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Preprint

This is the submitted version of a paper presented at *3rd Island Dynamics Conference with Performing Island Identities, 15#18 May 2013, Gazimağusa (Famagusta), North Cyprus.*

Citation for the original published paper:

Ronström, O. (2013)

Islands, culture, and cultural production on an island.

In: (pp. 1-16).

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-211979>

Islands, culture, and cultural production on an island.

3rd Island Dynamics Conference with Performing Island Identities, 15–18 May 2013,
Gazimağusa (Famagusta), North Cyprus

By Owe Ronström

Abstract

This paper deals with aspects of culture and cultural production in the island of Gotland, in the middle of the Baltic Sea. After a short introduction to Gotland, I will explore some of the key aspects that make this island stand out as different, and thereby constitute a core of its islandness. In the concluding part I will present a current cultural project, intended to serve as a kind of laboratory test of the content and scope of cultural resources and complexity of the island. In the presentation ‘culture’ is used in two meanings: as a society’s collective understandings, meanings, ideas and values, and as art, literature, music. Also ‘island’ is used in two meanings: as objects in the real world, and as representations, images, conceptions, a phenomenon of the mind. The project draws on and underlines the close interaction between these different meanings.

Islands, culture, and cultural production on an island.

This paper deals with aspects of culture and cultural production, in the island of Gotland, in the middle of the Baltic Sea. After a short introduction to Gotland, I will explore some of the key aspects of island culture, aspects that make this island stand out as different, and thereby constitute a core of its islandness. In the concluding part I will in a rather different mode present a project I am now working on, intended to serve as a kind of laboratory test of the content and scope of cultural resources and complexity of Gotland. In my presentation ‘culture’ is used in two meanings: as a society’s collective understandings, meanings, ideas and values, and as art, literature, music. Also ‘island’ is used in two meanings: as objects in the real world, and as representations, images, conceptions, a phenomenon of the mind. Hopefully, the context will clarify which of the meanings I refer to.

Geography, demography, economy

Gotland is the largest of Sweden's many islands. Around 57.000 people live here permanently. Approximately 40%, or 22.000, live in Visby, on the islands west coast. Once one of the most prosperous places in Northern Europe, Gotland has since long been a marginalized part of Sweden. Earlier Gotland was farming area. From the mid 1950's the depopulation of the countryside has been rapid and is still going on. Industries have always been few and constantly under threat of closure. Today farmers and workers are few, while the urban middle-class is rapidly increasing. Agriculture and tourism are the two main sources of income. Most Gotlanders have low earnings; for some time they have been firmly fixed at the bottom of the country's list for taxed income per capita. Unemployment is high, particularly among young people. Low income and low levels of education, in combination with high and increasing costs for travel, food and real estate forces many to leave the island, in search for better futures elsewhere. 70% of the islanders are born on the island. About 25 % are from the mainland, most of which are born in Stockholm County. Approximately 5% are born abroad, around 11% have "immigrant background", many of which have lived for long on the island and are well integrated.

From the islanders perspective the affective presence of the great divider, the sea, have helped to organize the world into a few basic categories, arranged on a scale from insiders to outsiders. The main "we" are what is today sometimes called "**gutar**", "goths", or more commonly "**Gotlanders**", a primordial ethnic category of islanders genealogically rooted in a past rural Gotland. Thus, you are born Gotlander, you cannot become one, which in practice means that around a third of the total number of Gotlanders does not actually live on the island, and that around a third of the islands population are not considered "true Gotlanders". A number of "others" have been brought together as "**mainlanders**" (more recently also called "Stockholmers" or "08's" after Stockholm's telephone trunk code). An important category of "mainlanders" are the permanent residents not born on the island, most of which are educated urbanites in white collar professions, living in Visby. Also locally important are the "**summer-Gotlanders**", a fairly large number of mainlanders commuting to their summer-houses around the island, among which a notable part is a small, but very influential and mainly Stockholm-based political, economic and intellectual elite. To the largest category belong the around 6-800.000 "**tourists**" that pay an occasional and often short visit to the island during the hectic summer months. To many of them Gotland is an Eden of sorts, to which they retreat from the anxieties of modern urban – and mainland - life.

Local Identities

'Island' sets about a widely distributed discourse centered around a certain kind of places, with a certain quality, islandness, populated by a particular kind of people with a particular kind of consciousness, a distinctive way of thinking and feeling — an island mentality — and a special way of seeing themselves — an island identity. Marginality, remoteness and distinctiveness are main nodes of the island discourse. About this revolve two packages of closely connected ideas. One is the positive: closeness, warmth and community. The other is the negative: inbreeding, backwater and stagnation. A lot could be said of what this island discourse expresses. More important is that it creates what it describes — a clear boundary with the surrounding world and within this boundary a conception of a fundamental similarity and belonging.

There are constant negotiations as to what this similarity is based on and what it means. Most people in Gotland seem to be in general agreement that it exists, however. This is not least expressed by a clear and consistent administrative superstructure. Gotland is a landscape, a military area, a commune, a county, a diocese, it has a head councillor, a county governor and a bishop. The perceived unity and fellowship result in differences being relegated to the background even when they belong to the most prominent aspects. And there are many types of boundaries on the island. One that is still partially existent separates worker Gotland, mainly in the northern and southern parts of the island, from rural Gotland, whose seat is in the centre of the island. A particularly living boundary passes between natives and those who have moved here, particularly if they are from Stockholm. Many who have moved here share an insurmountable feeling of exclusion: "One cannot become a Gotlander, one is born to it." At the same time many natives share a feeling of inferiority and subordination. Power has always come from without. Over and above these there are of course always the boundaries between young and old, men and women, rich and poor and the constantly accessible but not very dramatised boundaries between "Swedes" and "immigrants".

It is far from certain which differences between people are relevant. In practice, the attitude to the island can in many cases be decisive. One sort of island inhabitant are the ones who are passing through on their way elsewhere. They often find it hard to settle and difficult to establish themselves. The island repels career people; but it attracts at the same time another sort: survivors, polymaths, seekers. But in practice, all of these differences often tend to be

subordinate to the watershed that separates islanders from mainlanders, whether they are from Stockholm, Berlin or Madagascar.

Of course, boundaries are constantly crossed. People have always moved back and forth across the Baltic Sea, today perhaps more than ever. Many find themselves in a condition of migrancy: daily commuters, weekly commuters, students, conference delegates and Summer Gotlanders. The horizons of the islanders are often anything but local. The influx from without is and has in fact been a continuous factor in life on Gotland as far back as we can see. It is then important to remember that the boundary with the mainland is also symbolic, which is why it is possible to maintain, despite all the traffic. The boundary's function is to create a perception of separateness that can form the basis for identity-founding feelings of individuality and community.

The distance to the mainland means that the islanders often feel forced in the first instance to trust their own resources. This has a number of interesting consequences for the shaping of local identity and the social organisation of diversity on the island. Although there is a high level of diversity in the island, in terms of expressive forms and styles, and in terms of religious and ethnic groups, there are very few “multicultural” arenas, events or forms. Ethnicity is not a particularly relevant factor in social interaction in the island, and the discourse about a postmodern, globalized “multiculture” has little if any relevance. Since the most relevant boundary on the island is between “islanders” and “mainlanders”, immigrants become relatively invisible, and it is not unusual to find immigrants and Gotlanders on the same side in relation to the many “mainlanders” and “tourists”.

Reciprocity and thresholds

A condition for achieving and maintaining cultural diversity is sufficient economic resources. In a society with few assets the opportunities for supplying many different alternatives are generally few. The chronic lack of money in Gotlandic society has many consequences. One is that many accounts are regulated without money, as straightforward favours or through exchanges of labour. Reciprocity is an important cultural norm in the island, which leads to extensive exchange of resources and to strong local networks. This is not least true when it comes to cultural production. There are many artists on the island and many of them perform for low or no pay but are able instead to receive other types of services or goods for little pay. Reciprocity as a cultural norm reinforces the boundary between the island and the mainland,

since you often have to pay people from away with ready money. The high threshold to the surrounding world not only makes island culture self-reliant, but also puts the Swedish mainland on par with other mainlands, since it is not necessarily more expensive or difficult to buy goods or services from other countries.

Expressive Specialists

The level of formal education on the island is generally low, but the number of specialists is nevertheless high, not least when it comes to cultural production. The island seems to exert a powerful attraction on expressive specialists in many areas, whose collective competency is both high and broad, intellectuals, politicians, craftsmen, artists and musicians, among those people of international fame such as Ingmar Bergman, Olof Palme and Jan Eliasson, now second in charge of the UN. It is likely that there are more such specialists in relation to population size than anywhere else in the country.

There are quite large networks of expressive specialists of different kinds across the island that often is easy to identify, contact and activate. Also, the common islander is often culturally active: there are more choirs, sport clubs, cultural associations etc per capita than in other regions in Sweden. The private dance school in Visby is a good example. It has more pupils than the average big city Swedish dance school. One of its teachers says: “We’re at the top when it comes to dance in Sweden in every possible area, we’ve had a European Champion in jive, and now we have a Swedish Champion in hip hop, and we’ve won many prizes at competitions. But people don’t know that here on Gotland.” The dance school is in keeping with so many other areas on the island: high quality and more practitioners per capita than elsewhere in the country. At the same time it is difficult to convince others that this is the case. This is partly the result of the everyday practice of marginalisation, which has created a deeply rooted perception of always being behind, that what comes from without and in particular from the mainland cities is a priori better and classier.

Versatility, Surveyability, Overlap

A characteristic feature of island culture is *versatility*. Gotland seem to attract people of many and diverse talents and repel the highly specialised in narrow fields. A survival strategy for island culture as a whole is breadth. Resources and competences come wide but not necessarily deep. You will find people living from combinations of all kinds of professions. Such polymath conditions is a constant in the conditions for survival on the island since as far

back as we can see. This versatility vastly increases the total of available competences and resources and promotes rich networks. Also, the competences and resources become relatively easily mobilised, especially since many islanders do not immediately demand economic compensation for performing a service for another islander. This means that the entrance thresholds are often low for new ideas and projects.

Another striking feature is *surveyability*, or transparency if you like. I refer here to the well-known “everybody-knows-everybody” phenomenon, a result of a highly valued cultural practice well developed in many islands, to actively and constantly scan the social landscape, to take an interest not only in what is going on in the island, but also in who did what, and how they are related to whom. Also newcomers quickly pick up this cultural practice, as illustrated in an interview I did with members in the Latin American association. “There are around 70-80 South-Americans on Gotland and we know them all,” Freddy explains. Then Marcia replies “But now there’s another!” “No, two actually!” says Gladys. After a few moments they all agree that there are probably four new South Americans on the island.

The conversation is typical. Many on the island believe they have a rather precise overall picture of the island social life, especially in their own areas of interest or activity. They can therefore easily locate, get in contact with and activate the resources and competences they are in need of, which helps to explain the relatively fast and easy integration process of the Latin Americans in Gotland. A backside of this practice is of course that the constant scanning regularly leaves out certain dark spots, which makes specific corners of island social life not only neglected, but almost totally invisible, a phenomenon illustrated by the surprise Freddy, Marcia and Gladys showed when I told them that according to statistics there are in fact around 130 people born in South America on Gotland.

Yet another striking feature is *overlap*. The same people may interact as professionals in offices, as customers in grocery shops, as parents in day-care and schools, and then go on to meet as neighbours, or in pubs, choirs and sports associations. This makes people visible and accessible to each other in many different roles, and fosters a cultural practice of recognition, from actively seeking eye contact, and greeting each other in streets, to the common small talk about weather, family and work that serves as a scanning device to secure the necessary overview over island social life..

Versatility, surveyability and overlap are three factors that together make the local structure strong by forging many bonds between people, which together become strong bonds. As I already underlined, this is also true of many newcomers to the island, if at first to a lesser degree. As a consequence, people tend to become visible as individuals rather than as group members and their competency, interest, style or taste is in focus rather than their origin and “culture”. Taken together this means that the social organisation of diversity take on different meaning and form than in big cities such as Stockholm, where so much of the discourse centres on ethnicities, gender, sexual orientation and a few other broad collective categories.

Another interesting consequence of surveyability, overlap and versatility is that genres and activities that cross boundaries tend to become normal everyday occurrences and are therefore more or less left unnoticed. This has made it difficult to meet the politically correct rhetorical celebration of certain forms of mixing — such as in “multikulti”, “world music”, “crossover”. The abundant rhetoric about multiculturalism in today’s Sweden has been created with city conditions in mind - on Gotland there are few traces of the discourse that upholds the value of such activities, partly because the numbers of people are too small to form distinctly separate groups with boundaries between them that can be crossed, and partly because everyday practice makes such crossings commonplace.

However, because a very large number of styles and genres are represented on the island despite the small population, many different kinds of people must practice many different types of style and genre in many different contexts. It is precisely this overlap that makes the meeting of cultures, the crossing of boundaries and cross-fertilisation a part of the everyday that does not require any special emphasis or celebration.

An important quality of Gotlandic cultural life is that it is “flat”. Despite the relatively small population, there is a significant number of expressive specialists active in many fields and also a rather active audience. What is missing is a critical and evaluational stratum able to ascribe or remove cultural capital. The role of the newspapers and radio is mainly that of reporting that something has occurred and to see to it that all participants are included in the photograph and have their name mentioned. The result is that the division between high and low culture does not have much relevance, which has positive effects on the scope and diversity of cultural production, simply because of low thresholds, low investments and risks.

It does, however, also mean that thresholds with the mainland and beyond are reinforced, since not all results of cultural production meet conventional national standards.

Pathways

Ruth Finnegan's study of the pathways of music life in the English town of Milton Keynes north of London, *The Hidden Musicians* (1989) is in many ways exemplary. Just as in Milton Keynes, Gotlands cultural life can be described as a series of pathways over a field, paths that never cease to cross one another. Some are well worn in and easy to find, while others can scarcely be seen at all. They are trafficked by people who sometimes choose one sometimes another, in a mishmash of relationships and connections. Together they form a significantly more complex and extensive cultural life than the majority of islanders seem to be aware of. As in Milton Keynes, parts of this life is "hidden" from even the most active performers. And as in Milton Keynes, music, and other forms of expressive behaviour has great significance socially, economically, politically and culturally, which is perhaps Finnegan's most important point.

Gotland's cultural pathways are intimately related to one another because of constant crossing and overlapping. But they also reach far beyond local contexts, beyond Gotland and the Swedish mainland. The local environment is a point of intersection for them, not a point of departure or destination. There are no clear rules or regulations for how they are organised. Age is for some an important factor while for others family, class, gender, ethnicity, etc. The most apparent thing is the complexity, that they are not only different, but also differently different. The complexity that is already built in thanks to differences in the pathways of the organisation is amplified because they all compare and measure themselves with horizons that are not directly accessible in local life. "Local" makes us think of something limited, with an undertone of community, *Gemeinschaft*. But it is important to remember that the local does not need to be the most important arena for local cultural production. The horizon that decides a performance's content form and meaning might very well be far away and invisible to anyone but the performers. What at first may appear to be a local concern might at the same time very well have regional, national or transnational meaning. In such situations the local becomes just one horizon of many that are simultaneously accessible, and for those involved perhaps not at all the most important.

To sum up, Gotland is a fairly large island, with a small, relatively stable and homogenous population. Certain prerequisites are lacking for a differentiated cultural life, which other conditions compensate for, such as breadth, accessible resources and competences, a large number expressive specialists, a well-developed local distinctiveness, and equally well-developed border maintaining mechanisms to keep up the threshold to the mainland as a protective barrier.

A laboratory

Most of these aspects of island culture, and of islandness, are well-known from a large number of studies in anthropology, ethnology and sociology, studies of local culture, village and small town life, places that may or may not be surrounded by water. After all, islands may not be that different. Or is the other way around? You could argue that also other kinds of places are *islanded*, by being inscribed in a discourse that separates the local and regional from the national, small places from large cities, towns from countryside, and centers from peripheries. An important aspect of the notion of islands, and of islandsness, is precisely a widely distributed discourse about marginalised remote places, bounded, archaic, endemic, a discourse with the “capacity to produce what it names” (Butler 1996:8). Along with small towns and villages, islands tend to be among those places that can easily be produced as small and local, as periphery, as marginal. In islands this seem to especially amplified, to reach a wider magnitude, which makes islands good places to study mechanisms that produce marginality.

What I have outlined here, is a number of aspects that I find pertinent to island culture, to Gotland’s islandness:

- **Boundedness**, that raises and emphasizes borders and thresholds between the islands and some mainland or continent. As Godfrey Baldacchino notes, “as prototypical ethno-scapes, islands spearhead the study of the production of locality.”¹
- **An agricultural** past, and still dependant upon agriculture and...
- **Tourism**, a large number of visitors coming to appreciate the lure of the island, often ten times or more than the island population. This creates a pressure that ties islanders together, activates a number of border maintaining mechanisms, separates islanders

¹ Baldacchino 2007: 9, 16

from “people from away”, and pushes some islanders, especially the younger generations, away from the island.

- **Weak economy**, that promotes certain cultural practices, such as versatility and reciprocity as survival strategies.
- **Many expressive specialists, artists, intellectuals.** While other marginalized places tend to become emptied of such people, islands like Gotland, *Åland*, *Saaremaa* seem to exert a special attraction on expressive specialists and survivors, which raises the cultural complexity on the island
- **Reciprocity** is an important cultural norm; many transactions are done without money.
- **Versatility.** Islanders tend to become versatile, polymaths. The available competence is generally broad, but there are often only a few specialists in each area.
- **Overlap** is a characteristic feature of island life - islanders meet and get acquainted in many different arenas, which leads to **transparency** or
- **Surveyability.** Since thresholds within the island are generally low, locating and activating resources and competences is fairly easy, especially if you are an islander anchored in the important genealogical family networks in the island.

These are propositions, a set of hypotheses that I have arrived at. Then I got the idea to somehow test their strength or viability. As a cultural analyst laboratory tests do not belong to my normal methodological equipment. But in this case I decided to try to set up a project large and complex enough to involve a lot of people, from many different fields, a clearly outlined project, limited in time and space, demanding a large number of resources and highly specialized competences. And as so many other projects on the island, all of this had to be accomplished with little money. This is what I came up with:

Belle Sounds - A Very Large Concert

Imagine a very large musical instrument. Double it. Then double it again and again. Now imagine a very large stage. Double it. Then double it again and again. Before you stands the largest instrument in the world, at the world’s largest stage. The stage is the island of Gotland, the musical instrument – all the church bells in the island! Gotland is one of most church dense places in the world, with around a hundred churches of medieval origin. The project

will use all the bells, well over 200, to perform together as a musical instrument, presumably the world's largest ever.

The 8th of June 2013, at 11:00 the bells will perform BelleSounds, A Very Large Concert, composed by prominent Swedish composers, broadcast live by Swedish Radio, over Europe through EBU (European Broadcasting Union), and via Internet to the rest of the world. It aspires to be the world's hitherto largest live broadcast, made possible by new broadcasting technology developed for the project. More than 100 ringers will participate, together with approx. 150 volunteers, and a large staff of technicians. A documentary film for television will be produced by a talented film-maker.

There are many goals, at different levels. Among musical goals are

- to explore by means of church bells the sound of a very large space/place.
- explore social and cultural terms, conditions and limits for what can be perceived as "a musical piece", "a musical instrument" and, by extension, the phenomenon that we call "music".

The cultural-political aspiration evolves from the observation that the world's population is now rapidly converging to a few very large mega-cities, where more and more economical and political power is concentrated, leaving large parts of the world increasingly impoverished and marginalized. By means of church bells the project wishes for Sweden, Europe and the rest of the world to hear and understand that "small" and marginalized places, like the island of Gotland, can also have a large and powerful voice.

The existential goals draw on the communicative purposes and power that church bells have provided since the first days of Christianity. Via church bells, A Very Large Concert aspires to communicate with a congregation of islanders, and visitors; and to encourage islanders to consider their present predicament and likely future in a social, economical and geographical fringe of the globalized world.

The technical goal is to develop and test new technology for live broadcasts of large complex events. By bringing together Swedish Radio, Ericsson and telecom operators the project will contribute to the production of technical systems for broadcasting via smart phones over the

3G and 4G-networks that can be used by broadcasting companies for many different purposes.

As I already mentioned, the scientific aim is to test a number of hypotheses concerning cultural complexity, the scope of locally available networks, resources and competences, and under what conditions they can be localized and activated. To realize this project I thus needed to recruit a large number of islanders, with high and specialized competences of very different kinds: musicians, composers, researchers, bell-ringers, radio producers, technical engineers, IT-specialists, organizers, journalists and media people, film makers etc. All of them would have to live in Gotland. I also obviously needed skills in mapping, locating and activating such resources, as well as competence to operate in and with a number of circles, networks and institutions, such as the church of Sweden, the art world, the national and regional radio, musicians, the world of programmers, and IT- technicians, and not least the circles controlling financial support for these kind of rather wild and complex projects.

The idea came up in a conversation with a close friend, a journalist, writer and nationally renowned radio producer. She had been working with a book on Gotland's medieval churches, and recalled a book she stumbled on, that listed all the bells in the island, their age, size, and tuning. When I realised that the bells cover over three octaves, I turned to a radio technician I vaguely knew from before, and asked him if such a project was at all conceivable. He smiled and said "Yes, perhaps"! "But – some of the technology you would need has yet to be developed!" It turned out that he 20 years ago had recorded all the bells in the island, in connection with the production of the book about church bells. It also turned out that he, although stationed in Gotland, was now working for the national Swedish radio's department for technological development. He said that what I needed could be done, and that he had in fact been tossing around similar ideas in the national radio company for some years, but with little response. Then he leaned back and said: "What we need is to set up a production and to do that we need a producer that could find the money for it". In that very moment my friend the radio producer came by, and we both nodded and said. "and there she comes".

Among the next steps was to bring together the radio technicians with experts on telecom technology at Ericsson to find out if the idea to broadcast by smartphones was at all plausible. The answer was yes, but that they did not know if the necessary technology was available. While the broadcasting specialists tried to figure these things out, I set up a meeting with the

bishop in Visby, to hear his opinion about the project's viability, considering the complicated organisation of the church of Sweden. Since the answer was positive, I contacted the musical director of the cathedral in Visby, a well-known organist and composer, who agreed to write a part of the musical score. I realised that in order to win the financial support I needed, I had to turn to national funds. I also realised that there could be difficulties to gain the confidence of national and Stockholm based funding institutions for a project on the island of Gotland. I decided to make an exception from the rule that all participants had to be islanders and called an old friend, a professor in composition in the Royal Academy of Music in Stockholm, and one of Sweden's most prominent composers. She immediately accepted the challenge to create new music for this really huge instrument, the sound of which no one of us had heard, whose functions and effects we had very vague ideas about and even had troubles to imagine. I also thought it would be a good idea to document the project, so I contacted a film-maker in the island with whom I had been working before, and he also accepted. With all this I applied for funding from the new state authority Music Development and Heritage Sweden.

A month later in spring 2011 I received the necessary funding. Since then I have recruited over 100 ringers, more than 150 volunteers; together with the composers written a concert in three parts for an very large instrument hitherto unheard of, set up homepages and a facebook-group, penetrated regional and national media circles to get them to cover the project, in TV, radio and newspapers, and with the help of excellent technicians created a technical framework, with broadcaster apps, Icecast servers, and controlling systems, to be able to broadcast large events using only smartphones. All active participants, except for one, are islanders. To date the concert is sold to ten countries, covering about a million listeners.

What is there to learn from this project about cultural production in Gotland, about island culture and islandness? First of all, that most, if not all, of my propositions and assumptions have stood the test. All the resources and competences I needed have been available in the island, and they have been easily located and activated. To pull the test a little further I decided to make things a little more complicated than I actually needed, by creating a sampler based on the bells of Gotland, with a rather imposing sound, and to that a small playful application for the internet, so that anybody can play polyphonic music with churchbells on their computer. Also the competences needed for such specialised side-projects have been easily located and activated. The bishop, the composers, the heads of the Swedish radio, the ringers, the computer specialists, media: all have been just one step away. Also, answers to

the most complicated and specific questions have in general been one meeting or one telephone call away. Recently, after a meeting with volunteers in the middle of the island, I needed to know if there was a wifi connection in the vicinity of a certain church. We were three persons that lingered in the meeting room. One of them said, well I know a guy that lives just nearby that church. I recognised the name as a amateur violinist and painter, a friend of my son's. The third says. I have his number here in my phone let's call. The man answers by saying: I was just thinking about calling you to ask if I could be part of your bell project. Of course I have wifi connection that I can use.

When I ask persons I have located about how they think I found them, they have no difficulty to figure it out. What this points to is that much of the knowledge about the social networks is not only widely distributed, but also that it is rather symmetrically distributed. Not only do I know who knows, but the persons who know also know that I know and how I know. The result is open networks, a basic accessibility or availability. There is not much need for specialised human "search engines" to locate a needed competence or resource.

The idea that "everybody knows everybody" is certainly not true: During the last 6 month I have met many that I never met before. Still, most if not all belong to one or more island network. Thus, also in this project the centuries old border between "islanders" and visitors from away is reproduced. It seems that is at least some truth in the saying among newcomers that it may takes years to "come in into the society ", as the expression goes. Perhaps you could say that the island interface is closed, that you need to be able to log in to become a member. And membership comes with family relations, with hard work, long time, and a certain commitment to the island, to island life and culture.

The scope and importance of versatility is perhaps larger than I first realized. The people I have engaged combine the most varied professions. One is a pilot, a hotel manager and a musician, another a nationally famed cook, teacher, singer and renovator of old houses. Their networks are large and complex, and to a degree they also constantly overlap.

Underlined in this project is also the importance of reciprocity. Certain services is be available to the project because people find it likely that they can ask for services in return later on, or that they are in fact already paying back for services that they already have received.

Yet another finding is the importance of what could be termed “ethnicity”. I myself and a fair number of the most active in the project are born and bred in the island and speak in the island dialect. This opens some doors that for others may be closed. But to be an islander in Gotland is not only a question of where you are born, and how you speak, it is also a question of being possible to inscribe and locate in the island’s extensive genealogical maps, maps that are constantly worked out orally, as narratives. As an almost obligatory introduction to any conversation, before getting to the point, you would have to sort out who the involved persons are, where from they are, who they are married to, and if you are in fact in any way related. These discussions serve much of the same purpose as the famous songs from the west-African griots, bards and storytellers, the starting point for Alex Haley’s best-selling novel “Roots”.

Last but not least, this project underlines the close interaction between the two meanings of culture, as a collective system, and as art, and between the two meanings of island, islands as physical places in the real world, and as representations, images, of the mind. The project draw on and allude to old, well established and widely distributed ideas about the island’s islandness, its remoteness and distinctiveness, Gotland as endemic and archaic, of or in the past, a magic medieval place, almost abroad, a cultural place, well suited for artists, and a place where community and kinship runs both deep and wide.

Butler, Judith 1996: *Gender as Performance*. In: Peter Osborne (ed.) *A Critical Sense: Interviews with Intellectuals*. London and New York: Routledge.

Islands – two questions central to islands studies, what constitutes an island, and what constitutes islandness. The first question looks deceptively simple. It leads us to geography, to those pieces of land surrounded by water. The answers are produced by the question, what is. But what if we ask other types of questions? Actually, a better question might be ‘where is’, where is an island? While one strand points islands as objectively existing phenomena in the real world, another points to islands as representations, images, conceptions, as a phenomenon of the mind. (And yes there is the third that tries to go in-between these positions.) Also ‘when’ is a good question, when is an island? When points towards islands as phenomena called upon in certain contexts, as a discursive device to induce certain forms of action or meaning. ‘When’ leads to a situational, relational approach, answers that relates “where” to a specific “when”. In such a perspective ‘reality’ is what becomes real through human action and will, in other words, to performance – whatever objectively exists as reality only becomes objectively existing when performed. This leads to performativity, “that aspect of discourse that has the capacity to produce what it names” (Butler 1996:8). Islands as something performed, in turn, leads to the question ‘how’, how islands are presented, represented, framed, staged, produced.