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**ISN'T IT GOOD, NORWEGIAN WOOD? LIFESTYLE AND ADVENTURE
SPORTS PARTICIPATION AMONG NORWEGIAN YOUTH**

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores Norwegian youngsters' (and, to a lesser extent, adults') engagement with conventional and lifestyle sports via an examination of recent trends. In the process, it explores the significance or otherwise of 'nature-based settings' and the developing character of lifestyle sports. In terms of changes in youth sport, young Norwegians are the quintessential sporting omnivores. However, the particular mix of conventional and lifestyle sports that Norwegian youngsters favour has shifted within a generation, with the latter more prominent in 2007 than they had been even a decade earlier. The changes appear emblematic of a shift among Norwegian youth towards sports activities that offer alternative forms and styles of participation to those traditionally associated with 'the outdoors' as a style of life. In theoretical terms, the findings suggest that, as a generic and popular collective noun, the term lifestyle sport is most useful when it draws attention to the "commonalities" (Wheaton, 2013) shared by many of the activities often corralled under it.

Key words: lifestyle sports, friluftsliv, youth, participation, Norway

INTRODUCTION

In the context of the global growth of so-called ‘lifestyle sports’ (Wheaton, 2013), this paper examines¹ recent trends in Norwegian youngsters’ (and, to a lesser extent, adults’) sports participation. More specifically, it focuses upon participation in a particular set of lifestyle activities that, together, are viewed as part of a larger, quintessentially Norwegian and Scandinavian, category of activities, namely ‘friluftsliv’ (outdoor life). In the process, we endeavour to contribute to the literature on contemporary changes in youth sport participation in Europe, the significance or otherwise of ‘nature-based settings’ and the developing character of lifestyle and adventure sports². In the first instance, however, we need to say something about lifestyle sports and friluftsliv per se.

LIFESTYLE SPORTS

As Wheaton (2010, 2013) observes, since their emergence in the 1960s³ lifestyle sports have grown considerably becoming, in the process, increasingly visible. Thus, in the early years of the twenty-first century, lifestyle sports have attracted ‘an ever-increasing body of participants, from increasingly diverse global geographical settings’ (Wheaton, 2013: 3). Notwithstanding the difficulty of capturing participation rates in informal, recreational, outdoor, non-association-based activities – as well as the well-documented likelihood of a social desirability bias (wherein respondents display a tendency to exaggerate and over-estimate their involvement in what they view as socially-esteemed behaviours) inflating actual rates of participation – Wheaton (2010) believes that

¹ Based primarily on quantitative data from the Norwegian Statistisk Sentralbyrå (Statistics Norway) study of *Mosjon, Friluftsliv og Kulturaktiviteter* (Vaage, 2009) supplemented by preliminary qualitative data.

² We are grateful to a reviewer for this point.

³ It is worthy of note that some lifestyle sports have grown out of (e.g. bouldering) or are versions of (e.g. indoor climbing) activities more than a century old, such as climbing and mountaineering. Wheaton (2004) refers to those ‘traditional’ activities (such as mountaineering, surfing and canoeing) that have developed newer variants – and, in the process, taken on new meanings since the 1960s – as ‘the residual elements’: in other words, the traditional forms still popular with and practised by many.

participation rates in lifestyle sports are likely to be growing even faster than surveys suggest. Indeed, ‘lifestyle sports have spread around the world far faster than most established sports’ (Wheaton, 2013, p.2). Such expansion, she observes, includes not only ‘the traditional consumer market of teenage boys but also older men and, increasingly in a number of activities, women and girls’ (Wheaton, 2010, p.22). Participants range from those on the margins ‘who occasionally experience participation via an array of “taster” activities being marketed through the adventure sport and travel industries’ (p.24) through the ‘weekend warriors’ (Gilchrist and Wheaton, 2011) ‘to the “hard-core” committed practitioners who spend considerable time, energy and often money doing it’ (Wheaton, 2010, p.24) – including those for whom participation becomes a whole way of life that may well be sustained throughout the life-course.

Reference to *forms* of participation serves as a reminder that, when exploring developments in lifestyle sports, it is necessary to bear in mind that the term can be used in quite polarized ways. Rooted in the conventional sociological use of the term ‘lifestyle’, Coalter’s (1996, 1999) conception of lifestyle activities⁴ (rather than simply sports) implies a larger element of possible choice characteristic of modern-day consumer societies (Roberts, 2009)⁵. From this perspective, lifestyle sports are described in terms of the more-or-less common features of the many and varied activities (new and old) that have become increasingly popular in recent decades. These, Coalter suggests, are characterized as being more recreational in nature (or, put another way, non- or, at least, less competitive – than, for example, ‘traditional’ team sports),

⁴ Throughout the rest of the paper, sport and physically active recreation will be subsumed under the label ‘sport’. For the sake of consistency we will use the term ‘lifestyle *sports*’ – rather than ‘lifestyle *activities*’ – to include physically active recreational and adventurous activities as well as conventional competitive, institutionalized and vigorous ‘sports’.

⁵ The UK Office of National Statistics (Seddon, 2011, p.2), for example, defines ‘lifestyle’ ‘as a way of living: the things that a particular person or group of people usually do ... based on individual choices, characteristics, personal preferences and circumstances.’

flexible, individual or small group activities, that sometimes incorporate a health and fitness or adventure orientation; in other words, activities that can be undertaken *how* (more-or-less competitively or playfully, for example), *why* (intrinsic pleasure, adventure, health, body sculpting, sociability and so on), *where* (commercial gyms, voluntary clubs, local government sports centre, as well as coastal, countryside and mountainous locations), *when* (in bouts of spare time) and *with whom* (singly or with friends and family) individuals choose.

At the other end of the conceptual continuum is the idea that some activities are representative (especially among ‘hard core’ participants or ‘aficianados’ [Wheaton, 2013]) of a ‘style of life’ rather than merely a ‘style of participation’, as per Coalter’s use of the term. Conceptions of lifestyle sports as a style of life reflects the manner in which over the last 30 years or so it has become increasingly commonplace to claim that we now live in a post-modern and post-subcultural age ‘in which youth cultures no longer nest within class or any other wider social divisions’ (Roberts, 2011, p.3). Rather, it is argued, ‘scenes with their own “tribes” form around particular tastes and in specific places’ and these tribes ‘attract young people from a variety of structural [e.g. social class and gender] locations’ (p.3). In other words, the ‘scenes’ and the ‘tribes’ they attract reflect the fact that choice has become unhooked from social dynamics – rather than being, for example, *class-related* (let alone *class-based*), choices are, in the post-modern world, all-encompassing and unconstrained decisions based on individual’s preferred styles of life. These styles of life are said to be characterized by strong social and emotional bonds which develop between committed participants linked by shared attitudes, values and ways of life – often described as subcultural communities or neo-tribal affiliations (Wheaton, 2004). In this sense, the ‘variously

labelled alternative, new, extreme, adventure, panic, action, [and] whiz' sports (Wheaton, 2013: 1) are portrayed as 'very much an expression of [participants'] identities and lifestyles' (Tomlinson, Ravenscroft, Wheaton, & Gilchrist, 2005, p.4).

Against this backdrop, Norway makes a particularly interesting case-study of lifestyle sports for two reasons: first, it boasts particularly high levels of sports participation – within which there has been a marked shift towards lifestyle sports – and, second, because Norwegian [sporting] culture contains within it (in the form of *friluftsliv*) what, historically, has amounted to an almost ideal-type or archetypal example of lifestyle sports as a *style of life*: as 'bundles of tastes, purchases and activities which cluster together, confer identities, and allow those concerned to be identified as a particular kind of person' (Roberts, 2009, p.149). Literally translated as 'free or open air living', but more generally and colloquially taken to mean outdoor life and activities, *friluftsliv* has been described not only as the 'Norwegian way of outdoor recreation' but as a chief characteristic of 'the Norwegian cultural legacy' (Visit Norway, 2011a). Norwegians are said to 'embrace nature and enjoy the outdoors as a *way of life*' (emphasis added) wherein '*friluftsliv* offers the possibility of recreation, rejuvenation and restoring balance among living things' (Visit Norway, 2011b). In truth, rather than being a singular activity, *friluftsliv* has long been constituted of a relatively broad spectrum of outdoor pursuits, ranging from more-or-less common-place recreational activities (such as walking, cross-country skiing and cycling) through what are often referred to as 'adventure' activities (skiing, climbing and mountaineering and kayaking, for example) to simply living or 'being' in the outdoors (camping, fishing, horse-riding, 'berry and mushroom trips' and so forth). Indeed, the inclusion of *friluftsliv* as a general category of activities (and, for that matter, 'berry and mushroom trips' as a specific activity

within the over-arching category of *friluftsliv*) in the Statistics Norway study (Vaage, 2009) neatly illustrates the centrality and pervasiveness of the notion of a ‘way’ or ‘style’ of life in Norwegian sporting and physical activity culture.

Having introduced the central concepts of lifestyle sports and *friluftsliv*, we need to say something about overall sporting trends in Norway by way of contextualizing developments in *friluftsliv* as emblematic of developments in lifestyle sports.

SPORTING TRENDS IN NORWAY

Levels and rates of participation

The Norwegian Statistisk Sentralbyrå (Statistics Norway) study of *Mosjon, Friluftsliv og Kulturaktiviteter* [Exercise, Outdoor Life and Cultural Activities] (Vaage, 2009) consisted of four cross-sectional and representative national surveys conducted in 1997, 2001, 2004 and 2007 supplemented by earlier, similar studies. Among other things, the study revealed that participation in what we are referring to as sport⁶ (including physically active recreation) in leisure-time in Norway over the last decade or so increased for youth and adults (16-79 years) in general and women and older children in particular. Participation was skewed towards higher rates and more frequent bouts of participation with the highest proportion participating between 3-4 times a week and smaller proportions at both extremes (never/rarely or almost every day). Worthy of note was the relatively small minority at the ‘inactive’ end of the continuum and the increasing majority at the active or ‘regular’ participant pole. A comparatively large proportion (42%)⁷, exercised 3 to 4 times per week or more and 18% exercised almost

⁶ Vaage actually labels these ‘physical activity to train or exercise’, even though they amount to the same thing.

⁷ The figure of 42% is indicative of an upward trend (28% in 2001, 39% in 2004, 42% in 2007): an increase of 14 percentage points in six years.

daily (Vaage, 2009). Indeed, it was noticeable that the most marked increases in recent years had been among those who ‘exercised a lot’ (see Figure 1).

Insert Figure 1 about here.

Similarly, while there was an increase in participation across all age groups between 2001 and 2007, the greatest changes occurred in the 16-19 year age group: those exercising 3-4 times each week increased from 27% in 2001 to 60% in 2007. Indeed, despite fluctuating sex-related differences during childhood, by the time they approached youth the levels of sports participation of the sexes were converging with relatively small differences in the proportions of Norwegian boys (52%) and girls (48%) taking part three to four times per week or almost daily (see Table 1).

Insert Table 1 about here.

Such developments in the levels and rates of participation notwithstanding, some of the most interesting trends in sports participation in Norway, especially in relation to young people, occurred in the *forms* and *styles*, as well as the *context*, of participation.

Forms of participation

When it comes to the kinds of sports they engage with, young Norwegians, like youngsters world-wide, are sporting as well as cultural omnivores, only more so. In addition to attending an average of 36 cultural events⁸ in the course of 2007 (Vaage, 2009), young Norwegians were also the most active participants in the widest variety of

⁸ ‘Cultural events’ include such things as visiting the cinema, theatre, library and museum and attending sports events.

sports⁹. Among the age group where regular participation (three times each week or more) peaked, 16-19 year olds, almost 25% took part in at least 10 ‘branches’ (different activities) of sport over the course of 12 months.

Young people also tended to be the most active in particular branches of sport. While the youngest were the most active in soccer, cycling, swimming and skiing, for example, older youngsters tended to be the ones most likely to use gyms and health clubs – an area of substantial growth across all Norwegian age groups over the course of the decade 1997-2007. In fact, trends in the 15 most popular sporting forms revealed the (relatively) minimal – and, in some cases, diminishing – popularity of games (with the notable exception of football). In this regard, two developments in relation to forms of sports participation among youth in Norway, over the period 1997 to 2007, are particularly noteworthy. First, although 16-19 year olds were the most active in team sports, the popularity of major games (such as football) and ‘traditional’ games (such as handball), as well as relatively ‘modern’ games (such as basketball and volleyball), declined among young people. Second, the big increases in participation (across all age ranges, 16-79) at least once per month over the decade occurred in lifestyle sports and, in particular, organized walking (which nearly doubled from, 48% to 87%), weight training (up by half, from 24% to 36%), jogging (up by about one-third, from 34% to 45%), and cross-country skiing (one-quarter, from 38% to 51%). Indeed, the largest increases in lifestyle sports occurred among the 16-19 year age group: especially in cross-country skiing (from 52% in 2004 to 59% in 2007); fast walking (60%: 72%) and strength training (63%: 72%). Among the exceptions to this evident shift in the direction of lifestyle sports – particularly among the young – were decreases in swimming (which

⁹ Interestingly, there was a positive correlation between the amount of involvement in cultural activities and the amount of participation in sport – as much among young people as adults. Conversely, those children not engaged in physical activity also were the ones who took part in the fewest cultural activities.

almost halved from 37% to 21%) and aerobics [23% to 20%] while cycling remained almost identical in popularity in 2007 to 1997 (46% to 45%) (Vaage, 2009). On the basis of *Norsk Monitor* data (Synovate, 2009), Bergsgard and Tangen (2011, p.59) observed similar trends: ‘the most popular activities for adults aged 15 years and older were ‘hiking in fields and forests’, ‘cross-country skiing’ and ‘cycling’’. Despite their increasing prominence in the sporting repertoires of Norwegian youth, lifestyle sports do not appear, however, to have been simply and straightforwardly replacing ‘traditional’ team games in the sporting portfolios of young Norwegians. Rather, they were occurring *alongside* ‘traditional’ sports – in some cases, as co-occurring increases in participation – such that young Norwegians appeared to be doing more of everything, but especially lifestyle sports.

All told, while trends in forms of participation over the decade up to 2007 were by no means clear-cut, it was apparent that within the particular mix of conventional and lifestyle sports adopted by individual youngsters, lifestyle sports had become more prominent in 2007 than they had been only a decade earlier. Once again, data from *Norsk Monitor* supported this conclusion: ‘when children and youth engage in sports and outdoor activities on their own, they rank traditional outdoor activities and exercise highest, apart from football’ (Bergsgard and Tangen, 2011, p.61).

Venues for participation

When it comes to venues for participation, young people and adults in Norway make use of a wide range of sports facilities, including sports fields, floodlit trails, sports halls, indoor rinks and swimming pools. It is noteworthy, nevertheless, that the shift towards lifestyle sports and, to varying degrees, away from ‘traditional’ sports

coincided with a diminishing role for sports clubs and teams in young Norwegian's lives in particular. Among those engaged in lifestyle sports (such as swimming, jogging and walking) less than 10% participated through sports clubs and very few of those taking part in weight-training, dance and aerobics used clubs. While there were exceptions to this apparent trend (golf, for example), it seems that not only were the increasingly popular lifestyle sports growing independently of and beyond sports clubs, the same was true for some sports that have a strong tradition of being club-based in Norway (cross-country skiing, for example). The shift away from sports clubs was particularly marked among young people and attributable, in part, to the growing popularity of lifestyle sports – very few young people engaged in outdoor sports such as biking (cycling of all kinds), downhill skiing, cross-country skiing were associated with sports clubs (Vaage, 2009).

As well as revealing a seemingly diminishing role for sports clubs and teams in the sporting lifestyles of young Norwegians in the first decade of the twenty-first century, the Statistics Norway (Vaage, 2009) study revealed that among children and young people, the proportion active in sport through a sports club tended to decrease with age. It was 6-8 year olds who were especially likely to be affiliated to sports clubs while 13-15 year olds tended, to a much greater extent, to engage in activities without being affiliated to any sports team or club. The 'downward trend in children's and youth's active participation in sports clubs' in Norway (Bergsgard & Tangen, 2011, p.64) notwithstanding, as Bergsgard and Tangen (2011) observe, given their relatively higher levels of engagement with sport and sports clubs it is unsurprising to find that children and youth are not only more likely to use sporting facilities such as (football) pitches,

sports halls and gymnasias, swimming pools and cross-country skiing tracks but remain the most prominent members of sports clubs.

As with the changing patterns in the forms of preferred sports, it seems that the trend towards less formal, less organized venues for participation has not meant an abandonment of sports clubs as vehicles for participation. Rather, it represents a (seemingly significant) shift in the blend of club-based and informal venues towards the latter, as sports clubs become less important generally, as well as to children moving into youth and young adulthood. It is worth repeating, however, that this shift away from sports clubs (and team sports) does not appear to have impacted upon overall levels of sports participation, especially among young people.

Participation with whom?

When it comes to who, if anyone, they participate with, Bergsgard and Tangen (2011) observe that most Norwegian adults engage in sport and physical activity on their own (followed by 'with family' and then 'with friends', 'neighbours' and 'colleagues'). They note that more Norwegians are exercising alone nowadays than in the mid-1990s and "self-organized" forms of participation [of the kind associated with lifestyle sports] have consistently been the most common way of engaging in physical activity and sport' (Bergsgard & Tangen, 2011, p.61). That said, the Statistics Norway studies (Vaage, 2009) demonstrated that the shift towards participation in lifestyle sports beyond sports clubs has not resulted in isolated participants: a high proportion of those who do not participate in sports through teams or clubs do, nevertheless, take part together with others when they 'train or exercise'. Even seemingly individual activities were often (and in some cases usually) practiced with others. In 2004, one-third (34%)

of joggers, one-half of cyclists (48%), gym users ['strength training'] (54%) and walkers (55%), more than three-quarters of swimmers (79%) and downhill and cross-country skiers (82%) and almost all snowboarders and Telemark skiers (94%) were 'mainly involved' in their sport with others. Indeed, activities such as swimming and skiing appeared to have become even more social activities in recent years than previously. It seems likely that among young people these 'others' will typically be friends. Indeed (and as indicated below), it seems that if young Norwegians seek the company of their friends then, in many cases, they need to be playing sport! All-in-all, increases in levels and rates of sports participation in Norway appear correlated with developments in *forms*, *styles* and *context* (for example, in the company of friends) of participation, especially among young people.

Having said something about participation in sport in Norway in general, in the next section we want to focus upon friluftsliv (or outdoor and adventurous activities) as an area in which the shift towards lifestyle sports is most apparent and, potentially, most interesting and revealing.

Friluftsliv and outdoor and adventure sports

It is apparent from the Statistics Norway study (Vaage, 2009) that an area of sport – friluftsliv – which, historically, has been strongly associated (albeit, often in somewhat romanticized and idealized terms) with a way or 'style' of life is undergoing marked changes in participatory patterns, not least among young people. Friluftsliv has hitherto encompassed such activities as cross-country skiing, walking and camping as well as those historically associated with the etymological roots of the term 'sport' – hunting, fishing and shooting. As previously indicated, friluftsliv looms large in Norwegian

sporting culture as well as Norwegian culture more generally. It is easy to find advocates of the way of life – and the shared cultural values and norms it is assumed to epitomize and embody – that friluftsliv is believed to represent (Gurholt, 2008; Tellnes, 1992). Yet the metaphorical ground is evidently shifting under frilufsliv, both in terms of forms and styles of participation therein, as well as context.

The Statistics Norway study (Vaage, 2009) revealed that although there was an increasing amount of walking and cycling overall among the Norwegian population, fewer were walking ‘in the forest’ than did so in the 1970s. In this regard, Vaage (2009) succinctly summarizes the overall trends in the outdoors over the period 1970-2007 with the phrase ‘fewer trips in the woods’. Indeed, he points up a decline in the proportion of adults that do much beyond (downhill) skiing in the mountains. While the numbers of people taking ‘longer hikes in the woods’ (three times or more during the previous 12 months) increased over the four decades between 1970 and 2007, ‘longer walks in the woods’ (down by 20%), ‘longer skiing in the mountains’ (down by more than 50%), and ‘longer skiing in the woods’ (down by 80%) all declined over the same period. Similarly, participation in other ‘traditional’ outdoor (friluftsliv) activities diminished over the same period: fresh-water and sea-fishing each declined by approximately 30%, touring by canoe/kayak or rowing declined by 50% and ‘berry and mushroom trips’ diminished by 25%. The reduction over the 10-year period 1997-2007 in what are referred to as ‘berry and mushroom trips’ is particularly noteworthy given that it constitutes a quintessentially traditional frilufstliv (as a style of life) activity. Between 1970 and 1997 there was an especially sharp decline in the proportion of youth (16-24 years) who undertook ‘long walks in the woods’ and ‘longer skiing in the woods and mountains’ in the course of a year. A similar trend was apparent among young adults

(25-34 year olds) as well as the early-middle-age adults (35-44 year olds); although beyond early-middle-age, changes were not so readily apparent. More recently, Statistics Norway (2012) have confirmed these trends, reporting that over the period 1997-2011 there was a notable decline in the proportion of the population that had been hunting, fishing and berry or mushroom picking in particular, *especially* among the young.

Of course, none of these developments necessarily mean that young Norwegians (let alone Norwegians generally) have abandoned or are in the process of abandoning outdoor activities as lifestyles *per se*. They could simply be basing their friluftsliv lifestyles around different outdoor activities than their parents and grandparents. They might, for example, prefer the style of life that accompanies surfing and snowboarding to that historically associated with 'being in the woods'. Nonetheless, it was noticeable that young people tended to be most active in physically demanding and often adventurous outdoor activities such as skiing, skating, 'climbing mountains and ice', rafting and kayaking. It was also the young as well as younger adults who participated to the greatest extent in horseback riding, mountain-biking and snowmobiling in their spare time. 'Berry and mushroom trips', on the other hand, had become the preserve of older adults by 2007.

Taken together, the developments in participation evident from the Statistics Norway data might be construed as indicating that it is particular activities *per se* (especially in the case of *adventure* sports) that have captured young Norwegians' imagination – alongside the growing preference for more informal, recreational and sociable modes of participation – rather than, for example, a desire primarily to be in the outdoors: to live,

in other words, the friluftsliv lifestyle. In order to refine and develop this tentative hypothesis we supplemented our secondary analysis of the survey findings with a preliminary qualitative study, based around a theoretical sample (Bryman, 2012).

Conducted on 13th June, 2012, the semi-structured in-depth group interview (approximately two hours in length) involved three sports science graduates, all in their late 20s (27-29 years) – Reidar, Svein and Gunn [pseudonyms]. The three had remained involved with sport as researcher, personal trainer and postgraduate student respectively. They were purposively sampled for two main reasons: first, because as former sports science students they would (almost by definition) have been highly sports active throughout their (young) lives and, as a consequence, in a position to reflect upon personal and public developments in sports participation; second, they were known to represent ‘hard core’ lifestyle sports participants (that is, for whom, in their own terms, life appeared to revolve around their chosen sports – in this case boarding, ‘breaking’ and mountain-biking – and for whom their activity represents what Stebbins (1992) called ‘serious leisure’). The selection of the research participants was, therefore, guided by emerging theoretical considerations (Bryman, 2012) regarding developments in lifestyle and adventure sports, in particular – an arena in which Scandinavian youngsters are often at the cutting-edge. The group represented a convenience sample (self-selected from seven people contacted via SMS) snowballed from the contacts of Reidar. The findings are supplemented with anecdotal evidence derived from discussions with colleagues and sports science students in Norway over the course of the previous 12 months and subsequently. Here again, it is important to stress that these informants were selected in order to further develop the tentative hypothesis that seemed to be emerging from the secondary analysis of the Statistics Norway data.

A group interview was selected because we were interested, among other things, in the ways in which the group members discussed the issues *as a group* (Bryman, 2012) – the ways in which, for example, they supplemented, contradicted and cross-examined each other. Thus, by ‘shar[ing] their experiences and thoughts, while also comparing their own contributions to what others ha[d] said’ (Morgan 2006: 121), the 90-minute group interview threw light upon ‘the reasoning behind the views and opinions ... expressed by group members’ (Denscombe 2007: 179). In this manner, the group interview provided data not only on *what* the participants thought but also *why* they thought the way they did (Morgan 2006).

The data generated by the group interview was transcribed verbatim and subjected to thematic analysis in the form of the identification of recurring themes in the data. The main themes used to structure the interviews (as well as a starting point for analysing the data they generated) featured several sub-categories (e.g. their sporting biographies) while other themes (e.g. the significance of parents and friends) emerged within the group discussion. In this regard, all of the ‘categories of meaning’ were subsequently refined and continuously cross-checked to help ‘identify relationships between the codes and categories of data’ (Denscombe, 2007: 292) and to shed light on the patterns of behaviours described by the group participants. On the basis of this initial thematic coding several overarching themes could be identified in the group’s responses. The main themes emerging from the data related to the group members’ transitions from conventional to lifestyle sports, their motivations towards and perceptions of what they termed ‘modern friluftsliv’, and the significance of friends. These themes were then

considered in relation to key theoretical concepts, such as sociability and excitement, used to underpin the analysis.

In the first instance, the group described how, in terms of their biographical narratives, they had moved from regular participation (at least once per week but typically two to three times per week) in conventional/traditional sports (and games in particular) – such as soccer, handball and badminton – to lifestyle sports during the latter years of their youth. It was noteworthy, nevertheless, that their sporting portfolios around their early teenage years (as they moved towards the transition from elementary to secondary schooling) typically consisted of a repertoire of three or more activities, undertaken regularly¹⁰, and included such activities as cross-country skiing, orienteering, cycling and horse-riding.

Unsurprisingly (see, for example, Wheeler and Green, 2012), parental socialization appeared to have played a significant role in the interviewees' original involvement in sport and subsequent participation in their early teenage years around the time of transition from elementary to secondary schooling. Alongside disenchantment with various aspects of the conventional sports with which they had been involved as youngsters, a seemingly conscious desire to choose and develop their own self-identities and individuality, as well as seek alternative motivations for participation, played a part in the interviewees' transitions from traditional sports towards their current lifestyle and adventure sports¹¹. The prominence of their chosen activities in their lifestyles was neatly illustrated by Gunn's comment that 'I wake up and go to bed with it [downhill

¹⁰ Such 'wide sporting repertoires' have been shown to provide foundations for lifelong participation (see, for example, Haycock and Smith, 2012; Roberts and Brodie, 1992).

¹¹ Adventure sports are broadly defined as those sports or physically active recreations involving seeking adventure in order to generate fun and excitement (see Kerr & Houge Mackenzie, 2012).

mountain-biking] on my mind’, while the significance of the activities for their identities was succinctly expressed by both Svein (‘instead of being something that I do it’s something that I cannot do without!’) and Reidar (‘[It is] what I feel I represent’). At the same time, however, Gunn described herself as having an ‘activity identity’ seemingly alongside or, more precisely, as a dimension of her overall self-identity while Reidar added that his chosen activities ‘fit my personality’ and Svein observed ‘it’s part of my identity’.

By way of juxtaposing their own approaches to outdoor and adventure sports with (traditional) friluftsliv, Gunn referred to their styles of involvement as ‘modern friluftsliv’, adding that ‘modern friluftsliv’ is more a matter of ‘action [adventure] sports *in nature*’ – in other words ‘doing activities *in nature*’ (Reidar) [emphases in the originals] – rather than *being* in and among nature per se. The group were keen to point out, nevertheless, that with very many adventure activities the two went hand-in-hand. In other words, when mountain-biking, surfing and snowboarding, for instance, the environment not only made the activity possible but heightened the experience – in effect, adding the context of nature to the physical and psychological experience of something akin to what Csikszentmihalyi (1990) described as ‘flow’¹².

In this vein, the group viewed ‘modern friluftsliv’ as having developed away from the ‘traditional’ roots of Norwegian ‘outdoor life’ and appeared to share Gunn’s view that ‘I wouldn’t call what I do [downhill mountain-biking] “friluftsliv”’, not least because it typically involved the use of ski-lifts to access the trails. They also shared the view that participants in outdoor and adventure activities tended to have their own conceptions

¹² In the groups’ own terms, their activities appeared particularly well placed to provide them with peak experiences (or ‘flow’), through activities where the skill required meets the challenge of the activity and the participant becomes absorbed (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

(and definitions) of what frilufstliv was (or meant for them) and, in this regard, viewed 'modern friluftsliv' as having become something quite different to the conventional/traditional view of 'outdoor life' in Norway: 'I love friluftsliv but I don't have to go camping one week every winter at a cabin!' (Gunn).

When asked about contemporary trends, the group expressed views in tune with Wheaton's (2013, p.3) depiction of 'The allure and excitement of lifestyle sport'. Youngsters, they believed, were being enticed into lifestyle and adventure sports by the 'cool image' of the activities they were increasingly becoming aware of – among other things, via the internet (and YouTube in particular) – 'They have much more opportunities because they see more' (Gunn). The image of the new 'sports' was identified as a significant driver for contemporary Norwegian youngsters: as Gunn put it, '[Look at me] I'm so cool and so popular!' In this regard, friends were viewed as playing a significant part in enticing many young people nowadays into participation in lifestyle/adventure sports. Sociability also emerged as an important aspect of participation for the group. Among other things, friends were perceived as providing company with like-minded others, security and feedback in the form of reciprocal 'coaching', new ideas regarding 'moves' and confirmation/legitimation of both performance and credibility ([friends provide] 'some sort of acknowledgement' [Gunn]): 'It's 10 times more fun with friends ... to share the joy and to inspire' (Gunn). In this manner, the group's observations underscored and developed our earlier point regarding the perceived sociability (in the eyes of participants) of the loose collection of supposedly individualistic activities typically corralled under the terms lifestyle and adventure sports. Even among the small groups of 'hard core' participants interviewed as part of this study, emphasis was placed almost as much on the importance of friends

and sociability as it was on the nature of the activity itself or involvement as an aspect (rather than the core) of self-discovery or identity affirmation. Indeed, the group appeared to be describing a kind of virtuous circle: to keep the company of friends they needed to be doing ‘cool’ sports while doing such sports tended to enhance and sustain their friendship groups.

Anecdotal evidence from several people involved with friluftsliv in a professional capacity in Norway makes interesting reading here. A highly-experienced Norwegian mountain-guide, for example, reinforced the perception (of the group interviewed) that young people are not so interested ‘being in a tent or staying out’ (Alstad, 2011). Rather, they want to access activities such as downhill or Telemark skiing as quickly and conveniently as possible. Indeed, many of these young people are said to have never ‘been in’ or experienced nature in the traditional friluftsliv sense. They are said to want all the comforts of ‘home’ – for example, ‘overnatting’ (overnight stay) accommodation indoors rather than outdoors – before and after pursuing their chosen outdoor and adventure activities, in order not only to enjoy (what might be referred to in colloquial terms as) the ‘après-ski’ (with friends) but in order to recuperate prior to the following day’s activity adventure (Alstad, 2011). Nor, it seems, are those who take an educational and professional interest in the outdoors greatly different from young leisure-sport participants themselves. It was suggested that those training to be outdoor professionals are not as interested in ‘the outdoors’ and ‘nature’ per se as was once believed to be the case. Students and trainees, it seems, want adventure *qualifications* rather than outdoor *experiences* (Alstad, 2011; Davis, 2012; Haughom, 2012). The Norwegian Folkehøgskole – one-year voluntary, fee-paying high schools, some of which have traditionally been dedicated to ‘outdoor life’ (friluftsliv) – where traditional

friluftsliv often took place (e.g. dog-sledging) are said to be veering towards 'extreme' adventure sports as a means of recruitment with the result that traditional friluftsliv in these schools is being marginalised and dissipated.¹³

DISCUSSION

Latterly, as Roberts (2014) notes, 'The sociological gaze has shifted away from participation rates onto the cultural dimension of sports – meanings, motivations and identities'. This has been particularly true in relation to lifestyle and adventure sports. Thus, in this paper, we have endeavoured to explore developments in young Norwegians' sports participation in relation to participation rates and trends (in lifestyle and adventure sports in particular) as well as the associated 'meanings, motivations and identities'. In doing so, we have sought to explore contemporary changes in youth sport participation in Norway, alongside the significance or otherwise of 'nature-based settings' and the developing character of lifestyle and adventure sports.

In terms of changes in youth sport, it is apparent that young Norwegians are the quintessential sporting omnivores. Nevertheless, among the age group where regular participation peaks in Norway (16-19 year olds) the popularity of games declined over the decade 1997-2007 while participation in lifestyle sports continued to increase (Vaage, 2009). It seems that the particular mix of conventional and lifestyle sports that Norwegian youngsters favour has shifted within a generation, with the latter more prominent in 2007 than they had been even a decade earlier. In this regard, the levels, rates, forms and styles of participation favoured by Norwegians – and young Norwegians, in particular – represent

¹³ Between 2003 and 2006, 'outdoor pursuits' is said to have been the subject with the highest number of new higher education programmes as Norwegian institutions compete to recruit students following to 2003 'Quality Reform of HE' which introduced 'market dynamics' to HE in Norway (Karhus, 2012).

an exaggerated version of those found elsewhere in the developed world. The situation is very similar elsewhere in Scandinavia. Fridberg (2010), for example, has noted that the growth of lifestyle sports in Denmark and Scandinavia has occurred alongside stagnation in the traditional sports and games. Whether these developments are representative of what Atkinson (2010, p.1250) refers to as ‘a mass de-stabilization of many mainstream sporting forms’ or even ‘post-sport physical cultures’ (Pronger, 2004; cited in Atkinson, 2010) – including what he describes as choice based on the anticipation of play-like experiences – remains to be seen. The evidence presented here, however, suggests a greater degree of continuity alongside the undoubted changes than Atkinson appears to anticipate. In this vein, Borgers et al. (2013) observed recently that ‘today’s modes of sports practices [in the Western world] ... have diversified and de-traditionalised.’ Their study of kinesiology students in Belgium during the past four decades (1972–2009) revealed a diversification of sports participation styles since the 1980s, followed by an intensification around these newer styles during the 1990s, with the result that participation in the first decade of the 21st century had become ‘subdivided into multiple distinct traditional and non-traditional components, with growing emphasis on non-traditional, alternative practices.’

Interestingly, young people’s participation in lifestyle sports seems to be playing a part in shifting the peak of participation in Norway ‘rightwards’, so to speak; i.e. peak participation occurs at a later point (an older age) in childhood and youth. In fact, the peak in individual sports (and, by extension, lifestyle sports) represents not so much a peak as a plateau¹⁴ (or even escarpment) – whereas participation in sports generally (and in team sports in particular) peaks around age 13, the plateau in lifestyle sports seems to postpone drop-off and drop-out among Norwegians to their early 20s.

¹⁴ Among those who exercise a lot, there is *no* gradual decline in participation.

In terms of 'nature based settings', one especially interesting feature of trends in participation in Norway over the decade 1997-2007 has been developments in the quintessentially Norwegian category of outdoor and adventurous activities labelled 'friluftsliv'. Among younger Norwegians, in particular, the shift towards specific adventure activities and away from the activities involving longer trips and/or simply being in the woods and mountains has been marked. In this regard, the changes in Norwegian sports participation appear to signal a subtle but socially significant shift in motivations and meanings from those traditionally associated with sport and, for that matter, friluftsliv. Indeed, they appear emblematic of a shift among Norwegian youth towards sports activities that offer alternative forms and styles of participation to those traditionally associated with 'the outdoors' as a style of life. Thus, in terms of the emergent character of lifestyle sports, the paper provides some support for the idea that shifts are underway in the manner in which Norwegian youth participate (not only *what* they do, *how*, *where* and with *whom* they do it, but *why* they do it). It seems that young Norwegians' tendencies towards more-or-less reflexively and deliberately constructing their own leisure and sporting identities often emerges, from reasonably well-established sporting habituses and (often quite conventional) portfolios. The trend among Norwegian youth towards lifestyle (including adventure) sports seems to represent a mix of disenchantment with various aspects of the 'traditional' sports with which they had been involved as youngsters coupled with the (intrinsic and/or extrinsic) appeal of newer lifestyle and adventure sports and the prospect of generating their own idiosyncratic motivations, mixes of activities and identities. A seemingly conscious desire to (reflexively) develop their own identify-conferring (especially in the case of the more adventurous sports such as the many variations on biking, blading, boarding

and skiing) portfolios of activities (within which one or several are usually prominent) also plays a relatively significant part in youngsters' transitions from traditional sports towards their current lifestyle and adventure preferences.

All-in-all, the preliminary group interview and additional anecdotal evidence enriched the tentative hypothesis emerging from our secondary analysis of the Statistics Norway data in several ways. First, it reinforced the impression that lifestyle sports 'are essentially understood by participants as ... about "doing it"' (Tomlinson et al., 2005: 2). At the same time, however – and in tune with Kerr and Houge Mackenzie's (2012) observations – the multiple and multi-faceted range of motives for participation in adventure sports (or 'modern friliftsliv'), in particular, included but went beyond merely excitement- or thrill-seeking, incorporating pleasurable kinaesthetic bodily sensations, pushing personal boundaries while overcoming fear in the company of friends *as well as* 'connecting' with the natural environment. In the case of exercise-oriented lifestyle sports (such as gym activities, jogging, walking, swimming and cycling), the appeal appears to lie in the health, fitness and/or 'body-sculpting' possibilities as well as their informal and flexible character.

As Roberts (2009, p.149) notes, some sociologists argue that 'the identities that lifestyles confer are displacing and reducing the significance of longer-standing social markers such as social class and gender'. As far as Norway is concerned, however, this does not appear to be the case. Notwithstanding the fact that a significant feature of the growth in participation in Norway (as in Denmark and Scandinavia generally) has been

the increasing involvement of girls and young women¹⁵ in sport, the Statistics Norway (2012) and Vaage (2009) studies reveal participation in outdoor adventurous activities such as skiing to be most common among those with high household incomes. Indeed, the children of adults with higher income in Norway display a tendency to do more sport and physical recreation generally while the children of parents with low income remain the least active – in the outdoors in particular. In this regard, it is worth noting¹⁶ that while, in some of the literature on youths’ sporting and leisure cultures, the concept of lifestyle sports as ‘style of life’ adopts a post-modern perspective in suggesting that lifestyle sports have ‘become unhooked from social dynamics’, such a position cannot be attributed to all commentators on lifestyle sports. Wheaton (2004, 2013) and Tomlinson et al. (2005), for example, argue that while understanding the shifting context of post-modernity helps make sense of the emergence and development of lifestyle sports, youths’ consumption of and participation in lifestyle sports continue to be shaped by social divisions, such as age, class, gender and ethnicity. Tomlinson et al. (2005: 3), for instance, have observed that ‘The key determinants of participation appear to be: terminal age of education ... marital and parental status ... and economic status’. Thus, the perspectives of Tomlinson, Wheaton and colleagues appear in tune with a post-industrial (rather than post-modern) perspective on contemporary Western societies: namely, social divisions that used to be considered all-important now influence, rather than determine, phenomena such as sports participation. From this perspective, young people are able to make more lifestyle choices than hitherto but continue to do so in significant socio-economic contexts. As with leisure more generally, involvement in lifestyle and adventure sports is more adequately described as *class-related* rather than *class-based* – in the sense that there has been a democratisation

¹⁵ This constitutes part of the explanation for the increased centrality of lifestyle sports (and vice-versa) and, in particular, the growing demand within the more exercise-oriented disciplines (Fridberg, 2010).

¹⁶ We are grateful to one of the reviewers for drawing our attention to this point.

of sporting involvement and the differences between the classes and sexes have become blurred. The upshot is that consumerism simply offers young people new ways of negotiating their identities within such contexts (Wheaton, 2004, 2013). Thus, as significant as lifestyle and adventure sports may be for young Norwegians, they appear to remain one (albeit a significant) aspect of their overall gender, class and ethnic identities.

CONCLUSION

In *The Cultural Politics of Lifestyle Sports*, Wheaton (2013: 28) outlines the ‘defining features’ of lifestyle sports which she anticipates being ‘refined or refuted’ by future research in the area. The analysis presented in this paper suggests that the distinction introduced at the outset of this paper – between lifestyle sports as styles of *participation* or styles of *life* – presents in polarized, not to say dichotomous, terms a reality that is better understood in terms of a dynamic continuum. Thus, among the ‘defining features’ of lifestyle sports are “commonalities in the ethos, ideologies, forms of motion, [and] cultural spaces” (Wheaton, 2013, p.28); in other words, ‘family resemblances’ (Wittgenstein, 1953, 2001) that lend shape to the field and make lifestyle sports relatively distinct when compared with so-called ‘achievement’ or ‘traditional’ sports (Wheaton, 2004, 2013). The nature of Norwegian youngsters’ contemporary sports participation underscores the ‘alternative’ (to conventional sports) character of lifestyle sports, including the centrality of recreation and pleasure-seeking – what Atkinson (2011) refers to as the existential benefits of play and games – rather than competition, the informal nature of much participation, alongside distinct preferences for individual or small-group rather than team-based activities.

The term ‘lifestyle sports’ is, as Coalter (2007) says of the term sport itself, a collective noun that can hide more than it reveals. Nevertheless, the findings from this study suggest that, as a generic and popular collective noun, the term lifestyle sport is most useful when it draws attention to the “commonalities” (Wheaton, 2013) shared by many of the activities often corralled under it: these amount to the *where*, *when*, *how* and *with whom* of participation. With regard to the *what* and the *why* of lifestyle sports participation it seems to us that there is a need to keep in mind the distinction between those activities oriented more towards extrinsic outcomes (and health and fitness, in particular) and those that have more to do with intrinsic motivations such as ‘play’ (Atkinson, 2011) and ‘flow’ or peak experiences (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Only occasionally do lifestyle (and more usually adventure) sports become totalizing styles of life. More often, young Norwegians’ commitment to their (more typically, adventure) sports – and the associated ‘neo-tribes’ (Bennett, 1999) – becomes a significant aspect of their broader lifestyles and self-identities. In other words, their lifestyle sports by no means dominate their entire lifestyles: their identities continue to be grounded in their class and gender backgrounds. Nowadays, Norwegian youngsters appear to be taking greater control over their own sporting lives as they progress through youth. In this regard, their sporting biographies have become personal (reflexive) projects or (choice) biographies – at least for middle-class youngsters that demonstrate a desire for more ‘pure’ relationships (Giddens, 1991) – ones they have, by degrees, chosen rather than had thrust upon them through, for example, team or club membership.

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Figure 1 2007

The frequency of doing sport and physical activity in their spare time to train or exercise, by gender. 16-79 years. 2007. Percentage. Based on Vaage (2009).

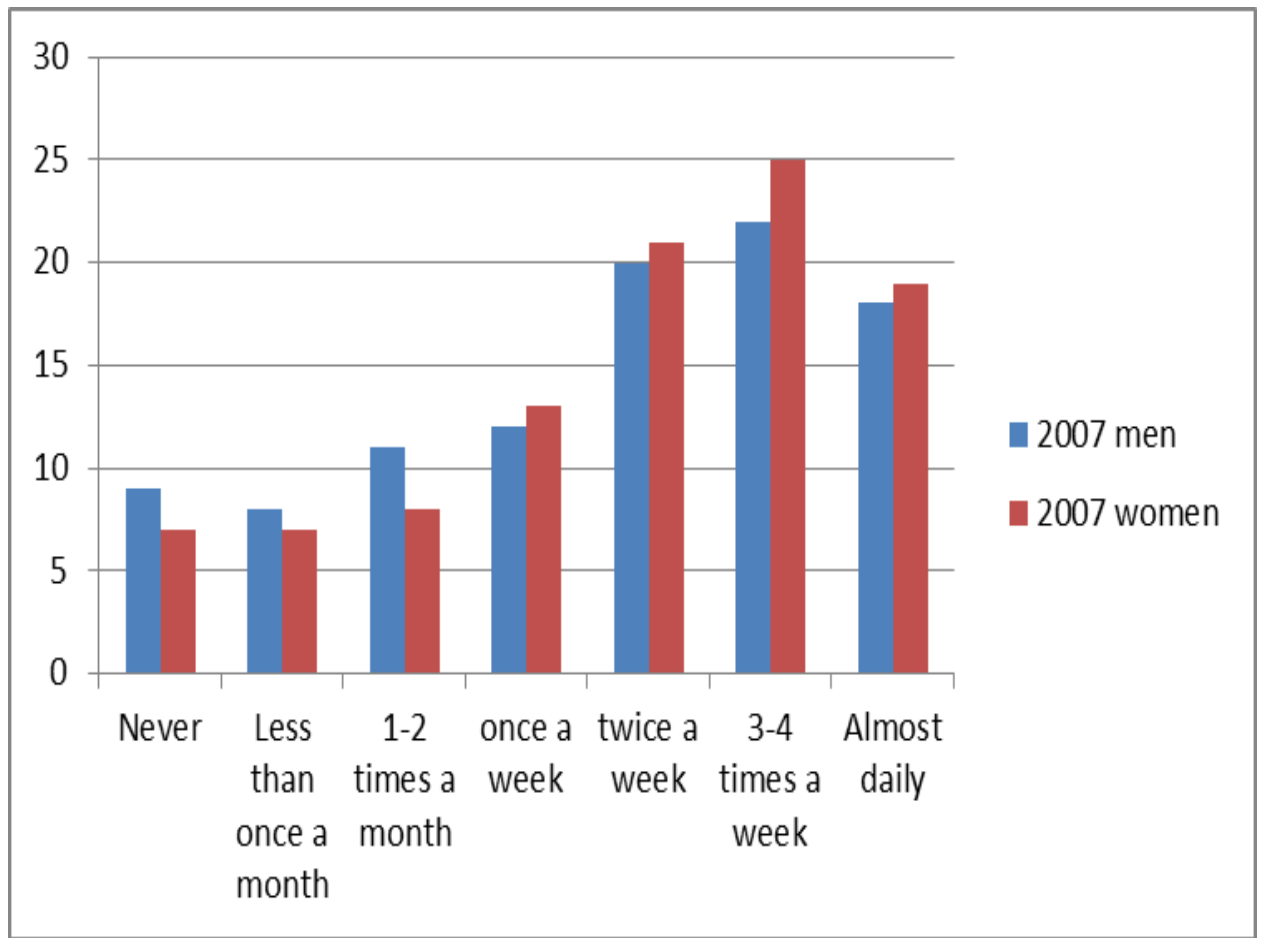


Table 1

The frequency of doing physical activity in their spare time to train or exercise, by gender and age. 6-15 years. 2007. Percentage. Based on Vaage (2009).

	never	less than month	1-2x per month	1x per week	2x per week	3-4x per week	about daily
Boys 6-8yrs	17	6	5	25	30	15	2
Girls 6-8yrs	10	4	6	36	30	13	2
Boys 9-12yrs	5	2	2	15	32	32	12
Girls 9-12yrs	6	4	6	18	32	28	6
Boys 13-15yrs	3	4	6	13	20	27	25
Girls 13-15yrs	4	6	4	9	29	34	14