Landscape research in Sweden
A comment on past and present tendencies
La recherche sur les paysages en Suède. Tendances passées et présentes

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Landscape research

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; Sporrong 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; Pell, 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.

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; Sporrong, 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; Sporrong & 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).

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.

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).

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).

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.

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).

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.

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.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Landscape change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Neolithic</strong></td>
<td>Introduction of agriculture occurs at least by 3900 BC in southern Sweden.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bronze Age</strong></td>
<td>Regional and temporal differences in organisation of the rural landscape.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Roman Iron Age</strong></td>
<td>The land-use systems covered relatively large areas and the arable land was probably used with long fallow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prehistory</strong></td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Period of Migration</strong></td>
<td>Changes in the structures can be observed and the older agricultural organisation was transformed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>600-1350</strong></td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>c. 1350-1400</strong></td>
<td>Medieval recession and reduction of settlements especially in forested areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1500-1800</strong></td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1580-1700</strong></td>
<td>Many towns are established, basically for channelling trade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1650-1700</strong></td>
<td>Increased number of landed estates with parks and aesthetic organisation of the landscape. The number of crofters increased due to this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1750-1800</strong></td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1800-1860</strong></td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The landscape today

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.

The mosaic of the landscape of the pre-industrial period has changed over the years. The grasslands, used as hey meadows or pastures, are vanishing. The transition zones between arable fields and dense forest pastures 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.

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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.

INDEX

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