

Urban, proximate nature - how is it important in a Norwegian and multi-cultural context?

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Introduction

Norway is a country known for its abundant green space, low population density, and long traditions for outdoor recreation. Hiking, cross-country skiing, fishing, and hunting - often far away from civilization - are still typical outdoor activities for many Norwegians, which have given rise to a purist notion of *outdoor life*, or *friluftsliv*. However, there has been some debate of whether this definition is too narrow and restrictive. Under this relatively narrow definition, participation in outdoor recreation is uneven among socioeconomic and demographic groups. For example, people with low levels of income and education have a much lower participation rate (SSB, 2017). While women's participation rates have increased considerably, except for fishing and hunting, young citizens as well as inhabitants with a non-western immigrant background engage relatively rarely with hiking or skiing in forested areas and mountains (Vaage 2015). One question arising from this development is whether policies should aim to integrate immigrants into practices defined by the hegemonic notion of *friluftsliv*/outdoor life, or whether policies should include a much wider array of outdoor recreation in the definition of *friluftsliv*. In other words, should policies stick to the restricted definition of *friluftsliv*, or should policies encompass the breadth of human interaction with the outdoors in a manner that is inclusive of diverse cultural and social backgrounds? In the latter case, everyday outdoor activities in urban green spaces could be included, because the greatest diversity of cultural backgrounds are found in urban areas. In an ongoing study, *Integrating value diversity in the assessment of urban ecosystem services from nature-based solutions in cities* (SIS URBAN), one of the main objectives is to expand our knowledge about inhabitants' engagement with diverse types of urban nature.

Methods and Research Sites

This study is based on 280 interviews on three different areas in Oslo, addressing passers-by requested to participate in shorter interviews on the spot. The three areas span a range of green space. The different nature types include continuous forested areas in the urban fringe (Østmarka), a small neighbourhood forest without facilitation or management (Goliaskogen), and green structures in a suburban area with apartment buildings (Furuset, see picture). In all the study areas, including the suburban area, residents have easy access to natural areas, both in the immediate vicinity to their homes and to continuous forested areas slightly further away from their homes. The fieldwork included summer and winter interviews.

Nearly one third of all inhabitants in Oslo have an immigrant background. In some boroughs, the proportion is near 80 %, many of which of Asian and African descent. This characterises the suburb of Furuset. On the other hand, the residential area surrounding Goliaskogen is dominated by ethnic Norwegians. During our short on-site interviews, we ensured to include segments of the population with low response rates in quantitative surveys (immigrants, youths and the elderly) among the respondents. The semi-structured interview guide focused

mainly on residents' actual use of their neighbourhoods, the kinds of qualities they ascribed to the green areas, any negative factors, and what kinds of improvements they wished for their area. With some exceptions, the interviews have been recorded and transcribed, and we are currently in the process of analysing the interview material.

Preliminary results

Although immigrants have a lower participation than Norwegians in outdoor recreation under the narrow definition (e.g. cross-country skiing and hiking), this study shows that immigrants value nature in a high degree, but emphasize different aspects of nature. Many immigrants expressed that green structures in their neighbourhoods represent an important motivation for living here, and that the greenness, the fresh air and the natural elements make a significant contribution to their quality of life and to their general level of well-being. Somewhat surprisingly, the study showed that the vast majority (including women) feels safe outdoors. This is in contrast with how these neighborhoods are often portrayed in the media, as being ridden with crime and social unrest.

Both immigrants and non-immigrants emphasised that proximate nature as Goliaskogen and the green spaces between the apartments on Furuset embedded certain qualities they could not find in the forest Østmarka beyond the residential areas (see also, Buijs et al 2009; Gentin 2011; Kloek et al. 2013). An impression from our study is, that while many Norwegians look at the proximate nature such as Golia and Furuset as an important *supplement* to outdoor recreation in the traditional sense, many immigrants describe the proximate nature as the most important and valuable source for experiencing nature. The nature, the people, and the houses were described collectively as important elements of the experience, while nature *without* human life and developments seemed to have a smaller value, expressed by statements such as "we do not need to go to the forest." While contiguous forested areas beyond the urban fringe seems like a more attractive and valued experience for those who use it, the proximate nature was described as an *integral* and valuable part of the everyday life, and an important element for developing place identity of the residents (see also Kloek et al. 2013; Peters et al. 2016).

The different nature types and different degrees of management represented in the various study areas gave valuable knowledge of qualities ascribed more 'wild' green areas nestled among residential neighbourhoods (Goliaskogen) vs. more manicured parks at Furuset, showing the importance of offering residents different types of green space. The importance of green spaces in an urban everyday life has so far been little explored through an inductive and qualitative methodological approach as used here. An important characterization of Norwegian outdoor recreation is the darkness and the cold, but we find a lack of knowledge about the impact of winter for people's daily well-being and public health. This study should contribute to the development of knowledge on this topic, including users' perceptions on what may be important facilitation measures to increase their outdoor activity level, also in wintertime.



Figure 1. Study area Furuset

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