

# An educational tool for outdoor education and environmental concern

Johan Öhman, Örebro University, Sweden, johan.ohman@oru.se;  
Klas Sandell, Karlstad University, Sweden

Although there are many indications that nature encounters can play a significant role in people's concern for the environment, an oversimplified belief in a general causal relationships are problematic. In this abstract we present an educational tool that respects the need to critically discuss the general relationship between experiences of nature, environmentally-friendly attitudes and behavioural change, but that at the same time respects the legitimate claims on the part of outdoor education practice for concretisation and clarity. The foundation of this model consists of a combination of theoretical perspectives and models that have been generated through a number of Swedish interdisciplinary research projects during the last decade. The presentation is based upon the article Sandell and Öhman (2012) where further references and discussions will be found.

## Environmental concern

“Environmental concern” can be said to consist of elements of all the various main themes of environmental engagement during the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Sandell et al., 2005) mainly: (i) *Nature protection* where certain areas (national parks, “wilderness”), places and objects (natural monuments, landmarks, preserved species) in the landscape are protected; (ii) *Nature conservation* seeing people as collaborating in the formation of the landscape with an increased interest in which landscape values are worth preserving and an awareness of that these values often are culture-related; (iii) The need for *environmental control* as nature and environmental issues not could be isolated to certain places, areas and species; and (iv) *Sustainable development* that includes both a globalised version of dealing with the symptoms as in environmental control and the demands of critical alternative thinkers for fundamental reconsiderations.

## Outdoor education

Different aspects of outdoor education are presented with the aid of two specific models: (i) principally diverse ways of motivating this education; and (ii) different approaches to the landscape when executing outdoor education.

The first way of motivating outdoor education focuses on the *instrumental values* of outdoor experience, i.e. that such experience consists of a suitable mean for different purposes, such as physical and mental health, group solidarity and a feeling for nature. In this case the valuable outcomes of outdoor experiences are separated in both time and space from the outdoor activities. The second way focuses on the *intrinsic values* of outdoor experiences, for example an affiliation with nature and a sense of humility towards the various non-human forces that can be experienced outdoors. Here the values are inseparably bound up with the outdoor experiences in themselves and cannot straightforwardly be found in the milieus and lifestyles of urbanised

modern society.

With regard to landscape relations we use Sandell's conceptual framework of ecostrategies (see e.g. Sandell, 1988, 2006, 2007) and identify three approaches to the landscape summarised as: (i) *active domination* where the landscape is regarded as a “factory” that should be adapted to the activity by means of different settings and requirements (ski facilities, adventure parks, climbing-walls) in order to produce the prerequisites the pedagogue is looking for; (ii) *active adaptation* where the activity is subordinate to the landscape (in terms of topography, time of year and weather) at the same time as one readily utilises and changes the landscape (hunting, fishing, log fires etc); and (iii) *passive adaptation* where one passively relates to the landscape and contemplates, studies and copes with the landscape and its accompanying topography, season, weather and animals (for example bird-watching).

## An educational tool

By relating the different aspects of outdoor education to the different themes of environmental concern a model that describes five main interconnected educational paths is suggested (Fig. 1).

*Path 1* is about how “outdoor pedagogic bridges” use outdoor contexts for deepening environmental engagement in the direction of sustainability. This path takes its point of departure in the “instrumental values of outdoor experiences” and is about using different outdoor contexts as a basis for discussions, experiences and illustrations of issues relating to people's relations with nature and the environment.

With regard to the utilisation of the landscape, the outdoor approach of “passive adaptation” can be an important source of inspiration in terms of wanting to protect animal species, plants or places from human impact in accordance with an environmental protection perspective (*path 2*). This is a basic mechanism in line with: “I like *this* place and I do not want it to be destroyed”.

The “active adaptation” approach can be an important source of inspiration for a nature conservancy perspective (*path 3*). The basic mechanism here could be described as: “I want to continue this hunting, fishing, berry picking, and these landscape values in this place must be preserved”.

Outdoor education motives in line with the “intrinsic values of outdoor experiences” have traditionally served as an important source of inspiration with regard to a more radical environmental engagement that includes issues of power and social planning (*path 4*). “Environmental politics” and “development issues” are however indicated in the diagram as main sources of inspiration for the perspectives of environmental control and sustainability, although we believe that a direct personal encounter with nature could be regarded as an important extra and complementary

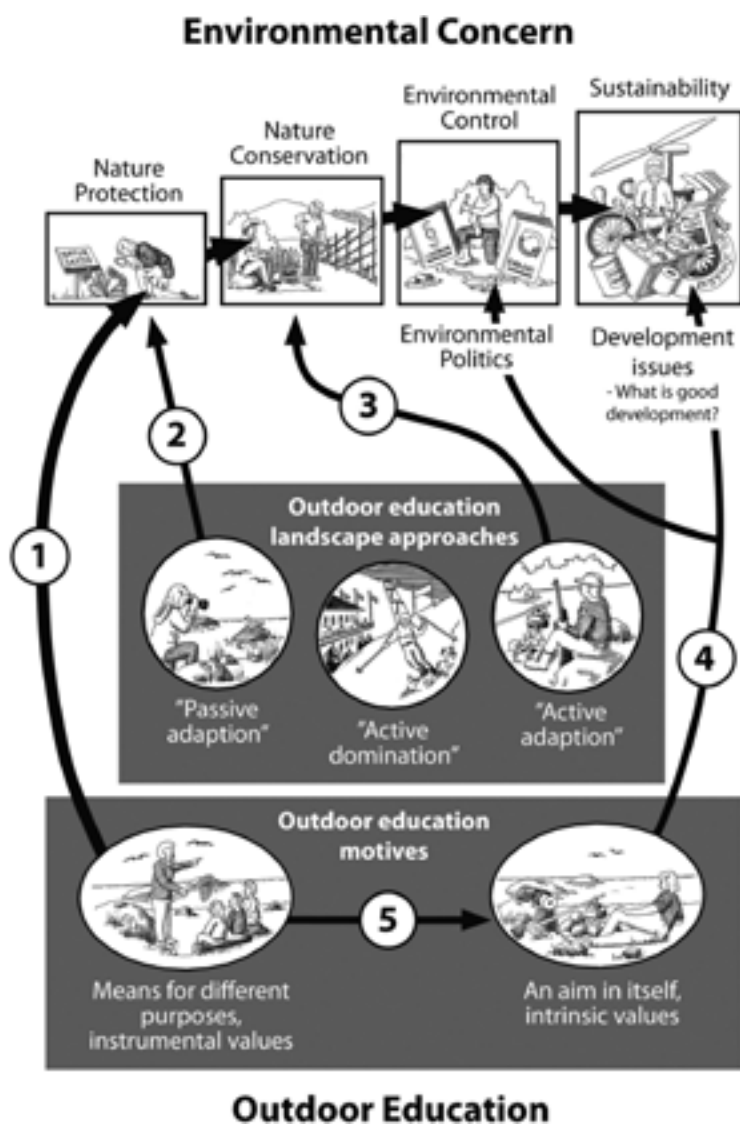


Figure 1. A model for outdoor education and environmental concern including the subtleties of “environmental concern”, “landscape approaches” and “motives” as well as five main environmental educational paths (Sandell & Öhman, 2012; drawing by Matz Glantz).

path. This is due to the fact that “intrinsic values of outdoor experiences” often indicate values that contrast with the conventional view of development in terms of material consumption, and therefore raise basic questions about the sustainability of “a desirable development” (see Sandell & Öhman, 2010).

Outdoor experience as “a means” can also give rise to the perspective of outdoor experience as “an aim in itself”

(*path 5*). As an outdoor pedagogue this is very much about capturing the moment; where the intrinsic value of contact with nature is given a place in outdoor activities even though it is in general motivated by different specific purposes (team-building, science, environment, self-reliance). It is also about nurturing more extensive and comprehensive environmental perspectives.

- Sandell, K. (1988). *Ecostrategies in Theory and Practice: Farmers' Perspectives on Water, Nutrients and Sustainability in Low-resource Agriculture in the Dry Zone of Sri Lanka*. Linköping: Linköping Studies in Arts and Science, 19.
- Sandell, K. (2006). *Access under stress: the right of public access tradition in Sweden*. In N. McIntyre, D. R. Williams, & K. E. McHugh (Eds.), *Multiple Dwelling and Tourism: Negotiating Place, Home and Identity* (pp. 278–294). Wallingford and New York: CABI Publishing.
- Sandell, K. (2007). *Access, tourism and democracy: a conceptual framework and non-establishment of a proposed national park in Sweden*. D. Müller, & B. Jansson, (Eds.), *Tourism in Peripher-*

- ies: Perspectives from the Far North and South* (pp.141–153). Wallingford: CABI.
- Sandell, K. & Öhman, J. (2010). *Educational potentials of encounters with nature – reflections from a Swedish outdoor perspective*. *Environmental Education Research*, 16(1), 95–114.
- Sandell, K., Öhman, J., & Östman, L. (2005). *Education for Sustainable Development: Nature, School and Democracy*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Sandell, K. & Öhman, J. (2012). *An Educational Tool for Outdoor Education and Environmental Concern*. *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, DOI:10.1080/14729679.2012.675146.