



Water Heritage in Sweden – Great Importance and Major Problems

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Water is the basis for all human life and living. All through history. Why then is the importance of water-related cultural heritage so often forgotten and neglected? Or not understood. There is a lack of knowledge and awareness. So, to start with, some examples to show what water-related heritage in a Swedish and Baltic context is.

The EU Water Framework Directive (year 2000) aims for “good status” for all waters. In Sweden the Sea and Water Authority interprets this very strictly. A particular aim is free flow of water in rivers and streams, to achieve free movement of fish and plants. This means demolition of old dams, watermills, electric power stations and all sorts of construction – changing landscapes and conditions developed throughout hundreds or thousands of years.

Is this really in line with other development and sustainability aims? If the water as fast as possible run out in the sea, and rivers and lakes might even dry out in summer. Loss of cultural heritage, local identity and way of living of course, both tangible and intangible values.

But there is more. The Russian war on Ukraine as well as climate change casts new light on this – the need for access to fresh water for people, farming and wild animals, water-power for production of electricity, food and all sorts of goods for local needs, fire protection. Local, small-scale assets that are difficult to eliminate by attacks or bombing.

There is an aim to restore wetlands, which on the contrary means bringing back physical barriers, and this is part of trapping nutritive salts to stop eutrophication of the seas. It affects the landscape, outdoor life and tourism. It brings changes to the ecosystem. The risk of flooding gets worse if no hindrance delays the water. It is also a democratic problem - often against the wish of the local community.



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