

Folklore or Fakelore?
The Problem of Staged Authenticity¹
Jozef Keulartz

*Norway is currently Europe's biggest folk museum
but simultaneously a huge laboratory of the future*
Hans Magnus Enzensberger 1984

Karoline Daugstad's informative and interesting paper addresses how definitions or valuations of Norwegian agricultural heritage can be seen as interplay between national and more locally based interpretations. However, only one case out of the three cases she presents directly refers to this interplay between the national and the local level. In this comment, I want to argue that the other two cases can only be assessed and evaluated adequately if we go beyond the national level and also take the global context into account.

Daugstad convincingly shows how the farmer's landscape especially in the inner and upper valleys close to the mountains in Southern Norway became a symbol of national pride and identity when the elite project of defining "true Norwegianness" after 400 years of Danish rule emerged in the first half of the 19th Century.

Daugstad's third case shows how this "national project", which coincided with the Romantic Movement in mid 19th Century, still severely affects the geographical distribution of specific agri-environmental measures, that form the main support system for Norway's agricultural heritage. The inland agrarian communities and valleys depicted as "true Norwegian" by the national Romantic Movement come out as the winners at the expense of both the Northern parts of the country and the coastal areas.

Daugstad calls the national romantics bias underlying this geographical pattern of distribution of agri-environmental measures a "risk", but it is not clear to me what this means. She remarks (1) that some of the Northern counties have traditionally had an economy based on fishery and reindeer herding mainly, and (2) that agriculture in these counties to a larger extent than in many other parts of the country has been disappearing during the last half century due to either depopulation or business specialization. Given these facts, there seem to be fewer reasons for specific agri-environmental measures in these areas than in the inner and upper valleys. Would an unbiased distribution of measures show an outcome different from the current one?

Let us now turn to the other cases that both revolve around landscape change and tourism. The first case is about the small village of Geiranger in the fjord district of Western Norway. Geiranger is a traditional agrarian community where grazing by cows and goats has produced a spectacular landscape. Because traditional dairy

¹ Comments on Karoline Daugstad: Balancing national ideals and local practices: Images, attitudes and measures in the field of cultural heritage in Norway. Published in the proceedings of symposium on 'The protection and Development of the Dutch Archaeological-Historical Landscape: The European Dimension.' 20-23 May, 2008. Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO), pp. D39-41.

farming is no longer economic feasible and farms are being abandoned, the fields are being overgrown with forest and the landscape loses its open character. This not only worries the farmers who don't want to give up farming but also the hotel owners and cruise companies who fear losing customers.

In order to prevent bushes and small trees from invading pastures, the local branch of the Norwegian Farmer's Association has recently tried to revive the long tradition of keeping goats. To make this possible, however, a regular state subsidy and/or a fee from the tourist industry would be required.

The second case on landscape change and tourism revolves around the perception and appreciation of the core areas of the national romantic imagination by the farmers (producers/insiders) on the one hand and the tourists (consumers/outside) on the other. Here, as in the previous case, both parties are worried that the landscape will lose its open character due to the disappearance of agriculture and the lack of mowing and grazing. Moreover, the same cure is recommended to prevent the loss of the agricultural landscape: *active farming*.

I think that both these cases on landscape change and tourism can be better understood from the tension between the global and the local than from the interplay between the national and the local.

Norway ranks among the top twenty countries on the Globalization Index. Even in the remote districts of the country, satellite TV and American hamburger chains have become a common sight. Norwegians travel more and more to a wider array of countries both on holiday and business. There's a steady rise in international trade, in the past years Internet has spread incredibly, and a mounting number of people use English as their first foreign language. As Thomas Hylland Eriksen, a professor of social anthropology at the University of Oslo and a popular public speaker, once remarked: 'The differences in life style between, say, Oslo and Milan, are not as accentuated as one would guess, if one were to take popular national symbols seriously. For according to Norwegian's own self image, Norwegians are mainly a nation of fishermen and farmers who live close to nature, they're simple and bucolic, and they grow awkward and clumsy when they travel abroad. This national-romantic image doesn't jibe with reality - in many aspects a majority of Norwegians share the same lifestyle as other Europeans. The national symbols give Norwegians a strong feeling of national identity, but they provide a poor description of the nation's culture, i.e. the way that Norwegians actually live.'

The effects and impacts of globalization are well-known: ongoing homogenization and commodification result in erosion of spatial and cultural diversity and loss of orientation and sense of identity. In reaction to these equalizing forces the local and the distinct are being celebrated more than ever before. There is a renewed interest in regional identity and cultural heritage. To counteract the dynamics of globalization a trend towards "musealization of the past" has emerged. Heritage tourism owes its character to this nostalgia in combination with the need for new economic initiatives where traditional practices are declining.

I believe that Karoline Daugstad's plea for "active farming" and the revival of agricultural traditions fits this nostalgic reaction to processes of globalization. This

strategy, however, runs the risk of what Dean MacCannell (1973) has called “staged authenticity” in the context of ethnic tourism. Heritage tourism tends to turn natives into objects: “characters” that have to provide for local colour and ambience.

In his discussion of the European Landscape Convention, Peter Howard poses this question: ‘In being concerned with conserving the local culture in the local landscape, while enhancing the economic lives of the local inhabitants, how do we stop them becoming “domestic Pets”?’ (Howard 2004, 431) Howard mentions the Sorbisch people of Niederlausitz and the Spreewald, the Sami of northern Norway, and the Greek-speaking people of Calabria and Sicily in southern Italy who have their language and way of life carefully protected. ‘But to what extent’, he asks, ‘are these people also treated as full members of modern society – if they so wish? Are they free to break out of their cultural milieu and make their way elsewhere, or are they doomed to be camera fodder for the weekend visitor?’ (ibid.)

Moreover, the current craving for authentic experiences is always in danger of creating its own artificiality. Because of the entanglement of commerce and culture, heritage tourism can easily get caught in a Catch-22 situation (Metz 2002). In order to preserve cultural heritage one is more or less forced to make it an attractive leisure destination, a unique selling point. But the more a heritage site becomes an attraction the more it will lose its semblance of authenticity, and, eventually, it will lose its appeal to tourists. To prevent this from happening, time and again a balance has to be stricken between culture and commerce, and between authenticity and artificiality.

I believe that we can only avoid this Catch-22 situation if we stop trying to freeze cultural heritage. This would require making a shift “from original state to historical palimpsest”, as David Lowenthal (1999) has called it. Authenticity should not be seen as something that inheres simply in some original source, some founding moment, some first structure, some autochthonous creations, some steadfast continuities but should instead be seen as something that inheres in entire historical palimpsests, in the very processes of temporal development and in the whole stream of time that continually reshapes every object, structure or symbol.

Here, one is reminded of the motto “Conservation through development” from the Dutch Belvedere Memorandum (1999) about the (love-hate) relationship between cultural history and spatial planning. The Memorandum argues for a new balance or synthesis between the retention of existing historic values and the creation or development of new spatial values and new forms of use. Is there an alternative for the solidification of traditional agricultural practices that have become economically outdated and obsolete? Could one think of new practices or functions that can link the past with the future? How can one make sure that Norway will stay at the same time Europe’s biggest folk museum and a huge laboratory of the future?

An option could be the integration of nature conservation and heritage management. In the Netherlands, the state forest service, by far the largest Dutch nature conservation organization, recently expressed an interest in the cultural history of its areas. The service established a taskforce to assess the cultural historical values and to formulate management strategies.

How could an integration of nature conservation and heritage management look like in Karoline Daugstad's case? Is it possible to replace traditional forms of farming by new forms of nature conservation? For instance by replacing seasonal farmland grazing by year round grazing by half-wild (feral) herbivores, such as Highland or Heck cattle and Konik horses? Could such a replacement be considered as an example of "Conservation through development"?

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