

Outdoor recreation in times of change

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Introduction

Background

During recent years a distinctive process of change is occurring within the sphere of many outdoor recreation and adventure based activities. A *sportification* process along with a *detachment from the landscape*, two very topical and interconnected trends in society, is emerging within activities previously oriented towards more nature based leisure. A transformation of direction, focus and place is occurring. “Sportification” means that instrumental elements of competitive sport have gained ground in traditional outdoor activities that can otherwise be characterised as strongly experienced-based without explicit competitive features. The detachment of outdoor activities from the landscape concerns the increased tendency for activities in which encounters with the natural environment have been both central and desirable to be pursued in specially constructed and specialised environments. For example, we detach ourselves from climate zones and seasonal variations by pursuing “outdoor sports” in controlled indoor climates, e.g. the indoorisation of lifestyle sports (van Bottenburg & Salome 2010). Accordingly, aspects of outdoor culture are increasingly directed towards special types of exercise. A change of the activities’ content and attraction to more socially adapted and tailored activity patterns takes place.

What do different groups do, where do they do it, what kind of aids are used and what are the expressed motives? Tangible activities formed our starting point of research and the theoretical reference frames used are explained as follow.

Theoretical frames of reference

In the analysis of *the activities’ relation to space/the landscape* Klas Sandell’s eco-strategic conceptual frame was used; a) is it a specific landscape or is it a specific activity/value that is the point of departure? and b) is human influence on the landscape recognised or not? (Sandell 2006). With regard to *what different groups choose for activities etc.* Pierre Bourdieu’s discussion of habitus was used to analyse and discuss how individuals’ embodiment of experiences are expressed in different tastes and lifestyles (Bourdieu 1984, 1990). Bourdieu’s theoretical concept has proved to be a powerful analysis tool in studies of outdoor recreation (Arnegård, 2006; Backman, 2008).

In terms of the wider societal context – what one experiences that one is able to choose from – the discussions about modernisation was used in line with social revolutionary processes in the shape of individualisation, globalisation, mediafication and commercialisation that have been emphasised as significant for our age (Giddens 1991; Featherstone 1994).

Methods

Interviews, questionnaires, observations and text analyzes are actual data collecting methods used in the various studies that are presented in this paper. Therefore new data, secondary data and compiling earlier research has been the focal point of gaining new knowledge in connection to our research questions.

Results

Activities such as kayaking, climbing, off-piste skiing, hang gliding, tour skating, mountain biking, multisport, adventure racing, surf ski, base jumping and kite surfing were considered. Struggles and battles as well as how one perceives the activities ought to be pursued, and the ethical and meaningful values that are relevant in a time of change and sportification were focused. Possible similarities and differences between practitioners of these different categories of outdoor recreation activities regarding the significance of personal and other factors for the choice of activity and what one understands as the meaningful content of the practice were also highlighted.

Discussion

These trends in outdoor recreation have consequences for leadership and learning as well as on recreational activity more general, physical exercise, public health and social planning. In other words, it is about connections to globalisation, individualisation, mediafication, commercialisation, technicalisation, sportification and changed nature and landscape perspectives. Practitioners in the field need to know what these new expressions of outdoor recreation mean.

There are also possible links with other parallel social phenomena like e.g. the mobility of communication systems (smart phones, GPS etc.) with a continuously extended electronically remote landscape in archipelagos and cities alike. An example of the profound potential of these exciting borderlands is that in the relatively recent journal *Transition*, the traditionally sharp dividing line between town and country with regard to the experience landscape seems to have been dissolved, in this case on the basis of the boarding culture’s interest in handrails in the town centre and off-piste skiing in the mountains (cf. Bäckström 2005). An important “renegotiation” is taking place on large parts of outdoor recreation activities’ basic rationale – which in our view is very important and exciting to follow and try to understand.

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