Chapter 15

THE LANDSCAPE OF VITTSSKÖVLE ESTATE – AT THE CROSSROADS OF FEUDALISM AND MODERNITY

Tomas Germundsson
Department of Social and Economic Geography, Lund University, Sweden

1. INTRODUCTION

An essential question regarding the understanding of landscape concerns the role of history. While every landscape is considered contemporary, they also possess historical dimensions. Sometimes the historical traits in a landscape are very palpable; but as long as no time machine exists, even the most ancient landscapes must still be regarded as present-day landscapes. “The past is [thus] a foreign country,” as David Lowenthal (1985) has so famously argued. Concerning linear time, there therefore exists a duality in every landscape, simply expressed as a “now” and a “then”. As the line between now and then is constantly moving, it means that the historical dimension of a landscape is continually reshaped. Furthermore, as time moves on, the past takes on different meanings depending on the position of the observer in the present. This is of course valid for history at large – all history bears the mark of the time in which it is written, but landscape history is special in that it is materialised history forming the totality of the present world.

The impossibility of writing – or representing in other ways – landscape history in a definite or unbiased way calls for constant revaluation and revision of historical landscapes. Otherwise, we run the risk of taking historical landscapes for granted, their history considered written once and for all. These circumstances become crucial especially concerning landscape
preservation, as preservation means letting history guide present-day landscape management.

Within a Swedish context (from which my case study is drawn), there is a theme within landscape history that is not attended to in accordance with its significance – namely, modernity. Consequently, we find that the era of modernity is underrepresented within the Swedish landscape preservation practice. Interest in the history of modernity has experienced a general upswing in Sweden during the last few decades; this has been connected especially to the emergence of the welfare state. This can be noticed both in academic writings and in popular historical publications. However, the legacy of modernity as found within a preservation perspective has mainly been attended to in an urban context. Modernity is hardly a focus of today’s preservation practices concerning the countryside and agrarian landscape of Sweden. I find this to be a serious shortcoming, because I believe that an appropriate knowledge regarding the history of modernity is essential to the understanding of the landscape of present-day Sweden. Changing relations with nature, the ideology of the welfare state, and centralised physical planning are but a few examples of societal processes that have influenced the shape of the Swedish landscape – and people’s relations to it – during the modern era.

In this chapter, I will use the example of a south Swedish estate landscape in order to demonstrate how the inclusion of aspects of modernity can provide an alternative view of the historical legacy of such an area. The estate is situated in the province of Skåne, which is widely known as a productive agricultural district, but also as a “non-Swedish” region, characterised by its openness and light beech woods. These features are readily associated with the estates found in the province, and in differing

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1 There exists no explicit demarcation defining what would be considered the “era of modernity” within a Swedish context. I use the concept here as a label for the period starting (with an obvious influence from the European Enlightenment) at the end of the 18th century and continuing up to the present, but with an emphasis on the changes in connection to the breakthrough of industrialism and urbanisation during the latter half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century.

2 The literature on modernity is extensive, but some recent examples with a geographical connection are: Johansson 1994; Larsson 1994; Pred 1995; Wahlberg 1996; Hagman 2002; Lisberg Jensen (2002). The more-widespread popular interest for Swedish modernity is reflected in well-illustrated publications such as Bengtsson (1994) and Rune (2003).

3 This can be noted in preservation and policy documents from regional authorities (an example is Tykesson 2001), but also in other literature, e.g., Lilja 1994; Dunér 2002; Eriksson 1990 and 2001.

4 This generalised statement could be confirmed by a study of the regional preservation programs in Sweden, but I do not refer to them individually here. References to some of them will be made later in the chapter, when the situation in the province of Skåne is dealt with.