

The Swedish Local Heritage Federation

How it all began

The local heritage movement emerged at the end of the 19th century, on account of the great social changes taking place in Sweden at that time. The old agrarian society was disintegrating, people were migrating from the countryside to towns and cities. Sweden was becoming industrialised, and many people saw a threat to the old cultural traditions.

The forces which wanted to preserve the old order of things - academics, authors, teachers - began to form associations. The first of these was already started in 1856. Local heritage museums came into being during the 1890s, for example in the provinces of Jämtland and Härjedalen. Other provinces followed suit. This was an epoch full of nationalism and romanticism, as reflected, for example by the interest which was taken in dialects and oral history.

More and more open-air museums were founded in various parts of the country. They were modelled on Skansen in Stockholm, the open-air museum in the middle of the city, containing old farmsteads, houses and artefacts and a well-stocked zoo. Skansen must also have inspired many similar museums in Europe.

Young students joined in the movement and organised big local heritage meetings. Local heritage ideals became interwoven with democratic aspirations, interest in popular education and - not least - a defence of human dignity against the trivialisation and materialism of industrial culture.

More emphasis was gradually placed on museum activities. Local heritage centres were formed as places for community experience, educational activity and festivities. The emphasis was on the local cultural heritage, and people began collecting artefacts from their localities. A nationwide federation was formed in 1916 and in 1975 trans-formed into the truly national organisation of the local heritage movement. Today that organisation is called the Swedish Local Heritage Federation (SHF).

The aim of the local heritage movement has always been to preserve the popular cultural heritage. Studies and research have grown in recent years. In this process the history of the 20th century has been increasingly highlighted. And the bigger the threats to our environment become, the more important it is to work for the preservation of the manmade landscape. In the closing years of the 20th century, the local heritage movement has begun more and more to use historical knowledge as an instrument of community policy

The Swedish Local Heritage Federation

(Sveriges Hembygdsförbund)

- Is the national organisation of the local heritage movement, located in Stockholm
- Deals with questions affecting all local communities
- Generates positive interest in local heritage activities on part of government and general public

26 Regional Heritage Federations

- Are fully members of the Swedish Local Heritage Federation
- Are active at regional levels as supportive bodies
- Give advice and service to the different local associations
- Some have professional staff
- Co-operate closely with the county museum

Some 1 900 Local Heritage Societies

- Work locally on a non-profit basis
- Protect own cultural environment
- Administer locally more than 1 400 old local heritage centres
- Are fully members of the Regional Heritage Federations

The Swedish Heritage Movement

Sweden's local heritage movement is unique - there is nothing like it anywhere else in the world. It is sustained by half a million people working on a voluntary basis to bring their local areas and surroundings to life. These local heritage societies are active nationwide, in town and country alike.

The local heritage centre incorporates a great deal of Sweden's cultural heritage. There are about 1 400 centres - repositories for artefacts of past ages: working implements, textiles and furniture. Many of them are furnished in the style of a certain period, while others house large collections of local artefacts.

But a local heritage centre is more than just a museum. Here we can also derive inspiration from the techniques, forms, colours and creativity of past ages. Here we can study the patterns of old textiles and experience old-fashioned gardens.

Central concepts

Culture: Its very difficult to define culture but the definition by Guillaumin is one that could be accepted by The Swedish Heritage Federation. *“the totality of the knowledge and practices both intellectual and material of each of the particular groups of a society, and of a society itself as a whole. From food to dress, from household techniques to industrial techniques, from forms of politeness to mass media, from work rhythm to the learning of family rules, all human practices, all invented and manufactured materials are concerned and constitute in their relationship, culture”*.

Cultural Heritage. The rural dimension of culture shall be respected in the project. But the rural culture is not isolated from the urban and global world. And shall not be looked upon as something exotic with a special kind of humans living harmoniously with their surrounding environment. That is not true and has never been. Life in the rural parts has also led to ecological catastrophes, over- and miss-use of land and nature. That is important. But there are of course a lot of knowledge of how and when to use natural resources in careful and sustainable ways.

It's also important that people in rural areas take part in the project and that there is an interchange between people working on a local arena in the different countries.

Sustainable development

Our definition of sustainable development is a development that economize with natural, social and economic assets. In this project we want to see it formulated and exemplified that cultural heritage is a resource for sustainable development.

In times when we stand in front of dramatically changes - the energy problem - the oil supply is running out, and the climate changes, - traditional knowledge is now urgent to overview. The traditional knowledge may no longer be something that tells us about the history but important for us to create the future.

Research outline

We would like to see a research outline concentrating on

1, a analyse of how the cultural heritage in the proposed themes leads to regional and sustainable development.

2, a analyse of how traditional knowledge could be integrated in a modern development structure. "Where in the chain of production needs changing's and what kind of capital in traditional knowledge do we have, and how could we implement that knowledge?"

A part from that should we produce texts to the exhibitions that puts the material in a historical and international comparative context.

The hart of the project is cultural heritage and regional and sustainable development. If the research gives results that leads to concrete suggestion or examples how to use cultural heritage as a resource for a sustainable development we hade come somewhere. The outcome of the project would be a greater respect for our cultural heritage.

Suggested Themes

The Swedish Local Heritage Federation would like to give an ethno biological background for the themes that will be suggested. It's about to see the connection between landscape, object/artefact and man and that in a historical as much as in a future perspective

Suggested themes:

- Textiles and costumes: manageable and beautiful objects to exhibit. Could be presented in different contexts: production, material, handicraft, influences, use..... The connection to the local landscape...
- Wood, artefacts: manageable and beautiful objects to exhibit. How to find and handle raw material, tools, influences. To use local specialities as a factor for development.
- Tails: tails as a creator of culture, explaining nature The same tails has been wandering around in the world just changing names and places. It creates a local identity in the same time as a global identity. To give form to these tails in dramatically ways is an important tool to create something together - to understand the history and build the future.

Methods

(just preliminary thoughts of one possible method)

Comparative studies between people (families) living in the rural areas (1 from each country). Ask them about how in the daily life they use traditional knowledge and their cultural heritage in large and how they think they could use the cultural heritage as a resource for local and regional sustainable development. How do the families relate to the content in the suggested themes.