

Titel of research proposal

A comparative cultural analysis of two national outdoor practices. The British and Norwegian Approach.

Introduction

Outdoor recreation activities are physical ways of interacting with nature that have become increasingly important as leisure activities in the industrialized countries throughout this century. The activities are social practices themselves, and will necessarily reflect disparate cultural patterns which confer different meanings upon them. Indeed the same activity may have different meanings in different cultural contexts, that is, it may be interpreted differently by different people, under the influence of particular frames of meaning.

National identity is a form of imaginative identification with the symbols and discourses of the nation-state. Thus nations are not simply political formations but systems of cultural representation through which national identity is continually reproduced as discursive action. Systems of cultural representation and group identity are to be found in the British and Norwegian Outdoor Traditions with its own specific features.

Comparative research¹ on the nature of British and Norwegian Outdoor practices has been widely limited to literative research with a socio-cultural approach. Qualitative interview research has been conducted by Atle Telnes² (1980?), where he compared British and Norwegian Outdoor education students.

This study is adressed to compare the social practices between two national traditions to be found in the character-training schemes of the British *Outward Bound* Movement and the norwegian *Folkhighschool*-movement, represented through its subject: *outdoor nature life* (Friluftsliv). Both movements are thought to be a cultural expression for their respective Outdoor-traditions. The study allows to give an indepth view of the phenomen of Outdoor Education with its respective national characteristics.

The British approach to Outdoor education

In Great Britain outdoor activities form part of the British National Curriculum for physical education. The working group for the British National Curriculum wrote:

*”Outdoor education is not a subject but an approach to education which is concerned with the overall development of young people. It is an organized approach to learning in which direct experience is of paramount importance. We are pleased that the Secretary of State accepted the potential value of outdoor education in recognizing the value contribution it can make to the personal and social development of pupils.”*³

¹Thordsson, Bjørn, Perspektiv på Friluftslivets pedagogik (1993)

²Telnes, Atle, *Forskjeller i arbeidsmåter mellom norsk og britisk friluftsliv. Mål og midler*. Telemark distrikthøyskole (upublisert artikkel), Telnes interviewed 178 british and 44 norwegian students on their perception to their respective outdoor practices.

³National Curriculum Physical Education Working Group, cited in Hopkins (1993)

There is general agreement that modern man needs physical challenge and adventure. Outdoor adventure activities are widely recognized and accepted as contributing to the social, moral and physical development of people.⁴

Referring to the University of Edinburgh course descriptions, British outdoor education is based on three main learning objectives, that is to foster:

- personal development
- environmental education
- adventure activities

However, using the learning potential for the Outdoors for issues in personal development appears to have the strongest emphasis. Nature being instrumentalized as an “arena” is prominent within this tradition.

British character - training schemes

The courses using outdoor activities aiming to influence young people are either residential or wilderness based. Trainees live in unfamiliar surroundings amidst companions from diverse walks of life. Normally they last between 1 to four weeks, and cater for young people from a diverse social backgrounds. Activities comprise mainly adventurous outdoor pursuits such as rock-climbing, fell walking, pot-holing, sailing, rope-courses etc. Some of the activities are prestructured such as rope-courses, others are left to the open dramaturgy of the encounter with the wilderness. Lectures, reviewing sessions, discussions and artistic work aiming to enhance the transfer of the learning process in the outdoors are prominent as well.

Most distinctively, the courses are intended to make an impact upon the characters of trainees. The aim is not simply to provide young people with unorthodox holidays, nor permanently to interest participants in the activities around which courses are based, for it is envisaged that as a result of a short residential course an impact will be made upon trainees characters that will influence their conduct in later life.

Moreover, the purpose of these character-training schemes, is to inspire individuals to fulfill their potential within themselves and in the interaction with others through challenging outdoor experiences. The courses are based upon a belief that the individuality of each person is grounded in a unique combination of personal capabilities, insights and values which may be developed and clarified through powerful experiences and challenging practical tasks.

This is supported by pedagogical processes using *facilitation techniques*. The central purpose of facilitation is to:

- enhance the quality of the learning experience
- to assist participants in finding directions and sources for functional change

In the debriefing part of facilitation clients are encouraged to discover and share their own metaphoric connections as a way to make the experiential programming more meaningful and relevant in their daily life or worksituation.

⁴ Hunt, J.S.Jr., *Ethical Issues in Experiential education*, Kendal /Hunt 1990

Character-training schemes are intended to be a catalyst; to encourage change and to help each participant more fully to achieve self-knowledge and understanding of others. It embraces both personal development and preparation for life in society. Courses help participants recognize the potential of working cooperatively with others in small groups or teams. Moreover, it addresses the educational development of the total human being by conducting courses of a controlled physically and mentally demanding nature.

The reason why the outdoors is used as a learning medium for personal and team development is seemingly due to its powerful nature:⁵

- the outdoors is an alien experience
- The outdoors is an equalizer
- Real consequences can be used as learning points
- Fears and challenges can be approached in a supportive environment
- everyday concerns are left behind
- Emotions are heightened
- Communication is enhanced
- The very nature of the outdoors and outdoor activities means that powerful and highly memorable moments are experienced
- The outdoors is practical

Many course organisers have reservation about the phrase “character-training”, in that it may awaken memories resembling schemes being used for the creation of “Hitler-youth” in the 1930ies. Instead a different term: “*Outward bound*”⁶ has become sufficiently well known for its own title to be self-explanatory and other schemes are often regarded by the general public as being of the “Outward Bound” - type. But other course organisers obviously cannot accept the use of a rival scheme’s name to describe their own ventures. Therefore throughout the British movement there is a perpetual search for appropriate but inoffensive phrases such as “self-discovery”, “education through adventure” or “outdoor-development-training”. As Basil Fletcher⁷, states in his assessment of the Outward Bound schools, “Nowadays it is rather outdated to talk of *character-training*.” However, as character-development or training is essentially what the schemes are all about, this is the name that will be used throughout the text.

It is no simple task to describe the types of character that schemes aim to cultivate, for “character-training” means many things to different people. As mentioned above, organisers often harbour reservations about this particular expression, but the alternatives such as personality extension, attitude-training, selfdiscovery and education through adventure, are equally concealing.

Organisers have much more precise ideas about how they hope to influence trainees, ideas which cannot fairly be reduced to catch-phrases. Roberts, White, Parker⁸ (1974) identify the

⁵ Barnes, P., *Theory into practice*, University of Strathclyde, 1997

⁶ In the old days when a ship was leaving the harbour, it was hoisting a flag prior to departure meaning the ship is outward bound. Dr.Kurt Hahn, founder of Outward Bound, used this as a metafor describing the unexpected aspects of young people about to embark on their journey through life.

⁷ Basil Fletcher (1970) investigation, is based upon questionnaires addressed to 3000 individuals who had previously been on Outward Bound courses

⁸ Roberts, Kenneth; White, Graham; Parker, Howard: *The character-training industry, Adventure-Training schemes in Britain* (1974) David & Charles Newton Abbot

following main objectives towards which character-training schemes are oriented as following:

- to gain in self-confidence
- maturity
- ability to mix well
- to facilitate the personal development of individual trainees,
- to inspire a commitment to community service⁹,
- to influence trainees in ways which will enhance social harmony.

Two further objectives, recognised by some course organisers, but to which the movement as a whole is less firmly committed are:

- the development of leadership qualities,
- and influencing trainees towards profitable uses of leisure.

Within the Outward Bound movement and other institutions outdoor experiences have been adjusted to a variety of courses such as: Graduate Development courses, the manager development arena as well as for social clients.

“Outdoor adventure programming has been used with every client group imaginable. Some of the more common ones have included: drug or alcohol dependents, eating disordered individuals, homosexuals, divorced couples, troubled families, delinquent youth, ethnic minorities, incoming university students, competitive sport teams, coaches and their elite athletes, accident response units, fire fighters, police partners, chronically unemployed folks, preretirement senior citizens, survivors of abuse or incest, released prison inmates, physically disabled, psychiatric patients, post operative surgery recoverers, military or armed forces and corporate executives.”¹⁰

The philosophy behind the British character-training schemes using the outdoors can widely be regarded as “a deep-city-based philosophy of life¹¹”, where learning-experiences gained in the wilderness are sought to be transferred to participants daily (mainly urban) routines.

The Outward Bound tradition

A main provider in Great Britain for character-training schemes using the outdoors¹² is OUTWARD BOUND¹³, which was founded by the German pedagog, Dr. Kurt Hahn, in Scotland in 1941. His vision was to provide an antidote to the psychological and social maladies of adolescence. Although, originally, Hahn founded Outward Bound as a means for training young merchant seamen who faced the demands of hazardous maritime service during the second World War.

⁹Outward Bound bevægelsen opererer med deres mission statement: To strive, to serve and not to yield

¹⁰Priest, S., *Outdoor Adventure Programming*, in: Outdoor Activities, Seminar Prague 1994, edition Erlebnispädagogik, Lüneburg, 1996

¹¹Bowles, S., *Guide to issues and trends in adventure education today*. Adventure College, Tornio, Finland 1995, S.17.

¹²Friluftslivaktiviteter i form af prestrukturerede øvelser

¹³www.outwardbound.uk

Today, Outward Bound is one of the most important of all adventure brand names within the character-training-movement and is worldwide represented with centres in more than 30 countries.

“It is the organization that fiercely guards the right of young people to have access to safe adventure experiences through which they realize their potential. The mountains and the sea have provided the classroom for a million young people who have benefited from Outward Bound since 1941, and while teamwork and physical endeavour have had periods in which they have been unfashionable over the last 60 years, the tide has now turned in their favour. Throughout that time Outward Bound has maintained a belief that outdoor adventures make a significant contribution to the development of young people. Now the nation has recognized again that skills and attributes such as leadership, and teamwork are critical if young people are to be equipped for the challenges they face whilst at school, and as they enter the world of work. In the current environment of sliding values, Outward Bound sees its niche and proclaims to be more important than ever. It claims to “trigger the right values and standards in young people and has a huge influence on their character and indeed, their courage.”¹⁴

The Norwegian approach to outdoor education

The Norwegian deep ecology tradition, headed by the philosophical heritage of Arne Næss and Nils Fårlund characterized by the slogan: *“Det rike liv med enkle midler”* created a national mythology on the spartanic contemplative Outdoor Nature life. Above all the cultural context of egalitarian scandinavian collective human relations, commonly known as the law of Jante (Janteloven) rejected the anglo-american dominated traditions and pedagogy focussing on individual competences such as inter- and intrapersonal relationships.

In contrast, following Nils Fårlund, the *deep-ecology* influenced nordic traditions of “Friluftsliv” seeks to reintroduce its participants with an indepth encounter of *“mother nature.”* Environmental education is of paramount importance epitomized through the slogan:

“Naturen er kulturens Hjem”

However, looking at the Norwegian approach in terms of the use of the outdoors, it becomes obvious that already from the early influence of Fridtjof Nansen in the beginning of the 20th century - the main figure in the nordic outdoor movement - personal development played a part in the norwegian tradition. But it was regarded as an autotelic approach to outdoor nature life, rather than an instrument for personal development.

Curiously, it had traces of how an ideal character should be like, incidentally in a very masculine manner.

“Se, i ødemarkene, i skogsensomheten, med syn av de store vidder og fjernt fra den forvirrende larm, er det personligheterne formes.”¹⁵

”I naturens og idrettens skole vaketes hans natursans og opdagerglede – lengselen efter å dra ut og finne det som skjultes bakom fjellene – og i herdningen der blev han en mann.”¹⁶

¹⁴from *our philosophy* at www.outwardbound.uk

¹⁵ Nansen, Fridtjof; “Friluftsliv”. Nansens Røst bind 2. Dybwad forlag 1943.(3)

¹⁶ Løvland, Helge *Friluftslivets betydning for våre idrettsfolk* Friluftsliv, Blix forlag Oslo 1939, p.395

Bjørn Tordsson¹⁷ (2002) emphasizes the masculine fashion of this early specific Norwegian “character”-ideal:

“Friluftslivmennesket er en man. Det er – sett fra tidens egen horisont – mannlige dyder som friluftslivet påstås å fremelske – å stole på seg selv, å være fysisk sunn og aktiv, å overvinne indre og ytre motstand, å være saklig og målrettet, å legge landet under seg.”

This can also be referred to as being the “Nansen-effect”, wherein wilderness invites to experience and develop male physical fitness and endurance as Tove Nedrelid¹⁸ puts it.

“Denne barskheten er sagnomspunnet, heltemodig, sterk og ensom og har på mange måter et macho-mann preg over seg. En av informantene mine, en mann i syttiårene, fortalte om sin barndom: Vi hørte om Nansen og Amundsen, og gikk etter fattig evne i deres spor.” Han har sterke minner fra fotturer i romjulen, da han i dagevis ikke så andre enn de to fetterne som var med. En jul hadde de lest ”Pelsjegerliv” av Helge Ingstad og Ajungilak av Høygård og Mehren, de laget pemmikan etter oppskrift i bøkene og dro på telttur.”

It is obvious that Nansen and Amundsen played vital rolemodels and had a decisive influence on the socialisation not only on young norwegian men and not only in their active time but far beyond their death.

Even though Nansen emphasized the potential of outdoor education for personal development, he omitted pedagogical concepts such as known from Dr. Kurt Hahn, which were successively refined through the charactertraining movement in Britain and the United States.

Norwegian character-training schemes

It can also be stated, that the Scandinavian approach to courses with personal development and their contents is not documented at all. Tordsson¹⁹ (2002), requests in his dissertation a solid analysis on how norwegian “Friluftsliv” should be facilitated in order to be utilized for personal development/character-training schemes.

„Vi har sett hvordan friluftsliv i lang tid er tatt i bruk som pedagogisk instrument for personlig og sosial utvikling- ikke bare i speiderbevegelsen og andre former for ungdomsarbeid, men også i en rik flora av kurs og programmer for utvikling av lederskab, team-bygging i arbeidslivet, barne- og ungdomsvern etc.[...]Det er derfor merkelig at denne virksomheten i så liten grad bygger på og har resultert i samlende hypoteser om på hvilke måter friluftsliv gir spesielle forutsætninger for sosialt fellesskab og personlig utvikling. Slike trengs, hvis en på faglig solid grunn skal kunne svare på spørsmålet hvordan friluftsliv skal drives, hvis det skal utvikle hvilke aspekter af sosial utvikling og kompetense.“

¹⁷ Tordsson, Bjørn: Å svare på naturens åpne tiltale, En undersøkelse av meningsdimensjoner i norsk friluftsliv på 1900-tallet og en drøftelse av friluftsliv som sosiokulturelt fenomen, Dr Scient avhandling, HIT

¹⁸ Nedrelid, Tove “Friluftslivet og vår nasjonale selvforståelse” NNT 3/1992. (8).

¹⁹ Tordsson, B., *Friluftsliv – begrepsavgrensning, forskningsbilde og paradigmer*. Dr.scient-afhandling levert Norges Idrettshøgskole 2002, S. 415.

Bischoff²⁰ (1996) emphasizes in her thesis on personal development and youth the fact that scarcely any material such as mission statements or written programme-description exist, which could give a clear insight on what kind of theories scandinavian outdoor trainings are founded upon.

„Min oprindelige tanke var at gennemgå og analysere projektbeskrivelser fra forskellige nordiske projekter. Jeg havde en ide om at gennem dokumentation af projekterne kunne jeg læse mig frem til hvilken teori man støttede sig til, hvilke arbejdsmetoder man brugte, hvordan programmet blev bygget op. For så videre derigennem at kunne læse mig frem til hvilke kompetenceområder man mente at kunne udvikle gennem friluftsliv.....Tanke var der, men det har vist sig vanskeligt at gennemføre fordi - der findes ingen norske eller danske projektbeskrivelser! Det der findes er amerikansk litteratur, diverse artikler og en „masse snak.“ [...] Samlet set peger de forskellige projekter på, at flere har arbejdet praktisk med tankerne om at friluftsliv kan give personlig udvikling, men den manglende dokumentation gør det vanskeligt at bygge noget videre på dette.“

In spite of a differing Norwegian mythological context, emphasizing cultural barriers, a recent internet-research²¹ showed, that in the year of 2003, 1800 norwegian institutions used teambuilding and personal development - courses to a large extend with the use of the outdoors. This is seemingly due to a change within Norwegian society influenced by globalisation, the need to compete with world society (global player) and the emphasis on chore values such as individuality.

Contemporary norwegian Outdoor Nature life

Nevertheless social competences, selfdiscovery, attitudetraining are to be found within the norwegian society displayed f.ex. through the Norwegian Folkhighschool - movement with about 90 boardingschools and more than 40 “*Friluftslivlinjer*”. These schools similar to the Outward Bound philosophy are using teaching principles such as *Learning-by-doing*, *dialogue-based* and *experiential learning*.

The subject *Nature Outdoor life (Friluftsliv)* utilizes the potential of learning in and about the outdoors within its curriculum. But scarcely no systematic usage of facilitation techniques to foster personal development is reported

The typical range of age is between 18 to 25 years. Each school has its own profile, but in general, the Norwegian folk high schools teach classes covering a variety of interest areas, including arts, crafts, music, sports, philosophy, theatre, media, photography, outdoor activities etc. .

*“In English, the name “folk high school” often gives a misleading impression. “Residential adult college”, “residential enrichment academy”, “experiential academy” or even “folk school” would be more apt modern descriptions. The folk high schools build on a holistic view of the students and challenge them **to grow individually, socially and academically**. Learning-by-doing is the basic educational philosophy of the schools. Their core methods are dialogue-based and experiential. The schools strive for challenging classes and courses, but the educational challenges are embedded in the personal and social growth, too. This **focus***

²⁰ Bischoff, A., *Friluftsliv – ungdom og personlig udvikling*, Hovedopgave, Høgskole i Telemark, 1996, S.49.

²¹ [www.yahoo.no /search](http://www.yahoo.no/search) words: Teambuilding/Natur

on the whole person is the strength and unique character of the folk high schools, where the point is to motivate, teach, inspire and foster commitment in you, the student. The schools give you the freedom to learn in your own way.”

The Folkhighschool mission statement displays similar issues on personal development where the pupil is allowed to mature in directions dictated by his own initial disposition. Pupils are expected to leave Folkhigh school experiences with greater self-knowledge and therefore increased self-confidence and they are expected to make more effective contributions to, and derive greater satisfaction from life, at both work and play. Here, the nature of the approach to foster personal development is rather accidental (“*Det ordner seg sjølv*”) and the subject Outdoor Nature life gets incorporated with the other subjects and activities in order to foster holistic “personal development”.

Description of research design

In contrast to former research on this field rather concentrating on literative research this approach aims to receive qualitative data from operational courses. The method being used will be the approach of the *qualitative interview* to provide “a deeper understanding of this specific social phenomen, where inner experiences, language, cultural meanings and form of social interaction will be mapped.”²²

Respondents will be trainees (elever) and instructors (Friluftslivlærer) which represent two environments: *Outward Bound/Loch Eil Scotland* and an *Outdoor Natur life-class* selected from a Norwegian Folkhighschool.

Both qualitative interviews research will closely follow up the same medium: a one week coastal Seakajaktour. Both outdoor-traditions are expected to be well represented in the chosen samples.

By operationalizing standard categories such as: relation to nature (forhold til natur), safety (sikkerhet) navigation (Vejvalg), learning objectives (læringsmål) etc. (*further categories have yet to be developed*) underlying assumptions to the respective outdoor practices will be compared and analyzed in depth. Participants/Instructors experiences and perceptions will be viewed with a phenomenological approach.

Qualitative Interview research will be the methodological approach.

In a second step, the data is to be related to classical literature in order to seek cultural-sociological causal relations to the findings.

time table

- review of literature (classical literature of British/Norwegian Outdoor Education Literature, literature on cultural analysis (December 2003-June 2004)
- development of theory
- development of research strategy: Qualitative Research /Qualitative Interview /develop open ended questions/Interviewguide to samples

²² Silvermann, David, *Doing Qualitative Research, A practical Handbook*, 2000, Sage Publications, London, S. 89

- Data acquisition field work with respective samples (August 2004)
- Transcription of interviews (September 2004)
- Beginning data Analysis (October 2004)
- final report and publishing of results (February 2005-June 2005)

One vital milestone is the acquisition of data. This includes field studies at Outward Bound Loch Eil, Scotland and a selected Norwegian Folkhigschool.

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