

Radical *friluftsliv* and green transition

Argaladei's 1970s as an inspiration for environmental education

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Introduction

The so-called green transition to a more sustainable model of development struggles to achieve the support needed to be sufficiently radical. It is well established that the world's upper and middle classes must reduce their fossil fuel use and material consumption in order to establish a sustainable relationship with the earth's life-supporting ecosystems (United Nations Environment Programme, 2024; Dixon-Declève et al., 2023). Human civilization has always existed in a challenging relationship with nature and the environment, from foraging across the savannah to concerns that frost will destroy the harvest or that wolves will take the livestock. But modern industrialization and urbanization has created an increased mental and physical distance from our dependence on nature, despite it being just as fundamental today as it ever has been. When direct experiences of natural environments – sitting on the ground, looking at the starry sky, feeling rain, cold and solar heat directly on the skin – are referred to in terms such as nature tourism and outdoor education, the pedagogical conditions for society's relationship to nature change dramatically. At a time when we are distanced, mentally and/or physically from the environment and landscape, the benefits of outdoor life have been re-stated. It is a very important part of life for many (Fredman et al., 2013) particularly so during and since the pandemic (Hansen et al., 2023).

In 2012, the Swedish parliament established ten goals for Sweden's outdoor life and in the latest evaluation of these goals its importance is made clear:

Outdoor activities are valuable both for the individual and for society at large. They contribute to people gaining an understanding of nature and the environment and to better public health, while strengthening regional development and the Swedish economy. /.../ Outdoor activities are also linked to several of the 17 global goals for sustainable development, the 2030 Agenda adopted by the UN in 2015, and to all dimensions of the Agenda: environmental, economic and social. Eight of Sweden's 16 environmental quality goals contain specifics about outdoor activities (Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, 2023, pp. 5–6, here translated to English by the authors).

These leisure-time relationships with nature can easily become part of an environmentally irresponsible lifestyle, however. It is therefore important to search for methods and approaches that can still utilize the environmental pedagogical power we have reason to believe exists in direct experiences of and in nature (see for example, Dunlap & Heffernan, 1975 to Johnson & Činčera, 2023). Based on this, we have delved into the activities that the Swedish outdoor association "Argaladei" developed during the 1970s. Our primary ambition in using this historical case study is to *offer inspiration for the development of a credible outdoor education with environmental pedagogical ambitions*. This sits at the intersection of the public's relationship with nature and the necessity of sustainable development.

Argaladei advanced a form of outdoor education that aimed at an alternative and more environmentally friendly society (an overview can be found in Waldén, 2001). Its combination of social criticism, advanced outdoor life and thoughtful pedagogy can serve as an important source of inspiration in the search for nature-related environmental pedagogy that promotes a more sustainable lifestyle today. A close study of this movement provides a background to the modern environmental commitment that emerged during the 1970s. It provides a perspective from which to look at the complex relationship between the encounter with nature and commitment to a suitably radical sustainable transition. Today we have a precarious imbalance between the challenges that climate and environment present and, the often very ambivalent, public environmental policy. The insufficiency of the public policy response provides good reasons to re-actualize the radical social criticism of the 1970s and the search for an alternative model of social development, here in the form of an outdoor life pedagogy. Argaladei was relatively unique as an outdoor ideological movement. It bridged the tension between utopian and romantically characterized outdoor ideals – so common in the history of outdoor movements – and the critical perspectives of the modern environmental and alternative movements. In doing so it formulated sharp, eco-political social criticism informed by ecosophical inspiration and scientifically based nature and cultural studies as well as existential and aesthetic arguments.

The essay begins by highlighting some characteristics of the recurring discussions about the environmental educational possibilities of nature encounters. We situate this within the social climate of the 1970s with its discussion of alternatives to the prevailing model of development and where, among other things, deep ecological perspectives were important. Against this background, we then delve into a case study of the outdoor association Argaladei during the 1970s, with the motto "*friluftsliv* [outdoor life] is a lifestyle". Based on the association's combination of social criticism, outdoor life and pedagogy, we highlight some central themes that we suggest offer possible inspiration for our current need for civic support for a green transition to more sustainable model of development.

Background

In this introductory part, we will provide a background to our analyses of Argaladei's activities. First, we present an overview of the research that has highlighted the educational potential of nature encounters, focusing on how such encounters can contribute to a sustainable transformation of society. Second, we provide an account of the specific relationship to nature that the Nordic outdoor tradition *friluftsliv* offers. Third, we describe the environmental policy context that prevailed when Argaladei's activities emerged in the 1970s.

The pedagogical potential of nature encounters

The relations to nature that have emerged in leisure and education – the experience landscapes – have developed in parallel with the urbanization and modernization of

society. There have been different approaches and different types of nature activities developed and advocated, but recurring themes among them include public health motives, their educational benefits, a means to foster environmental commitment and a counterbalance to the characteristics of modern society (Sandell & Sörlin, 2008; Sjödin, 2024; Öhman & Sandell, 2016).

There has long been a strong belief in the importance of nature encounters for increased environmental engagement and as a path towards sustainable development in policy, educational practice and research. For example, Thomas Beery (2013) has shown in an extensive quantitative study that there is a significant relationship between closeness to nature through outdoor activities and the feeling of connection with nature. Based on two qualitative studies of children's relationship to biodiversity, Beery and Jørgensen (2018) conclude that children's encounters with nature can create important opportunities for learning and understanding of natural diversity. In environmental psychology research, some studies have shown that there is a connection between frequent visits to forest areas and environmentally friendly behavior, but only a weak connection to environmental commitment (Nord, Luloff & Bridger, 1998). In the same field of research, Daniel Dutcher et al. (2007) show that our subjective experiences of nature are related to the feeling of connection with nature; for example, that we see ourselves as part of the natural environment, which in turn reflects a feeling of empathy. Karin Andersson and Johan Öhman (2015) describe how moral relationships to nature can be established in three ways: through spontaneous emotional reactions, by adopting nature-friendly norms from others, and through ethical reflections on previous nature experiences.

Research has shown that it is primarily through longer-term participation in outdoor activities that positive attitudes towards nature and the environment can be created. Malcolm Thornburn (2018) points out that if outdoor educational activities are short-term and activity-oriented, the experiences and learning tend to be rather superficial and do not enable an exploration or development of our complex and exciting relationship with nature. Furthermore, Greg Mannion et al. (2013) emphasize that a decisive factor is the teacher's knowledge of and feeling for the place that students encounter in outdoor education. Based on this knowledge and feeling, the teacher can work together with the students to create new relationships to the nature of the place but also to its history, culture and social significance.

A central critical question regarding whether nature contact leads to environmental engagement is what is meant by "environmental engagement" (see Öhman & Sandell, 2016). In recent years, policy-oriented research has clearly aimed to place outdoor educational activities in a broader context, linking them to society's efforts to achieve greater sustainability (Ross, Christie, Nicol & Higgins, 2014). Sustainability is thus replacing environment and ecology as the leading conceptual framing for pedagogy (Cook & Cutting, 2014; Clarke & Mcphie, 2014). Within this, the concept of *transformation* becomes central, both at the individual and societal levels, and Allen Hill and Mike Brown (2014) discuss the role that nature encounters can and should play in

such transformation processes. They emphasize that this transformation must also include education itself, and they develop an account of the opportunities that a place-related pedagogy can offer (see also Mannion, Fenwick & Lynch, 2013). Hill and Brown (ibid.) argue that with a place-related pedagogy, learning is not limited to the encounter with nature but also includes the people in that place and its cultural context and history. Hamish Ross et al. (2014) therefore argue that an outdoor pedagogy based on the concept of sustainability can focus not only on people's relationship to nature but also the social and economic dimensions of sustainability. Furthermore, Ross et al. argue, outdoor pedagogy thus gains a clearer political role as it is not limited to the participants' own relationship to nature but is also linked to issues of justice in terms of the distribution of natural resources and welfare, between people around the world today, between different species and for future generations.

Robert Cook and Roger Cutting (2014) argue that outdoor education must openly offer a vision of an ecologically sustainable society and show ways to realize this vision. Other researchers such as Hill and Brown (2014) emphasize that sustainability and learning are closely linked and that sustainable development must therefore be seen as an open process without a specific end goal. In a similar vein, Susanne Paulus (2016) argues that outdoor education should connect to a pluralistic tradition of environmental education (see Öhman & Östman, 2019) by highlighting people's different experiences of nature and where learning is seen as an open process, in contrast to traditional outdoor education's more instrumental and causal approach to the encounter with nature and its expected consequences.

Like many other researchers mentioned above, we believe that there is every reason, both on theoretical and empirical grounds, to have strong faith in the educational potential of nature encounters (Sandell & Öhman, 2010, 2013; Öhman & Sandell, 2016, 2021). But we are also convinced that it takes more than just some form of stay in a natural environment to forge a path to sustainable social engagement – and this is where the Nordic outdoor tradition in general and Argaladei's activities in particular become interesting.

Nordic outdoor life

The Nordic outdoor tradition has a history that goes back to the romantic currents of the late 19th century and the backlash against the rise of modern society (Hoffman et al., 2018). A free life in nature appeared as an admirable contrast to the structured and hectic life of the city. The very concept of "*friluftsliv*" (outdoor life) is usually attributed to Henrik Ibsen's poem *Paa Vidderne* from 1859. As Sweden industrialized and urbanized, an interest in the value of nature experiences grew beyond the rural community's livelihood relationships with nature and landscape (Sandell & Sörlin, 2008). In a similar way to other countries, this meant that the urban, mainly male, elites who had opportunities for leisure and travel sought out the mountains, coasts and forests. At the end of the 19th century, organizations were established, and art and literature emerged as a way of expressing this relationship to nature and landscape (see,

in addition to Sandell & Sörlin, 2008, for example Gurholt, 2008; Nash, 1982). Recurring motifs in the history of outdoor activities include their positive effects on public health and their potential as a tool for establishing a national identity. As leisure visitors grew in number during the interwar period, Sweden, as a relatively sparsely populated country, was gradually able to make use of the considerate right of access, later called the right of public access (Sandell, 1997). This was in contrast to many other countries where private land ownership retained a strong position such that general access was not considered a valid option. After the Second World War, interest in outdoor activities and nature tourism in Sweden was reinforced by the opportunities for economic growth in the form of, among other things, socially motivated nature reserves and hiking trails in southern and central Sweden with some simple infrastructure (Ahlström, 2008).

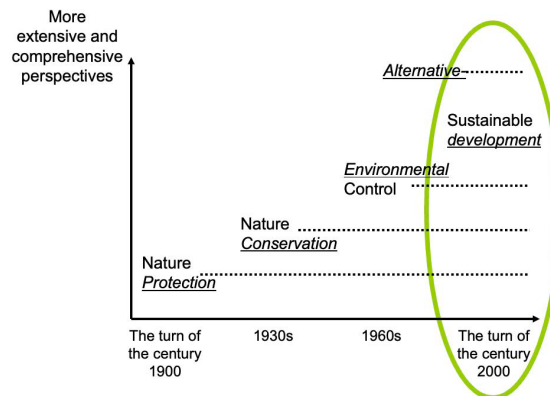
The Nordic outdoor tradition *friluftsliv* is characterized by material simplicity and an extensive right of public access (see for example Dahlberg, Rohde & Sandell, 2009; Sandell, 2006; Sandell & Fredman, 2010; Gurholt Pedersen & Haukeland, 2020). The pedagogical potential inherent in the specific character of the Nordic outdoor tradition has been noted by several researchers in the international literature (see for example Beery, 2013; Andkjær, 2013; Remmen & Iversen 2022). The term "*friluftsliv*" is often used in English texts to highlight its specific meaning. Particular interest has been directed towards the relationship of Norwegian outdoor life to Arne Næss's deep ecology philosophy, which emphasizes human integration into the ecosystem and nature's intrinsic values (Reed & Rothenberg, 1993; Henderson & Vikander, 2007; Breivik, 2021). The Swedish outdoor tradition is very similar to the Norwegian one but has often been considered broader. In some cases it has also clearly been inspired by Norwegian deep ecology perspectives, as in the case with the outdoor association Argaladei. This broadening is advantageous in terms of its potential as a source of inspiration for many. Nevertheless, although the Swedish tradition of outdoor life has great breadth and many international parallels (Fredman et al., 2013), it is important to remember that Argaladei's ideology and practice are not representative of this tradition in the 1970s in Sweden and even less so of today's conception of outdoor life. This is precisely why it provides an interesting source of perspective and inspiration.

The 1970's search for alternatives

Our case study is about the association – or rather the action group – Argaladei and is focused primarily on its most active period, during the 1970s. It is important therefore to highlight and discuss the influences that were current at that time. In part Argaladei reflects the general "zeitgeist", where radical social criticism was very salient in the social debate in Sweden and elsewhere in the Western world, with a wide-ranging commitment to questioning prevailing power structures. More specifically, it also reflects the new environmental movements that emerged at the time, and what was often called the "alternative movement". Seen in a historical perspective on society's relationship to

nature and the environment, together these movements formed the most radical environmental commitment (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Some main themes in the emergence of modern environmentalism. Although these perspectives can be largely linked to specific time periods, as the image shows, they both have sources of inspiration going back in time and are very much part of today's conservation and environmental debate (Sandell, Öhman & Östman, 2003).



We can illustrate many of the central elements of these new environmental and alternative movements by focusing on what happened in 1972. That year saw the UN Stockholm Conference, which clearly linked environmental and development issues, the new environmental organization Greenpeace was established (the year before, Friends of the Earth in Sweden had been established), the Club of Rome report "The Limits to Growth" was published, the world's first environmental party was started (in New Zealand as "The Values Party"), and in Norway Erik Damman's book, *The Future in Our Hands*, was published, which was the start of a movement that has since spread to several countries. We can say that, since 1972, environmental issues have been a global concern and the slogan that emerged from grassroots movements at that time - "think globally and act locally" - has become a recurring frame of reference for raising awareness of environmental and developmental sustainability.

The "Alternative" perspective's emphasis that it is the fundamental characteristics of industrialization that are the problem is of central importance in relation to today's discussions about sustainable development and green transition. It is not enough to try to deal with the negative side effects of modern society's prioritization of material growth, global fossil-fueled supply networks and extreme urbanization. This tension was illustrated during the 1970s, for example, not least by contrasting different societal developments with each other, for example A- vs. B-society (Tengström, 1978); Sun or Uranium (Lönnroth; Johansson & Steen, 1978); Earth as a lump of resources *vs.* ... as a soap bubble, shimmering with life (Brügge et al., 1981). Sigmund Kvaløy (later Sætereng, e.g. *Ecological Crisis – Nature and Man*, 1978) used imaginative drawings of different future landscapes to illustrate two contrasting directions of development. A recurring theme in the alternative development strategies put forward was that they highlighted

the natural, environmentally friendly and long-term, in contrast to the industrial, large-scale and nature-exploitative. Important strategies for the alternative became local production of food and energy, global solidarity and a prioritization of non-material quality of life.

Sigmund Kvaløy, mentioned above, was also closely related to other deep ecological inspirations in Norway – and with whom Argaladei had contact very early on. Above all, the philosopher Arne Næss (1973 and 1976) and the outdoor guide Nils Faarlund (1973 and 1978) should be highlighted here. The Swedish edition of Næss's *Ecology, Society and Lifestyle* (1981) provides an overview in the section, "The deep ecological movement. A small encyclopedia". Here we can first note the "shallow" ecological movement's focus on: the fight against pollution and the need for resource management and population stabilization. In addition to this, however, the "deep" ecological movement, according to Næss, highlights: classlessness, self-government, decentralization, local communities, regional expansion, self-sufficiency, division of labor, complex (not complicated) societies, diversity and self-development, protection of different cultures, e.g. minority cultures such as the Sami, symbiosis as a keyword in ecology, respect for life in its entirety (egalitarianism in the biosphere), fight against human self-domestication (making oneself a pet), Gestalt thinking in nature (everything is interconnected in mutual dependencies) and *docta ignorantia*, i.e. conscious ignorance (everything we do not know). In the Swedish context Rolf Edberg (1974) was also highlighted as a deep ecologist. The importance of the deep ecological perspectives for a more radical environmental and social discussion, then and since, cannot be overestimated and this approach has been developed in subsequent texts written by Næss with Haukeland (1998), Faarlund (1990) and Breivik (2020).

These alternative accounts of social development and the environment were (and are) ambivalent, however, on the role of outdoor life and nature tourism. On the one hand, outdoor life, both in Sweden and internationally, is largely just another expression of commercialism and material growth with constantly new specialized products and very fossil-fueled trips to more or less exotic nature experiences (cf. Figure 2 below). But at the same time, outdoor life is also very much an illustration of quality of life achieved with simple means and a concrete reminder of our relationship with nature and dependence on nature. Argaladei, which we will now delve into, clearly positioned itself here in the alternative and environmentally friendly position where closeness to nature, one's own creation and the values and techniques of indigenous peoples were highlighted.

Argaladei – a case study

This case study of the Argaladei association's activities aims to highlight the strong connection between social commitment and outdoor education. The study is based on written sources, primarily: an issue of the magazine for the association's 10th anniversary (Grundberg, Tordsson & Sandell, 1976); two written presentations from 1977 and 1986; and a compilation and anthology of almost 400 pages (Waldén, 2001).

Another important source of information has been one of the authors' (Sandell) own memories and extensive personal work material from intensive activity in the association's board and course activities during the 1970s, which has now been able to be critically discussed with the co-author (Öhman). In addition, some reflections of reference by persons who have their own experiences from the relevant time period are also included (see "Thank you" below).

Friluftsliv, a lifestyle

Argaladei, with the motto "*friluftsliv* (outdoor life) a way of life", started in 1966 when it began arranging outdoor activities in the Scandinavian mountains. The name was taken from a mountain on the Swedish-Norwegian border. The activities gradually grew and Argaladei was formalized as an association. Torvald Wermeln, a journalist and writer with a background in the Scout movement, and Stig Helmers, who had a background in adult education, were central figures.

Approximately 1,100 people participated in the initial mountain expeditions in 1967–1984 (Waldén, 2001, p. 4). The range of activities grew to include, among other things, shorter courses in coastal and forest environments and in winter outdoor life, as well as regional meetings. According to Waldén (2001): "Argaladei's activities had gathered over 2,000 participants" between 1967 and 2000 (p. 4). Since the beginning the organization aimed to provide an alternative to the youth culture characterized by commercial values, by inspiring active youth leaders to be well-prepared for outdoor life through knowledge of the environmental movement. The association is still active today (2025) albeit with much more modest activities.

Argaladei is revolt!

Before we specifically highlight some different themes in Argaladei's pedagogical approach we would like to reproduce the text of a presentation brochure from 1977 (Argaladei, 1977), which provides a good overall picture of the ideological roots of the activity as well as its target groups and ambitions (translated by the authors):

ARGALADEI is an alternative to the youth culture characterized by commercial values. Argaladei believes that outdoor experiences are an effective vaccine against, for example, the lying weekly press, films with false values, the cult of celebrity, unhealthy advertising and drugs. All of this has occupied many young people and made them inaccessible to a freer, richer lifestyle.

ARGALADEI claims outdoor life as something more than a physical activity. Nature is more than just another kind of lump of coal to run around on and sweat.

ARGALADEI therefore emphasizes the "inside" of outdoor life. Many artists, writers, poets and composers have received their inspiration and motifs from nature. Their works also belong to the outdoor youth. They are our guides.

ARGALADEI wants to work for a politically, socially, religiously and artistically aware youth. We fight side by side with field biologists, senior scouts, environmental groups and other

conservationists for greater nature awareness and against deforestation, water regulation and pollution.

ARGALADEI is thus more to be considered an action group than an actual association. It wants to contribute to the training of youth leaders within associations and municipal leisure activities – not competition but alliance. We are unusual because we are so different – here you will find field biologists, scouts, 4:H-ers, teetotalers, environmental activists and leaders within political and religious youth movements.

ARGALADEI aims to be a collaborative forum for the new outdoor youth. Regardless of association affiliation, we have much to gain from an in-depth nature experience and joint action, not least in the work to preserve our natural values.

ARGALADEI uses various courses and expeditions to convey its stance. These are run as folk high school courses /...[a presentation of the course offerings].../

ARGALADEI is not an escape from reality but wants to provide another reality – a broader outlook: knowledge about ourselves, nature and the world around us.

In the text above, we can particularly note the starting point in what were perceived to be destructive ideals for youth and where the criticism of commercialism was a central theme. Although this criticism of commercialism, and especially its impact on young people, soon became part of a much broader critique of civilization in which environmental issues were given a prominent place, it is also important to see the central role of commercialism in modern society. And it should be remembered that this was many decades before Sweden opened up schools and other previously public activities to the private sector. As a typical illustration of the time, we can note how the following poem by Sven Delblanc was reproduced in the study material "*Friluftsliv*" (outdoorLIFE), which was published in 1981 by central figures in Argaladei, Roger Isberg and Björn Tordsson¹ (Isberg & Tordsson, 1981, translated by the authors):

The mass media hammered into our consciousness that the important thing was to own and enjoy many things – many cars, many women and other consumer goods. The media roared quantity and mass so that no one could hear the poet's words when he spoke of sincerity, feeling and value.

This quote is still seen as provocative today – but that was its intended purpose. There were very strong feelings among those in circles to which Argaladei related

¹ It is mainly men who exemplify Argaladei's activities in this study and Carin Grundberg-Sandell (2001, p.176) states in her discussion of gender roles in Argaladei that "...the traditional gender roles have also been reflected in outdoor activities". She further writes that "...in Argaladei, outdoor activities have not been discussed particularly in depth based on thoughts about gender roles and whether it has been male-dominated. But there has been a certain awareness and discussion about the numerical dominance of men on boards and course management. During the 1970s, when Argaladei was at its largest, the gender equality debate was also intense." She further states that during the 1970s, there were between 14 and 28% women on the association's board, but that by the end of the 1990s, it was 50%.

about what was seen as a completely devastating commercial view of people, human values and nature. More than 40 years later, it is worth considering whether it is only the language that makes the quote provocative and whether perhaps the view itself has gradually just become more accepted.

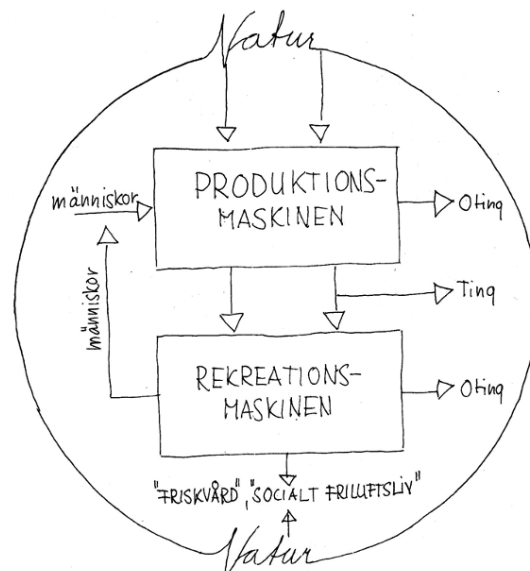
Argaladei: Alternative social development!

In 1982, the Norwegian Parliament allocated funds for a preliminary project on "Nordic possibilities to indicate a development path that leads away from the conflicts and problems that the current development pattern creates in both rich and poor countries" (Om att utreda en alternativ framtid, 1983, p. 1) [On investigating an alternative future]]. For Argaladei, it seemed obvious to be part of the Swedish working group for such an investigation (a work that later resulted in, among other things, the Swedish book *Vägar till Framtiden* [*Paths to the Future*]; Bergström & Friberg, 1987). But when Argaladei started in the late 1960s, its interests in alternative social development were more narrowly focused on youth issues and commercialism as indicated above. During the 1970s social criticism had broadened in line with the new environmental and alternative movements that had formed (cf. the discussion of the year 1972 above) and the deepening of critique that Norwegian deep ecology entailed, not least in relation to environmental issues. Argaladei presents a clear example of what was designated in Figure 1 as "Alternative" and they were in direct contact with and inspired by the Norwegian ecosophists very early on. For example, during the 1970s the association established collaboration with people such as Nils Faarlund (1973), Sigmund Kvaløy (1976) and Arne Næss (1976 [1973]) through correspondence and visits to Norway. Among other things, an ideas seminar was organized in 1977 in Linköping under the title "Outdoor life as pedagogy", the invitation to which was based on Arne Næss's (1976) position that "Outdoor life represents a comprehensive challenge to the whole person" and Eva Vikander's criticism, published in the Swedish newspaper *Aftonbladet* (12/2, 1977), of the contempt for people's interest in nature that lies in "transforming [the ski resort] Åre into one big Mallorca trip". Nils Faarlund, Torvald Wermelin and Stig Helmers were the lecturers for the seminar and the three main topics were: "Outdoor life as an alternative to commercial youth culture", "Outdoor life as pedagogy" and "Outdoor life and nature conservation".

Their positions entailed that a very critical environmental perspective was also applied to one's own outdoor activities, a theme that had not been particularly prominent during Argaladei's first years. Today, a "sustainability paradox" (Gurholt Pedersen & Haukeland, 2020) is sometimes discussed when it comes to outdoor activities, i.e., that an activity that is generally seen as nature-friendly can at the same time, through transportation, wear and tear and material consumption, worsen problems for nature, climate and the environment. It should of course be pointed out that this is not so much a paradox, since leisure time contact with nature is part of the often very environmentally disruptive landscape relationship of modern industrial society (compare, for example, Sandell, Arnegård & Backman, 2011; Sandell, 2016). This was

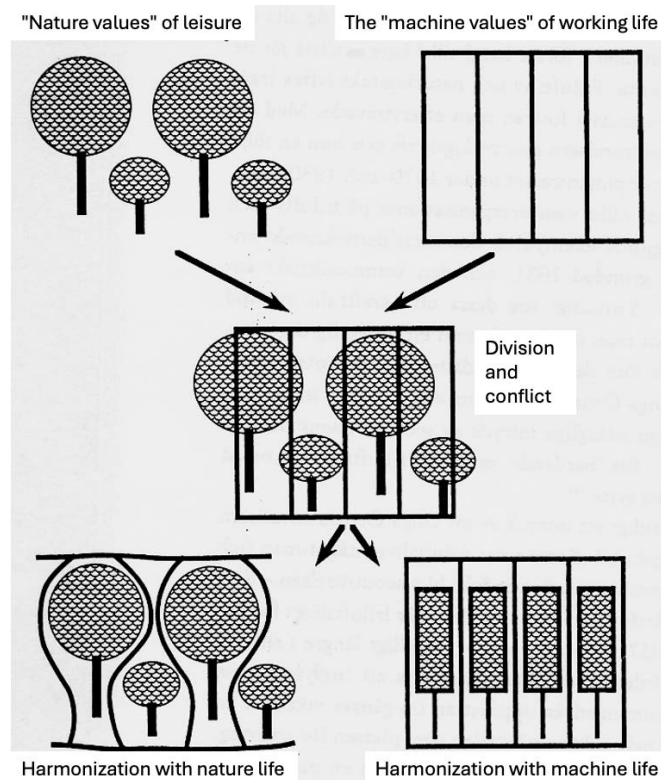
obvious to Argaladei early on, and Nils Faarlund's "society machine", which Björn Tordsson reproduced in his writing "Outdoor recreation in the technological society, a discussion material published by Argaladei" (Tordsson, 1978; Figure 2), provided a striking illustration of this. In Figure 2, we can see how nature (*Natur*) surrounds the whole thing and provides a production machine (*Produktionsmaskinen*) with natural resources to be able to deliver various "things" (*Ting*; read: all the products of industrial society) but which then also produces a lot of "unthings" (*Oting*; read: environmental destruction). In order for this production machine to be able to be supplied with people (*människor*; read: labor), a recreation machine (*Rekreationsmaskinen*) is required – which in turn must also be provided with natural resources and then also produces various "unthings". In this way, the production machine and the recreation machine reinforce each other, contributing to natural exploitation and environmental destruction.

Figure 2. Nils Faarlund's "social machine" illustrating how even outdoor activities can be a destructive part of an environmentally destructive society (Illustration: Björn Tordsson). For the Swedish terms used, see the text.



To avoid the negative impact of the recreational machine, it was important to allow oneself to be influenced in a natural direction by outdoor experiences, something that could be illustrated as in Inge Lien's figure (Figure 3). This illustration shows that there is a choice between either letting nature experiences influence society ("nature life") – or letting modern industrial society ("machine life") also influence leisure experiences in nature.

Figure 3. Inge Lien's illustration of the contrast and conflict between the nature values of leisure (in a natural outdoor life) and the machine values of working life (in an urban modern society). Redrawn by Sandell from Lien (1977).



This concrete commitment to a close-to-nature and environmentally friendly outdoor life gradually included a variety of craft-related areas; for example, building your own outdoor equipment such as backpacks and canoes from natural materials. Craftsmanship, creation and the relationship to natural materials were central here (cf. Haukeland & Sæterhaug, 2020). This also worked very well to connect to older traditions around outdoor life, crafts and self-reliance, with inspiration from groups that lived close to nature such as the Sami and North American indigenous people. Early examples of these sources of inspiration were Torvald Wermelin's widely distributed books on more advanced outdoor life (Wermelin, 1962 and 1964). Wermelin was, as mentioned above, one of the founders of Argaladei and his extensive and very practically oriented books were absolutely central to Argaladei's early history.² This enormous bank of practical advice on most aspects of outdoor life, from how to care for your boots and sharpen your axe to how to sew your clothes and make your own knife, is also in line with what is frequently discussed, not least internationally, as "a Nordic outdoor tradition" with an "...ecophilosophy of outdoor life, craftmaking and sustainability" (Haukeland & Sæterhaug, 2020).

² These were later revised and published in collaboration with Argaladei as Wermelin, Isberg and Tordsson (1982), and Tordsson and Isberg (1984), respectively.

Argaladei: Qualified *friluftsliv*!

But Argaladei's outdoor ideals and activities were not only characterized by high quality requirements for the equipment in terms of environmental considerations ("close to nature"), but also they had high demands when it came to what they did "out there". The mountain expeditions, which during Argaladei's heyday were the predominant activity, were characterized by smaller groups (a handful of people in each) with different specializations such as botany, glaciology, speleology, ethnology, painting, fishing, alpinism or ornithology, who read up on their respective areas and carefully planned their mountain activities. They then gathered for a three to four day "preparing" at a folk high school in the northern part of Sweden where knowledge was deepened through lectures and discussions about the mountains, equipment, Sami culture, safety, etc. Each expedition had about 30 participants divided into groups as above and often there were two to three such expeditions that converged on these preparing days. Then it was off to the various expedition locations where they stayed for about three weeks and usually with a common base as the hub for the various groups' activities. After returning from the mountains, the various groups wrote up their accounts of what they had done, which were compiled into a comprehensive report for each expedition. These reports then included everything they had worked on during the weeks in the mountains, such as plant inventories, maps of wolf dens found, poems, bird reports, crafts, photography, etc. In this way, participation in a mountain expedition was a commitment of about a month, in addition to planning and follow-up work. The Argaladei association, which was formed to keep order in continuity, finances and relations with the folk high school, has held annual meetings since that time that are both nostalgic and forward-looking.

Gradually, the association's activities were broadened and shorter courses focusing on canoeing, kayaking, winter, basic courses, advanced courses and opinion-building were added to the mountain expeditions. These all aimed to sustain the commitment to qualified outdoor life and an alternative model of social development, in line with the long quote above. A broad overview of the expeditions, types of courses, number of participants, and so on, can be found in *Argaladei: An incredible story* (Waldén, 2001). It is important to see that the outdoor life that is described here as "qualified" did not necessarily have to be "advanced" in terms of how high one climbed, how far one hiked or how heavy a pack one carried. Instead, the ideal was about a closeness to nature and an approach to nature and society that goes far beyond physical outdoor activity. Or, in the words of Stig Helmers (1976, p. 31, our translation):

You should give yourself time. Choose a mountain (or a hill in Småland [a county in the south of Sweden] for that matter). Spend time with it. This is important, it's about the art of experiencing. You don't experience anything of nature unless you establish a personal relationship with it. You can fly over the Rocky Mountains, you can take the cable car up to the Aiguille de Midi, or sniff the Great Ocean from a deck chair. Fantastic! But the terrible thing is that you turn the glory of the earth into passages and coloured postcards. You can never, filled with the delight of your discovery, rush to your friends to tell them about the incredible things that only you have discovered. Of course you can! You are an Argaladeian!

Argaladei: The small group!

Torvald Wermelin and Stig Helmers, the founders of Argaladei, had different – and complementary – roles. Wermelin, with his background in the Scout movement and as a journalist, was the enthusiastic "animator" (the expression he himself preferred when it came to awakening and inspiring people). Helmers, with his background as an academic, social psychologist, folk high school teacher and principal, was the thoughtful educator and philosopher. He once wrote (Helmers, 1979, p.11): "The living, small, close group of friends is the strongest instrument for development and change that exists at all. We should take advantage of that." In the same article, titled "The small group", he addresses the importance of these groups having concrete tasks (Helmers, 1979, p. 11, our translation):

Only when a group is given or takes on a task that everyone considers important and is committed to, does the group come alive. Overcoming difficulties together, having success, even (reasonable) adversity, releases energy and opens paths to growth and maturity.

The emphasis on overcoming difficulties together is captured in a recurring slogan - the "pedagogy of the uphill" – that is, to cope with tasks that could also be experienced as directly challenging together and in cooperation. This pedagogy of the small group, and the importance of these groups having focused tasks that they feel are meaningful, are manifested in the way that the various expeditions were divided into groups whose members had different roles, from mapping plants and making drawings to measuring glaciers and writing poems.

External knowledge and sources were often brought in during the preparations for expedition to ensure that the expedition reports were accurate and could be disseminated to others if necessary. The pedagogy of the small group relates also to the initial motifs of an "alternative social development". Helmers writes:

In our time, more and more people are becoming 'homeless' to a growing extent, as traditional local groups are being replaced by larger and more formally rigid groups. We know that most personal problems are fundamentally relationship problems, and that they can only be solved in and through local group community. And, what is more, many major societal problems can only be eliminated if society is built up with small groups, local groups, as a base. During the 20th century, the social situation of modern man has changed rapidly. Economic, social and cultural development creates ever larger units; from small workplaces with small apartments to giant industries in enormous machine halls, where the individual is isolated in a large, impersonal and abstract collective; from the small local consumer association, the trading post and the local shop to the central store and the supermarket; from the small trade union department to the large department, led by technical bureaucrats; from the infirmary to the central hospital; from the village school to a huge central institution, etc., etc. (Helmers, 1979, p. 10, our translation).

We should remind ourselves here that this was the 1970s, when the anonymous production chains and dependencies of "globalization" that are so obvious today had not yet been as clearly demonstrated. The focused group dynamic was seen as having the

potential to mobilize against such development. One issue of the group's magazine cited above (No. 1, 1979), for example, contained the headline, "One must dare to influence!", which is followed by a conversation between three outdoor leaders (Tre friluftsledare funderar..., 1979). In the article, Allan Höglund says "Outdoor life is not an achievement but a way to change and be changed yourself" (ibid, p.7). In his article in the same special issue, Torvald Wermelin hands a bouquet of flowers to Roger Isberg "...who with his 'guerrilla activity' against the colored weekly press and the male chauvinist pigs of the porn magazines wanted to awaken and warn but also to meet with alternative animation through outdoor life. A new approach and bold in the middle of the watery mess" (Wermelin, 1979, p. 15, our translation).

Argaladei: Art-Literature-Music!

Bringing a book on flora or birds up the mountain is hardly noteworthy. But carrying a lot of poetry and fiction up to the base tent on mountain expeditions did raise a few eyebrows. But this was a very conscious strategy that was often summed up with the abbreviation "Ko-Li-Mu" (art, literature, music) and was a central theme in outdoor life for Argaladei. One point in the long introductory text quoted earlier highlights the "inside" of outdoor life and how artists, writers, poets and composers are outdoor life's guides. In the association's magazine (which published three to four issues per year) as well as in other texts published by Argaladei, drawings, pictures and poems were frequent features and song, music and poetry were always part of its various gatherings. Just as an example, at the ideas seminar on "Outdoor Life as Pedagogy" in 1977 mentioned above, the invitation highlighted that: "For those who want, there is the possibility to come already on Friday evening, we will then have a simple evening gathering with poetry, song and music". Inspiring author names were, for example, Harry Martinsson, Paulus Utsi, Gunnar Harding, Rolf Edberg and Ann Margret Dahlquist-Ljungberg. But Argaladei's own members also wrote and published many poems and other texts as part of the association's activities. One example, among so many, is the following by Kate Kärrberg (in Argaladeitidningen 2-3/1976, p. 27, our translation):

So much you don't know – don't understand.
No need to know or understand.
But
with the help of imagination – not with science I see all the little trolls
I would otherwise have named
as stumps and stones.

Or this poem by Kjell-Åke Jansson (Argaladeitidningen 1/77, p. 8, our translation):

Balvatn
The endless movements of waves tenderly
surround and pour over
the massive evil of sharp stones.

To softly rounded liberation, where dreams and fantasies were hidden
from the storm's life forces,
nourished from open vastness and spaces.

Another example of the aesthetic interest is the description of what the Argaladei logo, designed by Bengt-Åke Lundgren in 1967, symbolizes (Figure 4) (The description reproduced in *Argaladei – friluftsliv en livsstil*, 1976, p. 23, our translation):

A circle forms an image of the whole. No part of the circle can be separated from another, there is no beginning, nor is there an end. Therefore, our outdoor experience can never be separated from the experience of ourselves, of each other, of society or existence in general. Everything is in everything.

The green colour is the colour of growing life, of trees, grass, and herbs. The green color is calm and soothing, is security and vitality – the bottom from which everything emerges.

The silvery streams show us the cycle of clean, fresh water – the substance that surrounds everything.

The colour of rebellion, revolt and ardent will is called red. But it is also the colour of tenderness, warmth and empathy.

A compass needle and a wild goose plow have the shape of an arrow. Shows us towards the north, but is also an image of will, longing and striving. The shape of the arrow is similar to that of the tree and the mountain, perhaps also the tent – the symbol of wandering freedom.

The bow is underneath. Because what good are so many arrows if you don't have a bow?

Figure 4. Argaladei's brand, designed by Bengt-Åke Lundgren, where the background color is green, the lines are silver and the arrow is red.



Wermelin provided a drastic illustration of the power and importance of creation by comparing the price of an oil painting in terms of the individual cost of the canvas, frame and paint, and the price of the finished painting. This "Ko-Li-Mu" theme of the outdoor activities can be best described as existential: to reflect on the most fundamental questions about humans, nature, society and development with the help of one's own and others' creative power - but to do so in a setting of natural landscapes, practical outdoor life and good friends. The recurring joint reflection opportunities were absolutely central to these outdoor adventures. Sitting in a circle around a fire or a kerosene lantern, singing, reading poems and talking. The more directly outdoor-related

aspects were close at hand here, such as where one is (the meaning of free nature), what equipment one uses (natural materials), activities one avoids (motorized and for short stays). But here there were also great opportunities to formulate fundamental existential questions when, through outdoor life, one was given the chance to have a certain physical and mental distance from modern, urbanized industrial society. How modern society has dramatically increased the mental and physical distance from nature then became a starting point for the importance of not just being on a short-term and distant "visit" to nature, but being out for a longer period of time and having time to experience the interaction with nature.

Argaladei: In conclusion

Although sweeping references to the "genuine" in relation to the "false", and the "right" in relation to the "wrong" can be seen as expressions of dogmatism and a lack of democratic respect for how different people want to spend their free time or how they want to design their nature encounters, the current climate and environmental crisis illustrate the need to heed many of the perspectives that Argaladei represents. An interesting aspect of Argaladei's activities is that they managed to bridge the gap between two seemingly quite alien perspectives. On the one hand, the exalted and romantic ideals with roots in early outdoor life, in the form of the practices of groups living close to nature, such as the Sami and North American indigenous people or the nature-romantic songs and poems shared around campfires. And, on the other hand, the enlightenment-influenced and scientifically argued civilization-critical perspectives related to the modern environmental and alternative movements, often with ecosophical inspiration, for example through systematic, scientifically based nature studies leading to ecopolitical social criticism. In concrete terms, we note in particular the following:

- Argaladei's motto about *lifestyle* – that is, how the understanding of outdoor life is deepened and broadened from a leisure activity to something that applies to the whole of life and thereby in principle "everything": housing, consumption, ideals, attitudes and so on, and where outdoor life's practices and materials can be an important bridge through the choice of close-to-nature and self-made equipment and environmentally friendly activities.
- The *qualified outdoor life*, which involves extended periods of three weeks in the mountains, not only requires good planning of light, non-perishable food, equipment and hygiene, but also means that landscape relations and group relations are highlighted other than the packing in time space that characterizes much of our contemporary outdoor recreation and life (cf. Sandell, Arnegård & Backman, 2011).
- The *importance of reflection* and its framing of: qualified outdoor life (closeness to nature and a certain amount of time), a safe social group (focused tasks,

dependent on each other), and artistic expression ("Ko-Li-Mu") both as part of outdoor life but also as important before and after outdoor activities.

- The *intrinsic value of nature* (not just as an instrumental value) and the personal encounter with nature in its various manifestations.
- The interaction between *outdoor experiences and social development* (cf. Figure 3).
- The *focused small group* as a foundation of the pedagogical strategy.

In summary, we see the above themes as of particular interest and as potential inspiration for our time, marked by climate crisis, dramatically reduced biodiversity and a multitude of acute environmental problems. It is important to highlight these themes today as they can help shape the very democratic basis (read: the public's inspiration and motivation) for a green transition that is worthy of the name. Currently, the green transition is at risk of being completely watered down and/or only leading to populist counter-movements that demand cheaper fossil fuels and no requirements to change consumption patterns.

Discussion and conclusions

In the introduction we stated that the purpose of this essay is to offer inspiration for the development of a credible outdoor pedagogy with environmental educational ambitions. In this concluding part we reflect on what such an outdoor pedagogy requires. We pointed to a number of themes that previous research has highlighted as necessary conditions for educational nature encounters to be able to promote an increased commitment to the environment and sustainable development. In the following we relate some of these themes to Argaladei's activities as we have described them above.

First, previous research has shown that occasional and short-term visits to nature are not sufficient (see, for example, Thornburn, 2018). *Longer stays* where one "lived a life" in nature, that is, where one moves, eats, sleeps and adapts to the rhythms, changes and circumstances of nature, were fundamental to Argaladei pedagogy. A life that is in many ways different from everyday life in the city is where the pedagogical potential lies.

Second, previous research emphasizes that the *quality of the nature encounter* is crucial (Mannion, Fenwick & Lynch, 2013; Sandell and Öhman, 2013). To ensure this, Argaladei's expeditions were carefully prepared and planned, and were also carefully documented and discussed afterwards. The careful preparations also created the conditions for both deeper and more holistic experiences, as the preparatory knowledge acquisition not only concerned nature but also the people, culture and history of the place. The purpose of the activity itself is also crucial for the quality of the nature encounter. Argaladei focused on the nature encounter itself and the intrinsic values of

outdoor life rather than on the activity, performance and instrumental values that are separate from the outdoor experience itself (for example, improved fitness).

Third, it is necessary to make an explicit *connection between outdoor life and social change* (Hill & Brown, 2014; Ross, Christie, Nicol & Higgins, 2014; Sandell & Öhman, 2013). This is perhaps Argaladei's main environmental educational strength, as the entire activity was placed in a politically engaged and socially critical context. It was based on a social critique that was in many ways radical, in the sense that it criticized the fundamental values and systems of modern society, not least the lifestyle that industrialized, urban society encouraged. But Argaladei was not satisfied with developing a critique: it also had serious ambitions to use outdoor life as a way to demonstrate an alternative lifestyle with other values, other communities and a different relationship to nature. In this way, Argaladei responds to researchers such as Cook and Cutting (2014) who believe that outdoor education needs to offer a clear vision of an ecologically sustainable society.

Argaladei's pedagogy amounts to what we would today call *transformative learning for sustainable development* (see Boström, Öhman & Ojala, 2024). That is, learning that not only involves accruing new knowledge but also involves a change in fundamental values and conceptual frameworks. As we have seen above, the criticism of commercialism and society's material growth craze also found concrete expression in outdoor practices, where crafts, recycling and use of natural materials constituted a form of counterforce. Living outdoor life in a sustainable way was absolutely central to the credibility of the criticism and the organization's pedagogical ambitions.

Although lifestyle change was at the center, this change was related to a transformation of the social and economic conditions of society. Lifestyle change was about not only practical aspects such as sustainable consumption, but also fundamental questions of values and the meaning of life that relate to what is currently being discussed in environmental education research as an existential dimension of sustainable development (Vandenplas et al., 2023). The importance of these existential questions becomes particularly clear in the important role that art, literature and music had in Argaladei's outdoor activities.

Many researchers today emphasize the radical changes that are required in order for us to be able to deal with the environmental and justice problems that threaten the existence not only of humanity but also of numerous other species, and that these changes are required in our educational activities. In other words, what is required is not primarily more outdoor education, but a changed outdoor education, and hence we believe that Argaladei's outdoor education activities provide an important source of inspiration. What makes Argaladei's activities an almost unique form of outdoor education is that the social commitment and radical ideas were not only part of the policy, but also consistently enacted in practice. Argaladei is one of the few examples of an outdoor education where the expected connection between nature experiences and environmental commitment had the potential to be realized in a convincing way.

A central question that follows a case study of practices from the 1970s is the extent to which and in what ways these ideals and practices have endured to this day, fifty years later. First of all, of course, the fact that the Argaladei association still (2025) organizes some activities, albeit on a much more modest scale than before, should be mentioned. An important steward of the Argaladei legacy is the outdoor courses at Sjövik Folk High School, started by Björn Tordsson and Roger Isberg, with self-built equipment and longer trips close to nature as important characteristics. The book *Daggdroppen... (The dewdrop...)* is another example of how the ideals and demands for an outdoor education with environmental educational ambitions in the spirit of Argaladei have lived on. It was published in 1981 and was originally written for the Scout Movement, but it has since been published in successively revised editions as course literature for, among others, prospective teachers and preschool teachers (Brügge et al., 1981; Brügge et al., 2018). Björn Tordsson's continued publications and pedagogical work (see, for example, Tordsson, 1993, 2003 and 2010) as well as Roger Isberg's (see, for example, 1991 and 2002) are other important examples. The extent to which ideals and practices have also been passed on in other ways is also an interesting and important empirical question that will hopefully attract future research efforts. Follow-up studies might also be carried out with those who have been involved in radical outdoor life (for example, in Argaladei). Here international comparisons would also be of interest.

An interest in traces of Argaladei's ideals and practices today also raises critical questions about what opportunities there are in today's society to fulfill the outdoor educational requirements that this case study of Argaladei has highlighted. That is, requirements that outdoor life be deepened and broadened into a *lifestyle* through close-to-nature environmentally friendly activities and self-made equipment. Requirements that outdoor life be *qualified* in terms of being outside for a long time and experiencing a life in nature – not just a temporary visit. A requirement that the experiences are *reflected on*, including through *artistic expression* ("Art-Literature-Music"). A requirement that the *personal encounter* with nature is given sufficient space and where the *focused small group* forms a foundation. When you see this list of requirements, it is not difficult to understand the barriers to achieving this in, for example, today's schools and outdoor associations. At the same time, there are hopefully also now certain opportunities for dedicated educators and leaders, especially those with a clear vision. It is perhaps a positive change that, compared to the 1970s, nature tourism has grown with a multitude of activities and actors where environmental awareness is often a central theme.

But if we continue to take stock of our list of demands from Argaladei's outdoor education and highlight the *intrinsic value of nature* and the *interaction between outdoor experiences and social development*, the difficulties become even more obvious. The radicalization of environmental commitment that occurred during the 1970s (cf. Figure 1) hardly characterizes today's social development. Even though sustainable development as a concept is commonplace compared to the 1970s, environmental issues (not least the climate crisis) have become more acute. Outdoor life in a broad sense is

today hardly characterized by close-to-nature, self-built equipment and environmental considerations. Here we can instead note themes such as sportification, commercialization, indoorization and motorization to an extent that was barely imagined fifty years ago (cf. for example Sandell, 2016 and Sandell, Arnegård & Backman, 2011). If we then highlight what was the very foundation of Argaladei's work – the criticism of materialism and commercialism – the contrast to today's social climate becomes stark. We have had a sharp increase in real wages in the decades since Argaladei started their work and the scope for other qualities of life than the purely material and commercial should have increased significantly. But it is hardly an exaggeration to say that our society today is more material and commercial than ever. In the words of Anita Goldman (2024, our translation): "The cultural communities are being replaced by a global market for individualized consumption." She continues: "When consumption becomes the meaning of everything, meaning is lost, and that is perhaps the worst loss of all". Large numbers of activities that were publicly owned and operated when Argaladei started are now privatized, and commercialism, like material growth in itself, is hardly a target for any broad social criticism today.

We nevertheless believe that the carefully thought-out and developed outdoor activities that Argaladei carried out in the 1970s are still highly relevant. Perhaps the difficulties in fulfilling the list of requirements above illustrate how great the need is in view of the sustainability challenges we face. Our hope is therefore that this essay will be able to act as a source of inspiration for both students, researchers and practitioners who are working in various ways to develop outdoor educational practice.

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