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# Negotiating the city during the dark season: a study of recreational running

Neva Lepoša, Hanna Peinert and Mattias Qviström

Department of Urban and Rural Development, Sveriges Lantbruksuniversitet, Uppsala, Sweden

## ABSTRACT

Seasonality plays an important role in determining how and where everyday activities are conducted. Yet how seasonality shapes recreational mobilities in the city, and how it matters for everyday urban life, remain largely unexplored. Inspired by recent research on the weather as lived, this paper contributes to the understanding of urban recreational mobilities as shaped by runners negotiating the urban environment and its seasonality. Thereby, we also explore a specific way to examine the city. We studied recreational running during the dark season in Sweden, based on diary-interviews with thirty runners, employing practice theory and affordance theory to explore how places, practices, and affordances characterize running during this season. Our findings reveal ways in which runners engage in different running practices in different settings, with the forest, pavement, and hills as our examples, and with lights as an additional analytical lens. We show how runners, in their strategies for dealing with the dark season in a city, tend to avoid some characteristics of the city (traffic, noise) while taking advantage of others (street illumination, road, and pavement maintenance). Thus, running practices are partly formed by urban planning and maintenance.

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## Introduction

We live in a weather-world and in a world of seasons. Weather takes part in shaping our everyday places and mobilities (de Vet and Head 2020; Edensor, Barry, and Borovnik 2021). We move, as Larsen and Jensen (2021, 67) put it, ‘in and through the air, sunshine, heat, rain, wind, snow, fog or icy roads’.

Studies of the weather call into question the modern conceptualization of abstract space as a static matrix furnished with objects (Ingold 2011). Furthermore, studies of weather and seasonality offer entry points for problematizing the equally modern conceptions of nature and the city. The idea of the modern city as a space liberated from rootedness of place and freed from the uncertainties of nature has motivated attempts to manage the seasons and weather so they no longer govern the rhythms of life. For example, storm water management aims to neutralize seasonal variations in rainfall, street illumination marginalizes the importance of the sunset, and

**CONTACT** Neva Lepoša  [neva.leposa@slu.se](mailto:neva.leposa@slu.se)  Department of Urban and Rural Development, Sveriges Lantbruksuniversitet, Uppsala, Sweden

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street maintenance aims to create 'summer conditions' year-round. This also goes for the management of the pedestrian zone. Blomley (2011, 3) sums up the rationale of the sidewalk as 'the orderly movement of pedestrians from point a to point b', with street furniture and bodies that impede the flow of the traffic considered as obstacles to productive mobility (see also Middleton 2009). Alongside expectations of a managed and organized urban outdoors, and of the increased levels of comfort and convenience made possible by the technologies of the twentieth century, there may also be a lower tolerance for outdoor 'irritants' (Hitchings 2021). While the manifestations of weather and seasonality (e.g. puddles, snow, leaves, high winds, and rainfall) are managed, these can also become increasingly irritable elements of everyday outdoor life. Therefore, the ways we live with and in the weather and seasons are the product of a dynamic and mobile relationship, rather than a unidirectional one where one affects the other. In this paper, inspired by Sheller and Urry (2006) who question the uselessness of travel time in their call for a new mobilities paradigm, we challenge the common assumption of weather and seasonality as obstacles that 'impact' on the urban environment, by exploring negotiations in outdoor practices.

Our study explores outdoor recreational mobilities, and recreational running practices in particular, to understand how the urban, or the city, is negotiated by runners in different seasons and weather conditions. We aim to capture how running is transformed as weathered places are 'fitted into' everyday recreation. In different weather and seasons, different materials, skills, and places become part of running practices, to make a running practice, albeit a different one, possible even in adverse conditions. We aim to contribute to the expanding literature on weather and running with a specific focus on the urban environment. Recent studies by Edensor and Larsen (2018), Larsen (2019), and Larsen and Jensen (2021) reveal the importance of the weather during various running events. Furthermore, Allen-Collinson et al. (2019) contributes with a phenomenological sociological perspective and argues that through lived *experiences* of the weather, we become weather-wise and develop weather-wise skills. In regards to seasonal aspects of light/darkness, Edensor (2015) discusses the co-constitution of the experience of the city, and Edensor and Lorimer (2015) explore walking and running in the darkness and illumination. They show the enchanting effects as well as the effect on bodily movement as a result of encountering dark and illuminated topography. We regard this body of literature as an important point of departure. Yet our shift in focus needs to be noticed: from a main focus on individual experiences or events to *everyday practices*, and from merely the weather to also *seasonality*. Using the diary-interviews method, we examine *how* and *where* runners conduct their run rather than focusing on how they experience different weather and light conditions, and analyse how runners use urban places during a particular season and its weather. Practice theory allows us to go beyond individuals' experiences of the weather and of the city, while the focus on everyday recreation goes beyond events to explore urban running in different seasons and under different weather conditions. Furthermore, our focus on seasonality goes beyond an ephemeral depiction of weather, which doesn't always capture the changing landscapes that runners engage with in different weather conditions. Ice, snow and mud, flooded places, and slippery leaves are lingering outcomes of past weather that could contradict assumptions based on the current weather during the run. These contradictions become visible as runners write and talk about their running practice. This in turn allows us to understand outdoor activities and cities as co-produced through the materialities of the city, runners' skills and bodies, their encounters with darkness and rain, and the personal materials (i.e. clothing and equipment) they use (c.f. Krause 2013). We employ the concept of affordances, understood as action possibilities, to focus analytically on negotiations, whereby action possibilities afforded by the materialities of the city are avoided or taken advantage of in running practices. This approach also provides insights into the material and social aspects of the compact city.

Rather than selecting a particular area and exploring how outdoor recreation 'fits into' the place, we start at the other end. We start with outdoor practices and explore how recreationists

'fit' features and elements of the landscape, shaped by the weather and season, into their practice. Understanding the practice as well as the landscape elements as an assemblage of materials, such as asphalt, pedestrian crossings, hills, and forests, as well as the bodies and equipment of the recreationists, and by centring analytically on practices, we explore how these materials are combined differently under different sets of conditions: when it is sunny, dry, dark, rainy, or slippery.

We conducted a qualitative study of 30 diaries written by recreational runners living in different parts of Sweden, recording their experiences of running in November and December, and of follow-up interviews with the same runners in January and February. Inspiration from both practice theory and affordance theory oriented our analysis of the rich material, which was organized around three different settings: *forest*, *pavement*, and *hills*, to which we added the category *light*, which is relevant in all these settings during the dark season in Sweden when it is darker than during the summer and spring. Attending to the importance of light provided another entry point for analysing running practices in these settings (especially the forest and the street), focusing especially on the daily light–dark cycle and strategies to cope with darkness. Speaking about forests in relation to the city may sound surprising. However, recreational forests were an important part of urban planning in Sweden during the 1970s (Qviström 2016) which may still influence today's recreational practices, although this vision has since given way to the contemporary 'compact city' paradigm (Zalar and Pries 2022).

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. First, we provide brief descriptions of our theoretical inspirations and the methods used. Then, we present our results, which demonstrate how all the abovementioned material phenomena are negotiated in different running practices during autumn and winter in Sweden. We conclude with a discussion of the importance of recreational activities such as running for contemporary urban planning and management.

## **The relevance of practice theory and affordance theory for the study of outdoor mobilities**

In this study, we examine *practices*, drawing inspiration from scholars of practice theory such as Andreas Reckwitz and Elizabeth Shove. Social practices are defined as 'routines' and 'sets of routinized bodily performances' (Reckwitz 2002, 249), consisting of elements such as materials, shared knowledge and skills, know-how, and motivational knowledge such as goals (Reckwitz 2002; Shove 2012). Moreover, Pink (2012) reminds us that practices are *spatially* embedded, in 'social, material and technological' environments 'charged with energy, emotion, shifting with the weather, and contingent on the activity of non-human organisms too' (Pink 2012, 23). Practice theorists make a distinction between 'practice-as-entity' and 'practice-as-performance'. 'It is through performance, through the immediacy of doing, that the "pattern" provided by the practice-as-an-entity is filled out, maintained and transformed' (Shove 2012, 104). From this perspective, instead of focusing on runners' preferences, or their opinions about certain weather conditions or environments, we analyse how and where they run in different weather and at different times (performances), giving rise to 'bundles' of running practices (entities). By taking account of seasonality (different light conditions) and the weather (different forms and amounts of precipitation), features of the city such as asphalt, pavements, forest trails, steps, or hills become something different, as constituents of different practices.

Practice theory directs attention towards *materials* (e.g. lights, shoes, and surfaces) and *skills* (knowing where to run in the city, and how to run on different surfaces in different seasons) as important topics for investigation. For instance, Larsen (2021) uses practice theory in combination with other theories such as the mobilities paradigm, to understand 'marathon running as an embodied and emplaced practice that is systematized by experts and mediated by various discourses, meanings, materials, and skills.' (Larsen 2021, 9, see also Hitchings and Latham 2017).

The use of *social practice theory* is still evolving in the field. In the literature on running, Larsen (2018a) develops a practice theory approach to study running and running events but does not focus on the weather or seasonality in particular. Gillett (2018) shows how outdoor physical activity is co-constituted with the material features of the neighbourhoods as well as seasonality and darkness. Maller, Nicholls, and Strengers (2016) stress the importance of urban roads, parks, buildings, and bike paths for performances of practices that have a positive health outcome. In mobility studies more broadly, Ihlström, Henriksson, and Kircher (2021) show that riding on the pavement is common among cyclists and that this practice emerged as a safety measure and a way of managing risks.

Practice theory has been useful for challenging some widely accepted ideas. Larsen (2018b, 5) challenges the idea that ‘commuter cycling is only for short distances and only makes sense in “compact cities”’. Our study employs practice theory to challenge the assumption that running in cities is limited to certain geographical places and surfaces (e.g. asphalt). Moreover, we show how times and places for running shift in different weather and seasons. We do this by exploring *negotiations*, combining practice theory with affordance theory to examine how runners take advantage of different affordances (action possibilities) related to different places and how other, less welcome affordances are avoided in practices conducted in the urban environment during the dark season in Sweden.

As indicated above, affordances are understood as possibilities for action afforded to runners by different materials and places (Gibson 2014; Rietveld and Kiverstein 2014). Locomotion, or any movement, requires a stable supporting surface. However, the possibility of locomotion is also determined by the abilities of the individual (Gibson 2014). For example, icy and slippery surfaces afford falling to runners—but can also afford mobility when suitable skills and materials are employed. Runners negotiate surface conditions by attaching different materials (i.e. equipment) to themselves, which become part of the person when used. A runner, by wearing winter shoes or spikes, can take advantage of the directed locomotion afforded by hard surfaces, even when they are slippery. Affordance theory informs several recent mobilities studies. Cook and Edensor (2017) focus on the experiences of cycling during the night and explore the rhythms of dark landscapes and the affordances of bicycles and cycling equipment. Larsen (2017) uses the concept of affordances in a study of cycle parking and locking. Jensen (2018) explores pram strolling in relation to the affordances of surfaces to question assumptions about urban accessibility. Finally, Qviström, Fridell, and Kärrholm (2020) show the importance of affordances of places for motivating and facilitating exercise, with a focus on running. We consider not only the affordances that are taken advantage of (e.g. mobility on a stable surface) but also those that are avoided (e.g. falling on slippery surfaces), employing the concept of negotiations to examine where and how runners run in different conditions.

The combination of practice theory and affordance theory allows a more in-depth analysis of *how* runners negotiate the seasonality of affordances in places where they engage in everyday running practices. Through this analysis, we aim to shed light not only on recreational running during the dark season but also on the interplay between recreational mobilities and the materialities of the compact city.

## Notes on the method

In this study, we employed diaries and diary-based interviews to explore how runners run in the changing outdoor environment (Zimmerman and Wieder 1977; Middleton 2009; Larsen 2018a; Qviström, Fridell, and Kärrholm 2020). We used our networks and social media to recruit outdoor recreational runners from different places in Sweden. Some of these runners live in the cities and others on the edge of the city or in the suburbs, reflecting the general trend towards living in or near urban areas. There is some variation in day lengths among places. However, in general,

daylight becomes more limited in November and December until the winter solstice, after which, in January and February, the days start to get longer again. In the middle of Sweden, for example, the sun rises at around seven in the morning on the first day of November and sets around four in the afternoon. By mid-December, there is daylight from ~9 am to 3 pm. Temperature also varies among places. For example, the average temperature in November 2020 was 8° Celsius in Malmö and Lund (southern Sweden), 6–7° in Uppsala and Stockholm, and 1–2° in Luleå and Piteå (northern Sweden) (SMHI 2022).

We asked participants to keep a diary during November and December 2020 and then invited them to a follow-up interview. The guidance for keeping the diary and protocol for the diary interview largely followed Qviström, Fridell, and Kärholm (2020), with the focus on seasonality being the major difference. Participants were asked to report every running event and to provide some general information such as age, where they live, how often they run and for what purpose, and what kind of runner they consider themselves to be. Additionally, upon request, participants were provided with a template for reporting the time, date, and place of running, weather, temperature, and what kind of (technical) equipment they used. The instructions also asked them to describe how they chose the place where they ran, and whether the outdoor environment influenced their choice or alternatively if they ran in their 'bubble'.

We received 37 completed diaries of different lengths, from ~3000 to 8500 words, and 30 participants agreed to a follow-up interview during January and February 2021. While the idea of the study was to focus on autumn, and November in particular, the winter automatically became part of the study, since interviews were conducted during the winter months and it was natural for interviewees to reflect on their running during that time. We use the term 'dark season' to encompass both the autumn and winter months, i.e. the time of year when it is dark for most of each day. Interview questions were organized into five themes: (1) where interviewees live and its suitability for running; (2) when they run and how their daily life shapes possibilities for running; (3) their route(s); (4) characteristics of the dark season, including the weather and light availability with respect to running; and (5) the interviewees' running habits. Their diary was read in preparation for the interview and used to formulate specific questions or requests for clarification. During the entire study, COVID-19 restrictions were in place, so interviews were conducted *via* Zoom. While few restrictions were compulsory in Sweden, they nevertheless had a major impact on everyday life. Gyms closed their locker rooms, work from home was encouraged, education was conducted online, etc. Therefore, for more than half of the participants, running was at least sometimes possible during the daylight hours.

Of the 30 participants, 19 were female. One-third of the participants (10) resided in Uppsala city; others lived in the Stockholm area (7), the outskirts of Gothenburg (1), Örebro (1), southern Sweden (Lund, Kalmar, and Malmö) (7), northern Sweden (Boden, Umeå, and Luleå) (3), and Jönköping county (1). At the time of participating in the study, their ages were between 26 and 67 years. Some participants were beginners, running shorter distances (half an hour), once or twice a week, while others were very experienced and dedicated runners, running five to seven times a week, up to 20 km per run or 70 km per week, often in the early mornings. Two of the participants (power) walked rather than ran. The majority of the participants ran two to three times a week. Almost everyone identified as a 'recreational runner', one identified as a serious runner, and two added that they were beginners. The description of 'recreational runner' was justified with an explanation that they do not compete, although many of them had taken part in some kind of marathon at least once at some point in their life. Although most participants identified as 'recreational runners', they ran in different ways, with a focus on hill sprints, interval running, running in a forest, running on maintained surfaces, and/or a combination of those. Approximately a quarter of them followed a training program (using an app), a few ran with a group of people or as a member of a club, and a few said they also run indoors. The majority varied their running, for example, alternating between a longer run during the weekend, and a

shorter one during the week. The purposes of running were mostly to feel good, to 'clear my head', and to get into shape as part of a physical training programme.

We analysed the material in three steps, inspired by thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2012). First, Swedish-speaking researchers read through the material corresponding to each participant, first the diary and then the interview transcript. Second, the material was summarized based on the following categories: place of residence; running location; times for running; planning and adaptation strategies and the skills and materials employed; surfaces and places where running took place; and how and when these were avoided or taken advantage of, with reference to their affordances. After gaining a general impression of the material in this way, several themes were identified for further analysis. One option we contemplated was to structure the material according to the type of running, since runners adjust the route and use outdoor materiality differently depending on the type of running they do; for example, hill sprints, interval running, running as means of transport, excursion running in the forest, running while socializing, etc. On reflection, to highlight the importance of urban environments, we decided to organize the material according to the different types of settings, i.e. hills, forests, and pavements, and in relation to light, which is an important element of all these settings during hours of darkness. The diaries and interviews were written and transcribed in Swedish; the excerpts presented in this paper were translated by the authors. The following sections present our analysis of the material as well as our reflections on the results, which draw on our own experiences of running while carrying out the study.

## The running practices

In the following sections, we discuss our findings under four headings: three settings in which different combinations of skills and materials constitute different running practices, and light, which is a particularly important element of all three settings during the dark season.

### *Forests: (not always) 'ideal' places for running*

I live in a great location [for running]. There is a two-and-a-half kilometre running trail [in the forest of Hågadalen] a few hundred metres away. There are also plenty of smaller paths branching off from the trail, and gravel roads and paths throughout the entire Hågadalen [a nature reserve area with forests and fields at the city edge] and then up into this forest area ... So there are really numerous opportunities for running. If you cross Norbyvägen, through the garden suburb and the residential area on the other side, you end up in Stadsskogen [the City forest, a nature reserve area], where there are also running trails. So I really live in a great place, if one wants to go running [laughter] (Interview with Åsa, n1, 40, Uppsala, 2021-01-28).

This is how Åsa<sup>1</sup> describes her place of residence. She lives in a house close to two forested areas, both of which are described as very suitable for running due to the existence of marked trails and small paths. The conception of a forest being an ideal place for running is not merely Åsa's opinion; her views mirror a dominant and often repeated ideal among Swedish runners (Qviström, Fridell, and Kärrholm 2020). It is notable that she describes the residential area as merely a place of 'transit' to access the forest as a place for running, which consists of marked trails and paths. The image of forests being an 'ideal place' for running reoccurs in our material, which also highlights the importance of illuminated trails for forest-based running, which were established throughout Sweden primarily in the 1970s and early 1980s (Qviström 2016).

Forest running integrates the material characteristics of the forest and its surroundings and affords low-impact running due to softer ground (compared to pavements); fewer stops due to traffic and traffic lights (free-flow running); and fewer other people and thus less zig-zagging around them. Some of the forest's affordances are mentioned by Tove (n9), a 43-year-old beginner runner who lives close to Delsjö nature reserve in Gothenburg, in her diary: '*[There are] paths in the forest, they are softer and the surface is more varied. It's the sound of the forest, not traffic*

noise or people talking loudly on the phone'. However, to take advantage of the forest's affordances during the dark season, special skills (e.g. time planning to avoid darkness) and more equipment (shoes with a good grip, spikes, a head torch) are required to avoid falling. Forest running is more sensitive to darkness compared to running in the city, where the apartments, cars, bicycles, and streets are lit. In terms of skills, running on trails and paths requires more attention and more advanced skills as the uneven terrain affords tripping over the roots. One '*strains the muscles and has to balance in a completely different way*'. This becomes even more challenging and risky under muddy and slippery conditions. Thus, forests become less accessible during the dark season as more planning, materials, and skills for running in the darkness are needed to avoid the affordance of falling.

For the majority of the runners in our study, forests are primarily a place for running during the short windows of daylight (between about 9 am and 3 pm) and dry weather. Outside of that window, several runners (especially women) avoid running in the forest due to safety issues (despite illumination). For example, Åsa can run in the forest during lunchtime as she works from home during the Covid-19 pandemic and lives close to the forest. However, she doesn't run in the forest at night, since: '*I have poor night vision and would risk spraining my feet or injuring myself in some other way*'. Jenny (n25), a 30-year-old runner who lives in Gröndal, Stockholm, comments in her diary: '*My best loops are too dark in the evening so I run on more asphalt and pavement than I would want to*'. During the time of darkness, forests are not accessible for Jenny, and she does not take advantage of the 'ideal' forest running despite living close to the forest.

While Åsa and Jenny avoid the affordances of slipping in the dark and wet forests, Mia and Björn do not. Mia describes how '*it feels awesome*' following a reflective track when it is dark, and Björn sometimes seeks out muddy places. In the excerpts below, their words capture the lure of dark and muddy forests, made accessible in Mia's case by following reflectors and running in a group and for Björn by applying advanced skills that afford posting on social media:

It's really slippery in the forest. We run intervals along the reflective track with a headlamp. The smooth flat rocks are slippery [but] it is good to run where there are plenty of leaves and soft [surface] if it is not too muddy. I'm starting to get to know the trails where we run intervals, even though we're running in the dark, it feels awesome. It is a powerful feeling to dare to jump over logs and stones in the dark. But I would not (dare) to run as fast as when it's light and dry on the ground. (Mia's diary, n13, 2020-11-11, running in a group with a guide, time 19–20)

I was out for a run and it was wet. It had poured down and there was just water everywhere. But I still thought it was fun to run and flap around [in the rain]. So ... sometimes I seek muddy places. ... The running gets a little more challenging and it's more awesome to run when it's a little mucky and grim. And it results in better pictures for Instagram. A pair of muddy shoes is... it's good to show off sometimes. (Interview with Björn, n7, 2021-01-20)

Several materials (light, darkness, dry or muddy ground, head torch, trail running shoes) and skills (knowing how to run on muddy or icy surfaces, or in the darkness, setting distances, times and speeds, and orientation) need to combine in a particular way for forest paths to become accessible during the autumn and winter months. However, *forest-like running* practices also occur outside of forests, in situations where some qualities of forest running such as softer ground, less traffic, and fewer people are to be found, and these can be integrated into the practices of runners living in highly urbanized and densely populated areas such as the central parts of Stockholm. We understand these performances as an attempt to access affordances similar to those of forest, which are still regarded as the 'ideal' place for running.

Different strategies are employed to engage in 'forest-like running', such as running close to the water, using traffic-separated paths, avoiding traffic lights, running in the evening or morning when the traffic (including pedestrian traffic) is low, and running on softer areas alongside asphalted or paved surfaces. Petra (n4), a 31-year-old runner who lives in a dense part of Stockholm, writes in her diary: '*Once down at Kungsholmen's waterfront, we run along the water with Karlbergssjön on the left. Here the surface is softer*'. Stina (n3), a 26-year-old runner from



Stockholm, describes how she negotiates the city's rhythms by running in the evenings when there are fewer cyclists and walkers, and forest-like, free-flow running becomes possible: *'I run in the evening because I like to be alone a little bit. I think it's nice. Cyclists cycle madly, which is disturbing. Many pedestrians take up a lot of space and are difficult to overtake.'*

Thus, the muddy surfaces and the darkness of forests shape their accessibility, which is negotiated by runners using different strategies, giving rise to different running practices, including (1) developing skills, paying closer attention to 'where they place their feet', and using specialist equipment, such as a head torch and trail running shoes; (2) engaging in forest-based practices that require less advanced skills, by running during daylight, choosing paths that they know are safe(er), and running in a group; or (3) seeking forest-like qualities in the built-up areas of the city to engage in 'forest-like' practices. However, runners can also avoid forest running all together and run on asphalt and pavements, as elaborated in the following section.

### **Negotiating seasonality by running on well-maintained surfaces**

Runners' opinions of asphalt range across the spectrum from 'love' to 'hate', yet maintained surfaces are part of many different running practices: either (1) in asphalt-focused running; (2) as a convenient and safer running surface when forests are anticipated to be slippery; (3) as a route to the forest. The first type, asphalt-focused running is described by Kalle. This 55-year-old runner based in Örebro not only loves asphalt but also calls himself an 'asphalt nerd'. For him, asphalt is 'Formula 1', and he has developed a specialist know-how about the relation between energy, distance, and speed when running on different surfaces:

Asphalt is always Formula 1, I love when I get out on the asphalt. I can feel the difference on different asphalt. "This is a soft asphalt, this was a little harder asphalt" and so on [laughs]. I'm an asphalt nerd, I love asphalt. And when my shoes get a grip on asphalt then I feel like a Formula 1 car. So when I'm out running long distances, it makes a big difference in terms of energy for me to run on asphalt or on packed gravel. Running 20 kilometres on packed gravel takes much more energy and I get a worse grip than running 20 kilometres on asphalt. (Interview with Kalle, n27, 2021-01-18)

Kalle runs outside year-round, in all weather conditions, and describes running in the rain as fantastic. While rain affords slipping, stepping into a puddle, and shivering when cold, he avoids these by using a special running rain jacket as well as applying skills for running in the rain, to keep his body warm and shoes relatively dry, despite the rain:

Rain is nice. Strangely enough, you don't get wet [...] I can't explain why, but my feet don't get wet from running in the rain. [...] It's the upper part [of the body] that takes the beating. The face gets very wet, and hair and such. And then the torso, and being wet in the face doesn't matter. Being wet on the head doesn't matter. Just take it, it cools well. You get cooled off. And then I have a running rain jacket because it's the torso you want to protect. [...] I love running in the rain. It's a wonderful feeling to run in the rain. It is fantastic. (Interview with Kalle n27, 2021-01-18)

The majority of runners we interviewed describe running on asphalt as harmful to the knees and body. However, during rain, snow, and hours of darkness, runners take advantage of asphalted surfaces, since runners anticipate that these surfaces will be cleared and illuminated, unlike paths in the forest, and that a dry and reliable surface with a good grip will afford continuous mobility, without the need for stopping or taking precautions. As a result, less effort is required to deal with seasonality (darkness) and weather (mud and rain), compared to the more tangible manifestations of seasonality in the forests. Thus, modern road and pavement management regimes that aim to ensure the free flow of vehicular and pedestrian traffic enable runners to avoid (or ignore) the specific affordances of the season, such as slipping and falling. Although the management is not undertaken for the benefit of runners, it affords predictable mobility on streets, which runners take advantage of. While equipping oneself with spikes or good trail shoes can enhance the affordance of mobility on otherwise slippery, snowy, and icy surfaces (in the forests), a more convenient performance is to opt for the cleared and salted bicycle tracks and walkways instead:

If there's just a little ice, I put on spikes. [...] So I put them on my jogging shoes and then I jog anyway, although a little slower so that I do not fall over. But when it's just too slippery and uneven, then I have had to run along Norbyvägen [a heavily trafficked road with combined cycle/pedestrian zones], for example, because there they are so good at clearing [snow from] the ... bike path and the walkway. So there you can actually almost always get around. It is, if not bare ground, then still the path is properly cleared and gritted. So then I run on the asphalt where it is well cleared [of snow]. [...] (Interview with Åsa n1, 2021-01-28)

Birgit, 48, from Värmland, who lives close to forests with illuminated trails, takes advantage of the anticipated predictable mobility afforded by asphalted roads as a way of negotiating the anticipated outcomes of previous rainy weather, as illustrated in this excerpt from her diary: *'I ran my usual short lap on asphalt, as it rained a lot and was probably wet in the woods'*. Her statement also shows how in wet conditions asphalt becomes a 'safe' and 'convenient' choice. Paved streets also become a 'safe choice' when it is dark since these roads tend to be illuminated: *'It may be very slippery and wet and so on, on the forest paths for example. Or very, very dark. Then it is very nice that there are good ice-free and illuminated asphalt roads you can take instead.'* (Interview with Birgit, n5, 2020-1-8). Paved and properly maintained surfaces affording fast mobility and opportunities for interval training are used for performance-focused running when the streets are empty and absent of traffic. They are also used for everyday running, sometimes as a running route to the forest or park (as described by Åsa in the previous section). The pavement and its management aim to create an 'abstract' space for free flow of pedestrian traffic. However, the 'free flow' is disturbed by traffic, while seasonality and weather cannot be entirely avoided. Runners still need to plan for the darkness, negotiate the traffic, and dress accordingly. Moreover, during icy conditions, even pavements can be slippery and require caution (in some weather events even more so than forests paths), as an 'asphalt runner' living up north in Sweden described in her diary: *'I tensed my whole body and "braked" every step for fear of slipping.'* (Margit's diary, n10, 53, Boden, 2020-10-30).

The affordances of the dark season are sometimes negotiated by abandoning running outside in favour of indoor training. This is very clearly expressed by Johan, who writes *'there has been more indoor training lately due to the bad weather'* (Johan's diary, n6, 26); and Margit who describes how *'It has been raining all night which has led to a lot of ice, so I went the gym and ran on the treadmill.'* (Margit's diary n10).

Thus, during the dark season, the illuminated city streets become places where the affordance of comparatively predictable, safe, and convenient mobility in everyday running is anticipated and taken advantage of. Runners anticipate that the even and well-maintained surfaces of city streets will reduce the need for special equipment (e.g. head torch or special shoes) and that the application of basic skills will be sufficient to avoid slipping and falling. Seasonal negotiations are thus specific to place, time, and running practices. Paved streets in a city afford relatively safe mobility for everyday running, while sloping surfaces afford another kind of physical exercise, as we elaborate on in the next section.

### **Negotiating slippery slopes**

Running on *hills and steps* is either (1) a *primary practice*, with a focus on developing muscle and core strength, using the change in elevation to gain more intense physical exercise, or to make effective use of limited distances available for running; (2) integrated into a (long-distance) run; or (3) avoided completely. During the dark season, the uneven terrain of steps and hills becomes even more challenging for running and thus less accessible for some runners, as more caution and skills are required to avoid the affordances of slipping and falling, especially on the descent.

Johan, a 26-year-old, partly time-flexible runner who lives in a dense part of the city of Stockholm, uses hilly areas in the city to enhance his physical exercise and as an effective way of getting a proper workout. While the pedestrian traffic interrupts his flow and limits the speed

of running, he can compensate for this as he knows where there are changes of elevation and traffic-free places, and the times of day when there will be less traffic. For instance, running in a hilly park in the city centre during daytime hours allows him to engage in (forest-like), 'free-flow' running, avoiding traffic but also flat surfaces. In the excerpt below, he describes how he negotiates the rhythms of the pedestrians in the city by avoiding them and 'heading for the hills':

I try to make this as efficient as possible. Since I think, you cannot run as fast as you want [in the city]. ... I would just feel like an idiot if I were to run with all I had ... at full speed ... along the sidewalks. But if you head for the hills then you really get your heart rate up properly. And you feel it in your legs. So it is a way to get a proper workout. (Interview with Johan n6, 2020-12-17)

A meeting was delayed so I thought I could get the best out of the time and run a little. I started at Kammakargatan [street] and ran to Bellevueparken [park] and back, so I ran up and down a lot of hills through parks. [...] the weather was useless as usual, [but] they have started to clear away the leaves so it's not as slippery anymore. It feels very bare with no leaves on the trees, some ugly buildings that can hide behind the leaves are more clearly visible now. (Johan's diary n6, 2020-11-24, 10am, weekday)

The second quote shows how pavement maintenance practices, such as removal of leaves, affect the running surface and become an element of running practice during this time of the year. Slippery slopes and steps, especially wooden, unmaintained steps, afford tripping and falling. Thus, some runners use their knowledge of the city to avoid slippery slopes when they anticipate the affordance of falling: '*I changed the route, to run where there are fewer downward steps*'. Alternatively, they slow down, especially when running down steps, as described by Johan, and by Jenny, 29, an experienced runner who runs 5 to 15 km three times a week:

You cannot keep up a good pace, quite simply. If you want to keep your heartbeat up, you cannot run fast enough, because then you will fall down the steps and get injured. And now with leaves [on the ground], it's just dangerous. It is more comfortable to run downhill [than down steps]. But if [the steps] go up ... I would say that it goes perfectly okay. Although I still very much prefer to run up a hill instead. But [running] up steps it is perfectly okay. (Interview with Johan, n6, 2020-12-17)

The hill I ran on is paved, it was quite wet on the ground and fallen leaves. I was wary that it might get slippery, especially on the descent, but it wasn't a problem. It is a pleasant environment on the hill, with forest all around. (Jenny's diary, n2, Uppsala, 2020-10-25, 5 pm)

Runners apply several skills to adapt to the surfaces they run on. First, they learn where slippery slopes are in the city and where the more slippery infrastructure is located (e.g. wooden steps), so they can adjust their routes accordingly. Sometimes that means avoiding slopes completely. Petra, a 30-year-old runner, n4, describes in her diary how: '*I chose this route because it's flat and I can't stand running on hills*'. One way for runners to gain knowledge of the route can be to walk it in advance to learn how 'hilly' it is, so they can anticipate its affordances for long-distance running. Second, runners' knowledge of places includes knowledge of the effects of prolonged seasonal weather on their running routes, enabling them to anticipate the affordances of slipping on the leaves in the autumn and on ice that the melted snow has turned into. Meanwhile, they know where the urban roads and pavements are maintained and so can anticipate the affordance of predictable mobility. Third, they embody skills for running downhill: slowing down becomes an un-reflected automatic reaction.

Thus, running on slopes requires more advanced skills and is more physically challenging. Moreover, it becomes even more difficult during autumn and winter when these slopes are slippery and afford falling, making this type of physically intensive running, and these surfaces, less accessible. During this season, lights become an important supporting material for running practices, as explored in the following section.

### Seeking lights during dark times

Lights are a material that strongly affects running practices during the dark season, similarly to and often in connection with paved streets. Runners negotiate darkness in winter by (1) using the early onset of darkness as a 'deadline' for 'getting their running done' when it is still daylight, in a *time-flexible running practice*; (2) doing their running in illuminated residential or other built-up areas; or (3) using their own lights to assist running in the forests when it is already dark. The last two alternatives constitute *artificial light-assisted running practices*.

Johan's strategy is to use the darkness as a 'deadline'. He tries to get his run 'done' before it gets dark:

My strategy is that I should run before it gets dark. Because otherwise, it does not happen. Feels like. So that's probably my strategy. To decide to do it as early as possible. And do not let it weigh on me. Just get done with it. (Interview with Johan n6, 2020-12-17)

This captures how the rhythm of the daylight during the dark season, and the materiality of light and darkness, can become an integral part of running practice, by changing when running is done. For Johan, the changing window of daylight sets a deadline, which typically overlaps with his regular work schedule. Such a time-flexible running practice is feasible when off work, or when working from home. More commonly, however, runners 'deal with' darkness by adopting *artificial light-assisted running practices*, either by taking advantage of the illumination in built-up areas or by carrying their own lights.

A common way of negotiating the darkness is by taking advantage of the illuminated roads and pavements in the city. Running in the illuminated city is juxtaposed in participants' diaries to running in the dark forest, as in the diary of Lea, a woman in her 30s, who lives in Tranås in central-southern Sweden:

Today I ran in the forest, it was a little colder than on other days. It was the first time I have run in the dark. I don't like being in the forest when it's dark, but there were quite a lot of people walking or jogging. But next time I want to run in the centre [of the town] in the evening. (Lea's Diary, n18, 2020-11-11, 6pm)

Participants' accounts emphasize that poor visibility can lead to accidents. Anton (n.32), 29, hurt himself in the darkness during the study. He states in his diary: '*I took off on a smaller path for the last bit. It was a mistake! In the dark, I slipped on a slippery stone slab and sprained my foot*'. Runners with fewer skills for running in the dark tend to gravitate towards the illuminated cities, where roads, apartments, and lit-up buildings serve as orientation, enhance visibility, and provide an opportunity to observe the life in the city. Tove uses illuminated asphalted roads when it is dark in Gothenburg:

I haven't tried the head torch yet, so I cannot run in the forest, because then I do not see where I put my feet. And therefore I have to run where it is possible when it is dark, and then it will be on the sidewalk or on these small paths. I'm not very fond of running on asphalt, but it's ... well, it's good to do. (Interview with Tove, n9, 43, 2020-12-17)

Running in the illuminated city (centre), residential areas, and roads with illumination, constitutes a 'safe running practice', as shown in Mia's diary, n13, where she states: '*I took the safe bet and ran through the villa area instead of the loop closest to the lake*'. Visibility during the dark season is enhanced not only by the artificial illumination installed for this purpose but also by the lit-up apartments, while the people living there contribute to the 'safety' aspect. When running in residential areas at dawn, runners can take part in the city 'waking up' and the lives of the people there:

Now I'm going to sound like a window watcher, but the fact is that you can look in when you see lighted-up windows and you can see a little how people are at home and so on. There are a lot of people living in this area so it's quite cozy that way. (Interview with Stina, n3, 2020-12-11)

Alternatively, in more advanced running practices, runners use their own head torches for forest running. In the following extract, Lars, 54, n15, an experienced runner in Uppsala who has experience of competing in orienteering, describes how he equips himself with lights to create artificial visibility while surrounding darkness supports the creation of his own world:

Head torch on and music in headphones. GPS and training watch on as usual (I think it's fun to compare km times with how it feels in the body/heart rate etc.). Dark outside. I get on the street towards the urban forest and run both on dark paths and on illuminated trails. Being in my own world is enhanced by the darkness. But fun to meet people and dogs on the trail. The moon shines through the treetops at times and the trees cast shadows on the ground in the evening. Lovely! (Lars's diary, n15, 20210-11-5, 6 pm)

A new type of light-assisted running practice is the reflective trail run, where reflectors are installed that reflect back torchlight shone in their direction. This, however, requires a new set of skills, and a good torch. Mia tried this type of running in a group when it was fun. When trying on her own, she realizes her torch is too weak. Her comments illustrate the importance of knowing where the reflectors are and of being equipped with a good torch:

Ran with a running group, good for motivation. Pitch dark in the forest. The reflective trail makes running fun, but [the reflectors] are hard to find if you don't know where they are. (Mia's diary, n13, 2020-10-13)

First I tried to run on a reflective trail in the forest but could see so poorly with the head torch. So I ran intervals along the illuminated running trail instead. [...] Good lighting. (Mia's diary, n13, 2020-11-26)

Thus, natural and, more commonly, artificial lights are an important material during the dark season. Runners either take advantage of the affordance of predictable mobility in the illuminated city or employ more advanced skills and materials to run in the forests if they are not sufficiently time-flexible to adjust to the availability of natural light. The materiality of light and the places that were the topics of previous sections (forests, pavements, and hills) together co-constitute city running, which we discuss in the concluding section.

## Discussion

This study examines how runners negotiate, i.e. avoid or take advantage of, different places in the city during the dark season in Sweden. In accordance with their skills and knowledge, they anticipate the affordances (i.e. action possibilities, such as falling or directed mobility) of places in their everyday running practices during this time of the year.

Empirically, our study demonstrates that running practices are location-specific, multi-faceted, and varied (see also Qviström, Fridell, and Kärholm 2020; Cook and Larsen 2022), whereby different sets of skills and materials are required depending on the times and places where running takes place. We started out without any assumption that urban running is bound to a particular geographical place or to specific surfaces, such as asphalt, and this allowed us to see that forests and forest-like running are highly present in urban running. Runners who adopt these practices seek out quieter places closer to green/blue areas (albeit in the city) that afford free-flow running on softer surfaces, avoiding the traffic and traffic lights. In the city, this requires planning the run around the business of the city, knowing how to avoid the traffic lights, and how to get to 'nature-like' places affording running routes of sufficient length. Along the illuminated streets lined with apartments, darkness and slippery surfaces are less of a concern than in the forests, where more advanced skills are required during the dark season. Running on slopes (steps and hills) is an effective way of conducting physical exercise in compact and busy cities, but slippery slopes make this practice less accessible during the dark season. Compared to forest running and running on slopes, running on maintained surfaces is geographically, skill-wise, and materially more convenient and a safer practice during the dark season. The lit and cleaned roads afford relatively predictable mobility and decrease the need for runners to carry their own lights

and wear special shoes, making this type of running more accessible during this time of the year for the urban and suburban runners who took part in this study.

By focusing on the dark season in particular, our study contributes empirically to previous research by detailing how the time of the year matters for recreational mobilities, in terms of both changing day lengths and prolonged, seasonal weather conditions. Previous studies have demonstrated the importance of the weather. Larsen and Jensen (2021, 68) observe that 'runners are uniquely immersed in the visceral realities of the weather-world from which there is no hiding'. For example, in urban marathons 'the weather can ruin a planned pace' (Larsen 2021, 10). In a study of urban running, Barnfield (2020, 553) reports that 'the weather was a problem and running late at night was problematic due to the lighting and the surface', so that participants in this study had to 'acquire skills of navigation, movement, how to avoid obstacles and time' (Barnfield 2020, 559). Our study shows how runners navigate seasonal weather conditions by selecting routes that avoid wet and dark places, or by devising strategies to deal with these conditions in accordance with their knowledge of the city, their skills, and materials they use. By using maintained and lit surfaces runners have the opportunity to observe the city waking up and avoid the anticipated affordance of, for example, falling on forest trails when they are slippery and dark. However, slippery, and/or dark surfaces become an exciting challenge in more advanced running practices while running in a group in darkness affords fun playing with reflectors, which would not be possible during the daylight hours or in summer. Thus, our study goes beyond the assumption that certain weather or light conditions are 'bad' or 'problematic'. We show how these conditions link up and combine with different affordances, skills, and materials to give rise to different running practices, such as play with reflectors, a muddy challenging run, or a safer and a more convenient run on maintained surfaces.

Moreover, our study illustrates how *urban planning* (e.g. the siting of street illumination and residential buildings) and maintenance of the surfaces (e.g. clearing leaves and snow from pedestrian zones) facilitate and become an integrated part of certain running practices. The importance of urban planning and maintenance regimes for running practices is not considered in previous research. Larsen (2021, 2) observes that runners are 'forced to run on car-clogged streets and pavements, and on paths that are dominated by and designed for walkers'. We found similar performances among runners in our study. However, by accounting for the seasonal aspect and juxtaposing urban running to running in forests, which in Sweden are planned for running (in contrast to the urban environment), we show that the cleared surfaces in illuminated cities afford safer directed mobility and that this affordance is taken advantage of by runners during the dark season. However, this only supports a particular practice, i.e. *running on well-maintained surfaces*. At the same time, running in forests, which are seen as 'ideal' places for running in Sweden, becomes accessible only to more advanced and experienced runners and those better equipped (with spikes and/or head torches). Our empirical findings critically interrogate the predominant focus on geographical distance when planning for accessibility in urban areas (acknowledged in Qviström 2015). It is clear from our study that even for runners living close to the forests, these are not necessarily accessible when it is dark and slippery, for example. Our study suggests that urban planning should take account of seasonality when planning for recreational running. As shown in this study, running in the forest in November or December can be very different from doing so during the summer season. Mud and darkness create affordances of falling for those running in the forest. Thus, these places become less accessible during the dark season, especially to less experienced runners, which is an important point for urban planners to consider. Moreover, when runners seek out 'forest-like' qualities in the city, this could be interpreted as a critique of contemporary approaches to urban planning and of the compact city paradigm. In their everyday outdoor recreation, runners have to deal with the traffic, noise, and traffic lights to get to the 'nature-like', quieter areas with softer ground.

Analytically, this study focuses on practices, rather than on individual experiences of weather, which is more common in previous mobilities studies. Regarding *the weather*, Allen-Collinson

et al. (2019) explore the weather and seasonality from the perspective of the mind-body-world and note that: ‘our weather-engagements may be more pre-reflective, ‘felt’ and sensed, without the weather forming a specific focus of intentionality and conscious reflection’ (Allen-Collinson et al. 2019, 779). These authors find that runners develop a ‘feel for’ the weather and weather-wise skills through embodied performance based on previous experiences. In this study, we find that weather-wiseness among runners is not merely momentary, it is planned, place-based, and anticipated. Runners take prolonged, seasonal weather conditions into account when planning when and where to go running, making adjustments according to their skills and anticipated conditions in different places—and their affordances. Larsen (2021) applies practice theory to demonstrate the importance of meanings, materials, and skills in marathon running. We found that these factors are also important in everyday recreational running. However, going beyond ‘events’ allows us to understand how runners select different places in the city when planning their everyday run according to their skills, available materials, effects of prolonged seasonal weather, and light conditions, as well as the available city infrastructure. Moreover, we show how runners opt for certain running practices in certain spaces, based on anticipated affordances.

Regarding *negotiations*, Deleen, Ettema, and Dijst (2016) show that individuals engaging in leisure activities use negotiation strategies to deal with constraints, for example by ‘using public space to save travel time and costs’ (Deleen et al. 2016, 256). Cook, Shaw, and Simpson (2016) discuss how runners negotiate ordered public spaces, hypothesizing that runners might feel obliged to give way to pedestrians due to the designated primary use of pavements for walking. In our study, we understood negotiations in a broader sense as components of practices. We show how negotiating the same weather and seasonality differently gives rise to different practices. Some runners find it more convenient to plan their route to avoid darkness and take advantage of maintained and even surfaces that require less advanced skills and materials. Others adopt more advanced practices, taking on the challenge of dealing with the darkness and slippery and muddy surfaces by employing advanced skills and specialist materials. Thus, our study goes beyond individual encounters, showing how spaces and weather are negotiated by recreational runners.

We show that mobility is not only multi-faceted but also relational and situational. Drawing on Edensor, Barry, and Borovnik (2021), we conclude that seasonality needs to be understood not only as negotiated but also as *placed*: it plays different roles and affords different kinds of running at different places and times. Cleaned and lit urban surfaces –planned primarily for walking and driving—afford more convenient and safer running when the city is emptier during the dark season. However, this ‘urbanized’ dark season running takes place further from the forests, which are still seen as the ideal place for running.

In conclusion, studies of recreational mobilities not only draw attention to places, times (seasonalities) and activities hitherto marginalized in the conceptualization and planning of contemporary cities (e.g. Qviström 2013). They also tell stories of what the modern city affords, which highlight the need for new management regimes to further develop such qualities.

## Ethical approval

The study complies with GDPR regulations within the European Union about the storage of any data, particularly personal information data. No additional ethics approvals were necessary.

## Note

1. All names are fictitious.

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