

# From Outdoors to Labour Market (FOLM)

## Research report

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Produced by

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## FOLM Project Partners

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## Glossary

This glossary includes essential terms and relates to descriptions used in other FOLM documents.

**CIE** – Centre for Innovative Education, Poland. FOLM Lead Partner and also one of the Training Partners implementing the programme with participants.

**CO** – Coach (see below)

**Coach** – Person providing the life and skills coaching during the (Preparation and) Coaching Phase of the FOLM programme.

**Coaching Phase** – Third phase of FOLM programme, in which Coaching is conducted. Consists of approx. 10 group and one-to-one sessions and follows the Outdoor Learning Phase

**Consortium** – Group of Partner organisations and institutions who co-delivered the FOLM project

**Delivery Phase** – Main phase of the FOLM project implementation (following the Pilot), from August 2019 to February 2022.

**Edinburgh Model** – The Outdoor Learning model implemented and adapted in FOLM.

**ES** – Spain

**Femxa** – One of the FOLM and Training Partners, Spain.

**Food Bank** – One of the FOLM and Training Partners in Poland.

**FOLM** – From Outdoors to Labour Market (Project title)

**FOLM Coordinator** – The designated lead partner of a the FOLM project, CIE who will co-ordinate the FOLM project.

**FOLM Partner** – one of the 7 institutions/organisations forming the FOLM Consortium.

**FOLM Platform** – Sharing platform to be used by the Coaches, Trainers and the NEETs for discussions, sharing information and job matching.

**FOLM WP Coordinator** – The designated lead partner of a project work package.

**Group** – A group of (approx. 10) FOLM Participants. Unit in which the programme was delivered.

**IE** – Ireland

**Lead researcher** – Assigned lead researcher to the FOLM project, Jule Hildmann (PhD) from the University of Edinburgh.

**LIT** – Limerick Institute of Technology, Ireland (now TUS). One of the FOLM and Training Partners.

**ME** – Mentor (see below)

**Mentor** – FOLM staff member delivering the Mentoring of the FOLM programme to participants

**Mentoring Phase** – Last phase of FOLM programme, in which Mentoring is provided to participants by a Mentor of the Training Partner the participant is signed up with. This Phase lasts up to 6 months and consists of one-to-one sessions (live, phone or virtual) between a participant and their assigned Mentor.

**OL** – Outdoor Learning (see below)

**Outdoor Learning** – refers to the outdoor activities described in the FOLM programme by the relevant partners.

**Outdoor Learning Trainer** – staff delivering the Outdoor Learning Phase of the FOLM programme

**Participant** – young person who fulfils definition of NEETs agreed by FOLM Partners, who was approved in registration process to take part in FOLM as its beneficiary.

**Partner (FOLM Partner; Project Partner)** – The seven institutions/organisations that constitute the FOLM Consortium

**Partnership Meeting** – meetings at regular intervals where representatives of each project Partner convened to discuss the progress and current issues around the project.

**Pilot Phase** – First phase of FOLM project implementation, from September 2018 to December 2019.

**PL** – Poland

**Programme** – The educational FOLM programme participants are taking part in, consisting of recruitment, (Preparation), Outdoor Learning, Coaching and Mentoring

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**Project** – The FOLM project

**Q-S&A** – Questionnaire Self & Agency. A self-report psychometric tool developed for FOLM on the basis of standardised tools on self-concept, locus of control, self-efficacy, and sense of agency.

**Recruiter** – Employee of the Training Partner allowed to make decision of particular persons becoming a Participant.

**Recruitment** – The first phase of the Programme, related to the Outreach Phase of the Edinburgh Model.

**Research Team** – UoE research staff who conducted (part of) the research activities in FOLM.

**t** – Point of time in the programme when certain forms are completed (t1= pre-OL; t2= post OL; t3= post CO; t4= post ME; t5= follow-up/3-5months post ME).

**TR** – Trainer / Outdoor Learning Trainer (see below)

**Trainer** – Outdoor Learning Trainer (see above)

**Training Partner** – LIT, Food Bank, Femxa and CIE - FOLM Partner who implements OL, Coaching and Mentoring.

**TUS** – Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands, Midwest (TUS), Ireland (formerly LIT)

**UoE** – The University of Edinburgh, UK

**VT** – The Venture Trust, UK

## Note on Covid-19 and this pre-final version of the report

The continued delays and extensions to the delivery of the FOLM programme caused by the Covid-19 pandemic has led to this report being due for submission at a point of time when the data collection had just completed. Therefore, data analysis is still ongoing. In consequence, findings in this report are pre-final, and a revised and extended final version will be disseminated at the earliest possible date in 2022.

Implemented by: Partners:



## 1. Introduction

This report presents a summary of the research activities conducted around the international project *From Outdoor to Labour Market* that delivered an Outdoor Learning (OL) programme to over 990 young adults (age 18-29) in Ireland, Poland and Spain between September 2018 and February 2022. The primary formal objective was to (re)integrate the participants into employment, education or training and thereby reduce youth unemployment. The wider educational and societal purpose was the empowerment of the participants towards transformative competencies and active citizenship.

This report contains

- An executive summary
- A description of the FOLM project and the OL programme it employed
- The objectives, methodology and findings of the research conducted around the project.

The research findings have already informed FOLM outputs such as the Sustainability Guidelines, Policy recommendations, and Project Summary Report) and will be disseminated through academic publications and a range of knowledge exchange and impact formats.

### 1.1 Background

Global developments and increasing uncertainty pose significant challenges to individuals and societies in contemporary times. The ubiquity of these challenges and the objective to navigate them successfully has led to the development of several international frameworks of transferrable skills and competencies: Most prominent are the *transversal competencies* (UNESCO, 2015) and *transformative competencies* (OECD, 2019) that are considered key to employability as well as a fulfilled personal life and peaceful, prosperous and sustainable societies (OECD, 2005). These competencies include components such as critical thinking, decision making, problem solving and conflict management (Whittemore, 2018), and are increasingly hailed as overarching learning objectives for formal education and life-long learning in Europe and beyond (OECD, 2005, 4).

Youth who are not in education, employment or training ('NEETs') form a specific demographic, many of whom are subject to multiple factors of deprivation and disadvantage in terms of access to resources and realisation of potential that can turn into transferable competencies. Many countries like Poland, Spain and Ireland are struggling to find structural approaches and strategies successful in engaging and effectively supporting these youth towards employability and active citizenship. Outdoor learning has been widely evidenced as an approach that promotes these transferrable competencies in vocational and other educational settings and as viable alternative for persons struggling with classroom-based learning (e.g., Allison & von Wald, 2010; Fiennes et al., 2015; Rickinson et al., 2004). Consequently, outdoor learning was chosen as innovative approach to reduce youth unemployment in the FOLM project.

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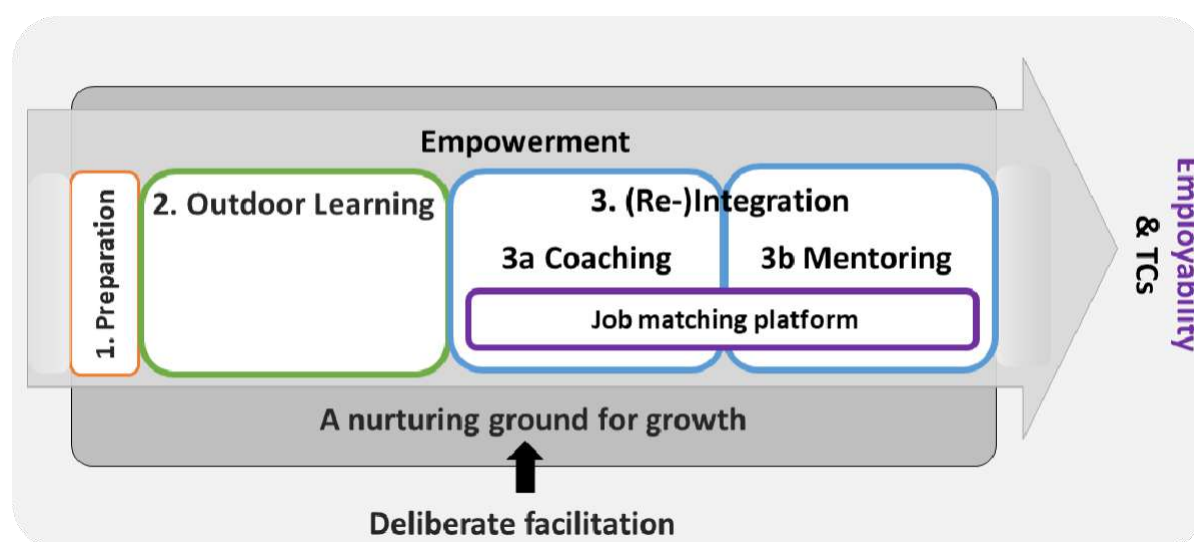
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## 1.2 Executive summary

The educational programme in FOLM is structured into several learning phases. It employs an OL model that has successfully run in Scotland for many years (the ‘Edinburgh Model’, Hildmann, Higgins, White, Strang & Hardie, 2019) and is based on interdisciplinary research and decades of field experience. The Model consists of three phases that were modified and complemented with additional input on employability in FOLM (Fig. 1).



**Figure 1.** Structure of the FOLM programme

The effectiveness of the FOLM project was evaluated by means of a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, and data collected from FOLM participants, staff working directly with participants in the programme, leadership and administrative staff, and to a lesser degree external stakeholders such as referral agencies, employers, public services, family members. This multi-source methodology produced a comprehensive 360 degree view on a wide scope of questions about the FOLM programme as well as Outdoor Learning (OL) as an innovative approach to VET.

### Main findings

990 young adults participated in the FOLM project (from Spain: 474; Poland: 382; Ireland: 134) between February 2019 and February 2022. Overall, the FOLM programme and underlying Edinburgh Model have demonstrated to be successful across different geographical and socio-cultural regions in promoting employability-related and transferable skills and competencies. 94.5% of participants progressed from the programme into either employment (15-40%, depending on the region; average 27.75%), education (38 to 84%, dep. on region, average 54.25%) or training (0 to 28%, dep. on region; average 12.5%)<sup>1</sup>. Participant groups demonstrated statistically significant increases in their

- Sense of Agency
- ‘Positive’ (i.e. realistic, constructive and growth-oriented) Self-Concept

These two factors were measured quantitatively as core component of a wide range of social and personal competencies. Participants and staff also reported considerable gains in parameters linked to transversal competencies such as

- A better understanding of their individual talents and aspirations

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<sup>1</sup> Preliminary data, provided by Food Bank. See online version of this report for updated data.

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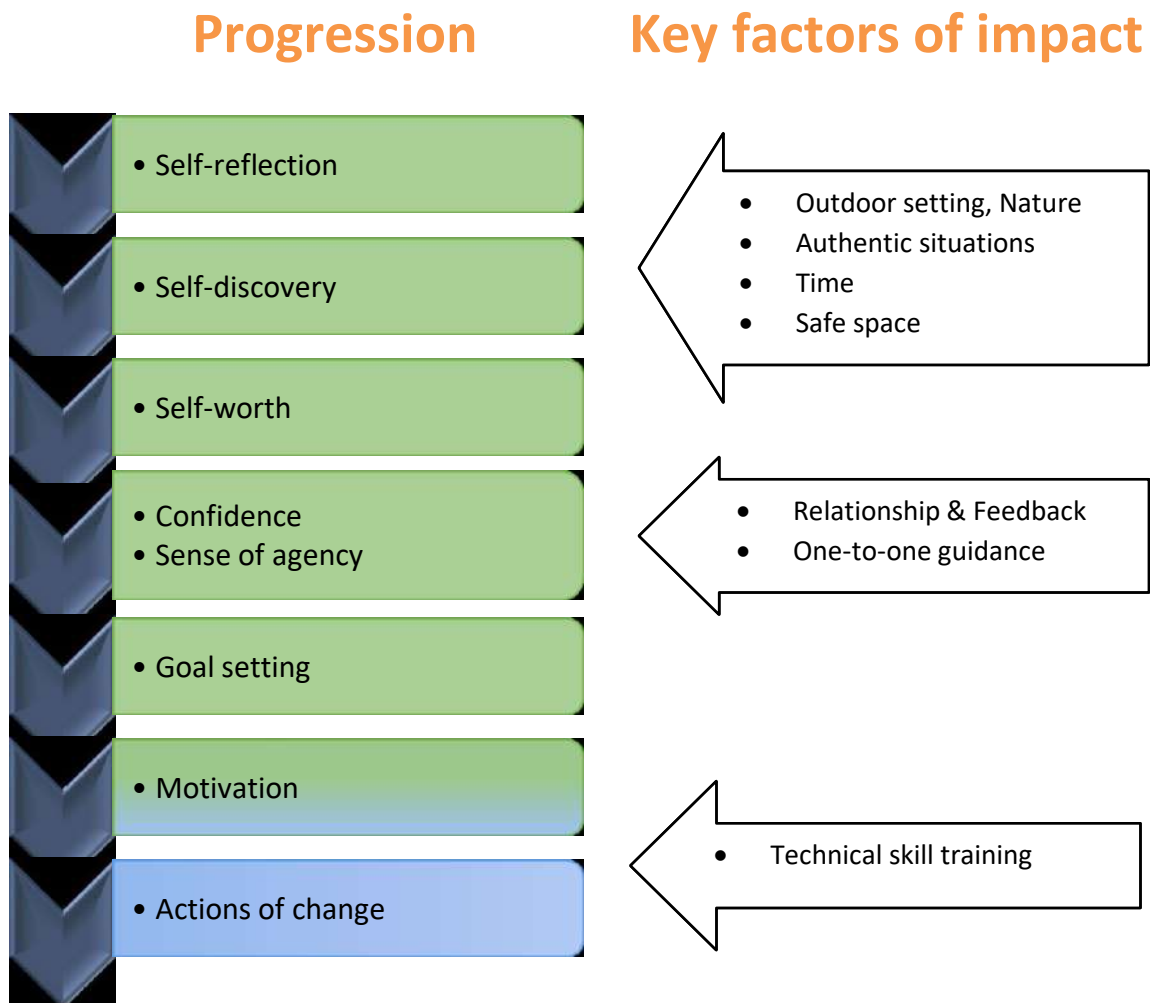


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- Goal-setting, and the motivation to pursue these goals
- Creativity and flexibility in their navigation of challenges / problem-solving and conflicts
- Taking responsibility for oneself, others, and a role or cause (e.g., the environment)
- Self-management (e.g. time management, self-motivation, apparel and hygiene)
- Collaborative behaviour

Overall, a progressive process of growth became apparent from the data that originates in the OL experience (Fig. 2)



**Figure 2.** Observed progression of growth (empowerment) in programme participants

The **Outdoor Learning** Phase was perceived by nearly all stakeholders as the key part of the programme and that it enabled self-discovery and fundamental experiences of one's skills, potential, and long-term objectives, paired with ample opportunities for practice and nurturing support from other group members and the staff. Data suggest the outdoor environment affords valuable space for self-reflection and self-discovery through (a) the reduction of our usual commodities, digital media and social expectations, (b) challenges, health benefits and micro-skills from active engagement with nature, and (c) a protective ('safe') space for transformation held by the participant group and staff.

In addition, the interactive, multisensory and holistic learning in the outdoors enables persons whose socio-emotional, physical and/or learning needs are not sufficiently met in a classroom-based

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educational setting to participate and thrive more fully. As such, OL has strong potential for empowerment towards transformative competencies and citizenship.

Each **Phase of the programme** has shown to fulfil an important function for participants' learning and growth:

- The Edinburgh Model's Preparation phase was reduced to a minimum in FOLM, which was seen to cause a notable lack of commitment in participants and added difficulties in recruitment. Investing time for relationship & trust building and goal setting prior to the OL was recognised by staff to directly lead to higher recruitment numbers, completion rate and learning impact.
- The Outdoor Phase afforded deep and impactful learning about oneself and others, which nurtured transformative competencies and employability skills.
- Both Coaching and Mentoring served a crucial role in supporting participants in transferring insights from the OL experience to applications in their daily lives. In FOLM, the Coaching Phase offered additional training and input on employment-related skills (e.g. CV writing, interviewing), which notably increased participants' chances to secure employment. The final Phase of Mentoring provided flexible one-to-one support that offered those who wanted valuable guidance and a safety net while they were progressing towards independence and/or other services.

The interweaving of the phases in the FOLM programme and Edinburgh Model have shown to be a crucial success factor as the phases complement and augment each other to produce the high rate of completion and EET placement achieved in FOLM.

Next to the Outdoor experience and the combination of programme phases, further factors identified to increase engagement and benefit for participants were the

- Staff – particularly a nurturing and respectful relationship
- Combination of learning in a group of peers with personal one-to-one support
- Daily themes, sessions, and roles that afford input and training of skills and mental shifts

The particular focus on employability was achieved through

- Transferable skills and competencies gained through the outdoor learning
- Specific employment-related skills (e.g. CV writing) during the Coaching Phase
- The job matching platform

The **regional comparison** showed modifications to the programme were most effective where they responded to rather than competed with the existing regional infrastructure and demographic needs. This paid off in higher programme completion numbers. It also became evident that collaboration with and/or support of the government is an immense booster for credibility, recruitment, access to resources, and successful transition of participants into EET at the end of the programme.

## Recommendations

Based on these and the full set of findings, the FOLM Consortium's recommendations for practitioners and decision-makers include:

- Prioritise relationship building, individualised attention and goal setting over numbers-based formal success criteria to afford the full benefits of transformative growth for participants.
- Adapt the Model to regional needs and available infrastructure and resources to optimise success.

- Collaborate with public services and local stakeholders to facilitate recruitment and post programme integration, and to establish credibility.

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- Train staff in line with national and international professional standards and invest in continuous professional development to ensure legal and safety compliance and high impact of interactions with participants.

## Conclusions

Key insights gained from the FOLM research are:

The FOLM programme and Edinburgh Model produced significant increases in key components of transferable competencies and a high formal success rate of transition into employment, education or training. These results exceed those of traditional employability programmes by far.

Regional adaptations of the model are advisable in order to integrate with and create synergies with the existing infrastructure, and to achieve optimal results.

Public sector support and integration is a key booster for the programme's effectiveness and impact.

While the setting up of the programme (with staff recruitment and training, development of procedures, scouting of locations, sourcing of outdoor equipment, etc.) requires significant investment of resources, public savings from successful reduction of (youth) unemployment create a substantial value for money in the long run.

Overall, the FOLM project has been highly successful in raising employability and transferrable competencies in young adults who were not in employment, education or training, which makes the programme – and more generally, OL as educational approach – interesting for VET and other regions invested in raising employability and transformative competencies in their population.

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## 2. From Outdoors to Labour Market (The FOLM project)

### 2.1. Project overview

The FOLM project was conducted from September 2018 to February 2022 by an international and inter-sectorial consortium to empower young people (age 18-29) to access employment, education, and training through an Outdoor Learning (OL) personal development programme. The project was delivered in Ireland, Spain and Poland, with expertise input from Scotland/UK.

FOLM was co-funded by Iceland, Lichtenstein, and Norway through the EEA & Norway Grants for Youth Employment with 3.4 Mio Euros.

### 2.2 Project objectives

The primary objective of FOLM was to increase employability-related transversal competencies in young adults who are previously not engaged in employment, education or training. The formal success criteria was to (re)integrate the participants into one of these fields of activity, ideally employment.

Beyond that and in line with the empowerment approach that informs much of outdoor learning and the model implemented in FOLM, the aim was to equip participants with skills that enable them to navigate relationships and diverse life situations to their satisfaction, i.e. to support them in their transformative development of transferrable competencies.

Finally, the project was seeking a scalable solution to (youth) unemployment across Europe by evaluating the model and its adaptability in different geographical and socio-cultural regions.

### 2.3 The Consortium

The FOLM Consortium was composed of seven (initially, eight) Partner organisation from four European countries and different sectors, including public, business, NGO, higher education (Tab 1).

Partner	Country	Role
Center for Innovative Education (CIE)	Poland	Lead Partner, Training Partner
Food Bank (FB)	Poland	Training Partner
Femxa	Spain	Training Partner
Regional Government of Cantabria (CG)	Spain	Training Partner
Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest (TUS)	Ireland	Training Partner
Venture Trust (VT)	Scotland/UK	Expertise Partner
The University of Edinburgh (UoE)	Scotland/UK	Expertise Partner

**Tab 1.** Project Partners, their countries and roles in the project

Including Partners from different backgrounds was intentional in order to draw on expertise in diverse



social, cultural and administrative contexts in the adaptation and evaluation of the programme. This was critical to ensuring usefulness and scalability across Europe and potentially beyond.

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Regarding the division of roles and responsibilities in the consortium: CIE led the overall coordination of the project. FB, Femxa with CG, TUS and later also CIE as Training Partners conducted the implementation of the programme in their respective regions. VT and UoE acted as expert consultants on OL and were tasked with training leadership and field staff on the Edinburgh Model and topics relevant for a successful and professional implementation of the project. Finally, TUS was in charge of quality assurance, and UoE of the research around FOLM. The collaboration throughout the project was described by all Partners as very collegial and supportive, which was identified as valuable contributor to the success of the project.

## 2.4 Geographical implementation

The FOLM programme was delivered in several regions across Poland, Spain and Ireland.

The regions initially selected were characterised by higher youth unemployment rates than in the rest of Spain, Poland or Ireland. In April 2017, Warmia-Masuria's youth unemployment rate was 21.9%, the region of Cantabria's was 36.1%, and the rate in Munster province in Ireland was 12%. Since the proposal stage and due to unprecedented influences like Brexit, Ireland's employment rate has risen to 'full employment', which – while a desirable achievement – rendered the challenge of recruiting participants a lot more difficult.

The original project regions in Ireland, Poland and Spain have a lot in common in terms of structural problems of rural regions that exacerbate youth unemployment, like underdeveloped infrastructure and the distribution of smaller towns and villages that were calling for innovative approaches to engaging and reintegration of unemployed youth.

## 2.5 The Outdoor Learning programme

The project employs an educational programme based on an outdoor learning model developed by VT and UoE. Since the programme is the subject of this study, both the model and its adaptation in FOLM are outlined below. Further details and background to the Edinburgh Model are provided elsewhere (i.e., Hildmann, Higgins, White, Strang & Hardie, 2019).

### 2.5.1 The Edinburgh Model for transferable competencies through Outdoor Learning

The Edinburgh Model describes an OL programme design using wilderness journeys to promote socio-emotional learning. The model emerged from interdisciplinary research combined with 40 years of practical experience and revision of the model in the field. It consists of three integrated phases fused together by underlying principles of pedagogy. Key factors include a nurturing ground for growth, learning in and with nature, practical self-facilitation tools, and the transferability of micro skills learnt on the course. Programmes designed using the Edinburgh Model feature certain structural elements:

- Three distinct phases – each with specific elements leading to impact
- Three underlying principles that integrate the phases into one continuous process

Empowerment is part of the intended outcomes as well as of the applied approach. The underlying principles support participant growth either directly, in form of active input and interactions, or indirectly, through measures that create a nurturing ground for growth. Within this, the phases of the

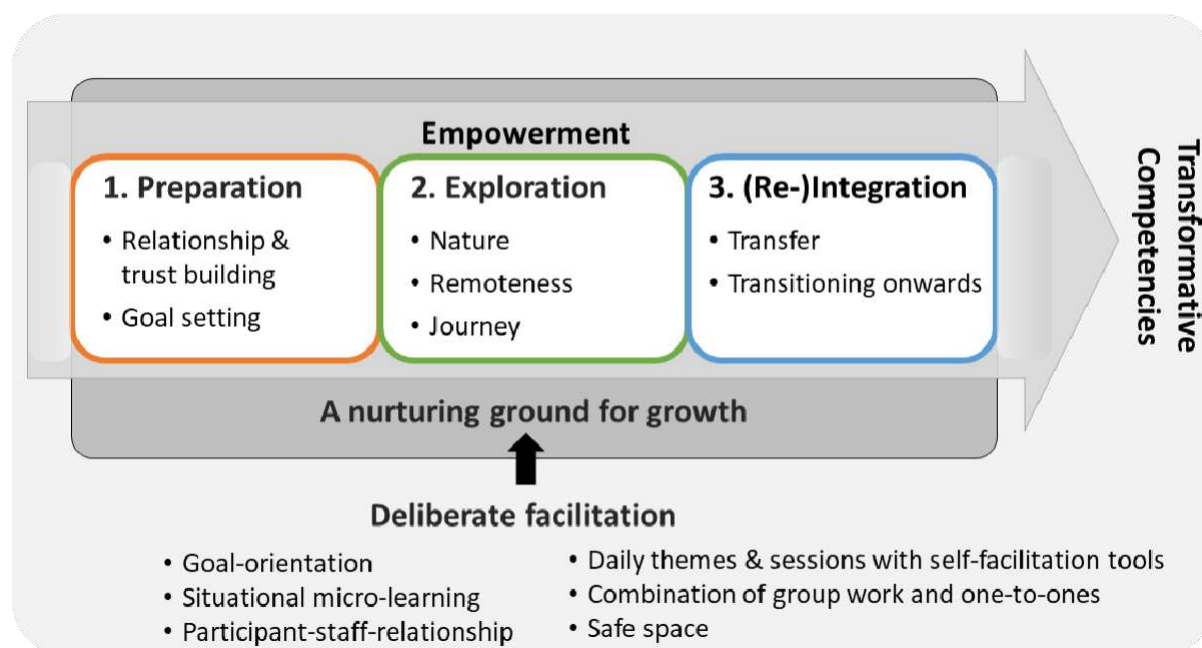
Model are conducted with their specific components (Fig. 3).

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**Fig. 3.** The Edinburgh Model

### 2.5.2 Implementation and adaptation of the Edinburgh Model in FOLM

The description below outlines the 3 phases of the Edinburgh Model and how they were adapted in FOLM.

#### *Phase 1: Preparation (in FOLM: Recruitment & Engagement):*

This first phase focusses on relationship and trust building and individual goal setting to create a strong foundation for learning and growth. Supportive and trusting relationships are a crucial determinant for success, and one that needs to be prioritised at the start of the programme. Clear goal setting activates and directs the participants' resources towards gaining the most from the outdoor experience (Phase 2) and consecutive coaching (Phase 3). Both are crucial for the effective recruitment and retention of participants.

**Implementation and adaptation in FOLM:** The duration of this phase varied in each country, and in general was minimised and partially non-existent, where participants had their first face-to-face interaction with FOLM staff at the start of the Outdoor Learning Phase.

#### *Phase 2: Exploration / Outdoor Learning*

The central phase consists of an OL experience of several days. Key components are

- Direct engagement with Nature (e.g. hiking, camping, foraging, bushcraft)
- Remoteness from home conveniences, roles, distractions, and digital media/communication
- Holistic (physical and socio-emotional) experiences
- Daily themes and self-facilitation tools
- Group sessions and personaliswed one-to-one sessions

The key composition is to have a sustained period of time spent together in nature as a group.

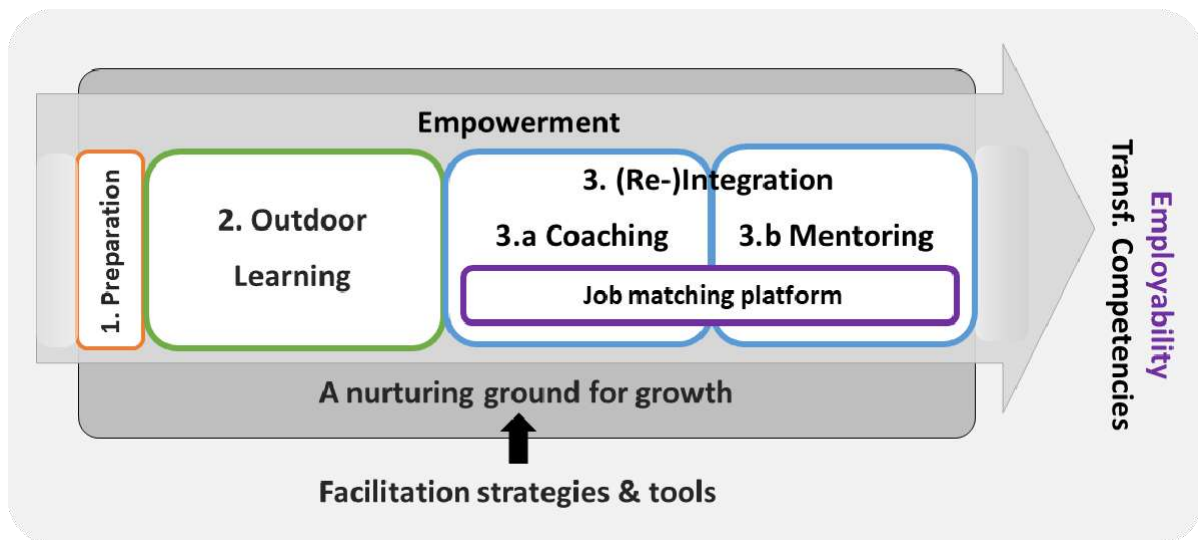
**Implementation and adaptation in FOLM:** The length of delivery of this phase was originally consistent across region as 7-day hiking expeditions. Variations arose later due to different regional restrictions posed by Covid, including a 5-day place-based OL programme devised and conducted in Ireland.

*Phase 3: (Re) – Integration (in FOLM: Coaching & Mentoring)*

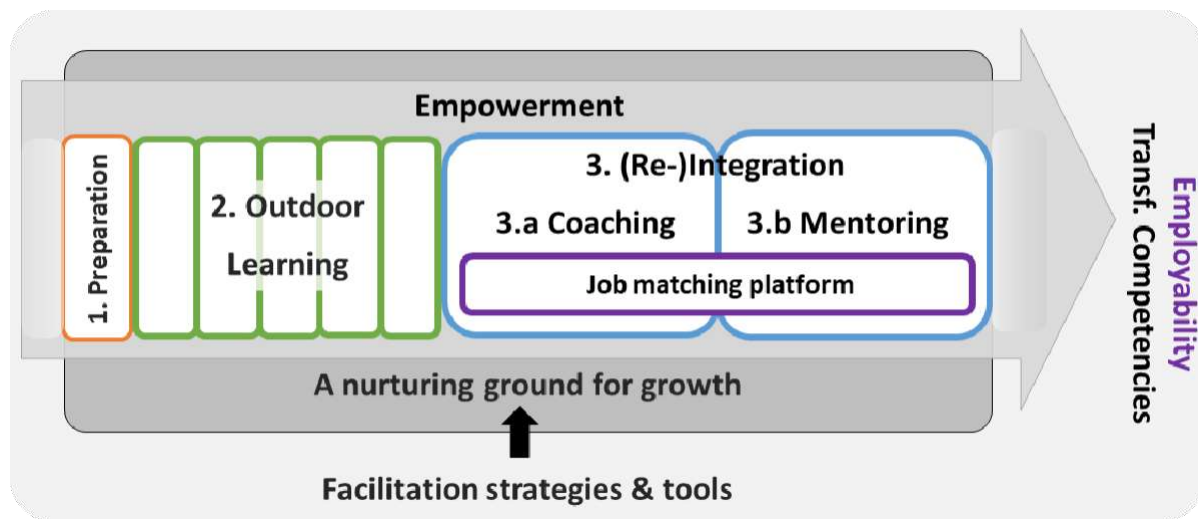
The third phase is dedicated to the consolidation and transfer of learning from the outdoor phase to participants’ individual home and/or work life contexts. The focus is on setting goals, creation (and implementation of personal action plans, and individual and group sessions, with support fading out as suitable in response to participants moving towards independence or other services. In FOLM, this phase saw several changes to the original Model:

- Instead of a flowing transition of the style and amount of support participants received, the phase was split into two separate phases: First, Coaching where participants would meet for approx. 10 sessions. This incorporated group and one to one work. The following Mentoring Phase consisted of monthly check-ins on an individual basis and concluded the FOLM programme.
- The Coaching in FOLM also integrated employability-related expertise input from the Training Partners (i.e., TUS, Femxa, FB, CIE), e.g. on entrepreneurship, CV writing, interviewing skills.
- And finally, a digital job-matching platform created by Femxa allowed participants to engage with employers and to move from the programme into employment.

Figures 4 and 5 visualise the structural changes made to the Edinburgh Model in FOLM (in comparison to the original, Fig. 3).



**Fig. 4.** Structure of the FOLM programme



**Fig. 5** The day-based programme variant in Ireland devised during Covid-19

### 2.5.3 Why this model and programme as innovative approach to activate youth?

The OL approach and model hold promise of a number of innovative success factors:

- An intensive outdoor phase is embedded in a community learning concept with transitional support for NEETs in (re)entering employment
- It is informed by research from neuro-science, sociology and other disciplines
- Wilderness settings are more appealing to NEETs than traditional courses
- Authentic challenges faced in the outdoors require responsibility, self-management, and other skills crucial for the job market
- Mastering outdoor challenges raises positive self-esteem and self-efficacy, with transformational effect on the motivation of NEETs towards seeking employment
- Lasting impact of outdoor experiences leads to a high success rate.

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### 3. Research in FOLM

The knowledge exchange and impact purpose of the project was accompanied and evaluated through a battery of research activities.

#### 3.1 Research objectives

The primary objective of the FOLM research was to evaluate the immediate effect and success of the project in the beneficiary regions and to attempt an estimate of the longer-term, sustainable impact potential of FOLM for (re)integration of young adults into the labour market through outdoor learning.

In addition, UoE staff held a part research part expert role in the project as academic consultants. They were tasked with offering process-oriented advice to the consortium throughout the project, e.g. on state-of-the-art insights from social science research and the international academic community – particularly on the promotion of personal and social development through OL – and by feeding back preliminary research insights. The intention of these continuous feedback loops was to enable the consortium to adjust parameters and decisions as early as possible *during* the process to optimise the outcome, cost efficiency, and sustainable impact of the project. Effects of this hybrid role are discussed later in this report.

#### 3.2 Research questions

The evaluation was guided by a variety of research questions. These main ones were:

- To what degree is the applied OL model and programme successful in raising transferrable competencies and employability in FOLM participants?
- Which factors are particularly conducive to the participants' development of transferrable competencies?
- What insights are gained from the interregional adaptation of the model towards future implementation in other European regions?

Secondary research questions addressed details in the OL process, impact of aspects around gender, age, and additional support needs, or cultural connections to nature and outdoor activities. These will be presented in separate focussed publications.

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 Research Design

The empirical study in FOLM employed a multi-method research design consisting of a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods that collected data from programme participants, field staff working with participants, leadership and admin staff, and – where possible – other stakeholders. This comprehensive methodology and wealth of data afforded (a) a triangulated 360° perspective and (b) a process-oriented approach where, when one research sub-question was answered to a point of saturation, research tools (e.g. interview questions) were updated to triangulate preliminary findings

or to hone in on further gaps of knowledge as they became apparent during the project. For example, the unexpected Covid-19 pandemic and regional restrictions forced the Coaching Phase to be moved

Implemented by:



Partners:





to a purely online delivery during the lockdown/s. In response, additional online surveys and staff interviews were introduced to evaluate the impact of this change.

While there are disadvantages to such a flexible approach to research, it maximised the relevance and appropriateness of each research activity in connection to its real-life context, and in consequence the value and impact of the findings.

## 4.2 Data collection

To answer the research questions, data were collected primarily by means of:

- Semi-structured qualitative interviews
- Psychometric self-report measures on self-concept and sense of agency
- A progress report for each participant (Personal File)
- Online surveys

For a full list of research tools, see Table 2.

Data source	Data collection tools	Content/Topics
<b>Main methodology</b>		
Participants	Questionnaire Self & Agency	Participants' self-concept and sense of agency
Participants	Interviews	Key learning, factors for growth, transfer,...
TR/CO/MEs/Recruiters <sup>2</sup>	Online surveys	Entry qualifications, background, expectations
TR/CO/MEs/Recruiters	Interviews	Expectations, professional views
Leadership and administrative staff	Interviews	Early identification of potential issues, project evaluation
TR/CO/MEs, Leadership & Admin staff	Pilot evaluation (combination of data collection tools)	Feedback, factors of influence, needs & hopes
TR/CO/MEs, Leadership & Admin staff	Mid-Delivery evaluation (online surveys)	Feedback, factors of influence, needs & hopes
<b>Auxiliary methodology</b>		
Participants	Personal File	Development through FOLM, barriers to participation
Participants	WP9 evaluation surveys	Main learning, feedback
Participants	Gamification tool	Info on Participant
participants, COs	Reflective one-to-one	info on OL and factors of influence
Participants	Testimonials (collected by Training Partners)	Their experience in FOLM, main benefits of participation
Various	Evidence of impact collection (WP11)	Evidence of FOLM's value
TR/CO/MEs, Partner	Focus group at monthly WP7 meeting	Grassroot views and feedback on specific topics

**Tab. 2.** Main and auxiliary data collection tools and data sources

Certain interviews and the Questionnaire Self & Agency (Q-S&A) were conducted pre, post, and follow-up to elicit statistical changes over time. Other methods were implemented more fluidly and partially aimed at informal anecdotal evidence and views.

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<sup>2</sup> TR = OL Trainer; CO = Coach; ME = Mentor; i.e. field staff per programme phase

Implemented by:



Partners:



### 4.3 Data analysis

The interviews and open text responses in other tools were analysed thematically, partially with the use of Atlas.ti for coding. Statistical analyses were conducted only on the S-QA, including exploratory factor analysis during the pilot evaluation to assess validity and strength of factors, goodness-of-fit of the baseline model and equivalence of the baseline model for different data subsets.

### 4.4 Data sources & samples

A total of 990 young adults participated in the FOLM programme in Ireland, Poland and Spain combined. Not all of them completed the full programme (see Tab. 3) for different reasons (e.g. some secured employment or enrolled in a course during the programme, others dropped out for health or personal reasons).

See latest version of this table as excel file in *WP3 Findings & report* folder!

Participant numbers	Femxa	Food Bank	TUS	CIE	Total
No of groups	47	39	21	10	117
Started OL Phase	474	280	134	102	990
Completed OL Phase	470	271	108	100	957
Completed Coaching	390	257	88	98	833
Completed Mentoring	400	250	77	75	802
Early leavers	74	30	57	27	188

Participant exit	Femxa	Food Bank	TUS	CIE	Total
Employment	133 (33%)	100 (40%)	18 (23%)	11 (15%)	262
Education	197 (49%)	115 (46%)	29 (38%)	63 (84%)	404
Training	0	22 (9%)	28 (37%)	0	50
Active job searching	70 (17.5%)	1 (0.5%)	0	1 (1%)	72
Other (disengaged, personal or health reasons, etc.)	74	1 (0.5%)	0		1
Travel	0	12 (5%)	2 (3%)	0	14
Covid-19	0	1	0	0	1
<b>Total:</b>	<b>474</b>	<b>252</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>804</b>

**Tab. 3.** (Incomplete) Data of participant numbers per programme phase as provided by Training Partners

In principle, all 990 programme participants took part in the research. Nevertheless, contributions were voluntary, and some participants chose to complete only parts of certain forms and tools. In addition, some methods were conducted only in the Pilot or Delivery Phase, which reduced the number of potential participants.

The total number of staff involved in FOLM in various roles is hard to determine as there was quite

some fluctuation due to internal and external factors. Min 180 persons were employed through FOLM, either as Trainers, Coaches and Mentors who delivered the programme with prolonged direct interaction with the participants, as recruiters, administrative staff or in (other) supporting roles.

Implemented by:



Partners:



Some of these overlap, since some individuals acted in several roles, e.g. as TR and CO or CO and ME. For example, in Ireland, the Coaching and Mentoring phases were integrated and delivered by the same staff member (i.e CO = ME). For the category of 'leadership and administrative' staff, it is even more difficult to establish a total number of persons, since staff were assigned to different tasks or areas of responsibility in the projects and had varying levels of insight and face-to-face involvement in the topics the research focussed on.

Each person employed through FOLM was invited to participate in some part of the study. More on this in the following sections on individual research tools.

Implemented by:



Partners:



## 5. Implementation and findings per research tool

Some tools were implemented in a similar or same way. These are listed here to avoid complexity and repetition in the tool-specific sub-sections:

- Interviews were conducted either in person – e.g., alongside training events or partnership meetings – or online via Skype or Zoom. They were video and/or audio recorded when possible with a hand-held recording device (in person interviews) or the in-built recording function of Zoom. Where recording was not a feasible option – e.g., due to ambient noise – the interviewer resorted to note taking. Recordings were transcribed with the automated service Otter.ai (for interviews held in English) or hand-transcribed (for interviews in Spanish and Polish). All transcripts were checked and proof read by a research team member.
- Where interviewees agreed, interviews were conducted in English. If Spanish and Polish-speakers preferred to hold the interview in their own language, an interpreter was organised or the interview conducted by a Spanish or Polish native speaking member of the research team.
- All online surveys conducted in FOLM used Online Surveys (prev. Bristol Online Surveys, BOS).
- For the thematic content analysis of qualitative data, Atlas.it was employed.
- The quantitative analysis of data from the Questionnaires Self & Agency was conducted by the Statistical Consultancy Unit of The UoE.
- Preliminary findings were continuously fed back into the Consortium to inform and improve processes as the project progressed.

The following sub-sections provide additional information specific to individual data collection tools. In the interest of keeping this report readable and of manageable size, the methodological aspects are presented in abbreviated form. Full details on the design; ethics; sampling; data collection, processing and analysis; and results of the main research methods used in FOLM will be disseminated in peer-reviewed journals and other suitable outlets in the near future.

### 5.1 Questionnaire Self & Agency

A questionnaire on self-concept and sense of agency was conducted with all participants at several point of time across the programme.

#### Objectives and integration in the overall methodology

Sense of agency and participants' (healthy, constructive, growth-oriented) self-concept are seen in outdoor and adventure education (and other disciplines) as foundation for higher order personal and social competence. Therefore, we wanted to elicit any development of these factors in the participants over the process of the programme. In the wider scope of the FOLM methodology, a quantitative tool was sought that could be applied across all regions and the full programme in a way that allows comparison between sub sets. The statistical data of the Q-S&A are complemented by the qualitative data of several other tools.

#### Implementation (Sample, data collection, analysis, etc.)

Implemented by: Partners:



The 30 item questionnaire was informed by existing standardised self-report measures around sense of agency, locus of control (e.g., Nowicki & Strickland, 1973; Rotter 1966) and self-efficacy (Bandura,

Implemented by:



Partners:



2006; Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995) – none of which by itself was suitable for this project and target group. According to prevailing literature, Sense of Agency is a result of internal locus of control plus positive to high self-efficacy. The questionnaire focussed on (a) a healthy / positive self-concept and (b) sense of agency. Both of these comprised several sub-factors.

The questionnaire was distributed to participants both in paper format and as online surveys, depending on face-to-face access to participants, particularly during the pandemic. It was completed at 5 points of time and participants were asked to complete it by the Training Partners' staff working with the participants in that phase (i.e. Trainers, Coaches, Mentors):

- t1: directly before or at the start of the OL Phase
- t2: Directly after or at the end of the OL Phase
- t3: At the end of the Coaching Phase
- t4: At the end of the Mentoring Phase
- t5: 3-5 months after the end of the Mentoring Phase

The research team was aware of the limitations of collecting data right at the start and end of an intervention. Within the dependencies of the programme delivery and restricted access to participants, these points of time were chosen as compromise to achieve a reasonable response rate. The response rate dropped significantly over the 5 points of time which Partners explained with the nature of a 'disengaged' target population and a considerable number of participants exiting the programme early, for a number of reasons. Throughout the Delivery Phase, the Consortium discussed this issue and all Training Partners took active measures tailored to their region to enable and encourage participants to complete the form, e.g., through reminder emails and individualised support for individuals with reduced literacy.

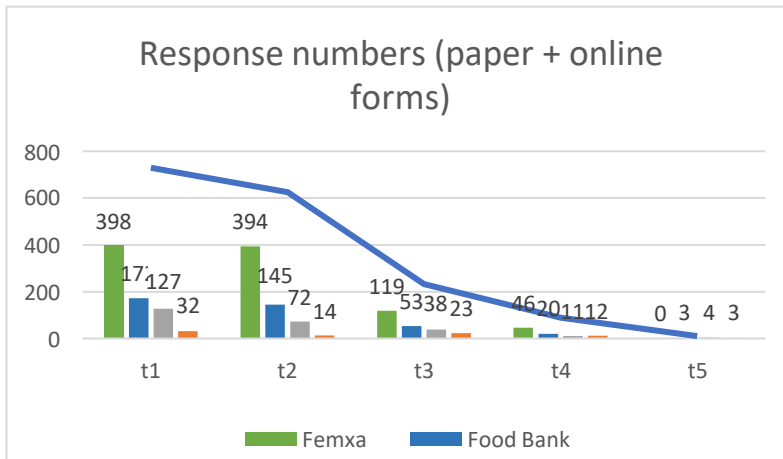
Data from the paper and online versions were merged and anonymised. The data from the Pilot groups underwent a factor analysis in 2019 to assess the validity of the tool. In consequence, some items were deleted or edited for the Delivery Phase and the Pilot data omitted from the final data set. Therefore, while the Q-S&A was conducted with all FOLM participants, the total pool for the final analysis consisted of roughly 930 participants. Data collection ended in February 2022 after a preliminary analysis in Autumn 2021. A goodness of fit analysis (Chi-squared) was conducted on the baseline model, separately for (a) self-concept and (b) sense of agency. Items and factors that correlated too highly with other factors were dropped from further analysis.

### (preliminary) Findings

Implemented by: Partners:







Implemented by:

Partners:



**Tab. 4.** Q-S&A. Preliminary data (will be updated after statistical analysis is completed)

Factor analysis shows significant increase of (a) a positive self-concept as well as (b) Sense of Agency in Spanish participants over the course of the OL Phase (i.e. between t1 and t2). In Autumn 2021, when this analysis was conducted and a preliminary report composed, insufficient data was available for analysis of the Irish and Polish cohorts, as well as for t3 – t5 in all cohorts. With all groups having completed the programme, enough data points are available for an analysis across t1 to t4. This is currently being conducted with the Statistical Consultancy Unit of the University of Edinburgh. Findings are expected by Summer 2022 and will be shared via updated online versions of this report.

## 5.2 Online surveys: Field staff

Online surveys were conducted at several points of time to gather views and feedback from the staff working directly with participants, i.e. the OL Trainers (TR), Coaches (CO) and Mentors (ME)

- (A) At the start of the project (completed by staff in the Pilot Phase)
- (B) As tool for the mid-Delivery evaluation (completed by staff in the Delivery Phase)
- (C) As tool for the end-of-project evaluation (completed by staff in the Delivery Phase)

### Objectives and integration in the overall methodology

- The surveys had each a distinct focus relating to their point of time in the project. Overall, their objective was to gather insight into the following topics:
- Prior expertise, attitudes towards FOLM's participant population, and expectations – at the start of the project (Survey A)
- Changes in attitudes and expertise through staff's involvement in the project (A + C)
- Evidence of learning and growth in programme participants (B, C)
- Experiences, lessons learned and feedback on the (regional) programme and project implementation (B, C)

Some of the questions overlapped with those in the TR/CO/ME interviews. This was intentional since the surveys could cover the full staff cohort efficiently, while funding limits did not permit interviews with every single staff member. Also, interviews conducted later in the project profited and were partially informed by results from the surveys. This way, the combination of surveys and interviews produced representative *and* in depth data within the available resources.

### Implementation

The links to the surveys were sent via the Training Partners to all TR, CO, ME and Recruiters who were active in the project in that phase. The survey texts were developed in English by UoE staff and upon request translated into Spanish and Polish by the Training Partners and/or native speaking UoE research staff. Spanish and Polish responses were translated into English and data combined from the different language versions for analysis in English.

All surveys were created and conducted with Online Surveys (prev. Bristol Online Surveys / BOS). Table 6 contains the response numbers per survey (where applicable, combined from different language

versions):

	Survey:	End-of-project evaluation
Partner:		

Implemented by:



Partners:



	C
Femxa	9
LIT/TUS	9
Food Bank	5
CIE	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>

Thematic content analysis of data from surveys A and B was conducted 'by hand', and for surveys C with Atlas.ti.

Findings were disseminated within the FOLM Consortium at the earliest convenience; feedback of the field staff directed at their regional Training Partner was passed on directly and only to the coordinators of that Partner; and a Pilot Evaluation Report was produced for the funder.

### Findings

Across the board, TR, CO and MEs expressed enthusiasm over the FOLM project and the positive impact they saw on the participants.

The views and shared experiences of the field staff contributed significantly to the development of a comprehensive understanding of how the structural components of the outdoor learning model employed in FOLM interact and generate impact on the programme participants. More on this in the Synthesis of Findings below.

### 5.3 Online surveys: Leadership and administrative staff

Leadership and administrative staff were asked twice to complete surveys.

#### Objectives and integration in the overall methodology:

Both surveys aimed to create a current overview of

- Lessons learned, factors and barriers to success for the (regional) programme implementation
- Internal and external factors to consider to optimise success and sustainable impact of the project
- Strengths and weaknesses in the collaboration in the Consortium

They were run parallel to the field staff surveys B and C as tool for the mid-Delivery evaluation (B) and end-of-project evaluation (C).

#### Implementation

Survey links and invitation to participate were sent to the coordinators of each Consortium institution with the request to pass them on to all staff members involved in FOLM at a leadership and/or administrative level.

Response numbers:

- Mid-Delivery: 36 total, with between one and nine respondents per Partner organisation

Implemented by: Partners:



- End-of-project: 23, with between one and four respondents per Partner organisation

## Findings

Implemented by:



Partners:



In the mid-Delivery evaluation (survey B), staff expressed a lot of concern around the impact of Covid-19 pandemic that had dominated the previous weeks and months and had caused significant interruptions and restrictions to the programme delivery. Particular worries included:

Advantages and new strengths emerged from the changes we made in response to the pandemic.

In both surveys (B and C), staff were asked primarily about

- What was working well so far (in their region and overall in the project)
- What issues they had encountered so far and/or they were foreseeing, and how these might be avoided or mitigated
- barriers and opportunities of a longer-term or even permanent establishment of FOLM or a FOLM-like programme in the participating regions
- Strengths of the FOLM Consortium
- Weaknesses and/or risks to success in the FOLM Consortium
- Open feedback on any other topic they wanted to address

Findings are integrated into the corresponding sections in the Synthesis chapter below.

## 5.4 Interviews: Field staff

Semi-structured interviews were conducted at the start and end of the project with a sample of staff working directly with participants.

### Objectives and integration with other tools

These gathered their in-depth views and feedback on a number of topics, plus additionally:

At the start of project or when the Trainer joined the project:

- Descriptive information on their professional background etc.
- Their opinions on and attitudes towards the project, the target population, and outdoor learning
- As a reflective tool, focussing on what they can contribute, ~~goal-oriented, resource-oriented,~~ in order to maximise efficiency and impact

At the end of the project:

- To capture any changes they have undertaken (in terms of views on the participants, etc.)
- Observations on impact of the programme on the participants
- Factors contributing and hindering participant growth as well as the delivery of the programme
- Internal and external factors required for

### Implementation

Two distinct interview guidelines and lists of questions were devised for the start and end interviews – although with some relating questions to capture any changes over time.

Implemented by: Partners:



The start-of-project interview was conducted with all FOLM trainers who attended the training week delivered in Ireland, Poland and Spain by VT and the UoE. The project proposal only foresaw interviews

Implemented by:



Partners:



with OL-Trainers. However, a small number of additional interviews were conducted with Coaches and Mentors.

More Trainers and Coaches attended the two-day top-up training delivered by VT and UoE after the Pilot phase, and more staff received training later in the project from their respective FOLM institutions / Training Partners. This fluid increase of staff pool happened alongside staff not actually being staffed for courses after their training, leaving FOLM or transitioning between Partners (all for a variety of reasons). By the end of the funding period, this fluctuation led to a total pool of professionals who were registered as TR, CO or ME in FOLM at some point that was too large to interview with the resources available in the research team. Plus, some had never actually been on a course, and others were not available for an interview.

Therefore, for the end-of-project interview, a sample of min. three Trainers was interviewed, with a priority to those who had facilitated the highest number of courses, plus one Coach (and Mentor) from each Training Partner. Considering overlaps in staff categories (e.g., one person being a Trainer *and* Coach, thereby being counted twice in the table below), a total of 62 interviews were conducted with field staff from all Training Partners.

Partner	TR Int-1	TR-Int mid	TR end	CO-1	CO mid	CO end	ME Int-1	ME mid	ME end
Femxa	11		3	3		1			1
LIT/TUS	9	1	4	2	1	2	.	.	.
Food Bank	5	2	3	1	1	1			1
CIE	.	1	6	.	.	1	.	.	
VT (as Pilot)	10		1	1			.	.	.
<b>total:</b>	<b><u>35</u></b>	<b><u>4</u></b>	<b><u>15</u></b>	<b><u>7</u></b>	<b><u>2</u></b>	<b><u>4</u></b>	<b><u>0</u></b>	<b><u>0</u></b>	<b><u>2</u></b>

**Tab 5.** Numbers of field staff interviewed

## 5.5 Interviews: Leadership and administrative staff

At least three formal interviews were conducted with leadership and administrative staff of each Partners in the Consortium throughout the full project duration.

### Objectives and integration in the overall methodology

Within the overall project, these interviews were situated within the quality assurance remit. Their primary intention was to capture Partners perspectives on the strengths and weaknesses or potential pit falls for the project to the Consortium's attention as early as possible. They formed a crucial part in the process-oriented feedback loops that were part of UoE's remit in FOLM.

Where feasible, they informed and were informed by findings from other research tools, such as the online surveys for the mid-delivery and end-of-project evaluation.

### Implementation

Views and feedback were gathered from Partners through formal interviews, emails, and informal



chats. This 'method' seems to have worked well to elicit honest and varied views. The informal note taking proved less interfering with communication than a formal recording. Also, at times audio/video-recording was not a viable option, e.g. due to high ambient noise. Since recorded interviews were set

Implemented by:



Partners:



out in the original project methodology, they were continued, and simply complemented by informal note taking from additional conversations, which achieved the same effect.

The UoE research team combined the data from these sources into one data set and conducted a thematic content analysis with the use of the programme Atlas.ti. UoE staff were not interviewed as the one person directly involved in the project implementation and Partnership meetings (and therefore with the kind of insights covered in the interviews) was the lead researcher who conducted the interviews. Therefore, views and feedback of UoE staff in their perspective as FOLM Partner were added to the findings when they were presented to the Consortium at a partnership meeting. Since the primary objective was internal processing, this was gauged as appropriate and had the consent of the Consortium.

### Findings

A total of 17 recorded interviews were conducted between November 2018 and February 2022 with a total durations of 10 hours 30 min (as of 08.03.2022). These are complemented by notes taken at 10 interviews and less formal conversations that were, for different reasons, not audio-recorded.

Findings that were relevant only to the management and progress of the project at that time are omitted from this report. Those relevant beyond the duration of this project are integrated into the Synthesis of Findings, below.

### 5.6 Interviews: Participants

A sample of participants from all regions were interviewed on their experiences and view as part of the project evaluation.

#### Objectives and integration in the overall methodology

Participants were interviewed to elicit detailed personal insights into their subjective experiences during the FOLM programme, and the kind and scope of impact these have had on them. The participant interviews triangulate and complement findings from the research methods targeted at FOLM staff, which helped to verify the findings reported here.

#### Implementation

A team of three researchers conducted the participant interviews:

- The FOLM lead researcher for the Irish participants plus two interviews in each of the Spanish and Polish cohort
- A native Spanish speaker for interviews with the Spanish participants
- A native Polish speaker for interviews with participants of the two Polish Training Partners

Country	participants interviewed
Spain	18
Ireland	7
Poland	12
	<u>37</u>

**Tab. 6.** Numbers of participants interviewed by country

## Findings

The interviews covered the following main topics:

- Open / unguided feedback on the programme
- Impact of the programme on the participant (learning, growth, changes in professional and/or life plans, employability aspects, etc.)
- Factors that contributed to these effects
- Comparison between and connection of the three programme Phases
- Changes post programme completion [in participants already past Mentoring]
- Observations and experiences relating to different genders, age range and other diversity aspects in the groups
- Cultural context of the programme (for comparison between regions)

Findings on these topics are integrated into the Synthesis of findings below.

## 5.7 Pilot Evaluation

An interim evaluation was conducted jointly by LIT/TUS (as project partner in charge of quality assurance) and the UoE at the end of the Pilot Phase of the project, with feedback collected from participants and FOLM staff.

### Objectives

The purpose of the Pilot evaluation was to identify as early as possible any emerging factors enhancing and hindering success in order to make adaptations to the project implementation before the main number of groups arrived in the Delivery Phase.

### Implementation

Different tools were employed to collect feedback from the participants, OL Trainers, Coaches (& Mentors) and leadership staff in the Consortium:

- Several sources were drawn on to gain views of the participants, including responses submitted in the gamification tool (discontinued after the Pilot Phase) and the quality assurance surveys from the end of the OL and Coaching Phase/s (conducted by LIT/TUS).
- TR, CO and MEs were invited to send feedback to a list of questions via email. 13 staff members made use of this opportunity.
- Leadership staff from all Partner institutions in the FOLM Consortium contributed their views and experiences via email, in formally scheduled and recorded interviews, and in informal conversations and meetings. Topics included what worked well, what issues they had encountered and/or could foresee, and any other comments they wished to make.

Insights gained from all these tools and sources were collated, anonymised and presented to the FOLM Consortium at the next scheduled partnership meeting. In addition, a *Pilot evaluation report* was submitted jointly by LIT/TUS and the UoE.

## Findings

Implemented by: Partners:



Overall, They reported some 'positives' and some issues that had already occurred, with suggestions or wishes on how they could be dealt with.

Implemented by:



Partners:



Reported 'Positives' included:

- Respondents expressed unanimous enthusiasm over the OL approach and the mission of the project.
- Staff saw the applied Edinburgh OL-Model as effective and reported a range of evidence for learning and growth in participants of the groups they had worked with.
- OL-Trainer and Coaches expressed great appreciation for each other and their contribution to participants' learning and the success of the programme
- Leadership staff noted that all project partners were very dedicated to the project and believed in its value, and there was a good sense of community among consortium partners which was seen as invaluable to overcoming disagreements and language barriers.

The main challenges and issues respondents saw during the Pilot phase were:

- The resources and times required for recruitment of participants at the rate needed to meet the target numbers.
- The huge administrative and logistic effort of the project, and that this caused unexpected additional workload and stress for FOLM staff at all levels, resulting in dissatisfaction and dropping-out of field staff and delays in the implementation of the project (during the Pilot Phase).

Suggestions for improvement included:

- Reduction of the administrative tasks, including the number of documents to be completed for various reasons and work packages. The introduction of the Personal File (see below) was one of the steps taken to that effect.
- Hiring of staff specifically dedicated to recruitment of participants in order to free capacity of the field staff to better focus on the interactions with participants during the programme.
- Better exchange of information and experiences between trainers and coaches to increase the quality of their work with the participants, and also to create a stronger sense of community and support among staff.

Further to this, many specific aspects and processes were addressed that are included in the Synthesis of Findings in this report.

## 5.8 Mid-Delivery Evaluation

Approximatively half-way through the Delivery Phase we collected views and feedback from the field and leadership & administrative staff.

### Objectives and integration in the overall methodology

The evaluation aimed at checking if the measures taken in response to the Pilot Evaluation had the desired effects, and what other positive or critical developments had happened that should be picked up on and utilised to further increase the project's effectiveness and success.

### Implementation (Sample, data collection, analysis, etc.)

Online surveys were sent to (a) TR, CO, MEs and Recruiters, and (b) leadership and administrative staff

Implemented by: Partners:



of all FOLM Partners. 36 responses were gathered, of between one and nine staff members per FOLM Partner. Most of the respondents were involved in FOLM since the Pilot phase or even from the initial

Implemented by:



Partners:



conceptualisation and funding application, and were therefore able to provide a wider and longer-term perspective. Responses were anonymised and presented to the FOLM Consortium at the next scheduled partnership meeting and to TR, CO and MEs at the next interregional knowledge exchange meeting.

## 5.9 Auxiliary Methodology

A number of other tools were included to complement and triangulate the findings from the before-mentioned research methods. Some of these covered only a small aspect or short phase of the project or were informal. Nevertheless, they contributed additional insights or shown light to blind spots of the main methodology.

### 5.9.2 Personal Files

#### Objectives and integration in the overall methodology

To replace the Gamification tool and other methods to collect general information on the participants.

This had several objectives, not all of which connected to research:

- Information relevant for preparing and conducting the OL safely (programme delivery)
- General person-related data required for registration in the programme (programme management and delivery)
- Awareness and documentation of any issues and potential changes of these during the programme (programme management and delivery, research)
- Documentation of progress of the individual participant, and sharing of that information among TR, CO and MEs to facilitate a smooth progression of participants through the programme (programme delivery, research)

The Personal File was a digital file for each programme participant that was stored on the GDPR-compliant data platform created by the Spanish project Partner Femxa specifically for FOLM. Only authorised FOLM staff had access to these files, to ensure data protection.

The Files consisted of two parts that each core staff member (TR/CO/ME) assigned to a participant completed at the end of the programme Phase they were working together:

(Part 1) A check list of potential issues that might apply to and impede a participant's full participation in the programme, such as health and wellbeing aspects, housing or family issues. Staff rated to what degree they had the impression each of the listed issues impeded the participant's ability to fully participate in the programme. When they felt they had not gained enough insight to gauge this, they marked them as 'Don't know'.

(Part 2) An open text box to document any information staff considered relevant to document and pass on to colleagues who would work with this participant in a later phase of the programme.

#### Findings

Data collection is just coming to an end and the analysis will continue for a few weeks. We already

know that a considerable number of TR/CO/ME did not complete the checklist, and or wrote nothing

Implemented by:



Partners:





or very little into the text documentation box. Therefore, we might not even have enough data for an analysis across all regions.

### 5.9.3 Quality assurance surveys

Part of LIT/TUS' role in FOLM was quality assurance (QA). Since there were clear overlaps in respect to objectives and content of the tools used by TUS for QA and UoE for research, a collaboration was agreed for the design and construction of the QA-surveys and the analysis of data. The implementation was led and coordinated by TUS. In practice, Training Partners asked their programme participants to complete a QA-survey at the end of each programme Phase, either in paper or online format, and TUS collated and processed the data, providing regular updates and summaries to the Consortium.

The analysis of data relating to WP3 in these surveys has not been completed yet and will be summarised here and in the Synthesis of findings below.

### 5.9.4 Reflective one-to-ones

Reflection on the Outdoor Learning Phase, conducted and documented by Coaches in one-to-one sessions with participants during the Coaching Phase. The purpose was to capture details on participants' experiences and development during the OL Phase, and to provide input for personal reflection on these to make them easier to make them applicable to work-related and other contexts of life.

Coaches reported a clear increase of the desired skills, motivation, and positive outlook on life after the OL phase. Key factors of impact mentioned in the notes are:

- The trainers & coaches
- Nature
- Physical effort (e.g. carrying heavy kit)
- The one-to-one sessions
- Daily themes and sessions
- The sense of community in and supportive from the group of participants.
- Unfortunately, Coaches notes were mostly short and partially illegible so that not enough data was available for a deeper analysis of these impact factors.

In addition, the majority of Coaches described the note taking more as a hindrance to their interaction with the participants than a valuable format for documenting participants' progress. It was therefore decided to discontinue this form of data collection after the Pilot Phase. Instead, the Personal File was introduced to achieve the same – plus other – purpose/s (see above).

### 5.9.5 Notes from conversations and meetings

With permission of the FOLM Consortium Partner institutions, UoE staff took notes of conversations at Partnership meetings and other occasions that were not part of the main research tools and not formally recorded due to ambient noise or the spontaneity of the occasion. These notes provided eclectic yet valuable information that filled gaps of the formal tools, for example when core issues, their potential causes and ways to optimise processes were discussed in partnership meetings.

## 6. Synthesis of Findings

The following insights were gained from the research in relation to specific themes that were either intentionally addressed in the data collection tools (etic themes) or that emerged from the data (emic themes). They are arranged here by topic and are synthesised from all research tools.

### 6.1 Impact on participants

The combined data strongly suggest that all participants have benefitted from the programme in one way or another and to a certain degree. Some effects were reported across the board, others seemed to be more individual and dependent on participants' personal needs upon entering the programme. Our data show statistically significant increases in Sense of Agency and a positive Self-Concept, the two factors measured quantitatively as foundation for a wide range of social and personal competencies. In addition, participants and staff report considerable gains in parameters linked to transversal competencies, such as collaborative behaviour, goal-setting, or self-management. The most fundamental areas of growth expressed by all stakeholders and across the research methodology were :

1. A realisation of ones unique talents, wishes, and contributions/value to the community
2. An increased sense of self-worth
3. Confidence (based on self-worth and a newly found sense of direction and purpose)
4. Identification of ones personal goals for the near and long-term future
5. Motivation to pursue these goals (based on a sense of (a) value of oneself and the goals, and (b) that ones goals are realistically obtainable)
6. Specific tools and strategies to work towards and achieve these goals.

Participants frequently named one more outcome that should be placed in the succession before 1 :

0. Feeling at ease and a sense of competence in and with nature

The element of nature connectedness was reported by many participants, e.g. in that they discovered a joy in outdoor activities and were spending more time now in the outdoors, and how relaxing and/or recharging they found this practice to be. We place this point as number '0' in the above list since the direct prolonged engagement with nature during the OL Phase provides the conditions for growth in which the other outcomes develop – under the facilitation of a safe space and the themes and sessions of the programme.

Points 1 to 5 have a clear incremental causal relationship and were all attributed to the outdoor learning experience, and point 6 to both the OL and Coaching (plus to a lesser degree, Mentoring) Phases.

83% of participants transitioned successfully to employment, training or education (EET), which is an astonishing success rate considering that the target population of FOLM is particularly remote from EET and – for a variety of reasons – hard to engage.

Based on these highly consistent quantitative and qualitative data, it can be said that without a doubt, the FOLM programme has managed to afford the participants with learning opportunities that have met their needs in a very effective way.

## 6.2 Main factors of impact/success

The following were named as most crucial aspects of the project:

- The OL experience
- The Phases, and continuity across them!
- Contact with nature
- The daily sessions and themes (i.e. putting theory into practice)
- Flexibility, adapting content and process to the current needs of a group / participants
- Infrastructure (logistics, resources, support)
- ...

### 6.2.1 Outdoor Learning experience

Participants and staff overwhelmingly agreed that the outdoor experience was the most impactful element of the programme, while the other phases are crucial for increased commitment and sustainability of results (more on the different phases below). Reported key factors in the OL Phase are engagement with nature, the combination of group work and one-to-one sessions, goal-oriented action plans, and a socio-emotional 'safe space' for learning – with a respectful guide and a supportive group of peers. These are in line with prevailing research on outdoor learning (Ewert & Siphthorp, 2014).

### 6.2.2 Nature

Several factors associated with being outdoors and 'in the forest / mountains' were seen to be impactful for participants learning and growth. Most prominently,

- Being remote and separated
- Direct physical & emotional experience
- Challenges; overcoming adversity
- Community
- Being part of something bigger

### 6.2.3 Field staff

All stakeholders agree that the field staff play a central role to the development of the participants and thereby the success of the project.

### 6.2.4 Combination of group work and one-to-one sessions

## Individualisation

How can different people with very different needs profit in similar and individual ways from one and the same programme?

- Structure plus flexibility within this structure
- (Phase 1) assessing different needs and goals – particularly effective if achieved in Phase 1
- Individual goal-setting

- One-to-ones offer specific space for individualisation within a group learning programme

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Partners:



- Group setting affords social learning experiences, comparisons, strength and encouragement through group identity and social cohesion, observations of alternative behaviour, and feedback
- Some areas of growth are fundamental and can be taken in different directions

## 6.4 Longer-term effects

Needless to say, it is hoped that learning effects are longer-term and not simply fade out again once a participant completes or prematurely leaves the programme. The Questionnaire Self & Agency had a follow-up data point (t5) to measure this, but unfortunately, the return rate at this t was too low to permit statistical analysis. Nevertheless, the interviews, participant testimonials, and feedback from external stakeholders provide qualitative evidence of the longevity of effects of the programme on participants and their surroundings: Participants who were interviewed a couple of months to a year and a half after the end of the Mentoring Phase all stated that they had continued on the path of direction they had set e.g., in their Action Plans at the end of the OL and during the Coaching Phase. When asked what strategies or resources helped them to keep up and continue these changes, they all expressed that in essence, the experience and self-discovery from the OL Phase was so deep and impactful, and the sense of direction and motivation they had gained from that kept carrying them forwards. This indicates that the shift participants make through the facilitated outdoor experience is transformational in the sense of shifting frames of reference for how we see/interpret our world/life, and strong and fundamental enough to continue in participants independently, beyond the end of support provided during the programme.

The reflection on their OL experience and the consolidation and individualisation during the Coaching and Mentoring Phase/s came out clearly.

## 6.5 Who benefitted most?

To elicit if the programme was particularly beneficial for certain demographics, staff and participants were asked if they noticed any differences in how people engaged in the programme, acted or reacted to situations and challenges, etc.

Frequently, staff reported that age was a more relevant factor of influence than gender. They noticed that older participants tended to be more eager to receive Coaching and Mentoring while younger participants required more guidance towards identifying personal and professional objectives and concrete steps to achieve these. Related yet not fully depending on age, staff noted that participants with more complex prior life experience tended to engage more in the programme and/or reflect and benefit more from the cognitive and reflective inputs provided through the field staff.

Other aspects of diversity that were noted by individual staff or participants were differences in participants

- Living in urban versus rural environments
- With migration background versus natives of that region or country.

Many staff concluded that participants benefitted most from the programme when they

- Had a clear understanding of what to expect of the programme, namely that this was a personal development programme with several phases and a lot of self-reflection, goalsetting,

- etc. (and not merely a week of fun in the outdoors)
- Were ready for change, i.e. came motivated and committed to engage and take responsibility for their self-development.

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When asked if based on their experience they recommended to narrow the selection criteria for cohorts to create more homogenous groups (e.g. groups for certain genders or age brackets

separate groups for 18-20-year-old and near-30-year-olds) they basically all agreed that the diversity in a group was beneficial for all members as the diversity afforded them a wider range of feedback, roles models, reminders of a younger self, etc.

“Diversity in the groups benefits all. Making groups homogenous would reduce the value for most”.

(Participant, Spain)

## 6.6 The phases of the model and programme

Each Phase in the Edinburgh Model as well as the FOLM programme fulfils an important function for participants’ progression and growth.

### 6.6.1 The Preparation Phase

This first phase of the Edinburgh Model was shortened to a minimum in FOLM, and partially even entirely omitted where the first day of the OL Phase was the first face-to-face contact of participants and FOLM staff. All Training Partners lamented a lack of commitment and notable drop-out rate of participants in the Coaching and, even more, Mentoring Phase. This was in part attributed to many participants arriving with inaccurate expectations (e.g. a week of adventure and fun), and not being fully aware of and committed to the self-development focus of the programme and the post OL work. Field staff reported that these participants often needed a lot more guiding towards identifying desirable personal goals and developing a motivation to pursue them, and that many displayed an open disinterest in paperwork and the classroom-based sessions during the Coaching Phase. Over time, FOLM Partners concluded that investing into relationship building and goal setting prior to the OL Phase pays forward to personal learning impact and programme completion rate. It even made recruitment easier and more reliable as more persons who had expressed interest actually showed up for the OL.

These observations and causal relationships were confirmed when pre-OL contact was increased and communication refined as part of the measures taken in response to the process-oriented feedback loops designed into the project as part of the impact strategy of the research (and quality assurance).

### 6.6.2 The Outdoor Learning Phase

The Outdoor Learning is seen by all as the part of the programme that affords the most fundamental and impactful learning about oneself – and to a lesser degree, one’ surrounding –, which can then be turned into transformative competencies and employability skills.

### 6.6.3 The (Re)Integration Phase / Coaching and Mentoring

There is general consent that the (Re-)Integration Phase serves a crucial role in supporting participants in making personal sense of insights gained from the OL experience, and applying them to their daily lives, and thereby ensuring longevity of the effects.

“A participants who left the programme early to go into education at the start of the Coaching Phase argued that his learning and commitment would have stuck better had he had more sessions to consolidate it”.

(Participant, Ireland)



The combination of group and one-to-one sessions is highly appreciated by many participants as providing both a continuation of the peer group experience and the personalised support. However, the formularised split into Coaching and Mentoring in FOLM worked for some participants yet did not meet the specific needs of others. A more flexible combination of group and one-to-one work (Coaching), with an individualised duration of support on demand rather than set number and schedule of check-ins (Mentoring) was argued to optimise the use of resources and impact achieved.

## 6.7 Focus on employment

The main purpose of the FOLM project and the EEA & Norway Grants' funding scheme is to increase youth employment. We therefore posed a number of questions relating to employment skills and work contexts.

In contrast, both Irish and Polish Partners targeted a population much closer to the original Scottish cohort, characterised by a combination of partially substantial deprivation factors and/or additional support needs, e.g., in terms of executive functioning or mental health. Staff members reported a plethora of examples demonstrating that many of their participants were struggling with much more basic life issues than finding employment. For them, managing to maintain a regular daily schedule or even just getting out of bed in the morning might be the significant step of change they were capable of making at that point of time. Staff – particularly in the Coaching Phase – demonstrated admirable flexibility and adapted the choice of sessions and topics covered in the Coaching to the specific needs of each group and participant. Therefore, CV writing or mock job interviews might be foregone in favour of more fundamental skill training, e.g., around communication (body language, eye contact) or self-management. While these might appear to be different from the official employability focus, they form essential groundwork that enabled these participants to move significant steps closer to at some point taking up employment.

Interestingly, and in line with these different regional needs, the inputs, online format and the job matching platform of the Coaching Phase were initially conceptualised with the needs of the Spanish employment context in mind, where they successfully filled a gap. Most tangibly, this was reflected in the high number of Spanish participants successfully transferred into the labour market. In Ireland on the other hand, many participants experienced access barriers to online sessions, had more fundamental needs than specific employment skills, and the job matching platform conflicted with existing recruitment platforms – which was seen as clearly linked to high(er) drop outs and lower transfer numbers into employment, education and training courses.

On a different note, interviewed staff who were in direct contact with collaborating businesses in their region fed back that employers expressed an appreciation for FOLM participants in comparison to job applicants or employees who had not completed FOLM in that they observed FOLMers to exhibit a positiveness and willingness to work, that they came well prepared for their job interview with an informed understanding of the job and company and a CV tailored to this purpose, and in the work context that they demonstrated good teamwork skills and the willingness and ability to take responsibility. This is invaluable information as it constitutes evidence of impact from those external stakeholders, and also demonstrates that the skills and attitudes developed in FOLM successfully transferred into employment contexts.

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## 6.8 Regional adaptations

Each Training Partner made adaptations to the original Model. Where these responded to regional requirements or specific demographics, this paid off in higher programme completer numbers. See the example about the focus on employment in the section above.

Ireland resorted to a day- and place-based version of the programme in order to facilitate courses at all during the tight restrictions of the pandemic.

Poland built on the expertise in survival training of their main OL Trainers and Polish cultural heritage and gave their programme a strong focus on bushcraft skills. This increased the focus of communal living and problem-solving (e.g. for food preparation), which heightened the sense of community and cohesion within groups, augmented the sense of individual purpose and contribution to the community, and general social skills.

Overall, it was concluded that sensitivity to socio-cultural, political and other particularities was key in the regional adaptation of the model, as was respectful collaboration with local stakeholders. This led to rich evidence of transversal competencies in programme participants and initiatives to continue and expand the project.

## 6.9 Barriers to success

The following were identified as main barriers to success of and during the project:

- Low or difficult access to potential participants;
- A lack of integration of the programme phases.
- An online delivery of programme sessions where participants faced connectivity issues. Particularly members of the rural population targeted in Ireland were excluded from participation if they were subject to lack of infrastructure or data poverty.
- Delays and restrictions imposed by the pandemic. These unforeseeable events required a lot of additional resources, time and creativity (see details on the impact of the pandemic below).
- A restrictive governance of the project, particularly in respect to funding conditions that limited the degree to which Partners were able to respond flexibly to situations and issues when they presented. More flexibility and autonomy for the institutions delivering the programme would have produced even greater benefits and synergy effects.

## 6.10 Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic

Staff expressed a lot of concern around the impact of Covid-19 pandemic that dominated most of the Delivery Phase of the project and had caused significant interruptions and restrictions to the programme delivery. Particular worries included:

- The impact on the participants, on their participation in the programme, mental and physical health, isolation, and acerbation of previous deprivation factors
- How to support and uphold communication pathways with participants during lockdown
- Additional challenges to recruitment (e.g. loss of access to potential participants, referral agencies and events not taking place)
- Staff resources for additional tasks, staffs' own health and wellbeing
- Unavoidable delays in the project delivery schedule

Implemented by: Partners:



- Impact of delays and additional expenses on the funding agreement

Implemented by:



Partners:



At the same time, staff evaluated that

- FOLM Partners were creatively developing and implementing ways to mitigate the impact of the pandemic and to take up the programme delivery as quickly as possible, with Partners investing beyond the requirement to cover and provide what was deemed necessary.
- The Consortium conducted additional meetings to share ideas and support each other with what measures were tried in each region and whether/how these might be useful for other regions as well.
- Individual staff were going above and beyond their job responsibilities

Some of the changes, while forced and at high cost, brought unexpected positive side-effects and valuable new insights. Advantages and new strengths that emerged from the changes made in response to the pandemic:

- Moving the Coaching Phase from in person to online delivery had mixed effects: While it increased accessibility for participants with long commutes, it excluded those with poor or no WiFi. Also, while social bonds established during the outdoor learning could be maintained online, new bonds were hard to establish purely remotely.
- Spanish colleagues observed that the lockdown heightened people's awareness of the benefits of being outdoors and engaged with nature, which led to higher recruitment numbers.

### 6.11 Recommendations for improvement

Participants and staff were asked for recommendations on how the FOLM programme could be improved. Any suggestions received during the Pilot and delivery of the project were fed back into the Consortium at the earliest opportunity, and where feasible, these were acted upon. See the section on the Pilot Evaluation on some of these.

Some recommendations may be relevant beyond FOLM to the implementation of a similar learning programme and/or other regions. The most dominant ones include:

- To have staff specifically dedicated to the recruitment of participants as the amount of time and work needed for recruitment must not be underestimated.
- The programme phases should be integrated as smoothly as possible, so that the participants experience them as one longer process rather than separate courses. Ideas to achieve a high level of integration include: The phases are conducted by the same staff members, i.e. Trainers are Coaches and Mentors. This reduces the need of a hand-over of information between staff and also offers the participant-staff and group-staff relationships more time and shared experiences to build up trust and cohesion, which is known to enhance the effectiveness of an intervention
- An effective system to pass on information and experiences between trainers and coaches to increase the quality of their work with the participants, and also to create a stronger sense of community and support among staff.
- Integration of outdoor activities into all Phases of the programme. This would harness the positive effects of OL not just in the dedicated OL Phase, would help reactivate memories and lessons learned from the Outdoor Phase, and cater more to participants for whom classroom-

based learning presents barriers to participation.

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- To create different ways and spaces for potential employers (Business Partners/collaborating businesses) and participants to engage more and more frequently. For example, a meet 'n' greet session in the Coaching Phase (this was already facilitated in Spain), face-to-face job fairs, and even a permanent walk-in info point as a physical complement to the online job matching platform.

## 6.12 Opportunities for & barriers to sustainability of FOLM

In the surveys and interviews, staff were asked what internal and external conditions they felt needed to be met for a more permanent establishment of FOLM or a FOLM-like programme. The most frequent responses included:

- Sufficient and reliable funding
- An inter-sectorial collaboration to optimise recruitment and post programme support for participants
- A good visibility (i.e. establishing a brand) and advertisement strategy in order to (a) recruit the desired numbers of participants, and (b) ensure participants had an accurate understanding of the programme objectives and participant responsibilities, and in consequence, ensure that individuals who signed up were ready for change and committed to self-improvement – as opposed to merely a week of outdoor adventure.
- Suitable (continuous) staff training that equips staff with technical outdoor skills as well as a variety of facilitation skills to guide individual and group learning processes and handle emergency situations

In Ireland, “outdoor education has many providers (public and private) and multiple actors working to support NEETs. The critical task in the coming months is to engage with the key stakeholders to "pitch" a package which they can engage in”

(Irish leadership/admin staff, mid-Delivery evaluation survey).

“The challenge of the FOLM project is the interest of institutions with specific budgets to continue financing the project”

(Leadership/admin staff, mid-Delivery evaluation survey).

## 6.13 Other interesting findings

### 6.13.1 Collaboration within the Consortium

“We’ve had to face many challenges, and we have done that together. It has made us better persons”

(Leadership/admin staff, Spain)

## 7. Conclusions

Outdoor Learning has been acknowledged for many years and in many countries to be an effective and sustainable approach to socio-emotional learning, for empowerment and the development of transformative learning and competencies. The Edinburgh Model underlying the FOLM project combines a number of specific success factors known from international research and decades of experience in the field. The FOLM project has made some regional alteration to this, all of which has been evaluated in the research activities conducted in FOLM. Key insights gained include:

### 7.1 Summary of Findings

With a placement rate of well over 80%, the FOLM programme has been highly successful in bringing a disengaged demographic of young people into employment, training, and employment. Participant data show statistically significant increases in key parameters of transformative competencies over the course of the programme. Evidence indicates that all participants have benefitted from the programme: primarily through a better sense of their personal talents, potential and worth they were enabled to form personal goals and acquired the practical tools, encouragement and confidence to pursue those goals in their own future journeys beyond FOLM.

The underlying outdoor learning model has been effectively applied in the different European regions and adapted to specific regional requirements (e.g., demographic and societal needs, landscape and climate, public regulations around land access etc.). The better the adaptation responded to the existing regional needs and resources, the higher the recruitment, completion and success rates of the programme.

Main factors contributing to the programme's success included: the facilitated OL experience, complemented by one-to-one and group coaching to transfer the learning into the home and employment context; nurturing interactions among staff and participants that focussed on personalised support and goal-setting; and an integrated cross-sector collaboration within the FOLM Consortium as well as with regional stakeholders – e.g., for recruitment and job matching.

The following were identified as barriers to success: A lack of integration of the programme phases; difficult access to potential participants; Online delivery where participants faced connectivity issues; competition rather than integration with existing regional infrastructure and agents; and delays and restrictions due to the pandemic.

### 7.2 Recommendations for practitioners and decision-makers

Based on findings, recommended structure for the programme model is in line with the original Edinburgh Model: importance of Phase 1, flexibility of group sessions (Coaching) and one-to-one support (Mentoring). Job matching platform and explicit input and training sessions on employability topics/skills has been feasible and increased effect in a project geared at inclusion in the labour market. A programme focussing more on e.g. wellbeing or \_\_\_\_\_ would be better advices to include inputs and sessions on these foci.

Institutions and organisations interested in implementing the Edinburgh Model or similar OL-related programmes are recommended to

- Make adaptations to the original model in a way that the programme or service (a) focusses

on the intended learning outcomes, (b) suits the target group (e.g., barriers to participation for persons with disabilities or caring responsibilities), and (c) makes good use of local

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resources and conditions. For example, it is advisable to collaborate with public services and local stakeholders to facilitate recruitment and post programme integration.

- Professionalise their staff through training programmes and certifications in line with established standards in the field of outdoor education in order to widen their understanding and competencies around OL.
- Prioritise relationship building, individualised attention and goal-setting over numbers-based formal success criteria to afford the full benefits for transformative growth from the programme.

### 7.3 Value for money

Setting up the programme required substantial effort, time and budget in all regions yet particularly where OL was an entirely new approach to learning and vocational education and training. However, the longer the programme ran, the better the initial investment paid off, since many processes only need to be conducted once (e.g. scoping of suitable areas and paths for the OL Phase, logistics of travel and accommodation, sourcing of outdoor equipment, recruitment and training of staff, creation of risk assessment and standard operations procedures, etc.). Based on this, we conclude that the programme is well worth the financial investment, and decision-makers are encouraged to aim for a long-term / permanent installation of the programme in a region to optimise its value for money.

### 7.4 Value for money

- Transferable skills → employability, citizenship,...
  - Happiness, self-worth → avoids health service costs in the long run
  - Agency --? Active citizenship, employment → paying tax instead of incurring social costs
  - Ecological stewardship → ecol. Crisis, sustainability
- Yes! Initial cost to set up is

### 7.5 Limitations

In the FOLM project, key UoE staff had two functions: Support the other FOLM Partners as 'expert' in a consultancy function, and conduct the research to evaluate the success of the project. These roles merged into a process-informing approach that included continuous feedback loops of preliminary research findings within the Consortium. This had two effects: Issues could be identified and ameliorated quickly, which improved the overall results of the project – for example, taking regionally appropriate measures to integrate the programme phases that were disjointed in the Pilot stage into one continuous learning experience for the participants, which notably raised participants' benefits and engagement. On the other hand, sharing research findings meant that they became part of the communal knowledge of all Partners and as such were communicated in various project outlets. While desired in terms of maximum impact, this blurred the lines of this research and the significance of its impact.

A further limitation is that more data could have been collected on the longevity of learning effects in programme participants. The Questionnaire Self & Agency did not yield enough responses at the follow-up point (t5) for statistical analysis, and the insights gained from participant and staff interviews are valuable and consistent, yet lacking statistical power.

Similarly, for a full 360 degree evaluation of the programme, systematic direct data from external

stakeholders such as employers, referral agencies or participants' families would be desired. In the scope of this project, these were captured only anecdotally or indirectly through staff interviews or

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evaluation forms at knowledge exchange events. A focus on the impact and views from these stakeholders was intended for a project extension that unfortunately did not receive funding.

## 7.6 Recommendations for future research

Future studies could focus on more longitudinal data as well as views from other stakeholders (e.g., participants' families and friends, employers, social workers) to allow more conclusive insights into longer-term effects on participants and wider impact on their (private and professional) social environment.

The current research was primarily directed at the Outdoor Learning. A lot of questions and details could be explored in respect to the Coaching and Mentoring Phase/s, as well as the specific employability components, such as the job matching platform.

Furthermore, research could explore the combination or integration of a FOLM-like programme in formal education, with participant groups training in specific vocations, or with demographic sub-groups such as young carers or persons with physical disabilities, to investigate how the programme would have to be adapted to best meet their needs and to yield optimal results.

## 7.7 Final conclusions

The employed outdoor learning approach proves highly effective in raising transversal competencies in programme participants – across regional variances in socio-cultural contexts and programme delivery. Outdoor learning demonstrates to be suited as a cost-efficient approach to reach disengaged populations and to bring them closer to and into the labour market.

In summary, the conducted research has found the FOLM project to be highly successful, and many positive and very practical lessons have been gleaned from it that are worth adopting in similar and new projects around Outdoor Learning, populations disengaged from formal education and/or public services, and/or programmes aiming for empowerment towards transformative competencies and active citizenship.

“Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?”

(Mary Oliver, poet).

## 8. Dissemination of findings

Preliminary research findings have been disseminated throughout the project for continuous knowledge exchange and increase of impact, for example through the following outlets:

- FOLM outputs such as the Sustainability Guidelines, Policy recommendations, and Project Summary Report.
- Presentations at the NEF events in Brussels (Nov/Dec.2020 and 26.01.2022) and Scotland (10.02.2022), as well as the European Forum of New Ideas / EFNI (Oct 2021)
- Presented at academic and practitioner conferences including
- AEE/SEER

- International Adventure Therapy Conference (IATC) and the Gathering of the Adventure Therapy Europe Network (GATE) (forthcoming, 20-25.06.2022)

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Shared with FOLM field and leadership staff at the online 'FOLM Evening of Celebration' (23.02.2022).

Feedback gathered from the staff surveys and interviews directed at the project's Lead Partner CIE was shared with the CEO of CIE via email and verbal communication.

Forthcoming:

- Academic journal articles
- Youth Mag article
- A summary of findings to be made available to FOLM participants

Finally, findings will be disseminated through academic publications and a range of knowledge exchange and impact formats over the months following the conclusion of the project.

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While the role of FOLM Trainers, Coaches, Mentors and Recruiters in the collection of research data is already acknowledged above, we also want to express gratitude – more on behalf of the FOLM

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participants as beneficiaries – for how the field staff have taken on board the vision and person-centred mission of FOLM and have been pivotal in making the project such a success through showing up as authentic persons and inspirational role models, sounding boards, and beautiful professionals. Your work and impact shines through in countless participant testimonials.

Needless to say, the programme participants have been at the heart of this project. We have only been able to evidence the impact their FOLM journey had on them through the various data they have willingly shared with us. Thank you for completing the many surveys, forms and other evaluation tools, and a particular Thanks to all who additionally met us for an individual interview and shared their personal experiences and valuable feedback. We wish you that the seed of FOLM will continue to grow and prosper in you.

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