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International students' affectual development in Arctic nature -

A story driven study

Eirik Brinck Hansen

Supervised by Marcel Reinold

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Photo: Eirik Brinck Hansen

Foreword

This master thesis is the product of five years of my friluftsliv and sport science education, split into my bachelor's at the Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, followed by my two-year masters here at the School of Sport Sciences at UiT the Arctic University of Norway. I would like to express my gratitude to all my teachers from both universities for the excellent guidance, inspirational conversations and all the time they have devoted to helping me succeed. An extra thanks to my supervisor, Marcel Reinold, for his outstanding ability to be a professional teacher and supervisor, but also for being a compassionate human being, understanding my frustrations and reminding me to find time for leisure and avoid burnout. This thesis would not have been possible without the participants and their willingness to share their thoughts, imaginations, experiences and perspectives. Thank you for your participation.

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Eirik Brinck Hansen

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Abstract

How are three months of friluftsliv experiences in the Arctic affecting exchange students' feelings of development?

Theory

As an inductive study the theoretical framework was kept limited. Mainly focusing on understanding friluftsliv as a cultural phenomenon (Løvoll, 2019), its position in an global context (Gurholt & Haukeland, 2020) and as a philosophical stand regarding well-being (Curtin, 2009); as well as the social constructivist understanding of perception and imagination of Ingold (2021), and an adaptation of Murphy-Lejeune (2002) explanation of skills needed to adapt as a foreign student.

Method

To gather qualitative data, I employed a mix of longitudinal story completion and virtual semi-structured interviews.

Analysis

Reflexive thematic analysis was used to make sense of the data. Four themes were constructed through the analysis:

- i. Friluftsliv as a provider of meaningful sociocultural connections
- ii. Experiences of self-efficacy by flourishing in physical and mental challenges
- iii. Appreciation of wilderness
- iv. Friluftsliv as a rewarding counter-experience to an over-rationalized world

Result

The data, though insightful, was insufficient for a generalizable conclusion, but can work as a pilot for future longitudinal story completion studies. Friluftsliv experiences build social connections among exchange students, enhancing development and interpersonal skills through shared challenges. Overcoming physical and mental environmental hurdles promotes resilience and self-reliance, reinforcing self-confidence and awareness. Friluftsliv offers immersion in nature as a rewarding counter-experience to an over-rationalized world, fostering personal growth and deeper connections to nature and people, giving it therapeutic and educational holistic potential.

1 Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the impact of outdoor education and experiential learning on personal development (Abelsen & Leirhaug, 2017; Graves et al., 2020; Leirhaug et al., 2020; MacQuarrie et al., 2015). Friluftsliv, a Scandinavian concept that translates to "open-air life," embodies the practice of spending time in nature to achieve physical, mental, and spiritual well-being (Curtin, 2009; Graves et al., 2020; Vikene, 2012). This tradition, deeply rooted in Nordic cultural heritage, emphasizes a close relationship with the natural environment. As global interest in sustainable living and holistic wellness increases, the principles of friluftsliv becomes gradually more relevant across a multitude of social institutions.

Higher education are partly incorporating friluftsliv into their curricula, particularly in Norway where there are five different institutions offering a bachelor's degree in friluftsliv (Utdanning.no, 2024). Exchange programs that include friluftsliv experiences offer international students a unique opportunity to experience the natural landscapes and cultural practices of their host country (UiT, 2024). These programs aim to foster a range of developmental outcomes, including enhanced self-awareness, resilience, and a deeper appreciation for nature.

This study aims to explore the effects of a three-month friluftsliv experience in the Arctic on the developmental feelings of exchange students. The central research question guiding this investigation is: How are three months of friluftsliv experiences in the Arctic affecting exchange students' feelings of development?

Understanding the impact of friluftsliv in such functions is important for mainly two reasons. Firstly, it provides valuable insights into educational institutions designing exchange programs, particularly those integrating elements of experiential learning and environmental education. Secondly, and arguably most importantly, this research has implications for promoting mental and physical well-being through personal development in nature-based activities, offering data to support the inclusion of friluftsliv in various educational and potentially therapeutic contexts.

2 Theory

2.1 Friluftsliv

2.1.1 Cultural phenomenon

Friluftsliv is a nordic cultural phenomenon based on societal changes, a long cultural history of lives lived close to nature (both Scandinavians and Sami), romanticized national heritage, national pride and independence, and Arne Næss' deep ecology (Løvoll, 2019). The first use of the term is credited the writer Henrik Ibsen in his poem "På viddene/On the heights" (Graves et al., 2020; Ibsen, 1871).

"The word [friluftsliv] attempts to describe a complex state of consciousness, being alone in the mountains. This complex state includes aspects of distance from everyday life, freedom, reflections of death, transcendence, and future visualization. By these aspects, friluftsliv has a much deeper interpretation than a description of simply being outdoors" (Graves et al., 2020, p. 208).

Understanding friluftsliv as a deep term capturing the reflections and values surrounding existence, cultural heritage in the form of practice, as well as a broad term embracing all recreational activities in nature (understood as all green areas), carries a weight "the outdoors" does not." The Norwegian ministry of environment definition is: "Friluftsliv means dwelling/wayfaring, and physical activity in open spaces during leisure time to participate in a variety of environments and foster aesthetic experiences of nature [naturopplevelser]" (Ministry of the Environment, 2000, p. 9)." (translation in Gurholt & Haukeland, 2020, p. 288). It is important to be aware of the weight of "friluftsliv" as a cultural phenomenon, although it is not a term frequently used outside of the Nordics.

2.1.2 Globalization and modernity

Cultures inspire and influence each other, melting together and becoming more homogeneous, a process accelerated by global digitalization. Borrowing language, customs and norms becomes increasingly prevalent. Society is through politics, media, more frequent traveling, entertainment and international conflicts getting kneaded together in different ways.

Friluftsliv is also influenced by these societal changes; changing away from the minimalistic, self-reliant and private that Ibsen wrote about, to experience as a product; "The formerly self-organized, self-cultivated, self-reliant and private initiatives are today guided by global

markets and a raft of experts – politicians, leaders of volunteer associations, professional guides, teachers, youth social workers and researchers.” (Gurholt, 2016, p. 290).

2.1.3 Friluftsliv, wilderness and well-being

“The fields of ecopsychology, socio-biology, environmental psychology and deep ecology have revealed interesting findings with regards to the relationship between human health and the natural world, asserting as it does that nature is an important component of human well-being (Frumkin, 2001; St Leger, 2003).” (Curtin, 2009, p. 452).

In an urban world with limited contact to nature, where human interference and controlment is permeating every aspect of our life, the fields of science and philosophy listed by Curtin (2009) propose that humans have an innate desire to be close to animals, plants and natural wild landscapes. Wilderness is remote locations with no perceptible human interference, spaces where life is lived without modern human settlements, and areas that are not drastically modified by human regulation, where ecosystems can flourish in symbioses at their own speed.

It is suggested that such environments tend to amplify and strengthen well-being, self-image and self-confidence, as well as giving a sense of sublimity (Curtin, 2009; Vikene, 2012). While discussing feelings, aesthetics and well-being Graves et al. (2020) points to differences between beauty and the sublime; the sublime being a large range of feelings including power and overwhelming impressions, and beauty being a more slow-paced connectedness to nature with more limited range of feelings. I.e the sublime is something untouchable and majestic, while beauty is comprehensible and closer to ourselves.

The physical surroundings in wilderness also provides a “... considerable potential for complex experiences, as there is room for silence, comfort, and contemplation on one hand, and challenging, even terrifying, surprising and overwhelming situations on the other” (Lovoll et al., 2020, p. 2). Wilderness challenges us to use our repertoire of skills and knowledge in a dynamic environment. The feeling of connectedness to oneself and to the environment’s beauty can foster feelings of happiness and contentment, which consequently promote well-being (Cartwright et al., 2018; Curtin, 2009).

“It is not only the activity or the social dimension that matters, but wilderness has its own attraction, namely striving not only to survive, but also to rely on skills and prior experience to have a meaningful time in the mountains.” (Graves et al., 2020, p. 214).

This suggests that nature, and wilderness in particular, offers a complex array of meaningful experiences; ranging from the purely physical experiences like tiredness, cold and hunger, to less intuitive and hard to describe perceptions and feelings like beauty, intrigue, contemplation, self-efficacy and belonging.

2.2 Social constructivism

“Constructivism holds that people make society, and society makes people.” (Onuf, 2012).

Because no social setting is equal but actively created by the people involved, nothing can be sociologically objective. Individual characteristics of a person shape how they view, experience and interact with the world. Factors such as experiences, personalities, meanings, cultural background, field of work and family situation provide people context for engaging with the world. Consequently, from a social constructivist perspective, there are multiple realities shaped by both the context and the perceptions of the involved agents and observers.

2.2.1 Terminology

Term	Explanation
Rules	“Rules are statements that tell people <i>what we should do</i> .” (Onuf, 2012). These are not always strict rules as in laws, but more often norms created by people of similar culture.
Agents (insiders)	Agents are active members of their society. As agents we have insight to detailed parts of the society we partake in constructing, but at the same time our perception of the world is limited to our goals and institutions, making us blind to bigger patterns (Onuf, 2012).

Observers (outsiders)	Observers are agents from a different society (institutions), looking into a world from the “outside”. “Outsiders can stand back, so to speak, and see patterns that insiders cannot see because they are too close” (Onuf, 2012).
Institutions	“...rules and related practices frequently form a stable (but never fixed) pattern suiting agents’ intentions. These patterns are institutions.” (Onuf, 2012). Institutions are groups of people controlled by common rules.
World	A metaphorical term encapsulating everything, from the physical material environment agents interact with, to the cultural differences that distinguishes one institution from the next (outer world), and the agents (imagination) mental understanding and meaning-making of the physical world (inner world) (Onuf, 2012).

2.2.2 Perception and imagination – experiencing and making sense of the world

“Perceiving and imagining may be quite different, but they have in common that they do not begin with a stimulus input and end with an image. Rather, they carry on... My contention is that perceiving is imagining – not, however, because the percept is an image, but because the world that is perceived is continually brought forth, or called into being, in the very act of imagination” (Ingold, 2021, p. 35).

We as human beings imagine what has been perceived and what could in the future be perceived. Our perception is only in the present moment, reserved to our senses in a short moment. The perception is quickly overtaken by our imagination, fueled by memories,

feelings and our sociocultural interpretations. Our imagination can then again alter, impair or enhance our memory of our previous experiences, and how we perceive future experiences.

“... even though my present condenses within itself the time gone by and the time to come, it only possesses them in intention. And if, for example, the consciousness that I now have of my past appears to me to match precisely what it was, this past that I claim to take hold of again is not itself the past in person; it is my past such as I now see it [imagine it], and I have perhaps altered it.” (authors translation of Merleau-Ponty, 1994, p. 5).

Our imagination grants us the abilities and opportunities to engage with the world creatively and purposefully. When perceived, these imaginative acts come to life, not biological life, but rather as "...the potential of a world given in movement to generate forms of things..." (Ingold, 2021), meaning the dynamic interaction between animate and inanimate. Our perception, actions, and reactions depend on our interpretative imagination and the possible actions an environment offers based on our perception, imagination, and physical capabilities, i.e. our affordances. An adult might see a fallen tree trunk on a path as merely a rotting old tree, while a child might see it as a pirate ship, a horse, a bandit's hideout, or maybe they see the mingling life in the stump. The tree trunk's physical character doesn't change, but how it is imagined and perceived varies greatly. Ingold (2021) describes imagination and perception through the act of walking, likening it to moving in and out of balance. Each time a foot is raised, and our balance is challenged, imagination engages with our affordances; "Imagination, here, sets you free to fall, while perception restores your balance so you can go on. The first signals an adventure, the second offers confirmation..." (Ingold, 2021, p. 38).

2.2.3 Being a foreign student – adapting to fit in

Being a student introduces many first-time experiences like moving out, living alone or with strangers, weekly scheduling, grocery shopping and building new friendships. Murphy-Lejeune (2002) discuss experiences students traveling abroad may encounter, and how they may achieve interculturality, based on the sociological work of Bourdieu. Adapting the main points of Murphy-Lejeune (2002) analysis with a constructivist perspective, foreign students cultural adaptability and development can be understood as follows.

The students mainly gather knowledge through experiences by implementing themselves into the host culture and observing the agents and their rules in practice. A secondary path but less effective is gathering knowledge through media, which gives less accurate insight to the institutional nuances. Murphy-Lejeune (2002) points out that language and linguistic understanding are constraining factors for cultural inclusion and understanding.

Learning to live alone and "...to survive in an unfamiliar environment... confers the ability to adapt with greater ease a second time". Having experience with solving common problems alone has a transferability to the students' ability to manage life as an outsider. This lack of assistance from family, having to learn how to live independently gives a feeling of self-confidence which reduces anxiety and fear (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002).

Not knowing anyone makes the students more vulnerable in one sense, but it gives them an opportunity to connect with others through communication. Participating in different institutions (work, clubs, school activities, and other common interests) "...similar to the natives' represents a valuable entry into a foreign culture, potentially leading to genuine intercultural exchanges and to the discovery of a certain social diversity otherwise unattainable." (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002, p. 107). Having commonalities with the group one is trying to integrate into usually speeds up the integration process by naturally fostering social connections with its agents. This construction of a social connection encourages the agents to be more open, giving a more authentic display of their world.

What the students get out of the exchange is dependent on the students' personality and how they choose to act. Murphy-Lejeune (2002) points to curiosity, tolerance and flexibility as core qualities in students' openness and ability to develop as a person. Curiosity explained as "...the desire to learn new things..." (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002, p. 110) allows the students to openly question constructs of new cultures and of one's own cultural rules and goals.

Tolerance is understood as the ability to perceive others with a broad mindset accepting their differences; "Tolerance occurs when your fear of others has been mastered and you are ready to launch into adventure." (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002, p. 110). Flexibility is the ability to constructively respond to social, cultural or personal changes in the world. Further to be accepted or to accept another culture, the students need to be aware of the perceptual limitations and ignorant understandings they as agents are constrained by. Only then are they able to process and adapt, moving closer to becoming an integrated agent.

“... a confrontation with a foreign environment which may violently jolt individuals and perturb their taken-for-granted world. It places individuals in a situation where adaptation and transformations are necessary if they are to maximise life in their new conditions. In other words, life abroad represents an extensive natural learning situation which stimulates many more aspects of learners’ personalities than are usually catered for in educational institutions.” (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002, p. 101).

3 Method

In the following chapter the method and methodology used to explore the question “how is three months of friluftsliv experiences in the arctic affecting exchange students’ feelings of development” will be explained. By illustrating the methodological framework, this chapter aims to ensure the transparency and rigor of the research, thereby enhancing its credibility. The question was approached inductively through qualitative methods. Qualitative research is particularly well-suited for exploring subjectivity and gaining deep insights into participants’ individuality by gathering data regarding experiences, perceptions, and behaviors (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). The main interest was to understand how the students’ feeling of development was affected, assuming it would be affected. Therefore an inductive approach was chosen to emphasize the participants’ voices and not bury their experiences in preexisting theoretical explanations.

“We do not presume to impose prior constructs or theories on the informants as some sort of preferred a priori explanation for understanding or explaining their experience....which creates rich opportunities or discovery of new concepts rather than affirmation of existing concepts.” (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 17).

This inductive approach also gave the project a methodological exploratory nature. The initial goal of using story completion to gain insight into the imagination and the affectual development of the students required an open approach. Such an open approach gave the participants freedom to express themselves, and the analytic freedom to interpret them based on what they said, rather than trying to force their statements into a preconstructed theory.

Initially story completion was used to gather written (fictional) narratives about outdoor experiences. Stories were gathered two times at an interval of approximately three months. The main interest was to explore how increased exposure to outdoor activities affected the

students' development through interpretations of their imagination. The stories were anonymously collected electronically. After the stories were collected, the familiarization and coding were done, a round of four interviews within a sample from the same group of students was conducted to triangulate. A combination of convenient and purposive sampling was used.

3.1 Participants, sampling and data collection

International perspectives on outdoor lifestyles and the surrounding/connected topics were the main interest, which transformed into focusing on the affectual development of intense experiences in arctic nature. A combination of convenient sampling and purposive sampling method were utilized.

The university hosts an exchange program every year where undergrad students from around the world comes to Alta, Northern-Norway. For one or two semesters they study friluftsliv in the outdoor life activity course. With the arctic landscape as classroom, playground and home, they are taught about different outdoor activities, planning and managing trips, safety, equipment, orienteering, cultural differences including friluftsliv as a cultural and sociological phenomenon and knowledge about nature. This exchange program opened the opportunity to gather a culturally broad set of perspectives of the outdoors, with all its interlocked discourses. There were seventeen exchange students in total from six different countries (Finland, France, USA, Germany, Canada and Spain), where genders were skewed heavily towards females. Eight of the seventeen was from Germany making up approximately 50% of the student mass.

3.1.1 Sampling and collection Story completion (SC)

“The first step for researchers adopting a story completion approach will be to determine the participants and contexts in which they wish to address their research questions.” (Gravett, 2019). The recommended number of participants does vary from 10 (Braun & Clarke, 2013) to 30 or even 50 (Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, Frith, et al., 2019) dependent on the quality and intent. The quality and depth of the stories does make a difference in the quantity needed. Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, Frith, et al. (2019) argue that 30 participants ensure enough data, to be able to convincingly make arguments and possibly draw generalized conclusions. At the same time the amount is not burdensome for a single-person-project. This recommended number of participants would mean the double gross amount available in this project.

Through the convenient sampling there was a gross sample size of seventeen, which was deemed enough because of the longitudinal nature of the study design (two story collections).

Of the seventeen, twelve people showed initial interest during the first introduction. After one week of writing time was over, the net amount had shrunk to five. The stories ranged in length from 198 words to 1599 when translated to English in the first dataset. The second dataset contained only three stories, ranging in length from 451-599 words when translated to English. Such a small sample size gave very little to be analyzed in terms of data mass. This was somewhat balanced by the high quality of the stories.

Identifying patterns became more difficult because of the small number of participants, and thereby the low amount of produced stories. The follow-up of three (second) stories was not enough to give a satisfying saturation. The quality of the stories gave the ability to compare a very small thematic scene. A total of eight stories – where six could be compared – were not enough to give a satisfactory saturation to give an informed discussion of the research question/topic. To increase data and strengthen the foundation for interpretation, interviews conducted with the same group of students were deemed the best and most feasible option.

3.1.2 Sampling interviews

After getting less than desirable data through SC, it was decided to use interviews to triangulate. Triangulation gives a more nuanced dataset to be interpreted and understood. Because of the inconvenience of not having enough story material quite late (at the end of the 2023 semester), the supervisor of the project – that was familiar with the students – made some executive decisions and initiated a purposive sampling through contacting students who showed openness for interviews. They were only asked if they were willing to be potential participants later, no binding contract or agreement was signed at this point. The potential participants' names and contact information was noted for future use, including gathering informed written consent. The sampling was made with the criteria of (i) gender balance, (ii) willingness to talk about experiences, (iii) level of reflection (based on teacher's experience with the students in class), (iv) heterogeneous cultural/ national background (was difficult to achieve due to skewed available population). Five students were contacted and informed after an ethical application to SIKT was approved. A written informational letter was sent out, and signed before the interviews were conducted. Four of the five went through with the interview.

3.2 Story completion

SC is a qualitative data collection method used to collect empirical data through the means of narrative storytelling (Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, Moller, et al., 2019; Gravett, 2019). Fictional stories are created by participants based on an opening or prompt called “stem”, which is constructed by the researchers. The stem usually contains just enough information to give the participants a context to build their stories on (see [3.2.4](#)). The method has been increasingly used in the field of psychology and psychotherapy as a way of capturing people’s projections (Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, Frith, et al., 2019; Gravett, 2019) – i.e. externalization and physical creation of peoples’ (internalized) worlds. How a person tells a story could implicate how they understand, construct and rationalize the social, cultural and materialistic world (Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, Frith, et al., 2019).

Understanding narratives as projections has led to the use of SC on topics of both social and cultural normative influences, subjective meaning- and sense-making. In sociology, sport and health science examples include – but are not limited to – views on health, sexuality, identity, relationships, eating disorders and disabilities (Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, Moller, et al., 2019; Braun, Moller, et al., 2019; Gravett, 2019; Kitzinger & Wood, 2019; Lenette et al., 2022; Vaughan et al., 2022; Williams et al., 2022). These are topics where people usually have strong opinions, which are heavily influenced and sometimes governed by social expectations and cultural norms.

In the following sub-chapters, the study design and how it was executed, the strengths and weaknesses of SC, and the development of the stem will be explained.

3.2.1 SC design and execution

Participants were informed about the project, the freedom to participate, instructed how to remove electronic authorship and how to hand in the stories. Then they were prompted with a story stem (see [3.2.4](#)). The participants were asked to finish the story by writing a fictional narrative, based on the opening stem.

The participants were free to write in their native languages or in English. The main reason for this was to give the participants the freedom to choose the vocabulary they found most fitting and rich. There was an expectation of more linguistic depth through ease of expression in native languages.

The study was presented and the [task](#) including the story stem handed out in the course “Outdoor Life Activities” on, Thursday 17.08.2023. Furthermore, the students received some practical information and instruction regarding anonymity and submission. They then got one week to write, edit, and refine their stories at home, with a deadline on Friday 25.08.2023. The second gathering followed the same procedure and was conducted three months later between Thursday 16.11.2023 and Friday 24.11.2023. This design is different from other studies where the task usually is sent out once, electronically to a larger number of people, conducted over a very short timeframe or using different story stems to produce variation in the data (Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, Frith, et al., 2019; Gravett, 2019; Williams et al., 2022). Gravett and Winstone (2021) also used a SC longitudinal design, but with two different gendered story stems. In this project it was decided to hold back characteristics of the protagonist in the stem and use the same story stem for both stories. The assumption was that the first story would work as an analytic baseline. The students were, as far as we knew, only marginally affected by each other and the local culture before our first inquiry.

After the first collection a familiarization process took place – reading the stories and noting interesting features. Beginning to understand the cultural similarities/differences between the stories gave an insight to what type of experiences the participants imagined. After the three months of intense friluftsliv experiences the second collection was initiated. A similar familiarization process took place, but the fact that the same students delivered a second story, based on the same stem, meant a comparison of the stories would more likely show changes in imagination. This allowed for an interpretation of how the participants were affected by analyzing their imaginary descriptions of various friluftsliv excursions.

3.3.2 Strengths of SC

By writing fictional stories there is a feeling of removing personal accountability and opening for more socially unaccepted views and discussions (Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, Frith, et al., 2019). The answers are raw and more unfiltered because of its fictional nature. The fictional aspect combined with the total anonymization, makes it more likely to feel less personal and intimidating than other qualitative methods like face-to-face interview, focus groups or observation (all where someone is watching). At the same time the things told in the stories are often very personalized and sometimes intimate as a result of the people projecting their interior world view. Openness, few guidelines in terms of creativity and total anonymity, means the participants are more likely to write something they would be reluctant to say out

loud (Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, Frith, et al., 2019). The answers are more likely to be untarnished by social expectations and norms, because of the participants' freedom to express themselves at will, without any kind of stigma following them.

The participants can illustrate their own understanding of a phenomenon without necessarily having experienced the phenomenon themselves. Meaning the students could write about *friluftsliv* without any personal experience with it. Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, Frith, et al. (2019) discuss that "...there is an assumption that something about the person writing the story is reflected in the story, but this isn't about the individual as much as a cultural group of people". The stories are not used to understand the people writing them, but rather as keyholes researchers can look through to get a small insight to larger sociocultural pictures and perspectives of the world. Pictures of discourses and socially constructed understandings, which the individuals are building their own interpretations on (Gravett, 2019; Williams et al., 2022).

3.2.3 Weaknesses and pitfalls with SC

The quality and usability of the stories is dependent on participants' creativity, writing skills and ability to understand and write a response to a story stem (Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, Frith, et al., 2019). The data is only as good as the participants are at writing and developing cohesive, interesting and applicable narratives. The lack of personal contact removes the ability to be flexible and follow up interesting narratives during and post inquiry in the way interviews, focus groups and observations can. Diving in to meaning- and sense-making is left to interpretation of the stories after they are complete. Participants are unable to clarify or elaborate more about the thoughts behind their writing. What is handed in, is what we get.

Another common weakness discussed by Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, Frith, et al. (2019), story refusal. This is when the participant in some way refuses to write about the actual topic. This could be because they don't want to contribute or are uncomfortable writing certain things. There is some "'resistance' to what's being asked of them" (Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, Frith, et al., 2019, p. 150).

Peoples' creativity and ability to build captivating stories is a double-edged sword in SC. We humans naturally get influenced by the social and cultural environments, our experiences and the forms of entertainment and media we consume on a daily basis; "They bring to that situation all of the representations, or discourses or constructions or assumptions or media

images, ...” (Kitzinger & Wood, 2019). Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, Frith, et al. (2019) also mention the possibility of some participants writing something illogical, or in the direction of fantasy/sci-fi; “You also get ridiculous fantasy scenarios, and there’s always at least one character who gets murdered or dies in every dataset.” (Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, Frith, et al., 2019, p. 139). Fantastical stories in themselves are not necessarily bad stories, but they are hard to interpret and easily spin off topic and (un)intentionally become refusal stories.

3.2.4 Development of story stem

As mentioned by multiple authors (Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, Frith, et al., 2019; Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, Moller, et al., 2019; Gravett, 2019; Williams et al., 2022) the stem needs to be intriguing and inspire the participants to write. The stem in this project was worked on with Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, Moller, et al. (2019) six considerations in mind (see Table 1). The stem used in the final task was:

“In the past few months I have decided to spend more time outdoors. After yet another trip I return home. At the same time as the backpack hits the floor my roommates walk out from their rooms. With curiosity in their voices, they ask ‘Where have you been?’.”

A first-person perspective was preferred over a third-person perspective. The first-person perspective allows the participants to take control over a specific protagonist and tell a personal story (Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, Moller, et al., 2019). With the participants being students, ease of writing and immersion was also a consideration and reasoning for choosing the first-person perspective of someone living with roommates. A third-person perspective would have put constraints on the participants’ imagination in the form of a given name, gender, ethnic background, cultural belonging, age or other forms of personalization. The participants were free to shape the story, the environment, and its characters as they saw fit for their narrative. The immersion of the participants into their own stories and their illustration of an outdoor experience was the goal. Through immersion we hoped the participants would write interesting, rich and insightful stories.

1. Length of story stem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No concrete rules on length <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Depends on the topic and participant group • Less detail is needed if participants are familiar with the topic
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2. Authentic and engaging scenarios and characters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stem needs to engage and be relatable • Good stories are unlikely if participants don't resonate with the stem • Details (like names, symbols and habits) can cue associations; use when suitable to answer research question
3. Amount of detail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stems needs context, characters, and topic of the story; not direction of the plot or ending • Too detailed and rigid stems constraints variation and richness • Stems without enough direction will produce stories irrelevant to the research question
4. Use of deliberate ambiguity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holding back or giving certain details gives opportunity to explore assumptions and underlying understanding • Which details about characters is given needs to be deliberate
5. First or third person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First-person perspective is useful when a certain protagonist view is of interest; less likely to get broader ranging stories with socially undesirable topics. • Third-person perspective gives a broader range of stories, and are more likely to touch on sensitive topics
6. A comparative design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be done in different ways • Different story stems can be used to get comparative stories based on varying perceptions or assumptions made on a topic • Comparing groups based on demographic categories

Table 1: Six considerations when designing a story stem. Full explanation with examples in Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, Moller, et al. (2019, pp. 1485-1486)

3.3 Triangulation through semi-structured interviews

Based on the amount of SC data ([see 3.1.1](#)) the decision to triangulate data was made.

Triangulation is an approach where multiple data gathering methods are used to strengthen and follow-up interpretations, viewpoints and themes. Two or more reference points – stories and interviews – are used to interpret and reflect on patterns (themes) throughout analysis more accurately. Gravett (2019, p. 4) studied sensemaking through educational transition and

says” ... we would recommend this method [combining SC and interviews] as an approach to doing story completion that provides the opportunity to generate additional insights”.

3.3.1 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were deemed the most fitting form of interview. The open structure with clear thematic frames and sufficient (re)flexibility made it the strongest and most fitting approach to gather interpretations, perspectives and thoughts (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The interviews were not meant to question the direct meaning in the SC stories – as the authors was anonymous – but rather as a means of discussing and possibly getting new perceptual and reflexive interpretations of the topics brought to life in the SC stories. The development of the [interview guide](#) started with recognizing key features from the SC familiarization. These features were structured into ‘themes’ that laid the foundation for the topics of the interview guide. I.e the ‘themes’ from the stories were used as framework when developing the interview guide. These initial themes were: (i) interactions with nature are memorable, (ii) spending time outdoors encourage climate engagement, (iii) variation in outdoor proficiency, (iv) nature accentuates attentive and aesthetic experiences, (v) the outdoors gives room for thinking and coping. During the development of the interview guide several iterations were developed. The biggest challenge was to keep the questions open but still in line with the initial themes. It was important to not construct leading questions but give the participants the ability to talk freely about a subject in a natural way (Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

Four interviews, each lasting 30-40 minutes, were conducted, recorded and transcribed throughout February 2024, with intervals of 5-7 days between each interview. The guide was used, as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2013), to keep structure and control during the interview to insure the conversation remained on topic, but not as a strict questionnaire resulting in shallow answers. Some thoughts and experiences regarding the rapport is written under “[My experiences](#)” in the ethics chapter.

3.3.2 Strength and weaknesses of semi-structured interviews

Strengths of virtual semi-structured interviews:

Virtual communication is now easier due to improved tools and increased familiarity after the Covid-19 pandemic. Conducting interviews virtually has some unique strengths compared to face-to-face interviews. Firstly, the ability to stay at home in a comfortable and safe space is a

convenience for both interviewer and interviewees. It makes the interview less intimidating and could make it more approachable for people otherwise reluctant to participate. The comfort of the participants' own home combined with the feeling of a certain distance, could also mean that interviewees feel less judged and thereby opens-up and disclose something they would not in a face-to-face situation (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The participants can sit back and relax without feeling that their personal space is compromised; "...many participants mediated forms of communication reduced encroachment into their own physical, personal spaces which aided their sense of comfort in the encounter" (Weller, 2017, p. 618). Secondly, virtuality eliminates the need for travel and travel costs, and there are no geographical limitations if both parts have a decent internet connection (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This makes it possible to conduct interviews with people even when there are great distances between interviewer and interviewees, which was the case in this project where not all participants were in Norway, and those who where was a considerable distance from the interviewer.

Many of the same advantages of traditional semi-structured interviews remain even when done virtually. The ability to be flexible and responsive to what interviewees say, to follow up and dig deeper into the richness and details of thoughts, perspectives, ambitions, values and choices are big advantages of semi-structured interviews (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). This ability to get in-depth data decreases the need for large samples. As mentioned, having some structure in the form of a interview guide, assists in keeping on topic and asking questions that gives insight that is useful in regards to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Weaknesses of virtual semi-structured interviews:

The quality of the interview is dependent on the researcher's communication skills and ability to multi-task. Some skills Braun and Clarke (2013) points to are: listening, attentiveness to own and participants voice and body language, ticking of questions on the guide as they are answered, and catching on to relevant information and asking follow-up questions. All this can be affected by the researcher's mental head space. An example how this happened in this project is elaborated on in "[My experiences](#)". The same issue as described in [3.1.3](#) of participant resistance can occur during interviews. It can be a consequence of interviewees' reluctance to talk about certain topics, or having made up their mind on what they think the interviewer wants to hear, and not actually answering the questions.

Braun and Clarke (2013) mentions time consumption in the form of organizing (writing interview guides, planning, testing/piloting equipment and interview guides), conducting (scheduling a fitting time for both parties) and transcribing (depends on the length of interviews and amount) as limiting factors in face-to-face interviews, still relevant for virtual interviews. In contrast to SC, participants are not totally anonymous, the researcher knows who they are, and they are not in control of the situation. These are factors Braun and Clarke (2013) points to as possibly “off-putting” or deviating for the participants. If the participants feel some kind of encroachment, it could restrict the participants willingness to participate or open up.

This distance created through doing the interviews virtually isn't always a positive factor. The rigid portrayal of environment is limiting the interviewers contextual material, meaning “...the scenery of their home, experiencing customs and hospitality, and meeting family and friends” (Weller, 2017, p. 619). Cultural cues that tell a lot about a person without the person vocalizing it. The distance makes the interview less personalized. This restricted relation makes it difficult to build rapport with interviewees. Technical problems like loss of internet or power, weak connections and static audio can put a hard stop to the interview and affect both the quality of the interview and the rapport. More on rapport in [3.4.1](#).

3.4 Ethics

The project received ethical approval by the University before the SC data gathering was conducted. Before the interviewees was invited an ethical application was approved by the Norwegian department of education's ethical comity, SIKT. Prioritizing “...autonomy, justice, informed consent, confidentiality, right to privacy, deception and protecting human subjects from harm.” (Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

In the collection of the SC stories each participant picked a numbered USB-drive. The stories were submitted and saved as Microsoft Word files with participation number as the title. Authorship was removed from the document by the participants before delivery. This was ensured by handing out an instruction on how to remove authorship together with the task. The participants' stories were thereafter only known by their number and could not be traced back. The documents were submitted on individual USB-drives at both collection points. The anonymized documents were saved to a OneDrive folder shared between the project supervisor and thesis author. The stories were translated into English and saved as new individual local files before analyses.

Participants were only identifiable by their preferred language if they wrote in their native language. The thesis author, geographically distant from the participants, had no familiarity or personal information about the group of students. All communication was mediated by the project supervisor on-site with the students. Students were informed that participation was voluntary, and they could withdraw from the project at any time without explanation.

The interviewees were informed through an [Informational letter](#), which they signed and returned. The ability to withdraw was given together with an oral explanation of the project's intent, and a final oral confirmation of consent was also received before proceeding with recording. The interviews were transcribed, but no names of participants were linked to the documents. The participants were first given a number, which later in the analytic process were changed to code-names.

3.4.1 Building and maintaining rapport with participants

“...rapport is essential to ethical practice, particularly in terms of building a research relationship founded on respect... It is widely regarded as a pre-requisite for minimizing social distance and establishing trust, and researcher efforts in this regard are important for candid disclosure and the richness of the stories participants narrate, and thus data quality” (Weller, 2017, p. 614).

Weller (2017) addresses the possible difficulty of building and maintaining rapport during virtual video interview:

“Building rapport in mediated interaction without having met a participant can prove challenging although there is evidence to suggest that the groundwork can be laid prior to the interview by, for example, exchanging emails or photographs (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Seitz, 2015)... Initial impressions and the building of rapport, along with the (albeit temporary for QLR) exit from an interview has a bearing on participant's perceptions of their worth and the researcher's general interest in their lives, as well as, degrees of understanding and empathy” (Weller, 2017, p. 616).

In virtual video interviews, a good internet connection is vital for building the initial impression Weller (2017) is talking about. In practice this means taking extra time to establish a stable video feed and clear audio before beginning the interview. Thus, showing the interviewees that you do care about them and their story, and consequently it is easier for them to open up about their lives and thoughts.

My experiences – Building rapport and interviewing

Building rapport and trust by ensuring that there was a good connection felt natural after many video calls during the COVID-quarantines. One of the interviews had to be rescheduled due to the video and audio quality not being adequate for free-flowing communication. The reasons for the bad connection were a combination of weather interference and not updated software. Besides this little hick-up, first interactions went something like:

Me (interviewer): Hello (waving). Can you hear me?

Participant: Hello (waving back). Yes I can hear you. Do you hear me?

Me (interviewer): Yes. How are you?

The video helped with keeping up the rapport through body language, gestures and facial expressions. During one of the interviews, I felt physically and mentally exhausted due to external workload, stress and anxiousness. The consequence was an internal impatience on my end. The interview started fine as described above, but I failed to keep up the rapport. Despite me trying to stay collected my demeanor was unnatural and strained, which most definitely could be detected in my tone, expressions and choice of words. The setting became somewhat forced but not uncomfortable, which was reflected in the participant as short, direct, but informative answers. This was something I caught on to during the interview and tried changing. I had to ask more follow up questions, but due to my state of mind I struggled to catch important statements that I in hindsight realize I should have followed up.

4 Analyzes and discussion

Reflexive thematic analyzes (TA) deemed the most fitting analytic approach because perspectives, meanings and interpretations were the main interest, rather than the narratives (story structure) themselves. The underlying meanings in the content, the moral(s) of the story, became the point of analytic entry.

The six phases of reflexive TA presented by Braun and Clarke (2017, pp. 196-202) (see [4.1.1](#)) was used to make sense of and get an analytical overview of the data. In the following chapter the term Thematic Analyses and Reflexive Thematic Analyses will be introduced, before the phases of analyzes are clarified. Following, the process of code and theme development will be explained. An introduction of the participants and summaries of their stories will be laid

out, followed by a discussion of how each participant's story is understood through the analytic themes.

4. 1 (Reflexive) Thematic Analysis

TA is a tool to structure the analytic interpretation of patterns in data and construct themes out of such patterns.

“Thematic analysis (TA) is a method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (‘themes’) within qualitative data...a tool or technique, unbounded by theoretical commitments – rather than a methodology (a theoretically informed, and confined, framework for research).” (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 297).

TA is based on interpretation, therefore there will be no objective truths, but the analysis will give the researchers views of the subjective meaning making, thoughts and values of the participants. Because of this double hermeneutic, it is important that the researcher is deliberate and conscious about this limited worldview they are interpreting in the analytic processes (Gilje & Grimen, 1993). What differentiates reflexive TA from other coding-based analyses methods is its “...open, exploratory, flexible and iterative nature..., compared to the more structured approaches to coding and theme development associated with (post-)positivist coding reliability approaches” (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p. 593). The analytic process is continual and ever changing based on the researcher themselves and the constructs that impact their lives (experiences, knowledge, culture, gender, philosophical and epistemological standpoint, familiarity with the paradigm, and their collegial). Reflexive TA is an active hermeneutic process where the researcher must be conscious of their thoughts, choices and actions; and how these are depicted (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2017).

Braun and Clarke (2017) describes the analytic process as a water hose laid in the grass, twisting and turning, sometimes going back on itself. Reflexive TA could in this metaphor be understood as a continual analytic method/tool, one thought builds on the previous in a continues series, which I would argue is not necessarily the case. Reflexively understanding and making sense of the data is not a smooth flow like the water in the hose. Therefor I would rather illustrate the hermeneutic process of reflexive TA as traveling in a city. Interweaving highways, progressing at varying speeds, sometimes there are only one-way streets or dead-ends, roundabouts and intersections to get stuck in, distractions that takes one of course, a lot

of intersections where choices need to be made before moving on, and there is no real end (or truth) but always a new view of a much larger cohesive scene. Braun and Clarke (2017) also use a similar analogy when comparing themes and codes to a city guidebook, explaining the process of analyzing data during phases.

4.1.1 Phases of analysis

Braun and Clarke (2017) splits the analytical process in to six phases. The phases are not to be used as strict checkboxes like in post-positivist research, but flexible guidelines that need to be adjusted to the researcher and the research question. There is no dualistic choices, but constant holistic and conscious evaluation of alternatives to how the data is interpreted to help answer the question (Braun et al., 2022). The phases are:

(1) Familiarization

The first thing one does with the data is to familiarize oneself with it. This means to read, listen or watch the gathered data multiple times. The goal at this stage is to get to know the data, find points of interest, and take notes on what ‘snags the line’. “What you want to achieve at this stage is both a sense that you really ‘know’ the dataset, but also to be engaging with the data as data rather than as information.” (Braun & Clarke, 2017, p. 196).

(2) Generating codes and (3-4) themes

“Codes are your tools for developing the analytic depth you need, to do justice to the dataset in addressing your research question” (Braun et al., 2022, pp. 58-59). Codes do *not* need to be perfect, but they need to be precise and specific, meaning they should not try to capture multiple meanings. In such cases where a sentence carries multiple meanings, multiple codes should also be used. Though on the other side the codes can get to precise and unique, or fine-grained as Braun et al. (2022) puts it, meaning the code captures a concrete scenario and aren’t suitable for capturing larger ideas or concepts.

“You can tweak existing codes as you work through the data, expanding or contracting them, splitting them into two or more codes, or collapsing similar codes together, to better fit your developing analysis.” (Braun & Clarke, 2017, p. 197).

The main point in using codes is to help with structuring nuanced interpretations and create heuristic engagement with the dataset. I.e. codes are used by the researcher to explore the data, gain insight and create analytic rigor (Braun et al., 2022).

When talking about themes it's important to understand that it is not something waiting to be discovered. The themes are patterns generated and constructed based on different philosophical and epistemological interpretations. "Themes do not passively emerge from either data or coding; they are not 'in' the data, waiting to be identified and retrieved by the researcher. Themes are creative and interpretive stories about the data..." (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p. 594).

(5) Refinement And Naming

The process of refining and naming involves reviewing previously constructed codes and themes, and seeing if they adequately fit the raw data, or if they are misrepresentative and need to be changed. "Revision can range from minor tweaks to a complete restart of the analysis – you have to be open to the possibility that you need to "let go" of some or all of your analysis if the review raises problems." (Braun & Clarke, 2017, p. 199).

(6) Writing up

There is no clear end to the analytic process in TA. In contrast to quantitative analytic methods, in TA the analysis is not finished before report writing begins. The analysis and writing are intertwined in each other (Braun et al., 2022). Regardless, formal academic writing is an essential step in formulating a well-executed, cohesive and reflexive TA.

4.2 Codes and themes – developing patterns

After the familiarization, where general notes were written as comments in the individual Word files, initial codes were constructed as new comments and replies, as well as written in a separate document. These codes were very general and not particularly good, largely because of the authors limited experience with coding, and still getting to know the method. The codes evolved throughout the recoding process to better represent the interpretations of the data. They could most likely be even more accurate than what they ended up as, but to move forward with the thesis the codes were considered adequate when patterns and connections became obvious. After recoding the interviews and SC stories there was a total of 64 codes across the datasets. Many of the codes only corresponded with one participant but had connections to other codes and together fitted in to a thematic. These codes was not considered less important, as Braun et al. (2022, p. 55) writes:

“A code can still be useful and relevant to addressing your research question even if it occurs only once, since themes typically developed from multiple codes that identify different facets of the meaning focus of a theme”.

The codes were put into MindManager to help visualize connections and patterns to make it easier to construct a portrayal of the thought process. Codes were clustered together, and tags were used to make it clearer what the initial themes that connected them were. These tags were vague and didn't tell anything without supporting codes. The clusters were further processed, and themes constructed to explain what their connection was. After the theme construction process where only the codes were used, the raw data was revisited to consider if the themes represented the participants and interpretations adequately; a process recommended by Braun et al. (2022, p. 97) “...to review the viability of the initial clusterings, and explore whether there is any scope for *better* pattern development”. The themes were consequently adjusted and reworded to frame the interpretative patterns more precisely, and thereby be able to give an interpretation towards the research question. The final themes was worked down to:

- i. Friluftsliv as a provider of meaningful sociocultural connections
- ii. Experiences of self-efficacy by flourishing in physical and mental challenges
- iii. Appreciation of wilderness
- iv. Friluftsliv as a rewarding counter-experience to an over-rationalized world

4.3 Empiricism – What do the participants tell

This study is about how culturally diverse students are affected by a period of increased friluftsliv experiences. In the following all participants' stories and voices have been presented. As a result of the analytic process the data was compressed to its most essential core to be able to discuss the research intent. The stories are summarized and the main differences between the first and second story are highlighted. The interviews are presented as shortened thematic explanations of what each participant vocalized. All the quotes from the transcription are edited to be more reader friendly. The only changes made are removing filler words and noises like “ehm, er, hmm, ahh”, and indications of pauses. In the transcriptions these words were added, all pauses were marked with either ‘short pause, pause or long pause’ depending on the length of the silence.

4.3.1 Unveiling the narratives – Insight to the stories

Participant #3

In the first story we meet a person getting visited by a couple of friends from out of town. They have planned a trip to a viewpoint they found on the photo-sharing app Instagram. The destination is off trail, and through the story the approach is described as difficult. The group relies on their phones and the description from the internet to navigate, rather than a physical map, and they do not have appropriate equipment to traverse the terrain described. They are fixated on getting to the viewpoint and taking their photos, no matter what. They come across as inexperienced and unprepared. At the end of the story, they are unable to get home by themselves and need to get rescued.

In contrast to the first story, in the second story it is quickly recognizable that the person is far more experienced. The story starts by describing a well-planned winter trip followed by a description of a set of challenges they meet early on. Weather makes it difficult to read the map and navigate, they need to cross a couple of rivers and pitch their tents. Already we see that the narrative has changed character from a destination focused approach to an experience focused one where awareness, skills and knowledge are displayed. The story continues by explaining a set of skill- and knowledge-based actions the protagonist executes to make themselves and the group more comfortable and safer. After returning safely by backtracking, the story ends with the group displaying gratitude and pride for their hard-earned accomplishments.

Participant #4

The first story participant #4 tells, starts with a description of them hiking in the woods alone, enjoying the solitude and beauty of nature. They emphasize the sounds of nature; “I sat in a small clearing right next to the water and could listen to it flowing. In the background only the singing of the small birds was to be heard.” It is quickly followed by how such environments are a relaxing space both physically and mentally, which enables them to think clearer. They talk about having negative thoughts regarding the state of the planet’s future, without specifying exactly what they view as negative. By the context it is interpreted as an environmentalist standpoint, with worries about the sustainability of our way of life. The story continues depicting the contemplation being disrupted by a new encounter with nature’s beauty. This time in the form of an animal entering the clearing. This animal encounter evokes a “...great feeling and I felt much better afterwards. They gave me courage to look

positively into the future after this magical meeting.”. The story ends with wild nature as a symbol of hope for a more sustainable world.

The second story starts off by tying itself to the first one by referencing that they are no longer hiking alone. They show gratitude to finally have friends that share their interest; being able to build inter-human connections. They compare how they previously only went for short hikes in the woods, but now they are able to do multi-day trips with friends. The excitement of being in nature, and not just visiting for a short duration.

“But this time it was different, and it was great. There was so much to discover. It's an indescribable feeling when you wake up early in the morning in your tent and can stand in the middle of the forest to brush your teeth. By lunchtime you have already reached your destination for the day, a nearby mountain peak, and can look out over the seemingly small world from above. And when you're back at the campfire in the evening and tiredness overcomes you, you've definitely had an eventful day and plenty of fresh air.”

A commonality between the stories is the emphasis put on how natural environments are being destroyed. Again, animal encounters are an incentive for change, this time it's not only symbolic of hope, but a cry for action; “Now I have the feeling we need to do something about that, we need to protect our nature somehow, so our future children will get to experience something like this as well.”.

Participant #6

Participant #6 starts off by explaining that they pack “the most important things” before taking a bus to a hiking spot. The protagonist explains how “The nature was amazing! At the beginning, I had to hike up a mountain, which was a little bit exhausting with the backpack. Still, I managed to reach the top and had a great view over the mountains and some lakes.”. They narrate their swim in one of the lakes was cold but enjoyable, them finding a camp spot, eating and going for a sunset hike. The last third of the story is about them returning to their tent, but being surprised by a mystery man, which they depict as an indescribable outdoor expert. The two of them exchange experiences before parting ways, leaving the protagonist with a different view on the work-leisure balance.

The second story starts somewhat dry with an explanation of the importance of preparation. It continues with a more exciting experience where the protagonist goes on a trip with friends where they need to change plans to stay safe. They choose to walk further upriver instead of challenging their planned crossing. They reach their camp where they set up the tent and start preparing food. Small details like using a hot water bottle to stay warm all night show their experiential knowledge tied to their new surroundings. Further into the story the group splits up and they go on individual mini adventures. The protagonist reflects on the value of “a great combination of nature, social and time for myself”, doing multifaceted trips to experience nature in different ways. The story ends with explaining that they return safely and mentally refreshed.

4.3.2 The wild voices – Insight to the interviews

Participant #7 (Simon)

Participant #7, I'll call them Simon, is a white, central European male with some previous outdoor experience from the European alps, south America and the United States before his exchange in Alta, Norway. As he described his former experiences he did not come across as extremely experienced or proficient, but sufficient to stay outdoors on a recreational level, on designated trails and during stable/predictable conditions. He was not a novice outdoors but also did not push the boundaries of safety and comfortability.

Simon described his experiences in Norway as different, challenging, positive, social, relaxing, enjoyable, wild and convenient. One of the experiences he talked about specifically was a winter trip where the temperature reached -16°C at night, “and I definitely felt my limits... I was fine with the cold, but I know persons in the group that struggled a lot”. He did not feel that the cold necessarily was the challenge, but as he puts it: “for me the hardest thing was trying to help. But not really being able to help”. Simon was trying to build relations with new people, yet he did not have the knowledge and skills to react appropriately to the signals of distress and discomfort while still taking care of himself. This inability to offer any meaningful help made him uncomfortable and shaped the trip into something different than he had expected. His former experiences were with groups of well-known friends with equal proficiency, in contrast to his stay in Alta where the group of students was unfamiliar and diverse. This new group of people offered Simon a different perspective and an opportunity to build social relationships; “I think it changed how I reacted with others. Definitely about, also about like, how much time I take talking with them about their

problems... I think I, developed myself with being like more able to communicate with the others.”.

Simon emphasized that his change in perspective extended beyond his interactions with the other students. His perspective of nature is mainly connected to differences in social and cultural structures. As he explained, where he’s from only a small percentage of the population is interested in the outdoors, in contrast to Alta where he felt like the majority regularly spent time in nature, even if it was only for a short hike. After the cold winter trip his understanding of the affordances of the wild outdoors changed, this may have something to do with his cultural intrinsic constraints; “...it definitely changed my perspective on where you go, or where you can also go camping, that you can do it actually for the sense of some kind of activity or tourism.”. He argued and remarked on the difference in cultures by explaining how his week in central Europe usually is cramped with daily chores, school obligations, and socializing. Needing to plan logistics for even small outings eats up time and motivation to execute the excursions. He reflected on life as a student being very structured and somewhat limiting where he’s from, and how it leaves little time for leisure.

“...it's definitely more stressful being a student here because there’s always events you need to attend, we do have classes every single day, so. We do spend a lot of time with university and it leaves you with less time enjoying what you actually like to do. Which I had plenty of time in Norway to actually go for other trips on the weekends.”.

He felt that in Norway his days were not as cramped, and he had time to do chores during the weekdays after school. This left time to go on short, and sometimes some longer hikes every weekend.

Nature in Alta is all around, and one does not need to travel far to enjoy natural landscapes. At the same time, Simon argued that recreational activities outside the city are much easier to reach in central Europe than Alta, because of the infrastructure and accessibility to different forms of transportation. But the accessibility to ‘untouched’ nature “...is bigger in Alta. The nature here, if you go to the Alps, is always with a lot of infrastructure... So I feel like if you want untouched nature, it is definitely easier to reach it from Alta”. The proximity to nature in Alta was something Simon highly appreciated. He felt like he had time and space to relax and structure his thoughts, rather than following a tight schedule and feeling like he had no real leisure time. The increased time he spent outdoors gave him an enjoyable physical and mental

space to think and grow as a person, "...I had more time to reflect about myself when being outside, which I enjoyed ... I think my personal development grew more in one semester in Norway than it did it five in Germany".

Participant #8 (Thomas)

Participant #8, I'll call them Thomas, is a white, North American male with a lot of experience from the American north-west through boy scouts, family vacations and recreation, and working as an assisting guide at a summer camp. He was well versed in the practical aspect of being outdoors and had no real challenge with the level of the course excursions at the University.

The first thing he did when he came to Alta was to borrow a pack-raft (inflatable paddle boat) to explore the fjord and its islands, alone. This is a good illustration of Thomas' proficiency and mindset regarding the outdoors. He enjoys spending time outdoors, challenging and developing different skills, appreciating the presentness he feels in nature and reflecting on life. He emphasized that the trips with the class were less enjoyable, because they were not very challenging, and "There's a lot more noise; You move a lot slower; There's a lot more to carry and I feel like you're not as, you're not as close with everyone.". When asked if the class group influenced his experience, he responded that it depended on the trip's goal and the group's dynamics. He explained that he enjoys spending time outdoors to escape society and find peace and quiet. The trips felt more or less like an escape from daily clutter based on the proficiency and mindset of his companions.

Simon appreciated that he had the option to ask the teachers and instructors if he didn't understand. At the same time, he was not opposed to the idea of group trips, but he found it more enjoyable when the level of proficiency was not as diverse as it was in the group of international students.

Some of his perspective seemed to change somewhat during the interview. As he reflected more and needed to put his experiences and thoughts into spoken words, he realized that he to some extent enjoyed and appreciated being surrounded by like-minded people, even though their skill level was not on par with his own. He said that the group evoked feelings of consolidation and assurance. He finely felt that his choice of career was not weird or useless; "Everyone I know here is interested in guiding and being outdoors, and it was really nice ... it has been very nice just to be surrounded by people who have the same interests... it just

reminds me this is, this is a career path people take. It's not, it's not weird for me to want to be doing these things. It's not a bad decision.”. Thomas' development was mainly social and cultural, not skill based. He pointed out that the different cultures he experienced while here was a big part of his adventure.

“I've never left North America before and it's just been a really cool cultural experience to be someplace where people are speaking different languages and you know. And, some of the ways of doing things are different, and I just wanted to broaden my horizons”

Participant #9 (Emma)

Participant #9, I'll call them Emma, is a white, central European female with moderate experience with the outdoors from growing up close to mountains and going on trips with her parents. She seems to be reasonably capable in the outdoors, but lacks some experience, knowledge and understanding.

Similar to Simon, Emma was used to trails, paths, cabins, and other infrastructure being available in and/or integrated into nature. She compared her previous imagination of natural landscapes to the nature she experienced while in Norway, and the first thing she mentioned was that she felt less safe, she felt that she was more dependent on her own and others proficiency. Norwegian nature “...is so much wilder...really rough and you really have to watch out for the circumstances and your surrounding”. But the perceived dangers and challenges she experienced in the Norwegian wilderness ended up as very empowering memories, feelings of strength and capability, as well as building meaningful connections to other humans.

One of the trips she talked about was to the island Senja, a 400km drive south from Alta. While chuckling she told me: “...we weren't prepared that much”. She described that her friend and she hadn't checked their tent before setting off as well as not being completely sure how to operate the gas stove. Her friend was also described as not very physically fit and both of them being sleep deprived as a result of the trip being during their exam-week. During the trip they, knowingly fatigued from lack of sleep and being ill prepared, chose to hike up the mountain Hesten because they were really motivated. A trip that could have ended in disaster ended up as “...one of the best memories I ever had in my life”. Emma did not view the trip as something risky, but as a challenge she completed with a friend. During the trip she had

“...many strong feelings of, of being dependent on the other person but still caring a lot for each other and also making decisions for the two of us, and not knowing if it's the right one”. She explored her physical and mental capabilities, and by doing so developed and experienced proficiency and self-efficacy in the outdoors. At the same time, she created a strong inter-human bond with her friend by exposing herself to situations where she was dependent on the capabilities of the friend.

The dependency Emma felt with her friend at Senja is something she also mentioned while talking about the class group. The excursions were not always very challenging and about developing physical skills. While talking about if she would have liked more challenging trips, she replied with:

“... sometimes I wished the skill level was a bit more on the same level [less diversity in the group]. But just to do more, or to do more exciting things. But yeah, in the end it wasn't about going, or walking, or hiking two more kilometers, or more meters in height, or like, going higher or faster or. So yeah, it was so much, about so much more than that.”.

She realized that the trips didn't necessarily need to be physically challenging to be enjoyable and meaningful, they also had aspects of social connectedness, cooperativeness and awareness that were far more important. “So I think the problem solving was a big, big part. And being connected with nature, just being in nature 24/7 and moving your body. Breathing fresh air.”.

Participant #10 (Sara)

Participant #10, I'll call them Sara, is a white central European female with limited experience in the outdoors. She was a novice before her semester in Alta. Her previous experiences were limited both in terms of difficulty and variety; “I grew up pretty close to the mountains... camping a lot with family... but it was more in a secure setting ... where I come from, everything is, more regulated”. Sara explained that all the trails she was used to were marked, and every campsite on pre-established grounds. She similar to Simon and Emma, found the scarcity of regulations in Norway scary but at the same time freeing, to be able to roam and camp freely.

Sara expressed a great appreciation for how close nature is in Alta. The closeness of nature in combination with knowledge from the course “...encouraged me and the others to also do

something in their free time, or in my free time”. Sara thought she would not have made use of the natural features of Alta if it was not for her studying outdoor life activities.

She assumed it was related to increased motivation to go outdoors and better information about destinations and activities. Sara recognized the positive impact friluftsliv had made on her physical and mental health, stating that:

“I really enjoyed it and I didn't think that I would enjoy it that much when I started the course. But in the end I was really happy that I did it, because it really opened up like, my mindset about nature and that it helps me that much, and yeah, physically and mentally.”

Sara's possibly biggest achievement was increasing her proficiency significantly enough to feel that she in the end was a valuable part of the group. Sara talked about how hard she felt the physical and mental challenge of going on long winter trips was at the start of the semester. Sara worked on pushing her physical and mental limits thinking that she could not give up because that would leave the group behind; “I really stepped over that boundary and had to think positively because there was no escape.”. Sara allocated a lot of her learning to her own experiences, as well as to other students sharing their experiences and solutions. In the three months she went from being a novice, having enough with taking care of herself, to an intermediate able to contribute to the group. When asked how this development made her feel she said: “I was more like, empowered, and also more confident in myself and my skills. And also to really have deserved a place in a group...”.

4.4 Report and discussion - How can we understand what the participants tell us

No dedicated discussion chapter is part of this thesis, rather the discussion is interweaved into the following thematic report.

In the following all four themes from the analysis will be discussed with the premise of the research question: “How are three months of friluftsliv experiences in the Arctic affecting exchange students' feelings of development”.

4.4.1 Friluftsliv as a provider of meaningful social connections

Stories

In **participant #3's** stories there is a clear social aspect to outdoor activities. In the first story, this is depicted through a hike with visiting friends, adventuring an unknown area. They are in

their own unexperienced way collaborating and trusting each other to reach their destination. Even though they encounter difficulties, it's evident they care about each other and don't want to disappoint their friends.

In the second story there is a distinct 'we mentality'. Mostly everything is explained and told in a way that indicates that the actions were done to benefit everyone in the group. The protagonist shows us that the group members was able to understand what everyone needed and did something helpful to contribute; "... we arrived at our base camp and pitched our tents. Some of us were already collecting wood, so we could start a campfire, which we could then gather around and cook dinner". The difference between the stories lies in that the protagonist in the second story shows a more mature, empathetic and experienced understanding of others, assisting them and building on inter-human connections through purposeful and collaborative actions; actual social connectedness as Cartwright et al. (2018) calls it.

In **participant #4's** stories it's apparent that there is an evolution of sociocultural connections, but it's not entirely clear what these connections contain. In the first story the protagonist is alone in the woods, sitting next to a river. The only connection introduced is between the protagonist and nature in the form of sounds and animals. A great and fascinating connection, but it's not an inter-human one.

The second story's plot continues much the same way, but a big difference being that they imply that they appreciated the change from usually being alone to "...I finally found some friends with the same passion as I have. We went hiking together for three days and spent the nights in tents. It was a great experience and so different to what I'm used to from my trips into nature before.". The protagonist at some point leaves the group to explore, but they evidently perceive a social connection to their new friends (Cartwright et al., 2018), a connection built on mutual interests and a fascination for spending time in nature.

Participant #6 starts their story alone, before meeting someone they feel a connection to. In the case of the first story, it is the indescribable outdoor expert the protagonist makes a connection to, ending up getting influenced by the social interaction and wanting to change their lifestyle. In the second story the connections between the characters take a different form and is not that evident. The protagonist is on a trip with a group of friends, but besides mentioning that they oriented, set camp together, and telling the reader how "It was really

nice to hear about everyone's experiences...”, there isn't much to indicate there was developed a connection. The story's characters are impersonal and rigid. The plot of both stories is very protagonist oriented and centers mostly around their personal improvement and self-interests. Although vaguely described, there seems to be some inter-human connections built in both stories.

Interviews

Simon seems to be a very sociable person that enjoys spending time with friends and family. He talks about going on trips with friends to ski-resorts in the alps, backpacking in south America and hiking in the Grand Canyon before his exchange in Alta. These trips he signified where different from what he experienced in Norway. While talking about the student group Simon felt that they connected in a way that he felt was hard to describe. They were strangers, but at the same time “... they love being outdoors. Even though it was only going for a small walk around the city, or if it was going on Komsa but everybody enjoyed being outside and liking the outdoors. And I feel like this was a very special group we had there, and it definitely reflected on myself.”. All the students were essentially outsiders in a new environment, trying to understand and adapt to the rules, simultaneous as they shared an insider perspective when I came to being outdoors. This clash between being an outsider and insider may be the reason Simon felt it was hard to vocalize his relations with the other students. Parallel to this Simon talks about how not knowing the other students very well in the beginning, combined with his compassion for other people, made it difficult knowing when to help. He talks about how he and the group consequently had to learn to communicate better and learn about each other in challenging situations. In other words, they met the usual developmental challenges of being foreign student's (Murphy-Lejeune, 2002), in addition to the physical and social challenges on the outdoor trips.

Thomas likes going on trips alone or with small groups, preferably close friends, and thinks larger groups are distracting and unenjoyable. However, he does during the interview reflect on his relations. Firstly, he states that he felt somewhat more accepted in the group of exchange students than he did in his community in America. Amongst like-minded people his choice to pursue a career in nature guiding was not seen as something weird or unusual. Enjoying the outdoors and practicing friluftsliv was not just a hobby, but a lifestyle and field of work. Much of Thomas' personality and interests stem from his background in boy scouts and his upbringing, placing him as a strongly integrated agent in the 'outdoorsy' world of

northern America. It therefore makes sense that he imagines a life where spending time outdoors could be more than just a hobby. His development of connection to the other students can also be explained through constructivism, in the sense that they all are or become somewhat insiders in the world of friluftsliv by constructs they share and develop together.

The second reflection Thomas makes regarding his social connections is from his summer job as a guide. He reflects on what he learned from this and said: “I think I really developed a lot, a lot of good skills working there, because I just got to meet a lot of new people from other parts of the country.”. Her he needed to construct relations with the people he was guiding, getting to know their perspectives and understanding of the world.

Emma vocalized quite a few instances where she either felt a direct social connection (perceived social connection) to someone or connections through collaborative actions (actual social connection) (Cartwright et al., 2018). In the beginning of the interview, she mentions that: “I experienced that everyone was very helpful and if there were any problems everyone tried their best to... make the best for the group. Or that the group is happy and everything, so this was a really nice experience”. There was a tacit cohesion in the group built on compassion and care for fellow students. As Emma spoke, she expressed how she had experienced more sublime nature elsewhere, but in Alta it didn't always matter how beautiful or wild nature felt, the people were far more important. The exchange students learning new skills together, depending on each other to succeed and sharing experiences made a bond between them. The trip to Senja which Emma experienced as “...one of the best memories I ever had in my life...”, mainly built on inter-human dependency and deep trust between herself and her friend. During the interview Emma in most instances uses “we” and not “I” when describing her experience of the trips, unconsciously tying her development to the people and the situations that is constantly constructed around and by her.

Sara, in contrast to the others, said that at certain times she did not fit into the group, feeling like she was left ‘outside’ and not able to include herself. Her proficiency was at a much lower level than her , which made it harder for her to contribute and feel included. Nonetheless, Sara felt she could not let the group down by giving up. With help from the others through shared experience and practice, Sara felt like she in the end of the semester was an integrated part of the group. She built connections with the other students by overcoming internal challenges by collaborating and learning from her own experiences, finally becoming a peer; “...in the last outdoor trip we did with the Norwegian students I was

more able to include myself in a group and also be useful. Before that, I wasn't really that useful for the group and everything. But then I could really help the group and yeah, yeah, be a useful member.”. Importantly, Sara's social development stems from learning from her peers' experiences, highlighting an important sociocultural characteristic of friluftsliv. By reflecting on and integrating her own experiences to understand her peers' stories, Sara deepened her personal growth and social understanding by using her imagination.

4.4.2 Experiences of self-efficacy by flourishing in physical and mental challenges

Stories

Participant #3 takes us on a journey with a person which starts as the perfect example of unproficiency, becoming a more proficient person that is proud of their accomplishments. The first story ends with them needing to be rescued after some bad decisions, unpreparedness, unforeseen weather and generally being ill-equipped. The second story is about a winter trip where some challenging situations like low temperatures, high winds, snow and river crossings make it hard to move, orienteer and keep warm. The protagonist and their companions experience that everything they do takes longer due to the cold. The story ends with: “After a last strenuous hike, we made it back to the cars and enjoyed a few warm waffles in a room in the village where we parked the cars. We were all very proud of ourselves...”. Some rich development in terms of proficiency is the biggest change here. Thus, change in skill and knowledge allowed the protagonist to overcome physical and mental barriers, and experience self-efficacy in the second story.

Participant #4 doesn't mention anything to suggest they felt self-efficacy in the first story. The progression from the first to second story somewhat reflects how constrained the protagonists, and potentially the author's, previous experiences may have been before, therefore also giving an indication of their development. In the second story, they mention how they experienced something new in the form of having companions, hiking in the mountains, spending multiple days outdoors and sleeping in tents. They write: “...when you're back at the campfire in the evening and tiredness overcomes you, you've definitely had an eventful day and plenty of fresh air”. New experiences like these are valuable in regards of personal development. Challenging and prospering through social, physical and mental accomplishments gives the protagonist a feeling of well-being (Lovoll et al., 2020) and self-efficacy, strengthening their self-confidence.

Participant #6 doesn't vividly describe their successes but does show some feeling of self-efficacy in both stories. In the first story they describe "At the beginning, I had to hike up a mountain, which was a little bit exhausting with the backpack. Still, I managed to reach the top and had a great view over the mountains and some lakes.", which shows feelings of self-efficacy after accomplishing a physical challenging task. Other than this there is no indication in the first story of overcoming challenges.

In the second story, though not very elaborate, but more evident feelings of accomplishment when successfully completing challenges are displayed. Early in the story the group encounters a physical obstacle; "One of the rivers was only partially frozen, so we had to walk further upstream to find a crossable location. We managed to cross the river and were really happy about it.". They demonstrate the development of risk evaluation, flexibility in changing plans, and the ability to handle challenges physically and mentally, emerging with a sense of accomplishment. Near the end the protagonist says, "I was surprised that I managed to stay warm during the whole trip!", indicating that they weren't completely sure if they were proficient enough, but still managing the whole trip and feeling good about it afterwards.

Interviews

Simon didn't talk much about his accomplishments and what he found physically challenging. Instead, he focused on the mental difficulty of watching other students struggle, which he found more burdensome. Subsequently leading to his biggest development being his communication skills. Simon mentioned that "...on the first trip we did (sighs), we didn't know each other, and we struggled, but after two days being in the cold I think we really managed pretty well.". This indicates that while they were initially mentally and socially challenged by not knowing each other, those concerns became secondary when the physical challenge of the cold set in. After getting through the trip and constructing better social connections in the group Simon felt that he, together with his now new friends had accomplished a lot.

Challenging himself, exploring, doing something new and getting the feeling of self-efficacy is one of the main reasons **Thomas** enjoys the multiplicity of friluftsliv. He was very deliberate about the fact that he is almost always trying to improve his skills; "But I think even then, even on my own personal trips I'm always trying to, to practice those skills because I want to be good at them. So, I even on my personal trips I'm trying to learn.". This chase after new experiences and new skills is something that also shows in how he described his

approach to choosing what he does and where he goes. He likes the idea of multifaceted trips, where he needs to apply different skills and knowledge, and is therefore always pursuing new activities that seem interesting to him. Thomas also brings up a different feeling of achievement that isn't always associated to a challenge per se, but as he said "...that was neat because that was the northernmost, the northernmost trip I've ever done ... It gives it that superlative. You know that feeling like, 'hey, this is the, the most something I've ever done.'". This concept is somewhat explained by Ingold (2021) in his walking analogy, every step is an adventure waiting to happen. Doing something for the first time and succeeding gives a feeling of great wonder and self-confidence, even if it isn't physically difficult.

How **Emma** describes her trip to Senja with her friend gives the impression that they were not that proficient with wild camping and wild hiking. This gave them the unique opportunity to challenge their skills and instigate valuable learning experiences with little prerequisite effort. As mentioned earlier, this trip was important to Emma and gave her a lot of enjoyment and self-confidence; "... when you made it, or when you come back from a trip, ehm, also once again it's very empowering, and I feel strengthened in a way.". Emma expresses that her self-esteem grew, and she felt more capable in challenging situations after her exchange in Alta, a development she associated with coping on outdoor trips. As described by Murphy-Lejeune (2002) personal development is usually accelerated for exchange students through being forced to develop useful skills and adapt to their new environment. Emma's development was likely even further encouraged as a result of the additional challenging experiences in friluftsliv.

Sara found the trips difficult, and as mentioned earlier she was on the brink of giving up on several instances. Regardless of her struggles she in the end only found positives with the experiences. "I mean there were like, situations or things that I didn't find that comfortable or was like really challenging for me. But I would say that was not negative for me, that's really helped me improve for the next outdoor trip... on the first outdoor trip I was really, really cold and that really made me I think stronger in that sense that I had to live through that and also improve for the next trip.". Sara's struggles gave her a foundation of experiences where she in the end prevailed. These experiences helped instigate her increase in skills and knowledge during the semester which grew her feeling of self-efficacy.

4.4.3 Appreciation of wilderness

Stories

Participant #3's first story is centered around a search for this instagramable location in wild nature. The protagonist and friends view the natural environment mainly as a series of obstacles to overcome. When they arrive at the viewpoint, they perceive it as a duller, less lively, rainier and foggier version of the images on Instagram, leaving them a little disappointed. This narrative highlights that their appreciation of nature may only be based on its aesthetic value. It's also possible that the protagonist is seeking the sublime experiences of wilderness, like the ones Graves et al. (2020) writes about. Either way, by leaving the established trails and venturing beyond their competency, they ultimately learn to appreciate the beauty of wilderness despite the contrast between their imagination and perception.

In the second story, any mention of aesthetics is left out, focusing instead on the physical sensations of exhaustion, cold, and hunger. With descriptions of whipping snow and wind, and building fires for cooking and warmth, the protagonist's perception and imagination go from an almost purely visual appreciation to a more complex admiration of the physical challenges that wilderness exposes them to. As explained by Curtin (2009) and Graves et al. (2020) such physically challenging experiences and skill oriented activities strongly correlates with personal growth and satisfaction of life. This change could be an indication that the participants, through increased proficiency finds what they previously saw as problematic, more enjoyable and worth pursuing.

Participant #4's appreciation of wilderness is the main plot that ties their stories together. As mentioned above, a connectedness to nature is built through the peacefulness of solitude and perceptions of nature's sounds and visuals. The first story starts with "The forest looked beautiful. It was totally quiet and peaceful because there was not a soul around. I sat in a small clearing right next to the water and could listen to it flowing. In the background only the singing of the small birds was to be heard.", giving a fantastical almost fairytale-like character to the forest. The participant's imagination of wilderness is giving nature soothing attributes that relax and awes the protagonist.

In the second story, the focus shifts from sounds and visuals to a more casual and less poetic depiction of appreciation:

“There was so much to discover. It's an indescribable feeling when you wake up early in the morning in your tent and can stand in the middle of the forest to brush your teeth. By lunchtime you have already reached your destination for the day, a nearby mountain peak, and can look out over the seemingly small world from above.”.

These connections and admirations of wilderness are further strengthened by sublime encounters with wild animals in both stories.

In both stories the protagonist's appreciation is centered around nature's aesthetic. The atmosphere created through descriptions of birdsong, flowing water, wild animals, different landscapes and the feeling of being small, all adds to the cohesion and mixture of experiencing beauty and the sublime. The change seems to lie in the author's more pragmatic mindset while writing the second story, not in their general appreciation of wilderness.

Participant #6 also gives the impression of their appreciation of the peacefulness and solitude of wilderness. In the first story the protagonist decides to take a swim in one of the lakes they encounter, saying “I enjoyed the view swimming in the little lake. It was just the nature and me.”. They continue by taking their evening hike, where they depict the aesthetics of a sunset “...the colors were so bright and intense you cannot imagine. The clouds turned red and pink, the sun was a big yellow/orange ball. I got lost in the beauty of the nature.”, revealing their appreciation of wilderness, and the sublime moments that bring joy (Graves et al., 2020).

In the second story they again mention the beauty of the sun setting. The difference here is that the protagonist is far more pragmatic and much of the appreciation of wilderness is not obvious. Its small mentions of nature being beautiful and them wanting “...to focus on the nature and special environments the next day.” that indicates their appreciation but does not elaborate further on exactly what they appreciate.

Interviews

The interviews show a different kind of appreciation of wilderness. When the SC stories mostly emphasized the beauty of nature and the perceptive parts of nature through pure imagination, the interviews gave insight to a more nuanced perspective with reflections on cultural and personal differences, and a less fantastical description of their interaction with wilderness.

Simon talked about how he back in Germany felt like he through public transportation had easier access to recreational nature (resorts and trails), but that it was very different from what he experienced in Alta. He expressed that the wilderness and the feeling of untouched nature in Northern Norway was what made it special, contrasting it with the nature in central Europe 'littered' with trails and infrastructure. Simon doesn't seem to prefer one over the other but appreciates both in their own way, wilderness for its freedom and skill development, and the resorts and trails for their conveniences and welcomeness.

Alta is surrounded by natural landscape, allowing more frequent use and time spent outdoors. Like Simon said "...in Alta, I was going outdoors every week, even if it was only for going for a small hike or going for longer walk. But I was in the outdoors every week, which I did never do before.". In Norway he felt physically closer to nature, as he could walk outside and always feel its presence, possibly enhancing his well-being Cartwright et al. (2018). The constant reminders of nature in Alta made Simon more aware of his surroundings, noting that "...I feel like this is what being in Northern Norway is different. The awareness for nature. So you, so you are aware that you have, you have nature all around and you can basically connect with nature.".

Thomas gave the impression of appreciating the quiet atmosphere and intimate connection with nature that solitude offers. As mentioned earlier, larger groups like the class were a distraction to Thomas. He felt like the social noise usually made the experiences less enjoyable. One of the things he mentions as the most unique and highly appreciated aspects of wilderness is the feeling of getting away from an overstimulating society; "I like, you know, getting away, I like getting away from the city, I like getting away from, from the town, from, from human noises, from the sounds of engines, from music, and just from people in general. And so it's, it's an escape, you know.". This wish to escape the urban environment fits with the understanding of humans innate desire to be close to nature (Curtin, 2009). The control, constraints and distractions created by modern society intensify these contrasts and the satisfaction Thomas feels when alone or with a small group of friends in the wilderness.

Another key aspect of wilderness Thomas acknowledges as important for his respect for nature, is the constant challenging of skills, which consequently encourages his enthusiasm for friluftsliv and appreciation of nature (Lovoll et al., 2020). The wilderness is not fixed, it is constantly changing, which also means it's unforgiving if the people visiting don't have the required skillset (Graves et al., 2020), a quality Thomas seeks out. Some of the last things

Thomas said in the interview was "...a big part of why I love adventure, and I think why most people love adventure and doing trips is it's just that I, I think it, it's that innate desire to want to see the world.", indicating that he also appreciates exploring the unknown, seeing new landscapes and perceiving different parts of wilderness.

Emma and Sara were used to the central European trails and infrastructure and had little to no experience with wilderness. They both talked about not feeling completely safe in the wilderness. Emma stating that:

"...in Norway you're really dependent on your own skills and your own, your gear and your knowledge, and maybe other persons you, you do outdoor experiences with. So, because nature it's so much wilder I would say, or this is my experience that nature is yeah, really rough and, that you really have to watch out... But in the end, when you made it, or when you come back from a trip, also once again it's very empowering, and I feel strengthened in a way. And much more than I do when I come back from a trip in Germany, or in other countries I have been."

This shows that even though Emma felt somewhat vulnerable, the wilderness and the necessity to trust herself strengthened her appreciation of nature and herself. Sara said that when she got more accustomed to it, the wilderness felt like freedom. She appreciated not having to follow a pre-planned route and being able to hike and camp wherever she chose. Their experiences with wilderness empowered them through giving them a space to get to know themselves better and enhancing their feelings of self-efficacy which contributes to overall well-being (Graves et al., 2020; Lovoll et al., 2020). Both appreciated the feeling of excelling through challenging experiences that were on the limit of comfort.

Emma also felt a deep nostalgic connection to nature while in Alta. She talked about how natural landscapes made her reminisce back to her childhood and the appreciation she used to feel on trips with her family – a feeling brought forth and further intensified by her experiences in Norwegian wilderness.

One of the first things Sara mentioned in the interview was "...one perk of the location Alta is that you are close to nature, and to have a lot of opportunities to go out and go for hikes and experience the nature, and also the fjord.". The immediate access to nature in comparison to her previous experiences from central Europe was highly appreciated. This immediate closeness to nature meant she also spent more time outdoors during her leisure time. Much

like Simon, Sara doesn't indicate that she prefers one over the other but finds that they have their own valuable qualities.

4.4.4 Friluftsliv as a rewarding counter-experience to an over-rationalized world

It's important to point out some important factors before moving on with this theme. Firstly, the understanding of the terms over-rationalized compared to thinking. Over-rationalization in this context is understood as thinking or acting purely based on reasoning or logic, without regard for or implementation of natural and spontaneous human sentiment. Thinking is simply the act of conscious or deliberate thought based on the individuals' experiences.

Secondly, not all SC stories gave elaborative examples regarding this theme. Nevertheless, there were in all stories parts that either were counter-examples or small but insightful examples of friluftsliv being rewarding in terms of letting the protagonist just exist, not needing a reason or explanation for what they do. It was not always clear what the authors of the stories were trying to convey, and they left some parts up for pure interpretation.

Stories

The first story of **participant #3** is a clear example of a person needing a goal, a specific reason to be outdoors. If it had not been for the Instagram post they found with the beautiful view, they would most likely not have gone. The protagonist and friends seem solely focused on reaching their destination, reacting arbitrarily to everything that happens along the way without being prepared to manage it. This is evident in their description of obstacles and inconveniences as problems, ultimately leading to their need for rescue.

The second story is different in that the protagonist and friends are fit to go on their trip safely. In essence the trip is much more open in that they are not fixated on a specific destination for the trip to be successful. This gives the protagonist the opportunity to focus on the simplicity of life. The most important things for the protagonist are described as keeping warm, eating food, looking at beautiful nature, hiking with friends and talking around a campfire. The entire intent of the trip's changes for the protagonist between the first and second story. In the first story we meet a person extrinsic motivated, seeking a one-dimensional experience but getting a multifaceted one. In the second story the protagonist has changed, and the trip is intrinsically driven by the innate enjoyment of minimalism and attentiveness in nature. This change in awareness can indicate that the author have gone

through some personal growth (Løvoll, 2019) and developed a more mature relation to and understanding of nature.

In **participant #4's** first story there is no rational reason for the protagonist to be in the forest by the river, listening to bird song and encountering deer. The only explanation for their presence there is because they wanted to enjoy the environment and atmosphere of the forest. The environment makes them relax and "...there at the river I could think super much". This indicates that they are in a state of awareness and the calming environment is a catalyst for deeper thoughts.

In the second story this fantastical element is almost gone. It's there, but the protagonist is far more pragmatic in their way of telling their story. Still, they keep the feeling of freedom, nature giving them a space to think and move freely; "I walked a little further away from our campsite to be alone and think...". The interaction with nature in both stories creates different contexts that awaken awareness and thoughts about the environment. Another key aspect of both stories is the implementation of wild animals. The interaction with wildlife would according to Curtin (2009, p. 470) be "...potentially fundamental to human mental health and happiness and that the very existence of wildlife enhances our lives.". The author leans into the innate human desire to connect with wilderness, and the enjoyment of its contrast to the regular urban world.

Participant #6 captures the freedom from the over-rationalized society quite well in their first story. The protagonist hikes freely, enjoying the scenery, stopping to take a short swim in a mountain lake before watching the sunset. At no point in the story does they stop to make sense of or reason why they spend their time doing rationally useless activities. The pure enjoyment of the activity and scenery is itself motivation enough. This illustrates a profound connection with nature and a break from the structured, goal-oriented mindset often prevalent in modern society (Curtin, 2009). The story highlights the intrinsic value of nature-based experiences and the importance of engaging with the environment for its own sake.

In the second story it is a little different, the protagonist is more conscious about what and why they do things, but the underlying feeling of enjoying the moment and not worrying about bigger agendas are still present. They mention the ability to take a break and think, "I enjoyed the me-time, as it allowed me to think about my life, current tasks I have to do, what I am happy with in my life and what I would like to improve. I really enjoy this me-time, as it

helps me to focus and get a new perspective on my life.”. Again, showing that the slower pace of nature can work as a counter-experience to the stressful everyday society and be rewarding in terms of giving time and space to decompress from overstimulation.

Interviews

Simon discussed how friluftsliv made studying in Alta different to what he was used to from Germany. He described his university life as “It is hard to describe. But being at a university in Germany is a lot of more, things you need to do... it leaves you with less time enjoying what you actually like to do. Which I had plenty of time in Norway to actually go for other trips on the weekends.”. His life in Germany was high paced with little time to properly relax. In Germany he always needed to plan, rationalize and schedule his life. A key difference Simon highlighted was part of the Norwegian academic system, noting its strong emphasis on practical, hands-on learning. Contrasting what he was used to in Germany, having reading plans, events and daily classes. In Norway he experienced the classes as more a combination of academic theory and practical skills.

He also observed that having more leisure time as a student was generally more common in Norway. Simon had the feeling of always having endeavors in Germany, then got a contrasting feeling during his time in Alta, saying:

“...I had more time to reflect about myself when being outside, which I enjoyed ...

...I think my personal development grew more in one semester in Norway than it did it five in Germany...

...I have more memories about what I did there on the outdoor trips. What I did with my friends on my days off...”.

Having this time to reflect about what he was doing and experienced rather than having to justify doing A over B, exemplifies the stark differences between structured, high-pressure environments and that of friluftsliv, allowing for personal freedom and reflection (Curtin, 2009; Lovoll et al., 2020).

In **Thomas’** case this theme ties together with his appreciation for wilderness. The rewarding feeling of escaping society and being self-reliant. Thomas in this sense comes very close to the more ‘traditional’ form of friluftsliv mentioned in Graves et al. (2020) and Løvoll (2019),

but he integrates modern equipment and activities into his practice.. Trusting his skills without needing to evaluate everything he does while outdoors, and consequently being able to relax and embrace the experiences. Thomas doesn't require a reason to go on his trips beyond the enjoyment of the experience itself. As he states, "...if I'm just doing a personal trip and I'm doing what I already know is within my abilities, and I'm just trying to have a good time," the experiences are inherently valuable. This perspective contrasts with the over-rationalized mindset, where every action needs a clear purpose or justification. For Thomas, the act of being in nature, engaging with the environment, and enjoying the journey is sufficient motivation. The freedom to explore, the joy of self-reliance, the aesthetic environment, and the intrinsic rewards of the experiences contribute to a sense of well-being (Curtin, 2009; Graves et al., 2020) that arguably is often missing in over-rationalized environments.

Emma and her friend's trip to Senja exemplifies how friluftsliv counters an over-rationalized society. They decided to embark on their journey during exam week, a time filled with stress, fatigue, and mental exhaustion, can be described as a striking departure from the rationalized routines of modern life. This spontaneous decision, free from extensive reasoning or justification, led to some of the best memories of Emma's life. Emma herself found it hard to describe why exactly this trip became so memorable. But it appears that Emma found it refreshing and unusual to experience a sense of freedom where she didn't have to constantly rationalize. Instead, she could embrace her emotions, enjoy the experience, and feel a deep connection with her friend.

Undertaking the journey during exam week may also have fulfill the therapeutic benefits of friluftsliv (Curtin, 2009; Vikene, 2012). By choosing to engage in friluftsliv during this time, Emma and her friend possibly found a powerful means of stress relief. The natural beautiful environment of Senja, in conjunction with the freedom to explore without a strict agenda, provided an escape similar to what Thomas stated, as well as from their academic pressures.

Sara in many ways felt that her participation on the excursions was rewarding, but not in the same way mentioned by the other participants. Being the least proficient among them, she initially had to approach her actions with more rationality to ensure their effectiveness. As she gained experience and her skills improved, her ability to think freely became more viable. This meant she could relax and get more comprehensive experiences. She emphasized that

she felt her experiences in nature benefitted her physical and mental health by challenging her adaptability.

Sara's journey exemplifies how engaging with nature can foster personal growth by challenging individuals to adapt and overcome obstacles. In an over-rationalized world, where efficiency and predictability are preferred, the dynamic and unpredictable nature of friluftsliv can push individuals out of their comfort zones and encourage them to develop new skills. Sara's progression from a more rational approach to a freer, more intuitive mindset reflects this process of personal development. This also highlights a fundamental shift in her relationship with the environment—from a rational, task-oriented approach to one characterized by spontaneity, enjoyment and connectedness.

5 Conclusion

In this study an inductive approach was implemented together with a combination of story completion and semi-structured interviews to gather qualitative data. The theoretical framework was built on understanding friluftsliv as a cultural phenomenon (Løvoll, 2019), its position in an global context (Gurholt & Haukeland, 2020) and as a philosophical stand regarding well-being (Curtin, 2009); as well as the social constructivist understanding of perception and imagination of Ingold (2021), and an adaptation of Murphy-Lejeune (2002) explanation of skills needed to adapt as a foreign student. Reflexive thematic analysis was utilized to answer the question: 'How are three months of friluftsliv experiences in the Arctic affecting exchange students' feelings of development?'.

From the analytic process these four themes were constructed:

- i. Friluftsliv as a provider of meaningful sociocultural connections
- ii. Experiences of self-efficacy by flourishing in physical and mental challenges
- iii. Appreciation of wilderness
- iv. Friluftsliv as a rewarding counter-experience to an over-rationalized world

The sample group could be considered too homogeneous ($\approx 50\%$ German) and gendered skewed towards female. Arguably this was of lesser importance in this qualitative research due to the heavy emphasis on individual feelings of development, but it was still important to be aware of and not marginalize. Regardless of the sample, there was at the end of this project not enough data to be able to draw a generalized conclusion. Further research using SC is

needed to evaluate if it is a suited method. Still, the empirical data gathered and shown in this project indicates that topics regarding friluftsliv and development produce rich and insightful SC data.

Short summaries of each theme and their ‘conclusion’ will follow.

Friluftsliv as a provider of meaningful sociocultural connections

Friluftsliv, emphasizing outdoor life and nature connection (Gurholt & Haukeland, 2020; Løvoll, 2019), fostered meaningful social connections amongst the exchange students. Shared physical and mental challenges and experiences in the harsh Arctic environment, built companionship through interdependent support. Such social bonds enhanced the students' feelings of development as they adapt to the wilderness together. Group activities like hiking and camping helped form trust, interpersonal skills, and deeper relationships. The increase of cooperation in nature encouraged personal growth, communicational skills, emotional intelligence, and resilience, fostering awareness and self-confidence.

Experiences of self-efficacy by flourishing in physical and mental challenges

The experiences and reflections constructed after three-month in the Alta notably enhanced the exchange students' feelings of development by fostering a strong sense of self-efficacy. Students reported flourishing in both physical and mental challenges, attributing their growth to the demanding yet rewarding natural environment. The Arctic conditions described as harsh, necessitated resilience and adaptability, leading to increased confidence and self-reliance. These experiences highlight the impact of immersive nature-based education and recreation on personal development. Overall, the students' ability to overcome adversity contributed to a deeper self-awareness and an enduring sense of accomplishment.

Appreciation of wilderness

Already before the course began the exchange students writing stories showed signs of appreciating wilderness. For some the appreciation changed character during the semester. The challenges posed by the environment and activities, the stunning aesthetics of the landscapes, immersion and closeness to nature, heightened awareness and the importance of environmental activism are all parts of the students' appreciation (Graves et al., 2020; Lovoll et al., 2020). Furthermore, the freedom experienced in wilderness instilled a sense of liberation and self-discovery. Collectively, these factors contribute to a holistic developmental

experience, enriching students' imagination and perception of nature, society and their place within these constructs.

Friluftsliv as a rewarding counter-experience to an over-rationalized world

The experiences in Northern Norwegian nature offered the exchange students a counter-experience to the over-rationalized world. Immersion in the natural environment of Alta fostered personal development, enhancing self-awareness, resilience, and a deeper connection with nature. Increased leisure time amplified the developmental effects of the trips with the university, helping the students to adapt and grow beyond their imagined limits. These experiences contrasted sharply with the structured, schedule-driven routines of their usual world, providing a refreshing and rewarding escape. The participants' stories and statements highlight the transformative potential of friluftsliv, suggesting that such immersive outdoor experiences can play a crucial role in holistic education and personal growth. As such, the increase in friluftsliv experiences stands as a counter to the burdens of contemporary life.

6 Acknowledgements

6.1 How could the process of sampling for SC have been done differently

The possibility of a designated pilot study to test the story stem and explanation was not initially considered, which might have increased participation. Recruitment difficulties likely stemmed from multiple factors: students' first week distractions, including more attractive events, other pressing tasks, and heightened socialization; the way the task and project were introduced and explained with limited time on the first day; and the impersonal nature of the handout. These factors may have made students feel they had nothing to contribute or found the project lackluster. The original plan to have students start writing stories in class on the first day might have leveraged peer pressure for higher participation. Presenting the task as homework or an exam could have increased participation but risked undermining the creativity and enjoyment of writing. A more personalized introduction might have helped, but delaying the writing process could have affected the stories' authenticity. Collaborating with other universities in Norway with similar exchange programs could also increase the sample size without major increase in organization and planning.

6.2 Future uses of SC in friluftsliv research

SC can be a valuable method in friluftsliv research for exploring complex topics like injuries and risk. As this project shows (although not to a generalizable standard), the method

provides rich qualitative data that can reveal implicit beliefs and offers a deeper understanding of psychological and cultural factors influencing outdoor activities. Ultimately, it can inform better practices in outdoor education and safety management, by giving insight into how it is imagined and thereby intrinsically understood by its practitioners. It could be interesting to collect stories from Norwegian friluftsliv students, comparing their development in the same way as done with the international students. With more data on both groups of students, the Norwegians' development and interpretations could be compared to the development and interpretations of international students. This could potentially say something about sociocultural differences and the international student's level of integration and interaction with locals and their culture. Getting stories from different universities with similar courses and educational programs would plausibly give more varied and nuanced perspectives.

6.3 Assumptions about myself

I do have some thoughts and assumptions about myself as a researcher that must be addressed. This was originally meant to be part of the methods chapter but was eventually relocated.

As a master's grad student, I'm not very experienced with the techniques and mindsets associated with good, well-practiced research. I recognize there will be significant gaps in my understanding of both academia and my own research, and therefore insufficient argumentation and academic depth to parts of my thesis. On the other hand, I do perceive myself as a somewhat knowledgeable person. I'm of the understanding that my social and communicational skills are adequate, even when conversing and explaining in English. My skills as an interviewer, with all the practicalities of listening, follow up questions, taking notes, building rapport and quickly acknowledging importances, need work as proven in [My experiences](#). I do consider my rudimentary analytical skills to be decent, even though they are unrefined and simplistic in practice. Together these skills gave a useful foundation to do qualitative data collection, handling, interpretation and reporting.

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Story completion task

Welcome to Northern Norway and UiT The Arctic University of Norway.

We like to invite you to be a participant in the master thesis of Eirik. Eirik is a master student here at the institute of sport sciences and wants to find out more about the effects of outdoor experiences.

Please note: You decide if you want to participate in this study. Feel free to reject or terminate participation at any time. However, we appreciate your participation! You will probably have intensive experiences in the outdoors in the upcoming weeks, and we think that it is worth finding out more about the effects of such experiences in order to contribute in the field of outdoor research.

The task is the following:

Write a *fictional* story about an outdoor trip! Feel free regarding the content of the story. So be creative and write a story which you find interesting and appealing.

Begin your story with the following:

“In the past few months, I have decided to spend more time outdoors. As I pick up the backpack ready for yet another trip, my roommates walk out from their rooms. With curiosity they ask ‘Where are you going?’.”

Feel free to write in your native language or in English. You have approximately one hour (in class) to write your story. You can hand it in after the one-hour mark. However, feel free to continue writing at home if you want or need more time. In this case, the story should be completed and handed in on Friday next week, 25th August at 9:15.

You will be asked to write a second, different story in November (16th November). The aim of the master project is to compare the stories, and thus probably learn more about the effects of outdoor experiences.

You should provide us your story as an anonymous Word document on an USB-stick which we hand out later. To remove authorship, follow handed out instructions.

You will receive a number which also shall be name of your document. Please save the number because you will use it again in November.

Note that we are neither willing nor able to identify you as the author of your story. We are not able to connect the number to your name since you are the only one who knows your number. It means that you remain completely anonymous in this study. Furthermore, there is no “right” or “wrong”, no “good” or “bad” outcome with this task. We are interested in the stories which *you* find interesting and which *you* want to write. Feel free to write whatever you find appealing.

If you have questions, don’t hesitate to ask.

Thank you very much for participating!

Do you want to participate in the project

International students' experiences and perspectives of the outdoors

This is a question to you about participating in a project where the intent is to get insight to how international students' experiences with friluftsliv shape their personal development and perspectives of the outdoors. In this informational letter I will give you an overview of the project and what participation will mean for you.

Intent

This is master project, and as mention the intent of the project is to get a better understanding of how your experiences with and in the outdoors have contributed to personal development and perspectives. I'm going to look at descriptions of experiences and how said experiences have made an impact on you as a person. I'm also interested in how you differentiate your experiences here from previous experiences.

Who is in charge of the project?

The Artic University of Norway is in charge of the project.

Why do you get asked?

You where her in Northern-Norway as an international student, where you attended friluftsliv programs. This have likely given you a lot of interesting experiences with and in the outdoors. I got your contact information from Marcel after you showed initial interest.

What is expected from your participation?

If you choose to participate I will be conducting an interview with you, which will last between 30 and 45 minutes. The interview will be hold over either Teams or Zoom, and only audio will be recorded. The audio will be saved as an anonymized file and transcribed. The questions will be about your experiences with the outdoors.

Participation is voluntary Participation in the project is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving any reason. All your personal data will then be deleted. There will be no negative

consequences for you if you do not want to participate or later choose to withdraw.

Your privacy - how we store and use your information

We will only use the information about you for the purposes we have described in this letter. We treat the information confidentially and in accordance with the privacy regulations. Only Marcel and I will have access to the audio recording and transcription. To further anonymize you and protect your personal data, you will be assigned a number (e.g. Participant 7) which will be used instead of your name in all data handling.

You will not be recognizable in the final publication.

What happens to your personal data when the research project ends?

The project will end according to plan between May and June of 2024. After the end of the project, the data material and your personal information will be deleted.

What gives us the right to process personal data about you?

We process information about you based on your consent.

On behalf of the Arctic University of Norway, Sikt - the Knowledge Sector's service provider has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with the privacy regulations.

Your rights

If you can be identified in the data material, you have the right to:

- access to the information we process about you, and to be given a copy of the information
- to have information about you corrected that is incorrect or misleading
- to have personal data about you deleted
- to send a complaint to the Norwegian Data Protection Authority about the processing of your personal data

If you have questions about the study or want to know more about or exercise your rights, please contact: *The Arctic University of Norway* through Marcel Reinhold at marcel.reinold@uit.no.

Our data protection office can be contacted at: personvernombud@uit.no.

If you have questions related to the assessment made of the privacy services from Sikt, you can get in touch via: Epost: personvertjenester@sikt.no or phone: +47 73 98 40 40.

Med vennlig hilsen

Marcel Reinhold Eirik Brinck Hansen

Declaration of consent

I have received and understood information about the project “International students’ experiences and perspectives of the outdoors”, and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I agree to:

Participate in an *interview*

I agree to my information being processed until the project is finished.

(Signed by project participant, date)

Interview guide

Introduction

Hello, my name is Eirik. I'm a master grad student at the School of sport sciences at the Arctic University of Norway.

My master thesis is about how outdoor experiences shape personal development. As you have been an exchange student with a focus on outdoor life activities, I am interested in your experiences and development in that field. So, it would be wonderful if you could share some of your experiences, thoughts and perspectives. There are no right or wrong answers, as it is your experiences and views that is of interest.

Collect consent from participant.

I will in addition to audio record the interview, be taking notes. So, if you see me looking down I'm most likely writing.

Don't hesitate to ask if you have any questions or if something is unclear.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Start recording.

Questions

1. Please tell me about some of the outdoor experiences you feel were pivotal and important for you when studying here.
 - a. Was there a specific excursion you remember as important?
 - b. A learning experience that felt extra important in some way?
 - c. A social setting? With whom? Why was the social setting important for the experience?
 - d. Why are these experiences important?
 - e. Did you have any negative experiences outdoors?
 - f. What exactly made these experiences negative?
 - g. Which positive experiences did you have?
 - h. What exactly made these experiences positive?

2. Were the outdoor experiences here different from previous experiences and, if yes, how did they differ?
 - a. Where there any differences in the social side of being outdoors?
 - b. Can you tell me more about how the environment makes a difference?
 - c. Did the fact that you were studying here give you a different perspective on the outdoors? How?

3. Do you experience any personal development through your outdoor activities?
 - a. If yes: How do you recognize personal development through outdoor experiences?
 - b. Does your personal development from the outdoors shape your daily life?
 - c. How do you think outdoor experiences presumably will contribute to shaping your future?
 - d. How do your development of knowledge and skills affect your experiences?
 - e. How do outdoor experiences affected you in a positive way? In what ways have you been positively influenced on an emotional level?
 - f. Can you tell me about any outdoor experiences which affected your personal development in a negative way? If yes: How and why?
 - g. What have you learnt about yourself through such experiences ?
 - h. Does your social network (friends, family, colleagues ...) notice any development or changes in you when you spend time outdoors? What have you been told?
 - i. Did you notice any development in the other students? Positive or negative?
4. Summarize or try to clear up misunderstandings.
5. Do you have anything to add or something you want to elaborate?

Thank you for your participation.

