



SCIENTIFIC FINAL REPORT

Two- and three-year projects and postdoctoral projects

Registration number, Östersjöstiftelsen: dnr 24/2016

Project manager: David Thurfjell

Project title: *Relocation of transcendence: Silence and the sacred of seculars around the Baltic sea*

1. The three most important results of the project and what conclusions can be drawn from them

The project set out (1) to provide new empirical material on the experiential relation to nature among urban, secular people in the Baltic Sea region, (2) to develop cross-disciplinary methodological designs for the study of experience in nature on the edge of language, and (3) to develop new ways of theorizing secularisation and sacralisation the Baltic Sea region. Because of the pandemic and some other reasons, the duration of this project was prolonged. Now, after more than six years of work we are happy to report that we have been able to deliver far more than we initially planned. It is very difficult to summarize the 67 publications that have come out of the project but if three results are to be picked it may be these:

(1) We have conducted several hundred interviews with urban, secular people in the Baltic Sea region. By working systematically and jointly with all interviews within the research group we have managed to produce analyses of our questions that are hermeneutical and qualitative but at the same time based on solid empirical footing.

(2) Methodologically we have explored means to study an aspect of culture and experience which is largely unarticulated, personal and private. The nature experiences of our secular interlocutors hold existential qualities which are felt to be strengthened by the silence that surrounds them. In order to study such experiences we have developed a variety of interview methods which aim to reach also that level of silent experiences. For instance, we have interviewed in the forest, while walking through the landscape, and by speaking of matters which only indirectly connect to the topic of our interest.



(3) Theoretically we have tried to analyse how the process of secularisation, that is particularly apparent in the countries of our focus, combine with the sacralisation of nature which is also particularly prominent in the same countries.

We have found that the existential depth that is often ascribed to nature experiences in the part of the world we focus, points to a facet of the secularisation process, indicating that love of nature among today's Northern Europeans is deeply entangled with the processes of modernization. Through a series of publications we have provided a historical analysis of how this phenomenon arose and explored ways of approaching it that move beyond the religious-secular dichotomy. We have suggested that the notion of "existential field" can be used to denote the semantic field in the Northern European culture in which secular, yet sacralized, nature experiences take place.

During the scope of the project we have moved towards an understanding of these two processes which sees them as two sides of a cultural turn that we, following Latour and others, call the ecologization of nature. If *modernization* is a process of compartmentalization, *ecologization* is its opposite. To ecologize *nature* is to take steps toward reconnecting with the landscape, the other species, the natural environment in ways which counteract compartmentalisation. We have explored such ecologizing efforts among regenerative farmers, environmental activists, and city people reconnecting with forests. In all of these fields we have found that specific moods and motivations rise in the interface between sensuous experience, individual commitment, and political endeavors in a time of ecological crises.

Furthermore the project has contributed to the development of a multidimensional understanding of nature experience among the seculars of the Baltic sea region. This includes cognitive and perceptual patterns but also emotional and ethical dimensions. We have explored the concepts of *face* and *facing* to signify meta-ontological aspects of the encounter with nature. Nature is experienced as a living presence in and of itself that urges ethical responsibility. We have operationalised the concept in a way that includes bodily, sensory, cognitive, emotional, and ethical dimensions and signifying a degree of active agency in nature. The experience of nature as a face, in both momentary attitudes and long-term processes, can be cultivated so that an openness to sensory, cognitive, emotional, and ethical appreciation of the world and its human and non-human inhabitants grows stronger.



2. The project's contribution to the international research frontline

We have presented our results in international top-journals and on international conferences and our research has gained much attention from colleagues worldwide. We hope that the concepts we have suggested will help forward the research front on the interface between religion, culture and nature. Our work has also led to a number of research applications and research projects. For instance the Danish project *Enchanted ecologies*, funded by Danish research foundation, and an American survey project about reverential naturalism worldwide (application sent to Templeton foundation)

3. The contribution of the research to the knowledge of the Baltic Sea Region and Eastern Europe

The project deals explicitly with two cultural features in which the populations of the Baltic Sea region stand out, namely secularisation and nature love. It is also empirically focussed on this region. Hence both its empirical and theoretical focus is of immediate relevance for this region.

4. New research questions that the project has led to

Some new questions are: How does the sacralisation of nature that we have described connect to ecological awareness? To what extent do the societal phenomena that we have explored also exist outside of the Baltic sea region? What is the connection between nature experience and meaning making?

5. Dissemination of the results of the project within and outside the research community

The project has resulted in 67 academic publications, a large number of conference presentations and hundreds of public lectures. A list of publications is included below.



LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

Monographs

- Ohlsson, Henrik (2022) *Facing Nature: Cultivating Experience in the Nature Connection Movement*, Södertörn Doctoral Dissertations, 2022, ISBN: 978 91 89504 05 9 (tryckt) tryckt), ISBN: 978 91 89504 06 6 (digital).
- Rubow, Cecilie. 2022. *Indendørs menneskets natur*. Aarhus Universitetsforlag, pp 299, [The Indoor People's Nature].
- Rubow, Cecilie and Mickey Gjerris (2018). *Naturens sprog. Historier fra virkeligheden om fortryllelse*. 2018, 205 sider. København: Eksistensen.
- Thurfjell, David (2020) *Granskogsfolk: hur naturen blev svenskarnas religion*. Stockholm: Norstedts.
- Thurfjell, David (2023) *En lockton i ödemarken: om människans förmåga att besjåla världen*. Stockholm: Norstedts.

Articles

- Andersen, Astrid O. Stine Krøijer, Cecilie Rubow and Matti Weisdorf (eds.). 2021. "Arter." *Tidsskriftet Antropologi* 83. 250 pages.
- Bubik, Tomas; Rimmel, Atko; Vaclavik, David (2020). *Freethought and Atheism in Central and Eastern Europe: The Development of Secularity and Non-religion*. Routledge.
- Bubik, Tomas; Vaclavik, David; Rimmel, Atko (2020). *Nonreligion in the CEE region*. In: Bubik, Tomas; Rimmel, Atko; Vaclavik, David (Ed.). *Freethought and Atheism in Central and Eastern Europe: The Development of Secularity and Non-religion*. (310–324). Routledge.
- Hošek, Pavel; Rimmel, Atko; Riistan, Ain (2019). *Postkristliku kultuurimiljö tekkeloo kontuurjooni Tšehhi ja Eesti näitel*. *Usuteaduslik Ajakiri*, 76 (3), 29–52.
- Jonuks, Tönno; Rimmel, Atko (2020). *Metsarahva kujunemine. Retrospektiivne vaade müüdiloomele*. *Keel ja Kirjandus*, 6, 459–482. DOI: 10.54013/kk751a1.
- Jonuks, Tönno; Rimmel, Atko (2020). *Kuidas eestlastest sai metsarahvas*. *Postimees*, 20.06.2020.
- Jonuks, Tönno; Päll, Lona; Rimmel, Atko; Kadakas, Ulla (2022). *Sõjakas kaitse – konfliktid loodus- ja kultuuripärandi hoiu kujundamisel*. *Methis Studia humaniora Estonica*, 24 (30), 156–183. DOI: 10.7592/methis.v24i30.22112.
- Krøijer, Stine and Cecilie Rubow, 2022. "Enchanted Ecologies and Ethics of Care." *Environmental Humanities*, 14.2.
- Lord, E. & Ohlsson, H. (2022). "Escaping the Modern Predicament: Nature as Refuge and Community in Contemporary Health Practices in Wales, Sweden, and Finland". I: Chamel, J. & Dansac, Y. (red.) *Relating with More-than-Humans: Interbeing Rituality in a Living World*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.
- Ohlsson, H. (2022). "Nature Connection as Spirituality, Wellbeing Practice, and Subjective Activism". I Mossière, G. (red.) *New Spiritualities and the Cultures of Well being*. Springer Nature, DOI: 10.1007/978 3 031 06263 6_10.
- Ohlsson, H. (2020). "Att närma sig en återbesjälad natur: om helighet och ritualiseringar i terapeutisk naturkontakt". I Lindmark, D. & Persson, A. (red.) *Rituella rum och heliga platser: historiska, samtida och litterära studier*. Artos & Norma, ISBN: 978 91 7777 151 7.
- Ohlsson, H. (2023) "Shinrin-Yoku in Sweden: The Political Significance of Embodiment and Sensory Attention in Nature". I Enstedt, D. & Plank, K. (red.) *Eastern Practices and Nordic Bodies Lived Religion, Spirituality and Healing in the Nordic Countries*. London. Palgrave Macmillan. ISBN: 978-3-031-38117-1
- Raudsepp, Maaris (2020). *Power relations in vernacular and institutional discourses on religion*. In: Kannike, A; Pärn, K; Tasa, M (Ed.). *Approaches of Culture Theory VIII*. (220–245). Tartu University Press.



- Rommel, Atko (2017). Religion, Interrupted? Observations on Religious Indifference in Estonia. In: Religious Indifference. New Perspectives From Studies on Secularization and Nonreligion. (123–142). Springer.
- Rommel, Atko; Sillfors, Mikko (2018). Crossbreeding Atheism with Spirituality: Notes on Soviet and Western Attempts. *Secularism and Nonreligion*, 7, 1. DOI: 10.5334/snr.94.
- Rommel, Atko (2018). Kui Kristus viimaks tulema peaks, kas teda Eestis mõni kristlane ka ootaks? Eesti Päevaleht.
- Rommel, Atko; Rohtmets, Priit (2018). Eesti – usuelu Metsik Lääs. *Postimees*.
- Rommel, Atko (2019). Religiooni uurimisest ilmalikus ühiskonnas. *Usuteaduslik Ajakiri*, 3, 95–126.
- Rommel, Atko (2019). Religion and non-religion in museum space: alterna(rra)tives of the Estonian national story. *Historical Sociology Journal*, 2, 69–84. DOI: 10.14712/23363525.2019.17.
- Rommel, Atko; Friedenthal, Meelis (2020). Atheism and Free-thought in Estonian Culture. In: Bubik, Tomas; Rommel, Atko; Vaclavik, David (Ed.). *Freethought and Atheism in Central and Eastern Europe: The Development of Secularity and Non-religion*. (84–110). Routledge. (Routledge Studies in Religion).
- Rommel, Atko; Bubik, Tomas; Vaclavik, David (2020). Studying freethought and atheism in Central and Eastern Europe. In: *Freethought and Atheism in Central and Eastern Europe: The Development of Secularity and Non-Religion*. (1–8). Routledge.
- Rommel, Atko; Jonuks, Tönno (2021). From Nature Romanticism to Eco-Nationalism: The Development of the Concept of Estonians as a Forest Nation. *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*, 81, 33–62. DOI: 10.7592/FEJF2021.81.remmel_jonuks.
- Rommel, Atko, Tönno Jonuks. (2020). Eestlane õppis ennast pidama metsarahvaks alles viimase sajandi jooksul. *Eesti mets*. 2021.
- Rommel, Atko; Jonuks, Tönno (2021). Millest räägib eestlaste enesekuvand metsarahvana. *err.ee*.
- Rommel, Atko (2022). How has atheism related to communism? In: Taira, Teemu (Ed.). *Atheism in 5 minutes*. (129–132). Equinox Publishing Ltd.
- Rommel, Atko (2022). Can an atheist be spiritual? In: Taira, Teemu (Ed.). *Atheism in 5 minutes*. (227–230). Equinox Publishing Ltd.
- Rommel, Atko; Rohtmets, Priit (2022). Eesti usuelu tulevik? Milleks kirik, kui meelerahu saab loodusest või joogatrennist. *Eesti Ekspress*.
- Rommel, Atko (2022). „Meie peame tingimata rahvast tundma õppima“: kvantitatiivsetest religiooniuringutest Eestis anno 2022. *Kirik ja Teoloogia*.
- Rommel, Atko (2023). On obscene and civil forms of nonreligion. *Religion, Brain ja Behavior*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2153599X.2023.2262545>
- Rubow, Cecilie. 2022. “The Indoor people’s Enchanted Ecologies.” *Environmental Humanities* 14,2: 475-493.
- Rubow, Cecilie (2022). ”Økoteologiske udfordringer.” *Kritisk forum for praktisk teologi* 16: 53-63.
- Rubow, Cecilie. ”Hele den vilde herlighed”. Anmeldelse af Nan Shepherd ”Det levende bjerg” og Jacques Élisée Reclus ”Et vandløbs historie” i Atlas. <https://atlamag.dk/kultur/bøger/hele-den-vilde-herlighed>. 2023: 8-9.
- Rubow, Cecilie. Uddrag af Indendørs mennesket i ”Landskab set fra siden” af Ellen Hylde-Mose. *Møstings*. 2023:51-57.
- Rubow, Cecilie. ”Forvandlinger i skoven” og ”Efterskrift i *Gennem Øjetræet*. Ulrik Hasemann og Matthias Svold. Book Lab, 2023.
- Rubow, Cecilie. (forthcoming) “Eco-Ecological Challenges”. To appear in the anthology *Creation Theology*, edited by Niels Henrik Gregersen.
- Rubow, Cecilie. (forthcoming) ”The Weird Magic of Becoming Ecologically Aware”. *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*
- Rubow, Cecilie. (forthcoming) “Introduction. Ecologizing Nature among (not quite) Secular Northerners”. With David Thurfjell. *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*
- Rubow, Cecilie. (forthcoming) ”Økoreligion og opblomstringen af jordisk metafysisk”. *Grøn samfundsteori*. Hans Reitzels Forlag.
- Sepp, Tiina; Rommel, Atko (2020). The Pilgrimage Landscape in Contemporary Estonia: New Routes, Narratives, and Re-Christianization. *Numen*, 67 (5-6), 586–612. DOI: 10.1163/15685276-12341603.
- Taira, Teemu; Rommel, Atko; Jansson, Anton (2021). The Nordic and Baltic Countries. Bullivant, Stephen; Ruse, Michael (Toim.). *The Cambridge History of Atheism*. (898–917). Cambridge University Press. DOI: 10.1017/9781108562324.049.



- Thurfjell, David; Rubow, Cecilie; Rimmel, Atko; Ohlsson, Henrik (2019). The Relocation of Transcendence around the Baltic Sea: Using Schutz to Conceptualize Nature Experiences. *Nature and Culture*, 2, 190–214. DOI: 10.3167/nc.2019.140205.
- Thurfjell, David (2020) ”Med ödmjuk hemortsrätt: det heliga landet för världens mest sekulariserade folk” i Louise Belfrage (red.) *Det heliga landet*. Stockholm: Stolpe förlag.
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- Thurfjell, David (2020) ”*Semantic confusions and the mysteries of life: A conversation about the phenomenology of religion with Ulf Drobin*” in Thurfjell, David, Satoko Fujiwara, Steven Engler (red) (2020) *Global phenomenologies of religion: An oral history in interviews*. Equinox.
- Thurfjell, David (2021) ”Med ödmjuk hemortsrätt: det heliga landet för världens mest sekulariserade folk” i Almqvist, Kurt, Belfrage, Louise & Shachar, Nathan (red.) (2021). *Svenskarna och det heliga landet*. Första upplagan Stockholm: Bokförlaget Stolpe
- Thurfjell, David, Cecilie Rubow, Atko Rimmel and Henrik Ohlsson. 2019. “The Relocation of Transcendence. Using Schutz to Conceptualize the Nature Experiences of Secular People.” *Nature and Culture* 14 (2):190-214.
- Thurfjell, David (2022) ”Ett utmanat religionsmonopol: Religion och religionskritik i Sverige 1947–1967” i Torbjörn Elensky (red.) *Avantgarde och radikalism 1947–1967*
- Thurfjell, David & Erika Willander (2023) ”Ärvd eller erövrad sekularitet?” i *Sociologisk Forskning* 59(4) 2023-02-19.
- Thurfjell, David (2023) ”In search of universal sacrality: Do secular Scandinavians experience the sacred like Rudolph Otto?” in Louise Belfrage (ed.) *Reflections on the sacred*.
- Thurfjell, David & Atko Rimmel (2023) ”“The Forest is my Church”: Christianity, Secularisation and Love of Nature in a Northern European Existential Field”DOI: 10.1080/0048721X.2023.2234364 Link: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0048721X.2023.2234364>.
- Thurfjell, David & Cecilie Rubow (eds.) (forthcoming) *Ecologizing Nature among (not quite) Secular Northerners*. Special issue of Bron Taylor (ed.) *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*.

Popular science publications

- Ohlsson, H. (2023). ”Ansikte mot ansikte med naturen”, Svensk kyrkotidning 7/2023. https://svenskyrkotidning.se/wpprod/wp-content/uploads/SKT_7-artikel-ohlsson.pdf
- Ohlsson, H. (2023). ”I skogens skimrande dunkel”, text till programblad för En midsommarnattsdröm, Malmö stadsteater, våren 2023. <https://www.malmostadsteater.se/fordjupning/bakom-kulisserna/i-skogens-skimrande-dunkel>
- Rimmel, Atko (2022). Counting (multiple) nonreligious identities in surveys. Nonreligion & Secularity blog.
- Rubow, Cecilie. ”Forestillingen om fangst. I museums katalog *Vildt nok. Jagt i dansk kunst*. Fuglsang Kunstmuseum, Ribe Kunstmuseum, Faaborg Museum og Skovgaard Museet. 2023: 88-91.
- Rubow, Cecilie. ”De nye naturer og den raske gåturs historie.” *Kirkemagasinet Domkirken*, København. Marts-maj, 2023: 8-9.
- Thurfjell, David (2023) ”Naturupplevelsens existentiella dimensioner” i Jens Assur *Privat Natur*. Stockholm: Norstedts.
- Thurfjell, David (2023) ”Gränser” i Leif Engström's exhibition catalogue

Five most important conferences

- The relocation of transcendence*. Internationellt symposium, Ödeshög, 15 augusti 2017.
- Natur, rumslighet och sekularitet*, symposium i Göteborg, 20 december 2017.
- Relocation of transcendence*. Sesjon på EASR2018, Bern, 20 juni 2018.
- What does love of nature have to do with saving the planet?* session på ISSRNC, Cork, 14 juni 2019.
- Enchanted ecologies*, symposium på Hornbækshus, Danmark, 17-20 november 2021.