

EXPERIMENTAL RETREAT AND WORKSHOP USING THE DEEP ADAPTATION FRAMEWORK

Virág Havasi

associate professor, University of Miskolc, Faculty of Humanities, Institute of Applied Social Sciences
3515 Miskolc-Egyetemváros, e-mail: virag.havasi@uni-miskolc.hu

Abstract

The study presents the methodology and experience of an experimental retreat and workshop addressing the four questions of deep adaptation, where we combined the supervisory work method with art therapy tools. The goals of “Mélylevegő” retreats and workshops were, and still are to reach, involve and support as many people as possible in the process of thinking about deep adaptation and then in the nascent small community solutions. According to the group leaders and participants the developed methodology functioned well, however we were not able to plan community actions. This requires more settings, processing of the feelings and thoughts of the participants. The study contains the responses given by the participants to three questions (out of four) of deep adaptation.

Keywords: deep adaptation, crisis of civilisation, art therapy, community development

1. Introduction

The message of the “Limits to growth” (1972) and “Our common future” (1987) still holds today; climate change is on its way with related challenges and there are other global systematic risks like loss of biodiversity, resource depletion, financial crisis, societal breakdown (Future Earth, 2020).

Servigne and Stevens in 2015 coined a neologism, “collapsology” to designate the transdisciplinary study of the risks of collapse of industrial civilization. They invited scholars, experts and the public to engage in a meaningful conversation on urgent questions regarding the catastrophic risks. Their aim is to inform as many people as possible about the hazardous scenarios so that society can organise itself politically to mitigate these existential risks. (Servigne et al., 2021)

In 2018 deep adaptation (DA) paper by Jem Bendell came out and had a tremendous effect. Its analyses and postures are very close to the ideas of collapsology. The DA agenda is based on the need for preparing for the worst- similarly to the ethical guidelines in certain professions, e.g. emergency department physicians. DA combines mitigation and adaptation goals. Bendell offered a framework for community dialogue in the face of climate change, asking four questions (The 4Rs) regarding the challenge. Resilience asks us: what do we most value that we want to keep and how? Relinquishment asks us: what do we need to let go of so as not to make matters worse? Restoration asks us: what could we bring back to help us with the coming difficulties? Reconciliation asks: with what and whom shall we make peace as we face our shared mortality? (Bendell, 2021)

Andrea Sélley (supervisor-coach, community developer) and Virág Havasi (sociologist, art therapist) started a series of retreats and workshops in 2023 with the aim of reaching, involving and supporting as many people as possible in the process of thinking about deep adaptation and then in the nascent small community solutions. In the retreats and workshops, supervisory work method is com-

bined with the tools of art therapy. The involvement of the latter was considered important because it supports emotional involvement and openness, strengthens the development of a sense of community among the participants, helps to deal with the negative emotions that surface, and transforms them into positive energies. In this study we present the experience of the first two occasions, trusting that others can also draw motivation from them, and can apply the method and develop it further.

2. Theoretical background

Science of global warming has failed to emotionally engage the majority of the society, particularly those in the most powerful positions (Jones and Steffen, 2019). It is partly because climate science is speculative due to the lack of precedents and experimental techniques and there are less understood elements in it (like the consequences of ice-sheet melting or the reactions of crops and ecosystems to warming). On top of all this, uncertainty of statistical methods translates into the message that the outcome is avoidable. (Bendell-Rupert, 2021) As a consequence many steps were taken, but not enough: the CO₂ emission is still growing, let alone the methane. The UN instituted the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in order to give regular comprehensive assessments on the state of climate change, but IPCC seems to underestimate the risks humanity is facing due to the abovementioned factors. Despite this there were other scientists who warned of the risk of collapse in 2020 (see: scholarwarnings.net). Among the steps taken we would like to highlight the Project Drawdown, the mission of which is to help the world stop climate change as quickly, safely, and equitably as possible. They do this by advancing effective, science-based climate solutions and strategies and fostering bold, new climate leadership. (see: <https://drawdown.org/>; Hawken, 2021; Hawken-Steyer, 2017) Although the approach of the Drawdown project is different than the one of DA, its role to help mitigation and give information is of paramount importance.

As we mentioned in the introduction, collapsology was born in 2015 and deep adaptation in 2018. DA movement managed to talk about the scientific, emotional and spiritual issues, political proposals, while involving the themes of injustice, colonialism, patriarchy (Servigne et al., 2021) and supposedly will do the same in the future. So even if the collapse of modern society does not occur, DA can induce positive changes.

As a response to Bendell's academic papers the Deep Adaptation Forum (DAF) was established, which offers free events and online platforms for people who are seeking and building supportive communities to face the reality of the climate crisis. DAF currently engages about 15,000 participants from various backgrounds and countries. (<https://www.deepadaptation.info/about/>) The Hungarian closed facebook group has more than 15,000 members.

There are also key links between DA and climate psychology. The main aims of this latter are to understand the phenomenon of denial and to develop a support system to those who suffer from ecological/climate distress. The Climate Psychology Alliance (initiated in 2014) is a venture in this field with academic and therapeutic strands. (Tait, 2021)

The ideas of DA triggered critics and outrage; many labelled it as unscientific, panic -inducing or simply calling Mr Bendell a doomer.¹ He anticipated such consequences making reference in his study to a heated debate in 2017 brought about by an article published in the New York Magazine. The article summarised the effects of global warming exercised on humanity and the eco-system. The resulting debate revolved around whether it is appropriate to share such information with the wide public as they strengthen the feeling of hopelessness and induce fear. Criticism against DA is also present in

¹ <https://www.klimagyasz.hu/melyadaptacio/mi-az-a-melyadaptacio>

Hungary such as Takács-Sánta (2022) has the view that the picture of an inevitable gloomy future may shake people's belief in the value of acting against ecological collapse, therefore making it a self-fulfilling prophecy. He considers harmful the principals of DA on personal level as well, because he thinks that believing in an inevitable collapse will brand our daily lives. As a result, we will live the rest of our ephemeral life in constant fear, trembling and eco-depression.

Takács-Sánta (2022) calls for the creation of an ecological civilisation. This aim is not different from that of DA. With our initiative we wish to bridge the gap between the two approaches. Typically, those people will attend our workshops who have a strong climate anxiety and who consider collapse a possible or certain scenario. We work with other methods, as well, then presented in this articles with people thinking differently, however in that case our aims are similar: searching for and supporting small-community solutions. People still denying the possibility of collapse maybe less determined, they are under smaller pressure of motivation, however their role can be also important. Searching for the answers to the questions of the 4Rs can be a good tool to those,too, who believe in the possibility of avoiding the collapse. Working on a peaceful transition can contribute to the mitigation of the aftermath of the collapse.

In order to distinguish between the two types of activities and attitudes, we suggest the usage of climate adaptation vs deep adaptation expressions. Both have the purpose of external (adjusting, accommodating to the change of external conditions) and internal adaptation (changing and adjusting our feelings, values, attitudes). In case of DA internal adaptation is more profile, more deep rooted. Here raising awareness of the non-climatic reasons of collapse (such as the scarcity of resources, the growth constraint of an economic system based on credit) also plays an important role and preparation for their consequences.

Criticism against DA sometimes derive from the fact that many people do not know or misunderstand its goals. Therefore, it is often identified with bunker mentality and is considered to be exclusive², however its objectives are totally the opposite.

As we mentioned before, many critics of collapsology and DA often assume that fear caused by bad news paralyzes and leads to inaction. But fear, despair and rage are healthy responses among the given circumstances and help us to stay alert, seek out information, refine our perception of risks (Sveringe et al., 2021). Tannenbaum et al (2015) concluded in their meta-analysis of fear that fear appeals are effective in positively influencing attitude, intentions and behaviour, and there are no identified circumstances under which they backfire and lead to undesirable outcomes. Joanna Macy, an environmental activist and eco-psychologist shows that no longer hiding the facts provokes a revival of energy and a kind of release of enthusiasm leading to joy and action. The Observatory of Collapse Experiences conducted surveys on the topic and also found that anguish of finitude is a driving force for action (Sveringe et al., 2021).

Cassey-Forquet (2020) presented the results of an opinion poll on collapsology conducted by IFOP, according to which 71% of Italian, 56% of British, 65% of French people and 52% of the USA's respondents agrees with the statement that western civilisation as we know it will collapse soon. In Germany this ratio was lower, only 39%.

ComRes conducted a survey on behalf of the Global Challenges Foundation, interviewing people across 8 countries (Australia, Brazil, China, Germany, India, South Africa, the UK, and the US). The survey asked respondents to gauge their perceived level of security as compared to the one two years

² Id pl. <https://ujegyenloseg.hu/kapitulacio-vagy-osszefogas-a-melyalkalmazkodas-kritikai/>

earlier with regards to global risks i.e. those that might affect 10% of the global population. A total of 61% of the respondents felt more insecure than earlier. (Hill, 2017)

Hungarian research result related to our topic is a study written by Scheider-Medgyesi in 2020. They used the ISSP's 2019 data for their analyses and found that only 9.6% of the Hungarian population thinks that environmental changes are one of the two most important issues in Hungary today. In general, the Hungarian society does not question the fact that the Earth's climate is changing (97%), however, a tenth of the respondents explains climate change primarily with natural processes. According to the results the Hungarian society is quite inactive politically regarding environmental protection. Moreover, the most common acts are signing a petition (6%) and donating money to green civil society organisations (5%), which activities do not require great commitment and effort. The contradictory situation in Hungary is shown by the fact that although 56% of the respondents are very or somewhat concerned about environmental problems, 59% of them are not willing to pay higher prices to protect the environment and 72% of them rejects higher taxes for the same purpose. (Scheider-Medgyesi, 2020)

Bognár (2020) in his theoretical paper discusses the opportunities and limitations of ecological communication in modernity. According to him, the decisive question of the future is whether the West will retain its leading role or whether the East will generate the social processes. Western societies have developed the ability to reflect on environmental issues, they are characterized by a post-modernizing value system, and the economic sector will be able to find new profit prospects under the new conditions. However, in his opinion, grassroots initiatives are too weak to successfully represent their values. Antal (2020) disputes Bognár's ideas and states that the classical environmental protection paradigm (according to which environmental protection problems can be handled by means of greening within the present legal-economic-political system) has collapsed. With the complex ecological and climate crisis a new, general, universal binary code was born, which overrides the logic of all social subsystems: whether humanity will survive or perish. Survival became a primary material interest and there is no time for the subsystem of environmental protection to gradually recode the operational logic of the other subsystems. The key to the solution does not depend on whether the leading role remains in the West, as positive initiatives have been born in the East as well (environmental protection of indigenous peoples, movements of indigenous people). On the other hand, he considers it important that the state supports the new initiatives, the signs of which can be the declarations of climate emergencies. (Antal, 2020)

3. Methodology of “Mélylevegő”³ deep adaptation retreat⁴ and workshop

In the “Mélylevegő” (Deep breath) retreat and workshop we wanted to connect the techniques of “Katarzisz Komplex Művészetterápia” (KKMT, Katharsis Complex Art Therapy) with the attempts to respond to the four basic questions of DA. Some of the beneficial effects of the KKMT are similar to that of DA: they help us to tune in the world around us, to connect with nature and with other people, to understand and develop ourselves, to conduct a more harmonious and meaningful life.

³ The name “Mélylevegő” (Deep breath) playfully combines the reference to deep adaptation with the fact that we take a deep breath when we want to avoid hasty acting, and breathe deeply during relaxation. The name “Deep Air-Deep Water” also emerged, but we chose the simpler version.

⁴ “A retreat is a type of group getaway in which the members of that group take time to form bonds with one another, contemplate their purpose and motives, and work on one or more specific goals.” (<https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/structure/training-and-technical-assistance/retreats/main>)

With our programme we offer possibilities to connect with others who are also fearing the worst and experiencing a range of overwhelming emotions. The power of community helps to face, share and process our feelings, move from despair toward hope. After meaningful discussions about implications of the current situation for our lives we will turn to action. The actions can have mitigation and adaptation goals as well, they can range from individual responses (like spending more time in nature, or feeling gratitude for what we have) to community based initiatives (like searching for and sharing resources, establishing study circles, taking the first steps towards food self-sufficiency).

The KKMT method was developed by Márta Antalvai and is based on an artificially induced cathartic experience. The participants listen to a poem and music in relaxation and then display the appearing internal images in their work of art using various tools. The poem and the music are related to the topic of the sessions, which are aligned with the annual cycle of nature, the archetypes and the festivals of the given months. (Havasi, 2017) Possible themes for the month of June (which was the time of our first events) are community, the feeling of freedom and air, the child within us and the bright and dark side of the personality. We connected these topics with the four questions of DA. Table 1 presents the syllabus of the two-day long retreat.

1. Table. Retreat syllabus

Designation of the task	The method of processing
1st day	
Tuning in: making a collage from objects found in the environment. (30 min.)	The works are processed using the free association method.*
What does the catchphrase “collapse of civilization” mean and how does it make you feel? What are the causes and factors of the collapse of civilization? (30 min.)	The participants share their feelings and opinions one by one.
Displaying sense of air and freedom- Drawing after listening to Jenő Heltai’s poem Szabadság in relaxation. (45 min.)	The topic concerns the ability to change, openness, and attitude to change, which are essential conditions for deep adaptation. The works are processed using the free association method.
Searching for an answer to the question of “Relinquishment”. (45 min.)	The participants have to illustrate in a coordinate system what they find difficult to let go of in connection with the collapse of civilisation; when will they let them go and how difficult it will be for them to do so. The time scale of the coordinate system is determined by the person concerned.
Break (30 min.)	
Making a double self-portrait from clay, showing the bright and dark side of our personality in one piece of work. (45 min.)	The processing is done using the free association method, while answering the question of what makes us happy and unhappy. Through this the participants can identify the factors that they do not like in our civilization, thus helping them to accept the possibility of the collapse of this civilization.
Searching for an answer to the question of “Resilience”. (45 min.)	The participants choose two OH ⁵ cards each and explain their choice. The cards should somehow symbolize what they want to keep and how they want to keep it.
Sharing and discussing feelings and thoughts that arose during the day. (30 min.)	
2nd day	
Tuning in: choosing a tree in the meadow, then drawing it with a tool of free choice (pencil, felt-tip pen, powder pastel, oil pastel). (45 min.)	The works are processed using the free association method.

⁵ Associative cards, created by Ely Raman (<https://www.oh-kartya.hu/>).

Representation of the desire for attachment in a drawing after listening to János Vajda's poem "Költő barátomhoz". (45 min.)	The works are processed using the free association method. The topic touches on our desire for community, so it is a transition to the next topic.
Searching for an answer to the question of "Reconciliation". (30 min.)	Conversation about the values of belonging to community, interdependence, friendliness and love.
Break (30 min.)	
Creating a montage (selecting, tearing out and pasting images from magazines) with the title "My vision of the future". (60 min.)	The participants talk about and explain their own montages.
Searching for an answer to the question of "Restoration". (30 min.)	Conversation about the things the participants want to bring back, want to learn and wish to act on; discussing issues of trust, common values, and social goods.
Closure (30 min.)	The participants share what they will do first in connection with deep adaptation after returning home, and what plan they have come up with.

*In the free association method the group members react individually to each work, sharing what comes to their mind about the given work, and then the maker of the piece of art gives feedback and describes what feelings they wanted to display, and what feelings led them to it.

Source: own editing

When compiling the syllabus of the workshop, we were limited by the much shorter time available, so we used art therapy tasks only in the case when we felt that they could not be omitted. Taking into account the experiences of the retreat, we combined certain tasks, modified their order and refined the questioning.

2. Table. Syllabus of the Workshop

Designation of the task	The method of processing
Tuning in: the participants say a symbol that expresses their current state of mind and their expectations for the workshop. (5 min.)	
How likely is the collapse of civilization, and when is it estimated to occur? What are the causes of the collapse of civilization? (15 min.)	The participants share their feelings and opinions one by one.
Searching for an answer to the question of "Relinquishment". (35 min.)	The same as on the retreat.
Searching for an answer to the question of "Resilience". (35 min.)	The same as on the retreat.
Break (30 min.)	
Making a double self-portrait from clay, showing the bright and shady side of our personality in one piece of work. (30 min.)	The works are processed using the free association method.
Creating a montage with the title "My vision of the future". The piece of art has to express what the participant wants to bring back, learn and act on (restoration) and also with who they want to make peace with (reconciliation). (30 min.)	The participants share their feelings and opinions one by one.
Choosing a tree on the meadow, drawing it, while thinking about the individual steps the participants plan to take in the near future. (20 min.)	The participants share their feelings and opinions one by one. Another instruction for the group members is, that they should observe whose ideas they can share in their planned steps.
Setting up short-term community action plans in Miskolc. (30 min.)	Work in pairs.
Closure with choosing symbols. (10 min.)	

Source: own editing

4. Experience of the first retreat and workshop

We sent the invitations to the “Mélylevegő” retreat and workshop to those friends and acquaintances who we assumed would like to get involved in this activity. Among them were university students, politicians, civil activists. Several of those invited indicated that they would like to join the programmes in the future but could not participate in the first events.

The location of the retreat was Hejce, a village in the Zemplén region. In addition to the two group leaders, six women (aged between 32 and 50) participated in the session (a member of the green movement, currently project assistant; a landscape architect- ecopsychologist; a landscape architect, currently a chess teacher; a biologist- permaculture consultant; a housewife who deals with rural tourism and family self-sufficiency; a social worker, currently a pharmacy assistant).

The workshop held in Miskolc was attended by five men and three women (aged between 20 and 55), including the vice mayor of the city responsible for sustainable development, a civil and a green affairs officer (both civil activists), two biology teachers, two university students, and a Roma activist living in the countryside.

Most of the participants had a science degree, which can be attributed to the fact that they are the most informed about the state of the Earth. No men signed up for the retreat, but this is typical of retreats in general, that no men or only a few of them participate in them.

We also tried to facilitate the participants’ connection to nature with the choice of location (Hejce is a peaceful village surrounded by mountains, while within Miskolc we were in a garden on the border of the city).

Since these were experimental sessions, we decided that we would be flexible with our plans and accordingly on the first day of the retreat we postponed the clay making and the round of evaluation until the next day, not only because the previous tasks took longer, but also because we noticed that the participants were emotionally and physically exhausted. We started the next day with an evaluation of what had happened until then, which we considered to be a tuning in. The rain however disrupted our plans so the outing and task of drawing outside had to be cancelled. We definitely wanted to work on the topic of double self-portraits, so we left out tasks related to attachment and peace-making. The clay and montage-making at the workshop with the associated oral processing took a lot of time, therefore the pair-work of planning the future was missed.

After the events (two weeks later) we addressed the participants with an online questionnaire, in which we asked what their impressions were concerning the tasks and the retreat/workshop as a whole, as well as who else they would recommend to be involved in the process, and whether they would undertake holding similar workshops. By the time of writing of this study three people had completed the questionnaire, all three participants of the retreat. Verbal feedback was received about the workshop: all of the participants found it useful and helpful and three of them took further actions after digesting the experience and later they were involved in organising a social hackaton⁶ event which addresses the challenges of climate adaptation.

The following positive feedbacks were received about the retreat reflecting that the applied methodology seems to function:

⁶ Social hackaton is an event where activists, entrepreneurs and creative people come together to find solutions for a specific selection of social problems in a very short period of time (e. g. during a weekend). Additional learning opportunities (e. g. mini-workshops, support of mentors, experts) help the participants in developing their projects.

„The approach is unusual and good. Although I often felt that ‘I don't know where I'm headed!’ The threads unravelled nicely, and it turned into a round whole.”

“The tasks and their transitions have revealed more and more paths – alternatives, and solutions – which means the start of something new.”

The critical verbal feedback about the workshop was that we did not plan specific steps to be taken. The suggestion is appropriate; we intended to prepare action plans, and the task aimed at this was left behind due to lack of time. Instead, we asked the participants to think about the questions more and agreed to meet again. Regarding future workshops we will not deal with planning of actions at all the first time we meet a new group.

The negative feedback regarding the retreat was similar, although with a different emphasis: *“I thought the story would focus on community action and thinking together. The event for me turned out to be very personal; I probably still have work to do here. I am interested to see how it transits to the community level.”*

In the following we will move on to the experiences of the tasks and their evaluation by the participants.

Collapse of civilisation

We approached the task related to the collapse of civilisation using two different methods in the two groups. At the retreat we asked what images and feelings it evoked; at the workshop we asked more specifically: what the probability of the collapse was and the expected time of its occurrence according to the participant.

The latter solution worked better, which is shown by feedbacks given about the retreat, i.e., that *“it was good overall, but it seemed generic”*, or : *“This was a general, thought-provoking phase, which tuned me to the topic a bit, but more to each other's way of thinking and values.”*

Many experts believe that our civilisation's current state and prospects should not be shared with people because they will become depressed and paralysed. The following feedback refutes this: *“I thought this task would be overwhelming, but it was more about mapping the problems that inspired me to focus on the solution.”*

At the retreat apart from climate change, the participants mentioned only behavioural and value factors as the causes of the collapse of civilization. It is true that the other factors (exhaustion of resources, depletion of soil productivity, etc.) are consequences of values and behavioural patterns, but regardless, they will be the direct triggers of the collapse. The answers to the more precisely formulated question at the workshop were much more tangible and decisive. The opinion was almost unanimous that the collapse of modern civilization will surely and soon occur or is already taking place. Here, the participants immediately added the direct causes of collapse, and almost all essential factors came together from the eight answers.

Relinquishment (coordinate system)

The participants had to illustrate in a coordinate system what they find difficult to let go of in connection with the collapse of civilisation; when will they let them go and how difficult it will be for them. The time scale of the coordinate system was determined by the person concerned. The time axis was not provided with numbers by the participants at the retreat, while the most extended period at the workshop was 25–40 years, and there was a solution in which the endpoint was “when we have to”.

For several participants at the retreat, private life and inner feelings became the focus of the solution, which is reflected in the feedback: *“It is a very personal line that can be unfolded in many different ways; it beautifully unfolds who is where – in emotions, time, objects, events...”*

Another difference between the two ways of working was that the retreat participants mentioned many personal things not related to the collapse of civilisation when asked to list things they did not want to relinquish. At the workshop the participants listed among the things that were difficult to let go of, which they later considered to be kept by all means.

In general, the participants would easily relinquish: car, city life, rushing, TV and Internet, heat in the apartment in winter, travelling (some people find this difficult), luxury, collecting things, non-seasonal diet and current work.

The participants would relinquish with moderate difficulties: interpersonal contact, readymade food, and instant shopping.

Things that were considered difficult to let go of: piped drinking water, electricity, coffee and tea, the school system, the health care system, public safety and starting a family.

The task had a very powerful effect: *“It made me think deeply. It was an important task; I had to look hard at myself. It was difficult for me to place my subjects on the axes. If the task had to be done again today, a different solution would be born. It was exciting to observe individual attitudes. It helped to clarify things and their importance.”*

Resilience (OH cards)

The participants had to choose two OH cards, which express what they want to keep by all means. At the retreat the participants saw the pictures on the OH cards before choosing, while at the workshop they randomly drew from the cards and expressed their thoughts triggered by them. Both versions worked well.

The task firmly touched everyone, some people were positively, others negatively affected. *“It brought home to me heartwarming realizations, and made me cry. I didn’t like this task; I felt very uncomfortable. Out of necessity, I chose two cards randomly and said something. I felt like I was lying.”*

The participants did not mention civilization-related factors at the retreat but rather very personal matters.

At the workshop “knowledge” and “connection with others” were the most frequently mentioned concepts the participants wanted to keep. They were formulated in different ways, with slightly different emphases: some emphasized humanity's accumulated wisdom in connection with knowledge, while others emphasized practical knowledge or the recovery of intuitive understanding. Several people mentioned that they do not want to let go of the family, even though it may be necessary. Among young people, many do not even plan to have children for the time being – for the sake of the offsprings. It was also mentioned that mental health should be preserved, that there should always be a place that we can call home, that we should preserve sensuality and loving togetherness, and avoid animalization. Health care and public safety also arose as things to preserve, but for some people with the overtone of accepting that they won't.

Double self-portrait (in clay), sources of happiness and unhappiness

Creating clay sculptures about the dark and bright side of ourselves and talking about them worked very well in the groups. The participants were open, attentive, understanding and the feeling of trust was touchable. The details and the characterisation of individual people are irrelevant from the point

of view of this study, so I would like to quote only one feedback: *“This assignment was boundary-crossing, confronting, thought-provoking and creative.”*

Restoration (Montage: Individual vision of the future)

For discussing the topic of restoration we asked the participants to prepare a montage with the title “My vision of the future”.

We did not specify the task at the retreat and accordingly the individual visions of the retreat were not related to the crisis and eventual collapse of civilization, but were about personal matters in a world similar to the one we currently live in. So, at the workshop we added to the instructions that the montage should express what they want to keep from our civilisation, how they want to do it and what they want to bring back from the past. This way we channelled the participants’ focus to the issue of the collapse of civilization.

At the retreat the participants were powerfully touched by the task: *“I cried here, so it was an ‘unpleasant experience’. It brought me face to face with what I can’t deal with, only ‘accept’.” “It was quite a painful task because I haven’t been able to plan for years; I have always been waiting for something or just looking for excuses. So, it was excruciating to recognize and face that.” “It was good to just look at the pictures at the beginning and experience when a spark suddenly came, and a plan started to take shape from the pictures, to which I was finally consciously looking for elements. In the end everything fell into place. It’s been here in front of me ever since. : –)”*

Among the participants those, who have a plot in a village, want to develop it, and the participant, who lives in a village, has become uncertain about his plan to move to the city. There were also others, who put a picture of a village on their montage representing “village as a liveable place”.

The preservation and transmission of knowledge was included in almost every montage, and the related explanations were: passing on knowledge to our grandchildren, preparing children, gaining practical knowledge, connecting with old cultures in a study circle, taking over the experience of the elderly, community book collection.

Several montages featured the image of food production, two featured female power and the world of tales.

There were people who added texts to the montage. The inscription “Alliance of change” refers to the fact that we need to change and need to do it together. This slogan was recalled in the closing round by many participants. The phrase “How much time do we have to prepare?” speaks for itself.

One work featured soldiers expressing the need to protect the established communities. The possibility of violence arose at both events when we talked about the probability and cause of the collapse of civilisation (Mad Max and other dystopic novels and movies were mentioned). At the question of “Resilience” it was also an important element; i.e. public safety must be preserved in some ways. In addition to those listed above, entirely personal, individual phenomena were also appeared in the montages, for example, mountain climbing, cycling.

Direct individual next step

At the retreat we asked the participants to choose a tree and while they were drawing it, they had to think about what direct actions they would take in relation to our topic. At the workshop we simply asked for their opinion on this issue.

At the retreat two participants had specific ideas (a woman will initiate with her neighbours to start to work more consciously on producing their food, while the other wants to remain calm and cheerful,

help and support others, collect and teach practical knowledge, cultivate friendships). The rest of the attendees “want to digest” what was said during the weekend.

The steps planned by the workshop participants were as follows:

- to create a community garden in Tomor
- Four people expressed the need to transfer knowledge to children (“*Children are the future*”, “*We have to find and develop a methodical form to learn and teach our children how to survive.*”)
- Three participants mentioned the need to disseminate information (“*We need to wake a lot of people up that we have work to do by talking about it and looking in the mirror.*” “*I’m leaving with a sense of mission, and that’s what I came with. Those around me don’t want to acknowledge it; they’re uninformed. I want to help with the preparation.*”)
- “*We have been chewing on this bone for a long time; I am a pessimist; we cannot break the momentum of the global world. However, we don’t have to invent cold water; we must retrieve old ideas.*”
- “*The idea should be spread in the local council as well. People in the local council are just paying lip service, but no money is allocated to this purpose in the budget, there is no work-force either.*”
- “*We should talk more deeply on a special workshop about whether there will be grandchildren.*”

Community actions

Although the task of planning community actions was missed, in the online questionnaire we asked the respondents whether they had found other people they could identify with.

The answers reflect that there have not been formulated particular actions yet, these questions must be digested before actual action can begin. As the respondents put it: “*Things go their way; I will go when they call me. I’m currently wrestling with the situations given by the montage task. I have to find a footing in the uncertainty.*” “*Improving my life, simplifying, connecting to the community, working together.*” “*...everything is still very turbulent...*”

Closing round

In several cases the symbols chosen for the closing round at the workshop were related to sleep: “*2 dl aludtej*”, “*Good morning!*”, and “*Sleeping*”. There were other sorrowful images mentioned, like: “*a weevil in a pot*”, “*a beetle hobbling on its back*”. These feelings are painful, but natural, healthy responses to our circumstances. Being together in a community, sharing our emotions with others help us to bear them and also, they make a strong bond among the participants.

Two participants closed the sessions with plans and planned actions: “*I see the beautiful forest; it’s hard to believe that there is something wrong. We have to wake people up in the local council.*” “*I don’t have a symbol; I have plans.*”

As a closure, we said we would hold workshops for one more year to involve as many people as possible. In addition, we will continue the collaborative thinking that has already begun with the previous participants at new meetings and develop action plans.

5. Summary

The goals of our “Mélylevegő” retreats and workshops were and still are to reach, involve and support as many people as possible in the process of thinking about deep adaptation and then in the nascent small community solutions. In the experimental retreat and workshop we tried to connect the techniques of an

art therapy method (Catharsis Complex Art Therapy) with the attempt to answer the four basic questions of the deep adaptation agenda. DA is not a method, but a framework, within which responses could be found through meaningful conversations, community actions, different experimental techniques to the complex phenomenon of the possible (probable) collapse of our civilisation. The present study summarizes the methods and experience of our experimental retreat and workshop. The vast majority of the participants in these events were professionals and civil activists, and all of them were informed about the issue of the crisis of civilization and were aware of global (and local) challenges and problems. However, not everyone had heard of the deep adaptation agenda. Those who had, painted a pretty gloomy picture of the prospects: “For me, the DA theme is about indescribable fear (with human panic and helplessness), as well as chaos interwoven with thoughtlessness and lack of thought.”

According to the group leaders and participants the developed methodology proved mostly suitable, but we could not plan any specific community action on the first events. This is well illustrated by the thought expressed in the closing round of the workshop: “It was good to go around the topic from many angles because people revolve around themselves. I began the day by not lamenting that humanity will disappear as we don’t deserve to exist. In the end, however, my feelings turned positive.”

For the next year, we have set the goal of holding one quarterly retreat and as many workshops as our time allows. The retreat indeed required more time and resources, and one of its essential experiences was that although it was typically attended by people with a degree in natural sciences, they did not deal much with the issues of deep adaptation and the collapse of civilization. The tasks were partially reinterpreted and shaped into highly intimate questions forgetting that the world will not remain as it was. Despite this, we decided to continue to organize the retreats as well, because on these occasions we can address other types of people, including those who are not interested in deep adaptation but rather in self-knowledge work. On the other hand, retreats can also be attractive to those with intense personal life blockages, that take precedence over the macro-social crisis. For them we can provide a community and complement the work on themselves with external meaningful goals.

We hope that the readers of this study will be inspired and become deep adaptation activists in their own ways. As András Takács-Sánta puts it: “To live in today’s mythical times in such a way that despite all threatening processes, we should (...⁷) take responsibility; and do our best is a beautiful, good, and joyful life.” (Takács-Sánta, 2022)

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⁷ Takács-Sánta mentions the belief in peaceful transition as well. Our ideas here differ: we rather hope for it and work for it, but consider it improbable.

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