

Sallie Anna Steiner

Mellon Foundation Area and International Studies Fellowships for Incoming Graduate Students Mellon
Submitted: August 24, 2015

Receiving a Mellon Award allowed me to travel during the summer of 2014 to Jølster, a rural county in Western Norway, where I conducted fieldwork towards my master's degree in folklore. My research in Jølster followed the transformation of a traditional style of tapestry weaving known as *smettvev* from a ritual custom and subsistence craft, to a heritage art and identity symbol for the people of Indre Sunnfjord, the district in which Jølster is located. During my time there, I occupied a small house in the village of Sanddalen, Jølster, and biked around, conducting interviews with representative *smettvev* practitioners as well as other community members who engage variously with this art form in their everyday lives. My interactions with these local collaborators allowed me to examine how the social role and symbolic significance of *smettvev* have been transformed in light of the changing economy, landscape, and growing mobility of the people of Indre Sunnfjord. I was able to document how, as the society has moved generally from a subsistence structure to participation in the global free-market economy, its traditional fiber arts have transformed from crafts done to sustain the physical well-being of the people, to intangible cultural heritage that validates, defines, and sustains their identity.

In addition to funding my travel and living expenses while in Jølster, receiving the Mellon Award also allowed me to travel from Norway to Aberdeen, Scotland, for the 2013 Folklore, Ethnology and Ethnomusicology Conference of Aberdeen at the Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen. At this conference, I presented my research to peers in my field and began the process of sifting through my material, condensing what I had learned into what would eventually become my master's thesis. Having completed my master's in the spring of 2014, I am now actively seeking to publish the journal-length article I wrote about my findings, "Woven Identities: The Making and Marketing of a Heritage Art in Jølster, Norway." My research would not have been possible without the generous support I received through the International Institute's Mellon Foundation, support that will live on as I contribute my continued research in Jølster back to my field in the form of conference papers, scholarly articles, and an eventual dissertation.