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# Bildung as the process of cultural heritage: two traditions under a single name

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## ABSTRACT

In this article, I describe the 19th-century Finnish philosopher Johan Vilhelm Snellman's ideas about Bildung, and show how this concept provided another basis for cultural heritage, which diverges from how the term was used after the 1960s and 1970s. Bildung refers to the historically unfolding process in which humanity, nations, and individuals, through their own efforts, become what they are. It is the movement towards self-realisation. As parts of this process, immaterial and material objects become meaningful, human entities, and consequently the value of cultural phenomena is to be estimated on the basis of their contribution to Bildung. The Bildung tradition conceptualises cultural heritage in ways that avoid some of the present dichotomies and problems, but it also introduces complications of its own.

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## Introduction: a conceptual shift in cultural heritage

The Finnish term for 'cultural heritage' (*kulttuuriperintö*) first appeared at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, and it has been used since then and with increasing frequency in the 21st century. When reading the oldest texts where the term appears, there is a feeling of familiarity but also alienation: the early instances of 'cultural heritage' cover some of the current significance and associations of the term, but ultimately it appears to mean something very different. No notion of tangible and intangible heritage is manifest, and there are no associations with museum institutions or academic disciplines (Aarnipuu 2008, 19). An apparent shift has occurred in the referent of the term over the course of the 20th century, and I argue that the earlier conceptualisation of cultural heritage can be traced back to the German tradition of *Bildung*. In Finland, 19th-century intellectual life drew heavily on German thinkers, and especially the well-known philosopher and statesman Johan Vilhelm Snellman (1806–1881), who left a monumental imprint on Finnish nationalism and cultural life, was indebted to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and his views on the development of humanity. In this article, I describe Snellman's ideas about Bildung, and show how it provides another basis for cultural heritage, which diverges from how the term was used after the 1960s and 1970s. The Bildung tradition conceptualises cultural heritage in ways that avoid some of the present dichotomies and problems, but it also introduces complications of its own.

In present-day Finland, cultural heritage is a term that can refer to almost anything. The Finnish term *kulttuuriperintö* is a compound of *kulttuuri* (culture) and *perintö* (heritage, inheritance, legacy). The concept individualises and delimits an entity from an array of things and creates a field of expectations, attitudes and actions, especially related to protection, conservation and care, but also valuation and characterisation. The entity becomes linked to certain judicial circumstances, authorities, institutions and international discussions on the concept of heritage. A case in point are

texts produced by the Finnish government. In a 2012 government proposal to the Finnish Parliament on the ratification of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage it is stated

in the discussion it was pointed out that intangible heritage has not been systematically recorded, catalogued and researched in Finland. Particular concerns were the disappearance of traditional crafts skills and the survival of dialects. (HE 101/2012 2012)<sup>1</sup>

While the term has become ubiquitous in public discourse, its meaning and effects have become the interest of academic research in the emerging field of cultural heritage studies. Although the justification for a more theoretical understanding of the concept among scholars may be a point of debate and diverging opinions, they often borrow definitions from research literature in English, or such international administrative documents such as the Faro Convention. For instance, Janne Vilkkuna (2002) presents a broad definition of cultural heritage which covers buildings, monuments, regions, environments, natural sites and all products of intellectual culture. What matters, according to Vilkkuna (2002), is that ‘protected cultural and natural heritage sites are selected by decision makers for some reason or other: beauty is in the eye of the beholder’. He concludes that in the late 20th century, there has been a shift towards a wider conceptualisation of heritage and realising that even natural heritage is culturally constructed. Outi Tuomi-Nikula, Riina Haanpää and Aura Kivilaakso express the same idea when writing that ‘as the debate first revolved mainly around tangible heritage, in the 21st century, the focus has increasingly shifted to the manifestations of intangible heritage and analyses of its relationship with tangible heritage, people’s identities and the principles of sustainable development and cultural sustainability’ (Tuomi-Nikula, Haanpää, and Kivilaakso 2013, 14). These statements reiterate the distinction between tangible and intangible heritage as well as the need to overcome such distinctions, often with the means of discursive analysis or deconstruction (e.g. Smith 2006; Rossolatos 2015; O’Brien 2019). Such approaches are common throughout contemporary Finnish heritage scholarship which is both highly international and sensitive to conceptual issues (see e.g. Enqvist 2014, 2016; Haapoja-Mäkelä 2019; Lähdesmäki, Thomas, and Zhu 2019).

Another means of assessing the established concept of cultural heritage is a historical analysis of its formation. This line of argumentation focuses on how the concept was formulated in administrative practice over the past fifty years, and remains reflected in the debates taking place, for instance, in UNESCO, and how interest has expanded from monuments and works of art to more diverse and ephemeral expressions of heritage (e.g. Hobsbawm 1983; Lowenthal 1998; Gillman 2011; Harrison 2013; Josefsson and Aronsson 2016). The historical analysis, however, can be extended even further back in time, and thus underline the concept’s historicity by bringing forth an alternative framework for cultural heritage from the 19th century, i.e. a conceptualisation based on the Bildung tradition.

Historical analysis is particularly appropriate in the Finnish context, where the term for cultural heritage has retained the same linguistic expression, the same word, while the referent has paradigmatically changed over the course of the 20th century. The transformation becomes apparent when the use of the term is traced back to early literature, newspapers and other passages of text. The shift between the earlier, 19th-century tradition and the currently dominant tradition seems to have taken place around the 1960s and 1970s. In this article, however, I do not focus on the transformation or the emergence of the usage familiar to us, but on the 19th-century intellectual environment which formulated the framework for the older tradition. It is clearly visible in Snellman’s work. I will start by analysing the contexts where the term ‘cultural heritage’ in its Finnish form was first used, and by revealing its implicit and explicit meanings, show how it refers back to the Bildung tradition. After that I will proceed to Snellman’s thought, particularly his articulations of the concepts of Bildung, tradition and heritage. I will finally conclude by describing how the Bildung tradition contributed to the emergence of the concept of cultural heritage in the

early 20th century, and what might be the ways in which this older tradition could help in reworking the prevailing post-war tradition.

### **Cultural heritage – neither institutional, tangible nor intangible**

Finnish newspapers used the term ‘national heritage’ (*kansallisperintö*) already in the 1880s (e.g. *Karjalatar*, 21 December 1883; 28 December 1883),<sup>2</sup> but it was not until the early years of the 20th century that the term ‘cultural heritage’ appeared. The first instances are isolated cases in newspapers and scholarly publications, and the use of the term became more frequent only after 1913. Despite its low level of occurrence, the meaning of the word is taken for granted and no explanations or definitions are provided for the reader. The concept seems to have many associations that resemble the current ones, but nonetheless it does not quite fit the present referent.

Among the oldest instances of the term is an article from 1900 discussing the discontinuing of newspapers as part of the Russification of Finland, which was the Russian Empire’s policy aimed at limiting the special autonomous status of the Grand Duchy of Finland. The author states that for the sake of our ancestors and ourselves, ‘we must proceed so that the cultural heritage of the past centuries is not wasted, so that the self-esteem of our people, whose growth has required the gentle care of many generations, does not become disconcerted and eradicated’ (*Vapaita sanoja*, 15 November 1900). The passage displays some characteristics resembling the 21st-century use of the term. First, there is a clear temporal structure that combines the past with the present and future, and, secondly, the assertion that the legacy of past generations obliges the present. The past is also useful in solving present problems. Thirdly, the reference to heritage appears to be political, and in fact other early instances of the term appear repeatedly in newspaper articles dealing with Russification, or the labour movement. The term is adopted to the political context because of its obligatory nature: Finnish heritage requires contemporary Finns to preserve their traditions in the face of the threat of Russification or socialism.

Another early manifestation of the word is from a 1903 news item about the political situation in Greece: ‘The heirs of the ancient Hellenes have not done very well in treating their great cultural heritage, and thus their stature is somewhat low in the West’ (*Päivälehti*, 20 February 1903). In a scholarly context, in his article ‘Luther and the freedom of religion’ from 1908, the professor of church history Jaakko Gummerus (1908) refers to Augustine’s *De civitate Dei*, and argues that the work ‘preserved so much of the cultural heritage of the ancient world for the new nations entering the domain of civilisation [*sivistys*, *Bildung*]’. These references to classical antiquity are typical of the oldest instances of the term as the deeds of the ancients are considered particularly good representatives of cultural heritage. However, cultural heritage does not mean ancient temples, vases or even oral tradition, and it does not involve institutions. It is something related to morals and a cultural disposition, perhaps even mentality and collective memory. Mentality refers to the tendencies and ways of thinking and the traditions that they form in a community, whereas collective memory means the shared pool of memories contributing to communal identity and self-awareness (see e.g. Burns 2006). A similar conceptualisation of heritage – not as a set of tangible and intangible entities – is present in a passage from 1907: ‘No matter how praiseworthy the Swedish cultural heritage was in the field of law [during the period when Finland was part of Sweden before 1809], there always remains a stain on it’ (*Talonpojan Lehti*, 5 September 1907), the author states, because official documents were not available in Finnish.

While the passages of text from the early 20th century do not give away much of the assumptions and associations related to ‘cultural heritage’, they nonetheless suggest a concept with a temporal structure, political consequences, and implications of value, although the actual referent or object remains opaque. It is not institutionally defined and neither tangible nor intangible. Our unfamiliarity with the use of the concept can be explained by its history going back to a discourse which was launched in the 19th century but did not continue to the 21st century. The driving force of that discourse consisted of discussions and cultural theories oriented towards the question of the

possibility of a Finnish nation and the character of Finnish culture. It was an intellectual venture strongly linked with German scholarship and its debates on nationhood, nationalism, and the significance of tradition and culture.

The 19th-century scholarly atmosphere in Finland was to a large extent defined by the texts of authors such as Johann Gottfried Herder, Friedrich Schiller and Hegel, and the troubled aftermath of the 18th-century Enlightenment and Immanuel Kant's rationalism. The most notable figure in adapting this German tradition into Finnish intellectual culture was Snellman. His ideas about Finnish culture and its heritage are thus ingrained in the German *Bildung* tradition, which provides a context establishing intelligibility also for the early instances of the Finnish term 'cultural heritage'. Although these texts do not explicitly state Snellman's name or the *Bildung* tradition, they are, broadly speaking, still positioned in and motivated by the same intellectual frame of reference. Consequently, I will proceed to sketch out the contours of the *Bildung* tradition.

### **Bildung as a process of humanity**

As in the case of many 19th-century philosophers, Snellman's thinking is of vast scope, but here I will pinpoint central ideas essential for the framework of cultural heritage. Despite Snellman's passionate devotion to the Finnish cause, most of his writings are in Swedish. In Swedish the word for cultural heritage is *kulturarv*, but the term was not used until it was introduced probably by Viktor Rydberg in 1883 (Svensson 2003; Hillström 2006), a few years after Snellman's death. In Swedish, Barbro Klein (2006) points out, the 19th-century concept had an intimate association with 'folk', a term referring to peasant culture, and was motivated by attempts to bring or reintroduce folklife to the modern public as an act of both preservation and modernisation. Although the Swedish *kulturarv* term does not appear in Snellman's writings, he frequently uses concepts that are closely related to it: tradition, legacy, culture and the German *Bildung* or rather *bildning* in Swedish (and *sivistys* in Finnish). The system of these concepts lays down the groundwork for making the first instances of the Finnish term for 'cultural heritage' understandable.

There is a considerable body of scholarship on Snellman's thought, and I particularly refer here to Jarmo Toiskallio's (1981) and Kari Väyrynen's (1981, 1992) analyses of tradition in Snellman, and Heli Rantala's (2006, 2013) study on the concepts of culture and *Bildung* in his works. The central concept in Snellman's thinking is indeed *Bildung*. In its present German usage, the term's main association is with education and pedagogy (e.g. Varkøy 2014; Weiß 2017), but it is still famously difficult to translate into English. Some of the renditions are 'education', 'self-education' and 'self-formation' as well as 'civilisation' (Koselleck 2002, 173) and 'ethical formation' (Herdt 2019, 6). German scholarship contributing to the historical analysis of the concept has been extensive, including Norbert Elias's (2008) classic distinction between culture and civilisation, and Rudolf Vierhaus's (1972) conceptual analysis of *Bildung* (see also Bruford 1962, 1975; Lennert 1980; Bollenbeck 2001).

Basically, the concept of *Bildung* refers to the historically unfolding process in which humanity, nations, and individuals, through their own effort, become what they are. It is the movement towards self-realisation. In contrast to formal education, *Bildung* is not a stable quality, or the quantifiable aim of teaching, but an active development in which Reinhart Koselleck (2002, 174) distinguishes three characteristics. Firstly, it refers to autonomous transformation through education; secondly, as it is freely pursued, the change is self-formation with many possible outcomes; and thirdly, self-formation encompasses shared cultural achievements and is actualised through them, particularly internal reflection. Subsequently, according to Koselleck (2002, 171, 195), *Bildung* reverberates in the fields of cultural knowledge (*Bildungswissen*) and cultural heritage (*Bildungsgüter*); and it integrates, without any limits, all aspects and forms of life.

The concept of *Bildung* follows a long line in the German intellectual tradition, stemming from the Middle Ages and the idea of the image (*Bild*) of God, and the spiritual need of the human copy to approach the divine original (Herdt 2019, 38–47). According to Vierhaus (1972),

however, the most important points of reference for the modern concept are from the 18th century: form (*Gestalt*) and formation (*Gestaltung*). They were central for the Enlightenment discourse on education in which *Bildung* was conceived in terms of cultural upbringing and development. In addition, for Snellman, the two crucial figures in the *Bildung* tradition were Herder and Hegel.

*Bildung* lay at the core of Herder's thinking, and for him, it expressed a new conceptualisation of humanity and history. 'Everyone has within an image (*Bild*) of what they are and should become' (von Herder 1820, 375), and the ultimate aim of human nature is to develop towards this image of humanity. In other words, humanity is the cause of itself, producing itself and its own goals, and therefore history does not have any purpose or task beyond its actors (Irmscher 2001, 139). Accordingly, Herder emphasises the radical historicity and relativity of *Bildung* and considers its unfolding as a diversifying and organic process involving not only the whole of humanity, but the entire cosmos with its multitude of entities, and their ethical becoming into themselves (von Herder 2016; Herdt 2019, 83, 87). Along the same lines, Snellman argues that 'life is an education where the individual is formed into a human, and this process of *Bildung* forms the humane in humans' (SA I 1992, 619), and 'mere human properties do not make an individual into a human but development and *Bildung*' (SA I 1992, 619). This education is not primarily formal and does not consist of a catalogue of things to know or skills to master, but it is rather the continuous ability to assess the state of affairs here and now and to re-orientate oneself towards the future (Rantala 2013, 74).

Hegel considered the process of *Bildung* as radically historical, percolating reality and its concepts and thus the very preconditions of our understanding, which makes a historical perspective vital for any philosophical analysis (Beiser 1993, 270–272). The purpose of *Bildung* is to overcome the natural world given to us through the appropriation of culture, which then becomes our actual nature. However, even that naturalised form of culture becomes gradually questioned in the *Bildung* process, and this leads the subject to adopt a more reflective, historically aware, and thereby universal, point of view (Odenstedt 2008, 559–560). The process stems from within but ends up with the subject rising above him or herself to a new universality without.

For Hegel, the process of *Bildung* is always also an active struggle for new levels of freedom, and this freedom is actualised in a nation or state (see e.g. Koselleck 2002, 181), but Snellman emphatically stresses the importance of *Bildung* for the community or society at large. For him, nations are the same thing as their more or less homogenous cultures (e.g. SA II 1992, 395), thus emphasising the dynamics of communities and individuals. Snellman frequently returns to analyse the ways in which *Bildung* structures the relationship between individuals and humanity or smaller types of collectivity, nations and states in particular. A similar tension in the *Bildung* process characterises the position of tradition in relation to the subject and its self-formation. Tradition is also a concept which moves the process closer to the concept of cultural heritage.

## Tradition

In Finnish, there is a close connection between the terms heritage or inheritance (*perintö*) and tradition (*perinne*). The drive of many 19th-century scholars was to uncover the ancient Finnish past and subsequent national culture. This included the project of finding and nurturing peasant ways of life seen as the carriers of Finnishness, and the concept of 'tradition' had a pivotal role in this erudite venture (Anttonen 2005). Oral poetry, particularly the national epic *Kalevala*, was central in exemplifying Finnish traditions (Saarelainen 2016), but like in Sweden, also rural customs, architecture and material culture came under scrutiny and valorisation, giving a strong impetus for developing the disciplines of Finnish folklore studies and ethnology. This intellectual atmosphere also formed the background of Snellman's thought, although his interest was in the tensions between an individual and tradition, and the individual's ability to shape the tradition into something new.

In an analysis of the character of academic study from 1856, Snellman rather freely quotes Johann Gottlieb Fichte (SA VII 1996, 560–561):

The task of each generation is to augment the inheritance of *Bildung* (*bildning*) that it has received, and thus to leave it for posterity. Academic disciplines comprise the part of this heritage which is known as intellectual life (*bildning*). The university is an institution dedicated to ensuring the uninterrupted and assured continuity of intellectual life from one generation to the next.

Snellman argues that *Bildung* contains the obligation to embrace it, expand it, and to hand it over to succeeding generations. This movement of receiving and passing on forms the basis of tradition. Humans are not born complying with the ideals of humanity, but are in a state of becoming, partly moulded by their environment, upbringing, customs, and formal education. In this way, individuals are bound to their culture and its state of *Bildung* (Rantala 2013, 90, 403). Although Snellman focused on the importance of communities in transmitting tradition along these lines, the individual nevertheless retains the crucial role. Knowing the tradition allows the subject to understand the values and practices of their community and to estimate the proper ways to further collective interests and define the common good. Tuija Pulkkinen (1989, 37–38) emphasises, however, that according to Snellman, nobody conclusively dictates to individuals how they should behave. Although tradition is transmitted materially through books, works of art, memorials and orally, and in this sense it persists independently from any subjective self, it nevertheless exists only when engaged by a consciousness. It is therefore up to the subject to decide what is appropriate for the community, and this gives the individual – and humanity in general – the essential opportunity to alter and transform tradition as part of the *Bildung* process.

In an 1837 manuscript for a lecture, Snellman analyses the relationship between tradition and creativity. He argues that humans as thinking and willing beings can only be understood ‘in relation to the given tradition and prevailing legal system, society and state’ (SA I 1992, 620), and the education provided by the state is the precondition for the individual to become a subject. Learning and morality require that the subject realises their dependency ‘on upbringing and *Bildung* [*bildningen*] (tradition) and thus the necessary connection of their self with society.’ As Rantala (2013, 90) points out, Snellman here equates *Bildung* with tradition. However, what is of the highest significance is not tradition itself but the ability to overcome it creatively.

The value of freedom and innovation can be seen in Snellman’s distinction between three forms of knowing: recollective, conceptual and productive knowing. The first one refers to knowing according to tradition, i.e. the adoption of the content of knowledge or memory (*minnesvetande*) received from previous generations. In contrast, conceptual knowing incorporates both the tradition and the significance and context of its content, while productive knowing means also the ability to invent novel content of which no one has been aware before. Although Snellman is explicitly talking about ways of knowing, what is actually more important to him is how subjects relate to knowledge and adapt it for their own uses (cf. Varkøy 2014, 19). According to Snellman (SA I 1992, 615–618), the *Bildung* of each epoch is the expanding capacity to pick up what previous generations have left behind and explain and comprehend it even more. Eventually, ‘it is no longer asked what the author meant with these or those words, but the way in which we should understand the author’s words’ (KT 1 2000, 199, 210).

The tradition ‘is not to be left as a sacred legacy from one generation to another and preserved as a dead treasure, but to be developed and enriched further’ (SA VII 1996, 564). It requires being taken up and re-interpreted (Väyrynen 1981, 181–182; Rantala 2013, 92): ‘The rationally thinking individual does not just carry on the tradition, but by systematically analysing its rational context gives it a new existence’ (SA VII 1996, 638). While the importance of individual agency and self-determination, and the demand to develop one’s understanding echo Immanuel Kant’s (1996) call for rationality and freedom, Snellman’s view on the *Bildung* process as a field of creative tensions and conflicts is closer to Hegel and his dialectical scheme of development.

Although Snellman was indebted to Hegel in the overall conception of *Bildung* as a process, Väyrynen (1992) points out that there is a clear difference between their understanding of tradition. Hegel does not see tradition as dynamic and future-orientated as Snellman who writes that

[the] nation is not constituted only by living generations. It has lived and will live on in future generations. Its intellectual life, its national spirit is the product of centuries. (SA III 1993, 476.)

Instead of Hegel, the Finnish philosopher seems to adhere here more to Herder, stressing a zealous and inventive attitude to tradition. *Bildung* is a process which takes subjects forward as each generation enriches the tradition by surpassing it (Väyrynen 1992, 145–156; Toiskallio 1981, 68–70). Even cultures and ways of life that are about to vanish, push developments onward and contribute to the *Bildung* process (Rantala 2013, 107).

Snellman seems to exemplify Koselleck's (2002, 176–177, 197) argument that in the framework of *Bildung*, traditions are not passed on but rather established retrospectively in the future disposition of the *Bildung* process. Hence, *Bildung* is always historical in the midst of its formation, yet constantly becoming something new. Such a dynamic movement also envelops entities which we would identify as items of cultural heritage even though their position in the process of *Bildung* is distinctly different.

## The historical traces of *bildung*

Snellman sees *Bildung* as a contradictory process in which tradition is received, outdone and passed on, and the entities we now describe as cultural heritage are embedded into this conceptual structure. Although they are not in his focus, Snellman nevertheless here and there passingly discusses tangible and intangible expressions of tradition. In an 1862 text on the freedom of speech Snellman writes:

Man has not acquired the ability of rational thinking from nature. He learns it. It is a legacy left to him by past generations on which he must build, or at least not replace it with nonsense. This intellectual upbringing depends on the nation and state to which he belongs and the period of the nation's general development into which his life falls. (SA XI 1998, 293.)

For Snellman, the most important legacy of humanity is reason, the activity of thinking, and in this passage, the nation is at the core of *Bildung*, but he also touches upon other forms of tradition. Tradition is the continuity of history, which according to Snellman, is not the unfolding of events as such, but that 'which is manifested in actions affecting the common interest' (SA IX 1997, 268), and thus 'history' and 'historical' are terms with which he refers to activities that have left marks and through them have led progress onward (Rantala 2013, 166). For instance, in 1859, Snellman argues that history 'also recognises the nations that have been destroyed, depending on what they have been able to do for humanity before the fatal moment, in other words depending on what kind of traces they have left of their existence' (SA IX 1997, 34). Snellman suggests that despite the fact that the indigenous cultures of North America do not seem to have left any remaining impression on general development, they have the right to live if they still make a contribution to humanity (SA VI 1996, 581). Those traces of past cultures which constitute history become part of the *Bildung* of humanity as a whole.

The most important expression of nations are their languages. The primacy of language as the place for the realisation of *Bildung* is evident in Snellman's notes from 1825 for an introductory lecture on logic:

Words, language, as expressions of rational thought, make man better than the animal [...]. We also observe that the language in which our best tradition was first clothed, and the people, in which this tradition was expressed, did not mean only words but also rationality by logos. [...] Consciousness is always verbal because it is thinking. [...] Words are the legacy of the millennia, in words man receives and expresses the whole developmental process of humanity, history, and Divine revelation. (SA I 1992, 547.)

The linguistic aspect of *Bildung* is essential for Snellman because it is the source from which the national or cultural way of experiencing and thinking flows. Conversely, language is spoken by a given people at a given level of development, as is evident in a text from 1840: ‘The general culture of mankind, the legacy of the millennia, lives on in every nation, although it has a distinct character in each nation, differing from others positioned on a higher or lower level of development’ (SA I 1992, 355). On the other hand, although communication through literature is of primary importance, also steamboats, railways and the telegraph – the modern innovations – also promote the unfolding of *Bildung* (SA VI 1996, 14). Reason and its legacy are common to all mankind, but they manifest a diversity of qualities in different situations.

Snellman never really engaged in analysing the material expressions of *Bildung* or what we would now call tangible heritage if a random opinion piece on a suitable grave monument for the national poet Johan Ludvig Runeberg (1804–1877) is not included. In this connection, he called for austerity as a funerary monument is primarily a sign of the grave, and not of the deceased’s glory (SA XII 1998, 597–599). However, Snellman did record observations on monuments and other cultural objects in his travel diaries. On a long trip through Germany in 1840–1841, Snellman visited Cologne and described his impressions of its cathedral:

It affects the viewer like a funerary monument. Indeed, a faded *Bildung* of bygone centuries lies beneath it, the noblest intentions of millions of people transformed into a beautiful dream, which inspires the traveller, tinkering with rhymes, to a few lame lines. (SA III 1996, 33.)

Despite his ironic admiration, Snellman considered the new plans to complete the construction of the cathedral, halted in the Late Middle Ages, as a symptom of an appreciative remembering turning into excessive worship and the wish to dig into the graves of the ancestors. As Rantala (2013, 177) points out, this irritation reveals Snellman’s attitude to history: the past should not be appreciated more than the present and the future. The passage also shows that, for Snellman, ancient monuments materialised the process of *Bildung* and its the bygone aspirations and aims: ‘*Bildung* derives from history, not nature’ (SA IX 1997, 182).

In his speech on modern materialism delivered in 1871, Snellman distinguishes between natural and cultural laws (SA XII 1998, 89–96). Although humans are bound by the unchanging rules of nature, they nevertheless utilise natural objects to further their own goals, which do not belong to the natural order:

Each expression of human labour, each human act thus also bears externally the mark of his own purpose, which is absent from natural phenomena. A ploughed field, dam, plough, factory machine, cottage, palace, temple – all these indicate their own purpose. But, for instance, a rose does not tell us what purpose it is for, neither does the mountain as high as the clouds, our planetary system or the cosmos. (SA XII 1998, 89–96.)

As parts of the *Bildung* process, material objects become meaningful, human entities, and this significance can be deduced from their physical appearance, but otherwise they belong to the natural order. Consequently, the value of tangible cultural entities is to be estimated on the basis of their contribution to *Bildung*.

## **Bildung and the traditions of cultural heritage**

On the basis of Snellman’s thought, the early 20th-century uses of the term ‘cultural heritage’ become understandable. Crucial for the concept are not the tangible or intangible entities, whatever they might be, but the part of them that participates in the historical self-formation of humanity, nations and individuals; this process is the self-realisation of subjects into what they are. The entities form the condition of that process, but as traces they are also outcomes of the same development, representing different moments of *Bildung* in history.

*Bildung* requires and enhances the freedom of its subjects, constituting formation as ethical growth. It comes with the obligation to receive it, to allow others to participate in its movement, and

to pass it on. The course of development is based on tradition and heritage, although they do not have value as such, but establish the matter to be moulded and used for the becoming of the subject. As parts of *Bildung*, material and immaterial objects become meaningful, human entities, and thus *Bildung* sets up a hierarchy of values and defines attitudes to cultural products. For Snellman, awareness, the focus of *Bildung*, is central, with language as its most important expression.

In the light of the *Bildung* tradition, the 21st-century claims that intangible cultural heritage has been forgotten or neglected do not seem valid in a longer historical perspective. On the contrary, for Snellman, in analysing heritage, the historical and creative process of self-formation is primary, and its intangible or tangible manifestations are secondary. Moreover, *Bildung* cherishes a critical and ethical attitude to the traces of the past and rejects an instrumentalist stance to self-development and culture. *Bildung* is both a product and a process, and as the subject is always in a state of becoming, his or her approach to heritage remains firmly directed towards the future. Overcoming the divide between the intangible and the tangible, maintaining a critical and an ethical attitude, and orienting heritage studies to the future are all concerns that are considered vital in present scholarship.

There has been a great deal of criticism of Snellman's thought, and much of it is particularly relevant today. Although he talks about humanity and the right to existence and freedom as part of *Bildung*, Snellman seems to deny women a role equal to men in *Bildung* (Karkama 1989, 33–34; Jalava 2005, 183–186; Rantala 2013, 94–98), and he is similarly dismissive about the capability of other cultures than the Western European to contribute to *Bildung*. For Snellman, *Bildung* remains in the realm of one predominant perspective and does not appear to involve a heterogeneous set of cultures and sub-cultures. In addition to his attitudes to women and non-Western cultures, also Snellman's instrumental view of the natural world can be considered problematic. He saw nature as the opposite of spirit and *Bildung*, something that has to be controlled and manipulated to serve cultural needs (Suutala 1986, 250–255; Rantala 2013, 87–88, 125). Finally, one could extend Adorno's (1971, 1997) criticism of *Bildung* to Snellman as well. Adorno argues that *Bildung* can be actualised as half-*Bildung* when the dominant groups in society impose their own ends on the process and control its movement. However, as well-founded as these concerns and critiques are, they are not necessarily inherent in the concept of *Bildung* itself (cf. Gustavsson 2014).

In his analysis of *Bildung*, Koselleck (2002, 184, 187–189) underscores its functionality as a metaconcept. It is a frame of reference which time and again adapts its own possibility to specific circumstances and ways of thinking, and thus it cannot be given a fixed definition in terms of cultural heritage or knowledge. Not only philosophically, but also socially and politically it is a metaconcept since it is available for many purposes, but at its core, it remains beyond institutions. Because of this malleability, Koselleck concludes, *Bildung* is transferable and comprehensible for anyone who can access the required 'cultural knowledge and possess the ability to judge cultural heritage'. Hence, Snellman's shortcomings in his thinking of *Bildung* can be considered secondary to the concept's development; his weaknesses are not immune to reflective reconsiderations and alterations.

The vitality of *Bildung* is exemplified by its presence in the works of Jürgen Habermas (1989) and especially Hans-Georg Gadamer (2001). Gadamer sees *Bildung* as a continuous process, but unlike Hegel, without any objectives or ends; *Bildung* is its own outcome. He also rejects Hegel's idea of the primacy of the subject in regard to history and argues that the relation between thought and its historical context involves transformation (Odenstedt 2008, 574–575). In other words, history and traditions are not just something that the subject reflects upon and alters; instead, the subject belongs to them. Even in the process of *Bildung*, subjects cannot entirely cut themselves off from their own context, and therefore they always contain residues of their past. From this perspective, Snellman's insistence on using traditions and heritage merely as an elastic material for the future might not be plausible.

A view of cultural heritage as part of *Bildung* began to fade in Finland over the course of the 20th century. The turning point was Finland's defeat to the Soviet Union in the Second World War, which vitally affected the country's international position. Now the aggressive cultural and political nationalism of the inter-war period had to be toned down (see e.g. Fewster 2006, 2011), and the 19th-century intellectual basis of Finnish nationalism was also re-evaluated. This induced a gradual

transformation in the concept of cultural heritage. The term ‘sivistys’ or Bildung is still used in public debates, and some continuity of the German tradition is visible, especially in statements by persons not connected with the academia or heritage management. However, the concept’s ties with the German philosophical tradition usually remain opaque (cf. Varkøy 2014, 20).

In 1969, the conservator Veikko Kiljunen (1927–2001) wrote a newspaper article on the efforts to preserve the cultural heritage of Florence after the disastrous flood of 1966. He called for the rapid expansion of international collaboration for salvaging ‘global cultural heritage’ (*Helsingin Sanomat*, 3 September 1969). The flood was a seminal event for the international protection and conservation of cultural heritage, but also for the dissemination of a new, more practically and institutionally oriented heritage discourse (Conway and O’Hara Conway 2018), which eventually replaced the 19th-century philosophical tradition in Finland.

Kiljunen’s text is among the first to espouse the novel tradition. It concentrated on monuments and objects and their institutional care, often following Eurocentric criteria and aesthetics. However, the assumptions and values of this tradition became increasingly questioned in the late 20th century, and entities of intangible heritage were incorporated into it. Cultural heritage is not a thing, but rather a process, it was argued. Similarly, if cultural heritage in the Bildung tradition is characterised by one word, it could be process. Although the two traditions thus seem to converge to some degree, they have vastly different foundations, and our current debates about the conditions and consequences of cultural heritage might benefit from comparing and jointly re-evaluating the traditions.

## Notes

1. This and other translations from Finnish and Swedish into English are made by the author.
2. In my analysis, I have utilised the Digital Newspaper Collection of the National Library of Finland ([https://digi.kansalliskirjasto.fi/collections?set\\_language=en&id=82](https://digi.kansalliskirjasto.fi/collections?set_language=en&id=82)), the published corpus of J. V. Snellman’s texts (<http://snellman.kootutteokset.fi/>), and a survey of the relevant 20th-century publications.

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