

## **Revival reconsidered**

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DRAFT!!

### **Introduction**

This article is an attempt to summarize and theorize over revival and related concepts. The aim is theoretical, the level is general and abstract. The discussion is based on my own research in Sweden, Hungary, Rumania, and former Yugoslavia, and on a vast and somewhat disparate literature on revival and related phenomena, from many parts of Europe and USA.

### **Approaches.**

Revival has been approached from a number of perspectives: historical, functionalist, structuralist, symbolical. The studies deal with revival and musical change, identity, nationalism, ethnicity and many other topics. There seem to be no ruling paradigm, no well-paved intellectual autostradas to follow, instead a jungle of ideas. A problem is that a greater part of the literature, theoretical and empirical, deals with the revival of folk traditions only. Of course, revival processes are not confined to folk traditions only, but are going on also in all kinds of fields. It is obvious that a lot could be won by widening the horizons and compare for example the revival of old jazzstyles, Bach's music in the 1820's, punk, Beatles and other popular musics of today. There are so many parallells between for example the early music revival instigated by Arnold Dolmetsch in the 1880's and the folk music revival of the same period, that a mere coincidence simply is out of question.

Although vast and disparate, the literature can tentatively be divided into two parts. One focus upon the question of authenticity and goes on to show that things are not what people think they are, that what is thought to be old is in fact new,<sup>1</sup> that the revived forms, styles, objects are in some way or another false, inauthentic, some even implying that they are unworthy, immoral.

From this follows that the focus is upon the objects, styles, forms and their origins. Questions about, what, who, when and how are given priority over

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<sup>1</sup> A well-known example is Hobsbawm & Ranger 19XX

questions about why. The perspective is that tradition is the handing over of objectively existing bounded cultural objects or artifacts,

Another part consider authenticity a not so interesting or relevant question. Instead revival is seen as a cultural expression, a process. The focus is upon function, meaning, change and so on.

and another that sees tradition as a symbolic construction.

Many studies deal with revival movement as social movements involved in political, economical and cultural struggles on many levels simultaneously. The traditions that are revived are discussed as symbolic expressions, sometimes metaphores, sometimes metonymes, of what the revivers are fighting for. Given the symbolic character of the whole undertaking it is not difficult to understand that one and the same revival movement can take on so many meanings at the same time, often even contradictory. A basic problem with this approach is, as I see it, the what and how is not as important as the why. It is as questions of styles, forms, genres, aesthetics are not really important for the results of the analysis. But of course, for many participants in revival movements it is aesthetics that really matter.

### **Words, concepts.**

A number of terms and concepts have been coined to cover basically the same type of phenomena: revival, revitalization, recreation, reorientation, re-enacting. However useful these “re-concepts“ may be, many of them share a basic problem in that they imply the existence of a bounded cultural entity, once alive, then vanishing, dying, later re-lived. The concepts may work as to point out approximately what we are talking about, but as analytical concepts they are simply not good enough. The same goes for another set of concepts derived from folklore terminology: folklorism, fakelore etc. These seem to imply a difference between original and copy, real and unreal, authentic and unauthentic, hardly a good starting point for research.

A major problem with all these terms and concepts are that they are neither systematically analyzed, nor systemized analytically. It is obvious that most of them deal with the same kind of phenomena, but the point here is that “the same kind“ is not to be blurred with “identical“. An example of what can be gained by sound analytical groundwork, is a useful distinction introduced by Niall Mackinnon in a recent study. According to the role of the past in the

present he suggest a difference between what he coins as 're-enacting' and 'revival':

A re-enacted event of any sort is not intended to be judged by the aesthetic criteria and artistic values of today: judgement pertaining to these criteria is suspended. Appreciation derives from the authenticity of re-enaction" (...) Re-enaction implies a suspension of the present, allowing the past to be entered into, but in a bounded sense. Revival also requires that the past be 'entered' in some symbolic way, but once so entered, artistic integrity is not so threatened by the intrusion of the present. It is entered 'once again' but allows continuity through a process of artistic evolution. Composition within a revived genre is permitted and encouraged (Mackinnon 1993:63).

Much of the interest in folk traditions around the turn of the century, in England, or Sweden, Hungary and many other countries, was induced by national spirits. The enemies were on the one hand the working class, seen as all too international, modern and urban, and on the other the poor yeomen, seen as all too local, stubborn and backward. The goal was to create a national folk culture, through a re-enactment, in which the traditional objects or items were focused. This is what Niall MacKinnon call the "Save the songs" movement of the Cecil Sharp-generation.

The interest in folk traditions in the 1960s and 70s was induced by other spirits. What Niall Mackinnon calls the "Save the singing" movement, was much more of a fight a for local values, "roots", smaller forms, self control, in a world perceived as too internationalistic, imperialistic or too nationalistic. The aim was revival, the focus was upon the events and the processes within these events.

From product to process, from nouns to verbs.

In the background, closely connected to these, we find a handful of the most potent and powerful concepts of modern Western civilization: nation, tradition, identity, ethnicity, and culture.

Closely related to these concepts is **tradition**. Also tradition is problematic, first of all because it is used both for the objects and the process of handing over the objects. Often used in connection to tradition are metaphores that implies a natural relationship. The most well-known is of course the

‘roots’metaphore: as a tree lives through and from its roots, humans live through and from their traditions, their cultural heritage. My position is that the relationship is not natural but symbolic. We construct traditions, we utnämner traditions, they are not simply "out there". This way of reasoning doesn't imply that traditions are less authentic, less valued or less valid, only that authenticity is not a feature of the object, nor a quality mark, but a result of successful legitimation.

‘Tradition’ is problematic not only because it is based on an assumption about something that is handed over from older to younger generations, but also because there are assumptions that the objects handed over represent certain values, and that they have important functions for the individual, the group, the nation. A particularly important aspect of ‘tradition’ is the very strong ties to the ideas about “the folk“, about national and cultural identity, and the question of survival of the society. Seen this way tradition is a set repertoire of ceremonies, rituals, customs, habits, objects, which has been handed over from “the folk“, or “the old peasant society“ as a valuable cultural heritage to be protected as an expression of national cultural identity.

### **Some general traits in revival movements.**

From the literature I have identified a number of related struggles, that can be combined in different ways:

- Fight against modernity. Tradition is often used as a natural opposition to modernity. Modernity is the distorting power, the agent of cultural entropy. Tradition is history, stability, continuity. Often the struggle against modernity is expressed as a moral obligation to save the world, country, region or whatever from cultural demise, from unwanted change, or at least to change the direction of change in a morally better way. The moral aspect is important to understand the heat of the fighters, and the presence of so many "burning souls" in revival movements. I will return to this.
- Fight against commercialisation, market economy, capitalism as a main cause of distorting change.
- Resistance against urbanisation, Stress on the pagan. The countryside against the city. This goes back to a dyad common to us all that between *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*.

- Fight against rationality, work, for play, happiness. This aspect is often overlooked, but for a person such as Henry Ford, one of the most important persons in the fiddle revival in the USA, this aspect was one of the most important. He wanted a society that was warmer, more friendly, with more room for the expressive forms. His way to implement this was to foster fiddlemusic. This again has to do with the basic notion of modernity as cold, rationalistic, as gesellschaft, and tradition as warm and emotional as gemeinschaft.
- Class struggle. The massive revival campaigns of the 1890's in countries like Sweden, England, Hungary, can be seen as a fight not only against industrialisation and modernisation, but also against the growing working class. What developed was a social-cultural union of the bourgeoisie elite and the elite among the rural classes in some parts of Europe, in other parts the bourgeoisie simply appropriated and made use of the cultural expressions of the rural classes, by turning them into national traditions.
- Another version of this kind of social struggle was going on in the post war revival in Western Europe (1960s-1970s). Closely connected to fight against commercialism, and "high culture" forms, such as opera, therefore also often against the old forms of revived folk music, especially the nationalistic forms from the turn of the century.
- Social struggle between races. In USA the fiddle revival in the early 20th century had an important aspect of fighting for white traditions, against black.
- Regional struggle. Marginalized regions often use traditions to raise their status. What they lack in economical and political power they often try to compensate in the field of culture, by claiming to be more authentic or traditional than the centers of power. This is true in Sweden, in England, in USA, in the Balkans.
- Fight for raised visibility through claims of **särprägel**. Visibility is a keyword which i will return to.

### **Some structural features of revival movements:**

In the middle of all these struggles we find a kader of important persons, mediators, agents, entrepreneurs. They both literally and metaphorically stand in the middle, inbetween being educated in the cities, a part of modernity, but located in the countryside and fighting for a revival of old values, norms or forms. They are teachers, doctors, vetrinärer, artists, intellectuals of different kinds. Sometimes also industrial leaders and politicians. These persons are connectors, mediators. They can be described as

enthusiasts, "burning souls". Through them a number of important things are achieved. They manufacture authenticity, by establishing the necessary contacts to the legitimizing centers which are:

- researchers and others that produce the knowledge about traditions
- institutions that control knowledge about the traditions (museums research institutions)
- schools, festivals and competitions, media, that is the market that distribute the knowledge in different directions. For example it is interesting to note the instrumental role that radioprograms broadcasting "original folk music" had for the revivals following second world war in USA (recordings of the Lomax family) in England 1942 the first radioprogram and a show in the fifties, in Hungary 1968 the first radio program, in Sweden from the early fifties.

### **Mediators and legitimation.**

In the middle of all these struggles we find a cadre of important persons, mediators, agents, entrepreneurs. They both literally and metaphorically stand in the middle, in-between being educated in the cities, a part of modernity, but located in the countryside and fighting for a revival of old values, norms or forms. They are teachers, doctors, veterinary surgeons, artists, intellectuals of different kinds, sometimes also industrial leaders and politicians. These persons are connectors, mediators. They can be described as enthusiasts, "burning souls". Through them a number of important things are achieved. They establish the necessary contacts to:

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These are the centres that produce traditions by identifying them. The identification has three aspects: similarity, continuity and legitimation.<sup>2</sup> By

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<sup>2</sup> Brück 1984, se också Ronström 1989b

transforming the processes to objects and to write these down in standardised form similarity and recognisability is achieved, which in turn produces continuity, maybe the most important of the three aspects. A historically grounded continuity is a prerequisite for authenticity, which is a quality mark that creates legitimation. Legitimation is crucial and essential. Different kinds of legitimation can be derived from the centres producing, controlling and distributing knowledge, for example historical, social, aesthetical. Media and market raise visibility and what is visible can be sold and spread. Festivals and competitions raise visibility, raise the status of the winner and of the whole genre that is displayed.

### **Orthodoxy and heresy**

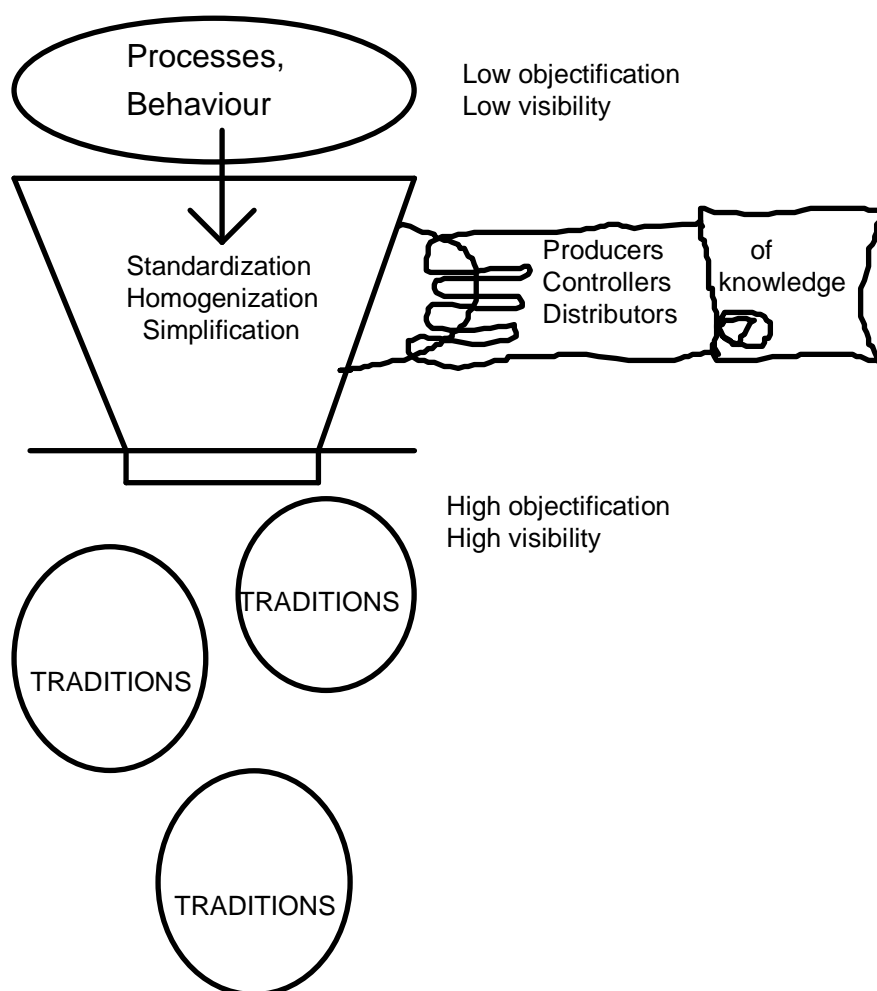
A problem with many studies of revival movements is their homogenising of the objects. Here Bourdieus notion of a field seems fruitful. When there is fights there are values fought about. As in all movements centring around cultural/aesthetic values, there seem to be two positions fighting each other, one is the orthodox, preaching authenticity, Puritanism, holding on. The other is the heretics, preaching development, change, going on. Many things can be understood about the directions revival movements take, from applying these concepts and analysing the outcome of the struggle between these positions. For example, the revival of the 60s can be explained as heretic opposition to the orthodox values held by the then institutionalised revival of the 1890's, and especially in Eastern Europe the state supported if not appropriated revival of the 40's. While the former revival was geared towards making folk traditions a part of national high culture or "the great tradition", the later was much more geared towards making the folk traditions a part of the little tradition, the vernacular, everyday culture. This was well expressed by Sandor Csoori, a leading Hungarian cultural personality closely connected to the dance house movements, on the back cover of a series of records under the name *Elő népzene - living folk music*:

"There were tow important historic moments in the history of folk dance: one when it went up onto the stage, and the other when it left the stage to return to the soil. Not as an art, but that it may remain dance - in the same way as the wind is wind and the rain is rain."

### **Objectification and objectivation**

Objectification and commodification is essential to revival movements. In its core traditionalization is an act of observing, categorising and classifying, that leads to objectification and reifying. We separate a piece of the ever-

changing flow of life and hold it up for ourselves as an object for appreciation, for study and as a model for action. This is true for all kinds of traditionalisation. But what is special with what we call revival movements are that they are self-conscious. An important part of the people involved know what they are doing and why. The outcome of the objectification intensiously and self-consciously produced by these movements can be summarised as simplification, standardisation, homogenisation. Knowledge of different kinds about life in former times are summarised and retold in standardised and simplified form, than again and again retold, summarised, simplified, before taken as models for conscious staging of "our old traditions".



An effect of this is the production of cultural distinctiveness. The objectification has also other consequences. For one thing it creates a difference between those who know more about what the revived traditions are derived from, and those who know less. For example in Sweden a lot of

traditionalising has been going on during the last three decades. Most Swedes, have access to more nuanced knowledge about what is officially staged as authentic traditions. For them it is possible to treat the homogenised and standardised versions with distance, irony, humour, even if they are serious about the traditions. Immigrants face the traditions as true representations of the old ways, well packed and wrapped with the brand-name clearly underlined. They have less possibility to see through the cover, to discover the variation, and this gives them less possibility to treat the homogenised traditions as other than objectively true. Many of them see knowledge about Swedish traditions as a way to become more integrated in Swedish society. But when they try to do so, the result in many Swedes eyes becomes parodical. The result may well be that the border between Swedes and immigrants become even more fortified, but in a way so subtle, that some of the immigrants may not even notice it.

### **Visibility**

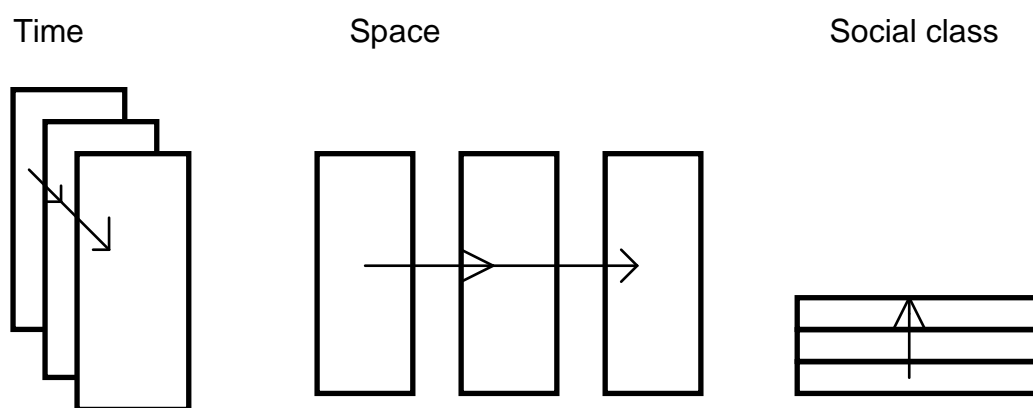
An important result of objectification is visibility. Mark Slobin has suggested visibility as a key notion for understanding cultural change. He identifies three levels, a micro level - villages, smaller regions, an in-between level which he calls regional - parts of nations, nations or groups of nations as for example Scandinavia, and the transregional - what is often called "international". The number of levels we operate with is not important, what I find fruitful is the notion of visibility and the insight that an effect of what we call revival is that a local repertoire, or genre, becomes visible at higher levels. Indeed this might even be the main aim of the revival. Thus the shift in visibility is an effect of revival but also the way we know that revival is at all going on.

### **New concepts.**

Shift is a good word to think with, maybe also move, because they both can be used as verbs and as nouns, without implying "re-" of any kind. Transplantation or transition could work since they imply only that something is moved from one context or location to another.

One way of conceiving the essence of revival is as a shift from one context to another. Three especially important cases:

- a) history
- b) geography
- c) socially (class, race etc.)



My point is that there can be no principal difference between these kinds of shifts. In principle they can be approached and analysed with the same kind of devices, methods and concepts, and my argument is that much could be won by doing so, not confining our studies to folk phenomena only. For example the studies of revival among migrants, ethnic groups living as minorities in new countries show many similar results to the studies dealing with historical traditionalising within the same ethnic group or nation.

In their well-known article "Tradition, Genuine or Spurious" the American folklorists Richard Handler and Jocelyn Linnekin argue for the necessity to abandon the notion of tradition as the handing over from one generation to the other of bounded cultural or natural entities. Tradition is a model of the past, that implies reference to the past, but this past is continuously recreated in the present and because continuity is constructed it includes an element of discontinuity. This of course means that authentic reconstructions is impossible simply because they are re-constructions. Authenticity, Handler and Linnekin argues, is indeed important, but it is not a question about historical truth, but of legitimation.

What is important here is that to "refer to" is not a natural but a symbolical relationship without any objective deposit that is being handed over. If accepted that tradition is an ongoing reconstruction of social life is symbolically constituted, the problematic relationship between tradition and modernisation, between continuity discontinuity dissolves.

Partly because of this kind of discussion the scientific focus has shifted from traditions as objects to traditionalisation - the process.

### **Tendences i traditionaliseringsprocesser.**

Let us look further into other kinds of effects of shifts or moves. The Swedish ethnologist Barbro Klein has identified some trends that has proved to be present in a large number of cases.

A first tendency is a general inclination to transform ceremonies and rituals, that was connected to agrarian-religious calendar, into ethnic, politic and national manifestations. Another is that people through celebrating traditions, temporarily become members of ritual, symbolic communities of which they normally are not members. Within the realms of such celebrations it is doing that counts, while outside it can be abstract notions such as cultural identity, heritage etc. A third tendency is that verbal traditions disappear, instead forms based on sound, sight, taste, occupy a place apart. That is the mind gives way to the eye, stomach and ear.

Yet another is that traditions can become seen as "eternally ours" even if the groups ancestors earlier never heard of them. There are certainly many old Swedish traditions that people in old Sweden never heard of, as there are traditions among Swedes in USA that we never heard of in Sweden, for example the British "may pole dance" which has become a part of American Swedishness. A fifth tendency is that it is the prestigious traditions of the old that becomes important in the new context, and a sixth is that people tend to hold themselves within certain limits when they from bits and fragments of different traditions compile new. To put it another way, when traditions are created, although there are many changes and new innovations, there is a core which is easily recognisable to both insiders and outsiders, a kind of brand-name. (Klein 1988:62ff)

These tendencies seem to be widespread, which means that although revival and traditionalisation tend to take on exclusively local meanings, yet they are processes that in the same time follow certain internationally widespread patterns. The relation resembles one of form and content: Although it is the differences between the traditions of different groups or countries that are enhanced, those ethnic or national traditions become moulded into the same kind of forms and thereby become similar and comparable. Nations, ethnic groups and other groups, thereby becoming similar and comparable. The result is that the groups take their places next to each other on the same kind of stages, where they display the same kind of forms in the same kind of

situations. In other words: they become more similar in their differences, at the same time as more different in their similarities.

### **Explanations**

In the literature a number of explanations to why a revival occurs can be found. These can be grouped in a number of categories, of which the most common seem to be:

- 1) Creating feelings of community, of ritual belonging. This explanation is close related to theories about identity, individual as well as collective. As I have previously pointed at, revival movements can be directed towards creating a larger national community, or smaller ethnic or regional or group communities.
- 2) Value reorientation, especially against modern development in economy, politics and culture. This explanation is often based on theories about sub-cultures, counter culture movements etc.

In connection with the first it is commonplace to point to the effect of the national project, which is masking of social differences under a all-national folk-cover. In connection with the second it is commonplace to point at reactions against large-scale production, mass-society, anonymity of urban life, professionalisation, commercialisation of culture and imperialism.

- 3) Compensation, for example aesthetic compensation for economical, or political decline.
- 4) Parody. Parodical play with aesthetical forms, the making up of "virtual realities" is often said to be characteristic of post-modernism. It is not difficult to find examples within folk revival movements that easily fit into notions of post-modern eclecticism and bricolage.

### **Intentions or effects?**

A serious criticism against all these explanations are that they operate at a general abstract level, they deal with movements, societies, culture. But these may be effects that say little or nothing about the intentions of the people involved. That is, there is a large risk mistaking the effects (integration, compensation, overriding class divisions, fulfilling individual or collective needs) for the intentions or motives. Studies from colleagues indicate that while many of these explanations seem to be valid in Sweden, the people involved operated with altogether different explanations, for example meeting with friends, doing it because others did it and "I don't mind doing it with

them" and so on. Many participated in revival movements without holding the revival to be especially important, interesting or worthwhile.

Another risk is to look for explicitly formulated goals, ideals, intentions, which of course there are. Some people involved in revival movements are extremely self-conscious, they know what they do and what they want to get out of it. But the risk is to mistake these persons for the whole movement, especially since it seems that some of us ourselves belong to this category and if not at least communicate closely, share language, concepts and ideals.

### **Driving forces**

In the literature also a number of driving forces behind revivals of different kinds can be identified. They can be summerized as:

- 1) forces connected to the past, often overtly ideological,
- 2) forces connected to the present, often geared towards aesthetical and social.

A variation of these are:

- a) forces connected to abstract values, "there and then" - either past or future,
- b) forces connected to concrete values, "here and now".

Yet another set of driving forces are:

- a) forces from within the group of revivers themselves, for example for their aesthetical compensation,
- b) forces from outside, for example the market, politics, tourism, exploring music as a method of promoting sales.

### **Inventing traditions: Back to the good old days, or forward to modern society?**

The well-known book *The Invention of Tradition* by Hobsbawm and Ranger offers interesting insights into revival movements. The celebration of traditions often creates feelings of group solidarity and of community. But what is special to many new traditions is that they aim at installing feelings for a special kind of mythical collective - the nation. Indeed, the invention of traditions has been an important part of the social engineering that created nations and still maintain them as plausible and self-evident.

"The invention of tradition" has become a very influential book, due to the inventive approach and the many fruitful ideas. One interesting hypothesis that finds support in the literature on revival is that the invention of traditions, or

traditionalization, becomes more important in periods when social and cultural change is perceived to be especially strong. Tradition then becomes a means to hold the world together through creating continuity, if only on a symbolical level. Several important periods of strong traditionalization in Europe can easily be identified, for example 1780s and 90s, 1840s, the decades around the turn of the century, and the years around the second world war, and 1970s and 80s.

It is however possible to look at the problem also from another angle. Anne Eriksen is a Norwegian folklorist who has attempted in a recent study to trace how ideas about "the old peasant society" and "the genuine folk culture" has grown out of the continuous interplay with "modern society". Her idea is that 'traditional folk culture' is in fact not a heritage from the past, but a product of modernity, an idea that has evolved as a conscious point of opposition to modernity, and therefore an organic part of it.

Thus, to praise traditions does not necessarily mean that one want to revive traditional society or that one are against modernity. On the contrary, traditions can function as a spring-board for rapid cultural change. By conjuring stability and continuity, solid groundwork is laid for radical modernisation. This presents people like Henry Ford in a new light, who himself was both a major agent and a symbol of progress and modernity, while at the same time a powerful spokesman and agent for revival of old traditions.

## **Conclusion**

My somewhat scattered and fragmentary overview over some aspects of the vast literature on revival has, I hope, shown that revival is indeed a complex phenomenon. With an expression borrowed from Fredrik Barth, revival can be described as a vessel of meaning, with many bottoms and parallel levels. As I see it, revival is only partly about "what once was". More importantly, it is about "what is" and "what is to come". Or to put it differently: in essence revival is a process of traditionalisation that goes on in the present, to create symbolic ties to the past, for reasons of the future.

To recognize that the ties are symbolic, not natural, is crucial. 'Symbolic' can indeed be used in many different ways, but the important thing here is that what is symbolic is also multivalent, polysemic, possible to charge with many different kinds of meanings and functions simultaneously. Because revival, traditionalization more than anything else is something you do together, the

participants can charge them with their own meanings without having to discover that these may be all different.

Thus, revival is a profoundly meaningful phenomenon. Here I have pointed at some of the levels of meaning:

- 1) meaning anchored in doing, that creates feelings of community within groups,
- 2) meaning anchored in history, that creates images of what once was,
- 3) meaning anchored in the present and the future, that contributes to creation of individual and collective identity,
- 4) meaning anchored in modernisation, where revival of 'old traditions' are not in opposition to, but one of the starting points for change.