Rural Landscape Perceptions in Norway and in Scotland

Purpose

The aim of this project is to explore the shift in values and perceptions with regard to selected landscapes in Scotland and Norway from 1950 – 2004. The study will focus on the rural population's identity and the way it is connected to landscapes at an individual and local level. The investigation will be qualitative, emphasising a historical and comparative perspective. In both countries, landscapes are in transition, and the working hypothesis is that the cultural identity of people in the selected areas is also in transition. Previous research in the field of landscape perception has predominantly been conducted from the perspective of urban or suburban users. The present investigation is intended to fill a gap in current research and provide guidelines for policy-makers.

Main objective

This project's main aim is to track the changes in selected landscapes, relating these to changing perceptions and values among the people who inhabit and work in them. The results are intended to provide decision makers with a better foundation for managing such areas. Initiatives from the EU in the early 1990's, state that afforestation can be a drive to reduce the problem of agricultural surpluses, by transferring agricultural land into forest. Simultaneously, forested areas have become of great recreational value to the visiting urban or suburban public. In the past century forested landscaped in Scotland and Norway have become landscapes in transition, marking a passage from arable land, to forest, to recreational woodland. Moreover, this latter development has in many cases caused conflict between different users of the landscape.

Background

Since the Second World War there has been a shift in the way in which we both use and perceive non-arable land in Europe. Scotland and Norway are two countries that have traditionally relied on an intensive use of non-arable land as an economic source. Non-arable land in these countries was a landscape of production, from which one extracted fodder, firewood, timber, wool, meat, fish and game. Today this part of the landscape has also become a source of recreation. People seeking recreation have become important to the rural population, and traditional production-landscapes have now also become landscapes in which to experience nature.

Definition of problem-areas and research objectives

By using economic, material and political changes in agriculture and forestry as a starting point, my aim is to illuminate the relations between continuity and change within the rural populations' values. These values will be investigated by comparing two generations of foresters and farmers in Scotland and Norway. I will explore whether the rural populations' value system has changed over time, and if so, how these changes appear in the rural populations' practise, and how they can be explained. The changes might be explained as imposed externally, by the rural population adopting predominant urban values, or as an intrinsic change within the rural population itself - or a combination of both. Ethnological research has explained the cultural changes within the agrarian population as partly a process of dissolution, and partly as a process where agricultural workers and farmers adopt urban ideals. The way these societies have developed after 1950 makes the cultural variations difficult to observe at an external level. Both ethnologists and historians try to unveil a collective set of experiences as well as the cognitive structures that organise it. Exploration of

cognitive structures has been called "The history of the mind" as opposed to "The history of ideas".Studies of mentality have given us insight to aspects of man which were previously not deemed part of the field of history.
Norwegian Society has changed dramatically since the 1940's due to a new way of thinking as well as a new societal organisation. A general increase in prosperity coupled with the development of set times for labour and leisure, can explain much of this change. However, and especially after 1960, the general publics trust in hierarchic and paternalistic attitudes have faltered dramatically. This has weakened the traditional religious and ideological movements, and strengthened activities which focus on self realisation. One way of realising the self is by recreation. Recreational activities which take place in the rural landscape is relevant to this study, and the most popular hobby in Britain is (surprisingly for many Norwegians) bird watching. Other activities pursued in nature also have many devotees, like for instance shooting, stalking, rambling or mountain climbing. A number of people simply have a strong interest in protecting nature, regardless of species.

My working hypothesis is that the values and identity of the rural population differ fundamentally from predominant urban cultural identities in Scottish and Norwegian society, that this identity is closely related to the landscapes rural inhabitants live and work in, and that their identity, like the landscape itself, is in transition.

Key issues that need to be addressed in relation to this process are as follows:

1) Is there a common set of rural values in Scotland and Norway, independent of national boundaries? Does local knowledge and experience of place lead to a valuation system related to a mutual understanding of rural rather than urban or peri-urban landscapes? If yes, how does this difference manifest itself through attitudes and practice?

2) How do the rural population in Scotland and Norway construct their identities? Is rural identity a dichotomy to urban identity, or are there several contested rural identities?

3) Are there any differences between the rural populations' landscape values in Norway and Scotland? Does the legal system, and diverging laws of access to the countryside matter to farmers' and foresters' perception of the landscape? If so, is a national distinction in post war landscape management, afforestation plans and ownership structures connected with differences in attitudes, values and perception?

By revealing how the local rural populations' values in Kilmartin and Lygra have developed since 1950, decision makers will be provided with a more copious foundation on which to ground their policies in a European context.

Case-studies

The area where I plan to conduct my research in Scotland is the area around Kilmartin in Mid-Argyll. This area is within close proximity to the urban population in Glasgow, and is a popular venue for outings as well as for the heritage industry. The landscape consists of grazed hills combined with afforested areas and some natural woodland. Mid-Argyll shows the shift in landscape values particularly well, as traces of old farmsteads and whole townships now planted with conifers can be found. Some of the people that used to live on these farmsteads still live and work in the area.

In Norway I shall concentrate on Lygra and surrounding areas in Lindås municipality. The area has a similar history of afforestation as Mid-Argyll. The landscape is diverse, with afforested areas, heather-land, and under-grazed rather than over-grazed areas leading to natural re-growth of forest. The rural areas are mostly privately owned, although the ownership structure shows several smaller landowners instead of a few large, as in Mid-Argyll.
Benefits of carrying out a comparative analysis in this case, is to apply the research to a wider European debate of values in land-use, and build bridges between environmental research and landscape studies in Scotland and Norway.