

Rural tourism and processes of cultural heritage manufacture

G. Swensen

The Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research, Norway

Abstract

Cultural heritage is today considered to be an asset well-suited to opening up new possibilities in marginal rural areas in need of additional business sectors, of which tourism is one of the most flourishing. This article discusses some of the precautions that have to be taken if a relationship is to develop that is beneficial to all parties involved and in which both heritage management and tourism are going to be winners. Cultural heritage assets are often considered vulnerable resources, but at the same time they stimulate emotions and may represent experiences highly sought after by a particular niche of tourists. From a comparative study of two upper mountain areas in Norway where mountain summer farming still exists, the article discusses the particular type of adaptations found in these regions as part of the heritage tourism debate.

Keywords: heritage tourism, cultural historic environments, cultural heritage protection, vernacular architecture.

1 Introduction

Heritage tourism has been interpreted as an answer to the fact that vast areas of the western world had their livelihood dramatically changed as a result of economic restructuring processes taking place in the 1980s. Heritage tourism can be apprehended as a strategy to create new jobs as well as preserve cultural identities in many areas that in earlier times were based on primary industries (Franklin [1]). In the new situation there has been a need to exploit local natural resources including vernacular built heritage to attract new markets (Franklin [1], AlSayyad [2]).

In this paper we look more closely at the relationship we find between the tourism sector and cultural heritage management. Do the expectations the



cultural tourist has of certain experiences lead to a tendency to manufacture heritage? And if an active process of manufacturing heritage is taking place, is this process in accordance with preservation of vernacular architecture in a sustainable way? The paper presents results from an interdisciplinary research project, 'Redefining Rural Resources – Local capacity-building in sustainable management of cultural historic environments of mountain summer farming'. The methods used are studies of documents relating to the planning processes and semi-structured interviews with main actors in the planning processes including the mayor, the heads of the municipal administration and the most active and central persons in the planning processes. Nineteen farmers were picked randomly for interviewing from a list of active users of summer farms in the two studied areas.

2 Heritage as a requested product

2.1 Tourism and heritage: two sectors with different objectives and motivations

Cultural and heritage tourism has been referred to as the oldest form of the 'new' tourism phenomenon (McKercher and duCros [3]). Certain factors in the 1980s, however, gave this particular tourism theme an upheaval. Urry was among the first researchers to spot the trend towards a market where a combination of tourism and heritage manifested itself (Franklin [1]. Urry 1990 [4]) suggested that a transformation in production and consumption patterns had resulted in a convergence between tourism and heritage activities. The tourism market became more diversified. More tourists turned away from package holidays to more sophisticated breaks where exclusivity, differentiation and unique personal experiences became the norms. The unique, and at the same time collective, nature of heritage resources means that such attractions have developed into a 'special' niche in the industry (Apostolakis [5]).

It is, however, important to bear in mind that tourism and cultural heritage management are two different sectors with fundamentally different objectives and motivations. Understanding cultural and heritage tourism, therefore, is predicated on developing an understanding of what tourism is, how it works, and what drives tourism decisions (McKercher and du Cros [3]). When Kercher and du Cros describe the nature of tourism, some of the important characteristics they stress are these: tourism is primarily a commercial activity – it involves the consumption of experiences – it is entertainment – tourists want controlled experiences – tourists want 'authenticity' but not necessarily reality – not all cultural tourists are alike. Cultural heritage management might see tourism as an important collaborating partner, but it is only one of many parties that it has to take into consideration. Tourism and conservation requirements may sometimes clash (overuse, physical deterioration of assets, unplanned tourism infrastructure development, etc.) (McKercher and du Cros [3]).

When we ask if the expectations the cultural tourist has of certain experiences lead to a tendency to manufacture heritage, we also need to ask what tactics the tourism sector itself has developed to meet the expectations? According to



McKercher and du Cros, all successful cultural tourism seems to share some common features: it tells a story; it manages to make the asset come alive; it makes the experience participatory; it makes the experience relevant to the tourist; and it focuses on quality and authenticity (McKercher and du Cros [3]). We will return later to the questions set out and discuss if some of these features can be recognised in the studied areas.

2.2 Vernacular architecture as a tourist commodity

Do the expectations of the cultural tourists affect – either positively or negatively – the management of vernacular architecture in a sustainable way?

New trends show that the list of subgroups in tourism are continuously being elongated, one of the more recent trends being more attention paid towards ordinary landscapes and ordinary people (Timothy and Boyd [6]). Emphasis on the built historic environment, so-called ‘architourism’, is one of the latest global tourism trends (Willson and McIntosh [7]; Lasanky and McLaren [8]), where people are significantly drawn to visiting a destination because of its architecture. To some tourists vernacular architecture will represent a notable asset because it combines the ordinary and the built historic environment and stimulates images of what many city-dwellers today would consider an exotic past. Vernacular architecture is mostly regarded as the past tradition of predominantly rural buildings. A common definition of the vernacular is ‘buildings, built by their owners and inhabitants using locally available resources and technologies, according to regulations and forms that have been handed down and adapted to circumstances through local traditions’ (Oliver [9]). The perspectives dominating the studies of vernacular architecture have been criticised for being ‘to narrow and restricted, as it results in representations of vernacular traditions that are frozen in time, incomplete and, quite often, romanticized’ (Vellinga [10]). A more dynamic approach views tradition as a conscious and creative adaptation of past experience to the needs and circumstances of the present. When vernacular architecture is discussed further in this paper, it is a more dynamic approach to the past traditions and creative adaptation desired by Vellinga that will be stressed. The buildings we find today in mountain summer farming areas are the result of building activities from different historical periods. While some of the buildings were built as early as the seventeenth century, the more recent building in the mountain region is primarily for second homes, and this building activity can be labelled ‘popular’ architecture. They are not vernacular in the sense of the above definition and so far professional architects have been largely left out. They have left ‘the vernacular zone’ (Brunskill [11]) where the traditional building forms and materials fitted into a shared conceptual framework. There are, however, elements today that have been transmitted from the vernacular tradition into the new forms of popular architecture which we find in our study areas, and we discuss this adaptation when we look more closely at the factors working for and against tourism and sustainable heritage management.



3 A comparative case study

3.1 A common lifestyle in rural areas in former times

Mountain summer farming represented a common lifestyle in most farming communities in Norway up until the twentieth century. It developed as an adjustment to natural conditions and the main reason for the continuous summer farming is the need for supplementary animal fodder: and in certain regions it can be traced back as far as the Bronze Age. The establishment of a seasonal base (June-September) for resource use in the outfields, the *seter*, was crucial for securing the production of dairy products for the farm household. Moving into the mountain region with the livestock was part of the yearly working cycle at the farm and was looked upon as a welcome change at the end of a long winter. The summer farms in mountain regions are the most well-known, the most numerous and also the most successful in withstanding restructuring and modernisation (Daugstad [13], Daugstad [14], Olsson [15]). The fact that a lot of farmers found it financially unsatisfactory to maintain mountain summer farming led to a dramatic reduction after 1945 owing to major changes within the rural sector, and today about 1200 summer mountain farms are in use (Norsk seterkultur [16]). The current official agricultural policy promotes a so-called multifunctional approach that aims to secure competitive and viable agriculture for the future. The policy underlines the importance of supplementing farming with other economic resources. This is in strong correspondence with farming tradition, where the combination of resource utilisation has a historic base. The growing recreational sector in the mountain areas represents new resources for mountain summer farmers to cash in on.

3.2 Budalen

Budalen is situated in mid-Norway. Traces of old summer farming buildings date back to the middle of the seventeenth century in this region, and during the subsequent 200 years a series of summer farms was established. A mountain summer farm normally consisted of three main building types: a house built as a combined dwelling and storehouse (*seterbu*), a cow barn and a hay barn. In addition to this, separate cookhouses and storehouses were common on most farms. According to the list of farmers receiving production subsidies in the municipality, twenty-eight farmers were practising mountain summer farming here in 2004. Of this total, seventeen of the mountain summer farms are situated within a landscape protection area (the two valleys, Endal and Budal). The number of active mountain summer farmers in this area has stabilised during the last ten years. The main farms are situated in a region where the summers are too short to provide enough cultivated grazing land for the livestock. During the peak summer months, normally between 1 July and 1 September, the livestock is moved into the valleys to supplementary grazing land in the mountainous area. 'Active farmer' is a label reserved for farmers with cattle but sheep farmers play an important role as caretakers of the settlements at the summer farms. Most of



the land in the two valleys is owned by the state and a special set of rather strict regulations apply (*Seterforskriftene*). Both valleys are neighbours to a remarkable mountain formation named Forollhogna. It is a popular habitat for large herds of wild reindeer and other rare wildlife and for this reason the region was designated as a protected national park in 2001. As part of this process, the two neighbouring valleys became listed as landscape protection area, which means that they are subject to restrictions concerning building alterations, rebuilding, etc. The main focus is still on the maintenance of active farming, which to a large degree influences how the regulations are interpreted and applied. There is a willingness to open the door to new activities aimed at producing supplementary income such as tourism and culture-based services, assuming that such combinations are necessary to maintain mountain summer farming (Swensen [17]).

3.3 Golsfjellet

Golsfjellet is a mountain area in the southern part of mid-Norway. The farms in Gol municipality have always been dependent on the resources in the mountain area; around 40% of the arable land in the municipality is still in the mountain area. According to the list of farmers receiving production subsidies in the municipality, twenty-five farmers were practising mountain summer farming here in 2004. According to the Agricultural Plan for Gol 2003 there is an expressed wish to maintain the summer farming tradition. In addition, recreation, tourism and the construction of second homes have been integral to the use of Golsfjellet in the past 100 years as a means of extra income for the farmers.

The summer farms in this area have a less uniform character than the ones we find in Budalen, and they fulfil various purposes. There may be several explanations for this. Since tourism has been an integral part of the use of Golsfjellet for a long time, continual adjustments to the original summer farm buildings have been made. Renting out rooms to tourists from the city during the summer holidays provided a welcoming supplementary income. To be able to meet these demands, the summer farms had to be extended and rebuilt. Another important reason for the more heterogeneous cultural environment is the changes that were made to the proprietary rights in the beginning of the 1970s that made it possible for farmers to sell off parts of their mountain land to holiday-home builders. As a consequence, the landscape contains a wide range of building forms – varying from old summer farms from the seventeenth century still in use, recently- built summer farms from the 1960s and 1980s, holiday homes and hotels as well as a contemporary large-scale cooperative cowshed run on an all-year basis.

4 Discussion

4.1 Marketing heritage

In this section the two case studies will be compared and discussed in the light of the two questions raised initially. As pointed out by AlSayyad, there is an



increasing demand for built environments that promise unique cultural experiences at a time when standardised products and services are marketed worldwide. This has led many nations and groups to engage in parallel processes of facilitating the consumption of tradition and manufacturing heritage (AlSaiyyad [21]).

AlSaiyyad's observation triggered the first question in this paper as to whether the expectations different groups of tourists have of certain products have been followed by a tendency of manufacturing heritage. Is such a tendency reflected in the cultural heritage products that are presented to the tourist in the two mountain summer farming areas?

The most striking feature in most areas dominated by traditional mountain summer farming is the integration that originally existed between the topography, the natural resources and the built environment. This integration is still one of the remarkable traits in Budalen. In Budalen tourism is looked on as a supplementary benefit, but it is subordinate to the primary function this summer farming landscape has, which is to support active farming enterprises. Agriculture continues to be the economic basis for this form of adaptation, and farming subsidies still play an important role. The products that are produced partly for a tourist market are primarily various milk products (local variants of sour cream, butter, cheese). Some of the active summer farmers have initiated a loose network to co-operate in marketing the area to visitors, and this also encourages knowledge building and sharing. The 'package' a visitor is offered is a chance to rent a room at one of the summer farms, participate in dairy-management, go fishing, etc. Most of the visitors, however, are people from nearby areas attracted by the rich possibilities for outdoor activities. Tourism is still a minor business in this region, and up till now it has only slightly affected the traditional built environment. A few farmers who believe this niche might create new opportunities have slowly started applying for permission to extend their buildings, add more buildings to the open farmyard or revamp dilapidated buildings. So far only one or two such cases have been handled by the municipality's Building Inspection Department.

At Golsfjellet the integration that originally existed between the topography, the natural resources and the built environment has to a certain extent been transformed. The image of the traditional mountain summer farm landscape continues, however, to exist as a viable concept owing to the role it has played in a recent master planning process where the summer farming landscape was seen as the major asset of the area. The emerging trends of a search for quietness, peace and genuineness were underlined. Summer farming activities, the cultural landscape and its visual environment were considered a harmonic and appropriate setting for traditional recreational activities (Mimir [18]).

The landscape includes various building groups: original farm buildings still in use – farm buildings that have gradually turned into hotels and finally been replaced by larger and more suitable accommodation facilities – older cottages scattered around the area - new second-home estates organised as a typical detached housing area with modern facilities. The summer farming landscape marketed is a harmonious, aesthetic landscape, but the active summer farming



landscape of Golsfjellet today is far more complex. Very few farmers actually live on the summer farm any more, owing to a well-developed road system that makes it possible to commute daily between the main farm and the mountain summer farm. Most of the people staying in the area are visitors staying in hotels or second homes.

4.2 Vernacular and popular architecture in the two studied areas

The vernacular period has been described by several architectural historians as a period when people without any formal training built houses guided by a series of local conventions. Tradition and function governed the construction as well as aesthetic choices and the use of local materials would dominate (Brunskill [11] Oliver [12]). This definition rules out most studies of contemporary society. Vellinga calls for a more dynamic approach where tradition is interpreted as 'a conscious and creative adaptation of past experience to meet present needs' (Vellinga [10]).

The buildings in both studied areas are marked by the fact that they are in active use. Up till now it has been possible to continue a viable summer farming tradition, a tradition that has stamped the continuous changes that have been made in the agglomeration of buildings in Budalen. The only buildings within the borders of the landscape protection area are summer farms established a long time ago, with the exception of some cottages built before the protection regulations became operative. One cottage estate has recently been established outside the protection area, and it has a rather small influence on the area in general. Since the area is classified as a Landscape Protection Area, all applications concerning the dwellings are considered by cultural heritage officers in accordance with the Municipality Management Plan [20]. The county's cultural heritage department has published an informative handbook asking farmers to take account of old building traditions when it comes to reparation, maintenance and new buildings. So far the major group of buildings undergoing changes is the cow barns. Any buildings in which milk products are processed for retail are today classified as production buildings and have to meet the specifications set by the agricultural authorities. The requirement to conserve the old cow barns while complying with new demands has led to interesting experiments. Most of the new cow barns, however, differ from the old in construction, length, dimensions and materials (Swensen [17]).

Tourism has played an important role in Golsfjellet as far back as the nineteenth century and has left distinct traces in the building traditions. In another study a close-up examination of three groups of buildings are made of the more complex building pattern in this mountain summer farming area (Saglie and Swensen [19]). One of the buildings originates from the seventeenth century, but had deteriorated over many years. The farmer, who is also a carpenter, drew up plans and actually constructed the rehabilitated and enlarged building. The new extension is modest in size, but introduces all kinds of modern conveniences, but most of the old materials left from the seventeenth-century building have been reused. The building illustrates a continued tradition of farming and active use of the summer farm, but shows how changes in



technology and economic resources influence the 2003 version as opposed to the seventeenth-century version. The second building analysed is a reconstructed summer farm house, where the aim has been to make it of a suitably high standard for letting. In this case the reference to the old building heritage is important, such as including the old building structure in the new setting and using elements such as grass roof, cog joints and latticed windows. These elements are found in summer farm buildings, but the way they are used in this example rather evokes the image of a manor-house, wealth and prestige. Thus a new mountain second-home style is created, also much appreciated and welcomed by the local people. Many of the same elements can be found when active summer farmers also modernise and enlarge their buildings. The third example is a former summer farm landscape turned into a second-home development. The second-home area is organised as a typical detached housing area with car access to each plot from long winding roads. In these second homes direct references to local building traditions are absent. But the value of the land as a location for second homes is enhanced by the story about the summer farming landscape in which it is set. References to architectural farmhouses are made, but mostly to the affluent style of a manor-house. In this case the local building traditions have had no influence, as the second homes are prefabricated buildings imported from other regions. Golsfjellet exemplifies well how a mountain region with an abundance of traditional rural resources has made modern adjustments to be able to reap the benefits of a steadily-expanding tourist market.

5 Conclusion

Unquestionably certain degrees of manufacturing heritage are taking place. But manufacturing heritage should not necessarily be interpreted purely as an example of 'a false process' (AlSayyad [22]), but rather be viewed as part of the dynamic processes of change.

Both Budalen and Golsfjellet illustrate common factors that are influencing vernacular architecture in contemporary western societies. The owner and the builder are seldom the same: the knowledge about traditional building methods is often situated outside the region; modern building materials require new forms of technical and form adaptations; modern demands for comfort and regulations often necessitate alterations. While some of the buildings exemplified here unquestionably still belong to the vernacular zone, others fall under the term popular architecture. In popular architecture no professional architects are involved, while other groups of experts like engineers and technicians tend to dominate the field.

Various forms of documentation (heritage plans, strategic documents, building information, etc.) that focus on the integration that has existed historically between the topography, the economic adaptation and the building forms can strengthen the local awareness of the importance of safeguarding the local vernacular architecture. Budalen is a successful example in this respect. It is a dynamic approach to how vernacular architecture can be seen as contributing



to sustainable tourism and playing a role in sustainable development in vulnerable landscapes. This includes an interpretation of vernacular architecture as a viable form of building not fixed once and for all in a given mould, but dynamic and giving room for development and new creative solutions.

Those features which McKercher and du Cros [3] link to successful cultural tourism are to a certain degree used in promoting the two summer farming landscapes on the tourist market. They manage to make the asset come alive when the landscapes are still inhabited by farmers and grazing livestock; they make the experience participatory by opening up the farms to visitors. The local history and the stories connected with the role the farming has played have rich potential for further development, as an interesting project currently being piloted proves. But the cultural tourist is known to be both a well-educated and selective customer, and this sets some preconditions for heritage tourism to flourish in such areas. Visitors searching for 'real' experiences will soon lose interest for manufactured summer farm landscapes if the farmers and livestock are missing.

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