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## (In)equality in the Outdoors: Gender Perspective on Recreation and Tourism Media in the Swedish Mountains

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**Abstract:**

This study investigates participation and visibility of women in outdoor recreation, by looking at the case of mountain areas in Sweden. We examined gender differences in participation in various outdoor recreation and tourism activities in the Swedish mountain region and explored how these activities are portrayed from a gender perspective on the websites of five major tourist destinations. Investigating participation in outdoor recreation from a gender perspective is important, as spending time in nature has been linked to better health and well-being. It can therefore be argued that if men have better opportunities and more encouragement to participate in nature-based activities, women risk exclusion from important elements connected to quality of life.

Remote mountain areas and Northern landscapes have traditionally been imagined and marketed as wild and untamed and, thus, oriented towards the male tourist gaze. Tourist activities such as shopping, visiting spas, spending time with family are, however, most often marketed towards women, perpetuating stereotypes of beauty, motherhood and care in leisure. In order to better understand and possibly counteract persistent gender norms in participation and representation of outdoor recreation, an analysis of tourist media visualizations becomes particularly relevant.

This study aims to contribute to the research on gender representations in tourism media by focusing on promotional images of mountain destinations, grounded in statistical data on outdoor recreation participation in Sweden. The study adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative data analysis aims to find out if there are gender differences in the modes of participation in outdoor recreation among the Swedish population, based on a national survey. The qualitative analysis of images on tourism websites aims to understand how outdoor recreation is represented in promotional media from a gender perspective. The results from both data sources are subsequently integrated.

Results from the quantitative analysis show a statistically significant association between gender and type of outdoor activity in a number of the activities included in the survey. Results from the qualitative image analysis revealed that traditional gender norms were present in the website images, such as portraying women in calm environments and men in action-filled environments. Women were also more often portrayed as passive landscape admirers. Findings also show connections between activity participation and gender display, as, for example,

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significantly more men were engaged in mountain biking, and more men were portrayed participating in this activity.

Persistence of gender norms in the outdoors is problematic on several levels. Perpetuating women's roles as passive participants undermines their aspirations for leadership positions in the outdoor context and reinforce the notion of women as outsiders in this environment. Moreover, portraying men as adrenaline-seeking adventurers places exaggerated expectations on men as conquerors of the outdoors. Stereotypical displays of outdoor recreation activities can therefore be argued to negatively affect both women's and men's relationship with the outdoors, as it can limit both genders in their choice of activity.

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