

# Nature in Motion

## A MULTI-THEORETICAL APPROACH TO LANDSCAPE INTERPRETATION



# Introduction



- M.A. Thesis: *The River Flows Forever On: Landscape agency in south-western Sweden, 550-1750 A.D.*
- Focused on investigating the rivers of Göta Älv and Ätran with a strong theoretical focus.

# Background: Nature in Archaeology



- Processual archaeology: Nature determinism, nature in control, archaeology as natural science
- Post-processual archaeology: Humanistic determinism, archaeology as social science, nature is the *object* of human agency
- 'Symmetrical' archaeology: the separation of nature and culture leads to simplifications. The world is a complex web of nature, culture, human and object. Theories in many contexts used to discuss the agency of *things* (Latour 2005, Gosden 2005, Webmoor 2007, Witmore 2007, Olsen 2010).
- The agency of landscape remains rather unexplored in archaeological research (Walsh 2008).

# Background: Interdisciplinary landscape concepts

- Concepts identified by cultural geographer Mats Widgren (2004).
- The Anglo-Saxon tradition: Landscape as representation, scenery and social construction. Related to the phenomenological landscape archaeology of Chris Tilley (1994) and others. Visuality and sensibility important factors. Viewshed analysis, soundsheds etc. Lately highly relevant in Scandinavian landscape archaeology (e.g. Tuovinen 2002, Von Hackwitz 2009, Eklund 2013).
- Germanic/Nordic tradition: The landscape from *within*. Practicalities of the everyday life. Social constitutions, laws, regulations, historical rural planning. Important not the least in Swedish cultural geography (e.g. Tollin 1999, Berg 2003).
- Land-based tradition: transformations of the landscape and landscape as resource. Related to 'integrated landscape analysis' formulated by geographer Ulf Sporrang (e.g. 1995). Characterisation of the land through cultural and natural factors. Mainly focused on historical elements of the *present* landscape (e.g. Skånes 1997, Ihse & Skånes 2008).

# From single- to multidimensionality



- Several theoretical frameworks
- Connections between different frameworks
- *Contrasts* should be seen as highly important
- Theory should enlarge the research perspective, not be a limiting factor

# Theoretical framework

- Four theoretical concepts to illustrate the complexity of river agency:
- **Symmetrical archaeology** as motivation for taking *both* natural and cultural factors into account, and raising criticism towards the separation of nature and culture. Latour's (2005) ideas to increase the number of agents involved in the shaping of society.
- **La longue durée**, fashioned by Fernand Braudel (1958) to capture the slow agency of the landscape. Such a perspective should be stretched over periods of social changes, in order to capture stable and slowly changing natur structures.





# Theoretical framework



- **The progressive-regressive method**, fashioned by Jean-Paul Sartre (1968).
- Relationship between individual and structure.
- The individual is limited by material conditions, but not governed by them.
- "It is by transcending the given towards the field of possibles and by realizing one possibility from among all others that the individual objectifies himself and contributes to making History (Sartre 1968: 94)."
- Study of *moments* where confrontation between structure and individual reshapes the course of events.
- This stands in opposition to the slow structures of Braudel (1958).
- Applied on a river, this means that the river is not entirely the result of natural laws. The river can transcend its 'possibles' through interaction with human society or through sudden environmental changes. When this happens, both natural and social structures can be reshaped entirely.
- Natural agency can thus also be characterised by 'quick' action.

# Theoretical framework

- **Third Space**, Homi Bhabha (1994).
- Relates to the interaction between opposing social units. This produces new entities with characteristics inherited from both units, but also with entirely new elements.
- Nature and culture as opposing units.
- Hybrid landscapes. Ditching in Sweden from 1200-1900 A.D. (Jakobsson 2013). Interaction between nature and culture occurs on several levels. Changes to hydrology, to agricultural practice, but also to social structures (laws and regulations).
- Symbolic relationships based on this interaction?

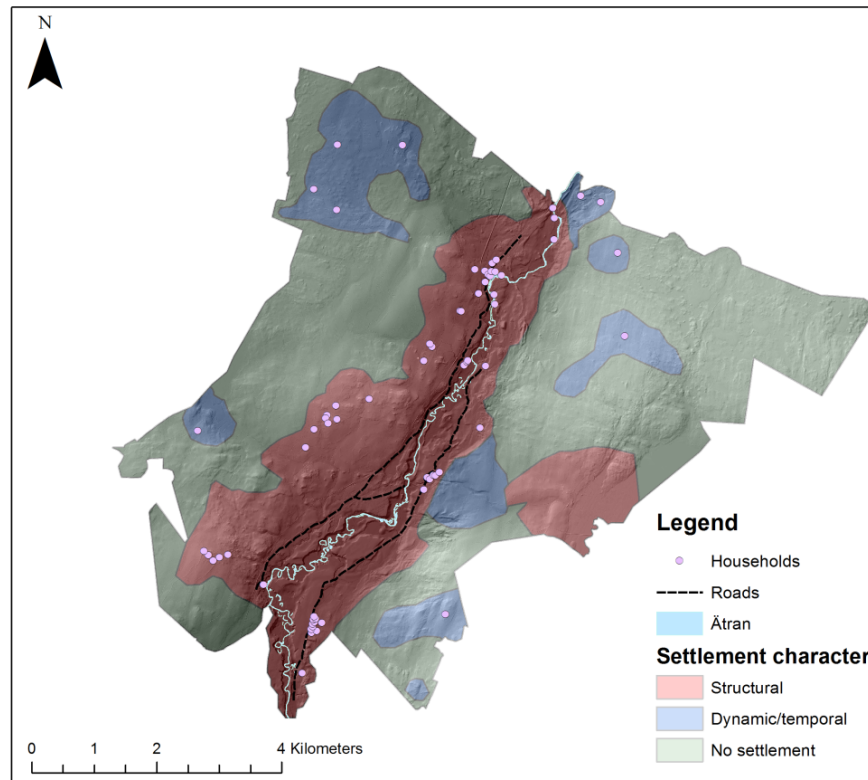




# A structural landscape

## Cultural Landscape Character in the 17th century

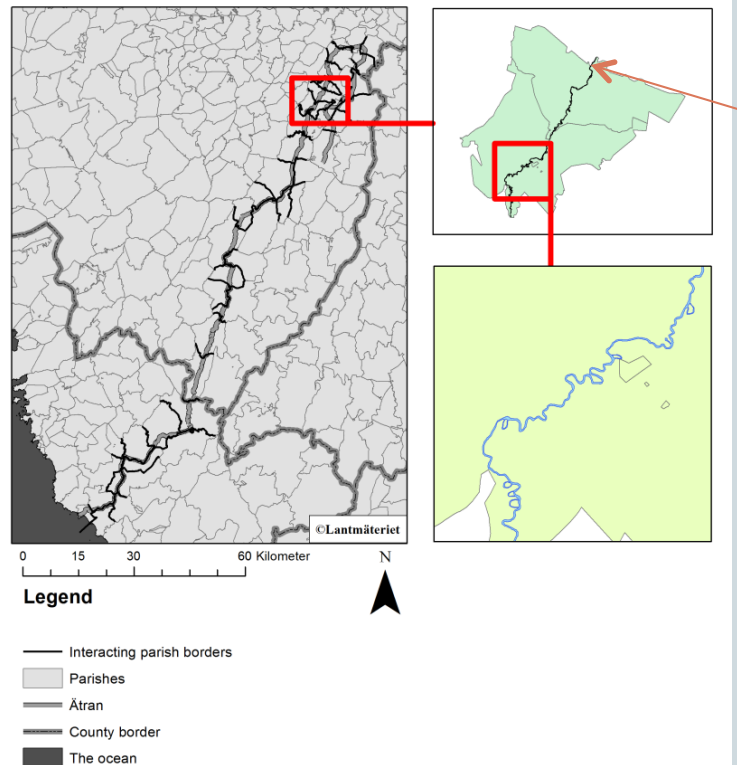
The parishes of Blidsberg and Dalum, County of Västra Götaland



Overview map and terrain model from Lantmäteriet (©Lantmäteriet I2014/00579)

- Characterisation based on 17th century maps and ancient monuments.
- Illustrates the dynamics of the landscape in the study area.
- The river is a central part of the cultural landscape.
- Human settlement has been tied to the river for long periods of time.
- Illustrates the slowly changing structure of *la longue durée*, a structure which has remained through large periods of social and technological changes.

# A changing landscape: in theory



- There is a general correlation between border patterns and meandering parts of the river.
- This is due to the character of the riverbed, which is highly loose in meandering places and thus difficult to cross.
- Close to Falkenberg, by the estuary of Ätran, this pattern can be clearly observed. Also to some extent in the central regions.
- The upper valley of Ätran deviates strongly from this pattern.
- The upper region of the river was defined by heavy milling activity in the 17th century. This was most likely the case also in earlier periods.
- Abandoned mill dams, left unmaintained, eventually breaks and releases large amounts of sustained sediments. This may reshape river morphology dramatically (Walter & Merritts 2008).

# A changing landscape: in practice

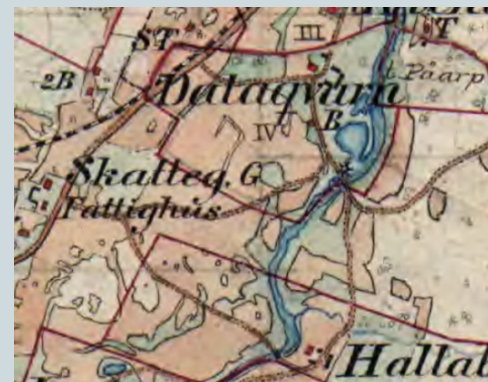
- Relatively small changes can be observed in the material.
- On a local scale, this may result in changes to the character of the interaction
- Example: Land use changes



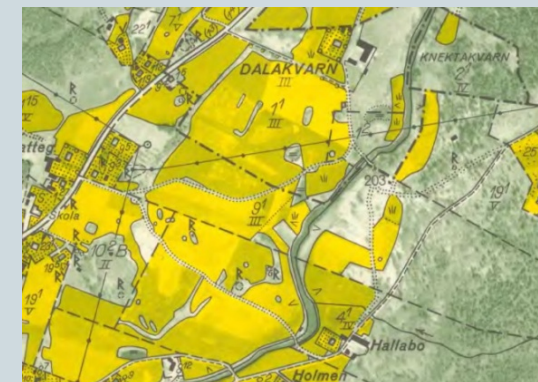
(Blidsberg 1642 O13-5:03:71-3 92-3)



(Blidsberg 1816 O13-5:3)



(Humla ca 1890 J112-34-8)



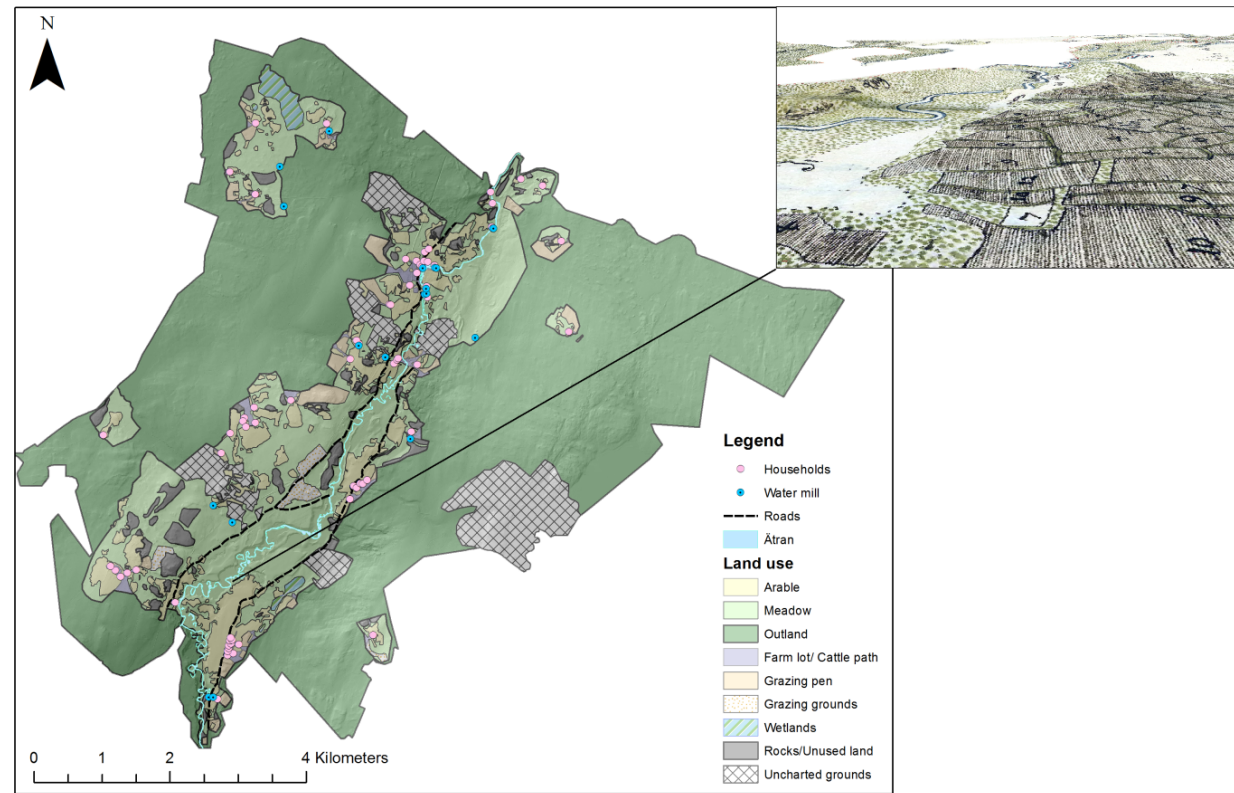
(Humla 1960 J133-7d5c62)

# A hybrid landscape

- The water meadows of the study area constitutes hybrid spaces
- Meadows are geographical third spaces between the river and humanity, a space where both agents meet physically
- Meadows are also shaping a *mental* third space, where the physical interaction between the river and humanity shapes the mentalities of the area. The results of this interaction are *intangible*
- In many areas, rivers were seen as persons, characters or living entities. In what way is riverine land use connected to this phenomenon?

## 17th century land use

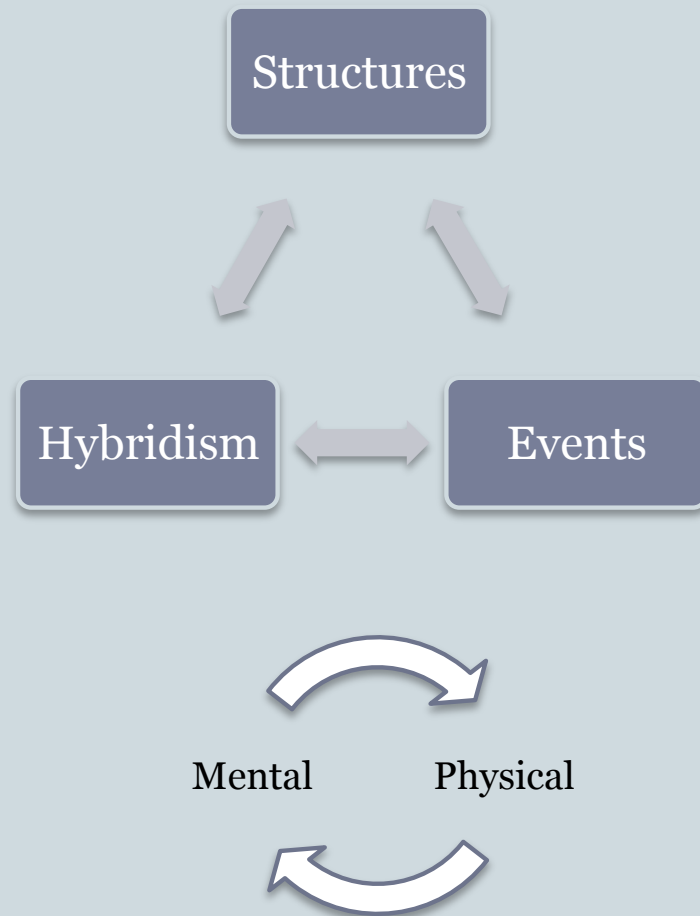
The parishes of Blidsberg and Dalum, County of Västra Götaland



Terrain model from Lantmäteriet (©Lantmäteriet 12014/00579)



# Interconnections



- In summary: both long term structures, short term events and hybrid interactions constitutes the foundation of the landscape.
- Events and series of events forms the backbone of long term structures (e.g. flooding shaping rural structure). Long term structures in turn sets the foundation of events (e.g. bedrock, topography, slope). Both events and structures have the possibility to formulate hybridism.
- Hybridism as a result of rapid change (events) may have widespread effects on the long term, and long term hybridism may cause unexpected events.
- All of the mentioned aspects occur on both a physical and a mental level, which means that interactions may take a multitude of different forms. The interconnections between mental and physical forms of landscape interaction are central to the presented theoretical theme.



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