

On Regional Landscapes in a Multicultural Society

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INTRODUCTION

REGIONAL CHARACTERISTICS of landscapes are rather created and maintained than results of natural conditions. These constructs offer some individuals a feeling of home (enhancing a communal identity), but exclude others. Traditionally, ethnic homogenous regions have been reinforced this way. However, is it possible to use landscapes to embody multicultural societies? Using examples from Scandinavia, this paper argues that the modern representations of time and space are major hindrances for such a project. Contemporary research within humanistic geography is used to sketch the possibilities of landscape representations beyond modernity.

CHARTING REGIONAL LANDSCAPES

Regional landscapes were charted in Sweden in the late nineteenth century, investigations enhancing nostalgic ideas of homogenous, rural communities as the true nature of the nation. According to Crang (2000) and Mels (2002) these classifications were primarily based on visual images and cartographic representations of objects (for example, houses, tools, folk-costumes), topography and scenery. The regional cultures and their landscapes were described as pre-modern, incapable of any kind of development (Crang, 2000). Such characterisations, emphasising a romanticised past of a uniform culture, can hardly be adjusted when society is transformed. Representing a static culture, these objects and sceneries have to remain intact – if they degenerate they will cause a feeling of loss rather than enhance a communal identity.

Today, new trans-national regions are constructed all over Europe, and are supposed to strengthen European collaboration and identity. One of these, the Øresund region, has been called a testing ground for cultural integration within the European Union (Berg *et al*, 2000). The region comprises eastern Denmark (Zealand with Copenhagen) and Scania in southernmost Sweden.

In July 2000, the Øresund Bridge was completed, cutting the travel time between Copenhagen and Malmö (the Scanian regional centre) to half an hour. The opening has been followed by an increased marketing of the region as the vital growth-pole of northern Europe (Berg *et al*, 2000; Bucken-Knapp, 2002; Øresund network, 2003). The approach to marketing the region stands in stark contrast to traditional images of regional landscapes. The focus is on the promising future of the region, not of the past. The bridge has become the unifying emblem, illustrating a modern society on the way to a prosperous future. Beside the bridge, however, symbols of the region have been remarkably vague; logos, schematic maps and aerial photos

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Figure 1: The Øresund Bridge, representing the Øresund region.

(accentuating the increased accessibility and the bridge), and photo collages of anonymous green areas, water and sunny beaches (without any specific regional characteristics), are launched to stimulate foreign investors and to enhance a regional identity (Berg *et al*, 2000, Øresund network, 2003). In short, a utopian future is mapped and marketed for forthcoming investors, whereas present inhabitants and places are ignored. Presence, as well as the possibility for multiple interpretations, seems to be as inappropriate in these images as in the traditional ones. Furthermore, foreign cultures do not fit when invoking a region in progress because they are perceived as pre-modern and therefore associated with the past (Latour, 1993).

As a complement to these vague representations of a region in progress, the century-old landscape-iconology prevails. Contemporary investigations on landscape values repeat these descriptions (for example, Sporrang *et al*, 1995), thereby keeping nostalgic images alive within landscape preservation and management, for example, in the Øresund region. However, this region is today dominated by suburban growth, transport infrastructures, golf courses and industrialised agriculture; therefore you have to know your history well to trace the remnants of the landscape viewed in traditional representations of rural Scania or Zealand. Besides, 84 percent of the population live in urban areas, and everyday environments are distant from the countryside. Further on, in Copenhagen, almost 20 percent of the population have a foreign background, in Malmö the rate is 40 percent. The traditional landscape-representations exclude immigrants without knowledge of local history or preferences for the countryside, and perhaps also a younger urban population.

Despite the differences, the century-old and the contemporary regional descriptions analysed above are part of the same modern tradition. In both cases, pre-modern communities are portrayed as *static* and *local* and divided in time from a modern and *global* society in constant *progress*. History, scale and ethnicity are thus intertwined. Cartographic representations play an important role in visualising this modern mythology where local communities and global societies are separated (Latour, 1993; Olwig, 2002). For example, when discussing different 'scales' we tend to believe that the global can be somewhere else than in the local. This explains the vague and

abstract representations of modern regions, emphasising their 'global' character. In following this modern mythology, there seems to be a contradiction in terms to combine a diversity of ethnic groups with the idea of a modern region in progress.

BEYOND MODERN REPRESENTATIONS

To represent multicultural landscapes, the taken for granted relations between ethnicity, time and scale mentioned above need to be questioned. Because representations of space and time are interdependent, the point of departure could be to reveal either the manifold of spaces or times in everyday life.

New modes of representation encourage new ways of seeing, and, if everyday life is to be represented, then techniques already used in trivial situations, but so far not when representing landscapes, are useful. Interpreting landscapes as patchworks of ordinary 'timetables' (for example, in public transport, opening hours, work-hours, TV-tableaus, seasonal changes, social norms for visits and meals) is one way to reveal the infinite time-spatial variations that shape contemporary landscapes. Furthermore, ethnic groups have 'timetables' on their own, with festivities and holidays. The result of a timetable analysis could be further emphasis being placed on materialising ethnic rhythms in the landscape, very much like the way Christmas transforms the urban scene a few weeks every year.

Berg *et al.*, (2000, p 18) believe that the Øresund project, in cultural terms, will "make the region more global, national and local at the same time". Such a 'scalar' diversity could be accomplished with a manifold of representations of time and history, as illustrated above. It is in representations of the local and everyday life that we have to make place for a global society. A weave of different times and rhythms, focusing timescapes rather than scenery, facilitates descriptions of a complex local/national/global identity.

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