

Museum & Place

Editors

Kerstin Smeds and Ann Davis

Editors

Kerstin Smeds

Professor emeritus, Umeå University, Sweden

Ann Davis

Professor emeritus, University of Calgary, Canada

President of ICOFOM:

François Mairesse

Professor, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle - Paris 3, France

International committee for Museology – ICOFOM

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Flâneries in a Northern Urban Landscape. Affective atmospheres, diffuse museum and the creation of heritage in the 21st century.

Saphinaz-Amal Naguib and Stein Farstadvoll

Introduction

The present paper by Saphinaz Naguib and its integrated photographic essay by Stein Farstadvoll address the cultural dimension of sustainability and questions pertaining to heritage in the twenty-first century, with Vardø, a small fishing town in the north-eastern coast of Norway, as our object of study. The two essays are set in a dialogic relationship with each other, and explore the notions of ecomuseum and “diffuse museum” that are taking root among scholars in museum and heritage studies. We investigate strategies used to prompt, shape and stage affective atmospheres in projects related to the production of heritage. Taking the tropes of *flânerie* and *flâneur/flâneuse* out of vibrant metropolises and over to the quieter rural context of Vardø, we stroll through the streets, observe people and their activities, look at buildings and things, contemplate the surrounding landscape, visit neighbouring sites, and try to get a feel of the place and its history. The photographic essay by Farstadvoll brings forth the *ambiente* and affective atmosphere surrounding our flâneries through the town and the surrounding environment.¹

I start with a theoretical reflection on the use of *flânerie* and *assemblage* as relevant approaches to the study of museums and heritage in the making. This is followed by a short outline of the history of Vardø and the presentation of the two projects that have triggered the regeneration of the town. I am especially interested in the use of street art to stop a process of ruination due to increased depopulation and abandonment; how art may become a medium to save towns from turning into ghost-towns; how art may bring about renewal and innovation, and become a major cultural and economic resource for these places.

I then explicate the main characteristics of ecomuseum, and offer an inclusive understanding of the concept of the diffuse museum in relation to Vardø. I go

1. The photographs by Stein Farstadvoll are marked: Farstadvoll. The author has added a few pictures she took while walking about in Vardø; they are marked Naguib. In addition, another contributor to this volume, Torgeir Bangstad, has provided the photograph of the *Movers' trailer*.

on to examine ways of preserving a sense of place by (re)creating the *ambiente* and affective atmospheres in projects concerned with heritage management and examine the impact of renovation projects and art on Vardø. To conclude, I ponder the long-term effect of cultural events in establishing a network of mixed heritage sites, and whether Vardø may in the future become a kind of diffuse museum.



Eternal Light – Eternal Night; artist: Stephen Powers. Photo: Farstadvoll

Flânerie and assemblage

Flânerie and assemblage have over the past three decades or so become *nomadic concepts* or, to use the terminology of Mieke Bal, *travelling concepts*, that move between disciplines, fields of research and scholars, and change connotations during their peregrinations.¹ *Flânerie* from the French verb *flâner*, to stroll, to amble, is a social and intellectual practice that evokes an art of walking and observing. It involves movement, perception, the production of knowledge and dissemination.² According to Keith Tester, *flânerie* is “the observation of the fleeting and the transitory”.³ It relates to the critical gaze of the *flâneur*, and is being resorted to as a method for reading texts, studying urban environments, examining material and immaterial traces of the past.⁴

1. Mieke Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities, A Rough Guide*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

2. Ilija Tomanić, Trivundža, “Dragons and Arcades: Towards a Discursive Construction of the *Flâneur*.” *Critical Perspectives on the European Mediasphere*, (Ljubljana, 2011).

3. Keith Tester, (ed.), *The Flâneur*, (London: Routledge, 1994), 7; David Frisby, “The *Flâneur* and Social Theory.” *The Flâneur*, edited by Keith Tester (1994), 81–110.

4. Mike Featherstone, “The *Flâneur*, the City and Virtual Public Life.” *Urban Studies* 35/5–6 (1998), 910.

The figure of the *flâneur*, the one who strolls at leisure through the streets of the modern city watching, listening and reporting on street-life, was first introduced by the French poet, Charles Baudelaire.¹ The *flâneur* of Baudelaire is an artist, a poet, a philosopher who ambles without apparent purpose through the streets of 19th century Paris. He is attentive to details; he endeavours to go beyond what he sees on the surface in order to find the hidden meaning of things.² During his promenades, the *flâneur* is attuned to the atmosphere and poetics of the urban environment, and makes connections between the different bits and pieces of his observations.³ At the same time, he knows that change entails continuity and that there is some kind of permanence in impermanence. Modernity, according to Baudelaire, is not determined by chronology; each period has its own modernity and brings about its own novelties and innovations. For him, the notion of modernity expresses “the fugitive, the transient, the contingent, half of it is art and the other half is the everlasting and the unchanged”.⁴

The *flâneur* is a solitary character who walks in the present to find the past. During his stroll, the street refashions him and leads him into a vanished time, into a past that may be perceived as all the more profound because it is collective. It is a past he shares with others, and not merely his private one.⁵ As he walks about the city the *flâneur* lets his mind wander to other places. He *assembles* various impressions and images that he records and organizes in such a way that they form the basis for what Benjamin describes as the ‘dialectical image’ where past and present moments meet and flare up into a ‘constellation’.

As we start walking through Vardø, we reflect on the concept of *assemblage*, and what we here are assembling. The concept of *assemblage* is here used as a method and theoretical approach to express ideas and practices about synchronising heteroclitic objects and putting them together so that they form a whole. *Assemblage* refers to the multiple, the fragmentary, and to “a continual process

1. The essay describes the painter Constantin Guys; cfr. Charles Baudelaire, „ *Le peintre de la vie moderne* (Paris : Collections Litteratura.com, 1863), 6-10.

Several studies have examined the gender of the *flâneur* and point out that urban women from the bourgeoisie did have their own ways of ‘walking the city’. At the end of the 19th century-beginning 20th century the *flâneuses* retain the sharp, critical gaze of their male counterparts, but their promenades are not aimless. Rather, they have a purpose and are commonly tied to consumer culture and shopping in the enclosed spaces of large department stores.

2. This perception of the *flâneur* was taken up later by Walter Benjamin, in *Paris, capitale du XXe siècle*. Essais T.4, (Paris : STAReBOOKS éditions, 2013 [1939]), 256 : « *Le flâneur cherche refuge dans la foule*. », 274 : « *Le flâneur fait figure d'éclaircur sur le marché. En cette qualité il est en même temps l'explorateur de la foule*. ».

3. Charles Baudelaire, „ *Œuvres complètes de Charles Baudelaire. Les Paradis artificiels. Petits poèmes en prose* (Paris : Michel Lévy Frères, 1869). https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Mademoiselle_Bistouri (Accessed on April 21, 2017).

4. Baudelaire, *Le peintre*, 11 : « *La modernité, c'est le fugitif, le transitoire, le contingent, la moitié de l'art, dont l'autre moitié est l'éternel et l'immuable* ».

5. Benjamin, Walter, *The Arcades Project*. Translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, (Cambridge Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002 [1999]), 879 - 880.

of emergence and becoming”.¹ Thus, it highlights the temporary rather than the enduring; the fragments, gaps and fractures rather than the intact and whole.²

Drawing on the works of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, in particular *Mille Plateaux*, and Manuel DeLanda’s assemblage theory, I consider assemblage as an ongoing procedure of arranging or, as the French term *agencement* implies, of fitting together a set of heterogeneous elements that may constitute the fundamentals of an emergent diffuse museum.³ I reflect on how these elements are connected, how their narratives echo one another, and convey a ‘sense of place’. In my use of the term, seen from a cultural historical vantage point and heritage perspective, assemblage entails the recognition that “surfaces are deep ... and multi-layered”.⁴ It means the need to recover the memory of things and investigate their changing significance in time and space.

Using *flânerie* and assemblage as methodological and theoretical approaches within the fields of museum and heritage involves taking one’s time, getting a feel of the atmosphere of a place, recognizing the traces of the past in the present, and also being open to wonder. *Flânerie* and assemblage imply that one not only takes into account the social, cultural and historical contexts, but in addition, the *ambiente* and *affective atmosphere* of a place and one’s own sensory experiences. Museums, in particular open-air museums, ecomuseums and diffuse museums have taken upon themselves to elaborate ideal spaces to pursue such activities.

Vardø, from ruin to regeneration

Vardø is a town of about 2100 inhabitants situated in a tundra like landscape on the island of Vardøya in the very north-eastern corner of the county of Finnmark. The population of Finnmark is ethnically and linguistically diverse. It includes so-called ‘ethnic’ Norwegians, the Sami who constitute the indigenous population of Norway, and the Kven who originally came from Finland and are one of Norway’s five national minorities.⁵

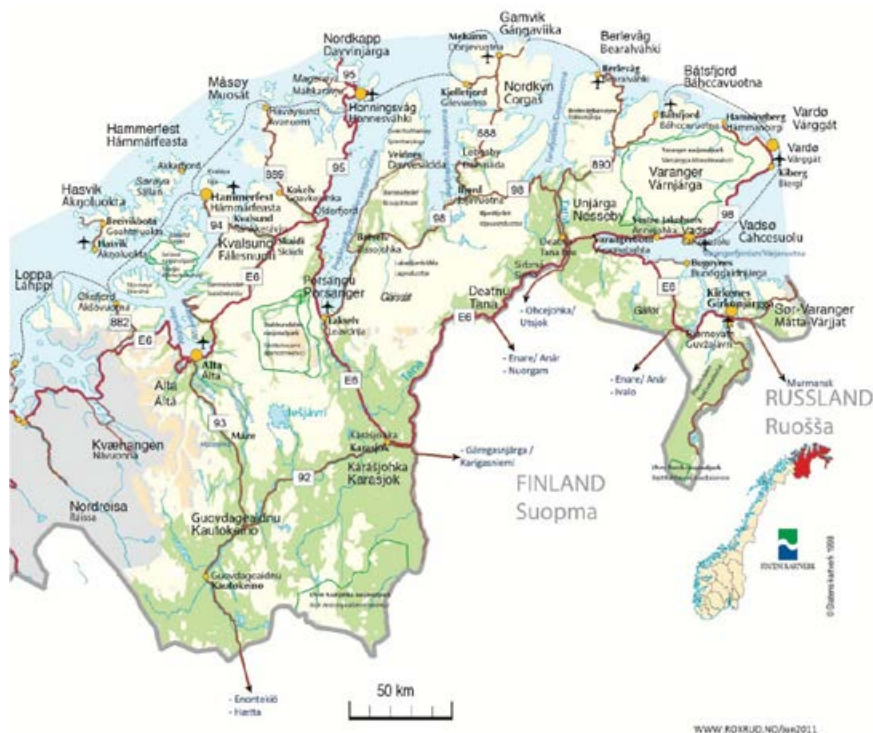
1. Rosanne Kennedy, et al. “All those Little Machines: Assemblage as Transformative Theory.” *Australian Humanities Review* 55 (2013) 46.

2. Ben Anderson and Colin McFarlane, “Assemblage and Geography.” *Area* 43/2 (2011) 124-127.

3. Gilles Deleuze, and Felix Guattari, *Mille plateaux. Capitalisme et schizophrénie*, (Paris : Les Éditions de Minuit, 1980); Manuel DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society. Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity*, (London: Continuum, 2006); John Phillips, “Agencement/Assemblage.” *Theory, Culture and Society* 23/2-3 (2006) 108-109.

4. Gonzáles-Ruibal, Alfredo, «In Praise of Depth,» *Archaeological Dialogues* 18/2 (2011) 165.

5. Norway recognizes six minorities. The Sami constitute the indigenous population of the country. The other five are national minorities. Two groups, the Romani or Tatere and the Roms or gypsies, are ‘travelling people’. Two other groups, the Kvener and the Skogfinnere, are people of the borderlands who originally came from Finland. The fifth group, the Jews, is a religious group composed mostly of urban people.



Map of Finnmark¹

Archaeological finds in the area around Vardø indicate the presence of settlements since the Stone Age. Vardø has a long history as a trading and fishing port that goes back to the 14th century. In 1307, the Norwegian king, Håkon V Magnusson ordered the building of a fortress that would mark the north-eastern frontiers of his kingdom, and in 1789 Vardø obtained the status of town. The major sources of income of the town have ever since the Middle Ages been fishing and seafood processing, in particular dry fish and in modern times also herring. Dry fish was exported to other countries in Europe through the intermediary of merchants mainly from the Norwegian Hanseatic city of Bergen who had obtained the monopoly over the trade.²

Vardø had also long-standing contacts with the Pomor populations living along the northern coast of Russia. So much so, that in the nineteenth century, Vardø was known as the 'capital of the Pomors'.³ The French geographer and ethnologist, Charles Rabot noted that on market days in the region one could hear people

1. Source: <http://www.travel-finnmark.no/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Side-1-Forside2.jpg>

2. Randi Rønning Nagu Balsvik, *Vardø – Grensepost og fiskevær. 1850-1950*. 2 vols. (Vardø: Dreyer Bok, 2007), vol. 1, 12-39.

3. Randi Rønning Balsvik, «Pomorbyen, Vardø og Russland.» In *Pomor – Nord-Norge og Nord-Russland gjennom tusen år*, edited by Einar Niemi, (Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 1992) 99-115.

speaking Norwegian, German, Finnish, Karelian, Sami and Russian.¹ During WWII, the German *Wehrmacht* occupied the region and its towns. They built bunkers and shelters, dug trenches and tunnels, and established camps where Russian prisoners of war were interned under very hard conditions.²



Remains of a German bunker in nearby Kiberg. In the gap, one can see Vardø One distinguishes the small white globe shaped radar overlooking the town. Photo: Farstadvoll,

At the end of the war, the retreating German army operated a scorched earth policy in Finnmark destroying the towns and surrounding nature. The reconstruction of Finnmark and its towns began in the 1950s. Vardø had nevertheless retained a coherent set of its pre-war buildings and these contributed in maintaining the town's character and atmosphere. During the Cold War period, several military surveillance and intelligence outposts were established in many places in the region, among these Vardø where newer radar systems have been installed. These globe shaped radar installations are set up on a plateau overlooking the town. In recent times, the economic uncertainties related to the collapse of the fisheries and lack of job opportunities starting already in the 1970s have led to a serious population decline. Many buildings have been abandoned, left to

1. Charles Rabot,, « Exploration en Laponie, Norvège, Suède, Finlande », in *Le tour du monde. Nouveau Journal des Voyages*, edited by Edouard Charton, (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1887), 114 : «Vous entendez parler le norvégien, l'allemand, le finnois, le carélien, le lapon, le russe. C'est un mélange de toutes les langues et de tous les costumes. »

2. Bjørnar Olsen and Chris Witmore. "Sværtholt. Recovered Memories from POW Camp in the North." In *Ruin Memories. Materiality, Aesthetics and the Archaeology of the Recent Past*, edited by Bjørnar Olsen and Thora Pétursdóttir (London: Routledge, 2014), 162-190.

crumble and to gradually turn into ruins. This situation was the starting point for all the projects with the aim of reviving Vardø.

(Re)creating a sense of place: preservation, *ambiente* and affective atmospheres

During my *flâneries* downhill from the church of Vardø, I pass the town hall, the Pomor museum with its nests of sea gulls under the roof, and direct myself towards the chapel, the cemetery, and then further down to the *Steilneset*, situated on a promontory along the shore of the sea. *Steilneset Memorial* is a memorial of the witchcraft trials that took place in Finnmark between 1600 and 1692, and one of two large projects as a result of efforts to revitalize the town at the turn of the present century. The monument was designed by the Swiss architect, Peter Zumthor and the French-American sculptor, Louise Bourgeois. Zumthor conceived a construction inspired by the forms and materials of the vernacular architecture and by local knowledge and traditional occupations.



The Steilneset Memorial, designed by architect Peter Zumthor. Photo: Farstadvoll.

The long hall is covered by sailcloth and evokes the *hjeller* or wood racks used to hang the cod to dry. The space inside consists of a dimly lit narrow corridor; the names of the ninety-one persons condemned for witchcraft and excerpts from each trial hang on the walls. Beside every plate, a small lamp and a mirror honour the memory of each individual. Louise Bourgeois' installation is constructed inside a cube made of glass and metal. It is an assemblage comprising an empty chair placed in the centre of a circular form. Under the chair, a flame burns constantly. The chair and fire are surrounded by seven big oval mirrors that reflect the flames and also the visitors to the site.



Steilneset Memorial - Burning chair, symbolizing the witches' burning at the stake. Installation by Louise Bourgeois. Photo: Naguib.

The memorial was inaugurated by the queen of Norway on the eve of Mid-summer's day, 2011. Interestingly, the speeches held at the inauguration tied the significance of the *Steilneset Memorial* to a much wider transnational and transcultural memory of persecutions, genocides and human rights issues.¹

The second project to revitalize the town was *Vardø Restored* (2012-2016). The driving forces behind the project were local people wanting to improve the future of their town and by extension the whole island. They believed that the restoration and renovation of some old emblematic buildings of Vardø would gradually bring life back to old businesses, attract new businesses and consequently encourage people to stay. Among these buildings there is the Hornøya lighthouse from the 1890s, the mechanical boat workshop Slippen that was operating since 1911, the Grand Hotel that was inaugurated in 1914, the pub *Nordpol kro* from 1886 where the famous explorer Fridtjof Nansen stopped over before setting out on the second expedition to the North Pole in 1898, the Pomor house from 1865, and also more recent buildings as, for example, the *Trygdekontoret*, which as

1. John Ødemark, "Cultural Difference and Development in the Mirror of Witchcraft. The Cultural Policy of Display at Steilneset Memorial." *Nordisk Kulturpolitisk Tidsskrift*, 17/2 (2014) 190-192.

its name indicates had housed the office for social welfare, and dates from the reconstruction period of the 1950s.

The main objective of the project has been to devise “a national model for local development based on cultural heritage in commercial ownership”.¹ The restoration of the different buildings has been, and still is, financed by the owners of these properties with the support of the Norwegian Foundation for Cultural Heritage, The Uni Foundation, the Directorate of Cultural Heritage, the municipality of Vardø and the county of Finnmark. A promenade by ways of small side streets leads me to the site of the fortress and its mixture of newer and older buildings. From there I push on towards the site of the Drakkar monument, back again to the centre of town, and get on the main road along the port and one of the restored buildings, the Nordpol pub. Strolling about brings to mind some of the many views on the objectives and worth of restoration and conservation of the built environment. Several of the standpoints on these issues were taken into account during the *Vardø Restored*-project.

Questions related to the preservation and caring of material remains from the past have been the object of many heated debates in different parts of the world. In Europe, the end of the 18th century saw the emergence of a new interest in the restoration and reconstruction of old buildings, archaeological sites and monuments. In Britain, the conservation movement led by John Ruskin emphasized that historical authenticity meant the recognition that each period leaves its specific mark on the object, making it unique and authentic in relation to time. The Italian architect and writer, Camillo Boito indorsed a more holistic view to architectural remains of the past that takes into account the different lifetimes of a monument and that values traditional crafts and the knowledge of artisans. Truth and authenticity were Boito’s main concerns.² He considered the historical monuments similar to ancient damaged, fragmentary documents, which, fits our purposes to understand the restoration development of Vardø.

Alois Riegl elaborated a system of values that is articulated around three parameter³ *commemorative intent* (Erinnerungswert), *history* (Historischeswert), and *aesthetic values* (Kunsthistorischeswert). The two last values depend on what Riegl called the *Kunstwollen* or art volition. The *Kunstwollen* encompasses the various art forms of a given historical period and culture. Riegl maintained that ideally the aging process of buildings, monuments and artefacts should be respected, and that all efforts of conservation and restoration are interferences

1. <http://www.architecturenorway.no/stories/other-stories/Vardø-2014/> (Accessed on January 15, 2017)

2. Camillo Boito., *Conserver ou restaurer: Les Dilemmes du patrimoine*, (Besançon: Éditions de l’Imprimeur, 2000 [1893]). Boito’s opinions on the conservation and restoration of historical monuments and architecture are stated in eight points in a document known as the *Prima Carta del Restauro* or the ‘First Charter of Restoration’ that was presented at the third Conference of Architects and Civil Engineers of Rome in 1883.

3. Alois Riegl, *Le culte moderne des monuments. Son essence et sa genèse*, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1984 [1903]).

with nature. Accordingly, things should be left to perish in beauty. Nevertheless, efforts should be made to postpone the process as much as possible. Hence, Riegl opened the way to preservation rather than restoration.



Perishing in beauty: Deserted house by the fjord at Vardø. Photo: Farstadvoll

In practice, the ideas of Boito and Riegl about the restoration and preservation of buildings involves renovation; that is ‘making something new again’, give it new meaning and at the same time uphold its authenticity, commemorative intent, historical and aesthetic values. As the case of Vardø shows, the preservation of the built heritage in towns is very much the art of re-creating a sense of place by reconfiguring, remodeling and rehabilitating sites and buildings in ways that respect their successive lifetimes and in doing so, maintaining their multiple, co-existing temporalities.¹ While some renovation schemes do not interfere with the original form of a building others, such as the old buildings that were selected in the *Vardø Restored* project, operate with extensions, modifications and adaptations to new usages. Other buildings were preserved thanks to street art. Other buildings again were just abandoned to their fate.

1. Saphinaz-Amal Naguib,, “Tales of Two Cities: Sites of Interculturality and their Narratives.” In *Kulturarens gränser. Komparativa perspektiv*, edited by Peter Aronsson et al., (Göteborg: Arkipelag, 2005), 128 – 144.



No entrance! Vardø Town Hall; an entrance was closed after renovation works. Photo: Farstadvoll



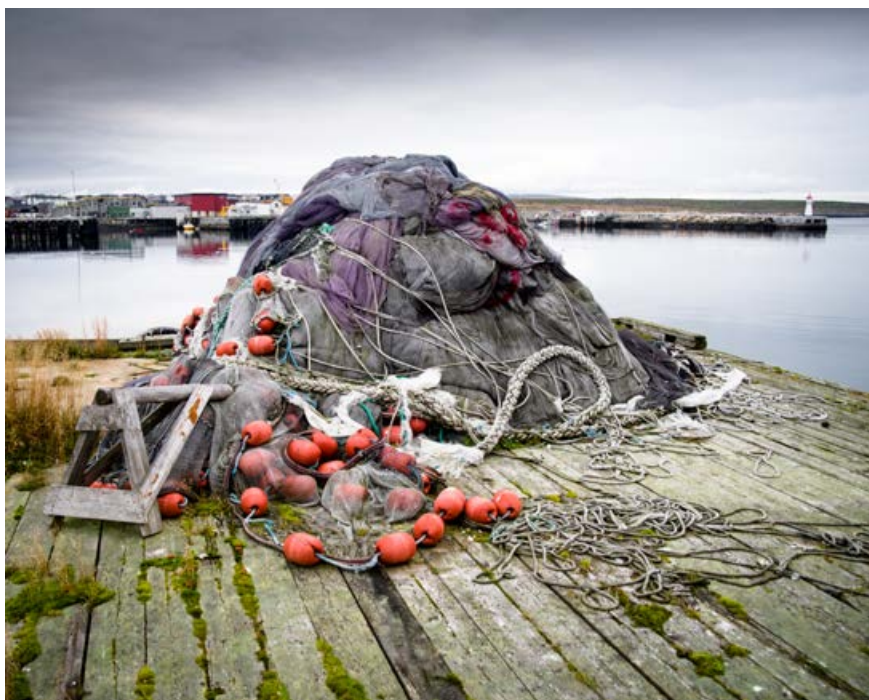
The massive wooden Old Primary School in Vardø designed by the architect Herman Major Backer and finished in 1888.¹ One of the buildings in Vardø that have been protected through resolution by the Norwegian Directorate for Cultural Heritage. Photo: Farstadvoll.



Art among debris. Artist: Claudio Ethos. Photo: Naguib.

1. http://arkitekturguide.uit.no/categories.php?cat_id=344 (Accessed on April 27, 2018)

Works of renovation endeavour to maintain and revitalise what the Italian architect, and historian of urbanism, Gustavo Giovannoni described as *ambiente*.¹ To Giovannoni the *ambiente* refers to both the physical environment and the atmosphere of a place. It expresses an ethereal quality that radiates through the interplay between environment, material culture, knowledge and the senses. It is contingent to location, surrounding landscape, history, culture, perceptions and feelings about a place. The aesthetics of the *ambiente* imply the affective presence of things and the manner in which they influence the production of atmosphere. As such, the *ambiente* has an impact on what Ben Anderson describes as *affecting atmospheres* that are produced by the contacts between different people, between people and things, between people and places. For Anderson, “the word atmosphere is used interchangeably with mood, feeling, ambience, tone and other ways of naming collective affects.”² The *ambiente* of a place does not radiate harmonious and beautiful atmospheres at all times. Quite the opposite, as some of the pictures in Stein Farstadvoll’s photographic essay show, powerful emotional and aesthetic experiences permeate the affective atmospheres emanating from ruins, destructions, abandonment and painful memories.



Fishing life. It is unclear whether this is an installation made of assorted fishing gear by an anonymous artist or simply an assemblage of abandoned fishing gear. Photo: Farstadvoll.

1. Gustavo Giovannoni, *Vecchie città ed edilizia nuova*, (Torino: CittaStudi, 1995 [1932]).

2. Ben Anderson, “Affective Atmospheres”, *Emotion, Space and Society* 2/2 (2009) 78.

The preservation of built heritage implies taking into account the cultural factor as well as the *ambiente* and *affective atmospheres* of a place. Preservation in matters of tangible heritage is a measure that entails agreement both on the cultural, political and economic plans as to the significance of what ought to be saved and what may be left to ruination and, eventually, cleared away. This poses a number of dilemmas to professionals in the various fields of heritage management and museology, politicians and developers. In a town like Vardø, fighting the looming spectre of ghost town, it requires elaborating alternative plans and contexts to bring about new life to the town. Street art and the Komafest 2012 offered suitable conditions to carry out the venture.

Out of the coma...

The kick-off event of the above mentioned second project, *Vardø Restored*, was the *Komafest* or Koma festival during the summer of 2012.¹ The website of the event tells us that the Komafest “is an art project on an arctic island in Norway. The project’s main focus is to highlight depopulation problems in the northern regions”.² The name Komafest plays on the imagery of Vardø waking up from a long comatic sleep and starting to live anew. The festival was arranged on the initiative of the Norwegian street art artist known as Pøbel (meaning *Mob* in English), in collaboration with the Varanger Museum as the project’s owner.³ In addition, the Komafest got the financial support of both national and local institutions, such as the county of Finnmark, the municipality of Vardø, Public Art Norway (KORO), North Norwegian Arts Centre, The Freedom of Expression Foundation Norway (Fritt Ord), and several local business people and entrepreneurs.

Eleven internationally renowned street art artists gathered in the town for a three-week period (5th – 21st July, 2012), and created about fifty art works on the walls of abandoned houses and warehouses. In addition to Pøbel, the other eleven participating artists were Stephen Powers from the United States, Whils from Portugal, Roa from Belgium, Atle Østrem from Norway, Claudio Ethos from Brazil, E. B. Itso and ‘Husk mit navn’ (meaning *Remember my name*) from Denmark, Horfe, Ken Sortais and Remed from France, and Conor Harrington from Ireland. The provisions made to the group of artists participating at the Komafest 2012 were clearly stated; their pieces were to relate to the identity of the place, the history and collective memory of the town and the region. Several artists took their inspiration from the surrounding landscape and urban scenery, and many of the murals and graffiti reflect a strong connection to the place.

1. There were two events following the Komafest 2012. In 2013, Pøbel opened a gallery of drawings, *The Blood Bank, an art exhibition for featuring the pulse of the city*. In 2016 new restoration and preservation projects were initiated on several old well-known buildings of Vardø.

2. <http://komafest.com/> (Accessed on January 15, 2017)

3. Varanger Museum consists of an association encompassing several municipal museums in the region as well as several historical buildings and sites; <http://www.varangermuseum.no/om-varanger-museum/> .Accessed on August 20, 2017.



Old freezer warehouse. Artist: Husk mit navn. Photo: Naguib.

Reading the news coverage of the event, the blogs, listening to recorded interviews and talking with local people, one notices a general agreement that the pieces created on the walls of old houses and warehouses were not vandalism but ‘real’ art. They repeatedly point out that the Komafest 2012 and the artworks on the walls gave a boost to the town. Not only did they put Vardø back on the cultural map of Norway but, in addition, made it part of an international art scene and gave an example in heritage management that could be pursued in other parts of the world.¹

The Komafest 2012 project was symbolically concluded with an installation by Pøbel, erecting an old moving company’s trailer that had been used as the main means of departure from Vardø, vertically at the entrance of the tunnel connecting the island to mainland.

1. Pøbel and *Vardø Restored* together with Russian partners were behind the project *New Life* for Teriberka, a small town on the Barents Sea in Murmansk. The project was greatly financed by the Norwegian KORO (Art in the Public Space), cf. articles in local newspaper *Østhavet* (16.07.2015, 3; 02.11.2016, 8; 17.08.2017, 9); <https://barents.no/nb/nyheter/2015/teriberka-inspireres-av-Vardø>. Accessed on 26 August 2017.



Installation: Movers' trailer. Artist: Pøbel. Photo: Torgeir Bangstad.

The impact of cultural projects such as *Vardø Restored* may have lasting effects on a place, they may contribute in transforming small dormant towns into a kind of Ecomuseum or rather diffuse museum, as we shall see.



1789 – *De siste ulvene* (meaning: *The last wolves*). Artist Atle Østrem.
Photo: Farstadvoll



Fisherman's face. Artist: Vihls. Photo: Farstadvoll.



The hunter. Artist: Connor Harrington. Photo: Farstadvoll.



Sea Fever. Artist: EB Itso. Photo: Farstadvoll.



Fortuna. Artist: Remed. Photo: Farstadvoll.



Sea gull father and child. Artist: Pøbel. Photo: Farstadvoll.

Street art and valorisation of place

The Komafest 2012 showed how art in general, and in the present case study street art, may serve to (re)create a sense of place. In my use of the word, street art is a generic term that encompasses a great variety of genres and styles combining several fields such as calligraphy, poster art, graphic novels, mosaics, paint and installations. Artists use various tools as spray cans, markers, stencils, sticker art, murals, lighting, knitting and ready-made. The pieces created range from the artist's signature or tag, phrases, sentences and poems to sophisticated murals,

and installations made of heteroclite objects.¹ Street art is a multi-sited, interactive and ephemeral form of art. It often carries social and political messages.² Several international street art festivals are being organized around the world. They are held in cities like Montreal, New York (NuArt), Copenhagen, Accra, Ibiza, Bodø (UpNorth festival), Bristol (Upfest), Stavanger (NuArt), just to name a few. Usually, street art is a practice of image making in urban public spaces that is increasingly used to valorise certain districts, mostly in urban environments, and by that turning these places into emergent heritage sites and tourist landmarks.³ Some artists do, however, delve into more rural surroundings for their pieces. The project *Ghetto spedalsk* or 'ghetto leprosy' by the Norwegian artists Dolk and Pøbel is an example of this new current. During the summer of 2008, they painted stencils on the walls of twenty abandoned houses in the Lofoten islands in northern Norway.⁴ The Komafest 2012 combined both and brought together the urban and rural environments of Vardø.⁵

As street art is gradually being acknowledged as a form of visual art, questions concerning the market value of the artworks and of copyrights are currently becoming increasingly critical and complex.⁶ In Vardø, the fate of the piece called *Skeleton of the whale* by the Belgian artist, Roa is interesting. During the Komafest of 2012, Roa created a mural representing the skeleton of a whale to cover the long wall of a derelict fishing station. In 2015, a local entrepreneur, Jørn Jensen bought up the place. His plan was to transform it into a centre for 'maritime activities'. In the process of restoring the place, he painted over the mural. When asked about it he answered that once the renovation is finished and the business picks up he may contract a street artist to produce a new piece.⁷ Many have criticized his decision and see it as an act of irreverence towards works of art and disregard of their importance for the future of the town. However, ephemerality is one of the main features of street art, and the purpose of the Komafest 2012 was to inject new life into old, abandoned buildings.

1. Rafael Schacter, "Graffiti and Street Art as Ornament." In *Routledge Handbook of Graffiti and Street Art*, ed. Jeffrey Ian Ross (London: Routledge, 2016), 154 – 155, footnotes 2 and 3.

2. For instance, the Arab Spring (2011-2013) witnessed a surge of political street art in the Middle East, cf. Saphinaz Amal Naguib, "Engaged Ephemeral Art: Street Art and the Egyptian Spring." *Transcultural Studies* 2 (2016) 53-88.

3. Graeme Evans, "Graffiti Art and the City. From Piece-Making to Place-Making," in *Routledge Handbook of Graffiti and Street Art*, edited by Jeffrey Ian Ross (London: Routledge, 2016), 168-193.

4. Martin Reed, "Street Art Norway. An Introduction". In *Street Art Norway, vol. 2*, ed. Martin Berdahl Aamundsen (Oslo: Kontur forlag, 2012), 58.

5. Mikaela Bruhn., *Can Street Art Make The Rural Feel More Urban? A Close Look at the Norwegian Municipality Vardø and the Street Art Festival Komafest*, 2015; <https://mikaelabruhn.wordpress.com/2015/01/20/can-street-art-make-the-rural-feel-more-urban/> . Accessed on February 20, 2017.

6. Peter Bengtsen, "Stealing from the Public: The Value of Street Art Taken from the Street." In *Routledge Handbook of Graffiti and Street Art*, edited by Jeffrey Ian Ross, (London: Routledge, 2016), 416-428.

7. Personal communication (interview September 23, 2016).

I will concentrate on four characteristic elements of this type of art that explicate the use of art to recreate a sense of place with its distinctive *ambiente* and affective atmosphere that may, in the end, turn the town into a diffuse museum. The first two main attributes of street art relevant in our case are *intentionality* and *performance*. The artists involved had been expressly invited to contribute to the Komafest 2012. They appropriated the public space to convey their messages, and the streets became their performance and exhibition space. The stage was open and interactive; it allowed them to communicate directly with the inhabitants of the town who had come to watch them work. During that period, the people of Vardø took actively part in the performance by covering one of the walls with their own graffiti. Their participation showed their engagement with a project that may become part of their future collective memory.

The third attribute is the *ornamental* mode of street art. According to Rafael Schacter “[o]rnamént is ... never merely ‘mere’.” As ornament, street art “can be seen to have the ability to construct a new sense of order within the city, to be able to physically score an idea, a concept of civility onto its material surface.”¹ In an article on the graffiti of New York, Jean Baudrillard compared them to wall tattoos that are added to the architecture of an urban space and “remake the walls and parts of the city; they free the walls from the architecture and turn them once again into living social matter.”² As ornaments, street art and graffiti remodel the urban environment and highlight a place’s life and social relations with the buildings. In Vardø, they shape the *ambiente* and give the place a particular atmosphere of still being alive, albeit at the same time forsaken. They function also as valuable instruments towards the preservation of deserted buildings and may eventually lead to their renovation.

1. Schacter, Graffiti and Street Art, *op. cit.*, 153-154.

2. Jean Baudrillard, « Kool Killer. Les graffiti de New York ou l’insurrection par les signes. » *Revista de sociologia* 3 (1974) 27-38; cited in Schacter, Graffiti and Street Art, *op. cit.*, 148 : « *Les graffiti refont des murs et des pans de la ville ... En tatouant les murs ... les délivrent de l’architecture, et les rendent à la matière vive, encore sociale, au corps mouvant de la ville...* ».



The shadow of sea gulls flying by. Artist: Stephen Powers. Photo: Naguib.

Walking around and pondering the multiple street art on the various buildings, I muse on the quality and function of the different pieces. *Ephemerality* comes to my mind, and this is, in fact, the fourth main feature of urban art. The reasons of this transience are many. They may be due to damage caused by the weather and erosion, people passing by, or by owners of buildings and local authorities painting over the pieces. Ephemerality does have a certain appeal, and several street artists see the disappearance of their works as a condition of the process to create *for the moment*, for the *experience*, for the *freedom*.¹ Thus, the erasure of their pieces from the walls – as happened in the case of the *Skeleton of the whale* mentioned earlier – or the destruction of their installations in the public space, seems actually to liberate them from the constrictions of conformist moulds. Ephemerality does not necessarily lead to oblivion. Jeff Ferrell points out that nowadays, a number of new channels help prolonging the experience of creation in time and space and, thus, actively counteract the evanescence of street art.² For instance, digital photography is increasingly used to document the various pieces. Artists around the world rely on a plethora of Internet platforms and social media to exhibit their works.³ This is also true for some of the pieces created during the Komafest 2012. Among the pieces that have been whitewashed are the above mentioned *Skeleton of the whale* by Roa, the graffiti *Cod is Great* by the American artist Stephen Powers, the mural showing a bird holding binoculars and watching a man perched on top of the window of the building whistling, and the one of a man trying to catch a running woman in his net by the Danish artist, Husk mit navn.

1. Rafael Schacter, "An Ethnography of Iconoclasm: An Investigation into the Production, Consumption and Destruction of Street-art in London." *Journal of Material Culture* 13 (2008) 46, italics in the text.

2. Jeff Ferrell, "Foreword. Graffiti, Street Art and the Politics of Complexity." In *Routledge Handbook of Graffiti and Street Art*, edited by Jeffrey Ian Ross, (London: Routledge, 2016), xxxiv-xxxv.

3. Naguib, "Engaged Ephemeral Art", *op. cit.*, 62 – 63.

Museum without walls: ecomuseums and diffuse museums

In light of the points discussed so far in this essay, one may consider Vardø as a kind of ecomuseum. These have been particularly committed to bring about sustainability through various incentives and projects directed towards the selection, preservation, protection and transmission of different kinds of heritage. Peter Davis describes ecomuseums as “museums of time in addition to museums of space”.¹ He defines the ecomuseum as “a community-based museum or heritage project that supports sustainable development.”² Not all use the label in their name; every museum has its’ own local interpretation, organization and practice of the concept. Norway adopted and implemented the philosophy of the ecomuseum early on in the 1980s. It represented a further development of the open-air museum and was oriented towards interdisciplinarity, conservation *in situ* and community development. In addition, the ecomuseum gave more attention to the present and future than to a ‘romanticized’ past.³

The main common features of ecomuseums are a holistic understanding of heritage that takes in the importance of territory and landscape, the uniqueness and identity of a place, the importance of heritage and memory, the interplay between the natural and the built environment, and active local participation or community governance. These attributes are put in practice thanks to programs directed to improve sustainable traditional, non/intrusive production activities and services, fund-raising and networking, training, education and research. The Declaration of Intent, Long Networks, states that “An ecomuseum is a dynamic way in which communities preserve, interpret, and manage their heritage for a sustainable development. An ecomuseum is based on a community agreement.”⁴

The aim of ecomuseums is to empower and involve local communities. Ensuring integrated governance implies the structural involvement of local stakeholders and individual inhabitants in setting up ventures to preserve, develop and maintain the local cultural and natural heritage. It rests very much on a relationship of trust between the different actors.⁵ Further, ecomuseums are not always limited

1. Peter Davis,, *Ecomuseums: A Sense of Place*, (London: Continuum, 2011), 5.

2. Peter Davis,, “Ecomuseums and Sustainability in Italy, Japan and China: Concept Adaptation through Implementation.” In *Museum Revolutions: How Museums Change and are Changed*, edited by Simon Knell et al., (London: Routledge, 2007), 199. The ecomuseum movement developed within the New Museology school of thought in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and it was one of its proponents, Hugues de Varine who coined the appellation in 1971 (cfr. Desvallées and Mairesse (eds.), 2011, 288-291, 552-556).

3. John Aage Gjestrum and Marc Maure eds., *Økomuseumsboka – identitet, økologi, deltagelse – Ei arbeidsbok om ny museologi*. (Tromsø: Tromsø museum, 2000), 190-191.

4. *Declaration of Intent; Long Networks, Ecomuseums and Europe*. Trento, May 5-8, 2004; <https://www.mondilocali.it/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/Declaration-of-Intent-2004.pdf> . Accessed on March 7, 2017.

5. Nunzia Borrelli and Peter Davis. 2012. “How Culture Shapes Nature: Reflections on Ecomuseum Practices.” *Nature and Culture* 7/1 (2012) 42.

to a single building or a site. They often consist of what Peter Davis describes as a ‘fragmented site’, a sort of ‘continuing landscape’ that comprises a network of sites scattered within a region it refers to as its territory. These sites can be places of archaeological and historical significance, habitats of rare fauna and flora or unusual geological formations that can be considered as ‘cultural touchstones’.¹ Accordingly, the projects in Vardø and surrounding region correspond almost perfectly with the definition and endeavours of ecomuseums.²

The same idea underlies the notion of the *dispersed museum* or *diffuse museum* that was introduced by the Italian architect, Fredi Drugman in 1980. The aim of the *museo diffuso* was to rediscover and valorise places of historical significance mostly in urban contexts and put them under one umbrella in a network of varied sites. For instance, in 2003 the city of Turin established a diffuse museum that encompasses all the sites tied to the memory of the Resistance, the war, deportation and freedom rights.³ Moreover, the ambition of ecomuseums and diffuse museums is to preserve the ‘spirit of place’ or ‘sense of place’ rather than to collect and accumulate various types of objects.⁴ The emphasis is on the distinctiveness of the locality: local history and local memory, local landscape, natural resources, vernacular architecture, ways of life and industries. These were significant factors in the *Vardø Restored* project. For Davis the notions of ‘place’ and the more subtle ‘sense of place’ touch deeper cords tied to identity, feelings, knowledge and experience. Place, he says, “is a very individual thing, yet it also has a community expression; it is a chameleon concept, changing colour through individual perception, and changing pattern through time.”⁵

The importance of territory and the sense of place accentuate the significance of landscape and the relationship between people and their environment. According to the *European Landscape Convention* that was adopted in Florence in 2000, landscape is a geographical area “as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.”⁶ Landscapes may also refer to urban spaces and to the position of a town or city in the topography and natural environment of a region. In the case of Vardø, it connotes to the constant presence of the sea, the absence of trees, the rocky

1. Peter Davis, “Places, ‘Cultural Touchstones’ and the Ecomuseum,” In *Heritage, Museums and Galleries: An Introductory Reader*, edited by Gerard Corsane, (London: Routledge, 2005), 365-376; *Ecomuseums*, 80.

2. Borrelli and Davis, “How Culture Shapes Nature”, 42.

3. Viviana Gravano, “Museo Diffuso: Performing Memory in Public Spaces.” In *The Postcolonial Museum: The Arts of Memory and the Pressures of History*, edited by Ian Chambers et al., (London: Routledge, 2016 [2014]), 115. <http://www.forumpa.it/cultura-e-turismo/il-museo-diffuso-di-torino-tra-memoria-e-futuro>; www.museotorino.it. Accessed on March 7, 2017.

4. The two expressions are often used as synonyms. As I understand it the ‘spirit of place’ conveys the idea of an inherent *genius loci* intrinsic to the location while the ‘sense of place’ expresses a relational feature between people and place. In the present essay I shall mostly use the expression ‘sense of place’.

5. Davis, “Places”, *op. cit.*

6. European Landscape Convention, 2000, Chapter 1, article 1, a; <https://rm.coe.int/16802f80c6>. Accessed on March 7, 2017.

terrain, the open horizon and a special kind of light. In his book *Landscape and Memory*, Simon Schama explicates that landscape pertains to cultural memory, and is designed by culture, convention and cognition.¹ Accordingly, landscape should be viewed in terms of space and topography, as well as a mental and aesthetic projection which exists only in the measure that it is gazed upon, lived in, represented and remembered. Thus, landscapes may be perceived in terms of *lieux de mémoire* or realms of memory.

As mentioned earlier, memory is one of the main attributes of ecomuseums. Pierre Nora, who coined the expression *lieux de mémoire*, maintains that realms of memory are *topoi*, that is, both places and topics, where memories converge, coincide or clash and delineate relationships between the past, the present and the future.² These realms of memory may be tangible and materialized in concrete objects such as archives, landscapes, monuments and museums, or intangible and conveyed through ways of life, beliefs and traditions. For Nora, realms of memory replace the *milieux de mémoire*, or environments of memory that have disappeared. Aleida and Jan Assmann led a new approach to memory studies in the early 1990s by introducing the notion of cultural memory based on different forms of knowledge, both tacit and learned. Cultural memory ties the present to a past that may be thousands of years old, and it is not necessarily enclosed within geographic and national boundaries.³ Cultural memory may very well be transnational and transcultural.

The notion of transnational and transcultural memory emerged around 2010 within the field of memory studies in the wake of, and as a criticism to Pierre Nora's *Lieux de mémoire* where the focus is exclusively on France. The colonial past and its impact on the countries and cultures it had dominated for so long, and the cultural significance of francophonie are downright ignored. The terms "transnational memory", "transcultural memory" as well as the more recent "travelling memory" refer to the movements and entanglements of collective and cultural memories across and outside the borders of nation-states, ethnic and religious groups.⁴ This approach to memory accentuates diversity, heterogeneity, polyphony and the fragmentary. It means a change of emphasis from an unwavering and "pure" national collective and cultural memory towards what Michael Rothberg describes as "*multidirectional memory*"⁵ that is more hybrid and includes fragments of memories. The entanglements of memories across

1. Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1995) 7, 12.

2. Pierre Nora, « Entre mémoire et histoire. La problématique des lieux de mémoire. » In *Les lieux de mémoire*, edited by Pierre Nora and al, Vol. I: La République: XVII-XLII, (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), XVII.

3. Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich: Beck, 1992); Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume: Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses* (München: C.H.Beck, 1999).

4. Aleida Assmann, "Transnational Memories." *European Review* 22/4 (2014) 546-556.

5. Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

borders do not make them universal. For instance, in Vardø and surrounding region the memory of the fishing industry and international trade, the memory of the witch trials, the memory of the Pomors' presence, the memory of the forced 'Norwegianisation' of the Sami and Kven populations, and the memory of the German occupation of the north of Norway during WWII resonate differently to different communities and societies. The regional, the national and the international offer each a different social and cultural framework for sharing stories. But, the significance of the narratives is not the same everywhere.

Also, museums have in the last three decades or so taken up questions related to diversity, trans-culturality and cultural contacts. As mentioned earlier, eco-museums and diffuse museums have usually concentrated on the local and on the homogeneity of their communities. This, however, may be changing. In the case of a town like Vardø, it implies considering the impact of, for instance, interactions between different ethnic communities, various forms of cultural contacts and trade exchanges. It also requires dealing with the predicaments of the physical remains of Germans camps from WW II and the memories contained in abandoned houses and enterprises, and decide whether to save them, or let them slowly fall into ruins, or actively remove them.

The town as a diffuse museum

The *ambiente* of Vardø emanates a particular atmosphere of life going on interspersed with a sense of abandonment and desolation. We, the flâneurs, stroll along the clean streets of the town, pass by pretty well-kept houses with their tended gardens, hear the voices of children playing in the yards of their school, enter shops and offices, and spend some leisure time at various eateries. Turning a corner while walking, we are taken by surprise by the appearance of remarkable murals or graffiti on the walls of derelict edifices. The point with the Komafest 2012 was to "see the houses again and prompt their salvage and preservation".¹ Without their walls bearing various pieces of urban art, the deserted edifices, and the closed down warehouses tied to the fishing industry, would seem infused with sadness or rather melancholy with its added portion of apathy. They would appear as a kind of "immature ruins" that are simply left to decay. These buildings are old but not yet imbued with the patina and age-value of antiquities. Nevertheless, they stand as vehicles of memory of a not so far away past and have the potential of becoming heritage.

Our flâneries through the streets of Vardø and the assemblage of impressions, pictures and things gathered during our strolls have brought to the forth reflexions about presence and absence, permanence and impermanence, preservation and the valorisation of a place's distinctiveness and *ambiente*, and about drawing upon culture and memory as sustainable resources in heritage management. Today, the main tourist attractions of Vardø include the old fortress, the *Steilneset Memorial*, the *Pomor Museum*, vestiges of German fortifications from WWII

1. Ole Martin Lislevand, personal communication (25 August 2017).

that connect the place to a broader international history as well as to a cultural memory that goes beyond the national and regional borders. In addition, there is an increased interest in experiencing the northern nature and landscape with the aurora borealis (northern light) and sea bird watching. The street art creations from the *Komafest* of 2012, and the wooden *Drakkar* sculpture shaped as the prow of a Viking ship or drakkar attached to the skeleton of a whale by the Taibola group of artists from Arkhangelsk/Severodvinsk could now be added to the touristic itineraries. The *Drakkar* is evocatively placed on a rocky promontory at the entrance of the fjord.¹



The Drakkar, by Taibola group. Photo: Farstadvoll.

Apart from the Pomor Museum, which is located in a traditional house from the region in the centre of the town, the other sites blend into the landscape in such a way that the borderlines between the town and the different sites seem somehow fluid.

Transnational and transcultural dimensions were articulated during the realization of the Steilneset Memorial, during the *Komafest* of 2012 and the creation of the *Drakkar* sculpture. The awakening of Vardø after its long slumber was done by resorting to culture and different art forms such as architecture, sculpture and street art. The speeches held at the inauguration of the Steilneset Memorial related the memorial to a much broader history and cultural memory of persecutions, genocides and human rights issues. For the *Komafest* 2012, a selected group of international artists contributed actively to the re-awakening of the town. The *Drakkar* was a gift to Vardø from a group of foreign artists. These events have contributed in (re)-creating a sense of place where different sites are

1. The Taibola is a group of Russian artists from Arkhangelsk/Severodvinsk. In July 2016 they were in Vardø and constructed a sculpture made of wood, which symbolizes modern Vardø. The artwork is situated in Skagen, outside Vardø, and is a gift to Vardø; <https://www.facebook.com/events/285246625163442/> (Accessed on June 20, 2017)

loosely connected to each other in a flexible trajectory of cultural touchstones that includes other sites in the neighbouring region such as, for example, the Stone Age remains at Mortensnes, the old village of Hamningsberg, the caves of partisans and the museum dedicated to their memory at Kiberg.¹

Culture and art have triggered a change in the *ambiente* and affective atmosphere of the town, and provided the basis for transforming Vardø into an emergent diffuse museum with several cultural touchstones that pertain mostly to local culture and memory. Some sites, as for example, the house of the Pomors that is today the Pomor Museum, the remains of German camps during WWII, the partisans' caves, the Steilneset Memorial, the street art from Komafest 2012 and the Drakkar sculpture have a transnational and transcultural resonance. A notable short-term outcome of *Vardø Restored* and the Komafest 2012 has been the increased number of tourists that have visited the region, also during the winter season. The long-term effects of these projects are still to be seen, but the short term effects have definitely been an increased tourist interest in the place. The street art of the Komafest 2012 could become part of an evanescent collection, continuously in the making. It could form a kind of temporal exhibition that is renewed regularly every few years. Some pieces would have faded away, been painted over or been replaced by new ones on the same spot or elsewhere. One of the aims of the project *Vardø Restored* has, in my view, been to place the town on a wider transnational and transcultural map in addition to the national and regional one. In practice, it entails pursuing international ventures in heritage management, and to try out ways of preserving and enhancing the sense of place and the characteristic *ambiente* of the town and its environment in all future projects without, however, freezing the place in a surrealistic time out of time.

1. Shaphinaz- Amal Naguib, "Vardø's rich street art scene: Will the city become an ecomuseum?", 2017, <https://cas.oslo.no/read/Vardø-s-rich-street-art-scene-will-the-city-become-an-Ecomuseum-article2468-1167.html>



Everything is a story. Artist: E.B. Itso. Photo: Naguib.

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Authors' short biogra- phies

Torgeir Rinke Bangstad is a researcher in contemporary archaeology at UiT The Arctic University of Norway. His research interests are heritage, memory, materiality and museology. Together with Þóra Pétursdóttir he has edited *Heritage Ecologies* which will appear with Routledge in 2019.

Jamie Allan Brown is a Youth Worker and researcher at the University of St Andrews, Scotland. His research focus is on youth empowerment and heritage concepts and experiences in Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean.

Karen Brown is Senior Lecturer in Art History & Museum and Gallery Studies, and Director of the School's Museums, Galleries and Collections Research Institute. Her research interests concern relationships between cultural heritage, memory and communities. She currently serves on the Board of the European Regional Alliance of ICOM and its Museology group, ICOFOM.

Bruno Brulon Soares is full professor in the Department of Museology Processes and Studies and in the Post-Graduate Program of Museology and Heritage at Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro - UNIRIO. His research focus are experimental museology, theoretical museology and the history of museums and museology.

Ann Davis is retired from the University of Calgary, Canada, where she directed The Nickle Arts Museum and taught Museum and Heritage Studies. She was the president of ICOFOM from 2010 to 2013. Her research focusses on museology and Canadian art history.

Stein Farstadvoll is an archaeologist and currently a Ph.D. candidate at the Department of Archaeology, History, Religious Studies and Theology at UiT - The Arctic University of Norway. Research focus include archaeology of the contemporary past and critical heritage studies.

Jennifer Harris researches and lectures on Cultural Heritage and Museology in the School of Design and the Built Environment at Curtin University in Western Australia. She focuses on popular culture in the representation of the past.

John N. Low is associate professor in the Department of Comparative Studies at The Ohio State University. He is a citizen of the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians. His research includes American Indian histories, literature, material culture, representation, and memory studies.

Kenneth D. Madsen is associate professor of geography at The Ohio State University. His research is on the political and cultural geography of U.S.-Mexico border communities, border barriers, indigenous-academic interactions, and fictional applications of geography.

Saphinaz-Amal Naguib is professor emerita in Cultural History at the Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages, University of Oslo. Her fields of research include museums in plural societies, the politics of street art and heritage in zones of armed conflicts.

Jette Sandahl has been director and member of the senior management of museums in and outside Europe. She is interested in museums as platforms for empowerment, participation and social justice, and publishes within the broad museological field.

Beverly A. Sandalack is full professor and associate dean in the faculty of environmental design at the University of Calgary, Canada. A landscape architect and planner, her research involves cultural landscapes, sense of place, urban design, and urban morphology.

Kerstin Smeds is a historian, professor (emerita since dec. -18) of museology at the Department of Media & Communications Sciences, Umeå University, Sweden. Her research focuses on our relations to things and time; exhibition theory & practice, museum as social and existential phenomenon; and heritage production.

Elizabeth Weiser is a professor of rhetoric in the Department of English at The Ohio State University. Her research interests include museology, historiography, narrative, and modern rhetorical theory, particularly as these impact collective identity.

Museum & Place is a multi-disciplinary anthology of writings on current theory and practice by thinkers from South and North America, Europe and Australia. It marks the emergence of a new discourse surrounding museums and illustrates the urgency of the debates about location. The essays investigate museums in settings beyond traditional places and institutions beyond traditional museums to expand and critique understanding of the vital links between museum and place.

About the Editors

Kerstin Smeds is professor emerita in museology and heritage studies at the Department of Culture & Media Sciences in Umeå university, Sweden. She holds a Ph.D. in history from the University of Helsinki. In 2001 she moved to Sweden and worked as Head of exhibitions at the museum of National Antiquities in Stockholm, before going to Umeå. Her research interests have been all kind of national manifestations such as festivals, arts & crafts and design history, museums and exhibition theory. Smeds' publications include eight books (one with Ann Davis), and numerous articles.

Ann Davis is retired as the Director of The Nickle Arts Museum at the University of Calgary, where she also initiated and taught in the program of Museum and Heritage Studies. Holding a Ph. D. from York University and a Certificate in Arts Administration from Harvard, her publications include six books, most recently *Visiting the Visitor*, with Kerstin Smeds, numerous catalogues and articles. She is the Past President of the Canadian Art Museum Director's Organization, and the Past President of the International Council of Museums Committee for Museology.