Development(s) of Outdoor Education in Sweden
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Introduction

In this chapter, expressions of Outdoor Education (OE, or its Scandinavian equivalent as friluftsliv) in Sweden will be presented and discussed. Primarily, attention will be given to how OE is expressed in formal educational settings meaning not only school activity but also courses held within outdoor organisations. The aim is to analyse and discuss formal OE in Sweden through the lens of some societal changes influencing not only OE and education but society in general. In the following, I will outline and discuss four trends in Swedish society and its educational system that I believe will affect OE for young people in the future. Firstly, I look at Swedish outdoor organisations’ efforts to meet a successively diversified and multicultural society. Secondly, I describe and discuss an increasingly privatised educational system in Sweden in which OE has become a popular alternative for schools and universities in order to attract students. Thirdly, I critique OE’s educational position within Physical Education and Health (PEH) and the pedagogic outdoor discourse I believe follows from it. Finally, I describe and discuss the focus on assessment in schools in Sweden and the consequences for OE. Some of the issues discussed will be specific for Sweden while some will be general for other European countries.

Before I start to dig into the late developments of Swedish OE I want to give a backdrop to the perspective(s) from which this chapter is written. I have my educational background and one of my research interests in how OE is contextualised and positioned within PEH in the Swedish school system and in Physical Education and Health Teacher Education (PEHTE) within Swedish universities. Along the way I have become more and more interested in how OE is communicated and expressed outside the context of education in schools and universities. This have led to my involvement in two of the major Swedish outdoor organisations (Friluftsfrämjandet and Svenskt Friluftsliv) as well as participation in the European network The Institute of Outdoor Adventure Education and Experiential Learning (EOE). Thereby I hope my perspective have widened somewhat after starting my OE journey within PEH and PEHTE. After having closely followed the development(s) in Swedish OE for more than a decade, one of my major conclusions and points of departure is that expressions of OE are very culturally dependent and will differ with the context it is taking place in.

Trend number one: Outdoor Education and inclusion in the “new” Sweden

Organised Outdoor Education in Sweden

In Sweden, formal OE is not only arranged by schools and higher education institutions, but also by non-profit outdoor organisations. These organisations have a different profile, provide different activities and attract different groups of people, but they all have in common trying to provide outdoor activities for Swedes (and visitors) to take part in during their leisure. Svenskt Friluftsliv (Swedish Friluftsliv) was established in 2000 and is an umbrella organisation for 24 outdoor organisations including a total of 1,600,000 members. While a few of the organisations have a rather wide outdoor character with many activities and sections, most of them are specialized on a certain activity or a certain context. For all the organisations in Svenskt Friluftsliv there is a challenge in providing low or no cost for their activities. The support to Svenskt Friluftsliv from the Swedish Government, which was recently almost doubled, is today approximately 4,800,000 Euro. As a comparison, organised
sport in Sweden includes approximately 2,800,000 members and receives 170,000,000 Euro in governmental support. Other challenges, surely not specific for outdoor organisations, are the decreasing number of young people and trying to attract new leaders and members (Backman, 2016).

**Inclusion of newly arrived Swedes**

As a member of the committee assigned to divide the financial support from the Swedish Government to the organisations in Svenskt Friluftsliv, I have witnessed increasing efforts from the organisations in trying to attract new groups of leaders and members. Although “new” groups differ from one outdoor organisation to another, a common feature when identifying target groups seems to be disabled people and newly arrived Swedes (Backman, 2016). Sweden has always had a relatively generous approach to migrants, but during 2015 and 2016 the numbers of people arriving to Sweden increased dramatically as a result of the conflicts and crisis in Syria. The increase of the Swedish population was approximately 1.5 - 2 percent during this period and Sweden stood out as the country that received most migrants in Europe. This condition received much international attention (Moore, 2016). Outdoor organisations, as with most institutions in Swedish society, face great challenges in meeting these big groups of newly arrived Swedes. The friluftsliv-tradition and The Right of Public Access, which by many is claimed to involve cultural values specific for Scandinavia (see e.g. Henderson & Vikander 2007), can perhaps serve as a mode for inclusion and for people to learn more about a new country. However, there is a delicate balance between trying to include people in the “Swedish way” of practicing OE while at the same time being affirmative to the interests and cultural values people might bring to Sweden. These issues will be further discussed in the conclusions of this chapter.

**Trend number two: Outdoor Education on the educational market**

**The outsourcing of education**

Educational scholars have observed and critiqued that fact that schools and higher education are today positioned in an economic market where metaphors like customers, producers, supply and demand are becoming more and more used (Arreman & Holm, 2011; Ball, 2012). In Sweden, this outsourcing was started through a political reform in 1992 which made it possible for schools, who had until then only been run by municipalities, to be started and operated by individuals and institutions with financial support from the Swedish Government. At first this was only a minor phenomenon in the Swedish educational system, mainly in upper secondary school, but soon it was spread among schools for younger children as well. In 2013, 13.3 percent of all Swedish children in compulsory school went to a free-school and the corresponding part for upper secondary school was 26 percent (Skolvalet, 2016). There has been intense political debate around the establishment of free-schools in Sweden. Two of the issues discussed have been the inflation of grades and the segregation of students (Bunar & Kallstenius, 2007). Higher education through universities in Sweden is still run through the agency of the state although they are also trying to adapt to the economic market.

**Expressions of Outdoor Education on the educational market**

Most of the free-schools in the Swedish educational system have some kind of profile or special characteristic in relation to the schools operated by municipalities. Common profiles are subjects such as sport and PEH, ICT, foreign languages, arts and natural science. It is difficult to assess whether or not OE is a common profile for Swedish free-schools. When searching for the Swedish words for “OE” and “free-school” on Google, only a few free-
schools with an OE profile have been identified. The critical discussions about free-schools in Sweden have not involved those with an OE profile. However, OE within universities has been more critically discussed regarding what the adaptation to the economic market means for their educational values. Kårhus (2010) have showed that PEHTE institutions in Norway sometimes adapt their OE courses according to what attracts students rather than to students’ future professional needs. Based on my own findings (Backman, 2008; 2009; Backman & Larsson, 2013) I would argue that the situation is the same in Sweden as in Norway and that the economic survival of institutions means that demands for professional and academic quality are sometimes put aside.

Trend number three: The position of Outdoor Education in Physical Education and Health

Although this topic is perhaps not a “trend” as with the other three issues discussed in this chapter, I believe that it deserves some attention when discussing OE in Sweden. Formal teaching in the outdoors has a long tradition in Swedish schools and its origin is to be found in the influence of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Carl von Linné (Carlgren & Marton, 2003). From having been a concern for the whole school during the first part of the twentieth century, it has more and more been move to the subject PEH (Sundberg & Öhman, 2008). The position of OE as a part of PEH is far from unique for the Swedish educational system (Brooks, 2002; Boyes, 2012; Cooper, 2000; Ho, 2014; Timken & McNamee, 2012).

Valued in the school curriculum and teacher education but not in school teaching?

One of the main findings in my doctoral thesis (Backman, 2010), which I found paradoxical, was that OE in Sweden (friluftsliv) was highly valued in the PEH curriculum and in PEHTE but it seemed to have little outcome in the actual school teaching in PEH. Is there reason to believe that things have changed today? My collection of empirical material for the thesis was made almost 10 years ago so it is likely to believe that things have happened, especially since the position of OE in the current curriculum (SNAE 2011a, 2011b) is now even stronger, and was implemented with much more resources for the training of teachers, compared to the former curriculum in 1994. OE is today one of three key learning areas in PEH for compulsory school in Sweden (SNAE 2011a) so it (still) has a strong position in the PEH curriculum. Regarding OE in PEHTE, I dare to say that nothing much has changed. I build my claim on recent studies of how content knowledge for future PEH teachers is assessed in Swedish PEHTE (Backman & Pearson, 2016; Backman & Larsson, 2016). Highly valued ingredients such as technical outdoor skills and journeys in a remote wilderness setting still frames the reference for OE in Swedish PEHTE. Perspectives such as for example ecology, sustainable development and place pedagogy are rarely to be found in OE in Swedish PEHTE although they are often claimed as significant values in OE (Backman, 2008; Mikaeli, Backman & Lundvall, 2016).

The transforming power of PEH and PEHTE

My own and other studies have showed that OE teaching is (or perhaps was) rare to be found in Swedish PEH. A simplified description would be that either it did not occur at all, or that it was present in the form of sport activities performed in the outdoors (Backman, 2004; Quennerstedt & Öhman, 2008). Regardless of whether OE is still marginalised in PEH, research tells us something interesting about the transforming power of the PEH and the PEHTE contexts. When OE (or friluftsliv) is brought into the contexts of PEH or PEHTE as an educational content, some values are included and some are excluded. I believe there are many reasons for this, such as PEHTE students’ backgrounds, their preferences for physical
practices, and value structures in the OE teaching in PEHTE. I also believe there are similarities between OE and other content in PEH, with dance as the perhaps most significant example. Research tells us that cultural, expressive and aesthetic aspects of dance are rare to be found in PEH and that it is merely a matter of physical activity to music (Gard, 2006). One common element between OE and dance appears to be that they are to a lesser or greater extent de-contextualised when brought into the PEH and the PEHTE settings (Kirk, 2010). When taking the perspective that educational content is a contextual construction it becomes interesting to think about what OE would have been if being “owned” by subjects other than PEH (Backman, 2015).

Trend number four: Outdoor Education in a discourse of assessment

Education in schools and universities have become more and more globalized in the sense that educational institutions in different countries are now easily connected to each other, they compare themselves with each other and sometimes co-operate. During the last two decades we have seen specific educational expressions of an increasing globalization between the European countries regarding assessment. McDowell (2010, p. 263) emphasises that “assessment is clearly under challenge in contemporary society with competing theories, diverse practices and many conflicting demands coming from a wide range of stakeholders”. The interest for assessment have shifted from being merely focused on summative evaluation of knowledge to include more strategies for learning, called Assessment For Learning (AFL) or formative assessment (see e.g. Black & Williams, 1998 and MacPhail & Halbert, 2010).

Discourse(s) of assessment in Swedish schools

In Sweden, educationalists have been interested in the learning potential within assessment, while the political discussion about assessment have been more focused on the summative aspects, i.e. evaluation and grades. The weak Swedish results in the last Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) evaluation have gained national as well as international attention, and have also become an infected national political issue (Augustin, 2013; OECD, 2015). The intensified interest for assessment in the university context can be perhaps be explained by the ideas of convertible education within the Bologna declaration which has had a strong influence on the discussion of teaching, learning and assessment in Sweden as well as in other European countries (Birtwistle, 2009; West & Barham, 2009). Some of the educational intentions in the Bologna declaration, such as for example the implementation of learning outcomes and a more differentiated scale for grades (compared to previous Swedish conditions) have also been implemented in the Swedish school system. There are intense discussions about assessment, both within the school context and within the university context, and to some extent this is of a different character depending on whether it is a discussion among educationalists or among politicians. I will argue that that formal learning within schools today has no choice but to adjust to prevailing assessment discourse(s) which will also set boundaries for what is possible to teach and to learn in OE.

Support For Assessment in Swedish schools

In the compulsory and upper secondary school in Sweden, a new curriculum reform was launched in 2011 (SNAE 2011a, 2011b). As an answer to the former critique against a lack of equality in teaching and assessment, this curriculum was more detailed regarding content, learning outcomes and criteria for assessment compared to the former one. In order to guide Swedish teachers into the right way of marking, the Swedish National Agency of Education (SNAE) also took the initiative to have material called Support For Assessment (SFA) produced in each school subject. For the construction of SFA in PEH, a group of lecturers and
researchers on The Swedish School of Sport and Health Sciences in Stockholm were contracted. From 2012-2014 three different materials (film and text) were produced including SFA in PEH for year 6 (SNAE 2014a), year 7-9 (SNAE 2012) and in the first course in PEH of upper secondary school (SNAE 2014b). As a part of the group producing these materials, I was responsible for writing SFA for OE in year 7-9 and upper secondary school although the material was reviewed by the whole group several times. Constructing examples for assessment situations and suggesting student actions for different grades in OE was one of the most challenging tasks with which I have ever confronted. One aspect which made the task even more difficult was that the SFA’s for the different stages (year 7-9 and upper secondary) were to be closely aligned with the criteria in the curricula for PEH in each stage. The curricula for PEH in each stage were differently structured as they were authored by different groups, and partly the curricula were formulated in a way which I did not agree.

Support for Assessment – an answer to what?

When the former Swedish curriculum reform was implemented in 1994, teachers were offered no, or very poor extra training in how to understand its effects on their daily work. What followed was a wide range of interpretations of what to teach and to assess in different subjects, not least PEH and OE. Studies of Swedish PEH teachers showed that assessment was rarely aligned with the stipulations in the curriculum and that they had difficulties of formulating written documents regarding their subject (Backman, 2011b; Redelius & Hay, 2012). When the current curriculum reform was implemented in 2011, SNAE had therefore taken special initiatives in order to prepare Swedish teachers for what was to come. SFA was one such initiative. The aim of SFA’s was not to replace the curriculum or to give Swedish teachers a detailed guide to follow; instead it was to give examples of assessment situations but still also to encourage teachers to work with their own interpretations.

Support For Assessment – examples from Outdoor Education

In the text below I will describe how outdoor education is expressed in SFA for PEH for year 7-9 (SNAE 2012) and upper secondary school (SNAE 2014b) in Swedish schools and also explain the assumptions and ideas behind these expressions. The general structure of national PEH curriculums for the different stages is that they are build up around: Aim and learning outcomes, Central content and Criteria for assessment.

Year 7-9

Table 10.1 below illustrates how one of several OE activities is expressed in SFA and how it is related to the PEH curriculum formulations regarding OE.
Table 10.1
The relation between formulations regarding OE in the Swedish PEH curriculum for year 7-9 and one selected outdoor activity in SFA for PEH (SNAE 2011a, 2012).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PEH curriculum, learning outcome</th>
<th>PEH curriculum, central content</th>
<th>SFA, task for OE</th>
<th>PEH curriculum, criteria for assessment, grade E</th>
<th>SFA, criteria for assessment, grade E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perform and adjust different outdoor activities and friluftsiv according to different conditions and environments.</td>
<td>1. How different outdoor activities and friluftsiv can be planned, organised and performed. 2. Rights and obligations in nature according to The Right of Public Access. 3. Cultural traditions in outdoor activities and friluftsiv.</td>
<td>Choose a suitable place and arrange an open fire using stones. Thereafter, you are to choose material for the fire and arrange the material so that it possible to light the fire. Without lighting the fire you are thereafter to show where you would light the fire and how you would keep the fire burning. Finally, you are to show how you would extinguish the fire.</td>
<td>The student performs outdoor activities with some adaptation to different conditions, environment and rules.</td>
<td>The student shows some adaptation to nature in his/her choice of place for the open fire. The student’s choice of material for the fire and his/her arrangement of the fire are to some extent adapted to effective ignition. The student shows some adaptation to principles for keeping the fire burning and to risks with open fire.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Included in the instructions from SNAE to the group constructing SFA was that we were not to focus on giving didactical advice for assessment to teachers but strictly keep to the formulations of tasks and criteria related to those tasks. However, in order to meet the realities of PEH teachers, our construction of SFA was preceded by many didactical discussions of what is possible and reasonable to do when teaching and assessing OE and PEH. For example, one such unspoken didactical consideration was that we wanted the teaching and assessment of OE to be possible to undertake during a normal class length (40-60 min) and in a natural environment close to school (Backman, Humberstone & Loynes, 2014). One underlying assumption when formulating the criteria for the OE tasks was to avoid quantitative measurement but instead to focus on qualities in an effort to guide teachers to a specific content (as in lighting an open fire in table 10.1). Further, we wanted to encourage the teachers to use their content knowledge in OE in the process of finding the levels for assessment. Important questions for the teachers to find answers to then became: “What is a good and a not so good choice of place for an open fire?”, and “What is a good and a not so good arrangement of material for lighting an open fire?”. When working with the criteria for SFA, the instructions were to continuously use the same “watchwords” as in the PEH curriculum. In the example with lighting a fire (see table 10.1) these were “to show some adaptation” for the grade E, “to show relatively good adaptation” for the grade C and “to show good adaptation” for the grade A.

Upper secondary school

The assignment to construct SFA for upper secondary school was almost the same as for year 7-9, however with some differences. One such difference is that SFA were to include examples of fictitious solutions by students instead of criteria for assessment (see column to the right in table 2 below). In table 10.2 below the relation between formulations regarding
OE in the PEH curriculum in Swedish upper secondary school and SFA including two tasks for one outdoor activity in upper secondary school and is presented.

**Table 10.2**

The relation between formulations regarding OE in the Swedish PEH curriculum for upper secondary school and one selected outdoor activity (including two tasks) in SFA for PEH (SNAE 2011b; 2014b).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PEH curriculum, learning outcome</th>
<th>PEH curriculum, central content</th>
<th>SFA, task for OE</th>
<th>PEH curriculum, criteria for assessment, grade E</th>
<th>SFA, example of student solution, grade E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ability to perform and adapt outdoor activities to different conditions and environments.</td>
<td>1. Outdoor activities which will develop an all-round physical ability. 2. Methods and safety in friluftsliv.</td>
<td>Together with a classmate you are to plan and perform a journey in nature. The journey should be adapted to efficient, energy-saving and safe movement. The mode for movement will be assigned by your teacher. It can be for example cycling, skiing, hiking or canoeing.</td>
<td>The student can carry out outdoor activities in natural environment with good quality of movement.</td>
<td>The student have chosen cycling as his/her mode of movement. The student have mainly chosen to plan his/her journey on gravel roads and trails in a nature area. The student uses a relatively energy-saving and efficient mode of cycling. The student is relatively determined when the route changes (uphill, downhill, turns, bumps etc) and uses relatively efficient movement strategies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Knowledge about what physical activities and experiences of nature can mean for physical ability and health. 2. Knowledge about cultural and social aspects of physical activities and experiences of nature.</td>
<td>Same as above.</td>
<td>You are also to describe the historical development of your chosen outdoor activity, the practitioners among social groups in society and the types of the chosen outdoor activity that are particularly common in the area where you live. Your documentation of the description and discussion can be in form of a written documents, a short movie or an oral conversation with a teacher.</td>
<td>The student can in basic terms discuss friluftsliv, as social and cultural phenomena, and in basic terms describe how different lifestyles and body ideals are expressed in friluftsliv and in society in general.</td>
<td>People have been cycling since way back in history. Today it is mostly the well-educated and wealthy people that cycles. There are many different styles of cycling. The style of cycling that one performs is related to different things such as age, education and income. Here in x-town there is a big club for cycling where many people are involved.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are two distinguishing features that separate the PEH curriculum for upper secondary school from the one for year 7-9. Firstly, there is more focus on students’ physical abilities for upper secondary school, which for OE can be interpreted as less outdoor activities with low-level physical activity. As all students are to perform “good quality of movement” (see table 10.2 above) in OE in order to pass. This demands that PEH teachers know how to identify these movement qualities. In table 10.2, movement quality have been interpreted as “efficient,
energy-saving and safe movements” which can be seen as one way to get closer to different aspects of movement quality. Secondly, there is also more focus on separating students’ practical/physical abilities from their theoretical/cognitive abilities. In table 10.2 we can see that abilities such as “discussing and describing” OE (friluftsliv) are emphasised. It is difficult to say whether assessment of theoretical components in OE (as in table 10.2 above) is a way that will strengthen and maintain the position of OE as an area of knowledge or if the demands for assessment will in fact marginalise OE from its educational values as a practical and theoretical area of knowledge. As can be seen from the tasks in table 10.2 there is also idea to increase students’ ability to take responsibility for their own health. We know from research (Engström, 2008) that many outdoor activities, unlike a majority of sport activities, can be meaningful for people from a lifelong perspective, which is one strong argument to maintain the position of OE within the Swedish school.

Conclusions

When faced with the challenge of writing something about the different expressions of OE in Sweden, this includes making some kind of selection of what to include and what to exclude. The trends and topics that I have chosen are based on my preferences for what I believe will be important to relate to in the near future. As Sweden, and many other European countries, have become more and more diversified and multicultural during the last two decades, I believe it is important for leaders in OE not only to affirm the OE practices in their own country but to be curious about what cultural traditions from other countries can offer. Writings about the friluftsliv-tradition have sometimes tended to be conservative and nationalistic (see e.g. Faarlund, 1994). In the ambition to include new groups of people to OE, I believe it is important to recruit newly arrived Swedes not only as members to the Swedish OE organisations, but perhaps more important, as leaders. Having leaders with language skills and OE skills other than Swedish (and English) is key to attract members from new groups. Regarding the marketisation of education in general, and of formal OE through PEH and PEHTE in particular, I do not see immediate problems for OE in schools as much as for OE in universities. If the students’ appreciation, and thereby the financial support to the institutions, is one of the main reasons for maintaining an exclusive OE discourse in PEHTE (Backman & Larsson, 2013; Kårhus, 2010), I would argue that this is a problem for the professional relevance of PEHTE. In the works of Kårhus (2010) and myself (Backman & Larsson, 2013) it is claimed that some issues of OE in PEHTE are not willingly open for an internal critical discussion. As Swedish PEH teachers think that the integration of school subjects is one important element in providing a qualitative OE teaching (Backman, 2011a), I would also argue that OE needs to be taken care of not only by PEH but by other school subjects as well. PEH and PEHTE seems to do well with the physical parts of OE, but have until now failed to include perspectives such a sustainable development, place pedagogy, history and culture in their OE teaching. Perhaps we need to share the responsibility if we want this to happen? Finally a few words about assessment in OE, a complex topic on which I have mixed feelings. On the one hand, I think the focus on assessment in today’s Swedish schools limits the options to provide meaningful and creative OE teaching which students can experience without a constant pressure for achievement. On the other hand, I also realise that the only way for OE to receive and maintain legitimacy and status in Swedish schools is if it is seen as equally important as other school subjects (see Potter & Dyment, 2016 for a further discussion). With the current situation, Swedish PEH teachers have no choice but to teach and assess OE. Based on my involvement in constructing SFA for OE in PEH for year 7-9 and for upper secondary school in Sweden I would say that there is too much focus on sport and physical activity in OE in general, but unfortunately also in the PEH curriculum for Swedish upper secondary school (SNAE 2011b). The SFA for OE (SNAE 2012, 2014b) was an
attempt to give some nuances to what can be included in OE in PEH. However, for upper secondary school, the general physical character of the curriculum set its limits. An interesting issue to give more attention to would be how Swedish PEH teachers experience SFA’s for OE. As SFA’s are rather new constructions, the teachers’ voices have not yet been heard, but this would be an important issue for future investigation.

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Swedish National Agency of Education: 
https://bp.skolverket.se/web/bs_gy_idridr01/information


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1 The Scandinavian concept friluftsliv can, as an educational element, be said to have its international equivalent in outdoor education or adventure education. However, considered as a Scandinavian leisure practice, friluftsliv has been claimed to lack an exact English translation, based as it is on its specific relation to the Scandinavian tradition, culture and landscape (Faarlund, 1994; Sandell, 2001). Therefore friluftsliv is today a concept that recurs in English publications (Backman 2010; Henderson & Vikander, 2007).

2 The Right of Public Access is a non-legislated tradition, with its history back in the beginning of the twentieth century. It can be described as a confidence given to the Swedes, allowing them to make outings in their land and countryside without many detailed restrictions (Sandell, 2001).