

# 'It Was Only When I Came Here that I Learned about Walking': Creating Meaningful Contact in the Norwegian Outdoors?



## RESEARCH

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## ABSTRACT

In Norway, refugees are systematically introduced to *friluftsliv*, or outdoor recreation, in order to increase social inclusion. However, *friluftsliv* is infused with normativities, including contention and negotiations surrounding how to perform in the Norwegian outdoors. We draw on qualitative interviews and field observations to critically explore how a group of refugees participate in and negotiate normativities in *friluftsliv*, and their reflections over sites and situations when participating. Analytically, we draw on ongoing discussions around the capacity to live with and accommodate difference. We take particular inspiration from the notions of 'meaningful contact' and 'curated sociability' in order to address what the creation of meaningful contact in the outdoors means according to the refugees, how it comes about, and the outdoors' potential as a site for social inclusion. We argue that although *friluftsliv* can offer an arena for meaningful contact and the challenging of stereotypes, the refugees' experiences also demonstrate the accentuation of difference and how normativities are made visible when transgressed.

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First, they said *tur*<sup>1</sup> in Norwegian, and I didn't know what this word meant...  
And then I went for a *tur*, and we went out into the forest, ... and then I  
understood what *tur* meant.

Interview with Sahir, from Syria.

In this opening quote, Sahir shows us that the concept of going for a walk in the outdoors is a cultural construct that newcomers to Norway learn through processes of acculturation, i.e. teaching migrants the host-society's culture. Sahir speaks not only of a literal translation of 'going for a walk,' but also of the importance of performing *tur* in order to understand the ideological and normative baggage the activity carries: questions about what it means to go for a walk, or *tur*, and how to behave and feel become apparent. In short, *tur* encompasses more than just putting one foot in front of the other, and more than just doing outdoor recreation (Baklien, Ytterhus & Bongaardt 2016).

This article investigates how refugees experience and participate in outdoor activities designed to be socially inclusive, yet taking place in a normative space that, according to Flemsæter, Setten and Brown (2015), is infused with unwritten rules and regulations. We draw on empirical research with a group of refugees about their encounters with long-term residents through participating in organised outdoor recreational activities in two rural municipalities in north-western Norway. Two key questions are raised: how do the refugees experience inclusion activities in the Norwegian outdoors? In what ways does participation in the outdoors create meaningful contact, yet also shape and accentuate difference?

In Norway, as in other European countries, there has been a substantial increase in migrant and refugee numbers since 2015 that has caused more intensive efforts towards acculturation (e.g. Magnussen 2021). Once granted refugee status and settled in a host municipality, refugees receive Norwegian language and culture training as part of a two-year compulsory Introduction Programme (IMDI 2018), providing participants with language and cultural knowledge to prepare them for entry into the workforce or educational system. *Friluftsliv* has become pivotal to government-funded programmes to teach migrants Norwegian language and cultural values, as well as being a general source of quality of life and better health for all (Norwegian Ministry of the Environment 2015: 19). Similar programmes involving so-called nature-based integration are also taking place across other Nordic countries, which have, much like in Norway, become central to increasing social inclusion, place attachment and acculturation (Gentin et al. 2019), through gaining knowledge and practical experience in the outdoors (e.g. Pitkänen et al. 2017; Singleton 2021). However, *friluftsliv* is not a blank backdrop against which social inclusion can just occur. Rather, as Rishbeth (2020: 28) aptly states, 'being outdoors is not neutral.' In existing literatures, this is problematised through studies of how migrants' use of greenspaces contributes to their wellbeing (Rishbeth et al. 2019), acculturation (Stodolska et al. 2017) and social togetherness (Peters 2010), yet also to how they stand out as 'the other' in host societies (Pitkänen et al. 2017; Singleton 2021). Migrants'

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<sup>1</sup> *Tur* in Norwegian best translates to *walk*, *journey* or *trip*. Here it translates as 'going for a walk,' but in the context Sahir refers to, it is also cultural and refers to a certain way of walking in a certain environment. That is, 'tur' here means walking for leisure and enjoyment in the outdoors.

own experiences of the outdoors (Buijs 2009; Pitkänen et al. 2017), as well as the Norwegian practise of being in the outdoors (Flemsæter et al. 2015; Gurholt 2008; Ween & Abram 2012) are hence cultural and played out through norms of behaviour and physical skills, always and already ideological. As conflicts between right and wrong ways of being, performing and moving in the outdoors are gaining increased attention (Brown 2012; Flemsæter et al. 2015; Ween & Abram 2012), we assert that 'the understanding of the Norwegian outdoors as easily and equally accessed and open to all' (Flemsæter et al. 2015: 343) needs to be critically questioned.

Analytically, we draw from ongoing discussions around the capacity to live with and accommodate difference (e.g. Ahmed 2000; Amin 2002; Askins 2016; Valentine 2008; Wilson 2017). In the substantial scholarly literature on what goes on in cross-cultural meetings between people, a persistent question is whether contact between migrants and established (local) communities aid inclusion, or conflict and othering. This is also a lingering question in policy analysis. However, there is agreement that physical, yet fleeting, proximity is not enough to dissolve prejudice and bring about social transformation (Amin 2002; Valentine 2008). Instead, Amin (2002) calls for 'spaces of interdependence.' Conceptualising such spaces as 'micro publics,' Amin (2002) holds that meaningful contact is best achieved in sites of purposeful organised group activity. In this article, we explore how and whether *friluftsliv* as a purposeful organised group activity has the potential to create such contact, i.e. 'contact that actually changes and translates beyond the specifics of the individual moment into a more general positive respect for ... others' (Valentine 2008: 325). Furthermore, we take inspiration from Rishbeth et al. (2019) and understand *friluftsliv* as a site of 'curated sociability' and, by implication, organisation, intervention and design in order to create opportunities for inclusion and recognition, de-othering, language training and the demonstration of physical skills.

There is much to suggest that refugees are expected to be socialised into a specific tradition of outdoor culture as a process of acculturation, i.e. to inherit, learn, take possession of and perform particular norms, values and customs (Pitkänen et al. 2017). Hence, we also assert that participation in *friluftsliv* (re)produces uneven power hierarchies based on the others' other experiences and physical fitness, where already-existing (national) imaginaries work to (re-)create senses of difference, exclusion and out-of-placeness. This assertion problematises whether *friluftsliv* can offer the conditions required to become a space of interdependence (Amin 2002).

This article contributes to what so far is a limited field of research concerned with understanding how contact between refugees and normativities of the outdoors held by established local populations is navigated. With very few exceptions (see Lorentzen & Viken 2022; Pitkänen et al. 2017), little is known about refugees' participation in *friluftsliv* or outdoor recreation in Norway. Hence, we offer novel insights into how a policy designed to generate inclusion of a marginalised group may also unintentionally operate to exclude through reinforcing difference.

The article proceeds by conveying how and why the Norwegian outdoors is held to be an arena for the social inclusion of refugees. Our premise is that, as already an arena for the performance of Norwegian cultural identity, inclusion through the outdoors is complex and contested. In the section that follows, we draw on the notions of 'meaningful contact' and 'curated sociability' to frame how to live with difference in the outdoors. After outlining the methodologies, we present and discuss the refugees' experiences from and reflections on their participation. By way of three interrelated

themes – togetherness and temporality; the outdoors, the Norwegian way; creating and curating otherness? – we demonstrate how the outdoors can be both an arena for meaningful contact, yet also where difference is accentuated. We conclude by offering three implications of our findings for an informed understanding of the outdoors as a space for social inclusion.

## NORMATIVITIES IN THE NORWEGIAN OUTDOORS

*Friluftsliv* is officially defined as ‘residency and physical activity in open air during leisure time with the aim of providing a change of scenery and nature experiences’ (Norwegian Ministry of the Environment 2015: 10). It has a long history in Norway, and is understood as an ideology, a philosophy and a way of life for many practitioners (Faarlund 2015). During the building of a Norwegian national identity throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, the Norwegian outdoors became a national symbol (Ween & Abram 2012) that, according to Baklien et al. (2016), has produced a *friluftsliv* culture that is not merely based on taking pleasure from the outdoors, but a duty. *Friluftsliv* hence encompasses more than just the act of simply doing outdoor recreation, which puts pressure on how people should perform in the outdoors (Flemsæter et al. 2015). This has a critical bearing on the outdoors as an arena for social inclusion broadly speaking. More specifically, it helps to shed light on two interrelated issues that pertain to why *friluftsliv* has become a central mechanism for the social inclusion of refugees. First, the general social diversity of society is not reflected in outdoor recreation patterns. The lower participation of immigrant groups in both physical exercise in general, and outdoor activities in particular (Taff & Aure 2021) is attributed to their lower health (Norwegian Ministry of the Environment 2015). Thus, public health policies have for almost two decades encouraged new groups of people, including immigrants, to regularly participate in outdoor recreation as this is seen as positive for their wellbeing (Norwegian Ministry of the Environment 2015). Second, an increasing diversity among *friluftsliv* participants produces an increasingly disputed set of practises and identities. Clashes concerning, e.g. ‘mountain bikers vs. hikers/walkers, motorised activities such as snowmobiling vs. activities based on calm and quietness’ (Flemsæter et al. 2015: 343) have been reported. The very notion of *friluftsliv* is thus ‘under threat’ from individuals and groups expected to participate, yet, and according to Flemsæter et al. (2015), not necessarily the way they should.

Interestingly then, claims are made that participation in *friluftsliv* offers various immigrant groups a unique understanding of Norwegian culture, i.e. that participation builds confidence and cultural competency, paving the way for social inclusion. Paying closer attention to how the normativities embedded in the outdoors impact activities for social inclusion highlights and problematises this. Hence, the contextual, and often unarticulated expectations about how to behave (Brown 2012; Flemsæter et al. 2015), put those without the ‘knowledge, cultural traits and capital to “fit” in’ (Rishbeth et al. 2019: 126) at risk of negative exposure and evaluation. It is within this context that we need to understand the complexity surrounding the participation of refugees in the outdoors.

## CREATING AND CURATING MEANINGFUL CONTACT

A long-held assumption has been that fleeting multicultural encounters, mainly in public urban environments, translate into respect for difference (Askins 2016; Magnussen 2021; Valentine 2008). However, ‘the effectiveness of multiculturalism’

is also being critically questioned, 'resulting in a shift in emphasis in both discourse and policy away from a recognition of difference towards the importance of cohesion and integration' (Valentine & Harris 2016: 915). This, in turn, has led to a concern for the sites and situations that produce 'meaningful contact.' This suggests two things: first, that fleeting encounters in 'spaces of transit' (Amin 2002: 967), such as cafes and buses, produce little meaningful contact between others. Second, that purposely, actively framed contact can generate recognition of and respect for 'the other.' Amin (2002: 969–970) usefully points to how difference can only be overcome in 'spaces of interdependence' where people can 'break out of fixed relations and fixed notions and learn to become different through new patterns of social interaction.' Hence, the sites of intervention 'must be constituted in such a way that cultural exchange, cultural destabilisation and transformation could be possible' (Magnussen 2021: 419). That is, they should hold the potential for negotiations of understanding and acceptance of cultural diversity. There is ample evidence that places with purposeful organised group activities, such as sports clubs, theatre groups, and communal gardens, offer meaningful contact and create interdependence (see, e.g. Askins 2016).

Such spaces have recently been looked at through the lens of 'curated sociability', i.e. as spaces set up with a purpose in order to offer refugees and asylum seekers support, contact, connection and belonging (Rishbeth et al. 2019). These spaces are actively framed, engineered or 'curated', i.e. they are 'relational, considered practices ..., which can make experiences of unfamiliarity less fearful' (Rishbeth et al. 2019: 127). They are also often formed around embodied activities in shared space and over time. The crucial characteristic of the activity enabling meaningful contact as noted by Askins and Pain (2011) is that meaningful contact can be achieved through the activities themselves, i.e. that doing together is the site of contact. This is particularly relevant for our purpose, as *friluftsliv* is very much about 'doing together' in the outdoors. The potential held by the outdoors to be a site of positive intervention and doing has thus been noted by Roberts (2015: 342) who holds that 'outdoor spaces can be even more effective when programmes are designed with diversity and respect for cross-cultural differences in mind.'

Creating meaningful contact through intervention or 'curation' in the outdoors is, however, not straight forward: curation is not neutral, innocent, or free from normativity. Meaningful contact in the outdoors will always entail negotiations of the meaning of difference, and crucially, whose difference. According to Ahmed (2000), difference tends to be normatively defined by the majority population as 'our difference' and is thus conditional. As Rishbeth (2020: 28) has pointed out, particularly for visibly different immigrants, 'the realistic option of spending time outside reflects not only the individual confidence of navigating new environments and "being oneself", but also is a gauge of exposure to threat.' In short, the outdoors come with the risk of standing out or not 'fitting in.'

Underpinning the above is that meaningful multicultural contact is a cultural practise that comes with both opportunities and challenges. We are particularly concerned with understanding such contact as one that recognises and understands how complex and contested normativities in *friluftsliv* become visible when the refugees and local people are purposefully and together engaged in outdoor activities. Because these activities happen in spaces where pressure is put on performing together in certain ways, it necessitates explicit negotiation of otherness, as normativities are often transgressed. It further follows that we need to pay attention to the duration of contact for it to be meaningful. The significance of temporality in addressing prejudice

has also been noted by Askins (2016). She argues that when committing to spending time together, ‘the potential for more nuanced understandings of each-other as multi-faceted individuals can arise’ (Askins 2016: 522). Contact is thus not free from history, i.e. we also need to stay alert to what has bearing on one’s contact with others, and how ‘aspects of one’s biography become significant in different moments’ (Wilson 2017: 462). Before demonstrating how the analysis is informed by such thinking, we outline the research design and methodologies.

## METHODOLOGIES

We draw on fieldwork undertaken in two rural municipalities in North-western Norway, between February and October 2018. During this period, the first author carried out 21 in-depth interviews that combined a walking and a sit-down component. The first author also participated in and made observations during 10 organised outdoor activities that included refugees and members of the local communities.<sup>2</sup> The activities included hikes, skiing, cabin and snowshoe trips and facilitated the recruitment of interviewees for the one-on-one interviews. Informal, unstructured interviews and observations conducted on group trips were used to develop a loose interview guide for the in-depth interviews that followed. Consent was given verbally by interviewees before individual interviews, and group participants were verbally informed by the first author and group organisers of the option to reserve themselves from being interviewed or observed. Our interviewees comprised of 11 men and 10 women, between 17 and 55 years old, with between six months and five years residency in Norway. The interviewees had their backgrounds from Eritrea, Syria, Ethiopia, Iran, Afghanistan and Palestine.

In this study, ‘newly arrived refugee’ refers to those granted refugee status within the last two years. Thus, all interviewees were attending the compulsory Introduction Programme at the time of the interview. Importantly, the arrival and settlement processes are not fixed: some of the interviewees came as asylum seekers, spending several years awaiting refugee status. Others were settled directly through the United Nations Quota programme.

Seventeen of the 21 interviews were in-depth combined walking and sit-down interviews, lasting between one and two hours each, and occurred in outdoor locations selected by the interviewees. The walking interview continued with a sit-down interview to address any topics missed, as well as to revisit topics that came up during the walk. This method allowed for a more in-depth enquiry into the interviewee’s experiences from participating in *friluftsliv* activities. The additional four sit-down interviews were conducted with interviewees who did not wish to or were unable to do a walking interview due to physical health restrictions. These interviews took place either at the interviewees’ homes, or in an outdoor greenspace chosen by the interviewee. Interviews were conducted in Norwegian. Interview excerpts have been translated into English by the first author, and all interviewees are given fictitious names.

Walking interviews (Anderson 2004) were not recorded but used as an open-ended conversation to access the lived experiences, which were further explored during the sit-down interview. Extensive journal notes were taken after each

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<sup>2</sup> Activities were organised through municipal language courses, student-training programmes for students of *friluftsliv* and guiding at the local university college, the local Red Cross divisions and the local divisions for the Norwegian Trekking Association (DNT).

interview in a research diary. The analysis consisted of a two-step approach. First, a broad background analysis of current and previous research literatures was conducted. Following this, interviews were transcribed, and patterns and recurrent themes, behaviours, responses and thoughts were categorised and coded based on the knowledge gained through the background research. These processes were overlapping, and a back-and-forth dialogue between literature and data informed the coding process using NVivo.

The methodologies chosen in this research crucially recognise how different places prompt different responses to questions and interactions between researcher and interviewee, as where we are influences what we do and what we say (Riley & Holton 2016). Walking interviews generated research interactions that were influenced by the spaces where knowledge was being generated, and by the movements performed during this knowledge creation. The surroundings and movement through them function as an 'elicitation technique' (Brown & Durrheim 2009: 916), as both interviewees and interviewer together engage with the spaces passed through. This has been vital as the focus moves outwards during walking and mobile interviews, rotating between interviewer and interviewee, shifting traditional power relations and allowing both partners to participate in a co-construction of places and movements and the meanings attached to them (Riley & Holton 2016).

When analysing the empirical material for reflections and responses to how the refugees experience social contact in the outdoors, a narrative that *friluftsliv* is a Norwegian tradition that 'ought to be' learned emerged. The material also showed evidence of uneven power relations during this curated contact, causing us to question how the ideologies and normativities in the outdoors shape these experiences.

## CREATING AND CURATING MEANINGFUL CONTACT THROUGH FRILUFTSLIV

Through the analysis, three themes emerged: *Togetherness and temporality; The outdoors, the Norwegian way; and Creating and curating otherness?* Together, they tell a story of how the Norwegian outdoors can both be an arena for meaningful contact, yet also where difference is accentuated.

### TOGETHERNESS AND TEMPORALITY

*Friluftsliv* involves time spent together, which creates opportunities for prejudice to be addressed. Sahir, with whom we opened this article, elaborates on the difficulty of meeting ethnic Norwegians in his age group, reciting that he had attended some social functions, parties and meetings, without establishing social contact in such settings. However, participation in *friluftsliv* brought him into closer contact with Norwegians and affected his experiences of feeling a sense of inclusion:

I think it's because you're out walking together, you're walking through the woods, you have lots of time together, and you're talking. And that's enough, to talk, and to have lots of time together, and to walk together.

Sahir identifies three key components of participating in *friluftsliv* that together, and for him, create meaningful contact: spatiality, movement and temporality, highlighting the importance of *moving together*. Following the same path, embodying the same rhythm, the same tempo and regulated by the same normativities regarding how

to move, this performance is seen to offer a sense of togetherness (Bischoff 2012). Furthermore, the forced, prolonged togetherness in the outdoors creates pressure to converse, as well as creating space for pauses in the conversation. When Sahir moved with his Norwegian peers, he could express himself more freely and had more time to express himself and address any prejudice that may have existed. Sahir's notion of meaningful contact resonates with Askins and Pain's (2011) shifting of focus from contact to activities, i.e. the idea that the space of meaningful contact can be found in the activity or the doing together. Rishbeth et al. (2019: 129) conceptualise this as 'doing alongside,' referring to the 'minor activities of sociality' independent of immigration status. The combination of movement, natural surroundings and conversation creates contact that for Sahir is meaningful. He identifies a co-mobility of mobile bodies, in a prolonged interaction, which changed how he communicated with others in close propinquities. Mobile bodies *doing* together in *friluftsliv* hence seem to shift their focus from the conversation, and the conversers, away from their bodies to the path in front of them, the nature surrounding them and the activities at hand.

Aliya, a young woman also from Syria, recalls something similar when telling of an experience at the local park in her small town:

We decided one time that only the women should go [to the picnic tables at the playground], and bring food and stuff, and there were lots of people there – Norwegians, who said that 'Oi, you're women and you can be out here, just you, no men, and that's ok!' And lots of people came and sat with us, and we just said, 'come and join us if you have time'.... It was really enjoyable.

Aliya emphasises here how other local users of the park and playground expressed positive surprise over the fact that a group of Muslim women were socialising in the park without the presence of males. She expresses that being at the park over time allowed for challenging prejudice and breaking down misunderstanding between groups. Amir similarly narrates how spending time with his Norwegian friends in the outdoors enabled his friends to address their prejudices and fears they had of him:

I don't remember where we were or where we were hiking, but I remember how they were scared of me. The first time. I felt it. I noticed it. But we talk about it now. We talk about 'remember that day?' or they say to me 'that first time when we were out hiking with you, yeah we were scared of you.' (...) They said to me that they didn't know me, and didn't know what I was like, and stuff. (...) Inside the school I didn't notice that they were scared, I don't know why. Maybe because we were at school so they were safe, that if I were to do anything, I wouldn't do it at school, but out there [hiking], they were like 'maybe he'll do something'.

Amir identifies the opportunity for achieving deeper social relations in natural settings, at the same time acknowledging the vulnerability of being alone together in the woods, highlighting the significance of both place and performance for his unrestrained social interactions with peers.

To generate 'togetherness' or 'doing alongside' (Rishbeth et al. 2019: 129) requires synchronicity, a joint performance, in-tact and coordinated. In *friluftsliv*, normativities coordinate and regulate this performance – as rhythm, tempo and trajectory combine to create a mobile unit moving together (Flemsæter et al. 2015). For example, Baklien et al. (2016: 48) found that when Norwegian families go hiking, they obtain a state of



presence and togetherness similar to Sahir's experiences: 'The families describe how in their everyday life they feel captured in their own life world, preoccupied with their own doings. When the family moves together as a unit, they start to see each other in a different way and a sense of presence emerges.' Sharing and following the same path at the same time, and over time, makes conversation flow:

Because you're out walking together, together through the forest, and it's really easy to talk there. It's an easy way to talk to Norwegians. It's easier to talk to Norwegians when you're out walking with them (Sahir).

There is still an expectation to converse, yet unlike other forced proximity contact such as public transport, school pick-ups and elevators (Wilson 2017), the backdrop on which the conversation takes place allows for long pauses, comfortable, unremarkable and ordinary, as there is a large number of background distractions to fall back on. Interestingly, this kind of slow conversation also enables more serious conversations, where long pauses may be necessary, yet in this setting are not experienced as uncomfortable.

Importantly, what is conveyed here is that participants in *friluftsliv* cannot simply walk away from the conversation, as participants are regulated into being together over time. The difficulty to break out of the situation, combined with the comfort of the long pauses in conversation, creates an environment where refugees and members of the established local community can potentially converse at a deeper level. An opportunity arises for participants to reflect on any prejudices and privilege they may have. Amir's experience of how through participating in *friluftsliv*, his Norwegian friends confronted their fear of him through spending time together, illustrates this opportunity. What we wish to highlight here is how the temporal dimension of contact through *friluftsliv* creates opportunities for inclusion and belonging. Echoing Askins (2016), *friluftsliv* provides an arena where people have time, and are not in a hurry to pass through. Hence, being and doing in the outdoors forms part of a larger, mobile interaction that is both processual and normative, as the refugees perform in certain ways and over time in order to be bodily, spatially and ideologically accepted. That there is a specific cultural context to this, is demonstrated in the next section.

## THE OUTDOORS, THE NORWEGIAN WAY

Everyday social contact, or 'local liveability' to paraphrase Amin (2002: 959), matters to how the refugees navigate outdoor normativities in efforts to create meaningful contact. As demonstrated in the previous section, cultural habits and ingrained norms held by people in the host society are crucial to this navigation. Participation by the refugees is hence conditional, yet not in negative terms per se. Aliya, a refugee from Syria who had participated in many organised *friluftsliv* activities arranged through, for example, DNT and the Red Cross, spoke of moving through the outdoors for the purpose of physical exertion as cultural. She drew connections between ways of moving, ways of thinking and acculturation:

Many who come here, the new ones, from Syria. We [Syrians] said to them [other refugees] 'come and give it a try (*friluftsliv*), it's really fun to try! Because you guys need to know how Norwegians move, how they think.'

Aliya is, however, also conveying an understanding of and privilege given to the notion of Norwegianness. She demonstrates that performances are regulated, adjusted or internalised as a means to fit in, in order to engage in meaningful contact. Hence,

the landscape and ideologies within it impact the contact between refugees, activity organisers and other informal users by influencing how the refugees 'curate' themselves in these sites, and how they feel other parties perceive them. Echoing Rishbeth et al. (2019), embodied histories are hence mobilised and performed during contact. For example, the refugees frequently referred to high levels of sociability in the streets, neighbourhoods and urban centres in their hometowns, and later surprise and confusion over the absence of this sociability in their host communities. Karam, a young Syrian man, illustrates this, describing how the norm of sociability in the outdoors was a surprise to him:

When we [Syrians] see people, we say 'hi'. But they don't do that here in Norway. Only when they're out in the mountains.

Abdul and Jamal, young men from Syria and Palestine respectively, provided similar accounts:

Abdul: Norwegians are kind, but only [when] in nature. You can talk to each other in nature. (...) Norwegians get a little weird when you say 'hi' to them in town. I don't know why it's like that.

Jamal: I think that when you say 'hi' to someone out in nature, it may be your neighbour, but then you don't say 'hello' to them when you meet them in the street.

What these young men demonstrate is cultural competence. They are aware that in the outdoors, Norwegians are more open to socialise and be cordial, hence, being out in nature is different from everyday life in town. Spaces of *friluftsliv* are thus normatively charged (Flemsæter et al. 2015), and at least in the beginning, refugees are for the most part unaware of in what sense. By implication, they unknowingly risk being condemned for breaking rules they did not know existed.

Halima, a young female interviewee from Syria, similarly explains how certain spaces and performances of embodied histories bring out surprising responses from long-term residents, and these responses' effect on how they come to see themselves as part of their new communities – or not:

We had a barbeque over there once (...) and everyone said 'Hey, what are you guys up to?' [in a friendly manner] (...) I think others think it's nice that we're so many people sitting together at a barbeque. Because maybe people first think that we just want to sit at home, and when they see that we go out and are happy and kind and social, then everyone was so happy and smiled at us and stuff.

Important is what this experience can teach us about how and why the embedded norms, expectations and associations with being outdoors are perceived not only as positive and good, but also a duty (Baklien et al. 2016). What Halima describes as long-term residents' assumptions that the refugees 'just want to sit at home,' are challenged, and thus aiding her entering into meaningful contact with local residents.

These sites and situations are further key to the refugees' process of acculturation, i.e. they play a significant role in changing the refugees' behaviours in ways that, according to themselves, make them more accepted as part of their local communities. Karam explained how he first became aware of existing normativities, and thereafter his behaviours changed to match the normativities of his host community:

I've been here for almost three years now, and I've ended up like that too [not saying 'hi' to Norwegians in town]. So, when I go out and someone says 'hi', I get a little like 'who the hell is that? Why is he talking to me?' And that's how Norwegians are, but I'm like that too now.

Although Karam tells of how his behaviours have changed since learning of the normativities around cordiality, it is unclear whether he deliberately corrects himself. Importantly, however, the interview excerpt conveys that Karam has become culturally sensitive in order to better fit in. Amraz, a young man from Kurdistan, presents a related example when telling how he found a way to enjoy the outdoors by driving along a road near town, which is a popular walking and cycling route in the area. There is little traffic, it is easily accessible from the town centre, relatively flat and it offers open views of the area. He first describes that he drives along this stretch of road to enjoy the outdoor experience, before reflecting over how he felt that people in the area saw that driving instead of walking was unacceptable along that particular stretch of road:

I drive in my car and listen to music. I need to be careful not to walk too much [referring to a recent knee injury and operation]. I think it's very beautiful there. But I'm very careful when I drive along there because I don't want anyone to say 'who's that guy? Why does he drive along here every day?' They don't know that I have a bad knee, so I'm very careful.

Amraz describes himself as representing a risk to the local community, and how he is careful to avoid causing fear or tension. He also shows that the embodied history he brings into his understanding of *friluftsliv* ideologies and the other bodies bearing these ideologies, potentially creates fear. He demonstrates an awareness of how walking along that stretch to enjoy nature is the norm. He also shows that he is aware of his transgression of these norms through driving instead of walking. Further, he speaks of the consequences this transgression has, as that his behaviour identifies him as an 'other,' as seen in his fear of raising curiosity and drawing negative attention.

When navigating different normativities embedded in the Norwegian outdoors, the refugees show how they have become aware of and sensitive to any consequences of their transgressions, both positive and negative. This demonstrates how participating in *friluftsliv* can (re)produce difference and otherness, where, in order to enter into meaningful contact, the refugees change behaviours to fit in and be accepted, yet also how transgressions translate into the building of cultural competence.

## CREATING AND CURATING OTHERNESS?

The amplification of difference and otherness becomes particularly visible when participation was conditioned by particular skills and physical fitness, combined with unarticulated and ingrained practises by local people.

Physical fitness and outdoor skills become an embodied, visible difference, granting power and legitimacy to those able to move more freely and quickly. Halima recites how physical fitness is an ideal and often closely tied to experience and building outdoor skills, and that the less experienced can find themselves left behind:

We hiked together, [but] the others [friends from the local community] went quickly ahead of us. Because they always go hiking, or, they have been there before, done that hike. But this was our first time, me and my

friend. So, we didn't get to walk together. But after a bit, they would wait for us. And when we caught up to them, they would say 'yeah, we can walk together!' but after 15 minutes they disappear ahead again.

Aliya offers another illustration of this difference:

It's hard because they [Norwegian friends] can ski really fast, but I can't. I can ski, but not as fast as them.

Embodied differences impact the refugees' ability to keep up with the group, making it difficult for them to feel they were equal participants. This difference becomes clearer and more visible in the terrains of *friluftsliv* than in many other social arenas (Singleton 2021). Dunia, a woman in her late thirties from Afghanistan, explained how she was used to being stationary in Afghanistan. She recalled how, shortly after arrival in her host municipality, she was taken on a hike where they walked a steep 300 meter descent to the fjord and were also expected to walk back up. She expressed frustrations around the physical difficulty of the hike, explaining how she grew up in Afghanistan, where she was mainly at home, inside and as a result did not have the physical fitness nor skills set for that hike. These histories are personal, gendered and grounded in cultural norms, and as such, they reflect what Lorentzen and Viken (2022) found in their study of factors influencing outdoor recreation behaviour among immigrant women in Norway. Yet, and within the context of our study, the three women quoted above, also demonstrate how participation in the outdoors is a coming together of uneven fitness and mastery of both the physical environment and particular ways of moving. These women articulate what it means to be othered, i.e. they are unable to activate their agency in the situations they are in.

Our final example draws on the first author's observations during an organised group hike with about 25 participants:

About 10 minutes into the hike, a group of young lively Syrian men sat down for a break, saying that they would catch up with the rest of the group before the glacier. There was a constant line of people heading up the path, so to catch up with others, you would have to go off the path and overtake. They did catch up with us, but took breaks every 15 minutes or so, sitting down in the middle of the path, forcing others to walk around them, to sing some songs or have a chat, before heading off again. The guide seemed to get annoyed at this, as did the group leader. (...) They weren't breaking any rules, but for some reason it was very annoying.

*Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> June 2018, first author's field notes from a group hike to Galdhøpiggen, Norway's highest peak, as a part of Til Topps [To the top], a Red Cross integration initiative.*

We read these observations in two ways. First, the rupture in tempo and rhythm that the young men created led to agitation, particularly among the hike organisers and guides. It was not their physical fitness that created the difference, but the tempo of their movement, i.e. the unarticulated skills and desire to move at a pace that was deemed inappropriate by the guide and organisers. The guide set the pace based on expectations of movement on a hike, which is a continuous trek over longer stretches of time. Stopping every 15 minutes broke with the rhythm and caused irritation, reinforcing difference between the group of young men, who made the transgression, and the rest

of the group holding a steady pace. This echoes Singleton's (2021) findings of how bodies and behaviours in Swedish nature-based integration activities create and reinforce difference and non-belonging among migrant groups. It also reflects Flemsæter et al.'s (2015) understanding that contested ways of engaging in the Norwegian outdoors frequently create conflicts and tensions. Second, the young men activated their agency through taking possession of the hike. They talked, sang and enjoyed themselves, i.e. they 'curated' their own sociability (Rishbeth et al. 2019), meaningful contact and space of interdependence (Amin 2002). Hence, they caused disruption because of the set-up of the interaction during the hike and the power imbalance between them and the organisers. Not obeying the 'rules' hence challenged 'our difference,' to paraphrase Ahmed (2000). By implication, these stories encapsulate how in landscapes infused with unarticulated normativities, otherness and difference are accentuated.

## CONCLUSIONS

We have demonstrated how the outdoors operates as not merely a 'backdrop' for contact between cultures but is rather infused with normativities and ideologies that affect how contact is played out, experienced and navigated. Considering this, we have examined how a group of refugees experience inclusion activities in the Norwegian outdoors. Normativities and ideologies embedded in these activities ensure elements of destabilisation, creating potential for both social inclusion and reinforcing difference. In concluding, we highlight three points for consideration in efforts to critically understand the Norwegian outdoors as a space for social inclusion.

Our first point is that given the substantial efforts to successfully include refugees in Norwegian society, it is vital to understand the refugees' own notions and negotiations of what social interaction entails within spaces that are already ideological and normative. Through our study, and by drawing on the notions of meaningful contact (Valentine 2008) and 'curation' (Rishbeth et al. 2019), we have conveyed how 'curation' can lead to meaningful contact between others in outdoor spaces of interdependence (Amin 2002). Important to these meetings is that they take place in a 'doing alongside' (Rishbeth et al. 2019), over time and allows for the mobilisation of agency and the building of cultural competency. In these situations of co-mobility, a communication arena emerges, allowing refugees and long-term residents to converse beyond the common courtesies found in the fleeting contact of everyday life. Importantly, however, these curated meetings also carry with them expectations that refugees are acculturated in specific *friluftsliv* traditions and normativities. They are then expected to perform adhering to particular norms, values and customs.

Second, understanding contact in *friluftsliv* as strongly guided by norms draws attention to the production and reinforcement of power hierarchies. Two interconnected results have emerged here. First, adapting behaviours according to these norms allows the refugees to both create and enter into meaningful contact and aids in deconstructing prejudices, through the above-mentioned co-mobility of togetherness and through the refugees meeting expectations of participation in *friluftsliv* as a duty. Second, breaking with these norms through a disturbing tempo demonstrates how outdoor skills and physical fitness impact where power settles. This creates a visible divide between those who both understand and have the physical fitness and skills to meet the expectations regarding tempo and rhythm, and those who do not. The combination of physical fitness, skills and experience further exacerbates the perceived difference of visible migrants, who already stand out and are gazed upon as the other.

Third, and finally, it seems reasonable to argue that both ideologically and in practise, *friluftsliv* maintains and reinforces tradition and 'sameness' (Faarlund 2015; Flemsæter et al. 2015; Pitkänen et al. 2017), leading us to critically question how inclusion activities in the outdoors are experienced by refugees, or any newcomer to such activities in Norway. The findings in this study hence call for further research addressing whose outdoor preferences, interests and traditions are being catered to and reproduced. This points directly to the normativities held by those organising the activities, about which there is a lack of systematic knowledge, including on a Nordic scale. The findings also point to what it takes, practically and ideologically, to accept and recognise the refugees', or immigrants more broadly, own practises and skill sets within an inert outdoors. There are signals that a more culturally diverse outdoors is possible, yet too little is known about what ideologically as well as materially shapes such an outdoors.

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The authors have no competing interests to declare.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Fieldwork and transcription of the empirical material were undertaken by the first author. A first draft of the article, including theoretical framing and analysis, was provided by the first author. Refining the article has been equally shared by the authors.

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