

“Optimism is prevailing now”

*Analysis and partial explanation of a narrative production
in the Vega island community in North Norway*

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List of abbreviations

DN - Direktoratet for Naturforvaltning /Norwegian Directorate for Nature Management

ICOMOS - The International Council on Monuments and Sites

IUCN - The International Union for Conservation of Nature

NINA - Norsk institutt for naturforskning /Norwegian Institute for Nature Research

NIKU - Norsk institutt for kulturforskning /Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research.

NIVU - Norsk institutt for vannforskning /Norwegian Institute for Water Research

UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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Maps over Vega

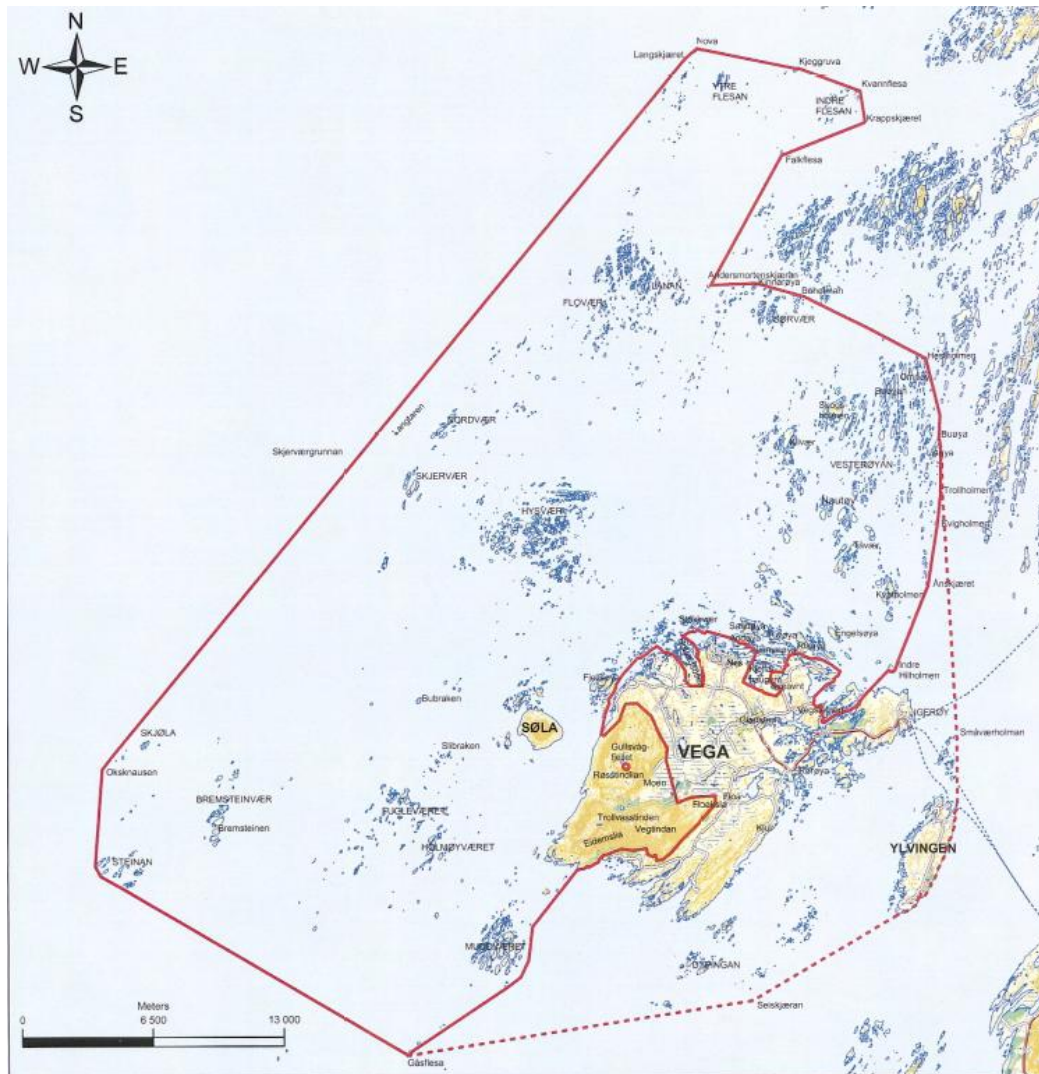
Map 1 Vega in Norway



Red circle: Vega

Source: http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/europe/norway_rel96.jpg

Map 2 Vega Archipelago



Red line: boundary of world heritage area

Dotted red line: boundary of buffer zone

Source: Sønstebø and Suul (2003)

Map 3 The main island of Vega



Source: <http://www.visitvega.no>

1. Introduction

Like many other small rural communities in North Norway, the island municipality of Vega is experiencing severe economic stress. Furthermore, the municipality's population has decreased continuously since the 1950s. The future does not look promising for the community. In this thesis, local narratives regarding life at Vega have been studied. Regardless of what one would expect, the narrative produced at Vega is of an optimistic character.

I will, in this thesis, present the optimistic narrative produced at Vega and strive to explain why it is of such an optimistic character. Several aspects could be seen as important for the development of this optimistic narrative. My choice has been to focus on local participation in the world heritage process¹. It is thus a partial explanation. I found it particularly fruitful to focus on participation, as participation is often lacking or superficial in many protected areas around the world (e.g., Goldman 2003 on Tanzania, or Igoe 2004 on the US). Research also shows that lack of participation has been a problem in several world heritage areas (Millar 2006). At Vega, however, local participation in the world heritage process has been substantial.

The case of Vega is interesting to study for several reasons. First, it is a case that illustrates conservation dilemmas in a local community. Second, the case illustrates difficulties for a municipality on the outskirts. Third, the case of Vega shows a fundamentally different trajectory than other similar cases with regard to the trajectory of the local narrative and the degree of local participation. Last, this case demonstrates a change in how people in a small community view not only conservation efforts, but also involvement from outside the community. Local viewpoints on these issues have undergone an

¹Vega is one of seven places in Norway enlisted on the UNESCO world heritage list. The other world heritage sites in Norway are: Bryggen in Bergen, Urnes Stave Church, Røros Mining Town and Circumference, Rock Art of Alta, Struve Geodetic Arc, West Norwegian Fjords – Geirangerfjord and Nærøyfjord (UNESCO 2011a).

immense transformation since Enge (2000) did his fieldwork at Vega at the end of the 1990s.

1.1 Research questions

Based on the situation described above, I have three research questions. My first research question is an analytic question, and aims to analyze local narratives at Vega. The remaining two questions are explanatory questions, and aims to explain the main narrative at Vega.

The research questions for this thesis are as follows:

1. *What are local narratives regarding life at Vega?*
2. *Could a high degree of local participation in the world heritage process help to explain why the main Vega narrative is of an optimistic character?*
3. *What level was the local participation in the making of Vega as a UNESCO world heritage site?*

1.2 VEGA 2045

This master thesis is part of the research project entitled, ‘VEGA 2045, World heritage and local knowledge - integrated modelling and scenario building for nature and cultural management’. VEGA 2045 is an interdisciplinary, collaborative research project lead by sociologist Hanne Svarstad at Norwegian Institute for Nature Research (NINA). The project is involving social, cultural heritage and natural scientists at NINA, Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research (NIKU) and Norwegian Institute for Water Research (NIVA). The project has two principal objectives, one related to Vega as a specific case and the other related to the development of interdisciplinary methodology. To address these principal objectives, the project has five work packages. The first work package is narrative analysis,

and it is under this work package that my thesis belongs. The remaining work packages are: ecology (terrestrial and marine), cultural heritage and livelihoods, integrated modelling, and scenario building (VEGA 2045 2011). In relation with the project's narrative analysis work package, researchers connected to VEGA 2045 conducted a fieldwork at Vega in 2008. I had access to the material collected on this fieldwork. In addition, I conducted my own fieldwork at Vega in 2011.

1.3 On interdisciplinarity

This thesis takes an interdisciplinary approach. Following McNeill (1999), a discipline is a combination of perspectives, methods and a field of study. Interdisciplinarity can be defined as any crossing between two or more disciplines. Interdisciplinary work is increasingly involving both social and natural scientists. The VEGA 2045 project is an example of this; it combines researchers with background in both social and natural sciences. In this thesis, elements from different disciplines within the *social* sciences have been applied. Sociology, political science and political ecology are the inspirational sources for this thesis.

The reason for choosing an interdisciplinary approach is that interdisciplinarity gives a larger toolbox to answer my research questions. Following Smith (1998: 311), "interdisciplinary knowledge construction offers opportunities for looking at different sides of an event or problem, drawing together the assumptions and methods of different disciplines". Gasper (2001) compares a discipline bound researcher to a person who does not adjust the use of eating utensils to the dish. As an intelligent eater, "the intelligent social analyst needs to draw on multiple perspectives and tools, selecting and combining according to the case and the purpose" (Gasper 2001: 1). In interdisciplinary research, the research questions themselves are the main focus, and appropriate theories and methods are applied to answer these questions.

1.4 Necessary clarifications

Some concepts used in this thesis are in need of a brief clarification.

Throughout the thesis the concept of ‘community’ and the concept of ‘locals’ are used, both in connection with the main Vega narrative and in connection with the local participation at Vega in the world heritage process. However, these are not straightforward concepts. As Barrow and Murphree (2001: 24) notes, “community is one of the most vague and elusive concepts in social science and continues to defy precise definitions”.

A community is often characterized from spatial, economic and socio-cultural terms (Barrow and Murphree 2001). Locals are characterized based on a spatial notion; they ‘belong’ to the same locality. However, none of these two labels, community or locals, should be regarded as unproblematic or straightforward. For example, even though local participation is high it does not necessarily follow that the participation has been inclusive. The participation might have only included a small group of the locals. This small group might have had legitimacy to act on behalf of the whole community; it might also not have had this legitimacy. The same argument goes for the concept of community. A community is more often than not a heterogeneous group, and it should be considered as this. It is not a community that does or act; it is people in this community that does these things. And it is not necessarily the case that these people are representative for the community as a whole.

In this thesis the snowball method of sampling was used to reach a broad sample of ‘locals’. Such a sampling method is useful to emphasize the diversity in a community.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is structured in seven parts, including this introduction - Chapter 1. Chapter 2 provides a contextual background to the case and to world heritage.

To better understand the main narrative at Vega today, it is important to understand the local context. It is also helpful with some background information on world heritage, in order to better understand what changes the status might bring to Vega. Chapter 3 presents the theoretical and conceptual framework of the thesis. I have applied narrative theory, discourse theory and participation theory in this thesis, and, hence, these are the concepts that are presented in the theoretical chapter. In Chapter 4 I will present the methodological approach of the thesis. The empirical evidence for the thesis was collected over two fieldworks. One of these I carried out myself. The other fieldwork was carried out by researchers at the VEGA 2045 project. The methodology of the fieldworks and the data analysis will be presented in the methodology chapter. Chapter 5 presents the analysis of the main Vega narrative. The first research question will be answered in this chapter. The theoretical framework on narratives and discourses presented in the theoretical chapter will be applied in the analysis of the main Vega narrative. In Chapter 6 the local participation in the world heritage process is analyzed, and, thus, answers to research questions two and three are sought. Theoretical perspectives on participation will be applied where fruitful. Finally, I will present the conclusions in Chapter 7.

2. Background and context

In this chapter I will provide a contextual background for the thesis. The context is presented for a better understanding of the main Vega narrative. The chapter is structured in two parts: first, background information of Vega, its society and history; and secondly, a short introduction to UNESCO world heritage and what such a status could mean for a small local community.

2.1 The Vega society and its history

Vega is a small municipality in the county of Nordland in the north of Norway (see maps, page ix, x, xi). The municipality consists of about 6,500 islands, islets and skerries. Only the two largest islands are today inhabited all year around, Vega and Ylvingen. During the summer season some additional islands are inhabited (Vega Kommune 2011). Historically the municipality's population has been spread on about 50 islands (Næss and Johansen 2008). And as late as 1970, 20 of the islands were still populated (Wold 2003).

The municipality has a total of a little less than 1,300 inhabitants (Vega Kommune 2011). The majority of the population lives on Vega, and mere 50 people are currently living at Ylvingen. For the municipality, 1,300 is a historically low number of inhabitants. The highest number of inhabitants ever registered in the municipality is 2,800. This was registered in the year 1900 (Næss and Johansen 2008). According to Statistics Norway (SSB) the number of inhabitants in the municipality has decreased steadily the last decades. Following the same calculations, the population will experience a continued decrease also in the future and can be expected to reach about 1,100 in 2030 (SSB 2011a). A report by Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research (NIBR) concludes that the decrease in population at Vega the last decade has been steadily around ten per cent. The overall average decrease in population for the Norwegian country side is between four and five percentage (Harvold 2009). The most alarming aspect of the population development at

Vega is the increasingly low number of young people and the corresponding overrepresentation of old people. On a scale where 1 represents the average amount of a particular age group for Norway as a whole, the group of people between 26 and 35 is calculated to 0.63 at Vega. The age groups from 66 to 75, 76 to 85 and 86 to 99 is calculated to 1.48, 1.41 and 1.41 respectively (Harvold 2009). There is a pronounced difference between the numbers from Vega and the national average for these age groups. The numbers give meager hope for future inhabitation of Vega. Numbers from Statistics Norway (SSB 2011b) show no improvement of this negative development following the inclusion of the island community onto the UNESCO world heritage list in 2004.

Inhabitation of Vega has a long history. In fact, some of Norway's oldest inhabitations were located here about 10,000 years ago. Extensive evidence of early Stone Age habitations exists in the area. More than 100 sites, some with visible houses, have been discovered in the slopes of the Vega Mountains. These discoveries are thought to be a tiny percentage of the total Stone Age inhabitations at Vega². As the sea subsided after the last ice age, people moved to lower grounds and the earlier habitation sites were gradually abandoned. On these lower grounds there has been a continuity of settlement to the present day, as well as a continuity of livelihood (UNESCO 2010). Traditionally, farming and fishing were the most common trades in the area, often in a combination. *Fiskarbonden*, the fisherman-farmer, has traditionally been the most common form of livelihood (Vega Kommune 2011).

Up until the 1960s life in the islands³ was viewed as relatively affluent by the inhabitants themselves. Life in the islands was at times rough, but the

² Several of the interviewees tell stories of people who have found something "Stone Age looking" in their lands and silently hidden it away in their houses. This is because they are afraid that their land will be put under strict protection. One interviewee says that there is probably "a lot of Stone Age artifacts hidden away in drawers" at Vega.

³ Life in the islands here means life on the small islands and skerries surrounding the main island of Vega.

population was continuously increasing and had a stable livelihood they could rely on. However, around the 1950s/1960s the central government in Norway started a more active policy line towards the districts. The goal was to increase efficiency and productivity. Northern Norway was in particular seen as a problem by the government. In their eyes, the region squandered its workforce as most of the jobs in the region were in low productivity sectors – e.g. subsistence farming, fjord fishing, eider down production or searching for flotsam (Wold 2003). In fact, it was calculated that the region with its 12 % of the total Norwegian population only produced 6.2 % of the total gross national product (Brox 1984).

The workplaces in the region reflected where people lived. As late as 1959, more than 80 % of the population in Northern Norway lived on the country side. Even though people living in the Vega archipelago were generally satisfied with their livelihoods, the government looked at their lifestyle with pity. The combination of viewing their livelihood as pitiful as well as problematic for national economic growth resulted in financial aid to encourage people to move away from the periphery to the bigger centers (Wold 2003). An important part of this new strategy was the launching of The North-Norway Plan by the Norwegian government in 1951. The North-Norway Plan was seen as a crucial for the strategy to increase productivity in the region (Brox 1984). This initiative from the central government coincided with a decline in the local fisheries. As a consequence of these paralleling developments, almost all the islands were abandoned and the population in the municipality halved in the course of a couple of decades (Næss and Johansen 2008).

Today, the most important business sectors at Vega are farming⁴, tourism and the service sector (Vega Kommune 2011). The oil industry is also an important employment sector and source of tax income for the municipality.

⁴ Mainly meat and milk production.

Fishing along the coast is no longer as profitable a livelihood as it used to be. The big quantities of fish have more or less vanished from the area around Vega. Today, fishermen have to go out of the municipality to get enough haul to make a living from fishing. In the 1980s this same local fishing area gave about 300-500 tons every year (Wold 2003). However, the primary sector is still an important sector at Vega and employs about 23.9 % of the total workforce. This is a lot higher than the average for both Nordland and Norway, respectively 6.4 % and 3.4 % (Harvold 2009). Yet, the leading employer in the municipality today is Vega municipality with a total of 127 and a half fulltime positions (2009 numbers). These 127 and a half fulltime positions were divided between 185 employees, 122 of which were part-time (Vega Kommune 2010: 20).

According to numbers from Statistics Norway, Vega municipality is registered with a 44.8 % governmental transfer as share of gross operating revenue. In contrast, the national average is 19.2 % (SSB 2011a). Thus, the municipality is highly dependent on governmental transfers. Summing up the municipality's economic situation for 2009, the chief administrator officer notes: “[o]ur economic situation must be viewed as very grave” (Vega Kommune 2010:2). The municipality of Vega has previously been registered on the ROBEEK list⁵. As things are looking now, they might soon be on the ROBEEK list again. The municipality has a high debt, and is one of the municipalities in Norway with the highest debt per inhabitant (Vega Kommune 2010).

The Vega archipelago has a unique nature, ranging from high mountains to lowlands covered with forest. The archipelago has the largest strandflat in Norway, measuring about 50 kilometers from the main land to the outer edges. Furthermore, the municipality belongs to the Caledonian mountain chain. The flora and fauna is rich on the islands, especially on the northern side of Vega.

⁵ This list is a “register over municipalities and counties who need an approval from the Municipalities- and regional ministry to make valid decisions on borrowing or long term lease agreements” (KRD 2011).

A particularly unusual trait regarding the local flora is that you can find alpine plants in the lowlands. The area also has an unusual rich birdlife, compared to other places so far north (Næss and Johansen 2008). This richness in the nature has made Vega subject for numerous scientific studies.

For the livelihood in the islands the eider and the tradition of collection eggs and down has been of crucial importance. The eider duck has been looked after by the islanders for more than thousand years. The islanders have been making shelter for the eiders and protected them from their enemies. In return, the eider have provided down. Traditionally, eggs have also been collected. It has been, and still is, a mutual relationship between humans and animals. Some islands had more than 800 breeding eiders around 1900. As much as one ton of cleared down was produced in the county of Nordland in 1900. However, as people moved away from the islands, the eiders have disappeared from the area. Today, these old traditions are being rescued by bird tenders who move out and stay in the islands for the duration of the breeding season. As a consequence, the number of birds is now increasing again (Næss and Johansen 2008).

Several protection efforts have previously been launched in the municipality. One of the more prominent is the Coastal Preservation Plan, *Kystverneplanen*, a scheme developed to protect the coastal area in the north of Norway. However, this was an unpopular scheme locally and it met a lot of opposition (see e.g. Enge 2000). At the outset the protection plan included two-thirds of the municipality's area. However, because of strong local opposition this was not possible to carry out. At the time of implementation the Coastal Preservation Plan included one-tenth of the municipality's area (Enge 2000). Today, there are three nature reserves on the main island⁶: Kjellerhaugvatnet, Eidemslie and Holandsosen. In addition to these areas on the main island

⁶ Definition of a nature reserve as set forth by the Nature Conservation Act of 19th June 1970: "nature reserves are set aside where strict protection is essential. They contain habitats, biota or biotopes that are of special scientific or pedagogical significance" (Sønstebo and Suul 2003: 58).

there are several different types of protected areas in the archipelago. A nature reserve is established around the Lånan/Skjærvær area, bird sanctuaries⁷ exist on the islets of Lånan, Flovær, Skjærvær and Muddvær. Hysvær and Søla have protected biotope sanctuaries⁸ (Sønstebø and Suul 2003). All of these protection schemes were already in place before the UNESCO world heritage nomination. The bird sanctuaries, biotope sanctuaries and the nature reserve in the Lånan/Skjærvær area were all established in 2002 (MD 2002).

Holandsosen was temporary protected for twenty years, before it became a nature reserve in the year 2000. Eidemsliene became a nature reserve the same year. Kjellerhaugvatnet became a nature reserve in 1997 (Sønstebø and Suul 2003).

1st of July 2004 Vega was enlisted as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The inscription text puts especially weight on the eider down harvesting in justifying Vega as a world heritage areas:

“The Vega archipelago reflects the way generations of fishermen/farmers have, over the past 1,500 years, maintained a sustainable living in an inhospitable seascape near the Arctic Circle, based on the now unique practice of eider down harvesting, and it also celebrate the contribution made by women to the eider down production” (UNESCO 2010).

The whole municipality is not included in the world heritage area. On the main island of Vega the three nature reserves and the mountain area is included (see map page x). In addition to the world heritage area there is also a buffer zone with certain limitations regarding usage. This buffer zone covers the parts of the municipality that are not included in the world heritage area itself.

⁷ Definition of a bird sanctuary as set forth by the Nature Conservation Act of 19th June 1970: “protected biotope areas are set aside to protect the habitats of specific species of animals and plants”. The purpose of the bird sanctuary at Vega: “to preserve a good and undisturbed breeding and growing up area for sea birds” (Sønstebø and Suul 2003: 59).

⁸ Definition of a biotope sanctuary as set forth by the Nature Conservation Act of 19th June 1970: “a protected area is set aside to preserve distinctive or beautiful natural or cultural landscapes. No activities can be undertaken there which can substantially alter the nature of character of the landscape” (Sønstebø and Suul 2003: 58).

2.2 UNESCO World Heritage

The Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage was established at UNESCO's 17th general conference in Paris in 1972. The goal of the convention is to safeguard the world's natural and cultural heritage in the generations to come. The world heritage committee meets once a year and provide the expertise to evaluate and select world heritage sites. The committee consists of representatives from 21 state parties to the convention. These are elected for terms up to six years. Before a site can be evaluated by the committee, it has already been through a long process of nomination, as well as being evaluated by the advisory bodies⁹ (UNESCO 2008). It is the nation state that has to nominate the specific site. However, only states that have ratified the Convention can nominate. There are, as of June 2010, 187 states that have ratified the World Heritage Convention (UNESCO 2011a). A tentative list needs to be handed in from the state party before a nomination. The way the list is constructed is far from perfect as it is highly dependent on the role played by the state parties. Ashworth and van der Aa (2006) argue that the list suffer from severe imbalances. From 1978 to 2004, 12 % of the members nominated more than 30 % of the listed sites. Some sites are overrepresented, e.g. historical towns and religious buildings, and other sites are underrepresented, e.g. prehistorical sites and living cultures.

Today, the world heritage list includes 911 properties, constituting the acknowledged cultural and natural heritage of the world. Of these 911 sites, 704 are cultural, 180 are natural and 27 are mixed. The sites are spread on 151 countries. In Norway there are a total of seven world heritage sites, the Vega

⁹ The advisory bodies are The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and The International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) (UNESCO 2008).

Archipelago being of them. All except the west Norwegian fjords are enlisted as cultural sites (UNESCO 2011a). Vega is selected on the criteria (v)¹⁰:

“to be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change” (UNESCO 2011b).

To be elected as a world heritage area have several consequences for the local site. The local site gets acknowledged as an area with an outstanding universal value. This gives status and attention to the area, both nationally and internationally. For a small place like Vega, with less than 1,300 regular inhabitants, this means a great deal. In addition to increased recognition, some possible effects of a world heritage listing can be increased tourism, economic and social improvement, improved protection and management (Leask 2006). However, a world heritage listing carries with it enormous expectations, especially from the local inhabitants.

As Hall (2006) notes, these expectations are not always met. For example, the visitor number might not be as high as first expected. It might also be that the number of visitors is so large that it compromises what the status was originally set out to protect. Another problem for peripheral sites like Vega is that a large number of visitors might make the site a less attractive tourist location. At peripheral sites visitors are often attracted by the remoteness or isolation of the place. A high number of visitors will deteriorate this attractiveness (Boyd and Timothy 2006). A world heritage status carries with it both possibilities and challenges.

¹⁰ There are a total of 10 criteria (Leask 2006). A site can be elected on more than one criterion.

3. Theoretical and conceptual framework

This chapter seeks to present and discuss theoretical perspectives and concepts applied within the thesis. The chapter is structured in three parts: narrative theory, discourse theory, and participation theory.

3.1 Narratives

I have applied narrative theory to the study of local narratives at Vega. Theories on narratives have been used in Chapter 5 to answer research questions one: *What are local narratives regarding life at Vega?*

There has been a long tradition of studying narratives within literature studies¹¹. In recent decades, it has also become common to study narratives within the social sciences. Today, narrative studies cross disciplinary boundaries and are used by, for example, geographers, anthropologists, historians and psychologists alike (Elliott 2005). According to Johansson (2005), to narrate is an elementary activity in all cultures. Barthes (1977:79) notes that narratives are “simply there, like life itself” and that they are “international, transhistorical, transcultural”. Narratives are seen as a universal phenomenon.

A narrative is a specific way to tell about perspectives of a situation. However, there is a considerable disagreement and a wide range of definitions on what a narrative is. Some definitions are broad and cover almost anything; this is, for example, the case in the clinical literature (Riessman 1993). Others are very restrictive, as proposed by, for example, Labov and Waletzky (1997)¹². Svarstad (2009) defines narrativity as a phenomenon implying that people

¹¹ E.g. Propp’s analysis of Russian fairy tales in the 1920s (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009).

¹² Labov suggests that a narrative has formal properties and that each one of these has its own properties. A fully formed narrative includes six elements: an abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution, and a coda (Riessman 1993).

have a tendency to organize knowledge and reflections as a story. Following Elliott (2005: 3), “a narrative can be understood to organize a sequence of events into a whole so that the significance of each event can be understood through its relation to that whole”.

One of narrative’s key features is that it has chronology. It is a story with a beginning, middle, and an end. This narrative definition can be traced as far back as to Aristotle and his *Poetics* (Elliott 2004). According to Elliott (2005), the other key features of a narrative are that they are meaningful and social.

Regarding narratives as social, Elliott’s (2005) argument is that narratives are carried out in a social context: they do not form in a vacuum. I will present more on this in Chapter 4, which focuses on methodology. Following Elliott (2005:4), a narrative is meaningful because it can help to “understand the meaning of behavior and experiences from the perspective of the individuals involved”, as well as facilitating empathy. However, a narrative does not merely provide meaning for an outsider who listens or reads the narrative; it can also be a potent tool for the narrator. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009: 55) “stories are a powerful means of making sense of our social reality and our lives”. The telling and recounting of a story provides meaning and also contributes to constructing identity.

When a story has a temporal quality (i.e. chronology), a plot often follows. The plot is formed by the linking of a prior event to a subsequent event. A rearrangement of events within a narrative can change the plot. A plot is therefore not only depending on chronology, but also on causality (Elliott 2005). However, albeit a story has chronology, it does not necessarily need to have causality. B might have happened because of A, but it need not be the case. Yet, causality is often assumed when the audience reads or listens to a story (Elliott 2005).

There are three basic descriptions of the development of a narrative plot: progressive narrative, regressive narrative and stable narrative (Lieblich et al.

1998). A progressive narrative tells the story of advancement and achievement. A regressive narrative, on the other hand, has a course of deterioration and decline. In a stable narrative, there is no change - the narrative shows neither sign of advancement nor deterioration (Elliott 2005). These three formats can also be combined to form more complex plots, especially over time.

A focus on the actors in narratives has been common throughout the history of narrative study. This aspect has been particularly important within literature studies. Traditional actor types in a narrative may be heroes, villains, victims, and helpers (Svarstad 2009). Yet, the actor gallery of each narrative may contain different actor types (Benjaminsen and Svarstad 2010). In Greimas's classic, *Semantique structurale* (1974), it is argued that the actor gallery in a story is never larger than six. Greimas suggest six specific key actors: senders, receivers, helpers, antagonists, objects and subjects.

Besides studying the actor gallery, the actor level and the narrative producers¹³ can be important elements in a narrative study. Svarstad (2009: 44) provides a typology (Table 1) on narratives that focuses on the actor level and the position of the narrator. At the actor level, Svarstad (2009) differentiates between narratives about individuals and narratives about collectives. The position of the narrator could be either inside the narrative or outside the narrative.

Elliott (2005) presents a similar typology. In Elliott's typology, the distinction is between first-order and second-order narratives. First-order narratives are narratives people tell about themselves and their own experience. Second-

¹³ Regarding narrative producers, these are not limited to the ones who first produced a narrative but also those who reproduce and modify a narrative (Benjaminsen and Svarstad 2010).

order narratives are accounts by researcher to make sense of the social world and of other people's experience (Elliott 2005).

Table 1: Typology on narrator's position and actor level

		The narrator's position	
		The narrator is part of the narrative	A researcher or a professional narrator formulates the narrative
The contents' actor level	Narratives about individuals	Type 1	Type 2
	Narratives about collectives	Type 3	Type 4

Source: Svarstad (2009: 44).

However, as Svarstad (2009) notes, these typologies are a simplification of an often complex reality. The divisions between different types tend to be gradual, and more than one type might be relevant for the same case. The linkages between the production of collective narratives and narratives about individual experiences can be interesting to study, in and of itself (Svarstad 2009).

In Chapter 5, I apply the theoretical perspectives on narratives in my analysis of narrative production at Vega.

3.2 Discourses

When presenting the main Vega narrative, a comparison of similarities between leading discourses and elements from the main Vega narrative will be presented. There are several similarities between narratives and discourses. Following Svarstad (2009), they both create a framework to better understand small and big issues in daily life and in the society in general, and they both make assertions about the reality, to which these assertions can be put forward

by anyone. Moreover, narratives and discourses can influence each other (e.g. Svarstad 2004). A closer look at discourse theory in general, and environmental discourses in particular, is needed to better understand this interaction.

There are two main perspectives on the meaning of discourse¹⁴. These have their origins in the linguistic and the social science - of the later, particularly sociology (Svarstad 2009). In a linguistic perspective, discourse can be seen as a “stretch of language that may be longer than one sentence” (Salkie 2006: IX). Following this perspective, discourse analysis is an analysis of “how sentences combine to form text” (Salkie 2006: IX). It is the social science understanding of discourse that is applied in this thesis. Within this perspective, Agder et al. (2001) define discourses as “a shared meaning of a phenomenon”. Benjaminsen and Svarstad (2010) provide a similar definition; they see a discourse as a shared viewpoint by a group of people on a specific issue.

One of the leading theorists on discourse in the late twentieth century is Michel Foucault. Through historical studies of topics such as illness, sexuality, madness, government and punishment, Foucault showed how practices have been closely connected to prevailing discourses. The prevailing discourses effects what people see as meaningful, true and acceptable (Foucault e.g. 1972, 1979; Svarstad 2009). Foucault’s argument is that there are constraints on how people are able to think at any given time and place. These constraints are caused by the leading discourse at that time and place.

Benjaminsen and Svarstad (2010) see a discourse as a lens that people view the world through. However, discourses are not independent from actors. Discourses are not merely a lens for people to view the world; they are also formed by people. They can be formed on a local, regional and global level.

¹⁴ In addition, discourse may be used synonymously as everyday talk/discussion (Svarstad 2009).

Discourses may affect important political choices, and hence the actors involved in discursive formation exercise discursive power.

A discourse analysis provides an identification and description of discourses. One topic has one set of discourses, and another topic might have another set of discourses. Usually, there are a number of leading discourses on each topic. A discourse might also be hegemonic. In the case of a leading or hegemonic discourse, considerable discursive power is executed (Benajmsen and Svarstad 2010).

Hajer (1995) and Dryzek (2005¹⁵) gave early contributions to discourse analysis on the environmental field (Benajmsen and Svarstad 2010). Following Dryzek (2005), environmental discourses started forming at the same time as the development of industrial societies. Dryzek uses two dimensions to classify the main environmental discourses of today: reformist or radical, and prosaic or imaginative. Hence, the following set of leading environmental discourses is proposed:

Table 2: Set of environmental discourses

	Reformist	Radical
Prosaic	Problem solving	Survivalism
Imaginative	Sustainability	Green radicalism

Source: Dryzek 2005: 15.

Problem solving takes the political and economic status quo as given, and tries to handle the environmental problems by exercising public policy measures. Survivalism is a ‘limit’ concerned discourse and believes continued economic and population growth will hit the earth’s limits. It seeks a reorientation away from economic growth as well as a redistribution of political power. The sustainability discourse refers to the attempt to solve the conflicts between

¹⁵ This volume was first published in 1997.

economic and environmental goals. Green radicalism rejects the structure of the industrial society and the prevailing conceptualization of the environment. Its follower's base is broad and does not agree on solutions. There are differences within each type, as these four discourses are basic.

Dryzek's (2005) discourse types are broad and do not fit on all environmental areas. Svarstad et al. (2008) describe four leading discourse types on biodiversity conservation. They are: preservationist, win-win, traditionalist, and promethean. These same discourses are also common in other environmental issues.

Following Svarstad et al. (2008), the preservationist discourse is primarily concerned with conserving the environment, be that of species, biotopes or landscapes. This discourse was common in the late 19th and early 20th century. It still exists today, though somewhat marginal. The preservationist discourse shows little interest in the potential restrictions conservation may entail for people using the resources. The win-win discourse is also mainly concerned with conservation. However, unlike the preservationist discourse, the win-win discourse sees an integration of local people as a mean to achieve conservation. The argument is that the environment and locals, as well as external actors, will be better off from a conservation effort. This discourse type has an extensive adherent base today. Among others, a broad range of conservation organizations adhere to this discourse type (e.g., WWF, the Nature Conservancy). The third discourse type, the traditionalist discourse, similar to what Agder et al. (2001) calls the populist discourse, rejects involvement by outsiders. This position sees locals as the most capable of taking care of their environment. The traditionalist discourse is promoted by, among others, social scientists and human-rights activists. Finally, the promethean discourse type challenges the very existence of environmental problems and the need for conservation. The argument is that any possible problem of this sort will be solved by technological inventions. Promethean thinking has been decisive since the industrial revolution, and up until a

couple of decades ago it was still the most central of the environmental discourses. It is still very visible in environmental thinking and discussion (e.g. Lomborg 2008), though not as influential as it used to be.

Benjaminsen and Svarstad (2010) present these four discourses in the following matrix:

Table 3: Four leading discourses on the environment

Type of discourse	Is protection of natural resources seen as important?	Are the needs and interests of the locals seen as important?	Does the discourse type have a positive stance to partnerships between local and external actors?
Preservationist discourse	Yes	No	No
Win-win discourse	Yes	Yes (as a means)	Yes
Traditionalist discourse	Yes, as sustainable use	Yes	No
Promethean discourse	No	Yes	Not relevant

Source: Benjaminsen and Svarstad (2010: 88).

These discourse types were formulated in a biodiversity setting; nonetheless, they do fit well with other settings. Benjaminsen and Svarstad (2008) have, for example, applied the traditionalist discourse to a mountain conflict in Norway. Later in the thesis, in Chapter 5, I will compare these discourses to elements from the main Vega narrative.

3.3 Participation

Local communities have historically often been the weakest party in protection schemes. Regimes such as fortress conservation and coercive conservation have not included local communities (Hulme and Murphree 2001). Such regimes are not as common anymore; still, opinions by local people might not get heard, as they may lack influence. To help explain the main Vega narrative, I will study local participation and influence on the world heritage process. Participation theory will provide some useful insight in this regard.

The language of participation is widely used and is common in organizations ranging from the World Bank to radical Non-Governmental Organizations. The language of participation is also adapted by UNESCO's World Heritage mission statement that "encourages participation of the local population in the preservation of their cultural and natural heritage" (UNESCO 2008: 3). The meaning and the practice of the concept varies enormously. Following Cornwall (2008), participation has become "an infinitely malleable concept, 'participation' can be used to evoke - and to signify - almost anything that involves people" (Cornwall 2008: 269).

There exist several typologies to differentiate between various forms of participation. According to Cornwall (2008), all forms of participation may be found in any single process. One type of participation does not exclude another form of participation in a later stage of the process.

Among others, Pretty (1995) developed a typology to better understand the different forms of participation (Table 4). Pretty's focus is mainly on the users of participatory approaches. Pretty divides understandings of participation into seven distinctive types - ranging from manipulative participation to self-mobilization. Power is important in this typology, and the span of who's in power varies immensely from one end of the spectrum to the other.

Table 4: Pretty's typology on participation

Typology	Characteristics of each type
1. Manipulative participation	Participation is simply a pretence, with “people’s” representatives on official boards but who are unelected and have no powers.
2. Passive participation	People participate by being told what has been decided or has already happened. No listening to people’s responses.
3. Participation by consultation	People participate by being consulted or by answering questions. External agents define problems and information gathering processes, and so control analysis.
4. Participation for material incentives	People participate by contributing resources (e.g. labour, in return for food, cash or other material incentives).
5. Functional participation	Participation seen by external agencies as a means to achieve project goal, especially reduced costs. Involvement may be interactive and involve shared decision making but tends to arise only after major decisions have already been made by external agents.
6. Interactive participation	People participate in joint analysis, development of action plans and formation or strengthening of local institutions. Participation is seen as a right, not just the means to achieve project goals.
7. Self-mobilization	People participate by taking initiatives independently of external institutions to change systems. They develop contacts with external institutions for resources and technical advice they need but retain control over how resources are used.

Source: Pretty (1995: 1252).

White (1996) presents a typology that focuses on interest in participation rather than degree of participation. White divides participation into four different interest forms: nominal, instrumental, representative and transformative. Table 5 gives a presentation of these different interests in participation. The first column represents the form, the second column represents the interests from a top-down perspective, the third column

represents the interests from a bottom-up perspective, and the final column characterizes the overall function of each participatory form.

Table 5: White's matrix on participatory form

Form	Top-Down	Bottom-Up	Function
Nominal	Legitimation	Inclusion	Display
Instrumental	Efficiency	Cost	Means
Representative	Sustainability	Leverage	Voice
Transformative	Empowerment	Empowerment	Means/Ends

Source: White (1996: 144).

Yet another typology was developed by Arnstein (1969), which is called the ladder of participation. Even though this was developed in the 1960s, it is still relevant today. Arnstein's ladder has the following eight steps: manipulation, therapy, placation, informing, consultation, partnership, delegated power and citizen control.

Different participatory typologies have a lot in common. Typically, such typologies are presented on an axis from bad to good (Cornwall 2008). The typologies presented here describe such a spectrum. However, there are some differences in the end-points. Arnstein's citizen control goes further than Pretty's self-mobilization and White's transformation. Following Pretty (1995:1252), "self-initiated mobilization may or may not challenge existing distributions of wealth and power". For Arnstein, the last step of the participatory ladder does exactly this - it challenges power. However, it is Pretty's and White's typologies that are most relevant for Vega's world heritage process.

A weakness of these participatory typologies is that none of them pay particularly attention to equal participation at the local level. Pretty is aware of this problem and notes that "communities are not homogenous entities, and

there is always the danger of assuming that those participating are representative of all views” Pretty (1995: 1254). Yet, this issue is not included in the typology presented by Pretty. All views might not be represented, and the most marginalized in the community are the ones least likely to be represented. The question of representation, participation and possible marginalization is closely linked to the power relationships in a community. In an analysis of influence, this is important to keep in mind. Even though local people are participating and are represented in a national or international process, this does not assure that *all* local viewpoints are equally heard.

4. Methodology

In this chapter, I present the methodological choices for this thesis. The structure of the chapter is as following: first, a presentation of the choice of research design; second, a presentation of the methodological approach; third, a presentation of narrative analysis; and last, some reflections on methods and ethics.

4.1 Research design

The choice of research design in this thesis is case study.¹⁶ The research design provides the framework for the study. Following Stake (2005: 443), a “case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied”. The specific case in a case study is often a community or organization (Bryman 2008).

Ragin (1992: 2) argue that “at a minimum, every study is a case study because it is an analysis of social phenomena specific to time and place”. Bryman (2008: 53) prefers to use the term case study only “for those instances where the ‘case’ is the focus of interest in its own right”. According to Stake (2005), there are roughly three types of case studies that can be identified: intrinsic case study, instrumental case study and collective case study. An intrinsic case study is undertaken when one wants to better understand one particular case. The purpose is not development of new theory or to study the case because of its representativeness, but primarily because the case is interesting in itself. In an instrumental case study a particular case is used to better understand a specific issue or theory. The case itself is of secondary interest. In a collective case study several cases are studied jointly to inquire on a specific topic. Each case is contributing to a better understanding of a specific topic, and not

¹⁶ Other forms of research design includes: experimental and related designs, cross-sectional design, longitudinal design and comparative design (Bryman 2008).

merely to better understand a specific case. Yin (1994), on the other hand, differentiates between five different forms of case studies. Is the case study used to explain, to describe, to illustrate, to explore, or as a meta-evaluation?

The standard criticism against case studies is that findings are not possible to generalize to other cases. However, to generalize is rarely the purpose of a case study. For the Vega case, generalization was not the purpose. The case of Vega is most similar to an intrinsic case study as described by Stake (2005). The Vega case is, as elaborated on in Chapter 1, different from other cases in several regards. It is an interesting case in itself. However, the borderlines between the different types of case studies proposed by Stake are not set in stone, and I would argue that the Vega case also provide findings of instrumental value. There is something to learn from the case that can be relevant for other cases as well, for example regarding challenges for an outskirt municipality and ways to handle them or regarding questions of conservation. Regarding Yin's distinction of case studies, the Vega case does not fit perfectly in any of the categories presented.

4.2 Methodological approach

Qualitative methodology is the basis of this thesis. Qualitative methods imply a less structured set of questions than quantitative methods. The interviewee is hence allowed to set the agenda within the topic to a greater degree than with quantitative studies (Elliott 2005). To reduce the chances of misinterpretation, triangulation is often used in qualitative methodology. Triangulation is simply the use of multiple sources of evidence (Yin 1994). Stake (2005: 454) points out that “the qualitative researcher is interested in diversity of perceptions, even the multiple realities within which people live. Triangulation helps to identify different realities”. The choice of research design supports triangulation. In fact, according to Creswell (1998:123) “a case study involves the widest array of data collection as the researcher tries to get an in-depth knowledge of the case”. This contributes to case studies strength (Yin 1994).

Approaches to qualitative methods are numerous, but broadly they fall under four basic categories: observation, interviews, documents and audio-visual materials (Creswell 1998). A triangulation can be achieved mixing any of these approaches. In this thesis, data from all four categories have been used, though to a different extent. All these data collection methods as multiple sources of evidence have been crucial for me to build up an in-depth knowledge of the case in question. In the analysis, however, the interviews have been the core foci.

4.2.1 Interviews

According to Yin (1994), one of the most important sources in a case study is the interview. This is also true for this case study. The most common case study interview is of an open-ended nature, where you can ask interviewees about facts as well as their opinions about events and situations (Yin 1994). Elliott (2005) argues that the optimal length of a research interview is 90 minutes. Some of the interviews for this thesis were longer, some were shorter. As long as the interviewee is comfortable with the time spent I do not see this as problematic.

The interviews for this thesis were performed over two periods. A tape recorder was used for both rounds of interviewing.

The first round of interviewing

The main Vega narrative is analysed from 20 interviews performed in August 2008 as part of the VEGA 2045 research project at NINA, NIVA and NIKU. These interviews were performed by senior researchers Hanne Svarstad, Olve Krange, PhD. candidate Knut Fageraas and master student Karin Sundli. Narrative analysis is one of the work packages and a central element of the VEGA 2045 project and, hence, these interviews were conducted with a narrative analysis in mind. The interviews were long, semi-structured and open. The interviewees did most of the talking and could talk freely about issues that concerned them. However, the interviewers did have a list of

themes that they were interested in. An analysis of these interviews have been conducted and elaborated upon in Svarstad (2009).

I had the privilege to join the VEGA 2045 project, under a predefined scope, in autumn 2010. As my focus would be on the narrative analysis element of the project, I got access to the interviews that had been conducted in 2008. I carried out my own analysis of the main Vega narrative from these interviews.

The identities of the interviewees are anonymous even for me. After a preliminary narrative analysis on this first round of interviews, I conducted a second round of interviews in a narrower strand - namely on local participation in connection with Vega's world heritage site status.

The second round of interviewing

Another 11 interviews were carried out, this time by me, in February 2011. These interviews were of a semi-structured character. The purpose of the interviews was to get a better understanding of local participation in connection with the world heritage status. In these interviews I focused on local participation in the process of becoming a world heritage site as well as local content/discontent with the world heritage inscription text.¹⁷ A preliminary analysis of the first round of interviews was already performed, hence viewpoints on the positive and optimistic Vega narrative were also asked for. A bias with fieldwork in February is that most fishermen are away for the Lofoten fishing season in this time span¹⁸.

The law of diminishing return states that a decreasing amount of new information will be gained by each interview made. Each new person we talk to will give us less new information (Martin 1995). During the semi-structured interviews at Vega I did experience this. After some interviews, the same

¹⁷ See appendix 2 for the interview guide (in Norwegian).

¹⁸ However, because of bad weather in January a lot of fishermen had not left yet at the time I was at Vega. One fisherman (not from Vega) died in shipwreck this February in an attempt to sail to Lofoten in the bad weather.

information was repeatedly talked about by the interviewees. Bertaux (1981) calls this process a saturation of knowledge, and see it as a different form of representativity. Bertaux argues that this is a different level of representativity than the usual morphological level; it is representativity at the sociological level. However, as in most qualitative studies, this study does not claim to be representative. This is reflected in the sampling strategy.

Sampling strategy

Snowball sampling was the chosen sampling strategy in both rounds of interviewing. In snowball sampling a small group of relevant people are initially contacted, and then these people are used to establish contact with other informants of interest (Bryman 2008). According to Miles and Huberman (1994: 28) the snowball method¹⁹ “identifies cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information rich”. It is argued that this type of sampling strategy will lead to a bias as it does not give a representative sample of the local population. However, this sampling methodology is usually used in qualitative studies and does not claim to be representative (Bryman 2008). In both rounds of interviewing interviewees were encouraged to suggest people with different perspective than themselves. Thus, a wide range of people got interviewed. For an analysis to be of good quality it is among other things crucial that rival interpretations are included (Yin 1994). The chosen sampling strategy assured this, and the snowball sampling proved to be a successful sampling strategy in the Vega case.

To tape, or not to tape

To the question “to tape or not to tape”, Weiss (1994: 53) propose that the answers varies enormously from researcher to researcher. One researcher might wish the tape recorder to oblivion; while another might keep the tape recorders microphone up close to the interviewee’s face under the whole interview. Both extremes are in use and accepted in the research community.

¹⁹ Also called the chain method of sampling (Miles and Huberman 1994).

There are some concerns that need to be given thought before using a tape recorder. A recorder might change the way the narrative is told and how questions are answered, i.e. it might make the informant more self-conscious. However, using a tape recorder is now widely thought of as a good interviewing practice (Elliott 2005). As long as the interviewer is aware of possible pitfalls I do not see it as problematic to use a tape recorder.

All informants were asked for approval for the use of tape recorder. Only one informant asked for the tape recorder to not be used. For two of the interviews there was a technical problem that caused the tape recorder to shut down during the interview. Luckily this was noticed so that I was able to take notes.

Transcription of the interviews

The transcriptions of the first 20 interviews were performed by a fellow master student involved in the VEGA 2045 project. They were transcribed in a direct manner. That is, they were transcribed true to the informants' oral dialect, rather than strictly keeping to one of Norway's official writing standards²⁰. This made the transcripts rich in language, and in consequence the transcripts were hard to translate to English. My English translations do no justice to the transcripts. Some of the richness in the expressions and vocabulary was lost in the translation to English.

The second round of interviews was only to a certain extent transcribed. I partly wrote summaries and partly transcribed the interviews. I found this to be the most fruitful approach for these interviews as they were not to be used for a narrative analysis.

Words or expression are, where I found it necessary, put in brackets in italic in the original language. I particularly found it necessary with local words and expression.

²⁰ Norway has two official writing forms/languages: Bokmål and Nynorsk. The dialect at Vega is not very similar to any of these. It is also very different from my own dialect.

4.2.2 Other sources

The interviews are supplied with other sources, such as articles, books, statistics, official documents, news reports and audio-visual materials.

Observation was done under my fieldwork at Vega. Even though the interviews have been the primary source of information, the thesis would not be possible to write without these other sources. They have provided background information, as well as better understanding of the case. Some of these other sources have been used as references in the thesis, others not.

However, I would say that even material not used has been of great value. I have for example seen a handful of documentary films about Vega, as well as the TV series *Himmelblå*. This has been valuable for my understanding of the Vega society.

Quotes from Norwegian documents I have used in the thesis have been translated by me.

4.3 Narrative analysis

Narrative analysis is applied in the chapter on the main Vega narrative (Chapter 5). Following Lieblich et al. (1998: 2), “narrative research differs significantly from its positivistic counterpart in its underlying assumptions that there is [...] one correct reading or interpretation of a text”. Elliott (2005: 37) elaborates on this: “[t]here is no *single* narrative method, but rather a multitude of different ways in which researchers can engage with the narrative properties of their data”. This gives narrative research a rich and interdisciplinary profile. In Spector-Mersel’s (2010: 205) words, “[r]eading through the narrative literature, *diversity* appears to be the name of the game”.

According to Johannessen et al. (2004), a data analysis has two purposes: a thematic organization of data (to reduce, systemize and make the material ready for the analysis) and the analysis itself. These two purposes are closely connected. To get a grasp of the most important content of the interviews, it is

common to organize the material in categories using codes. This is helpful to get a better overview of the material (Johannessen et al. 2004). There are two common criticisms of coding: coding causes the data to lose context; coding leads to a fragmentation of data and therefore a loss of narrative flow (Bryman 2008). Furthermore, the choice of codes is done by the researcher and are therefore of a subjective character.

In the analysis of the main Vega narrative, coding was done early in the process to gather similar stories together.²¹ This was helpful to organize the material. However, when performing the analysis I continuously went back and forth between the coded material and the full interviews to ensure I did not lose context. To be able to keep the individual narrative flow, long segments of the stories would have to be cited. I have chosen not to do this. However, by reading through the stories over and over again I feel I have been able to pick out segments that fit well with the narrative flow of the individual accounts. Coding was not used for the second round of interviews as these interviews were focused on local participation to begin with²².

Mishler (1995) provides a framework to explain different modes of narrative analysis. In this framework the different methods of analysis is split into main focus on content, structure or performance. Content and structure needs no further presentation, performance is “the interactional and institutional context in which narratives are produced, recounted, and consumed” (Elliott 2005: 38). Riessman (2004) provides an alternative framework that distinguishes between four models of narrative analysis: thematic analysis; structural analysis; interactional analysis; and performative analysis. Yet another framework is provided by Lieblich et al. (1998). Their analytical framework contains two dimensions to understand different ways to analyze narratives. Does the analysis focus on content or form? Is the analysis holistic or

²¹ An index of the coding used in the narrative analysis can be found in Appendix 1 (in Norwegian).

²² See Appendix 2 for the interview guide (in Norwegian).

categorical? In a categorical analysis, “the original story is dissected, and sections or single worlds belonging to a defined category are collected” (Lieblich et al. 1998: 12). A holistic analysis, on the other side, tries to understand the narrative as a complete entity. Following Lieblich et al. (1998) the outcome of these four different dimensions is four different modes of reading a narrative that can be presented in a four cell matrix:

Table 6: Lieblich et al.'s four cell matrix on different forms of narrative analysis

Holistic-content	Holistic-form
Categorical-content	Categorical-form

Source: Lieblich et al. (1998: 13).

There are of course some varieties in how these different modes of analysis are applied, and not mere *one* way to do it. For a *holistic-content* analysis “a broad perspective of the general theme and emerging foci” can be the center of the analysis (Lieblich et al. 1998: 87). A particular segment of the story can also be used to shed light on the story as a whole. In a *holistic-form* mode there are different aspects that can be studied. Strategies to study a narrative’s holistic-form are often based on the narrative typology, the progression of the narrative and/or the cohesion of the narrative. In a *categorical-content* perspective the text/narrative is dissected into small pieces of content for analysis. The typical steps towards categorical-content analysis are as follows: selection of subtext, definition of categories, sorting material into the categories, drawing conclusions on this material. The last mode presented by Lieblich et al. (1998) is *categorical-form*. The purpose of the categorical-form is to learn something about the story that is not visible from the text alone, e.g. by studying the reflection of cognitive skills or emotions in the narrative.

Regardless of type of analytic mode, a presentation of the content of the narrative is, more likely than not, part of a narrative analysis. In fact, in the social science the interest used to be entirely on content. However, this has shifted the last decades, and interest in form and structure of a narrative is now

more common (Elliott 2005). In the analysis of the main Vega narrative my focus is mainly on the holistic-content and holistic-form modes of analysis. Even so, I must specify that I do not find it fruitful to operate with such strict divisions as Lieblich et al. (1998) presents in their four cell matrix and my analysis is influenced by this. To some degree I also incorporate a categorical-content perspective in my narrative analysis.

4.4 Reflections on methods and ethics

A narrative does not exist outside its social context. For an oral narrative an audience is needed, and this audience is also part of the construction of the narrative (Elliott 2005). The audience is always crucial for the development of the narrative. The narratives people tell will most likely change depending on the audience. A narrative research interview is no exception. In narrative research the interviewer not only collect, but also construct the information the interviewees share (Elliott 2005). In addition, the audience will most likely understand the same narratives differently. It is a subjective process in both ends. During research with tape recorder the interviewee might also change or adjust the story with the thoughts of future audience in mind. Thoughts of someone else listening to the text, and perhaps even transcribe it, might change the way the narrative is told (Elliott 2005).

How questions are asked will affect the answers to be given. This is the case both for the narrative interviews and for the semi-structured interviews.

Questions for this thesis have been sought to be asked in a neutral and open manner. However, early in process of narrative interviewing it was detected that most of the informants talked about pride. This was then included to the topic list, and in some later interviews asked for deliberately.

The question of what to include and what to exclude from the thesis is of crucial importance. “Even when emphatic and respectful of each person’s realities, the researcher decides what the case’s “own story” is, or at least what

will be included in the report. More will be pursued that was volunteered, and less will be reported than was learned” (Stake 2005: 456). This is problematic, but impossible to avoid in a qualitative study with rich material. Yet, I do feel that the topics I choose to highlight in this thesis came ‘naturally’. After reading through the material over and over again it becomes clear what topics are most important. Nonetheless, some topics had to be left out, because of time and space limits as well as relevance to the main topic of the thesis.

According to Bryman (2008), the most common ethical considerations a researcher needs to be aware of are the following: is your study doing harm to the participants, is your study an invasion of privacy, is there a lack of informed consent, and if deception is involved. My study steers clear of these issues. However, one problematic ethical issue exist. As Vega is a rather small society, full anonymity is hard to assure. Some of the quotes might be recognisable for people familiar to the Vega society, and some of the informants have had roles in the world heritage process that make their quotes easy to recognize²³. I have myself experienced this as I after my fieldwork at Vega could understand who several of the informants from the first round of interviewing were even though they were initially anonymous for me. For this reason I decided to name one of my informants in two quotes. In both of these two quotes the informant’s identity is quite obvious for people familiar to the locality. These quotes have been read through and accepted by the informant in question. Also, the short presentation of the one complete negative narration might feel offensive for this person. Names, places and age have been removed from quotes where I found it necessary for the anonymity of the informant²⁴.

The master project was reported and accepted by Norwegian Social Science Data Services.

²³ In the thesis informants are named I#1, I#2, I#3 etc. The year of the interview is also included.

²⁴ In these cases brackets have been used and the original name/place/age removed, e.g. [place],[age], [xx].

5. The optimistic Vega narrative

Research question one - *What are local narratives regarding life at Vega?* - will be answered in this chapter. The analysis of the narrative interviews from Vega depicts what I will call the optimistic Vega narrative. The snowball method was used to reach people with conflicting views. Yet, only one interviewee gives a fully pessimistic narration. Some interviewees present partial pessimistic viewpoints. However, all of these interviewees have optimism intertwined with pessimism, and, seen as a complete entity, they form an optimistic narrative. There might of course be aspects of narrative production at Vega that have not been captured by this thesis.

The chapter is structured in six parts: presentation of the form and main content elements of the narrative; presentation of individual narratives connected to the collective narrative; presentation of the narrator; presentation of actors in the narrative; some thoughts about the stability of narratives in general and the optimistic Vega narrative in particular; and a comparison of the optimistic Vega narrative with leading discourses in the environmental field.

5.1 Form and content of the optimistic Vega narrative

The optimistic Vega narrative can be characterized as a progressive narrative. A progressive narrative tells the story of advancement and achievement (Elliott 2005). At Vega, most of the interviewees' stories show a positive development towards a brighter present and future.

The stories told by the interviewees follow the narrative form; they have a beginning, middle and an end. The stories have a plot, and causality is expressed in the chronology. The *beginning* of the story portrays a situation with problems and decline: "At the beginning of the 90s, we had bad times here. We felt we couldn't do anything" (I#1 2008); "It was a very negative

attitude here before” (I#7 2008); “The challenges in the islands were hidden and forgotten about, and there was a danger that all the values would disappear” (I#7 2011); “In the 90s, we had a declining tendency: The youths were all moving away. We were among the municipalities with the strongest decline in youth population” (I#11 2011). The *middle* is represented by a change of situation. The island community received the world heritage status, and things changed for the better at Vega: “I have the impression this [bad times] has shifted a lot the last couple of years” (I#1 2008); “It [the world heritage status] created optimism, it created a strength, business opportunities for the farmers, for the boats, and for the transportation sector here at Vega. It created more income for the shops, the hotel, the tourist sector” (I#1 2008); “Following the world heritage status, there was a positive wind over Vega and the Vega society” (I#2 2008); “It [the world heritage status] made us see new possibilities” (#3 2011); “We started to think in a positive direction” (I#7 2008). The *end* of the narrative is represented by the current optimism as well as an optimistic outlook at the future: “The Vega society today is characterized by optimism” (I#1 2008); “It is a very optimistic atmosphere out here” (I#11 2008); “Optimism is prevailing now” (I#2 2008); “Vega municipality is experiencing a period of growth, a time of prosperity” (I#10 2008); “And right now there is a very positive wind over the municipality, it is connected to the world heritage, people have seen the investments (*satsinga*)” (I#6 2008).

Three main content elements point to the existence of a progressive narrative.

They are:

1. *Continuous inhabitation*
2. *Investing and believing in the future (satse!)*
3. *Pride and identity*

I will now present these three content elements. On the whole, the existence of the *world heritage status* was a central theme. The world heritage status has clearly affected the Vega society. As elaborated upon in the background

chapter (Chapter 2), a world heritage status could mean a great deal for a small society like Vega. It could give increased recognition, socio-economic development and more tourists. However, often the expectations are not matched by the reality, and, in some cases, such a status might also give the local society new problems (Hall 2006). In the analysis, I have not treated the world heritage status as an element of its own but rather as a part of the local context. *Exceptions* from the main narrative will also be presented.

5.1.1 Continuous inhabitation of Vega

In strong contrast with the last decades' continuous decrease in population (as expounded upon in Chapter 2), the interviewees are in general positive and optimistic about the prospects of continuous inhabitation of the municipality. It is not a state of denial. All of the interviewees are aware that the population has steadily decreased for the last decades: "It has been going downwards, but now we have noticed that it is going upwards. People are coming back" (I#15 2008). Several of the interviewees admit they have thought that this development has been happening for a while. However, *now* they really believe Vega has reached the turning point: "I think a great number of people are going to move here now. I do think it will happen, at least after a while" (I#14 2008).

At the same time, there is anxiety that their hopes and beliefs - for this negative development to change - might not come true. As one interviewee puts it, "I think some are holding their breath a little bit (I#10 2008)". Another interviewee elaborates, "I hope it will work out. Our goal is that we should be 3,000 inhabitants here in a couple of years. [The interviewee laughs]. I hope so. I do believe it a little bit, too. Well, some people are coming now" (I#11 2008). Continuous depopulation is not an option.

Several interviewees mention that they link the depopulation they have experienced the last decade mostly to old people dying rather than to people moving away from the municipality:

“We have thought that it [the amount of inhabitants] is going to change for a while, and it has. One year there was a little surplus, maybe two-three, but with the composition of the population that we have here, there are a lot of people who are dying. It is not that there are so many people moving, but there are a lot of people who are dying, and there is a quite high average age. But I do believe that now, now it is going to change” (I#1 2008).

Examples of young families who have moved back to Vega after years in other areas in Norway or abroad are cited by numerous interviewees as positive examples on the inhabitation issue:

“I have noticed that a lot of young people (...), when they finish their education and are starting to have kids, they are moving home. I think it is brave because there is danger for depopulation here. But now it is optimism that has taken over, and it is great” (I#2 2008).

“Now several have moved back, families with small children. They go away to study in Oslo or Trondheim or Bodø or something like that, and then they get a child and they say: no, we can’t live here with kids, we have to move home again” (I#3 2008).

Both push and pull effects are elaborated on as reasons for young people returning. On the pull side, nature, safety and family are mentioned as important for their choice to move back to Vega. The same reasons, or rather the lack of these factors at other locations, are important on the push side. Several of the interviewees mention that they are happy their children are growing up at Vega and not in Oslo. Vega is pointed out as a good and safe place to grow up: “Less and less people want to live in rush hour traffic and let their kids grow up in shopping malls” (I#3 2008); “The most important reason is closeness to the family. You have the children’s grandparents and all that. And there are safe growing-up conditions, and yes, it has a lot to do with family, of course” (I#14 2008).

Attracting young people back to the island is a central aim and a strong hope for both the officials working in the municipality as it is for individual Vega citizens. In this regard, several informants see investments for the future as crucial: “I know that several people who are originally from here want to

move back. We have to see what we can do to support that. The municipality has chosen to invest in infrastructure” (I#8 2008).

One informant speaks of a resulting effect regarding young people moving back to the island:

“That some have chosen to move back to Vega has some consequences. More young people want to come when they know they have their old buddies here. You get a following effect. When you know him, and her, and she is here, then I can also move back here, because I have a network, there are some people I know here, whom I can hang out with. I think it is important. It becomes a positive trend” (I#13 2008).

Even though there is a wish for young people to move back, there is also thorough understanding and appreciation of them moving away. As there is no higher education opportunities in Vega municipality, moving away in a period when one is young is more or less expected and several interviewees speak positively of the experience, knowledge and learning one attains when living away:

“They have to move away. They have to, most of them have to. They should move away and get an education. Yes, they have to. So, everyone has to move away, but they should come back again later, when they have a foundation. And now, there are several who have moved back” (I#3 2008).

“It is important that the youth move away for a period. They need the ballast, the experiences one attains when living somewhere else. And when they return, they will add more to Vega than if they hadn’t gone away in the first place. The possibility that they will stay here is also greater if they have lived away for some time. Then they are more sure of their choice. You are more stable if you have tried some different things, then you know better what you actually want to do” (I#1 2011).

This period of living away is seen as a strong value when they later return to settle down at Vega. A fear some interviewees mention is the risk of these young people moving back too early:

“I have noticed that people who move here straight after school move away again after a year or two. They are not done with, yes, with different things, and there might be things that they want to do and have

in their ballast, and experiences that we can't get here. (...) They should not be too hasty" (I#5 2008).

Seen from this angle, even the lack of young people moving back to Vega gets portrayed in a positive manner.

Various interviewees see the elder generation, the ones on the brink of pensionable age, as very eager to move back to Vega:

"Older people with ancestors from Vega often move here. They have been living in cities, in bigger towns, they know the home nursing care does not have enough people and it is difficult to get accepted in the nursing homes. They move to Vega because it is safe and small and new and very good. So, there has been a trend now with a lot of old people moving here" (I#13 2008).

Locals are, of course, aware that this type of influx is not a sustainable form of population increase: "We might be left with a lot of old people who are not in production, they do not produce (...), old single men who sit in their own house" (#13 2008). But seen from a pragmatic side, they do give the municipality short-term financial stability. "When people move, we get less money from the central government. We get our share based on the population size" (I#8 2008).

When the interviewees tell stories about influx, the focus is almost always on original *Vegaværinger*. In a few cases, families who were not original from Vega are mentioned: "Some young families with kids have moved to the municipality the last years. We are very happy for this" (I#10 2008); "Some new have moved here, and I think more are coming now. A family with two kids moved here this spring that weren't related to anyone, nor did they know anyone. Some are coming" (I#1 2008). However, the general picture given by the informants imply that the purpose is to attract *vegaværinger* back, rather than trying to attract *new* people to Vega.

Continuous inhabitation of Vega is crucial for the future at Vega, and the strong belief in future inhabitation is an important element in making the Vega narrative a narrative of a progressive character.

5.1.2 Investing and believing in the future (*satse!*)

A strong belief in the future is expressed in the optimistic Vega narrative:

“We have to impart that we are an island in development, because we really are, and that, what can I say, that there is life possibilities (*liv laga*) here, and that we have work, and that we enjoy ourselves, and that we are progressing” (I#2 2008).

Several interviewees mention that Vega municipality has high investments compared with other societies in the north of Norway, and that, in comparison with these other municipalities, their community is dynamic and energetic.

The interviewees talk proudly about investments in new roads, a new school, and better health care:

“The municipality has invested in infrastructure. We have a new school, culture house, new tarmac. We have a new nursing home and care home with single bed rooms. Everybody should get the help they need. It should be good to grow up at Vega, and it should be good to get old at Vega” (I#8 2008).

Investments have been highly prioritized from the municipality, and extensive investments have been placed in the communal infrastructure. Actually, from the municipality’s year report for 2009, investments are specifically mentioned as crucial for them to appear as a municipality in development with good and varied welfare facilities and with an eye on the future (Vega Kommune 2010).

The Terra investments²⁵ are mentioned as a contrast to Vega municipality’s investments. The money the municipality owes will at least give benefits to their own community. No one will for example come and dig up their new tarmac or school: “They will not tear down the school!” (I#3 2008);

²⁵ Investment scandal involving eight municipalities in Norway in 2007.

“We shouldn’t think too much about it [the debt]. A lot of municipalities are worse off than us when it comes to finances. At least we have spent the money on ourselves; we have not bought some Terra stocks. We can be proud that the money we are short, this money we have spent ourselves” (I#7 2008).

The investments are seen as stable, as they immediately give something back to the community. However, as several interviewees mention, the municipality has been under government administration - the ROBEK list - because of their poor economic situation and administration.

One interviewee says that Vega municipality has the third highest amount of debt per inhabitant in Norway. However, this is not mentioned in a negative way, but rather as a sign of the municipality’s willingness to go after what they want and need: “We are in third place in Norway when it comes to debt per inhabitant. So, we have invested (*satsa*)!” (I#3 2008). The investments are contributing to making Vega a good place to live, get old, and grow up.

Another angle to look positively upon the municipality's high loans is that it scares other municipalities from merging with Vega: “We have an incredible high debt per inhabitant. So, now no municipalities want to merge with us!” (I#3 2008).

The link between investments and the belief in the future is stated by several of the interviewees. Solid investments from the Vega municipality make people feel that their own private investments are safe: “We are dependent on each other. And when you see the municipality is investing, then I think the business sector dares to invest as well” (I#14 2008). There has been a great deal of private investments at Vega, regardless of the individual businesses being rather small and the total business community being small in total. This is especially true for the tourist sector. Now that they have this formal world heritage status, it feels less dangerous to try something new:

“So, then our inhabitants and others saw that the municipality was investing (*satsa*), and then the private business sector invested (*satsa*) as well. Because they see that there is a development here. So, we have had

pretty big investments in the private sector, and it is a quite small sector, the businesses are small” (I#8 2008).

When Vega people see that someone is having success, it gives a positive spin off, as it gives more people the confidence to invest:

“More people are daring. If they can make it, then so can I! And then they put up a *rorbu*²⁶ and rent it out and then people start coming there. And we get this spill-over effect and therefore also a boom. People see that they can make it if they only dare (I#13 2008)”.

It is expressed by several interviewees that the future at Vega is depending on how locals act on the current situation:

“The development out here is depending on us, how competent *we* are. Here we have a society that is well functioning, we have a wonderful nursing home and school and good roads. We can’t blame it on anything else if we don’t make it. There is a strong foundation here and a lot of opportunities for business activity (I#17 2008)”.

In an article from 2008 by the regional newspaper, *Helgeland Arbeiderblad*, Vega is portrayed as a community where belief and investment in the future is strong. The area of Helgeland made a big jump on the national innovation barometer in 2007, and this was mostly caused by innovation and business activity at Vega. A founder of a local business at Vega tells the newspaper:

“A lot of people are investing in tourism and accommodation, everyone has faith in the future, and it is easy to get some support. It is a very positive atmosphere among people, and I think it has a lot to do with the world heritage status. But the municipality has also invested in roads and a school, and it seems like there are life possibilities (*liv laga*) to live and work here. People are moving home again and want to settle down” (Hagerup 2008).

Several of the interviewees are farmers, and farming is talked about as an important and integrated part of Vega municipality. Several mention that they do not think the ferry connection would have been as good as it is without the local farming community. The farmers get words of praise from several interviewees for their ability to adjust. If some rules or regulations are shifted

²⁶ A *rorbu* is a traditional fishing hut, now a popular type of tourist accommodation.

on the national level, they are known to adjust their production to avoid losing in the new context that is created. They are seen as flexible:

“The farming sector is very much on its feet and active at Vega, and there has been a generational change at most farms. (...) They are active; they invest in new farms, buy milk quotas. Vega is among the communities in Nordland with the highest investments” (I#1 2008).

There has been a generational change in the farming sector. Interviewees say the sector used to be more pessimistic and inward looking. This has only recently changed. The new generation that has taken over the farms has a more optimistic outlook on the future. The constant pressure on profitability within the sector has pushed some choices to be made, and a lot of the farmers have chosen to invest for the future:

“There was a generational change, and after that, there is optimism. (...) Either you had to quit, or you had to do something. So, a lot of farmers invested, and that is great. (...) It is openness here, and a good professional ambience, and we can learn from each other. So, it is really good” (I#11 2008).

The views on the future that the optimistic Vega narrative presents surely form part of a progressive narrative.

5.1.3 Pride and identity

Yet another element of the progressive and optimistic narrative at Vega is the expressions of pride and identity given by the informants. Such expressions were central in the interviews. Informants express that they are proud of being from and living at Vega. Their identity is closely connected to the island community. Was this pride already there before Vega got the world heritage status, or is it something that came with the world heritage site status? The interviewees give mixed perceptions on this. However, on the issue of the existence of pride and a strong local identity, there is agreement.

Some interviewees express that pride has always been present at Vega: “The pride of Vega is pretty strong and has always been strong for a lot of people”

(I#14 2008); “You have to be proud when you are living on an islet in the middle of the sea. It is a form of survival mechanism. (...) This is not something new” (I#3 2008);

“There is pride in being from Vega; I think it is part of trying to survive, to hang on to life out here. They cannot take that away from us. We are going to live here, and we are going to be our own municipality, even though we are less than 1,300 people” (I#13 2008).

People are aware that Vega is not the easiest place to live, neither regarding infrastructure, work, nor weather. Still, they struggle to make a living in the municipality and could not imagine living anywhere else:

“I think it is great here, and I can never imagine living anywhere else. This is not a new feeling that came with the world heritage. We who live here have always been patriots, and we really like living here. It is a reason why we struggle to stay put here. I have had, and there still are, a lot of other opportunities (I#19 2008)”.

The history of inhabitation at Vega is long and rich. Some locals find it intriguing and exciting to live at an island where there has been inhabitation for more than 10,000 years, and the society's long history has been important for the development of local pride: “It has been people who have made a living here for several thousands of years. That is completely unique. So, maybe *you* are even from here, maybe you descend from Vega?” (I#6 2008).

Another interviewee elaborates on the issue of local history and pride:

“I think it started in the 70s-80s. It was almost like a local awakening when we had the archeological excavations. (...) At first there were some conflicts between the farming sector and the archeologists because they were digging in an area with active farmers. But then they got a concept for imparting the information and started with archeological walks, they took people with them and informed and showed. Suddenly, Vega was seen as Norway's Stone Age island. When they found something up in Mohalsen²⁷, it was on the national news. It was the oldest finding in Norway. And then it was turned to something positive,

²⁷ Mountain area at Vega.

to something that people were proud of. So, I think a lot around the history has made people proud” (I#1 2008).

The long and rich history has clearly affected the local pride. Another important element for the local pride is the world heritage status. However, as already noted some *vegaværinger* say that they have always been proud, regardless of the world heritage status. Yet, it is clear that the attention Vega has received after they got listed as a world heritage site has contributed to creating a strong sense of local identity and pride. Interviewees say the world heritage status was crucial in shifting the wind for Vega. Several informants say the inscription of Vega to the world heritage list changed something in Vega inhabitants’ image of themselves: “A lot has happened after we got it [the world heritage status]. I don’t know if it was something psychologically that made us aware that we had something” (I#11 2008);

“The world heritage status created a huge expectation among the inhabitants. We thought it was what we needed to break the curve. It did something with people’s mentality. It created pride, an own identity. And it made us see new possibilities” (I#3 2011).

The same picture is set by several other interviewees: “The world heritage status opened our eyes. We are a bit sleepy out here, and we did not really understand how lovely it is here (I#12 2008)”. Another interviewee explains: “For a lot of people here, Vega has had no value. This has changed; it seems as if they suddenly discovered Vega (I#19 2008)”. Awareness of local nature and history has strongly increased after placement onto the world heritage list. Several informants tell about acknowledgement from outsiders’ eyes and the importance this has for local self-image: “We have gotten a lot of attention from the outside about how beautiful and nice Vega is. This has made our pride stronger. It is difficult to see what one has, but with outsiders’ eyes, it becomes easier” (I#2 2011);

“We get some feedback from outsiders and get an appreciation for what we have accomplished, especially after we got the world heritage status. (...) They say that we should be proud of this. (...) This world heritage, it is the way of life that we have lived for generations. It is nice to know

that it is worth something; that what we have been doing for generations is actually worth something (I#4 2008)”.

Regarding outsider eyes, the TV series *Himmelblå*²⁸ has also been an important contribution to local pride. Several of the informants mention the series as something positive that has happened for Vega. How the series communicates issues of life and nature at Vega makes them feel proud. One informant says the choice of making this series in the Vega municipality makes locals feel proud: “I think that the mere choice of making a TV series from Vega is making Vegaværingene even more proud, and it contributes to this positivism that we have in our community” (I#13 2008).

Himmelblå has had some positive effect on the inflow of tourists, and several informants speak of the *Himmelblå*-effect. However, it is the world heritage status that is seen as most valuable to attract tourists. The world heritage status make locals feel they have something to show to, something that can make it easier to attract people to visit Vega:

“So, we are on UNESCOs world heritage list, together with the quay in Bergen and the pyramids in Egypt. That is sort of a standard line. It is no small thing. (...) Yes, actually, we can make it out here. We can live off tourism, just like Lofoten²⁹ is doing. We got something special, we got something we can sell, really can sell. I think we had this before as well, but now we have this paper that says: Vega is a great place! Come and look!” (I#13 2008).

There has also been a new feeling of pride among children. Several of the informants mention a story of how the local boy’s football team reacted when they played against the larger city mainland neighbour and lost: “They lost really badly and the other team was making fun of them afterwards. Then one of the boys said: ‘yes, but you don’t have a world heritage status!’” (I#1 2008).

²⁸ *Himmelblå* is a Norwegian TV series that is portraying life at Ylvingen. Three seasons have been produced, of which the first was screened in 2008. *Himmelblå* is Norwegian for “sky blue”.

²⁹ Island community in North-Norway, with a well developed tourist industry.

It is obviously that the status has had an effect on how people from Vega view themselves and their habitat; it has nourished a new sense of pride and identity. Some informants give the impression that this is not a coincidence, but rather an active choice that has been made: “We decided to end the depopulation and decay, to get a grip!” (I#3 2011);

“We had a lot of meetings and brain-storming, and we made this slogan that we wanted Norway to be proud of Vega. Then we had to start with ourselves! I am very proud, and I have always been proud. Maybe it is because I see it from the outside” (I#11 2008).

As part of the plan to create a stronger feeling of pride and identity at Vega, a tough fight against *bygdedyret*³⁰ was launched. In fact, they have even organized an official burial of *bygdedyret*: “We discussed *bygdedyret* and decided we should burry it. Away with *janteloven*³¹ and the whole package” (I#6 2008);

“We wrote *janteloven* on a poster, put it on the floor and tramped on it, a symbolic act. And we had a chase and caught different types of *bygdedyr*. Someone had written a description of the different animals, it was fantastically good because you could picture them, you could recognise their traits. And then we kind of caught them in small matchboxes that we taped, and had in a shoebox which we painted black and buried” (I#11 2008).

Inhabitants are aware *bygdedyret* does not die and you have to have a constant effort in the fight against it: “No, this *bygdedyr*, it lives everywhere, and will continue to do so” (I#19 2008). However, the ceremony and focus on the problem has raised awareness on the issue: “That funeral is not something we do only once; it is something we have to do several times. There is no quick fix. No, we have to work as positive as possible” (I#4 2008); “We have seen that *bygdedyret* has started to become smaller and that we must pull together to build this society up again” (I#8 2008).

³⁰ Bygdedyret is an animalistic nick-name for the negative forces that spreads rumors and etc. that often exist in small countryside communities.

³¹ The law of Jante, formulated by Sandemose in 1933.

Both the decision to be proud and the decision to bury *bygdedyret* imply that Vega inhabitants face their problems and deal with them.

The strong local pride and identity forms an important part of the optimistic and progressive Vega narrative.

5.1.4 Exceptions from the optimistic Vega narrative

Exceptions from the optimistic Vega narrative will be presented in this subchapter. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter one informant has a more or less fully pessimistic narrative and clearly presents an exception from the optimistic Vega narrative. Here is one example from this interview: “No, I’m not proud, I am a *Vegaværing*, and that’s just what I have to be. I think it is just as well as any other place, I don’t think it is any extra here” (I#9 2008). I could have had more examples from this interview here; however, I do not feel that this is neither necessary for the thesis nor ethically defensible.

However, there are some other exceptions from the main narrative. I will now present four local skepticisms.

Firstly, there is some fear that increasing hordes of tourists will put too much pressure on the nature and, therefore, affect the quality and quantity of the nature. The nature has certain limits, and it is important that these are respected. Therefore, some interviewees claim, it is important that the number of tourists is limited: “It will be too much traffic out here if they are not able to stop some boats from going out. The most important for me is that we take care of the birds and the landscape” (I#10 2008);

“Let’s say we get 300 people out with boat every day in the summer season; Hysvær, Skjærvær, Lånan. The landscape in the islands is build by humans; they have used seaweed, earlier the rock was almost bare. So the soil is very thin, and especially when it is not used as grazing land, it just leaves for the ocean. If we had 300 people there every day, then it would not be any soil left. It would all become downtrodden” (I#2 2008).

A second reason for scepticism concerns transfer of resources. One of the interviewees says that the amount of responsibility that follows a world heritage status has not been matched by a correct amount of money. Several informants elaborate on this issue. Their argument is that if the government wants the cultural landscape of Vega to be kept at bay, money is needed to do so. It is not something that can be done without a sufficient amount of resources:

“Norway needs to understand that if we are to take care of the values that exist here, then resources need to be injected. We are under 1,300 people who live here, and capacity building in relation to world heritage work is necessary and very important in the time to come (I#14 2008)”.

A third scepticism concerns the actual visible effects from the world heritage status. There is some discontent with the results from the world heritage status. One interviewee says she thinks the effects of the world heritage are not so strong any longer. In the first years, it was very important and talked about a lot, but the last years it has faded away a bit and feels more like old news. One of the informants says that it should be possible to do more and to do better business with the status. The opinion is that the world heritage site is not properly developed as it is today, and that it should be possible to make more out of it for the local society:

“The world heritage should be developed so that it becomes a business opportunity. The world heritage as it is today is just something that is roaming around in the air. I mean, it is probably just two or three percentage of the Norwegian population that knows what it means (I#15 2008)”.

The fourth scepticism regards local inhabitants' ambivalence towards the world heritage status. One informant says that, particularly, the elders in the community were ambivalent towards the status: “They said, ‘We have made it without the world heritage before, so why shouldn't we now?’ They said, ‘What can we *do* with the status?’” (I#3 2008). Nonetheless, when explained that the world heritage status was not for them, but for the new generations, most elders have accepted this new development for the island community.

Additionally, some informants feel the status does not concern them. They feel that the status is something that is relevant for skerries and islets in the middle of the sea and the people who own these skerries and islets, but not for the Vega mainland and its inhabitants. Ambivalence is expressed well in one informant's words: "I don't know what the word heritage has done for Vega, I do not know. (...). I can't go around and feel as part of world heritage all the time (I#9 2008)".

5.2 Individual narratives connected to the collective narrative of optimism

An important element in a narrative study is to study the links between individual narratives and the collective narrative. Individual and collective narratives support and reinforce each other.

The collective narrative of optimism tells, among other things, about the belief in continuous inhabitation of Vega. Of the 20 narrative interviews, 14 of the informants tell specifically about moving to Vega. Most of them moved *back* to Vega, but some also moved to Vega for other reasons, e.g. husband/wife from Vega, ancestors from Vega, etc. Some of the informants moved back to Vega because of the peace and quiet:

"I grew up at Vega, I am born at Vega. I stayed here until I was [xx] years. Then I lived in [place] for [xx] years, before I moved back. Now I have lived home in [xx] years, at Vega. (...) I was sick of [place]. (...) It was too much hassle. Traffic and fuss. (...) The tram passed right outside the window. I didn't like it. It was never peaceful" (I#16 2008).

Several of the informants moved home when they got kids:

"I am from Vega; I grew up at [place]. As every [xx]-year-old at that time, I moved to go to the high school in [place]. And then I lived in a lot of different places, in both north and south. (...) You look differently at things when you get kids. So, then closeness to family, origin, and all those things became important" (I#1 2008).

“There is a time for everything, and now it’s time for little kids, to be at one place, just stay put, but maybe later when the kids are older and we are a little freer again, then I would like to take some more schooling and to live somewhere else, just for some years. *But*, it is only for some years, and then I want to come back here. It is here I am supposed to be” (I#13 2008).

Some of the informants did not plan on moving home, but ended up moving home nevertheless: “I grew up at Vega. I moved when I was [age], and then I lived [xx] years elsewhere. (...) I was just going to try to live at home for a year, but I ended up staying. During that year we decided to stay here” (I#8 2011);

“On our way to Vega for the summer vacation in [year], we stopped at a Bed & Breakfast in [place]. We were talking with the owners, and they told us that they were building a cabin in [place], where the man was originally from. If these old people in [place] could build a cabin, then so could we! They were very kind and gave us all their research material, a big chunk of brochures. We decided to build our own place at Vega, a cabin! It was finished in [year]. We went there for vacation every year. In the fall [year], we were joking about staying at Vega and not go home” (I#3 2011).

The family ended up moving to Vega the next year. However, the son was a bit sceptical about moving to Vega:

“He did not want to move to Vega. He wanted to continue to live in [place] and finish the last year of secondary school there. He was going to live with his aunt and uncle. We all went here for summer vacation, but when he was supposed to return to [place], he had changed his mind. He thought Vega was splendid (*alletiders*) and wanted to move here after all!” (I#3 2011).

The collective narrative of optimism puts weight on the investments and beliefs for the future of Vega. Several of the informants are entrepreneurs and are investing in the future: “Two apartments is not enough, it is only a hobby. It is not possible to make money from it. Therefore we have invested quite a bit, to give the tourists some opportunities when they are here” (I#7 2008). Several informants have more than one job and are trying both new and old kinds of employment:

“I started a firm to work on a specific project. When you live in a gravel area (*gruslagte strøk*), there are very few exiting jobs. You have the nursing home, and the municipality administration and the school. So, if you want a fun job, then you have to create it yourself. In the city, you can get a job, but you have to be a lot more creative to get a job here. You have to create the job yourself, and you have to be multitasking. So, you have a lot of jobs. I think we have about 6-7-8 jobs in our household altogether now” (I#3 2008).

The collective narrative of optimism has pride and local identity as a strong component. There are several individual narratives that elaborate on these issues: “I would not have survived in Oslo. I am so happy to live here! Oh, it is so pleasant. And, I am so happy that the kids get to grow up on a place like this, that they can use the nature (I#11 2008)”;

“I have always thought this is the world’s finest place, but I have *moved* here. So I have probably put myself more into the tourists’ situation than those who have lived here their whole life. You often can’t see what you already have” (I#11 2008).

Several of the informants talk about the importance this pride has for the local children:

“My son was about [xx] years when we got the world heritage status. We were always hiking a lot in local nature, and I was trying to explain to him what world heritage is and how great it is. So, he asked what the world heritage was at Vega. I told him about the islands, and all the things the grandparents were doing, and all their knowledge, and about birds and fish. For him, then, all of Vega became world heritage. Later, he had some cousins to visit and was explaining to them about the world heritage. ‘Look around! All is world heritage!’ For him, everything that had to do with Vega was world heritage. ‘This is our world heritage, and we have gotten a prize for it!’ It was the most outstanding in the world for him. There is a lot of pride. Oh god, I hope he will keep that pride. When I was growing up, it was not the greatest to come from a small fishing community in Nordland. Not that I was *really* bothered by it. But, I hope that he will be proud of coming from this place. It is often like this with small district communities - it has not been so great to come from such a place” (I#8 2011).

Individual narratives support the collective Vega narrative in every aspect.

This helps making the collective narrative of optimism even stronger.

5.3 The narrator

The optimistic Vega narrative consists of both type 1 and type 3 narratives as classified in Svarstad's (2009) typology. A type 1 narrative is an individual narrative, where the narrator's position is part of the narrative. In a type 3 narrative, the narrator's position is also part of the narrative, but this is a collective of narratives. Both of these types were common at Vega.

As Svarstad (2009) notes, such a typology is a simplification of an often more complex reality. In the optimistic Vega narrative, there is a narrative type that is not covered by this typology: narratives about other individuals. This is not a type 2 narrative, as the narrator is not a researcher or professional narrator, but rather a fellow local inhabitant. In the optimistic Vega narrative, this narrative form is common.

Narratives about other individuals point to another dimension of narrative theory. A narrative is not only produced, it is continuously reproduced, and this is also the case at Vega.

Several stories are repeated by different informants. Where these narrations were originally produced is difficult to say, but they are continuously being reproduced. The story of the boy's football team that lost against the neighboring town is a story several informants mention. The story of how the community worked together to fix the hotel after years of decay is another. A third story that is continually repeated is the story about how they decided to fight the *bygdedyr*. A fourth story is about a man and wife who live on one of the smaller islands half of the year, in a house built of driftwood without electricity and water, and runs a restaurant as well as accommodation in the summer months. One interviewee says: "You feel pride of what such people are able to do" (I#5 2008).

Such stories as the ones mentioned here are contributing to the feeling of pride at Vega. Stories of success, optimism and pride are reproduced and, hence, contribute to creating pride.

5.4 Actor types in the narrative

There are four prominent actors in the optimistic Vega narrative: the entrepreneur; the traditional sector; the *dugnad* workers³²; and the municipality. External actors, such as tourists and the central and regional government, are also mentioned. However, these external actors do not play a prominent role. In the optimistic Vega narrative, it is the locals who are controlling the development at Vega: “The development out here is dependent on us, how competent *we* are” (I#17 2008).

All of the actors in the optimistic Vega narrative are positive and optimistic. They are central in both collective and individual accounts. Traditional narrative actor types, such as victims and villains, are not present. I will now present the central actors in the Vega narrative.

5.4.1 The municipality

The municipality is an important actor in the optimistic Vega narrative. The municipality has made huge investments, and this is shown to be appreciated in the narratives. The municipality actor was thoroughly presented in the subchapter ‘investing and believing in the future (*satse*)’. I will nonetheless give one example here:

“At the same time as we got the world heritage status, the municipality did some huge investments. So, then the inhabitants and others saw that the municipality was investing (*satsa*) and then the private business sector invested (*satsa*) as well” (I#8 2008).

³² Voluntary community workers.

5.4.2 The entrepreneur

The entrepreneur is central in the optimistic Vega narrative. The entrepreneur is portrayed as important for Vega's future. Individual accounts, collective accounts and accounts about other individuals present the entrepreneur.

Hence, there are plenty accounts of this actor type in the narrations. Here are some examples:

“We have an attempt in Lånan [to make money from the eider tradition]. The landowners have organized and established a limited company, *Utværet Lånan*. They are 17 shareholders in the company; it is the landowners of today and their descendents. They take more for the duvets than the ones who work independently, and they are developing some new products” (I#1 2008).

“It is inspiring to create something, like at the farm islands, if you set up a *rorbu* there. Then you have created something valuable, not that you will earn a lot of money calculated on a per-hour basis. I have a simple philosophy, you have to enjoy your work and you have to make some money on it” (I#17 2008).

Women's role as entrepreneurs is especially emphasized:

“There are more women than men with more than one job. Most of the women who are farmers have at least a second job; some even have a third job. And today, there is no one who works full-time in the tourist sector, except the hotel, of course. The women in [company], for instance, she also works as a hairdresser” (I#3 2011).

5.4.3 The *dugnad* workers

The spirit of contributing to the community is strong at Vega. Voluntary community work is common, and the voluntary community worker (*dugnadsarbeideren*) is seen as important for the Vega society. The voluntary community worker is an important actor in the optimistic Vega narrative, and almost all of the informants give accounts about *dugnad*. Here are some examples: “Every summer we have a big *dugnad* to organize Vegadagene. (...) It is a huge *dugnad*. We do it every year, and it is a huge *dugnad*” (I#3 2008);

“If Vega is to have a future, then everybody needs to work together for the community. If we can’t have a *dugnad* together for the society, then we won’t succeed. The spirit of voluntary community work (*dugnadsånden*) is very big here. So, if you, for example, have a spouse working in the oil and who has a lot of free time, then he will be involved in the community, for example by buying a boat so that he can take the tourists around in the summer. He doesn’t need to do it economically, but he does it so that we can have something to offer here at Vega. It is a community feeling that you don’t get when you live in a big place. (...) It is about 20, 30 dedicated people who work with everything. They are in the sports, in the band; they are the same almost everywhere. (...) It is unusual that people do so much *dugnad* without getting any monetary compensation out of it. It is unusual” (I#8 2008).

“I think it is fun to get involved in committees and stuff like that. We are so few. Usually it is the same people who take on all the tasks and who sit in all the boards, in sports and in the politics. So, you have to contribute a little. And, especially when you have kids, then you should, for example, take a course and be a swimming guard so that we can have a pool and swimming for the kids. I mean, you have to contribute a little bit” (I#13 2008).

A story that is repeated by several informants is the story of how a local *dugnad* group got together and bought the old hotel at Vega. Together they saved the hotel from its decay:

“We managed to go together, 11 of us, and we bought it! Not to brag, but I feel that was a milestone. We showed that people could work together. (...) We had the last bid. And then we build up the house with *dugnad*. We showed that we could work as a community, and we managed to stick together” (I#6 2008).

5.4.4 The traditional sector

Narratives about the traditional sector at Vega are central in the optimistic Vega narrative. The traditional sector has always been, and still is, important at Vega: “Delivery of primary resources is the most important business sector here at Vega. We do not have a lot of processing. (...) We deliver primary resources, milk and meat and all those things” (I#4 2008).

Traditionally *fiskarbonden*, the fisherman-farmer, has been important for the Vega society. The eider has also been an important income source in the past.

Today, specialized farmers are important for the society, and the eider tradition is reinvented. Here are some accounts on the traditional sector:

“We are a farming community. I have worked in the farming sector, and I think it is important. We are a strong farming municipality. (...) Fishing and farming is important here, as well as the island culture. People have lived and had a livelihood in the islands, it is incredible. The conditions are pretty rough” (I#6 2008).

“Several farmers have started up with pig production. Around 30 million kroners will be invested the next years in the farming sector at Vega. Several farmers are shifting to pig, or they are starting to run a mixed farm, with milk and meat” (I#14 2008).

“The eider comes every spring, in the end of April. It is a shallow water area out in the islands, so it is perfect for her. For several hundred years people living in the islands have been making her house, dried seaweed, made nests and watched over her while she lays there. It is a two months period that we call *vartie*, and that time we have to be quiet. (...) During that time it is the eider that reigns in the islands. Back in the days when the fisherman-farmer (*fiskarbonden*) lived in the islands, they didn't use the fireplace in the morning and they went to the barn in the evening so that the cows would be quiet in the morning. And the kids got some toys to play with so that they would stay quiet. They couldn't run around on the island when the eiders were coming up to nest. This was especially so in the morning and when there was a high tide. And, they had some extra curtains to put in front of the windows so that the eider would not feel that she was being watched when she came up to find a house” (I#2 2008).

Today, bird tenders move out to the islands in the breeding season. They still have to take precautions, but the situation today is clearly different from how it is described in this quote.

Several informants emphasize the transportation needs the traditional sector generates and suggest that the connection to the mainland would not be so frequent without such a large traditional sector:

“The farming sector here generates quite a large transportation need, with forage here and there. So, I do not think there would be such a frequent ferry connection if it hadn't been for the farming sector. There are about three trucks a day that are farm-related” (I#17 2008).

5.5 The life of a local narrative: the optimistic Vega narrative revisited

A challenge with analyzing narratives in social science is that the meaning of events is, or can be, continuously changing. The meaning of a previous event is dependent on the development of subsequent events and the meaning connected to these subsequent events. Therefore, a narrative is often not stable over time (Elliott 2005). A narrative is not something dead that can be held on to and kept as it is for the infinite future. To tell the story of a local narrative is merely a snapshot of how the locals view their situation at *that* time and in *that* context. It *might* stay the same, but it does often change as the context changes, and new events engrave new lessons, knowledge or truths in people's realities.

The optimistic Vega narrative has gone through some adjustments since the narrative interviews took place in August 2008. During my interviews at Vega in February 2011, I noticed a more subdued optimism among some of the interviewees.

The optimism is no longer so strong on inhabitation issues, especially on the prospects of more people moving to the island community: "We *are* very optimistic; we *do* have a lot of good things going on. But why does the population continue to decrease!?" (I#3 2011); "There is no longer a loser-thing to live at Vega, but, unfortunately, the population has not increased. It seems like people prefer to live in the cities" (I#5 2011); "We hope for positive effects on the population growth, even though it is taking some time. It has at least stagnated. The drastic decrease in population has stopped. But we have to do something more to get an increase" (I#7 2011).

There are some who move to Vega but only stay for a while:

"Most people who move here have some kind of connection to Vega. Often one of them is from Vega and the other is from somewhere else. There are also some who move here who are not from Vega, but they

often move away again after a little while. (...) You have to be a social person if you are moving here. It can be hard to get on the inside of this community, and to be able to do that you probably need to be quite social” (I#6 2011).

There is some self-scrutiny regarding Vega as a place to move to. Maybe it is not such an easy place to move to? It is, for example, difficult for people who move to Vega to find a house to live in. I personally saw several posters at the grocery store where the need for housing was expressed. I also talked with some people who had had problems finding a house they could rent all year round, as most of the houses for rent were only to be rented out outside the summer season. One informant elaborates on the issue of housing:

”Why don’t we get more people moving here? It needs to be an attractive place to live. Our focus has shifted a bit recently from an omnipresent joy for the world heritage, to seeing the challenges that comes with it, to thinking about how we can be a good community. A lot of people who move to Vega only stay a short time period, and then they move again. I do think that it is important to get a good house. It should preferably be at a beautiful location, close to the sea. A lot of people move here because of the beautiful nature. Then, you really shouldn’t place them in the middle of the sump behind the nursing home at Gladstad! It is not good for their well-being! It has to be sound houses, but for a good price. Do we have those kinds of houses at Vega today? No. (...) Research shows that providing a nice and attractive housing is more important than an attractive workplace. In addition, we do not have a lot of meeting places for people who move here. We have a lot of organizations and groups here at Vega, but they are not presented for them. They are the ones who have to contact the organizations, and not a lot of people do that when they just moved to a place and know no one. The only public place we have is the library and the café. And we do not have a welcome committee. People are aware of these issues and think it is a problem, but nobody does anything about it” (I#3 2011).

Regarding investment for the future, some informants think the farmers are investing as much out of necessity as out of beliefs in the future. Maybe it is their only choice?

”I do not really see the fact that farmers are investing as a sign of optimism. Yes, sure, they are investing. But the alternative is to close the farm. You have to continue to grow if you want to continue as a farmer. The farming sector has changed a lot during the last couple of decades.

In 1984, the average number of cows at Vega was 10; today it is 23. And, in addition, it used to be normal that the wife worked at the farm. It is not like that today. Today, the farmers are dependent on extra income to survive as farmers. And a lot of farmers have some extra employment outside the farm, even though running a farm is usually a lot more than a full-time job” (I#4 2011).

However, not everyone shares this outlook on the farming sector. Several informants are still optimistic on behalf of the sector:

“There is a lot of optimism at Vega, and especially in the farming sector. It is very visible in the farming sector. Several farmers are building barns for more than 8 million kroner. There is positive development and a lot of joint operations in the sector. It is very sustainable that way, and it also makes it easier for the farmers to have proper vacations” (I#1 2011).

“The largest pig productions in the county of Nordland are located on Vega. More and more farmers go together to build joint barns. The barns out here are very modern. And the farmers are generally young. They have a lot of go-ahead spirit, they work hard and they work a lot” (I#5 2011).

Either way, it seems that the optimism for the farming sector is no longer all-encompassing. However, regarding other aspects of the optimistic Vega narrative, the optimistic spirit is as strong as ever: “It used to be shameful to come from an island, now it is great!” (I#3 2011); “We have a new form of identity and belonging. This is especially so for the kids. (...) There is a new and strong pride, not only for kids, but also for adults” (I#6 2011). And there is still a strong optimism for inhabitation; however, it is no longer shared as strongly by everyone.

It seems like *vegaværingane* are impatient for change.

5.6 The optimistic Vega narrative compared to leading environmental discourses

Discourses and narratives can influence each other, and societies narratives are framed within a discourse (see e.g. Svarstad 2004). The optimistic Vega narrative has most likely not influenced any discourse types as it is a rather

exceptional narrative. However, the optimistic Vega narrative might be influenced by one or more discourse type. Thus, it would be interesting to compare the optimistic Vega narrative to relevant discourses. Does the optimistic Vega narrative have similar traits as any leading environmental discourse? I will investigate this issue in this subchapter. This can provide some extra insight to research question one: *What are local narratives regarding life at Vega?*

Benjaminsen and Svarstad (2010) suggest four discourse types to be prominent in the environmental field: preservationist, win-win, traditionalist and promethean. Three questions are posed to distinguish between these four leading environmental discourse: is protection of natural resources seen as important; are the needs and interest of the locals seen as important; and, does the discourse type have a positive stance to partnerships between local and external actors?

The answers of the preservationist and promethean discourses do not fit with the main narrative at Vega at the present time. However, the optimistic Vega narrative does have elements that fit with both the win-win and the traditionalist discourses. I will now present linkages between these two discourses and the present narrative of optimism that is found at Vega.

5.6.1 The win-win discourse type

Win-win discourses prioritize conservation. However, they see an integration of local people in the conservation effort as the best way to achieve it. With such a conservation effort, ‘everyone’ - that is, the environmentalist, locals and external actors - will win from the conservation effort (Svarstad et al. 2008).

There is a lot of talk about conservation through use (*vern gjennom bruk*) at Vega. Several informants tell stories, in optimistic terms, of how they do this. Conservation through use has always been done at Vega and should also be

part of the future: “We got the world heritage status because we have taken care of the landscape here. It has been very important for us to take care of the landscape” (I#10 2008); “If you do not have people in the area who are interested in conservation, then you can’t introduce conservation. Then it will become worse, that is for sure” (I#10 2008).

Originally, many people at Vega were skeptical of conservation efforts. However, by actively promoting conservation through use the municipality has managed to reframe the issue of conservation so that it is embraced by most people in the community:

“Locally, there were not a lot of positive attitudes toward protection at Vega, but then, the mayor introduced the concept of ‘conservation through use’ (*vern gjennom bruk*). We have used this nature for thousands of years, and it is the *use* that has created the values. That is why the best protection is use. (...) So, we tend to say that the term conservation through use was created here. The mayor was very concerned with this. This was not the protection philosophy at that time at all, you where not supposed to use the nature” (I#1 2008).

Negative accounts of how the situation was before conservation through use was seen as an accepted strategy by relevant national bodies are given by several informants:

“They were trying to take care of the biodiversity, but they were left with only meadowsweet. And, everything they tried to conserve disappeared. That’s why the term conservation through use came around. Now, even DN³³ has seen that people are an important actor in all of this. That was not the case in the old kind of protection. Then people were bad (*fy-fy*)! And, that’s the attitude that has prevailed all the time, so now it is a new kind of dialogue. We can say: people have to be present to take care of it. We do not have a lot of wilderness in Norway, what we really have is cultural landscape, it is very little wilderness. So when DN tried to create wilderness by putting a fence around it, it did not work out. So, that attitude has changed. Now, they understand that people have to be present; that it is better with conservation through use” (I#3 2008).

³³ The Norwegian Directorate for Nature Management

Conservation through use is today an important part of world heritage work at Vega:

“With the world heritage status, people are again starting to use the graze land. And, they are a lot more conscious about it. Protection does not mean that it can’t be used. It should be maintained, because that is what gave us the status. (...) People are a lot more aware that conservation or protection does not mean the same as staying away from it” (I#11 2008).

The picture that is presented with ‘conservation through use’ is a win-win situation for both national bodies and for the local people. The area is conserved, and the local people are still able to use the resources for their livelihood, without this usage making problems for the conservation of the nature. The reframing of conservation has proved to be a smart strategy for Vega. The win-win discourse has influenced the optimistic Vega narrative with its positive view on conservation.

5.6.2 The traditionalist discourse type

Traditionalist discourses reject involvement by outsiders in protection efforts. In this discourse, the locals are seen as the most capable of taking care of their environment (Svarstad et al. 2008). Benjaminsen and Svarstad (2008) give an example from Gausdal in Norway of a local narrative that is part of what they call a broader Norwegian “rural traditionalist discourse” (2008: 49). Elements from the traditionalist discourse type are also present in the optimistic Vega narrative. In fact, at the time Enge (2000) did his fieldwork at Vega, the traditionalist discourse was the prevailing discourse in the local community. Involvement by outsiders, and especially by the authorities (*myndigheten*), was rejected.

The traditionalist discourse is no longer so prevailing at Vega, but it is still present. However, in contrast to the narrative of conflict produced at Gausdal the traditionalist discourse type is part of an optimistic narrative at Vega. There is a strong pride immanent in the traditionalist discourse as it is

expressed at Vega. The optimistic Vega narrative states that they, *vegaværingane*, are the best to take care of their own environment:

“I dare to say that the old guys who operated this before, they knew their things a lot better. (...) It is a misunderstanding that the authorities should protect things from a *vegaværing*. An old *vegaværing*, he knows exactly what should be protected. No one is as talented as a *vegaværing* to take good care of the birds that live here. We have something unique here at Vega and in all of Norway if I may say so. (...) We have taken care of the eider and the birds here at Vega for hundreds of years, as well as administrating it in a good manner. And then, a paper-pusher in Oslo comes here and tells us ‘you can’t go ashore on that island, because the seagull is breeding there’. When we were little kids, we went ashore on that island. We always left one or two eggs in the nests, to keep the stock viable. Today the seagulls are extinct, because of the pollution. That is what has happened. (...) The wild mink is the worst that could have happened for the animal life here. It takes eggs, it takes the ducklings, and it takes the eider as well. And then the paper-pushers in Oslo say ‘you can’t shoot the mink. It is protected’. That is how it goes. We can’t shot the seal either, and the consequence is that we don’t have any sea grass left here” (I#20 2008)”.

“It is typical DN people. They sit behind their desk and have an academic approach to nature. Here, the nature has been useful for people, it has been the larder. For people at DN, it is an aquarium, only for decoration” (I#6 2011).

The traditionalist discourse is still existent at Vega - however, not as strong as it used to be. The quotes presented here are clear examples of the locals viewing themselves as the most fitted for conservation of their area.

5.7 Concluding remarks

I have, in this chapter, presented and analyzed the main Vega narrative. The main Vega narrative is a progressive narrative of an optimistic character. The main elements in the optimistic Vega narrative are the belief in a continuous inhabitation of the island municipality, a strong belief in the future for the community, and the existence of pride and a strong local identity. All these elements are important in the progressive narrative. There are some exceptions from the optimism, mostly regarding disagreement on what the community

should do with the world heritage status. However, this disagreement is rather marginal.

There is a strong link between individual narratives and the collective narrative. This contributes to making the optimism strong. In addition to the individual and the collective narratives, narratives about other successful individuals are common in the optimistic Vega narrative. This is a narrative type not described by Svarstad's (2004) typology on the narrator. Yet, it is prominent in the optimistic Vega narrative. All types of narratives - individual, collective and about other individuals - are being reproduced at Vega. The continuous reproduction makes the optimistic narrative even stronger as the stories reproduced tend to be of an optimistic and successful character.

In contrast with most narratives, there are no traditional actor types like victims or villains at Vega. Instead, all actor types are optimistic and positive. The main actors presented in the narrative are the municipality, the entrepreneurs, the *dugnad* workers and the traditional sector.

Discourses and narratives can influence each other. In the Vega narrative, traces of both the win-win discourse and the traditionalist discourse can be found. The traditionalist discourse has been more prominent in the community historically. Today, the win-win discourse is more central. Yet, there are still traces of the traditionalist discourse in the optimistic Vega narrative. The win-win discourse is manifested best through the strong focus on 'conservation through use' (*vern gjennom bruk*). With this type of protection, the environment, the locals and outsiders all win. The conservation through use model is strong in the Vega society.

With the interviews for this thesis conducted over two periods, it is possible to see a little change in the narrative production. Narratives are often not stable over time. In the second round of interviews, the optimism was no longer as strong as in the first round of interviews. However, it is still a strong optimistic narrative.

Why is the Vega narrative such an optimistic narrative? The economy of the municipality and the population prognoses, as elaborated on in Chapter 2, gives no ground for optimism. These numbers provide a rather pessimistic prospect for the municipality. The next chapter will investigate a possible explanation for the strong position of the optimistic narrative production at Vega.

6. Explaining the optimistic Vega narrative

The previous chapter showed that a strong, albeit somewhat changing, optimistic narrative is being produced at Vega. Why does the optimistic narrative have such a strong position among people at Vega, regardless of the problems and challenges the municipality is facing? This chapter will seek to explain the optimistic Vega narrative. There are several possible explanation alternatives than can shed light on this puzzling paradox.

As the previous chapter showed, the world heritage status created a new spirit of **entrepreneurship** in the Vega community. This group of inventive people spread optimism in the society, as they proved that it is possible to make new ways of living in a society historically dependent on the primary sector.

The spirit of *dugnad* is important at Vega and makes it possible to have community organizations and activities, even though the municipality's finances are looking bad. It contributes to a solidarity that is probably important for the inhabitants' contentment of life at Vega.

As optimism and positivism is expressed by inhabitants, it gets reproduced in the society. A **self-fulfilling circle** can be created. Such a positive circle has been created deliberately at Vega. There have been many tactical choices to promote Vega, both for inhabitants and tourists. The emphasis on local pride was decided upon by a working group. The municipality's decision to invest, although in a poor economic situation, is a sign for people who live there and for emigrated *vegaværinger* that Vega is an attractive place to live, which is exactly what the municipality's politicians want to communicate. People who have moved home to Vega spread the word to their friends of how good life is at Vega, and that it is possible to make a viable living in the municipality. This encourages more people from Vega to move back home. Also, the decision to fight the *bygdedyr* express that Vega is an attractive place to live.

Finally, it seems like the process of making Vega a world heritage site, to a great extent, was characterized by local **participation** and influence.

All of these aspects probably contribute to explain the optimistic Vega narrative. However, the scope of this thesis will be limited to the role of local participation in the process of becoming a world heritage site. The optimistic Vega narrative seems to imply a situation of high local participation. Was this really the case? How was local participation taken into account at Vega in the world heritage process? This chapter will examine the local participation in the world heritage process at Vega and, hence, answer research question two: *Could a high degree of local participation in the world heritage process help to explain why the main Vega narrative is of an optimistic character?*

I find it particularly interesting to study local participation, as it is often at a minimum, or merely superficial, in protected areas around the world (Benjaminsen and Svarstad 2010, Svarstad et al. 2008, Adams and Hulme 2001, Barrow and Murphree 2001). Goldman (2011), for example, shows how the Masaai are excluded from participating in the management of the Manyara Tarangire ecosystem in Tanzania. Igoe (2004) gives an example of national parks where Native American communities have been excluded in the state of South Dakota in the US. These are not unique examples.

A UNESCO world heritage status is not a traditional protection effort. Contrary to standard protected areas, no extra protection efforts at the local site are requested of world heritage sites. However, following a world heritage listing, the municipality and county tends to be more restrictive with building permits and the like. The Convention on world heritage does state that the national state obliges to protect the area “with effective and active measures” (UNESCO 1972). Restricting new constructions in the area is an example of such a measure. At Vega, the whole municipality is not included in the world heritage area. However, the area that is not included forms a buffer zone (see map page x), and might thus experience such measures too.

UNESCO's world heritage mission statement encourages local participation in world heritage preservation efforts (UNESCO 2008). Nonetheless, it should not be taken for granted that preservation efforts are done in a participatory manner in world heritage areas. According to Millar (2006), local people and groups are often left out of both consultation and management of world heritage sites. Millar argues this has happened and still happens in both poor and rich countries. In the UK, for example, many people are even unaware that they live in or nearby a world heritage area.

The content of the chapter is based on historical sources as well as interviews with Vega inhabitants. I have studied several aspects to better understand the local participation in the world heritage process. The chapter is structured in two parts. First, I will analyze the local influence on the most important elements and the local contentment with the text that inscribed Vega on the UNESCO world heritage list. Second, can local participation in the world heritage process help to explain the optimistic Vega narrative previously presented?

6.1 Local participation in the world heritage process

This subchapter seeks to answer research question number three: *What level was the local participation in the making of Vega as a UNESCO world heritage site?* This will be done in the following manner: First, I will briefly present the course of events of the world heritage process; secondly, I will analyze the local influence on the most important events; and thirdly, I will analyze the local contentment with Vega's world heritage inclusion text.

6.1.1 World heritage at Vega: from idea to listing

In 1996, a report prepared for the Nordic Council of Ministers, *Nordic World Heritage: Proposals for new areas for the UNESCO World Heritage List*, suggested four new world heritage areas in each of the Nordic countries. The report was not a nomination, or even a tentative list, but rather "a joint

recommendation from an interdisciplinary group of scientific experts to the responsible authorities in each country” (NORD 1996:8).

Vega was mentioned as part of one of these suggestions - the North Norwegian Archipelago. The report was found by Rita Johansen - by a coincidence - at Vega: “I do not know how, but I happened to come over that report. I started to read it, and I understood that this was a possibility. It wasn’t a sort of bell cover protection (*osteklokkevern*), it wasn’t a new set of management rules, it was a status” (2008).

There were already several projects working on local development in the community at the time the Nordic report was found³⁴. A local preliminary project on the possibility for world heritage grew out of this existing work.

On 20 December 2000, the project group sent an application to relevant Norwegian institutions³⁵ for partial financing of an expansion of the local world heritage project. The answer from the Environmental Ministry was that a tentative list would be prepared, and that parts of the Vega archipelago was one of the areas that Norway could nominate. The Environmental Ministry saw it as expedient that the process was coordinated nationally, and the Directorate for Nature Management was asked to fulfill this role (Vega Kommune 2001).

The Directorate for Nature Management organized a world heritage meeting for the proposed North Norwegian Archipelago area. However, it was only people from Vega municipality that showed up. The other municipalities included in the area were not interested in a world heritage status.

Extensive work on the possibility to attain a world heritage status was also being prepared elsewhere in Norway, especially in the Geiranger area. Even

³⁴ LA21, Bygdepolitiskprogram, Verdifull Kystkultur, Vega gjennom 10 000 år.

³⁵ The Environmental Ministry, the County Governor in Nordland, Nordland County Municipality and the Norwegian Directorate for Nature Management.

so, when Norway submitted an official tentative list 1 October 2002, Vega was on the top of the list, which meant a nomination of Vega would happen first. The list included a total of four places: 1) the Vega Archipelago, 2) Lofoten, 3) Tysfjord and Hellemobotn and 4) Geirangerfjord and Nærøyfjord in western Norway (Sønstebø and Suul 2003).

With the tentative list in place, the work with the nomination document started. The responsibility of this work was carried out under the Directorate for Nature Management. The Directorate collaborated with local as well as international organizations (e.g., ICOMOS and IUCN). The official nomination was to be sent to UNESCO headquarters in Paris by the end of January 2003 (DN 2002).

The inscription of Vega onto the world heritage list was decided at the World Heritage Committee's 28th session in Suzhou, China. The session took place June 28th to July 7th in 2004. The Vega Archipelago was inscribed as a cultural landscape (UNESCO 2004).

6.1.2 Local influence on the world heritage process

I have now briefly presented the course of events of Vega's world heritage process. However, to what level was the local influence on the important elements in the world heritage process at Vega significant?

I will now analyze local influence on seven crucial elements of the process. Aspects from participation theory presented in Chapter 3 will be included where I find it useful for the analysis. The seven elements I see as the most important are: the presenting of Vega as a possible world heritage area; the investigation and presentation of the possibility for a world heritage status; the first meeting organized by the Directorate for Nature Management to discuss this possibility; the work to attain local underpinning; the preparation of the tentative list; the preparation of the nomination document; and the inclusion of Vega on the UNESCO world heritage list.

Element 1: the presenting of Vega as a possible world heritage area

The first element I have chosen to focus on is the initial presentation of Vega as a possible world heritage area. As mentioned in the overview of the process, it was a report prepared for the Nordic Council of Ministers in 1996 (NORD 1996) that first suggested the possibility of establishing a world heritage area at Vega. Jon Suul³⁶ was the head of the report group. Suul had previously studied birds at Vega (see Suul 1975). However, this was the only local link in this phase of the process.

The Nordic report suggested four areas in each of the Nordic countries. For Norway, the four proposals were: West Norwegian fjord landscape; coastal spruce forest in Almdalen; North Norwegian Archipelago; and North Norwegian fjord landscape. Vega was not suggested as its own area, but as a part of a larger area. The North Norwegian Archipelago area included a total of nine municipalities. These municipalities were Bindal, Sømna, Brønnøy and Vega in the Helgeland area and Røst, Værøy, Moskenes, Flakstad and Vestvågøy in the Lofoten area (NORD 1996).

The Nordic report states that “a precondition for giving them [the proposed areas] priority was that the areas concerned were secured through some form of national protection” (NORD 1996: 149). However, in 1996 this was not the case for Vega municipality.

The aim of the report was not to start a world heritage process, but to “propose new WH³⁷ areas in the Nordic countries in compliance with the UNESCO Convention” (NORD 1996: 11). The Convention “encourage State Parties to the *Convention* to nominate sites within their national territory for inclusion on

³⁶ Suul was at the time working at the Norwegian Directorate of Nature Management. He is today the head of the Norwegian Foundation for Cultural Heritage.

³⁷ World Heritage.

the World Heritage List” (UNESCO 2008: 3). The suggestion of the world heritage areas in the Nordic countries was done with this in mind.

To summarize, the local influence on this suggestion was low. The suggestion did not come from Vega, and locals did not even know about the suggestion until some years later.

Element 2: investigating world heritage at Vega

The second element of the world heritage process I have chosen to focus on is the finding of the report and the local investigation of what this could mean for Vega municipality. After the Nordic report had been written and published, not much happened on world heritage work in Norway. However, in 1999, the report was “found”, as the interviewees express it. Several of the informants mention this finding and how they came to see this possible world heritage status as a new opportunity for Vega:

“Someone found the Nordic report that mentions Vega as a part of a possible world heritage area, along this coastal area. This report showed up out of nowhere! Local action was taken on it immediately. It was over 20 years since Norway got an area on that list, not that we had applied or anything. Because of this, a preliminary project on the possibilities for world heritage here at Vega was started. They understood that this could be a really good branding for Vega. It is an enormously important quality stamp to other countries” (I#6 2011).

Action had to be taken on this opportunity - and preferable immediately: “We understood that we had gold between our hands, so we gave everything we had (*sprang på som faen*) to do something about it” (I#5 2011).

A preliminary project group on world heritage started their investigation shortly after the finding of the report. This working group was a continuation of the already existing working group ‘Vega through 10 000 years’³⁸. Rita Johansen was the head of both of these working groups. The preliminary

³⁸ Vega gjennom 10,000 år.

project group on world heritage was organized under the supervision of the municipality's department of trade (Vega Kommune 1999a; 1999b).

The group decided to focus their groundwork on four topics: the possibility that more tourism could deteriorate the areas unique qualities; the connection between emigration from Vega and encroachment of the island and loss of biodiversity; actions to restore the ecological balance in the sea; and assessment of consequences and possibilities conservation efforts could give to Vega (Vega Kommune 1999b). The preliminary project gave the municipality a better understanding of possible problems and possibilities with a world heritage status.

According to the evaluation of the situation by the head of the project group, Rita Johansen, a world heritage status would be a great opportunity for the Vega society:

“[After the finding of the Nordic report] I started to investigate what world heritage really was. (...) I found out that it was not a threat, but an opportunity. It is not conservation, it is a status. So, we in the project group decided to get world heritage on the agenda in Norway. There had not been any nominations for a very long time” (2011).

The project group's recommendation to Vega municipality was that they should work to attain world heritage status (Vega Kommune 2000a). The group's evaluation was that a world heritage status would be an immense resource for the Vega society:

“A future world heritage status will be of great importance for the marketing and profiling of the area. It will give local identity and pride, increase knowledge of the island culture and traditions, and it will with time lead to business development and better utilization and administration of the resources” (Vega Kommune 2000a).

An expansion of the project was recommended to the municipality administration. This was granted. In addition to the reasons mentioned in the projects group's evaluation, the municipality saw a world heritage status as an opportunity “to preserve and develop the values of the unique natural and

human-created culture landscape the area represents” (Vega Kommune 2000b).

The project group had a big job ahead of it to reach the municipality’s goal of nomination:

“We had a job to do, both regarding what we wanted to be the content of our world heritage and politically. Politically, towards the parliament and the environmental ministry, they were the ones that had to decide if a nomination of new areas should be commenced. And regarding content, we had to prioritize studies on the Vega society” (I#10 2011).

At the end of the year 2000, the local project group sent an application for partial financing of the project to relevant public institutions. The municipality was in a grave economic situation and could not afford to continue with the project alone.

In this phase of the process, locals were the only ones involved and influencing the course of events. After the finding of the report, they had to decide if this was something they wanted to investigate closer. They did, and, hence, worked both with the actual content of a possible local status and politically to influence the relevant institutions. The decision to work for an establishment of a world heritage status was thus purely local. The suggestion was taken outside Vega but was not acted upon by others than locals themselves. The last level Pretty (1995) presents in his typology on participation, self-mobilization, fits perfect to describe this element of the world heritage process at Vega. People at Vega have “taking initiatives independently of external institutions to change systems” (Pretty 1995: 1252). They did this when they decided to work for a world heritage status. They saw such a status as a possibility to change the stagnant situation at Vega. People at Vega did “develop contacts with external institutions for resources and technical advice” (Pretty 1995: 1252). After the preliminary projects on the possibility for a world heritage status, they did make contact with the relevant institutions for their case.

However, even though the influence at this stage of the process was local, it did not include the whole community. Primarily, it was the project group and the municipality that were part of the process at this stage.

Element 3: the Directorate for Nature Management organizes the first meeting on world heritage

The next element I have chosen to focus on is the first meeting the Directorate for Nature Management organized for the proposed area, the North Norwegian Archipelago. This meeting was important because it changed the area of the possible world heritage site from the North Norwegian Archipelago to the Vega Archipelago.

Following the local project group's application for partial financing of a world heritage project, the Environmental Ministry's answer was that a tentative world heritage list would be prepared. The Environmental Ministry decided that the process was to be coordinated nationally under the Directorate for Nature Management. Vega municipality was asked to be an important contributor and partner in this work (Vega Kommune 2001).

To begin with, the Directorate included the whole North Norwegian Archipelago area in their work. However, when they organized the first meeting to discuss the possibility for a world heritage status, none of the other proposed municipalities³⁹ showed up. Vega was the only municipality interested in the possibility for a world heritage status: "All the other municipalities said no. I think it was because they were afraid of possible conservation measures. It was a misunderstanding. They had misunderstood what a world heritage status really was" (I#5 2011); "We were the only municipality showing real interest in that report. It was only us that did something about it" (I#8 2011).

³⁹ Bindal, Sømna, Brønnøy, Røst, Værøy, Moskenes, Flakstad and Vestvågøy.

One informant thinks it was the already existing local consciousness on culture, history and the like that made Vega more apt for the idea of a world heritage status than their neighboring municipalities:

“When the Directorate sent the invitation to participate in a meeting about the possibility for world heritage, it was only Vega that showed up. And I think it is because we had a very..., of course, we had already started the work here, but either way, if you had had the same consciousness about culture and things like that in the other municipalities, then it is not sure that Vega would have been the only one to apply. It would probably have been a bigger area” (I#1 2008).

In this phase, the locals no longer had full control of the process like they had in element two. The control of the process moved to the Directorate for Nature Management. Yet, locals were still to be an important contributor, and they had surely managed to influence the Environmental Ministry to accept and go further with their hopes for a world heritage status. This element is similar to Pretty’s (1995) ‘interactive participation’. Following Pretty (1995), people at this participatory level among other things participate in joint analysis and the development of action plans.

As none of the other municipalities in the original North Norwegian Archipelago area wanted to be part of a possible world heritage area, the Vega inhabitants attained a greater possibility for influencing the process than they would have had if all or some of the other municipalities had wanted to become part of the project.

Element 4: attaining local support

The fourth element I have chosen to focus on is the local process at Vega. The local participation in the previous elements was - to some degree - restricted to the ones that were active involved in the process at Vega. A broad local underpinning was not attained yet.

Some negative attitudes towards the status could have been expected at Vega. The Vega inhabitants have previously experienced protection efforts being forced - top-down - upon them, as described by, for example, Enge (2000). In

this previous experience, the work with the Coastal Preservation Plan in the area did not start locally, but was rather initiated outside the community. Initially, the preservation plan was to include two-thirds of the municipality's area (Enge 2000). It is understandable that a protection effort that included such vast quantities of the local area met local opposition, especially as local inhabitants were not included in the development of the scheme.

The Coastal Preservation Plan is not the only negative experience the Vega inhabitants have had with top-down protection efforts. Holandsosen Nature Reserve is another example:

“Holandsosen was protected without local underpinning for a long time. It was temporarily protected for 20 years after the bell cover principle (*osteklokkeprinsippet*). The protection effort removed the original cultural landscape it was supposed to protect. The sheep had grassed there and therefore given growth possibilities for species that would normally not be able to grow in that area. These species disappeared with the sheep. Now they are back” (I#6 2011).

With these recent negative experiences in mind, some negativism could be expected against a possible implementation of a world heritage status. There was indeed some primary opposition to a world heritage status. However, in the words of one interviewee, “very few people were *against* getting the world heritage status” (I#2 2011).

Those *vegaværinger* who first were against a local world heritage status based this standpoint on fear of strict conservation. A visit from the world heritage area Öland in Sweden is mentioned by several of the informants as an important turning point for the locals. Previously, “the ones who were against the world heritage only saw the problems; they did not see the possibilities” (I#6 2011). The meeting with the farmer from Öland changed this, and people started to see the possibilities:

“We had a lot of discussions before Vega became world heritage. We had a lot of open meetings. The mayor himself was sceptical in the beginning. He did not like it because he was afraid of conservation. He is

an SP⁴⁰ guy. Then we had a guy from Öland here to talk about his experiences with world heritage, based on the culture landscape, as the idea was to get here. When people heard how it really was, and that it would be possible to get some subsidies to keep the culture landscape nice and for driving animals out for grassing, a lot of people changed their viewpoints. They understood that it didn't involve the conservation they were so afraid of" (I#6 2011).

"It was important to reach out with information. DN organized a meeting with a farmer from Öland. He talked about his experiences. After that meeting, people kind of calmed down. They understood that we would still be able to fish and farm. We were going to continue doing these things like before" (I#8 2011).

Informants emphasize the importance of meetings and inclusion in the local process. Several open meetings and study circles were organized:

"During the nomination process, we were working with the local underpinning. We arranged meetings with organizations and groups. We had some study circles with information on cultural history, nature, geology, marine issues and the environment to try to communicate what it was about, what the world heritage really was" (I#10 2011).

It was felt that the local underpinning was achieved with these open meetings. This was seen as important for the legitimacy of the process:

"There were a lot of open meetings. The local underpinning was established. After this, the application was prepared by the ministries. But then, they knew that there was a strong local underpinning. It was the only way to go forward; I think it had to be like that. If it had been a top-down process without local foundation, then there would have been problems with legitimacy" (I#6 2011).

In addition to the open meetings, the local media was central for the information flow: "The media has been important for the information flow. There has been a lot of information going through the media. They show up on everything that happens here, and write about it" (I#5 2011).

⁴⁰ SP: Senterpartiet= the Center Party. Political party in Norway, district and farmer oriented.

To get local organizations on board was seen as crucial to attain a strong local underpinning. It would have been difficult to work for world heritage if any of the local organizations were against it:

“Locally, it was especially two groupings that were important in the process. It was the farmers group and the fishermen group. These groups had quick and active people in leading positions and joined in on the work towards world heritage. That was important. It was crucial for the world heritage work to have them on the team (...) There might have been some individuals that were against getting world heritage to Vega, but no groups. This was crucial” (I#5 2011).

In this phase of the process, a lot of work was done to attain local support of world heritage work at Vega. Inclusion and information was important in this process. Open meetings were arranged, where everyone could show up and air their viewpoints. This phase of the process was characterized with a thoroughly local participation.

Element 5: preparing a tentative list

The fifth element I have analyzed is the preparation of the tentative list. A tentative world heritage list was prepared and submitted 1 October 2002 to UNESCO. It was the first tentative list Norway had submitted in a long time. Vega was number one on the list, which meant it would be nominated first. The list included four places: 1) the Vega Archipelago, 2) Lofoten, 3) Tysfjord and Hellemobotn and 4) Geirangerfjord and Nærøyfjord in Western Norway (Sønstebø and Suul 2003).

Vega inhabitants had pushed for a tentative list as they knew that a nomination would not be possible without a tentative list: “Some political work was needed to push the government to prepare a tentative list. If not, nothing would happen on world heritage” (I#4 2008). Norway had not had any nominations or a tentative list for almost 20 years⁴¹. There was a stand-still of world heritage work in Norway.

⁴¹ The previous world heritage inscription in Norway was in 1985, when the Rock art in Alta got inscribed (UNESCO 2011c).

One interviewee emphasizes the victory over Geiranger on the tentative list⁴²: “I think the best part of it is that we won over Geiranger. The Government decided to work to get Vega nominated first. Therefore, we got nominated the year before Geiranger. That was fun!” (I#5 2011). However, the choice of placing Vega on top of the tentative list was not random. It was the fruit of the political work local Vega politicians had practiced towards the Environmental Ministry and the parliament over years.

The tentative list was prepared by the Norwegian government. Yet, local Vega inhabitants still had some influence on the decision to both prepare the tentative list and to put Vega on the top of the list. Extensive political work had been laid down by local Vega politicians in order to reach this objective.

Element 6: preparing the nomination document

The sixth element I have chosen to focus on is the preparation of the nomination document. With the tentative list in place, the work with the nomination documents could start. The Directorate for Nature Management was in charge of this work:

“DN started to work with the nomination application. There was a local reference group involved in this work. It was big and wide and inclusive. So, locals were very much involved in the process of writing the application - not only the municipality administration, others as well. (...) There were thorough discussions on every part of the nomination text. (...) Sentence by sentence. Everyone could say what they thought about the nomination text, and, after it was completed by DN, the nomination was thoroughly scrutinized and agreed upon by the municipal council” (I#7 2011).

In the report from a meeting on the nomination paper, the Directorate writes: “the draft for the nomination document was looked through, page by page. The reference group corrected text and language, supplied any incomplete information and gave view points on how to emphasize different topics” (DN 2002).

⁴² Geiranger became a world heritage site in 2005, a year after Vega.

The reference group consisted of seven people. Two of these were national representatives, two were regional representatives and three were local representatives. Thus, locals were fairly well represented in this group. There was also an observation group. In the observation group, there were seven representatives. Of these representatives, one was regional, and the rest were local (DN 2002).

In the preparation of the nomination document, international organizations were advising and helping Vega to appear as the best possible candidate for a world heritage status:

“A lot of people from different UNESCO organizations came to Vega to see as well as experience the area. Among others, ICOMOS was here. They travelled around in the islands, and they also saw it from above from a helicopter. (...) The experts took the basis information we had prepared and supplied it. Together, we did everything we could to strengthen the application” (I#5 2011).

The nomination was sent to UNESCO headquarters in Paris at the end of January 2003. Several informants talk about the timing of the nomination as favorable for Vega. Here are some of the informants' tales on this timing:

“We were lucky; we got in on the right time. It was a long time since Norway had nominated any areas. Nomination of world heritage sites had stagnated completely in Norway. And, the four areas that had world heritage status before us were actually all conservation projects” (I#10 2011).

“Norway hadn't had any nominations in over 20 years! And, because Norway had spent a lot of resources and work on international world heritage work, we had a lot of good-will and status inside the world heritage committee. This was probably a good thing for us!” (I#5 2011).

The Directorate for Nature Management was in charge of the work with the nomination document and, thus, had the most influence on this part of the process. Nonetheless, locals were still part of the process. They were represented in the reference group and the observer group for the preparation of the document, and the document was also studied closely in the

municipality council before it was sent to Paris. However, this part of the process did not include all the locals.

Element 7: the inclusion of Vega on the UNESCO world heritage list

The last element I have chosen to focus on is the inscription of Vega Archipelago onto the world heritage list itself. The decision to inscribe Vega as a world heritage site was to be taken at the Committee's 28th session in Suzhou, China. The session took place from June 28th to July 7th in 2004. At this session, Vega got inscribed as a cultural landscape (UNESCO 2004). A large group of people from Vega went to Suzhou to witness the session:

“We were 23 people that went to China to hear the result of the nomination. We were there for 10-11 days. In China, they were very impressed that over 2% of Vega's population was there for the meeting. We didn't mention the amount, only that we were 2% of the population. They were very impressed by this, and therefore, they hastened the decision so that we could hear it before we had to fly back home. The case was moved ahead. We were in the top of a skyscraper in terrible weather and the skyscraper was swaying in the wind when we got the news. We celebrated and we called home. The flag went straight up (*til topps*) in Vega. It became a flag day” (I#6 2011).

Locals were present at the session in China. However, they did not have any influence on the inclusion of Vega to the world heritage list. This was the sole decision of the Committee.

To sum up, local participation was high in the world heritage process. Vega would most likely not have today's world heritage status without local inhabitants working committedly towards this goal. The idea of Vega as a world heritage area was not launched at Vega, but the municipality and *vegaværingar* acted on the idea. However, not *all* locals were included in *all* parts of the process. The following matrix shows the level of local influence on the different elements I have focused on above:

Table 7: Local influence on seven important elements

Element 1	Element 2	Element 3	Element 4	Element 5	Element 6	Element 7
Low	High, but not inclusive	Medium	High	Medium	High, but not inclusive	Low

Even though the local influence varied in the different elements, the community as a whole feels strong ownership of the world heritage status today. As one interviewee puts it, “the whole world heritage is a grand *dugnad*: It is not imposed upon us from the government (*myndighetan*). The initiative was taken locally, it was a big *dugnad*” (I#3 2008). The key local actors in the process were perceived as legitimate actors.

Seen as a whole, the world heritage process at Vega fit well with Pretty’s (1995) ‘self-mobilization’. As noted in the theoretical chapter (Chapter 3) the last level of Pretty’s typology (1995) does not go as far as Arnstein’s (1969) last step concerning citizen power. In contrast with Arnstein’s last step, Pretty’s last level does not necessarily challenge power. At Vega, power was not challenged. However, a high degree of local participation was nonetheless established.

Regarding White’s (1996) focus on interests in participation, the local participation at Vega could be seen as a transformative participation. As the optimistic Vega narrative portrays, there has been a dramatic shift at Vega from pessimism to optimism. The high degree of local participation in the world heritage process has helped transform the narrative at Vega. Even if participation alone does not provide a complete explanation for this transformation, it has surely contributed. However, in contrast with White’s use of the concept, the goal was never empowerment from the top-down view

of things at Vega. The empowerment was more of a coincidence than an intended interest in the local participation. Yet, at Vega there has surely been empowerment of the local community. This empowerment is particularly manifested by the entrepreneur actor type in the optimistic Vega narrative, the investment and belief in the future and the strong pride.

Even though locals did participate in the world heritage process, it was the national government and the Directorate for Nature Management that was in control over the process, and, hence, executed the most power. These institutions had the influence over the development of the process. Regardless of the local interest in a world heritage status, these institutions could have decided to not work for an inclusion of Vega on the world heritage list. As the world heritage list is organized today, the inclusion of new sites is highly dependent on the national states. If the national state does not work for a nomination of an area, nothing will happen, no matter how ‘outstanding’ the area might be. Hence, the national state is the actor with the most power and influence in a world heritage process⁴³.

The Vega municipality, the Directorate and the Norwegian government turned out to be ideal partners in the world heritage process. They had the same objectives, thus, their collaboration on world heritage was successful for all partners - regardless of power relations.

6.1.3 Local contentment with the final product

In addition to studying the process, I regard taking a closer look at local contentment with the actual inscription *text* as fruitful. It could provide an alternative view on local influence in the world heritage process. It does not help to be an important contributor in the process if the outcome of the process ends up being problematic or unwanted by the local community.

⁴³ Of course, the world heritage committee also has considerable power as it is the body that evaluates and selects new world heritage sites.

The inscription text reads as follows:

“The Vega archipelago reflects the way generations of fishermen/farmers have, over the past 1,500 years, maintained a sustainable living in an inhospitable seascape near the Arctic Circle, based on the now unique practice of eider down harvesting, and it also celebrates the contribution made by women to the eider down production” (UNESCO 2010).

Some informants expressed surprise that issues seen as central for viewing Vega as a unique place locally, as for example Vega’s Stone Age history, was not included in the inscription text. However, contentment on the text was nonetheless expressed:

“I was a bit surprised that our Stone Age history was not important. It did not count for the inscription decision. Stone Age was not outstanding. There are so many Stone Age places. (...) I think the inscription text was nice. It was entirely as I wanted it to be” (I#5 2011).

Several informants emphasized pride in connection with the text’s positive focus on women’s traditional role in the Vega society:

“I am very happy that the inscription text has a lot of focus on women. Most of the focus has traditionally been on the men, especially on the fishing season in Lofoten (*lofotfiske*). But, the women did a lot of work while the men were away. I am very proud of the focus on this work” (I#2 2011).

The role of the eider in the inscription text was elaborated on by several informants:

“Some here at Vega thought that it was a bit too much about the eider in the inscription text. The eider did get enormous importance. But, it is a great image. The eider is great! It is nice and sweet, and it has a pleasant and warm story. It was the women who worked with the eider and it gave good and stable income to the home back in the days. It is nice that this is appreciated. There was one that said ‘oh, I’m a bit sick of that down dot’. But, I think it has to be this way. A cultural landscape is not an easy thing to market. The eider is. Traditionally, the men have had a monopoly on our history. A lot of the focus has been on the fisherman-farmer throughout the times, and there has been little focus on the women. But, they are the ones that were at home alone and took care of the children, the barn, and the animals while the men were away several months at the time for fishing. It was not only the males who were

farmers. The wives took care of a lot of the farm work, especially in the barns. So, I think it is great that the inscription text is sort of a tribute to local women” (I#6 2011).

As apparent in the quote above, not everyone at Vega appreciated the focus on the eider. This was mentioned by several informants:

“I think the inscription text is good as it is. (...) There have been some tactless remarks from some men about the ‘down dots out in the islands’, that they are ‘totally uninteresting’ - comments about how they have never heard about it before. The island culture has not traditionally had a high status here at Vega” (I#10 2011).

The eider did surely become more central for the world heritage inscription than many *vegaværinger* had foreseen. However, of the *vegaværinger* I encountered this focus on the eider was appreciated rather than disliked:

“The eider did become more central than we had anticipated. But, that is the way it is, things rarely turn out as one plans. I do actually think that the inscription text made it easier to market this world heritage. Something as tangible as the eider, it might even be the first domestic animal in Norway. It is very tangible, and it has a history. So, that twist was probably a good idea” (I#9 2011).

Today Vega inhabitants are using the eider for all that it is worth, and the animal is important in various Vega logos as, for example, in the world heritage foundation’s logo. Here are some examples:

Figure 1, 2, 3 The eider



Sources: www.verdensarvvega.no and www.lanan.no

The inscription text did turn out a bit differently than expected by many local inhabitants. Local influence on the text was high, but it was not all inclusive. However, today the focus on the eider is seen as positive by most Vega inhabitants. Yet, some find the focus on the ‘down dot’ a bit problematic.

These views are nonetheless marginal in the Vega society. Most inhabitants are content with the situation. There is no doubt that it is easier to market an eider over a cultural landscape.

6.2 Can local participation help to explain the optimistic Vega narrative?

The optimistic Vega narrative presents a puzzling picture. This chapter has sought to better understand this optimism by analysing the local participation in the world heritage process at Vega. By answering research question three (*What level was the local participation in the making of Vega as a UNESCO world heritage site?*) I have sought to answer research question two (*Could a high degree of local participation in the world heritage process help to explain why the main Vega narrative is of an optimistic character?*).

This chapter has shown that the local participation in the world heritage process at Vega was substantial. The high degree of local participation in this process can help to explain the optimistic Vega narrative. The high degree of local involvement, participation and influence on the world heritage process has empowered Vega inhabitants to take control of their community's situation and change it for the better. Vega inhabitants and the national government had corresponding objectives and were therefore optimal partners in the world heritage process.

Yet, participation alone is not the full story. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, there have been several aspects that, to a lesser or greater degree, could have contributed to the current optimism. That participation *has* contributed does not exclude other possible sources of influence on the optimism. Rather, it is probably the picture as a whole that has given root for the optimism that reigns strongly at Vega today. However, I do think that participation is central to explain why the narrative is of such an optimistic character.

Viewing the matter from a different angle could give some new insight: Could the optimistic Vega narrative exist *without* a high degree of local participation in the world heritage process? I do think the answer to this hypothetical question would be no. If the world heritage status was something that got placed over the Vega inhabitants heads from the outside - without them having worked for it or wanting it as the situation is today - the local narrative would probably have been of a different character. The situation would then most likely have been more like the one Enge (2000) describes from Vega in the late 1990s - a situation of conflict and local reluctance towards the Coastal Preservation Plan.

Strong local participation in the world heritage process at Vega does not provide a complete explanation of the optimistic Vega narrative. However, it is a necessary explanatory factor. The optimistic Vega narrative would not have existed without strong local participation in the world heritage process.

7. Conclusions

The focus of this thesis has been the narrative production in the island community Vega in North-Norway. Research question one - *What are local narratives regarding life at Vega?* - have been answered through a narrative study. Regardless of decreasing inhabitation and the municipality's poor economic situation, the narrative at Vega is of an optimistic and positive character. It can be characterized as a strong, progressive narrative. In the time span from August 2008 to February 2011 the narrative at Vega had gone through some minor changes. Nonetheless, it remains an optimistic narrative.

An analysis of the optimistic Vega narrative was presented in Chapter 5. Theoretical elements on narratives and discourses presented in Chapter 3 were included in this analysis. Three elements form the centre of the narrative: confidence in continuous inhabitation of Vega; a strong belief and, hence, investment for the future in the community; and a pride and identity closely connected to Vega. There are strong linkages between the collective narrative of optimism and individual narratives regarding life at Vega. Individual and collective accounts support and reinforce each other. The main actors in the narrative are the municipality, the entrepreneurs, the *dugnad* workers and the traditional sector. Other actors are also mentioned in the narrative; however, those previously mentioned are the ones that are central. An interesting aspect of the actor gallery in the optimistic Vega narrative is that none of the actors are victims or villains. These are typical actor types that are found in most narratives. In the optimistic Vega narrative all the actors are positive and optimistic.

The optimistic Vega narrative has linkages with both the win-win discourse and the traditionalist discourse. Both of these are common environmental discourses. The two discourses are very different; however, *vegaværing* have somewhat managed to include both in their narrative. The traditionalist discourse is historically the most prominent in the island community. Today,

the win-win discourse is more central. ‘Conservation through use’ (*vern gjennom bruk*) is the core of the local win-win discourse. At Vega traditional conservation has been reframed, to a form of conservation that relies on use of the resources. This shows a skilled narrative competence.

Despite all reasons to be concerned about the future, the analysis of the main Vega narrative shows that the municipality’s inhabitants are optimistic. I have sought to explain this apparent paradox in this thesis. Several reasons have been mentioned of potential importance for the production of the optimistic Vega narrative. However, my attention has, in this thesis, been directed to local participation in the world heritage process.

I found this aspect particularly fruitful to study, as participation in protection processes is often at a minimum in protected areas around the world. This has also been the case in several world heritage areas. A world heritage status does not demand extra protection; however, in practice, this is often the case, as the local and regional governments tend to be stricter on certain issues (e.g., building permits).

Research questions two and three are explanatory and are closely connected. Research question two - *Could a high degree of local participation in the world heritage process help to explain why the main Vega narrative is of an optimistic character?* - have been answered by help from research question three, which deals with the actual local participation in the world heritage process. Research question three - *What level was the local participation in the making of Vega as a UNESCO world heritage site?* - has been answered by analyzing historical sources as well as informants’ accounts of the world heritage process. Theoretical perspectives on participation presented in Chapter 3 were included in the analysis of the local participation in the world heritage process.

As shown in Chapter 6, the local participation in the world heritage process at Vega has been substantial. While it was not locals that came up with the idea

of suggesting Vega as a world heritage area, they have been influential all through the remainder of the process. The publishing of the Nordic report on possible world heritage areas did not lead to any action on world heritage in Norway. Then the report was “found” at Vega. The Vega municipality at the time was in a critical position with poor finances and continuous depopulation. A world heritage status was seen as a new possibility for the municipality. A group of key people acted on this opportunity, and managed to get the rest of the society interested. Vega inhabitants took the chance they were given and worked committedly towards a world heritage status. The local influence and participation in the world heritage process has contributed to producing an optimistic narrative, and to change the local narrative from one of stagnation to a progressive narrative.

Yet, a high degree of local participation in the world heritage process does not explain the puzzling optimism on its own. It is a necessary explanatory factor; the optimism would probably not have existed without the strong local influence and participation. However, it does not provide a complete explanation. Other aspects have more likely than not contributed to this optimism. I have mentioned some in this thesis: the spirit of entrepreneurship, the *dugnad*spirit, and the creation of a positive self-fulfilling circle.

It would be interesting to study these other elements closer. I think it could also be of great interest to study how stable the optimistic Vega narrative remains over a longer time span, say, for ten years. Narratives are merely a snapshot of the prevailing perceptions in the community in a specific point. Hence, they often, though not always, change constantly. This was also the case at Vega. I could see a change from the interviews conducted in 2008 to the interviews conducted in 2011. To analyze local narratives at Vega in some years would be interesting. A world heritage status often brings with it huge expectations; this is also the case at Vega. If expectations are not fulfilled, a change in the narrative production could be expected.

Several lessons can be learned from Vega by other similar, rural communities - both in Norway and abroad. First, a small community is not necessary totally powerless when it comes to its own development, no matter how dark the future may seem. Active local involvement in the community's future can give new opportunities. However, this is clearly not possible everywhere. Second, substantial local influence and participation in a national/international process can be achieved without local decisional power. This is especially the case where local and national or international bodies share the same objectives. Third, conservation dilemmas can be solved in a manner that satisfies most parties - if it is introduced and managed in a proper manner. The Vega inhabitants have managed to view issues like conservation and involvement from outsiders from a different perspective than what has historically been prevailing in the community, and they have taken advantage of the new possibilities such a change gave. At Vega they have managed to reframe conservation to 'conservation through use' (*vern gjennom bruk*). This shows a clever narrative production that could be of interest to other similar locations. Forth, Vega inhabitants have managed to give local traditions and history new life and meaning. Previously dying traditions have been revitalized and are today a new source of income. Fifth, it is possible for a small community to change their narrative from a regressive one to one of progression. Such a change might become a self-fulfilling prophecy for the community. At Vega, it was, for example, decided upon in a working group that they wanted Norway to be proud of Vega, and that they should start being proud of Vega themselves to reach this goal.

All of the aspects mentioned here are important lessons for other rural communities in a similar situation. However, even though the main narrative at Vega has changed from one of regression to an optimistic progressive narrative, it is not certain that it will stay like this. Vega might experience setbacks in the future that could change the prevailing narrative production in the community.

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Appendix 1: Index for narrative analysis

- 1a. Optimisme/pessimisme
- 1b. Betragtninger om mulighet for fortsatt bosetting på Vega
2. Verdensarvstatusen
3. Stolthet
4. Vega historie
5. Framtidsscenarier
6. Ærfugl/duntradisjon
7. Vern: betraktninger
8. Samarbeid/dugnadsånd
9. Ildsjeler
10. Entreprenørskap
11. Bygdedyret/janteloven
12. Konflikter

Appendix 2: Interview guide for fieldwork February 2011

- Hva synes du om verdensarven?
- Kan du fortelle (det du vet) om prosessen mot verdensarvstatus?
(Hvordan startet det hele, hva fikk ballen til å rulle..) Hva var viktige beslutninger/ utviklinger underveis?
- Deltok du selv på møter som tok opp dette temaet? Hvordan var i så fall deltakelsen på disse møtene? (bredt/smalt oppmøte, aktivt/lytting, tidspunkt/sted osv.)
- Kom du med innspill til prosessen? Følte du at du hadde mulighet til å påvirke? Følte du at alle synspunkter ble inkludert? Gamle/unge, kvinner/menn?
- Hvordan var informasjonsflyten til kommunens innbyggere underveis?
- Var det noen sterke motstandere til at Vega skulle få verdensarv?
(Hvordan ble disse i så fall behandlet, ble de hørt/inkludert?)
- I hvor stor grad vil du si lokale krefter har påvirket sluttproduktet?
- Er det noe du er særlig stolt over i forhold til sluttproduktet?
- Hvordan er deltakelse (i forhold til verdensarv? Generelt i forhold til utvikling av kommunen?) på Vega i dag?

Appendix 3: Complete inscription text

Decision - 28COM 14B.45 - Nominations of Cultural Properties to the World Heritage List (Vegaøyen - The Vega Archipelago)

The World Heritage Committee,

1. Inscribes Vegaøyen - The Vega Archipelago, Norway, on the World Heritage List as a cultural landscape on the basis of cultural criterion (v):

Criterion (v): The Vega Archipelago reflects the way generations of fishermen/farmers have, over the past 1500 years, maintained a sustainable living in an inhospitable seascape near the Arctic Circle, based on the now unique practice of eider down harvesting, and it also celebrates the contribution made by women to the eider down process;

2. Requests the authorities to develop a specific strategic plan for the World Heritage property that will contribute to the overall Master Plan for the archipelago. It should address:

- a) measures to support traditional forms of land management, particularly the grazing of sheep on the islands,
- b) sustaining field patterns,
- c) the interface between conservation and sustainable development in respect of aquaculture,
- d) documentation,
- e) how private land-owners may be engaged in the management processes;

3. Recommends that the authorities undertake an inventory of the eider duck nesting houses on the islands and develop a conservation plan to ensure the protection of these unique structures;

4. Encourages the authorities to formalise the collection of traditional, intangible knowledge of the islands' cultural processes and traditions, in order to monitor their survival;

5. Further encourages the State Party to explore ways to minimize the visual impact on the landscape of the large radio mast on Vega Island;

6. Also recommends that the State Party consider extending the World Heritage area - or its buffer zone - to include islands and marine areas to the north and northeast;

7. Further recommends that the State Party consider acquiring abandoned islands for public ownership, where appropriate, in order to sustain the cultural landscape and protect the biodiversity of these islands.

Source: UNESCO (2004): *Decisions adopted at the 28th session of the World Heritage Committee (Suzhou, 2004)*. URL available at <http://whc.unesco.org/archive/2004/whc04-28com-26e.pdf> retrieved 06.05.2011.

Appendix 4: Pictures from Vega

All photographs by Anette Bergheim.



Picture 1: The harbor area in Kirkøy



Picture 21: Greeting and information sign at the ferry connection in Rørøy



Picture 3: The harbor area in Kirkøy



Picture 4: The harbor and *rorbuer* in Nes



Picture 5: Holandsosen Nature Reserve



Picture 2: Guristraumen, flat sea/skerries landscape



Picture 3: Sitka spruces, forest encroachment