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Joy of nature, *friluftsliv* education and self: combining narrative and cultural–ecological approaches to environmental sustainability

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Autobiographies of prominent environmentalists describe that their early lives have been rich in personal experiences of nature. The early childhood experiences of philosopher and climber Arne Næss (1912–2009) inspired the development of deep ecology philosophy, which markedly influenced the emergence of Norwegian *friluftsliv* (literally: free-air life) as a foremost environmental pedagogy in the 1970s. The approach was underpinned by the notion of identification with nature and this empathy was intended to encourage people to act protectively towards nature and to develop sustainable ways of living. In 2001 and 2006, nearly 200 youths aged 15–19 living in the sub-Arctic, in a suburb of the capital city Oslo and along the southern coast wrote essays on their relationships towards (local) natural places. Hereby, semi-structured questions stimulated a biographical approach. This article contributes to the understanding of the complex empathetic relationships of natural places, education and environmental sustainability by combining a narrative and cultural–ecological analysis of young people’s lived experience of *friluftsliv* and manifestation of self, ascribed to embodied and emotional experiences of and care for natural place.

Keywords: outdoor/*friluftsliv* education; youth; natural place; environmental sustainability; narratives; cultural–ecology

Introduction

Autobiographies of prominent environmentalists, such as the Norwegian philosopher and climber Arne Næss (1912–2009), describe many early experiences of nature (Milton, 2002). In Næss’s case, these early experiences inspired the development of the deep ecology philosophy (Næss, 1973), which regards identification with nature and natural things as a basic principle. This identification is seen to lead to empathy with and recognition of the right to self-realization for all life forms, in ways that make moral rules and rational arguments redundant. Consequently, identification is perceived to induce people to protect nature, not because they think they *ought* to but because they *feel inclined* to (Milton, 2002).

In *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, Næss (1976/1989) argues that the role of outdoor life and education—*friluftsliv* (literally: free-air-life) in Norwegian—is counter-acting the ills of an increasingly industrialized society. Inspired by Fridtjof Nansen (1861–1930), scientist, polar explorer, humanist and Nobel Peace Prize winner, Næss sees *friluftsliv* partly as a continuation of earlier (hunter–gatherer) ways of living and simultaneously as a concept describing more-or-less non-competitive contemporary lifestyles in nature. As neither of these strands today primarily comprises the harvesting

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activities necessary to sustain a subsistence lifestyle, one should define their rationale as a kind of abundance characterized by an affluent lifestyle, in which an intimate relationship with nature is the prime motive. In other words, *friluftsliv* is conceptualized as an aesthetic approach to what in a Nordic—notably Norwegian—context is frequently called ‘the nature’, a notion that is used regularly to refer to often vast areas of uncultivated, ‘untouched’ mountainous and forested land; areas that would frequently be called wilderness in Anglo-American contexts (Arler, 2009).¹ Furthermore, Næss argues that directive embodied nature experiences, for example through low-tech activities such as walking, swimming, skiing, and climbing, may lead to higher degrees of self-sufficiency and increased respect for other life forms. The ideal for an ‘ethically and ecologically responsible friluftsliv’ (Næss, 1976/1989, p. 178) translates as ‘richness in life by simple means’.

The deep ecology philosophy heavily influenced *friluftsliv* when it developed as an academic field in the early 1970s and inspired a critical, reflexive and supposedly alternative but practical environmental pedagogy (Faarlund, 1974). The ideas were eventually transformed into a rather normative and dogmatic (Breivik, 1979) and male-dominated and elitist praxis (Gurholt, 2008a). It also influenced Norway’s national curriculum (Ministry of Church, Education and Research, 1997) and state policy (Ministry of Environment, 2000), and was recognized by other Nordic scholars (Sandell, 1999) and scholars worldwide (Martin, Turčová, & Neuman, 2008; Reed & Rothenberg, 1993).

This article intends to lead the discourse onto different tracks by contextualizing the question of how youth education and upbringing, place and environmental sustainability may be connected, and by analysing how and why young people come to relate to the natural world in the ways they do. Combining cultural–ecological and narrative approaches, the intention is to contribute to the understanding of what it may mean to grow up in a particular environment, in which encounters with the natural world are part of daily life. Consequently, the way in which the concept of nature and *friluftsliv* is mediated, embodied and understood in education (Gurholt, 2008a) refers to dialectic learning processes consisting of transformative and complex interrelationships of the human, the socio-cultural and natural places. Thus, *friluftsliv* education is turned into a question about cultural–ecological diversity. The work of Milton (2002) and Ingold (2000) inspires my efforts. Additionally, the approach is grounded in ethnographic *friluftsliv* research, and in an anthropological intent to improve our understanding of the complexity of human–nature relationships associated with *friluftsliv* (Pedersen, 2003a).

The empirical analysis is generated from narratives on nature experiences written by young Norwegians living in a community in the sub-Arctic, in an Oslo suburb and on the southern coast.² Two questions guide the analysis: how do young people come to act towards, know and feel about nature as they do; and how do they reflect upon and understand nature, what they do in nature and how they feel?

Cultural–ecological approach

Ideas of protecting natural resources date far back in Norwegian history (Berntsen, 2011). In mountainous and sparsely populated Norway (of which only 3% is farmed even today), the Romantic Movement of the late eighteenth century, with its idealization of wild nature inhabited by strong mountain peasants not yet ruined by civilization, inspired the rise of a proud national identity seen as originating in its ‘physical nature’ (Bø, 1999, p. 63). Romanticism also underpinned Nansen’s (1922) conceptualizing of *friluftsliv* as ‘simple

life in nature', and the idealizing of, particularly male, character-forming qualities of solitary encounters with the elements of so-called untouched nature (Svendsen, 1999). This is a notion that can be interpreted as a counterproductive response to an, at the time, increasing fear in western cultures of modernity feminizing male-embodied selves (Gurholt, 2008b).

Radical ecologies or biocentric views, including deep ecology and concerns for animal rights and all other natural entities (trees, ecosystems, etc.), of the 1960s onwards are also inspired by nature romanticism, and are, despite differences, united by the same fundamental aim: to strive to liberate all life (Argyrou, 2005). These perspectives encompass protective approaches towards wild nature particularly, which is assumed to have inherent value independent of human evaluation and of any benefits that nature and natural resources may have for humankind. Feminists, who identify with radical ecology and constructed eco-feminism as a radical rupture with modernity, criticized deep ecology for not questioning the interrelated domination of men over women and nature in western philosophy. Further, they argued in favour of seeing women as being closer to nature, and thereby as having a special privileged position in caring for nature. This position has been extensively critiqued within feminist theory for being false (Soper, 1995). However, the notion that humans can be reunited with nature by returning to an earlier, seemingly pre-historical or authentic state of being—which is reflected in *friluftsliv* pedagogy inspired by deep ecology—will at the extreme imply that humans cease being human. Hence, the philosophy of deep ecology has been criticized for maintaining a romantic distinction between nature and culture, for leading into fundamentalist and antidemocratic positions and for not taking socio-cultural relations into account (Argyrou, 2005; Milton, 2002; Sutton, 2004).

More broadly, social anthropologist Tim Ingold (2000) argues in *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* that the core of the discourse questions what it means to be human. From a socio-cultural viewpoint, one would argue that no human can step outside society and history. In a phenomenological sense and from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (2002) position, humans cannot step outside their bodily and material existence and situatedness within place and time. From the phenomenological point of view, there follows a conceptualizing of what it means to be a human-in-the-world who recognizes humans as positioned in and interacting with other people, non-human entities and the environments of which the humans are part (Ingold, 2000). What therefore ensues is that proponents of deep ecology are, 'right to argue that human beings are *natural* beings, but they are wrong to suggest that the biological is somehow more "real" than the social' (Sutton, 2004, p. 114).

The word *ecology* stems from the Greek word *oikos* (*home*) and the Latin word *logia* (*a study of*). As such, ecology may be understood as *the household of nature*, or, more broadly, of the world (Macauley, 1996, p. 2). Inspired by cultural-ecology, I propose an approach to *friluftsliv* research and education for sustainability that examines the complex dialectic relations between the individual, the socio-cultural and the environmental as being embodied, positioned and transforming in place and time. The approach may shed new light on how and why individuals and groups perceive and come to know and treat nature and self in the ways they do.

Anthropology, and similarly phenomenology, has traditionally insisted on treating other people, their lived experiences and life worlds, seriously and respectfully. The perspective has parallels in humanist pedagogy, which insists on taking seriously the lived experience of the individual child and youth, including their prerequisites, needs and

interests (Manen, 1990). These theoretical reflections bridge the way to scrutinizing stories about lived nature experiences as told by young Norwegians.

Narrative analysis of nature and self

In 2001 and 2006, nearly 200 young people aged 15–19, either living in a suburb of eastern Oslo or in one of two smaller towns—one far north in the sub-Arctic, the other along the southern coast—wrote about their experiences and views of nature and *friluftsliv*. The question they were posed was an open one, but it stimulated an autobiographical approach in the young people's responses, which altogether comprised about 300 hand-written pages. The texts were generated in collaboration with public upper secondary schools located in middle-class neighbourhoods dominated by ethnic Norwegians. Some teachers presented participation as voluntary; others saw it as mandatory. Consequently, the response rates varied, from 30–50% in some classes to 100% in others. About one-half of the respondents were female.

Autobiographical writing forces individuals into reminiscent and reflective attitudes and contrasts with the face-to-face conversation of life-history interviews where people interact immediately with researchers: 'This reflective attitude together with the linguistic demands . . . places certain constraints on the free obtaining of lived-experience descriptions' (Manen, 1990, p. 64). Autobiographies thus allow people room to create their own presentations of self, and are constructions that can always be told differently depending on the writing style and on which perspectives and events the authors, consciously or unconsciously, choose to cite. Further, personal narratives are positionings of self, signifying performances and negotiations of identity (Riessman, 2008). Yet narrators cannot freely construct presentations of self from any model they wish. Rather, they draw on known styles of storytelling reflecting culturally mediated and shared interpretations.

After reading the essays, some teachers expressed spontaneously that pupils gave more details about themselves in these texts than usual. The common narrative structure begins with daily childhood experiences, and continues with anecdotal writing on how the young perceive (local) nature's role in relation to how they have become the individuals that they, at the time of writing, see themselves to be.³ The episodic dimension in every narrative tends to encourage a linear representation of time (Freeman, 2004). The narrative structure condenses expressions of content and events wherein notions of a 'connection in life' accentuate to further prominence. Conversely, the impression easily appears that the individuals' lives, their nature/*friluftsliv* relations and their understandings of self are more consistent, linear and connected than is actually the case. Implicit in this definition of narrative is autobiography as a relational wholeness of body, self and world.

Personal narratives are meaning-making units of discourse. Accordingly, narrative inquiry concerns content and meaning (Riessman, 2008). By thematic analysis of grounded coding, I have aimed to arrive at a hermeneutical interpretative understanding of the stories told. Each narrative was in the first place analysed separately, and then contextually in the light of all the stories told in each of the three settings (Pedersen, 2003a; Vigane, 2007). The comparative narrative thematic analysis aims at interpreting similarities and differences in the young narrators' recollections of meaningful relationships of nature and self *across* case histories and places.

Since *friluftsliv* holds an elevated symbolic value in Norwegian culture, young people may tend to over-emphasize nature's positive significance to them. Additionally, each

individual is part of numerous contexts and frames of interpretations, and will have contradictory embodied experiences and opinions. Nature experiences may therefore be interpreted differently at various times/contexts of one's lifespan; however, all reports may contain parts that hold a 'truth' (Riessman, 2008). Consequently, interpreting the narratives requires a humble, double-hermeneutic approach that calls for the researcher and readers to be involved in the processes of re-telling and re-interpreting other people's reflexive re-living and re-telling of their lived experiences. 'Life as told' may be quite different from 'life as lived' (Freeman, 2004, p. 71).

Accompanying these methodological reflections, while meandering between the thematic comparative analysis of the narratives told, authoring the narrative of the enquiry and transforming it into English, I generated five main themes: childhood experiences of nature; playful dwelling: transforming relations of nature and self; meanings of nature; gender–nature relations; and caring for nature.

Childhood experiences of nature

At the core of the narratives are detailed descriptions of being lucky enough to have grown up in neighbourhoods close to natural worlds and of childhoods spent playing freely outdoors, occasionally illustrated by detailed drawn maps. For example, as expressed by an 18-year-old girl living in the sub-Arctic: 'I've always enjoyed being outdoors' and 'When we live as we do, with the mountains right in our yard and the ocean just beyond our kitchen window, I think it is important that we utilize nature as much as possible'. Suburbanites express it more as follows: 'Despite being a city boy, I like being in the woods better than walking along the main streets downtown in Oslo'.

Embedded in the writing style are personal emotions and first-hand knowledge of places and social settings, in the colours, scenery and qualities of hills, streams and beaches, and so forth, and of the elements of nature (snow, rain and wind). Encounters with nature may be expressed poetically, as in the following written by a 15-year-old boy living near the coast: 'the clear, blue sky ... The green–blue water ... washing the seashore. The birds singing and flying towards the south ... This is just the way it is having grown up as we have'. Moreover, the style of writing is precise and sensuous; for example, as shown by the following reminiscences of a specific path by another boy from near the coast:

This is what I remember, that it twists between trees and tiny area of wet woodland, towards a nice little beach, between bushes and rocks. It exists in my mind. I have walked it since I was little. At that time, it was large. Today it is small. In all kinds of weather my mother took me on hikes along the coastal path; I did not always like the idea, though each time it turned out to be the best hike ever. The communal experience with family and friends is different ... We cross the salty bare rock-face, breathe the fresh salt air of the sea and find exciting sticks to play with. The adults pick flowers and collect interesting rocks. Every time, my mother brings garbage home [that she has collected].

The personal narratives are often thoroughly self-reflective, as exemplified by an 18-year-old sub-Arctic boy describing growing up in a family engaging in 'many different kinds of hikes, everything from mushroom and berry picking to extended hikes in the mountains'. However, he maintains: 'The best hikes were those with the other boys, which gave ... a completely different feeling than the hikes with my family'. He continues:

On my big confirmation day, I was given seven knives, an outdoor cooking kit, a robust lunchbox, a Teflon frying pan, a hand-carved wooden cup, a person tent, and a mini sleeping bag. I was Mr Nature himself (!), something that was no coincidence by any means.

Later, Mr Nature (a name that he uses in English to conjure up a somewhat magnificent image—with a feeling of global significance but with a hint of irony) reflects over changes in his life while he was studying sports in upper secondary school. He asks ‘Have I lost my relationship to nature?’, and then answers:

I’m probably not the nature boy I used to be, but I still go outdoors ... I have so little time ... The way in which I am in touch with nature has changed. It is now through working out and taking InterRail trips that I become a part of the great circle of life (Loch Ness, Stonehenge, the Highlands ...). Soon it will begin to snow ... and I will become the nature boy once more. Incredibly, the winter boy is the same now as he was three years ago. I’ve just replaced skis with a snowboard. Half of the week includes hikes in the mountains and runs down the ski slopes ... I always bring my backpack. This is what I dream about, the escape from being normal and the boring feeling of always having to be someone. Just floating around and passing amongst the trees and plains. Greeting the animals, in a way. This is what I call two months in heaven!

Substantiated through personal actions and embodied experiences, young narrators describe immediate interactions with and knowledge of natural places, as part of what it means to grow up. Only rarely do they refer to the significance of formal schooling. However, the fact that accounts are lacking does not necessarily mean that *friluftsliv* is absent in school. Rather, it may underscore the naturalized position *friluftsliv* has as part of public life (Pedersen, 1999). *Friluftsliv* as taught in school may not be perceived by young people to be any different, because teaching/learning mostly occurs in local places, guided by a national curriculum (Ministry of Church, Education and Research, 1997) that reflects daily outdoor life (Gurholt, 2008a).

The young people’s stories parallel the aforementioned descriptions of the way in which Næss recollected his childhood as being immersed in local natural worlds a century earlier (Gjefsen, 2011). Apparently, a notion of cultural continuity arises, which may find support in national surveys confirming regular hiking as having been a part of popular culture for decades. Surveys show that four out of five Norwegians aged 16–79 hike locally on foot and on skis every year, while nearly one-half go on hikes in forests and mountains. One-half of those aged 16–24 are involved in skill-oriented activities such as Telemark skiing and snowboarding (Statistics Norway, 2009). Important preconditions for such developments can be found in the Public Access Act, which confirmed ancient legal rights to roam freely on uncultivated land; the growth of a welfare and knowledge society; and infrastructure that makes natural places accessible for most inhabitants by either foot or public transport within less than 30 minutes, even in Oslo.

From a cultural–ecological perspective, personal growth and education are recognized as constituting a series of complex encounters of individuals with their surroundings in which learning ensues through a process of engagement and discovery more than as cognitive construction. Thus, learning is seen as a way of ‘apprehending the world’ by dwelling and embodiment (Ingold, 2000, p. 42) rather than by the transmission of cultural information and pre-established beliefs and knowledge from one person/generation to the next. However, in these learning processes, narration and negotiation are always close ‘followers’. Despite the difference between ‘life as lived and life as told’ (Freeman, 2004,

p. 71), the narratives give insights into how particular human–place complexities are made sense of, condensed, communicated and personalized.

Playful dwelling: transforming relations of nature and self

Clearly, the narratives express consistencies across the three dissimilar topographical and climatic contexts that also represent distinct historical developments and place identities. While the sub-Arctic is widely known as the ‘last wilderness of Europe’ and the ‘land of the midnight sun’, the vast tundra from a local viewpoint is perceived simply as ‘home-land’. The coastal ‘summer holiday paradise’ is known locally as ‘Norway’s navel’, whereas the Oslo suburb borders a 1700 km² wooded belt that over the past century has served as a national symbol of skiing and *friluftsliv*, and since 2009 has been protected by law (Gurholt & Broch, 2011). Particularly the sub-Arctic and coastal landscapes, which in narrators’ grandparents’ childhoods of subsistence living were regarded as ‘kitchen and living room’, are transformed into aesthetic seascapes and wilderness to serve urban people’s needs for pleasure, recreation and adventure.

In all three contexts, the young people express pride and love of the places to which they relate, even if they are not necessarily engaging in outdoor activities regularly at the time of writing. Being adolescents, they frequently describe their lives as busy and their relationships to nature as somehow distanced, expressed from a sub-Arctic viewpoint as: ‘Even though nature is very important to me, I don’t regularly make active use of it myself. Instead, I often find myself observing it’ or ‘Nature plays an important role in my life, but I don’t utilize it actively. I often catch myself looking at nature’. The young people living in the Oslo suburb and by Norway’s southern coast express similar feelings: ‘When I was younger, I spent much more time in nature’.

Relations to ‘the nature’ and *friluftsliv* are described as changing during a young person’s life, although this is not always so explicitly expressed as in the case of Mr Nature, who wonders about the possibility of having lost his connection to nature. To summarize, the suggested transformations include a decrease in time spent outdoors, more hikes with friends than with family, ‘natural playgrounds’ becoming global and ‘new’ activities (e.g. snowboarding instead of skiing) being performed. Seasonal variations exist, with peaks of outdoor activity during the winter months, over the Easter and summer holidays, during the fishing season, during the spring and during the ‘White nights’ around midsummer.

The young narrators highlight various skills and ways in which they act upon nature—walking, jogging, backpacking, picking mushrooms, angling—various styles of skiing and cycling, motor boating, snowmobiling, self-organized games and sports. They express different abilities and specific knowledge of local place names, weather conditions, cultural history and mythology, but also of land ownership structures, hunting regulations and management regimes. Sandell (1999) makes an important point, echoed in the narratives: childhood relationships of confidence with natural worlds through playing and roaming freely lead to qualitatively different styles of *friluftsliv*. The young people may identify with any of the contemporary emblematic *friluftsliv* lifestyles, or may develop a combination of competencies and connections. These may be based on simple natural pastimes involving the harvesting of local resources, such as berries, fish and game, and/or pleasurable hiking in nearby environments, as well as on the far-away and high-tech lifestyle activities that are currently becoming favoured (Pedersen & Viken, 1996). However, very few young people identify with the very risky, extreme and adventurous approach that dominates the media and recent youth research. Rather, nature resumes its

role as a place just for being and having fun, and for shared experience and friendships. In the young people's narrations, they draw a nuanced and complex picture of what they feel as flow, excitement and self-realization:

When I'm outdoors, I get an indescribable feeling of being free ... What makes ice fishing so fun is that you can look down the hole and see the fish ... It gives me a kick ... my legs move and my body starts shaking. That's how everybody can see that I've hooked a fish.

Most likely, young narrators perform and appreciate a mix of activities and contexts, and relate themselves as being situated between local traditions and global trends. Some even reflect on such relationships by means of nuanced statements. A girl born in northern Norway claims that being locally oriented should not be equated with being backwards, 'but as a person ... who is fine on my own'. Nor do narrators see themselves as *fanatical*, something that to them has negative connotations. A boy who has lived for the first half of his life in a German city and then moved to sub-Arctic Norway sees the relationship thus:

Nature has always had a type of magical influence ... I would neither describe myself as one of these 'trendy' outdoorsy types of people ... nor as one of those ... who wear outdoor clothes all year round, whether or not they are out hiking in the mountains or working in a bank ... I think I lie somewhere between all that. Because I like to go outside on Sunday mornings and hunt, fish, or just enjoy the quiet ... just sit down somewhere and philosophize ... imagine that I'm living under the same conditions as people did thousands of years before me.

To live in the world is to inhabit it and make it a home, claims Ingold (2000, p. 169), in which 'self and the world merge in the activity of dwelling'. The approach most frequently expressed by young narrators is a kind of immersing oneself in (local) natural worlds by dwelling and enjoying the here and now, through self-organized games and hikes. The approach may be called *playful dwelling*.

'Nature means a lot'

Moreover, young people in all three locations emphasize their relations to nature as being treasured and meaningful. Frequently they use phrases such as 'Nature means a lot to me', or even 'everything', but 'I'm not totally sure what it is'. Although 'it touches something in you when living at sea', it is hard to describe its meaning, because 'I actually don't know how to explain it'. Several philosophers and anthropologists have elaborated how the concept of nature is ideological, multi-faceted and confusing (for example, Arler, 2009; Ingold, 2000; Soper, 1995). To illustrate the implicit complexity of meanings that the young narrators associate with the concept of nature, I refer once again to the condensed story of Mr Nature.

Generally, nature is referred to by Norwegians as '*the nature*', which corresponds with what Ingold (2000, p. 41) terms 'the really natural nature', as opposed to culturally constituted concepts of nature. Thus '*the nature*' represents tangible places—for example, actual rocks, hills or rivers—that are perceived to exist, have a materiality and can be seen, heard, smelled and kinaesthetically felt. Through activities like hiking a path or diving, numerous environments become personally known. Therefore, it may seem paradoxical that the young tend to describe their relationships with nature, at the time of writing, as distanced, in that they tend to describe nature as something they observe rather than something they actually act upon and touch. A possibility that young people feel they

are losing their relationship to ‘the nature’ (Louv, 2009) is limited, however, to whether they see themselves as no longer regularly participating in something they regard as *friluftsliv*. Only in this exact sense do they feel somehow detached from nature.

The young alternate between ‘the nature’ and other notions of nature (e.g. the notion of nature as the origin or authenticity of everything, and the inner essence of things; for example, human nature). Nature is a *place* where one plays and grows, but it is also a *space* in which to retreat or escape from always having to be someone. Nature possesses metaphorical value for what a human being can be(come); for example, of being a boy and becoming a man, and perhaps a person who cares about the environment. Metaphorically speaking, being in nature is like being in heaven, in a space filled with freedom and sublime impressions, or seen as eternal and something bigger than one’s self, the great circle of life (e.g. symbolized by indigenous Sami burial sites, rocks for sacrificial rites or ancient graveyards). Nature means time—seasonal time, contemplation time, recreational time and developmental time. The concept of nature may refer to species, animals and plants, and appears in tools like wooden cups.

The young people see themselves as embodied, as emotionally and reflexively related to (local) nature as life-giving material resources, as an inspirational and spiritual source, and as playgrounds to explore. However, identifying with nature and natural things never appears as a question of re-connecting with nature, because they already feel connected. Their feelings of connectedness are not grounded in feelings of suffering as prescribed by deep ecologists, implying that human and other entities are of the same substance and ‘can be transformed into one another’ (Milton, 2002, p. 79). Rather, the young narrators feel a bonding, longing and love for natural worlds to which they relate, depending on personal involvement, what Milton (2002, p. 79) calls ‘person-based identification’. The profound significance of nature includes a spectrum of meanings, from the prosaic to the sacred.

Nature–gender relations

In Norway, young people grow up and are educated in contexts that strongly emphasize ideals of equality (Lien, Lidén, & Vike, 2001). Additionally, *friluftsliv* is regarded as a cultural field that equalizes social inequalities (Pedersen, 1999). It may therefore be the case that young people today do not see *friluftsliv* as particularly gendered. However, when reading the narratives with sensitivity to gendered ways of expression, distinctions between female and male narrators, as well as among the females and among the males, become visible and add more complexity concerning how nature/place, *friluftsliv* and sustainability connect with the ways young people grow and develop.

Differences in the ways in which boys and girls describe themselves as being involved in *friluftsliv* activities replicate national surveys. Whereas boys spend more time regularly outdoors in activities such as angling, nature sports and driving off-road vehicles, differences between the two genders are rather small (and have over recent decades diminished) regarding participation in activities such as hiking on foot and touring on cross-country skis (Statistics Norway, 2009).

Not all young writers have grown up in active, outdoorsy families, or have learned to become friends with nature. More girls than boys express themselves negatively regarding certain *friluftsliv* activities, school outings and family (ski) trips, and articulate an ambiguous love–hate relationship to practical hiking, although they retain lively aesthetic and symbolic connections with nature. A sub-Arctic girl expresses her ambiguity: ‘I hate bugs ... I hate to be in small boats ... I get seasick ... Skis are the worst thing ever invented. I

hate school outings where one has to observe trees and plants'. However, some paragraphs later she has opposite views:

The place where I grew up on a fjord, that's our summer house. That's my paradise. In the summer, globeflowers and wild chives cover the fields. The midnight sun is more magnificent than elsewhere. In the winter, white blankets cover the fields with the northern lights tinting the sky with a thousand colours. Life can be very harsh. However, when one learns to cope with the surroundings, life can be quite cosy.

Noticeably, several boys describe themselves genuinely as a 'nature boy', a 'winter boy' or a 'nature person', meaning someone who loves to be outdoors and who has gained the skills and knowledge needed for dwelling and safe wayfaring in outlying places. Only occasionally do girls describe themselves similarly. If they do, it is to say that they feel somehow an exception. A suburban girl expresses it as follows: 'Although I'm a typical city girl, I've always had a special kind of love for the origins, the authentic—for nature'. The narrations reflect taken-for-granted cultural expectations that over generations have associated *friluftsliv* with men and masculinity (Gurholt, 2008b). However, girls do not find it worth 'expending energy fighting against this'. Rather, both girls and boys tend to define gender issues as a matter of girls' individual choice. Sometimes this is expressed quite explicitly, as in the words of a sub-Arctic boy: 'I think that boys in general enjoy themselves outdoors better than girls do ... that's too bad, because I'd like to bring girls along on trips, but they have to want to be there of their own accord'.

Simultaneously, girls and boys describe gendered nature experiences as being embodied. However, whereas boys tend to see gender-biased nature relations as biologically determined, girls see them as socio-culturally formed and changeable. As paradoxical as it may seem, more girls than boys mention formal schooling as being positive for their outdoor experiences. Especially, girls who have completed a year at a folk high school that has included outdoor adventure excursions feel that they have gained the knowledge, skills and self-confidence needed to trust in their own competence while facing a variety of challenging outdoor situations. The girls' descriptions are in line with gender research emphasizing intersections of environments, activities performed and gender identities as multifarious and socio-culturally transformative in time and place (Massey, 1994; Soper, 1995).

Caring for nature

None of the young people describes themselves as a green activist. For example, none of them is involved in radical environmental movements or direct action. Nor do they refer explicitly to global warming or climate change, as the personal narratives were written just before public debate on these issues exploded towards the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century. Mainly, the young people write about how they have learned to pick things up after themselves and to leave no traces, because one 'ought to treat nature and natural things respectfully and be cautious with something that is joyful'. Such core elements of the ethos of *friluftsliv* are woven into the Public Access Act, organized according to trust and a general obligation of harmless and traceless dwelling and wayfaring, and are translated into practical principles such as 'breaking no branches' and 'always bringing a backpack', to carry everything needed for the hike and not to leave litter.

At one level, the writings on caring for the environment centre on *visible* litter, complaining about people who are 'not bothered to pick up their own garbage, because

they take nature for granted'. Simultaneously the narrators describe themselves as caring, responsible and protective: 'Personally, I always attempt to leave no trace and encourage others to do the same. We all must contribute to a clean environment'. Especially the young people living near the coast are concerned about maritime waste, such as oil discharged from oil tankers: 'To use wooden boats or sailing boats in contrast to speed-boats is a good initiative to improve the environment. Our wooden historical working boat uses only a little fuel tank throughout the whole summer'.

At another level, young people's reflections centre on *invisible* perspectives of care, expressed as concern for nature's overall life-giving significance as something 'we must of course take care of' because 'If we destroy nature and kill the animals, we will also die in the end'. The latter statement may be interpreted as concern for humans as well as for the eco-system, for 'nature is, in spite of everything, the biggest reason why we humans are able to live on this planet'. Despite loving nature, the young people do not see themselves as nature fanatics who think humans should always give priority to nature protection over the interests of humans, and who present natural environments as a pristine and independent domain whose value progressively declines the more we humans interact with it (Soper, 1995, p. 44). Rather, the young narrators have experienced that if people are to survive they 'have no choice but to treat nature and natural things as resources' (Milton, 2002, p. 53). Their position has much in common with what Soper (1995) calls a realist and humanist perspective. Accordingly, ideas of sustainability that promote a voluntary simplicity that uses up fewer of the earth's resources, and ideas that promote the use of local products and *friluftsliv* hiking around local places—all are reflected among most young narrators. However, these statements do not prevent some from dreaming of owning speedy off-road vehicles. Nor do they see nature/*friluftsliv* as antagonistic to daily urban life.

Accordingly, young people regard ideas of sustainability as concerns for the socio-cultural continuation of life. Their feelings of bonding and belonging to the natural worlds of their childhood are associated with an expressed bodily felt need to also in the future live in places that remind them of their childhood's natural landscapes, as 'the outdoors at home has scenery that cannot be found anywhere else'. The 'northerners' express a need to live their lives in places surrounded by wide mountain horizons. The 'suburbanites' express a need to live somewhere close to a forest, whereas those growing up by the sea feel they will always have to see, smell and breathe the ocean. Boys and girls in all three locations write that should they have children, then they want them to have the same opportunities to play and roam freely outdoors. Eventually, they would want to settle somewhere close to nature.

Possible implications for sustainable education

Deep ecology has inspired outdoor educators to prescribe an ecological self, one unifying itself with nature and natural things, as a possible outcome of their teaching and as a premise for sustainable development (Reed & Rothenberg, 1993). The attitude is criticized for being based on a taken-for-granted and rather naive understanding that a linear and predictable relationship between human and nature exists (Sandell & Öhman, 2013). Likewise, a constructivist approach that in recent years has inspired critical pedagogy and cultural anthropology is criticized for being misleading in its emphasis on the view that the diverse knowledge which humans possess, our assumptions and desires, are learned cognitively through the medium of cultural interpretation within the contexts in which we live (Milton, 2002). Inspired by

phenomenology and ecological psychology, the proposed relational cultural–ecological approach defines itself as a fertile alternative: the way in which human beings come to know the world in the first place is by perceiving it directly, through bodily experiences (Ingold, 2000).

In *Loving Nature: Towards an Ecology of Emotion*, Milton (2002) takes these insights a step further. By bringing to the forefront the role of emotions in understanding why people feel, think and act towards nature and natural things the way they do, she emphasizes the dual nature of emotion as consisting of both feeling and meaning. The approach thus challenges attitudes towards nature that are divided between emotion and rationality. Solutions to current environmental challenges cannot be found in a bio-centric deep ecology, nor in a cognitive-based pedagogy that denounce humans' bodily needs, deeds and meaning-making.

The combined narrative–cultural–ecological approach looks more towards interpretative understanding than generic explanation. The approach displays implications of conceptualizing young people as positioned and embodied persons, in which lived experiences ensue from immediate incorporations of place that have materiality and temporality, through joyful, playful and meaningful dwelling. Answers to questions about how to act with environmental sensitivity, and about ways in which nature experiences can contribute to the transformation of self and society that environmental sustainability calls for, must be sensitive to relational processes in which the socio-cultural, political and environmental are embodied and narrated, and thus become part of self. Sustainable education cannot just adapt to pre-described (deep ecology) standards of action and comprehension. The ethics, emotions and politics of young people's lived experiences and their viewpoints must be taken seriously. Consequently, the perspective opens up for contextual, complex and inclusive debates on environmental issues and outdoor/*friluftsliv* youth education.

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Notes

1. The Norwegian Public Access Act 1957 builds on a distinction between *innmark*, meaning cultivated areas, and *utmark* (literally: 'outfields'), meaning non-cultivated mountainous and forested land. Despite being vast and remote, *utmark* are hardly conceptualized as being 'wild'. Designation as *utmark* merely allows people to hike and roam freely even on private land, subject to minor restrictions and a general obligation to be considerate.
2. The article re-analyses, compares and theoretically reframes empirical material generated through two projects researching: (1) the Significance of Nature in Young People's Identity Formation in sub-Arctic and suburban contexts (Pedersen, 2003b), and (2) Coastal Culture,

Gender and Sustainability, in which the empirical material was generated as part of a masters thesis (Vigane, 2007) under my supervision.

3. Two stories were rejected: one was obviously a joke, and the author of the other told the researcher that it was a fiction.

Author biography

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