

Why Hiking? Rationality and Reflexivity Within Three Categories of Meaning Construction

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Abstract

Hiking is a popular leisure activity among people in many industrialised countries. In the case of Norway, a large part of the population goes hiking through forests, mountains and cultural landscapes. What meaning do these hikers attach to their activity? An analysis has been made of letters received from 84 hikers who write about how and why they enjoy their hiking trips. Employing a grounded theory approach, three categories of meaning constructions were identified: a recreation category, a category of the simple outdoors discourse, and a belonging category. In all of these, the hikers see their trips and their further lives in relation to constitutive aspects of modern society. Concepts of rationality and reflexivity were found useful for the interpretation of the meaning contents of each of the categories.

KEYWORDS: Outdoor recreation, Hiking, Outdoors, Friluftsliv, Rationality, Reflexivity, Modernity, Norway, Grounded theory, Ecotourism

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Introduction

In Norway, “hiking” consists of leisure trips conducted on foot during the summer and on cross-country skis during the winter. Thus, hiking or strolling trips are based on the use of the human body and are enacted without motorized vehicles. A trip may take less than an hour, or it may take many days. Hikers typically go through forests, or into mountain areas, or pass through landscapes that to various degrees bear signs of human influences from present or earlier activities. In Norwegian, hiking is talked about as “going on a trip” (*gå på tur*).

Hiking constitutes an important part of outdoor activities in Norway and is part of what Norwegians call *friluftsliv* (literally “free air life”). Dunlap and Hefernan (1975) distinguish between two types of recreational activities: Hunting and fishing are *consumptive activities*, while hiking is among the activities labelled *appreciative*. Besides hiking, many other activities may also be labelled appreciative outdoor recreation, for instance, picnicking or sun bathing on a lawn or a beach, or activities involving the use of motorized vehicles.

In contrast to some outdoor sports, hiking does not imply any formalised competition (Olwig 1995). Hiking must also be distinguished from activities implying substantial modifications of the landscape by arenas and installations, such as those for downhill skiing or golf. There are also significant differences between hiking and a wide range of outdoor activities requiring more specialised skills, for example mountain base jumping, climbing, dog sledding and off-road biking (Bischoff and Odden 2002, Mæland 2004).

A recent national survey shows that as many as 82% of the adult population (age 16-74) went hiking on foot in 2004, and 50% went cross-country skiing. Altogether, 95% of the population was involved in at least one type of outdoor recreation (Odden 2005). Although almost every Norwegian goes hiking sometimes, social differences can be found. An unpublished study by the Norwegian Trekking Association (*Den Norske Turistforening*) provided an image of the typical mountain hiker as a person with higher education who comes from Eastern Norway (thus, most likely an urban dweller), and who works in the public sector (cited in Pederson 1995). Furthermore, Pedersen (1995) has found gendered patterns, with women tending to go on shorter hikes than men, on hikes closer to home, and together with family.

Norway is not at all the only country in which hiking is a popular leisure activity. Odden (2008) has compared existing survey data about walks among adults (age 16-74) in six countries and found that although Norway ranks first, this activity is common in the other countries, too. In Norway, 95% of people hike, in Denmark the figure is 92%, in Sweden it is 87%, and in Finland it is 81%. These figures included people who answered that they had been out on walks at least once during the prior twelve months.

For cross-country skiing, Norway and Finland are on the top of the list of countries with survey data on this activity with 48% and 46% participation, respectively. After that comes Sweden (29%), Austria (17%), Canada (17%), Switzerland (15%), and finally, the United States (4%). Sweden, Norway and USA are the only countries with relatively long time series data on walking. Over the last decades, all of these show growth in walking (Odden 2008).

This paper addresses the question of why people enjoy hiking. In order to understand this, it is necessary to investigate what constructions of meaning hikers themselves make. In the broad field of leisure studies, one of the approaches is to make “modernity” the context in which leisure occurs and evolves (e.g. Rojek 1995, Wang 1996, Kuentzel 2000). In some of the recent studies of Norwegian outdoor activities, modernity also constitutes a central reference for several scholars (e.g. Pedersen 1995, Riese and Vorkinn 2002, Tordsson 2003, Bischoff and Odden 2002, Skaar and Odden 2008).

What is modernity? Within classical sociology, modernity and modernisation are connected to the transition from traditional to industrial societies. Social theorists describe society in terms of a *late* modernity (e.g. Habermas 1992), *high* modernity (e.g. Giddens 1991), *liquid* modernity (Bauman 2000), or *post*modernity (e.g. Lyotard 1997). Terms such as modernity, modern society, and late modern society are used about a variety of aspects of society, and are often applied without a precise definition. In this paper, I apply the term “modern society” in reference to Western contemporary societies, bearing in mind the highly developed production structure of these societies and that most of the population enjoy a high degree of consumption and the security of an advanced welfare state.

This paper provides an analysis based on relatively extensive qualitative material where Norwegian hikers themselves wrote about their engagement and passion for this leisure activity. My point of departure for analysing this material was an interest for learning about why hiking is an activity with such a broad appeal today in a modern society such as Norway.

The Methodology of the Grounded Theory Analysis

In 2002 and 2003, the Norwegian Institute of Nature Research invited people to submit letters with their thoughts on their involvement in hiking. Such invitations were first presented in 50,000 pamphlets that were made available to visitors through the managed hut system of the Norwegian Trekking Association (DNT). Invitations were also provided to members of DNT through their membership magazine. To ensure a good participation from rural areas, advertisements were also published in ten rural newspapers in five different regions of Norway. People were encouraged to write about what a good outdoor trip is for them, either in general or through the description of one particular trip.

Through the submission of 81 accounts, 84 persons responded to the request of writing about why they go hiking¹. The accounts ranged from one to 60 pages, the latter constituting a diary based on long trips over several summers in a row. Most contributions were between two and five pages. The contributors were not selected as a representative sample of Norwegian hikers but constituted a self-selected group of people who undertook the relatively high effort to participate. A great majority of the contributors were women (62 of 84 persons, 74 %). In comparison, survey data from 2004 showed that the same share of men and women reported to go walking (83 and 82 % respectively), while there was a small but sig-

¹ Three of the written contributions were submitted by two persons together. Thus, the 81 accounts were submitted by 78 individuals and three couples.

nificant difference for cross-country skiing (53% men and 47 % women) (Odden 2008). The predominance of women who expressed their views in writing is in contrast to the situation of the public space in Norway, in which Pedersen (1999) has recognised that most authors of books and articles on the outdoors are men². The analysis did not reveal any gendered differences in the contributions to the content of the categories of meaning constructions described below.

A strength of the study lies in the thorough way that respondents shared their thoughts on why they enjoy hiking. Further, the influence by researchers is in this case much less than most other methods in which researchers, for instance, formulate questions of surveys and interviews.

An analytical approach based on grounded theory (Glasser and Strauss 1967, Strauss and Corbin 1990, Richards and Richards 1994, Mjøset 2005, 2006) was applied to the data. Grounded theory is an epistemological approach for qualitative studies in which induction plays a central role, in contrast to mainstream social science strategies where empirical investigations are designed to test the relevance of theories.

Because grounded theory does not require that a researcher explore a specific theory at early stages of data analysis, the researcher can concentrate more on interesting aspects of the empirical material that may otherwise be overlooked, and at later stages it is possible to consider the application of a broad range of relevant theories. Grounded theory also provides a strategy for the elaboration of new theories that, in contrast to a vast part of the grand social theories, are grounded in empirical knowledge.

Prior to the analysis of the empirical material, I did not have any particular theories in mind to bring into the study for testing or application. Furthermore, since I had not carried out any prior studies about hiking or other aspects of outdoor activities, I did not have any theories in mind from the field of the subject matter. Nevertheless, I did not enter the study entirely without pre-established knowledge. For one thing, I am a Norwegian and belong to the vast majority who regularly go hiking. Some scholars, adhering to a positivist tradition, believe that researchers studying their own “tribes” cannot be objective. From other perspectives, an inside position may hinder one from seeing interesting aspects because they constitute the “taken-for-grantedness” that, for instance, Bourdieu (1977) acknowledges with his notion of doxa. On the other hand, practical knowledge of a topic and related cultural aspects may constitute a resource for quality checks. Hence I have tried to make use of my insider position by trying to enhance the understanding of the empirical material by comparisons of analytical possibilities to my own practices of hiking and related reflections. Thus, there is an addition of participatory observation that goes along with the various phases of the analysis of the written material.

² A similar majority of women (65% of 630 answers) contributed to the production of life stories in a competition arranged by the social researchers Almås and Gullestad (1990, 1990 eds.). Furthermore, in an analysis of high school essays on humans and nature, Pedersen (2003) notes that this methodology, to a greater extent, captures the perceptions of girls/women than those of boys/men.

The analysis of the empirical material was conducted through four phases. During the first phase, I reviewed all of the material at least three times, using an open coding procedure, and developing an index of a variety of codes as they grew out of the coding process. Instead of applying one of the computer programs designed for such analyses, I used a manual method with coding on sheets of paper (marked with respondent number and page number), and at the end of this exercise, made copies so that I could collect all pages with the same indexed code in the same file. Compared to relevant computer programs, this manual technique provides an easy way to alternate back and forth between comparisons of fragments, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, seeing fragments in their broader contexts of each account. The first phase of data analysis resulted in a large number of files of coded elements that organised the material according to the aspects covered in the accounts, such as descriptions of various types of experiences and positive benefits from hiking trips.

In the second phase, I looked for connections between the content of various codes, and I found here the discovery of types of micro-macro relations particularly interesting. This work was conducted while still not bringing in any particular theories for comparison. The effort led to the synthesis of index codes down to three categories, which I labelled as: (1) the recreation category, (2) the category of the simple outdoors discourse, and (3) the belonging category. In the first category, hiking is interpreted as recreation and as an aspect of a harmonious understanding of contemporary society and everyday life. The second category provides constructions of hiking as a way of living out a critique of society. In the third category, the activity of hiking is used as a means for establishing a sense of belonging and continuity of one's own life in relation to earlier and traditional ways of living. The simple outdoors category was the first to clearly emerge in the analysis, and it provided a comparative basis that made it possible to "see" the first category instead of taking its premises for granted. Further reading and consideration of the material was necessary before the belonging category was also identified as a dimension of the same kind as the two first categories.

It is important to stress that the appearance of meaning contents belonging to one of the categories in an account does not exclude the appearance also of one or even both of the other two categories. Thus, many of the respondents have multiple ways of reflecting and making sense about their passion for hiking. The three categories may be interpreted as three different discourses on hiking and outdoors. The empirical material provides an example that shows how individuals may draw upon different discourses when they construct their own meanings and produce their own stories about their ways of living.

In the third phase of the analysis, I undertook a literature study relevant to the topic of hiking and with a special focus on Norway. I discovered that there is a considerable body of literature on the broad topic of the outdoors, and that the vast bulk of contributions to this literature have been written by men with a strong moral platform that in my empirical material is reflected in category 2 of a simple outdoors discourse. Furthermore, I also found an emerging trend among writers of the outdoors in Norway to focus on new and "modern" trends of specialised outdoor activities. In contrast, my study focuses on an activity considered

more “traditional”. Yet, this study shows that the meaning constructions around this activity are tightly connected to important features of the modern society in which they are produced.

In phase four, I searched for a deeper understanding of each of the three categories, focusing specifically on micro-macro connections of people’s way of living their lives and their related reflections in connection to features of the contemporary society. In my search for relevant theory at this stage, I found it appropriate to examine various theoretical notions on modernity. I concluded that Weber’s concepts of formal and system rationality adds substantially to the interpretation of the meaning categories. Further, I found Giddens’ notion of reflexivity also to enhance the understanding of each of the categories. In the literature examination of the fourth phase, I also conducted a broad review of literature on leisure studies in order to identify relevant theoretical perspectives. The findings of the paper have been subjected to “communicative validation” (Kvale 1999) through examination by other social scientists, including experts on outdoors in Norway.

Rationality and Reflexivity

Weber dealt with the topic of rationality in a variety of ways. It is useful to apply a major conceptual distinction between his dual notion of “formal (instrumental) rationality” as an action type on the individual (micro) level, and “system rationality” (or rationalism) as a macro concept within institutionalised foundations. The foundation of Western society with its market-based production and bureaucratic management in the private and state sectors is described as system rationality. Building on Weber’s last theory of Western capitalism, Collins (1986) has established a causal chain in which several factors lead to a “rationalized capitalism,” involving entrepreneurial organization of capital, rationalized technology, free labour force and unrestricted markets. Formal rationality action is based on the calculation of what most effectively leads to the fulfilment of defined goals. Weber’s other ideal types of action are based on value orientation, affections and tradition. Weber thought that the system rationality of modern society would create a highly effective “machinery” of human beings and physical objects. He did not only see formal rationality as a choice, but also as an enforced requirement for individual action. Furthermore he was worried that a consequence would be felt by individuals as an “iron cage” (Mjøset 1980, Collins 1986, Weber 1978).

Reflexivity is, according to Anthony Giddens, a feature that distinguishes modernity from traditional society, and reflexivity increases in late modernity. All social forms and actions are subject to reflexivity. This implies that knowledge replaces traditions as guides for social practices. Thus, knowledge provides a basis for considerations of various alternatives for action. Social practices are constantly changed in light of information about these practices. Reflexivity of the self constitutes an important dimension in which “self-identity is constituted by the reflexive ordering of self-narratives” (Giddens 1991:244). This implies that individuals construct their own identities in which they define who they are and what they do (Giddens 1990, 1991). The notion of “reflexivity” was found useful in the interpretations of findings in the study reported here, especially in terms of how hikers reflect on their lives in relation to society, and in how requirements related

to system rationality constitute a central subject for these reflections.

In the following, I will present each of the three categories. First, I describe each category the way that it was identified in phase two, Thereafter, I present my interpretations of each of these categories in light of the theoretical literature that I found to be most useful in phases three and four.

1. The recreation category–hiking as re-creation of societal performance abilities

In many of the response letters of the study, hiking appears as a means of re-creating the ability to achieve and function properly in contemporary society. Physical health aspects of hiking are often mentioned, and psychological aspects receive even more attention. Regarding physical shape, one respondent wrote, for instance, that for her, hiking was “a good prescription which gives cheap and good health treatment without pills” (Respondent (R) 62)³. Another respondent argued that hiking is important in “a time in which the ordinary man in the street becomes flabbier, fatter and sicker” (R 53).

Three metaphors tend to reappear when the respondents address mental health. The first is that hiking provides an opportunity to disengage or detach the mind (in Norwegian: *koble av*). This is seen as a very positive feature and something that is not possible in one’s hectic everyday life. The second is that hiking implies that “batteries are being re-charged.” For instance: “A new work day awaits us and we meet with charged batteries” (R 4). Along the same lines, nature experiences are seen as “refilling,” as “breathing space,” which we need “as a counterweight to a hectic everyday life so full of time limits and appointments” (R 42). The third metaphor is a notion of hiking as an act of mental purification. One respondent emphasised that his hiking provides “purifications and renewal of the mind” (R 28). Another hiker wrote that she lets herself become taken by the “intensive, beautiful, soul balsaming landscape” (R 16).

A feeling of happiness related to hiking provides an important motivation for several respondents, as this straightforward comment expresses: “When I go hiking, I become happy during the trip and afterwards” (R 76). In the empirical material, the emergence of happiness is often seen as important for one’s total quality of life, and as a dimension that adds to one’s ability to meet the demands of work. One hiker (R 42) characterizes (her) hiking as “pure antidepressant”.

In addition, many respondents stress that their hiking provides an opportunity for reflection and contemplation. For instance:

“When the silence has fallen, the thoughts arrive. These are thoughts from a hectic and challenging work week. It has not been possible to reflect over these thoughts before. Now the thoughts can come, there is no disturbance” (R 4).

Finally, “peace and quietness” (*fred og ro*) are often emphasised as important aspects of hiking. Respondent 5 put it this way: “The hiking trips give an inner quietness and peace, which is difficult to find otherwise.” Likewise, Respondent 50 wrote: “First of all I walk in the mountains to get away from the noise and fuss of everyday life, feel the quietness on the body, listen to the silence which still can be found in the mountains.”

³ All translations of the quotes in this paper from Norwegian to English have been done by the author.

Interpreting the Findings of the Recreation Category

In the recreation category, hiking is seen as providing positive effects on physical as well as mental fitness. The writers connect these positive effects to their abilities to meet performance requirements in work and daily life. Such requirements of efficiency and productivity are primarily needed at work, but respondents also point to other aspects of everyday life with many expectations and duties.

Adorno and Horkheimer (1973:137) have described amusement under late capitalism as the extension of work. Amusement provides an escape from the mechanized work process. Furthermore, it *re-creates* strength and the renewed ability to continue coping with work. Hiking constitutes a leisure activity in which many of the writers feel that they receive renewal and “refilling” of physical and mental strength to deal with the demands of society.

During the last hundred years, *Fordist* and *Post-Fordist* production systems have provided important features of societal system rationality. Fordism implies physically demanding jobs, often of repetitive and mechanical activities. In return, workers are guaranteed employment; they receive relatively high wages which support mass consumption; and their working hours and leisure time are regulated. Post-Fordism, which evolved in the end of the 20th century, consists of flexible production directed towards a flexible consumption (Lipietz 1987, Harvey 1989, Rojek 1997). Respondents’ comments within the recreation category fit well with this macro-sociological understanding of the economy. Here, hiking functions as an important re-creation of the ability to work. Both Fordism and Post-Fordism impose tough demands on the work force, and they reward performance with leisure and an opportunity for increased consumption or spending. Demand for commodities and services then stimulates the economy. While the consumptive aspects of recreation are not immediately obvious in the writings of respondents whose comments were included in the recreation category, they are implicit. In the Norwegian economy, the activity of hiking contributes considerably, and increasingly, to the economy through the building and use of second homes (cabins) in rural areas, as well as by consumption of a variety of goods and services related to transportation, food, lodging and equipment (Vittersø 2007).

Wang (1996) argues that it is useful to distinguish between *logos-modernity* and *eros-modernity*. Whereas *logos-modernity* coincides with the concept presented above of formal rationality, *eros-modernity* encompasses irrational and non-rational desires and demands. In addition to the disciplined work handled more or less by *logos-modernity*, Wang finds that modernity also is characterized by an enthusiasm for pleasure-seeking in the form of institutional leisure and culture. *Eros-modernity* provides a source of life-satisfaction and without that, life is experienced as boring and meaningless.

Many of the respondents interpret hiking as a source of pleasure. In the texts there are descriptions of enjoyable aspects, such as looking at beautiful landscapes, and listening to the natural sounds of birds and brooks. At the same time, hiking provides relaxation and recreation that is useful in relation to work tasks. Thus, the concepts of both *logos-modernity* and *eros-modernity* are relevant in understanding why people engage in hiking.

Because society is characterized by a system rationality that people experience as highly demanding and challenging, the meaning constructions of the recreation category imply that hiking provides a renewal of spirit so that one can cope with society's demands. The re-creational effects of hiking turn the activity itself into a formal rational element in the lives of people. Aspects of logos-modernity as well as eros-modernity contribute to these re-creational effects and to an overall logos-modernity, and, thus, to a formal rationality on the individual level in response to the system rationality on the macro level.

Reflexivity also becomes a rational means by which individuals are more capable of handling everyday requirements. In this regard, hiking serves as an outlet for deeper thoughts about aspects of the otherwise hectic life. Besides, aesthetic dimensions of landscapes and other experiential satisfactions generate thoughts about pleasant dimensions of life. Moreover, reflexivity contributes to an identity construction of the participant as a "hiker."

2. The category of the simple outdoors discourse—hiking as a way of living out a critique of society

In the second category, hiking is interpreted by the respondents as a way of living out a critique of society. This category of the simple outdoors discourse is not as prevalent in the material as the recreation category, but it is clearly present in about a tenth of the written texts. As statements in the recreation category show, hiking is seen as precious, but producers of the simple outdoors discourse of hiking also express strong criticism of modern aspects of society such as urbanization, a focus on commodities and shopping, the lack of silence, the lack of natural surroundings, tight time schedules, and so on. Thus, in the recreation category, hiking provides a means for individuals to better adjust to life in the modern society, but in the category of the simple outdoors discourse, respondents see hiking as an alternative to modern society.

For example, one respondent wrote the following:

"Nobody can live a happy and fully worthwhile life without nature! 'Nonsense!' some will say. But it is really not possible. Those who live without contact with nature survive in a way, but surely with reduced quality of life. They are exposed to the tarmac syndrome, large city fever, shopping mall germs, neon lights, plastic values and disposable delights. They fumble and search, and they think that all happiness comes from a fat wallet. ...But *I* find *real pleasure* in more natural surroundings. *My* thoughts circle around the mountains, around "my" mountains, around "new" mountains, or around the ocean, on summits and on paths, on the next opportunity to a new experience—a nature experience" (R 42).

The following quote also demonstrates a clear opposition to the consumption society and holds hiking to be an alternative: "Strong forces raise people to be 'good' consumers, who spend their leisure with shopping instead of going hiking" (R 61). That respondent also commented that people tend to think that happiness can be bought. She strongly opposes that, and holds that instead "the most precious moments of full happiness are free of charge."

The texts grouped within the simple outdoors discourse category often stress the perception of “real luxury” in the simple life of hiking, in contrast to the conventional perception of luxury in the sense of material wealth. Two respondents, for instance, wrote about the experience of drinking water from a brook in the mountains as the world’s best “champagne” (Rs 3 and 16). Another respondent described her perception of luxury in the sense of finding a space to put up her tent with several features of the landscape providing her with natural luxury:

“My favourite campsite is located at least some hundred meters away from the nearest path, preferably against a rock which hides the tent. A few meters away there is a chuckling creek, and this has a puddle of warmed water for the evening bath for a sweaty body. The campsite has at least one big flat stone which is suitable as combined dining table and chair, and a distance away some larger stones can function as privy walls to screen from onlookers. Some birds fly around and twitter, while no mosquito thrives in the area. The favourite campsite has a view to some nice summits, it has sun until late evening, but it may be shady in the morning. And of course the terrain is flat and without stones on the spot where the tent is pitched” (R 48).

This respondent also makes a comparison to conventional luxury: “When I sit outside my tent and eat my simple dinner by sunset, I sometimes think: Can really all the rich people who stay in luxury hotels or eat at five star restaurants around the world be as happy and satisfied as me?” (R 48).

Besides a general critique of modern consumerism, a more specific attitude of anti-consumerism regarding outdoor equipment is also expressed. For instance:

“One can go slowly, fast, backwards, sideways, on ones hands. Nobody cares.... Thus, one can walk in weather-beaten, old and worn-out clothing, yes, one can even almost go naked. Or decorate oneself in the last style from Adidas, Nike or whatever it is called. I don’t do that” (R 69).

Besides the critique directed at commodity consumption in modern society, there is also a criticism of the lack of freedom regarding the use of one’s own time. As a contrast to perceptions of the peace, quietness, and freedom of hiking, there are complaints such as this about society in general: “... here are clock cards and quality controls, and even seminars to learn how to handle stress, a Wednesday this autumn between 11 AM and 3 PM” (R 27).

In the simple outdoors discourse category, one also finds concern for the conservation of nature, and this grows out of a strong sense of unity with nature. One respondent wrote:

“The most important aspect of a good experience in nature is the pleasure. By giving the children this experience from when they are small, they learn how to pay attention to and respect everything that sprouts and grows. It is a gift to live in harmony with oneself and the surroundings. A large part of this gift you get by using, experiencing, feeling and enjoying nature” (R 30).

A metaphor of “feeling at home” in nature was also used by several of the respondents. One wrote: “To get to the mountains is like coming home” (R 20). Another remarked: “When gathering by a warming fire one feels like home. We feel actually more (at) home here than in our own house” (R 70).

Interpreting the Findings of the Category of the Simple Outdoors Discourse

When examining Norwegian literature on the outdoors (*friluftsliv*), the simple outdoors discourse category provides remnants of an established critique of society discourse in Norway⁴. The academics Gunnar Breivik, Sigmund Kvaløy, Nils Faarlund and Arne Næss have for several decades been central contributors to this discourse. Breivik (1978) perceives the simple outdoors as an objective, as well as a way to re-direct society towards a new “eco society” built on ecological principles. Likewise, Kvaløy (1978) sees the simple outdoors as one of several channels leading away from the “industrial growth society”. An ecologically benign outdoors builds on an understanding of the ecological and social crisis of our society. This type of outdoors is intended to increase the national self-reliance on natural resources, an element that Kvaløy argues is central to achieve sustainability. Faarlund (1978) argues the importance that people find their way to “eco-lifestyles,” which are consistent with the “ethological inheritance” of human beings. Faarlund holds this to be the natural life for which human beings are programmed. The eco-lifestyles provide the solution for the ecological crisis, and the simple outdoors constitutes a way to such eco-lifestyles. Arne Næss (1976) endorses outdoors in terms of playful forms of short stays in nature. He has established guidelines for ethical and ecological responsible behaviors outdoors, in counterpoint to strong forces that try to replace such simple activities with mechanised, environmentally destructive and competition-based stays in nature.

The central producers of the simple outdoors discourse are critical of hiking that is practiced merely as recreation. Kvaløy, for instance, argues that the outdoors ought to contribute to our ability to handle what he sees as society’s ecological and social crisis. This is contrary to viewing outdoors as a relief valve that strengthens the grip of the industrial growth society (Kvaløy 1978). Likewise, Faarlund (1974:41) remarks that the outdoors must not become simply a place to rehabilitate the techno culture and artificial respiration of a culture that is contrary to what he sees as the inherited premises of human beings and the ecological interplay of the planet. Furthermore, Faarlund (1978) also warns against commercialisation related to the outdoors, such as that related to equipment, and he argues for supporting primary and traditional producers through the use of items like wool clothing and wood skis (Faarlund 1983).

The Norwegian discourse about the simple outdoors has links to similar thinking in other countries. From the USA, for instance, Dunlap and Heffernan have defended appreciative recreational activities, such as hiking, camping and nature photography, that attempt “to enjoy the natural environment without altering it” and are “compatible with the ‘preservationist’ orientation which attempts to

⁴ Here, I apply a concept of “discourse” by defining it as a shared way of understanding and presenting a social phenomenon.

maintain the environment in its natural state" (Dunlap and Heffernan 1975). Furthermore, the works of Henry David Thoreau, as well as the ideas by the scout founder, Ernest Thomson Seton, have considerable similarities with those of the simple outdoors in Norway (Olwig 1995).

The discourse of the simple outdoors portrays hiking not only as environmentally friendly itself but also as leading to engagement for conservation and sustainable use of nature. Tordsson (2003) notes that although ideas about the simple outdoors, as well as its connections to a more sustainable society, were highly visible in Norway in the 1970s and 1980s, not many people turned these thoughts into practice. Scholars have also shown that there is a plurality of outdoor practices in Norway, and that the notion of a simple outdoors is not currently playing a dominant role (Pedersen 1995, Vorkinn 2001, Riese and Vorkinn 2002).

As shown so far in this section, the meaning contents of this category fit into the Norwegian discourse of a simple outdoors. Rather than dealing with hiking as a means to adapt to the requirements of our society characterized by system rationality, respondent's texts in this category see hiking as a way of living out a critique of the contemporary society and the negative effects of its system rationality.

With the Weberian rationality concepts, the ideas expressed by respondents's texts in this category can be seen as portraying the simple outdoors as a formal rationality type of action engaged in a deliberate strategy to change the system rationality of society.

Commoditisation in terms of the leisure industry, the culture industry, and the tourist industry may all be seen as manifestations of the infusion of the logoclement into eros-modernity (Wang 1996). However, respondents in this category, strongly reject this element of logos-modernity in relation to their hiking practices. There are aspects of the simple outdoors that clearly are in line with the concept of eros-modernity as well as with all three of Weber's ideal types of action besides that of formal rationality, and the authors of texts grouped in this category write about what they see as a good, valuable and right way of living. Nevertheless, I find it reasonable to argue that the formal rationality is a predominant feature of the action and related reflections.

It is worth pointing out the way that simple outdoors discourse texts see hiking, as an alternative way of living "at home" in natural surroundings. This is a type of *life politics*, implying a choice of lifestyle and self-realisation (Giddens 1991). These hikers portray themselves as persons, who practice an alternative lifestyle, and who also have visions about a more ecologically benign society. In very concrete ways, the attitudes of the respondents in this category are manifested by the use of clothes with natural fibres and the avoidance of specialised high-tech equipment and luxury cabins. Thorstein Veblen provides a theory of the connection between leisure and social status in a mass consumption society. Veblen shows how symbolic value is invested in certain activities and lifestyles (Veblen 1967 [1899]). The recreation category can be understood in light of Veblen's theory, while the category of the simple outdoors discourse entails reactions to a commoditised way of life and self representation that Veblen calls "conspicuous consumption." According to Giddens, the late modern society has a plurality of choices, although many of the choices are rather standardised, and individuality

may be seen as freedom directed by the market. Nevertheless, Giddens points to how the individuals reflect on the commercialisation itself (Giddens 1991), and the simply outdoors society texts provide examples in which this type of reflexivity is very clear.

The recreation category and the category of simple outdoors discourse appear to be expressions of two very different discourses. In the first case, people seem to be satisfied with modern society, while in the latter case, they are very critical and see hiking as a way of enacting a new type of society. Nevertheless, both categories provide expressions of enthusiasm about hiking, and it is not always possible to place a text fragment only in a single category. People clearly make use of different discourses without always making definite choices between them.

3. The belonging category—hiking to establish a sense of belonging and continuity

The third category of meaning derived from the hiker's texts focuses on how respondents establish linkages to the past and to earlier ways of living in the landscapes where they go hiking. A sense of belonging is related to "original living" far back in human history, as well as in more recent traditional farming systems. Furthermore, a sense of continuity is communicated with respect to cultural roots as well as to earlier periods of respondent's own lives. Several hikers emphasise the importance of passing on the sense of belonging to their children and grandchildren by taking them out hiking. Respondents call for society to conserve nature and cultural landscapes so that future generations can also experience a sense of connectedness. One respondent wrote the following:

"I wonder why it is very important for me to share experiences in forests and mountains with the next generation. To get out in nature, away from people and traffic, alone or with a few others ...: That brings a...feeling of freedom. One (is united with) nature. Nothing else is important. One is back again to the origins. Human beings are a part of nature. In the cultural landscape this is indicated by paths which find the easiest way to the top, a cleared courtyard on a sunny ledge in a hillside, a lonely fisher hut far away in the mountains, a cabin in the forest, a cairn on a mountain top. A link to the generations before us. Yes, this is what is important. This is what I do not want the coming generations to lose" (R 55).

Many of the respondents wrote that on their hiking trips, they think about earlier people staying on the summer pasture cottages in the mountains. One respondent describes arriving at a cottage which is not used any more, and she imagines the life of the milkmaid with her livestock:

"It must have been fantastic, sunrises and bright summer nights which had to create peace in the mind. The making of cheese and butter. The old songs suddenly came to me. In such surroundings the poems had to come by themselves. No artificial media reality that shouts for attention. ... Here, the lyric and the artistic had to be in full blossom" (R 3).

Others have a less nostalgic approach, like the following: "Yes, I take my Sunday walk with a light sack, and I think about how they toiled, those who wandered along these paths before us" (R 52).

Besides the traces of earlier traditional living, some of the respondents visit areas in which they do not live themselves, and they value meetings with local inhabitants and particularly farmers. These meetings seem important for them because they create a sense of authenticity and closeness to the places, as well as feelings of connection to traditional and "old" ways of living.

Some of the respondents also show that hiking provides a sense of continuity not only in a long-ago, historic perspective but also in their own lives. One respondent wrote:

"I will never get lost when I go to "Moor Mountain Pass." Neither in nature nor in life. Because the route is on solid ground. I know every turf, every meter. Soul and body become so harmonic and peaceful when I take this trip. Often I pause at the "Pine Ridge" and look at my rural district. I see the "Perch Lake" twinkling if the sun shines. Yes, in a way I see my whole life below me. That is where I have lived almost all my sixty years" (R 69).

Other respondents wrote about their walks near their present homes in a part of Norway in which they did not grow up. In these cases, associations are made to aspects of life from the beginning of their attachment to these places and landscapes. Some of these respondents point especially to memories that they have of hiking in the new places when their children were small.

Interpreting the Findings of the Belonging Category

Witoszek (1991) argues that there is a Norwegian tendency to derive "culture" from "nature". The belonging category can be interpreted as empirical support for this assertion, since it shows how hikers search for cultural roots in landscapes that may be seen as natural.

As Pedersen (1995) notes, hiking provides a break with pre-modern societies' utilitarian relationship to nature. Nevertheless, the belonging category indicates that hikers understand their experience as a means to perceive a connectedness with pre-modern life. Since the Second World War, large changes have taken place in Norway, with increased industrialisation, rationalization of the primary sectors and the building of the welfare state. Both urban and rural areas have been altered in this process. According to Tordsson (2003), there is a perception among outdoor recreationists that an alternative "premodern" identity can be shaped through activities such as hiking. Several researchers have observed how the simple outdoors often are connected to the life of the traditional farming society (Klepp and Thorsen eds. 1993, Pedersen 1995).

Faarlund, presented above as a central contributor to the discourse of the simple outdoors, points to the way that the outdoors may create linkages with the earliest human life. With a minimum of technical equipment, people can simulate life styles of human beings during their first couple of million years. Faarlund also argues that the outdoors may pass on the understanding from contemporary cultures of gatherers, hunters, nomads and "primitive" agriculturalists. According

to Faarlund, in these cultures people see themselves as an integrated part of nature and they understand the laws for nature's complicated interaction as the laws for their own lives and practices (Faarlund 1974).

Similarly, Olwig (1995) shows how some outdoor activities strongly remind us of the life styles of the ancient hunters and gatherers. He points to the high level of specialisation and segmentation of present society, and he sees outdoor recreation as a conscious or unconscious search back to a nature that society has left behind. This is a way that life becomes more understandable, because it is possible to see how one's own actions contribute to sustaining life.

Tordsson directs the attention to the condition of constant changes that provides a central characteristic of modern society. In contrast, the outdoors can be used as a means to identify with "traditions" and "cultural heritage" as something that remains constant (Tordsson 2003).

Like the other two categories, the belonging category can be seen as a response to the system rationality of the modern Norwegian society, and it adds to the varieties of reflexivity. System rationality leads to an increasingly higher division of labour, which as Marx noted, may cause people to feel alienated. Under conditions of alienation, people do not see how their own works contribute to fulfilling their needs and wants. Alienation may also imply that people fail to understand how own lives and specialized work are linked to recent history as well as to earlier stages of human development. In these circumstances, hiking provides a means to reduce alienation by creating links of belonging – with nature as well as within human history. The empirical material in this category also shows that hiking provides opportunities for people to create a sense of continuity and belonging in their own lives and with their close family, with reference to landscapes where they create long personal relationships through their hiking practices.

Some of the respondents provided accounts that almost exclusively contributed to the belonging category, while several accounts that were predominantly in this category also contained elements of one or both of the other two categories. Since hiking may produce a sense of belonging and thereby help reduce the feeling of alienation, thinking along the lines of the belonging category may provide mental contributions to recreate people's ability to perform at work. In other words, there are clear connections between the recreation category (1) and the belonging category (3). Further, when belonging refers to nature, there is also a clear overlap with the simple outdoors discourse category.

Conclusions

This study has been situated within qualitative studies about leisure activities, such as hiking, as they relate to social theories on modernity. The term modernity has often been applied in vague or inconsistent ways. In this paper I have tried to go beyond superficial connections between modernity and the outdoor activity of hiking. In the context of the modern society of Norway, I have shown how the application of concepts of "rationality" and "reflexivity" can contribute to a deeper understanding of meaning constructions on hiking.

The study reveals three empirical categories of meaning constructions: the recreation category, the category of the simple outdoors discourse, and the be-

longing category. Figure 1 summarises how each of the three categories implies responses to formal micro (individualistic) and system (macro) rationality, and, concomitantly, how each of the categories involves types of reflexivity that construct hiking as a response or solution to the challenges or problems of life in the modern society.

Figure 1. Summary of Findings.

| Categories of meaning constructions | Relations to Characteristics of Modern Society | |
|--|--|--|
| | Formal (micro) and system (macro) rationality: Aspects perceived as problematic | Reflexivity: Constructing the hiking as individual solutions |
| 1. The recreation category | High performance requirements at work and in everyday life. | Maintaining ability to perform at work by mental and physical re-creation. |
| 2. The category of the simple outdoors discourse | Modern society imposes high tempo and commodity consumption, and these have grave effects on the well-being of people as well as on the environment. | Hiking constructed as a way of living out an alternative to contemporary society. |
| 3. The belonging category | System rationality of modern society leads to high division of labour, which causes alienation for the specialised role-possessors. | Hiking heals the alienation by the creation of links of belonging—in nature and human history. |

The findings of this study may also be seen as providing relevance to policy-making and planning. In their efforts to obtain public access to outdoor areas, as well as to get economic support, hiking organisations often point to the positive health effects of hiking and thereby to its positive effects for society. This paper broadens insights about why hiking may provide core contributions to well-being for people in modern societies. The grounded theory analysis of texts written by hikers themselves has made it possible to contribute to the understanding of why people devote their leisure time to hiking.

This is a leisure activity that usually is not associated with consumptive, rational purposes. Thus, hiking deviates from more traditional outdoor activities, such as hunting, fishing and berry picking. Nevertheless, the study reveals that in all the three identified meaning categories, hiking provides a rational response to central features of modern society.

Furthermore, in Norway it is possible to interpret hiking as a more or less ritualised activity, particular as a family activity on Sundays. Thus, hiking can easily be seen as something Norwegians simply just do. In other words, Weber's ideal type of traditional action seems to provide an appropriate framework for understanding hiking. Nevertheless, this study shows that rationality is a central feature of the analysed texts.

In this paper, a grounded theory strategy has been applied to analyse written accounts from Norwegian hikers in order to try to grasp why they enjoy their leisure activity of hiking. The analysis led to identification of three categories of meaning constructions, and aided by existing literature and social science theories, deeper interpretations of these categories were made. Can the findings be of relevance beyond the narrow topic of hiking in Norway? First of all, it is clear that although hiking was the narrow focus of the study, the three categories have relevance to a broader topic in Norway of outdoor activities (*friluftsliv*) and debates on outdoor activities and related area planning. Moreover, grounded theory studies like this are meant to be followed by other studies to establish the breadth and limitations of the relevance of the findings and in order to specify features that may have particular broad relevance. Thus, such consecutive stages constitute research that is rather similar to conventional theory testing. Since hiking is a leisure activity that is popular in many countries, researchers could apply the three meaning categories as templates for comparison to reveal similarities and differences in the constructions that hikers in other countries make about their activities.

I want to end this paper by demonstrating the possibility for a broad relevance of the findings by suggesting that the three meaning categories may be used to contribute to the explanation of the growing popularity of a recent trend of globalisation that is labelled “ecotourism”. The tourism industry today invites us on journeys to interesting environments all around the world. If people tend to reflect in accordance with the recreation category (category 1), they would be looking for holidays that provide effective escapes from the high performance requirements of society’s system rationality. What about snorkelling on coral reefs somewhere in the Indian Ocean? Or taking a walking safari to watch mountain gorillas in Uganda? These both seem to provide ways of bringing people in closer touch with nature as well as taking them as far away as possible from the challenges and stresses in everyday lives. From the perspective of the belonging category (category 3), ecotourism may also be a very good idea. The hikers in Norway show that hiking may contribute to reducing alienation by creating webs of belonging with nature as well as with human history. In the context of globalization, people may increasingly tend to expand their geographical range in their search for belonging. Ecotourism is a concept that seeks to bring tourists in touch with local people, and with programs to give (at least some) support to local conservation as well as to people. Thus, ecotourism appears as a win-win endeavour that provides the tourists with a good consciousness from a vacation that supports the environment and local people.

From the category of the simple outdoors discourse (category 2), however, global ecotourism must be seen as an element of modern society that provides yet a new step in the wrong direction, with considerable contributions to greenhouse gases and a wasteful lifestyle. The win-win claims from the ecotourism companies are not likely to be realistic from this perspective. In Norway, though, the simple outdoors discourse seems to be losing ground, and in many other countries it may not exist at all. Thus, some of the explanation on the expansion that we see of ecotourism today may be found in the prevalence of responses from the recreation

(1) and belonging (3) categories to the present system rationality in the wealthiest parts of our globalised world. Further elaboration of theory along these lines has to be grounded in further empirical investigations.

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