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The Art of Friluftsliv, a New Philosophy for Climate Change

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The art of friluftsliv, a new philosophy for climate change

“Climate change is just a symptom of much wider problems concerning the way we relate with each other and with nature.”

According to a speaker at the Ecological Challenges Oslo 2014 Conference in September, climate change exists because of human’s nature misuse and sociological tendencies.

A community in Norway is doing something about it.

Situated in Hurdal, is Norway’s first ever eco-village. The community is now nearly 200 people strong and prides itself on integrating an enriching social environment with a resource-intensive lifestyle to reduce their carbon footprints.

The truth is, this connection with nature is nothing new to Norwegians.

Spirit of climate change

Psychologists say that when it comes to climate there almost couldn’t be a more perfect problem for the human brain to want to avoid. Climate change is abstract and because of this the human psyche is more attracted to the idea of ignoring environmental threats than it is to coming to terms with them.

But what if it is fundamentally within all of us to address climate change?

Friluftsliv is a Norwegian word that literally translates to “free air life” and describes Norwegian’s cultural enchantment with nature. It is a spirit that lives within all of us, not just Norwegians, and encourages people to explore nature and to also respect it. A give and take sort of philosophy.

“Friluftsliv is part of Norwegian identity,” said Merete Hovdenak, a Konservator at Galleri Würth who studied friluftsliv during her master’s program. “It’s how we live. We don’t go to a cafe to meet up, we go outdoors to the mountains or sea to get away from all the stress of the city. It’s easier to clear your head when you are out in beautiful nature.”

Although it doesn’t easily translate and its connotations go far beyond any English approximation, friluftsliv is an ethos applicable to anyone. It is possible that through friluftsliv the human race as a whole can rally around curbing climate change.

Adopting friluftsliv and implementing it into daily life like most Norwegians have would not only reap mental health benefits, but would also contribute to the well-being of the environment.

Take the eco-village in Hurdal for example.

Friluftsliv, a way of life

“For a Norwegian it's hard to understand that environmental threats exist because many of us treat our surroundings with such a high level of respect,” Hovdenak said. “We are so close to nature and make sure not to harm it by picking flowers or littering because we want to be able to use it and enjoy it in the future.”

The idea of creating an eco-village originated more than 20 years ago, but it was not until 2002 that project Hurdal got its start.

With more than 30 environmentally friendly homes constructed in the last 12 years, the community is flourishing. The eco-village seeks to provide more sustainable living in rural areas and promotes innovative solutions in response to climate change, pollution, resource scarcity and social problems that our environment and society are facing today.

The goal for those living in the eco-village is to practice the alternative to an individualistic, materialistic and consumer oriented lifestyle. Instead they seek a low-consumption, sociocultural way of life.

“The village values a holistic lifestyle,” said Kristin Seim Buflod, Hurdal eco-village's design educator. “We combine many aspects like growing your own food, interacting with neighbors and sustainable housing to give village members the whole package.”

The homes in the eco-village are solar energy. (?) Several greenhouses, gardens and an organic farmer produce fruits, vegetables, herbs and berries that are cultivated in the village's 160 acres of approved fertile soil. The produce is sold at the village's market and through the kitchen garden farm shop on the premises of the village. In the future, the eco-village hopes to have a wood farm bakery and a village cafe to provide its residents with even more healthy and sustainable food products.

The campus is also designed to minimize transportation needs and everything is within a 10 minute bike ride. The residential areas are pedestrianized, making it easy to get around by foot. Many of the villagers do not own a car and rely solely on their body to transport them - leading to even more time spent in nature.

In terms of the way people interact with each other, the village values volunteer projects and interest groups that facilitate social engagement within the community. Horticulture group, pets group, kayaking group and yoga/meditation group are just several examples of the organized gatherings in the village. At the same level that the village values sustainably and low carbon footprints, it also seeks to reconnect people with each other.

“The social aspect is very important in the village,” Seim Buflod said. “There is a good social environment and because of it there are good neighborhoods. The idea is that people care more about each other when they feel included and it carries over to the way they view and treat the environment. Sociologically, they have found that this way of living is what makes humans

happiest. We are a “herd” species and in such an environment, you get nurturing for many aspects of your life.”

“It’s a lot of work to maintain this type of sustainable lifestyle, but it’s well worth it,” Seim Buflod said. “It’s a way to get down our carbon footprints and reduce overall carbon emissions. The idea has to spread in order to really see a noticeable difference in the environment, but the villagers are definitely preoccupied with their relationship with nature and really focus on giving back to her.”

Nature, like art must be preserved

Just as one appreciates a piece of art, one can appreciate nature by engaging friluftsliv.

A stroll in the park under big green trees, a brisk climb in the mountains, a sleep under the stars - they all offer an experience.

“It is of vital importance for people to connect with nature and be with nature,” Seim Buflod said. “It’s personal as to what it is you like, similar to art, but its so important to engage your mental energy with something that renews your mind.”

Getting out into nature can also be humbling experience for some.

Immersing oneself in the wilderness and enjoying the simplicity nature is a reminder of how important it is to respect the Earth and not damage it by exploiting its natural resources.

“Out in the wilderness you see how little you need to have everything,” said Petter Thorsen, who runs Wild Norway, a company that offers wilderness camping trips and survival courses year round. “There is value in silence.”

Also similar to art, friluftsliv, the passion to care for and be in nature is passed down from generation to generation in Norwegian families.

“A lifelong passion for nature is in instilled in Norwegians as children,” Hovdenak said. “We really try to immerse them in nature beginning at a young age so they truly come to appreciate it and care for it like other generations have.”

Guardians of nature, if you will. That is how the Norwegians see their relationship with their habitats.

“We live from nature and if we destroy it we are destroying our possibility to live. We only have one earth - if we destroy it we have done something very wrong to the universe. This is why it is so important to teach younger generations how valuable nature and our environment is.”