



**Belgeo**

Revue belge de géographie

**2-3 | 2004**

**Landscape research in Europe**

---

## Landscape research in Sweden

A comment on past and present tendencies

*La recherche sur les paysages en Suède. Tendances passées et présentes*

**Ulf Jansson, Peeter Maandi and Mattias Qviström**

---



**Electronic version**

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/belgeo/13586>

DOI: 10.4000/belgeo.13586

ISSN: 2294-9135

**Publisher:**

National Committee of Geography of Belgium, Société Royale Belge de Géographie

**Printed version**

Date of publication: 30 September 2004

Number of pages: 361-368

ISSN: 1377-2368

**Electronic reference**

Ulf Jansson, Peeter Maandi and Mattias Qviström, « Landscape research in Sweden », *Belgeo* [Online], 2-3 | 2004, Online since 14 September 2013, connection on 07 July 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/belgeo/13586> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/belgeo.13586>

---

This text was automatically generated on 7 July 2020.



*Belgeo* est mis à disposition selon les termes de la licence Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International.

---

# Landscape research in Sweden

A comment on past and present tendencies

*La recherche sur les paysages en Suède. Tendances passées et présentes*

Ulf Jansson, Peeter Maandi and Mattias Qviström

---

## Landscape research

- 1 Regional studies of the Swedish landscape largely disappeared when the geography departments were split into a human and physical branch in the late 1940s. A few such studies have been published since of a review character (Hägerstrand & Lohm, 1991; Sporrang *et al.*, 1995). Landscape regions were also topical during the work with the National Atlas of Sweden in the 1980s and -90s (e.g. Helmfrid, 1994). In the 1980s a wider interest in landscape studies emerged, with an increasing focus on theoretical issues. The last 20 years of landscape research is reviewed below. Differences between contemporary and earlier landscape research should not be exaggerated, but four trends can be detected:
  1. The German speaking countries inspired earlier studies, but at least since the 1980s the Anglo-American influence is apparent.
  2. A number of theoretical works have been published recently (Mels, 1999; Olwig, 2002; Peil, 1999; Saltzman, 2001), in contrast to the more empirically oriented research of earlier days. Several critical discussions on traditional regional geography have also appeared (Crang, 2000; Sörlin, 1999).
  3. Landscape research is conducted far beyond the traditional boundaries of geography, making it difficult to delimit the content of landscape research.
  4. Research is more obviously oriented towards societal applicability, such as physical planning and landscape conservation, in contrast to the earlier dominance of descriptive research.
- 2 The study of agrarian landscapes and their evolution remains as a major theme in landscape research, which traditionally emphasised the prehistoric and medieval periods. Geographers in cooperation with archaeologists have made ample use of the extensive cartographical material from the 17th century onward in combination with

field excavations and observations, to reveal a new chronology of landscape change in mostly southern Sweden (e.g. Roeck Hansen, 1999; Riddersporre, 1995; Sporrang, 1985; Widgren, 1983, 1999). Studies on land-use and property rights for later periods put emphasis on economic and social factors (e.g. Jansson, 1998; Sporrang & Wennersten, 1995). Long-term perspectives on landscape have also been applied in research at Lund University, e.g. within the interdisciplinary “Ystad project” focusing on land use changes in southern Sweden during 6000 years (Berglund, 1991).

- 3 Historians have become increasingly involved in landscape research (e.g. Andrén, 2000) as well as archaeologists (Bergman, 1991; Seiler, 2001). Professor Janken Myrdal has coordinated a multi-volume work on Swedish agricultural history (e.g. Morell, 2001; Welinder, Pedersen & Widgren, 1998). The interdisciplinary research-project “Landscape as arena; science, institutions and the discourses on environment, 1800-2000”, co-ordinated and administrated by the Department for Historical Studies at Umeå University, is an example of the width and theoretical interest in contemporary landscape research (Nordlund, 2001; Sundin, 2002). Its purpose is to analyse the scientific and intellectual history of landscapes, focusing on the evolution of cultural and natural heritage conservation.
- 4 Most research has focused on the agricultural landscape, although forests cover more than half of Sweden’s land surface. There are some studies on the exploitation of the forest for establishing new farms from the 16th century onwards, as well as studies that focus on the management of forests during the modern period. The resilience and sustainability of historical and modern forests has also been analysed, especially for the 19th and 20th centuries (Axelsson, 2001; Bladh, 1995; Eliasson, 2002).
- 5 After several decades of absence, an interest in landscape re-emerged among ethnologist in the 1980s (Löfgren, 1989), confined primarily to the Department of European Ethnology in Lund, where the diversity of today’s vernacular landscape has been studied (Löfgren, 1999; Saltzman & Svensson, 1997; Saltzman, 2001).
- 6 Within time-geography the importance of landscape research in managing environmental problems has been emphasised in the 1990s (Bladh, 1995; Hägerstrand, 1993, see also articles in Ihse, 1996). The significance of limited space and of the continuous circulation of resources in time-space is seen as an important object for study in order to understand the interrelationship between nature and society.
- 7 Geographers and anthropologists in Stockholm have since a decade studied landscape changes in Africa (e.g. Börjesson, 1998). The Programme for Applied Environmental Impact Assessment in Uppsala is involved in interdisciplinary projects on landscape dynamics in for e.g. East Africa (Strömquist *et al.*, 1999). In Uppsala, human geographers focus on landscape and land ownership dynamics in Estonia from a long-term time perspective (e.g. Hoppe, 1993).
- 8 Applied research within a wide field has characterised the work of landscape architects, at the departments of landscape planning in Alnarp (Gustavsson & Ingelög, 1994) and in recent years also in Ultuna, both departments belong to the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU). Landscape design and -planning have never been separated, because research in these fields are conducted at the same university departments. Focus has for example been on visual aspects in landscape management, and environmental psychology (Hägerhäll, 1999). Historical landscape research can also be found at Alnarp (Olwig, 2002). Landscape ecology has been conducted, among others,

at the department of physical geography at Stockholm and at SLU (Hanson, 1992; Ihse, 1995; Sarlöv-Herlin, 1999), with a clear American influence.

- 9 There are no independent research institutions involved in landscape research. Government agencies primarily publish research summaries, but the National Heritage Board is involved in developing methods of landscape research (Schibbye & Pålstam, 2001).

## Stages of landscape change

Table 1. Simplified table showing major events in history that are important for changes in the landscape.

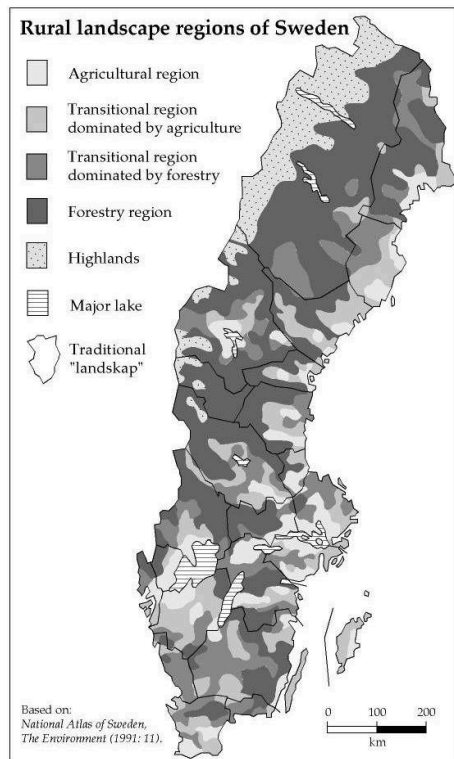
Period	Landscape change
Neolithic	Introduction of agriculture occurs at least by 3900 BC in southern Sweden.
Bronze Age	Regional and temporal differences in organisation of the rural landscape.
Roman Iron Age	The land-use systems covered relatively large areas and the arable land was probably used with long fallow.
Prehistory	The Saami population in northern Sweden were hunters and gatherers, some became reindeer herders moving over large areas of present day Sweden, Norway and Finland in search of winter and summer pasture for their animals.
Period of Migration	Changes in the structures can be observed and the older agricultural organisation was transformed.
600-1350	Expansion of settlement, creation of the system of agriculture with meadows, arable and livestock. Hamlets occur in areas in southern Sweden. Settlement as well as land-use is formalised.
c. 1350-1400	Medieval recession and reduction of settlements especially in forested areas.
1500-1800	Renewed colonisation of forested areas in southern Sweden and in a later stage in the northern part, taking large areas of the Saami's reindeer pastures and converting them to small farms in the inland.
1580-1700	Many towns are established, basically for channelling trade.
1650-1700	Increased number of landed estates with parks and aesthetic organisation of the landscape. The number of crofters increased due to this.
1750-1800	The first land reform (storskifte) that limited the number of strips in the open fields. The communal forests in the hamlets were divided among the landowners.
1800-1860	The second land reform (enskifte and laga skifte) that resulted in dissolution of the nucleated settlement in hamlets. Farms were moved out to the former arable, meadow or forest.

1850-1900	Modernisation of agriculture. New techniques are used. Expansion of arable. The amount of meadows decreased, large projects for creating new land from lakes, bogs and fens. Clearing of stones, cairns and other obstacles in the arable fields became common. A dramatic increase in the number of land-less workers and crofters.
1880-1930	Swedish society became more industrialised and the population increase meant that, in spite of emigration and a large proportion of people living in the countryside, the towns grew.
1900-1960	Family-farms with a large proportion of their income from dairy-products, while retaining the arable land became the dominating type of farm along with large estates (mixed farming).
1950-	Increased urbanisation. Rural areas have either become less densely populated or are becoming residential areas for a commuting urban population.
1960-	The number of small farms was reduced. Farms were amalgamated into larger commercially viable holdings. An increasing specialisation in the production occurs and family farms with mixed farming become rare.
1990-	Diverging trends with a deregulation of subsidies to the agriculture in the early 1990s, and an increased support through subsidies to farmers for ecological values in the landscape. Sweden joined the EU in 1995 and the full force of the European agricultural policy hit the landscape, with renewed increased level of subsidies.

## The landscape today

- 10 During the latter part of the 20th century, small farms were increasingly abandoned, especially in the forested areas. Hence, the number of people involved in agriculture decreased. The amount of individuals economically active in agriculture and forestry was only 1,5-2 percent of the workers in Sweden in 2000. In some areas few farmers remain and large amounts of arable were converted to forestry, thus a very small number of the general population will have personal relations to the actual management of rural landscapes (Stenseke, 1997). Simultaneously, rural areas become increasingly important for leisure, and tourism industry will become more important for the survival of rural communities.
- 11 The mosaic of the landscape of the pre-industrial period has changed over the years. The grasslands, used as hay meadows or pastures, are vanishing. The transition zones between arable fields and dense forest disappear, and with them biotopes of great importance for flora and fauna. In response to the polarisation of landscape types, political steps are made to preserve valuable landscapes both in a pure biological sense and as a cultural heritage. The research summarised here will have an important task to fulfil.

Figure 1. The map presents landscape regions as defined according to the dominant land use. The boundaries of traditional, administrative regions, *landskap*, have been included. Although replaced by a new administrative division in 1634, they remain as strong symbols of regional identity.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ANDRÉN A. (2000), "Landscape and settlement as utopian space", in FABECH C, RINGTVED J. (eds), *Settlement and landscape*, Jutland Archaeological Society, pp. 383-393.
- AXELSSON A-L (2001) *Forest landscape change in boreal Sweden 1850-2000: a multi-scale approach*, Universitas Agriculturae Suecicae, Silvestria 183, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Umeå.
- BERGLUND B. E. (ed) (1991), *The cultural landscape during 6000 years in southern Sweden - the Ystad project*, Köpenhamn.
- BERGMAN, I. (1991), "Spatial structures in Saami cultural landscapes", in KVIST R. (ed.), *Readings in Saami history, culture and language 2*, pp. 59-68., Center for Arctic cultural research, Umeå University.
- BLADH G. (1995), "Finnskogens landskap och människor under fyra sekler - en studie av natur och samhälle i förändring", *Forskningsrapport 95, 11*, Höskolan i Karlstad, Karlstad.
- BÖRJESSON, L. (1998), "Landscape. Land use and land tenure in Mama Issara, Tanzania", *Minor Field Studies No. 47*, Uppsala, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences.

- CRANG M. (2000), "Between academy and popular geographies. Cartographic imaginations and the cultural landscape of Sweden", in COOK I., CROUCH D., NAYLOR S., RYAN J.R. (eds), *Cultural turns/geographical turns: perspectives on cultural geography*, New York, Prentice hall, pp. 88-108.
- ELIASSON P. (2002), *Skog, makt och människor: en miljöhistoria om svensk skog 1800-1975*, Skogs- och lantbrukshistoriska meddelanden 25, Kungl. Skogs- och lantbruksakademien, Stockholm.
- GUSTAVSSON R. & INGELÖG T. (1994), *Det nya landskapet: kunskaper och idéer om naturvård, skogsodling och planering i kulturbygd*, Jönköping, Skogsstyrelsen.
- HANSSON L. (ed.) (1992), *Ecological principles of nature conservation. Applications in temperate and boreal environments*, London & New York, Elsevier applied science.
- HELMFRID S. (ed.) (1994), *Landscape and settlement*, Stockholm, Almqvist & Wiksell International.
- HOPPE G. (1993), "Jordbruk och landsbygd i Estland: ett långtidsperspektiv med särskild tonvikt på landets svenskbygder", *Ymer*, vol 113, Stockholm, Svenska Sällskapet för Antropologi och Geografi, pp 44-68.
- HÄGERHÄLL C. (1999), *The Experience of Pastoral Landscapes*, Alnarp, Dep. of landscape planning.
- HÄGERSTRAND T. (1993), "Samhälle och natur", in VEGGELAND N. (ed), *Region och miljö*, Köpenhamn, NordREFO, pp. 14-59.
- HÄGERSTRAND T. & U. LOHM (1991), "Sweden", in TURNER B L II (ed.), *The earth as tranformed by human action. Global and regional changes in the Biosphere over the past 300 years*, pp. 605-622, Cambridge, Cambridge university press with Clarc university.
- IHSE M. (1995), "Swedish agricultural landscapes - patterns and changes during the last 50 years, studied by aerial photos", *Landscape and urban planning*, 31, pp. 21 - 37, Amsterdam, Elsevier.
- IHSE M. (ed.). (1996), *Landscape analysis in the Nordic countries*, Stockholm, Swedish council for planning and coordination of research.
- JANSSON, U. (1998), *Odlingssystem I Vänerområdet, En studie av tidigmodernt jordbruk I Västsverige*, Meddelanden från Kulturgeografiska institutionen vid Stockholms universitet 103, Stockholm.
- LÖFGREN O. (1989), "Mindsapes and landscapes", *Folk, Journal of the Danish ethnographic society*, 31, pp. 183 - 208.
- LÖFGREN O. (1999), *On holiday: a history of vacationing*, Berkeley, Calif. Univ. of California Press.
- MELS T. (1999), *Wild landscapes. The cultural nature of Swedish national parks*, Lund, Lund university press.
- MORELL M. (2001), *Det svenska jordbrukets historia, band 4. Jordbruket i industrisamhället 1870-1945*, Borås, Natur och kultur/LT:s förlag.
- NORDLUND C. (2001), *Det upphöjda landet: vetenskapen, landhöjningsfrågan och kartläggningen av Sveriges förflutna, 1860-1930*, Umeå, Umeå univ.
- OLWIG K. R. (2002), *Landscape, nature, and the body politic: from Britain's rennaissance to America's new world*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press.
- PEIL T. (1999), *Islescapes. Estonian small islands and islanders through three centuries*, Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis, Stockholm studies in human geography 8, Stockholm, Almqvist & Wiksell International.
- RIDDERSPORRE M. (1995), *Bymarker i backspegel. Odlingslandskapet före kartornas tid*, Swedala, Trelleborg.

- ROECK HANSEN B. (1999), "Land Organisation in Finnish Villages around 1700", *Fennia*, 177, ,2 Helsinki, pp. 137-156.
- SALTZMAN K. & B. SVENSSON (eds.) (1997), *Moderna landskap, identifikation och tradition i vardagen*, Stockholm, Natur och kultur.
- SALTZMAN K. (2001), *Inget landskap är en ö. Dialektik och praktik i öländska landskap*, Malmö, Nordic academic press.
- SARLÖV-HERLIN I. (1999), *Edge Habitats in Agricultural Landscapes. Woody species, landscape ecology and implications for planning*, Alnarp, Dep. of landscape planning.
- SCHIBBYE B. & Y. PÅLSTAM (2001), *Landskap i fokus: utvärdering av metoder för landskapsanalys*, Stockholm, Riksantikvarieämbetet.
- SEILER A. (2001), *I skuggan av båtgravarna: landskap och samhälle i Vendels socken under yngre järnålder*, Theses and papers in archaeology. B, Stockholm, Stockholms universitet.
- SKÅNES H. (1996), *Landscape change and grassland dynamics. Retrospective studies based on aerial photographs and old cadastral maps during 200 years in south Sweden*, Stockholm, Naturgeografiska inst, Stockholms universitet.
- SPORRONG U. (1985), *Mälabygd. Agrar bebyggelse och odling ur ett historiskt-geografiskt perspektiv*, Kulturgeografiska inst. Sthlm. Univ. Meddel. Ser. B61, Stockholm.
- SPORRONG U., EKSTAM U., SAMUELSSON K. (1995), *Swedish landscapes*, Stockholm, Swedish environmental protection agency.
- SPORRONG U. & WENNERSTEN, E. (1995), "Marken, gården, släkten och arvet: Om jordägandet och dess konsekvenser för människor, landskap och bebyggelse i Tibble och Ullvi byar, Leksands socken 1734-1820", *Leksands sockenbeskrivning del X*, also in *Meddelande nr 91*, Kulturgeografiska institutionen, Stockholms universitet, Stockholm.
- STENSEKE M. (1997), *Bonden och landskapet: ägares och brukares relationer till markerna och förutsättningarna för en uthållig markanvändning*, Lund, Lund University Press.
- STRÖMQUIST L., YANDA P., MSEMWA P., LINDBERG C., SIMONSSON-FORSBERG L. (1999), "Utilizing Landscape Information to Analyze and Predict Environmental Change: The Extended Baseline Perspective. Two Tanzanian Examples", *Ambio*, Vol. 28, No. 5, Stockholm, Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences.
- SUNDIN B. (ed.) (2001), *Landskapet som arena. Vetenskapen, institutionerna och miljön, 1800-2000*, Institutionen för historiska studier, Umeå Universitet, Umeå.
- SÖRLIN S. (1999), "The articulation of territory: landscape and the constitution of regional and national identity", *Norsk geografisk årsbok*, vol. 53, pp. 103 - 112.
- WELINDER S, PEDERSEN E. A. & WIDGREN M. (1998), *Jordbrukets första femtusen år. Det svenska jordbrukets historia*, Stockholm, Natur & Kultur/LT.
- WIDGREN M. (1983), *Settlement and farming systems in the early Iron Age. A study of fossil agrarian landscapes in Östergötland, Sweden*, Acta universitatis Stockholmiensis, Stockholm studies in human geography 3, Stockholm.
- WIDGREN M. (1999), "Is landscape history possible, or How can we study the desertion of farms?", *The Archaeology and Anthropology of Landscape: Shaping Your Landscape. One World Archaeology*, 30, Editors Peter Ucko & Robert Layton, Routledge.



## ABSTRACTS

The article provides a brief overview of Swedish landscape research, including a survey of relevant literature. It is argued that while formerly, landscape was the focus of mainly geographers with an inventorial and historical orientation, the practical and theoretical scope of contemporary research has widened considerably, encompassing many disciplines. Yet the focus on agrarian landscapes seems to persist, at the expense of other dominant landscapes, notably forests. The article also summarises the major stages of landscape change.

L'article donne un bref aperçu de l'ensemble de la recherche suédoise en matière de paysage, y compris de la littérature la plus pertinente. Le paysage était à l'origine un objet d'étude pour des géographes. Aujourd'hui la pratique et la portée théorique de la recherche paysagère est pratiquée par plusieurs autres disciplines. La concentration de la recherche sur les paysages agraires semble néanmoins persister, aux dépens d'autres paysages dominants, notamment les forêts. L'article récapitule également les étapes principales du changement de paysage.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés:** Suède, paysage, paysage rural

**Keywords:** Sweden, landscape, rural landscape

## AUTHORS

### ULF JANSSON

PhD, Department of Human Geography, Stockholm University, [ulf.jansson@humangeo.su.se](mailto:ulf.jansson@humangeo.su.se)

### PEETER MAANDI

PhD student, Department of Social and Economic Geography, Uppsala University  
[peeter.maandi@kultgeog.uu.se](mailto:peeter.maandi@kultgeog.uu.se)

### MATTIAS QVISTRÖM

Agr. D., Department of Landscape Planning, Alnarp, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences,  
[mattias.qvistrom@lpal.slu.se](mailto:mattias.qvistrom@lpal.slu.se)