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Memories, traditions, heritage[1]

By Owe Ronström

There´s something going on here, but you don't know what it is, do you Mr. Jones?" (Bob Dylan)

Heritage is hot these days, it is everywhere. Heritage has become a moral imperative, a cult – "to neglect heritage is a cardinal sin, to invoke it is a national duty", writes David Lowenthal. It is a crusade: "from ethnic roots to history theme parks, Hollywood to the Holocaust, the whole world is busy lauding – or lamenting – some past, be it fact or fiction.". "Never before have so many been so engaged with so many different pasts", Lowenthal continues, but "the lure of heritage now outpaces other modes of retrieval." All the different pasts that were - history, tradition, memory, myth, memoir - is being consumed and subsumed by heritage, a word that today has "become a self-conscious creed, whose shrines and icons daily multiply and whose praise suffuses discourse." (Lowenthal 1998:xiii, 1, 3)

This article deals with heritage production in Gotland, an island in the Baltic Sea. Gotland is situated approximately 100 km from the Swedish coast, and 180 km from the Estonian coast. The island is 170 km long and 52 km wide, with a total area of 3140 km2. Around 58.000 people live here permanently, less than 2% of Sweden's population. Approximately 22.000 live in Visby, the island capital and only city. Around 1.4 million travel to and fro the island every year, most of them during a short and intensive summer season.

Once one of the most prosperous places in Northern Europe, Gotland has since long been a marginalized part of Sweden, living mostly from agriculture and tourists attracted by its roses and ruins. The production of history in the island is certainly not new. Many different pasts have been staged already centuries back, which turns Gotland's history into meta-history, a history of histories.

During the last decades the island has seen an intense heritage production. New types of pasts have been staged, by new types of people, for new types of markets and consumers. In

[1] The research is a part of the current research project "Heritage politics and heritage production" where my part deals with the making of Visby as a World Heritage site in the mid 1990's. Paper read at the SIEF conference in Marseille April 2004

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remarkably short time "The Hanseatic town of Visby", has been created, Sweden's sixth and the world's 470th world heritage site, a creation of urbanity and European medievality, cast in a limestone-grey and rose-red poetry (cf Ristilammi 1994), and with a discourse revolving around the noble and the bourgeoisie, the international or trans-national, culture and civilisation. Its strongest proponents were at first intellectuals and professionals in Visby and Stockholm, with the antiquarian authorities as their official spokesmen, but later on many young re-enactors and live role players have populated Visby's Middle Ages.

Almedalen, the frontispiece of Visby

The result is one of Sweden's most post-modern cities. Distinct and effective branding has made it possible to launch The Hanseatic town of Visby on a global heritage market, which, among a number of things, has led to an increased aesthetisation and homogenization of the town's inner parts, and a fortification of the border between the controlled and expensive inner parts and the growing diversity in the cheaper outskirts of the town.

What interests me is the production of Visby as a World Heritage, not how it is received, nor if the result is historically authentic or economically successful, which are questions often discussed locally. The central question is not "What is heritage", but rather "What is it not?" and "Why is it not?" Heritage production is as much about creating backsides and peripheries as fronts and centers, as much about hiding some things as about forcing other things up front.

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Setting up an entire city as "medieval" is as much about focusing upon a homogenized, bounded period of time, as not allowing for contemporary complexity and diversity. This brings us to heritage politics, how selected pasts are used to assume control and power over public space, which, in turn, brings us back to production: how, by whom, and why was Visby transformed into world heritage?

The short answer is that the process was initiated and controlled by a small number of persons in leading positions in the local museum sector. By successfully using and fusing their local, regional, national and global networks they were able to take charge over a large part of the inner town, and to reconstruct it according to their vision. The central positions of the main actors in local and regional, as well as in national heritage circles, gave them access to capital flows, which they were able to direct to their projects, which in turn gave them influence over all levels of the heritage production, from dreams and visions to concrete questions about methods, techniques, colours, and materials.

A common way to explain such phenomena as World Heritage is to point at global trends or structures. The local example is seen as dependant upon and explained by the global. And yes, heritage is a globalised phenomenon, it is indeed everywhere. Much heritage is about producing the local for the global market (cf Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 1998). It's most globalised form, the World Heritage sites, represents one of the few successful attempts to create a global reality, by implementing locally "outstanding universal values" (Thitchen 1995). But heritage is also a local phenomenon, and here my focus is upon on how such global structures as "World Heritage" are used strategically as resources in local struggles for power and influence. This necessarily leads to local - emic if you wish - understandings of 'heritage' and related concepts.

Mindscapes and domains

The main argument I want to pursue in this paper is that any production of collective memory, of collective pasts, must by understood in relation to other such productions. I will call such productions mindscapes. The concept is borrowed from Orvar Löfgren, who, echoing Appadurai, uses it productively in his recent study of vacationing (Löfgren 1999). The

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concept urges us to understand a site, whether a tourist destination or a heritage site, as both a mental and a physical entity – 'mind' for the former and 'scape' for the latter.

A mindscape is produced by two interacting processes: while some things are actively selected, foregrounded, others are neglected and overlooked. From information theory we learn that the relation between what we actively select and what we overlook is around one to a million. Thus exformation, to forget about all the things a certain mindscape is not, is the more important part of the process, even if it is the part we give the least attention.[2] Thus, mindscapes are set up by establishing a certain perspective or gaze that makes us see a few things and to overlook a whole lot more. Mindscapes are institutionalised in 'domains', large networks of interlinked practices, ideas, artifacts, institutions etc. These domains operate in different ways, have different goals, and occupy different niches in time and space.

In Gotland – as everywhere – many different mindscapes coexist. Some are built upon memories and pastness, while others are anchored in here-and-now activities. Gotland is a land of sagas and of sunny beaches, of old traditions and relaxing vacations in small summerhouses. Visby is a medieval town and a World Heritage site, but also a town to live, love and work in, a student town, a family vacation town, and not to forget, a summer party-town, attracting many thousands of young visitors from the mainland.

Together these mindscapes make up the somewhat ambivalent story of today's Gotland, marketed to tourists as "the different land– almost abroad." On the one hand the land of tourists, sun, beaches, of non-stop parties, and on the other the land of such rich memories, traditions and heritages, that looking backwards is seen as the main road to the future. Today tourism and heritage have become major industries, and if heritage will be produced in the same pace as during the last decade, many of the islanders will in the future find themselves employed as a kind of live role players, playing themselves as islanders in one of the worlds' biggest open-air museums.[3]

[2] A definition of exformation is "explicitly removed information" (Nørretranders 1991:132) but here I use exformation for "overlooked and neglected information".
[3] Cf Staiff (no year)

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Competing mindscapes

Some of these mindscapes cooperate in interesting ways. The 'party-town', for example, located between the harbour and the main square from late evening to early morning during summer nights, seems to go well together with the 'World Heritage site', located in the same area from early morning to late evening. Other mindscapes, however, compete over the same niche.[4]

An especially important competitor to the 'World Heritage' in Gotland is "the Old Peasant Society", with one of its centers in the outdoor ethnographic museum in Bunge, Gotland's version of Sweden's national ethnographic museum in Stockholm, Skansen. Here, "tradition" is produced, in a poetics that centers on the local and regional, 'the folk' and "the peasantry" of the 17th to the 19th centuries. Its strongest base today is among islanders in the countryside, farmers and craftsmen, often organised around the old parish-churches.

The 'tradition' mindscape: folk dancers and old peasant houses at the Bunge outdoor ethnographic museum.

Both the 'Hanseatic Town' and the 'Old Peasant Society' are fertilized by the insular position. The American historian John Gillis argues that places like Gotland become remote and islanded by being inscribed in an old and widespread figure of thought that departs islands in time and space from their mainlands. To travel to an island is to travel backwards in time,

4 Another mindscape of the past that is closely related to both 'kulturarv' and 'tradition', is the prehistoric era, (often stretched out far into the Viking period), belonging to a domain that in Swedish is called 'fornminnen' ("ancient lore"). To this domain belong excavations, bones, graves and barrows from all over the island.

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which is why islanders often are described as especially "old-time" and authentic.[5] Gillis's ideas help us to understand the success that both mindscapes have won in the island. If the past is a foreign country, Gotland is certainly foreign, being since long remote and islanded, a place already in the past, or of the past, therefore the perfect place for producing mindscapes of the past (Ronström 2000a).

Both mindscapes, The Old Peasant Society and 'The Hanseatic Town of Visby', are produced from things past - memories, experiences, historical leftovers. They are in many ways similar. They operate on the same markets and are rationalized and legitimized in much the same way. But it is nevertheless important to recognize that they are not the same, that we are dealing with two rather different modes of production, resulting in two different mindscapes, organised, formalised and institutionalised in two different domains, or in David Lowenthal's words, different "pasts".

In this article I will explore some of these differences and argue that one of the explanations behind the massive heritagisation of Gotland recently is precisely how these differences work politically and ideologically in the production of cultural representations. I argue that a shift from 'tradition' to 'heritage' has taken place in the late 20th century and that this shift can be understood as a result of a crisis of representation, leading to an urbanisation of publicly displayed and officially sanctioned memorial sites, the "lieux de memoire" of Gotland (Harvey 1989, Ristilammi 1994, Nora 1989) This in turn can be related to a number of social, cultural and economical changes in the 1970's and 80's, as well as to changes in the political structures on the island.

Words

'Heritage' is indeed everywhere these days. One of the reasons behind this is, as David Lowenthal notes (1998), that people seem to have become obsessed, or even possessed, by the past. But there are also other explanations. One is that 'heritage' has become the generic English term for many rather different kinds of pasts: history, tradition, memory, myth, memoir, etc. However, if this is true in English, it is not necessarily so in other languages.

[5] Gillis' notion of 'island' is related to and resembles the old ethnological concept "relict area" .

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Even if the German 'Kulturerbe', the Irish (Gaelic) ´dúchas', the French 'patrimoine', are commonly translated into 'heritage', it does not follow that these words mean the same thing. Swedes and Norwegians use the same word, 'kulturarv', and share many of its connotations. But even between these closely related and mutually understandable languages there are important differences in usages and meanings of 'kulturarv'.[6]

There are many ways of using the "heritage-words" in different languages, and there have been other before the ones current today. In part, the present "heritage crusade" may therefore be a chimaera, an illusion, a result of dressing up many and different old phenomena in new clothes and make them look as one and the same new phenomenon. What this points to is that any discussion of 'heritage' has to start by examining the main words of the field, their usages and meanings. Here my intention is to examine the local understandings of two of the words in Swedish that today often is confused by being translated into 'heritage', 'tradition' and 'kulturarv'. What do they mean in the Gotlandic context?

The older of the two competing mindscapes is "tradition". The word is known in Swedish since mid 16th century. Since then it has been used in several rather different ways. The usage that we are concerned with here is "the handing down of customs, practices and beliefs", stressing either the process of handing down, or the customs, practices and beliefs themselves. In this sense the word is known in Swedish since 1669. In the 19th century it became firmly linked to "the old peasant society"[7], and thereby "traditional society" also became the natural opposite to "modern society".

The newer of the two is 'kulturarv'", 'cultural heritage', established in Gotland only in the mid 1990's, together with its close companion "world heritage". The word 'kulturarv' was introduced in Swedish 1887 by the author Viktor Rydberg, Sweden's first and only professor in cultural history (Aronsson 2004:113), most likely as a translation of the German 'Kulturerbe'. At first is was used mainly for the great ideas, values and pieces of art that serve as a common frame of reference for the nation or a greater region, as in "our Western cultural

[6] Thanks to Regina Bendix, Tok Thompson, Anne Eriksen and Lizette Gradin for insights into the different usages of 'heritage' and its counterparts in different languages.
[7] NE: tradition. The word 'traditional' entered Swedish language in 1836, 'tradition-bearer', in 1916.

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heritage".[8] After the Second World War the word seems to have been more or less abandoned, as happened to its German counterpart.[9]

From the 1970's a number of new concepts were introduced in Swedish cultural policies, such as 'cultural memory', 'cultural environment'. In the early 1990's 'cultural heritage' became the buzzword of the day. It was introduced, it seems, as an administrative term by antiquarians in and around Riksantikvarieämbetet, the National Cultural Heritage Board, to cover their central areas of activity. From then on the 'cultural heritage' domain in Sweden has been dominated by the National Heritage Board, marked by its practices and interests, in the same way as the 'tradition-domain' became marked by the practices and interests of the first Swedish ethnologists and ethnographic museums in the late 19th century. In the last years the meanings and usages of 'kulturarv' has been vastly expanded, but it's core still remains the central interest area of the National Cultural Heritage Board: monuments, groups of buildings and sites.[10] As Svante Beckman has noted, this in many ways represents a backlash, a return to ideas and principles that Swedish museums determinedly departed from, or even abandoned, in the 1970's and 80's (Beckman 2002).

'Tradition' vs 'kulturarv'

'Tradition' and 'kulturarv' have much in common. Both ensures survival to things in danger of disappearing, by adding value, such as pastness, exhibition, difference and indigeneity (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 150) They share a set of double references; first to something that has been but is re-enacted in the present; then to artifacts as well as behavior; and lastly to the process of handing over things from one generation to an another, as well as to the things handed over.

In other respects they are quite different. While the tradition-domain centers around the rural, the 'old peasant society' of the 17th and 19th centuries, and is mainly geared towards production of locality and regionality, 'kulturarv' is predominantly urban, centered around the remnants of the noble and the bourgeoisie, geared towards the international or transnational,

[8] In the Swedish official glossary 'kulturarv' is defined as: "what a people or nation in terms of (spiritual) culture has taken over from earlier generations."See http://g3.spraakdata.gu.se/saob/ "kulturarv"
[9] Regina Bendix april 2004, personal communication
[10] Note the connection here to the World Heritage Convention from 1972.

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and in Gotland with a focus on the medieval. If the core of 'tradition' is customs, rituals and expressive forms, such as narratives, music, dance, the core of 'kulturarv' is monuments, groups of buildings and sites.

'Tradition' '	Kulturarv' ('Heritage')
Folk, peasants	Bourgeoisie, the upper class
Poor	Rich
Rural	Urban
17-19th centuries	Middle Ages
Customs, rituals, expressive forms	Monuments, groups of buildings, sites
Local and regional	Transnational, global
Sweden	Europe
Immaterial	Material

An important difference between tradition and heritage in the Gotlandic context is the type of spaces or scapes they produce. Tradition produces a closed space, you cannot just move into it. Tradition works much like ethnoscapes or VIP-clubs: to enter you have to be a member, or to be invited by a member, and membership is genealogical, it comes with birth. Cultural heritage produces a much more open space that almost anybody can move into. Instead of membership by birth, the right kind of values - and wallets - are necessary, and acceptance of the master narrative of the domain, that of the importance of careful preservation.[11] Using computer language you could say that while tradition operates with restricted access to the source codes and with closed interfaces, heritage operates with open sources and interfaces.

In Gotland, as in many other places in Sweden, tradition sets up a rural mindscape - there is not much tradition in town. In principle, tradition is all over the countryside, every parish, every family, every group can have its own tradition. If, as the Swedish ethnologist Jonas Frykman once put it: "tradition is ennobled custom", tradition has to be in the plural: you have yours, we have ours, they have theirs. From early 19th century the 'folk' has been the main 'tradition-bearers', and if, as the American folklorist Alan Dundes has demonstrated, 'folk' is

[11] In May 2004 a house was for sale in Visby at a new Swedish "all-time-high" prize record per square meter.

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any group with at least one common denominator, tradition has to end up in the plural: every folk has its own tradition (Dundes 1980).

'Kulturarv', 'cultural heritage', works quite differently. It is predominantly an urban phenomenon. Even where heritage is located in the countryside it is part of an urban mindscape. There is much less of it, which makes it more precious and expensive. 'Kulturarv' tends be understood in the singular: 'kulturarvet,' the cultural heritage.

While 'tradition' tends to fill the landscape, there is much less of ´kulturarv'.

If 'tradition' produces the local, 'kulturarv' clerarly is tied to larger units, such as the nation, Europe, or as in World Heritage, the entire world. Within these units it produces the common, as in "our cultural heritage". From this follows that not everybody can have or appoint cultural heritage, which is why heritage production to a much higher degree than tradition is in the hands of specially approved professional experts. 'Kulturarv' is carefully selected according to certain approved criteria. In terms of Anthony Giddens heritage production can be described as a modern institutionalized machinery, dependant on trust in abstract globalised expert systems (Giddens 1990) Selection is the key, the more selection the more need for expertise. The current expansion of the word threatens this order of things, which is a possible reason why the main actors now seem to be on their way to abandon the concept.

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‘Kulturarv’ ”empties” spaces, which makes them possible to refill with all kinds of inhabitants. In Visby the Middle Ages is rhetorically populated with people of diverse origins, Germans and Swedes, jokers and jesters, tradesmen, knights and violent kings. But the space does not belong to any of these people. It belongs to everybody and nobody, it is ours, but not mine or yours. Cultural heritage resists local people’s claims for indigenous rights. While tradition can be produced locally, the production of ‘kulturarv’ is centralized and produces something beyond the local and regional, beyond the distinctive, the ethnic, the multicultural, beyond all those groups with their differences. It is everybody’s and therefore nobody’s

Tradition focuses a specific past, certain types of places, behavior and artifacts. But the production is not necessarily about these things. Instead they are often intended to give life to the people behind, the folk, the villagers. Such mindscapes are easy to visit but difficult to enter. Cultural heritage focuses a much more generalised pastness than tradition and do not primarily point to the people behind, but more often to the monuments. groups of buildings and sites themselves.

From tradition to heritage

Heritage is a global phenomenon, but what interests me here is how this phenomenon is used locally to redefine, reformulate and take control over aesthetics, history, economy and power. The idea is that the change from tradition to heritage is significant, that it signals changes in the production of collective memory, and that this has to do with changes in local power structures. So, why is it that ‘kulturarv’, ‘cultural heritage’ has become such a great success in such a short time?

A part of the answer, I think, lies in the fact that the field of tension between tradition and ‘kulturarv’ in Gotland coincides with and reinforces almost all other important fields of tensions with long history in Gotland: rural- urban, low-high, islanders-mainlanders, peasants/workers – intellectuals/bureaucrats etc. A result of this strongly charged set of relations is that other possible heritage productions, built around industries and workers’ history or around ethnic groups and ”multiculture”, become almost totally irrelevant and

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invisible. The earlier emphasis on rural traditions and today's emphasis on the Middle Ages has resulted in few and vague traces of workers and immigrants.

As already mentioned the shift from tradition to heritage represents in effect an urbanisation of publicly displayed and officially sanctioned cultural representations of Gotland. If before the "true Gotland" was situated in the countryside, today it has moved to Visby. This in turn can be related to a number of social, cultural and economical changes in the 1970's and 80's, as well as to changes in the political structures on the island. From the 1970's new types of professionals have moved to Visby and Gotland, and by and large it is their values and dreams that are implemented in the heritage mindscape, their ideas of a good life and a good place to live that is staged. Locked out of the 'tradition' mindscape, being newcomers from the mainland, and on principle grounds excluded from being an 'Gotlander', they were able to stage new forms of cultural representations that did not exclude them, but on the contrary, placed them in the very center – Visby's inner parts.

As John Gillis notices, in many places the recent wave of interest in genealogy and local history is generated largely by people "from away". Their appreciation of the place they have moved to is constituted through a temporal distance, making them oblivious to the presentist concerns of the locals. And, as John Gillis puts it, "when strangers have the power to impose their image of there and then on a place, the local's sense of living in the here and now is notably heightened." (Gillis 2001) This is certainly the case in Gotland. Among islanders, especially from the countryside, it is not uncommon to mutter over the annual invasion of medievalists. There is even a mock-resistance movement among the most daring refuseniks, jokingly called "*Våga vägra medeltiden*" [Dare to refuse the Middle Ages"]. As Gillis also notices, islanders today often find themselves promoting the image of remotedness as vital to the tourist trade, while at the same time struggling against the notions of backwardness and inferiority that this image brings about. This is also true of Gotlanders, who, as so many other islanders internalise remoteness as a feeling of inferiority and backwardness, ultimately leading the younger generation to migrate.

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Effects of heritage production

Three effects of heritage production, at the same time closely related strategies for taking control over the mindscapes brought about by such production, is historization, culturalization, and aesthetization. Historization is to use the past to give form to the present and the future. Culturalization is when people start to reformulate in cultural terms who they are and what should represent them as a collective. In heritage production aesthetisation is both a goal and a means to reach other goals. On the one hand aesthetics often is a self-evident good and an unquestionable value, on the other it is also an important means to seize power. Through aesthetization important issues can be moved from the political sphere to contexts where questions about style and taste are settled by professional aesthetical expertise.

The influx of monetary and cultural capital in connection to the World Heritage appointment has led to an intensified aesthetisation of the Visby's inner parts. The result can be described as an art gallery that exhibits objects ready for visual consumption: houses, streets, shops and restaurants represented as full-scale models of themselves. The main object, however, is the art gallery itself, the reconstructed model of the Hanseatic Town of Visby. As in all art galleries the whole appears only when you pass through the exhibition halls at a minimal speed and distance. "The artists", then, are not the creators of the parts, but of the whole - reconstructors and preservationists, such as antiquarians, architects, cultural historians. In this light the World Heritage appointment can be seen as a part of a general development in which precedence over formulation and interpretation of central cultural representations has moved from producers to reproducers (cf Gillgren 2000).

So, for whom is heritage produced? Who will benefit from it, in terms of economy and power? In this case the inhabitants of Visby is a possible answer. The World Heritage appointment has provided augmented aesthetical qualities, raised attention, and increased real estate values, which can enlarge their resources and lifespace. Another answer is the tourists, who are generally pointed at as Gotland's saviors from decay and oblivion. A third is the heritage producers themselves. Both the inhabitants of Visby and the tourists can then be seen as the necessary means to confirm and increase their cultural values and capital.

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What does heritage say and do? An important part of the machinery that produces heritage is certain rhetoric formulae that provide general abstract explanations and legitimation. Five common types are easily distinguishable: heritage creates/reinforces identities and gemeinschafts; heritage creates stability in a world marked by increasing tempo of life, faster changes, fragmentation and decreasing continuity in people's lifes-worlds; heritage is a result of a general growth of interest in history in times of economical recession; heritage is aesthetical compensation for structural, cultural, and/or economical marginality or deprivation; heritage is an answer to (post/late)modern processes that promote play and experience, a general development "from informative to performative" (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 1998).

Together with the heritage productions themselves, these rhetoric formulae represent and reinforce widespread ideas about a growing qualitative difference between the past and the present. The heritage industry's answer to this alarming development is of course preservation. Heritage also reinforces ideas about cultures, nations, groups as having an identity that can be lost and found, and that without such an identity people cannot make their way towards the future. Perhaps even more important is that it reinforces the commodification of memories, through objectification, aestethization and historization; sets up markets where such commodified memories can be displayed, bought and sold; increases and directs attention, tourist flows and cultural capital etc. In short, it is not so much that heritage is about power, or has a power-aspect, heritage production is a way to exercise power.

A final question

In a couple of articles the Norwegian folklorist Anne Eriksen (1993, 1995) has discussed the relation between tradition and modernity. She notes that many of the traits attributed to traditional societies are clearly oppositional to those understood as typically modern. This opposition, she argues, makes tradition a part of modernity, and the whole idea of 'tradition' modern (Eriksen 1995:23). Almost commonplace among ethnologists today, here I would like to pursue this argument just a small step further. I have tried to show that the production of 'kulturarv' in Gotland is in many ways in opposition to the older 'tradition'. If 'tradition' is a modern concept, what then is 'kulturarv'? If we understand tradition as a part of modernity, as

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its logical opposite, shall we then understand 'kulturarv' as a part of another kind of opposition, belonging to another type of society, such as late modernity or postmodernity?

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