

# Summary

## Forest geography: agricultural remains in forest settlement districts

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### *Introduction*

Remains left after agriculture – former fields, clearance cairns, etc. – are complex. Such remains call for a holistic-based research approach, embodying what Hägerstrand refers to as the diorama principle: examining entire spatial and temporal blocks, taking account of soil, morphology, inner and outer geographies, and the present as well as history.

The local context is important in this regard. As well as local history and local archaeology, it is argued that local geography has an important role, when considering the place of all remains in their surrounding context. One must still position the local in broader contexts, at the regional, national, and international levels. This does not mean, however, that local factors should be overlooked, forgotten, or over-generalized.

Agricultural remains are not simply dead, morphological objects on the ground, traces of ancient, dead people. They are also important as bearers of significance in present-day society, at local and other scales.

The aim of this thesis is to contribute to a holistic view on research on agricultural remains in forest settlement districts.

## ***Agricultural remains and research***

Studies of landscape, of its morphology and history, have been important to geographers in much of the western world for over a century. Agricultural remains have long been a research focus in France, Germany, Great Britain, the USA, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and other countries. Field surveys, mapping, a vast nomenclature for various types and forms of remains, and historical maps have been used and developed over this period.

However, landscape studies have been affected by changing theoretical currents, and culture landscape geography generally bears the stamp of an empirical, traditional branch of geography. In recent decades, new branches of landscape theory has begun to strengthen, which has given normally empirical field geographers interesting and sometimes challenging new outlooks.

There often seems to be a gap between the theoretical and field research performed and published: cultural remains and traces tend to remain shapes and traces, while ideas tend to remain ideas. As well, history tends to remain separated from the present. However, Swedish geographers have developed interesting methods for including present-day people in surveys and mapping activities concerning older remains – but this has been made in Africa, mostly due to the low degree of supplementary source material in studies performed there. Any holistic view of such complexities as agricultural remains should also include the present – present-day people, interested parties, their experiences, values, and knowledge – in order to narrow this gap between theory and practice.

## ***Agricultural remains in Värmland***

The task of the first study is to attain an overview of known agricultural remains, organized on a regional basis. The geography, dating, and function of agricultural

remains in the Swedish county of Värmland, as known from registers, were accordingly examined (Appendix I).

One issue is that some terms used in registering agricultural remains have particular significance in research regarding function and/or dating. Later, as used in field surveys by the Swedish Board for National Antiques (Riksantikvarieämbetet), the same terms have sometimes been applied to remains, regardless as to their function, age or context.

More in-depth examination requires costly excavation, dating, pollen analysis, and so forth. The examinations presented here are based on the inner and outer geographies of the agricultural remains. This entails taking account of the character of locality itself, its relationships with other prehistoric or historical cultural remains, and historical and present-day settlements. Historical maps were consulted as a source material, but not in any great detail. Field visits are integral to a holistic, relational approach like that used here; hence, 110 of the 158 agricultural remains considered here were visited in situ.

The results indicate that approximately one third of the examined remains can be relatively dated to prehistoric times, and about as many to historical times. It is hard to determine the age of slightly under one third of the 158 remains, while the remaining remains can be dated to fairly recent times, from the end of the nineteenth century. Some variation in functionality can also be seen; aside from common land uses, such as former fields (discernable from the traces of ploughing), more specific and lesser known (but probable) types of functionality can be identified.

One such functionality is what is here called ‘meadow cultivation’ (Sw. *ängsodling*), i.e., periodically cultivated meadow land, in which growing grass for hay-making was the most important activity. Another variant is the use of small, fenced-in fields located in forests, in the outland, but still intensively cultivated. Such small fields (Sw. *lyckodling*) may represent the

results of complementary economic projects, social stratification, or tax eviction.

Presumably prehistoric agricultural remains (generally fields marked by clearance cairns) can be found in southern Värmland, concentrated in the central and south-easternmost portions of the county. To the west, such remains are few and far between, while in the eastern and northern parts of the county, no such prehistoric agricultural remains have been found.

Remains of meadow cultivation apparently existed in most parts of the county, though with intense concentrations around the shores of Lake Vänern, especially in the eastern and south-eastern parts of Värmland.

The results regarding the dating, function and geography of agricultural remains in Värmland will serve as a basis for the further studies.

The overview of agricultural remains identifies areas in Värmland with concentrations of prehistoric agricultural remains. Other areas apparently completely lack such remains, though studies have demonstrated that there was also cultivation there in prehistoric times.

One way to examine forms of human land-use and impact is to combine historical landscape geography and vegetation history through pollen analysis. This combination of research approaches has been used throughout Sweden and other countries.

### ***Pollen, maps, and traces of agriculture in Dalby***

A study including pollen analysis, historical maps, written sources and field surveys was performed in Dalby, in the northernmost part of Värmland (Appendix II). For decades, this area was considered not to have been permanently settled until the late middle ages, since no prehistoric graves had been found there. Accordingly, any prehistoric artefacts were explained as having been discarded or lost by people passing through or only working there periodically.

The present study was part of a larger, interdisciplinary research project, involving three archaeologists, a vegetation historian, and a landscape geographer. The aim of this partial study was to get a better view of outland activities, such as cattle grazing and hay-making on mires. However, these activities were difficult to detect using any standard method, including pollen analysis. Instead, clear indications were found of intensive outland cultivation, probably of manured fields, in all five sites where peat samples were taken for pollen analysis; no probable fields could be found in the surroundings of these sites.

This points to the dynamics of human land-use and impact on the landscape, and also to the limitations of using visual methods only (such as mapping and field surveys), especially in forest settlement districts and regions.

### ***Pollen, agricultural remains, and territoriality in Övre Ullerud***

The next study examines the settlement geography of Övre Ullerud (Appendix III) in central Värmland. This settlement district is one of those containing a concentration of probable prehistoric agricultural remains, as seen in Appendix I. A pollen analysis was performed to gain a better understanding of the human impact on the land and vegetation. Also consulted in the study are written sources, place names, medieval letters, and other prehistoric remains such as graves. These are related to each other according to the diorama principle of Torsten Hägerstrand, which considers remains in temporal and spatial blocks.

Territoriality is also important at different levels in this study. As well, the matter of area – space – and its territoriality is regarded as more important than place, from the level of the single farm estate, through hamlets, to that of settlement districts (Sw. bygd).

The results indicate that at least two settlement rearrangements took place in Övre Ullerud during the Iron Age. Pollen analysis indicates that

human impact began at a minimal level in the Middle Iron Age, intensifying later in period with intense cultivation. However – and this is interesting – these rearrangements happened within the already fixed territory of the settlement district. The place name “Övre [i.e., upper] Ullerud” is probably of great age, older than most – if not all – names of estates and hamlets in the settlement district. This indicates the relative stability of the district as such, but with a high degree of internal dynamism allowing the farmers to rearrange their settlements.

This identifies the local community as a factor to be considered, and also the importance of looking at spatial continuity rather than place continuity in such research. Spatial here does not only refer to the territoriality of single farm estates or hamlets, but also to that of settlement districts – both within individual settlement districts, and between districts at the regional and/or national levels.

### ***Agricultural remains as bearers of significance***

Even in the initial phase of the work, interest in agricultural remains was noted, not just among researchers or antiquarians, but among the concerned general public as well. Partly because of the complexity of such remains, people are obviously interested in them, both for their historical value and for the importance of having them in one’s environs.

The value attached to agricultural remains can thus be said to exceed the inherent value of historical remains in general, and extend towards a present value, as bearers of meaning. This affects how historical remains are included in local development processes, and how they are, or can be, maintained for future generations.

This study (Appendix IV) examines the views of and values attached to agricultural remains by selected present-day groups of people, with regard to landscape, local history, and preservation. As well, the views and values

of these groups will be related to each other to allow for comparison. Such research takes account of an interesting and important aspect of democracy, regarding cultural preservation, cultural heritage, and respect for different kinds of knowledge.

The results show that remains of agriculture as such are rather anonymous, but since they concern many interested parties they have importance as present-day bearers of significance. However difficult to examine or understand, remains of agriculture are included within what people consider important to preserve for future generations.

The present study indicates that different interest groups, unsurprisingly, have different ways of regarding and valuing landscape, local history, and cultural preservation. On the local level, both nature and culture are important to maintain, and are rather included in a holistic process of sustainability and development than in preservation processes only. Lay knowledge ought to be considered by the experts as knowledge, and not as misunderstandings. This calls for dialogue between parties, dialogue comprising an important part of more democratic preservation strategies and policies.

### ***Agricultural remains and an approach to a comprehensive view***

The studies led to five main observations:

- **Agricultural remains form complex entirety.** Taken together, such remains present more interesting features than they do when regarded as isolated, punctual objects with external morphologies; in their entirety, these remains extend over time as well as over space. Examining such artefacts calls for a holistic approach, a diorama principle.
- **Studies of agricultural remains call for interdisciplinary science.** Traces of agrarian activities can be discerned in various ways, using mapping, field surveys, and pollen analysis, for example. Visual methods alone do not always reveal the vast variety of settlements involved of the land-use history in forest settlement districts.

- **Agricultural remains are bearers of meaning.** As cultural remains per se, agricultural remains can at first glance appear quite generic or even unremarkable, though closer inspection reveals them to be rich present-day bearers of meaning.
- **Agricultural remains are ways of seeing.** An agricultural remains site can be regarded as an arena where opinions meet and contest. Such remains yield knowledge beyond the object fascination typical of traditional cultural preservation and an artefact-oriented archaeology. Their implications extend beyond mere chronological considerations, such as history vs. present vs. future; rather, time, space, and function come together in agricultural remains.
- **Agricultural remains require landscape analysis.** The approach to studying agricultural remains depends on the view of the concept of landscape held by the researcher. By examining and comparing how different interest groups view and value landscape, it is possible to take these differences and similarities into consideration in social planning and cultural preservation. Dialogue and compromise are necessary and crucial in this process.

### ***Agricultural remains and relational landscape – some outlooks***

Some outlooks towards a relational landscape concept are finally made, based on the previous studies, and as a base for future projects. The outlooks comprehend landscape as embodying differences, multiplicity, and constancy amid change. This allows us to get free of dualisms, such as nature – culture, people – land, to bridge the subject – object gap, to focus on complex entities and relationships instead of either society or land.

One interesting theoretical direction is that of hybridity, following the works of Haraway, Whatmore, and others. In this approach, landscape components such as remains of agriculture are regarded as actants – as actively part-taking components, one as significant as another. Another advantage of the approach is inclusion, i.e., the avoidance or reduction of otherness.



Another useful approach is that of the diorama principle, according to Hägerstrand, who describes haptic in contrast to tactile spaces, and networks constituted by fine threads. A hybrid, haptic, landscape concept applies to Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of rhizomatic spaces. The concept of centreless mycelium-like networks is germane to understanding the dynamics of local societies especially in forest settlement districts, both past and especially present – spanning time and crossing interstitial boundaries. Also, the use of a relational rhizomatic landscape concept in the process of dialogue and compromise between expert and lay knowledge and values in social planning and cultural preservation, is obvious enough.

Discussions and processes that began in the wake of the European Landscape Convention emphasize democracy in planning processes and the inclusion of lay knowledge and values. A relational landscape perspective could play a significant and effective role in achieving the Convention's goals, in working with the past in the present for the future, with people for people, including shape, area, agricultural remains, birds, plants, and conflict as well as agreement – especially since it means that traditional divisions between different areas of expert competence and perspectives have to be bridged over, synthesized and compromised.

This outlook towards a relational landscape concept would have been much more difficult to outline without first examining such complexities as those constituted by agricultural remains from a holistic approach.