This is the published version of a paper presented at The 16th International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES), Kunming, China, 27 - 31 July, 2009.

Citation for the original published paper:

Andersson, M., Aronsson, I. (2011)
Why World Culture Heritage? Democracy, local participation and knowledge production in the world culture nomination of Farms in Halsingland, Sweden.
In: Dorothy Billings, Viatcheslav Rudnev (ed.), Indigenous Knowledge and Sustainable Development (pp. 21-33). Beijing, China: The Intellectual House

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published paper.

Permanent link to this version:
http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-199417
Indigenous Knowledge and Sustainable Development

Dorothy Billings, Viatcheslav Rudnev (Eds.)

International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences
Commission on Indigenous Knowledge and Sustainable Development (IUAES)

知识产权出版社
土著知识与可持续发展/Indigenous Knowledge and Sustainable Development
Tuzhu Zhishi Yu Kechixu Fazhan
(美）杜罗西·比玲斯  （俄）维亚特切斯夫·鲁德内夫  主编

出版发行：知识产权出版社
社 址：北京市海淀区马甸南村1号
网 址：http:∥www.ipph.cn
邮 编：100088
邮 箱：bjb@cnipr.com
发行电话：010-82000860 转8101/8102
责任编辑：010-82000860 转8130
印刷：北京中赢拓展科技发展有限公司
开 本：720mm×960mm 1/16
版 次：2011年11月第1版
字 数：258千字
ISBN 978-7-5130-0824-2/D·1326（10362）
Why World Culture Heritage?
Democracy, local participation and knowledge production in the world culture nomination of Farms in Halsingland, Sweden

Andersson Maj-Britt. and Aronsson Inga-Lill

Department of ALM, Uppsala University, Sweden.

majbrittandersson@hotmail.com

ingga-lill.aronsson@abm.uu.se

Abstract

This paper analyzes the nomination process of the Swedish heritage site Farms and Villages in Halsingland (2007) for UNESCO’s World Heritage List. It was anticipated that the large timbered red-painted farmhouses of Halsingland in the north of Sweden would be listed in June 2009, but ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) came to another conclusion, deferred the nomination and returned it to the Swedish authorities for improvements.

The nomination process lasted for over 10 years and has been a painstaking process involving the local communities and the county administration board in the county town of Gävle. The costs were estimated to be 15 million Swedish Crowns (1.6 million EURO) which did not trickle down to the owners of the farmhouses. The local people were nonetheless thrilled because they assumed that a nomination would benefit them economically, especially if they were prepared to join the tourist circus and make their homes accessible for visitors. The extra income was badly needed since the restoration costs for these large houses in most cases can only with difficulties be carried by the individual house owner. But some were openly critical to the entire enterprise and they saw
Indigenous Knowledge and Sustainable Development

it as a status project for some politicians and a threat to the perceived harmony between the traditionally built environment and the landscape. A nomination would cause a disruption between old and new ways of living instead of continuity. In a cultural heritage nomination process a complicated interaction arises between expert knowledge and local knowledge, which generates insights that need to be formulated in the final product. Cultural sensitivity and local participation must be pillars in such a project to make it sustainable.

Introduction

Around the world there is a rush in nominating tangible sites for UNESCO’s World Culture Heritage List. The requirements for the nomination are that the sites have “universal value for mankind” and that they are unique and authentic. The nomination must also consider the economic sustainability of the place that often includes the tourist industry. Currently Sweden has a total of fourteen natural and cultural heritage sites on the list (1 natural, 12 cultural, 1 mixed).

In the fall of 2007, the Swedish National Heritage Board (RAÄ) sent in its last nomination in the foreseeable future to UNESCO’s list of World Heritage. Sweden nominated the wooden farm houses in Hälsingland known as Hälsingeårdar — Farms and Villages in Hälsingland (2007). (See Map, Figure 1: Source, Wikipedia).

Representatives of ICOMOS visited the sites of Hälsingeårdarna in the summer of 2008 and spring 2009 to secure that the nominated objects were protected and managed in compliance with regulations and statutes. According to standard procedures, ICOMOS evaluates the physical, economic and cultural values of a potential site, compiles the data and writes a report. This report forms the basis for their decision whether or not to forward the nomination to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee. The committee members from 21 countries meet once a year to decide whether a suggested nomination should be approved or declined. If an object is declined, there are almost no possibilities for it to receive a second chance to be incorporated in the list.

In May 2009, ICOMOS deferred the Swedish nomination with reference to the guiding key concepts of authenticity, uniqueness, representativity and outstanding universal value to the lack of consideration of the socio-economic context. ICOMOS deferred the nomination rather than declined it and gave the Swedish authorities the possibility to refine the nomination. Some recommendations for improvements were presented (ICOMOS Document, No. 1282, 2009). The Swedish nomination was meant to be dealt with at the
UNESCO World Heritage Committee Assembly in Seville at the end of June 2009.

**From Initiative to Application**

The Swedish application was compiled by the RAÄ which has many years of experience with previous successful world heritage nominations in Sweden. RAÄ prepared the nomination based on data compiled by the county curator. The application consists of descriptions, explanations, maps, maintenance, protection and illustrations in accordance with UNESCO’s Operational Guidelines that give detailed instructions on how to formulate an application. Unfortunately, it is regarded as a loss of prestige if an application is denied, or, as in this case “deferred”, instead of looking at it as a joint working process for the benefit of all. An application from Sweden has never before received this kind of response from ICOMOS and it is appropriate to say, in light of the new circumstances, that the County Administrative Board of Gävleborg is facing a delicate situation after such a long and arduous process. It took almost ten years to produce an application from the time that the RAÄ approved Hälsingeårdarna for nomination. This can be compared to the nominations of the site Falun and Kopparbergslen that was a contemporaneous nomination for the World Heritage list and was accepted in 2001.

The nomination of the Hälsingeårdarna has a history that goes back more than a decade. A nomination was first formulated by the native and local resident Maj-Britt Andersson (co-author of this paper) in a letter to the RAÄ in 1999. Before the letter was sent, the proposal was presented to the then director of Hälsinglands Museum in Hudiksvall and the county curator who both dismissed the proposal on indistinct grounds. The matter took a new turn when RAÄ in a letter, which was forwarded to the County Administration Board and The Ministry of Culture urged Andersson to further develop the argument in collaboration with the County Administration Board in Gävleborg (RAÄ 302-1000-1999). This collaboration was never initiated so even at this early

---

**Figure 1:** Map of Hälsingland.

stage, there could be discerned a gap of distrust, or lack of communication, between the authorities and the locals which is not in harmony with the ideology of a democratic and multi-vocal heritage.

**Fields of Tension and the Cultural Economy**

The county of Gävleborg consists of the provinces Hälsingland and Gästrikland while Gävle is the seat of the county government. There is a certain tension to be discerned between the local population in Hälsingland including the owners of the culturally historical houses in Hälsingland called Hälsingegårder and the authorities in Gävle. A great deal of the local population in Hälsingland possesses a historically dependent skepticism to authorities in all different forms. In the process of application, there is a faint tone of tension that can be discerned if one has followed the process and is well acquainted with the parties concerned. The proposal from the County Administration Board has an obvious lack of voices from the house-owners despite the explicit mentioning in the text of the importance of a close collaboration with them.

UNESCO Operational Guidelines demand local participation. In the proposal, there is a sympathetic list of the different local collaborators. Nevertheless, it may appear that the world heritage nomination is not only about the farms, the houses and the place *space*, but rather function as a mean, or a front, to achieve status and power positions, as well as to get access to financial resources in the form of EU-grants and others. There is nothing wrong with these intentions because we live in a harsh economic reality and by the way this is how it is done in the rest of the world. There are strong economic interests in world heritage, but our argument here is that the proper order must be that the local house owners benefit from the money, employments, resources and prestige that are materialized in work opportunities and projects. Unfortunately, we suspect that the potential resources instead would be going to the County Administration Board and clever cultural entrepreneurs, middle-men who sell their vision of the place. In the worst case scenarios, they are neither rooted there, nor do they have deep knowledge about the place. It is easy to forget, that the nomination of Hälsingegårder began with the recognition of their universal value and that these culturally historical buildings were jeopardized by the lack of funding for maintenance.

Neglected preservation and maintenance have not been attended to, to any large extent, with many EU-millions that have been spent on different projects with their focus on rural development involving the farms. Excellent but damaged porches and portals as well as
interior design from the 19th century by local craftsmen are in urgent need of restoration or to be copied in order to save the traditional knowledge. The permanent demand from the owners of Hälsingegårder is financial support for maintenance and restorations in order to facilitate and promote sustainable economic development.

The world heritage nomination is estimated to have cost 15 million Swedish Crowns (approx. 1.5 million EURO) according to the county curator (Dagens Nyheter, 2008-07-20). The culture economy, however, does not seem to give preference to the house owners’ economic and practical possibilities to straighten ramshackle buildings, stabilize house foundations, put new roofs on the large barns, conserve beautifully carved porches and delicately ornamented Forsa-doors, eliminate mildew and damp damages, or acquire adequate knowledge and education. The need for acute conservation and maintenance is tangible. There is also a need to strengthen advanced academic research of the Hälsingegårdon.

![Figure 2: Bullerberget Rengsjö. A small farm or “utanvidsgård”](image)

**Resistance and Distaste**

UNESCO emphasizes the importance of anchoring the world heritage discussion on the local level to avoid a von Oben approach. Nevertheless, the investigation of Hälsingegårder was imbued early with tensions between the local people and the County Administration Board. It is common that tension arises in the negotiations between authorities and local people during world heritage investigations. Basically, this is about who has the preferential
right of interpretation (the last say) in combination with local economic struggle for access to resources. The Swedish process shows similarities, but also differences to other world heritage nominations around the world (Turtinen, 2006; Saltzman, 2001 & 2002). A site must always be situated in its historical, economic, cultural and political context, which means that every nomination process has its special characteristics and themes influencing the outcome and profile of the nomination. In the case of Hälsingland, the work was initially characterized by confusion, lack of competence, social skills and local participation, which unfortunately resulted in the rather hasty and superficial world heritage proposal.

The criteria for the nomination of the Hälsingegårdarna were unclear from the start.

In the northern parts of Sweden, the lack of nobility and upper class culture has marked the society and created a relatively weak social stratification. Narratives written by the county governor and dating back to the 19th century vividly describe that the people of Hälsingland were more difficult to govern than the population of Gästrikland. Such a strong and proud parish mentality still seems to be present in this part of the country. Parish mentality exists all over the world (in Italian campanilismo) and might explain to a certain extent the difficulties for the parties to co-operate effectively. It becomes difficult to join forces when everyone stubbornly sticks to his/her own business instead of seeking compromises and co-operation towards a common goal that would gain everyone, even the culture heritage tourist industry. But to flatter and subordinate oneself, or brag does not fit a person who belongs to a farm that has been in the family since the 16th century. The nomination was therefore from the beginning ambivalently received.

“Wrung out Dishcloths”

The proposal RAÅ approved in 1999 coincided with the national interest X202 from 1974 in the parish of Forsa, municipality of Hudiksvall. The 1999 proposal was postponed due to several reasons. Firstly, the area still lacked the necessary prescribed laws of protection because of a combination of the county’s neglect and the local politicians’ lack of interest for the topic. Secondly, the county met with opposition from the local people in Forsa. After a wild “heritage meeting”, the representatives of the County Administration Board returned to Gävle as “wrung out dishcloths”, narrates one of the participants. This incident indicates that there was an urgent need for allowing ordinary people to speak out and to listen to multiple voices about the process. There was an obvious lack of respect and trust involved.

At the same time, we should carefully watch our step and not let the local knowledge be the only governing voice in projects of this magnitude. There is a tendency to glorify
local knowledge and “sneak about” because one is afraid of offending the local people. This
would be just as much a mistake as allowing the authorities in Gävle to solely governing
the process. Culture heritage experts, politicians, administrators, culture entrepreneurs and
owners of Hälsingegårdar all contribute to the knowledge on how we best carry out
complex projects of this kind. These different, complimentary and even contradictory
knowledges must be recognized, analyzed and made operational on all levels. Such an
approach demands that each party be prepared to let their knowledge be deconstructed and
scrutinized and maybe discarded in order to enhance the quality of the nomination as a joint
effort (Aronsson, 2007). It also demands a transparency and distribution of information—
also the unpleasant information that could upset people. We suggest a true dialogue
between the parties, which is much more complicated and strenuous than a von-Oben
approach or an approach of compliancy.

A Serial Nomination

The serial nomination of 15 objects that made out the proposal to the World Heritage
Committee was an emergency solution and a diplomatic response to the problems and
difficulties the County Administration Board of Gävleborg and RAÄ had encountered in
their first meetings with the local people. The stated aim of the proposal was to place
the architecture of these large farm houses and their economic history on UNESCO’s World
Heritage list. The houses should furthermore be evaluated and located in their natural
context. Among the objects were the very large private owned farms, a village museum, a
summer farm and a flax mill.

The objects were scattered in the landscape. They represented an architectural variety
and present different constellations of ownership. Each municipality was represented with
at least one world heritage site, which was more a sign of equity thinking and lobbying than
aspects of preservation. Some of the proposed world heritages sites are privately owned and
run as farming and forest enterprises. Other sites are public museums. The selection of
objects consolidates the myth about Hälsingland as a landscape inhabited by well-off
farmers, rather than the landscape that we encounter when studying the area maps and
parish records of the 19th century. We suspect that this kind of discrepancy between facts
and a consolidation of a mythical landscape can be found in many global world heritage
sites around the world. This is in accordance with David Lowenthal’s (1998) theoretical
model on how heritage relates to history. Lowenthal states that Heritage is known as just
demonstrated, in ways utterly unlike history. Like medieval relics, heritage is sanctioned not by proof or origins but by present exploits (1998: 127).

**The Myth of Hälsingland Consolidated**

Consequently, the nomination that was prepared and finalized by RAÄ and the County Administrative Board of Gävleborg in 2006 mirrored a wishful official image based on a corresponding selection of research results on the farms from different disciplines. In its *Executive Summary and Justification for Inscripton*, the nomination states that nowhere in the world are there as many well-off farmers who have built such impressive houses in order to manifest their social position in the agricultural society. The preference of building large is in line with the article published in “Bebyggelsehistorisk tidsskrift” in May, 1983 by Fredric Bedoire and Lis Hogdal “Storbönder. Gärda och befolkning i Voxnans dalgång”. This almost two decades old and discussed article was reprinted in 2000 as an offprint financed by the County Administrative Board of Gävleborg and was used as the scientific background for the proposal.

The argument that the farmers in Hälsingland have built large to mark their social position leads to a false conclusion in so far as also landless people in Hälsingland have built bigger than the peasants in the south of Sweden. The farmers in Hälsingland were also highly involved with the industrialization of the region — a fact that Bedoire and Hogdal neglect. The entrepreneurship of the farmers played a crucial role in the accumulation of wealth to the farmsteads. This accumulated wealth was spread to the landless population. As employees on the farms they were involved in the production of linen and other industrial enterprises.

A functionalistic explanation to the farmers’ preferences of building large houses — even for the cattle — can be found when looking at the practical circumstances of everyday life in Hälsingland. The slow growing forest produced lumber of great length available for rich and poor alike to be used for house building. Equally, a house of a landless as well as a house of a wealthy farmer could have an elegantly carved porch and imposing interior decorations styled by skilful local craftsmen, most of them landless themselves. For a Hälsing, poor or rich, it is nothing exotic in building large. It is the norm. People unfamiliar with this style of architecture, however, love to problematize the size of the houses. Here we have a confusion. By ignoring the relatively weak social stratification in the north of Sweden, one misses the point of connecting the right for all to build large
with the modern Swedish well-fare equality model. The very Swedish preference for a red wooden house of one’s own might have its historical explanation in this early non-formulated but existing equality ideology (Harnesk, 1990).

The Swedish well-fare state has largely been based on a landless working class with its roots in the 19th century rural society. In Hälsingland the landless were in the majority during the 19th century. The landless owned their houses located on the outskirts of the villages on the fringe of the forest or on other rugged land. They were called utanvardsfolk (outsiders), but they were well integrated in the societal order and its common norm system of moral values, codes, aesthetics and economy. In the nomination, only large wealthy farm houses are nominated. There is no doubt that there are buildings of the landless and small farms that have earned a place in the nomination but are treated as outcasts of society. Unfortunately, by overseeing this cultural historical wealth, the nomination presents an askew picture of the natural and cultural heritage landscape in Hälsingland. An inclusion would have enriched the nomination.

![Image](image.png)

Figure 3: Jon Lars i Långhed. (Photographer unknown.)

**Interior Design Art Defused**

The painters and carpenters are found among the landless, who were in the majority in the countryside of Hälsingland during the 19th century when most of the large farm houses of today were constructed. They have created the high quality entrance porches, portals, doors and an exceptional interior design art of outstanding international class and quality born and generated within the preindustrial rural society or at the fringe of industrialization. These excellent craftsmen have been noticed by the art historians Maj-Britt Andersson, Lars
Stackell and Manne Hofrén, but their research was not emphasized in the proposal. The illustrations were surprisingly thin considering that Hälsingland is famous for its colorful high quality folk art.

Surprisingly, more efforts were put on the insertion of empty quotes confirming the uniqueness and grandeur of the buildings. We find that the proposal would have been enriched by inserting illustrations of, e.g., a richly carved Forsa-door, an elegant porch from Ljusdal, furniture typical for the Alfta master carpenter Olof Brunk, as well as flower-paintings by the tenement soldier Anders Ådel and the peasant painter Jonas Hertman trained by a town painter, often apprised as work by fraternity artisans from the town, but in reality produced by the local craftsmen (Andersson, 2000). Instead the County Administrative Board of Gävleborg leaned on the myth of Hälsingland as a picturesque landscape of homogeneous well-to-do farmers (storbönder).

Figure 4: Norrbergsstugan at Delsbo Forngård. (Photographer unknown.)

Figure 5: Wall painting by Gustaf Reuter, 18th century. (Photographer unknown.)
Special Interests and Glorification

The proposal would have gained on an in-depth critical close-up examination. It had little connection to the more recent culture heritage research findings and to the necessary broadening of the analysis to the gender, power and class perspectives. The comparative outreaches are unsatisfactory due to the lack of comparative material from the magnificent vernacular architecture found in the world, for example, at the Black Sea in Turkey, in Switzerland and Romania. The connection to academic research was weak and consequently new and highly relevant texts and insights were not effectively communicated.

Unfortunately, the proposal was an example of the lack of research competent staff at many of Sweden’s county administrative boards and RAA and thereby creating a space where personal interests and arbitrariness dominate rather than scientific systematic knowledge. There are several factual errors in the proposal. For example, the high quality native craftsmen from Hälsingland have not been communicated in a satisfactory manner.

The Operational Guidelines demand that the applicants prove the uniqueness of the proposed objects. In the case of this proposal, the words have literally been overused (e.g., on page 5 these words are to be found 6 times), which have the counter effect on the reader, as these key words are not well-founded in the text. As already mentioned, ICOMOS came to the conclusion that the uniqueness and authenticity were not proven in the proposal of Hälsingeårdar from the County Administration Board in Gävle.

In accordance with the demands of the Operational Guidelines, an almost indefinite number of investments, preservation plans and protection of the historic buildings in Hälsingland have to be realized and reinforced if the nomination would have been accepted. The proposal anticipated that the countryside must be prepared for a sharp increase in culture tourism and the University College of Gävle should introduce new courses on Hälsingeårdar and vernacular architecture. A new information center is also planned. Again, these proposed plans are not in harmony with the reduction of the Hälsinglands Museum in Hudiksvall that has been degraded from a professional culture-historical museum to an museum lacking personal and financial resources. Hälsinglands Museum is the natural node around which the world heritage nomination would revolve by functioning as a knowledge bank and information center and with museum pedagogic educational activities. The County Administration Board has not strengthened the position of this
museum as a visitor’s venue. With our inside perspective, we fear that the many promises in
the nomination will never be realized, at least not on the soil of Hälslngland.

References

Aronsson, Inga-Lill. (2007), On Knowledge Production and Local Participation. NOHA—ECH
resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-98244


Harnesk, Börje. (1990), Legofolk. Drängar, pigor och bönder i 1700- och 1800-talets
Sverige, (diss.), (Umeå: Umeå studies in the humanities).

Lowenthal, David. (1998), The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of history

Länsstyrelsen Gävleborg. (2007), World Heritage Convention, Swedish Nomination
2007, Farms and Villages in Hälslngland.Application compiled by Kulturarv
Hälslnggårdar and Gävleborg County Administration Board 2006-12-19.

Saltzman, Katarina. (2001), ’Inget landskap är en ä: Dialektik och praktik i ölandska

- (2002), ’Konsten att förankra ett världsarv: maktens anspråk och människors


Ronström, Owe. (2008), Kulturarvspolitik. Visby. Från sliten småstad till
medeltidsikon, Stockholm: Carlsson

Internet Sources

UNESCO. www.unesco.org
Hälslnggårds. www.halsingegardar.com
Map of Halsingland. www.wikipedia.com

Unpublished Material
Riksantikvarieämbetet (RAÄ), Förslag att nominera Halsingegården till
Världsarvslistan 302-1000-1999

List of Figures
Figure 1: Map of Halsingland. Source: Wikipedia.
Figure 2: Bullerberget Rengsjö, a small farm or “utanvidsgård”. Source: Photographer unknown.
Figure 3: Jon Lars i Långhed. Photographer unknown.
Figure 4: Norrbergsstugan at Delsbo Forngård. Photographer unknown.
Figure 5: Wall painting by Gustaf Reuter, 18th century. Photographer unknown.

© Maj-Britt Andersson & Inga-Lill Aronsson 2011.