

## LIVING INSIDE A CULTURAL LANDSCAPE IN FINLAND

### ABSTRAKT

I Finland finns 156 områden som utnämmts till nationellt värdefulla kulturella landskap. Underhållet och utvecklingen av kulturella landskap innebär specifika utmaningar och ett mångsidigt förhållningssätt är rekommenderat. Landskapen bevaras med principiella beslut och därför har inte utförandet lyckats i alla delar av landet. Intressenivån och de ekonomiska tillgångarna varierar, men ofta då frågan diskuteras är det endast landskapets utseende som uppmärksammas. Detta leder lätt till missförstånd mellan landägare, invånare och beslutsfattare, som argumenterar på basis av personliga visuella preferenser och känslor. Denna artikel är ett bidrag till att utvidga diskussionen med hänvisning till biologisk mångfald och odlingsvetenskapliga idéer om renandet av nersmutsad miljö.

*Keywords: cultural landscape, environmental aesthetics, cultural landscape maintenance*

### PRESERVING THE GREEN IN A CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

In Finland there are 156 areas named nationally valuable cultural landscapes.<sup>1</sup> These areas are seen valuable due to their development in a human-nature collaboration throughout a long period of time. In 1992 a group of experts went through all of Finland to find areas that should be preserved as cultural landscapes. The report states that the status of a cultural landscape does not concern the landscape's visual appearance, only the areal concept of it. A cultural landscape does not have to be aesthetically attractive.<sup>2</sup> The development in Finland has seemed to wipe out certain landscapes, especially in the rural areas.

There are people living life and owning land in these areas. There is a disagreement on how to maintain the areas and with what arguments the permits

for changing the landscape should be granted. In the original report, it is suggested that the maintenance and preservation of a cultural landscape should be a multidisciplinary task supported by the state, also financially. In reality there are big differences between the communities that care for these areas in Finland. This article is a discussion of how the green parts, the nature, of cultural landscapes are presently cared for. Which factors should we consider when maintaining our landscapes?

I am currently working on my thesis (Bachelor of Horticulture, Landscape planning) which focuses on finding the problems that occur in the caretaking of a cultural landscape. The aim is to use the information to improve the communication and knowledge concerning the maintenance of a cultural landscape in Finland. I have worked in the field of visual arts and part of my experience lies in the interaction with the so called public. After numerous discussions, I have noticed, that opinions concerning the visual, in this case the appearance of a landscape, are considered personal and emotional. Usually a person's home or memories are connected to a location, which needs to be respected. When trying to encourage landowners to take care of the cultural landscape inside their property without a clear obligation, one needs, therefore, to be able to communicate on many different levels.

### THOUGHT IN ACTION MAY BE TRICKY

The concept of a "nationally valuable cultural landscapes" is directed by state officials, but in practice, it is down to communities to preserve landscapes through permits and planning. Communities work instructed by higher levels of expertise such as The Finnish Heritage Agency, which operates under the Ministry of Education and Culture. A maintenance plan of a cultural landscape includes an analysis of the landscape's history, its characters and the nature's diversity in addition to the long term plan of the maintenance of the landscape. It is not a mandatory plan. However, based on my experience, one may ask whether the official parties have efficient tools to guide the caretaking of a cultural landscape as a whole.

In some communities there appears to be a problem in executing the maintenance plan or it does not exist at all. Often communities lack the finances required to follow a given maintenance plan. In other instances a community may shift the task of cultural landscape maintenance to a private landowner, which causes other difficulties to emerge. The question is, if a community does not understand what and how to maintain a landscape, how could a single landowner manage?

Furthermore, it is possible also *not* to take care of a cultural landscape. In my experience there is no institution that would and has the power to sanction a private landowner or a community for not doing anything. Sanctions come into the picture if one does something without permission. One can also get an official permit that is in contradiction with the principal decision.<sup>3</sup> The only law that effects the maintenance in these areas is the nature preservation law.

All in all, because the status of a cultural landscape is only at a principal decision level, areas qualified as cultural landscapes have been and are developed in various ways. A decision in the principal decision level is not mandatory or binding like a law would be.

## CHANGING THE GREEN IN A LANDSCAPE

One of the biggest problems in landscape maintenance occurs when the growing vegetation in a landscape is unattended for decades. Renovating such a landscape involves a huge amount of work and usually the work is done very hastily. An example in Finland is the Billnäs iron mill in the county of Raseborg in Western Uusimaa. An international example is the Monrepos park in Vyborg, Russia. There is currently a local debate in Raseborg due to the situation in Billnäs and an international debate concerning the restoration of the Monrepos park. The debates include discussions about tree cutting, nature preservation, personal visual taste, choosing the right historical pavement materials and so on.

The effect of changes in a landscape varies depending on the amount of living material. Living materials in a landscape, e.g. trees, have a life cycle which can be estimated to a certain point. In Finland most of the cultural landscapes include a huge amount of living nature and therefore the impact in the visual output is significant when altering the amount of nature in an area. In some cases cutting trees is not against the preservense of the character of the cultural landscape and in others it is. In a park, vanished tree alleys is a dramatic change. In a former industrial area, like Billnäs, the impact of trees in the cultural landscape is different. However, in the maintenance of cultural landscapes there are various causes and effects to consider.

Cutting many trees at once opens up the landscape to deteriorating elements like wind and erosion. Foliage has many functions in a landscape such as shadowing the ground, diminishing sounds and purifying pollution from the air. Some protected animals need shadows during the night because of artificial lights. Vegetation under trees may suddenly face changed circum-

stances and diminish and perhaps even die, which again changes the landscape's character. Sometimes it is good to take it slow and be patient.

## AESTHETIC OPINION, HISTORICAL DISTORTION AND PERSONAL FEELINGS

While living in a cultural landscape for years, I have followed and taken part both in the official and the unofficial discussions of what to do with an abandoned cultural landscape. Despite the official definition of a "nationally valuable cultural landscape", local argumentation is seemingly often based on visual and emotional aspects along with limited knowledge of biology.

Inofficially, the label "cultural landscape" is often considered positive and when people describe such a landscape, the terms are very often linked with aesthetic values. "Why did they have to cut down those beautiful birches?" "But the alders were just unvaluable trash trees." We have a huge amount of new knowledge about the nature and its diversity, but still in people's minds different trees have different values; birch is highly respected and alder not. They both have different qualities as material, but as plants they are equally important to the ecosystem. One may also discuss tidiness as a cultural phenomena in Finland, and connect it to an urge to control nature. As an aesthetic criteria, tidiness seems to have a firm position when evaluating appearance of a landscape.

However, references to appearance and emotions appear in many levels of landscape preservation discussions, from official statements to private tree cutting permit applications. Cultural background, biological behaviour and our personal memories seemingly mould the way we see our surroundings, irrespective of our status as inhabitant, owner or civil servant. According to the official report, emotions and visuals do not qualify as relevant issues in the care of a cultural landscape. How, then, could we expand the black and white opinions to a more versatile discussion concerning our cultural heritage? Landscapes are joint history, not only personal spaces.

## THE FUTURE

The horticultural field has traditionally concerned itself with the appearance of vegetation. Nowadays, new ideas bring other aspects to the planning table, for example biodiversity and visually interesting plans with low maintenance costs.

I argue that we further must develop the communication between different parties involved in cultural landscape maintenance and truly combine knowledge from different fields of expertise. Hopefully this will allow us to preserve also the green parts of our cultural landscapes along with the built ones.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Prime Minister's Office, A decision in principle, concerning landscapes and developing landscape maintenance in Finland, 1995
- <sup>2</sup> Definition of a cultural landscape in Finland according to the report 66/1992 part I made for Ministry of the Environment 1992 by an appointed working committee. Includes elements such as cultural, folkloristic, architectural, livelihood along with living parts like vegetation and animal heritage.
- <sup>3</sup> The decision in principle concerning landscapes and developing landscape maintenance in Finland by the Prime Minister's Office in 1995.

## SOURCES

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