

# The Nature of Cultural Heritage Sites

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In the late 1990s holidays close to nature often take people to places that are demarcated as cultural heritage sites. Here people can sample the past in their search for a life in harmony with nature. The development of these living museums where visitors can try their hands at old crafts, get a taste of what life was like in the past, and witness people's lives in a local setting, goes hand in hand with ecological perspectives, green tourism, and natural products. The purpose of this article is, first, to present the tendency to use history and culture as an escapeway to nature, and second, to discuss the nature of cultural heritage politics. In the quest for fixed values, clear identities, and adequate ways to relate to nature, there is a tendency to criticize our own modern society with the aid of history. The critical attitude to modern civilization found among many of the visitors could be an expression of alternatives and resistance and an active way to discuss and test contemporary environmental issues. Cultural heritage sites have a potential as alternative places where lasting values could make them useful for trying out new attitudes to nature and culture in the future.

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History is today commodified while simultaneously being brought to life and presented as something natural and authentic but also different and adventurous. Unique leisure-time experiences are used as a means of distinction when people's identity formation is increasingly directed inwards. In this essay I shall address the tendency to use history and culture as an escapeway to nature. Reuse, which has become the mantra of our times, entails the natural use of history in the landscape.

In the late 1990s holidays close to nature often take people to places that are demarcated as cultural heritage sites. Here people can sample the past in their search for a life in harmony with nature. Vacations today are supposed not only to involve the active creation of culture but also to take place in restful encounters with nature. Both these experiences can be found in the historical landscapes where nature meets culture, leisure becomes labor, the past becomes the present, and heredity meets environment. History is used as a reminder of a better life, exciting and evocative. Ancient monuments, castles, ruins, deserted farms, abandoned in-

dustrial landscapes, and overgrown railroad tracks become a kind of adventureland with a natural seductiveness for the visitor. Here one can use one's imagination to create atmospheric refuges which grant coherence and wholeness in a fragmentary world.

## Authentic Experiences in Nature

Many of the places to which people make their way in the quest for authentic experiences in nature are defined by professional administrators as part of the cultural heritage. The term "cultural heritage tourism" has been officially used in Sweden for a few years to describe the work with tourism and regional development carried on by the Central Board of National Antiquities (Riksantikvarieämbetet). By using the cultural heritage as a tourist attraction, narratives about our past are made clear and concrete. This not infrequently takes place parallel to the portrayal of Sweden as a country with unique natural scenery. At special cultural heritage sites tourists try out the good life in a form that involves challenges to their physical

and mental stamina. Wetland paradises are sold parallel to medieval markets; one can enjoy a cup of coffee to the mating display of the ruff, or buy a knight's shield for protection in fights. When the cultural heritage is transformed into saleable products, the producer alludes to ecological values and a sustainable future.

The longing to get back to nature has always been associated with something natural and genuine. What is new is rather that nature is staged or presented as an experience market, aestheticizing both nature and the past. The development of a tourist landscape based on the cultural heritage and on living museums where visitors can try their hands at old crafts, get a taste of what life was like in the past, and witness people's lives in a local setting, goes hand in hand with ecological perspectives, green tourism, and natural products.

In 1995 the government declared that the tourism profile of Sweden should be based not only on our natural scenery and geographical location but also on our cultural heritage. It is thus mainly in the late 1990s that ecotourism and cultural heritage tourism have been developed. In both these forms of tourism people look for authentic experiences of nature and also for experiences of other people's living conditions and a genuine sense of local life in the past.

## Cultural Heritage Brought to Life

One of the aims of Swedish cultural policy is that the cultural heritage should not just be preserved but also used and brought to life. The visitor should be able to take part in some form of activity such as baking, weaving, making baskets, striking coins, or attending a gardening course. Tourists should be able to experience the everyday life of bygone times in a natural way. What were once sold to tourists as sights for seeing have now become sites for doing things, and trying out various activities has become one of the most important ingredients in the vacation experience of the cultural heritage tourist.

Looking at sights without coming into close contact with the people in them was the ideal of early mass tourism (cf. Stallybrass and White 1986:173 on the significance of the balcony in

the nineteenth century). Today we long instead to mix with the people at the places we visit, to come into contact with them and share their everyday lives.

At the medieval castle of Glimmingehus it is possible during the second-last year of the 1900s to take part in a medieval masons' lodge, an experimentarium where one can help to make bricks, burn lime, and build scaffolds in the medieval way. For those who prefer to indulge in culinary experiences there is a chance to bake bread, grind flour, churn butter, pound herbs, and try other aspects of late medieval cookery. A herb garden and orchard are being developed beside the castle. On fragrant summer evenings one can sit in the herb garden and hear tales of folk belief and languishing love. All the senses have to be satisfied, and old traditions are dredged for new markets and tourist attractions.

Historical landscapes are used today not just to understand the present and the future with the aid of the past but perhaps above all as a different fantasy land, or what Allan Pred has called "escapespaces", where one can step over the controlling boundaries of "civilized everyday life" and temporarily forget one's duties and disappointments, to dream oneself away in other than everyday identities.

Throughout the modern era, life in the past has been constructed as the good life, the age when people lived in harmony with nature. This has served as a contrast to a present that is felt to be threatening and difficult to grasp. Today more and more people are trying to bridge the modern separation of nature and culture, in their search for the answer to the question of what a good life is. The voyage of discovery often goes inwards, into the self. When asked why they try their hand at activities at a medieval market, or an antiquity center, or in a natural landscape, many people say that they want new perspectives on life. Changing one's life for a while and choosing a temporary identity gives an opportunity to derive nutrition from the landscape of history.

When the Viking Age fortress of Trelleborg and the surrounding landscape is now being reconstructed, it is being done on the site where it once stood, which is now in the very center of

the modern town of Trelleborg, on a former industrial site. The reason for building a fortress is not just to achieve a historical reconstruction and to reuse the site, but also to create an arena where it will be possible, with the aid of the imagination, to strengthen one's cultural identity.

## From Nurture to Nature

The cultural settings in Sweden that are defined as being of national interest have long been subject to a law regulating land use in areas considered by experts and community as examples of "culture," "nature," or worth preserving for a mobile leisure life.

Instead of isolating these cultural heritage sites as separate entities to be understood in a chronological context, however, they have been formulated in the 1990s as a resource for people in their identity formations.

Museums are often described as identity-confirming institutions. We are supposed to be able to visit them to study who we are by understanding what has been and how we became what we are. The same role is played by institutions responsible for the cultural heritage in their management of the landscape. Today identity is one of the most important concepts in the aims of cultural heritage management. One must be able to reflect oneself and history in the cultural heritage. But when

museums and other institutions in charge of the cultural heritage are forced to compete on the same tourist market as theme parks, they are becoming increasingly similar to them. When public funding of traditional institutions is reduced, the museum shops take on a crucial significance in the museum budgets, along with higher admission fees, dependence on sponsors, and exhibitions that sell (cf. Cronon 1996:216). As this development proceeds, the institutions also depart from their educational responsibility. The cultural heritage is sold to tourists who can pay instead of being used as an educational resource. This can be compared with the way in which chains of stores such as The Nature Company sell Authenticity, Uniqueness, and Simplicity through commodities that function as a critique of modernity (cf. Cronon 1996:191).

In the 1990s, the Central Board of National Antiquities, as administrator of the past in the landscape, has switched from stressing the concept of the cultural *environment* (*kulturmiljö*) and is instead marketing the term the cultural *heritage* (*kulturarv*). The development is thus from environment to heritage, from nurture to nature. There are many arguments as to what the cultural heritage is, how it should be defined, and what function it has. Svante Beckman (1993:19), a historian of ideas, has identified a few different ways of using the cultural heritage, based on Nietzsche's idea of three

Viking ship arriving at Fröja thing 1998. Fröja thing is the name for a market and meeting that has been held yearly in an archaeological experiment village, Hög, in southern Sweden during the late 1990s. The name Fröja alludes to the Norse goddess and thing was where people met and dealt with matters in common during the Viking age.



different ways of using history: antiquarian, monumental, and critical. He argues that the cultural heritage is often used as a weapon in power struggles. The antiquarian approach idolizes the past and seeks to escape the present; the cultural heritage is seen as a counter to a degenerate contemporary culture and an oasis that makes it possible to endure modern life (1993:20). The monumental approach has chiefly been used to hold together political structures such as nations and groups. Examples of this can be seen in today's Swedish parliament, where the term cultural heritage is used with particular frequency to mean something shared and something Swedish. The critical approach to history or the cultural heritage is more useful. It seizes on the fact that history and the cultural heritage are something that each age creates for its own purposes. History in the

landscape could therefore be used in an emancipatory way to satisfy people's needs and wishes.

### Testing a New Life at Viking Heritage Sites

Interest in the life of the Vikings has grown in many places. To prevent general knowledge of the Viking Age from becoming shallow, to avoid excessively banal tourist ventures of the theme-park kind and too many competing attractions, Viking Heritage – A Network for Viking-related Knowledge and a Council of Europe Viking Network have been set up in Visby, Gotland. This drive is supported by the European Union. In Sweden alone there are at present more than fifty projects in progress aiming at bringing the Viking Age to life. Many of them are taking place in Viking villages and historical activity



Hardworking blacksmith making fine crafts at Fröja thing 1998.

centers of various kinds. Like several other modern-day Viking markets, the Viking Assembly in Trelleborgen leads many people to arm themselves for combat, dress up in Viking clothes, and sell Viking Age goods of their own manufacture:

“Artisans and merchants of all conceivable kinds will demonstrate their craft skills. In particular, they will show their unique selling talents! Food, tools, tents, household utensils, and clothes will be on display all through the market. Visitors will gain a sense of what life was like for the historical Vikings, and the market as a whole will offer the visitor a genuine taste of Viking life!”

The goods on sale include jewelry, weapons, clothes, baskets, drinking horns, herbs, glass beads, and much besides. Many people devote a large part of their spare time to making these goods; some of them do it as their living. Yet they would not view themselves as contemporary producers; for them it is instead an attempt to try out new ways of living. One craftswoman who makes Viking jewelry also says that she wants to live like a Viking. It has simply become a lifestyle for her and her family. This is not just because we are fascinated by the Vikings, she explains; it is also a matter of a natural way of life, one that feels ecologically correct.

These Viking craftsmen set up camp and live on the site for several days. They show off their produce, make mail shirts, demonstrate ship-building and sailmaking, metalwork with gold and silver, wood carving, coining, and vegetable dyeing. There are frequent fights at the market, and one is struck by the many martial elements. Archers shoot arrows at the fortress, battles are enacted, berserks stage warrior shows, and Viking wrestling is demonstrated.

The everyday life of a distant past is turned into a contemporary market for testing new customs and habits, ways of life and patterns of production. In an experimental archaeological village in Scania visitors are invited to experience everyday Viking life as it was a thousand years ago:

“The Viking village in Hög takes you on a voyage away from the traditional accounts of the history books. Experience the everyday life of the Vikings. Characterized by hard work and fine crafts, in close interaction with the powers of nature and the benevolence of the gods ...”

These Viking Age markets are new phenomena. They are a part of our late modern society. They did not receive their form and scope until the mid-1990s. At Foteviken on the Falsterbo peninsula, Viking battles and feasts have been staged since 1997. Foteviken Museum styles itself a Viking reservation. They say in their marketing that all Vikings are welcome to take part, to come and live with them – the permanent Vikings. The requirement is that one should wear Viking clothes and be prepared to help all the visitors who want to learn more about their cultural heritage.

At these markets the visitor can not only purchase beautiful objects from the past but also buy everyday Viking goods. The materials



The bow is drawn in the archery games at Fröja thing 1998.

used to make these commodities are all natural, invoking the past. As the program puts it, they are “far removed from plastic and other modern-day materials.”

The visitor is offered a living past in a multitude of different ways. In old workshops you can try ancient crafts: preparing skins, forging iron, making glass beads. At the Eketorp fort on the island of Öland you “experience the past” through long theme visits where you have a chance to do practical work with a craft. The activities receive a top rating in the *Guide Michelin*: “In the prehistoric workshop you can try your hand at making various objects in the old-fashioned ways. Each week there is a different theme: cooking, textiles, leather, ceramics, wood, metal-working or music.”

## Distinctive Individuals in History's Adventureland

It is not the intrinsic historic value of ancient monuments that is important for today's tourists but their value as a leisure arena. In contrast to everyday life, it is supposed to be possible to shape distinctive individuals in history's adventureland. The play-acting becomes a way to use history to rework the present. A wide range of free zones, similar to the medieval

culture of laughter, are recreated in today's society so that we can have an opportunity to reflect on ourselves from a distance.

At many Renaissance chateaux and medieval castles in Sweden one can take part in feasts and banquets, folk festivals and games, frolics and revelry – activities that turn the world upside down. In the anonymous Sundayland of the historical adventure one can play whatever role one chooses – beggar or king – and freely mock the routines of mundane existence (cf. Svensson 1997). Medieval festivals and Renaissance markets have been developed into large-scale popular festivities, and guilds and associations have been formed to maintain interest the whole year round by means of gatherings where they discuss history, make costumes, or play music.

The exhilarant feasts and activities have a great deal in common with the culture of laughter that was so typical of the Renaissance, as shown by the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin through his analyses of the works of the great sixteenth-century writer Rabelais (cf. Svensson 1998). In burlesque popular festivals, carnivals, and spectacles, people created free zones of a kind, which temporarily liberated them from duties and rules, habits and patterns. Here they were allowed to make cruel fun of the authorities with impunity, making them look ridiculous, to the great amusement of everyone – including the objects of the mockery. Something similar occurs today in the dramatizations staged by Renaissance companies for staff parties and business get-togethers of various kinds. Under the guise of humor one can criticize the prevailing hierarchies and question the position of the boss. At the same time, this jesting fosters a sense of community, a collective topsy-turvy view of the world that is not otherwise possible today. In fact, it was not until the late modern society of the 1990s that these Renaissance phenomena were recreated, and I would interpret this as a sign that we are in the process of changing the world and people, once again opening the horizon to laughter and play. In this role-play it is also possible for adults to change identity for a while and to turn things upside down. There is a striking interest in outsiders, and perhaps new attitudes are



Lunch break for the tradesfolk at Fröja thing 1998.

tested when one sits in the medieval stocks or stages a beheading as entertainment.

In his interpretation of Rabelais, Mikhail Bakhtin has shown how the burlesque Rabelaisian laughter can also be seen as typical of the carnival culture of the times. Bakhtin describes this as a folk culture. The laughter could be aimed at anyone, but everyone took part in it. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries society underwent a change so that the collective perspectives were gradually closed off. The gap between the people and the elite was widened, and the new state ensured that order prevailed, unchallenged by burlesque revels (Bakhtin 1984, cf. Österberg 1991). Laughter became more private and less dangerous. There was no longer a common laughter shared by everyone. There were now restrictions on the boundary transgression that was formerly permitted.

Many of the participants in these anachronistic associations speak of a powerful sense of community at the markets and festivals. It feels just like being among people from those bygone days, they say, expressing a special feeling of authenticity, which is just what the Viking tourist above spoke of.

As a sign of the times, tourist and museum brochures now no longer invite people to come to *view* sights, exhibitions, and museums, but to *experience* the cultural heritage that is on sale.

## Bringing the Cultural Heritage to Life

Since the Central Board of National Antiquities decided to bring the cultural heritage to life, there has been a debate about how it should be made accessible. The aesthetic and entertaining use of the cultural heritage is on the advance, both in the tourist trade and in cultural heritage management. Svante Beckman's description of this is that the market is now taking over the cultural heritage from "the academic custodians of the ancient temple," but I would rather say that they are working together. The problem for both sides is what Beckman calls "making the publicly managed cultural heritage competitive on the experience market."

The aim of cultural heritage tourism in the 1990s has been "to put the experience in the center," and for this purpose the authorities in

charge of culture have cooperated with the tourist trade. There has been a crucial change in the administration and in the use of the cultural heritage. From having formerly been a state concern managed by experts with educational aims and instruments, it is now increasingly in the hands of commercial interests. This means that different experts are required nowadays. When the unit for cultural heritage management of the Central Board of National Antiquities was recruiting new staff in the mid-1990s, they stressed how "attractive" the cultural sites were. The would-be applicants could look forward to working with public activities "from product development to marketing." The cultural heritage was held up as one of our most important tourist products.

The cultural heritage tourist also tests new attitudes to nature and tries to find an ecologically more correct way to live. History or culture is used as a way to understand nature. When history is related and compared to our own times, there is a tendency to criticize our own modern society with the aid of history, in discussions about how everything in the past was genuine, whereas today we lack fixed values and everything feels artificial. There is a longing for authenticity, not just in ways of life, artifacts, and architectural details, but also in raw materials, resources, and attitudes. Anti-quarian and environmental arguments often run parallel today, which is why visitors to historical sites want both to find bygone culture and to have an experience of nature (cf. what Harvey calls "ecological emotions"). The managers of the cultural heritage have to stage a kind of alternative aesthetic.

At medieval castles, Renaissance markets, and Viking assemblies, the goods for sale are not only those alluding to history but also herbs and spices, nature cures, and health products. The tourists' interest in nature has also led the cultural heritage managers to lay out a garden at the popular museum in Stockholm whose main attraction is a seventeenth-century ship.<sup>1</sup>

## Nature as a Contested Sphere

The Swedish cultural heritage has always been closely associated with nature, and even things





Woman visiting the market to sell her home-made soap. Fröja thing 1998.

that are in large measure products of culture – pieces of cultivated landscape such as enclosed pastures – are allowed to represent something original and natural. The pasture has become a kind of symbol of the Swedish essence. Even a scarcely idyllic writer like Strindberg used the pasture to invoke all that is genuinely Swedish. When Sten Selander in the 1944 yearbook of the Swedish Touring Club described the Swedish pasture as Sundayland – the land of bright idylls – he associated it with the cultural heritage of the Viking Age. He let some grazing sheep in a thousand-year-old grave field illustrate what for many people embodies the natural countryside of Sweden.

Our attitude to nature today is more ambivalent, however. We constantly meet it in modern society's contradictions and paradoxes in

nature. There is not just one nature but many different natures, and nature takes the form that social life gives it.<sup>2</sup>

The freedom that people want to experience in nature is often circumscribed because the environmental values of the demarcated attractions are lost as they are marketed. Signs and symbols in tourist guidebooks direct people's movements in the landscape so that everyone goes to the same places (cf. Macnaghten and Urry 1998:191).

Of course, a dual attitude to nature has dominated our use of it throughout the modern development. At least since the seventeenth century, the way to a modern society has led to a division of nature into two parts. On one hand it is used for scientific purposes, "it is spied on and its fundamental laws are investigated," to use an expression borrowed from the German sociologist Klaus Eder (1997:145). On the other hand we use it as a "free nature" for the purposes of tourism and recreation. Nature and culture have often been set up as irreconcilable opposites, and hence also nature tourism and culture tourism. Yet when civilization met the wilderness, the result was a blend of the two. Historical monuments were visited at the same time as nature. Yet culture's control and transformation of nature has led to ecological crises, and the pleasure of being in nature is now enjoyed hand in hand with a new kind of natural experience, namely, despair about the consequences of civilization.

New social movements are taking shape which see it as their duty to recreate a more harmonious attitude to nature. The road to this goes via the past. It is in earlier ways of life and attitudes that the answer is sought, while nature is simultaneously granted an almost essentialist primacy of interpretation. Statements about nature suggest that we have no influence over it – it's just the way things are (cf. Cronon 1996:30). This often goes together with the perception of nature as a kind of moral imperative, that is, a view of what nature should be like and a faith in nature as an authority elevated above all doubt. The American environmental historian William Cronon (1996:36) compares this way of regarding nature with the way people in Western traditions formerly used God



as the authority for their beliefs.

We think that nature is the opposite of civilization, just like the wilderness. But what we see when we gaze into the mirror of wilderness, according to Cronon, is just a reflection of our own longings and desires (Cronon 1996:69f). There is a tendency to use history and culture as an escape route to nature. Trying out Bronze Age life or reaping oats with a sickle have the same meaning as visiting an “ecological farm.” The past is experienced as more self-sustaining and natural than the present. Many people today devote their leisure to things that were considered as work in preindustrial society. Chopping firewood, tending sheep, making hay, or preparing linnen, building fences, and weaving baskets are more significant elements for

leisure farmers using the landscape than for those who are permanently settled in the countryside.

Just as there has long been a nostalgic yearning for wild *places* (cf. Cronon 1996:77), people now, when modern development has domesticated, urbanized, and industrialized our surroundings, yearn to get back to a *time* in which we imagine that nature’s resources were used in moderation and people lived in harmony with their environment.

## Memories and the Sense of Past

The human geographer David Lowenthal has described the past as a foreign country, a country that is becoming increasingly foreign while



Under this pastoral greenery the remains of the Viking town Birka can be found. In a two meter deep culture deposit the traces from life in alleys and houses can be found. Since the mould is black from the charcoal of Birka’s fireplaces the place is called *The black ground*. Birka is enlisted on Unesco’s World Heritage List since 1993 – one of eight Swedish world heritage sites – as one of the most well-preserved examples of a Viking age trade centre. In the mid-8th century the king of Swedes founded Birka. This was the first town in Sweden, and in its heyday the town had over 700 inhabitants. Merchants made their way here with precious goods from near and far. Craftsmen like blacksmiths, horncarvers and pearl makers worked in the town. Birka was also an important harbour and place for reloading international trade. Here English buckets met with Arab coins and Chinese silk with Frankish glasswork. In the end of the 10th century the Viking town on Björkö was abandoned. Today it is again visited by a lot of people making their image of the past.

simultaneously being filled with more and more of our own times. He says that memories and survivals from the past tell about vanished times, but the past that is described is not necessarily what actually happened but in many cases our own construction, a creation of our times. In this way the cultural heritage acquires immense strength since it can be used in every age according to its needs and preferences.

The way in which a certain period of the past is enacted or history is written says just as much about the times when this happens as about the age that is being described. In addition, one must always ask from whose perspective the history is being told. The cultural heritage tourist rearranges the past and constructs a cultural heritage to suit his own ideals and patterns. The past that is described is not necessarily related to what happened. What is produced is a certain kind of historical knowledge, while other kinds are sorted out.

The cultural heritage that is brought to life tends today to consist mainly of entertainment value. The visitor is supposed to gain a sense of the past (Rodaway 1995:256) rather than educational knowledge. Going to that nostalgic

fantasyland means that the revival of the past takes place solely in the form of the pleasing and entertaining parts of history. The visitor who has paid money for his or her experience should be able to leave the cultural heritage site feeling happy about the past. Nature and culture thus become a commodity which gives the subject an identity. This is a construction of the visiting subject as a consumer, as Paul Rodaway observes (1995:257). Perhaps it is the inability of traditional cultural institutions to deal with social and environmental problems that leads to a quest for alternative ways of life and new attitudes, and that sometimes takes on forms like this (cf. Harvey 1996:100).<sup>3</sup>

Memories are of crucial importance for all identity formation. The feeling of a past confirms who we are in the present. The place or the landscape to which the memory is related reinforces the importance of the past. To understand ourselves and the past, there must be some traces left to relate to. Cultural heritage managers thus have a responsibility for our cultural well-being. Experts on the cultural heritage fail to discharge this responsibility if they do not help to create emancipatory cultur-



A day in springtime in Birka at around the year of 900. Model in the museum to fire the imagination of the past.

al heritage sites, where visitors can also understand the difficult and dark sides of history. All people need to have their experiences confirmed.

The nature of cultural heritage politics, however, is such that certain values are included while others are excluded. There are clear knowledge structures within which experiences should be gained. There is a strict division between male-culture-strength-civil and female-nature-submission-goodness. A development is in progress which confirms what Gillian Rose has shown about how nature has been feminized, so that nature and woman have been opposed to culture and man (1993). This nature association, however, is not just about gender. Indigenous people and "colonized others" are also associated with nature, as David Sibley (1995) has shown so clearly. As David Harvey has pointed out, all ecological arguments are really arguments concerning the whole of society. You can see this in the growing cultural heritage tourism and ecotourism where there is a kind of faith in them as having the answer, with a lifestyle that is in better harmony with the environment. In the same way, people's lives in the past in our part of the world are felt to have been ecologically sounder. Cultural heritage sites in one's own country, and the people who lived there, are equated with Others. Tourist brochures describe life in the past in the same terms as those used today about, say, the Amazon rainforest. This has established a contradictory but powerful primacy of interpretation. In addition, the interpretation, the language, and the gaze with which the tourist regards nature, culture, or the landscape<sup>4</sup> have also been adopted by those who are regarded (cf. Pratt 1992 on autoethnographic expressions).

## Nature as a Cultural Value

Cultural heritage sites have their own history, yet today they are recreated as a natural zone where the cultural heritage visitor looks for well-being. By visiting a cultural heritage site and living the everyday life that bygone people are assumed to have lived, we become one with the people who lived there and can simultaneously say that we have had a genuine experience of nature. When visiting cultural heritage

sites people moves between past and present, while they simultaneously are at the interface of nature and culture, of city and country, of wild and civilized. Nature has been interpreted as a *space of experience*, charged with a multitude of notions as to how people should acquire this experience. In this space there are codes, clues leading us back into history. It is therefore also possible to step into a landscape and find oneself again. There are narratives in the landscape, identities that one can assume. Nature is place-bound, and the place is created by the time and by the social values inscribed on it (cf. Harvey 1996:303). Perhaps visiting cultural heritage places is a short cut to authenticity and self-understanding. By interpreting history as natural it disregards the fact that nature is a contested sphere into which we always project our values and desires. There are of course no fixed and indisputable facts, and movements and cultural processes are crucial in the understanding of social life, but David Harvey has demonstrated the danger of just emphasizing the changeability of everything: "If everything that is solid is always instantaneously melting into air, then it is very hard to accomplish anything or even set one's mind to do anything" (Harvey 1996:7). He recommends the use of values instead of facts. Values must be able to be fixed, he says, and it is the permanencies that we achieve that give meaning to our lives. By analysing how different evaluation processes work, we understand better how permanence is achieved at specific places and in specific historical situations. Certain values are more dominant than others and make people adjust to them (Harvey 1996:11, 78f).

With Harvey's outlook it could be said that nature is produced as a value and a way of handling the world. Cultural heritage sites give permanence to these values. In the quest for fixed values, clear identities, and adequate ways to relate to nature, the critical attitude to history found among many of the visitors could be an expression of alternatives and resistance and an active way to discuss and test contemporary environmental issues. Cultural heritage sites have a potential as alternative places where lasting values could make them useful for trying out new attitudes to nature and culture in

the future. Today they instead have the effect of conveying conformist standards (cf. Sandell and Sörlin 1994:41) which sustain the prevailing power structures.

Are cultural heritage sites taking the place of traditional cultural institutions? They are at any rate powerful and symbolically charged spaces of experience, with an ability to channel important values such as identity, authenticity, and authority. Are these active places where one can handle major environmental and social issues while simultaneously fulfilling oneself, or is it simply a new form of social control? The cultural heritage sites could be a kind of creative alternative sites displaying new norms and ways of life (cf. Harvey 1996:321ff), but today they are probably not primarily expressions of environmental criticism but are rather used as a way to distinguish oneself.<sup>5</sup>

## Notes

1. Posters from Vasamuseet tell the visitor to attend their genuine seventeenth-century garden.
2. In the book *Contested Natures* (1998), Phil Macnaghten and John Urry discuss the fact that there were multiple kinds of nature. They describe people's experiences and perceptions of nature as contradictory and claim that there is no simple attitude to nature, since it is so closely associated with the cultural constructions and social practices that create nature.
3. David Harvey urges us instead, in Raymond Williams' spirit, to use the boundaries, the borderland, to create a critical space where the hegemonic discourses can be challenged and questioned. In the borderland one has an opportunity to transgress boundaries. It can be used both as a refuge and as a point of departure for resistance.
4. It is mainly the countryside that is cherished as a leisure landscape. We "go to the country" for our vacations, and it is mostly in the countryside that the cultural heritage is staged. The Swedish words for nature and landscape are used as synonyms for the countryside.
5. Cf. David Harvey (1996:433), who talks about a geography of differences. People's possibilities must be realized, even if this takes place within a geography of differences. He objects to the reductionism that sees all people as equal, an aspiration that in his opinion has to do with a general capitalistic commodification. Instead we should investigate the relations between what is generally shared and what is separate and individual.

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