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Creative Destruction or Destructive Creativity? Negotiating the Heritage of the Cold War in the Experience Economy

Introduction

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union completely changed the military-political situation in the Nordic countries. New precision bombing technology and the movement from invasion defence to input defence in countries like Sweden resulted in many of the subterranean modern fortresses of the Cold War no longer having any use. Despite the rapid geopolitical changes in Northern Europe during the recent years, there is still a current problem of what to do with the superfluous military establishments of the Cold War: let them fall into decay, preserve or reuse them – and for what purpose?

The article examines the cultural as well as spatial foundation of a new genre of heritage in Sweden and in its neighbouring states – the cultural heritage of the Cold War – whose value is negotiated by various stakeholders through a range of processes: emotional, social and cultural processes as well as legal and economic ones. Similar to the built heritage of industrial society, the derelict bunkers of the Cold War have become a cultural playground for tourism and creative industries. For instance in Stockholm, a commando bunker has been reused for museum exhibitions and fashion shows. Further north, a subterranean bunker has been used as a scenography for airsoft games. Does the above concern “creative destruction” in Joseph Schumpeter’s sense, that is, new industries that flourish on the basis of the old? Alternatively, is it an example of sheer “destructive creativity” in the name of the experience economy?

The heritage of the Cold War

The end of the Cold War caused a fundamental revision of Swedish foreign and military defence policy. The consolidation of new national states,

democratization processes, national identity crises, and regional and ethnic conflicts all characterized the political situation in Europe. The military threat that had existed during the Cold War was no longer a reality.

As a result, the Swedish armed forces began an intensive conversion process (and for many employees, a painful one), known as the LEMO process. The number of units was more than halved, while international operations became increasingly important. All the other European countries were involved in similar transition processes. In former European communist countries, a two-part process was carried out: the creation of national armies with new agendas, and the reduction in size while phasing out nuclear capacity.

There have been limited ambitions to preserve the post-military landscape or to make use of the deserted military bases of the Red Army. It is generally considered a “negative heritage” in view of its negative connotations, which evoke the repression, militarism and environmental destruction of the former Soviet domination. In the Baltic States, there are few examples of preservation actions that focus on the Cold War heritage. The military structures have either been destroyed, deserted or reused for other purposes.

In contrast, the heritage process has been less problematic for the West European countries, which were either members of NATO or neutral. The Cold War heritage is also a heritage of alliances. Therefore, the international connection is as important as the national one. The conversion process had a major impact on the fixed fortifications along the extended coastline: coastal artillery, including subterranean bomb shelters, artillery and other weapon systems, lodging barracks, service

The post-industrial society	The post-military society
<p>1) Political-economical changes: de-industrialisation A straightforward decline in the output of manufactured goods or in employment in the manufacturing sector; a shift from manufacturing to service sectors. New strategic demands of mobility and flexibility (for companies).</p>	<p>1) Political-economical changes: de-militarisation End of war preparation in large scale; reduction of nation's army, weapons, and military vehicles to an agreed minimum of weapons and troop forces; professionalization and end of conscription. New strategic demands of mobility and flexibility (for Defence).</p>
<p>2) Globalisation: economic & geographic expansion Industrial outsourcing and move to low-wage countries; expansion of a global market; multinational companies.</p>	<p>2) Globalisation: economic & geographic expansion Global warfare; move from invasion defence to an internationally engaged input defence; enterprises of national rebuilding after conflicts.</p>
<p>3a) General technological development Better industrial production and process methods.</p>	<p>3a) General technological development Better industrial production and process methods; development of weapons with more fire power and more precision.</p>
<p>3b) Digitalisation: the digital revolution Digital technology replaces human labour.</p>	<p>3b) Digitalisation: the digital revolution Digital technology replaces soldiers; development of digital precision weapons, remote-controlled weapons, drones; development of a "digital fortress", a defence against cyber-attacks.</p>
<p>4) Heritagisation The appearance of mental distance and alienation; creation of a new cultural heritage, followed by aestheticization and valorisation processes; appearance of "vacant spaces".</p>	

THE SIMILARITIES between the post-industrial and post-military societies.

structures, training establishments, and coastal reconnaissance stations. Cocroft (2003, p. 3) suggests a broad definition of Cold War "monuments" which is useful for this article, that is, "structures built, or adapted, to carry out nuclear war between the end of the Second World War and 1989".

The built heritage of the Cold War is also a heritage of secrecy, invisibility and silence. Structures built in great secrecy during the Cold War, mostly invisible to citizens, were then dissolved into oblivion. Moreover, it is a heritage of reassurance – or oppression – depending on whose viewpoint you take.

Heritagisation of post-societies

The heritage of the Cold War is one born out of crisis. It is a reflection of structural change in society, like its analogous twin-heritage of the industrial society. Daniel Bell (1973, p. 14) coined the

notion of post-industrial society in order to describe economic changes from a manufacturing-based economy to a service-based economy, a diffusion of national and global capital, and mass privatization. There are remarkably similar circumstances behind the development of the post-industrial society and that of the *post-military society* (see table): (1) political-economical changes; (2) globalisation; (3a) general technological development; (3b) digitalisation; and (4) heritagisation.

The post-military society is an equivalent notion coined by Martin Shaw (1991, pp. 184–185) arguing that post-militarism, much like post-industrialism and post-modernism, is a defining characteristic of the end of the 20th century, i.e. a structural transition from the Cold War era. Nevertheless, just as post-industrialism does not abolish industry, or post-modernism modernity, so, too, post-militarism, while it transforms the military and milita-



SAAB EVENT AT AEROSEUM staged by AS Systems GmbH.

alism, does not remove them from central positions in the social structure, Shaw argues.

The making of the Cold War-heritage is also very similar to the making of the industrial heritage in view of the heritage process. In contrast, the Cold War heritage in Sweden has emerged through a more centralized process than the industrial one, principally because the military structures are state property. In this process, the Swedish National Property Board (SFV) as well as the Swedish National Heritage Board (RAÄ) have played essential roles in defining which military structures should be preserved for the future. The basis for valuation generally applied by heritage institutions was pragmatically elaborated by SFV: the criteria of quality and costs were balanced in order to sort out objects in good condition with educational and touristic potential.

Furthermore, networks of local driving forces and retired officers have been important for the

heritage process as well, by essentially putting pressure on the heritage institutions and politicians with the goal of defining 'their' former work place or local heritage as worthy of preservation. Often, the potential of becoming a tourist attraction is used as a key argument by stakeholders (Strömberg 2010).

The making of the Cold War heritage is derived through a range of processes which imply a shift of *function* (spatially, legally and socially), a shift of *representation* (culturally and emotionally), and finally, a shift of *management* (administratively and economically). With the industrial heritage process in mind, the making of the Cold War heritage depends on an analogous 'authorized heritage discourse', to employ the notion of Laurajane Smith (2006, pp. 12–13, 29). This discourse constitutes a common two-step-change in different pace and internal order.

First, from military building to heritage, which is a conversion process which implies practices of *identification* and *selection* (investigations by cultural heritage institutions and researchers); *declaration* (up-grading decision-making by the authorities); *salvation* (emotional preservation actions by private initiatives and driving forces); *depiction* (nostalgic and popularized presentations by artists, authors and film-directors), and finally *preservation* (protection managed by heritage institutions). These practices characterize what has been called ‘heritagisation’ which refers to “the process by which objects and places are transformed from functional ‘things’ into objects of display and exhibition” (Walsh 1992, cited in Harrison 2013, p. 69).

Second, from heritage to attractions and educational devices, which involves *valorisation* (implied by planners, museums and tourism entrepreneurs); *education* (uses of heritage for the potential of learning); and finally, *sensation* and *socialization* (appropriate activities by visitors on the site) (Strömberg 2010, p. 660).

Valorisation as symptom of creative destruction

Focusing on the second step in this process, cultural heritage was previously not viewed as being a decisive factor for economic development. However, during recent decades, there has been an instrumental and, to some degree, a neoliberal shift in memory politics from conservation and national manifestation to usage of heritage for economic and educational purposes. In view of the new approach, culture and heritage are actively used as a resource for various purposes in the present (Aronsson, 2004). Cultural heritage has become increasingly available as a strategic resource for regional development and raw material for destination development.

The experience-based aviation centre *Aeroseum* is a good example of how the heritage of the Cold War is redefined in view of the neoliberal discourse of experience economy. *Aeroseum* was originally a subterranean air-dock at Säve, close to Gothenburg. Here, visitors are able to explore old aircrafts and helicopters, both virtually and in reality. The air-dock was constructed during the Cold War to protect the Swedish Air Force against nuclear attacks. In addition to guided tours and other activities, *Aeroseum* offers a unique venue for con-

ferences and corporate events. The somewhat spectacular environment has also been used for television and commercials. The launch of the new Saab 9-3 was held at *Aeroseum* in 2007, a suitable site for the Saab Company in view of its background in aircraft construction. Meanwhile, the public broadcaster in Sweden used the airbase as a setting for the concert of the week in 2010.

Another example of adaptive reuse is *Bergrummet*, located in the centre of Stockholm. This is a former subterranean headquarters of the Swedish Navy that was taken out of military service at the end of the Cold War. It has now been made available by the National Property Board as an exhibition space. In 2013, the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities developed an exhibition concept suitable for the Chinese Terracotta figures, which were temporarily displayed in this cavernous interior. According to the former head of the museum, the underground environment was particularly suited to enhance the experience of looking at archaeological objects, especially when they derive from a period of history when the Chinese burial customs changed to rock tombs (Strömberg, 2013). Furthermore, the bunker was reused as a stage for a runway show during Stockholm Fashion week in 2015.

By experimenting with their spatial, imaginative and historical potential, new activities have occurred in the wake of demilitarisation while serving as a funky stage and a metaphor for other ventures and businesses. Military bases have gone from being a part of a national defence economy to being involved in the experience economy. This corresponds with the theories of the economist Joseph Schumpeter who introduced the term ‘creative destruction’ to explain how declining industries and businesses are torn down and replaced by those that are more viable: in this case, tourism and the creative industries.

In conclusion, there are several potential benefits in reusing the residual materiality of war and its constant preparations. Firstly, they can make room for new activities and new businesses that might generate new development in areas of economic decline. Alternatively, they can function as symbols of economic regeneration. Adaptive reuse may also imply certain forms of preservation: new activities may actually prevent the built heritage from falling into decay.



THE CHINESE TERRACOTTA ARMY exhibition at Berggrummet by Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities.

Destructive creativity?

What happens when post-military heritage becomes a ‘funky’ stage for potentially more controversial narratives? In 2007, the event company *Berget Event* arranged the fifth in a series of airsoft games in the Swedish subterranean fortress of Hemsön, dating from the Cold War. The event – one of the world’s biggest airsoft games – attracted over a thousand participants. The plot was based on a counterfactual scenario with a hypothesis of what would have happened if the Cold War had not ended. Berget Event’s games may be described as a live role-play with elements of military simulation, an enhanced participatory extension of the dramatized narratives, which have become an increasingly popular way of communicating and experiencing history. Calling it a mix of “scouting, role-playing, and military service”, the event company made an agreement with

the National Property Board to rent parts of the fortress as a realistic scenographic backdrop to support the game’s narrative (Strömberg, 2013).

Airsoft games are provocative, not least because of the realism and their emotional closeness to contemporary conflicts. This gives rise to a number of ethical issues that problematize the boundary between perceived reality and the fiction being acted out. The airsoft game at Hemsö fortress is an example of a radical approach to built heritage, which too challenges institutional ways of considering heritage.

Similarly, in Nemenčinė, on the outskirts of Vilnius, there is another radical example. A former subterranean television station from the Soviet era has evolved into a peculiar tourist attraction: *Soviet Bunker – The Underground Museum of Socialism*. Here, you can experience Soviet-style repres-



DRAMATIZED SOVIET REPRESSION combined with dinner at Soviet Bunker – The Underground Museum of Socialism.

sion during dramatized guided tours, with dinner included. You are drilled to stand in line, to do push-ups and get insulted by people playing KGB officers. As a souvenir, you receive a gift from the Soviet era and a certificate for completed basic disciplinary training. Although the bunker was never used by the KGB, it is a story of Soviet tyranny that unfolds, a fictional version of a narrative of oppression that verges on entertainment. Similar attractions are *Grūto parkas* in Lithuania, *The Secret Soviet Bunker* in Ligatne, Latvia, and *Bunker -42* in Moscow.

A condition of this radical approach to the heritagisation process is the *mental distance* to the former activities. Similar to the dirty industrial heritage depicted by Robert Willim (2008, pp. 123–124), the traces of the military past are now looked upon with distance and nostalgia. These processes imply

a type of *cultural sorting* that selects and extracts positive aspects out of context. Thus, uses of history and adaptive reuse entail complications and gives rise to a range of ethical questions. First, the radical reuse of buildings as makeovers and promiscuous re-appropriations might physically damage or trivialize the heritage to the point it can lose its context and authority as a historical site. Second, there might also be emotional drawbacks when military sites are reused in such contexts. Third, there might be problems of falsification, as in the Lithuanian case when the attraction has nothing to do with the original use, namely the former television station, not the headquarters of KGB.

Finding a sense of balance

Are the entrepreneurs going too far in search of spectacular experiences and profit? Or is it a matter

of moral panic when roleplaying no longer is about neo-medievalism with crossbows, but threatening realism in Soviet uniforms? Perhaps the Lithuanian example primarily reflects the way people in this region process their history of occupation: to attempt to render the infected memories of Soviet era harmless and financially profitable simply by mocking and satirizing their unpleasantness? Another critical question is how economically successful and viable creative industries and heritage tourism really are.

Ethnographer Birgitta Svensson identifies four different values that come into play within the heritage process: symbolic values; values of economic growth; experience values; and values of human dignity. She asks if they really are associable, and responds in the affirmative. However, she argues that we must consider each of the values rather

than just one of them. Above all, she writes, we should care more about quality – the focus and content – rather than quantity when combining the different values (Svensson, 2005, p. 164).

Svensson's response to her own question is to the point. In the same way as sustainability demands a pragmatic balance between environmental, economic and socio-cultural issues in order to be successful, likewise I believe that adaptive reuse and uses of heritage demands a sense of balance. In other words, finding equilibrium between commercialization and cultural integrity; taking into account experiential as well as historical values; depicting the extraordinary while not forgetting the everyday perspective; balancing conceptual refinement with genuine simplicity; exploring imagination with restrained creativity and balancing spectacularity with moderation.

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