

On the global quest- the case of inscribing the Vega Archipelago as a World Heritage Site

July 1st, 2004, the Vega Archipelago was inscribed as a World Heritage Site by the World Heritage Committee of UNESCO in Souzhou, China. The justification of the inscription of the area as a cultural landscape reflects the way generations of fishermen farmers have, over the past 1500 years, maintained a sustainable living in an inhospitable seascape near the Arctic Circle, based on the now unique practices of eider down harvesting, and it also celebrates the contribution made by women to the eider down process¹.

The inscription of the Vega Archipelago into this prestigious list is quite astonishing in the light of the post-war development in this area. Centralisation, specialisation and modernisation processes have marginalised this part of the coast severely after World War II. The fisherman farmer is 'eradicated' from the area, and the area of inscription was abandoned as all-year round settlements during the early 1980s. 10 years ago any local 'vegværing' would have seen the prospect of inscribing 'jetsam and ramshackle houses' for the World Heritage List as a hilarious joke. But the nomination has run at high speed, and has gained solid local support. Being born and raised in Vega, but not lived there permanently the last 25 years, there seems to have taken place an extraordinary change the last decade, concerning raise of self esteem and vitalisation of the place and its local history. What on earth has happened? How could this remote and marginalised area of Northern Norway be nominated and inscribed into a list of such high celebrity, under governance of a supra-national level of the cultural heritage field, at such an amazing speed?

Theories on globalisation processes emphasize the need for exploring the impact of exterritorial and de-territorial dynamics on community generating activities, Baumann 1998, Appadurai 1991, Marcus 1998, Giddens 1997, Friedman 1994. Globalising processes are claimed to homogenize human diversity by the technical annulment of temporal/ spatial distances, *ibid.* Baumann states that instead of homogenising the human condition, the technological annulment of time and space tends to polarise it. 'It emancipates certain humans from territorial constraints and renders certain community generating meanings exterritorial- while denuding the territory to which other people go on being confined, of its meaning and its identity endowing capacity', Baumann 1998:18. Baumann's concern deals with a new power structure, based on the creation of professional elites, which are not determined spatially. But it concerns also a new consciousness about the self, and thus the power of imagination in the fabrication of social lives, which is inescapably tied up with images, ideas and opportunities that come from elsewhere, Appadurai, 1991. But elsewhere is also somewhere, and Bauman's perspective is quite discouraging seen from the periphery. Neither should it not be taken for granted that the networks of elitist governance are inaccessible for local people in the peripheries, nor that place is denuded and loses its identity endowing capacity due to these processes. Seen from the perspective of the cultural heritage industries, I claim the opposite takes place. New accounts on globalisation stress also the necessity of recognising the dynamics of local features in these processes, for instance Robertson's concept of 'glocalization', 1995.

¹ Based on the report No 1143 presented by ICOMOS at the 28th Session of the World Heritage Committee, Souzhou, China.

I am interested in exploring how a place with its own mode of abstractness may participate in global mediation and fabricate new imaginable ideas of social lives. Casey claims the concreteness of a place has its own mode of abstractness, based in its *relationality* (there is never a single place existing in utter isolation) and in its inherent *regionality* (whereby a plurality of places are grouped together), *ibid* 1996:46. In these processes features of sameness are at work, but the perspective Casey underlines, is that 'it is not the minds that make this sameness, it is the work of places in interaction with bodies that find themselves engaged in them', *ibid*:30. The way Casey refers to sameness it may be linked to identification. And in order to identify one has to be engaged. But does this engagement need to be restricted to permanent inhabitants and life long belonging? What about seasonal relationships? Could some mobility structures add engagement?

Could a community utilise the de- and exterritorial dimensions for counteracting the dynamics of homogeneity, by using the place and the tradition as a starting point? What conditions success and failure, access and inaccessibility in these processes? How can this new situation be utilised by a small community as a way to participate and expose itself in the flow of information in the global mass communicative era?

1.0 Empirical background

The nomination of the Vega Archipelago is the first application the Norwegian nation state has submitted to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in 19 years, and it is the first time a larger area, a cultural landscape, has been proposed. On the national level several activities have taken place during the last 10 years. Nordic World Heritage Foundation has been established, with objectives to support the Nordic World Heritage work, as well as to counteract the imbalance of sites between the western countries and the developing countries. In 2003 Norway gained representation in the committee. The Vega Archipelago was identified as a potential World Heritage Area by a workgroup set by the Nordic Council of Ministers in 1996. NORD 1996:30/31. In February 2003 the application for inscription was submitted to the World Heritage office in Paris by the Norwegian government. The decision was taken by the 28th Session of the World Heritage Commission in Souzhou, China, based on the submitted field reports by experts of the organisations of ICOMOS, International Council on Monuments and Sites, and IUCN, The World Conservation Union. The application has been administrated by the Directorate for Nature Management on behalf of the Ministry of Environment.

1.1 Marginalisation & devitalising processes

Vega is situated at the coast of Helgeland (65 40'N, 11 40'E). The area of inscription consists of a myriad of small islands, islets and skerries (approximately 6500 only within the municipality of Vega), and the waters are very shallow all the way to Egga, the Continental Shelf. This is the strand flat area which has proved good living conditions both for seabirds and humans for centuries and millenniums. Today 1200 inhabitants are settled within the municipality, on the two main islands, Vega and Ylvingen. 100 years ago the population was more than twice the number, and the settlements were denser in the islets than on the main island². Historically subsistence economy of the fisherman farmer (*fiskarbonden*) combining fishing, farming and other activities, has been the major adaptation form in the strand flat area up to last century. In 1960 there were 232 fishermen in the municipality, while today there

² Folketelling 1801, 1865, 1875, 1900,

are 70 registered, and only 50% of them are classified full- time fishermen, and the majority of these is of old age, Enge 2000.

The last settlements in the egg- and down sites were abandoned during the early 1980s. Due to the North Norwegian Plan, these areas were classified unproductive peripheries, "utvær", and the people were paid to move, Wold 1985. The people did not move of economic suffering, but rather because of lack of infrastructure. In order to keep the families together, to avoid sending 7 year old children away for boarding school or to relatives on the mainland, the families moved. The prospects for the fisheries were not too good, and the area was also hard struck by environmental/ ecological changes. The mink industry introduced a new predator for the eiders into a landscape where the mink itself has no natural predators. During the 1970s an outbreak of green sea urchins resulted in severe overgrazing of the kelp forest along large parts of the Norwegian coast³. The kelp forest was transformed into desert, influencing the habitat of both fishes and sea birds. Several protection acts have been inaugurated the last decades, also the protection act against seal hunting. It led to increased numbers of seals, and the seal hosts a parasite (kveis) that infects the fish, especially the cod. The fish from Helgeland became impossible to sell. In combination with the restrictions made in the national fishing policy during the 1980s, the coast of Helgeland became a catastrophic area for fisheries. Today the recruitment to the fisheries is about null. The marine activities have changed. Also in Vega different projects of aquaculture have been tested the last two decades, with limited success. The petroleum industry bores for gas at the Field of Norne, just south west of these areas, and the industry employs several of the locals. In 2000 a new protection act was approved by the Norwegian government concerning the coastal line of Nordland. (Kysteverneplanen) This act was the first step towards a larger protection plan for the whole coastal area of Norway. The plan caused conflicts between different fields of activities locally, Enge 2000. The protection act was a prerogative for the nomination, since the inscription as a World Heritage site does not involve extra protection, only a status. The long and hard struggle about the protection plan is quite a paradox in the light of the supportive atmosphere towards the nomination, and it might indicate possible future complication for the management of the status.

1.2 Revitalising processes

Despite the pessimistic prospects in the fisheries and low conjuncture for income generating activities, very vivid processes of revitalising the place and its history have simultaneously taken place. These are linked to the field of cultural politics⁴. Two large regional projects were accomplished during the 1990s, "Artscape Nordland" and "Footprints to the North". Both projects aimed at gaining synergetic effects by the regional size of the project, for attracting tourists to the region. Vega was just one of many municipalities involved, but Vega had its role, especially within "Artscape Nordland"⁵. The question raised by Artscape Nordland was: *Whether the periphery of the art world could become a centre by taking its starting point in the specific features that characterises the place itself, in this case, Nordland with its scattered settlements and dramatic nature?* Jaukkuri, 1999. International artists were

³ With reference to a project proposal for the NRC's programme 'Changing Landscapes', 'The Vega Archipelago; interactions between culture, landscape and seascape as basis for community management and added value', under leadership of Hartvig Christie, 2004.

⁴ And research, but I have to limit my scope here.

⁵ The idea was born in a seminar in Vega, artists from the island participated in the process of realising the project, and the first sculpture unveiled was in Vega by Queen Sonja, 1992, and this sculpture by Kain Tapper serves as a metaphor for the project 'A new discussion'.

invited to create land art sculptures in every municipality of Nordland. The project received international recognition *and* it caused hullabaloo in many local communities. The Footprint to the North project was built on the same idea of size, giving synergetic effects for attracting tourists, but in this case the projects were developed locally, by identifying a local cultural feature for presenting the place. In Vega the eider down harvesting practice was chosen, and an eider museum was established in one of the fishing villages at Nes, Vega. Nobody knew then about the forthcoming nomination of the area for World Heritage. The foci on the two regional projects, must be understood as partial explanation for the revitalisation processes, but these projects brought new ideas about belonging into the local discourse, pointing towards the de-territorial dimensions of the identity endowing capacity of a place and thus preparing the ground for the grasping the idea of World Heritage.

1.2.1 Engagement

Since I already have performed great parts of my fieldwork, I am tempted to point at some of the intriguing aspects of the nomination for World Heritage based on a tentative analysis. When the new potential Norwegian areas for World Heritage were identified by the Nordic Council of Ministers in 1996, the Directorate followed up the report by addressing all the potential municipalities. In Vega as in many other municipalities, the letters were put in the archive by the administration. The nomination process started when 3 local women involved on idealistic basis in cultural politics, picked up the rumour, saw the potentials and went to Trondheim to see the Directorate for Nature Management. And this starting point has been characteristic of the whole process. The local politicians and administration have been involved, but the centre of engagement has basically been on idealistic basis. New idealistic organisations have been established, Nordland Eider Organisation, Friends of the Archipelago, both based on ideal objectives related to specific activities and interests, but also as a means to be gain access to the processes of political and administrative governance of the nomination. And maybe this is a key issue of local revitalisation? It cannot work by administrative and political protocol only; it has to be built on engagement and dedication. So the process notifies creation of networking alliances between local grass root people and elites on national, international and trans-national level, where the key issue is engagement in some kind of exchangeability related to the uniqueness of the place.

1.3 A place's own mode of abstractness

The justification of the inscription of the site puts great emphasis on the eider down harvesting practices. The tradition serves as an example of the unique and long-termed adaptation to the natural resources on a harsh coastline, and stresses the relation between man and environment, and sustainable management through practical use. The eider, *Somateria mollissima*, is a very common bird in the circumpolar north, but it counts as the holy bird of the coastal people. Eider down harvesting takes place in many countries and districts in the northern hemisphere, but it is mainly on the coast of Nordland the tradition of building houses for the birds are practiced. The houses are built of driftwood, and they constitute an odd, but fascinating, aesthetics of the islets. During *varntie*, the central concept of the practice and the local name for the season or time when the eider settles for brooding, all the activities in the islets are steered by the care for the eider, and its need for peace and quiet. The cat was held in a line, the oven was fired at specific times, and the children were kept inside. Old protection acts rule in these areas, both symbolically and legally.

The relationship between human and bird, does not resemble any known husbandry practice, since there is no ownership relations towards the bird at work. The bird is only voluntarily “tamed”. Only the care can make it stay, and when the brooding is done, the eider returns to its wild state. The rent for the housing is paid by the precious eider down, which has served as a high value commodity in the continental trade for centuries.

After being introduced to the practice, I start to realise that the eider house and the local concept of *varntie* entail the key to a specific mode of abstractness of the place. And this key holds the potential for global mediation. In his book, *The poetics of space*, 1958, Bachelard describes an investigation he calls *topophilia*. He explores the ontological dimension of felicitous space. He identifies the house, the shell, roundness, the nest, phenomena which able protection. All these symbols are *empirically* involved in the practice. There is a nest, a house and green, oval eggs. The eider house is the hotbed for brooding new life, for fertility and reproductive forces. And the gift of exchange, the eider down, makes up a marvellous featherbed for human relaxations, intimacy, rest, sleep and dreams. I claim this to be the key for potential global mediation. These images can transcend cultural categories, because they speak to the senses.

This dimension represents both a potential and a danger, because it communicate so well with the very strong status of environmentalism in the global discourse, where animals and nature preservation serves as very powerful meta- narratives for anthropocentric humanism or, under the danger of making it into a new plane of perfection based on values foreign for the islander’s practice, Anderson, 2004, Chruickshank, 2004, Milton, 2002, Casey, 1996. It is thus important not to submerge to the symbolic and imaginative dimensions, but keep an eye on social aspects of the practice and on knowledge management based on skills. At the same time, this pertains the paradox of the site. Due to the ‘nature’ of the practice, *varntie*, the area can never be accessible for massive tourist streams. It must be protected. But if the tourists shall comprehend the value of the site, there is need for mediating it by virtual means. To let the tourist get a glimpse of what is there. This entails the exclusiveness of the site and its potential as a branded image.

2.0 Theoretical perspectives & method - multi- sited ethnography & social fields

The urge for a multi- sited ethnography, has been proposed by several anthropologists in order to approach globalisation processes and to study the impact on ex- & de-territorial dynamics on community generating processes by means of actor orientated approaches. Usually a valid research project should include a comparative approach of different sites with similar or comparable phenomena. In a multi- sited ethnographic approach the comparative dimension is to be discovered, it is implicit in the research design, ‘in the form of juxtapositions of phenomena that conventionally have appeared to be (or conceptually have been kept) ‘worlds apart’, Marcus 1998:86. The challenge is however to build on “realistic” or emic juxtapositions, and not surrender totally under the fictional aspects of theoretical, textual or filmic representations, and the social dimension should not be overlooked, Marcus 2006. Appadurai 1991, asks for an ethnographic account which takes into consideration the re-stabilizing and destabilizing social dynamics of de- territorialization, by the concept of *ethnoscapes*, which he defines as ‘the landscape of group identity’. I believe this concept has a lot in common with earlier approaches of *social fields*, Grønhaug, 1976, 1977.

The concept *social field* builds on “good, old fashioned” ethnography, exploring participation and analysis of social interaction, based on identifying actors, relations and activities for situational analysis. It provides a starting point for tracing actors’ network relations, even if

these actors seldom or to a limited observational degree operate within the same arena at the same time. It provides a possibility to identify connections between a field's social range, *scale*, and the relations between this field and other fields, *complexity*, by determining the actors' possibilities to circulate between arenas and different fields⁶. One focus concerns inclusion and exclusion of actors due to social and/ or cultural dynamics; another focus concerns examining the knowledge, the skills of mastering an arena's work tools and remedies, which in combination allow to explore the permeability and impermeability of social fields. Roughly, *social fields* constitute what I have referred to above as *knowledge regimes*. I prefer this concept in order to stress the aspects of knowledge and that different knowledge forms contain different modalities for mediation.

I intend to use the *document*, the submitted application for world heritage inscription, as a way to structure information about the process. I will trace *the social life and the mobility of this document, the people and actions involved, and the ritual aspects of its inscriptions*. This perspective pertains also a commodity perspective. Appadurai says: 'I propose that the commodity situation in the social life of any 'thing' be defined as the situation in which the exchangeability (past, present or future) for some other thing is its socially relevant feature', 1986:13. I will not be able to follow the paths of the document in real time, but I will follow the social corridors and explore the ways different actors and social systems work and relate to the document. By participation in the 'real' landscape where the bird tendering takes place, and explore the seasonal practice and the relation building between human and bird, as well as joining the local delegation going to China in order to attend the Committee meeting, I may be able to *discover the spatial mobility aspects of its exchangeability, and how this is linked to transformability*.

2.1 Taskscapes & embodied knowledge

In order to trace the transformations of knowledge modalities wrapped into the application document, there is need for perspectives on bodily practices. Ingold, 2000, has worked on theoretical perspectives on the relationship between man and environment, as a means to escape the dichotomy of nature- culture. His approach fits well with the exploratory strategy the field concept provides⁷, with a necessary theoretical extension or strengthening through phenomenology and practice theory. He develops his argument based on Heidegger's phenomenological perspective in the article 'Building, dwelling, thinking', Farrell Krell 1978. Heidegger works on ontological and intentional dimensions in the relationship between man and the world. Shortly summarised; Man builds the place, *locales*, through his activities and action in the landscape, *building*, and in these activities there is an *intention*, something is to be built. Through these actions the specific *temporality* of the place is created, and temporality is closely related to the ontological dimension, *dwelling*. The concept of *dwelling* provides the meaning of the human incorporation of the past and the future and the environment, which creates the *temporality* of the *locales*, the place. Latour, 1996, criticizes Heidegger for "belonging in the forest", to tie *being* to a romantic idea of man's relation to nature. Ingold handles this by introducing the concept *taskscape*s, in order to stress the aspects of skills and bodily incorporation and in order to escape the concept of *landscape*.

⁶ By this approach Grønhaug avoids treating community as a bordered unity, and provides an approach based on an empirical exploration set in time and space.

⁷ While Grønhaug's proposed strategies result in dissolving the concept of 'culture', I believe Ingold's present a way to dissolve the concept of 'nature'.

The concept landscape is a tricky one. It developed through painting, linked to a specific way of looking, tightly connected to the growth of European bourgeois in a specific historical context, and this heritage reverberates the whole industry of cultural heritage, Tilley 1996, Green, Williams, Frykman. Landscape entails thus a very specific way of perceiving the environment, linked to different temporalities of *taskscape*s. Ingold refers to *taskscape*s (pl.) in order to imply different uses of the environment. An ornithologist and a fisherman will look for different things when they observe birds. Their perceptions will be guided by their skills and their motivations in the observations. The way I interpret Ingold he does not discriminate or reduce environment to 'nature'. It is as important to understand the temporality of a bureaucrat as the temporality of a bird tender, and only by this perspective is it possible to understand what inform potential mutual engagement in a case or in a place.

By juxtaposing 'ethnoscapes', 'landscapes' and 'taskscape' of different localities or sites, new perspectives on understanding aspects of the global/ local relations in an inscription of a world heritage site may rise.

The project concerns also the analytical challenges on the relationship between the past, present and future, and this will be approached by *narration* and ritual aspects of *social memory*, Ricoeur, 1985, Connerton, 1995. The perspective on embodiment is crucial in order to juxtapose between the narrative forms of written or textual documents and stories, and the ritual aspects of social memory. By focusing on the commemorative aspects of *social memory performed as embodied ritual practice taking place*, Smith 1998, I intend to stress the importance of embodied knowledge in order to meet the challenges of how to keep the tradition alive, practiced in a modern life context.

2.2 Moving images, bi- or multi- 'focalities', 'reflexivities' and ethics.

I have been using a video camera during my fieldwork, and I will address this issue briefly. MacDougall states that 'Images and texts not only tell us things differently, they tell us different things', 1998:257. One of his reasons for this statement is the potential of moving images to convey or mediate sensory and emotional information without disconnecting them to cultural categories. Another reason deals with the encoding of the filmmaker's act of looking in the film, which is fundamentally different from a written work. Ethnographic filmmaking always contains traces of the crossing of minds, whether they mean to or not.

Going 'home' this time also for my fieldwork, I am obliged to problematize a few aspects of the challenges it represents. In Vega I belong to a certain idea of a social structure, which I need to be conscious about. These relations will structure my possibilities and impossibilities to participate in different settings, but on the other side, these dynamics is inevitable in any fieldwork or life situation. There is no position to escape, one has to utilise it, in this case, for the purpose of the research, Abu Lughod 1991, Haraway 1991. The film rushes offer ways to use the positioning as a constructive instrument for learning and exploration, by inviting the protagonists to comment on the footage, to propose missing angles and to guide the researcher's understanding of what is actually taking place. Using film demands a sober attitude towards ethics, because anonymity can never be provided. Working with the camera, raise the questions of ethics in a very direct way, as well as the validity of your perspectives.

3.0 Dissemination and relevance of the project

My film rushes serve as a means to validate and broaden my understanding, but they also serve as a means to extend the possibilities to mediate embodied knowledge. In the thesis I am planning to use rushes as image 'descriptions' of my analysis, to show what cannot be said or written. This way of working makes also interactive media relevant. I plan on making a homepage for presenting the project, which contains an electronic archive. The objective is to make the project available to broader audiences, as well as to present and reveal the basis of the knowledge production and its conclusions. The process I have participated has also historical value for the place. A central concern in the project has been to provide access to the material for the local people involved in the project, and this can be a practical way of doing it.

A film is planned, which will deal with the mode of abstractness of the place, where I will focus on the eiderhouse, *varntie* and the relationship between man & bird. The film will be shot by focusing on the activities in an eider house from the eider nests, as the base story line, where the social activities in the islets during *varntie* related to the relationship between man and bird will be intertwined.

Articles will be published both academically and in popular form.

4.0 Plan of work:

The project was accepted at the PhD programme UoT, Faculty of Social Sciences in 2002. The project has not gained funding, but since the inscribing activities for world heritage status started in January 2003, I was obliged to start the work if the project were to be realised. I have participated in most of the inaugurating activities on different levels, and spent 3 seasons in the islets with the islanders and the eiders on a part time basis. Most of the fieldwork activities are thus accomplished, but there is need to do some complementary actions. Some courses in PhD training are also accomplished. Due to the lack of funding, I had to apply for renewed admission to the PhD programme this year. The project is now accepted and the formalities cleared.

2006:

Complementary fieldwork activities

Analysis of fieldwork material, film and text

Research and study trip to Aberdeen University, Department of Anthropology, 4 months

PhD course in scientific theory

2007:

Analysis, writing of articles

Teaching responsibilities

Editing of film; 'Varntie'

2008:

Analysis, writing of thesis

Creating Homepage for the project, archive systematization

Teaching responsibilities

2009:

Finishing of thesis, films and homepage
Dissertation

5.0 Collaboration with other projects and research milieus:

Visual Cultural Studies at the Faculty of Social Sciences has served as a basis for my relations to the University of Tromsø after my Cand. Polit. graduation. Professor Lisbet Holtedahl, has guided my development of this project. She is now on long termed sick leave, and Dr. Hogne Øian is appointed as new supervisor. I hope however to be able to maintain a relation to VCS in order to utilise the ethnographic film competence there. For the PhD programme my connections will be best taken care of at the Institute of Social Anthropology.

Within the Faculty of Social Sciences, several research projects with thematic and theoretical relevance for the PhD project; 'Globalization from below' under the leadership of Professor Nils Aarsæther; 'The management of cultural heritage in marginalised coastal communities' under leadership of Professor Reidar Bertelsen; and 'Citizenship, Encounters and Place Enactment in the North' where Prof Guneriusen and Dr. Paulgaard have the leadership for the 'Place Uniqueness/ Place Enactment' – pillar.

For the moment the most substantial research benefit links to Dr. David Anderson's engagement as Prof II at Centre for Sami Studies, UoT. Dr. Anderson works at University of Aberdeen. He works on very relevant topics and theoretical perspectives, and is appointed co- supervisor for the PhD project. Through this relationship my project will be linked to the Department of Anthropology, Aberdeen. The research milieu is recognised as one of the best in Europe on ecological anthropology, environmental issues, perception of environment, and man- animal relations within the circumpolar north. Prof Tim Ingold is Head of the Department, and he has provided an invitation for a fellowship visit fall 2006. Prof Robertson also works at the University, and hopefully there will be possibilities of attending some activities at the Sociology Department during the stay.

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