

DISCUSSION POINT

RADAR PROJECT: INTERACTIVE MAP OF CULTURAL HISTORY

We all live on a landscape. A landscape, either an artificial urban architecture or a natural landscape, shapes us like we shape and conceptualise the landscape around us.

Landscape and its importance to society has been emphasised and valued by several scholars of different disciplines. It is an environmental issue (Raudsepp 2001), but at the same time it is closely interrelated with human society and culture, which have been studied by scholars of different fields from archaeology (Lang 1999) to anthropology (Gov, P. 1996).

The most important ways of conceptualising and “domesticating” landscape in local socio-geography are legends and folktales (Tuan 2002, Ingold 1993), and toponyms (Lotman 2001), emphasising important objects in the landscape. Next to folklore, landscapes have been conceptualised through buildings, burial sites and other man-made objects. Legends, narratives, toponyms and constructions attributed to different landscape elements refer to the attitude of the local community to the surrounding world and reflect how community identifies itself.

Proceeding from the above argumentation, the folklore department of the Estonian Literary Museum decided to create a digital map of Estonia reflecting how the landscape surrounding us has been conceptualised and perceived by local inhabitants. The project became to be called *Radar*, symbolising a search and also the Estonian word *rada*, meaning ‘a pathway’, which joins different objects on the landscape. Originally, the project was intended as an additional educational material for schools, but when the pilot project was completed, we realised that it comprises much more and would interest other institutions and a wider circle of readers, interested in their past, ancestors and home place, or the landscape, where they have lived and continue to live and which is being consistently (re)conceptualised.

The *Radar* pilot project area was present-day Lääne-Viru County. The county is rich in archaeological, art, architectural, and most importantly, folkloric monuments. Furthermore, Lääne-Viru County is among the best studied counties by scholars of different disciplines. Representatives of all the previously mentioned fields of study have conducted numerous field work in the area. Choosing Lääne-Viru County for a pilot project gave the best and the most concise idea of how to study the rest of Estonia in the future.

For the pilot project, all local narrative history concerning the region was searched from the different archives of the Estonian Literary Museum (Estonian Folklore Archives, Estonian Cultural History Archives), and then digitalised. Then, materials from local history museums (mostly from the local narrative history files of the Väike-Maarja Museum) were accumulated, resulting in an extensive corpus of information on all the parishes in the Lääne-Viru County. In summer 2003, field work was conducted in the area, in the course of which the location of all the objects mentioned in narrative history was determined, measured with GPS and photographed. The objects were located with an invaluable help from local historians, since many objects of folkloric significance have begun to fall into oblivion with the hurry and mobility of contemporary life; reintroducing objects and places of folkloric value to the local people is one of the additional values of *Radar*.

During photographing, all the discovered objects were then entered in a digital map and linked to photographs and folktales. References to original sources have also been included, thus the project can be used for scientific purposes. Both the photographs and folklore texts have been included in the database of the folklore server.

The pilot project resulted in the completed interactive map of Lääne-Viru County with icons of folkloric objects. A click on an icon opens the object description with a photograph. Hyperlinked references to original sources are added to the text.

A work of this scope differs widely from folkloric fieldwork so far, which main purpose has been collecting folklore. *Radar* processes the existing folklore material and links it to specific locations on the landscape.

Both the pilot project and the following main project follow the historical parish structure. This means that data has not been sorted according to present-day county and parish borders, but according to the centuries-long borders of church parishes. Sorting by this principle takes into consideration the formed cultural areas, and also conforms to the sorting of folkloric, linguistic and ethnological material in the collections since the mid-19th century.

Main Project

The main project of *Radar* will be carried out in stages. By the year 2008 the department will hopefully complete the map of eastern Estonia, comprising the historical Viru County, Tartu County, Võru County and the Setu region. The basic work stages will be the same than in the pilot project, where the choice has proven to be efficient. In addition to folkloric material, cultural historical information will be added to some objects. Other maps are intended to add to the final result. Estonian Art Academy has initiated an analogous project on art and cultural monuments, aiming to determine the location of different objects significant in Estonian cultural history or associated with historical figures, and to compile a similar database. The National Heritage Board has already completed a database of archaeological monuments under protection; an analogous database of protected nature monuments has been completed by the Estonian Nature Infosystem. The variation and linking of four analogous layers on different subject will probably provide a new and a more complete view of how our ancestors have perceived and conceptualised themselves in the surrounding environment.

The pilot project has so far been supported by the Estonian Literary Museum, Cultural Endowment of Estonia, the Council of Gambling Tax, the Estonian National Culture Foundation, etc. Their support has allowed to purchase necessary equipment for fieldwork and to complete the work. Hopefully, we will find new supporters for the main project, and the new, attractive, multifunctional means for studying, conceptualising and introducing Estonian culture can be completed.

The project team

References

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