



# Facilitation

of experiences in natural environments

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## Abstract

There are many and varied benefits associated with experiences in natural environments. This thesis examines the practices and perspectives of people who professionally facilitate and thus enable such experiences. The practices, perspectives, experiences, natural environments and their associated benefits are conceptualised as cultural ecosystem services through a framework, which is theoretically contextualized through the human ecological triangle. Four professional facilitators have been interviewed through semi structured phenomenological interviews. The analysis has been operationalized by utilizing a mixed deductive and inductive coding approach. Results show that the interviewees' practices and culturally conditioned perspectives are continually producing and reproducing each other. Facilitation - to enable and explore each participant's own experience - is central. The practices examined stand on three legs; the knowledge of the facilitator, the opportunities provided by environmental spaces that invite human-environment interaction, and the participants' own subjective experiences. The facilitators' practices relate people to themselves, each other, and the natural world.

*Keywords: cultural ecosystem services, facilitation, human ecological triangle, experiences, human-nature interaction*

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# Introduction

## Background

There are many and varied benefits associated with being outdoors. Maybe you yourself recognize this sense of well-being that many people experience. Benefits to being outdoors range from physical and mental health, education, to environmental consciousness and even our identities. Actors within different fields research, utilize and promote these benefits.

In a European context, health challenges increasingly involve issues related to modern lifestyles, and the focus of public health has shifted toward preventative measures, including outdoor recreation (Nilsson et al., 2010, p. 5; Lisberg Jensen, 2008, p. 7). Research shows for example that positive effects such as restoration and rehabilitation are to a larger extent provided by natural environments than by built environments, and that children are more physically active outdoors compared to indoors (Lisberg Jensen, 2008, p. 17, 19; Mårtensson, 2011, p. 55).

Outdoor natural environment's ability to promote and support public health is echoed and employed by public actors. One of the sources referenced here is a report issued by the Public Health Agency of Sweden, where human ecologist Lisberg Jensen (2008) has compiled a research overview on "health benefits connected to outdoor recreation in close-by nature" (my translation). On a regional level, the County Council of Scania states that they "shall create better conditions for recreation, restoration, and physical activity in the Scanian natural and cultural landscape" (my translation, Region Skåne, 2021). Finally, 2021 has been coined the 'Year of Outdoor Recreation,' supported by The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (Naturvårdsverket, 2021).

The benefits of being in nature and the outdoors is also utilized and promoted within outdoor education. Nature is considered to provide children with both physical and mental challenges, while it also enables children to move and create more freely (Mårtensson et al., 2011, p. 15). Nature is a "free space" (my translation, Swedish: "*frirum*") that is to a lesser extent under human control. A systematic review of research shows that outdoor education "can promote students in respect of social, academic, physical and psychological dimensions" (Becker et al., 2017, p. 1).

Especially outdoor recreation among children is often viewed as a way to promote environmental consciousness (Lisberg Jensen, 2011, p. 45, Zylstra et al., 2014, p. 123). Research does show that experiences of nature in childhood may support environmentalism and environmental behaviour in adult years (Wells & Lekies, 2006, p. 1). Lisberg Jensen calls this 'the sustainability argument' (my translation, Lisberg Jensen, 2011, p. 45).

On a fundamental level, “[l]ove for nature and outdoor recreation [... are] core factors in the construction of a national Swedish identity” (Lisberg Jensen & Ouis, 2008, p. 9). The outdoor recreation movement arose during the late 19th century as a response to industrialization and urbanization. Principal actors were the Swedish Tourist Association and the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation, who still hold influential positions (Ibid, Rosengren, 2010, p. 269-271). Thurfjell (2020), professor of religious studies, recently released a book examining “how nature became the religion of the Swedes” (my translation) which sheds light on the existential dimension secular Swedes describe in relation to nature (Ibid, p. 9). The connection between the Swedish identity and nature, he says, is manifested by the freedom to roam (Swedish: *allemansrätten*; Ibid, p. 165-166). Initiated in 1940, it was established as a culturally anchored custom, but since 1994 it is part of the Swedish constitutional law.

Lisberg Jensen (2008, p. 12; and with colleagues in Mårtensson, 2011, p. 18) emphasises that people may benefit from outdoor recreation only when they *perceive* nature as ‘good’ or ‘healthy’ in some way, which means that benefits are culturally conditioned. Thus, the ‘nature positive’ identity described above enables positive experiences in nature which are seminal for positive benefits to arise. This reflects the human ecological approach, where nature and culture are both considered to influence an individual’s lived experience (Lisberg Jensen, 2011, p. 28-29).

Lisberg Jensen and colleagues (Mårtensson et al., 2011, p. 18) assert that “to better understand conditions for positive experiences of nature, the practices by which connection with nature arise need attention and examination” (my translation).

## Aim

The aim of this thesis is to examine practices and perspectives of people who, professionally and within different contexts, facilitate experiences for others in natural environments. This aim may be understood as a response to and continuation of the quote above (Mårtensson et al., 2011, p. 18).

The people who facilitate are understood as facilitators as they, through their practices, enable experiences. By focusing on professional facilitators, we may examine circumstances where practices are facilitated in an organized and conscious way. As described in the background section, there is a call for benefits related to such practices and therefore, it is beneficial to draw from organized circumstances. This does not mean that non-professional or spontaneous practices are, in any way, less. They will just not be part of this thesis.

To examine both *practices and perspectives* represents an effort to illuminate not only practices but also the cultural reasoning and expectations connected to them. As described above, from a human ecological point of view, people's perspectives are culturally conditioned, and they influence an individual's experience (Lisberg Jensen, 2011, p. 28-29). Thus, perspectives provide cultural context.

This thesis is explicitly aimed to examine professional facilitators *within different contexts*, which refers to different cultural circumstances, such as professions, organizations, and goals. By examining different facilitators, we may illuminate important overlapping qualities, as well as differences that may emerge due to context. Further, this thesis aims to examine facilitation of experiences in *natural environments*. This formulation includes different environmental contexts and avoids using the contested concept of 'nature.'

By drawing upon Steiner's human ecological triangle (2003, p. 57) of 'person,' 'society,' and 'environment' (P, S, and E), we may understand this thesis' aim to examine human agency in the form of practices (P) that are informed by culturally conditioned perspectives (S), that take place together with other people (S) in natural environments (E). Thus, this thesis examines cultural and environmental dimensions of human practices. The human ecological triangle and its theoretical contributions are described in more depth in the theory section.

## Research questions

These research questions aim to examine practices and perspectives of people who professionally, within different contexts, facilitate experiences for others in natural environments. The people who facilitate are referred to as facilitators.

- How do the facilitators facilitate their practices?
- What are the facilitators' perspectives on their practices?
- Are there similarities and differences between various facilitators' practices and perspectives?

Practices refer to things that facilitators *do* that enable experiences in natural environments. The first research question asks *how* they do those things, while the second research question aims to capture the facilitators' own understanding of *why* they do things that way. Perspectives are assumed to be culturally conditioned and the second research question thus also provides cultural context. The third research question aims to examine whether facilitators' practices and perspectives share similarities and differences, and to identify those. This is of interest as this thesis aims to examine different contexts wherein facilitators do practices.

- The terms ‘facilitation’ and ‘facilitator’ are frequently used. They refer to the fact that professionals, through their practices, *enable* experiences for others. Aaskov Knudsen (2020, p. 150) explains that a facilitator “make[s] it possible for the participants’ own experiences and values to take centre stage.”
- The wording ‘natural environments’ refers to environments that are fully or partly created by ecosystems.
- Throughout this thesis, ‘nature’ appears frequently. From a phenomenological point of view, ‘nature’ is understood to be environments that are perceived as nature, and environments that enable a subjective experience of nature in some way. From a scientific point of view, ‘nature’ is the earth’s ecosystems.

## Theory

The practices, perspectives, experiences, natural environments, and benefits examined in this thesis will be understood through the concept of cultural ecosystem services. This approach has two main motivations. First, practices and benefits related to experiences in natural environments are encompassed by the concept of cultural ecosystem services (Fish et al., 2016, p. 212-213). Second, as the conceptualization of cultural ecosystem services explicitly take into account both cultural and ecological dimensions, it enables a human ecology approach. The analysis will be operationalized by a conceptual framework of cultural ecosystem services (Fish et al., 2016), which we will understand by drawing upon Steiner’s human ecological triangle (2003, p. 57).

However, first we will cover the theoretical background by examining the general concept of ecosystem services and its critique, followed by an introduction of cultural ecosystem services and, finally, the conceptual framework by Fish et al. (2016).

### Ecosystem services

Found at the intersection of ecological and social systems, the concept of ecosystem services results from efforts to form a basis of understanding of human dependence on nature in modern times (Braat & de Groot, 2012, p. 4). In the early 1980s, when the term ecosystem services was coined, the idea was to make economic arguments to encourage public support for nature conservation by framing nature as ecosystems that provide economic benefit. Focus on the connection between economics and ecology grew as the sustainable development discourse was established.

The definitions of ecosystem services vary, but they are typically defined as the contributions ecosystems make to human well-being, referring to what benefits humans receive, consume, obtain, acquire, or harvest from nature (Braat & de Groot, 2012, p. 5). In the premier issue of the journal *Ecosystem Services* 2012, it is explained that “Services are therefore actually conceptualizations (‘labels’) of the “useful things” ecosystems “do” for people [...]” (Ibid, p. 6).

In the early 2000s the United Nations initiated an effort to assess the world’s ecosystems’ services, called the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005, p. ii-iii). The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment divides ecosystem services into four categories; supporting, provisioning, regulating, and cultural services, while others define three categories; provisioning, regulating, and cultural services (Ibid, p. V; Schröter et al., 2019, p. 8).

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment work which was finalized in 2005, has been highly influential in introducing and establishing the concept of ecosystem services in both research and policy-making (Schröter et al., 2019, p. 7). The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity, the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, and the EU Biodiversity Strategy are examples of how the concept has been employed in research and policy-making, often simultaneously, “contributing to better knowledge and better use of that knowledge,” as phrased by Braat and de Groot (2012, p. 13). Furthermore, according to Schröter et al. (2014, p. 514), the use of the ecosystem services concept “can facilitate *collaboration* between scientists, professionals, decision-makers, and other stakeholders” (my italics).

In summary, ecosystem services are the contributions that ecosystems make to human well-being. The concept was initially focused on nature conservation and economic benefit but has expanded to include multiple aspects and benefits over time. It is employed by various stakeholders, predominantly within research and policy-making.

### Critiques of ecosystem services

This section is primarily based on an article by Schröter et al. (2014), which accounts for critiques of the concept of ecosystem services as well as counter-arguments. We will touch upon three out of the article’s seven issues; environmental ethics, the human-nature relationship, and economic valuation. These issues are the most common in the ecosystem services debate and are of the highest relevance concerning this thesis’s topic.

Ethically, the concept of ecosystem services is criticized for its anthropocentric orientation as opposed to a biocentric perspective - a debate between instrumental and intrinsic valuing of nature - which is an ever ongoing ethical debate within environmental



sciences (Schröter et al., 2014, p. 515). There is no denying that the concept of ecosystem services is anthropocentric. However, anthropocentric arguments may strengthen biocentric values. Within the category of cultural ecosystem services, instrumental and intrinsic values are often overlapping; benefits such as inspiration, discovery, and belonging are dependent upon the pure existence of ecosystems, thus integrating intrinsic values. Furthermore, researchers argue to incorporate relational values into environmental valuation (Saxena et al., 2018, p. 54). This is an emerging concept within environmental ethics that focuses on the human-nature interaction which is not reducible to instrumentality.

Critics caution that the economic language used within the concept of ecosystem services turns people into consumers and nature into a commodity, which causes further harm to the human-nature relationship by making people “increasingly separated and alienated from nature” (Schröter et al., 2014, p. 515). The notion, and critique, of consuming nature is sometimes pointed out in conjunction with outdoor recreational activities (Lisberg Jensen, 2008, p. 14). However, supporters of the ecosystem services concept reject this critique. They instead claim that the concept “offers a way to reconceptualize humanity’s relationship with nature” (Schröter et al., 2014, p. 515) by reconnecting modern societies with the ecosystems they are already dependent upon (Ibid). Schröter et al. (Ibid) emphasise the category of cultural services because of its ability to facilitate a holistic perspective of humans’ relation with nature.

Finally, the concept of ecosystem services is commonly criticised for its economic valuation of nature, typically in monetary terms (Schröter et al., 2014, p. 516; Fish et al., 2016, p. 3). Firstly, note that there are other non-economical ways to value ecosystem services available, such as biophysical and sociocultural assessments. Nonetheless, economic monetization is indeed the most common. As most of society is operationalized by the logic of money, monetization puts ecosystem services in relation to other human-made services, which provide arguments in decision-making processes. However, Schröter et al. (2014, p. 517) assert that economic arguments should be treated as part of an overall argument and that they “[do] not replace ethical, ecological, or other non-monetary arguments.”

### **Cultural ecosystem services**

In this thesis, the understanding of cultural ecosystem services is based on the paper and framework proposed by Fish, Church, and Winter (2016). Before I introduce their proposed conceptualization of cultural ecosystem services, we will cover the current academic and policy-making context of cultural ecosystem services.

Descriptions and definitions of cultural ecosystem services lack agreement (Fish et al., 2016, p. 208-210; Milcu et al., 2013, p. 7). Cultural ecosystem services are broadly

characterized as intangible or immaterial. The Millenium Ecosystem Assessment defines the cultural services as being the “non-material benefits people obtain from ecosystems through spiritual enrichment, cognitive development, reflection, recreation, and aesthetic experiences” (Fish et al., 2016, p. 209). The European Environment Agency states that cultural services “cover all the non-material, and normally non-consumptive, outputs of ecosystems that affect physical and mental states of people” (Ibid). Kenter et al. (2011 in Milcu et al., 2013, p. 1) describe them as being “often subtle and intuitive in nature” and Anthony et al. (2009, in Milcu et al., 2013, p. 1) say that they are “implicitly expressed through indirect manifestations.” This lack of agreement and distinctions is an aggravating issue for research and policy-making (Fish et al., 2016, p. 209).

While other ecosystem services are possible to measure in biophysical terms and therefore easy to quantify and monetize, cultural services are not; “The majority of cultural ecosystem services are placed outside the methods of neoclassical economics” (Milcu et al., 2013, p. 7). Methods applied in research are adapted to the logics of the other categories, but such scientific (quantifying) and economic (monetizing) epistemologies have proved to produce little cultural knowledge (Milcu et al., 2013, p. 2, 7). Those cultural services that are easiest to quantify such as recreation and ecotourism are also (“unsurprisingly”) the most frequently researched (Ibid, p. 5, 7). Thus, the cultural dimension of ecosystem services is often overlooked and insufficiently researched.

However, research shows that industrialized societies value cultural ecosystem services more than other services, and that the demand is predicted to grow (Braat & de Groot, 2012, p. 12; Milcu et al. 2013, p. 2). This discrepancy between research and public demand represents a growing gap between “counting that which matters to people and that which is easy to measure” (Milcu et al., 2013, p. 7; also in Fish et al., 2016, p. 2010). Milcu et al. (2013, p. 9) propose that “capitalizing on the societal relevance of cultural ecosystem services could help address real-world problems.”

In summary, cultural ecosystem services differ from other ecosystem services. This means that critique aimed at the concept of ecosystem services overall is often not applicable, as described above.

### Conceptualization of cultural ecosystem services

Fish et al.’s (2016) conceptualization of cultural ecosystem services is distinguished in a number of ways, which we will explore below.

According to Fish et al. (2016, p. 211), cultural services are understood as “relational processes and entities that people actively create and express through *interaction* with ecosystems” (my italics). The fact that cultural services are created through interaction

means that they are relational and created differently compared to provisioning and regulating services, which are commonly considered to be produced by ecosystems in biophysical terms and then acquired by humans (for example, imagine oxygen produced by photosynthesis and then breathed by a person) (Chan et al., 2011, p. 206; Fish et al., 2016, p. 208-210; Milcu et al., 2013, p. 7). Provisioning and regulating services are usually regarded as linear while cultural services are non-linear (Fish et al., 2016, p. 211). However, Fish et al. (Ibid) point to research that challenges the common linear characterization of ecosystem services overall by showing feedback loops between people and ecosystems, indicating that provisioning and regulating services, too, are relational. Either way, for the purpose of this thesis, we will acknowledge that cultural services are non-linear and relational. This characterization and emphasis constitutes a human ecology approach to environments and ecosystems, as “human ecology [...] has long considered the environment in relational terms” (Saxena et al., 2018, p. 54).

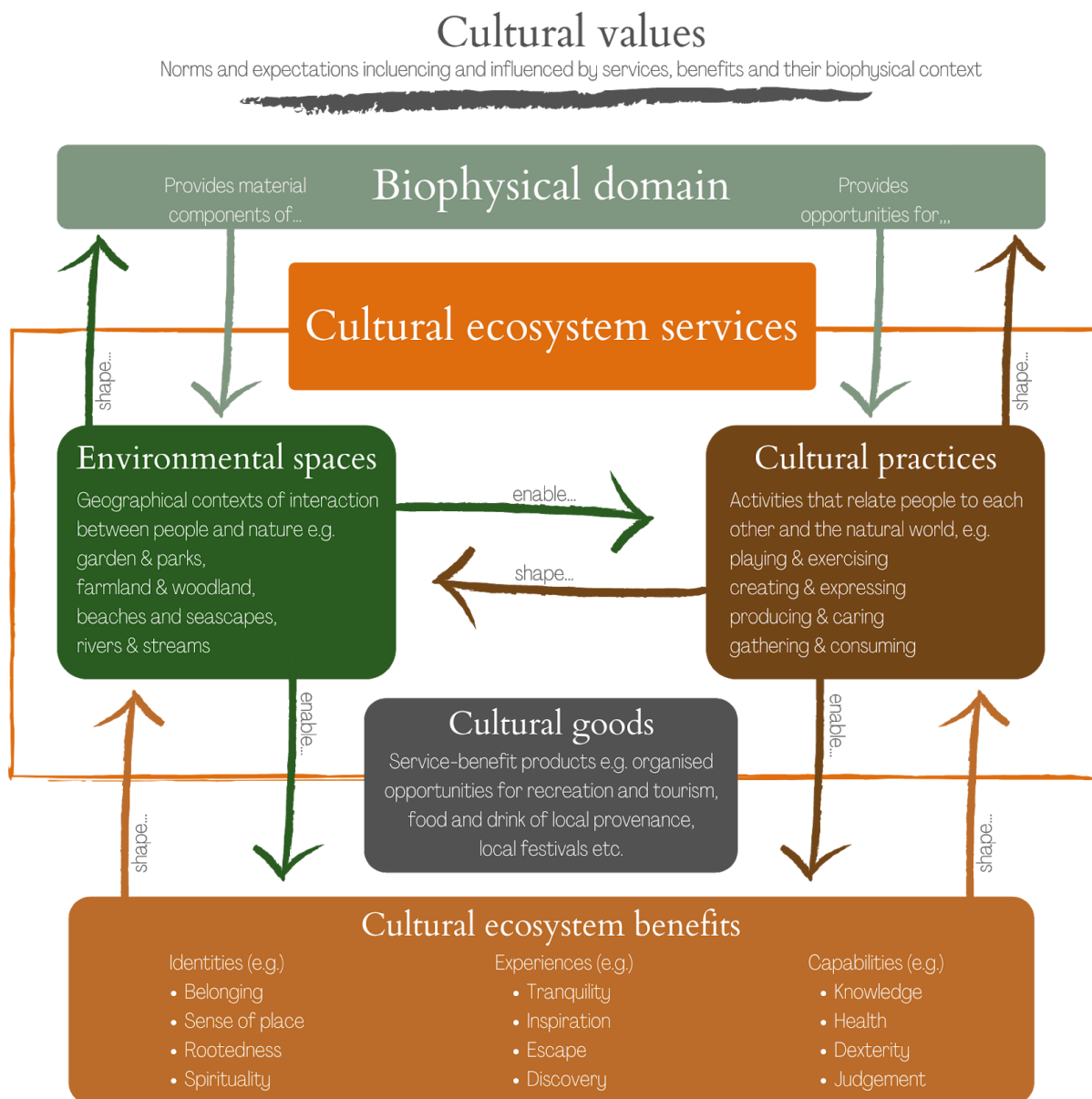
Further, Fish et al. (2016, p. 209, 211) reject the immaterial and intangible characterization often used to describe cultural services. They recognize that there are “immaterial and material dimensions to both” ecosystems and culture. This is a well-established view in research fields such as archaeology, anthropology, and human ecology (Fish et al., 2016, p. 209, 211; Saxena et al., 2018, p. 55).

The definition of cultural ecosystem services proposed by Fish et al. (2016, p. 211) follows; “cultural ecosystem services are the *contributions ecosystems make to human well-being in terms of the identities they help frame, the experiences they help enable and the capabilities they help equip*” (authors’ italics). Fish et al. (Ibid, p. 209, 211) actively make a clear distinction between services and benefits; services are co-created by interaction between humans and ecosystems, and benefits are the (possible) outcomes of services. Such a distinction between services and benefits have been lacking regarding cultural ecosystem services (Ibid; Milcu et al., 2013, p. 1).

As stated above, Fish et al. (2016, p. 213) define three key ways to frame benefits; by identities, experiences, and capabilities. However, this does not enable researchers to draw direct lines between certain services and certain benefits. Instead, there are “many and varied cultural [...] benefits associated with ecosystems” (Ibid, p. 4) that may arise over time, which are dependent upon personal perception and interpretation (Ibid, p. 7). An experience in nature can be understood through the lens of identity, experience, and capability all at once, no matter whether you are ‘living’ it or researching it. Therefore, Fish et al. (Ibid) suggest approaching benefits not by artificially separating them but by exploring how they “mutually reinforce each other.” The subjective and inseparable view of cultural benefits underscore that they are, again, non-linear and relational.

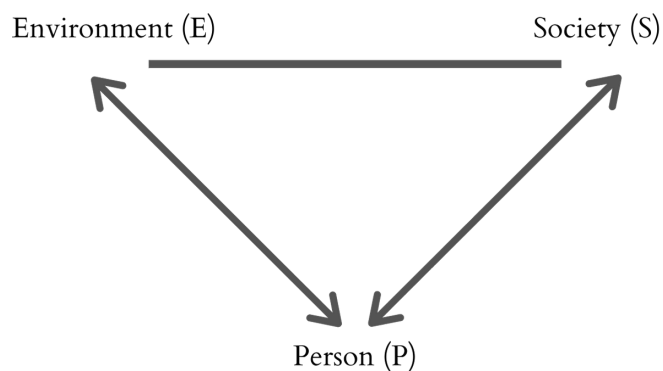
This conceptualisation of cultural ecosystem services and benefits is normative - concerned with positive effects - which is in line with ecosystem assessments overall (Fish et al., 2016, p. 214; Schröter et al., 2014, p. 518). Thus, culture is understood in terms of its “virtuous and life enriching qualities as opposed to something contested, limiting or indeed threatening” (Fish et al., 2016, p. 214).

### Conceptual framework of cultural ecosystem services



**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework of cultural ecosystem services drawn by the author based on the original figure by Fish, Church & Winter (2016)

This is the conceptual framework of cultural ecosystem services (CES framework) presented by Fish, Church, and Winter (2016) which provides the analytical basis of this thesis. Before exploring the details of this CES framework, let us do a quick overview. To reiterate, cultural ecosystems are understood as processes or entities co-created by interaction between humans and ecosystems. In the CES framework, this is illustrated by the spheres of cultural practices and environmental spaces. Some, but not all, cultural services are also cultural goods, which means they are part of the economic market. Cultural services enable benefits to arise, which are framed in three key ways; identities, experiences, and capabilities. Cultural services are situated within an overarching biophysical domain, which is constituted by ecosystems. Lastly, everything is embedded in the context of cultural values, which accounts for norms and expectations. All of these spheres and their connections must be recognized as ongoing and influential processes as they are continually created culturally by humans and biophysically by ecosystems.



**Figure 2.** The human ecological triangle drawn by the author based on the original figure by Steiner (2003)

In this thesis, I draw upon the human ecological triangle (Figure 2) by Steiner (2003, p. 57) to inform our understanding of the conceptual CES framework (Figure 1). All three components of the triangle - 'society' (S), 'environment' (E), and 'person' (P) - are represented. Steiner (Ibid) proposes the triangle as a “theoretical framework for general human ecology.” The triangle illustrates that humans are part of three relations; the relation with the self (P-P), the relation with 'environment' (P-E), and the relation with 'society' (P-S). Steiner (Ibid) characterizes these relations as *recursive* which means that elements (P, E, and S) enable relational interaction, while such interaction upholds the elements' continued existence - it is circular. However, note that the relation between 'environment' and 'society' (E-S) is *not*

recursive, the line merely indicates “a structural coupling” (Ibid). This means that influence between ‘environment’ and ‘society’ (E-S or S-E) is always mediated by ‘person’ through human agency (Ibid, p. 60-61). This is a foundational assumption and is important for our understanding of the processes of the CES framework (Figure 1), as described in detail below.

Both frameworks (Figure 1 and Figure 2) aim to conceptualize human relations and interactions with the sociocultural and the biophysical dimensions of reality; the human ecological triangle on a general level and the CES framework on a specific level. By drawing upon the former to understand the latter, cultural ecosystem services may be understood through a perspective anchored in general human ecology.

Briefly, ‘society’ is directly represented by cultural values, ‘environment’ is represented by the biophysical domain and environmental spaces, and ‘person’ is represented by cultural practices. Cultural ecosystem services, cultural goods, and cultural benefits all involve human agency and may thus be understood as ‘person’ in relational interaction with ‘society’ and ‘environment.’

According to Fish et al. (2016, p. 212), cultural values are the norms and expectations, the “collective principles and life goals” of a culture. Emphasis is put on the exchange between cultural values and cultural practices as “cultural practices *reflect and constitute* cultural values and are a discernible way that culture can be said to manifest itself” (my italics, Ibid, p. 6). Thus, if we want to identify cultural values connected to ecosystems, we should investigate cultural practices. This mirrors Steiner’s (2003, p. 57) understanding of the relationship between ‘person’ and ‘society.’ Human social practices reproduce or transform social structures and rules (i.e. cultural values), which in turn simultaneously govern humans - both restricting and enabling human agency in relation to ‘society’ and ‘environment.’ As phrased in the CES framework, cultural values are “norms and expectations influencing and influenced by services, benefits and their biophysical context” (Figure 1). Steiner’s (2003, p. 60-61) view of ‘persons’ as mediators leads us to assume that such influence between ‘society’ and ‘environment’ is transferred through cultural practices. The CES framework corresponds with this assumption, as cultural practices co-create services, enable benefits, and shape its biophysical context. We must, however, also assume that other kinds of social practices that are not included or articulated in the CES framework, such as social organization, politics, or the market, too, have mediating roles between ‘society’ and the ‘environment.’

Cultural practices are defined as “Activities that relate people to each other and the natural world” (Figure 1). This definition illustrates that cultural practices are constituted by

two recursive relations of the human ecological triangle (Figure 2); Cultural practices relate people to each other, which is the relation between the individual - 'person' - and other people - 'society' (thus, P-S). It is important here to highlight that while 'society' encompasses those things that we normally associate with the word (like public administrations, politics, and the economy), it encompasses *all* interhuman interaction and cooperation, including interaction with friends and family (Lisberg Jensen, 2011, p. 29). To continue, cultural practices relate people to the natural world, which is the relation between the individual - 'person' - and the natural world - 'environment' (thus, P-E).

Fish et al. (2016, p. 213) divide cultural practices into four categories; playing and exercising, creating and expressing, producing and caring, and gathering and consuming. They represent both work and non-work related activities, they may be sedentary or active, social or solitary. In the last category, consuming media about nature is included, like watching a movie about whales, which means that cultural practices may be physical or non-physical. Another example I want to point out is the activities of growing food, hunting and fishing. These activities may be considered as part of provisioning services as they provide food, but research has shown that farming, hunting or fishing may be considered a way of life - an identity - thus part of cultural services (Ibid, p. 3). Furthermore, people grow food, hunt and fish as part of their work or part of their leisure time (Ibid, p. 6-7). The point is that cultural practices and their benefits must be understood as highly subjective experiences and perceptions.

Cultural values influence how we view, relate to, and shape the physical world around us (Fish et al., 2016, p. 212-213). This influence is mediated and manifested through cultural practices that shape environmental spaces (Ibid; Steiner, 2003, p. 60). While the biophysical domain is constituted by all of the ecosystems around us, environmental spaces are "the places, localities, landscapes and seascapes in which people interact with each other and the natural world" (Fish et al., 2016, p. 213). The biophysical domain and environmental spaces can be understood as subdivisions of the 'environment' of the human ecological triangle (Figure 2). The biophysical domain may be understood as ecosystems that humans have little direct interaction with, while environmental spaces are culturally distinguished from the biophysical domain through human-ecosystem interaction, and are thereby given particular cultural relevance. According to Steiner (2003, p. 60), as humans use environmental spaces as settings for cultural practices, over time, they become "more and more socially altered and constructed." By dividing the 'environment' of the human ecological triangle (Figure 2) into a biophysical domain and environmental spaces, Fish et al.'s conceptualization reflects a transdisciplinary and human ecological approach. As described by Mårtensson et al. (2011, p. 16-17), a strictly natural scientific perspective implies a de-identification of nature where its

parts are reduced to easily defined stimuli, while social sciences risk to view nature as a sociocultural construct that disregards independent biophysicality. However, the CES framework (Figure 1) explicitly illustrates both the biophysical and the cultural dimensions of the 'environment'.

The establishment of a national park is a clear example of a distinguished environmental space, however, the cultural shaping of environmental spaces is just as well manifested in small and personal ways. Fish et al. (2016, p. 213) point to research that encourages cultural ecosystem assessments "to explore 'places on the margin.'" For example, in efforts to promote equal outdoor recreation for children (Swedish: *naturkontakt*), Mårtensson et al. (2011, p. 12) urge that "attention must be paid in particular to pathways and spaces in close proximity to children's environments [...] where they spend a lot of time" (my translation). To pay attention to places on the margin that are not readily delineated and as easily assessed as a national park represents a critical approach and acknowledges that researchers and policy-makers, too, are culturally embedded and whose cultural practices, too, do shape the environmental spaces they interact with.

Cultural practices shape the environmental spaces and in turn, environmental spaces enable cultural practices. This constitutes cultural ecosystem services. As mentioned above, some, but not all, cultural services are also market-based cultural goods. These include guided tours, local foods and so on. Drawing upon Milcu et al.'s (2013, p. 2, 7) findings mentioned earlier, those cultural services that constitute cultural goods are presumably most frequently researched.

Finally, cultural ecosystem services enable subjective benefits to arise.

According to Fish et al. (2016, p 212), the cultural significance of ecosystems may be understood by examining the "interacting elements of culture - spaces, practices and benefits - and the cultural values they shape and reflect" (Ibid), which is what this CES framework aims to operationalize.

## Methods, methodology, and material

To reiterate, the aim of this thesis is to examine practices and perspectives of people who, professionally and within different contexts, facilitate experiences for others in natural environments. I have chosen to interview professional facilitators to learn about their practices and perspectives. Fish et al. (2016, p. 214-215) call for methodological plurality and intend for the CES framework (Figure 1) to be implemented in both quantitative and qualitative research. However, to understand the cultural dimension's complexity, they highlight the importance of interpretive research techniques, such as interviews.



In the process of developing and conducting interviews, I drew upon knowledge and experience that I had acquired from working with children and families in urban gardens. As Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p. 18) write, a research interview is interactive, produced between two people in conversation on a topic of interest to them both. As the topic of this thesis is of a particularly practical quality, overall, my experience may be considered as beneficial, enabling more knowledgeable interaction. This is further explored under the heading 'Reflexivity.'

### Phenomenological interviews

The method of interviews draws upon the fundamental human interaction of speaking (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 15). It's the way we learn about other people and, indeed, the world. Interviewing has become a well-established method within social sciences and confirms a qualitative approach to the world and what we know about it (Ibid, p. 28, 42-48). I've adopted a phenomenological approach to interviews.

Phenomenology is an anti-positivist position first developed as philosophy by Edmund Husserl around 1900 and later applied by social sciences (Ibid). Phenomenological research aims to understand the world through other people's perspectives. These subjective perspectives are epistemologically recognized as relevant knowledge. The phenomenological interview is interested in the interviewee's reality or lifeworld as they perceive it, acknowledging and inviting ambiguous diversity. The phenomenological approach corresponds well with the aim of this thesis, which is to examine the facilitators' own understanding of their practices. Moreover, Fish et al.'s conceptualization of cultural ecosystem services adopted for this thesis do emphasise that cultural services and cultural benefits are dependent on subjective interpretation.

### Sampling

In selecting interviewees, I used two forms of purposive sampling (Bryman, 2012, p. 416). As this thesis aims to examine facilitators of different cultural and environmental contexts, I aimed for a width of interviewees in terms of professional title, organization, target groups, and natural environments. This can be understood as a form of maximum variation sampling (Ibid, p. 419).

I was fairly familiar with the various organizations but not personally with the interviewees themselves, with one exception; one of the interviewees is my friend and a previous fellow student. Per her recommendation, I contacted two of the other interviewees; one who works within an organization I had already decided on and one that I contacted by what is called snowball sampling (Bryman, 2012, p. 419). After failing to reach the person I

thought would be the fourth interviewee, I contacted another person who does the same work but in a different location. She then became the fourth and final interviewee. Note that two interviewees were sampled directly, while the other two were sampled through two steps; first their organization and then the actual person from a group of colleagues.

Throughout this thesis, the interviewees are referred to by titles that I have created based upon their actual work title and the purpose of highlighting characteristics and differences. The interviewees are; an outdoor guide, an outdoor pedagogue, an outdoor educator, and a rehab gardener. The interviewees are presented more in depth further down.

### Interview guide

In the process of developing the interview guide, I conducted a test interview with a fellow student. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p. 150-151, also in Bryman, 2012, p. 476-477) list nine kinds of questions, and the test interview proved follow-up questions, probing questions, and interpreting questions to be most fruitful, as they urged the test interviewee to clarify and give more detail. These kinds of questions can not be formulated beforehand, which made my written interview guide less important. Instead, attentive and reflective listening was central in order to move the interview forward, which is emphasised by Bryman (2012, p. 478). Therefore, I decided to go on with an interview guide consisting only of the following four themes which I knew by heart;

- Right now - the year with corona
- Background - education, work, personal background
- Relation with nature - experiences, thoughts, perspectives on their work, hopes
- Nature in society - what nature and the interviewees' work may contribute to the larger society

In differentiating between semi-structured and unstructured interviews, Bryman (2012, p. 471) characterizes unstructured interviews as more of a regular conversation that may be sparked by a single introducing question while semi-structured interviews are anchored by themes and questions. The interviews conducted for this thesis are thus to be understood as semi-structured phenomenological interviews leaning toward unstructured.

Note that there is no language of the CES framework (Figure 1) present in the interview guide. This represents an effort to not let preconceived analytical categories leak into the interview.

## Conducting interviews

I contacted the interviewees by email, in which I shortly presented myself and the aim of the thesis, whereby I asked for them to participate. Everyone agreed. After confirming each interview's time and date, some interviewees asked for a list of questions that I would be asking. I created an information sheet (in Swedish, see Appendix 1), wherein I presented the thesis' topic in more detail. I also explained that I would work not with pre-formulated questions but rather with my interview guide's four themes. In the document, I also made clear that I would follow the Swedish Research Council's ethical guidelines.

I shared with the interviewees that I have similar experience working with children and families in urban gardens, thus expanding my identity beyond my current status as a student. I did this to create common ground and grow trust, hoping to attain more depth in the interviews.

The four interviews were conducted within a week, the first one on December 1st and the final one on December 7th, 2020. They lasted between 51 and 70 minutes and were all recorded for later transcription.

2020 has been the year of Covid-19. I did only one interview in person while walking outside in an urban park. Two others were conducted using video calls, and one on a phone call. It's hard to tell whether a non-corona year would have seen me do all interviews face to face or not, as the interviewees are fairly spread out geographically. However, the past year has made us more accustomed to digital solutions, and therefore, I hope the interviewees and I were able to use such digital tools with more ease. Of course, valuable non-verbal information such as body language, gestures, and facial expressions are weaker on video and non-existent on the phone (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 165). I found that I said affirming "mm" s more during the telephone interview, compensating for the loss of body language, something that Bryman (2012, p. 488) points out as well.

After the in-person interview, I discovered technical issues in the recording, resulting in compromised audio and loss of words and sometimes phrases. However, the interview was lengthy, and I collected more than enough material. I also want to add that I found it more challenging to focus while walking and interviewing, distracted by the movement and surroundings. These are merely reflections on my part. Nevertheless, studies comparing interviews conducted face to face and by telephone show little difference in interviewees' answers (Bryman, 2012, p. 488). My recordings and transcriptions show no noticeable difference related to the way that the interviews were conducted.

## The interviewees

- The outdoor guide is a manager of a combined nature reserve and outdoor recreational area. She works predominantly with all kinds of visitors. Her background is within nature interpretation, outdoor pedagogy, and human ecology, with a focus on cultural landscapes.
- The outdoor pedagogue is the head of outdoor pedagogy at a combined nature reserve and outdoor recreational area. Her environmental context is thus similar to the outdoor guide's. The outdoor pedagogue works predominantly with school children and families. Her background is within pedagogy and equal participation, with experience in work with both culture and nature.
- The outdoor educator works at an outdoor pedagogy center (Swedish: *naturskola*) where she educates municipal school and pre school teachers in outdoor pedagogy. Her background is within pedagogy, with a focus on natural sciences and mathematics.
- The rehab gardener is part of a team including an occupational therapist, two physiotherapists, and a psychotherapist. Together they facilitate a garden centered rehabilitation program for participants who suffer from stress-related disorders, which is part of public health care. The rehab gardener has a background within gardening as well as sustainability related work in an academic setting.

## Recording, transcribing, coding, and translating

Interviews are commonly recorded and transcribed within qualitative research (Bryman, 2012, p. 482). It enables the interviewer to listen to the interviewee fully, and then repeatedly revisit what was said and especially *how* it was said. Transcribing also enabled me to evaluate my own words and to better my skills before the following interview. All interviews were held in and transcribed into Swedish.

Coding the transcription initiates the analytical process (Bryman, 2012, p. 575). I coded the material in two stages through a mixed deductive and inductive approach (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 218). During the first stage, I utilized the spheres of the CES framework (Figure 1) as 'sphere codes,' which represents a deductive approach where the material is coded by preconceived categories. The spheric codes are; cultural values, biophysical domain, cultural practices, environmental spaces, cultural goods, and cultural ecosystem benefits. To gain visual overview, I transferred the sphere coded key phrases from the transcript into illustrated CES frameworks, one for each interview. During stage two I utilized an inductive approach wherein codes emerge from the data, which is the typical way of coding (Ibid; Bryman, 2012, p. 575). I reviewed both transcripts and illustrations, and

identified common themes, which I coded by 'theme codes.' Since some data may be marginalized when using predetermined sphere codes, the inductive theme codes that freely emerge from the material ensure that important data is not overlooked. The inductive approach compliments the deductive one. While the sphere codes to a large extent accounted for the question of 'what', the theme codes accounted for 'how.'

The material remained in Swedish during the analysis process until I actually wrote the following analysis section. I translated the material into English as I paraphrased or quoted the interviewees. Wherever I experienced that the translation could not fully embody the original meaning, I inserted the original Swedish phrasing in parenthesis.

### Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are important especially during interview based research, since such research directly deals with people whose words, in this case in the form of a thesis, will be published (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 78-79). In this section, some considerations are examined and reflected upon, including; ethical guidelines, contributions and consequences, and representation.

As described earlier, the interviewees received an information sheet (see Appendix 1) where I explained the aim of the thesis, presented the four themes of my interview guide, and made clear that I would follow the Swedish Research Council's ethical guidelines (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). The guidelines entail that the interviewees are informed on the purpose of the research, which they were through the information sheet. The interviewees can retrieve their participation at any point. Further, the guidelines require that the interviewees give their consent to interviews being recorded, which they all agreed to in conjunction with the interviews. Finally, information and data will be used only for the purpose of this research. In addition, I informed the interviewees that their identity as well as their organizations will be anonymized in the published thesis.

This thesis' aim is not to question or criticize the practices and perspectives of the interviewees, but to *understand* them. The phenomenological approach in particular accepts the lifeworld of each interview just the way they perceive and describe it. This means that interviews were based on positive and genuine interest. Some of the interviewees explicitly expressed that the interview had been a positive experience for them, an opportunity for self-reflection. Overall, this thesis has potential to contribute to and diversify the interviewees' own understanding of their practices and perspectives, especially since they each work within different contexts.

It is important to take into consideration that the interviewees on a daily basis work with and communicate around the things that this thesis aims to examine. It is my

impression that the interviewees were comfortable during interviews and that the research has caused them no unnecessary stress.

In aiming for accurate representation of the interviewees, I want to make two points, regarding language and analysis. As described in the section above, I provide the original Swedish phrasings of the interviewees whenever translation falls short, to bring forth the true original meaning. On an analytical level, the mixed deductive coding approach is complemented by the inductive approach, making sure that nothing important is overlooked and thus ensuring accurate representation.

### Reflexivity, reliability, and validity

Reflexivity, reliability, and validity raise the question of objectivity (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 259-260). Since qualitative research does not claim to produce objective knowledge in a positivist sense, objectivity may rather be understood as a non-biased position in relation to the subjectivity such research examines. Objectivity as in *free from bias* is a moral notion connected to the researcher as a person. The examination of the researcher's own "contributions to the knowledge production" (Ibid) and what biases one may carry is termed *reflexive objectivity*. This is the aim here.

As mentioned earlier, I have experience from working with children and families in urban gardens. Kvale and Brinkman (2009, p. 46-47) write that knowledge of the interviewer results in *sensitivity* regarding the topic. Such sensitivity may result in interviews conducted on a more knowledgeable level. Due to this thesis' topic's practical quality, I consider practical experience to be very important for my understanding of the interviewees. However, Kvale and Brinkmann (Ibid) say that *sensitivity* regarding the topic should be carefully balanced with *intentional naivety* where the interviewer should strive to remain open minded and curious. This requires a continual critical examination of one's own preconceived notions - a strive to be unbiased. The fact that the interviewees worked within different contexts created unique circumstances for each interview. This kept me awake to new phenomena, a kind of naivety. Kvale and Brinkmann (Ibid) write that the interviewer should aim for a balance between the two contrasting approaches of *sensitivity* and *naivety*, which they call *qualified naivety*. This approach served as my primary guidance during interviews.

Both reliability and validity are concepts under scrutiny among qualitative researchers (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 262-263). Some are strongly anti positivist and reject the concepts, while others aim to reformulate the concepts to make them relevant in qualitative research. In this thesis, I adopt the latter approach, as described by Kvale and Brinkmann (Ibid).

Reliability is concerned with whether research findings are consistent and reliable - would the same findings be made by other researchers another point in time? (Ibid). The interviews were semi structured leaning toward unstructured, based upon the four themes of the interview guide. Thus, the interviews were to a large extent driven by the interviewees' own associations, where many of my questions were drawn from what they had already said. I avoided leading questions and put a lot of effort into formulating questions based on the language of each interviewee, rather than my own language. This minimized my role as a questioner and expanded my role as a listener, which should strengthen the reliability of the interviews.

The analysis of this thesis is based upon both deductive and inductive coding. The deductive coding involves less interpretation from the researcher while the inductive coding ensures that segments from the interviews that are not easily categorized into predetermined codes are still analysed and brought forward in the results. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p. 264) caution that "too much emphasis on reliability of the results may counteract creativity and richness of variation." The combined deductive and inductive approach to coding may represent an effort to find that balance.

Within qualitative research, valid knowledge production is understood as an ongoing negotiation and discussion between competing interpretations (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 264). To examine validity is to examine "the extent to which our observations really do mirror the phenomena or variables that interest us" (my translation, Pervin, 1984 cited in Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 264). Does our method help us examine what we set out to examine?

In the following section, the validity of this thesis will be considered by examining the theory in relation to the research questions, the method and methodology in relation to the topic and the aim, the reliability of the interviewees, and the analytical reasoning (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 267).

One way to examine validity is to examine whether the chosen theory supports the researcher in answering the research questions (Ibid). The research questions of this thesis are aimed to examine practices and perspectives of people who facilitate experiences for others in natural environments. Those practices, perspectives, experiences, natural environments and their associated benefits are all encompassed by the CES framework (Figure 1) applied in this thesis. The CES framework enables examination of human agency (practices) in its cultural and environmental context, which makes it suitable for a human ecology approach (Steiner, 2003, p. 55).

Another way to examine validity is to examine whether the chosen method and methodology are helpful in examining the topic according to the aim of the research (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 267). The aim of this thesis is to understand facilitators' practices and perspectives from their own subjective point of view, which make interviews a motivated method. Phenomenological interviews in particular invite the interviewees' lifeworlds the way they perceive and describe it, focusing on *understanding*. The interviewees were purposively sampled to gain width regarding professional title, organization, target groups, and natural environments, which corresponds with the aim of the thesis.

One of the intentions behind conducting semi structured interviews leaning toward unstructured is to counteract a tendency of interviewees to adjust their answers according to what they believe the researcher wants to hear. Instead, the (semi structured interviews leaning toward unstructured) interviews of this thesis were to a large extent driven by the interviewees' own associations.

Phenomenological interviews produce data of a highly subjective quality. By operationalizing the analysis through the CES framework and providing transparency of my reasoning, the reader is invited to follow the process in a detailed way and may form its own understanding. Thus, the interpretations and conclusions presented in this thesis are, so to speak, continually up for negotiation and discussion.

## Analysis

The analysis is structured around codes, both sphere codes and theme codes, as follows; Creating interaction, Facilitation, The self, Cultural benefits, Environmental consciousness, Human made and nature made, Cultural values in light of the coronavirus, and Cultural goods. The greater part of the material is centered around the interaction of cultural practices and their interaction with environmental spaces. This was to be expected as this is where human agency ('person' in the human ecological triangle), and thus the interviewees, is located.

### Creating interaction

Environmental spaces provide opportunities for cultural practices. However, these opportunities are unpredictable, as described by the outdoor guide; "Nature is unpredictable. You can't plan a guided tour. You can't plan what kind of mushrooms you'll see, which animal tracks you'll see. What the weather will be like, if the bats are out flying." As cultural practices and environmental spaces interact, facilitators of cultural practices must respond to these unpredictable opportunities. Both the outdoor educator and the outdoor guide



described an approach that embraces and makes use of opportunities provided. “It is up to me as the pedagogue to see possibilities,” said the outdoor educator, referring to the fact that even in the smallest rubbish-like natural things that many people overlook, there are opportunities for engagement and education. The outdoor guide said that in her work, it is important to actively approach visitors and make details of the environment visible to them. She said that as she introduces for example a polypore growing on a tree (what we understand as an opportunity), then the visitors are engaged and want to know more.

From the perspectives of the interviewees, opportunities enable. The interviewees are active in their interaction as they identify unpredictable opportunities and facilitate cultural practices around things that other people may not even notice. In turn, the engagement with the environment grows. This interactional process constitutes a cultural ecosystem service. However, the response and interaction is dependent on knowledge. The outdoor guide points to this in saying that she is dependent on both the environment and her knowledge of the environmental space (Swedish: “*platskännedom*”). Thus, knowledge determines *if* and *what* opportunities are identified and *how* facilitators respond through cultural practices.

This notion is underscored by the outdoor educator. She described that some of the teachers she educates who are new to outdoor pedagogy feel worried about leaving the classroom behind and go teach outdoors. They worry about managing both the group and the education outdoors where things are less predictable. The outdoor educator said that she aims to achieve a mindshift by encouraging teachers to *explore alongside* the children (Swedish: “*våga vara medupptäckare*”), instead of trying to have all the answers. However, teachers as well as parents also express fear of children getting hurt outdoors. The outdoor educator spoke a lot about this fear and how she strongly encourages adults to allow for children to take calculated risks. “[Children] have to be allowed to climb high, try high speed, be allowed to hide, to not be constantly observed, be allowed to play with water and handle fire. To use real tools, to wrestle. [...] All these things, children have to experience and practice in order to be able to take responsibility and to identify and calculate risks by themselves as adults.”

These examples show that environmental spaces can cause worry and fear among people who are unaccustomed to interacting with them. As humans can not fully control what opportunities will be provided, their fear may be understood as a fear of loss of control. Just like the outdoor guide expressed earlier that “[y]ou can’t plan a guided tour,” teachers can not fully know exactly what will happen when teaching outdoors. The same goes for risks - what if there is a very climbable tree? In her work, the outdoor educator provides *knowledge* to support and encourage teachers to develop new responses to environmental opportunities, an approach that views opportunities as enabling instead of worrying or

dangerous. Environmental spaces *enable* teachers to explore alongside children; environmental spaces *enable* children to take calculated risks. This shift is not isolated to the sphere of cultural practices, but influences cultural values. As teachers no longer regard opportunities of environmental spaces as worrying or dangerous but instead enabling, their very view and valuation of the environment has shifted.

As established earlier, cultural ecosystem services are created by interaction between cultural practices and environmental spaces. Thus, in supporting teachers to facilitate cultural practices in *interaction* with environmental spaces, the outdoor educator supports them to become facilitators and co-creators of cultural ecosystem services.

## Facilitation

Facilitation has emerged as a central characteristic of the interviewees' practices. The outdoor educator said that when a school class goes outside "there is much less of a pedagogue lecturing or telling [the children] exactly what to do, it is a way to explore alongside one another." The outdoor pedagogue, too, spoke of facilitating "experiences with nature" and to provide "knowledge and feeling" (Swedish: "*kunskap och känsla*"). The facilitating approach was illustrated in detail by the rehab gardener. She described the garden as a supportive and enriching environment that provides many opportunities to "find [...] metaphors or connections to your own life and health." "[W]e open up for the possibility of these kinds of thoughts to arise," but she emphasised that "[w]e don't give lectures [...], our practice is based on experiences. Most often these [kinds of reflections] just arise. And sometimes they may not. It's individual [...]." "I try not to be explicit [...], I rather want this to be explored on your own terms. If it is [at all]."

The interviewees enable, explore, and embrace the subjective experience of each participant, which signifies a facilitating practice. As phrased by Aaskov Knudsen (2020, p. 150), the facilitator "make[s] it possible for the participants' own experiences and values to take centre stage." The interviewees' explicit rejection of lecturing underscores this.

The interviewees illustrate that the facilitating approach encompasses experiences in three ways; the experience of cultural practices, the experience of environmental spaces, and the experience of subjective cultural benefits. They do not control others' experiences, they merely enable and facilitate them. Thus, we may establish that facilitation is a central characteristic of cultural practices and, in addition, how cultural practices relate to and interact with environmental spaces and cultural benefits (Figure 1).

## The self

Cultural practices are in the CES framework (Figure 1) defined as “Activities that relate people to each other and the natural world”. Note that it says ‘to each other *and* the natural world’ - not ‘or’. This entails, to my understanding, that those two relations are assumed to grow simultaneously. The rehab gardener spoke clearly to this when acknowledging that growing a connection to others in the group, the cultural context, as well as growing a connection to the garden, the environmental context, is important - simultaneously. The outdoor educator emphasized that teaching outdoors gives rise to changes in the teacher-pupil dynamic; they will relate to each other differently when they step outside and explore alongside one another. The outdoor pedagogue said that adventures in nature build comradery and leadership.

However, the interviewees share an additional relation or connection that grows outdoors - the relation to the self. The rehab gardener described that participants often have ignored the signals of their own bodies for a long time, which manifests in symptoms like pain, dizziness, and headaches. Therefore, the rehab program focuses on facilitating for participants to reconnect with their bodies and its signals. The outdoor pedagogue said that being in nature is empowering (Swedish: “*självstärkande*”). The outdoor educator said that she wants to convey to people that “nature can be a space where one can just be. To reflect and unwind and discover new things but there are no expectations present.” Whether nature is a scrub or a deep forest, to be in nature and not be observed, to be in solitude, she said, is empowering (Swedish: “*att man stärker sig själv*”). All of these perspectives represent a relation to the self, whether it is about empowerment or reconnection. This represents a change in the relation to the self.

Fish et al. (2016, p. 213) say that “ecosystems are replete with cultural meaning through which people understand themselves and their relationship to the world around them” when describing identity related cultural benefits. Cultural practices are also described as being “social and solitary” (Ibid). This means that one can indeed ‘do’ a cultural practice and acquire benefits solo. However, solitary pursuits are not included in the actual CES framework (Figure 1) and its definition of cultural practices. As the interviewees so clearly emphasised the relation to the self that may grow in natural environments I want to challenge the definition and propose a new one; Cultural practices are activities that relate people to *themselves*, each other, and the natural world. This is further anchored within the ecological triangle (Figure 2) and Steiner (2003, p. 55) who explicitly addresses the recursive relation to the self (P-P).

## Cultural benefits

Cultural ecosystem services *enable* cultural benefits to arise, they do not directly lead to or produce them (Figure 1). To reiterate, benefits are defined and understood in three key ways; the identities they help frame, the experiences they help enable and the capabilities they help equip (Fish et al., 2016, p. 211). However, as described in the theory section, the benefits are diverse and subjective, and should not be artificially separated. This approach is manifested in the interviewee's practices.

Overall, their focus on facilitation actively embraces and encourages each participant's subjective experience, as described earlier. This does not mean, however, that the interviewees and the organizations they work for do not have specific goals. The outdoor educator educates teachers in outdoor pedagogy to enable diverse learning in schools and preschools. The rehab gardener and her team facilitates a rehab program for participants who are ill, so that they may come back to health and be able to work again. The outdoor guide and outdoor pedagogue have similar goals that involve education, public health, and nature conservation. As the interviewees work toward achieving these goals, they make space for participants' subjective experience and personal process which entails smaller benefits. Thus, over time, each participant is enabled to grow a diverse and unique set of benefits that eventually constitute a larger benefit or goal, such as education, rehabilitation or health. This is the signifying quality of the interviewees' facilitating approach to benefits.

In the CES framework (Figure 1), this is illustrated by the enabling and shaping processes that connect cultural services and cultural benefits; cultural services enable cultural benefits to arise, which then shape both cultural practices and environmental spaces. They, in turn, co-create cultural services, and so on. Larger benefits or goals are thus actually constituted and enabled by many service-benefit cycles that take place over time, or as phrased by Fish et al. (2016, p. 211) - "series of cultural services."

## Environmental consciousness

All interviewees spoke of environmental consciousness. The outdoor guide wanted visitors to gain an "understanding of how humans are connected to nature [...], what role humans play in nature." The rehab gardener said that we as humanity have distanced ourselves and lost connection with nature and the understanding that we are actually part of it all. She thought that gardening itself may serve as an eyeopener. The outdoor educator said that it is important to grow a connection because if we don't feel connected to all living things, then there would be no reason to care for the planet. Similarly, the outdoor pedagogue said that "[t]o me, these intimate experiences with nature are crucial in order to grow a relationship to

nature. Because if you don't have a relation to nature you won't care about it, or see [...] how everything is connected [...].”

All in all, from the perspectives of the interviewees, connection and understanding is central to environmental consciousness. This reflects ‘the sustainability argument’ mentioned in the background section (Lisberg Jensen, 2011, p. 45). Connection and understanding can be understood as benefits, which over time influence overarching cultural values and promote environmental consciousness. Environmental consciousness in turn influences how people relate to the environment overall - the biophysical domain - which the interviewees referred to as “the planet,” “nature,” “the environment,” and “the climate.”

### **Human made and nature made**

In the CES framework (Figure 1), the issue of ‘human made and nature made’ is located in the interaction between cultural practices and environmental spaces. We have throughout this analysis explored such interactions already, but this section is explicitly focused on physical alterations of environmental spaces. Although the interviewees work in different natural environments, their perspectives make a similar point - that meaningful alterations of environmental spaces enhance their enabling processes and thus generate more interaction. This section overall underscores the position of Fish et al. (2020, p. 2, 4) by recognizing that cultural services are not only immaterial but material too.

First, we will explore the interaction between the rehab gardener and her garden. Thereafter, we will visit the perspectives of the outdoor pedagogue and outdoor guide, who both work in combined nature reserves and natural recreation areas. Lastly, the outdoor guide brings forth reflections regarding coronavirus regulations and funding.

Along with the rehab gardener we step into a garden and a context where the environmental space is explicitly designed by humans. “[W]hat experiences may this plant provide?” is an illustrative question phrased by her. Let us consider this as an example of the material dimension of interaction between cultural practices and environmental spaces. During winter when the garden rests, the rehab gardener plans for the coming season, deciding on seeds and plants. This shapes (the cultural understanding of) the garden. In spring, the garden enables cultural practices such as sowing and planting followed by repotting, watering, and weeding. This in turn shapes the garden - there is indeed a difference between a garden that is taken care of and not. As the plants grow they provide greenery and flowers, they host insects and contribute to growing spaces in the garden. They provide food and material. All these aspects enable different cultural practices. For example, the rehab

gardener makes sure that the garden provides natural material to be harvested and used in creative and crafting exercises.

This clearly illustrates the material dimension of interaction between cultural practices and environmental spaces as well as their co-creation. It shows that by making meaningful alterations, the rehab gardener enhances the garden's ability to enable cultural practices and thereby the interaction is diversified.

The outdoor pedagogue said that “[y]ou need quite a lot of support and help if you are unaccustomed [to nature].” She spoke of practical issues such as building and maintaining hiking trails, markers and maps. She said that they alter the natural environment so that inexperienced people are not held back. People are afraid to get lost, but with time, she said, people feel more safe and grow confidence to leave main trails and explore further.

On the topic of altering or not, the outdoor guide spoke about accessibility. She said that accessibility is a matter of finding balance between altering the natural environment in order to make it more accessible, and keeping a feeling of wilderness that may be lost with too much interference. “It’s possible to walk through an industrial forest and get the feeling of ‘ooh, this is nature, untouched by humans’ - and then all the pine trees stand in straight rows, there is no dead wood and so on. But it still feels like you’re in nature. However, as soon as you see something that is actually built, then it feels... more human in a way. And you want to get away from that.”

She also shared reflections about the visitor’s center building at her work. Its importance, she said, “depends on what lense you look through.” On the one hand, it is not important at all, as the surrounding natural environment is the actual main focus. Usually almost 70% of their work (with visitors) is based outside, and following the coronavirus it is 100% outside. On the other hand, their funding is (usually) based on the number of people who enter through the doors of the building. Perhaps most importantly, the building provides a sense of safety to people who are unaccustomed to nature or weather - “You can come out and experience nature. You can go for a stroll and then you can always go inside. So, in that way, [the building] provides safety.”

When considering ‘human made and nature made’ from the perspectives of the outdoor pedagogue and outdoor guide, it is not a question of either-or but rather a matter of nuance and finding balance (which is why this section is titled human made *and* nature made, not ‘or’). A general take away from the interviews is the basic acknowledgement that nature and natural environments can be challenging in different ways. By making (human made) alterations, both the outdoor pedagogue and outdoor guide provide support in an

effort to make people feel safe, and thus enhancing the environmental spaces' ability to enable cultural practices.

All interviewees put emphasis on feeling safe and safety (Swedish: *trygg* and *trygghet*). For example, the rehab gardener said that "In the beginning [for a rehab group], we put a lot of time into creating a sense of safety" (Swedish: "*skapa trygghet*"). As expressed above, the outdoor pedagogue and the outdoor guide make alterations to nature in order to make people feel safe so that they even show up in the first place. Thus, a sense of safety is very important, if not prerequisite, in order for cultural ecosystem services to enable cultural benefits. Especially regarding larger benefits that, as described earlier, are constituted by many service-benefit cycles, it is important that participants want to come back and take part in activities again. Both the outdoor pedagogue and outdoor guide pointed this out. Lastly, all interviewees express that their facilitating practices are based on *positive experiences* of exploration, joy, inspiration, reflection and engagement - "It has to be joyful" (Swedish: "*lustfyllt*"), as the outdoor pedagogue said. All this combined, we may conclude that a sense of safety is important, if not prerequisite, in order for cultural ecosystem services to enable cultural benefits - and that one way to ensure a sense of safety is to alter environmental spaces.

Perspectives on the relation between human made and nature made was further brought forward by the outdoor guide. She spoke about the building at her work with regards to coronavirus regulations and with regards to funding.

The coronavirus sparked management questions as the outdoor guide and her colleagues began to adjust their workspace according to state regulations. "Then it was very hard to kind of distinguish - [...] where is our responsibility and where does it end?" The visitor's center building was rather given but the campfire sites, the bird watching tower and the trails were trickier, she said. Finally it was decided, following government advice, that the building indoors was the staff's responsibility and the rest was up to each visitors' personal responsibility. "[...] To move in nature has to hold a kind of freedomness to it. You can not have a one-way trail, you just can't," she reflected.

To my understanding, regulations, restrictions and responsibility are all different forms of control. To the outdoor guide, the idea to impose such control outdoors in the ecosystem was simply not imaginable or doable. Hence, the coronavirus restrictions were implemented on the building. This suggests that human made built environments are more easily controlled than nature made environmental spaces, which, as established earlier, provide unpredictable opportunities. It is my impression that this unpredictableness and the freedomness that the outdoor guide spoke about are overlapping notions. Her perspective

indicates that if strict control were to be imposed on environmental spaces, then the freedomness (or unpredictableness) would be suppressed and thus, the environmental space's ability to enable cultural practices would be reduced, inhibiting interaction.

As described earlier, the outdoor guide said that the funding of her work is based on how many people enter through the doors of the building even though the work that she and her colleagues do is about the outdoor environment. As discussed in the theory section, cultural ecosystem services overall have been unsuccessfully measured by conventional economic and scientific quantifying methods. What the outdoor guide described illustrates such an instance of applying ill-suited quantifying methods of measurement, which in addition targets the building rather than the outdoor environment. The simplest correction would be to instead measure how many people enter the outdoor environment. However, this of course means that one overlooks all qualitative data, such as why people come to visit in the first place, what spaces they choose to interact with and how, and what benefits they may have acquired - and if such data correlates or not with the organization's qualitative goals. I want to point out that it is possible that such qualitative investigations take place, although the outdoor guide did not mention it. No matter, the fact that the funding of the outdoor centered work they do is based on quantified data related to the building serves as a practical example of theoretical issues within the concept of cultural ecosystem services.

### Cultural values in light of the coronavirus

The outdoor pedagogue said that due to the coronavirus, people showed up en masse at natural recreation areas and trail heads this past season, putting a strain on the infrastructure. Parking lots was one problem to solve, another one was information as the new visitors had little experience - "information and freedom to roam [(Swedish: *allemansrätten*)] and where it is allowed to make fires and what you are allowed to do in order not to damage nature [...]." Likewise, the outdoor guide experienced similar challenges as the coronavirus led new visitors to her natural recreation area. She described a frustration growing among the regulars toward the newcomers who didn't quite know how to behave in a nature reserve. One conflict was about noise. "[...] there is a culture not to be too noisy when visiting a nature reserve [...]. And to definitely not play music from your phone," she explained.

The new visitors who found their ways to natural recreation areas and hiking trails during the 2020 season bring to light cultural norms and expectations at play in what we understand as cultural ecosystem services. The freedom to roam, as a cultural value, is mediated through the outdoor pedagogue's practices. The issue of noise may be understood



as a conflict of cultural values that is mediated and played out by different groups of visitors' practices. This represents a process where norms are reproduced and transformed at the same time.

## Cultural goods

All interviewees are professionals who get paid for the work they do, but neither of their participants (visitors, school and pre school teachers and children, rehab participants) pay to take part. Instead, all are funded by either municipalities, county administrations, or county councils (Swedish: *kommuner, länsstyrelser, landsting*). One interviewee previously had additional funding for a specific project through a bank foundation. However, overall, the cultural ecosystem services covered in this thesis is funded by tax money. The outdoor educator and outdoor pedagogue described that their workplaces had a 'mission' or 'assignment' (Swedish: "*uppdrag*") to achieve goals on behalf of the municipalities respectively county administrations. This reflects the position of Fish et al. (2016, p. 213), that "cultural ecosystem services are not reducible to the market sphere" - they are not commodified, "but neither are they wholly outside it" - they are paid for.

Fish et al. (Ibid) say that "services are subject to specific kinds of economic construction and transaction that place many of these elements within the realm of market based 'goods.'" If a cultural service is also a cultural good if it is involved in economic construction and transaction, then the cultural services facilitated by the interviewees are also cultural goods. Contrary, these cultural services are part of the public sector and thus situated outside the market. In addition, I argue that these cultural services are not *perceived* as goods by neither the interviewees nor their participants, as the (non-market) economic transactions take place elsewhere. This means that phenomenologically, these cultural services are not cultural goods.

## Conclusions

To reiterate, the research questions aim to examine practices and perspectives of people who, within different contexts, facilitate experiences for others in natural environments. The people who facilitate are referred to as facilitators.

- How do the facilitators facilitate their practices?
- What are the facilitators' perspectives on their practices?
- Are there similarities and differences between various facilitators' practices and perspectives?

The distinction of practices and perspectives has proved to be a merely artificial separation for analytical purposes. The interviewees' practices are motivated and created by their perspectives and, in turn, their perspectives are influenced by their practices. This corresponds to the theoretical assumption described in the theory section; Fish et al. (2016, p. 213) say that cultural practices reflect and manifest cultural values while they also influence them, and Steiner (2003) assumes that (cultural) practices (P) in the human ecological triangle reproduce or transform 'society' (S), which we understand as the element that holds cultural values. Cultural practices also shape environmental spaces which become more and more culturally distinguished from the biophysical domain, which means that cultural practices shape our perspective on the natural environments - 'environment' (E).

Facilitation, which is central throughout the interviews and the analysis, can be understood both as a practice ('to facilitate') and a perspective ('a facilitating approach'). Facilitation is signified by the interviewees emphasis on practices based on experiences and not on lecturing; the interviewees enable, explore, and embrace each participant's subjective experience. The interviewees' facilitating approach encompasses participants' experiences in three direct ways; the experience of cultural practices, the experience of environmental spaces, and the experience of subjective cultural benefits. Over time, service-benefit cycles enable larger goals (or benefits) to be achieved, such as education, rehabilitation, and public health. Thus, by facilitating each participant's individual process, the interviewees support them in achieving goals.

The interviewees facilitate their practices by actively identifying opportunities of environmental spaces and creating cultural practices based on those opportunities. Opportunities are more or less unpredictable - the forest or lake will certainly be there, but whether birds or insects show up is not certain. The interviewees' embracing and utilizing response to opportunities is dependent on knowledge; people who are unaccustomed and have less knowledge may experience a loss of control in environmental spaces which can cause worry, fear, or a sense of feeling unsafe. The cultural practices the interviewees facilitate enable experiences for their participants, which may enable subjective cultural benefits to arise.

The interviewees describe that their practices are based on *positive* experiences. Therefore, it is very important, if not prerequisite, that participants feel a sense of safety. As outlined in the background section of this thesis, the positive experience is seminal for benefits to arise (Lisberg Jensen, 2008, p. 12; Mårtensson, 2011, p. 18). This is also in line with Fish et al.'s (2016, p. 214) normative view of culture, as well as the ecosystem service

concept overall which focuses on (positive) contributions to human well-being (Schröter et al., 2014, p. 518).

In essence, the cultural practices examined in this thesis stand on three legs; the knowledge of the facilitator, the opportunities provided by environmental spaces, and the participants' own experiences.

The interviewees' cultural practices relate people to each other and the natural world simultaneously. However, another relation was emphasised - the relation to the self, which was described in terms of empowerment and connection. In the human ecological triangle, the relation to the self is characterized as a recursive relation between 'person' and 'person' (P-P). Fish et al. (2016, p. 213) describe the relation to the self in their paper but have not included it in the CES framework (Figure 1). The results of this thesis imply that it should be included, and the following definition of cultural practices is proposed; Cultural practices are activities that relate people to *themselves*, each other, and the natural world. This definition reflects the three recursive systems of the human ecological triangle (Figure 2) simultaneously; (P-P), (P-S), and (P-E), respectively.

Practices of both facilitators and participants contribute in reproducing or transforming cultural values connected to their practices.

All interviewees express that their practices could contribute to environmental consciousness by providing participants with connection and understanding for either nature or the human dependence on nature. This stands in relation to all participants, no matter age. Thus, 'the sustainability argument' as termed by Lisberg Jensen (my translation, 2011, p. 45) extends beyond children's contact with nature.

The interviewees make physical or material alterations to environmental spaces to enhance their ability to provide opportunities for cultural practices and thus deepen and diversify the interaction. The matter of 'human made and nature made' is not a question of either-or but rather of finding balance. The degree to which alterations are made differs between the interviewees. While the outdoor guide expressed the importance of preserving a sense of wilderness in her environmental space, the rehab gardener illustrated how she actively interacts with her garden in a material sense. This is the one instance where the difference of the interviewees' natural environments displays in an obvious way.

From a strictly theoretical perspective, the ecosystem services (that is, the interaction between cultural practices and environmental spaces) examined in this thesis may or may not be cultural goods (Fish et al., 2016, p. 213). The cultural services are subject to economic construction and transaction, which indicate that they are cultural goods. However, as they

are paid for by tax money and thus are part of the public sector, they are located outside of the economic market, which indicates that they are not cultural goods. Finally, from the perspectives of the interviewees as well as their participants, the cultural services are not (phenomenologically) *perceived* as cultural goods as the (non-market) economic transactions take place elsewhere.

Throughout this thesis, I touch upon control - or rather non-control - in various forms. Environmental spaces provide unpredictable opportunities that make environmental spaces less controllable. The interviewees *facilitate* experiences, they do not control them. The facilitators *co-create* ecosystem services that enable subjective benefits to arise, they do not single-handedly produce either services or benefits. To the outdoor guide, the idea to impose coronavirus restrictions - a form of control - outdoors in the ecosystem was not imaginable, it would inhibit the freedomness of the outdoors. All in all, this corresponds with the characterization of nature as a “free space” (my translation, Swedish: “*frirum*”) provided by Mårtensson et al. (2011, p. 15) in the background section of this thesis. They describe that nature is challenging but also enabling; it is to a lesser extent under human *control*. Through the interviewees, we may conclude that non-control is at the center of their facilitating practices, the experiences they enable, and the natural environments they interact with.

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## Information inför intervju

humanekologisk uppsats av Kajsa Hansson

Ur ett humanekologiskt perspektiv är naturen inte en enkel fysisk entitet utan snarare en relationell process mellan människa och miljö. Personer som i sitt arbete leder andra i naturliga miljöer har därför en central roll - att socialt facilitera naturen. Därför är jag intresserad av att intervjua dessa nyckelpersoner som jag ser som högst inflytelserika i vår samtid, som i allt större utsträckning vänder sig till naturen för att finna lösningar både på organisations- och individnivå.

Genom intervjuer vill jag undersöka hur intervjupersonerna tänker kring och förstår sitt arbete, sin relation till naturen, och om deras natursyn förändrats över tid genom till exempel utbildning, arbete och personliga erfarenheter. Jag är också intresserad av deras tankar kring naturens roll i samhälle i stort. Jag kommer genomföra intervjuerna på ett semistrukturerat sätt, d.v.s. utifrån teman snarare än förformulerade frågor. Jag kommer göra min analys utifrån konceptet kulturella ekosystemtjänster som betonar just samspelet mellan människa och miljö, där sociokulturella och biofysiska dimensioner möts.

Mina teman inför intervjuerna är följande;

- Just nu - Hur har året med corona varit?
- Bakgrund - Utbildning, arbeten, personlig bakgrund.
- Naturrelation - Erfarenheter, tankar, perspektiv på sitt eget arbetssätt, förhoppningar.
- Naturen i samhället - Hur naturen/arbetet kan bidra.

Jag följer vetenskapsrådets forskningsetiska principer inom humanistisk-samhällsvetenskaplig forskning. Deltagare är informerade om undersökningens syfte. De bestämmer själva över sin medverkan och kan avbryta sin medverkan. Deltagare måste ge uttalat samtycke till att intervjuer spelas in. Uppgifter och data kommer brukas endast i forskningssyfte. Utöver detta kommer enskilda personer och verksamheter i uppsatsen anonymiseras och alltså inte nämnas vid namn.

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