

# ***Tourists in horseless carriages, farmers in horse-drawn wagons?***

## ***Norwegian tourism, 1900-1915***

*By Bård Toldnes, North Trøndelag University College, Levanger, Norway*

*The stream of tourists which moves through Europe, from North Cape to Gibraltar, does not consist of overweight magnates and fat wives of bankers only who only demand to travel on the comfortable pillows of the railway wagons. There are people who want to see more than can be seen from a railroad carriage window - people who want to experience the charm of a country's peculiarities, the countryside's fresh air, its free and undisturbed life and the pub's beneficent naturalness. As a whole they want to travel in the most free and modern way: by motor”<sup>1</sup>*

Norway with her mountains and fjords was always an attractive country for tourism, although not to the extent we see today. The roads had a very moderate standard, which for obvious reasons resulted in reduced tourism in the rural areas far from the largest towns, unless they came by the cruise ships, the so-called floating hotels.

The most eager spokesmen for increased tourism had great confidence in the automobiles. The new horseless carriages were in many ways signs of a new era to come. “That they are modern and well suited for the tourist traffic cannot be denied, even if they drain some of the income away from the posting stations. It is of no use to bid defiance to the world's development.”<sup>2</sup>

Even if the automobiles were seemingly a sign of times to come they had to be adapted to the needs of the Norwegian countryside and the Norwegian culture where the relationship between the automobiles and the horse and carriage was vital. To what extent did Norway establish tourism based on the automobiles before WW1?

On the whole the automobiles came to Norway from Europe. Automobiles were in many respects looked upon as symbols of modernity; a body of values and representations, something new as a part of a more heterogeneous cultural flow from the continent, a flux of European influence. At this time Norway's road traffic was dominated by the use of horse and carriage. In this respect the horseless carriage was also a cultural challenger. To what extent did the tourists want to experience Norway by using the new technology? Or was it rather so that the foreign travellers wished to see a Norway characterized by the culture of the Norwegian farmers developed through ages?

The controversy related to the car, what it should and could be used for, can be seen both at a national and local level. The national controversies connected to the purpose and use

---

<sup>1</sup>“Tidsskrift for Cycleindustri og -Handel” (Danmark) Nr 14, Oktober 1900

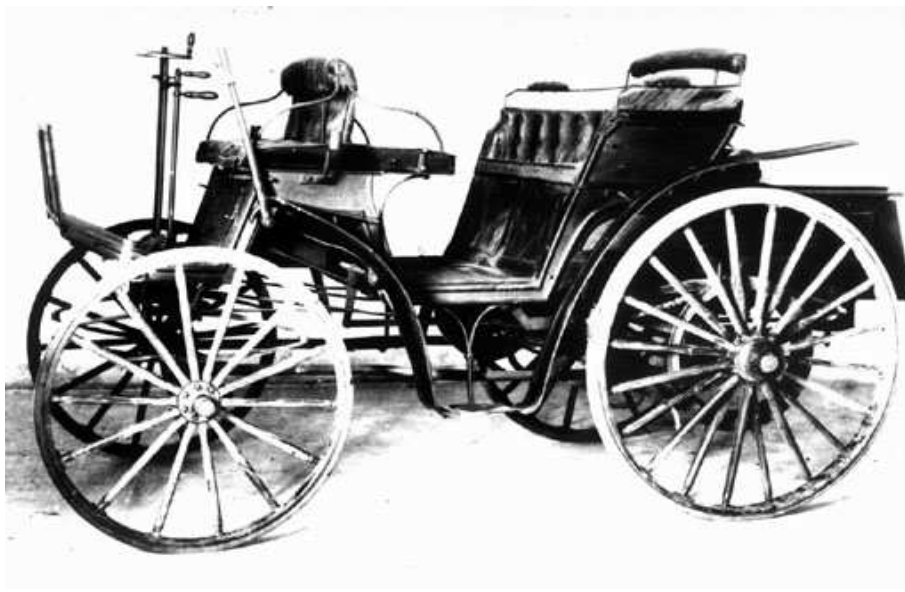
<sup>2</sup>Innlegg i Lillehammer Tilskuer 8. september 1909

of the car can be seen as disputes between the Norwegian Parliament and the Road Department and its leader, Road Director Krag. Several books have touched on this subject: Road director Johan Skougaard (road director Krag's successor) in his book "Det norske veivæsens historie" (A History of the Norwegian Road Department), Peer Gretland "Bilens historie" (The History of the Motor Car) and Torleif Lindtveit and Finn P. Nyquist: "På hjul i Norge" (On Wheels in Norway).

What happened on the scene of tourism, and especially in the countryside, we know little about. We also know less about how the car was interpreted both in terms of practical use and what it represented on a local level. Books by Frank Ernest Hill ("The Automobile, how it came, grew and has changed our lives"), James. J. Flink ("America adopts the Automobile") and Norman T. Moline ("Mobility and the small town") deal with questions connected to when the car came to rural America. Wolfgang Sachs ("For the love of the Automobile") presents an analysis located to Germany. Vendela Heurgren ("När bilen drabbade landsbygden": – "When the automobile came to the village") discusses the opposition against the car when rural Sweden was faced with the new technology. I will try to go a bit further and make an analysis on the micro level and consider to which extent the local community was influenced by automobile tourism directly and indirectly.

I will in the following analyze how the Norwegian tourist trade regarded the possibilities of the automobile as a replacement of extensive use of horse and carriage. I will have a special focus on culture related to the daily life of the Norwegian countryside where the understanding of the automobile can be seen on a broad scale: from the dating practices of young people to local politics.

### **The tourist traffic**



**Factory owner Østbye's Benz**

The first automobile came to Norway in 1895 when factory owner Østbye from Gjøvik together with a small group of investors imported a Benz from Germany. The second Norwegian imported car came three years later, another Benz, but smaller. After that a growing influx of both gasoline and steam-driven vehicles followed, both from Europe and USA<sup>3</sup>. The first horseless carriages were in many ways regarded as a pastime for the idle rich influenced by German and French culture, the home countries of the very first automobiles.

In 1901 the Belgian tourist Beduin conducted a journey by automobile in Norway, from Kristiania [Oslo] to Lærdalsøren on the western coast of Norway, becoming the first tourist in an automobile on Norwegian soil. Needless to say, this trip created a lot of attention not only because Beduin conveniently had omitted to apply for permission. The automobile was like a visit from outer space for most farmers on the route.

Early on, English salmon enthusiasts used engine driven vehicles on their fishing trips to Norway. A. Barkley Walker, around 1902, brought a three-wheeled motorcycle to Norway from England when he was fishing salmon in the famous Namsen River.

In the summer of 1903 Lord Phillips used his car in Sunndalen in the Romsdal County. The newspapers reported the event, pointing out that “the horses are very afraid of the noisy vehicle. The Englishman found no pleasure in using the carriage since the chief county administrative officer Kielland has demanded that the automobile must not be used in the county unless the speed of the automobile is low, an order the speedy Englishman had no intention of following”.<sup>4</sup> The automobile was sent back where it came from by boat. Kielland was identical to the famous Norwegian author Alexander L. Kielland, appointed chief county administrative officer in 1903.

These two demonstrations of reaction to the new technology have to be regarded as incidents, but were still a sign of the times to come. The focus was clearly on tourism and horseless carriages.

The automobile frightened the horses, an argument that was used for what it was worth. A horse was a horse, but not in the automobile discourse. The most convinced antagonists claimed to observe a difference between the various races. “As perhaps is known, the fact that the engine driven vehicles frighten the horses, namely the Fjord horses, has raised an opinion doubting the practical usefulness of such vehicles in our country.”<sup>5</sup>

In my opinion this was a term of reference, emphasising the difference between the culture of the cities and the culture of the areas around the most visited Norwegian fiords.

The horses in the city were used to noises of various kinds. Furthermore the horses were bred in the countryside and adapted to tasks in the cities. They became gradually used to

---

<sup>3</sup>“Stavanger Avis” 6. oktober 1898

<sup>4</sup>Sundmørsposten 29. juli 1903 på grunnlag av en artikkel i Romsdalsposten

<sup>5</sup>Lillehammer Tilskuer 5. september 1901

the higher noise levels of the busy city life. There was every reason to believe that the countryside horse would react the same way, given ample time. The way I see it, the frightened horses were used as arguments against the new technology to preserve the countryside's way of life, where the horses used in the fields, on the country roads and in horse breeding were important aspects of this culture.

Even if Norway had a considerable degree of self-rule in the union with Sweden, a strong opinion engaged itself for the work for liberation, a fact that took place in 1905. The process of establishing the relatively young Norwegian nation was coloured by a desire to sort out what was to be the cultural basis for the "new" nation. The automobile, indirectly seen as a visual sign of European influence, was brought into the discourse of liberation which had a strong focus on what was "Norwegian" and what was to be regarded as foreign and thereby unwanted.

Although it may be easy to find arguments supporting that the Norwegian fight for liberation was more of a national political and economic character, this process also included a cultural debate. As an example, the thus far accepted formal Norwegian language stood against the attempt to further a new national language based on the various dialects used in the Norwegian countryside, illustratively called "New Norwegian". The cultural contrast between the cities and the countryside could be seen in the discourse concerning the two Norwegian languages. While the supporters of "New Norwegian" for the most part were found in the countryside, the literary Norwegian language, a result of the long-lasting union with Denmark (from 1380, and ending on the 17<sup>th</sup> of May 1814) was used in the urban areas. In my opinion it is very difficult, if at all possible to see the integration of the new technology without taking this aspect into consideration.

Several of the Norwegian authors such as Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, Hamsun and Kielland were directly or indirectly engaged in this debate where tourism also was a part of the discourse. In many respects the Norwegian writers played as much a political role as their role as authors. This was well illustrated through the many contributions, especially from Bjørnson and Hamsun in the newspapers.

Their books were in many instances well known on an international level and can be regarded as written illustrations of what tourists might find in Norway. In the early literature of Bjørnson the life of the Norwegian farmer was described in the national romantic tradition, underlining the importance of rural life and culture, a fact which also contributed to what the tourist could expect to see in Norway. Bjørnson's attitude towards the culture of the countryside was, however, gradually yet dramatically changed.



**“Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson visits the home of his childhood in 1896”**

In 1889 Bjørnson wrote an article in *Harper's new Monthly Magazine* where he let the American readers know that “our mountain folk have from olden times looked down upon people in the lowlands as slow and stupid, while the lowlanders have looked on the mountain folk as rough, poor, and proud in the midst of their poverty”.<sup>6</sup>

In the 1890s the fighters for New Norwegian moved their position forward and became both more visible and aggressive in their policy. Initially it was a question of equal status for the two languages. On the 17<sup>th</sup> of May 1894 seven students at the Teacher's School of Education in Levanger encouraged rebellion by answering their exam in New Norwegian. The department finally accepted this, opening the way for a new practice where the students had to show sufficient knowledge in both languages. In 1896 Norway's Youth Association (Norigs Ungdomslag) was established, an interest organization for young people of the countryside supporting New Norwegian, thus highlighting cultural differences between the youth in the countryside and the youth of the cities, who was perhaps a less interested party.

In November 1899 the newspapers in the Norwegian capital, Kristiania (now Oslo), published a resolution related to the battle of the formal Norwegian language. Behind the resolution stood Bjørnson who had gathered no less than 1400 people for the written language thus far used. After this Bjørnson held several speeches confronting the New Norwegian language and the romantic view of the youth of the countryside. He sarcastically argued against the idea that the roots of the Norwegian culture were found in the traditions of the Norwegian farmers and that the foundation for what was to be regarded as Norwegian culture had to be based on the language in the cities.

---

<sup>6</sup> "Norway and the Norwegians"- As told by one of Norway's most famous writers, poets and orators by Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson. As published in 1889 by America's famous Harper's new Monthly Magazine, reprinted by Per A. Holst Forlag 2001 page 25.

The author Arne Garborg engaged himself on the side of the supporters of New Norwegian pointing out that this was a fight between two nationalities, the Norwegian and the Danish-Norwegian in the hands of Bjørnson.<sup>7</sup> The battle between the two Norwegian languages did thus not only create a polarization between left and right in Norwegian politics; it also created boundaries between the city and the countryside, boundaries which the new automobiles had to cross.

Soon after the turn of the century Bjørnson pointed out in the newspapers that the tourists were met by a system more ruled by speculation than by a serious effort of pleasing the tourists. The tourists were met by sellers of unimportant artefacts, where less than serious agents saw the possibility of easy money more than a quality presentation of what were Norwegian crafts. Bjørnson asked for a more professional attitude to the tourist trade.<sup>8</sup>

Bjørnson's view created a large debate in the newspapers. One of his opponents pointed out in the major newspaper in the capital ("Morgenbladet") that "Before one gets an efficient police control with "the thousands who visit our country" and the numerous farmers whose main income is from conveyance, as little as possible should be done to promote tourist traffic, at least on the so-called "mass routes", the routes of the floating hotels."<sup>9</sup>

Bjørnson was, however, not blind to the fact that the growing tourism created change in the rural areas. "In Lærdalen I was told that the up and coming youth no longer could participate during the haymaking season, they had never learnt how to do it."<sup>10</sup>

The youth found it more attractive to work at the local hotels and the posting stations, or as a mayor in a local community put it: "The girls at the hotels, the boys in conveyance. If a boy could scrape the money together somehow, he would find himself a horse and wagon which he regarded as the capital solution."<sup>11</sup> This move from the farm to tourism created a polarization between the generations in the countryside, which became even more visible when the first automobiles came.

The drivers of the first automobiles were to a large extent youth from Kristiania. Divisions developed between the local youth with their horses and carriages and the young boys from Kristiania where the enthusiasm for the new technology was clearly visible in the cars and the drivers' shiny uniforms. Needless to say, the young girls of the countryside found the young drivers from the cities more attractive and exciting than the farmer boys in the woollen clothes, thus splitting even the youth in the countryside.

The enthusiasm of the youth from Kristiania stood in marked contrast to the opposition, the fear and uncertainty of the local communities. Interests in the conveyance of tourists from outside also became a threat to the basis of the local economy where the local

---

<sup>7</sup> Norges Historie, Bind 9: "Det moderne gjennombrudd 1870-1905", H.Aschehoug & Co (W.Nygaard) Oslo 1997, side 174, resolusjon om språkspørsmålet i november 1899

<sup>8</sup> Sundmørsposten 25. august 1902

<sup>9</sup> Morgenbladet 28. august 1902

<sup>10</sup> Sundmørsposten 25. august 1902

<sup>11</sup> «Indtrøndelagen» 26. august 1910: «Er Turisttrafikken gunnlig for landet?» Ordfører A. Grøndahl, Vestre Slidre, Valdre, uttalelse i intervju

populace was, largely speaking, losing its grip and control over the roads and its own community.

In many ways the situation in Norway was the same as in Sweden. Vendela Heurgren has pointed out that the automobile became a matter of discord between the generations; the elder generations showed a rooted discontent where the automobiles were concerned while the youth looked upon the new technology with enthusiasm<sup>12</sup>. As I have tried to show, this was even more complex, since it also created a division not only between the youth of the countryside and the youth from Kristiania, but also among the youth from the farming districts.

Even if the local conveyors offered transportation to the local community to some extent, there was an attempt to explain the problems in the conveyance system by the negative influence of tourism. "Tourism was in general not looked upon with enthusiasm, by either farmer or worker, in the north of the Gudbrandsdalen valley. A lot of hotels and tourist stations have been erected in smaller communities and quite a few farms have been converted into hostels for the tourists. It is admitted, however, that some money is brought into the countryside through tourism and that some people live by it, but this fact does not compensate for the disadvantages, the damage and the spoiling of its people and disturbance of the daily life of the countryside"<sup>13</sup>. In this respect tourism challenged the relatively stable institutions of the countryside.

Tourism also gradually changed a set of standard norms of accepted behaviour in the countryside. As an old cotter said: "while working, streaming with perspiration, city folks were strolling along in herds, doing nothing". A fellow worker elaborated this by saying: "It is sad to see the visible difference between people – some have to work themselves to death for their bread and butter, while others do nothing. I believe that we who burn the candle at both ends will have a better time in the Heaven of God than city folks."<sup>14</sup>

Boundaries were stretched between those who had money and leisure time and those who had not. This contrast became even more visible when rich people from the main cities came to the countryside in their automobiles. In their hands technical change was perceived as progress. The automobiles were associated with speed, leisure time and individual freedom. Leisure time was also firmly connected to having money. A line of demarcation was then drawn between rich and poor also. The tourists in many respects ended up in the same category as the rich people from the cities. They had both the time and money necessary to conduct tours in the Norwegian countryside.

The northern part of the Gudbrandsdalen valley in southern Norway would in time become a central part for tourism. A crucial point was "to educate the people of the countryside to independence and self respect. A proper medicine should be to increase the national consciousness of the farmers."<sup>15</sup> Tourism then became an indirect part of a

---

<sup>12</sup> Vendela Heurgren: "När bilen drabbade landsbygden", Om den svenska landsbygdens motstånd och inkorporering av bilen under 1900-talets första decennier Nordiska Museet, Författaren och Nordiska museet, Stockholm 1995, side 24

<sup>13</sup> Lillehammer Tilskuer: "Af Beretningen om J. Sælands Undersøgelsesreise", 23. mai 1910

<sup>14</sup> Lillehammer Tilskuer: "Af Beretningen om J. Sælands Undersøgelsesreise", 23. mai 1910

<sup>15</sup> Lillehammer Tilskuer: "Af Beretningen om J. Sælands Undersøgelsesreise", 23. mai 1910

class struggle between the farmers and the people from the more urban areas. The wish for an increase in the national consciousness of the farmers could not be disregarded with respect to the dissolving of the union with Sweden in 1905. Then a national front was erected against the influence from Sweden and as a whole against what was regarded as “foreign”.

As long as the horse and wagon were used for the conveyance of tourists, tourism was in many respects still a part of the farming communities, in spite of the controversies between the generations that were apparent. When the automobile challenged this traditional system, a new situation was created. The change in mobility culture was primarily in the hands of the upper classes reflecting the lifestyle of the European bourgeoisie.

The negative attitude in relation to tourism was not left without opposition. At the first tourist conference in Bergen in 1910 it was pointed out that “if a magnificent tourism for Norway is to be achieved, which the country deserves, a comprehensive work to promote tourism has to be started.”<sup>16</sup> Strong means had to be used. It was especially important to counteract the attitude of the farmers that “the tourist traffic was depraved in all its consequences”.<sup>17</sup> Their attitude towards tourism reflected in many ways the farmer’s antagonism against the automobiles. Tourism was a issue with political undertones where a whole society had to be modernized. Common denominators seemed to be a fear for what was regarded as foreign and modern and a wish to preserve the farmers’ culture. A change could only be achieved through creating a change in the farmers’ attitudes to tourism, a complicating and long-lasting process.

### **The automobile and the railroad**

From the early 1860s Norway had put both effort and money into establishing a national railroad system. Contrary to most European countries, the development of the railroad was as a whole financed through national loans and had to a smaller extent national or foreign investors. This system of financing contributed to regarding the expansion of the railroad system as a national enterprise, something “Norwegian”. The national financing drained money away from road building, not unlike the situation in Denmark, which Steffen Elmer Jørgensen has analyzed.<sup>18</sup>

The railroad was well suited for the Norwegian climate. Relatively seldom the trains had to stop because of problems with snow and cold climate. The railroad system could then be used for tourism even during the winter. The tourists could visit the Norwegian mountains to ski, given that a suitable hotel was found not too far away from the railroad track. Even if some automobiles might be used during the winter season, another

---

<sup>16</sup>Foreningen for Reiselivet i Norge, Aarbok fra 1910, stenografisk referat fra Den første norske turistkongress, afholdt i Bergen 7/8. September 1910, side 146

<sup>17</sup>Foreningen for Reiselivet i Norge, Aarbok fra 1910, stenografisk referat fra Den første norske turistkongress, afholdt i Bergen 7/8. September 1910, side 146

<sup>18</sup>Se Steffen Elmer Jørgensen “Fra chaussé til motorvej”, Dansk Vejhistorisk Selskab, Odensen Universitetsforlag 2001



problematic challenge had to be met: The farmers used the road for horse and sledges. They needed for obvious reasons an adequate layer of snow for this purpose. The automobile owners on their part, wanted as little snow and ice as possible. The power, however, was in the hands of the farmers who were responsible for the daily maintenance of the roads, including clearing the road of snow. Because of this, winter tourism was connected with the use of the railroads. In this respect the railroad led to a centralization where the largest mountain hotels at the railway lines also got the winter tourists, although not to the extent seen today.



**"Driving through ice tunnel July 1905 in Norway"**

In the countryside demands for smaller local railroads were raised. In many ways the local railroads in connection to the central railroad system met the needs of the local communities where transport of goods was concerned, contributing to a gradual change from a household economy based on what the farms could provide, to a market economy. The trains also came to the stations strictly scheduled, a fact that made it possible for farmers with frightened horses to stay away from the local road which often followed the railroad track.

I will briefly illustrate the strength of the railroad issue in some local communities. In 1910 the small community of Vaagemo not far from the Gudbrandsdalen valley was given the opportunity to choose between ambitious but rather unrealistic plans for a local railroad and improvement of the local road system for the use of the automobile. The road law of 1853 had given all the decision rights concerning the use of the roads to the county chief administrative officer. On a direct question from the chief county administrative officer if the local community wanted a tertiary railroad in 10 to 12 years or the road now, one of the chairmen of the local council answered: “We would rather wait”.<sup>19</sup>

When the horseless carriages came, the new vehicles challenged the local railroad plans and became competitors to the railroad. Quite a few chief county administrative officers realized that it was not a question of railroad or automobile, but in a longer run, both. In spite of considerable resistance from the farmers the chief county administrative officers opened the main roads for automobile routes but only with strict regulations. Like the railroad, the arrival of the automobile routes was pinned up at the posting stations. The use of the automobiles was to a great extent shaped by the farmers’ enthusiastic attitude towards the railroads, thus creating a “railroad automobile”, literally speaking. This demand for regularity made it possible for the farmers to stay home during the incident. This was, however, not a clear-cut deal between the farmers and the authorities. From time to time, the automobiles were late, a fact that contributed to long-lasting opposition even against the automobile routes.

In many respects the railroad welded the local community together in the battle against the automobile. The railroads were also in some circumstances looked upon as more cultural than the country road, which traditionally was seen as an artery for travelling strangers with dubious purposes and dishonest goals.

Some local railroad enthusiasts claimed that the youth withdrew from the road and gathered at the railroad stations: “The traditional and uncontrolled strolling along country roads in large groups Saturday evenings and nights is now considerably reduced. At the railroad station the youth meet and exchange points of view and conduct innocent flirtation.”<sup>20</sup>

The railroad station then became a meeting place for the youth where a more advanced civilization framed the activity of the youth. While the railroad represented something positive for the farmers, the country road was the scene of uncontrolled and unwanted activity. Although not a crucial argument against the automobile, the railroad was as a whole preferred to the horseless carriage.

The farmers’ resistance against the new road-using technology led to strict regulations for the use of the private automobile. Some counties decided that private automobiles were not to use the main roads unless they queued up behind the automobile routes. Some

---

<sup>19</sup>Lillehammer Tilskuer 2. mars 1910 (referatet fra møtet gikk over flere utgaver av avisen)

<sup>20</sup>Lillehammer Tilskuer 23.februar 1910

counties did not allow the use of private automobiles at all. Because of this it was almost impossible to cross the borders between the various counties before the new automobile law came into force in 1912.

### **The new automobile law and local self rule**

In the Middle Ages the small local communities were free to rule themselves, but during the Danish-Norwegian autocracy the local self-government was set aside. Through the laws regulating the executive committee of local council of 1837 the historic heritage connected to self-government in the small local communities was revitalized. These laws established a foundation for the development of local self-government we know today. The inhabitants both in the towns and in the rural areas were given the opportunity to decide on local matters through the establishment of local councils. The main roads were in the hands of the county chief administrative officer, but in connection with the use of small country roads the local authorities were to be heard. Within a European perspective this strong focus on local government can be regarded as a distinctively Norwegian phenomenon. It can also to some extent explain the opposition from farmers in the integration process of the automobiles in the Norwegian countryside. The main road was often the only road and could then be regarded as a country road where the local decision makers were to be heard.

Up until the new road law of 1912, the county chief administrative officer as a rule determined if a road should be opened for the automobiles. For obvious reasons, this created large problems for the automobile pioneers. Some county chief administrative officers were liberal, while others were regarded as true automobile haters.

The Norwegian private car owners had, like most European countries, their own organisation, The Norwegian Automobile Club (NAK) founded in 1907, which was an agitator for a more accepted use of the new vehicles. In 1910 the club's secretary pointed out that "The year 1910 is a memorable year when the use of the automobile on tourist routes is regarded. Now automobiles are used on the most central routes."<sup>21</sup> His statement was in my opinion only to be regarded as propaganda. In 1910 around 10 automobiles were found on the newly established automobile routes.

The club pointed out that "the automobiles are seen in a process of growing victimization, but in spite the fact that the final goal seems to be a prohibition against the automobile, the use of the automobile penetrates almost every day new sectors of society."<sup>22</sup>

The automobile was almost persecuted yet still penetrated society, almost like an animal in a Darwinistic scenario where the automobile as the strongest would survive. The new vehicle was strictly regulated, or "tamed" or "domesticated" to use the expression of Jon Sørgaard and Knut H. Sørensen. They have used the expression "domestication" as a

---

<sup>21</sup>Foreningen for Reiselivet i Norge, Aarbok fra 1910, stenografisk referat fra Den første norske turistkongress, afholdt i Bergen 7/8. September 1910, side 13, Ingeniør E.H.Rotheims innlegg, sekretær for Norsk Automobil Klubb.

<sup>22</sup>Foreningen for Reiselivet i Norge, Aarbok fra 1910, stenografisk referat fra Den første norske turistkongress, afholdt i Bergen 7/8. September 1910, side 13

metaphor within the SCOT tradition. The expression was originally presented by Silverstone, et al., who studied the “moral economy of household”. The expression points to how wild animals can be tamed to live together with people. In this process not only the animal changes behaviour, but also those who tame it. The expression “domestication” therefore moves the focus away from innovations, design, development and production to more about how technology is seen, used and culturally integrated.<sup>23</sup> As we have seen, private automobiles had to follow strictly regulated automobile routes, a domestication or local shaping of the new technology brought in from Europe.

Several protagonists of the new technology emphasised the need for a national law, reducing the power of the county chief administrative officer. “If this does not happen, the positive use of the automobile in the tourist trade may be wasted, since the county automobile rules make communication difficult and frighten the tourists away from seeing Norway in their private automobiles. The use of the automobile in the tourist trade is much in vogue in all civilized countries and for our country it is vital to see its possibilities and participate in the competition.”<sup>24</sup>

The county rules established a framework for the understanding of the automobile, a “script”, to use Madelaine Akrich’s metaphor, an interpretation of how the automobiles were to be understood. It was a vehicle in the hands of the local communities. Akrich writes: “Designers thus define actors with specific tastes, competences, motives, aspirations, political prejudices, and the rest, and they assume that morality, technology, science and economy will evolve in particular ways. A large part of the work of innovators is that of ‘inscribing’ this vision of the world in the technical content of the new object.”<sup>25</sup>

### **The new automobile law**

When the new automobile law came in 1912, the development of the railroad, and especially the tertiary railroads seemed to have reached saturation point. The state had engaged itself in building smaller local railroads, but “the tertiary railroads have not turned out to be lucrative.(...) Further expansion seems to be a dead end at the moment, especially in view of the competitor and a possible successor, the automobile.”<sup>26</sup>

Norway had a very low and scattered population. Central decision-makers within the tourist trade suggested that one ought to see the railroad and the automobile within the same context, where perhaps it was more economical to use the automobile instead of trains. “By using the automobile a wide range of new possibilities has been opened. Where there earlier was a narrow valley community –“cul-de-sac”, where it was regarded impossible to build a railroad and where the farmers had to travel both day and night to

---

<sup>23</sup>Sørensen and Sørgaard 1993: side 10.

<sup>24</sup>Gjenpart av “Reiseforeningen”s skrivelse til Stortinget datert 15. januar 1911, publisert i Aarbok for 1911: “Beretningen om Foreningens virksomhet i 1911”, side 18

<sup>25</sup>Madelaine Akrich in Bijker and Law 1992, page 208.

<sup>26</sup>Direktør T.A.Heiberg i Landslaget for Reiselivet i Norge, foredrag ved automobilmøtet i Kristiania Handelsstands Forening 26. november 1915”, Landsforeningen for Reiselivet i Norge, Aarbok 1915, trykt hos Marius Stamnes, Kristiania, side 23

reach the main valley's railway station, one or more automobiles run to correspond with the train. The valley's and local community's products can be brought straight to the larger markets, mail and newspapers are brought in on a daily basis. Doctors, senior civil officials and businessmen can travel conveniently and fast through the districts. Travellers from abroad seek in the tourist season rest and recreation in rural districts which were seldom visited earlier".<sup>27</sup>

According to the new road law the main roads were now generally open for the automobile. Through this the power of decision-making was shifted from the regional level represented by the county chief administrative officer to the state road department.

The country roads, however, were generally now closed for the automobile. Before 1912 the county chief administrative officer could determine which of the country roads could be used by automobiles. Now the county road board had the formal authority. If the county road board wanted to open a local country road, the local council was to be heard, a fact that put the control of the small local roads in the hands of the members of the local council, the farmers. At local level the power was transferred from the county chief administrative officers to the members of the local county. In this transfer of power the automobile was the catalyst. As a result of the new law, some automobile pioneers could use the main roads as before, but permission to use the small country roads they had used prior to 1912 was withdrawn.

Even if the main roads as a rule were open for the automobile, the county road board could close even the main road for the horseless carriages, given that the local council regarded the use of the automobile as dangerous in relation to the standard of the road.

Both the county chief administrative officer and the county road engineer were members of the county road board. If a main road was to be closed or a country road opened the road engineer examined the road, giving advice relating to the standard of the road. The influence of the road engineers increased and a more professional attitude towards road maintenance and road building was a result. The increase in professionalism could also be seen in a more up-to-date use of machinery. There was a stronger focus on road keeping and administration of the road system, bringing the position of the road engineers forward, not unlike what Pär Blomkvist has pointed out happened in Sweden in the same period.<sup>28</sup>

The importance of local self-rule was a fact neither the central road department nor the regional decision-makers could overlook. The county road boards had the roads in their hands, literary speaking. As road director Skougaard put it: "It cannot be denied that our society in general is to a large extent democratic; the principle of self rule has developed to a stronger and stronger degree. This was clearly shown when the first road law of 1853

---

<sup>27</sup>Direktør T.A.Heiberg i Landslaget for Reiselivet i Norge, foredrag ved automobilmøtet i Kristiania Handelsstands Forening 26. november 1915", Landsforeningen for Reiselivet i Norge, Aarbok 1915, trykt hos Marius Starnes, Kristiania, side 23

<sup>28</sup>Pär Blomkvist: "Den gode vägens vänner", Brutus Öestlings Bokförlag Symposion, Stockholm/Stehag 2001

came. My opinion is that the central administration must take into consideration what the districts say.”<sup>29</sup>

The way I see this, road director Skougaard accepted the strong position of the local societies. If the roads were to be used to a greater extent by automobiles, the national road system had to be improved. Road director Skougaard, like his predecessor road director Krag, clearly saw that the automobile had come to stay, even if the use of the new vehicle was unsure. Both the road director and the road engineers became mediators between the agents of automobile and those who showed a clear-cut opposition to the new technology. This aspect is also analysed by Blomkvist. In Sweden the road engineers became a visible group of agents in the integration process of the automobile, where “the farmers had to be conquered for automobilism and through this also for “the good road”.

<sup>30</sup>

Opposition from the farmers then was not a strictly Norwegian phenomenon but could be seen in other European countries as well. It can, however, be argued that the opposition of the Norwegian farmers became more visible because of a strong wish for local self rule, a tradition established during the union with Sweden.

Viewed as a whole, the automobile law of 1912, a part of the overall road law, was the law of the countryside, especially where small country roads were concerned. Most of the main roads in Norway were, however, opened to the automobile. More cars were seen in the countryside and so modern city life and culture were more visible, and the expression “time” also received new meaning.

The limitation of the use of the automobile on country roads through the strong influence of the local councils slowed down the integration process of the private automobile in the Norwegian countryside. It also influenced tourism by car. The opening of country roads was a very slow process, which made both the county road board and the local councils what Thomas P. Hughes has called “reverse salients”.<sup>31</sup> The farmers were in many respects looked upon as conservative and stubborn where new technology was concerned. If a main road was closed to automobiles, the farmer’s reactionary power was clearly visible. Gradually, however, more and more automobiles were seen on Norwegian roads. This was a process the Norwegian farmers in the long run could not stop. My opinion is that the Norwegian farmers’ antagonism against the automobile contributed to the perhaps unfair stigmatisation of the Norwegian farmers as being backward and old-fashioned.

### **Travelling as an experience**

It could not be taken for granted that tourists would prefer the automobile to the horse and wagon, even if the automobile was regarded as modern and a growing part of

---

<sup>29</sup>Veidirektør Skougaards foredrag på automobilmøtet i Kristiania Handelsstands Forening 26. november 1915”, Landsforeningen for Reiselivet i Norge, Aarboek 1915, trykt hos Marius Stamnes, Kristiania, side 54

<sup>30</sup>Blomkvist side 76

<sup>31</sup> Thomas P. Hughes: ”American Genesis”, page 72

European culture. “Everywhere the route automobile is taken into service, the horse and wagon is expelled. But at the large centres of tourism on the Western coast, where the floating hotels put hundreds of their passengers ashore, traffic with horse and carriage flourishes, bringing large income to the districts.”<sup>32</sup>

As I have pointed out, the integration of the automobile in the Norwegian countryside was strongly influenced by the wish for regularity where the automobiles were to follow strictly scheduled routes between the posting stations. No stops between the posting stations were normally accepted. By using the timetabled automobile, the edge of the ditch and the closest fields with their farmers and animals became a dizzy passing fog, not unlike what could be seen through the railroad window. “From the coupe of the railroad one gets tired of the giddy feeling of the passing landscape.”<sup>33</sup> The scenery became focused and sharp only at a distance, where the distant landscape became more central than contact with people, even if the speed of the automobile was moderate compared to most trains.

The railroad became more a commuter-access to the tourist “hubs” and the railroad system became more a manifestation of railway engineering than the adventure of seeing a beautiful landscape. The railroad track to Bergen was described as “a masterpiece of engineering art.”(...) “Altogether there are 178 tunnels with an overall length of 37,5 km. In addition, large constructions of wood are made to prevent snow from covering the track”.<sup>34</sup> The tunnels and the heavy wood constructions in my view reduce the sensation of passing through an untouched landscape. Even if the scenery was unchanged on large stretches, the journey by train was amputated if a wish for experiencing the sublime Norwegian countryside was crucial.

David E. Nye has described how the experience of nature as something sublime creates a frame for the understanding of new technology. “Virtually everyone who sees an object that is considered sublime has heard of it first and comes with a set of expectations”<sup>35</sup> In my opinion these expectations were met by experiencing the Norwegian countryside by horse and wagon, and not from the railroad carriage or by automobile. As Nye puts it: “Even if the sublime is not a philosophical absolute but an historicized object of inquiry, I will argue, the sublime experience still retains a fundamental structure, regardless of the object that inspires it in the interpretation that is given to this experience.”<sup>36</sup> If we follow Nye, the magnificence of the Norwegian countryside could not be conveyed through descriptions or images but through direct experience, where the choice of transportation was vital.

---

<sup>32</sup>Foreningen for Reiselivet i Norge, Aarbok for 1913, Beretning om Foreningens virksomhet i 1913, om Heste-skystrafikken

<sup>33</sup>Christian Gierløff: “Om kunsten å reise” Gyldendal Norsk Forlag 1927, side 24

<sup>34</sup>Per Nisse: “Fædrelandet”, H. Aschehoug & Co (W. Nygaard) 1914, side 385

<sup>35</sup>David E. Nye: “American Technological Sublime” The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Third printing 1999, page 13

<sup>36</sup> David E. Nye page 9

Tourism by automobile was a new experience compared to travelling by horse and wagon. "Travelling by automobile a half or a whole day is in itself a new experience and enjoyment among the many well known pleasures tourism can offer. A journey in an automobile opens up a new experience and so many surprises - not to mention the many humorous scenes along the country road with angry dogs, frightened pigs and slow cows. One has the feeling hour after hour of being at a cinema without being tired."<sup>37</sup> The angry farmers and the frightened horses were not mentioned.



Postcard from around 1910 , "On the road to the Olden lake" on the western coast of Norway

By choosing horse and wagon the tourist could contact the conveyor and the local farmer, both integrated parts of the scenery. The farmer, the field and the life on the farm were vital parts of the Norwegian rural life illustrated in Bjørnson's early literature, creating a framework or a script for understanding the Norwegian countryside.

On a national level a wide-spread search for what was regarded as "Norwegian" had taken place. There existed, however, no obvious answer to this question. "Much of what was presented as the culture of the Norwegian farmers was more a construction than the living tradition of the countryside. As well the national costumes, the folk dancing and the old-fashioned language of the farmers had to be seen in a modernistic light. The song dances were not a living tradition in Norway, but imported from the Faeroe Islands adapted and promoted as Norwegian. The national costumes of the various regions in the countryside had for a long time been out of use. The costumes which were given status as national costumes, often had to be reconstructed and modernized, influenced by both

---

<sup>37</sup>"Verdens Gang" 21. juli 1910



Norwegian and foreign elements. In many ways this was also a process of modernization in a national form as a jibe directed against the city culture.”<sup>38</sup>

The Norwegian author Knut Hamsun sarcastically pointed out that “We dress ourselves in the so-called national costumes. (...) We dress in gaudy finery with trousers reaching up to the arms just to be funny. But we do not do this for nothing; we stretch out our hands to get paid for it.”<sup>39</sup>



**Girls in national costumes, postcard to Denmark dated 1905**

This rather modernistic expression of a Norwegian tradition was clearly seen in the postcards bought by the tourist in large quantities, produced at the same time as the automobiles came. The motives of the young Norwegian farmer girls in their traditional costumes were very popular, motifs taken in the spectacular scenery of sublime Norwegian nature where also the horse and carriage often were vital elements.

For some tourists, the remains of this national romanticism (or perhaps even reconstructed national romantic picture of Norway) was exactly what they had come to see, a society seen through nostalgic glasses. Using the automobile or railroad became more a sensation equal to what could be seen on tourist picture cards where the contact with the distant landscape became more central than the daily life of the Norwegian countryside and the life of the mountain people.

---

<sup>38</sup>“Norges Historie- Det moderne gjennombruddet 1870-1905 av Gro Hagemann, H. Aschehoug & Co. (W.Nygaard), Oslo 1997 side 167

<sup>39</sup>”Verdens Gang” 8. juli 1910

To use a horse and carriage along “the overland routes” on the western coast of Norway became a different experience from using the automobile. “In many of the overland routes the travellers still prefer the conveyors to have a quiet time and to enjoy the beauty of nature, but because of the fact that the conveyors are retiring due to competition from the automobile and lower fares, some routes suffer from a shortage of horses and wagons.”<sup>40</sup>

The roads on the western coast were only moderate and not build for the automobile, even if the most “modern” hotel owners and conveyors bought 7-passenger automobiles to meet the demand from some tourists, wanting fast transportation to the nearest mountain. The expense connected with building up a capacity necessary to bring all the tourists from the floating hotels up to the nearest top, was often too high. There was also the question of organization. “it is an open question if every buyer of an automobile shall be given permission to convey tourists. If that is the case we will soon face the same situation as the conveyance by horse and wagon has created. Capturing tourists and fare cutting which has been seen on the major tourist routes and disorder of every kind will be the result.”<sup>41</sup>



**Mixed culture, a 7-passager Opel from Geiranger and the conveyor’s horse and wagon, picture taken around 1912 (Wilse, Nasjonalbiblioteket)**

---

<sup>40</sup>Foreningen for Reiselivet i Norge, Aarbok for 1913, Beretning om Foreningens virksomhet i 1913, om Heste-skysstrafikken

<sup>41</sup>Telegrafdirektør Heftyes åpning av automobilmøtet i Kristiania Handelsstands Forening 26. november 1915”, Landsforeningen for Reiselivet i Norge, Aarbok 1915, trykt hos Marius Stamnes, Kristiania

The wish to use the automobile from some tourists and local salesmen had created a market and raised both the question of the distribution of the income for the local societies and how the tourist trade was going to be organized.

The actors in the tourist trade organized themselves in local tourist associations connected with The Norwegian Tourist Association (Den Norske Turistforening) and The National Association for Travelling in Norway (Landslaget for Reiselivet i Norge). The tourist organizations were, however, heterogeneous and had members from the conveyors, representatives from the travelling agencies and the major tourist hotels. The common factor was that the members of the organizations saw a prosperous future for the automobile. In 1910 the local tourist association at Vinstra in the valley of Gudbrandsdalen debated tourism in relation to the automobile and said: "There is no enthusiasm for prohibiting the use of the automobile".<sup>42</sup> The local tourist organization had a different view than most local councils in the valley, which in many respects had far less positive views of the use of the automobile. In this we can see a polarization between those who had income from tourism and the farmers who did not.

A member of the local tourist organization said: "the travellers want the convenience and comfort the automobiles can offer"<sup>43</sup>. The local newspaper pointed out that the tourist traffic is lively at the moment. (...) Most foreigners prefer the horse and carriage, and conveyance by horse is as high as before the automobiles came."<sup>44</sup> A possible explanation for this controversy can be that the foreign tourists preferred horse and carriage while Norwegian travellers were accustomed to the wild nature and less concerned about the magnificent view and the well known culture of the countryside.

### **The concept of time**

In 1910 one of the main Norwegian newspapers, "Verdens Gang" of Kristiania stated: "The majority of the population in this country has now overcome its antagonism against this new and modern vehicle. The automobiles have been accepted to the same degree as the railroad. A few exceptions are found, especially in the parts of the country with no regular use of the automobile. The automobiles are so to speak a part of the farmer's consciousness as the vehicle of today and the future."<sup>45</sup>

The newspaper of the Norwegian capital took a point of view, which probably would increase. The integration of the automobiles was like rings in water, spreading from the central rural areas into the countryside, where Kristiania came first. "We are approaching a new tourist season and everybody knows that the automobiles more than ever will be used by the agents in the tourist trade. The automobiles will shorten the distances to a

---

<sup>42</sup>Gudbrandsdølen 22. og 24. september 1908

<sup>43</sup>Lillehammer Tilskuer 16. August 1909

<sup>44</sup>Lillehammer Tilskuer 13. Juli 1910

<sup>45</sup>"Verdens Gang" 3. juni 1910

degree so far not seen and function as commuters between the eastern and western parts of Norway.”<sup>46</sup>

It was only a matter of time. The arguments were in the hands of the technological determinists of the Norwegian capital. The way I see this, it was a far more complicated situation. Eastern Norway was the urban area between the city of Kristiania and the small town of Lillehammer. The countryside found between the central communities and on the western parts of Norway was to a considerable extent populated by farmers, with a different culture and a different use of the road. In my view this process of integration would take time.

The aspect of time became gradually more and more important. One of the first automobile agents in Norway said in 1911: “I believe the automobile in Norway has a greater importance than is appreciated so far. It is extremely expensive to build railroads and we need commuters between the stations. We want to travel faster than by choosing horse and carriage. More than ever the expression “time is money” has a true meaning.”<sup>47</sup>

The railways had set a new standard. Although time was not money for the tourists, they could have a new experience: “The tourist areas where the automobiles are used, are for several months almost desolate, but during the summer season they are lively and populated, not only by tourists who hastily drive along, to get a rapid glimpse of as many evocative and beautiful sights as possible.”<sup>48</sup>

The aspect of time became gradually more and more important even in the tourist trade. In this respect, the automobile contributed to changing the content of the tourists’ stay in Norway. For the weekend travellers from Kristiania time was, however, of greater importance. They wanted to see as much as they could during their short vacation.

### **Tourism and the private automobile**

The tourist and the owners of the automobile in many respects had the same needs. They wanted to use the road whenever this was regarded as convenient. They wanted to stop where there was something to be seen or experienced. Very often the most spectacular scenery was not found at the posting stations but between them. This wish stood in opposition to the demand of most farmers, wanting the automobiles to be strictly scheduled in automobile routes.

A hotel owner pointed out that “the indignation over the private automobile owners is strong among the farmers. We, the hotel owners, have a different point of view. Those who drive private automobiles are people who very often stay at the hotels a couple of days, which of course is of greatest importance to us- we live by it. In the tourist trade

---

<sup>46</sup>“Verdens Gang” 3. juni 1910

<sup>47</sup>Grosserer Bertel O. Steen på generalforsamlingen i Molde i 1911, Aarbok for 1912, Foreningen for Reiselivet i Norge, side 144

<sup>48</sup>“Verdens Gang” 23. juli 1910

“free driving” is the best.”<sup>49</sup> Another hotel owner had a more restricted position supporting the farmers: “I feel that what the authorities have done is correct. To limit automobile driving to the automobile routes is best in regards to the bad roads.”<sup>50</sup>

It was a paradox that the most attractive tourist routes had the worst roads, bringing the integration of the automobile to the board of the road director and the economic contributions from the state. The way I see this, the opposition against the private cars also influenced tourism by car, a question with economical aspects as well.

According to county chief administrative officer Lambrechts of Kristians county: “I have discovered that the opposition against the private automobiles is supported by the fact that the rich people of Kristiania want to use the roads whenever they have spare time and feel like it. At the time all permissions had to pass my desk, very few foreigners applied for permission. My opinion is that those who travel as a spare time activity have to be considerate to the daily users of the roads, the farmers. The private automobiles must use the roads at the same time as the automobile routes.”<sup>51</sup>

The way I see this, Lambrechts’ point of view clearly illustrates the opposition between the farmers and the culture carriers from Norway’s capital. The boundary between those who had their daily work at the farm and those who had ample spare time and money was too large for bridge building. The word “automobile” had a different meaning for the urban people as compared to the farmers. For many farmers it was of no relevance if the driver was a citizen from the city or a tourist driving his own vehicle. This influenced the use of automobiles in the hands of foreign tourists as well.

### **A changing society**

In 1915 The National Association for Travelling in Norway held an automobile meeting in Kristiania. The main issue was to discuss the importance of the automobile in connection with tourism and the development of automobilism in Norway in general.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore the meeting wanted to raise a debate concerning the county road boards closing of the country roads for the private automobiles. At this meeting the county chief administrative officers, the county road engineers, the road director, representatives from the army, and the Norwegian State Railway were invited. In addition members of the county boards, automobile companies, tourist bureaus, the tourist hotels, etc. were also invited.<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup>Debatten på automobilmøtet i Kristiania Handelsstands Forening 26. november 1915”, Landsforeningen for Reiselivet i Norge, Aarbok 1915, trykt hos Marius Stamnes, Kristiania, side 90

<sup>50</sup>Debatten på automobilmøtet i Kristiania Handelsstands Forening 26. november 1915”, Landsforeningen for Reiselivet i Norge, Aarbok 1915, trykt hos Marius Stamnes, Kristiania, side 90

<sup>51</sup>Debatten på automobilmøtet i Kristiania Handelsstands Forening 26. november 1915”, Landsforeningen for Reiselivet i Norge, Aarbok 1915, trykt hos Marius Stamnes, Kristiania, side 87. (Kristians county was not the county including Kristiania, but was located in the Gudbrandsdalen Valley.)

<sup>52</sup>Foreningen for Reiselivet i Norge skiftet navn til Landsforeningen for Reiselivet i Norge i 1914/15.

<sup>53</sup>Foreningen for Reiselivet i Norge skiftet navn til Landsforeningen for Reiselivet i Norge i 1914/15

The director of the National Association opened the meeting by stating that “The importance of the automobile and its world-wide victory I leave to the experts in this gathering to describe. For our country the automobile has revolutionized the tourist trade and in an incredibly short period of time conquered considerable ground and is extensively used in areas impossible to foresee less than 6-8 years ago when our officials started to become involved”.<sup>54</sup> The “world wide victory of the automobile” was a description in the true deterministic tradition where the director stood out as a visionary speaker in “the Bjørnson tradition”. The answer was given: The automobile and its victory could not be stopped.

This was the first automobile meeting in Norway where people from all sectors of communication were invited. In this respect this was also a political forum where the most important decision-makers were present. The voice of the individual automobile pioneer was replaced by a large forum, which from different angles saw possibilities in the integration of the automobile. Signs of an automobile movement could be seen, automobile organizations pulling in the same direction, a group of influential persons with momentum, to use the expression of Thomas P. Hughes.<sup>55</sup>

The automobile owners met highly restricted country roads. Of the approximately 20.000 km of country roads in the southern part of Norway, only 1100 km, (5.5%) were open for automobile traffic in 1915, 3700 km could be used under special circumstances and 16300 km, (81.5%) were closed.<sup>56</sup>

Road engineer Hiorth at the central administration expressed it this way: “To a substantial degree, the figures confirm the fact that the population in the countryside is hostile to the automobile cause, but we have to remember that the closing of country roads is covered by the law and it is unfair to expect that the prohibition will be removed unless there is a great demand for it. And that will not be private driving on country roads for pleasure.”<sup>57</sup> Hiorth remarked that light could be seen at the end of the tunnel, since doctors, veterinarians and others with special needs were given permission to use roads otherwise closed.<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup>Direktør T.A.Heiberg i Landslaget for Reiselivet i Norge, foredrag ved automobilmøtet i Kristiania Handelsstands Forening 26. november 1915”, Landsforeningen for Reiselivet i Norge, Aarbok 1915, trykt hos Marius Stamnes, Kristiania, side 22

<sup>55</sup>Se Thomas P. Hugnes: “American Genesis”, Penguin Books , New York 1990

<sup>56</sup>Avdelingsingeniør H. Horns foredrag på automobilmøtet i Kristiania Handelsstands Forening 26. november 1915”, Landsforeningen for Reiselivet i Norge, Aarbok 1915, trykt hos Marius Stamnes, Kristiania, side 35

<sup>57</sup>Avdelingsingeniør H. Horns foredrag på automobilmøtet i Kristiania Handelsstands Forening 26. november 1915”, Landsforeningen for Reiselivet i Norge, Aarbok 1915, trykt hos Marius Stamnes, Kristiania, side 36

<sup>58</sup>Avdelingsingeniør H. Horns foredrag på automobilmøtet i Kristiania Handelsstands Forening 26. november 1915”, Landsforeningen for Reiselivet i Norge, Aarbok 1915, trykt hos Marius Stamnes, Kristiania, side 36

It was important to save time when a visit from the local doctor was expected. When farmers regarded the use of the automobile as crucial, they also accepted the automobile. The first automobiles on country roads were thus viewed in the context of usefulness, “the utilitarian automobile”. This technological utilitarianism gradually opened the country roads for more automobile routes, lorries and cars belonging to doctors, dentists and clergymen.

Hiorth also pointed to the fact that most long-distance traffic was out of the question because of the prohibition. One has to cross the countryside from every direction to reach the destination.”<sup>59</sup> In this respect the automobile law of 1912 opened up the possibility for, but not the realisation of, further use of the automobile in the Norwegian countryside. This was especially problematic for an increased use of the automobile in tourism, since most travellers did not want to zigzag through nature of little interest but to visit the major sights worth seeing.

“The automobile routes have within very few years occupied 40% of the main road system in the southern part of Norway.”<sup>60</sup> It would only be a question of time before the timetabled traffic would be found on the majority of, and the most central, country roads. In my opinion the automobile routes functioned as “road openers” in Norway, opening the roads gradually even for private automobiles. The automobile route companies had consolidated their position and the population in the countryside gradually considered the automobile as an adventure. “That automobile traffic will increase to a level so far not seen is indisputable. Recently the population of the rural areas has started buying automobiles to a greater extent and recently the popular Ford automobile and other smaller and relatively cheap cars suitable for the farmers’ private needs have reached our country. They cost less and show a versatility resulting in a broad acceptance. They will without doubt contribute that the well-known expression: “people ought to live scattered but see each other often” come true.”<sup>61</sup>

The main roads of southern Norway had a standard suitable for even the larger cars. Gradually bus-like automobiles were seen. When the narrow, steep and most demanding roads on the western coast of Norway were concerned, they did not have an acceptable standard for the use of large vehicles. The western coast became, literary speaking, the birth place for the seven-passenger cars, standard open automobiles but equipped with a longer chassis which when handled with care could take the tourist up to the most spectacular sights.

Norway had a considerable stream of tourist to the western coast. It is no exaggeration to say that the seven-passenger automobile in many respects became “the west-coast

---

<sup>59</sup>Referat fra automobilmøtet i Kristiania Handelsstands Forening 26. november 1915”, Landsforeningen for Reiselivet i Norge, Aarbok 1915, trykt hos Marius Stamnes, Kristiania, side 91

<sup>60</sup>Avdelingsingeniør H. Horns foredrag på automobilmøtet i Kristiania Handelsstands Forening 26. november 1915”, Landsforeningen for Reiselivet i Norge, Aarbok 1915, trykt hos Marius Stamnes, Kristiania, side 44

<sup>61</sup>Veidirektør Baalsruds foredrag ved N.I.F.s og Veivæsenets jubilæer 9. desember 1924, referat i Meddelelser fra Veidirektøren nr 54, des 1924, side 218

automobile”, at least in the tourist trade. The considerable tourism found here led to a greater density of seven-passenger cars compared to comparative countries. As observed, the automobile had to be adapted to local Norwegian needs where the roads were “reverse salients”. This process with controversies and negotiation took almost 20 years.

The development and improvement of the roads towards a general opening up for the automobile had to take time. This did not only have to do with safety. A general improvement of the Norwegian road system, which had long suffered from the draining away of money from the roads into the railroads, was also very expensive.

The expansion of the Norwegian railroad system was soon to be viewed in the acetylene light of the automobiles. “It would be a very undesirable situation if local groups of activists should succeed pressing forward a demand for more tertiary railroads built at the same time as the more important main tracks”.<sup>62</sup> It was no longer a matter of the expansion of the railroad system, but more a question of the railroad and the automobile living side by side.

The negative attitude of the farmers had to be changed as well, turning the focus away from the railroad; a long lasting process also including a change in the farmers’ economy. The way I see this, the integration of the automobile in Norway as a whole was a long way into the future, when both the use of private automobiles and the use of the horseless carriage in the tourist trade were concerned.

The automobile had allegedly revolutionized the tourist trade. Words like “victory” and “revolution” were not collected from the national romantic literature, but were more likely coloured by Marx’ unstable political platform. The use of words and expressions was also important in the automobile discourse. The two expressions in many ways reflected a demand for a faster change in society, wrapped up in a modernistic language, showing that the speed of change was rapid. This was the language of the most impatient automobile enthusiasts and the framework for their understanding of the automobile and not the farmers’.

By October 15. 1915, at the time the major automobile meeting was held, altogether there were 2033 engine-driven vehicles registered in Norway, including 522 motorcycles. Ninety-five automobile routes had been established, using 218 automobiles.<sup>63</sup> Perhaps a revolution, but a very small one.

## Summary

The integration of the automobile in general and in the tourist trade in particular, was a complicated process, creating controversies at many levels, from the love life of the young Norwegian farmers to local politics. The automobile was a different technological

---

<sup>62</sup>Avsnitt IV “Om opprettelse av bilruter istedefor bygging av sidebaner og lokalbaner” ,“Innstilling fra Komiitteen til revisjon av prinsippene for vår jernbaneutbygging”, Steenske boktrykkeri Johannes Bjørnstad, Kristiania 1921 side 38

<sup>63</sup> Statistisk Aarbok for Kongeriket Norge for 1915, side 67



object in the hands of tourists and the private automobile owners of the cities compared with the understanding of the new vehicle in the countryside.

The tourists as a group did not, however, want to see and experience the same things. An American tourist might be a second or third generation Norwegian emigrant wanting to find his roots. An Englishman wanted to fish salmon in the Norwegian rivers, bringing his own vehicle to Norway, while a German perhaps wanted to experience the sublime nature of the western coast of Norway. To a large extent this market was to be served by the Norwegian farmers and the small hotel owners in the conveyor system, based on the horse and carriage. The standard of the roads was very limited, creating frustration and conflicts in the meeting between horse-owners and the automobile enthusiasts.

For quite a few tourists the contact with the countryside and Norwegian culture in the countryside was more important than seeing as much as possible in the shortest period of time. If they wanted to be transported “by motor” they had to choose the automobile routes. These cars only stopped at the posting stations, leaving no opportunity to stop and see the sights or meet the local population along the way.

Sightseeing by horse and carriage was a different experience. By using horse and carriage the tourists came into closer contact with nature, while using an automobile or the railroad the nearest landscape became a blurred mist compared to the much slower speed of the horse. In this respect the automobile and the railroad functioned more as commuters to the major tourist centres.

The farmers as a group opposed the use of the automobile and especially private cars with owners wanting to stop whenever it suited them. The farmers demanded strictly regulated automobile routes, not unlike what was seen in connection with the railroad. The resistance against “free driving” also hit those of the tourists who wanted to see the Norwegian countryside from their own automobile. In this respect, private automobile drivers and the tourists were met by the same harsh regulations and resistance.

Tourism changed the life of the Norwegian countryside. The youth found driving and life at the local hotels more exciting than the rather monotonous daily routines at the farm. This move created a polarization between the generations, since the older generations in many respects wanted to conserve the traditional way of life of the countryside as it had been through the decades.

When the automobiles came, the new and shiny vehicles very often had young drivers from Norway’s capital, Kristiania. The youth in the countryside who had bought themselves horses and carriages were met by a new and frightening kind of modernity, which was a challenge also in the dating process as regards the young women in the countryside. In this respect the automobile also created a cultural gap between youth in the small urban communities and youth from more rural areas.

In 1905 the union with Sweden was dissolved. The young Norwegian nation began to seek its own national identity, which to a large extent was based on the culture of the farmers. The automobile, in many respects, became visualizations of differences not only between the cities and the countryside, but also between what was regarded as “Norwegian” and what appeared to be “foreign”, contributing to a Norwegian nationalism based on the culture of the countryside, although to a certain degree,

reconstructed and modernized. In this respect the automobiles not only became symbols of the city culture but also symbols of unwanted cultural influence from abroad.

The Norwegian wish for local self-rule had a strong foundation. Through the laws of 1837 regulating the executive committee of local council, the local communities to a large extent were given the right to determine matters within their own regions. This also influenced the integration of the automobile, since the farmers often had a strong and undisputable position in the local councils.

The farmers fought a long-lasting battle against the automobile, preferring the local railroad to the horseless carriage. This also influenced the use of the automobile in the tourist trade. The local roads were in the hands of the farmers. As long as they were closed, they were also closed for tourists.

The general prohibition against using country roads, regulated through the new automobile law of 1912, lasted for a long time. It was not removed until as late as the revision of the automobile law in 1938.<sup>64</sup> An interesting point is that this version of the automobile law made it possible that “owners of automobiles such as public officials, doctors and midwives, veterinarians and on special occasions, others, can use engine driven vehicles on roads otherwise closed for such traffic.”<sup>65</sup> The decision rights were not surprisingly given to the county road board. The exceptions came when the local communities regarded the automobile as useful, focusing on what can be called “the versatile automobile” and not a vehicle in the hands of the rich.

The integration process of the automobile was a long-lasting one. The local councils were to control the use of the country roads for a long time, a fact that also influenced automobilism with regards to tourism. A general opening was not seen until after the Second World War.



---

<sup>64</sup>KNAs rutebok og årbok for 1938, side 54

<sup>65</sup>KNAs rutebok og årbok for 1938, side 63

