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Knowledge about the past: a result of the interaction between man and technology

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Knowledge about the past: a result of the interaction between man and technology

Short Abstract:

Investigations of a vanishing rural lifestyle and vernacular architecture were conducted in Scandinavia about 100 years ago. Several technologies were used – cameras with different accessories, tools for measuring, drawing and writing, and also technologies for transportation (bicycles, railways).

Long Abstract:

In my on-going PhD research project I study how investigations of a vanishing rural lifestyle and vernacular architecture was conducted in the Scandinavian countries during the first decades of the 20:th century. Several technologies were used in these documentation projects - cameras with different accessories, tools for measuring, drawing and writing, and also technologies for transportation, mainly bicycles and railways. The aim of making the documentations at the countryside was to preserve knowledge about housing and lifestyle, not primarily preservation of houses and sites.

Knowledge of considerable dimensions came out of these investigations. Several books and articles pictures (both photographs and drawings) were spread both to researchers and to public. All the photographs taken during the investigations created what can be characterized as "visual conventions" of the rural lifestyle, housing and vernacular architecture. These conventions dominated the notion of rural lifestyle for a long time - perhaps still?

The knowledge that was produced about rural lifestyle and vernacular architecture was dependent on the technology that was used, and the ideas among the men working in these projects were formed by the technical preconditions. The ideas emerging from Bruno Latour about the relations between man and thing can be used to analyse how the fieldworkers of the past interacted with their tools. The fieldworkers' way of thinking and acting was influenced by contemporary technical conditions. By studying the photographs, drawings and records from the fieldworks the dependence on technology also in knowledge that is known as a part of humanities becomes evident.