

Making use of history: The revival of the bagpipe in Sweden in the 1980s¹

by Owe Ronström, 1989

Introduction

In the 1980s a type of bagpipe, formerly used in parts of Dalarna (Dalecarlia), Sweden, was brought out of the museums, spread all over the country and played again as never before. The very few known traditional bagpipers were rediscovered and their music and life-histories reconstructed to suit new purposes. The subject of this paper is to describe and analyse this process, when parts of a common historical and cultural heritage were transformed and used in contemporary society as objects of identification.

Theoretical discussion

Central to the revival of the bagpipe in Sweden are the concepts of 'tradition' and 'cultural identity'. A common way to speak about revival movements of this kind is to say that "by awakening an old and long since forgotten tradition, people have strengthened their cultural identity". This is a type of "account" (Lyman and Scott 1968) that is abundant in newspapers which report of the revival, and among the revivers themselves. Also among anthropologists, ethnologists, ethnomusicologists etc., the concepts are frequently used as accounts, arriving at them as conclusion instead of taking them as points of departure for a more problem oriented discussion.² The concepts of 'tradition' and 'cultural identity' are commonly used in everyday languages as well as in specific scientific languages, but however useful they may seem to be, as analytical tools they raise several important problems.

Tradition

'Tradition' implies the handing over from one generation to the other of cultural or natural entities, such as abstract habits, norms, values or material objects and artefacts. 'Tradition' *refers* to the past, but this past is continuously recreated in the present (Hymes 1975, Hobsbawm 1983) and "because continuity is constructed, it includes an element of discontinuity. To refer to the past, to take account of or to interpret it, implies that one is located in the present, that one is distanced or apart from the object reconstructed" (Handler & Linnekin 1984: 287). What is important is that to "refer to", or "to be about", is not a natural but a *symbolical relationship*, without any "objective deposit" that is being handed over (ibid. 275f).

If accepted that 'tradition' is an ongoing reconstruction of social life that is symbolically constituted, the problematic relationship between 'tradition' and 'modernisation', between

¹ This is a revised version of a paper which was originally prepared for and read at the 29th conference of the International Council for Traditional Music (ICTM) in Berlin July 30th-August 6th, 1987. The theme of the conference was Music and cultural identity.

² The ICTM conference in Berlin gave many examples of this kind of research.

continuity and discontinuity dissolves. This inevitably leads towards a consideration also of the concept of 'culture' and 'cultural identity', since these concepts are so closely linked together.

Cultural identity

'Cultural identity' is problematic, as I see it, for several important reasons. Both parts of the concept are certainly problematic and the combination of them raises even more difficult questions. 'Culture' is often understood as an objectively existing superindividual entity, with presupposed homogeneity and consistency, hence people are treated as collective bearers of "a heavy historical yoke", reproducing culture, rather than active and creative agents. Diversity is too often overcome by rigid classification into fixed categories, and change is perceived as a shift between two discontinuous categories (from 'before' to 'after').³

'Identity', in a similar way of thinking, is commonly understood as a human quality which is inscribed in the individual during his first years. Identity, like culture, is supposed to be a homogenous and consistent entity which is floating in the blood, hence the contents of this entity can be described and analysed and "loss of identity" can be treated as a psychomedical problem.

'Cultural identity' refers to an intermediate level in between the superindividual and individual levels. It is reasonable in social analysis to operate with such an intermediary level, but to determine the relations between 'culture' and 'identity' and the processes of intermediation poses almost unresolved problems. 'Culture' is an abstracted superstructure which cannot be readily located at the individual level; 'identity' is located in the individual psyche and cannot easily be turned into a collective representation.

As a result of the combination of the objectified concepts of culture and identity, it is often the identity of a culture (a *cultural* identity) which is studied, rather than the part of an individual's identity experiences which stems from sharing culture with others (a *cultural identity*). As is the case with other concepts of the same kind (social, ethnic, collective identity) cultural identity is often inferred by scientists with an outsiders perspective. A cultural tradition is defined and described and those who are not willing to stick to the definition are described as having "lost their cultural identity". Closely related to this is the persistent thought that you have to be a born X to be able to play X-music.⁴ This is a type of "alter-casting", where one of the agents in social interaction (the more powerful) creates, or casts, an "identity" for the other (the less powerful) and forces him to adhere to it (Lange & Westin 1981). Identity concepts are based in social interaction and an

³ This point was explored by Anthony Seeger in his paper "The musical negotiation of cultural identities between Indians and Non-Indians in the twentieth century", read at the Berlin conference.

⁴ In the conference in Berlin Linda Fujie reported upon this kind of thinking in her paper "Governmental arts organisations and musical traditions: The case of Japanese taiko drumming groups in the United States". She stated that among the governmental arts organisations in New York a traditional music is considered to belong to a community and mirror the identity of the community. To be born in the community is a prerequisite for traditional musicians to be able to get subsidies from the funds of the arts organisations. In their paper in the same conference Märta Ramsten and Jan Ling reported upon the musical tradition in Leksand, Sweden. Among the folk musicians it is explicitly stated that you have to be from Leksand to be able to perform the folk music from Leksand. Whether you ever have lived in Leksand seems not as important, it is the inherited "roots" that matters.

important aspect of all social interaction is power. In many cases the concept "cultural identity" is used as an instrument for establishing and maintaining a specific power structure.⁵

Another related problem is that this type of cultural identity ("a culture's identity") is supposed to be internalised in the individual, as is the personal identity. People who strategically make use of their multicultural knowledge, whose "cultural identity" can be said to be founded in their versatility in many different cultural idioms, must then be treated as anomalies, outside the system. This has actually been the case with the *klezmer* musicians and gypsy-musicians in eastern Europe (Slobin 1984).

The discussed concepts are vague and problematic abstractions but they nevertheless seem analytically indispensable. As I see it, much can be won by taking 'culture' and 'identity' not to be real existing entities, but *symbolical constructs*. Then, 'culture' is not *what* is shared, but *the sharing in itself* (cf "I know that you know that I know") (Hannerz 1983); 'identity' is not an entity with certain identifiable qualities, but the experience of *sameness*⁶ which stems from comparisons and negotiations made in social interaction. The identity has three aspects: 1) Two objects or concepts are said to be one and the same, they are *identical*, 2) Two persons or objects are said to be the same under different circumstances and during different times, they show *continuity*, 3) One person is the same as he claims to be, which is the juridical aspect of *legitimation* (Brück 1984).

The implication of this theoretical discussion is that 'cultural identity' is to be understood as the result of constantly ongoing contrastive processes of categorisation, related to any or all of the three aspects of identity. The identity "is always formulated in interaction with others, and depends upon evolving distinctions between categories that are symbolically constituted ..." (Handler & Linnekin 1984: 287). These evolving distinctions have their different frames of interpretation, all of which are *keyed* in special ways. Many such frames of interpretation can be at work simultaneously (Goffman 1974) and how this keying, or *cultural foregrounding* (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 1983), is actually carried out must be determined only situationally.

Neither are these theoretical standpoints new, nor should they today be provocative or hard to understand. But it seems to me that too little has been done when it comes to converting theories into empirical studies. Still lingering behind the rhetorics of social theory are a lot of "normalised" practices of research, resulting in reifications of social life, and certainly in simplifications. What we need now, most of all, is not more theories, but empirical studies of all kinds where the processual, the ongoing, the creative aspects are underlined.

Taking the theoretical discussion outlined above into consideration, I have tried to analyse how history was transformed and used and how cultural identities were evoked in the revival of the bagpipe in Sweden. The main hypothesis is that the revival would not have been possible without the interconnection of contrastive processes of cultural identity at several different levels. Here I will be content to analyse a few of the contrastive processes involved, relying up on interviews,

⁵ A most obvious example of this has been given by John Blacking, who states that "The south African government's planned multiculturalism imposed a new kind of cultural hegemony by refusing to incorporate blacks, on the grounds that their indigenous cultures must be respected and preserved." (Blacking 1984: 18.)

⁶ I am grateful to Lena Gerholm for important remarks on several of the topics discussed above.

participant observation and insights gained as a bagpiping musician, myself being a part of the described revival movement.

The bagpipe in Sweden up to the 1970's⁷

The bagpipe seems to have been generally known in Sweden from medieval times up to the 17th and 18th century (Rehnberg 1943: 8-19). There seem to have been several types of instruments. One presumably older type is known only from medieval iconographic sources, one or several other types have been used until quite recently among the Swedish speaking population of Estonia and the Baltic Islands and one type was used primarily in the western part of Dalarna (Dalecarlia). There are around fifteen instruments of the latter type preserved, most of which are presumed to have been made during the 19th century.

This rather odd type of bagpipe consists of a small stitched bag, made of tanned calfskin, with a shape similar to a calf's stomach. The pipes, made from spruce or birch, are connected to the bag by means of stocks which are tied or nailed into the bag. The chanter is usually between 20 and 25 centimetres long, with 6 finger holes and a thumbhole. The finger holes are drilled or burned out. Special tuning holes or vent holes are drilled out on some chanters, near the mouth of the pipe. These holes are intended to facilitate the tuning of the lowest note. The drone is between 20 and 30 centimetres and is usually made in one piece. The sound was produced by a single reed. The preserved reeds are rather primitive in comparison to the reeds used for bagpipes, for example, in the Balkans or the British Isles.

Very little is known about the tuning of bagpipes in Sweden, the playing techniques that were used, the tunes that were played, or on what occasions they were performed. The very few known bagpipers of the late 19th century all lived in western Dalarna. Gudmunds Nils Larsson (1892-1949), from the village Hulån, near Järna, who learnt a few tunes from his father, was the last known traditional bagpiper in Sweden. However, he was never much of a musician and his repertoire seems to have consisted only of a couple of polska-tunes and a march.

The first revival

The first revival of the bagpipe in Sweden started as early as the late 1930's, when prominent persons in hembygdsföreningen (the local cultural history association) in Järna were engaged in the project of making Gudmunds Nils Larsson a symbol of the unique and deep cultural roots of the region and especially of the villages around Järna. 1943 Mats Rehnberg published his dissertation "Säckpipan i Sverige" (The bagpipe in Sweden). This scientific study was a first basic prerequisite for the revival of the bagpipe in Sweden. It is worth noting the dialectical interplay between the dissertation and the subjects of the study. During fieldwork in 1941 and 1942 Rehnberg visited Järna several times and inspired Gudmunds Nils Larsson to order new chanters for his instrument and to improve his playing capacities, and the work also helped to give the local people a more positive picture of the instrument (Ronström 1990).

⁷ This paragraph draws upon Ronström 1982.

Among the first to take an active interest in the reconstruction of the bagpipe were two members in Dalaföreningen (the association of people from Dalarna) in Stockholm, the music teacher Ture Gudmundsson and the veterinary surgeon Hjalmar DalImer. A number of copies of Gudmunds Nils Larssons instrument were made, some of them with direct inspiration from Rehnberg's dissertation. Using one of these, Ture Gudmundsson made the first recording of Swedish bagpipe music for the Swedish Radio corporation in 1949.⁸ However, in the 50's and 60's the interest in the bagpipe faded and disappeared, not to return until the late 1970's.

The revival of the 1980's

At the end of the 1970's several persons, independent of each other and in different parts of the country, tried to make new bagpipes from models of old instruments. Although some of these persons, such as the instrument-maker and musician Åke Egevad, made very fine instruments and also became good bagpipers, their efforts were met with very little interest. The real revival started when the young gifted folk musician Per Gudmundsson, together with a talented young amateur instrument-maker, both from Dalarna, created an instrument based on old bagpipes found in museums. The instrument-maker, Leif Eriksson, made bagpipes first only to order, but later he began to produce instruments on a larger scale, for sale at Dalarna's museum in Falun. This association with the museum helped to give Eriksson's newly constructed model a kind of legitimation, as an Authentic Swedish Folk Music Instrument. The accessibility of this well-made and fairly cheap instrument, together with a small booklet giving the basic know-how of bagpiping, was the second basic prerequisite of the bagpipe revival.

The number of bagpipers grew slowly and in 1980 Sjöviks *folkhögskola* (folk high school) in Dalarna arranged a weekend seminar for beginners on the bagpipe. Seminars of this kind were successfully repeated every year. A TV producer, with personal contacts among folk musicians in Dalarna, became interested and made a TV film about the bagpipe tradition in Sweden and the efforts to revive it.⁹ This film was broadcasted several times. The diffusion by TV and other media constitutes the third important prerequisite of the bagpipe revival.

The bagpipe festival in Järna, Dalarna

In June 1986 an international bagpipe festival was arranged in Järna, Dalarna. The idea of organising a big festival was launched by members of the *Järna spelmanslag* (fiddlers club), enthusiastically supported by the cultural secretary and librarian in the central community of the commune, Vansbro. Among the most active members of the *spelmanslag* were some well-educated professionals. They felt the idea of a bagpipe festival to be "in the air" and as a journalist from Järna, a distant relative of Gudmunds Nils Larsson, said: "If something like this is to be done, it is to be done here by us and not by somebody from Stockholm who comes here to fix it all and goes away when its ready" ("Ska det göras nånting sånt här då ska det vara förankrat här också bland oss

⁸ Up to the 1980's this was the only recording of a Swedish type of bagpipe. However, the recording must be regarded as not very successful and should not be used as a source for a study of the bagpipe in Sweden.

⁹ The producer is Johan Forsblad and the name of the film is "Att blåsa liv i en tradition" ("To infuse life into a tradition"). The film was recorded during 1982 and 1983 and broadcasted first time in April 1984.

och att det inte kommer nån Stockholmare, nån som kommer hit bara och fixar det och pyser iväg sen.”) (Invju 22/4 1987).

The project was heavily supported by district politicians, together with governmental cultural institutions. Most of the Swedish bagpipers, (including those playing foreign bagpipes), and bagpipers from other countries were invited. The three-day festival consisted of concert performances, lectures, workshops and an exhibition of bagpipes. By a series of symbols and symbolic actions the bagpipe was effectively tied to the commune and the village of Järna and used to advance its cultural capital. Relying on historical sources, provided by villagers specialising in local history, different programs were staged¹⁰ in which the local provenance of the bagpipe was explored. A picture of Gudmunds Nils Larsson playing the bagpipe was printed on postcards, badges, stickers and T-shirts, his instrument and even his cap was shown behind glass in the exhibition, his grandson gave a short speech during the opening ceremony of the festival, a local craftsman even made small sculptures of the new local hero to be sold at the festival.

Against the odds the festival aroused tremendous interest from regional as well as national mass media. All newspapers in Dalarna reported extensively from the festival, two of the biggest newspapers in Swedish published detailed reports with pictures, and radio and television companies from Sweden, Norway and Finland broadcasted direct from the festival. Apart from the media the festival was an affair mostly for the already initiated bagpipers and some curious villagers from the region, all in all not exceeding some 500 persons. Nevertheless the bagpipe festival was considered a great success and it will be repeated in the coming years.

To sum up, a scientific dissertation about the bagpipe in Sweden, good and cheap bagpipes for public sale, the diffusion of the instrument and its music by national media and the bagpipe festival in Järna were important in the process of reviving the bagpipe in Sweden. By a creative process of social engineering the initiators succeeded in making Leif Eriksson's bagpipes known and widely accepted as a Swedish National Instrument of old and ancient origin and an object of cultural identification.

The bagpipe as an object of identification

The Dalecarlian and the Swedish

In the last part of the 19th century , Dalarna was established as the most authentic and traditional region in Sweden, although it in many respects was one of the most atypical. Due to special historical, demographic and economical circumstances, peasants in the lake Siljan area lived in big and densely populated villages with a rather egalitarian structure and highly developed social control. Lacking fertile soil they were forced into seasonal labour migration on a large scale (Rosander 1976, 1985). They became known all over Sweden as a special type of people, highly conservative and traditional in their ways of living, with their dialect, colourful folk costumes and peculiar songs and fiddle tunes as distinctive "ethnic" markers. The villages around lake Siljan were the models from which people like Artur Hazelius, the founder of Nordiska muséet and

¹⁰ One of the more spectacular was a group of soldiers in two-hundred year old uniforms playing bagpipes while marching from the centre of the village of Järna to the festival area.

Skansen (the big open air museum in Stockholm) created the picture of the *Typical Swedish Peasant Society*. This was supposed to be a society without class struggles, where people were proud to stick to the traditions of the old days, obviously a suitable model for the bourgeoisie in their struggle for economical and political power at the turn of the century (Frykman & Löfgren 1979).

In this truly anachronistic model, explicitly manifested in the permanent exhibitions at Skansen, the Dalecarlian was equated with the Swedish, the very specific with the most typical. This model was taken over by the people from Dalarna themselves and used as a platform for a type of provincial nationalism which tried to re-establish the medieval administrative unit, *landskapet* ('the landscape'), as the basic unit of identification (Löfgren 1987: 6).¹¹ From the beginning of this century love for the mother country and love for *hembygden* (the home-region) was impressed upon the coming generations as two sides of the same coin (Alsmark 1982: 34). This type of "standardized regional identity" (Löfgren 1987) was advocated by educated middle class people working in small towns and villages and it is among this kind of people-teachers, veterinary surgeons, dentists, etc.-that we find the first bagpipe revivers, in the 1940's as well as in the 1980's.

Although bagpipes were played and built by people from other regions, using different types of bagpipes as models for their experiments, it was only when people from Dalarna started to make and play instruments of the type found in Western Dalarna that the efforts to popularise the instrument met with success. In Dalarna, taking interest in ancient and primitive artefacts such as the bagpipe is not simply odd and peculiar, as it would be in other parts of Sweden, but a natural and highly praised way of preserving the specific cultural heritage of the region. Whilst a bagpipe from other parts of Sweden would have been met with suspicious questions about authenticity, the bagpipe of the Dalarna type was at once accepted as genuine. The bagpipe was easy to fit into the widely accepted model of Dalarna as, at one and the same time, the most specific and typical Swedish peasant society and this model provided the newly constructed bagpipe with a suitable historical and contextual frame. The bagpipe could thus be used to fortify the border between the Dalecarlians and the Others, represented by the tourists invading the Lake Siljan area by the hundreds of thousands every summer.

According to the model, the identification of the instrument as *Dalasäckpipan* (the Bagpipe of Dalarna) at once made it known also as the *Swedish Bagpipe* and only then could it be made into an object of national identification. In the beginning of the 1980s several folkmusic magazines published articles where the Dalecarlian type of bagpipe was presented as The Swedish Bagpipe,¹² and in papers reporting from the festival in Järna this was made explicit through accounts such as: "The Swedish bagpipe is back." "Not only the Scots play the bagpipe, it was also played in Sweden." "Vansbro stages top festival: Did you know that the district of Vansbro once was the home of bagpipes in Sweden?"

¹¹ During this period the 24 landscapes in Sweden were furnished with their own "landscape-songs", "landscape-flowers", "landscape-arms". Dalarna also received its own regional symbol during this period, the "dalahäst" (See Gerverus 1980).

¹² For example Boberg 1981, Ternhag 1980, Säter 1984.

Although the bagpipe is generally held to be primitive and backward, it is at the same time considered to be an ancient instrument which can be used as an indication of a long history of civilisation. The rich cultural heritage of the Swedes, now confirmed also by the existence of a Swedish bagpipe, is frequently alluded to in all kinds of reports about the bagpipe revival, especially from the bagpipe festival. I suggest that this can be interpreted also as an indication of the newly reborn and growing interest in the ethnicity of the Swedes. The problem of "Swedishness" has been highlighted in recent years by Sweden's many immigrants – by now constituting over 1/8 of the entire population – from more than a hundred nations, and also through the very powerful Americanisation disseminated through TV, Radio and other national mass media. Other indications of this interest range from courses in local dialects and weaving techniques, books about Swedish food, to the scientific study of "Swedishness".¹³

The region, the district, the village and the fiddlers club

While on the national level the bagpipe was identified as either Dalasäckpipan or The Swedish Bagpipe, depending on the situation, in Western Dalarna none of these categorisations were considered relevant. In the small and poor communities of Sweden, such as Järna and Vansbro, one of the most deeply felt oppositions is against people from the more developed urban areas, mainly in the south. Against the economical powers of *stockholmare* (a pejorative denoting anybody from a big city in the south) people in remote rural areas have been advancing diverse strategies for fostering and developing any kind of local initiative.

The bagpipe festival in Järna was arranged by a local committee led by the librarian and cultural secretary of the commune. The committee applied for financial support from the commune and without any debate it was granted 150,000 sw kronor, more than 1/3 of the total budget for public cultural events in the commune. The local politicians, characterised by the chairman of the cultural authority as "totally uninterested in cultural affairs", supported the project mainly as a means of promoting the commune on the tourist market. The severe economic crisis of the peripheral districts in Sweden has forced the small and poor communes to engage in aggressive PR and "survival projects", to attract industries and tourists by specialising in different ways. The communes have been forced to use all kinds of economic and cultural capital, to seek new unexplored niches in this struggle for existence. In the 1980s we have been presented with "The ecology commune", "The commune of advanced technology", "The friendly commune", "The commune with the long cultural tradition" etc. In this case we find the commune of Vansbro establishing itself on this market as "The commune of bagpipes"!

The same kind of struggle is at the same time going on within the region itself. Although situated in Dalarna, the communes in Southern and Western Dalarna have not been able to benefit from the model of Dalarna as the most authentic landscape in Sweden. Almost all resources connected to the tourist industry, to the regional administration and the few big factories in the region, have been concentrated in eastern Dalarna, especially the lake Siljan and Borlänge-Falun areas. "It annoys me that it is so difficult for us to stand up against the parishes by the lake Siljan" ("Det retar mig att det är så svårt för oss att hävda oss gentemot Siljanssocknarna") said the leading cultural politician in

¹³ Such studies are, among others Att vara svensk 1984, Gaunt & Löfgren 1984.

Vansbro. The bagpipe festival was from the beginning intended to strengthen "the resistance movement against the east" as a leading member of Järna spelmanslag expressed it, and it was to this end that all the badges, stickers and T-shirts, connecting the bagpipe with Järna, were made.

The importance of this opposition to eastern Dalarna is twofold. For the common people in the commune, the politicians and some of the members of the organising committee, the discontent with the state of affairs is of general economical and cultural nature. But for the most active organisers, all of them members of *Järna spelmanslag*, the festival had yet another area of importance. While almost every little village in eastern Dalarna can boast a fiddler of national renown, the villages in Western Dalarna have long been lacking either prominent musicians, or the means to make them well-known. In the field of folkmusic, more important in Dalarna than anywhere else in Sweden, important struggles have been going on since the beginning of this century. Only in the late 70's were the folkmusicians of Western Dalarna able to advance their positions in this cultural battlefield, by exploring the styles and repertoires of local folkmusicians of the late 19th century. Going "back to the roots" in their search for a powerful symbol *Järna spelmanslag* found no prominent local fiddler to rediscover, but instead turned to the bagpipe and to Gudmunds Nils Larsson, thus in some respects continuing what was started already in the 1940s. Today, since he lives only in the memory of the oldest people in the village, it was easier to use Gudmunds Nils symbolically and to neglect the fact that he played only very little and most of ten when he was drunk; that he during his lifetime was considered a somewhat odd and strange figure; that he, in his last years, was commonly perceived mainly as a peculiar relic from a distant past, playing for the amusement of the children of the village.

For the members of the fiddler's club in Järna local provenance was far more important than the musical aspects of bagpipe playing. As one of them said: "This is not 'the Drone club' but 'the association of Gudmunds Nils friends' " (Det här är inte föreningen bordun, det är "Gudmunds Nils vänner" som gäller här).

The bagpipe festival was obviously aimed at strengthening the cultural identity of the villagers of Järna. But there was yet another contrastive process of importance within the village. The festival was an international affair, and among its stars were famous bagpipers from Bulgaria, England, Germany etc. To the young educated professionals in the fiddler's club it was important "to be able to show to the Järna villagers, the old men and women, that all this once existed here and that we ought to be proud of it, but also-look, we have new young players too, both in this area and further afield!" ("Att få visa Järnabönderna, gubbarna och gummorna, dels då att det här har funnits här och att vi borde vara stolta över det här, men titta nu, det finns nya yngre som håller på i våra trakter och längre bort...").¹⁴ These young people were at the same time advocating a local cultural heritage and rejecting what they perceived as the narrow-minded provincialism of the older villagers. To widen the horizons, to bring an international perspective closer to the village, was one of the objectives of the organisers.

¹⁴ From a recorded interview with Maud Granberg, journalist, member of the festival committee and the fiddlers club in Järna.

The bagpipe – a summarising symbol

From the discussion outlined above it is clear that the bagpipe has been used as an object of identification at many different levels simultaneously and that it is in contemporary Swedish society that it has become loaded with meaning. But still, all this would not have been possible were it not for the power of the instrument itself.

The suggestive sound of the instrument and its animal-like appearance have the power to evoke strong emotions as do few other instruments. In fact, the bagpipe is probably the only old musical instrument which is generally recognised in Sweden. In the “collective mind” of the more than 10,000 people I have questioned during fieldwork through a period of 10 years, the bagpipe exists as a strange, mythical instrument, made from a stomach of an animal,¹⁵ with a strong and impressive nasal sound (imitated by humming while closing the nostrils with two fingers). This is known to people who have never heard or seen a bagpipe, who know little or nothing about other musical instruments, and even to small children who can't distinguish a violin from a guitar.

Sherry Ortner has analysed a group of important symbols which she calls key symbols. *Summarising symbols* are those which are “seen as summing up, expressing, representing for the participants in an emotional powerful and relatively undifferentiated way, what the system means to them.” Such symbols “operate to compound and synthesise a complex system of ideas, to “summarise” them under a unitary form which, in an old-fashioned way, “stands for” the system as a whole (1973: 1339f).

I suggest that in modern Swedish society the bagpipe is an important symbol which stands for the old peasant society as a whole.¹⁶ The bagpipe is generally associated with a long-gone way of life, uncivilised, uncultivated and raw. The *bag*, believed to be a natural stomach, smelling and evoking strong feelings of disgust; the *blowpipe*, connecting the animal-bag directly with the mouth (also this strongly disgusting¹⁷); the first humorous *sounds from the pipes* while the bag is being filled, reminiscent of other “natural sounds”; the suggestive constant *humming of the drone*; all this effectively connects the bagpipe with the *natural*. The natural is ambivalent: it is the *primitive* as opposed to the *refined* but also the *simple* as opposed to the *artificial*. This ambivalence is

¹⁵ It is indeed interesting that the bag is thought to be a stomach, considering that the preserved bags all are made from stitched leather pieces in the shape of a calf's stomach. Among the Swedish population in the islands of the Baltic Sea the bags were made from the stomach of a seal, which was noted by Carl von Linné in 1741 (Linné 1975 (1741): 197). See also Rehnberg 1943: 21f. However, the bagpipes that ordinary people could possibly have seen or heard before the 1980's, such as the types from Scotland, England or the Balkans, do not have the shape of a stomach.

¹⁶ From the old iconographic sources in Sweden it seems clear that the bagpipe was used as a symbol of the worldly, low, and peasant-like as early as medieval times (Rehnberg 1943). However, as painted out by Hellqvist 1957, there are also other symbolic usages of the bagpipe in the wall-paintings and frescoes in medieval Swedish churches. Interesting points about the bagpipe as a symbol in Western art in general can be found in Winternitz 1967, Mahling 1976.

¹⁷ Feelings of disgust, connected to taking objects like the blowpipe of a bagpipe into the mouth, may well be a reason for the introduction of the bellows-blown bagpipe. Cf Winternitz 1967: 80: “The fashionable shepherds [of the 17th and 18th century], smelling rather of perfume than of the stable, took over the pastoral bagpipe along with the hats and ribbons. This folk instrument, as it then was, did not, of course, fit the hands of the courtiers. It has to be refined: its most awkward, heavy parts, particularly the drones, were reduced; the chanter became smaller in size and sweeter in tone and received more conveniently spaced fingerholes and, later, even keys; and, as mentioned before, the blowpipe, unbecoming to a lady's mouth, was replaced by bellows. Thus arose the musette. ...”

fundamental to the most important opposition connected to the revival of the bagpipe in Sweden, and it cuts through all the levels previously discussed.

Among people affiliated to the field of folk music and folk dance the concept of the “Old Swedish Peasant Society” is loaded with strong positive values of long and unbroken historical traditions. Here the simple, old and authentic are important and the bagpipe is generally thought to be older, simpler and more authentic than almost any other folk instrument.¹⁸ Therefore it has been an effective instrument for advancing the positions of its advocates, raising their cultural capital, both within the fields of folk music and folk dance and in society in general, since these fields have retained much of the symbolic values that have been invested in them ever since the late 19th century.

But this advanced position is not unquestioned, since among folk music enthusiasts, and certainly among people outside the world of folk music and folk dance, there are many who have strong negative feelings about the bagpipe. Its sounds are of ten described as uncomfortable, even physically insufferable, its appearance is described as sometimes entirely comic, sometimes as unpleasant and disgusting. Here the negative power of the bagpipe on the emotional level stands against its positive power on the symbolical level of expression.

Conclusion

In the process of reviving the bagpipe in Sweden parts of a common historical and cultural heritage have been transformed and used in contemporary society for many different purposes. The bagpipe has been placed in the midst of a set of contrastive processes important at several different levels. These contrastive processes are constantly recreating and reshaping the borderlines along which the categorisation of the ‘We’ and the ‘Other’ is taking place, and this in almost totally unpredictable ways. The cultural identities that become the result of these simultaneous and situationally defined processes have been described at the national, regional, local, group and individual levels. However, it seems to me that the most important, and at the same time the most intangible and elusive of all the processes involved in the revival of the bagpipe is connected to the instrument itself. It has a distinct garlic- or celery-like quality, which makes it hard to remain indifferent and unaffected when confronted with it. Its appearance, its sound, the associations it calls forth, inevitably evoke strong emotions; as with garlic and celery – either you like it or you don’t!

¹⁸ In Sweden, as in many other European countries, there has been a considerable interest in bagpipe-like sounds among all sorts of musicians. In her study of the changes in stylistic ideals among folk fiddlers in Sweden, Märta Ramsten has described the style which has been preponderant among the young since the seventies, as full of “sonorous double-stops and drones, with almost exaggerated markings of the rhythms by stamping, with the violin held against the chest and the bow held above the heel, making ‘technical’ playing impossible. An intentional archaic manner of playing (...) This style (...) can without the slightest doubt be seen as one of the most perceptible and tangible expressions of the folk music vogue among folk musicians.” (1985: 198f).

References

- Alsmark, Gunnar 1982 Folktraditionens roll vid utformandet av nationelloch regional identitet. In: Aili Nenola-Kallio (ed.): *Folktradition och regional identitet i Norden*. Åbo.
- Att vara svensk. Kungliga Vitterhets, Historie och Antikvitets Akademiens Konferenser 13.1984
- Blacking, John 1984 'Dance' as cultural system and human capability: An anthropological perspective. In: Janet Adshead (ed.) *Dance-a multicultural perspective. Report of the third study of dance conference*. University of Surrey, 5-9 April 1984. ss 4-21.
- Boberg, Juno 1981 Säckpipans historia. Säckpipan i Sverige: Säckpipans renässans, Omdans nr 3.
- Brück, Ulla 1984 Identitet, lokalsamhälle och lokal identitet. *Rig*, årgång 67, häfte 3, ss 65-77.
- Frykman, Jonas & Löfgren, Orvar 1979 *Den kultiverade människan*. Lund.
- Gaunt, David & Löfgren Orvar 1984 *Myter om svensken*. Stockholm.
- Greverus, Ina-Maja 1980 Bara en liten dalahäst eller: konsten att tolka en "folksymbol". I: Bengt Jacobsson, Lena Johannesson, Anna Jonsson, Olle Sjögren (eds.): *Folklig och kommersiell konst*. Stockholm.
- Goffman, Erving 1974 *Frame analysis*. New York.
- Handler, Richard & Linnekin, Jocelyn 1984 Tradition, Genuine or spurious. *Journal of American Folklore* 97: 273-290.
- Hannerz, Ulf 1983 Om skillnader i kulturlighet. In: Ulf Hannerz: *Över gränser. Studier i dagens socialantropologi*. Lund.
- Hellquist, Per-Anders 1957 Musik-motiv i Sveriges kyrkokonst före år 1600. Unpublished.
- Hobsbawm, Eric 1983 *Inventing Traditions*. In: *The invention of tradition*. (eds.) Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger. Cambridge.
- Hymes, Dell 1975 Folklore's Nature and Sun's Myth. *Journal of American Folklore* 88: 345-369 .
- Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara 1983 Studying ethnic and immigrant folklore. In: Richard M. Dorson (ed.): *Handbook of American folklore*. Bloomington, Indiana.
- Lange, Anders & Westin, Charles .1981 *Etnisk diskriminering och social identitet*. Stockholm.
- Linne, Carl von 1975 (1741) Carl Linneus öländska och gotländska resa år 1741. Stockholm.
- Lyman, Stanford M. & Marvin B. Scott 1968 *Accounts*. *American Sociological Review* 33: 46-62.
- Löfgren, Orvar 1987 Nationaliseringen av Sverige. Paper read at the seminar "Den svenska modellens kulturella ansikte", Umeå Universitet 14-16 January 1987. Unpublished.
- Mahling, Christoph Helmut 1976 *Der Dudelsack in westeuropäischer Plastik und Malerie*. *Studia Instrumentorum Musicae Popularis* 4: 63-70. Stockholm.
- Ortner, Sherry 1973 On key symbols. *American Anthropologist* 75: 1338-46.
- Ramsten, Märta 1985 The new fiddlers. Trends and revivalism in the folk music of the seventies. In: *Folkmusikvågen. (The folk music vogue)*. Stockholm.
- Rehnberg, Mats 1943 *Säckpipan i Sverige*. Stockholm.
- Ronström, Owe 1982 Om säckpipan i Sverige. *Sörmlandslåten*, 1:10.
- Ronström, Owe 1990: Kring säckpipan i Sverige. I: *Säckpipan i Norden*. (Per-Ulf Allmo red.) Stockholm & Uppsala: Allwin.
- Ronström, Owe 1990: "...fick av gumman i gården se en gammal spelpåse." Blåsa liv i en gammal tradition. Ett stycke nutidshistoria". I: *Säckpipan i Norden*. (Per-Ulf Allmo red.) Stockholm & Uppsala: Allwin. ss 159-170.
- Rosander, Göran 1976 *Turismen och de folkliga kulturen*. Dalarnas hembygdsbok.
- Rosander, Göran 1985 Den regionala identiteten. *Exemplet Dalarna*. *Nord: Nytt* 25: 27-42.
- Slobin, Mark 1984 Klezmer music: An American ethnic genre. *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 16: 34-41.
- Säther, Eva 1984 Säckpipan måste skötas som ett spädbarn. *Tonfallet*, nr 11: 18-19.
- Ternhag, Gunnar 1980 Tack vare Leif låter den svenska säckpipan! *Spelmannen* nr 3.
- Winternitz, Emanuel 1967 *Musical instruments and their symbolism in Western art*. London.