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Morality, mobility and citizenship: Legitimising mobile subjectivities in a contested outdoors

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we examine articulations of mobile citizenship produced through the discursive practices of state agencies, drawing in particular on a study of the contested reconfiguration of outdoor citizenship in Norway. Whilst increased participation and diversity in outdoor activities is highly valued and encouraged because of its social benefits, moral landscapes of the outdoors may be part of settling and reinforcing social differences and existing power relations. The article identifies three discursive normativities through which state officials negotiate mobility and outdoor citizenship; knowledge, skills and socialisation; engaging (with) nature; deserving (in) the outdoors. These normativities serve as a basis for a critical discussion of different aspects of outdoor movement, and how social identities interact with the citizen responsibilities assigned to different forms of mobility, such as mountain biking, skiing and walking. The article demonstrates how and why certain outdoor practices, spaces and boundaries of citizenship are both fluid and critically negotiated by the state officials. By bringing together theories of moral landscapes, mobility and citizenship, the article contributes to understandings of the politics of mobility, and particularly the theorisation of how morality works in relation to different dimensions of mobility. It also highlights how the contestation of mobile citizenship is an issue in rural as well as urban realms.

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Introduction

Dogfight in the ski tracks. Dog owners and dog haters crash in the ski tracks. Ski poles become weapons in the war over ruined tracks and dog poo.

[(Dagens Næringsliv, 2011)]

In this newspaper report a rather unpleasant picture is painted of outdoor encounters between people at ‘war’ in the ski tracks in Oslo. The current article addresses contested and changing notions of citizenship underpinning such tensions in the outdoors where participation is just as much morally as legally controlled and regulated. We wish to explore this in terms of mobile citizenship since increasingly diverse mobile subjectivities seeking to access the outdoors punctuate these contemporary struggles for legitimacy. While mobile subjectivity often is studied through an empirical focus on the performed bodily practices of those doing the moving,

we rather look at how subjectivity is discursively mobilised by state actors who play an important part in stabilizing, reinforcing or challenging various normativities of the right way to move in particular spaces. In that respect, the article will shed light on how corporeal mobility is enacted beyond the spaces of the moving body, by examining how the changing role and priorities of the State interface with the unsettling of taken-for-granted imaginaries of the Norwegian outdoors. In short, the article investigates how one group of powerful actors bestows legitimate citizenship upon moving subjects in an increasingly contested outdoors. To understand these reconfigurations of outdoor citizenship, and hence the normativities through which different actors are associated with particular modes of moving, we bring together theories of moral landscapes, mobility and citizenship. This enables us to identify how morality works in spatialised ways, shaping who can move where, and how they are expected to do it.

Norwegian outdoor life culture, or *friluftsliv*, is legally backed in *Friluftsløven*, the Act Relating to Outdoor Recreation, first passed in 1957. *Allemannsretten*, the Public Right of Access, which is folded into *Friluftsløven*, grants all citizens the right to access most areas in the country whenever they wish to. However, the details of

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legitimate outdoor practices are entangled in extra-legal social and cultural processes, and in consequence, the idea of outdoor citizenship implies there are certain context-specific requirements that need to be fulfilled in order to ‘rightfully’ move – and indeed move in particular ways – in the Norwegian outdoors. We assert in this article that such extra-legal requirements challenge the understanding of the Norwegian outdoors as easily and equally accessed and open to all.

There are two key issues in current public debates pertaining to diversity, participation and outdoor citizenship in Norway, which we believe to be crucial for shedding light on such extra-legal processes. Firstly, latent demand for using the outdoors and how patterns of outdoor recreation participation do not reflect social diversity of society more broadly. This is generally considered unsatisfactory in the context of persistent problems of physical, mental and social health. There is thus a pronounced policy at present to encourage new groups of people, such as youth and immigrants, to participate in the outdoors (Ministry of the Environment, 2000–2001). This implies that certain groups of people need to cross boundaries and develop orientations to other social groups and cultures with different moral codings (Urry, 2000). Secondly, diversity amongst existing sets of users and how to manage an expanding range of outdoor practices and identities is disputed. We have for example witnessed heated debates over current uses of the outdoors where tensions between user groups have hit the media; clashes in the ski tracks are only one example. Other reported clashes concern mountain bikers vs. hikers/walkers, motorised activities such as snowmobiling vs. activities based on calm and quietness, and activities like kiting and surfing vs. environmental protection concerns (e.g. related to disturbances of flora and fauna). Such clashes relate to how particular groups and their movements tend to be defined in relation to others, where production of and struggles over symbols, ideas and knowledges are important parts of the (re)configuration of cultural citizenship (Isin and Wood, 1999). In short, individuals and groups are struggling to become rightful citizens of the Norwegian outdoors, where cultural acceptance is the key to legal entitlement.

This leads us to the following critical questions: Does inclusion in the Norwegian outdoors mean that new groups of people should adopt an existing and established *friluftsliv* culture, or alternatively, that the perception of practices and subjectivities deemed legitimate in particular spaces needs to be reconsidered? What defines and should define contemporary Norwegian *friluftsliv*? These questions reflect an increasing pressure put on the State to reposition itself in terms of its role and priorities in relation to outdoor recreation. Broadly speaking, the State not only needs to accommodate the frugal and fit outdoor citizen, but importantly also rural development, commerce, nature protection and outdoor participation by an increasingly heterogeneous set of users (Sandström et al., 2008). This transition, which is linked to the current trends of liberalisation in the public sector (Mydske et al., 2007) as well as rural restructuring and commodification processes (Perkins, 2006), conditions our current exploration of the proposition that participation and diversity in the outdoors are hampered by processes acting to maintain prevailing outdoor values.

Empirically, we draw on nine in-depth, qualitative interviews with *friluftsliv* officials from the former Norwegian Directorate for Nature Management (DN)¹ along with a content analysis of strategically

¹ A merger of the Norwegian Directorate for Nature Management (DN) and the Norwegian Climate and Pollution Agency as of 1 July 2013 means that DN is now known as the Norwegian Environment Agency. In this article we will use the acronym DN because the interviews and the study as a whole were undertaken prior to the merger.

² The interview material was transcribed in full, coded according to the principle of cross-sectional indexing and the analysis was facilitated by the use of computer aided qualitative data analysis (CAQDAS).

selected policy documents.² Our main focus in the analysis is on the role of a key state agency, which is an executive and advisory body for the Ministry of the Environment,³ and challenges staff are facing while facilitating inclusion and management of difference in the Norwegian outdoors. Folded into DN’s responsibility for outdoor recreation, is managing the right of public access (*allmannsretten*). Hence, DN plays a crucial role in delineating ‘right’ from ‘wrong’ with respect to physical movement, representations and practices in the outdoors. Due to their power in ascribing legal and formal validation to rightful citizens, they are a key stakeholder group that needs to be considered. We acknowledge, of course, that DN is one of many stakeholder groups, such as NGOs, nature conservationists and the media, who also contribute to the shaping of normativities of outdoor citizenship. There is, however, a lack of knowledge about the role of State agencies in the legitimisation of claims to *friluftsliv*.

Analytically we bring to bear the three theoretical stands of moral landscapes, citizenship and mobility, to enhance our understanding of acceptable outdoor movement and interaction. We engage the growing body of literature on citizenship and mobile subjectivity in order to grasp in more detail how outdoor mobility becomes contested and culturally as well as legally contingent (e.g. Cresswell, 2006, 2010; Parker, 2007; Adey, 2010; Cresswell and Merriman, 2011a). Furthermore, we highlight what the concepts of moral landscapes (Setten and Brown, 2009) and mobile citizenship can offer each other in terms of how landscapes, moral judgements, and myriad dimension of movement and mobility, become entangled in struggles over appropriate spatial conduct, and specifically how this can help flesh out and refine Cresswell’s ‘constellations of mobility’ (2010) theoretical framework.

Moral landscapes, mobility and citizenship

Citizenship generally refers to the status of being a citizen, i.e. to hold membership in a community and responding and committing to rights, entitlements and obligations which at any time are relevant for any particular community (Chouinard, 2009). Citizenship theory has in large measure moved away from being concerned with ‘rights’ granted from a state or a bureaucracy, to being increasingly concerned with a moral citizen project “generated through greater emphasis placed on individualisation and the concomitant flexibilization of rights claims” (Parker, 2001, 381). This shift in focus to time and place specific social and cultural relationships has consequently become key in order to explain and understand “the practices of power” (Chouinard, 2009, 110) inherent in any citizen’s belonging and participation within a community. However, necessary as it is to pay more scholarly attention to more informal assessments of belonging, we argue in this article that there is still a need to consider how State actors are shaping citizenship through their mundane discursive practices.

Citizenship, in the sense of belonging to nation states as well as to other types of spaces, entails management and negotiation of mobility (Adey, 2010; Hindess, 2002). Citizens have thus been defined just as much by the right to move as by the nations or cities to which they belong (Cresswell, 2010). This analytical ‘move’ is now generally seen as a key characteristic of the ‘mobility turn’ within the social sciences, which, in our case, more specifically aids our analysis of a moral discursive landscape of managing and negotiating mobility. Of particular relevance is hence recent research on mobility, which has emphasised what exactly happens on the move, “how mobile time and space is filled with liveliness” (Cresswell and Merriman, 2011b, 4) and how mobility is inscribed with meaning (Cresswell, 2006; see also Sheller and Urry, 2006; Urry, 2007).

³ As of 2013, The Ministry of Climate and Environment.

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