find the stimuli and motivation to invent their own micro-adventures?

After two pandemic years spent between 'stop-and-go' and forced semi-confinements, remote lessons have not compensated for in-presence teaching; on the contrary, they have accentuated some of the discomforts of device dependency (Maria Aristeidou & Simon Cross, 2021). Will it be enough to give our pupils the freedom to leave

the house for them to resume outdoor experiential activities as if nothing had happened? As Dewey (1938) expressed in the final paragraph of his powerful book *Experience and Education*, the conflict between new and old education, progressive and traditional education, method and subject matter, child and curriculum, should not be accepted as somehow fundamental and basic. Therefore, returning to what was stated above, can adventurers' adventures be a new educational paradigm in outdoor adventure education? According to Quay and Seaman (2013), "educators must continue to pursue this problem to a deeper level, to finding out what education is" (p. 62). The practice of listening to adventurers' adventures and then imagining the creation of one's own place-based micro-adventures can be situated in a learning connected to "constructivism, social constructionism and cultural discourses" (Quay, 2003). It is legitimate for doubts to arise in this regard, and the scientific literature in the field of education still needs to be researched through specific studies, so that we can have a grasp of the state of the art and lay the foundations for future outdoor experiential activities that are place-based to help children overcome the trauma caused by Covid confinement (Crepet, 2023).

Note

1. https://www.fondazioneslowfood.com/en/what-we-do/slow-food-presidia/ (Accessed on May 7, 2024).
2. https://www.siped.it/convegno-studi-ricerche-outdoor-education (Accessed on May 7, 2024).
3. See also the University of Palermo "I CARE" project.
4. Pandemic school dispositions: https://www.firstonline.info/en/scuola-quarantena-e-dad-con-un-solo-positivo-le-regole/ (Accessed on May 7, 2024).
5. Also see: https://www.siped.it/convegno-studi-ricerche-outdoor-education/ (Accessed on May 7, 2024).

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Werther Giannini ha conseguito il dottorato di ricerca in "Reggio Childhood Studies" presso Università degli studi di Modena e Reggio-Emilia una tesi dal titolo *Adventurers' adventures as a spark to resume experiential activities in places where human activities are sustainable and in defence of biodiversity* sotto la supervisione del professore Alessandro Bortolotti (Dipartimento di Scienze per la Qualità della Vita – Università di Bologna) e Professor Mike Brown (Auckland University of Technology).

I suoi interessi di ricerca comprendono *outdoor adventure education*; attività esperienziali outdoor connesse alla sostenibilità e alla biodiversità; l'avventuriero e il discente durante le attività esperienziali *place-based*; la ripresa delle attività esperienziali post-Covid attraverso l'interazione tra discente e avventuriero.

Contatto: werther.giannini@studenti.unimore.it