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# Traveling for nature? On the paradox of environmental awareness and travel for nature experiences

## Abstract

*Climate change is widely regarded as the major environmental problem facing the world today. Due to this, transportation, including traveling for recreational purposes, is now being thoroughly examined. Still, and despite a growing awareness of the impact of traveling, the demand for nature based tourism holds its position in general and, paradoxically, also among environmentalists. To understand this paradox, a qualitative study was conducted of Nature and Youth Sweden, to explore an organization that combines a profound commitment to the environment with a great outdoor interest. Data were gathered through focus groups with district boards and by a content analysis of the organization's magazine. Results show that recreational traveling of environmentalists may be explained by the practice of placing nature in remote and "pristine" areas. Preferences for places characterized by biodiversity, natural quiet, an absence of other people as well as human impact reflect a desire among environmentalists to distance themselves from contemporary urban society. This desire outweighs one of their most important environmental concerns: global warming. Even though the members of Nature and Youth Sweden reject traveling by air on environmental grounds, it is concluded that environmentalism appears to be a reason for traveling, rather than a barrier.*

*Key words: environmentalism; place, ecotourism; landscape; nature based tourism; Nature and Youth Sweden*

## Introduction

Climate change is now widely seen as the major environmental problem facing the world (UNEP, 2010), and transportation, regarded as a main contributor to the change, is at the core of the sustainability debate (UNEP, 2011). For the tourism industry transportation is fundamental, and, accordingly, there is a growing attention among scholars on issues regarding global warming and traveling for leisure reasons (e.g. Hall & Higham 2005, Gössling & Peeters, 2007).

The contribution of tourism to CO<sup>2</sup> emissions has grown steadily since the 1950s (Hall & Lew, 2009). This trend is likely to continue as long haul traveling is estimated to reach about 1.5 billion international arrivals by the 2020 (UNWTO, 2011). Paradoxically this increase occurs at the same time as the general public awareness regarding environmental degradation, and the human role in it, seems to be rising (Bell, 2004). This indicates an inconsistency between people's awareness and their actual

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behavior (Barr, 2003, Heberlein, 2012), which becomes even more apparent when considering phenomena such as nature based and "sustainable" forms of tourism, including ecotourism. With today's transportation system, the very existence, and growth, of ecotourism (Page & Dowling, 2002) supports what research has found: the demand for nature based tourism holds a strong position also among environmentally aware individuals (Mehmetoglu, 2007), and they generally do not hesitate to travel far distances to engage in outdoor and nature based activities (Wolf-Watz, Sandell & Fredman, 2011).

Within the broader context of global environmental change, and while acknowledging the awareness-behavior inconsistency as a major obstacle for a more sustainable society (cf. Heberlein, 2012), this article aims to analyse why environmentalists travel for nature based experiences in spite of their presumptive awareness of the negative environmental impact of most means of transportation. What are the rationales when conscious environmentalists travel for outdoor recreation, despite knowing that transportation contributes to global warming?

Environmentalism should be understood as an ideology that seeks to prevent the environment from being degraded by human activity. Still, it is of importance to distinguish between the terms (i) environmental awareness, (ii) environmental attitude and (iii) environmental behaviour. In this article environmental awareness is understood as a degree of knowledge of, and understanding about, the environmental situation. Environmental attitude refers to an awareness of environmental problems *plus* to an expressed dedication to overcome and counteract these problems, while, finally, environmental behaviour means the actions actually taken based upon environmental attitudes (Berns & Simpson, 2009). Thus, environmentalists are environmentally aware individuals who may base their actions on pro-environmental attitudes.

Although intuition suggests that environmental awareness and attitude assessments are typically predictors of general pro-environmental behaviours, there is no automatic congruence (Heberlein, 2012, Nilsson & Martinsson, 2012). For example, within a tourism context, Wurzinger and Johansson (2006), found no difference in environmental behaviour between eco-tourists and nature based tourists, despite the fact they accounted for different environmental attitudes. In fact, when it comes to environmentalism, people's attitudes seem to be more radical than people's behavior (Barr, 2003).

While recognizing earlier work within social psychology on the gap between views and behavior (e.g. Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Ajzen, 1991), this article takes on a human-geographical perspective by suggesting that environmentalists' outdoor recreational traveling can be analyzed by studying the way they locate "nature", and what significance they ascribe to various settings within the outdoor recreation landscape. What are the preferred qualities of these settings, and where are these to be found? How may the significance of these qualities justify problematic travel behavior from an environmental standpoint? To approach these questions the article is based on a study of an organization which combines an articulated environmental commitment with a profound interest in outdoor recreation – Nature and Youth Sweden (Sveriges Fältbiologiska Ungdomsförening).

## Environmentalism, recreation and place

Among environmentalists, nature in terms of "the natural landscape", is repeatedly represented as "the wilderness" (cf. Hannigan, 1995; Wall-Reinius, 2012), and just as often it is regarded as a haven

from the modern industrialized and urbanized society (cf. Worster, 1994). In practice this is typically manifested by an unimpaired interest for nature based experiences (cf. Leopold, 1970), ordinarily in terms of activities that are low-tech and that seemingly impose little impact on the environment, such as biking, hiking, canoeing and nature studies (Berns & Simpson, 2009).

This interest in nature encounter was confirmed in a recent national survey in Sweden, in which environmentalists were shown to be more involved in outdoor recreation compared with non-environmentalists (Wolf-Watz *et al.*, 2011). Accordingly, the overall increasing levels of environmental awareness have been considered a key reason for the growth of outdoor recreation in form of nature based tourism (Mehmetoglu, 2007). This, in turn, puts focus on a matter where environmentalists do not differ from the non-environmentalists, namely traveling. In fact, Wolf-Watz *et al.*, (2011) have shown that environmentalists explicitly pronounced traveling as being important for their outdoor experiences.

When looking at to what extent nature as such constitutes a travel motive for nature based tourists, a main characteristics among those tourists who emphasize nature most is their strong environmental awareness (Mehmetoglu, 2007). Moreover, given the role of travel elaborated on above, it is also reasonable to hypothesize that environmentalists put large emphasis on *where* outdoor recreation takes place, i.e. on the placing of nature. Accordingly, the ecotourism market has been described as made up by those tourists who search for a nature-oriented experience in pristine natural environments (Eagles, 1992). Honey (1999) defines ecotourism as travel to fragile, pristine, and usually protected areas and Ryan *et al.*, (2000) state that the experience of ecotourism essentially lies in the intensity of the interaction with the site visited. Although forms of nature based tourism is usually associated with mountains and forest environments, ecotourism experiences may as well be provided in highly modified land such as urban areas (Higham & Lück, 2002; Dodds & Joppe, 2003). Nevertheless, when discussing environmentalism and traveling for outdoor recreation purposes there is an obvious need to put focus not only on *mobility* as such but also on the particular natural setting, *the place*, and the interaction between these two (cf. Baerenholdt & Granås, 2008).

Recent research on the importance of natural settings for recreation experiences has moved on from an understanding of recreational areas as sets of natural attributes to a focus on the symbolic meanings and emotional bonds that visitors may attach to various settings and destinations (Manning, 2011). In center of this perspective is the concept of *place*. The place concept is complex and its meaning, importance and use have been subject for discussions among scholars since at least the 1970s (Tuan, 1977; Rose, 1995; Creswell, 2004; Gieryn, 2000). While the conceptualizations of place do differ, most of them include three components: geographic location, material form and an investment with meaning and value.

With regard to the emergence of modern society, including processes of increased mobility and globalization, there has been a notion of decreasing significance of places (Relph, 1976; Buttimer & Seamon, 1980). Today, in turn, mobility as phenomena is challenged by the growth of imaginative and virtual travel (Urry, 2002). Still, there is a notable, and increasing, amount of corporeal travel which, according to Urry, shows how "physical proximity" to particular people, places or events makes travel necessary and desirable. It is argued that corporeal travel for the "face-to-face" and "face-to-place" encounters do play an important role for the establishing and maintaining of social life. Accordingly, scholars have suggested that preferences for particular recreational places may relate to the way they

can facilitate social life (e.g. Kyle, Graefe & Manning, 2005) and foster group belonging (Hammit, Backlund & Bixler, 2006).

The literature presented above stresses the meaning people ascribe to certain settings, and their significance for social life. Therefore, when studying environmentalists' traveling for nature as a matter of nature preferences, one may consider more than just the right combination of physical characteristics.

## Materials and methods

In accordance with their slogan – "Outdoors in nature – inside the environmental debate" – the organization Nature and Youth Sweden can be considered representative of people who combine environmentalism with practical nature experiences. The organization's main activities include outdoor-related activities and pro-environmental actions. It has an upper age limit of 25 years and count approximately 2300 members (2010) from all over Sweden (Fältbiologerna, 2010). They are organized in local clubs which fall into four different districts run by district boards. Activities and events are organized on three levels: club, district and national, where the latter ties the clubs and districts together, and distributes the members' magazine *Fältbiologen* (Fältbiologerna, 2010).

The combination of strong environmental values with an expressed interest for outdoor recreation makes the organization a "unique" (Yin, 2003) or "crucial" case (Goggin, 1986) and, therefore, an excellent object of study. For the study, a group of especially devoted members of the organization (district boards), and explicit articulation (texts in the member magazine), were selected. The members' magazine *Fältbiologen* and the communicative interaction between members in three district boards were dealt with by a content analysis and focus groups respectively. Data collection started with initial analyses of the members' magazine which thereafter were shared with the focus groups participants. In addition, results from the first focus groups were shared with the participants of the second and third group. Therefore, the validity of the study findings was judged by the participants throughout the data collection process.

### Content analysis of *Fältbiologen*

The magazine *Fältbiologen* is published quarterly and has a yearly circulation of about 2800 copies (Fältbiologerna, 2010). As a mediator of information and messages of various kinds *Fältbiologen* has a central role for setting the framework of shared values and norms, and for manifesting prevailing discourses. Editorial staff is made up of members of the organization and make the magazine on a voluntary basis. In addition to the fixed contents of the magazine, such as opinion, calendar, and internal news sections, it offers a wide range of written material. Most of them are composed by members of the editorial group, but occasionally texts sent in by ordinary members are included. The description of the magazine reads:

*You'll find articles about how beavers live, how to identify the species of horseflies and how to build a tree house. You may read the reports from activists who stand between the forest machines and the last old-growth forest, of those who work to save the climate and how you can join in and make a difference.*

The magazine is generally in the range of 30 to 35 pages, and usually includes 3-5 featured articles related to topics of interests for the members. The content analysis draws upon a systematic review of 10 years of publication (from No. 1, 2000 to Nos. 3/4, 2010), making a total of 36 issues. The review embraces types and numbers of reported outdoor activities and their related transport patterns, as well as texts reflecting the organization's views and values regarding climate change, transportations, as well as their recreational landscape preferences,. Following the suggestions of Graneheim & Lundman (2003), these texts were analysed by condensing meaning units, i.e. paragraphs and sentences containing relevant information, into short descriptions (Table 1) followed by a sorting into the sub-themes and themes which formed the basis for interpretation.

Table 1  
**Examples of meaning units, condensed meaning units, sub-themes and themes from the content analysis**

Meaning unit	Condensed meaning unit	Sub-theme	Theme
"A twenty kilometre walk to the nearest road; with mountains, quietness and silence at every turn."	Isolation, quietness and silence	Natural silence	Positive landscape qualities
"Strolling around among the wetlands and hazel and discovering everything that creeps, floats and twitters."	Discovering plants and animals	Biological diversity	Positive landscape qualities

## Focus groups

In addition to the content analysis of the members' magazine focus groups (Patton, 2002) were conducted. The organization is generally city-based and most members are found in the densely populated areas of southern and central Sweden, especially in the metropolitan areas. The three (of totally four) district boards selected for the focus groups all operate in these areas and, hence, they are geographically representative for the organization. The focus groups were conducted to complement and deepen the findings from the content analysis of the members' magazine by enquiring about the motives, values and meaning making behind their travel habits.

The choice of district boards as focus groups had several advantages. Board meetings provide opportunities for condensed interaction between members and represent contexts in which ideas are formed and decisions are made. The boards are also authorized to decide on organizational activities. Moreover, the choice of boards was practical as it facilitated the participant recruitment process, and as it is easy to locate a focus group in connection with an already scheduled meeting. Another advantage is that the participants are familiar with each other, which creates good conditions for discussion.

A high level of group cohesion can sometimes be problematic when conducting group focus groups (Wibeck, 2010), as manifestations of "group-think" becomes more likely. In this case, however, it was rather an advantage if dominating perceptions were clearly expressed since the purpose of the study was to grasp the general views and meaning making in an outdoor devoted group of environmentalists. Another aspect to consider regarding focus groups is power relations within the group (Barbour & Schostak, 2005), though in this case there was no risk of negative impact on the results as group's values shaped by one or a few influential individuals would still be the group's common values.

All focus groups were semi-structured in the sense that they revolved around a number of pre-formulated topics of discussion (cf. Denscombe, 2009), all of them tested on a group of research colleagues in advance. The focus groups aimed to complement the information collected from the content analysis, and the topics for discussion included: (i) the organization's outdoor activities and the settings associated with them, (ii) the motives for, and significance of outdoor recreation for the organization, (iii) approaches to traveling and transportation, and (iv) their recreational landscape preferences. The three focus groups lasted about 1.5 hours each involving 4-5 participants between 18-21 years of age, with the exception of one individual who was 14. They were recorded, transcribed and then analysed using the content analysis method described above.

The results presented in the following section are based on data from both content analysis and focus group. Overall there was an extensive congruence between the views of the different focus groups, as well as between the focus groups and the findings in the members' magazine. Quotations from the focus groups are chosen on their ability to illustrate central recurrent themes and common beliefs and opinions. These quotations, and the quotations from the content analyses of Fältbiologen, are translated from Swedish to English by the author.

## Results

For Nature and Youth Sweden outdoor recreation in various forms represents a significant part of the organizations activities. Outdoor related events and activities for all members are regularly offered in the members' magazine. Within the time-period of this study these activities are largely of the same variety and include activities such as courses, various camps (bird watching camps, sea camps etc.), inventory trips (to forests potentially worth protecting), hikes, bicycle tours, canoeing or just spending time together in nature. The number of activities varies but usually ranges between 10-20 activities per year. At district and club levels nearby excursions, field trips and overnight stays in cottages they have access to, are regular features. What activities to engage in, and where they are to take place, is a subject of discussion at annual district meetings and club events. Many activities at club level are also arranged spontaneously throughout the year.

Events and activities arranged by the organization are documented in various ways. Most of them are reported in the annual reports either on national, district or club levels of the organization as a prerequisite for governmental financial support. Some events are written about as "reports" for the members' magazine and district papers. In a more informal way sharing photos on the Internet, e.g. Facebook and various web pages, is common.

Nature and Youth Sweden emphasize the importance of learning when engaging in outdoor recreation. Animal spotting and nature studies are recurrent events, and, indeed, learning elements are prominent in most activities. As described by some of the focus group participants:

*Rather than just walking in a green scenery we are interested in the greenery and all its nuances. We are interested in nature when we are in the midst of it (Participant 1).*

*If we take a simple activity like canoeing at Vättle Mountains, which we did last weekend, it's not as though we are expected to learn, but even so we look at the flowers and such like, and there's always someone with us who knows a lot about flowers or birds so you can ask them questions about such things (Participant 2).*

*It's very rare that we go out without someone having a bag net, book or binoculars with them*  
(Participant 3).

*We usually say that if you are fighting for nature it is also good to be knowledgeable about it and be out in it* (Participant 2).

Another motive for organizing and taking part in outdoor events highlighted during the focus groups is socializing. The outdoor events are important ways to meet new people and old friends and, in extension, to maintain a sense of belonging:

*There are so many benefits [of participating in various events]. ... The organization benefits from our meetings, especially as we are so few. It is important to meet, as a movement. Meet face-to-face and not just have e-mail contact* (Participant 1).

While learning and socializing are key motives for outdoor activities, there is also a frequently mentioned need to simply "get away" or "get out" from their everyday life and commonplace surroundings.

## Transportation and mobility

Many outdoor activities and events arranged by Nature and Youth Sweden are close to members' home residence, but still a significant part of their activities involves travel. The activity calendar in the magazine lists a wide range of activities at places throughout Sweden and, at times, abroad. The review of the magazine reveals that about 55% of these activities take place at a distance of more than 300 km from all metropolitan areas of Sweden (Stockholm, Gothenburg, Malmö and Uppsala) during the period studied. This indicates a relatively high level of mobility, given that almost 70% of the members live in these areas. In the focus groups this transport pattern is confirmed and justified by the participants through statements such as "We are in favor of mobility" and "We go wherever we want to in Sweden without restraint".

Still, while stressing the importance of traveling, the focus groups also revealed that transportation is a complex issue. Within the organization there is an evident awareness of global warming, and the environmental impacts associated with transports. The review of the members' magazine reveals that over the ten year period, besides loss of biodiversity, climate change is the most acknowledged environmental problem. Moreover, there are numerous and recurrent texts that directly or indirectly relate to transportation and that include statements against use of fossil-based fuel and give prominence to the use of cycles and (electric) trains instead of cars or airplanes. These may be texts about Swedish train policy (Hansson, 2010), development of alternative fuels (Hanström, 2006), care instructions for bicycles (Hagegård, 2007), criticism of road constructions (Asplund, 2001) or more direct standpoints such as the examples of car usage and aviation below:

*Nature and Youth Sweden and other environmental organizations have for a long time worked to reduce people's dependence on cars, to make our cities and environment more humane. Noisy vehicles, emitting exhaust fumes make no one happy, and both man and environment would feel better if more people walked and biked* (Froster, 2001, p. 16-17).

*Aviation is responsible for 12% of the world's transport-related carbon emissions. [...] So why is the airline industry not required to pay any energy or carbon tax? Why is environmentally friendly public transport*

*not subsidized? Why is it so expensive to get around by train, bus or subway? If these kinds of alternatives were available and affordable, then people wouldn't need to use their cars (Axelsson, 2007, p. 3).*

The participants of one focus group reflect on the organization's negative approach to flying and the ongoing discussion regarding transportation within the organization like this:

*... if you fly there's a danger of being shot at [by the other members, though not literally], I believe (Participant 1).*

*Yes, flying is not accepted (Participant 2).*

*The next climate meeting is in Mexico and there has been quite a lot of discussion as to whether we should send a representative at all. You have to weigh up the advantages and disadvantages (Participant 3).*

*How far you should travel for things [i.e. events] is a hard nut for the organization to crack (Participant 4).*

Still, as going by bike or foot would not take them far, the organization makes a more or less pronounced compromise to accept fossil-fuel based transportation as long as it is collectively performed. Thus public or collectively performed transportation conducted in trains, boats and busses, or a rented minibus is permissible. The exception is the use of airplane as they are too much of a symbol of environmental pollution. Using a car (i.e. taxi) is accepted if no other option is available.

The unwillingness to fly restricts movements of the members; however the image of the organization as fairly mobile remains a part of the organization's identity. Trips to remote destinations, such as the mountain areas and offshore islands, are common and reoccurring. Moreover, the review shows that about 15% of the outdoor related activities offered for all members required traveling outside Sweden. At times, intense attention paid to the climate issue in the magazine does not seem to leave any noteworthy impact on the transport patterns of the organization (Table 2).

Table 2

**Occurrence of texts related to climate change and/or transportation, and percentage of nature based activities taking place at distance  $\geq 300$  km from the major metropolitan areas of Sweden (Stockholm, Gothenburg, Malmö, Uppsala)**

Year, issues	No. of climate change/ transportation related texts	Distant activities (%)
2000, 1-3/4	10	42
2001, 1-4	15	55
2002, 1-4	3	48
2003, 1-4	4	61
2004, 1/2-4	5	60
2005, 1-3/4	5	78
2006, 1-3/4	6	53
2007, 1-4	15	66
2008, 1/2-4	3	50
2009, 1-4	24	60
2010, 1-3/4	6	65

## "Hotspots": Preferred landscape qualities and social distinction

Just as travel patterns of Nature and Youth Sweden show consistency, their recreational landscape preferences indicate recurrent features. These can be discerned from a number of texts in the members' magazine, among which the most obvious place-making is found under the heading "Hotspots", a standard feature since 2003 where all members are given the opportunity to tell about outdoor places worth visiting.

Many hotspots presented under this heading are located within protected areas, and at considerable distance from the larger urban areas of Sweden. The sites may be found all over Sweden and include mountain areas, coastal areas, and forests. Despite this variety, some nature qualities recur. The most common qualities of an attractive site are presence of species richness, natural quiet, and an overall absence of human impact as well as an absence of other people.

A typical description of a hotspot includes a declaration of the natural value of the site, including an enumeration of various species found in the area. For instance, the description of the national park Skuleskogen (Skule Forest) reads:

*On the rocky slabs and in the dense spruce forests it is possible to see woodland birds, like hazel grouse, capercaillie, black grouse, ptarmigan, siberian jay, black woodpecker, grey-headed woodpecker, three-toed woodpecker and lesser spotted woodpecker, that in other places have been displaced by forestry activities* (Abel, 2004, p.8).

Besides enumerating existing species, prominence is given to places with few visual or audible traces of human impact. As an example, the surroundings of Hundalshyttena (Hundal huts) in Norway are depicted in this way:

*Magnificent views with white and unspoiled mountains wherever I turn. I think for myself that this is one of the regions where man has not left a deep mark. As seen from without, anyway. And not yet* (Råghall, 2009 p. 9).

Another example is this description of Lisselberget (Lissel Mountain):

*There grow cranberries and silence and here and there an old slow-growing spruce. A gray-headed woodpecker is flying past in long, descending arcs and I breathe freely. Natural forest in all directions. But between the tree trunks westwards grins a clear-cut area. So would Lisselberget also have looked if Nature and Youth Sweden had not bought the forest in 1997* (Froster, 2003, p. 8).

These no-impact ideals are repeated when discussing favorable outdoor settings within the focus groups. Roads and even infrastructure for making natural areas available for recreation and tourism, (with exception for facilities for nature studies such as bird spotting towers) is a source of irritation for the participants. Any traces of forest production, and especially clear cutting, would ruin the nature experience. The absence of human impact, together with the nature qualities of silence and solitude, should be understood as preferences given for natural settings free from any human influences. In fact, prominence is given to sites where nobody else is present. Silence in this sense should be understood as natural quiet, i.e. the absence of sounds from human activities. The preference for unspoiled settings, with great biodiversity and relatively few people where confirmed in the focus groups:

*Yes, as few people as possible! (Laughs) (Participant 1).*

*Nature and Youth Sweden does sometimes organise activities in cheesier places, like Universeum [Science Discovery Centre]. But most of all you want to access the countryside with the highest natural value. You want to see what nature looks like without human influence (Participant 2).*

*Yes, the real thing ... (Participant 3).*

Places "worth going to" are described in terms of their characteristics, but frequently also by comparing desirable places to undesirable ones. The two quotes below clearly illustrate this: the valley of Tärnasjön (Tärna Lake) is contrasted against "civilization" and its characteristics, and Ryaskogen (Rya Forest) opposes the industrial landscape.

*13 miles' walk to the nearest motor road. Only mountains, emptiness and silence everywhere. ... After a walking tour that feels all too short we have to return the following morning, back to civilization and everyday life. Every step leads us closer to cars, computers and cell phones. Every step leads us further away from wilderness, magnificent views and silence (Abel, 2005 p. 8).*

*When you get off the bus at the stop Rya Forest you meet a metallic industrial landscape, populated by tanks, works, corrugated plate and asphalt. But here is also a primeval forest. A remnant of a bygone era ... Have some coffee in a meadow, climb the fallen oaks and gather a few pounds of wood anemones. Until the fence shows up on the other side and the industrial buildings take over again (Frid, 2007, p. 8).*

The participants also show special aversion to places related to "downsides" of modern society such as urban environments, including industrial areas, shopping malls, and business areas. Also natural areas that are affected by human activity are dismissed. Forests under forestry production are scornfully referred to as conifer plantations, and parks and designed nature are far from "the real thing". In one focus group the participants express it this way:

*Concrete and places for consumption are the absolute opposite. But even the parks in Malmö are just green spaces. OK concrete, but nature that has been doctored isn't much fun either (Participant 1).*

*It has a kind of cultural value. Take Slottskogen [The Castle Forest] for example, I love being there but I don't go there simply to hunt for ants and lichen (Participant 2).*

*Slottskogen is rather like the countryside in the city. It's not like that [city park] in Malmö (Participant 1).*

*Hedges and circular ponds (Participant 3).*

*The heavily pruned trees ... (Participant 1).*

...

*It certainly doesn't bear any resemblance to a forest (Participant 2).*

In, both, members' magazine and focus groups less attractive environments are also depicted by referring to the kind of people who can be expected to appear at such sites. References are made to "brats" (i.e. rich man's kids), forest company representatives, tourists, as well as to ordinary people who cannot tell the difference between spruce plantations and real forests. In fact, the need to "get away", seems to have just as much a social element as a geographical.

Accordingly, the answer to the question of what would make the organization turn their backs on one of the places, beside degradation of the site's environmental qualities, is the influx of other people behaving in an inappropriate manner, i.e. different from the members themselves. Seemingly it is of importance not only to choose one environment before others, but to ensure a distance to those who represent the latter environments and to the downsides of a society that these environments and people are associated with.

## Discussion and conclusion

Within the broader context of environmental degradation and global warming, the aim of this article was to analyze why environmentalists travel for nature based experiences in spite of their presumptive awareness of the negative environmental impact of current transportation technology. For this purpose a study of Nature and Youth Sweden, an organization which combines an articulated environmental commitment with an interest in outdoor life, was conducted. The study shows that even though the members of the organization are highly aware of the negative environmental impact of most means of transportation, and see it as their task to work for a reduction of it, they, paradoxically, and in accordance with earlier research, do not hesitate to travel for their outdoor recreation experience. Nature and Youth Sweden emphatically reject air travel for environmental reasons, but still the general picture of people's environmental attitudes being more radical than their actual behavior seems to apply also in this case.

The article suggests that environmentalists' outdoor recreational traveling can be analyzed by studying the way they place "nature", and the significance they ascribe to various settings within the outdoor recreation landscape. Nature and Youth Sweden engage in a range of outdoor activities at particular settings, *places*, which are defined within a continuing construction process where natural environments are classified, valued, and ascribed with shared meanings. Within the communicative contexts of the organization clear precedence is given to places characterized by the qualities of biodiversity, natural quiet and absence of other people as well as of human impact. For most members of Nature and Youth Sweden, being residents of major cities, transportation is required for visiting these often remote sites.

Nature and Youth Sweden emphasize learning as motive for outdoor recreation. This is in accordance with traditional "wilderness" ideals where the pure nature experience often includes learning elements, such as visiting and admiring "untouched" nature. However, while this pinpoints the importance of particular physical characteristics, the study of the organization also reveals that the nature preferences comprise a social dimension. Socializing is a claimed motive for traveling and the importance of physical travel is clearly related to the need of corporeal proximity, not only to specific places but also to fellow members.

Furthermore, the traveling of Nature and Youth Sweden seems to be part of a process of othering and exclusion. The preferable natural settings are defined in relation to other places where other people dwell, as a way to separate "us" from "them", and "where to be" from "where not to". Thus, traveling for nature based experiences reflects not only the demand for particular natural qualities, but also the need to, at least from time to time, ensure a distance and distinction to people and environments that represent perceived downsides of the society, of which some are where the environmentalists lead their everyday lives. These reasons taken together, nature as such and social distinction, motivate the

environmentalists to travel, at the expense of the environment and in conflict with one of their most evident environmental concern. All in all, and with reference to earlier research (Mehmetoglu, 2007), environmentalism appears to be a reason for traveling, rather than a barrier.

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