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## Active seniors in the outdoors: experiences, health and wellbeing

A qualitative study of senior participants in an organized walking group in a small community in Norway

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## Abstract

**Background:** We are now living longer, and as these changes evolve, there is a need to consider environments that promote health and wellbeing among older adults. Nature has been an object of many studies, considering its effects on both physical and psychological function and wellbeing, and several theories exist on our relation to natural environments. With the increase of interest in nature's role in overall health, and with the perception of the concept friluftsliv in Norwegian society, there now exists a variety of walking groups for older adults. However, there is a need for research into how these walking groups may influence various aspects in the life of mature, aged adults and how one can facilitate and motivate such a group.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study was to gain knowledge on how older adults experience participating in a walking group, who they are and how they perceive their own health through the weekly walking tour. Furthermore, how a walking group is facilitated in a way that it promotes positive aspects of the participants health and wellbeing. The following research questions were addressed:

“What characterizes senior participants in an organized walking group, and how do they perceive their own health through the weekly walking tour? How informants experience and reflect on participation, health and wellbeing.”

**Method:** The study uses a qualitative method inspired by phenomenology, where data was collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. The informants were recruited from a walking group in a small community in Norway and interviews were transcribed and analyzed phenomenologically by systematic text condensation.

**Findings:** The informants describe the walking group as an arena for socializing and communicating with other participants, and several of them highlight this aspect of the walking tour. Other aspects described as important were the abilities to continue to be physically active and enjoy the natural surroundings, and where some informants were more preoccupied with the sensory experiences than others were. However, mood and happiness were shown to be harder for the informants to describe. The findings also show that many of the informants have always enjoyed activity in nature in numerous

ways throughout their life. Another perspective in the findings suggest that there may be more women than men participating in the walking group, however, this is not something the informants think of much.

**Conclusion:** This study suggests that walking groups may influence mature aged adult's perceived health and wellbeing positively. Informants reflect on their participation as a way of continuing to be active and connect with other people. Participating in the group may be a way of coping with the fear of being lonely and fear of losing their physical function. Furthermore, the facilitating of the walking group seems to be important and inspiring work for the tour leaders, as well as making the weekly walking group a place where participants can achieve a sense of meaningfulness and belonging.

**Key words:** Walking groups, older adults, physical health, mental wellbeing, nature experiences, sensory experiences, outdoor organizations.

## Acknowledgements

*“We didn’t learn to use the outdoors, such as hiking or cycling. My mom and dad were not that much into hiking, but we did it once. It was during World War II, and I was six years old. It was special, there was little food and well, there was no reason to go on a trip. We took our bikes on the train from Lillesand to Birkeland. At Birkeland we cycled to Aamli, and then further on to Treungen. There we had an overnight stay in a tent, they had borrowed a tent. The next day we came to a guesthouse, I can still imagine it. We stayed there until the next day and we celebrated my birthday there. After all, during the war there were not many goods to get a hold of, so my mom went to the village and got some cream. They then made a cake with the cream, during the war, on my birthday – I remember that! And then we cycled home again. We were away for a week, and that was the first and only trip I went on with my family – apart from road trips.”*

This story is told by my grandfather. Since I was a little girl, I remember hiking trips, skiing and speedskating with my grandfather. We still go on walking tours together. I think that is why a part of me has always been fascinated by nature and friluftsliv. So, thank you Kåre for always taking us out on different activities in the outdoors.

Finally, it is time to deliver this master thesis. These past years have been inspiring, challenging and given me insight into many aspects of physical activity, and there are several people I would like to thank in helping me through to the final thesis.

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Melissa Mosby

# Table of contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Table of contents</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	<b>8</b>
1.1.1 Background.....	9
1.1.2 Purpose and research questions .....	10
<b>2. Theory and research</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>2.1 Aspects of aging</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>2.2 Outdoor life and friluftsliv</b> .....	<b>12</b>
2.2.1 What is friluftsliv? .....	12
2.2.2 Outdoor adventure and friluftsliv programs .....	13
2.2.3 Engagement in nature experiences and changes in friluftsliv.....	14
<b>2.3 Health perspective in this study</b> .....	<b>15</b>
2.3.1 Salutogenesis .....	15
2.3.2 Physical activity.....	16
2.3.3 Mental health and wellbeing.....	18
2.3.4 Sensory experiences and pleasure in nature .....	20
<b>2.4 The benefit of social network for health and wellbeing</b> .....	<b>21</b>
2.4.1 Aging and loneliness.....	21
2.4.2 We are social beings .....	22
2.4.3 Walking groups as a social arena.....	24
<b>3. Method</b> .....	<b>26</b>
<b>3.1 Research design</b> .....	<b>26</b>
3.1.1 Lived experience.....	27
3.1.2 Interview as method.....	27
<b>3.2 Recruitment and selection</b> .....	<b>28</b>
<b>3.3 Data collection</b> .....	<b>30</b>
3.3.1 Pilot study .....	30
3.3.2 Conduction of the interviews.....	30
<b>3.4 Ethical reflections</b> .....	<b>31</b>
3.4.1 The researcher`s responsibility .....	31
<b>3.5 Transcription and analysis</b> .....	<b>32</b>
<b>3.6 Quality of the research</b> .....	<b>34</b>

<b>4.</b>	<b>Results and discussion .....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>4.1</b>	<b>Experiences and qualities of participation in the walking group .....</b>	<b>36</b>
4.1.1	Sense of coping with retirement and loneliness through the weekly walking group .....	36
4.1.2	Importance of being included in and feeling of belonging to a social network through the weekly walking tour .....	39
4.1.3	Experience of the customization of the weekly walking group .....	44
4.1.4	More women than men participating .....	47
<b>4.2</b>	<b>Experience of strengthened health and well-being .....</b>	<b>49</b>
4.2.1	Physical activity and experiencing debilitation of the body .....	49
4.2.2	Sensory experiences in nature .....	53
4.2.3	Subjective wellbeing; mood and happiness in natural environments .....	56
<b>4.3</b>	<b>The significance of nature experiences in the early years and throughout the lifespan.....</b>	<b>59</b>
4.3.1	Nature as a playground .....	59
4.3.2	Significance of early experiences and engagement with nature .....	64
<b>4.4</b>	<b>Active seniors in the outdoor walking group – from the tour leaders’ perspective .....</b>	<b>68</b>
4.4.1	How is the outdoor walking group organized and facilitated for the participants?.....	68
4.4.2	What does the participation mean to the tour leaders? .....	71
<b>5.</b>	<b>Conclusion and implications for further research .....</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>6.</b>	<b>References.....</b>	<b>78</b>
	<b>Appendix 1: Approval from NSD .....</b>	<b>89</b>
	<b>Appendix 2: Information about the study and informed consent .....</b>	<b>91</b>
	<b>Appendix 3: Interview guide participants .....</b>	<b>94</b>
	<b>Appendix 4: Interview guide tour leaders .....</b>	<b>96</b>

# 1. Introduction

Around the globe people are living longer, Estimates show that by the year 2050, the proportion of people over 60 years will be nearly double (World Health Organization [WHO], 2018a). Therefore, we will soon have a higher ratio of mature aged adults globally. Physical activity and exercise among older adults is now well researched, and findings show the importance of maintaining a functional and independent lifestyle (Di Pietro, 2012; Lohne-Seiler & Torstveit, 2012). Older adults can benefit from both endurance, balance, strength, and flexibility training. Thus, reducing and preventing physical and psychological decline in the aging process (Lexell, Frandin & Helbostad, 2008). However, most of the research which has been done has focused on the physiological aspect of how it is to age, separating the body from emotions, mind, and feelings (Humberstone, 2019). As the demographic is changing, we need to address this change in the world and in our societies, by thinking and considering what kind of environments and activities will promote healthy aging (WHO, 2018a).

Natural environments and green spaces have been given increased attention in association to health and wellbeing (Bowler, Bu. Ung-Ali, Knight & Pulling, 2010), and there is an increased interest in how natural surroundings promote physical activity and are experienced by older adults (Calogiuri & Chroni, 2014; Orr, Wagstaff, Briscoe & Garside, 2016). Nature and outdoor activities may enhance wellbeing, and blue and green spaces can provide older adults with experiences of mental wellbeing, social connections, enhanced physical health and quality of life (Finlay, Franke, McKay & Sims-Gould, 2015). Several studies show that experiences in nature, views to green spaces and having contact with nature, all have a positive influence on all of the mentioned aspects of life (Næss & Hansen, 2012).

Moreover, government reports emphasize the importance of voluntary organizations in promoting activities outdoors, as well as the importance of individuals feeling included into social networks (Ministry of Climate and Environment [MCE], 2016). Through various organizations there now exist numerous outdoor activity programs for older adults, with activities such as hiking, walking, and historical wanderings being offered (Nordstrom, 2020). Walking is a popular form for physical activity, also among older adults in Norway (Dervo et al., 2014). Furthermore, friluftsliv is perceived as important



in the development of Norway's identity as a nation and is therefore an integral part of people's identity and life history (Hofmann, Rolland, Rafoss & Zoglowek, 2018).

### **1.1.1 Background**

Since I do some work related to public health, and hold a bachelor's in Public Health, Physical Activity and Friluftsliv Studies, it became desirable to combine these themes into this study project. I have a personal passion for outdoor living and nature and have felt the impact nature has on physical fitness and wellbeing myself - especially the restorative effects on my mind and attention. Therefore, I see the importance of this theme from a personal view, and also based on the government's increase in strategies to promote natural surroundings as a part of public health work in Norway. Friluftsliv has in this work been classified as an important, health enhancing arena for overall health and quality of life. However, studies show that outdoor activity in nature decrease with age, especially with the elderly in society (MCE, 2016). In this project I wanted to study the phenomena of the way mature age, older adults experience natural environments and gain knowledge about how they perceive and reflect over their participation in a walking group. Therefore, a phenomenological inspired approach was used to explore the aspects of participating in an outdoor walking group. This also to contribute with reflections around how a group may be facilitated to achieve success in healthy aging. The theory of salutogenesis by Antonovsky was used as a theoretical framework, along with attention restoration theory by Kaplan & Kaplan, to understand the informants perceived health, wellbeing, and connection to nature.

To gain an understanding of how it is to age, older adult's perception of their experiences and sense of being active in natural environments, there is a need for subjective perspectives (Humberstone, 2019). By interviewing participants in an outdoor walking group, I wanted to gain a more in depth understanding of the theme presented. The motivation for using this approach was to gain a holistic view and enlighten the themes through a deeper perspective – and to contribute to existing research.

### **1.1.2 Purpose and research questions**

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of older adult's experiences and perceived health and wellbeing through an outdoor walking group. Several aspects were included in this study to gain knowledge about who the participants are and about their engagement with natural environments, as well as how the outdoor walking group was organized. The following research questions were addressed:

*What characterizes senior participants in an organized walking group, and how do they perceive their own health through the weekly walking tour? How informants experience participation, health, and wellbeing.*

## 2. Theory and research

### 2.1 *Aspects of aging*

The age at which a person becomes older is not universally marked. The definition may vary from country to country and living conditions are often associated with when one is eligible for pension benefits. However, for most developed countries the chronological age of 65 years may be the threshold for defining an older adult (WHO, n.d.). Norwegian pension plans are flexible, meaning that one can start receiving pension benefits at the age of 62 which are subject to pension savings. After the age of 67 one can receive pension benefits without considering pension savings (Norwegian Labor and Welfare Administration [NAV], 2013).

According to the Norwegian Health Report, life expectancy in Norway for 2017 was 84,3 years for women and 80,9 years for men. Measuring life expectancies is an important measure of the overall health in a country or society. Since the measuring started in Norway, the life expectancy has increased from year to year. This is associated with the decrease in mortality in all age groups, and the decrease in both infectious diseases and lifestyle diseases throughout the decades (Norwegian institute of public health [NIPH], 2018). However, the life expectancy does not say much about other aspects of life and how many years are lived in good health. Healthy life years (HLY) or disability-free life expectancy may therefore also be an indicator in society to monitor health as a productivity and economic factor. Using healthy life years as a measurement could say something about the quality of the years lived, as well as to help understand the concept of quality of life. When using HLY as a measurement, statistics show that men are expected to experience several more years with good health compared to women (Lillegård & Ramm, 2010).

The threshold for when one becomes older may also be dependent on how individuals experience the aging process. Older adults are not a homogenous group and numerous factors contribute to the aging process when considering their differing prerequisites for participation (Sudmann, 2017). Individual differences such as genetics, lifestyle, culture, society, and education are factors that can influence one's health and performance when aging. We must distinguish between the aging decline that is mandatory and the facultative decline. Meaning the mandatory processes which happen

with increasing age that we have no control over- degradation of biological cells, systems, and organs. On the other hand, facultative aging which we do have some control over and consists of factors such as an individual's lifestyle and the community's quality of healthcare (DiPietro, 2012). The physiological and biological changes do not create illnesses themselves but makes one more vulnerable to disease and illness (Lexell et al., 2008; Ministry of Health and Care Services [MHC], 2018). The social age is shown through how one sustains communication with other people in the community, participation in society and working life. Changes in roles and transitions in life characterizes one's social aging, especially when it is time for retiring where many people experience loss of networks and meaningful purposes (MHC, 2018).

There seem to be some beliefs and myths about aging, one is that passive individuals who are sick, need help and do not benefit from activity. This may show how important it is to break with stereotyping, as this could affect and discriminate many aspects of an individual's life (Sudmann, 2017). There may exist some ambivalence connected to older individuals. We tend to appraise the vitality of older people who participate in physical challenging contests or other activities, and at the same time, we read in newspapers about older individuals that do not get the help they need (MHC, 2018).

## **2.2 *Outdoor life and friluftsliv***

### **2.2.1 What is friluftsliv?**

Hiking and walking are attractive and popular leisure activities in many countries around the world. In Norway, hiking and walking is a part of what is called friluftsliv and translates directly to outdoor life or living in English. However, this cannot cover the concept friluftsliv as it is often perceived by Scandinavians as a particular cultural aspect of their society as well. It runs emotionally deeper than just being outdoors, people express themselves through friluftsliv and emphasize their contact with natural surroundings as well as meanings (Hofmann et al., 2018).

Studies show that hiking and walking are the most popular activities with the largest support and furthermore, they have had stable participation numbers throughout the

years (Dervo et al., 2014). The first government proposal on friluftsliv from 1987 and later documents, define friluftsliv in this way: Residence and physical activity in open air during leisure time to experience diverse natural environments and have experiences in nature (MCE, 2016, p. 10).

This could indicate that the idea of friluftsliv may be something you carry out far away from home in untouched or virgin nature (Dervo et al., 2014). However, the latest governmental proposal also includes and emphasizes the importance of other types of friluftsliv such as nature experiences close to home (MCE, 2016). Skår (2010) found through qualitative studies that nearby or residential friluftsliv- can give the same nature experience and positive effects that are associated with friluftsliv in more remote areas. In any case, attempts finding a suitable definition of friluftsliv seem to be difficult when trying to cover all its meanings and features. Perhaps one must accept that friluftsliv holds different meanings to individuals and that people have their own subjective definition of it (Hofmann, 2018).

### **2.2.2 Outdoor adventure and friluftsliv programs**

Various associations offer walking groups directed towards seniors, some also offer historical walks or hikes to significant places. The participation in group walks has increased as a popular form of activity in the promotion of physical activity around the world (Kassavou, Turner & French, 2013). One of the main associations which organize walking groups is the Norwegian Tourist Association [DNT] and it has had a large impact on friluftsliv in Norway (Nordstrom, 2020). Over the past 30 years DNT has developed many activities which are offered in both remote areas and nearby surroundings and for all age groups. Volunteers make sure of facilitating pathways and maintaining overnight cabins the DNT has to stay at along the trails (DNT, n.d.). Designing outdoor programs for older adults is something that has been given more attention recently (Tapps & Fink, 2009). Later research also considers how outdoor adventure programs for older adults can be facilitated, and how older adults experience such outdoor adventures (Boyes, 2013; Kluge, 2005; Sugerman, 2001). According to Kluge (2005), it is important to know the target population in order to create an outdoor adventure program, which gives them an experience that is meaningful and safe. This is because all individuals have differing abilities and experiences with them.

### **2.2.3 Engagement in nature experiences and changes in friluftsliv**

The concept of friluftsliv may be identified through several approaches and origins. Peoples relation to friluftsliv is also a holistic feeling that is hard to explain (Hofmann et al., 2018). The phenomenon of friluftsliv in relation to exploring natural environments can be contributed to the time of romanticism, nationalism, and the construction of Norway's identity. The depiction of unexplored territory and raging mountains was both beautiful and alluring, and thus this became symbols of Norwegian heritage and identity (Hofmann et al., 2018; MCE, 2016). The search for being at one with nature, human identity and one's own roots in nature became attractive (Hofmann et al., 2018). In this way, rural and urban places were reunited (MCE, 2016). However, according to Breivik (as cited in Flemsæter, Brown & Holm, 2011, p. 4), friluftsliv emerged from two separate traditions, a rural and an urban distinction. Rural traditions were based on the utilization of resources such as fishing, hunting, and harvesting. Whilst urbanized friluftsliv was more focused on personal experiences of natural environments. Considering more recent developments in society, the concept of friluftsliv has also changed. Even though the simplicity of friluftsliv still continues, we now have wider possibilities and diversity of activities in nature. Much due to the change of various factors in society throughout the decades (Dervo et al., 2014).

Changes in the use of natural environments and green spaces can also be seen in how older adults now reflect over their own engagement with nature experiences in their childhood. Due to developments in society, less physical activity is required in everyday life. There is an increase of attention being paid towards the activity level among children, and many spaces which previously encouraged outdoor play and expression have now been designated as potentially dangerous (Berg & Mjaavatn, 2008).

Spontaneous play outside has been shown through research to be descending, going from spontaneous play to more organized and planned activity and often supervised by adults (Karsten, 2005; Skår & Krogh, 2009; Skår, Wold, Gundersen & O'Brien, 2016).

As reported by Rowland (2008), a relationship between early engagement with physical activity in childhood years and physical activity in adulthood is not clearly determined. Likewise, Thompson, Aspinall & Montarzino (2008) says that findings on the association is mixed and points out that the research which has been done has not differentiated between indoor and outdoor environments. Therefore, the outdoor

environments in relation to physical activity and quality of life has not been sufficiently demonstrated. In Thompson et al., (2008) they sought to gain knowledge of a possible association between childhood experiences in nature and into adulthood. Their findings however suggest that adults that engaged in natural environments in their childhood were more likely to continue to visit such places throughout life and have a higher level of confidence in visiting natural places alone.

## **2.3 Health perspective in this study**

### **2.3.1 Salutogenesis**

The theory of salutogenesis developed by Aaron Antonovsky describes a health promoting model as an opposition to pathogenesis. In other words, the model of salutogenesis defines health as a continuum (degrees of health), focusing on factors that give a higher degree of health. The development of salutogenesis focuses on the options individuals have to realize a positive health instead of what makes them sick (Sletteland & Donovan, 2012). By finding own coping strategies rather than focusing on problems in life, one can influence one's own health (Martinsen, 2011). Antonovsky found that individuals which he had interviewed, and which had been through major traumas in life, still reported to be coping well in their lives. How they did this and questions as to how the individuals viewed their own life were pertinent. Through his work he conceptualized the sense of coherence (SOC) as a term and identified three core components relating to this. SOC is viewed as an individual's force of resistance in comprehending internal and external pressure (Antonovsky, 1987).

The three components that he identified were comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness. Those with a higher sense of SOC were better prepared to deal with stressors in life, than those with a lower sense of SOC. Comprehensibility refers to the internal and external stimuli one encounters and how one is able to make sense of a situation. In other words, being able to understand and make sense of what happens in life. Manageability is where an individual believes themselves capable of coping and finding solutions that are adequate to the demands and finds meaning in doing so. Meaningfulness posts as the motivational element, and is according to Antonovsky the

most crucial component, even though they all intertwine with each other (Antonovsky, 1987).

Reviews of studies show that SOC is very much related to how an individual perceives health, and that there is an association between higher degrees of SOC and better perceived health – this especially noticeable in those who had a high SOC. Furthermore, good mental health was especially related to high SOC, making the relation between SOC and physical health seemingly more complex (Eriksson & Lindstrom, 2006).

The theory has also defined general resistance resources (GRR) that are important in the development of the SOC. Antonovsky (1979) defines GRR “as any characteristic of the person, the group, or the environment that can facilitate effective tension management.” (p. 99). Meaning that an individual’s resources have to be accessible in order to meet demands and stimuli in life, and that these demands are perceived as comprehensible, manageable, and meaningful to the individual. The stimuli are perceived as information rather than noise, and one is able to recognize and utilize coping resources to combat stressors and move towards the positive pole of the health continuum (Antonovsky, 1996). According to Antonovsky (1979) such resources include numerous factors such as: physical, material, cognitive, emotional, social support, and social tie to name some. Social support is viewed as the most important of the GRR’s, making the social networks to which one is included into the most crucial. Eriksson and Lindstrom (2011), list at least four coping resources which need be available when developing SOC: Social relations, existential thoughts, contact with inner feelings and meaningful activities.

### **2.3.2 Physical activity**

“Physical activity comprises any bodily movement produced by the skeletal muscles that results in an increase in metabolic rate over resting energy expenditure” (Bouchard, Blair & Haskell, 2012, p. 12). Physical activity has a major impact on older adult’s own health and physical function, and in maintaining an independent lifestyle (Lohne-Seiler & Torstveit, 2012). Event though, the biological aging process is not stopped by physical activity, it can reduce and prevent further aging changes both physically and psychologically (American College of Sports Medicine [ACSM], 2009; Lexell et al., 2008). The national guidelines of physical activity recommend that older adults should be active with a moderate intensity for 150 minutes a week, or for 75 minutes with high intensity activity – or that they should be as active as their condition of health and



function allows them. Furthermore, strength training and activities that involve improvement in balance and mobility are recommended (Directory of Health, 2015a). It is never too late to start being active as any activity is better than none, and late-life exercise is shown to improve both strength, endurance, and physical functioning (Keysor & Jette 2001; Lohne-Seiler & Torstveit, 2012). However, nationwide studies in Norway show that older adults (65+) have a lower activity level than younger adults with a higher decline being in the oldest people (Directory of Health, 2015a).

According to Morris & Hardman (1997) walking is one of the most natural forms of activity for humans, and they define walking as “a rhythmic, dynamic, aerobic activity of large skeletal muscles that confers the multifarious benefits of this with minimal adverse effects” (p. 307). Walking as an activity does not require any special equipment nor skills, and almost anyone can do this at their own pace and intensity – apart from extremely frail or disabled individuals. Furthermore, any amount of walking utilizes energy having an impact on bodily processes and strengthens major muscle groups - especially those of the legs. Walking uphill places a higher demand on the cardiovascular system and an extended use of the muscles in the lower trunk (Morris & Hardman, 1997). This is also shown in a meta – analysis from 2007, where findings suggest that sedentary but healthy individuals that start with a regular brisk walking program will increase their cardiovascular fitness, reduce body fat, and lower their blood pressure. Overall, promoting walking as an activity could be an excellent way to increase physical activity in the population (Murphy, Nevill, Murtagh & Holder, 2007).

One of the main national strategies in politics concerning friluftsliv has been to facilitate for everyone to use nature and the outdoors, especially prioritizing nearby or residential friluftsliv (MCE, 2016). Studies on which motives people have for being physically active in nature and the outdoors show that experiencing nature, sensory experiences and fresh air in natural environments are important (Calogiuri & Elliot, 2017; Hervik & Skille, 2016).

### **2.3.3 Mental health and wellbeing**

The Norwegian government describes the significant impact nature and friluftsliv has on mental health and of having a higher degree of quality of life and highlights this affect in political strategies. (MCE, 2016). According to the World Health Organization, mental health is:

“A state of wellbeing in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community” (WHO, 2018b, para.2).

Wellbeing seems to be the positive aspects of our mental health. Moreover, the term wellbeing consists of several theories and can be placed in a continuum from subjective to objective theories. Sometimes it can mean that a person is feeling good or has a feeling of satisfaction pertaining to their own life situation. Other times it can mean that people are functioning well in their surroundings, and in interaction with other people – or that they are just generally satisfied with their environments. Wellbeing is often used in combination with quality of life and is also used along with happiness as a state of subjective wellbeing (Directory of Health, 2015b). According to Diener (as cited in Zhang & Chen, 2019), happiness is a positive side of our mental wellbeing and a goal in life for many people.

To explain the associations between natural environments and mental health and wellbeing there exists several theories. According to biophilia hypothesis, humans are not fully adapted to live in urban areas as we are still connected to natural environments, and that raises questions as to whether manmade environments may have a negative impact on our minds (Grinde & Patil, 2009). Grinde & Patil (2009), reviewed several articles and studies to determine if biophilia had merit and how plants and nature had an impact on the human mind. Their findings show that there is a substantial amount of evidence to suggest that nature does play a role in health and wellbeing, and therefore the biophilia hypothesis may have some merit.

Out of the biophilia hypothesis several theories have emerged, one of them is the attention restoration theory (ART) by Kaplan & Kaplan (1989). This theory distinguishes between two different attentions, the involuntary attention and direct attention. The involuntary attention does not require much effort, involuntary attention

may occur when something interesting is happening. On the other hand, paying attention to something that is not very interesting requires more effort on our direct attention. This again is a draining process which may lead to mental fatigue. In restoring our attention, Kaplan & Kaplan (1989) suggests that nature can have a restorative effect. In this way, natural environments which trigger our spontaneous attention may restore our attention. Four central aspects are identified as having a restorative effect on our attention in natural environments: The concept of being away, concept of extent, of fascination, and of compatibility. Natural surroundings and these four factors seem to have a special relationship and are main contributors in a restorative experience. Being away refers to the experience of getting away from everyday hassles, routines, and noise - or taking a break from situations which place a strain on mental efforts. This again being closely connected to the concept of extent. Meaning one is feeling a connectedness to the perceived environments, and a sense of being a part of something larger in life and freedom. Fascination is described as important to our involuntary attention and helps us to function without using our direct attention. This meaning that an experience of interest and stimulating sensory experiences within the environment trigger our spontaneous attention. Compatibility refers to the purpose one has that fits the demands of the environment. That there is a harmony present between ones needs and the resources in the environment (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989).

According to Humberstone (2019), research done on older adults and physical activity – as well as on outdoor activities are mainly focusing on the physiological perspective and Humberstone points out that there is a need for a broader in-depth perspective. We need to consider the whole body, mind, and emotions in order to uncover the experiences and perspectives of older adults who choose to be active in the outdoors. Finlay et al., (2015), show the impact green and blue spaces have on older adults. Participants used these spaces to get out of their home, and to be physically and socially active. These findings suggest that nature plays a role in the everyday life of older adults, and the connection between landscapes and health is important towards developing everyday contact with nature that can enhance the quality of life for aging populations.

Zhang & Chen (2019) reviewed several studies on physical activity and the relation to happiness. Even though we cannot firmly conclude a causal relationship between the two factors, several studies show there is an association between happiness and physical

activity. Furthermore, research has been done on how nature and green areas may enhance our happiness and overall quality of life. Næss & Hansen (2012) tried to discover if people who appreciated nature were happier or more satisfied with life. Findings in this study show that those who spent a lot of time outdoors in nature and those who appreciate nature have some higher degree of quality of life. Moreover, their findings suggest an association in increased appreciation of nature and increase in positive feelings. However, the link between appreciation of nature and higher quality of life is small.

A large study in the United Kingdom provides findings when measuring life satisfaction, happiness, and sense of worth. Findings suggest that the closer you are to greenspaces, the more they might positively impact your mental wellbeing, with life satisfaction being the strongest association (Houlden, Albuquerque, Weich & Jarvis, 2019).

#### **2.3.4 Sensory experiences and pleasure in nature**

Phoenix & Orr (2014), part of a larger qualitative study show how pleasure is connected to experiences of physical activity in older adults. Participants in this study report of different types of pleasures while being physical active. They identified four different types of pleasure and how they could be seen in relation to physical activity. Sensual pleasure relating to the senses which participants experienced through being active, documented pleasure considering documentation after being active, habitual pleasure as a sense of purpose and structure in everyday life and pleasure of immersion referring to the escaping of occupied thoughts or gaining of perspectives (Phoenix & Orr, 2014).

This also accords to a systematic review of quality evidence on older adult's sensory experiences of the natural world. According to Orr et al., (2016), senses and sensory experiences within older adults in interaction with nature is under-researched. They sum up the existing evidence from several studies done on sensory experiences within older adults and describe several categories of sensory experiences such as viewing green spaces from inside, description of being and doing outdoors and sensory experiences related to vision. Their synthesis of studies included a diverse group of older adults and various settings for natural contact. Findings suggests that older adults enhance their

quality of life and wellbeing by enjoyment and pleasure by being and doing in nature, as well as looking at nature (Orr et al., 2016).

## **2.4 The benefit of social network for health and wellbeing**

### **2.4.1 Aging and loneliness**

Loneliness and wellbeing in older adults has been given a lot of attention from governments, media, healthcare professionals and others for some time now. Political strategies are taking preventive measures to minimize loneliness in society for all age groups, and throughout the years several larger studies are done to examine the prevalence of loneliness (Lunde, 2016). When talking about loneliness as a phenomenon, it is a multidimensional term with different aspects which are often seen as underpinning a lower quality of life (de Jong Gierveld, 1998). Loneliness often refers to the subjective and negative evaluation of the gap between an individual's desired and actual quantity and quality of social relationships. In that way, loneliness is a subjective experience of a condition and a feeling of being alone without a social network (de Jong Gierveld, 1998). However, the concept of positive or voluntary loneliness is perceived as a means to higher goals, reflection and escaping the hassles of everyday life (de Jong Gierveld, 1998; Lunde, 2016).

There is a common understanding that loneliness is a problem especially among older adults, and the older you get the lonelier you will be. This assumption can be seen as a typical stereotype and is often associated with individualistic societies. (Dykstra, 2009; Hansen & Slagvold, 2016). However, in direct contradiction to the stereotyping, when comparing satisfaction of life among all age groups in Norway, studies show that there are very small differences. There is a slight increase from the age of 45-75 years, and then after the age of 75 years it decreases (Hansen & Daatland, 2016). This is also displayed in the occurrence of loneliness, as data from the Generations and Gender Survey shows that an individualistic country such as Norway had the lowest rates of loneliness among older adults compared to other countries in Europe (Hansen & Slagvold, 2016). The highest occurrence of loneliness seems to be in the lowest age group and in the oldest age group, giving it a U-shaped curve. (Hansen & Slagvold, 2013). In other words, the association between older adults and loneliness seems to be

less than the general perception of it is. An excessive negative focus on loneliness and aging may do more damage than good, contributing to a degrading view on older adults (Lunde, 2016).

While retirement brings one into a new phase of life and the role is shifted from employee to retiree, studies show inconclusiveness in relation to health effects. Syse et al, (2017) suggests that retirees are a diverse group, and that the experience when retiring is individually positive or negative. However, generally speaking, for most retirees the experience has a positive effect on certain health behaviors and mental health.

#### **2.4.2 We are a social beings**

Human beings have always lived in communities and being sociable lies within our nature and has sometimes been a necessity in order to survive. We need each other, not just for surviving but also to develop our knowledge, competence and for mastering our own lives in order to gain a higher quality of life (Bø & Schiefloe, 2007). A social network describes the relationships between people, and Finset (1988) defines social networks like this:

A network consists of informal relationships between people who interact more or less regularly with each other (p.13).

Fyrand (1994) points out several key components to social networks: social interaction, social relationships, and informal structures. Social interaction refers to the mutual interaction and to the exchange of values which are considered meaningful to individuals. When social interactions reach a point of stability or regularity, it is considered a social relationship. The development of a relationship is based on some form of interest from both parts. The informal structure of the social network considers that the relationship is created by one's own initiative and needs (Fyrand, 1994). These social networks have several central characteristics: the size of the network, the tightness of the network and homogeneity of it. A social network with a higher degree of homogeneity could give a heightened sense of one's own identity as well as a feeling of safety (Dalgard & Sørensen, 2009). Other dynamic characteristics consist of the regularity of contact, multiplexity and duration and reciprocity of contact. Studies show

however that the quality of contact is more important than the regularity when considering health benefits, whereas the frequency on the other hand says something about an individual's prioritizing of time (Dalgard & Sørensen, 2009).

Human needs are basic human requirements for normal development and growth, and a common goal we all seek is a higher quality of life. Schiefloe & Bø (2007), elaborate on the social needs of humans, and mention three factors: a need for safety, meaningfulness, and affiliation. They also identify three processes that are necessary preconditions for fulfilling these needs. A precondition to seek social community by ways of communication and interaction; seeking approval in form of positive evaluations and bettering self-esteem and to earn trust and understanding enabling insight into the structuring of living. These social needs are an important foundation, and the need of feeling accepted and included may be one of the most essential (Bø & Schiefloe, 2007).

To be integrated into a social network is deemed essential for our quality of life, and a good support for our feelings of mastery, wellbeing, physical health, and social adaption (Schiefloe & Bø, 2007). Good social support includes love, caring, to be recognized and the feeling of belonging to a social community and network (Norwegian Institute of Public Health, 2015).

In our life, we take on different roles according to the expectations and norms in our various social networks. Most people are included in many social contexts, and therefore act equivalently in different social roles (Fyrand, 1994). One such role is being a friend and having relations to others may be a source of safety and support the sense of one's own identity. Friendships vary in forms from near and close to more distant relations, however friends are the relations we choose in life and they function as a social support (Daatland & Koløen, 2013).

The Living condition survey implies that the Norwegian population in general have a stabile social network. However, the data shows that older adults have a slightly smaller social network than younger individuals have (Statistics Norway, 2017). Older adults seem to have fewer close friends than younger adults, suggesting there is a slight decrease in relations with age. However, older adults seems to have more contact with

family (Daatland & Koløen, 2013). A meta-analysis by Pinqart & Sorensen (2000) shows that the quality of social contact is far more important than the quantity of contact. Furthermore, it suggests that quantity of friendships is more important than quantity of family contact in associations to subjective wellbeing. In other words, the quality of social contact was more important regarding family ties.

### **2.4.3 Walking groups as a social arena**

Another thing to consider is where activity and exercise is facilitated, and who is participating may seem to have an influence on positive effects such as mood, health, and cognitive functions in individuals. The social environment can therefore play an important role in an individual's physical activity routine (Lexell et al., 2008).

According Torjuul, Birkenes, Myren & Torvik (2015), activity in a group may lend support, engagement, satisfaction, and companionship to older adults – and that in turn may be motivation in itself helping older adults to improve their wellbeing and physical function. Through interviews in focus groups all the participants underlined the importance of the social environment and getting together with friends.

Being outdoors presents a combination that is unique: being physically active in a beautiful natural environment with social connections that may promote social wellbeing (Boyes, 2013). Boyes article explores various ways in which older adults engage in outdoor activities: adventure engagement, the role of the environment, social aspects, and physical and psychological benefits of adventure programs. Participants in this study referred to the social experience as a highlight. The, the psychological and physical benefits were reported on, as well as improvements in physical fitness, wellbeing, and health.

Similarly, the findings of Sugerman (2001), where the most important reasons to participate in outdoor adventure, were the attraction to the natural environment, to be involved in physical activity and the acquisition of new skills. In addition, the social connection to other people with the same interest was also a reason to participate. A longitudinal study on walking groups and the positive aspects of wellbeing show an association between group walks in nature and perceived reduction in stress, depression, negative effects, and an enhanced feeling of overall wellbeing. However, this study did



not find any differences in the social support in the non-walking and walking group (Marselle, Irvine & Warber, 2014). On the other hand, Wensley & Slade (2012) found that walking in groups gave an enhancement in quality of life and wellbeing through social contact and social network. This was however a small study combined with semi – structured interviews. Communication while walking was important to the participants of the study and a way to share experiences.

## **3. Method**

### **3.1 Research design**

There exists many different forms of knowledge and one is not necessarily superior nor more correct than another. However, scientific research should present knowledge systematically and which is reflected upon critically, as opposed to random considerations. Assumably, there is a connection between all the stages in a research process and an openness into how a study is done (Malterud, 2017). To use a method means to follow a pathway from start to end, in attempts to uncover information about our reality. The method is chosen by the research question that one holds (Johannessen, Tufte & Christoffersen, 2010).

To be able to answer the research questions in this study, it was desirable to find an approach that viewed the phenomenon in a holistic manner and where one gained knowledge about the theme through peoples own descriptions and experiences. With this in mind, a qualitative method was chosen to explore and gain a deeper knowledge about the theme. Qualitative research methods give us an understanding of social and cultural phenomena and help us to uncover an individual's or a group's experiences, thoughts, feelings, and actions. In other words, the idea is to research how people experience and understand their own existence (Grimen & Ingstad, 2015), and to discover the characteristics of a phenomena (Repstad, 2014). This kind of data cannot be quantified but only described and needs to be interpreted. Usually, in qualitative research there are fewer participants with several variables, and the process is somewhat circular where the different parts of research intertwine with one another (Grimen & Ingstad, 2015). Often, one discovers interesting aspects during the research process, and one finds a need to adjust the research questions as one progresses (Repstad, 2014). Throughout the research process in this study the research questions were adjusted at times in accordance with new discoveries in the data material. No large adjustments were made, but small beneficial adjustments to reflect this study in a proper way.

### **3.1.1 Lived experience**

This study is inspired by the phenomenological approach because of its explorative way in uncovering individual's meanings, understandings, and experiences to a phenomenon (Johannessen et al., 2010). Phenomenology is the study of how one immediately experiences the life-world and one's own lived experiences. Lived experience does not only consider an individual's experience, but moreover how one responds and lives through experiences in life. Phenomenologists talk of lived experience as a means to explore dimensions of the human existence (Given, 2008).

Through this approach the researcher seeks to understand the meaning of a phenomenon seen through someone else's eyes (Johannessen et al., 2010). We are our body according to phenomenological approaches: we experience through our bodies and perceive the world by our senses. Without our body, we cannot reflect or sense our lived world. How we use our bodies actively have an influence on our health, mental state and how we perceive the world (Martinsen, 2011).

When using this approach, the research question must be formulated in a way that ensures that it is the informant's experiences one is gathering. Furthermore, the importance of collecting data from informants that are presumed to hold the kind of experiences in relation to the research question (Johannessen et al., 2010). The research question in this study comprises several aspects to gain informants experiences on participation, health, and wellbeing through a walking group.

### **3.1.2 Interview as method**

Kvale & Brinkmann (2015) characterize a qualitative interview as a dialogue between researcher and informant with a form of structure and a purpose. Interviews are a form of gaining knowledge of informant's lived world and enables one to interpret this. Through interviews it was also desirable that insight into several preconceived ideas would be obtained simultaneously. Therefore, semi-structured interviews seemed to be the most suitable method for this study, with a well-prepared interview guide and some flexible questioning which allowed one to achieve depth in data. Johannessen et al., (2010) describes the interview guide to be a base for the interview, but the order of questions and themes may vary. Therefore, semi-structured interviews can achieve a balance between flexibility and standardization. The formulation of an interview guide

should include several themes that derive from the research questions and subcategories in order to shed light upon the appointed themes. The interview guide may also be reassessed during the collection of data (Johannessen et al., 2010; Malterud, 2017).

When designing the interview guide, different themes and subcategories that could answer the research question were formulated into open-ended questions. To gain basic knowledge about the informants, the first questions were about their background in the outdoor walking group, age, and former occupation. These first questions were to learn more about the informants and to create an environment that informants felt safe in (Johannessen et al., 2010). The subcategories in the guide were not structured questions, but rather keywords to follow-up questions. The themes also gave the informants the opportunity to talk freely about their experiences. Finally, closing questions were structured to give the opportunity to reflect and provide more information that was of importance to the informants -or if they had any additions to the interview.

Since this study was about outdoor walking groups, it was initially interesting to conduct the interviews outdoors as a form of walk-along interview. A walking interview is a type of in-depth qualitative interview method and can be unique in obtaining contextually based information about how people experience their environment and the effects of the experiences on their wellbeing and health. Benefits with this type of interview method is that the respondent functions as a tour guide for the researcher, thus providing an opportunity to increase participation from the respondent. It may also reduce the typical power dynamics between respondent and interviewer (Carpiano, 2009).

### **3.2 Recruitment and selection**

A purposive sampling strategy was the best technique to gather informants for this study. The use of this strategy ensured that suitable informants were included in attempts to answer research questions. This is a way to make certain that categories of cases within a sampling universe are represented in the final sample. The sample is selected for a reason – either because they have similar features or characteristics or they are expedient to the aim of the research (Johannessen et al., 2010; Robinson,

2014). The inclusion criteria for this study was mature aged informants that participated in an outdoor walking group.

The numbers in the sample is influenced by practical and theoretical perspectives, in qualitative research there exists no standard assessment of sample size (Malterud, Siersma & Guassora, 2016). The suggestion of sample size to this study was not a fixed number – just an approximate sample size with a maximum and minimum. Sample size may be increased due to new information through the interview process (Robinson, 2014). Malterud et al., (2016) proposes the use of information power to indicate how many participants are needed in a sample. High information that is relevant for the aim of a study requires less informants, than lower information power.

The recruitment of informants went well, and there were no difficulties in getting participants to this study. The study included nine informants, where seven of the informants were participants in the outdoor walking group, and two of the informants were tour leaders of the group. All the informants were active in the outdoor group and their ages varied between 64 – 86 years old. Since the definition of a senior is unprecise, there being no accurate criteria for whom may be defined as a senior, it is emphasized that the outdoor group was a “senior group”. The age therefore varies as well as the experience and length of participation.

The initial contact with the informants was made through one of the group leaders in the walking group. The leader of the group was positive to the study and informed the outdoor group of it in order to seek out potential candidates. Tour leader received written information about the study, the informants’ rights, and informed consent papers to sign.

To establish a trustworthy relationship with the potential informants and to inform them further about the study, the researcher participated on a walking tour with the outdoor group. Beforehand, the leader had a list of candidates that would be willing to participate in the study. Interview times were agreed upon, and contact information exchanged between researcher and potential informants.

### **3.3 Data collection**

#### **3.3.1 Pilot study**

Prior to the interviews, a pilot study was conducted. The people in the pilot study were eligible and in the target group for this study's main purpose and research questions. When preparing for the data collection and developing the interview guide, it can be difficult to know if the questions relayed will work accordingly in answering the research questions, and what kind of dialogue it will instigate (Malterud, 2017). Therefore, it was suitable to test the questions before doing the interviews. The informant in the pilot study contributed with feedback on questions, and valuable insight into suitable themes that could be explored in the interviews. Several aspects from the pilot study were included in the renewed interview guide.

#### **3.3.2 Conduction of the interviews**

In the first phase of the interview an establishment of trust between researcher and the informant was set. This to create an environment where the informant felt comfortable and safe sharing valuable information (Malterud, 2017). Initially, the intention was to conduct the interviews when walking a tour, so it would be a walk-along interview. However, only one of the interviews was conducted in this manner. As a researcher, I learned that many of the informants felt more comfortable doing the interviews at their home. According to Repstad (2014) the place where the interview is conducted can influence the successfulness of the interview, therefore it may be important to find a place where the informants feel "at home". Most of the interviews were then conducted in the informant's own living room, one interview as a walk-along interview and one interview was done after the organized walking tour at the informant's car. All the interviews were conducted after the organized walking tour in the afternoon, or the day after. The informants decided the time of the day which suited them the best.

Before starting the interview, information about the study and the informant's rights during and after the interview were repeated. The informants had read the information guide and signed the informed consent paper in advance, and these were gathered in. In addition, any questions about the study or interview were answered. To obtain data a voice recorder was used in the interviews, so the focus would be entirely on the informant. After each interview, some reflections were noted.

### **3.4 Ethical reflections**

Research brings upon several ethical considerations, and through a qualitative method one comes close to the informants and their experiences of the world. When designing project purpose and research questions, one should consider that the final obtained knowledge should be beneficial in some way for society and for the informants that dedicate their time to participate (Malterud, 2017).

Due to personal information in this study, and the possibility that the informants could be recognized indirectly because of age and gender, and because of information stored electronically -this study was applied for approval at the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD). The informants were informed that the data obtained would be anonymized in order to maintain their confidentiality and privacy, and would only be used for the purpose of this study. Fictive names were given to ensure confidentiality, as well as the geographical place where the study had been conducted. All data was to be handled only by the researcher and supervisor for this study, and the information was stored on password secured files that no one else had access to. At the end of the project, all data and sound recordings would be deleted.

The law of privacy act clearly specifies there should be informed consent when researching on human beings. Furthermore, participants in a study should have knowledge and information about the study they are participating in (Johannessen et al., 2010). Informants received information about the study and informed consent forms before the interviews, so they had time to read through the papers. The aim and purpose of the study was repeated in the beginning of interviews to verify that they knew what the study was about. Information about their rights to retract from the study whenever they wanted without any further implications was explained again.

#### **3.4.1 The researcher`s responsibility**

According to Malterud (2017) when starting a study, we bring our prior knowledge into the whole research process. It affects how we gather, read, and interpret the data material. This prior knowledge includes experiences, hypothesis, and theoretical perspectives, and also the researchers own interests and motives. It is therefore impossible to be wholly neutral or objective in the research process, especially in qualitative studies. Throughout this study project I tried to reflect upon my own prior

knowledge and interests and tried to identify factors that would lead to the development of new knowledge. It was challenging at times when I saw how my own preconceptions might influence the questions in the interview guide. The pilot study also shed some light on perspectives that had not been considered previously. In science we expect that researchers keep an open mind throughout the research process in order to uncover and explore aspects of a phenomena that one initially did not think of (Malterud, 2017). An attempt to stay open-minded throughout the whole research process also opened up for further explorative perspectives that could answer the research questions.

### **3.5 *Transcription and analysis***

The transcription of the data was done by the project manager, shortly after the interviews. This to the effect of remembering non-verbal communication that occurred during the interviews, and which the audio recorder cannot catch the essence of. The process of transcription is a phase where audio becomes written language – and the process is influenced by the researcher's own interests and characteristics. Even though the raw data from audio recordings and transcriptions is respected, it cannot be perceived as entirely true as the data has been filtered through several processes (Malterud, 2017). According to Malterud (2017) it is therefore important that the researcher does the transcription process, and that it is done consecutively throughout the data collection.

The transcription and data collection was done by the researcher who attempted to stay true to the data in transcribing the data conveyed by the participants in the best possible manner. The transcriptions of the interviews in this study were done verbatim, where signs of laughter, pauses and sighs were included in the transcription. Detailed transcriptions can be useful for the researcher to draw attention to the different nuances that occurred in the interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

It is also important to mention that the data collected and transcribed was initially in the Norwegian language. The data is therefore through yet another process in translation, and some challenges may occur when trying to preserve the meaning of the content in best way possible (Malterud, 2017).



In the analysis process the researcher is attempting to find and reveal the true meaning of the interviews, what the data can tell us and how to retell the histories and answers from the interviews in a meaningful way. The data from qualitative research do not speak for themselves, they must be interpreted (Johannessen et al., 2010; Malterud, 2017). After the transcription process of all the interviews it was necessary to find a way to organize the written data in order to gain a bird's eye view of the material. Since this study was inspired through a phenomenological approach, it is usual to analyze the meaning of the data collected and read it in an interpretative way to find the deeper meanings of people's thoughts (Johannessen et al., 2010). This study used Systematic text condensation (STC) that is modified from Giorgi's phenomenological analysis. STC is useful in a variety of theoretical frameworks and holds several similarities to the phenomenological method, but also uses a descriptive approach to informant's experiences (Malterud, 2012). Commonalities between phenomenological analysis and STC are the described and relevant sides of a phenomena that are researched through analysis, and where the researcher's own experiences are set aside. The benefits of following STC are the advantages of being able to give a simple introduction in analysis processes for newcomers, and also in not requiring comprehensive theoretical and philosophical roots (Malterud, 2017). As a fresh and inexperienced researcher, the stages in the process were helpful. Moreover, this analysis seemed to fit as the data was summarized from several informants. Throughout the analysis process some categories and perspectives emerged that were not thought of initially, and this data was included in the results in an attempt to gain even more insight in the walking group as whole.

The first phase is to get a total impression of the data collected, all of it from chaos to themes. The transcribed interviews were read several times to get to know the data well, and to give a whole impression. Malterud (2012) suggests that one should look for preliminary themes, and the number of themes should be manageable. Suggestions for themes that would answer this study's research questions and develop them further were written down.

In the second phase of the analysis, relevant text is sorted and separated from text considered irrelevant to the research question (Malterud, 2017). The data considered relevant for this study's research questions were marked, and the data material was thoroughly gone through to identify meaning units. Malterud defines a meaning unit as:

A fragment of a text containing some information about the research question (2012, p. 797). As the meaning units were marked in the text, they were also systematically sorted into the themes that were written down manually - this part is called coding.

In the third phase, the meaning was drawn out of the units and sorted into subgroups that could comply with the research questions. In this phase the data was reduced from many pages of transcription to a text with fragments of the transcription – making it easier to sort out to subgroups. Some codings were placed elsewhere, or new subgroups were identified. The meaning units were then re-read several times to look for new patterns. The analysis resulted in four categories and eleven subcategories, however the numbers of categories and names were adjusted throughout the entire analysis process.

The last phase involved the synthesizing of the meaning units, and developing a story based on the data – a description. The pieces of text were put together and compared to the material they originally came from. The subcategories in this study received their own sections in the result chapter, and the descriptions were strengthened with quotes from the participants.

### **3.6 Quality of the research**

An important part of the research process is to consider the quality of the research done in a study (Repstad, 2014). To validate is to actively ask questions about the data's validity and how the method used represents a logical way in answering the research questions (Malterud, 2017). Also questioning to which degree, the method and findings in the research reflects the aim of the study and represents the reality (Johannessen et al., 2010). Validity is often divided into external and internal validity, which reflect upon the study's relevance and transferability.

External validity involves whether the findings can be transferred to similar phenomenon's (Johannessen et al., 2010), considering the context of the study (Malterud, 2017). We must consider the relationship between what kind of sample we derive our knowledge from, the type of knowledge we want to develop and reaching of findings. Several aspects were highlighted throughout this study that could be of importance and use in similar situations and walking groups. Still, some statements did

not apply for all the informants as there were some differences in the various subjects. This may however not be the aim itself as we were more concerned about finding the uniqueness in the individuals (Malterud, 2017). One limitation may be that findings only consider older adults which are already active and may have a good physical function and high wellbeing. Even though this study cannot apply to everyone, it can give an insight and deeper understanding of how a walking group may support and enhance one's health and wellbeing through various factors.

The sample size is also connected to the ability to generalize the findings, in this study the sample size is small with nine informants. However, there is no standard guide to how many informants one should have in qualitative research. Often, a deeper analysis with less interviews is better than superficial analysis of many interviews (Repstad, 2014).

Internal validity asks questions about the truth of the findings and how the method used, and the results are relevant to answer the research questions (Malterud, 2017). The strengths of this study's method lies in the semi-structured interviews capability to stay focused on the research questions, and at the same time allowing informants to speak freely about their experiences. In this way, the interview guide can be reconstructed to the individual being interviewed. The size of the sample is also closely connected to the relevance of the study (Malterud, 2017). This study had a purposive sampling strategy thus giving the researcher the opportunity to get relevant data in line with the research questions in search of answers. Because older adults are a homogenous group, this study covers several distinctive factors in the walking group.

Transcribing the interviews oneself gives the researcher the opportunity to remember valuable information relayed during the interview that could give meaning to this study. Doing this also strengthens the validity to the study done. Using a systematic analysis process when interpreting the findings helps verify the method used and makes it easier for others to see what has been done and increases chances to recreate the study (Malterud, 2017). The data collection is also accounted for to strengthen the reliability. However, in qualitative designs a re-creation is more challenging because of the interpretation of the researcher's own perception (Johannessen et al., 2010).

## 4. Results and discussion

In this chapter the results from the data material will be presented, along with discussions of the findings. The main findings in this study are as follows: 1) Experiences and qualities of participation in the walking group. 2) Experience of strengthened health and wellbeing. 3) The significance of nature experiences in the early years and throughout the lifespan. 4) Active seniors in the outdoor walking group – from the tour leaders’ perspectives.

These main themes were identified to answer the following research question:

“What characterizes senior participants in an organized walking group, and how do they perceive their own health through the walking tour? How informants experience and reflect on participation, health and wellbeing.”

### **4.1 Experiences and qualities of participation in the walking group**

#### **4.1.1 Sense of coping with retirement and loneliness through the weekly walking group**

Many of the informants say they were familiar with the outdoor walking group before they joined the group themselves. Some had friends or relatives that were active in the group and became therefore a part of it as soon as they became retirees. For Anna it was important to participate to expand her network and have a social relation to others when she became retired. She expresses her feelings like this:

*“After I quit working and my husband had been a retiree for several years, we decided to join the group to get out, make some new contacts and acquaintances and stuff like that. So that was the reason why we started walking then. We have always enjoyed walks, yes, but it has always been the two of us – when you are a part of a senior group you meet so many new people and that is valuable when you are retired - all considered... Well, I have a husband that is not a hundred percent well, so I thought it would be wise to have some contacts in case I may be alone someday. Have something to go on with, you know... So that was one of the reasons.” (Anna, 75 years).*

Halvor talks about the feeling when you suddenly are done working, and how different your life may be. Without a job, you may need something that gives you a feeling of coping and mastering everyday life. He expresses his feelings as such:

*“My point is that emotions mean a lot. We, seniors are very... well, there is no doubt that we become more and more lonely. We see friends pass, and it`s not easy. Before I stopped working, I would work 24 hours a day, and then suddenly you sit there watching tv-shows. Forced to do nothing, loss of spouses and friends getting sick. Well it is not easy. So, in a sense one`s coping, but it is important to feel that you are mastering things and contributing with something.” (Halvor, 81 years).*

Loneliness and the feeling of being lonely when getting older was mentioned by other informants as well. Some informants talk about seniors who have trouble walking becoming more vulnerable and leading into a situation of becoming lonelier. May talks of her own situation in this way:

*“Obviously, when you have problems with your legs and you cannot get outside and move about, you quickly feel lonely. So, it is a little important for me to stay fit, so I do not have to be left inactive. Mhm, when my husband died, I lived alone in the house, and was pretty lonely and passive.” (May, 64 years).*

Several of the informants underlined the feeling of loneliness, not in a sense that they themselves are lonely but rather pointed out the reoccurrence of seeing and hearing about loneliness on TV or other places. This could indicate that the informants have thoughts on loneliness and participate in the walking group to prevent it- in case of loss of spouses or others. Two of the informants talked about this and offered it up as a reason to join the walking group- “in case I may be alone one day.” On the other hand, due to the interview form - it may be that the informants did not want to share if they were lonely. Often the concept of loneliness is a negative one, and it is quite likely that it may be viewed as stigmatizing among older adults because of this stereotyping (Lunde, 2016). Informants also shared their views on who may become lonely, saying that people who become ill may be more vulnerable to loneliness. For some it was important to be physically active to maintain their health and therefore prevent sudden

illness. As shown in studies, people are most vulnerable to loneliness when it is related to the loss of a partner or restrictions in their own physical health – not necessarily of increasing age (de Jong Gierveld, 1998; Hansen & Slagsvold, 2016). Furthermore, studies show that mature elderly adults in Norway have the lowest rate of loneliness in Europe (Hansen & Slagsvold, 2016), and that the elderly are comparably satisfied with overall life (Hansen & Slagsvold, 2013). However, it is important to note that there seems to be a marked change in the oldest adults (over 75 years old), their perception of loneliness and depression were far more prominent now than five years previously (Hansen & Slagsvold, 2013).

One informant reflects on the transition from employee to the role of retiree, and that it can be difficult. This informant went from working many hours a day to having nothing to do when retiring. Transitioning from one role to another may be a strain for some as it requires adaptations to the new everyday lifestyle and mastering your emotions. There would seem to be certain expectations linked to the retirement role (Fyrand, 1994). According to a study by Syse et al., (2017), retiring in general appears to be associated with positive mental health and certain health behaviors, however for some people it may be a negative experience, and as pointed out retirees are a diverse group. This Norwegian survey included people aged 57 -66, where data was collected twice at five years intervals. The study excluded those in part two of the data collection who had retired because of health reasons and gained disability benefits (Syse et al., 2017). Because of this exclusion, the survey may only give us an association with the older adults who were employees until they reached retirement age and perhaps had an overall good health and were well functioning. My findings do not support any primary reasons as to why informants became pensioners and one can only assume why – leaving us speculative as to how informants perceive their own retirement. Unequivocally, informants started in the walking group when they were retired, and it would seem that the increase in leisure time contributed to participation. Finlay et al (2015) found that the integration of blue and green spaces in participant`s everyday life gave a sense of maintaining personal habits and their quality of life when retired. Using natural environments was important in the sense of decreasing feelings of loneliness, and provided a higher sense of purpose, social, physical, and spiritual wellbeing.

The findings in my study may be associated to Antonovsky's (1987) theory of salutogenesis and sense of coherence. Loss of friends or spouses and retiring may be stressors that happen in life, and participation in the walking group may be a way for the participants to counteract the feeling or the fear of becoming lonely, as well as lend support in the transition of roles to retiree. In other words, informants may make sense of events occurring in their lives, find meaning in being active in the walking group and find a capacity to do so. According to Antonovsky (1987), the development of SOC is stable from the age of 30 and into retirement. However, this is not empirically supported, and although they seem to be relatively stable, findings show that SOC can develop throughout one's lifetime (Eriksson & Lindstrom, 2011). Studies also show that the component of meaningfulness may be the most important one for older adults (Koelen, Eriksson & Cattan, 2017), Antonovsky (1987) also emphasizes this dimension as the most crucial one. Perhaps informants perceive the walking group as worthwhile despite problems connected to other dimensions in life. Through the engagement and commitment of the weekly walking group, one senses a higher meaningfulness or purpose, and this in turn enhances the two other components of SOC.

#### **4.1.2 Importance of being included in and feeling of belonging to a social network through the weekly walking tour**

The feeling of being a part of a social network and relatedness is something that some of the informants mention and they describe how relations and a simple: "hey" can be appreciated. One participant points out that it is important to be seen and heard in the senior citizens community - in other words being recognized is appreciated and may be an underlying cause to joining the outdoor activity group. Halvor describes it like this:

*"Otherwise, whether we will admit it or not – you go down there and join the outdoor walking tour, and some say: "Halvor", and you appreciate that. You are seen and noticed and can ask about things or you may have something to tell. So that is absolutely an underlying reason for this group. Fellowship in this community." (Halvor, 81 years).*

Per also describes the feeling of being a part of the group and says that it is a loyal group that always shows up to participate. If someone does not show up you wonder why they are not there, because you get to know everyone so well. Per says:

*“In a way, it’s kind of makes you wonder why he or she didn’t meet up today because you get to know everyone so well. So, we become like a big family in a way.” (Per, 74 years old).*

Another informant, Heidi, relates to the fellowship in the group:

*“On Wednesdays, being met with: Soo nice to see you!” (Heidi, 66 years).*

Several of the informants say that they rarely miss a walking tour, and that they participate regularly. Despite whatever reasons the participants have for joining the group, some say there need to be a particularly good reason for not showing up. Per describes it this way:

*“It has to do with the social aspect, as well as the exercise – getting outdoors. And for many people each Wednesday gets set aside for the walking tour in advance. Appointments and other things that you have to do you do on Tuesdays or Thursdays, or another day of the week. Wednesdays is the day for walking, and it is plotted in the calendar.” (Per, 74).*

One informant expresses how he perceives the importance of the weekly walking tours. Lars says:

*“It is the social aspect as well as getting outside and stretching your legs. I have talked to several of them, and this is their life – to participate on this walking tour. They don’t know what they would do if they didn’t have this walking tour once a week.” (Lars, 80 years).*

All the informants say that there is a good atmosphere in the group and among the participants. There are no cliques and you talk and chat with everyone - it is a pleasant and nice group of people. Kari, who is participating for the social relations offers her opinion:



*“There have been times when someone has said that it has been too long or too tiring. I know they talked about one trip once that was too long, but at that time I was not participating so I do not know. Hehe. But no, there is no one who is angry with anyone, not that I have noticed. But then again, I’m not that observant.” (Kari, 68 years).*

Kari and Per talk about the coffee and picnic break as especially important during the walking tour as a part of the social inclusion and communication. Per describes the importance of the interruption created by the break like this:

*“It is a nice group. And it is something about the coffee break as well, which is important. Although we are only away for only 2-3 hours and we do not really need any food like really, it is a part of the social aspect. Coffee and food. It is something about sitting down and talking with other people. If there is someone new in the group maybe you seek them out and talk to them. So, it is a social thing – to stop.” (Per, 74 years).*

Kari also expresses the break as a highlight of the walking tour, she says:

*“It is probably not because you need it or are very tired. Often, we walk in front or behind each other, so when we sit together it becomes very social. And the social part is... well, I like to talk.” (Kari, 68 years).*

Halvor talks about the walking group as a place that opens for social interaction and makes it easier to talk to other people. He points out the uniqueness about being social outdoors on a walk:

*“The reason why you participate on the weekly walking tour is mostly about the social atmosphere. You walk and talk to some more and others less – depending on the subject. I feel it is easier to talk with people on the walking tour than those who are having coffee every day in town. Every day they sit at the same place and have the same person beside them. For me that seems a little artificial and cumbersome.” (Halvor, 81 years).*

While chatting and the social interaction seems to be an important aspect of being a part of the group for many of the participants, one of the informants talk about an opposite feeling. The participant explains that the social surroundings is not that important to her, and that the movement of the body is a far more important motive for participating. When questioned on the social aspect of participating in the walking group, May who has been a part of the group a couple of years describes this:

*“It is not so much to do with the social aspect for me. I actually do not like to chat whilst I am walking. My dad often said that you should not walk and talk – you should use your powers to walk not chatting (hehe). So that is what I... well, I can chat with people, but I walk to walk and not to socialize. I walk to exercise and to get outside, and I am more pre-occupied with the nature surroundings than the social aspect.” (May, 64 years).*

For May, the feeling of being active and exercise outdoors seems more important and getting fresh air and exploring the natural surroundings. However, May mentions that it is a nice way to meet new people and to be recognized when meeting other participants elsewhere in her everyday life.

This study on elderly participants in a walking group shows how important social relations, social support and social networks are for numerous informants in relation to the weekly walking tour. These informants talk about and highlight the social aspects of participating, ahead of the physical efforts of participating. As it is been theorized about and proven through social networking, humans are social beings and need relationships to increase our knowledge and enhance quality of life (Bø & Schiefloe, 2007). The findings around the importance of belonging to a social network can be understood when considering a human’s social needs. According to Bø & Schiefloe (2007) safety, meaningfulness and relatedness are fundamental needs, and we need confirmation of our own identity and dignity through social networks. Furthermore, Antonovsky (1979) points out social support and social relations as important coping resources in maintaining or developing higher SOC. The feeling of belonging to a social network is crucial in order to experience motivation and mastering in one’s own life, and movement toward the health pole in the salutogenic health continuum.

Bergland et al., (2016) also shows how social networks are associated with a perceived higher quality of life, as well as physical health. Being a part of the walking group where all participants are seniors could possibly give a better sense of identity, where being safe and understood through the sharing of similar values and interests. Interaction and social relations are according to Fyrand (1994) when exchange of values feels meaningful for both parties and the interest is mutual.

The walking group`s positive effects on social relations and participants social relatedness in a social network are repeated through interviews from several informants. Informants talk about how they feel a sense of belonging in the walking group – and how everyone contributes in creating a fellowship. If someone does not show up, they wonder why. Thus, friendships and being socially connected are profoundly important for our own safety and identity (Daatland & Koløen, 2013). In the salutogenic approach, social relations may be seen as one of the key factors to developing a strong SOC (Eriksson & Lindstrom, 2011).

Communication in the form of talking with others, especially in the coffee break during the walking tour is deemed special, and one informant mentions that talking to others when outdoors felt more natural and came easier. This is also shown in qualitative interviews by Wensley & Slade, (2012). They reported the natural environment as a social arena where it was easier to open up for difficult themes. Furthermore, the communication was highly valued. Their study does not include older adults, but younger people. Still, social needs are present in all human beings, and are an important foundation in living our lives (Bø & Schiefloe, 2007). Sugerman (2001) and Boyes (2013) also looked at the experience for outdoor adventure groups with older adults and found that natural environments enhanced the participant`s social wellbeing. Sugerman (2001) found that the connection between the participants in the form of shared interests was a reason to participate.

Still, one informant talks about the opposite feeling of being sociable and chatting whilst walking with the group. Even so, this participant along with others stated that it was nice to participate and to be recognized in the social network, and according to Bø & Schiefloe (2007) the feeling of being appreciated and seen may be looked upon as the essence of several social needs. The informant may feel and relate to social support in

the walking group, whether or not she is chatting or talking whilst walking. By participating in the walking group on her own terms, she finds meaning in the weekly tour as an activity and therefore maintains a degree of SOC in her life. The informant may have good friends in the walking group and is satisfied with the quality of those relationships rather than talking to everyone in the group.

#### **4.1.3 Experience of the customization of the weekly walking group**

The informant's experiences of the outdoor walking group are seemingly positive, and some express the organization of the weekly tours as motivational and good. Kari, who has been a part of the group for several years says this about the organization of the walking tours:

*“There is a slightly different pace among all the participants, but we do stop and wait. If someone walks too fast, they get called back. It is after all a group tour – that is specified. We have to stick together.” (Kari, 68 years).*

May, who has been a part of the group for a couple of years also addresses the positive adaption of the walking tours and how the tour leaders are good at their job:

*“The tour leader has been chairman of the group for as long as I have been a part of it, and I think he is really good. He is good at including everyone and making us all feel as a part of the group on the tours He takes care of everyone so that the tempo does not become too fast – so that everybody is with us. “Now we have to have a break” he says, hehe. So, we stop, and everyone gets a break.” (May, 64 years).*

May also explains that she likes the walking tours that are on gravel roads and a flat surface best, because if there are too many tree roots and a rough terrain, then she does not have the same positive experience as the others.

*“When we walk and climb up hills, I have to look down all the time. And I tell the tour leader when starting out that I do not know where we are at all - for all*

*I know we could be on our way anywhere. I cannot orientate myself - I just walk and look down. So, I do not get the same experience.” (May, 64 years).*

May explains further that there have been many walking tours on broader paths and gravel roads:

*“But we have had many great walks where we have walked on slightly wider trails and on flat ground, and that is nice. They say that it is good for your back to walk in the woods, to walk in rough terrain because of the movement in your back. But I do not want to ruin my hip, therefore I prefer to walk on flat ground. (May, 64 years).*

Two informants, Anna and Per mention that every year they get a list of all the different walking tours and the destinations. In this way the participants can follow the list and maybe seek out if there is a walking tour they especially do not want to attend. Anna says this:

*“It is like this - most of the participants they know these walking tours. So, they pretty much know if it is a hard tour, and maybe they do not want to attend that particular tour. We plan our walking tours, and it depends a bit on the weather as well. Especially in wintertime. So, then we must find another tour. But we do not take the toughest walking tours we had to skip those (...) They are good at finding other options. (Anna, 75 years).*

Other important aspects of the weekly walking tour that some of the informant's mention is cultural elements. On some walking tours the tour leaders will tell historical facts about the place they are walking through – sometimes they have local guides that join them as well. Two of the informants, Lars and Halvor, lists the cultural additions as important to them when participating. Halvor likes to tell the stories as well. Lars talks about culture and history like this:

*“It is very social, you talk about everything and you also get some information on - well things we pass on the way that is interesting. Some historical stuff, or*

*things like that. Yes, so it is very important to get to know not only the terrain, but also things that have happened in the terrain.” (Lars, 80 years).*

Halvor tells this story:

*“There are some funny stories (...) that I have tried to include. There were boatbuilders here in this town, shipbuilders – call it whatever you want. One condition was that they should have an oak log in the boat. It had to be oak. Once they had trouble finding materials here in this area, so they purchased a log in Sogne [another town, remark of the author]. They then had people to row it here (hehe), they towed it from Sogne using a rowboat. It is so incredible! Think about the distance and the oak log, and the rowing! It is so cool! They probably spent weeks – in wind and weather. So, I think it is a fun story and I have tried to share such stories with the others.” (Halvor, 81 years).*

Informants confirm that one group leader walks first ahead of everyone and one walks last behind the group assuring that everyone keeps up. There are breaks during the walking tour and the tour leaders regulate the pace with which they walk. It seems like the tour leaders are good at facilitating so that many can participate, and they also find alternative routes if the weather makes the terrain wet and slippery. However, there are challenges in facilitating so everyone is happy about the pace, length, and surface of the walking tour. For some, the hardest terrain may be small paths with slippery roots and other obstacles in the way. Some participants may have fears of falling and causing injury to themselves. Still, walking in varied terrain and differing surfaces may have a positive impact on balance, general mobility and walking ability – and therefore contribute to overall enhanced physical function. Having faith in one’s own abilities seems important for participation in activities, whereas low self-esteem can be devastating for participating in activities which feel unsafe (Lexell, et al., 2008). One informant talks about the fear of injury whilst walking, perhaps feeling the physical demands as being higher than her own capabilities and tells of how she always has to look down when walking. Despite this, the informant regularly participates on the walking tour and it may be that the informant perceives the walking tour as especially meaningful to her and therefore continues participating. According to Roe & Aspinall (2011) being challenged can be a positive experience for some individuals, but not for

everyone. Some challenges that are too demanding may lower one's own sense of manageability, but in my study the informant still feels a sense of manageability – just not to her full extent.

Overall speaking, the informants declare it is nice when taking a break to be told about the places they visit. For many people, the interaction between culture and nature at a site are the foundation for the experience, and the motivation for walking (MCE, 2016). The informants that listed cultural additions as important also mentioned the importance of passing on historical facts and events that have happened. This is also shown in Svarstad (2010), where participants wrote letters about why they would go hiking. They wrote of the meaning of a sense of belonging and of the linkage to past living conditions in landscapes they were visiting while hiking. Some emphasized the importance of passing this on to new generations, in order to experience the sense of connectedness (Svarstad, 2010). It is often said that friluftsliv is an important piece of Norwegian heritage and identity: Perhaps following in the footsteps of previous lives when walking, visiting cultural sites and through these nature experiences we obtain a sense of belonging which in turn strengthens our own sense of identity further.

#### **4.1.4 More women than men participating**

About whether there are more women than men participating, Heidi says that she does not really think much about it, and to her it seems mostly that there is a fair portion of both sexes in the group. However, in another activity group that she participates in for those who cannot walk very far, the majority of participants are women. Heidi says:

*“On Wednesdays it is quite even. But on Tuesdays, there are not many men participating. Men die before women, so the women are left behind. Women usually live longer than men (..) So there are many widows participating on Tuesdays.” (Heidi, 68 years).*

May also expresses her opinion on the number of women participating:

*“I think that the average of women participating is higher than for men, yes. I think so. There are many couples participating, but also many single women.*

*And a couple of single men, but I have not really thought about it that much. It doesn't matter if you are a woman or a man, we are all human." (May, 64 years).*

May continues talking about why there may be more women than men:

*"They talk about it on the news that there are many lonely people... older people, and there are more men than women. Women are better at going out and meeting people. Men do not have the same forums: they do not go to women's night or stuff like that. Women and mothers have been more with their children doing various things and following them up – many men have probably been at work more and traveling. And then, they do not have the same network as women do when the kids grow up and move away (...). But when it comes to walking, I think that perhaps men are less active because that they are ill more. Women are stronger, that we are the strongest sex." (May, 64).*

If there are more women than men participating in the walking group, then that seems to be something that informants do not focus on much. In obtaining data for this study, the number of men and women recruited as informants was quite even. When asking them what their thoughts were on this, they mostly stated that there are small differences. Studies done on life expectancy show that women have a higher life expectancy. However, it would seem that men have a higher expectancy of being healthy for more years than women (Eurostat, as cited in Budfir, 2016). In other words, women live longer, but men live more years where they are healthy than women do. This does not necessarily mean that the difference in life expectancy among men and women is an overall factor for participation. One of the informants mentioned that women may have more network and forums outside their own home. This may be seen consistently with the Living Condition Study (2016) that shows that more women than men report to have close friends, and when getting older there is a slight drop in friendships for more men than women (Daatland & Koløen, 2013). Furthermore, the participation in outdoor activity according to Dervo et al., (2014) has changed over the decades. More women are participating in outdoor activities, especially walking in nearby nature. A reason for this may be seen in relation to women's organization of family life and household, and in women being slightly more active overall with exercise.



According to a study by Bergland et al., (2010) more men than women were likely to walk more than one kilometer and had a greater walking ability. Perhaps this could be as men have a higher rate of healthy life years throughout life, and that the calculated life expectancy does not say anything about an individual's health. As for participation in the walking group, my findings do not assume any exact numbers of women nor men. Even though some informants mention that there may be a smaller ratio of men to women in the group, this is something that has not been researched enough in my study to draw any conclusions from.

## **4.2 Experience of strengthened health and well-being**

### **4.2.1 Physical activity and experiencing debilitation of the body**

This section will consider all of the activity that the participants do including participation in the walking group.

All the informants are walking on other days of the week, some every day and others on specific days. Lars and Anna explain that walking once a week with the group just is not enough physical activity. Lars who has been in the activity group for 18 years, and has been active in sports most of his life, says:

*“One walking tour a week is not enough. You have to walk more: I walk with others or by myself. In order to stay in shape this one walking tour is not enough. After all, it is not always possible to walk as when winter comes there is snow and ice. I therefore have to work out at home where I have a bike, and yeah the thing you pull – a rowing machine.” (Lars, 80 years).*

Almost all the informants talk about physical activity and the challenges of getting older. The commonalities are that the older you get, the harder it is to stay in shape. Per, that has had a heavy physical job throughout his working years talks about retiring and an exhausted body:

*“When becoming a retiree, it does not mean that you need to be sitting. I have been working until I was 70 and have always had long days. My body is worn out, but I notice that whenever I'm walking or exercise – it keeps the body going. If I sit down I'm afraid my body will stiffen. I see many people that I know who*

*cannot get out of their chair. In reality they probably could've if they had just begun initially. So, I have faith in that, you have to keep going.” (Per, 74 years).*

Kari, who has always enjoyed being outdoors and has been on many walking tours talks about her latest hiking tour to a popular hiking destination in Norway, Besseggen:

*“I have had the opportunity to walk Besseggen several times, and I have always thought that this time is the last time. However, I then get persuaded again to do the hiking tour, but now I have walked that tour for the last time, hehe. I noticed last time that it was painful walking downhill, and that is something I never felt before... so you get older. There is no doubt about that. It is important to keep fit or else it will be gone. I also think that the older you get, the sooner it will fade away if you do not move your body and maintain your fitness. I think so.” (Kari, 68 years.)*

Furthermore, Kari says that she notices a change in endurance when she is active, and she talks about when she regularly walks an uphill:

*“It is good endurance exercise: I notice that when I walk uphill it becomes easier when you have done it for a while. After all, it is very gratifying. You know, as you get older it is easier to fall down.” (Kari, 68 years).*

Both Lars and Per who has been active in sports such as orientation and skiing say that they do not participate in that kind of sports now. Per says that he did not have the time when he started working long hours. Lars describes that he misses skiing sometimes:

*“Skiing, that has something to do with your balance. I really liked skiing, I did. But it is not like, it is that relevant any longer. In a way I really miss it, hehe. I have the skis at home in my garage, hehe, so maybe I will try a little. But it has to do with my balance, and I think that it can be trained.” (Lars, 80 years).*

For Per it is important to be physically active, and apart from participating in the outdoor walking group he also walks every day for the positive effects of exercise:

*“With a tired body, walking in terrain is better than walking on asphalt or flat roads. That I can notice on my back and feet- that it is not as good as, well walking in varied terrain.” (Per, 74 years).*

As for the perspectives on being active outdoors, Lars who has always been active explains that it becomes a sort of a notion that you must get outdoors:

*“It feels like your body has to get outside, you just have to, yes. So, it becomes like... an opium, hehe. You notice on your body if you have not had the opportunity to be active, so it is important. So, it is actually a motivation. And it is nice to be outside in the natural environments. Especially at this time of year.... Gyms and swimming pools are not the same, hehe.” (Lars, 80 years).*

One thing Per and several other informants talk about is the feeling that their body will stiffen, and that you have to keep on going to maintain physical form because it is harder than before. Throughout life there is a decline in normal physiological functions with aging. Loss of muscle mass, reduction in cardiorespiratory function and changes in mobility and balance may be experienced (ACSM, 2009; Lexell et al., 2008). However, aging is an individual process meaning that there are variable factors in how you age. Lifestyles factors such as physical activity can have a major impact on how you age and reduce the risks of several illnesses (Lexell et al., 2008). Still, findings in my study have not taken into consideration whether or not any of the informants have any prior or current illnesses or physical challenges. Mostly because the method used to collect data was open-ended interviews that focused on what the informants described and on developing that information, and because of the emphasis on wellbeing and health.

Findings in my study uncover that it is important for the informants to keep and maintain their physical form and function. The informants seem to be active seniors who especially enjoy walking several days a week. As one of the informants mention: “It’s actually motivation”, when talking about how the body needs movement. According to Eriksson & Lindstrom (2006) the relation between SOC and physical health are quite complex, even though SOC may be a contributor to people’s health. The informants in my study who are active several times a week, view their physical health as important thus providing them with a meaning to why they choose to be

active. This motivational factor is perhaps triggered by having a body that still be physically active, giving the informants a higher sense of what they are capable of doing, and enhancing their perceived health. According to the salutogenic theory, one can perceive one's own health as good and move towards the positive health pole, despite having illnesses (Antonovsky, 1996).

A review by Keysor & Jette (2001) shows that physical activity can improve physical function, aerobic capacity, strength, and flexibility in older adults. Other studies also imply that late-life exercise and physical activity are highly likely to help improve overall functions, even in very old adults. With the walking group as an arena for physical activity there are probably more opportunities than not to be active in various terrains and on differing surfaces. This again contributes to improved mobility, balance, and physical form for the participants. Hence, walking may be one of the best activity forms for older adults and is an important part of outdoor mobility. This suggests that self-rated health might have a strong connectedness to outdoor walking ability (Bergland et al., 2010). Walking is also the most performed activity in Norway, quite possibly because of its simplicity and that it is an activity many people can manage as well as its minimized risk of injury (Morris & Hardman, 1997).

One informant points out that “gyms and swimming pools are not the same”, saying that it is nicer being outdoors in natural environments to exercise. Corresponding findings from Hervik & Skille (2016) interviews with middle aged and older men in Norway show that the participants would rather be outdoors doing physical activity than being indoors. Even so, the physical activity level varied among the participants, but some said that being inside in a fitness center did not give them the same benefits and they felt more active when exercising outside (Hervik & Skille, 2016). Hence, referring to the ART by Kaplan & Kaplan (1989), the natural environment and physical activity outdoors may provide more than just physical benefits. Stimulus of various senses may perhaps be a reason to why people enjoy being and doing outside in nature, rather than being inside at a gym. Furthermore, nature may help us in restoring and maintaining our physical health.

#### 4.2.2 Sensory experiences in nature

The informants talk about the many sensory experiences that occur in natural settings, and how this is highly appreciated. May, who appreciates the nature experience more than the social aspect explains how she feels when she is walking in natural environments:

*“I walk to get movement and to get outside. I am more concerned about the nature experience, than the social aspect. I think it is lovely, I can get dressed and go and walk by myself on my usual route – without another human being. Because it is so nice to move my body. I also like to listen to the birds, and - well look at the weather and swans on the water. Flowers and trees and stuff.” (May, 64 years).*

The use of all senses in natural environments, and noticing all the sounds in the surroundings is something that Anna talks about:

*“Fresh air, and when you walk in the forest you can feel like it smells of forest. And by the sea where you can smell the sea and seaweed – it is lovely.” (Anna, 75 years).*

Per also expresses how nature has an impact on his health. He is fascinated by the wildlife in nature and appreciates being active outdoors. Per has been active in outdoor sports earlier in his life:

*“Nature means a lot you can say. The different seasons have different qualities in nature. I also think it`s better for the body... You have birdlife and wildlife, and you can hear, sometimes you can hear deer. You may not see them, but you can hear them. Birds that is chirping, it is pretty interesting.” (Per, 74 years).*

Halvor is one of the informants that is more than most preoccupied by the experience of nature. He describes how nature is inspiring to him in this way:

*“The more you know about nature, the more exciting it becomes. You do not go to an opera unless you know something about opera. You do not listen to classical music when you do not know anything about it. You must work quite a*

*long time to understand something and like it. I'm not musical, but I know quite a lot about nature, and that makes it more and more interesting... So, I can stop and look at a mountain and the crooked thing there and find it interesting. In nature everything is connected and has meaning.” (Halvor, 81 years).*

Halvor continues saying he is walking several days a week to “get fresh air”:

*“It is the exercise, and we have to get outside to get some air we say. Yes, we have to get some air. It is quite airy, hehe. It is, after all, a commonly used term; get outside and get fresh air.” (Halvor, 81 years).*

Another informant mentions that the nature experience is not that important to her. Kari tells that it can be just as nice sitting in a restaurant with friends:

*“I have to admit something about nature. I might as well enjoy a restaurant with people, as much as walking in the forest. Well, so it's mostly for the social perspective... it is nice and there are areas that are pleasant, but I like being in the mountains more. I prefer to hike in the mountains because you get the real view and fresh air.” (Kari, 68 years).*

Even so, Kari likes the mountains and has always been on hiking trips to big national parks in Norway. There may be a difference in feelings walking in forests or walking up in the mountains.

Many of the informants mention the heightened awareness of many senses, such as sight, sound and smell when walking outdoors. It is a place where you can feel alive and appreciate the fresh air. In other words, being outside in natural environments may allow us to experience enhanced senses that one normally would not experience indoors. Informants in my study seem to enjoy experiencing the smell of the forest, sea or watching birdlife and wildlife. This can also be seen in Orr et al (2016), a review on qualitative studies considering sensory experiences within the natural world. Several categories of sensory experiences were identified, and one of these is the experience that emphasizes vision. Meaning that watching and looking at nature creates enjoyment – where plants, flowers, the beauty of nature and watching wildlife and birds gave a

connectedness to nature. These visual descriptions can show how older adults perceive enjoyment and pleasure and how they can feel a connection to nature by watching it (Orr et al., 2016). These associations are also shown in Finlay et al (2015), where older adults enjoyed walking in pleasant natural environments and immersing themselves in the sounds, sights, and smells around them. The study also considers the multisensory experience of blue spaces, like listening to the sound of water or dipping one's toes in water and the experience of the restorative environment in relation to enhanced perceived health.

Likewise, Hervik & Skille (2016) found that motivation to exercise outdoors were related to opportunities of having sensory experiences and improved health by getting "fresh air". The notion of fresh air is also described as a sensory experience in Orr et al (2016), making the weather not just a visual perception but also a feeling. "Fresh air" was linked to wellbeing, feeling alive and being a part of the world (Orr et al., 2016). Similarly, the sensory experience of feeling the fresh air on skin and hair, as well as the joy of different smells and sounds were connected to sensual pleasures in Phoenix & Orr (2014) study on older adults, pleasure, and physical activity. The sensory pleasures were experienced spontaneous feelings throughout the activity.

One informant talks about nature as interesting and exciting, and of taking note of details in the landscape that others may just pass by. This point of view is interesting, and maybe it lies deeper within us – curiosity as to a deeper meaning of nature. It might be seen related to the biophilia hypothesis, that humans are evolutionarily connected to nature and have a need to be in natural environments (Grinde & Patil, 2009). For this reason, humans are finding natural environments exciting and giving nature more meaning. In the same way, Svarstad (2010) found that hikers reported to feel a linkage to the nature that they wandered in, and a feeling of belonging to human history.

The sensory experience along with fascination of the natural surroundings and the fluctuating seasons, might be interpreted through the attention restoration theory. According to Kaplan & Kaplan (1989), people tend to search for a deeper understanding of nature's role in their lives, and that natural surroundings could function as a restorative environment. Natural settings could contribute to the attention of the human mind in a sense that does not require that much effort and then again does not drain our

mental health. For example, the fascination when being in natural environments could stimulate various senses and interesting experiences. Furthermore, feeling a higher sense of belonging to the world could be restorative for the informants. However, Kaplan & Kaplan (1989) suggest that what kind of environment individuals prefer can be affected by one's experiences and knowledge about an area. Kari in my study prefers the mountains to the forests as perhaps her experiences connected to outdoor life and friluftsliv mainly has been wandering in the mountains. Kari grew up in an outdoors family where vacations were spent outdoors, often in the mountains hiking or skiing and this may have contributed to her preference for this type of environment.

#### **4.2.3 Subjective wellbeing; mood and happiness in natural environments**

Several of the informants do believe that being active outdoors influences their mental health, and Anna talks about how she is feeling when walking:

*“I think it is lovely. If you are constantly thinking about something, you can take a walk to clear your mind. It is as if your minds still and become more peaceful. So, I think that is really great.” (Anna, 75 years).*

Several informants think it is difficult to express their perceived mood, May talks about this:

*“Ehh, well, I do not know. I live alone so there is noone telling me when I am angry or not. I think I am pretty even, yeah. But I like to get outside, I am happy to be outside. I am very fond of birds and listening to their chirping ... I like to look at all of life, the gardens, the nicely mowed lawns – I find it quite cozy. Houses and properties, and I get in a really good mood when I see how nice people are keeping their properties. Some like to walk in the forest, I like to get out of the forest – then I am in a good mood. I do think that you can get a bit angry or sad if you do not have the opportunity to walk outside. If the weather is dreadful for days, I then say I am a bit weather sick.” (May, 64 years).*

Better mood or feeling happier after being with the outdoor walking group is something that some of the informants talk about from the perspective of the social interactions with other people. Having relations and someone to talk to seems to improve one's overall mood. Kari describes her own mood:



*“We are having a good time on Wednesdays, so one is always in a good mood then. That is clear. However, I think for my own part that I am pretty stable in my moods, hehe. Neither bad nor extremely bad or extremely good days – I think I am stable. But just because it is so very social on Wednesdays, you become really happy.” (Kari, 68 years).*

Per also thinks that the weekly walking tours are contributing to a good mood:

*“You notice that. Everyone’s mood is particularly good because you have the social aspect. That is why Wednesdays are kind of a holy day, hehe – and that is good.” (Per, 74 years).*

Halvor describes how he feels after a walk:

*“I feel that I am alive after walking.” (Halvor, 81 years).*

Being active in natural environments seems to have a positive impact on the informant’s mood and happiness. However, it is important to note that the questions asked regarding their own mood after a walk seems to be something that the informants found difficult to answer. It could be that several of the interviews were conducted many hours after the walking tour, but even so, throughout the interviews the informants state that there is something special about being active in natural environments (as pointed out in the previous section). However, considering their own specific mood after a walk was somehow more difficult to answer, even though the informants said that they presumably improved their mood after being active in natural environments. Since subjective wellbeing, happiness, positive affect, and psychological wellbeing are terms that intertwine with each other, it can be difficult to separate them and just consider one. They are used in several ways although they measure the same thing; and they are subjective to perceptions individuals have on how they see their own life (George, 2010). Even so, according to Hansen & Slagvold (2013) emotional reactions among older adults become weaker and less intense, also the negative emotions. Furthermore, they viewed emotions that decrease with age. “Feeling irritated” and “feeling excited” were intense emotions or feelings that decreased the most (Hansen & Slagvold, 2013).

One informant in my study mentioned that a walk in a natural environment can reduce her spinning thoughts, and her mind becomes more peaceful. This might be related to the restorative effect nature has on us when we are mentally fatigued, and by placing oneself in an environment that has minimal demands on our direct attention (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989). Phoenix & Orr (2014) show how “the pleasure of immersion” was one important type of pleasure in relation to physical activity within older adults. Focus on mind and the body through physical activity could distract the participants from preoccupied thoughts in the moment of movement (Phoenix & Orr, 2014).

A systematic review by Zhang & Chen (2019) shows the relationship between physical activity and happiness. Although this does not exclusively show physical activity in natural environments, their findings show that there is positive associations between being active and happiness. Several randomized, controlled studies in the review were conducted on older adults who displayed an increase in happiness (Zhang & Chen, 2019). One informant in my study likes to walk by houses and look at all the nice gardens and mentions that “I’m happy to be outside”. This can show both a link to being physically active outside, and perhaps how viewing green areas has an impact on the informant’s mood without being necessarily in a forest. For example, Orr et al (2016) show in their systematic review how viewing nature also from one’s own window might have an impact on wellbeing and appreciation of nature. In Finlay et al., (2015) qualitative interviews with older adults found how blue and green spaces could have an impact on mental wellbeing, such as peace, restoration, and rejuvenation. Some participants also mentioned the importance of just being or sitting outside, getting fresh air, and viewing green spaces, but also nice gardens in their neighborhoods (Finlay et al., 2015). Furthermore, a study by Houlden et al (2019), findings support that nearby green spaces have an impact on mental wellbeing, especially life satisfaction.

The informants in my study seem to be active individuals with several walking tours a week, so is it the activity level that gives an enhanced effect on happiness and mood, or is their happiness making them more active? Eriksson & Lindstrom (2006) found that the salutogenic approach as a health promoting resource was associated with better wellbeing and subjective health. In this way, SOC could be highly related to one’s mental health, especially for those who initially held a higher sense of SOC. As Zhang and Chen (2019) mention in their review, the association between happiness and

physical activity might be mediated by health status and social functioning. Næss & Hansen (2012) found that those who appreciated and participated in activities outdoors had more positive feelings and were happier in their lives. Even though, some associations towards quality of life and the use and appreciation of nature were small, they were beneficial.

Another aspect of good mood that the informants mention is in relation to the social network that the weekly walking group provides. Informants stated that the social aspects of the weekly walk, influenced their moods positively and that is why Wednesdays are particularly important. As shown in the section regarding social networks, these networks are important for our perceived quality of life and wellbeing (Bø & Schiefloe, 2007). In George's (2010) review on later life, it is shown how social relationships and social support is an important determinant for subjective wellbeing. This is also shown in a meta-analysis by Pinquart & Sorensen (2000), the quality of social contact was closely related to subjective wellbeing, more so than the quantity of social contact.

### ***4.3 The significance of nature experiences in the early years and throughout the lifespan***

#### **4.3.1 Nature as a playground**

To understand and get an insight into what characterizes the participants of a senior walking group, it is valuable to gain some knowledge about the earlier stages in their lives and experiences of outdoor life and friluftsliv. Have informants always enjoyed being outdoors in nature and have their childhood experiences had an impact on further use of nature. The term "Sunday tour" is a common phrase in Norway where you spend your day outside in nature with family or friends and take a packed lunch and thermos with coffee or cocoa with you.

Many of the informants speak of a childhood where they were active outside and in nature. Nature was their playground. Halvor tells that he spent a lot of his time outdoors:

*“We were outside a lot, there was no TV’s, nor radio or these games, hehe. So, it was the outdoors, that was our playground.” (Halvor, 81 years).*

Anna also remembers being outside playing:

*“Because we were outside playing, and in the winter, we went tobogganing. There were not that many cars or traffic, at least not where we lived. It was quite simple, and we spent the day outside.” (Anna, 75 years).*

Many informants talk about playing outside, however there is a slight difference in whether the informants spent time with their family (mother and father) hiking outdoors. Several of the informants talk about walking tours or playing in nature, but never with their family. Halvor explains that hiking trips was an uncommon phrase, and one which they rarely thought of – even exercise was an unusual word for him:

*“Oh, I have to think about the hiking trips... Well, okay, so the importance of hiking trips was never really emphasized in daily living. And exercise was not something we needed that much at the time because we got that in other ways. I remember my dad thought exercise was.... Well, it was an unknown term back then. My father thought it was a funny word, the Housewife association started a gymnastics group where they gathered some housewives and had gymnastics, and they got so tired that they had to take a cab home, hehe... That was the first time that I heard about someone doing that then, and that was probably back in the 60’s.” (Halvor, 81 years).*

Halvor explains further about the walking tours in his adolescence:

*“When I was a kid there were not... well, we went on hiking trips, Sunday walks and skiing I remember. And we hiked as well when growing up, but our parents did not participate. It was older siblings or friends.” (Halvor, 81 years).*

When asked if they spent much time on hiking trips in their childhood, Anna and Per says that they did not go on hiking trips with their families. Anna spent a lot of time outside playing, and perhaps that is the reason why her parents did not see the need to go on hiking tours. Anna explains it in this way:

*“No, I wouldn’t say no, we basically did not go on many hiking trips or walks. After all, I was an only child. I was outside of course, but we did not go on hiking trips in my childhood.” (Anna, 75 years).*

Per has always liked to be outdoors and spent a lot of time outside in both his childhood and adulthood. Often, he would go walking in the woods alone with just his backpack:

*“We were outside a lot. I liked to walk in the woods back then too. So, in the autumn when I was walking in the woods, I would always take a backpack with me and take a bunch of wild berries with me home. There were the berries, and I liked to be outside in the woods... Our family was not that keen on walking tours, but I loved it. My dad though liked to walk, that is true... Well, I walked by myself a lot, but that was fine.” (Per, 74 years).*

Some of the informants express that they had very little of the culture of hiking from their families, whereas several other informants tell of childhoods in outdoorsy families. Kari, May and Heidi had parents that liked being on hiking and skiing trips – and often had their children with them. For Kari it had a positive impact on her outdoor perspective, Kari expresses how it was in this way:

*“Well, it is quite a long time since I was a kid, when I was a small child not everyone owned a car. So, we would take the bus to our cabin, and just hiked in the nearby surroundings. Because we came from – well we lived in the city. When we got older, we spent every summer in the mountains, and every Sunday in the wintertime skiing. My dad was a very outdoorsy man and he wanted us to be that too, anyway some of us became that. Hehe. We were an outdoors kind of family.” (Kari, 68 years).*

As for May that had an outdoor loving family as well, she did not have the same experience with hiking and skiing. She had enough of all the outdoor trips, an “overdose” of the outdoors which she describes in this way:

*“My dad was a skier in his youth, so our parents took us skiing every weekend. We built a cabin high up in the mountains above the tree line and drove up as*

*often as we could to go skiing- and for as long as we could until the spring and summertime. I was so tired of skiing, I used to say ... when I grow up and can decide for myself – then I will never go skiing again. Hehe.” (May, 64 years).*

May explains further how she felt when she had to be a part of her families outdoor living. When everybody else started summer activities outside – she was with her family on skiing and hiking trips:

*“Well, we went to the cabin around Easter holiday, you know. And when April and May came along, my friends started walking around in sandals and started skipping rope outside. We then got dressed in our warmest clothes and went to the mountains searching for the last snow so we could go skiing. It was not fun, it was not fun at all. I was so tired of skiing, I wanted to wear sneakers and sandals, and were not allowed to do so. We were supposed to have ski boots, but I did not want to. So, when I grew up and moved away from home, I did not feel the urge to go skiing anymore. I didn’t want to go out in the woods, I moved to the city and lived in the middle of concrete and stone.” (May, 64 years).*

Also Heidi had a family that loved being outdoors skiing, even though it was not her favorite thing to do. She liked to have her feet on the ground and liked to go hiking in the woods with her friend. She tells it in this way:

*“It is a long time ago. You could say, well, I had a dad that almost forced us out skiing when we were young. But it was not my favorite thing to do.... Me and my friend liked to go hiking a lot. So, we were always outside walking together, and we have been doing that for as long as I have known her – and I have known her since before we started school together.” (Heidi, 66 years).*

Both Heidi and Kari had positive experiences with growing up in an outdoorsy family, they continued to be active outdoors and enjoyed it.

Several of the informants spoke of a childhood where they were a lot outside playing, “outdoors, that was our playground.” Furthermore, the same informant reported that “there was neither tv nor radio or these games”, suggesting that there has been a change

in how children experience nature and outdoors. The linkage between changes in playing outdoors and the use of nature was something also other informants mentioned. This supports previous research done on changes in nature experiences and playing outside among children (Karsten, 2005; Skår & Krogh, 2009), and the increased responsibility of parents, other adults and public institutions to encourage nature contact (Skår et al., 2016). Skår & Krogh's (2009) findings from a qualitative study show that there has been a change in children's natural experiences from spontaneous play to more planned and adult-controlled activities. Their findings consider different time periods, with participants reporting that nature used to be a place of duties and play, and simply as "something that was there". According to Karsten (2005) the word "playing" meant "playing outside", suggesting that the main domain of activity took place outside. Also, the study by Karsten (2005) considers the decrease in playing outdoors as well as the increase in supervision from adults. However, the study took place in a city in the Netherlands, where most children played in the streets in contrast to Skår & Krogh (2009), where the study was conducted in a geographical area with more similarities to my study.

One interesting view that several of the informants highlight is the nonparticipation of parents on walking or hiking tours. It seems that it was more common to do this with friends or siblings, and that they spent so much time outside that they did not think much on it. This is also shown in Skår & Krogh (2009), where no participants reported being with adults in nature, but some remembered different age groups with both girls and boys playing together. Furthermore, the memories of nature were considered to be both playing, but also duties and work. In the sense of helping parents with various tasks outdoors. Skår et al., (2014) shows that the youngest children are playing more outside than older children now perhaps because of parents taking them outside. According to several studies, there has also been an increase in concerns among adults towards increased traffic and unsafe natural surroundings (Skår et al., 2016).

Secondly, the minimal hiking and walking trips with parents could perhaps be linked to the changing trends in outdoor life and friluftsliv throughout decades, or to the term friluftsliv itself. Friluftsliv is often defined as something that is carried out far from home (Skår, 2010), perhaps playing outside in natural surroundings was not associated with friluftsliv itself. From the foundation of DNT already in the middle of the 1800's,

they tried to promote and inspire to trekking and cross-country skiing in rural areas. Making friluftsliv something that attracted people living in cities and urban areas of Norway (Ween & Abram, 2012). The content of friluftsliv is also changing in line with social, economic, demographical, cultural, and political changes in society (Dervo, 2014). From being in early times activities reserved for urban citizens to explore rural nature, to changes in the 70`s with more rural people participating and enjoying the life of trekking as much as visitors from urban cities (Ween & Abram, 2012). In comparison to my study, the interviews were conducted in a small county in Norway surrounded by nature and oceanic lines, perhaps giving this community less urban characterization. It must be mentioned that some informants were newcomers while others grew up in the county, making it hard to point out to which extent the differences in growing up in rural contra urban landscapes were among the informants. It might also be important to consider the age differences among the informants that ranged from 64 – 81, could make some sense of the differences in the use of nature and friluftsliv as children. As the informants in the upper age continuum of this study report the presence of minimal adult supervision, whereas the youngest informants report having a more outdoors oriented family. Furthermore, two of the youngest informants grew up in a city, and could suggest that to be active in friluftsliv they had to get out of the city. These informants tell about holidays spent in the mountains and at the cabin. In Skår & Krogh (2009), several distinctions in time periods growing up show lesser duties and more leisure time for the children, along with participants remembering some walking trips with family. Perhaps greater leisure time and differences in economical factors for families contributed to an increase in weekend holidays with walking and skiing trips. However, my study has not considered the different time periods extensively or enough to conclude with anything relating to the changes in society, making it only a topic for discussion.

#### **4.3.2 Significance of early experiences and engagement with nature**

As described in the section above many of the informants had a childhood characterized by playing outdoors, and many of the informants mention that they always have been active in one way or another. Some have been active in sports or have enjoyed other outdoor activities such as skiing in their adulthood. When talking about how it affected



their life when they became parents or older, several of the informants talk about walking tours and an outdoors lifestyle being something that they continued with as a family. For Halvor Sunday was a regular walking trip day. Kari that grew up in an outdoor oriented family continued to take her kids out skiing and walking:

*“I had walking tours with the kids when they were little... and we were skiing a lot. We had something called distance cards that we would fill out every time we went skiing on how many kilometers we skied. And when the spring came, they would get a reward or something like that and this was important for them – it was important for my boys. So, we went skiing a lot, often when it was school holidays or on Sundays.” (Kari, 68 years).*

Per who also enjoyed the outdoors throughout his childhood and used to participate in orientation events, speaks of how he continued to be active with his kids. He tells it in this way:

*“We were on walking trips and that resulted in when our kids grew up, they took their own kids with them on walking trips... We had two girls, and we used to carry them on our back in a baby carrier and go hiking.” (Per, 74 years).*

When asking Per if he thinks his own appreciation of the outdoors has had an impact on his family, he says:

*“Yes, clearly. They are walking a lot in nature now. And I think it helps to pass it on and continue with it, because they have been very fond of being in nature. And their kids also like to go on walking tours.” (Per, 74 years).*

As for May that had an “overdose” of the outdoors life in her childhood, she says this about finding the joy of hiking again:

*“I got over it, and I have been on tours out of my own free will. However, it is far and few between each time I have skis on my feet – I have to admit.” (May, 64 years).*

She further explains that she has never been to any of the popular hiking destinations in Norway, but enjoyed the nature in other ways and has had many wonderful tours:

*“I have been on many nice trips. I went on many boat trips with my husband, we had quite a large boat. We were out on the ocean a lot, mooring at night at small islets and climbing around on their rough rocks. So, we used nature in that way. I did not do any water skiing or stuff like that, but we were in our boat a lot. More out at sea than on mountain tops. It is a kind of outdoor life that as well. The best thing is fresh air, to breathe in outside and the feeling of fresh air down your lungs. It is good, and it's extra good when it starts to get a little cold – Yes, I think so.” (May, 64 years).*

Many of the informants continued to spend time in activities outdoors when they grew up and when they started their own family. The association between people's engagement in green spaces and outdoor life in childhood, and their relationship to nature later in life is an interesting perspective. Being physically active outdoors in the early years has been suggested to be an important influence. However, according to Rowland (2008), there is no determinant relationship between being physically active as a child and being active into adulthood, mostly because of the lack of experimental evidence. On the other hand, Tapps & Fink (2009) suggest that children who are not engaged and exposed to nature experiences, are more likely to have a lesser interest in green areas in adulthood. The relationship between early engagement in natural experiences and the likelihood of using natural environments later in adulthood, is however shown in a study by Thompson et al., (2008). The survey included two projects in Britain, and findings show that the frequency of visits to green and natural places in childhood was associated with how often they later in adulthood visited the same places. Their findings also suggest that being exposed to nature in early life was related to people's own confidence later in life in visiting nature alone, emotional renewal and physical activity. This could also be seen considering a large study from Denmark where higher levels of green spaces during childhood was associated with a lower risk of developing various psychiatric disorders later on in life (Engemann et al.,2019). In similar matters, my study revealed that most of the informants were engaged in natural experiences as children and further on continue to be active outdoors throughout their lives. How this affected their subjective wellbeing throughout the lifespan is difficult to

measure, but as mentioned earlier in this study: the informant`s perceived subjective wellbeing increases when being outdoors.

However, one informant reports that the outdoors oriented lifestyle in younger years made her not engage that much in outdoor activity when grown. For this informant there was too much outdoor activity happening when growing up, however she reconnected with the outdoors as an older adult. The biophilia hypothesis suggest that people can hold both positive and negative affections to natural surroundings, but that biophilia might increase in an individual`s interaction with the natural and social world (Kahn, 1997) Furthermore that the biophilia trait can through experiences and learning be either strengthened or subdued in individuals (Grinde & Patil, 2009). According to Kluge (2005) participants engaging in outdoor adventure programs related to their past experiences, may be represented in one of three groups. The second group in this article “second time arounders`”, or those who have had some experiences, and wish to reconnect with their past selves or seek a new meaning in life.

Several informants report taking their own family on walking and hiking trips, and as one informant states, “it helps to pass it on and continue with it”. Showing that natural experiences are important to the informant, and he wants his own children to perceive and experience the same enjoyment. In a study by Loeffler (2019), participants stated that it was important to continue going out on trips with their children as a part of family tradition.

Overall, childhood experiences may have provided the informants with confidence in engaging in activities outdoors such as walking, hiking or sports. Being active from an early point in life may be a contributor to the informants' lived life experiences with natural surroundings and also engaging their own family in walking and hiking trips such as Sunday trips. Furthermore, Antonovsky (1987) suggests that life experiences are the basis for either high or low SOC. Starting from early childhood with high levels of the resources (GRR) which enables one to build a strong SOC. Such as Loeffler (2019) suggests: “The seeds of older adult`s participation are often sewn in childhood and the participation changes over the lifespan...” (p. 118). The study suggests the importance of engaging in nature-based activities in childhood as a factor for healthy ageing – both physically and psychologically.

#### **4.4 Active seniors in the outdoor walking group – from the tour leaders’ perspective**

##### **4.4.1 How is the outdoor walking group organized and facilitated for the participants?**

The senior outdoor activity group started early back in the 2000`s, and as the tour leaders explained, it started with a group of seniors that wanted to go walking together. The walking tours were longer and a bit harder back then. Michael who has been a part of the group since the start tells it like this:

*“Gradually there were more and more participants, and the group became well known. At that time, the walking tours were a bit...well, a good deal longer than they are now. The length of the walking tours has slightly decreased.” (Michael, 86 years).*

Paul, who has been participating for over 10 years, says the same thing:

*“We hiked both up hills and down hills, it was a lot of more exhausting trails at that time.” (Paul, 76 years).*

After over 20 years in existence, the outdoor walking group has gradually become a large group of seniors that every week meets up to walk together. The tour leaders explain that this group is an independent group and they are not a part of the “Norwegian Tourist association.” There has been some talk about becoming part of the tourist association, but that is something they want to bring up at the annual meeting. Paul explains how this works:

*“We are independent, and we like to be independent, hehe...We have some questions about this, so we are going to bring it up at our meeting with the board eventually. How to do this? Because as I understand it, they want us to join the tourist association. I am a member as a private person, but there are many that are not. Anyhow, the group is not a part of it, but we will address this.” (Paul, 76 years).*

As for the board of the outdoor walking group, it consists of several people that regularly have meetings. Even though they are an independent group, they each year

receive some financial support from the local bank – and the members in the group pay Nkr10 for each hiking tour. Paul who has been on the board for several years talks about how they do things:

*“We have five members on the board, well, that’s the senior group. We also have another walking group, and it has one leader. That person is also a member of our board, so all together we are six members. We have meetings regularly, and the board organizes the walking tours. We decide upon which walking tours at two meetings during the year” (Paul, 76 years).*

Paul further explains how many walking tours they have during in a year, and how they share the roles as tour leaders in charge of each walking tour:

*“We have about 16-17 walking tours in the autumn and spring semester, and we make a list over each tour. On that list there are dates for each tour, and we always walk on Wednesdays. So, we plan everything on the list, the destination and who is responsible for the walking tour. We then distribute the list to all the participants, so everyone can see where we are going. In that way they also have the opportunity to choose which walking tours they want to participate in... We are ten people that function as tour leaders, and we share that responsibility. And it is good that it is not always the same person.” (Paul, 76 years).*

On the question if the walking tours are weather dependent, or if they ever cancel or customize the scheduled tour, Paul says proudly that they only once in 20 years canceled a walking tour. He says this:

*“What is important here is that we always try to implement all of the walking tours. We do not cancel any tours, no. Two years ago we had to cancel one, and that was the first tour we have canceled in the entire history of the time this outdoor walking group has existed. That has been the only time in 20 years... If it is bad weather, we sometimes must alter the route– I think we did that with nine hiking tours. The weather was so bad that we could not walk the tours on the program, like the tour we were supposed to do today. Another person and I went out there on Sunday to check the terrain, but it was too wet with too many*

*slippery roots, so we had to find another walking route... We do put some effort into setting up these tours and try to adapt the walking tours to the conditions.”*  
(Paul, 76 years).

This study is concentrated around one of many walking groups that exist in Norway. Various associations offer walking groups directed towards seniors, and some also offer historical walks or hikes to significant places. One of the major associations that organizes walking groups is the Norwegian Tourist Association (Nordstrom, 2020). However, in my study the walking group is an independent group – as they like to say. It seems that the walking group may have done many things right when creating and facilitating walking tours since the participants come back every Wednesday. The DNT association reported that in 2017 they reached over 300 000 members (DNT, n.d.). It may be fair to suggest that the national romantic idea of friluftsliv, and the job the DNT as an organization has done throughout years has had influence on why people continue to use the natural surroundings. How a walking group or walking intervention can enhance physical activity and enjoyment among older adults are also shown in studies (Jancey et al., 2008; Kassavou et al., 2013). According to Jancey et al., (2008), a community-based program where the participants could interact with their neighborhood was motivation to be physical active and to develop social networks.

According to Tapps & Fink (2009), there is a need and desire for instigating outdoor activity programs for older adults. One main point they consider when creating outdoor programs, is the importance of freedom that may give a sense of responsibility and control. Meaning that the outdoor program should not be structured tightly. The tour leaders in the outdoor walking group inform about the predetermined walking tours giving participants lists on the upcoming trips. Thus, offering the opportunity to participate whenever they like, and removing any pressures of having to participate every time. The fact that the tour leaders are seniors themselves, may give participants a heightened sense of their own identity and safety (Dalgard & Sørensen, 2009). Perhaps the participants relate to them and feel safe in the choices of walking tours that the board has made.

The tour leaders also adapt the walking tours according to weather and conditions by going out themselves observing the terrain. They talk freely about doing so thus

giving everyone an opportunity to participate. Tapps & Fink (2009) considers safety to be an important factor when planning outdoor activity, and Kluge (2005) also points out that participants in an activity group bring with them various experiences and knowledge to the table when participating, and as with any other age group safety is an important issue. According to Antonovsky (1979), in order to experience a degree of SOC and mastery in life, it is important that the activities or perceived situations are manageable, comprehensible and provide individual meaning. The tour leaders express that they put a lot of effort into facilitating, making sure that the walking tour is manageable for the participants.

#### **4.4.2 What does the participation mean to the tour leaders?**

The senior group is popular in the community and it has had many participants throughout the years. For being such a small community, it is impressive that they have such good backing and support, something the leaders as well as the participants are proud of. On questions about the participant number, and why they think that so many people are participating, Paul says:

*“It is also about getting to know people, we have seen lately that many newcomers who just moved to this community are participating. And they think that it is nice to expand their network and see new places where they never have been. Even people that are from around here experience new places.” (Paul, 76 years).*

He further explains why he thinks people participate again and again:

*“The important thing about these walking tours has been to get people outside, right. Get outside and do endurance exercise. As well as getting outside, the social aspect is important – and that is good. The coffee break means a lot to the participants. And at last, they get to experience new places in the district. We stick to nearby walking trails” (Paul, 76 years).*

Michael, who has seen people come and go in the outdoor activity group for 20 years, says that Wednesdays has become a kind of “sacred” day for the seniors:

*“You can say the ones who participate, if you talk with them you understand that Wednesdays are marked on their calendars. That is how it is, they are going on the walking tour on Wednesdays. So, they say that on Wednesdays they are not available for anything else because they are going hiking. These days are sacred and set aside to go on hiking tours.” (Michael, 86 years).*

The social aspect of the hiking tours is repetitive in all the interviews. Tour leaders also highlight the annual trip to Denmark and the Christmas feast as popular gatherings among the participants. On these occasions as many as 70-80 seniors participate, and they even had to hire a double decker bus to make room for everyone on the last trip to Denmark. Paul says:

*“At the annual meeting we call it the “Porridge feast”. We have some entertainment and go through the annual report as well as the financial stuff. We also have the voting in of the board. In the spring we have a trip to Denmark, where we leave and are away for four days. There were extremely many participants on that last trip.” (Paul, 76 years).*

As Michael and Paul like to be active outdoors, they like their job as tour leaders very well. On questions on what their motivation is to function as a tour leader, Paul says:

*“For my part, I think it is tremendously nice that we have so many happy people with us on the hiking tours. I also find it nice to get outside and do some exercise, and for our part as well – see places that I rarely visit. It is good to get to know new people, and it is great to follow them and see how they develop and whether they like the walking tours. And I think that’s a really good part!” (Paul, 76 years).*

Michael also reflects over the social aspects and the good mood he is met with by the group, and the importance of this:

*“I see when we are hiking that there is a good mood amongst the participants. I believe that is a good medicine. I meant that, there is no doubt!” (Michael, 86 years).*



When interviewing both the tour leaders and the participants, the huge number of participants throughout the years is something they emphasize. At the very most there have been over 70 participants however, at this point in time the usual number of participants is 30. The tour leaders especially point out the social aspects of participating as a crucial factor in returning. This was confirmed by several informants through the participant interviews and repeated throughout the data collection. As the tour leaders explained, they also have an annual trip and other social gatherings, which the informants also talked about. This walking group may therefore also function as a place where several social happenings occur, and not just the weekly walking tour. Perhaps creating a social community for older adults in a small town, and as mentioned several times through this study the social networks and social support we experience in our lives is valuable and important. The social networks we engage in and are committed to are especially crucial as coping resources (Antonovsky, 1979). Having the weekly walking tours in natural environments could also be associated to biophilia (Kahn, 1997), as we feel a connection to our social network but also an affiliation to the natural surroundings. It may be that this interaction feels stronger when there is a feeling of sameness from experiencing something together in nature.

The tour leaders express that they also get to know the district better, and that this is something they appreciate. According to ART, restorative effects can also happen in nearby surroundings and we do not have to be far away from our home as we have differing preferences in environments (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989). Hence, some may enjoy new experiences not far from home.

In addition, the tour leaders express that they appreciate seeing how participants develop through these weekly walking tours. They find the job meaningful and worth engaging in. Moreover, it is shown from projects on walking groups for older adults that voluntary recruited tour leaders create a sense of ownership in the group. In Norwegian society voluntary work holds a strong position and is important in the development of *friluftsliv* (MCE, 2016). Furthermore, Statens seniorråd (2017) show that older adults are well represented in voluntary work and in creating social networks, and by this a contributor to combat loneliness in society. Voluntary work could therefore be seen as highly important and could give a higher sense of quality of life and wellbeing. Tour leaders that foster and implement social support, encouragement and positive feedback

could help give the participants of the walking group motivation to participate. Thus, giving their role as a tour leader importance in doing so (Jancey et al., 2008).

Similar to findings in other studies done on outdoor adventure programs, walking groups and leisure activity, it might be that the walking group considered in my study has created an environment offering physical activity, enjoyment, nature experiences – and one of the most highlighted points: a social arena to connect and communicate with other people. Therefore, as mentioned previously, the participants set aside Wednesdays in order to join the walking group each week.

## **5. Conclusion and implications for further research**

The purpose of this study has been to gain insight into who the participants are in a senior walking group in, and focus on their experiences of participation, health, and wellbeing through the group. Also, to gain insight into how the walking group was organized, facilitated and how the tour leaders describe their engagement with the walking group. With these purposes in mind, the following research questions were formulated:

“What characterizes senior participants in an organized walking group, and how do they perceive their own health through the weekly walking tour? How informants experience and reflect on participation, health and wellbeing.”

To gain insight and deeper knowledge about the themes presented and catch the essence of experiences connected to the walking group, a qualitative method with semi-structured interviews was used. This study was inspired by phenomenology to explore the holistic view of the informant’s own experiences, descriptions, and opinions. The goal has not been to quantify the findings, but rather complement previous research with a more in-depth perspective.

To analyze and interpret the findings, this study used a phenomenological inspired analysis. Systematic text condensation was chosen because of its use in various theoretical frameworks, and of its many commonalities to phenomenology. Through categories about the informant’s experiences and qualities of the walking group, this study discussed what the informants perceive as important for participating. Loneliness was one aspect that came up during interviews and was explored further. For many informants, participation in the walking group may be a way of coping with retirement and a way to make social connections. This study points out how the walking group is perceived as a meaningful place for the informants, and social support and social relations as important coping resources. Furthermore, findings also show that there are small differences in male and female participators in the walking group.

The informant’s own perceived health and wellbeing were identified as important in this study and being active outdoors contributed to their level of physical activity, which

many pointed out as being crucial at their age. In fear of being left sitting still, they felt an urge to move their body. However, several informants mention that it takes more activity besides the weekly walking group to maintain their fitness level and reflect upon the need to be active several days a week.

Nature experiences gave the informants sensory experiences like watching and hearing wildlife, as well as the various smells in the natural environments. Informants mention the nature experience as interesting and lovely with some informants being more preoccupied with these experiences than others. Nature also seemed to have effects on the informant's moods and happiness. However, many informants seemed to find it hard to rate their own mood after a walk, but state that since the weekly walking group was a place to socialize, they became happier. These findings may give some hold to the attention restoration theory, as a way of describing the effect natural environments have on individuals.

To gain knowledge about who participates in a walking group, the informant's engagement in nature and greenspaces in childhood was explored. Several of the informants told of a childhood spending a lot of time playing outside. However, interestingly, some did not have any recollection of being in nature or on walking trips with their parents. On the other hand, some of the youngest informants spoke of a childhood in an outdoors oriented family. These findings might show differences in the changing trends in friluftsliv. The study found that many of those who had active childhoods and spent time outdoors as adolescents continued to be active in the outdoors or in sports as adults.

The research in this study shows how a walking group for seniors is important for participants, and the organization behind establishing the group and how they take care of everyone due to the facilitation by the tour leaders, social aspects and entertainment throughout a walking tour. These factors may be important in providing the participants with activities that are comprehensive, manageable and gives them a sense of meaning – maintaining a sense of SOC and therefore moving towards the positive pole in the health continuum. Having a longer coffee and lunch break gives the walking tour a place for social connection, and also having historical and cultural facts presented during the tour occasionally is appreciated among the participants.

This study has some limitations. Firstly, a small sample of nine informants located in a specific geographical area limits the transferability. The informants were also active seniors participating regularly in outdoor activity. Moreover, this study had a broad perspective, so it is also clear to say that there is a need for further investigations into several of the main themes by narrowing them down. Therefore, there cannot be drawn any firm conclusions, but insights into directions for further research on these themes. Also due to the method used in collecting data where the interviews were open-ended and focused on what the informant had to tell. This leading to new and interesting discoveries. The data collected in this study cannot give a statistical generalization, but perhaps shed some light on different aspects to the themes presented.

This study considers a broad holistic perspective of the participants in the walking group and touches many factors that may be important and relevant for older adults and healthy aging strategies. Furthermore, this study might provide a view on how organizations can facilitate activity groups for older adults. We now know through research that both physical activity and green spaces do impact our health and wellbeing, however it seems that research considering older adult`s own experiences in the natural world are sparse. Because of the broad approach, further research could dig deeper into several of the main categories found in this master thesis such as: significance of exposure to nature in childhood and throughout life; how SOC may function as a health promoting approach in outdoor activity groups for seniors; and how nature`s restorative effect on the human mind may inadvertently effect feelings of loneliness in elderly people positively. In this way, more research could increase knowledge in both how to succeed with activity programs for older adults, and how older adults perceive their own lives in relation to natural spaces. Furthermore, this might also provide more knowledge on the impact of nature and greenspaces throughout the lifespan.

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# Appendix 1: Approval from NSD

22.5.2020

Meldeskjema for behandling av personopplysninger



## NSD sin vurdering

### Prosjektittel

Active Seniors in the outdoors - lived experiences, health and well-being

### Referansenummer

673218

### Registrert

01.10.2019 av Melissa Mosby - melissam@student.nih.no

### Behandlingsansvarlig institusjon

Norges idrettshøgskole / Seksjon for kroppsøving og pedagogikk

### Prosjektansvarlig (vitenskapelig ansatt/veileder eller stipendiat)

Kirsti Pedersen Gurholt , kirsti.gurholt@nih.no, tlf: 90044205

### Type prosjekt

Studentprosjekt, masterstudium

### Kontaktinformasjon, student

Melissa Mosby, melissa.mosby@hotmail.com, tlf: 40628282

### Prosjektperiode

30.10.2019 - 30.06.2020

### Status

05.10.2019 - Vurdert

## Vurdering (1)

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### 05.10.2019 - Vurdert

Det er vår vurdering at behandlingen av personopplysninger i prosjektet vil være i samsvar med personvernlovgivningen så fremt den gjennomføres i tråd med det som er dokumentert i meldeskjemaet 05.10.2019 med vedlegg, samt i meldingsdialogen mellom innmelder og NSD. Behandlingen kan starte.

### MELD VESENTLIGE ENDRINGER

Dersom det skjer vesentlige endringer i behandlingen av personopplysninger, kan det være nødvendig å melde dette til NSD ved å oppdatere meldeskjemaet. Før du melder inn en endring, oppfordrer vi deg til å lese om hvilke type endringer det er nødvendig å melde:

[https://nsd.no/personvernombud/meld\\_prosjekt/meld\\_endringer.html](https://nsd.no/personvernombud/meld_prosjekt/meld_endringer.html)

Du må vente på svar fra NSD før endringen gjennomføres.

<https://meldeskjema.nsd.no/vurdering/5d925268-ca2e-4b43-a09a-980c5d7bbf66>

1/2

**TYPE OPPLYSNINGER OG VARIGHET**

Prosjektet vil behandle særlige kategorier av personopplysninger om helse og alminnelige kategorier av personopplysninger frem til 30.06.2020.

**LOVLIG GRUNNLAG**

Prosjektet vil innhente samtykke fra de registrerte til behandlingen av personopplysninger. Vår vurdering er at prosjektet legger opp til et samtykke i samsvar med kravene i art. 4 nr. 11 og art. 7, ved at det er en frivillig, spesifikk, informert og utvetydig bekreftelse, som kan dokumenteres, og som den registrerte kan trekke tilbake.

Lovlig grunnlag for behandlingen vil dermed være den registrertes uttrykkelige samtykke, jf. personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav a, jf. art. 9 nr. 2 bokstav a, jf. personopplysningsloven § 10, jf. § 9 (2).

**PERSONVERNPRINSIPPER**

NSD vurderer at den planlagte behandlingen av personopplysninger vil følge prinsippene i personvernforordningen om:

- lovlighet, rettferdighet og åpenhet (art. 5.1 a), ved at de registrerte får tilfredsstillende informasjon om og samtykker til behandlingen
- formålsbegrensning (art. 5.1 b), ved at personopplysninger samles inn for spesifikke, uttrykkelig angitte og berettigede formål, og ikke viderebehandles til nye uforenlige formål
- dataminimering (art. 5.1 c), ved at det kun behandles opplysninger som er adekvate, relevante og nødvendige for formålet med prosjektet
- lagringsbegrensning (art. 5.1 e), ved at personopplysningene ikke lagres lengre enn nødvendig for å oppfylle formålet

**DE REGISTRERTES RETTIGHETER**

Så lenge de registrerte kan identifiseres i datamaterialet vil de ha følgende rettigheter: åpenhet (art. 12), informasjon (art. 13), innsyn (art. 15), retting (art. 16), sletting (art. 17), begrensning (art. 18), underretning (art. 19), dataportabilitet (art. 20).

NSD vurderer at informasjonen som de registrerte vil motta oppfyller lovens krav til form og innhold, jf. art. 12.1 og art. 13.

Vi minner om at hvis en registrert tar kontakt om sine rettigheter, har behandlingsansvarlig institusjon plikt til å svare innen en måned.

**FØLG DIN INSTITUSJONS RETNINGSLINJER**

NSD legger til grunn at behandlingen oppfyller kravene i personvernforordningen om riktighet (art. 5.1 d), integritet og konfidensialitet (art. 5.1 f) og sikkerhet (art. 32).

For å forsikre dere om at kravene oppfylles, må dere følge interne retningslinjer og eventuelt rådføre dere med behandlingsansvarlig institusjon.

**OPPFØLGING AV PROSJEKTET**

NSD vil følge opp ved planlagt avslutning for å avklare om behandlingen av personopplysningene er avsluttet.

Lykke til med prosjektet!

Kontaktperson hos NSD: Kajsa Amundsen  
Tlf. Personverntjenester: 55 58 21 17 (tast 1)

## Appendix 2: Information about the study and informed consent

### Invitasjon til å delta i forskningsprosjektet:

#### “Active Seniors in the outdoors – lived experiences, health and well-being”

Dette er et spørsmål til deg om å delta i et forskningsprosjekt hvor formålet er å sette fokus på turdeltakere i et organisert turtilbud for seniorer. I dette skrivet gir vi deg informasjon om målene for prosjektet og hva deltakelse vil innebære for deg.

Hensikten med dette masterstudiet er å undersøke hva friluftsliv og turer betyr for helse og livskvalitet for seniorer i dag. Målet er å kunne bidra med ny kunnskap om hva som kjennetegner livet til seniorer som deltar i organiserte turtilbud – ut ifra deres egen livsverden og erfaringer.

For å kunne svare på disse spørsmålene og øke kunnskapen rundt temaet søker jeg etter seniorer, både menn og kvinner som kan tenke seg å bli intervjuet.

Prosjektet er et ledd i studiet «European Master in Health and Physical Activity», og gjennomføres ved Norges Idrettshøgskole.

### Hvem er ansvarlig for forskningsprosjektet?

Prosjektet ledes av masterstudent Melissa Mosby, Norges Idrettshøgskole.

Prosjektansvarlig og hovedveileder er Professor Kirsti Pedersen Gurholt, Norges Idrettshøgskole.

### Hvorfor får du spørsmål om å delta?

Jeg henvender meg til turgruppa fordi dere er midt i målgruppen for mitt prosjekt, og representerer erfaringer som kan kaste lys over hva friluftsliv og naturopplevelser betyr. Ved å delta kan du være med på å øke kunnskapen rundt hvem som er deltakere, og hva som gjøre turer og opplevelser i naturen betydningsfulle og verdifulle å delta i. Du blir forespurt om å delta fordi du er deltaker i et lokalt turtilbud.

### Hva innebærer det for deg å delta?

Hvis du takker ja til å delta i prosjektet vil jeg invitere deg med på et intervju, som vil vare i cirka 45-60 minutter. Intervjuet kan gjennomføres på forskjellige måter, det kan foregå ute i naturlige omgivelser mens vi går en tur eller et annet sted der du som informant føler deg komfortabel. Selve intervjuet vil ha form som en samtale. Spørsmålene jeg stiller vil handle om dine egne erfaringer og opplevelser som deltaker i en turgruppe – samt omkring friluftslivets betydning for deg. For å få med all viktig informasjon fra intervjuet, ønsker jeg å benytte en lydopptaker som kun jeg har adgang til. Om du ønsker å delta ber jeg deg å signere samtykkeerklæringen.

### Det er frivillig å delta

Det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet. Hvis du velger å delta, kan du når som helst trekke samtykke uten å oppgi noen grunn. Alle opplysninger om deg vil da bli slettet.

Deltakelse i prosjektet vil ikke medføre noen risiko for deg som informant, og det vil ikke ha noen negative konsekvenser for deg hvis du ikke vil delta eller senere velger å trekke deg.

### **Ditt personvern – hvordan vi oppbevarer og bruker dine opplysninger**

Vi vil bare bruke opplysningene om deg til formålene vi har fortalt om i dette skrivet. Vi behandler opplysningene konfidensielt og i samsvar med personvernregelverket. Leder av prosjektet og prosjektansvarlig vil ha tilgang på datamaterialet gjennom studiens varighet.

Alle opplysninger og intervjuer vil bli behandlet konfidensielt og anonymisert. Datamaterialet som kommer frem under intervjuene vil bli oppbevart i passord beskyttet datamaskin for å hindre tilgang på informasjon til uvedkommende. Lydopptak av intervjuene vil ikke bli knyttet opp mot navn eller noe som kan gjøre deg gjenkjent.

### **Hva skjer med opplysningene dine når vi avslutter forskningsprosjektet?**

Prosjektet skal etter planen avsluttes mot slutten av juni 2020. Ved prosjektslutt vil alt lydopptak og personopplysninger bli slettet.

### **Dine rettigheter**

Under hele prosjektperioden - har du rett til:

- innsyn i hvilke personopplysninger som er registrert om deg,
- å få rettet personopplysninger om deg,
- få slettet personopplysninger om deg,
- få utlevert en kopi av dine personopplysninger (dataportabilitet), og
- å sende klage til personvernombudet eller Datatilsynet om behandlingen av dine personopplysninger.

### **Hva gir oss rett til å behandle personopplysninger om deg?**

Vi behandler opplysninger om deg basert på ditt samtykke.

På oppdrag fra Norges Idrettshøgskole har NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS vurdert at behandlingen av personopplysninger i dette prosjektet er i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

### **Hvor kan jeg finne ut mer?**

Hvis du har spørsmål til prosjektet ta kontakt med Melissa Mosby, masterstudent ved Norges Idrettshøgskole (tlf: 40628282 eller epost: [melissa.mosby@hotmail.com](mailto:melissa.mosby@hotmail.com)) eller hovedveileder og prosjektansvarlig Kirsti Pedersen Gurholt, professor ved Norges Idrettshøgskole (tlf: 90044205 eller epost: [kirsti.gurholt@nih.no](mailto:kirsti.gurholt@nih.no)).

Med vennlig hilsen,

Melissa Mosby  
Masterstudent, Norges Idrettshøgskole

Kirsti Pedersen Gurholt  
Professor, Norges Idrettshøgskole

Oslo, 26.09.19

## Samtykkeerklæring

Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet «Active Seniors in the outdoors – lived experiences, health and well-being», og har fått anledning til å stille spørsmål. Jeg samtykker til:

å delta i intervju

Jeg samtykker til at mine opplysninger behandles konfidensielt og inngår i prosjektet til det avsluttes, ved utgangen av juni 2020.

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-----

(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)

Jeg kan kontaktes via telefon nr.: \_\_\_\_\_ og/eller  
epost: \_\_\_\_\_

Samtykkeerklæringen kan leveres til turleder eller masterstudent.

# Appendix 3: Interview guide participants

## *Innledning*

- Presentere seg selv.
- Informere om prosjektet, og hva man kommer til å stille spørsmål om. Informere om hva lydopptakeren skal brukes til.
- Garantere anonymitet og konfidensialitet.
- Informere informanten om retten til å avbryte intervjuet når som helst.
- Er det noen spørsmål før vi begynner?

### **1. Innledningsspørsmål**

- Navn?
- Alder?
- Kjønn?
- Yrke? Tidligere yrke?
- Hvor lenge har du vært deltager ved dette turtilbudet?

### **2. Hovedspørsmål**

#### **1. Kan du fortelle om hvordan du ble med på turtilbudet?**

- Var det noen som dro deg med?
- Er du med regelmessig?
- Var du kjent i området før du ble med?
- Hvordan var første gangen du var med?
- Hva fikk deg til å fortsette å bli med?

#### **2. Hva er din opplevelse av turtilbudet?**

- Hva betyr det for deg at både menn og kvinner deltar på turtilbudet?
- Er det noen uoverensstemmelser i gruppen?
- En stor gjeng med deltakere? – Hvorfor tror du så mange blir med?
- Er det flere kvinner enn menn på turtilbudet? Hva tror du er grunnen til det?
- Hva tenker du om kaffepausene på turen?
- Hva er din opplevelse av det sosiale fellesskapet?

#### **3. Hva ser DU på som viktigst for å delta?**

- Sosiale kontekster?
- Friheten?

#### **4. Er det noen typer turer du liker spesielt godt? Lengre/kortere eller overnattingsturer?**

- Hvorfor liker du den type tur best?

#### **5. Hvordan har det sosiale fellesskapet noe å si for deg?**

- Møter du turdeltakere utenom disse turene?
- Hvordan er det på tur med så mange andre?

#### **6. Historie og kultur på tur?**

- **Hva synes du om historiske og kulturelle innslag på turer?**
- Forteller turlederne noe om turen underveis i løypa?
- Er det viktig for deg å lære noe på turene?
- Viktig hvor turen går hen?

#### **7. Hvordan påvirker turtilbudet deg ellers i hverdagen?**

- Går du mer på tur andre dager?
  - Går du da med familie og venner, eller alene?
  - Er du blitt tryggere til å gå tur alene?
- 8. Hvordan synes du det er tilrettelagt med stier og skilting til lokale turer?**
- **Er de til nytte for deg?**
  - Mange som går de samme turene?
  - Utslitte stier?
  - **Får dette flere folk til å gå ut på tur?**
- 9. Kan du fortelle om hva friluftsliv og naturen betyr for deg personlig?**
- Hva liker du best ved å være ute? Eventuelt hva liker du mindre?
  - Hva søker du etter når du er på tur?
- 10. Har du holdt på med/eller holder på med andre aktiviteter i naturen?**
- Avhengig av årstiden?
  - Trening?
  - Rekreasjon?
  - Båtliv?
- 11. Hva betyr det for din helse og velvære å kunne gå på tur?**
- Hvorfor er det positivt/negativt for din helse?
  - Mindre plager?
- 12. Er det tyngre å komme seg ut i bevegelse nå, enn tidligere i livet?**
- 13. Hvordan påvirker naturen humøret ditt tror du?**
- Hvordan har du det dersom du ikke kan eller ikke deltar på en eller flere turer?
  - Forskjeller i humøret fra naturkontakt eller ei?
  - Hva er din opplevelse av mental helse og turgåing?
- 14. Har du alltid likt å gå på tur, være ute i naturen?**
- Hvordan tror du at du har blitt påvirket til å være ute på tur?
  - Påvirkning på livet ditt?
  - Innvirkning på familielivet?
- 15. Var du mye ute i naturen i barndommen?**
- Gikk dere på tur i familien?
  - Lange eller korte turer?
  - Overnattingsturer?
  - Har du drevet med noen form for idrett eller sport før/nå?
- 16. Utviklingen av friluftsliv og bruk av naturen, hva er dine tanker om det?**
- Er det flere som går på tur nå?
  - Refleksjon over utviklingen av naturen, før og nå?
  - Flere mennesker ute på tur enn tidligere?

**Avslutning (forberede to spørsmål i forveien: «Nå er det bare to spørsmål igjen»)**

- Nevne noen av hovedpunktene som er kommet frem i løpet av intervjuet.
- Nå har jeg ikke flere spørsmål, har du noe mer du vil si eller kommentere før vi avslutter?

# Appendix 4: Interview guide tour leaders

## *Innledning*

- Presentere seg selv.
- Informere om prosjektet, og hva man kommer til å stille spørsmål om. Informere om hva lydopptakeren skal brukes til.
- Garantere anonymitet og konfidensialitet.
- Informere informanten om retten til å avbryte intervjuet når som helst og å trekke seg fra studien gjennom hele prosessen uten begrunnelse.
- Er det noen spørsmål før vi begynner?

## **1. Innledningsspørsmål**

- Navn?
- Alder?
- Kjønn?
- Yrke? Tidligere yrke?
- Hvordan kom du med i gruppen?  
Hvor lenge har du vært turlleder?

## **3. Hovedspørsmål**

### **1. Kan du fortelle meg litt om hvordan turgruppen startet?**

- Når startet turgruppen?
- Hvem etablerte den?
- Hva var målet den gang/nå med turgruppen?

### **2. Hvordan rekrutterer dere medlemmer?**

- Hva skal til for å få med deltakere tror du?
- Hva er de største utfordringene?
- Åpen for alle?
- Hvor mange registrerte medlemskap har dere?
- Hvem blir med på et slikt turtilbud tror du?
- Koster det noe å være medlem?

### **3. Hvordan er oppslutningen om turene?**

- Fast antall?
- Er det flere kvinner enn menn som møter opp?
- Noen turer som har større oppslutning enn andre?

### **4. Hvorfor tror du det er så mange flere med på akkurat dette turtilbudet, enn andre?**

### **5. Kan du fortelle om turene?**

- Hvordan er organiseringen av dem?
- Kultur og historie på tur?
- Hvor ofte møtes dere til tur?
- Hvor går turene?
- Har dere korttur og langtur grupper, hvordan fungerer dette?

### **6. Kan du fortelle om det sosiale samværet på turene?**

- Har dere sosiale sammenkomster utenom turene?
- Gjenopplevelse av turene med bilder, fortellinger?



**7. Finnes det noen uenigheter eller motstridende interesser?**

- Hvordan balanseres dette?

**8. Er det flere turledere?**

- Hvordan deler dere på ansvaret og organiseringen av turene?
- Er alle turledere med på turene?

**9. Kan du fortelle om arbeidet som turleder?**

- Hva gir dette arbeidet deg?
- Egen motivasjon for å delta som turleder?
- Hva slags oppgaver har du i forhold til rollen som turleder?
- Hva er de viktigste målene for turene?

**10. Hvordan promoterer dere for turgruppen?**

- Har dere hjemmeside eller annen media?
- Avis annonser?
- Hvor kommer det frem at det finnes en tur gruppe for seniorer?
- Lokal dekning av turgruppen?

**11. Kan du fortelle litt om selve organisering av gruppen, har dere et styre?**

- Har dere jevnlige møter eller årsmøter?
- Diskuterer dere års program av turer?
- Frivillig arbeid?
- Er turgruppen en del av en organisasjon?
- Får turgruppen noen form for økonomisk støtte?

**12. Hvordan synes du det er tilrettelagt for folk i kommunen til å ta en tur ut i naturen?**

- Skilting og opprettholdelse av turstier?
- Er det lett for seniorer å komme seg ut på tur alene?

**13. Synes du betydningen av ordet friluftsliv og bruk av natur har endret seg med årene? Utviklingen av naturbruk?**

- Tror du det er flere som går på tur nå enn tidligere?

**14. Har du alltid likt å gå på tur, være ute i naturen?**

- Hvordan tror du at du har blitt påvirket til å være ute på tur?
- Påvirkning på livet ditt?
- Innvirkning på familielivet?

**15. Går du ellers på tur utenom turgruppen?**

- I så fall, går du da alene eller sammen med andre?
- Sammen med andre fra turgruppen?
- Lengre eller korte turer?

**Avslutning (forberede to spørsmål i forveien: «Nå er det bare to spørsmål igjen»)**

- Nevne noen av hovedpunktene som er kommet frem i løpet av intervjuet.
- Nå har jeg ikke flere spørsmål, har du noe mer du vil si eller kommentere før vi avslutter?