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## **Young people's outdoor refuges: Movements and (dis)entanglements**

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## Young people's outdoor refuges: Movements and (dis)entanglements

Young people's outdoor refuges have been identified as places that provide respite from everyday pressures. Inspired by four concepts of *lines*, *knots*, *meshwork* and *wayfaring*, as defined by Tim Ingold, this paper aims to contribute with a dynamic understanding of the practices of outdoor refuging in an increasingly demanding and structured everyday life. The paper reports on photo-elicited interviews with twenty-one young people from a countryside town in Denmark. The findings suggest that outdoor refuges simultaneously serve to disentangle young people from distressing knots in their everyday lives, while fostering positive emotional and sensory entanglements with the human and non-human environment. Further, the findings highlight the significance of mobile phones in the young people's refuging practices. The findings resonate with discourses on the changing conditions for young people's spatial autonomy, and raise questions about acknowledging, protecting and promoting their opportunities for outdoor refuging.

**Keywords:** Outdoor refuges; Young people; Mobility; Mobile phones, Multi-sensory relations to outdoor environments; Spatial autonomy

## Introduction

From time to time Neville wanders off to the woods near his home, where he visits a special tree that provides respite from everyday demands at school and at home. For this 14-year-old, 'there are no demands'. In the forest, 'you can just do what you want. For example, if you have tons of homework to do, or something... you just go there and relax and think of something completely different than school and ... Just let your mind drift'.

The opening quote suggests that the outdoors can play a critical role in young people's affective geographies by providing spatial opportunities for respite from the collective demands presented by school. Temporarily removing oneself from everyday life and society to rest and recuperate has a long history (Lea 2008). Various settings and places have proven instrumental in providing restoration and respite (Gesler 2003), and the impacts of outdoor environments with respect to health and well-being is well-established (Kaplan and Kaplan 1989; Ulrich 1983; Adams, Savahl, and Casas 2016).

Owens (1988) highlights how teenagers value outdoor places where they can get away from other people and stay out of sight. And, likewise Sobel (1993) argues that some favourite outdoor places provide escape from social demands and expectations. Outdoor places that provide respite from everyday pressures and convey a sense of freedom and independence seem to play a vital role in meeting the psychological needs of both children and youths (Sommer 1990; Dovey 1990). Young people's outdoor places thus provide opportunities to relax, calm down, and be alone, while giving a sense of freedom, belonging, and being away (Korpela et al. 2001). Both children and adolescents use their places for emotional and mental restoration (Korpela 1996; Korpela, Kyttä, and Hartig 2002), although this specific affordance seems to be more pronounced for teenagers.

Natural environments have a central importance in this process of mental restoration, and a number of studies highlight the importance of this link (Kaplan and Kaplan 1989; Sommer 1990; Kellert and Wilson 1993; Korpela et al. 2001; Louv 2005; Huynh et al. 2013; Gill 2014). Natural settings are not inherently therapeutic and restorative, however, as the broader context associated plays an influential role (Milligan and Bingley 2007; Ward Thompson, Aspinall, and Montarzino 2008). Indeed, the 'comfort' of certain natural environments seem to emerge from people's on-going relations with the world, which call attention to the embodied practices of children's affective geographies (Djohari, Brown, and Stolk 2017). While some previous studies have sought to prove and quantify the benefits of being in outdoor and natural environments, this paper develops critical insights into the practices and interactions that provide for such outcomes.

Young people's venues for refuge and safe spaces are not exclusive to the outdoors, and have been studied across a range of settings, including the physical space of home, grandparents' homes, school and other institutions, and parallel societies (see e.g. Brown 2017; Wasshede 2017; Gottzén and Sandberg 2017), as well as virtual spaces provided through digital technologies (Wilson 2016). The particular focus on outdoor refuges in this paper is connected with recent shifts in the spatial conditions that hallmark young people's outdoor lives. These shifts are driven mainly by growing concerns around children's safety, with particular respect to stranger danger and traffic accidents (Valentine 1996; Valentine and McKendrick 1997; Mattsson 2002; Karsten 2005). The unintended side effect of these concerns is that children's outdoor lives are increasingly taking place in adult-supervised venues (Holloway and Valentine 2000; Louv 2005; Skår and Krogh 2009), and their independent mobility is increasingly restricted (Alparone and Pacilli 2012; Carver et al. 2013; Nansen et al. 2015; Holt et al. 2015).

The influence of these restrictions on young people's lives becomes even more ripe for inquiry when they are considered alongside the changing nature of childhood for those who

were born between 1995 and 2010, and part of the *iGen* (Twenge 2017) or *Gen Z* (McCrindle 2014) demographic. Although one must be careful to generalize, this generation is particularly characterized by the way they inhabit a ‘networked public’ (Boyd 2014) and are in constant contact with others on social media through their mobile devices (Twenge 2017).

The current paper seeks to interrogate the nature of young people’s everyday outdoor refuging practices and places, which are influenced by the combined issues of children’s restricted independent mobility and their low tolerance from being removed from their wireless, hyper-linked world. First, we aim to confirm the importance of outdoor refuges by providing detailed accounts of how they are significant to young people. Second, and more much importantly, we seek a deeper understanding of the ways in which *outdoor refuging* is practised among contemporary Danish youth.

The paper seeks fertile analytical ground through drawing on the work of Tim Ingold. Four concepts - *lines, knots, meshwork and wayfaring* – as defined by Ingold (2011a), are employed to more deeply understand the ways in which young people inhabit their outdoor places of refuge. This theoretical framework is introduced below, after which we outline the methodology, present findings that are interpreted with extant literature and the framework, and offer implications for further research and policy development.

### **Lines, knots, meshwork and wayfaring**

The defining nature of relations between people and place is well acknowledged. This is reflected in a vast body of literature both within human geography in general (Relph 1976; Tuan 1977; Seamon and Mugerauer 1985; Sack 1997), and more specifically within children’s geographies (Hart 1979; Moore 1986; Sobel 1990, 1993; Dovey 1990; Philo 2003; Rasmussen 2004; Fasting 2013).

Drawing on phenomenological thinking, the concept of place has some merit for the current study

of young people's outdoor places of refuges, as it sheds light on intimate, personal and emotional relationships between self and place (Gregory et al. 2009; Cresswell 2015).

However, we find that the notion of place fails to fully grasp the importance of embodied movements and practices in understanding how humans inhabit their environments (Thrift 2007; Ingold 2011b, 2011a; Horton et al. 2014). Ingold argues that life is lived along lines in a *meshwork*, rather than being contained within specific places (Ingold 2011a). From this perspective the world is always 'becoming', as its inhabitants are 'treading their own paths through the meshwork and thereby contributing to its ever-evolving weave' (Ingold 2011a, 71). Thus, spaces are in a state of 'on-goingness' - continuously becoming and being transformed through moving and interacting bodies (Horton and Kraftl 2006). These assumption allows for a more dynamic view of our research subject, where the respite, comfort or pause of refuges is seen as emerging from on-going embodied practices and interactions with the world, rather than being delivered and received more passively from given environments (Djohari, Brown, and Stolk 2017).

Ingold proffers this concept of *meshworks*, which are composed of lines and knots, as a way to grasp human entanglement with the world, and the concept *wayfaring* to describe the basic human mode of inhabiting the world (Ingold 2011a). The notions of wayfaring and meshwork become central to ideas surrounding 'place', since the latter term is vastly insensitive to the 'primacy of movement' that is the cornerstone of human inhabitation (Ingold 2011a). Ingold contends that life is not lived inside place or space – as static perimeters containing life — but along intertwined lines of growth and becoming, 'through, around, to and from them, from and to places elsewhere' (Ingold 2011a, 148). Places, then, are the knots and the lines from which they are tied, and are the movements through which humans inhabit and make meaning of the world. A place is, hence, not a container of life, but rather a knot, where the trails of inhabitants are entwined and bound up with each other (Ingold 2011a). Ingold (2011a, 149) explains how places 'are like knots,

and the threads from which they are tied are lines of wayfaring. A house, for example, is a place where the lines of its residents are tightly knotted together’.

The proposed shift in perspective from place ‘as container for life’ to place ‘as knots tied from lines of movement’ renders novel and fertile perspectives on children's refuges possible. Refuging can thus be interrogated through the ways they enable young people entangle and disentangle from certain knots in their lives, and the movement entailed in negotiating this meshwork. Ingold’s conceptual framework, hence permits a novel gaze into young people’s outdoor refuging.

## **Methodology**

A case study (Stake 2005) was used to address the study’s broad aim of exploring young people’s relations to their everyday outdoor places. Two principal methods of data generation were employed: photo-elicited interviews (Kvale and Brinkmann 2015; Heath et al. 2009) and participant observation (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007; Hastrup 2010). The current paper reports on the photo-elicited interviews only. The study was conducted in a countryside town (approx. 2000 inhabitants) in Denmark that offers easy access to forests, lakes, open farmland, public green space and outdoor recreation facilities. The town is located approximately 10 kilometres from the third-largest city in Denmark. Informants were recruited through the local municipal primary and lower secondary school, which has a register of 469 pupils from kindergarten to 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Out of 22 students asked to participate, 21 were interviewed (11 girls and 10 boys). All were aged 14-15 years old, and were from the 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

The study adheres to the ethical guidelines on research with children, as outlined by the ERIC-compendium (Graham et al. 2013), and was done in accordance with The Danish Code of

Conduct for Research Integrity<sup>1</sup>. Both parents and youths gave informed written consent before the study began (Greig, Taylor, and MacKay 2007), and informal verbal consent from the young people was re-confirmed throughout the research process (Alderson and Morrow 2004; Gulløv and Højlund 2010).

The interviews were carried out in 2015, during school hours on the school grounds, and lasted between 22 and 35 minutes. The young people were interviewed in pairs (with one participating twice as a ‘buddy’ for the 21st). This pairing was done in an effort to level the power inequality between the researcher and the youths (Thomas and O’Kane 1998; Christensen and Prout 2002) and to yield a greater depth and breadth in responses than would be possible in individual interviews (Gulløv and Højlund 2010; Lewis 1992; Fasting 2013). The pairs were formed through discussions with the youths and their class teachers in order to ensure that the interviewees felt safe and comfortable. Doing interviews in pairs may have biased the youths’ answers, particularly with respect to socially sensitive issues, such as the desire to occasionally escape the company of peers. Judging, however, from the positive interplay between the young people and their general open-heartedness during the interviews, the benefits of doing pair interviews far outweighed the pitfall of obtaining biased reports from the youths.

Prior to the interviews the young people did ‘photo walks’ during which they took photographs of everyday outdoor places of significance that they visited on a regular basis. The ‘photo-walks’ prepared them for the interview by directing their attention to a few specific places of their choosing (rather than the outdoors in general), and through being a multisensory lived experience which could ‘give a push’ to their reflections on relations to and meanings of these places (Pyyry 2015, 153). The pictures were sent to the principal researcher through SMS, messenger or email, and were available during the interviews as A4 colour prints. During the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ufm.dk/publikationer/2014/filer-2014/the-danish-code-of-conduct-for-research-integrity.pdf>

interviews, the photographs were used as items to prompt talks about relational, corporal, temporal, spatial, and material aspects of the young people's outdoor places (cf. van Manen 2014). The photographs also served the purpose of creating a casual and easy-going atmosphere where constant, direct eye contact could be avoided by looking at the pictures. The use of photography in interviews can convey a deeper understanding of everyday practices and experiences (Pink 2007; Oldrup and Carstensen 2009; Rose 2007). Inspired by Pyyry (2015), photography is seen as a multisensory embodied practice, which potential both resides in 'the practice of taking photographs and the event of 'thinking with' them in an interview' (Pyyry 2015, 150).

Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Pseudonyms were used to protect the informants, and data was kept on a password secured device and hard-drive (Kvale and Brinkmann 2015). The thematic analysis conducted was inspired by Braun and colleagues, and followed six interrelated phases: *Familiarization*, *Coding*, *Theme development*, *Theme refinement*, *Theme naming* and *Writing up* (Braun, Clarke, and Weate 2017). Initial themes were developed through open (data driven) coding (Kvale and Brinkmann 2015; Braun, Clarke, and Weate 2017), which allowed for respondents' personally important, *emic* themes to emerge (Stake 2005). In this process outdoor refuges emerged as a key theme. Aiming to refine the sensitivity of the analytical themes, Ingold's four concepts of *Lines*, *Knot*, *Meshwork* and *Wayfaring* (2011a) was employed, which allowed for a deeper interrogation of the data. The findings are reported below through two principal themes that were developed from the analysis. These are *Becoming disentangled – refuges as temporary knot-loosening* and *Becoming entangled – refuges as multi-sensory knotting*.

### **Becoming disentangled – refuges as temporary knot-loosening**

Many of the photographs of significant outdoor places depicted places that the young people described variously as 'breathing room', 'free space', 'covert', 'haven' and 'place of refuge'. This

points to the spatial significances of these places, which are very different from most of their everyday ones, such as home, school, sports facilities, shops, and outdoor gathering places – all of which are characterised by high levels of entanglement with peers, parents and other adults. The pictures showed diverse environments, ranging from solitary trees, lakes, thickets, and forest roads over open farmland, countryside paved or gravel roads to secluded playgrounds, school grounds, and neighbourhood foot trails and biking paths.

The young people's refuging was practised within walking, skating or biking distance of participants' homes. Their refuges were universally cherished for their capacity to facilitate respite from, and 'reset' within, in a life filled with challenges, demands, expectations, disturbances and structures, which together conspired to create high levels of pressure in the young people's lives. Patricia described how her refuge fills her with peacefulness: 'It is peaceful and calm. It makes me happy...new energy. Then I can return, and I'm feeling much better'. Noel explained how he goes to his special place to 'escape from everyday life'. It's the kind of place where 'when we have done our homework, or are about to do it and not really feeling up to it, we can go here and relax a bit, and then we'll be tip-top again'.

This opportunity to 'reset' or 'escape' is consistent with the findings in previous studies (Sommer 1990; Korpela 1996; Korpela, Kyttä, and Hartig 2002; Djohari, Brown, and Stolk 2017), which suggests that the entanglements of the lines of movement of young people, siblings, teachers, peers or parents are central to understanding youths' refuges and outdoor lives. These lines entangle and form knots throughout the meshwork of the young people lives, and as such their school and home are places where the lines are tightly knotted (c.f. Ingold 2011a, 149). Refuges, on the other hand, afforded a marked sense of disentanglement from these dominant arrangements, and were highly valued for their absence of the pressures and demands associated with school work and interactions with parents and siblings.

By way of example, Kenny explained, 'I like to go there [a nearby forest] for a walk, if it's been a busy week with gymnastics and loads of homework, [because] there isn't really a purpose with what you do [there]. There isn't really anything you have to do'. Similarly, Jed disentangled temporally from the pressure of schoolwork by walking in a near-by forest '...when the pressure from school is really intense and I can't really cope. When it gets to intense. Then I go for a walk in the forest, or at least outdoors'. While these young people clearly find sanctuary from schoolwork in their nearby outdoor places, the key driver in outdoor refuging seems to be a common need disentangle from parents and siblings.

Jane explained how she from time to time wanders off along a nearby gravel road, to where nobody knows where she is. Here she can be alone and avoid duties imposed by her parents. Also, she can temporarily escape her mother's over-bearing desire to be with her all the time, after her parents' recent divorce. Marvin reported that he occasionally makes an escape to a treetop at the fringes of their garden to get away from his noisy sisters. He recounted how both of his sisters often have visiting friends who seem to spend much of their time screaming and laughing at high volume. Beatrice said that now and then she goes for a walk to avoid situations where she and her parents are 'straining each other's nerves'. These walks can both be initiated by her own admittedly foul mood or from a confrontation where her parents are annoyed with her. Beatrice explained why these walks are important to her:

Getting out after having maybe a bad day. Then you can get out and just be there for a while. Or if my parents are a bit mad, then I believe it's good for both me and them that I go out. Then I'm a bit out of the way.

These insights from the young people point to the complexities of the spatial dynamics of power and control that shape their social geographies (Horton, Kraftl, and Tucker 2011). Young people

deliberately seeking outdoor refuges can be viewed as a spatial response to the demands, expectations and pressures they feel in their home lives. However, denoting refuges as movements away from entanglements with parents, peers and siblings tends to reinforce a child-adult or child-family opposition that may provide an inadequate account of the dynamics of these places. Benwell (2013) urges for a more nuanced understanding of the child-adult relationship, as children's and adults' needs and concerns might not always be in opposition. As indicated in Beatrice's account above, her temporary movement away from the home appears to be a collective need and something the entire family benefits from. This shared desire for disentanglement from family is also at play below – both between Noel and his brother, and between the boys and their parents.

Noel reported that he and his brother often go to a nearby schoolyard to escape everyday life at home. He explained that his parents are stressed-out, and often lack the energy to give them as much care and attention as they would like. When his parents start smoking and drinking upon their return from work, Noel's visits to the schoolyard serve as respite from the intensity of his home life.

'[...] they spend a lot of time out there [in the covered patio] smoking and talking and stuff. Out there we can't really get close to them. Eh... sometimes they are drinking as well, but that's just the way it is. Then it [going to the schoolyard] is a way of getting away from that ... to take it easy and not let it trouble you.'

These findings demonstrate how children's practices around outdoor places are closely related to tensions in the home, and that these tensions may be a driving force in their outdoor refuging. Thus, the data suggest that refuges provide opportunities for a temporary loosening of the tight familial knots that are so prevalent when the young people are at home with all of their family members. Following Ingold (2011a), this loosening can be understood as temporal disentanglement from

established and recurring lines of movement. Beatrice reported that she is sometimes bored when she is out walking. She explains that ‘in a way it is nice that there is nothing out there’. Similarly, Jane, when encouraged to recount what makes her place so important, replied that ‘there isn’t really anything here. It’s quiet and nobody else comes to this place’.

When linking the above findings with a relational material ontology, the notion of ‘nothing out there’ seems like a contradiction in terms, as human and/or non-human entanglements are inherent elements of existence – even when we are alone (cf. Ingold 2011a). The young people’s accounts can, however, be understood as differences in entanglements within the meshwork. Recent studies have shown how smaller children have a strong affinity for embodied intra-actions with natural materials (Änggård 2015; Taguchi 2011), while young people tend to respond to human interactions to the detriment of their attraction to the natural environment (Kaplan and Kaplan 2002). The young people’s accounts of their refuges as being empty or containing nothing thus reflects the temporary absence of (or disentanglements from) other people.

As the data were analysed, they slowly revealed how young people’s entanglements are in a constant state of flux. Our participants moved to escape demands, expectations and disturbances, and these movements involved loosening some knots, while tightening others. Moving often takes young people to sites rarely visited by adults (e.g. playgrounds, schoolyards or treetops) or on paths (e.g. biking, running, skating or walking). From this perspective, and in Ingoldian (2011a) terms, seeking refuges involves shifting the degree to which young people are entangled and disentangled in the various knots that hallmark their existence. In a process more akin to wayfaring rather than dwelling (c.f. Ingold, 2011a), the study participants loosened their entanglements with ‘home knots’, while tightening other highly contrasting knots through their refuges.

### **Becoming entangled – refuges as multi-sensory knotting**

The young people's refuges took many shapes and entailed, for example, deserted gravel roads, systems of paths, secret treetops, empty playgrounds, and unattended schoolyards. Understanding home life and refuges as knots permits us to see how the youths favoured certain human and non-human entanglements, and how these contribute to the different values placed on them. The participants expressed an appreciation of sensory encounters with the outdoor environment, such as pleasant sounds made by animals or the wind, beautiful lights and landscapes, the pleasant sensation of wind, sun or some materials, and the presence of vegetation and animals.

Beatrice reported that looking at the sunlight shimmering over the fields, the alignment of the power pylons, and the cars in the distance helped her to relax. Further, she recounted how she enjoys hearing the sound of the wind through the grass, the birds chirping and the trickling sound of the small stream she is passing by. Marvin recounted how the shape of his special refuge tree provides a pleasant backrest that makes 'just sitting and doing nothing' enjoyable.

The data strongly indicate that entanglements with the outdoor environment play a considerable co-constitutive role in the becoming of the refuge. Recent lines of work have drawn attention to the role of affective and sensory aspects of the human-environment relationship (e.g. Wylie 2005; Thrift 2007; Ingold 2011a). The young people point to various sounds, scents, sensations and images when accounting for how materiality affects the atmosphere of their places of refuge. These multi-sensory encounters come across as inherently rewarding and non-distressing feelings within the refuges. Phillip recounted that 'it is the birds, when they twitter or sing or how to say it. It gives me ... like ... peace. Then I can think about something or nothing, and then just listen to the birds ... and just relax'. It is from these interactions with the environment – much like

listening to music (see below) – that the refuge emerges as an unthreatening and undemanding place.

The study's findings strongly indicate that young people's embodied entanglements with the environment contribute to the significance of the refuges. Thus, the relief, freedom and comfort of these places partially emerges through sensory entanglement with the environment as illustrated here. When talking about her refuge, Fiona reported that she sometimes follows the tire tracks across the fields, and enjoys walking with her arms out to the side, where she can feel the grass, because 'it gives a sense of freedom'. *Haptic engagement* emerges at the interface between the body and the environment, and thus concerns basic traits of human relational practices (Woodyer 2008). Viewed from this perspective, haptic engagement is a way of simultaneously sensing oneself and the world, and can generate valuable feelings of connection to (Bingley 2010), or co-belonging with, the world (Hawkins and Straughan 2014). This builds the argument that young people's places may indeed be regarded as sensuous landscapes (Rodaway 1994; Cele 2006), and that refuge and respite can emerge through multi-sensory entanglement with the environment.

Thus far we have seen how the practice of refuging involves degrees of disentanglement from one's home knots and entanglement with outdoor environments. A third, and rather unexpected, finding is that refuges are also places where young people remain connected with peers and parents – despite choosing to be away from them - through the use of mobile devices. So, while the outdoor refuge allows one to seek solitude, it still permits a way of remaining connected to other people. As the following examples demonstrate, the young people usually brought their mobile phones with them, and these were used to re-entangle with peers and even parents. The phone's user is ultimately vested with the agency that determines the degree to which they are entangled; thus, the young person has the power to decide with whom to tie knots, how

tight a knot to make, and when to loosen or untie completely. Seen this way, the tightness of young people's various entanglements are very fluid and ephemeral.

Neville reported that he always brings his phone when he goes to his refuge. He uses his phone to listen to music and to text his friends. Neville also explained that the phone allows him to follow what is going on at home. He explained how he enjoys texting with his friends in his refuge, but also that it would disturb his peace of mind if his friends were present at the refuge.

I: Are you together with anybody at your place?

N: No. Then I wouldn't feel the same peace. Then you would have to think and answer questions and stuff all the time. Here you can find peace and just be alone.

I: Do you bring you phone?

N: Yeah. Always. If something goes wrong at home, then I like to have it with me, so I can hurry home. And then for music. This is where I have Spotify. So I can listen to music.

I: And the phone doesn't disturb you?

N: No!

I: ... it's just because you said that you like the peace...?

N: Well...if I'm texting someone, then I can be out there and not be disturbed.

Neville seeks peace of mind and time alone at his refuge, and his phone is critical to these aims as it empowers him to control his level of entanglement with others. His testimony finds strong resonance with Twenge's (2017) work on what she has labelled 'iGen'. Twenge explains how, outside of school and extra-curricular activities, many of today's young people choose to be 'together alone': they prefer to be on their own, but still very strongly connected to others through their mobile devices. What is noteworthy is that these Danish youths are also choosing to be alone

and outdoors, rather than merely alone and indoors. Children's all-embracing immersion in a digital world has blurred the lines between the physical and virtual domains of childhood, and point towards a need to reconsider our assumptions of children's spatial experiences (Rooney 2012; Wilson 2016).

As noted by Neville (above) and other participants, their phones were not only about staying in touch with others; they also allowed the young teenagers to listen to music while being in their places or on the move. Indeed, based on the data, we can claim that music – for many of the interviewed young people – is central to the embodied experience of the refuge. Listening to music creates an acoustic entanglement that is both relaxing in itself, and which resists and excludes other forms of entanglements. Naomi made frequent visits to a neighbouring playground, and explained how she often goes there to find peace and escape everyday life at home.

It is nice to be there [the playground] when there is nobody... Mostly when I go there I listen to music, because then I can't hear if there are noisy children or anything. Then I can only hear the music, and it gives such a nice...peace.

Sources of music have previously been shown to have therapeutic applications (DeNora 2000), and a valuable means to help young people negotiate difficult social situations and enhance well-being (Wilson 2016). The inherent qualities of music is most likely at play in Naomi's report above, but the quote is also indicative of the power of music, which can enable one to govern one's ability to loosen knots with one world, while tightening them with another. Most of the young people stated that they never would leave home without their phone, so from that perspective, the phones can be seen as an integral part of the refuges (and of the youths).

## **Conclusions and Implications**

The findings suggest that outdoor refuges are common ways for young people to respond to an everyday life filled with challenges, demands, expectations, disturbances and structures, which conspire to exert pressure on them. Outdoor refuges can be seen as one way that 21 Danish 14-15-year-olds actively sought and embraced opportunities to unwind and find respite from these pressures. The findings suggest that young people's refuges operate through a highly fluid tension between entanglement and disentanglement, and between movement and pause. When viewed from this perspective, notions of outdoor refuges should be sensitive to the multiple ways that young people form and negotiate relations with their various human and non-human environments at different points in the day.

In summary, the findings demonstrated that the young people engaged in the practice of 'refuging' in order to disentangle from demanding, if not distressing, everyday lives. The findings then showed how refuges afforded two kinds of entangling: one features the tightening of knots with the outdoor environment, and the other focuses on the tightening of knots with their peers and parents through the use of their phones. It is evident that 'refuging' is initially a knot-loosening action, where movement permits young people to become temporarily disentangled from siblings, schoolwork, peers, and parents. Moving takes them along weakly knotted lines – either to places where adults rarely reside (e.g. playgrounds, schoolyards or treetops) or moving along on paths — which makes it difficult to be followed. As the home knots are loosened, other multi-sensory knots are able to be tightened (or vice versa), such as those with the sounds made by animals or the wind; views of lights and landscapes; sensations of wind, sun and various materials; and the presence of vegetation and animals. To our surprise, mobile devices played a remarkably central role in these refuges. They permitted increased entanglement with friends through various social media applications. Intriguingly, communications with parents often also continued while in

the refuges, despite these family members being the ones the study participants were seeking to elude in the first place.

Entangling autonomously with (and disentangling from) everyday environments can thus be regarded as an inherently important and meaningful aspect of young people's lives, which – among other things – can directly influence their well-being. It follows that adults have an obligation to acknowledge, protect and promote young people's spatial autonomy, by affording them opportunities to explore and interact with neighbourhood environments in diverse and self-directed ways. The capacity for young people's outdoor refuges to serve as a foil for the strains associated with their everyday lives resonates with recent concerns around changing spatial conditions for children and young people. As noted earlier in the paper, a growing body of evidence shows that children's independent mobility has been restricted in recent years (e.g. Alparone and Pacilli 2012; Carver et al. 2013; Nansen et al. 2015).

Linking with this evidence, the current study's findings suggest that young people's everyday mobility and spatial autonomy may play a vital role in maintaining (if not increasing) their well-being. Not only does young people's spatial autonomy and movements affect their physical health (Cooper et al. 2005; Salmon et al. 2005); their development of social competencies (Hüttenmoser 1995); their experiences of social difference and belonging (Matthews, Limb, and Taylor 2000); their sense of autonomy (Prezza and Pacilli 2007); and their access to adequate play spaces (Karsten 2005), but it may also influence their abilities to negotiate assorted pressures in their everyday life. With today's young people at the 'forefront of the worst mental health crisis in decades' (Twenge 2017, 3), finding ways to help them cope – and then thrive – in their worlds, is of paramount importance. The significance and value of young people's spatial autonomy (including the negative consequences of children's restricted independent mobility) need to be made obvious to town planners, politicians, parents, teachers, and social workers, as they shape the structures that

mediate youths' day-to-day activities. Rich opportunities for further research exist in the exploration of how young people practice outdoor refuging in more urbanized settings and in different geographical and cultural contexts.

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