

ABSTRACT

Ack Värmland. Regionalitet i diskurs och praktik (Ack Värmland. The region in discourse and practice) (Written in Swedish with an English summary) by Carina Kullgren. Department of Ethnology 2000.

This thesis deals with the Swedish county Värmland, its nature, landscape, people and history. The question to be answered is how the idea of a region is constructed in the form of narratives which are combined in different ways in order to construct ideas, values and norms that can be put to use for economical, political, social or cultural reasons.

Different themes, such as the landscape, people and historic episodes, have created narratives that aim at naturalising Värmland by constituting its boundaries and its core, but at the same time undermining the clear borders in all cardinal points. Värmland resides as a number of floating possibilities for identification in the form of different narratives about its long history and earlier periods of self-government. The most distinguishing characteristic is, however, the multiplicity of Värmland, which is seen as enriching every aspect of its manifoldness.

“The people of Värmland” is a central theme in the discourse of Värmland. In novels and other texts about the landscape the typical inhabitant of Värmland is a recurrent figure. Unwrapping the discontinuities of social community reveals the unequal descriptions that favours men and put women in the position of being “natural” (and thereby becoming equal to “landscape”), beautiful (like nature) or honourable and thereby reduced to a place in the kitchen. At the same time is Värmland populated by women who deviate from heterosexual norms that surround the construction of gender in general. They can thus become liminal characters and contribute to the idea of Värmland as something opposed to the centre and therefore support the idea of a regional identity.

The complex idea of Värmland has been distributed along some important institutionalised paths. The industrialisation of Värmland rearranged the landscape in ways that changed the condition for the production of mental images of the county. Another important flow of information that has affected Värmland as a region is the importance of social movements in the area as well as political and financial initiatives. In later years a strategy has been developed to tell narratives about Värmland as a tourist gaze, which must be understood in relation the recession that has made Värmland become a sparsely populated and financially weak region. The reconstruction of Europe has established new paths for the creation of regional identity, resulting in both possibilities and constraints. Changes force regions to create a distinctive picture of themselves in relation to other regions in Europe. The narrative tension is then not primarily between centre and periphery, but between regionally based clusters of attraction.

Keywords: regions, regional identity, Värmland, narratives, culture, landscape

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