

Folk Music as a Tool of Expressing the Spiritual Values of Nature¹

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Industrial exploitation of forest is a cultural self-evidence of our time. The individual experience of forest among citizens is confused by forestry discourse, led by forestry specialists. Forest is defined e.g. as a planning area or a mature stand. It is expressed in numbers, excluding “nature” from the forest. Meaning of forest as a sacred place is stripped away, which makes exploitation feasible. On the other hand, even biological concepts such as biodiversity do not cover our whole experience of forest.

Forests may offer radical experiences of spirituality and sacredness for a modern individual. *Sacred* is typically associated with a boundary – between life and death, continuity and limits, natural and human, settled and unsettled. The experience of sacredness arises in the subjective, non-conceptual reality of an individual. On the other hand, a community tends to define things that are allowed to be considered as sacred. Therefore it is difficult to break through the forestry discourse by using words, because those who speak “incorrectly” are excluded from the discussion community.

The task of art is to help us to reach the experience of beauty, goodness and sacredness. In best case art is a critical way of thinking that challenges the prevailing moral and values. The art of music has always been an important element in building of human communities. Music affects our minds through emotion and non-lingual concepts. When we hear music we first get a feeling and then thoughts. In a case of a song with lyrics, the melody creates an atmosphere and the words specify what it is all about.

Folk singers in all cultures have expressed their awareness about the natural powers as well as about relationship between man and nature. Therefore it is worth asking whether music, especially folk singing, could work as a tool to communicate the non-economical meanings of nature.

Folk music maintains tradition and transfers knowledge and wisdom in a community. Finnish folk poetry has traditionally been performed by singing. It contains myths e.g. about the genesis of the world (from a bird egg) and a big oak that covered the sky, just to mention a few. In addition, folk poetry describes many traditional ways of living in co-operation with the nature and offers a rich vocabulary for description of forest, mires and waterways and their fauna.

The experience of sacredness cannot be taught or transmitted from one to another, nor it can be produced artificially. However, the conditions where it can arouse and come into consciousness may be created. A folk singing performance may offer individuals and communities with new, strengthened meanings that are linked up to the surrounding nature. This can also happen in festivals such as Seurasaari soi! (www.seurasaarisoi.fi) or Sommelo (www.runolaulu.fi/sommelo/).

¹ Abstract of a presentation made at the VI Habitat Contact Forum of the Barents Euroregion Arkhangelsk, Russia - June 2010.