

Sustainability in Rural Development Based on Natural and Cultural Heritage

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Abstract – The historical landscape was a mosaic of fields, meadows and forests in small patches. Farmers had to rely on all available resources. But the changes in land use during the second half of the 20th century transformed the landscape, and the biological traces from customary use of yesteryears, e.g. the biological cultural heritage or bioheritage, are today threatened. Bioheritage includes species dependent on man’s customary uses, and traces of such use, e.g. elements, structures. A continuation of customary use is necessary for the preservation and maintenance of bioheritage for the future. However, the economic situation for small-scale farmers is today threatening this continuation. The question is: can nature and culture values and customary uses add value to products produced by the farmers and thus contribute to a continuation?

Keywords: bioheritage, traditional knowledge, rural development, synanthropic biodiversity.

INTRODUCTION

Through the centuries or even millennia, most of the rural life remained virtually unchanged. The agricultural production of the Scandinavian countryside in early 19th century did not differ too much from that of the Roman Empire. To a large extent small-scale farming in the third world is still dependent on a similar agriculture. Of course all sorts of inventions and changes have been made through the years, but the overall conditions haven’t changed. The characteristics of such landscapes are a mosaic of fields, meadows and forests with fairly small patches. Manure to fertilize the fields came from the domestic animals that grazed the pasturelands in summer and autumn and lived on fodder from the meadows in winter and early spring. This constituted an annual cycle dependent on and recycling local resources. Farmers needed and relied on all available biological resources in order to create a decent living. Food, but also tools, buildings, furniture, clothes, farm implements etc. were produced from local resources. During the late 19th century the Scandinavian farming systems underwent major changes. Leguminous plants were introduced and large scale ditching was initiated and carried out. The nutrient flows of the farmland fundamentally changed (Byström & Einarsson, 2008). During the 20th century, chemical fertilisers and fossil fuels further transformed the landscape. The mosaic

landscape gradually turned into a uniform and homogenous landscape and the farmers got more and more specialised. The fields of grain grew bigger, while other farms specialised into dairy production (Emanuelsson 2009).

Today only a small fragment of the landscape is used in manners resembling the historical use and production. Such remains of the old farming landscapes are internationally referred to as social-ecological production landscapes (SEPL), or what we often call cultural landscapes. To preserve and manage such landscapes, that are associated with substantial biological and cultural values, there is a need for either a continuation of the customary practices that formed the landscape, or various corresponding conservation measures. But how can such a continuation be upheld when the production methods needed generally are, or are perceived, as being economically non-viable?

METHODS AND SOURCES

The reflections in this paper are mainly based on observations, interviews and experiences made during the work within Naptek (Swedish National Programme on Local and Traditional Knowledge related to Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity) 2006–2012 and the Interreg-project Grazing of outlying land: a biological cultural heritage as resource for a sustainable future 2011–2014. Most of the work has been done in close collaboration with or after consultations with farmers and knowledge holders in order to get an emic perspective of the research question. The geographical focus area is Central Sweden, mainly Gävleborg, Dalarna and Jämtland.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND ORGANIZING CONCEPTS

The biological traces from centuries of customary use are often referred to as biological cultural heritage or bioheritage. It can include either synanthropic biodiversity, i.e. wild or domestic species dependent on man’s traditional activities, or traces of previous use, e.g. elements, structures and even landscapes shaped by historical use of biological resources. Biological cultural heritage can e.g. consist of the presence of a plant species dependent on grazing, mowing and hay harvest, like moonwort (*Botrychium* sp.), or a particular tree shaped by pollarding for leaf fodder or other human activities (e.g. Emanuelsson, 2003; Bele & Norderhaug, 2012; Ljung, 2011 & 2015). These can be seen as both nature and culture values in the surroundings of farms with customary use of semi-natural fodder on outlying land through mowing and hay-harvesting or grazing animals. Connected to this customary use there is also local and traditional ecological knowledge, e.g. the inherited and at the same time experience-based knowhow in practical use of biological resources. This knowledge is part of an intangible cultural heritage of traditional rural communities. However, both the traditional knowledge and the tradition bearers are getting more and more scarce in

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Scandinavia, since the economic situation for the farmers makes the younger generation less likely to carry traditions forward (Tunón et al., 2013).

The question is: can nature and culture values in connection to such customary uses add value to the traditional farmers' products such as local foodstuff or tourist experiences in a traditional context. Could an increased public awareness of the cultural context and its values make customers more willing to compensate farmers for their customary use? Below I will present some ideas and reflections regarding these contexts.

BACKGROUND

Semi-natural grasslands and their values have been in focus for nature conservation efforts for a few decades, especially in the Southern parts of Sweden. Consequently special subsidies have been developed, since these areas have nature values due to the grazing and hay harvesting. In Central and Northern Sweden there are subsidies for grazing at summer farms. The traditional production in the region is based on dairy products where the home farm is used in the winter and for keeping the livestock from autumn to late spring as well as for cultivation of crops, while the summer farm(s) and the outlying lands are used for grazing and harvesting of winter fodder during the summer months (e.g. June–September). In a transhumance pattern the majority of the livestock are moved from the winter shelters to the summer grazing. During the peak of this production mode, there were thousands of summer farms in the region, while there are merely a few hundred left in Sweden today, and the numbers appear to be decreasing. There has also been a gradual change in the way the remaining summer farms are being run; the dairy production has been replaced with meat production or to a stronger focus on tourism (Bele et al., 2013; Tunón et al., 2013).

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusion, still to be proven in practice, is that customary values of Scandinavian mountain pastoralism could contribute to a higher pricing of the products offered by the farmers to consumers and presumably an increased income for the farm. The potential of the intangible cultural heritage in development of a sustainable future has earlier been highlighted (Tunón, 2010; Westman & Tunón, 2010). Furthermore, the cultural landscape as such as well as its attractiveness to tourists has previously been evaluated and is indisputable (Strumse, 1998). There is also a quest for the authentic within cultural tourism that could prove to be beneficial for the farmer.

The nature and culture values of summer farms and their surroundings are fairly well known, but the use of heritage values in a marketing context has not been extensively studied. The initial step will be to collect experiences from farmers that in practice have tried to use tangible

and intangible values to add value to their products and thus compile good examples that can be used to inspire other farmers as well to further develop the concept. This could in the end contribute to a continued production in the semi-natural landscape and a preservation of both nature and culture values. Furthermore, the use of semi-natural grasslands in food production is also often considered energy- and climate efficient and there are huge potentials of the fodder production on outlying lands that today aren't in use.

At present, the continuation of the customary use of semi-natural grasslands is dependent on a stable system of subsidies for preserving and developing nature and culture values. However, in most cases this is not enough; there is also a need for better prices on the provided products and higher incomes for farmers in order to create a long-term sustainability of these landscapes.

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