

Friluftsliv and “feeling for nature”

By Svein Loeng

To describe friluftsliv is not like describing a subject or a thing. “Procedural and declarative knowledge” isn’t good enough to give voice to this phenomenon. Friluftsliv is more like “soul” and “feeling”. It’s a “value activity”, not a “knowledge activity”. Friluftsliv is to “live in”, not “learn about”. The quality can be described as a “feeling” – not observable, but “feelable”. The gestalt of friluftsliv is the “feeling for nature”.

The author’s problem is to express this wordless core of friluftsliv. Linguistic expressions are **too** weak, words are **too** small. The expressions may be full of empty phrases. The deeper meaning is somewhere between the lines – beyond the words.

You will also get an idea of this wordless core when you bring your nature experiences back to “civilization”. When you meet people and tell your story, some of them will probably not “understand” you. They see the pictures and listen to the descriptions, but will not meet the underlying soul if they haven’t got the “feeling for nature” already. They see trees, rivers, flowers, landscapes; they see the parts, but haven’t got the “feeling”. But if you haven’t got the “feeling”, you miss the soul. These stories must meet a fellow soul to be understood and “felt” on a deeper level. The stories must be told in an atmosphere of “feeling for nature”.

Most Norwegians engage in friluftsliv for the sake of silence and **peace**. Many of us also mention the soul of nature and the mysticism – a sort of inner quality caused by meeting the greatness of nature. We seek this to be whole persons. Not the “product”, but the “feeling” is central.

For some people friluftsliv is closely related to fishing, hunting or berry-picking. For others these activities are “excuses” to engage in friluftsliv. **It’s their alibi for utility (Litt usikker på hva du mener her)**. They think they shouldn’t go there without an errand of utility; they won’t just go there doing “nothing”. Therefore they bring a fishing rod, a gun or a bucket, just for the “excuse”. Their errand is to do “nothing” – meet the peace and quietness and the greatness of nature – meet something “bigger” than themselves.

When I go skiing, I certainly have a “feeling for skiing”, but that “feeling” brings me out in nature and gives an extra dimension to my “feeling for nature”. In summer I have a “feeling for walking”, but walking along a road is something different from walking in the mountains or the forests. Skiing is fun in general, but skiing in the wilderness, close to nature and far from civilization, gives maximum rise to the “feeling for nature”.

When we bring friluftsliv into schools and academic colleges, we should take care of its characteristics. Friluftsliv is not a traditional subject – but is it possible to “teach” it? Will traditional learning cause a deeper “touch”? Will “declarative and procedural knowledge” create a “feeling for nature”? Maybe, but the “touch” may not be a “feeling for nature”, but rather a “feeling for the subject”, for instance biology, ornithology, etc. . . . You meet nature through the subjects, not through a deeper feeling for nature itself. Friluftsliv becomes a subject like most other subjects.

We must not consider friluftsliv as an ordinary subject. Its characteristics demand other approaches. Therefore we should develop this “feeling” before we start “learning about”. “Awakening” before education. The inner motivation must be there. “Feeling for nature” must be a driving force for learning. Seeking natural knowledge should be a result from “feeling for nature”.

To “teach” the subject of friluftsliv should then be to develop the “feeling for nature” – or take care of it if it’s already there. It’s not a question of traditional teaching and learning; it’s not “school”.

“Declarative and procedural knowledge” can be expressed in words. A “feeling” is wordless, not measurable, not observable – only “feelable”. This “feeling” should underlie our educational approaches to friluftsliv.

The same philosophy should pass for friluftsliv as a university college subject. The study of friluftsliv should have main focus on developing a “feeling for nature”. The search for “declarative and procedural knowledge” should not be the starting point. The search for “knowledge” should be the result from this “feeling” – an awakening of “feeling” before “learning about”. If the study of friluftsliv mainly focus on “declarative and procedural knowledge”, it will lack an essential dimension, and become a study like other studies, reduced to an academic discipline consisting of subjects. It will not be a study of friluftsliv, but a study of subjects concerning nature. The main focus should be on “feeling”, not “learning”.