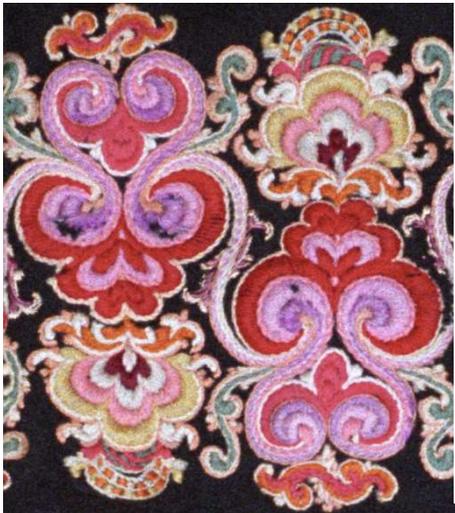




NORSK INSTITUTT FOR
BUNAD OG
FOLKEDRAKT

The Norwegian Institute of bunad and folk costume

Norsk institutt for bunad og folkedrakt



The Norwegian institute of bunad and folk costume (NBF) – Norsk institutt for bunad og folkedrakt - was established in 1947. The institute's archives contain documentation of traditional clothing and folk costumes, from the whole country.

We have developed a methodology for documentation nationwide in cooperation with museums, NGOs and individuals. We run University classes and production/training courses on these subjects and our staffs also does research on these topics.

1. Norwegian Folk Costumes

The particular clothes worn by the rural farmer population in pre-industrial Norway are called folk costumes. Folk costumes were a result of tradition, external influence, local creativity and individual taste, and differed from the clothing habits in urban areas. People living in urban regions and the provincial civil servants, wore clothes influenced by European fashion.



Despite individual variation, the folk costume was often particular for a specific region. People from one area could easily be distinguished by their apparel from those belonging to other areas.

In some areas, for example in the Setesdal Valley in Southern Norway, the folk costume evolved during the 18th and 19th century for the most part unaffected by external influences, as the contact with surrounding communities was limited.

Other rural areas, around the national capital Oslo and the valleys north to Trondheim, were subject to much more frequent interaction across community borders. The cut and fit would resemble fashion costume, but the clothes could be 20 to 30 years out of fashion.

Clothes were mostly made on the farm by people themselves, although some pieces of the costume could be made by specialists. Homemade wool materials were often used, instead of silk or expensive imported materials prominent in the fashion costume. Different areas had different forms of decoration: In some areas the costume had extensive embroidery or silk and velvet as decorative elements, while in other areas the costume had very little decoration.

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Most people had particular clothes for church going or Sunday best. The more well-to-do, the more differentiated the clothes could be, although the cut of the folk costume would be the same for everyday clothing and best clothes. In many areas, the transition to urban fashion started earlier among the men, maybe because they were in more contact with urban areas through trade and other work related travel.

2. Documentation of Folk Costumes

Clothing traditions in different regions of Norway have been documented by museums since the 1930s. Researchers travelled to the rural districts and collected old clothes, described the design and use in the particular area, and subsequently exhibited them to the public.

Norwegian institute of bunad and folk costume (NBF) is working to promote knowledge about folk costumes and bunad as a cultural expression. It aims to sustain traditions of folk costumes, prevent deterioration of the manufacturing of bunads, and to advice in the construction of new bunad models. An advisory board, with academic qualifications, is appointed by the Ministry of Culture.



During field work, local collaborators, sometimes local museums, are engaged to arrange for the registration.

Registrations of the actual items are done by the professional staff at *Norwegian institute of bunad and folk costume*.

Through this work, an extensive archive has been established. As of 2011 it contains approx. 70 000 registrations of clothes and costume parts. This is supplemented by photos, sketches and notes about material related to traditions from different districts. Additional sources include illustrations from artists, sculptures, probate material, letters and other items that describe the old costume traditions.

Each item is photographed, and a description is produced detailing the fabric, colour, technique and cut. Additional information from the owner is also included. In this way, knowledge about the garments and their history is preserved. The archives at *the NBF* also include samples of fabrics, information on textiles, and detailed descriptions of sewing technique. The material is made available to the public on request.

3. Reconstruction

A special part of the advisory work at *the NBF* is related to the reconstruction of *bunads* based on local folk costumes traditions. These projects are usually started off by local bunad associations, who make contact with the NBF for help and assistance.

In these cases, *NBF* first assess whether there are sufficient garments preserved and other material available to recommend the initiation of a reconstruction, or if additional documentation is required.



It also needs to be decided where the boundaries between different costume districts are found, how the clothing habits have developed in the area, and from what historic period the best sources for a reconstruction exist.



An evaluation is also given as to which garments could most favourably be reconstructed, and in case the applicant has already chosen certain garments, how they correspond with the available sources.

If desired, advice about pattern/design, fabric and sewing/stitches is given prior to the evaluation of the final elements of the *bunad*. In order to evaluate the new *bunad* and to what extent it can be claimed to be a good replication of a particular folk costumes, the original garments that is copied, needs to be presented as well.

4. From Folk Costume to *Bunad*

The use of folk costume decreased in many areas around the middle part of the 19th century. Only shortly after, however, the folk costume became an object of renewed interest. In the 1840s the romantic nationalism gained momentum in Norway. The rural folk culture became regarded as valuable, and thus also its clothes. Folk costume emerged as a popular theme among artists, and gradually the Norwegian national sentiments were also expressed through the use of such clothes.



In this way folk costume regained their appeal, although with an altered form and different content. Theatre and dance performances with people wearing folk costumes came in fashion, exhibitions were arranged, and royals had themselves portrayed costumed in formal wear of the rural people. As a part of this interest, the clothes were modified to correspond with the taste and perceptions of the urban elite.

From mid-19th century, the term “national costume” was established to describe such clothes. Clothes from various parts of Norway were used as national costumes during this period, including those of the national minorities.

Around 1900 there were reactions against this development. The *Norwegian nationalist movement* opposed the union with Sweden and campaigned for that which was specifically Norwegian. They wanted to recreate the old rural, pre industrial folk culture which was slowly vanishing, and reintroduce it in the rural and urban communities in an improved version. Old folk costume was again taken in use, but new costumes were also created with elements from the old folk costume.

It is at this stage that the folk costume becomes *bunad*. The *bunad* became an important element in the political-cultural contemporary debate— a visible expression of a wish that the specific Norwegian should form the basis for cultural and political activities.



Folk costume was thus brought to public attention and mass communicated as national costume, with the result that it was generally perceived that the clothes of the farmers were symbols of the Norwegian nation and identity.

5. Bunad in modern Norway



Norwegians wear bunad at special occasions. Most commonly it is worn at public celebrations, like the National Day the 17.th of May, when people in bunads crowd the streets. Other occasions are family celebrations like weddings, the Christian confirmation, baptism and also funerals.

Women, men and children alike wear bunad, but it is most commonly worn by women. A complete bunad has the status of full formal costume and are thus suitable for purposes of representation in Norway and abroad.

When families gather costumed in bunad from the same area, it confirms their identity and ancestry. A bunad, or parts of it, is often handed down through generations, and thereby gains value for the new owner, and also strengthens the bond to the family history.

Most areas of Norway have their own bunad, even where there are no records of local traditional folk costume. In these cases the bunads are constructed, based on and inspired by, other things than clothes, like an embroidered purse, a shoe, or the local flora and nature. It has become important for many communities to have their own bunad, and therefore we have a large variety of bunads today, with very different historical backgrounds.

Many people in Norway make their own bunad, and it is popular to buy kits with ready cut fabric, yarn and patterns. A new, complete costume can be very expensive to buy, and many people cannot afford this. Many people also enjoy making costumes for members in their families, like grandchildren. This adds sentimental value to the bunad. However, many people choose to buy their bunad from professional stores. These bunads are also made by hand, custom made and might take many months to produce.

The modern bunad-industry is no longer wholly Norwegian. Fabrics with embroidery are made in China or Vietnam and then completed in Norway. The production of handicrafts is much cheaper in Asia than in Norway. In addition, there are not enough people working within the field in Norway to supply the growing demand of handmade costumes.

An emergent problem is the fact that the specific knowledge of making the folk costumes is in danger of being lost. Fortunately, there are people and organizations working to preserve and spread this knowledge, and to educate new craftsmen- and

women. The Norwegian institute of bunad and folk costumes is one such organization.

6. Today, there are five categories of *bunad*:

1. *Bunads* which represent the final stage in the development of folk costume. The Folk costume, particularly for use at celebrations and formal occasions, eventually gained renewed interest and function as *bunad*.
2. *Bunads* based on a particular folk costume that had gone out of use, but which was not forgotten by the local people. Many people knew the look of the Folk costume, and to some extent old garments were used in the *bunad*.
3. *Bunads* reconstructed based on preserved garments from old folk costume, and which are from the same district and period and belonged to the same type of costume. Other sources that have information about the type of costume, e.g. written information, illustrations and oral traditions, are used.
4. *Bunads* that are constructed based on insufficient and random material from old costumes. Elements without existing source material have been designed to match the appearance of the other garments.
5. *Bunads* fully or partly composed as a new creation. Some of these are inspired by material from the Folk costume, while others have found inspiration from different types of items and garments.



