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PREFACE

*Is a Tree Transplanted to Another Continent the Same Tree?
Some Reflections on Friluftsliv in an International Context*

Andrew Brookes and Børge Dahle

How can and how should individuals, families, and communities experience nature in the modern world? Now, just beyond the twentieth century, with nature itself under threat from every quarter, these are perhaps the most important educational questions for this century. Their apparent simplicity tempts two quick responses. One that of course we must “get back to nature.” Two, that the end of nature was a foregone conclusion a century ago, and it is time to concentrate our efforts on the social, cultural, and environmental problems of a post modern world – all that now remains of nature are copies of copies, and perhaps that is all there ever was. There is some truth in both responses. Perhaps the most important tasks for outdoor educators is to deal with some of the resultant complexities.

It is hard to be certain what is going on each time a small party sets out to paddle a river, a family heads to a cabin in the mountains, or old friends meet at a favourite fishing spot. A return to nature perhaps, but mixed with some capillary effects of modernity, creeping into all of the nooks and crannies previously untouched by the industrial and electronic revolutions. For those who accept the responsibility of teaching or guiding in the outdoors, and for those interested in the overall shape of education, indoor and outdoor, both getting the mix right and knowing it is right are difficult. Returning to nature is not as simple as it may seem; we should not be too ready to congratulate ourselves. At the same time, we are not ready to accept that nature is finished and it is “post-modern”

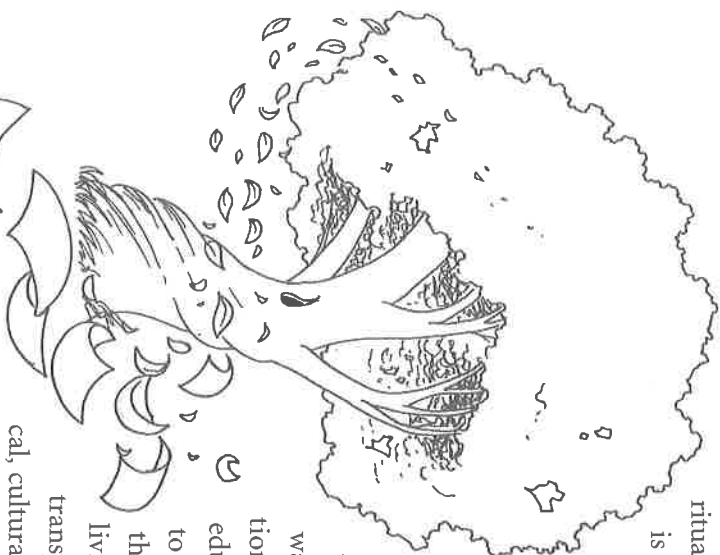
all the way down. We are in agreement here with Nils Faarlund, “it is too late to be pessimistic.” In the industrialized democracies, the ways and means by which nature is encountered and understood by individuals and communities will contribute importantly, one way or another, to the ontological assumptions on which future environmental histories will be made. We see outdoor education as shaping the accumulated experiences of communities. While the power of education (and for that matter of the nation state) may seem diminished in the face of global forces beyond the reach of either, it remains important to find what can be achieved through outdoor education, and to achieve it.

Norway has a special contribution to this discussion. The Norwegian tradition of *friluftsliv* (literally free air life), or more accurately traditions of *friluftsliv*, give some cause for optimism about the possibilities for maintaining routine involvement in the outdoors as a kind of stabilizing influence, or point of reference, within, or alongside, a modern industrialized society. The case of Norway also illustrates some of the difficulties and dilemmas, which emerge when *friluftsliv* is accommodated in a changing world. *Friluftsliv* may be, as Arne Naess has suggested, Norway’s gift to the world, and the principles of deep ecology, rooted in the Norwegian landscape, culture, and history, provide some guidance for educators trying to interpret what *friluftsliv* might have to offer outside of Norway and Scandinavia. However, *friluftsliv* cannot be simply uprooted and translated into different cultural, historical and geographical contexts. In considering outdoor education in particular contexts, educators face dilemmas in balancing tradition and change, concrete experience and textual abstraction, local perspectives and broader views. Environmental education, which is not sensitive to the particular environment in which it is developed, is potentially flawed.¹

These dilemmas arise when considering *friluftsliv* in an international context. The older Norwegian traditions (which we will call here nature-life) from which *friluftsliv* has grown are specifically local, and somewhat personal; they might be seen more as part of living family histories than expressions of national identity. The nature-life traditions of particular groups – community, friendship, or family – are associated with specific places, in this respect resembling an indigenous relationship with the

land. They resemble oral traditions, kept alive by repetition and subtle improvisation in response to the patterns and variations in nature, encountered along well-known paths. They are part of, not out of, the ordinary. Their meaning derives from the slow accumulation of stories and familiarity around certain places in the forest, particular cabins, a summerhouse, and a berry patch. They represent the unselfconscious inclusion of the nearby hills and forests in "home." In important ways they are rather personal, akin to the everyday intimacies within a family. They are grown into rather than derived from principles; they are lived and performed rather than recorded.

In order to share in traditional nature-life as an outsider, perhaps one must be invited to join a family or to form a friendship; then come the



Sunday walks, the ski trail, the small

rituals, the tree under which lunch is taken – these are simply there, part of the relationship. It may be that to fully understand one must wait a lifetime, to experience the full expression of the tradition from grandchild to grandparent. To share these traditions in a different way – through their adaptation for inclusion in formal education, or after adjustments to allow for urbanization and the complications of modern living, or after attempting to

transport them across geographical, cultural, and political boundaries – inevitably entails changes. There may be

good reasons for considering such adaptations. Nature-life traditions seem to have provided some Norwegians with a sense

of local and national identity linked to an environmentally helpful conservatism (while avoiding the militaristic nationalism for which the twentieth century will be remembered).

However, the environmental history of Australia provides numerous cautionary tales, if any are needed, about the dangers of pressing on, with the best of intentions, in transplanting culture and beliefs into different landscapes. What seems right in Norway may not be right for Canada or Australia. We see an international discussion on "friluftsliv" as means to direct attention towards differences in the forms (which outdoor activities take), to location-related differences (geographical, cultural, and historical) and to the significance of these differences.

It is in the nature of abstraction, and *friluftsliv* is no exception, that when a tradition, or constellation of local traditions, is compressed into a single word – *friluftsliv* – later to be unpacked in a new context (a school, a glossy magazine, over the border in Sweden, in North America ...) we find a new concrete expression of *friluftsliv*, which may differ so much from the prototype as to be, in some respects, its opposite. It is appropriate that *friluftsliv* be adapted to the circumstances in which it is being made concrete. However, such changes have implications for the validity of the connections we might wish to make between *friluftsliv* and deep ecology, and for the educational qualities we might suppose are associated with *friluftsliv*. Here the educational dilemmas are not only between tradition and change, concrete experience and textual abstraction, local perspectives and broader views, but also form around these questions: which tradition, what form of experience, which locality and whose view of that locality should shape our practice? The cautionary tales that emerge from Australia are not just about the environmental consequences of transplanting species and practices, but of "transplanted" intentions and beliefs.²

Within Norway, *friluftsliv* is multiple. We refer here not to the uniqueness of each local expression of traditional *friluftsliv*, or nature-life, but to manifold, somewhat contradictory forms of *friluftsliv*. Perhaps 30 per cent of the Norwegian population continue with some form of the "everyday" nature-life tradition. This should not be interpreted in a fundamentalist way; members of that 30 per cent may also experience a

world of satellite television, motor vehicles and ski resorts. They drink coffee, which contains, as has often been pointed out, the whole history of western imperialism. We could say, however, that the collective consciousness, or constellation of worldviews, in Norway still contains nature as understood through the nature-life tradition. For others, *friluftsliv* is understood differently. It may be learned through formal instruction. It may consist of discrete single episodes, rather than an ongoing repetitions and variations. It may be more consumerist. It may be organized around the themes of adventure, challenge, and exploration – leaving home – rather than familiarity and coming home, as Sigmund Kvaløy-Sætereng puts it, “inside nature.”

Friluftsliv has been associated in the last decades of the 20th century with some towering figures in modern exploration, particularly Fridtjof Nansen. It is possible to see Nansen as a hero who exemplifies national characteristics, in the same way that Norwegians, as a skiing nation, might see their Olympic skiing team as truly representative of the nation. No doubt life in Norway provided an excellent preparation for polar exploration; but the fact remains Nansen is famous not for his mundane participation in Norwegian life, but because of his exceptional achievements. Perhaps he was moulded by the everyday, but his fame comes from breaking the mould. What is striking about contemporary forms of *friluftsliv* in Norway (apart from the 30 per cent already mentioned) is the resonance not with the ordinary Norwegian life, which shaped Nansen, but with his more exceptional exploits. The distinction is important. Quite different, perhaps opposite, understandings of nature are embedded in nature life as mundane, familiar, and local, compared to *friluftsliv* as exciting, risk-entailing, and exploratory.

There are a number of evident social explanations for this emphasis on the exceptional over the mundane (and perhaps too there are cultural explanations for it going largely unnoticed). Adventure is news; indeed, turn of the century polar exploration (1900) was deeply implicated in laying the foundations for sensationalist journalism (not a pejorative term then).³ A middle-class, urban *friluftsliv* revival in Norway reflected a literate, abstract view of nature. The adoption of *friluftsliv* by educational institutions also helped *friluftsliv* to become something shaped by

literature, while the unwritten rural traditions of *friluftsliv* have remained largely undocumented.

Friluftsliv in educational institutions, and the *friluftsliv* associated with backpacking tourism has mainly involved people in their late teens and twenties. Research into how traditional nature-life has been maintained and reproduced suggests this is the group least important to the tradition, or put another way, this is the stage of life where individuals are most likely to abandon the tradition (perhaps temporarily until they start families of their own).⁴ One way or another, *friluftsliv* must move to accommodate the realities of urban life, competing interests and so on. But educators must pay attention to the educational implications of changes in *friluftsliv* driven by consumerism, marketing, convenience or necessity. It is possible that the supposed educational benefits of *friluftsliv* may be reversed or negated when *friluftsliv* is treated as a kind of product or brand.

These dilemmas intensify when the study of *friluftsliv* is taken across national borders (perhaps referred to as outdoor education or adventure education). Differences in culture, history and social arrangements must be considered, and especially the landscape. The particularities of landscape are often neglected in outdoor education discourse. We do not mean to imply that the consumable qualities of the settings for outdoor education have been neglected. On the contrary, scenic value, suitability for skiing, camping, rock climbing and so on have had a high priority in outdoor activity-based education. But what educational aims and practices should apply for populations in urban or highly developed rural landscapes? Must outdoor education involve travel to somewhere more suitable? How might familiarity be developed – should Danes, for example, adopt particular places in Norway? What of landscapes that do not share the particular qualities, which have so suited the Norwegian landscape to *friluftsliv*? (The Norwegian landscape seems to represent an archetype of western visions of nature.) We will not attempt to answer these questions here, but make two points. First, we should pay careful heed to how local outdoor education, outdoor recreation, or *friluftsliv* respond (or fail to respond) to the local landscape, and how these practices sort and select landscapes for attention or neglect. Secondly, we

should consider carefully how educational imperatives and the principles of deep ecology might lead us to forms of "friluftsliv" outside of Norway, which, by responding appropriately to the local landscape, take quite different forms from those which have hitherto characterized outdoor education and some contemporary friluftsliv.