



## **Threatened landscapes—the presence of the past in today’s planning**

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### **Abstract**

Increasing mobility over the last 30 years has added to the population density in the south-eastern regions of Norway. This article focuses on the effects of the landscape changes that take place in the outskirts of towns and cities, with special focus on how pressure on land resources effects the preservation of cultural heritage. It is based on the project “Threatened landscapes – A study of the decision-making, legitimacy and practice of cultural heritage management in local planning”. The project aims at shedding light upon two main questions: What happens to the cultural and historical values in an area during a process of area development? To what extent has the cultural heritage management authorities succeeded in setting the terms for the developmental procedure? To tackle the first question, a mainly humanistic approach is appropriate, as it sets a need for knowing what sort of material structures from former times are embedded in the landscape. The second question highlights the impact of the planning procedure and its possibility to ensure that the cultural heritage is appropriately handled. The pressure on the fringe of the cities is caused by expansion of housing-estates as well as transport systems and it leads to a division and separation of integrated areas. The requirement for cultural heritage work increases parallel with the growing fragmentation process. Despite the activities from several local idealists, the study shows that the cultural heritage work still primarily is taken care of on a formal basis - through the formal planning process in the hands of the regional responsible bodies. Particular attention is paid to handling the controlling perspective, but heritage work kept on this level represents a minimum-standard where the commitment brought in by enthusiasts to a large extent is missing [1].

## **1 Introduction**

Endangered areas can be approached from several angles. The concept emerges when familiar phenomena in an area are being threatened by extermination due to climatic changes or by over-consumption etc. It might also appear as a side effect of developmental expansion, when important cultural heritage remains get lost due to a high degree of building or establishment of new roads. It is in this last sense of the word that endangerment is used in this article.

One of the major challenges within today's social development is to generate useful methods within physical planning. At the same time as planning is meant to attend to an overall picture where form- and functional ideals are getting adjusted to both present and prospective demands, it has to be assumed that the cultural heritage is taken care of as a potential resource. These three demands are today strongly pulling in different directions and often seem to exclude each other. The project "Threatened landscapes - A study of the decision-making, legitimacy and practice of cultural heritage management in local planning" focuses on how the planning process is handled from the cultural heritage point of view [2]. There are several different participants present in the field of heritage work, and focus is directed towards the various spheres that appear on a local level. This article presents closely the approaches that arise in the project, as well as presenting some examples from the case-studies.

## **2 Approaches to the study of cultural heritage management**

Focus in the project is directed towards cultural heritage management interpreted as a sector based interest. We know too little about how the cultural heritage interests manage on the local level and how it is taken care of as a sector based interests with in the local communal planning system. There are a lot of viewpoints on good planning available in forms of instruction guides, handbooks and so on. Despite this fact, we actually know very little about how actual planning is taking place, and what priorities that end up as winners.

Our main approach to face these problems is to raise the following question: What happens to the cultural and historical values in an area during a process of area development? Attention is directed towards the role the cultural heritage interests play and what consequences this practice has for the landscape and the cultural heritage. To obtain insight into this question, it is relevant to look into the basis of knowledge, values and professional background the different actors have, since this effects the praxis.

## **3 The concept "cultural heritage"**

Cultural heritage is a concept with various meanings. Within the Norwegian planning procedure the concept is to a large extent related to the content in the cultural heritage legislation. The year 1537 is significant, because the Reformation represents an important marker in the Cultural Heritage Act. When cultural heritage from earlier times are threatened by modern activities, special

dispensation is necessary to enable developer to build, and the cultural heritage administration on the regional level plays an important role in such procedures. When preservation of younger cultural heritage is being discussed, the planners have to refine their argumentation, and they may continuously experience the difficulties involved in getting a breakthrough within the field. The Plan- and Building Act (PBL) is the prime tool for local planning and as such plays an important role for preservation of cultural heritage. It has a flexible character and gives a wide range of possibilities to use the planning tool in the direction one wishes. This is an advantageous position for municipalities with plenty of resources, but is a weak position for those with a limited economy. As such the planning process can be looked upon as a discursive arena where different interests are played out against each other.

However, cultural heritage is also a much wider concept than the way it is used in the strictly legal sense. The amount of valuable old buildings, roads, workshops, gardens, landscape-formation etc are getting scarcer each year, and the conservation of such areas are considered important to a lot of local people. Through History Groups and other voluntary groups, resources are being put into saving this sort of remnants for the future. Cultural heritage is moreover to an increasing degree showing a potential for tourism, and used in this way it often gets the label "heritage industry" [3]. The potential for conflicts increases when its economical interests increases.

#### **4 The process of landscape fragmentation**

To understand the numerous cultural aspects of landscapes, attention is drawn to the time- and space components in landscape. Within landscape research, focus has been directed along two paths: on the one side towards the abstract concept of space, and on the other side towards the concrete notion of place understood as the locality people relate to on a personal level. A sense of place can be identified as the emotional attachments to localities developed by individuals and communities in the course of living and growing up at home. Places matter because they are the focus of personal sentiments, with the feeling for place permeating day-to-day life and experience [4]. These two aspects of landscapes have been discussed by a series of researchers [5]. Human relations "inscribe" themselves into landscapes as concrete signs. In this way the daily tasks that take place within a landscape appears like biographical encounters between people of today and past times [6]. Landscape in this sense can be understood as an expression of the links between people and their environment and of the operation of social life within particular milieu [7]. Areas and landscapes are in other words founded in social as well as individual understanding of time and space.

The landscape analysis in this project focuses on the process of fragmentation that often hits the landscapes in area with population growth. Changes deform the traditional structures in the existing landscape and effect the function. Because of this, only parts or remnants of the traditional landscape formations can be recognised in to days landscape, where they tend to form isolated and



fragmented elements in otherwise uniform room. They may be difficult to spot, and the knowledge about them can simply have vanished. In some areas the traditional landscape is completely blurred because they have been replaced by new, rational methods [8]

## **5 Pressure on the fringe of the cities**

Two communities have been selected as case-studies to analyse the pressure that municipalities on the fringe of bigger cities experience.

Madla close to Stavanger in county Rogaland is an agricultural area in the outskirts of an old city located and strongly coloured by the nearness to the sea. Madla has been dominated by agricultural activities for hundreds of years back. During the last 20 years it has gradually been drawn stronger into the grip of the city, and the need of more building areas as well as areas for industrial purposes has been protruding. The building of bungalows started around the turn of last century, but the establishment of larger housing-estates set out in large scale around 1960-70, at the same time as the locality formally were included in Stavanger. Gradually the farm-units were split up and areas sold away, and to day it is hard to get a distinct impression of where the farms were situated. A lot of the areas leave the impression of being sub-urban housing estates. One exception is a large forest- and farming area where the need of conservation is widely supported. Madla is effected by its expanding neighbour Sola, and plans are being made for establishing a new motorway right across Madla, with large effect for the farming.

The other case-study is Nannestad in county Akershus. This locality is situated approximately 60 km north of the capital. It is part of the best agricultural areas in Norway, with prosperous farms with a long history. It still has an evident character of being an agricultural area with large green belts and extensive forests, and 9 200 people are living there now. For hundreds of year it has maintained its character of being a "sleepy countryside", without strong pressure from busy railways and elaborate rodents. Since 1992 this situation has changed. The fact that Norway's new international airport was planned in the approachable neighbourhood, has brought great changes. Both the building of a new railway and extension of the road into a 6 lane motorway, have prepared the ground for people working in the capital to move to Nannestad. Three new housing estates are established since the final decision of locating the airport was done. Another direct consequence is the new regional road planned to connect the eastern regions to the airport. This road is meant to open in 2003. The airport has lead to a situation where Nannestad is gradually turning into a suburban fringe, where the effects of the neighbourhood to Oslo are getting evident. The area has chanced into an area under pressure, which is a situation that directly influences how the cultural heritage management is being tackled in the municipality.

Comparisons drawn between the two localities show that similar conflicts emerge in the two areas:

- The need for expansion of housing-estates and transport systems, leads to a division and separation of integrated areas. The fragmentation process increases. Modern motorway planning widely differs from the principle which the old road systems are based on, and they lead to a division within farming milieus. The establishment of new airport in Nannestad brought a widening of the existing road as well as new road lines and railway stretches. Madla is facing a new transport system being established between Stavanger and Sola, and thereby causes a splitting up of the unity the area.
- Private property interests compete with wider territorial planning. For hundreds of years the coastal zone of Madla has represented an essential part of making a living from fishing. To day long stretches of the coastline are privatised, and the connections between the farms and the sea is broken most places. Only a few clusters of older boathouses are preserved.
- The localities include areas integrating both natural and cultural historical values. The process of defining preservation areas is well established, but the need for co-operation between interests concerning nature preservation and cultural heritage preservation is strong. These areas have large potentials for recreation purposes.

## **6 Participants, basis of knowledge and legitimacy**

Cultural heritage work covers a wide field of activities where a varied set of actors participates, and each actors position and point of view influences the values that are being emphasised. We may presume that the cultural heritage management's own decisions, interpretations and evaluations will influence their legitimacy [9]. If there is too much of a gap between the opinion held by "the man in the street" about what can be considered valuable, and the opinions held by the cultural heritage profession, it is very likely to weaken their legitimacy. If, on the other hand, the chosen preservation procedures seem reasonable and adequate to the local understanding, this will strengthen their legitimacy.

In this project we direct our questions towards what form of knowledge and values the preservation management base their decisions upon, since we consider it likely that the academic background and ideological basis held by officials within the cultural heritage management will influence the practice in this field. We wish to examine whether there exists professional, discursive, struggles between different participants and different professions on the question of what should be preserved and why. Are there certain parties or opinions that easier seem to get a breakthrough for their arguments than others? The question of legitimacy will be analysed empirically by examining to what extent the cultural heritage interests are given priority before other sector based interests (like agriculture, communication, health care).

We know that cultural heritage work has several participants, and the degree of integration varies greatly. Areas where the interaction between the different spheres or fields of preservation work are well integrated and are regarded as a



matter of course, also are the areas where we find the criteria for success and a flourishing cultural heritage work. In other areas the activity seem low. The discussion about the various spheres will be based along a line from experience-near to experience-distant positions, or otherwise also known as personal space versus abstract expert space.

Within the local preservation work, there are in principal terms room for a series of participants with different positions, and I will present the following five different forms of participation: local idealists (1) - preservation work in schools and local public life (2) - preservation work integrated in local county council planning (3) - local county council planning is taking place without any focus on preservation work (4) - the formal planning process is in the hands of the regional responsible bodies (5). The discussion is based on the situation in the first case-study (Nannestad) and it exemplifies the wide range of material structures the people living in this community are concerned about. The degree of integration between the different levels or spheres varies.

*Local idealists (1).* In Nannestad it is primarily the History Group that fills this role. They are involved in the preservation of one of Nannestads oldest farms and they have also succeeded in turning one of the classrooms in the old school into a voluntary based museum.

In some communities where preservation campaigns have taken place, it is this form of idealists that have made it possible to save local memorials. The discussion in Nannestad at the moment concerns the preservation of the fundament of an old barn in the very centre of Nannestad. Central politicians are opposed to keeping it and are prepared to tear it down to make room for shops and other new buildings. It has become a bit of "a hot potato" locally at the moment.

There are several private people who have come forward as examples of people with a big interests in preservation work. An example is the owner of a large farm that received the county restoration price a while ago. The farm was offered to the county council for sale so to start up a local museum. But the price the county politicians offered, were considered too low and the offer was turned down.

*Preservation work in schools and local public life (2).* This field is primarily tied up with the History Group. Today there is no public financed local museum in Nannestad, but there are discussions along that line. An anonymous person has promised to support financially the establishment of a local museum. The precondition however is that it is to be localised in the very centre of Nannestad, in a building erected for this purpose.

*Preservation work integrated in local county council planning (3).* It is necessary to differentiate between cultural heritage work as a sector where officials are employed specifically to look after heritage-projects alone – and others that have it as a sideline. In Nannestad it is definitely a sideline. This field of work is organised as one of the many tasks looked after by the Head of the Cultural Office. In the interview he made a special point of mentioning that the organising of the Cultural Heritage Plan still is considered one of the main issues. Heritage work however is only one aspect of his job, and he has only one

assistant helping him part-time, and his priority is directed towards youth work. Since most of the planning in this municipality is based in the Technical Office, cultural heritage is in practice as well as in reality placed under this section.

*Local county council planning is taking place without any focus on preservation work (4).* Nannestad is as already shown representative for this situation. The way the planning process is organised, it is a precondition that concrete plans of various types are being presented for the regional cultural heritage department for verification. This contact is considered "satisfactory", but the relationship is not particularly close. By the local idealists the county councils heritage-profile is characterised as none existing.

*The formal planning process is in the hands of the regional responsible bodies (5).* This means that the responsibility for cultural heritage work in Nannestad is primarily taken care of on a formal basis - through the formal planning process in the hands of the regional responsible bodies. The regional heritage apparatus is mainly functioning as a controller. It makes sure that formalities around the process are taken care of. Particular attention is paid towards handling the controlling perspective; that means handling the formal rejections when serious interests are at stake. But the heritage work is kept on this level, characterised by a minimum-standard and without the commitment that enthusiasts bring into the work. Most of what take place is solely run on formal basis. There are very few preservation cases started on the sideline. This gives the heritage work a bleak and rather invisible profile.

## 7 Expert based systems

Planning within this category is functioning within what Anthony Giddens names as an abstract system, where focus lies on planning routines and procedures [10]. An important trace in an abstract system is that it functions as a means of emptying systems for local knowledge. Giddens calls this process "to descill", meaning emptying of skill. They replace local knowledge as common insight with another highly specialised type of knowledge. This process means that they necessarily are raising a partition between laymen and experts. At the same time more and more people in the modern society are forced into a situation where they are turned into lay-people. The highly specialised and expert based systems claim that everyone has to have a fundamental trust to the functioning of the systems, without themselves knowing how. It is relevant to raise the question if a healthy and vital preservation interest can survive under these conditions?[11]

While the planning process can be defined as an absolute system, the preservation interest is based in the personal, concrete space. Peoples feeling of belonging are closely tied to places they have their experiences from. They may have grown up in the area and have gained their knowledge from cress-crossing the county. Or they have their workplaces here and thereby gradually have built up their local insight. We may find a useful tool in the distinction made within social-anthropology between experience-near and experience-distant positions [12]. The well known social-anthropologist Clifford Geertz describes the two

viewpoints in this way: "An experience-near concept is, roughly, one that someone ... - in our case an informant - might himself naturally and effortlessly use to define what he or his fellow see, feel, think, imagine, and so on, and which he would readily understand when similarly applied by others. An experience-distant concept is one that specialists of one sort or another ... employ to forward their scientific, philosophical, or practical aims. ... Clearly, the matter is one of degree, not *polar opposition* . . . . And the difference is not ... a normative one, in the sense that one sort of concept is to be preferred as such over the other". He follows up by stressing the disadvantages of cultivating either one of these positions, as they both have their weaknesses: "Confinements to experience-near concepts leaves an ethnographer awash in immediacies, as well as entangled in vernacular. Confinement to experience-distant ones leaves him stranded in abstractions and smothered in jargon". What Geertz actually does is in other words to point out that these two point of views are not to be looked on as oppositions. The trick lies in combining them.

The cultural heritage work in Norway has attended increased interests on the local level during the last 10-15 years, and this interest is based on the experience-near past people find represented in their surroundings and are taking care of securing for the future. It represents a resource for gaining sustainable environments. The challenge lies in developing strategies which open for co-operation between several different actors in planning.

## **8 Conclusion**

Areas where the landscape is under pressure, are related to complicated discussions. As this article has shown, the cultural heritage interests on the local level are not necessarily given priority if economical and social services are competing within the same budget. Despite the activities from several local idealists, the study shows that the cultural heritage work in our case-study is primarily taken care of on a formal basis - through the formal planning process in the hands of the regional responsible bodies. Particular attention is paid to handling the controlling perspective; that means handling the formal rejections when serious interests are at stake. But the heritage work is kept on this level - as a minimum-standard without the commitment that enthusiasts bring into the work. This gives the heritage work a bleak and rather invisible profile as we have seen it is being practised in our case-study. Without a strong local assistance and foundation, the preservation work will maintain an anaemic character. The cultural history is based on local lives. It means that someone has to get engaged in telling the stories, so they can stay on as a living memory of the place.

## **References**

- [1] This project was presented at IALEs Development of European Landscape Conference in Stockholm/ Tartu 2001. The contributions to the session "Cultural Heritage in Changing Landscapes" are at the moment being edited in a separate publication.

- [2] Formed in the intersection between the humanities and the social sciences, the five participating researchers are based on subjects like archaeology, architecture & physical planning, ethnology, geography and sociology. They are based in Norwegian Urban and Regional Research Institute (NIBR) and Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research (NIKU). We all share the intent to try to combine and develop methods that stem from different disciplinary traditions; like visual methods, historical cartography, green structure analysis and the use of in depth interviews. We expect these discussions will contribute to form a mutual platform for further studies of the time-space dimension within planning.
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