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## Unreviewed Mixed Matters Article:

# Looking Back

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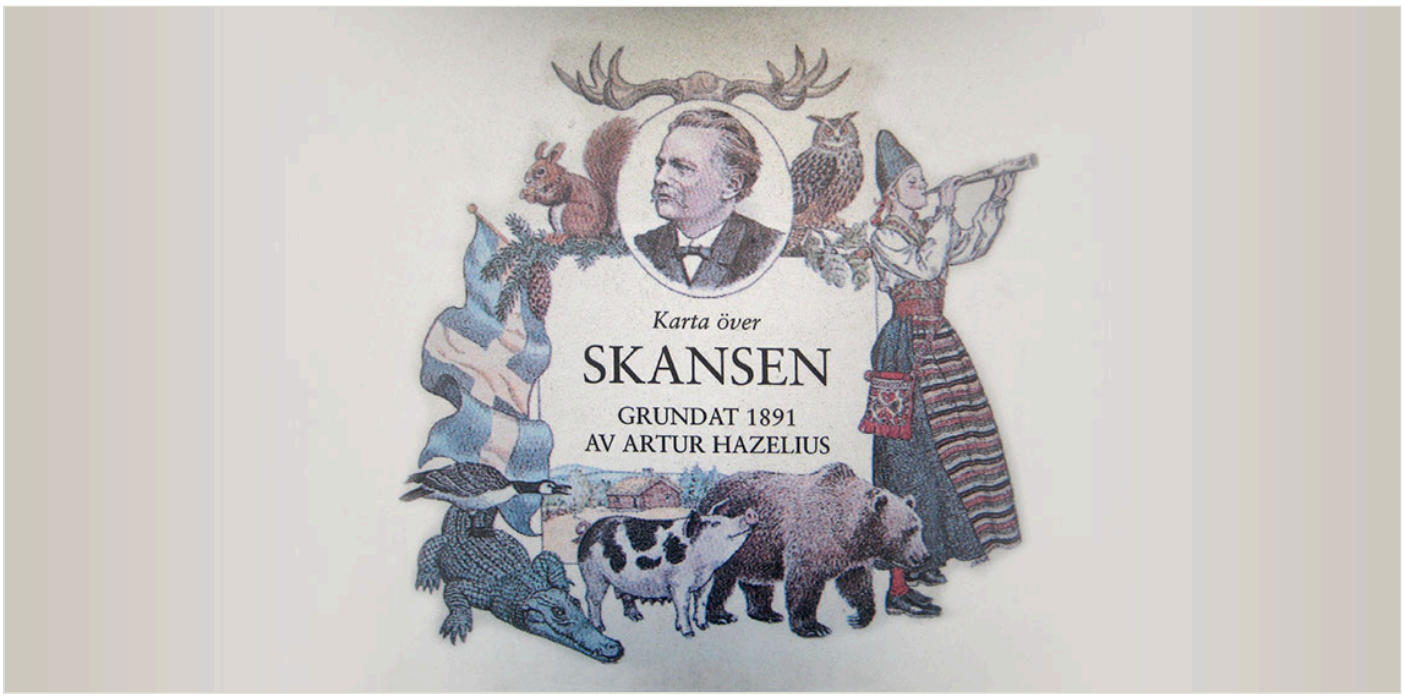


Over 25 years I have actively worked with knowledge dissemination and bringing history alive. From this experience I have concluded that it has been among the most fantastic developments since museums first started.

> Traditional open-air museums in Europe are visited by

## Artur Hazelius laid the foundation for Open-Air Museums

millions of people. The demands of these visitors for more hands-on experience have been well met by the archaeological open-air museums.

Artur Hazelius laid the foundation for museum activity throughout the world, and already then used both objects and ways to bring historic environments alive. Skansen in Stockholm, Sweden, one of the first open-air museums in the world, was founded in 1891. Buildings from across the country were moved here. Open-air museums were developed around this concept across Europe.

Today there are thousands of open-air museums of diff erent kind and status. The Association of European Open-Air Museums (AEOM) defines open-air museums as “scientifi c collections in the open air of various types of structures, which as constructional and functional entities, illustrate settlement patterns, dwellings, economy and technology” (Association of Open-Air Museums 1973, 109).

Even in Hazelius’s time dolls and people were used to try to create environments that reinforced the historical image. In the USA this type of museum with living history grew into a great success. One such investment was made by Henry Ford in Greenfi eld Village, a monument to himself and industrial development (The Henry Ford 2015). During the 1960s, a couple of years aft er opening, the museum had 600,000 annual visitors. His and several other investments into true history was in part a counter move to Disney who opened their first adventure park in California in 1955 (Disneyland 2015). Disney planned to build the history of America in a similar way. However, due to other investments this never happened. Colonial Williamsburg was one such investment in the USA that would become a sanctuary where early American history would be visualised in its proper environment. Th is issue was pushed by the visionary William Goodwin with the help of John D. Rockefeller Jr.’s commitment and funding. The whole town was bought and restored to a 18th century state (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation 2015)

Activities related to re-enactment have a long history. For example, in the year AD 80, the Roman Emperor Titus organised a large event to celebrate the inauguration of the Flavian Amphitheatre, including re-enactment: “the third day saw a naval battle, from which a land-engagement ensued” (Dio, LXVI.25.4). Titus reenacted Athens’ historically disastrous attack on Syracuse in 414 BC’ (Coleman 1993, 67).

In the Middle Ages, tournaments oft en reenacted historical themes from Ancient Rome or elsewhere. It was during the 19th century that historical re-enactments became widespread, refl ecting the then intense romantic interest in the Middle Ages.

The SCA (Society of Creative Anachronism) started in 1966, when a few friends who were history buff s and science fi ction and fantasy fans hosted a big outdoor event in Berkeley,

California (Society for Creative Anachronism 2015). In Europe during the 1970s a new generation of historians and social researchers had, like in the US, a new perspective. This was a desire to spread knowledge, to show the fate of the common man, and local history. At the open-air museums the interest shift ed from the buildings and objects to the people behind them. The open-air museums were highlighted as a unique educational opportunity to present history in an easily understandable way.

The Welsh open-air museum St Fagans has a row of six miners' homes from different time periods ranging from 1805 to 1985. The cabins are designed so that visitors can move from one to the other in order to
learn about the changes from one generation to the next.

A strange phenomenon occurred in the 1950s at the reconstructed Stone Age village at the open-air museum Hjerl Hede in Denmark. Adults and children showed the life and work in ancient times from behind a fence. It was like watching animals at a zoo, and visitors could not speak with the actors. This way of presenting Stone Age is still ongoing.

## Reconstructed buildings and environments

The way of presenting the past in Hjerl Hede had an indirect infl uence on the development of open-air museums. It is the background of Hans-Ole Hansen, the founder of the experimental centre Lejre, now known as Sagnlandet Lejre. When museums across the world sought inspiration they were directed toward Lejre. The project "Ancient times in the present" (Forntid i Nutid) started in 1980 at the Scanian Zoo (Skånes djurpark). For the first time in Sweden several Stone Age settlements were reconstructed. During the 1980s a number of archaeological open-air museums were opened in Sweden. Several facilities were only made up of a single or a small number of prehistoric buildings. The dominating time period was the Viking Age. Not only buildings but a number of copies of ships were reconstructed based on discovered ship wrecks.

In the mid-1980s an archaeologist from Lund University, Anders Ödman, began the reconstruction of a longhouse in Hög, along with a few pit houses. It was made for experimental purposes using archaeology students and volunteers.

During the 1990s interest rose across Sweden to perform building reconstructions. An important reason for this was the extensive, legally protected archaeological activity that had awakened the interest in ancient times with the general public. The high unemployment rate during the 1990s also played a major role. As the government could place unemployed people into activities to reconstruct ancient times, many projects became economically feasible.

A monument has been built. A time capsule that may not be touched or changed. Everything built from current scientific interpretations and theories. Sometimes a hearth has been built where it was found. But it is never lit. Furnishings are not part of the picture. We have completed our experiment and reconstructed a building. What happens next? Will they stand empty and crumble? Will we study their decay?

## The monuments become visitor attractions

These reconstructed historical buildings built for an experimental purpose do in many cases obtain a new focus once completed. Even during the time of construction they can catch peoples' interest. Either in the museum grounds they are built on, or the remote location available to the archaeologists and volunteers, they become an object on display. Maybe at fi rst as an empty building, then tied to a volunteer group who move in and bring it alive, or perhaps as a site for educational school activities. In many cases the empty buildings oft en become a site of educational museum activity or as a gathering place for interested volunteers.

What are their purpose and use? Knowledge and adventure. This is increasingly strengthened by tourists and museum visitors craving hands-on active learning.

## Birth of networks

On the 26 October 1999 representatives of all ancient villages and facilities in Sweden gathered for the first time in Ås. Tomas Johansson and Harriet Löwenhielm thus initiated the creation of the association NSLF, the Network of Living Ancient History in Sweden. The founding goal of the Swedish network was to evolve the Swedish concept into an international concept. These were the thoughts behind Tomas Johansson establishing a closer collaboration with Martin Schmidt, then head of the "Archäologisches Freilichtmuseum" in Oerlinghausen, Germany, and Roeland Paardekooper, the Netherlands. This laid the foundation of EXARC in 2001.

During 2007 another step was taken toward a broader approach with the founding of the association NOOAM, the Nordic Organisation for Archaeological Open-Air Museums, with myself as chairman. To establish an international basis for the concept, archaeological openair museum common guidelines were needed for reconstruction work, education, re-enacting, living history and interpretation of experimental archaeology. Across Europe several diff erent terms were used to describe the same kind of facilities and activities, such as park, centre, ancient village, historical workshop, et cetera (See Paardekooper 2012).

## LiveARCH

The project LiveARCH was a network of archaeological open-air museums funded by the EU Culture Program. It is part of ICOM's (International Council of Museums) museum concept development. Here EXARC with EU funding, where I (serving as president), Board Member Geir Sør-Reime and EXARC Director Roeland Paardekooper, could further develop this branch of museums with reconstructed environments, dressed actors and interiors, education and bringing history alive with new methods. Under LiveARCH too, Paardekooper wrote the fi rst ever PhD overview of this type of museums (Paardekooper 2012).

An important milestone in this work toward a unified rule set was reached at a large EU meeting within the project LiveARCH held at Foteviken Museum in Sweden on 9 November 2007. Here it was agreed to use the common name Archaeological Open-Air Museum to describe our branch of open-air museums.

A connection was also made to the international organisation ICOM (International Council of Museums), which already in 1957 laid the international foundation for this type of museum. ICOM itself mentions open-air museums specifi cally: 'The title "open-air museum" cannot be denied to a museum of which the buildings, completely or partially, as copies or true to scale reconstructions are rebuilt aft er original patterns, are properly furnished and open to the public.' These concessions can be made only under the condition that: 'the original buildings of the type portrayed are no longer available (and) the copies or reconstructions are made according to the strictest scientific methods' (International Council of Museums 1956/7)

## Volunteer activities

Another important piece of the puzzle of running and developing archaeological open-air museums was the EU project AmaProf, which focused on the experience of working with volunteers and employees by Middelaldercentret in Denmark and Foteviken Museum in Sweden (AmaProf 2011)

## OpenARCH

The project OpenARCH has become the direct follow up and development of LiveARCH. For the past five years we have worked to further strengthen the concept of open-air museums, concerning management, quality assurance, staffi ng issues, research and craft smanship and obviously the relationship with our visitors (OpenArch 2015).

Traditional open-air museums in Europe are visited by millions of people. The demands of these visitors for more hands-on experience have been well met by the archaeological open-air museums.

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