

A DIFFERENT LAND

Heritage Production in the island of Gotland¹

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Abstract

In the early 1980s a massive heritagisation of Gotland and of Visby, the island's capital and only city, began and in 1995 UNESCO awarded Visby World Heritage status. This article considers how the immediate success of the heritagisation of Gotland can be explained. I argue that an important explanation lies in the differences between the new heritage mindscape and that of the older, traditional peasant society of the 16th and 17th centuries. In the final part of the article I discuss heritage production in relation to island production and argue that 'islanding' is a process closely related to heritagisation. The concept of heritage seems to work especially well in remote and islanded places. For Gotland, heritage production has led to an intensified 'islanding', which, in turn, has led to a booming tourist industry. Precisely that which made islands central to previous times makes islands peripheral and marginal to the present world. Heritage is both an expression of, and an instrument for, that marginality.

Keywords

Gotland, Visby, heritage, tradition, islands

Introduction

In December 1995 UNESCO declared "the Hanseatic Town of Visby" a World Heritage site, approximately the world's 470th². After an introduction to the island and a brief overview of the different mindscapes that have been produced by this process, I turn to heritage politics, examine how selected pasts have been used to assume control and power over public space and ask how the immediate success of the heritagisation of Gotland over the last few decades can be explained.

One common explanation is 'globalisation'. Heritage is indeed a global phenomenon, but it is nevertheless necessary to follow how it is 'downloaded', transformed, and used locally - any local production of a collective past must be understood in relation to other competing local pasts. In Gotland the main competitor in the market of mindscapes of the past was what in Sweden is generally known as the 'old peasant society' ie representations of traditional peasant society of the 16th and 17th centuries. I will argue that an important explanation of successful heritagisation lies in the differences between these mindscapes and how they work politically and ideologically in the production of cultural representations.

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A second important explanation lies in the fact that Gotland is an island. In the last part of the article I discuss heritage production in relation to island production, and argue that “islanding” is a process closely related to heritagisation. In the same way that heritage can be produced from pasts that never were, ‘islands’ can be produced in places not surrounded by water. Heritage seem to work especially well in “places remote and islanded” to use a phrase from John Gillis (2001). Islands are as central to heritage production as heritage production is to islands. For Gotland, heritage production has led to an intensified “islanding”, which in turn has led to a booming tourist industry that in the long run might not serve the islanders well.

Gotland

According to a recent survey Sweden has 221,800 islands, of which 401 are permanently inhabited³. Gotland, my own home island, is the largest of these, 170 km long and 52 km wide, with a total area of 3140 km². It is situated in the Baltic Sea, approximately 100 km from the Swedish coast and 180 km from the Estonian coast. Around 58,000 people live here permanently, less than 2% of Sweden’s population. Approximately 22,000 live in Visby, on the island’s west coast.



Figure 1 – Map of Gotland and adjacent Baltic areas

(adapted from http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image:Balt%C4%B1k_denizi.png)

Once one of the most prosperous places in Northern Europe, Gotland has long been a marginalised part of Sweden. Most Gotlanders have low earnings; for some time now they have been firmly fixed at the bottom of the country’s list for taxed income per

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capita. Unemployment is high, particularly among young people. The population falls into three main categories. 75% are Gotlanders born on the island. About 15% are mainlanders, most of who were born in Stockholm County. Approximately 10% are immigrants, many of whom have lived for a long time on the island and are well integrated socially and culturally. Traditionally, Gotland is a farming area. Today the workers and farmers are few, while the urban middle-class is rapidly increasing. The island seems to exert an especially powerful attraction on expressive specialists - intellectuals, artists, craftsmen and musicians. It is likely that there are more expressive specialists in relation to population size than anywhere else in the country. The impact of tourism is great, which makes seasons strongly marked. Around 1.5 million people travel to and from the island annually, most of them during a short and intensive summer season, from mid-June to mid-August. To many tourists Gotland is an Eden of a sort, to which they retreat from the anxieties of modern everyday mainland life.

Gotlandic stories

There are many ways of telling the Gotlandic story. A different land, almost abroad, a 'limestone Hawaii', 'Sweden's Mallorca', boast the ads in the tourist brochures. Gotland - where the sun is always shining, where there are beaches all over the place and where the party never stops, the jungle-telegraph goes among the young. Gotland - where the pace of life is slower, and where people live more quietly and relaxed, write the official authorities, trying to tempt families and stressed professionals to settle on the island. And then, of course, there is the Gotland of the historians, folklorists, archaeologists and antiquarians - the land of ancient sagas and legends, where the medieval is still present in everyday life, where the old peasant traditions are still alive and where many still speak that ancient, funny-sounding dialect. Last but not least, the Gotland of the islanders themselves, whose songs of praise of the land willed to them by their father's hand mix with other and more blues-like refrains about getting away to mainland places where life may be better.



Figure 2 – Gotlandic traditional ensemble performing at Midsummer festivities

History runs deep in Gotland. The production of histories in the island is certainly not new. Many different pasts have already been staged centuries back; which turns Gotland's history into a meta-history, a history of histories. The remnants of the first Gotlanders are exceptionally rich, which makes Gotland a promised land for archaeologists (Westberg, 1999). There is an abundance of stories about hidden treasures, to be found on Thursday nights, when the moon is full, by a direct descendant of the original owner using a white horse without even a single black hair. And there are stories about how such treasures have been found, folklore about folklore, such as the one about Stavgard in southeast Gotland, where some boys stumbled over a rabbit hole after having listened to their teacher telling old stories about hidden treasures and found a hoard of silver coins. This was in the 1970s and, of course, it happened on a Thursday night with a full moon. There was no horse involved but according to some reports one of the boys was a descendant of the historic person associated with the treasure (Larsson, 1983). Another almost archetypical Gotlandic story is about the farmer in Othem, northeastern Gotland, who a few years ago ploughed his fields, when suddenly - plonjk! With his plough bill he hits the largest hoard of silver treasures found in this part of the world, today on display in the new treasury of the historical museum of Gotland, Fornshalen⁴.

The focal point of Gotlandic storytelling these days, however, is not prehistoric times, but the Middle Ages. In Gotland the Middle Ages was anything but dark, it was the peak period. Visby was the tiger economy of the time: in only a hundred years or so the whole city was built, with its impressive city wall, a dozen churches and monasteries, and almost a hundred churches all over the island. In the 13th century Visby had around 12000 inhabitants and was the trade-centre of the Baltic region. Large ruins remind us of the prosperity, and remnants of toilets with running water and a communal sewage system bear witness to the level of civilisation. This was, as Visby city guides are keen to emphasise, at a time when the inhabitants of today's big mainland cities still dwelled in poverty and darkness (or when the cities were not even founded).

The end of the medieval story marks the beginning of the next, that of the old peasant society. In its classical period, the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, Gotland is often portrayed as a peasant's republic, never conquered, never enslaved, without noblemen or gentry. The official rulers were the governors from the mainland and the small bourgeoisie in Visby. But in reality the peasants mostly ruled themselves, with nearly 100 parishes as their base of power. If not always so well off economically, the peasants nevertheless developed an extremely rich culture, with narratives, music, dance, costumes, folk art and all kinds of other traditions, known to us through the efforts of 19th century folklore collectors such as the great Per Arvid Sävje (Palmenfelt, 1993). A common representation of the proud, self-reliant peasant is that of the self taught folk fiddler, performing the difficult traditional polska tunes of the island.

Any production of collective memory, of a collective past, must be understood in relation to other such pasts. I call such productions 'mindscapes'⁵. The concept urges us to understand a site, whether a tourist destination or a heritage site, as both a mental and a physical entity - 'mind' for the former and 'scape' for the latter. Mindscapes are established by certain perspectives or gazes that makes us see some things and overlook a whole lot more. Mindscapes are institutionalised in 'domains', large networks of interlinked practices, ideas, artifacts, institutions and so on. These

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domains operate in different ways, have different goals, and occupy different niches in time and space.

The Gotland saga, as generally told on the island, has three main parts, three mindscapes, each belonging to a different domain. The first, stories about genesis and the prehistoric era (which is often stretched out far into the Viking period), belongs to a large domain that in Swedish is called *forminnet* ('ancient lore'). To this domain belong excavations, bones, graves and barrows from all over the island. It goes back to royal initiatives in the late 17th century and became especially strong among the nobility, the clergy and intellectuals, especially in the early 19th Century. The second part is the tradition-mindcape, which has its strongest base among islanders in the countryside (farmers and craftsmen often organised around the old parish-churches). This was created in the late 19th Century, in a poetics revolving around 'the folk' and 'the peasantry' of the 17th to the 19th centuries, and was mainly geared towards production of rurality, locality and regionality.



Figure 2 – Midsummer procession

The third and newest part is the heritage mindscape (the Swedish word is *kulturarv*, 'cultural heritage'⁶). During the last decades the island has seen an intense period of heritage production. New types of pasts have been staged, by new types of people, for

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new types of markets and consumers. In a remarkably short time 'The Hanseatic town of Visby' has been created, Sweden's sixth world heritage site, a creation of the urban and the European medieval, cast in limestone-grey and rose-red poetry (Ristilampi, 1994) and with a discourse revolving around the Middle Ages, culminating in the 12th and 13th centuries, the nobility and the bourgeoisie, an international or trans-national culture and civilisation. Its strongest proponents were at first intellectuals and professionals in Visby and Stockholm, with the antiquarian authorities as their official spokesmen, but later on many young re-enactors and live role players have populated Visby's Middle Ages. Many of these are mainlanders, some of who have moved here to become a part of the mindscape set up by the heritage domains.

The result of this recent heritagisation is Sweden's most post-modern city. Distinct and effective branding has made it possible to launch 'The Hanseatic town of Visby' on a global heritage market, which, among a number of things, has led to an increased aesthetisation and homogenisation of the town's inner parts, and a fortification of the border between the controlled and expensive inner parts and the growing diversity of the cheaper outskirts of the town.



Figure 3 – Visby and its public designation

Heritage politics

What interests me is the *production* of Visby as a World Heritage site, not how it is received, nor if the result is historically authentic or economically successful, questions which are often discussed locally. A central question is not 'What is heritage,' but rather 'What is it not?' and 'Why is it not?' Heritage production is as much about creating backgrounds and peripheries as fronts and centres, as much about hiding some things as about forcing other things up front. Setting up an entire city as 'medieval' is as much about focusing upon a homogenised, bounded period of time as not allowing for other pasts, or for contemporary complexity and diversity. This brings us to heritage politics, how selected pasts are used to assume control and power over public space, which, in turn, brings us back to production: how, by whom, and why was Visby transformed into a world heritage site?

The short answer is that the process was initiated and controlled by a small number of persons in leading positions in the local museum sector. By successfully using and fusing their local, regional, national and global networks they were able to take charge of a large part of the inner town, and to reconstruct it according to their vision. The central positions of the main actors in local and regional, as well as in national heritage circles, gave them access to capital flows, which they were able to direct to their projects, which in turn gave them influence over all levels of the heritage production, from dreams and visions to concrete questions about methods, techniques, colors, and materials.

A common way to explain such phenomena as 'World Heritage' is to point at global trends or structures. The local example is seen as dependant upon and explained by the global. And yes, heritage is indeed a globalised phenomenon. It is everywhere. Heritage has become a moral imperative, a cult, writes David Lowenthal: "to neglect heritage is a cardinal sin, to invoke it is a national duty." It is a crusade: "from ethnic roots to history theme parks, Hollywood to the Holocaust, the whole world is busy lauding - or lamenting - some past, be it fact or fiction." "Never before have so many been so engaged with so many different pasts," Lowenthal continues, but "the lure of heritage now outpaces other modes of retrieval." All the different pasts there were - history, tradition, memory, myth, memoir - are now being consumed and subsumed by heritage, a word that today has "become a self-conscious creed, whose shrines and icons daily multiply and whose praise suffuses discourse" (Lowenthal, 1998: xiii-3). Much heritage is about producing the local for the global market (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 1998). Its most globalised version, World Heritage sites, represent one of the few successful attempts to create a global reality by implementing outstanding universal values locally (Titchen, 1995; Turtinen, 2006).

Competing mindscapes

But there is more to it. Heritage production may be a globalised phenomenon but it nevertheless needs to be approached also as a local phenomenon, which necessarily leads to local or emic understanding of heritage. What does heritage mean, say and do in the Gotlandic context? How and by whom are the global machineries for producing the different pasts known as World Heritage used as resources in local struggles for power and influence in the island of Gotland?

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In Gotland - as everywhere - many mindscapes coexist. Some are built upon memories and 'pastness', while others are anchored in here-and-now activities, as I have suggested. Gotland is a land of sagas and of sunny beaches, of old traditions and relaxing vacations in small summerhouses. Visby is a medieval town and a World Heritage site but also a town to live, love and work in: a student town, a family vacation town, and not to forget, a summer party town, attracting many thousands of young visitors from the mainland. Together all these mindscapes make up the somewhat ambivalent story of today's Gotland, marketed to tourists as 'the different land - almost abroad'. On the one hand the land of tourists, sun, beaches, of non-stop parties; and on the other, the land of such rich memories, ancient lore, traditions and heritages that looking backwards is today often seen as the main road to the future. Some of these mindscapes cooperate in interesting ways. The party town, for example, located between the harbour and the main square from late evening to early morning during summer nights, seems to go well together with the World Heritage site, located in the same area from early morning to late evening. Other mindscapes, however, compete over the same niche. An especially important competitor to World Heritage in Gotland is the tradition mindscape, generally known as the 'old peasant society'.

Similarities and differences

The 'old peasant society' and the 'Hanseatic Town of Visby' are in many ways similar. Both are produced from things past - memories, experiences, historical leftovers. Both promise things in danger of disappearing: "the obsolete, the mistaken, the outmoded, the dead, and the defunct experience a second life as exhibits of themselves, by adding value, such as pastness, spectacle, difference, and indigeneity" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998: 149). They operate on the same markets and are rationalised and legitimised in much the same way⁷. It is nevertheless important to recognise that they are not the same; that we are dealing with two rather different modes of production, two different mindscapes of the past.



Figure 4 – traditional thatched buildings

To begin with, as already noted, the tradition mindscape centres on the rural, the ‘old peasant society’ of the 17th-19th centuries, and is mainly geared towards production of locality and regionality⁸. Heritage is predominantly urban. Even when located in the countryside, it is centered on the remnants of the nobility and the bourgeoisie, and geared towards the international or transnational, in Gotland with a focus on the medieval. Both tradition and heritage can be understood as ‘chronotopes’ in the Bakhtinian sense (Bakhtin, 1981) but while tradition tends to use time to produce ‘topos’, place, and distinct localities (interconnected with large cultural geographies), heritage tends to use place to produce ‘chronos,’ specific pasts that are more loosely rooted in place.

The two mindscapes operate with two rather different interfaces. Tradition produces a closed space; you cannot just move into it. Tradition works much like ethnoscaping or VIP-clubs: to enter you have to be a member, or to be invited by a member, and membership is genealogical, it comes with birth or marriage. Heritage produces a much more open space that almost anybody can move into. Instead of membership by birth, the right kinds of values (and wallets) are necessary, and acceptance of the master narrative of the domain, the importance of careful preservation. Using the analogy of computer language, it could be said that while tradition operates with restricted access to the source codes and with closed interfaces; heritage operates with open sources and interfaces. Central to tradition are customs, rituals and expressive forms, such as narratives, music and dance; while monuments, groups of buildings and sites are central to heritage. Traditions exist principally in the plural - every parish, every group of folk can have its own tradition. Heritage tends to be understood in the singular, there is much less of it, which makes it more precious and expensive. If tradition produces the local, heritage is clearly tied to larger units, such as the nation, Europe, or as in World Heritage, the entire world. Not everybody can have or appoint heritage, which is why heritage production, to a much higher degree than tradition, is in the hands of specially approved professional experts who select what is to be preserved according to certain approved criteria. Selection is the key, the more selection the greater the need for expertise. In that sense heritage is a good example of the kind of global abstract expert systems, dependent on new forms of impersonal trust, that Giddens (1990) has described as one of the consequences of late modernity.

Heritage tends to ‘empty’ spaces, which makes it possible to refill them with all kinds of inhabitants. In Visby, the Middle Ages is rhetorically populated with people of diverse origins, Germans and Swedes, jokers and jesters, tradesmen, knights and violent kings. But the space does not belong to any of these people. Heritage resists local people’s claims for indigenous rights. While tradition can be produced locally, the production of ‘heritage’ is centralised and produces something beyond the local and regional, beyond the distinctive, the ethnic and the multicultural. It is everybody’s and therefore nobody’s.

Not least important is how the two mindscapes structure feelings. Tradition tends to evoke a nostalgic, bitter-sweet modality, a longing for and mourning over lost good old days, together with commitments to honour a specific local past, often personalised as ‘family roots’. Heritage is about a much more generic past that you may pay an occasional visit to without much nostalgia, obligation or grief. After fieldwork in the medieval week in Visby in the mid-1990s, the ethnologist Lotten Gustafsson noted that the Middle Ages were generally “greeted as an inspiring model, a spicy and mythical taleworld without attaching sorrow” (Gustafsson, 2002: 181). A visit to Kattlunds, a museum farm in Grötlingbo, south Gotland, provided her with an effective contrast. In

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the locals' own version of a medieval market, crafts and products of more recent times, representing the old peasant society, were displayed and sold:

The historical time that was referred to was so close that people still remembered it and did not necessarily need knowledge from books. Also emotionally it seemed to be close, tied to well-known places and inhabited by relatives and parishioners who lived and worked there before... Knowledge of the hand and the senses was successfully used to create affinity to the place and to the dead who went before us. The past was conjured up as a well-known place inhabited by real ancestors. The production of cultural heritage in Grötlingbo spoke of experienced continuity. (Gustafsson, 2002: 178 – author's translation)

If, as is argued by Eriksen (1993) and others, tradition mirrors the desires, anxieties, longings and belongings of modernity, heritage is more of an answer to processes in the late or post-modern world that promote play and experience, a shift “from informative to performative” in relation to the past⁹.



Figure 5 – traditional country cottage

Fields of tension

Up to this point the argument has been that heritage is a global phenomenon that is 'downloaded' locally to redefine, reformulate and take control over aesthetics, history, economy and power. The idea is that the change from tradition to heritage is significant, that it signals changes in the production of collective memory, and that this has to do with changes in local power structures. So, why is it that heritage became such a great success in such a short time? A part of the answer lies in the fact that the field of tension between tradition and heritage in Gotland coincides with and reinforces almost all other important fields of tensions with long histories in Gotland: rural/urban, low/high, islanders/mainlanders, peasants/workers, intellectuals/bureaucrats and so on.

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In this context tradition and heritage appear as yet another manifestation of the border between rival forms of Gotlandicness with long histories:

Tradition	Heritage
Folk/peasants	Bourgeoisie/upper class
Poor	Rich
Rural	Urban
17-19 th centuries	Middle Ages
Customs, rituals, expressive forms	Monuments, groups of buildings, sites
Local and regional	Transnational, global
Islanders	Mainlanders
Sweden	Europe/World

One result of this strongly charged set of relations is that other possible heritage productions, built around industries and workers' history or around ethnic groups and 'multiculture,' become almost totally irrelevant and invisible. The earlier emphasis on rural traditions together with today's emphasis on the Middle Ages has resulted in few and vague traces of workers and immigrants.

Another part of the answer lies in how the differences between the mindscapes outlined above work politically and ideologically in the production of cultural representations. The shift from 'tradition' to 'heritage' can be understood as a result of a 'crisis of representation,' leading to an urbanisation of the publicly displayed and officially sanctioned memorial sites, the *lieux de memoire* of Gotland¹⁰. This in turn can be related to a number of social, cultural and economic changes after World War II and to changes in the political structures on the island.

In the late 1940s Gotland had almost 60,000 inhabitants. By the mid 1960s around 15% of the population had left. Large governmental investments in the 1960s made the curves of the graph point upwards again. In 1996, the year of the World Heritage nomination, the population had reached almost 58,000, after which a new decrease began.

The Gotland that saw the population decrease was different from the Gotland that saw it increase again. The old Gotland was among Sweden's most rural areas. Most of the population comprised farmers and workers with low education, who in the late 1940s began to leave the island in search for jobs, education and better lives on the mainland. In the new Gotland the urban middle-class grew fast. Most of the newcomers were educated professionals urbanites, officials, antiquarians, archaeologists and historians, attracted rather than repelled by the insularity. They came for the island's nature, climate and rich cultural historic legacy, and they mainly settled in Visby. A gentrification began that transformed the somewhat shabby quarters in the old town to habitats of the new aesthetic and intellectual elite.

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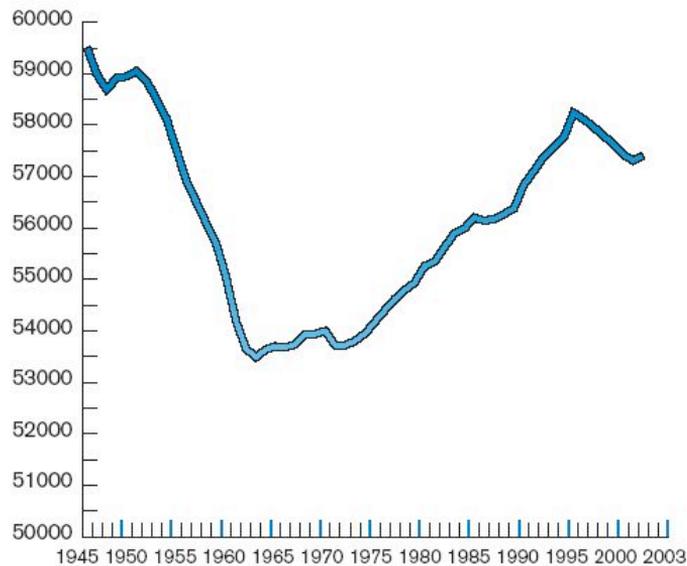


Table 1 - Demographic changes: The population of Gotland (1945-2004)

To the old world belonged a number of symbolic representations of the old peasant society. In the new world these soon became obsolete. Uncomfortable with the old representations, and as newcomers from the mainland locked out of tradition, the new city-dwellers began to produce new forms of cultural representations based on a construct of the urban medieval that did not exclude them but, rather, placed them in the very centre. The central parts of the old city, now charged with the double authenticities of a mythical medievalness and a mythical islandness, were transformed according to the newcomers' vision, into a trade mark, symbol, and logo for a new class, a new time, a new world (Nora, 1989; Schorske 1980).¹¹

Heritage may be about preserving some past. But it is also about commodification of memories and setting up markets where such commodified memories can be displayed, bought and sold. Heritage increases and directs attention, tourist flows, cultural and financial capital. In short, it is not so much that heritage is about power, (or has a power-aspect) but rather that heritage production is a way to exercise power. The shift from tradition to heritage in Gotland, in effect an urbanisation of publicly displayed and officially sanctioned cultural representations of the island, signals important changes in local power structures. If previously the 'true' Gotland was situated in the countryside, today it has moved to Visby.

Heritage production and island production

But, again, there is more to it. Heritage production is closely tied to 'islanding,' the production of "places remote and islanded" (Gillis, 2001). To 'island', *att åiå* in the nice Gotlandic verb, is to produce bounded places with a distinctive and rich history, which is precisely what heritage is about. The heritagisation of islands is fast and widespread.

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Islands make up about 1.5% of the earth's landmass but account for 10% of UNESCO's World Heritage sites (Baldacchino, 2004: 5). As David Lowenthal notes:

Today's craze for islands resembles our passion for heritage - ancient sites and monuments, roots and genealogy, vintage cars and bygones. Nostalgia works best on an island. (2004: 2)

Being circumscribed and containable, islands are more comprehensible and knowable than mainlands, as the past is more knowable than the present (ibid: 3). The connection between islands and the past makes the history of islands especially comprehensible, which is why much heritage production is also island production.

Herein lies yet another explanation for the immediate success of heritage production in Gotland: geographical islands like Gotland become 'islands of the mind' by being inscribed in an old and widespread figure of thought that distances them in time and space from their mainlands. A journey to an island thereby becomes a journey backwards in time, which is why islanders often are described as especially 'old-time' and authentic (Gillis, 2001). If the past is a foreign country, Gotland is certainly foreign, being since long remote and islanded. Being a place already in the past (or of the past) it is the perfect place for producing new mindscapes of the past, be it memories, history, tradition or heritage, which results in a further fortification of its remoteness and islandness. Our world is full of people who want to preserve other people's ways of life, and especially those of threatened minorities, ethnologist Barbro Klein notes (1997: 21). This is not least true for marginalised places like most islands. In Gotland, as in so many other islands, the recent wave of interest in genealogy, local history and heritage has largely been generated by people 'from away'.

In Fårö, in north Gotland, the number of permanent inhabitants has long been decreasing. One reason is the rocketing real estate prices, a consequence of the attraction that Fårö has long exerted on the Swedish political, cultural and intellectual elite by the remoteness that comes with the lack of a bridge between Fårö and 'greater Gotland.' Bridging the two islands has been an issue for more than a century. In a referendum in 1996 the opponents of the bridge won, after which the question disappeared from the agenda for some time (Källgård, 2007: 258). In the Spring of 2005 the issue was raised again, in a new light. The chairwoman of the association 'Future Fårö' pleaded in favour of a bridge, arguing that a bridge could make the island less attractive, lower the house prices, and make it possible for families with children to buy a house in: "With the real estate prices we now have we will die out, there is no growth in society" (quoted in *Gotlands Tidningar* 15th April, 2005: 6). There is a common pattern here. The mainlanders' appreciation of the place they have moved to is constituted through a temporal distance that makes them oblivious to the contemporary concerns of the locals (Gillis, 2004). While summer guests are often against bridging or tunneling for reasons of seclusion and remoteness, permanent residents might foreground values that come with connectedness (Baldacchino, 2007).

As John Gillis has observed, "When strangers have the power to impose their image of there and then on a place, the locals' sense of living here and now is notably heightened" (2001: 6). This is certainly the case in Gotland. And as Gillis has also noticed, islanders today often find themselves promoting the image of remoteness as vital to the tourist trade, while at the same time struggling against the notions of backwardness and inferiority that this image brings about. The insularity that people 'from away' look for and admire can for the islanders themselves become more of a

burden; “the identification of islands with insularity does not necessarily serve them well” (Gillis nd: 24).¹² This is also true of Gotlanders, who, like so many other islanders, internalise remoteness as a feeling of inferiority and backwardness, ultimately leading many of the younger generation to migrate. The many visitors praising the old at the expense of the new have produced a gap between narratives about life in the past (during the ‘Golden Age’) and the present life. As a schoolboy in the 1960s I was taught stories about Gotland as a centre of trade and culture, about Gotlanders being rich, widely travelled, and ahead of their time. Outside school I soon learnt that the future had escaped from the island, and that we’d better escape from it too. This disparity, in combination with daily experiences of marginality and dependency, is one of many reasons behind many Gotlanders’ marked ambivalence to their island home.

Islands or “islands”

Thus, an explanation of the recent heritagisation of Gotland is simply that heritage and islands go well together. But then again, it is important to notice that islands are not simply pieces of land surrounded by water. What we are concerned with here is ‘islands of the mind’ (to use John Gillis’s phrase) cultural constructions belonging to a ‘geosophy’ or ‘mythical geography’ mapping out a vast meta-archipelago of powerful metaphors, myths and ideas (Gillis, 2004).

This point is made clear in an example from British anthropologist Andrew Blaikie. Heritage, he notes, “has a habit of creating symbols that render otherwise disparate phenomena self-evidently related” (1999: 151). He then goes on to observe how the coasts of England from the late 19th Century became associated with old age, pastness and community. The aging fishermen and farmers that by the turn of the century 1900 lingered in small coastal towns and villages were portrayed as the last of a dying breed, marked by a coastal life that gave them a particular moral and spiritual status. In novels, tourist brochures and in photography they were portrayed as living exemplars of all that was good about the past, a model of an “alternative Eden that the modern world was passing by” (ibid: 153).

Blaikie finds a strong connection between these ideas and the extensive migration by middle-class retirees to the coasts and islands of England during the last decades. Already in the 1920s places like Isle of Wight had become stereotyped as ‘haunts of the old.’ Later on, particularly in south England, whole villages and towns were erected exclusively for the aged and launched together with health products, sports activities and notions of communality and “the morally and spiritually uplifting virtues of coastal communities” (ibid: 150). The relatively wealthy retirees who populate what has become known as the “Costa Geriatrica” have moved to the coast attracted by “an image of health, safety, and moral rectitude in comparison with the increasingly shabby suburbs of the manufacturing towns whence they came” (ibid: 161).¹³ What heritage is about, Blaikie argues, is creating a shared past as a commodity, which “has much to do with tapping the desires of its consumers” (Blaikie, 1999: 160). Thereby the past “no longer is a prelude to the present, it becomes an alternative to it, one that restores absent elements” (ibid: 164).

With the help of such ideas the intrinsic ambivalences and conflicts in the modern project are given a spatial dimension. In the cities of the mainland there is the new modern life, progress, and development. In islanded places, such as islands, villages,

coastal communities - 'relict areas,' are the 'good old days', a slower pace of life, roots, links to nature, individual and collective histories; all that is necessary to provide contour and meaning to modernity but accessible only by memory or reconstruction. If the idea of a retardation of time in islanded places is born as an effect of the increasing speed of mainland life (Gillis, 2004: 80-81; Lowenthal, 2004: 2), the opposite is also true.

Gotland is one of those islanded places, near and dear to many but, at the same time, kept at a distance in time and space. And with ideas about archaism - conservatism, obsolescence, retardation and pastness - come ideas about endemism - inbreeding, distinctiveness, narrow-mindedness and isolation. Many tourists travel to Gotland to experience its many pasts in real life, and at the same time to be able hold at least some aspects of urban modernity at arm's-length. On the small island of Furillen, on Gotland's east coast, the owner of the exclusive internationally known hotel has expanded his business by building small hermitages available for rent at 2500 kronor a day in the nearby remnants of a limestone quarry. The local newspaper reports:

Place your watch in the klockparkering¹⁴, take off the silk tie. No cell-phones or laptops... After leaving your clothes and belongings, you collect some bread, perhaps some ham, and then you get your bike and a map to your hermitage. Carefully placed in the spectacular surroundings, a 7.8 square metre hut made from old barn boards. A stove, a bed with a fluffy down comforter and a table with a glass of water. That is what you get, total seclusion and, hopefully complete harmony. Your only neighbours are a few Gotlandic sheep, cows and three gotlandsruss [small Gotlandic horses]. (Zielinski, 2005: 12 – author's translation)

The price for such total seclusion and complete harmony is high and rapidly increasing, as prices are for other typical, ideal island features, such as community, a slower pace of life, remoteness and the good old days. Tourism and history, joined to heritage, are today often described as providing the only road to survival for Gotlanders. Tourism and heritage have become major industries and if heritage is produced at the same pace as during the last decade, many of the islanders will, in the near future, find themselves employed as a kind of live role players, playing themselves as islanders in one of the worlds' biggest open-air museums (Staiff, nd).

Endnotes:

¹ See also Ronström (2000, 2008).

² The number is approximate because world heritage sites are appointed in groups.

³ Källgård (2005: 295). The counting was done in 2001, and included all pieces of land surrounded by water down to 25 square metres, in some cases even smaller.

⁴ See <http://www.lansmuseet.gotland.se//1145> - accessed June 2008.

⁵ I have borrowed the concept from Löfgren, who uses it productively in his *On Holiday* (1999). John Gillis also uses it in his *Islands of the mind* (2004). 'Mindscape' belongs to a family of concepts, where we already find, among others, Michail Bakhtin's 'chronotopes' and, more recently, Jun'ichiro Suwa's island concept of 'Shima', which he

defines as “cultural landscapes’ where imagination takes forms of reality” (2007: 6). All these concepts build on the same idea, once beautifully formulated by William Thomas, that whatever we think is real will have real consequences. Approaching ‘the island’ as a cultural phenomenon is to enter into these consequences, a world so full of images, dichotomies, myths and metaphors, many of which are old and widespread, that makes islands into ‘vessels of meaning’ to borrow an expression from Fredrik Barth (1969).

⁶ I use 'heritage' here as a translation of the Swedish *kulturarv* although the meaning in many respects differs from British, Australian, American and other usages of the word.

⁷ They also share a set of double references: first to something that has been but is re-enacted in the present; in terms of artifacts as well as behaviour; and then to the process of handing things over from one generation to another, as well as to the things handed over.

⁸ Feintuch (2006) gives an interesting example of tradition and the production of locality.

⁹ Lecture given by Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Gotland University 16 March 1999. See also Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998).

¹⁰ See Harvey (1989), Ristilampi (1994) and Nora (1989).

¹¹ See also Schorske (1980) on *fin de siècle* Vienna.

¹² See also Gillis (2001: 16; 2004: 131) and Edmond and Smith (2003: 17).

¹³ The Israeli anthropologist Haim Hazan (1994) has also observed the age-old connection between seas, coasts and the aged.

¹⁴ *Klockparkering* is a Swedish term for a place to leave clocks or watches when people are entering relaxing environments.

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