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The island of Djurö – change and ultrastability

The place

Geographically the island of Djurö is a surrealistic landscape with fjords, lagoons and peninsulas. See map! Steep rocks frame idyllic meadows. It makes part of Värmdö kommun. Farming and fishing used to be the prevailing professions till about the beginning of the 1900s. Now (year 2011) all professions are represented and most shuttle by bus and bridges to Stockholm some fifty kilometres away. About a thousand people live on the Island all year round. An equal number moves in summertime.

Developments

The right to passage, boating and swimming was general and mostly not formalized up to fifty years ago but that changed. Fences rose even on disputed areas, even without any legal support, even at the price of paying fines. The struggle for land, water and beach hardened. The map shows the parts of beach or port still accessible. At the first sight these parts might seem sufficient but it should be noted that just around the village centre, where people live, the sea is fenced off. The habitation is concentrated along the highway and this one is also the general way for communication by foot or bike. The struggle for water and beach is so unpleasant that many just do not think about the sea.

The stakeholders

Djurö is a differentiated, even segregated, society. The *landowners* want to build by the sea, and terraces leaning out over the water are much appreciated. Extreme privacy has become a sport beyond real comfort as you may see by the estate advertisements. So fences are built and jealously protected. Illegal fences are kept and the relatively modest fines are paid. External landowners have often greater verbal and financial powers than the old inhabitants so they win building permits of a kind refused to the latter.

The *inhabitants* nowadays shuttle to the city. Unless they have a share in a beach or in the boat club they do not think of the sea. They accept fences and segregation. We may compare with Eric Fromm's stories from fascist societies¹.

The struggling *businessmen* express very clearly that they would need clients from all the islands in the neighborhood but that this is impossible without port facilities near enough to their shops.

The *church* takes responsibility for its parish. It does not close off its areas, not even by what could have been the Vicar's reserved beach and jetty.

¹ Fromm, E. (1942). The fear of freedom. [Routledge and Kegan Paul](#). Machiavelli also writes about a complacent mass though without the ethical values of the former.

The *summer-guests* do not need the society as do the permanent inhabitants. They are happy enough with the lot of land they have been able to capture. Their real home is elsewhere. They do not see the disadvantage for society of their fences.

For the *tourists* the archipelago has still got a romantic aura. They can take a steamer to several islands with nice hostels, but they would not come to Djurö. They would not care for the one single available crowded beach. The boat sport people could not come unless they had special relations to a harbor facility.

Estate brokers love the expressions *private beach* and *private bridge* even in cases where these expressions are not in accordance with the Swedish laws of public access. This creates language, expectations and culture, a not so generous culture. It creates ambiguity and conflict.

A kind of *public* may be defined: those who leave litter, those who make noise and crack the rocks with their pic-nic fires. Some do really very little to defend their access rights.

Politicians and administrators have got the idea that it is sufficient with *one* beach and *one* harbor on each island. They often speak about careful and restricted exploitation but never about *winning back* some of the sea. The committee for building permits has got laws to follow and they are under a kind of supervision by the regional authority. Still many extra ordinary decisions in opposition to the not so clear laws are taken every year. It is as if the well-known Swedish egalitarian ambitions did not cover the mobility by and the use of the coast. An interesting paradox is shown in the latest general plan. It offers on the one hand many beautiful words about places to meet and on the other hand no real suggestions about this. Is this hypocrisy or strategy? Shall we in the near future experience an effort to create attractive meeting points by the sea perhaps even by some new public ports?

Many *NGO:s* are active, most of them with a cultural or sporty program. A successful job is done on many frontiers even to the extent that people forget the sea. Is this the purpose of the beach-owners dominating these societies? The boat club keeps a very good harbor and it is formally obliged to offer two guest places, but to access to those is not so easy. The Club declares that they work for sailing as sport and recreation. Useful boating is not their domain. The big Swedish natural heritage society works for remote areas. Close neighborhood to habitation is not their bracket.

The island council, the *Byalaget*, is the lowest level political body and it has got a tough time to deal with too many things. The difficulty in sticking to essentials is a general phenomenon and it is nicely described by Dan Ariely for example². The *Byalaget* has also got difficulties in teaching about options available. Neither comparisons with the nearby town of Lidingö nor with France and its *loi littoral* make people rise. After all people are not starving (but there are suicides).

Social and financial status

The citizens of Djurö (and in most of the archipelago) have lost access to the sea since it was just a habit and not a set of written contracts. The consequences for the inhabitants of Djurö are both social and financial. What happens is not the common balnearisation where the competition for land raises the prices beyond what the youth of the place would afford. At Djurö only the prices for beach, and jetty goes astray. So the youth can afford to stay if they keep off the shores. But they will stay in

² Ariely, D. (2010) *Predictably Irrational*. chapter 9. Harper Collins.

a segregated society where beach and naval logistics is reserved for some few particulars, not even for the remaining enterprises. So they leave. Djurö is a transcient society.

The idea of extreme integrity for the private beaches affects all personal relations on the island. Lots of incidents along the waterfront are spoken about and they leave their traces in the minds of those concerned. Most times the landowners are involved but there is also the tension between boat keepers and those going for a swim. We experience a change of world view which Romain Laufer would call a *risque majeur*.³ The culture is no more the same and this is not only due to the timely restructuration of industries and professions.

The new littoral law of 2010 will only worsen things. It still permits, even encourages, further extension of extended blockers.⁴

Change, resistance and resurrection

How could all this happen? The immediate reason is that the municipal administrations have been generous for generations about building permits by the sea and there were not much of so called *weak signals* to warn for the catastrophe coming. Other reasons may be seen in the set of surprises which offers each of the water front exploitations which have been studied in detail:

- The knowledge of integrity zones is not widely spread neither by the administration nor by the public. This makes it possible for cunning builders to draw zones of integrity all the way to the water.
- The power of owners of water have surprised. They claim, win and close beach beyond what is clear by the law.⁵
- Roads are gated illegally without any sanction.
- Illegal fences stay and the due fines are paid.
- Land-owners unfriendly expansions in words and signposts still surprise.

Byalaget makes resistance and it pleads for resurrection. It works in some dialogue with the public administration about affairs around building permits, public service etc. It also comments on the plans for the area. Annual meetings with the leading politicians are organized at Djurö. Cultural events by Midsummer and Valborg have also traditionally been a task of Byalaget's. The latter have been successful and they recreate some of the ambiance lost by the tension about access to the sea.

Byalaget for a period also tried to organize research projects funded by the European Union to clarify the social and economic importance of the littoral zone. Several applications were handed in to the Interreg, to the Espon and to the Fund for rural development. These efforts did not work:

- Rules of participation by a public organization could not be fulfilled since our municipality was more of an opponent than a partner.
- Byalaget could not provide the partial funding required.
- Byalaget is not important enough to be an attractive international partner with universities and other big organizations, so the requirements of international cooperation could not be fulfilled.

³ Laufer, R. (1993). Management et risque majeur. Ecole de Paris de Management.

⁴ Swedish law, Miljöbalken 18§d4

⁵ Swedish law, Jordabalken 1 kap 6§

- The problem is perceived as local and the socio-economic importance of the waterfront is not obvious to everyone. Most water front research is done in biological and physical perspectives.

Some of an impression rose that the EU funding system is a social game with minor importance for its citizens.

Resurrection

It is too late to copy societies like Stockholm or Lidingö; not to speak about the Basque countries! Värmdö has irreversibly spoilt most of its options for maritime infrastructures. There are possible minor remedies though.

The Municipality should become more honest in their maps and other statements of affair. We have a *gated society*⁶ and that should not be hidden by deceptive maps.

Politicians and officers in the land use planning sector should learn to think systemically⁷:

- about the legal instruments⁸ to restrict and make clear zones of integrity,
- about the importance of the sea for *all* inhabitants and for *all* enterprise on the island, e g about systemic effects of land disposal,
- about the close environments to the habitations,
- about differences in how similar exploitations by the water can support or destroy for the society,
- about networks of maritime communication, not only about single sites,

The municipality should reconsider to buy and make accessible port and beach facilities *where the people live*. That is our price to pay for the old sins of *laissez faire*.

The Municipality should invent some real control of a disorderly public but also of landowners who fence off.

The regional authorities have still an important role of control. They can be more resistant than a municipality to local lobbyism.

The national level must revise again the recent littoral law understanding the necessary conditions for a community by the coast.

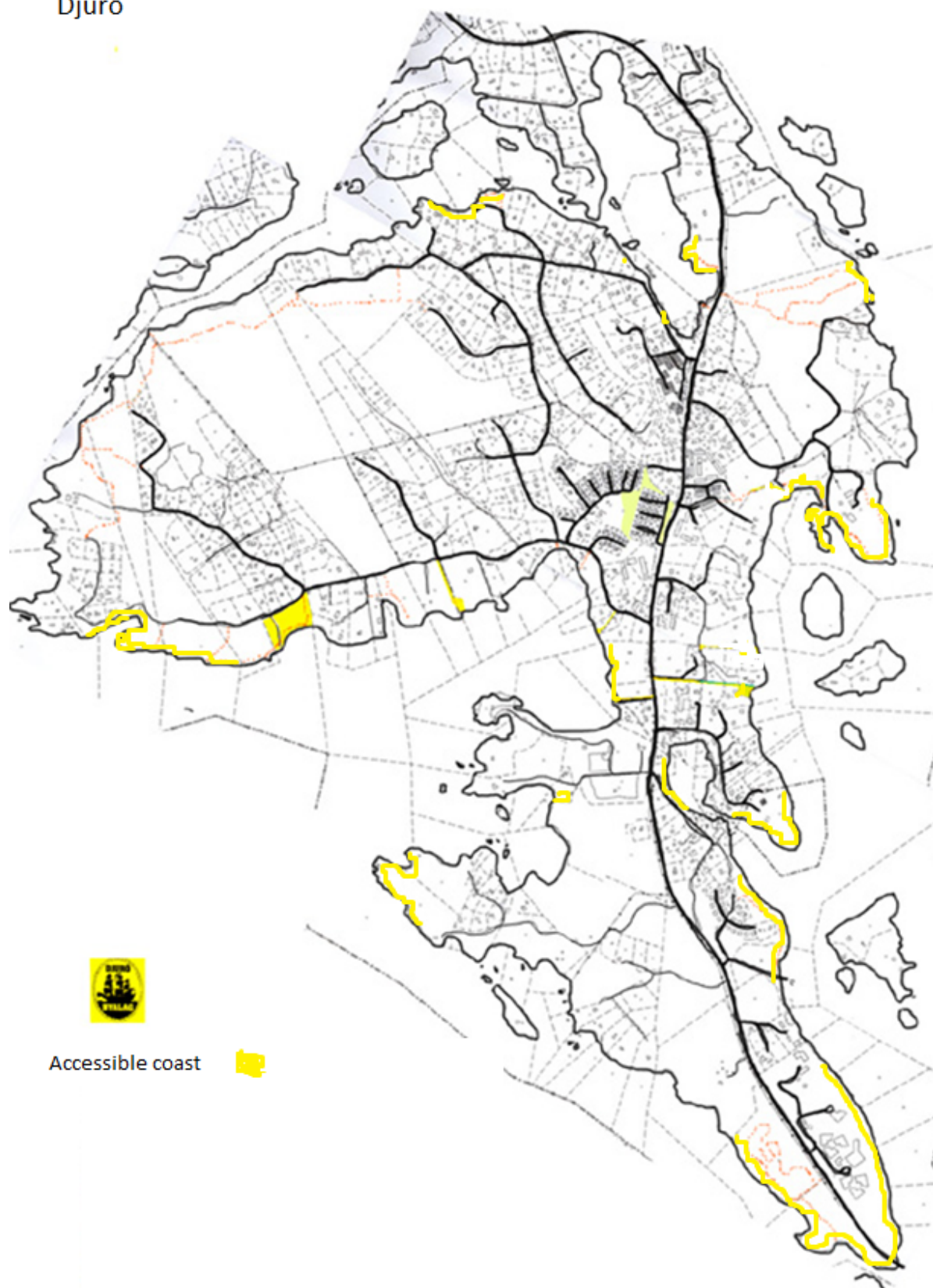
The public could learn about happy littoral life in other countries, but that is up to them. However certain things they must learn: not to crack the rocks by their pic-nic fires, not to leave litter behind and not to make noise. Maybe this is too high a price. Maybe the public deserves their restrictions. I do not care too much anymore. I go myself to the Basque countries and their Atlantic coast, and I offer this report as an alarm to communities who have still the liberty to create something nice with their littoral population.

⁶ A solid explanation of such milieus is given by Atkinson, R. (ed) & Blandy, S.(ed) (2005), *Gated Communities*. [Taylor & Francis Ltd](#) .

⁷ *Systemic* is more than *systematic*. See for example Lawson, H. B. (2010). *A Journey through the Systems Landscape*. College Publications, UK.

⁸ There is especially the instrument of *tomt* = *hemfridszon* which is to join a building permit and which specifies the *part* of a lot which preserves to the owner the strict integrity.

Djurö



Accessible coast

