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# Introduction

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This international compilation brings together current leading scholars in outdoor studies from a variety of disciplines to bring to readers principal ideas and leading-edge developments. We also draw together the strands of outdoor studies into one volume, making the important connections among key threads including education, leisure, physical culture, sport, the outdoor environment and practice.

During the last decades research into outdoor studies has grown significantly, yet haphazardly and erratically. This text examines and reflects upon these developments and draws upon scholars from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds to consider the accomplishments and opportunities for future research and perspectives. Mapping this discipline, such that the relevant connections are emphasised and emergent research is highlighted, is timely.

This *International Handbook of Outdoor Studies* draws together what may have been viewed as disconnected dimensions in the past. This volume is not only a review of outdoor studies, but aims to provide a coherent framework through providing greater engagement among the contributing dimensions and by making cutting-edge, interdisciplinary research available. It provides a resource for researchers, policy makers, lecturers, and graduate and undergraduate students undertaking research and applying research to practice. This Handbook brings together and summarises the current core body of knowledge in outdoor studies, and offers guidance for the future.

Outdoor studies has its roots in the late 1990s, when the education assignment of the term outdoor education was felt, by some academics and practitioners, to be too limiting because it did not cover the full range of study and practice in the outdoors, which was perceived not to be of an educational nature. In some countries this concern also coincided with an increasing marginalisation of the outdoors in school curricula as well as a widening expanse of opportunities and understanding of its potential range and breadth worldwide. Many professionals held an underlying and emerging desire to capture an understanding of outdoor environments through environmental education and human–nature interactions with interpretative and reflexive approaches.

One definition of outdoor studies used in the UK is:

a discipline which includes the study of perceptions and responses to the natural environment, personal and environmental philosophy, environmental knowledge and outdoor skills. Using direct experience, it seeks to raise environmental awareness and encourage personal development within a framework of individual and group values and safety. (UCSM, 1998, p. 1)

Outdoor studies, we suggest, is the term that fruitfully encompasses a broad range of approaches, foci and methods such as, but not limited to, experiential learning, adventure education, organised camps, environmental education, outdoor leadership, nature-based sport and wilderness therapy. Terminology in any sphere, and not least in this book, is governed by culture, policy drivers and history, with political, temporal, institutional, chronological and marketing determinants. We maintain agreement that:

The ‘outdoors’ may be perceived, in one sense, as an ideological space where people alone or together engage actively or passively with their ‘environment’ . . . In another sense, the ‘outdoors’ is perceived as a vehicle for learning as well as leisure . . . As such, it is formally constituted by a number of groupings looking towards recognition and the development of outdoor profession(s) . . . Thus the outdoor sector provides, makes available or engages with, outdoor adventure experiences for a variety of purposes, including education, youth and social work, management development, therapy, leisure and recreation. Consequently, diverse outdoor traditions have emerged not only in relation to specific geographical landscapes, but also as a consequence of particular cultural, social and political contexts. (Humberstone, Brown & Richards, 2003, p. 7)

A significant development in the last 20 years has been in the socio-cultural and socio-environmental study of outdoor recreation, leisure and sporting activities. These areas provide the medium through which formal, non-formal and informal education and learning have been made available and accessible mainly, but not only, to young people. Emerging from particular schools of sociological thought, these types of activity have been identified for the purposes of social and/or cultural analysis as sports including lifestyle, alternative, extreme, adventure (e.g. Lyng, 1990; Rinehart & Sydnor, 2003; Wheaton, 2004; McNamee, 2007; Thorpe & Rinehart, 2010) or for socio-environmental analyses, nature-based sport/sport in nature (Vanreusel, 1995; Humberstone, 1998), and more recently, action sport (see Thorpe, 2014).

Initially, research analyses and writings around adventurous and extreme sports from sociology of sport perspectives, for example, tended to be concerned with theorising the notion of voluntary risk taking or being ‘on the edge’ in Western society. From an educational perspective, Turčová, Martin and Neuman (2005) highlighted the variations and ambiguities in the ways outdoor and adventurous activities have been identified. Furthermore, some educators tend to refer to these educational media as outdoor or adventurous activities (see Allin & Humberstone, 2010) or, in Scandinavian contexts, *friluftsliv* (Gurholt, 2008).

Although these diverse interpretations and terminologies provide rich bounty for analysis, they also point to tensions among different schools of thought, and significant potential for discourse, and in particular the analysis of outdoor physical cultures as sports. For example, more than four decades ago, outdoor educator and mountaineer Drasdo (1972) asked:

Is mountaineering anything to do with sport? Despite some affinities, the answer is no. It is impossible to find a definition of sport which will include all the values of mountaineering without also including all manner of activities which are manifestly not of a sporting nature. (p. 33)

These variations in terminology and thinking across disciplines and countries are worth discussing today. The chapters in this Handbook represent thinking from across disciplines and from authors in more than a dozen countries throughout the world. The authors of these chapters describe what outdoor studies means in their contexts, and highlight the underlying, and oft times unspoken, differences and hegemonies among the viewpoints and perspectives.

The intention of this Handbook is to draw upon this internationally and interdisciplinarily varied picture of the field that incorporates outdoor areas such as education, learning, recreation, activities, sport and adventure, including combination sub-sets of physical education, environmental education and categorisations within those areas. We present this picture from a Western-oriented pivot, using the English language as its tool. Texts in other languages besides English are likely to highlight a richer interpretation of this field. A pluralistic approach including transdisciplinarity as it runs through outdoor studies, however, is presented with critical framing, with the emphasis on professional practice through historical, social, cultural, ethical, methodological and political lenses. The Handbook is necessarily selective in cultural representations, choice of emphasis and topic areas. However, paradoxically, it fulfils a niche area, and has international and transdiscipline appeal.

This *International Handbook of Outdoor Studies* is organised into six parts. The first, 'Constructs and theoretical concepts', defines and explores the structural and philosophical underpinning of the discipline in key areas and through multiple perspectives with a flavour and sense of internationalism and culture. The next part, 'Formal education in outdoor studies', focuses on the training of teachers and formal curricula within as well as outside physical education, in addition to more specialised aspects such as outdoor play, outdoor learning, environmental education, outdoor education, and outdoor and adventurous activities. The third part, 'Non-formal education and training in/for/about the outdoors', addresses structured out-of-school outdoor settings with designated leadership, such as after-school programmes, community-based organisations and summer learning environments. Non-formal opportunities provide a means to combine education and leisure/outdoor recreation in highly complementary ways. The fourth part concentrates on 'International voices and cultural interpretations', and centres on hearing cultural and historical backgrounds and perspectives aside from the dominant British-American discourses. These cultural assessments allow traditional as well as emerging ideas to come forward based on varying cultural interpretations of outdoor studies. The fifth part explores 'Social and environmental justice and outdoor studies'. Outdoor studies cannot be complete without consideration of social and environmental thought, and the diverse frameworks that illustrate contradictions, complexities and webs of connection. The final part of this Handbook, 'Transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches to understanding and exploring outdoor studies', aims to describe how researchers and practitioners from different disciplines work jointly to create new conceptual, theoretical, methodological and translational processes that move beyond discipline-specific approaches to promote outdoor studies.

This Handbook signposts future participatory research, through the continued involvement of providers, participants and other stakeholders. The chapters converge on understanding and potentially transforming human interaction within and with the environment or non-human world. At the educational level, co-construction in outdoor learning increasingly is seen as a

process of developing best practice to make a difference to people and to the environment. While, at a cultural level, participatory research in diverse nature-based physical cultures may uncover the practices that may lead to increasing ecological sensibilities and praxis.

In this Handbook, we present a range of viewpoints from authors from different disciplines and geographical areas. A value of this book is that it raises questions and challenges to consider in the future related to research and to practice in the outdoors. Chapters in this book highlight the broad range of contexts, understandings and approaches that make up outdoor studies. Nevertheless, mapped across all of these dimensions is the significance of the dynamic, fluid human–environment/nature interactions and the importance that outdoor pedagogies of diverse kinds may have in promoting ecological sensibilities among young and not so young, and within various outdoor educational and physical cultures.

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