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Olsson, Pia

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“GOOD FACTUAL KNOWLEDGE” FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS: QUESTIONNAIRE ACTIVITY DEFINING TRADITIONAL CULTURE

Pia Olsson
University of Helsinki

ABSTRACT

This article examines how a specific questionnaire activity, originally created by the National Museum of Finland and produced between 1956 and 1996, affected the way traditional culture is understood. The article analyzes the questionnaire in terms of the objectives that guided the activity and the ways in which these booklets reflected the practices of ethnological research. Having been initiated and collected by one of the country's leading cultural institutions, the questionnaire material could be interpreted as an expression of institutionalized cultural heritage.

Within the overall framework of societal and disciplinary change, these cultural symbols reflect the ways in which cultural objects are given significance and meaning. In the Finnish context, the idealized and homogenized rural setting was an essential aspect of the questionnaire for a long time. The most significant changes happened gradually, most particularly during the 1980s when there were changes in the questionnaire themes and in the ways in which respondents were expected to describe the phenomena in focus.

AN INITIATIVE FOR DIALOGUE

In 1956 the National Museum of Finland invited people who were interested in traditional Finnish culture to write about their memories of life in the old days. This call was not made in vain. Almost 500 people responded, although some were not quite sure what was expected of them. The “esteemed museum keeper” received a letter from one anxious individual asking how well she had done in this new activity.

and apologizing for any mistakes she may have made (National Board of Antiquities; letter to the ethnological department November 4, 1956). Otherwise, the new project seemed to have started successfully. Year after year, hundreds of willing informants submitted their written descriptions, thereby enabling the writing of history “from below.”

It has been argued that a substantial part of our culture is based on things we remember and on our experiences. Experiences are not given and unchangeable, however, but are structured through the processes of remembering and writing (Korkiakangas 2005, 129, 135). There are various ways of constructing these reminiscences. Archives and museums use questionnaires to collect information about the past, and recently also about the present. One of the organizers of such an activity in Finland is the National Museum. The reminiscences archived there have a special role in defining “traditional Finnish culture.” The focus in the following analyses is thus on the role of the questionnaire activity in this process.

The questionnaire booklets circulated by the National Museum to its network exemplify the use of ideological power in defining the concepts *tradition* and *traditional culture*. They reflect the various ways of classifying, evaluating, and organizing people’s opinions and experiences (Klein 2003, 70). As Regina Bendix argues, cultural heritage does not exist, but is made. Aspects of everyday life are chosen to represent the valuable aspects of a culture (Bendix 2009, 255). This construction is visible in the ways the archives operate both on the practical level and in terms of substance, in the “collecting” of tradition. Thus the archive collections comply with both the technical and functional definitions of cultural heritage: they preserve concrete objects for future generations, but there are certain social objectives and the need to put an official stamp on what of the institutionalized heritage is being preserved (Lillbroända-Annala [2014], 21–22; Anshelm 1993, 13–14).

My interest in questionnaire activity was awakened when I used two of the above-mentioned questionnaires as source material in my research on Finnish women’s lives: the first dealt with the war experiences of a specific group of women, members of the Lotta Svärd auxiliary organization (Olsson 2005), and the second one had a broader focus on Finnish women’s self-understanding (Olsson 2011). Analyzing these very popular questionnaires aroused in me the desire to reflect on the way the respondents may have been guided in their reminiscence work.

At the same time as I became familiar with and very enthusiastic about questionnaires as sources of ethnological research, there was an upsurge of interest in

the methodology of oral history in general and questionnaires in particular, both in Finland and in her neighboring countries (see, e.g., Fingerroos et al. 2006; Hagström and Marander-Eklund 2005; Mikkola 2009; Nilsson, Waldetoft, and Westergren 2003). Attention was focused on the formation processes of the produced knowledge and the way it is always a product of selection made in the different phases, among other things.

Even though it is not simultaneous, the interaction between the archive and the respondents could be described as dialogue, with one asking questions and the other one giving answers (Korkiakangas 1996, 101). I refer to this dialogue, woven within the interaction of the questionnaires and the responses, as meta-dialogue. The authority of the archive is evident in the way it determines the themes and the questions that are considered important as a record to be kept for future generations. The way this authority manifests itself is, again, based on the historical and cultural contexts of the time. The initiative to concentrate on certain themes in the questionnaire comes from an official source, and the sub-themes considered important are pre-determined in the questions. However, the authority of the respondents is visible in the act of responding (Klein 2003, 70; Mikkola 2009, 109; Olsson 2011).

The history in the National Museum of collecting written sources by questionnaire can be traced to the beginning of the twentieth century. However, it was not continuous (Kaukonen 1959, 8; Lehtonen 1972, 116–19) and became more regular only in the 1950s, specifically in 1956, when the above-mentioned questionnaire was circulated. The beginning of the activity has been traced to one individual, Niilo Valonen (1913–1983), who was appointed head of the ethnographic section in the National Museum in 1955 and was a professor in European ethnology at the University of Helsinki from 1961 to 1977. Thus there was a personal link between the research done in the university and the questionnaire activity. The strong link between research and museum work goes back to the first years of European ethnology at the University of Helsinki. The first professor of what was then Finno-Ugric ethnology, U. T. Sirelius, also acted as the head of the ethnographic section and initiated the early questionnaire work in the museum (Lehtonen 1972, 113–19).

The questionnaire activity at the National Museum was part of a broader program on both the national and the international level: the Finnish Literature Society has been engaged in similar activities since the late nineteenth century (see Blomster and Mikkelä and Stark in this volume). It was not a unique phenomenon

in 1950s Finnish society either, the different departments of ethnology, for example, being engaged in similar practices. Niilo Valonen acquired experience with questionnaires during his studentship, drawing on the collections of the Dictionary Foundation and Uppsala University, and perhaps most importantly in connection with the Nordiska Museet in Stockholm in 1947, when he was involved in conducting an inquiry into the use of birch-bark (Korhonen and Räsänen 1992, 152). The first questionnaires were drawn up in cooperation with the Seurasaari Foundation and the National Museum of Finland (the last joint questionnaire was compiled in 1974). The Seurasaari Foundation was established to support the Seurasaari open-air museum. This connection with the rural way of life and its material culture automatically guided the themes in the first questionnaires. The regular activity at the National Museum (then under the wing of the National Board of Antiquities) continued until 1996, when it stopped for more than ten years. For the purposes of this article I refer to all questionnaires as having been administered by the National Museum, although there were organizational changes along the way.

My aim in this article is to take a closer look at the questionnaires circulated by the National Museum. I will concentrate on the kind of knowledge that was considered of interest and the way certain themes and aspects of life were highlighted at different periods of time. To understand the processes behind this knowledge production, it is essential to consider not only what “survives and what is recoverable” but also what is given attention in any political and social climate (Byrne 2009, 230). My overview of the questionnaire themes covers the four decades of activity before the break in 1996. I am interested in the objectives that guided the questionnaire activity, and the way these objectives reflected the practices of ethnological research at the time—which, again, has not been separate from the rest of the societal sphere. The focus here is not on the substance of the responses, but on how the questionnaires may have carried hidden—and sometimes more explicitly brought out—messages to the potential respondents. The analysis is based on the forty-one questionnaire booklets circulated via the museum and its partner from the 1950s to the 1990s.

DEFINING THE ESSENTIAL

The questionnaires distributed by the National Museum were published in booklets, all of which were similarly designed during the period in focus here. The booklets cover many different themes: the 1964 version, for example, contains questions

about traditional food, clothing worn in different situations, women's trousers, and morning routines. The forty-one booklets that were published cover a total of 314 themes. Some of them are very specific, such as "yeast" and "cabbage," whereas others are more general, including "changing agriculture" and "raising children." The number of questions on each theme varies, but in most cases they are plentiful and comprehensive, and, especially on matters concerning material culture, they are complemented with drawings or pictures. The compilers vary, even within one booklet. Most of them, however, represent researchers in the field of European ethnology; thus, in this sense, the questionnaires also reflect the objectives of the discipline and the individual researchers at the time (see also Lilja 1996, 114).

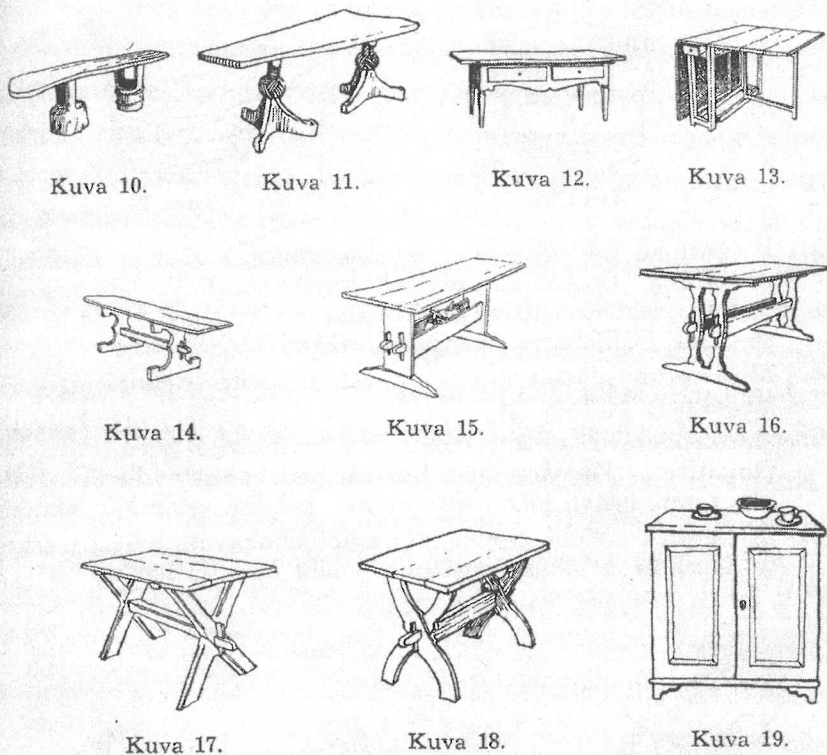


Figure 1. "The forms of the tables in the farmhouse living room reflect the influences of cultural styles from different times. We know of several local variations. Which of the main forms in drawings 10–19 have been used in your area?" Question 11 in the first questionnaire reflects one of the objectives and practices of the activity: an interest in areal specifics. (Kansatieteellisen osaston kysely 1, 5)

The booklets are informative, including the results of earlier questionnaires and background information on the current themes. They also give some details about the museum and changes in personnel, thus making the organization more familiar to the network of respondents (see, e.g., Seurasaari 1961, 1962, 1963). They all give brief guidelines for informants at the beginning, reflecting the intended content of the responses. The guidelines remained very much the same over the years: a “good” respondent did not necessarily answer every question. It was far more important to write in as much detail as possible, to include pictures and drawings by way of illustration, and to use the dialect form of the words describing objects and special phenomena. One addition was soon made, however, in the fourth questionnaire: no information taken from the literature, such as on local history, would be included (Seurasaari 1/1958, 8).

This further guideline primarily reflects the way some respondents may have misunderstood the purpose of the questionnaire activity: for some reason—perhaps to ensure factual accuracy or because they did not have any experience on which to draw—they conveyed information from published sources rather than from their own lives. It also emphasizes the fact that the main interest was in gathering information that could not be conveyed in any other way than through personal cultural knowledge.

The way the reminiscences and fragments of information were to be “collected” is explicitly stated in the questionnaire compiled in 1958 with the co-operation of the Chapter of the Kuopio diocese to deal with “*church folk memory*,” which as “*a token of honor for the work of our fathers [. . .] was quickly to be archived [. . .]*”¹

The church council would appoint a chief collector (such as a teacher) in every congregation and a suitable number of helpers (scribes, photographers, illustrators). The best thing, however, is for those with a good memory to write their own descriptions. (Seurasaari 1A/1958)

This guideline shows the bipartite method of collecting data on traditional culture, and also the hierarchical structure. Knowledge obtained in interviews was welcome, but the most valued information came directly from the informant.

1 The quotes, either italicized or indented, are from the questionnaire booklets or archived minutes originally in Finnish. They have been translated by the author.

Questionnaires were distributed approximately once a year, although in some years early on (1957, 1958) there were two or three, and none at all in four years (1960, 1962, 1986, 1993; see the homepage of the ethnological archive for the list of themes: <http://www.nba.fi/fi/tietopalvelut/arkistot/kansatiede/kyselyaiheet>). The questionnaire activity seemed to be well received, and by the end of 1958, there had been 1,250 respondents. The media and various organizations were used to boost the circulation of the booklets (Korhonen and Räsänen 1992, 152).

Although the first questionnaire (entitled "*Do you remember the old farmhouse living room?*") focused its forty-three sub-themes primarily on the material culture of the old farmsteads, it also contained items about the social hierarchies and conditions on the farm. The questions concerned sleeping arrangements—who slept in a bed, who on the floor or on a bench, for example—and the seating around the table. The last theme concerned life in the farmhouse living room. The informants were asked to write freely but to focus on the facts. As a consequence, the museum archived 82,563 sheets of "*good factual knowledge*," the perceived aim being to gather "*information on essential aspects of a disappearing way of life*" (Seurasaari Foundation: Board meeting November 13, 1958).

These comments, recorded by the organizers, provide insight into the type of knowledge the questionnaires were designed to disseminate. First of all, good knowledge was factual, and second, there were aspects of life that were more relevant than others. Furthermore, the focus was explicitly on aspects that were considered to be on the verge of disappearing. Factuality could be interpreted as objectivity, and essentiality as part of representativeness, both of which were focal research ideals in the early stages of questionnaire activity in the Swedish context, for example (Lilja 1996, 85–86). Defining the results as "good" or "authentic" is also familiar from other archives. Good material for an archive collecting traditional culture could be something that complemented not only the collections but also the image of the supposed past reality. The goodness of an account could also be evaluated by the way it reflected the traditional and vernacular culture in the choice of wording or estimated authenticity, for example (Lilja 1996, 85–86; Mikkola 2009, 104–10; Peltonen 2004, 202). Assessed on this basis, it is clear that the questionnaires were carefully structured with detailed and multiple questions that also demarcated options for the "right" descriptions (Lilja 1996, 115).

Furthermore, the informants were not responding to the questionnaire purely for their own amusement; there was also a social motivation behind it.

evaluated on the extent of their knowledge and how they formulated their responses. The prize for the “best” responses was a small amount of money or a silver spoon. A club for active collectors was established as early as 1958 so that the prizes would not always go to the same informants. In the first year, fourteen people joined this special group. Later, a special medal was designed, resembling the Rusko tankard (*kousa* in Finnish) from 1542, to reward informants whose responses were considered particularly valuable and relevant to the research (Seurasaari 2/1957, 4, 6–8; Seurasaari 1/1958, 7; Seurasaari 1963, 2–3, 5). The Rusko tankard was thought to be a suitable reward because it represented a Finnish craft that required both patience and skill. The products were both beautiful and presentable as was the tankard, which, because of its age and significance, was considered a valued memento of the old times (Seurasaari 1964).

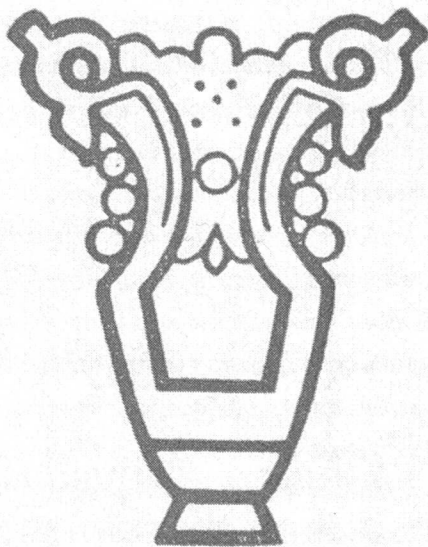


Figure 2. The Rusko tankard symbolized the work done by the most active respondents: patience and skill were behind both the craftwork as well as the descriptions of traditional Finnish culture. The gold and silver medals entitled the respondent to free admission to the National Museum and to the Seurasaari open-air museum (see, e.g., *Museoviraston kyselylehti* 1975, 3).

Evaluating some descriptions as better than others served to inform the respondents of expectations. The question from one respondent about making mistakes, quoted at the beginning of this article, was not far-fetched. The “ideal record”

conceptualized by Agneta Lilja (1996, 235–36) was created when the archive and the respondent were unanimous about how both the form and the contents of the description should be expressed.

After five years of questionnaire distribution, the number of informants had risen to 1,746, and the number of pages totaled 144,328. It was suggested that this was a big enough number to provide trustworthy descriptions of the issues concerned and to cover the whole country. Again, this assessment refers to one of the general ideas behind the research of the time: the need to make generalizations based on the collections. All in all, objectivity, representativeness, and generality all reflect the holistic view of ethnographic research that was prevalent at the time: the phenomenon in question was to be analyzed as comprehensively as possible. As Lilja (1996, 86) points out, the objects in the archive were like pieces of a puzzle that—when completed—would give an all-inclusive overall picture. This is also why it was important to follow up the way the information cumulated in both the number of informants and the areas they represented. In 1966, for example, after ten years of questionnaire activity, the archive had 296,635 pages of information from 2,257 informants representing 511 parishes or towns (see also Herzfeld 2005, 23–24 on the holistic idea; Seurasaari 1961, 1; Seurasaari 1966).

The reasons for partaking in this kind of activity are many and varied. Some people may connect it with enlightenment and the transfer of knowledge, and for others it may have a pedagogical function. When contextualized as part of cultural heritage, it could also be interpreted as a way both to affect and to reflect on one's cultural and social identity. Alternatively, the motivation could lie in both the writing process and the results, in other words the public documentation of one's past (Latvala 2005, 100; Lillbroända-Annala 2014, 23; Stark 2006, 59–60). All in all, the motives reflect both personal reasons and the ways in which the activity may have emphasized different kinds of information. In some cases, the different motives are intertwined and not easily recognizable from the responses. Furthermore, motives understood as collective could also be personally experienced. (See Mikkola 2009, 111–19 for more about the motives of the early respondents in the Finnish Literature Society network.)

The popularity of some of the questionnaires reflects the general interest the topics aroused in society at the time, but by the beginning of the 1980s the number of respondents each year had stabilized at between 900 and 1,000. Two of the most

Status of a Woman attracted over 1,000 responses, and the questionnaire dealing with women's wartime experiences more than 2,500. By comparison, there were 663 responses to the third questionnaire, which was distributed in 1957 and covered seven separate themes (Seurasaari 1/1958; *Museoviraston kyselylehti* 1981, 3). What should be noted, however, is that questionnaires may not only reflect but also arouse interest in the topics in question (Westergren 2003, 18–19).

The activity was built on a network of informants, which in time ensured a reasonable number of responses to each questionnaire. Being a regular informant was like a hobby for some people. This kind of loyalty is visible in statistics published in 1986. The archive was in its thirtieth year of operation: twenty-six of the people who responded to the first questionnaire in 1956 were also involved then, and seven of them had returned every one. By 1983, the total number of respondents was 2,639, including 1,566 women and 1,073 men. The number of Swedish-speaking respondents was low at only 122. Most informants were between 53 and 83 years of age, the biggest group being the 63- to 73-year-olds. Many of them were farmers' wives (483) and farmers (424), housewives (306) and teachers (290) (Heikinmäki 1984, 4–5; Heikinmäki 1987, 2, 4–5; see also Sjöholm 1999, 190–91; Mikkola 2009, 97). Lars-Eric Jönsson (2014, 334) points out that to have a right to cultural heritage is to win recognition. The statistics picturing the respondents give another clue to the intended outcome of the questionnaire activity, and to the question of whose heritage comprised the heritage of the Finnish people. The network of respondents guaranteed a certain response rate, but also—even as an open and living nexus—demarcated the group of people sharing their knowledge about the essential phenomena considered part of traditional culture, the prototype being an elderly rural woman.

RESCUE WORK AND AREAL SPECIFICS

The aim in the very first questionnaire about the farmhouse living room, published in 1956; was “to collect as old reminiscences” about the furnishings as possible. Changes in the interior were also of interest, but the first priority was to obtain information from as far back in time as was feasible and that might not be available for much longer (*Kansatieteellisen osaston kysely* 1 1956, 1). The hunt for the oldest possible information could be seen as the continuation of work done by different heritage organizations and student unions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when old was associated with authenticity (Korkiakangas 2010, 76).

The above-mentioned aim reflects the general idea that was embedded in the first questionnaires: a specific emphasis on phenomena that were likely to disappear. Obtaining information in this way was considered rescue work. The informants seemed to be inspired by the desire to capture these disappearing ways of life for "posterity" (Seurasaari 1/1958, 3–4). This note of urgency is explicitly apparent in the third questionnaire booklet in the context of Karelia and Karelian evacuees.

Later on in the 1950s, the issue of the Karelian culture, which seemed to be in danger of vanishing after the war, was identified as the trigger of the renewed questionnaire activity. Having been driven from their traditional environment, the Karelian evacuees would soon lose their cultural knowledge, and thus the questionnaires covered all the "main categories" of material culture. Eventually it was realized that the themes devised for these respondents also applied in other parts of Finland. The hidden emphasis on Karelia is not evident in the responses, however. Among the 611 responses to the first questionnaire were 38 descriptions from areas lost to the Soviet Union (Valonen 1977, 3–4). The fact that Karelian culture helped to inspire the questionnaire activity after the Second World War is understandable because of its historical role in the formation of the national cultural heritage (Willman 2006, 143–45).

The 1957 questionnaire was published in a booklet entitled *Seurasaari*. The purpose was not only to issue questionnaires, but also to make contact with people and associations that valued the nurturing of the Finnish folk tradition (Seurasaari 1/1957). However, much of the content comprised different thematic questionnaires, including the following: at the meadow cabin; the fishermen's sauna and other remote dwellings; on linen; and weaving, felting, and the use of friezes. This and the subsequent editions also gave feedback on the results of previous questionnaires:

[The first] collection produced a wonderful result. As we thought, there are people in various parts of the country who understand the significance of this kind of work, making notes and archiving the lives of the elderly. Images of the Finnish *tupa* and *pirtti* were obtained from perhaps the last generation to live in these rooms. On the shelves of our archive their value will increase more than those who produced them could ever have imagined. It will not be very long before this kind of picture can only be drawn from fading memories. (Seurasaari 1/1957)

The second edition of *Seurasaari* also expressed gratitude to the informants for their memories and interest in the past: again the results were good. The female respondents were especially thanked for their contributions on the topic of friezes (and a year later for their responses concerning the making of knitted mittens). All the informants were praised for continuing the work started in the nineteenth century. Taking part in this mission gave continuity to the work of Elias Lönnrot, M. A. Castren, and other researchers, which was considered one of the most important national duties at their time (*Seurasaari* 2/1957, 6; *Seurasaari* 1/1958, 4). All in all, in line with Michael Herzfeld (2005, 147–83), I see the rescuing of the reminiscences as a form of structural nostalgia, in other words, a “collective of an edenic order” or as a “time before time” with a balanced perfection of social relations. In the context of the early questionnaire activity, the rhetorical longing—even as a form of material culture—was directed to the rural land-owning peasantry.

The rural context reflects the very traditional focus of Finnish European ethnology: the countryside and its land-owning farmers on which the image of Finnishness was built. In this sense the beginning of the questionnaire activity reflected the search for a Finnish identity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which is also explicitly reflected in the references to names like Lönnrot and Castren. Simultaneously, this activity contributed to the construction of the countryside as an idyllic, humane, and communal environment that was familiar from other forms of ethnological research in Finland. The rural past was considered the basis of the cultural identity, and the role of the ethnologist was to strengthen it by preserving and recording these aspects of the past (Korkiakangas 2010, 75–78).

The preservation role assumed special importance in the 1950s as the changes in the rural environment became more substantial. On the societal level, this was a question not only of mechanization and industrialization, but of the juxtaposition between rural and urban ideals against which the traditional rural culture had to defend itself. The way in which traditional rural life was valued in society was also changing, as more critical viewpoints were aired (Korkiakangas 2010, 83). In this context the questionnaires dealing with rural life are more like apologies for a way of life that had been at the core of ethnological activity for so long. The booklets describe the “rescue work” as a competition in which the opponent is a rapidly changing society.

According to the introduction in the booklet for the 1966 questionnaire, the position of those engaged in this rescue work was good: there had been many

processes of change, but the concept of culture had become more complex because of the notes from the informants (Seurasaari 1966, 1). Once the respondents had been recognized for their work in the 1960s, it was considered possible to distinguish between the *new times* and the *old times*:

Seven years ago the National Museum and the Seurasaari Foundation set a demanding goal for the friends of the Finnish folk tradition: the great collection of old traditions from all areas. We—those asking and those answering—were very aware that much had already disappeared for good. But we knew that a lot of valuable and unique material was still there to be retrieved. It was also interesting to record when and how the new times came to replace the old. (Seurasaari 1963)

Although the changes clearly motivated the collecting activity from the very beginning, the accelerating speed of change made it even more important during the following decades. Temporary cultural phenomena were replacing the "*very old traditions*." Niilo Valonen, professor of European ethnology and one of the activators of the questionnaire work, emphasized the dual objective of the work: "It is important to preserve the old reminiscences. But it is also important to show the phases through which our new culture was born" (Seurasaari 1970, 3). This all reflects the general process of cultural heritage, one of the functions of which is to create continuity at the same time as highlighting originality. The social changes and modernization that took place after the Second World War created the need to defend the cultural intactness, which became concrete in the different processes, such as questionnaire activity (Lillbroända-Annala 2014, 26; Anshelm 1993, 9). The process of modernization also prepared the ground for nostalgia, the sense that something had been lost forever, which again could be seen as an inspiration for engaging in rescue work such as responding to a questionnaire (see Lilja 1996, 36–37; Korkiakangas 2010).

Another general aspect that is visible in the first questionnaires, and was familiar to ethnological researchers at the time, is the view of culture as a geographically based phenomenon. In the case of Karelia, for example, the questions were designed specifically to allow the Karelian culture to be depicted from the responses. The general idea was "to get a more specific view of our cultural areas." The interest was almost entirely in life within the Finnish borders—in both Finnish

and Swedish—the only exception being the Ingrians, whose questionnaire activity was investigated in 1958 (Seurasaari 2/1957, 7; Seurasaari 1/1958, 1; Seurasaari 2/1958, 50). It is not much of an exaggeration to suggest that the only deviation from the homogenized image of Finnishness in the questionnaires was the areal diversity. The differences between the possible majority and minorities were not recognized in this cultural-heritage process (see Jönsson 2014, 334).

Even in the 1970s, Finnish ethnological research leaned heavily on the historic-geographic method in the study and display of cultural loans and their movement, the geographical diffusion, and the changes in cultural phenomena in the different cultural areas. Drawing ethnographical maps representing both material culture and customs was a common European trend as early as in the 1920s. The main emphasis in the Finnish maps was upon the division into two cultural areas—eastern and western—as part of the European context. This mapping was later criticized because, among other things, experience and knowledge about a certain area affected the way the map was drawn: it could never capture the multi-faceted reality (Ruotsala 2009, 172–75, 178). However, the mapping of culture became familiar to readers of the questionnaire booklets when the results of previous surveys were given. The 1966 booklet, for example, showed the various ways of making sauna whisks in different areas. The example was considered important to the network of informants as it “showed how a full picture, based on the responses could be constructed of a phenomenon that was previously unknown. This is why every bit of information is important” (Seurasaari 1966, 2–4). Ethnological research and the study of cultural areas in particular were now open to totally new possibilities. Thus the aim was not only to record the various aspects, but also to construct a general picture of a certain cultural phenomenon in the broad context of Finnish culture. Given this aim, it is not surprising that the phenomena that attracted attention may sometimes—at least in retrospect—seem somewhat trivial. The idea behind the maps, however, was to facilitate the distinguishing of border zones between the cultural areas (Ruotsala 2009, 179). Awareness of these differences was awakened and strengthened through the questionnaire booklets.

CHANGING OBJECTIVES?

After the 1950s, Finnish ethnological interest began to extend beyond rural traditions to include urban issues and the working population. These trends gradually became visible in the questionnaire activity, too. An explicit step from the rural to the

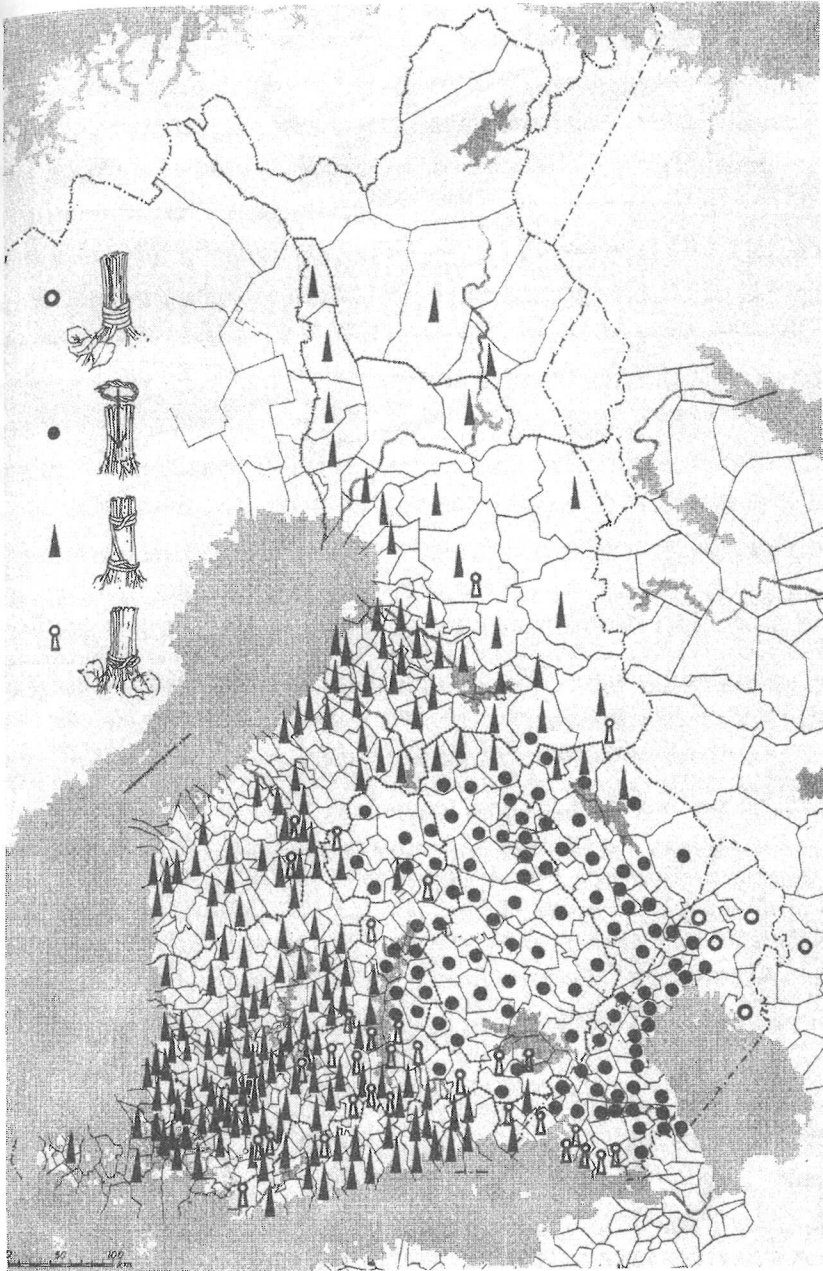


Figure 3. "The results obtained from the scientific informants" in 1961: the different ways of making sauna whisks in different areas. "The most important thing is, however, that the right information about Finnish cultural heritage is now recorded for present and future generations." (Valonen 1966, 2-4)

urban was taken in 1965, when towns and their market places, urban homes, and the relationship between urban and rural people were the main themes. Nevertheless, it was members of the rural population who were asked to reminisce about urban matters, as the questions dealt with trips to town from the countryside. The focus in 1994, however, was explicitly on the urban experiences of city dwellers, the main theme being the post-Second World War city-housing program (Seurasaari 1965; *Museoviraston kyselylehti* 1994, 5).

The extension of the scope is also reflected in the details of the questionnaires. A photography competition was organized in 1965 in order to obtain information on all kinds of Finnish homes. The focus was on chairs, which of all items of furniture were considered best to reflect the changing trends. The idea was to collect photographs of chairs from all kinds of dwellings—rural and urban, small farms, the homes of the working class, professionals and office workers, and from houses, manors, and vicarages (Seurasaari 1965, 17). The chair had also been featured nine years earlier when the questionnaire focused upon the old farmhouse living room as a representation of the ideal past. In the case of the chair, the dichotomy of stability and change in the objectives of the questionnaire work is crystallized in a very concrete way and on a small scale.

However, it was not only the ethnological research that affected the questionnaire activity but also the principles inherent in museum work—in as far as the two can be separated. The lay collectors were encouraged and thanked for “creating a valuable archive of traditions alongside the material collections in the National Museum” (Cardberg 1984, 2–3; Seurasaari 1961, 1). It was the modern museum that was not content with merely collecting artifacts: an artifact without information about its use was only a “dead thing.” Thus the activity moved more and more to the field. Attracting popular interest in this work was crucial, however, as the museum had only limited resources. From this perspective, the primary aim was not—at least in the first few years—to obtain written information from informants in their own words, but to use lay collectors in place of museum professionals to record cultural phenomena. On the other hand, the concepts “modern museum” and “field” say something about the changes in the museums and in research on European ethnology.

The questionnaire booklets of the 1980s emphasized the immediate past: the interest was in how people acted, worked, and experienced things in different periods of history. In other words, the oldest possible knowledge was no longer the only or most relevant piece of information. Changes in the phenomena of interest

and in the historical perspective are perhaps most visible in the 1981 questionnaire, in which the first theme covers holiday trips abroad—described later as a “national movement of recent decades” (*Museoviraston kyselylehti* 1981, 4, 10; *Museoviraston kyselylehti* 1982, 2). Here the present perceptibly takes the place of the past, and in this the questionnaire activity followed the changes in the objectives of museum work. The first political program for museums in Finland from 1981 emphasized the need to record phenomena typifying contemporary society, which would entail using more illustrative and literary methods of recording. The disciplinary differences in research traditions between history and the social sciences seemed to be disappearing, and the study and documentation of contemporary themes were emphasized in discussions about museum work (Ala-Pöllänen 2013, 201, 204–205). Questionnaire activity had all the means to fulfill these objectives; it was just the substance of the themes that needed to be redirected.

The change in interest was also visible in the way the responses were to be constructed: the viewpoint was no longer only “scientific”:

The questions here cover many themes that are open to reminiscence, and they are based on long-term research. We believe that the new perspective will attract as much interest as the earlier appeals for scientific informants. (Seurasaari 1965, 1)

The 1967 booklet was said to herald a new era in questionnaire activity, although what this meant is not specified (Seurasaari 1967, 1, 4). Perhaps it was merely a reference to the beginning of the second decade of the work. There was, however, a reference to a new response focus in the introduction to the first theme dealing with kinship relations and the profound changes they were going through. Although the questions emphasized the need for information about how these relations worked in the old days, the respondents were encouraged to give examples from their *own experience*:² this would be a bonus (Seurasaari 1967, 6). The first time the informants were asked to base their responses on their own experiences was in the introduction to the 1963 questionnaire: they should restrict their answers to questions on which they had some experience or were otherwise well informed about (Seurasaari 1963, 7). Later on, this change was referred to even more explicitly in the cover text:

² The Folklore Archives of the Finnish Literature Society treated “reminiscences” (including memoirs and reminiscences about personal life) as a separate genre from 1975 onwards (Latvala 2005: 26; see also Mikkola 2009: 108).

It is the duty of a researcher in folk life to follow the different phenomena from the earliest times up to the present. This time we have chosen to focus on the big changes that have happened in recent decades. We hope to receive information about the different periods and the lives of individual persons, among other things, reflected against the general cultural-historical background. [. . .] The information we are after lies in the memories of younger people as well. (Seurasaari 1968, 1)

One of the main themes in this questionnaire concerned young people leaving home to make a living elsewhere. The informants were still encouraged to tell life histories, which were believed to shed light on everyday living (Seurasaari 1968, 6). The concept of a life history gives a clue to the new perspective. The approach became more visible in Finnish ethnology in the 1970s and 1980s, when the focus of the research moved to the lifestyle of industrial workers and their occupational histories. At first the life history was a secondary objective, used mainly to date other cultural phenomena (see Snellman 2005, 9; 2012, 440). Responses based on life histories featured particularly strongly in the questionnaires of the 1980s that dealt with women's lives.

The allusion to a time of rapid change still prevailed in the 1980 questionnaire dealing with changes in the rural environment. What is noteworthy here is the new emphasis on the experiences of the respondents, which are connected to the changes happening at the time of the writing. I see this as another major change in the idea behind the questionnaire activity (see also Olsson 2011, 42). It was not only the past but also the present that was of interest.

The aim in the questionnaire about the evolution of a village, its different features and phases, is to find out how people experience the big changes in their environment that are taking place in our time. These changes are regulated by big companies and firms, political decision-makers, planners, and building authorities. The ordinary inhabitant of a municipality experiences them in his or her everyday life but does not have much influence on them. It is important to record the history and development of one's own village, which is easier with the help of a detailed questionnaire. Thus we preserve knowledge worth remembering for future generations. (*Museoviraston kyselylehti* 1980, 6)

The text is written in the present tense, and to underline the fact that contemporary time is also valuable, the present is seen as the future past.

One theme in the same questionnaire booklet rests on only one prompt, introduced by the old saying: "Necessity is the mother of invention." The two-line prompt asks the informants to write about a situation in their lives when the saying proved its relevance (*Museoviraston kyselylehti* 1980, 22). This is an example of minimalism in the compilation of questionnaires. Reference to coverage and detailed information is conspicuous by its absence: all that is left is a personal experience in a very specific situation. This kind of questionnaire formulation represents the antithesis of the precisely detailed surveys with multiple questions and sub-questions, such as the very first one in 1956.

This was perhaps the biggest change in questionnaire activity during the four decades covered in this article. The informants were no longer necessarily seen as masters of "traditional" folk life, speaking on behalf of a larger cultural area; they were individuals speaking about their own lives. This was not always the case, however. Some questionnaires in the 1980s still emphasized the need for general knowledge rather than personal experiences.

This focus on personal experiences was becoming more common generally in questionnaire activity, and was not restricted to the work of the National Museum. The change was gradual, however, the transformation period continuing until the 1990s (Pöysä 2006, 226). The feedback given to those responding to the 1987 questionnaire, which was one of the most popular ones and dealt with women's lives, still stressed the number of responses as well as the geographical coverage as special merits, for example (Heikinmäki 1987, 2). These criteria continued to carry weight, although inspiration came not so much from areal specifics as from personal and situational experiences with their emotional undertones.

CONCLUSION

The tradition initially archived in the collections of the National Museum was mainly that of the Finnish rural population, and especially of farmers and their wives. This reflects the focus among ethnologists at the time on a Finnish culture based on rural traditions (see Snellman 1997, 26–27). To create a cultural heritage is to give symbolic value to some sections of the culture. The questionnaire activity has created this value by deeming some cultural aspects worth reminiscing about and recording. As individual themes, they may sometimes appear as mere bagatelles and

thereby irrelevant. Within the overall picture of societal and disciplinary change, however, these pinpointed cultural symbols reflect the ways in which cultural objects assume significance and meaning.

In the context of Finnish society and European ethnology, the cultural knowledge accumulated in the questionnaires reflects the way rural culture was still seen as the basis of the national cultural identity after the Second World War. This clinging onto a homogenized and idealized rural culture was understandable during the decades of urbanization, industrialization, and reconstruction. The fact that these themes also attracted the attention of the respondents is also indicative of their meaningfulness. Although the change to a more versatile view of culture began during the four decades in focus here, the rural emphasis was visible for a long time. The cultural change eventually became interesting in itself, redirecting the focus of the activity. This, in particular, led to the redefinition of cultural symbols in the 1980s, also reflecting the changing cultural identity. The homogenized image nevertheless remained on the level of the questionnaire booklets throughout the period in focus here. Diversification came through the change towards more personal accounts explicitly requested in the calls for participation.

What constituted a “good answer,” in other words a good description of the tradition, was also defined in the booklets produced for potential informants: the factuality of the response as well as the age of the described phenomenon. The ennobling of culture is visible in the feedback and acknowledgements given to the respondents (see Bendix 2009, 255). Work for the archive was equated to the work of researchers valued as inventors of Finnish culture.

Another aspect—which is not dealt with here—concerns the ways of responding to these calls for information: whether people followed the guidelines laid down by the collector or took liberties in their understanding of the past (Mikkola 2009, 126–34). The informants were asked to write about essential aspects of life that were determined from above according to the disciplinary ideas at the time. The practice of rewarding the respondents served not only to motivate them but also to guide them in certain directions in their recollections. However, as arrogant as it may seem from the viewpoint of the twenty-first-century research emphasis, informants were not considered as capable of formulating their responses and emphasizing the factors they themselves considered important.

Denis Byrne argues that “most of the heritage that means most to us in the frame of our individual lives will never be the subject of heritage recording or

conservation" and that most of us would not even want to "live in a world where all commemoration was public, none private" (Byrne 2009, 236). Even with its limitations, I believe the questionnaire activity comes quite close to the questionable ideal of individual lives becoming objects of recorded cultural heritage. From the perspective of the discourse on heritage, I see it both as official heritage production and as a form of counter-heritage (Byrne 2009, 230). The booklets give us an idea of the conscious efforts that were made to rescue and record the traditions considered cultural heritage. However, only by acquainting oneself with the actual responses does one gain the ability to see the abundance of individuality that is found behind the heritage considered as shared. Thus, rather than seeing questionnaire activity as the production of knowledge "from below" or "from above," it should be understood as a process of interaction. It is this interactive process that will allow all involved parties to pursue the generation of knowledge labeled "tradition."

ARCHIVE SOURCES

National Board of Antiquities

Incoming letters 1956–57.

Seurasaari Foundation (in the possession of the Foundation)

Minutes of the meetings.

DIGITAL SOURCES

Ethnological Archives, National Board of Antiquities: <http://www.nba.fi/fi/tietopalvelut/arkistot/kansatiede/kyselyaiheet>

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