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Reviewed Article:

The Stone Age becomes Sustainable - Experiences from being an Educational Partner for Sustainable Development for more than 15 years

Persistent Identifier: <https://exarc.net/ark:/88735/10672>

EXARC Journal Issue 2023/1 | Publication Date: 2023-03-03

Author(s): Rüdiger Kelm ¹ ✉

¹ Steinzeitpark Dithmarschen, Süderstraße 47, 25757 Albersdorf, Germany.



Since the year 2006 the Archaeological-Ecological Centre Albersdorf (AÖZA), Germany, has worked as an officially recognised partner for sustainable development on an institutional base for the Sustainable Development Goals of the UNO on a regional level. In this article the

thematic background of the educational work in archaeology and ethnography will be connected with the practice of communication with our visitors in our open-air museum.



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Preface

Of great importance are here the partnerships with the Environmental and Educational Ministries of the Federal State of Schleswig-Holstein (since 2006) as well as the memberships of our museum as partner of the National Park Wadden Sea (since 2014) and as partner of the association “Alliance One World” (since 2015). In the frame of these cooperations we could realise seminars and trainings on the topic, as well as external expert for stakeholders and other interest groups and also internally for our staff members and our volunteers.

Some examples will be presented about our practical experiences of working with, for example, topics such as water resources in prehistoric times, food and use of natural materials in Stone Age and living and surviving in winter

season in prehistoric times, which gives the participating students different key competencies, which they can transfer to modern daily life.

Introduction - The Steinzeitpark Dithmarschen

The Steinzeitpark Dithmarschen in Albersdorf, in the county of Dithmarschen (Schleswig-Holstein, Germany), is an archaeological, open-air museum that integrates the surrounding landscape. Since 1997 the park has been developed on a plot of land over 40 hectares large, with nine original archaeological monuments under the mission statement cultural landscape (See Figure 1).

The Steinzeitpark is part of the Archaeological-Ecological Centre Albersdorf (AÖZA), a beneficiary Limited Organisation, which consists of the “Stone Age House” (Steinzeithaus), the Museum, with original artefacts, as well as a reconstructed, model-like settlement of the Mesolithic through to the Late Neolithic period (named “Stone Age village” because of marketing reasons). They are there to convey archaeological research results (See Figures 2).

Right from the beginning of our work, the Steinzeitpark aims to teach the public about the relationship between the natural environment and the development of the land. It also wishes to gain public support for the protection of our natural and cultural inheritance, which is less abundant today. The Steinzeitpark Dithmarschen attempts to teach people in a way that integrates theory, practice, intellect, and feelings.

We believe that a knowledge of the past that has been reflected upon can help us to understand the present, and that, as a result, the visitors will develop a desire to go deeper into the presented topics. The Steinzeitpark Dithmarschen helps to work toward lasting ecological, cultural, and business development as a certified educational centre in the region of Albersdorf (Kelm, 2005) – already this means from a conceptual base to take points of sustainability into account and to work practically on it. Alongside regular improvement of the infrastructure of our AOAM the park supports and conducts archaeological and historical research of the countryside. The data provided is used for the further landscape development of the Steinzeitpark.

Since spring 2021 a new exhibition and educational centre with the name “Stone Age House” (Steinzeithaus) has been constructed at the entrance area of the Park. This will replace from the forthcoming season- 2023 - on the current museum rooms housing the permanent exhibition (See Figure 3).

Ethnology and Experimental Archaeology as the Source of Archaeological Analogies

Archaeology as a discipline with its methods and expressive possibilities and the scientist, who is only sometimes aware of the fact that he/she is “time traveling,” so to say, are both on a trip to the past that is merely incomplete. Thus, the picture we have of the past is blurred. Archaeology is therefore reliant on analogies and analogical conclusions for many interpretations of the deep past, as finds neither “speak” by themselves, nor for themselves or their past.

The scientific perception of prehistoric tools and their functions often occurs as an evolutionary influenced basis. The evolutionary perception of the tools is all too often transferred to the perception of the groups and peoples who used (or who are using) the tools in different time periods. If you understand archaeological culture (groups) as a material expression of a functional adaptation to the environment, then there is a large probability that similar environments in the past and in the present were and are similarly manipulated. But in order to state such a hypothesis to compare different culture groups, a large enough amount of provable data should be presented through the formal analysis of finds and results.

The Steinzeitpark Dithmarschen strives to make it possible for groups of people, whether it be adult, children, or school groups, to have direct contact with ancient monuments and their proper “Stone Age” cultural landscapes. These include old forms of living and settlement, old breeds of domesticated animals, and much more, which can offer perspectives into past ways of life. Ethnological precedents are also very often used in practical, pedagogical work (See Figure 4).

In all of these areas – whether it be the reconstruction of tools, models of houses, or particular forms of exhibiting in the museum – the problem of reconstruction and rendering of prehistoric societies is always quietly looming in the background. It is possible to form stereotypical interpretations of the past in our mind's eye – which can take root – and that are more or less congruent with the present as we know it.

On the Imparting of Key Competencies in an Archaeological Context

As disciplines, both archaeology and ethnology deal with people's natural necessities of life, with the consumption of resources, and with the possibilities to adapt to or manipulate these resources. At many environmental education centres and at the Steinzeitpark in Albersdorf, the practical and methodical program called, "Education for Sustainable Development", based on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the UNO, has recently been implemented. In combination with ethnology, this imparting of archaeological themes allows new access to the meaningful, basic questions of existence, which are also significant to modern mankind. It can result in an elevated respect for physical work and takes timely dimensions into consideration, which are often neglected by the "Education for Sustainable Development" program. Particularly archaeology's view of cultural intrusions can lead to awareness, and, in the best case, to tolerance of other (past) cultures.

Here it is also important to emphasise that the social transition from the Mesolithic to Neolithic societies, for example from hunter /gatherer societies to agricultural economies, is the so-called "First Great Global Social Transition", in the terms of the UNO (the second is the Industrial Revolution of the 19 century, while the third is the recent development of globalisation and digitalisation). This is an important theme and topic which we have to focus more on in the next years.

How can such an expectation be concretely realised in an archaeological institution? At the Steinzeitpark Dithmarschen each educational event consists of a hands-on and an experience oriented part. These offers take place at the mostly authentic learning environment of the Stone Age village and include an instructive introduction by the "Stone Age curator" and a practical, constructive experience for the participant as second part. Through these programs at the Steinzeitpark, which deal with specifically conceived themes, the participants are meant to improve their personal competencies in professional skills (knowledge and insights), method competence (skills and techniques), social competence (group behaviour and interactive negotiation), as well as self-competence (self-responsible behaviour). All these competencies are key competencies of the "Education for Sustainable Development" theme. They can improve the quality of life, be applied to various essential aspects of life, and are relevant to every individual. These competencies should enable one to successfully overcome complex challenges, by mobilising psychosocial components like cognitive skills, knowledge, value orientations, emotions, and motivations. The learning is meant to be as cooperative,

participatory, and self-organized as possible. This kind of self-driven learning motivation is the best guarantee for lasting learning success through method competence (See Figure 5).

Our presented educational work, based on this key-competencies combined with the “actualised”, relevant topics of the prehistoric life of human beings in relation to ecological circumstances lays the ground for our official certification as an institution for the Education of Sustainable Development.

Here we focus also in special programs on special topics relevant for sustainability and quite easy to demonstrate in AOAMs; these include:

- Water resources – in prehistory and today
- Food – origin and use (new topic: “hunger”?)
- Clothing – how to behave sustainably.
- Living through climate extremes – today and in prehistory

In presenting such programs we compare prehistoric life with the life of our visitors today, ask questions, open discussions and motivate to think about it.

The Certifications of the Museum

Certificates or seals of quality are also highly significant for museum institutions, as they guarantee standards and validity of performance for the visitor. The standards for receiving particular certificates can serve as corrective feedback and as a source of ideas for the staff. Additionally, they also serve as (expanded and very target group oriented) advertising platforms, where all partners of a network give information about the other partners (See Attached PDF).

1. The Steinzeitpark has at first been recognised as an “Educational Centre for Sustainability” by the Department of the Environment of Schleswig-Holstein (since 2006). Here we focus – as reported above – on the topics “Comparison between today and prehistoric time” (which gives relevance for our guests) and on the understanding for different cultures.
2. Since 2014 we are officially a “National Park Wadden Sea Partner”, where we have to follow the strict regulations in using biologically and ecologically sustainable resources in our institution (f. e. green energy, office equipment etc.).
3. Since 2015 we are a member in the “Alliance One World Schleswig-Holstein” (BEI SH e. V.), where we not only are active on the mediation of knowledge about different cultures worldwide, but also work in this framework on the base of social values (f. e. in the working conditions of our staff).

The very considerable effort to obtain the particular certifications began, in our experience, to pay off in the middle term in the improvement of our offers and in the rise of visitor numbers. Not at least also in the establishment of new cooperation networks, gaining new experiences and ideas and leading practically to new seminars, presentations and publications about our tasks and work.

Conclusion and Perspective

To conclude, the following points have been established to lay the ground for our work on sustainability:

1. Conceptual work:

- Make the topics / narrative of an Archaeological Open Air Museum relevant – use stories which have relevance to your audience (for example, talk about food in prehistoric times and compare it to recent times: where do we buy our food, different qualities etc.);
- Make the topics emotionally empathetic – so that they are interesting for your visitors and provide an experience where you like to think upon after your visit (for example not only talk about themes, but also demonstrate them practically and let – in the best case – the guests participate and let them produce something which they can take home);
- Lay the base of educational work on some of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the UNO, where of course also problematical points (like hunger, war etc.) should be presented and discussed with your visitors in an open atmosphere (for example we are also presenting information on diseases in former times and what to do about it then).

2. Practical Steps:

- Create practical programs out of these topics and themes;
- Search for appropriate networks, which could be gained by certifications, and – last but not least - ...

3. A deep breath and lots of luck and fun with it!

Finally, it should be mentioned here that the archaeology and the local and regional (environmental) history are placed together in an exciting and informative context at the Steinzeitpark, which is why the institution receives so much support from regional volunteers (in addition to the over 600 active members of the AÖZA e.V. financial support society). This makes favourable conditions for the Steinzeitpark to receive especially also visitors from the local and regional population, which lay the foundation of the success of our institution, not only by economical means but also in a content wise frame.

Attachment(s)

2022 Certificate of the Stone Age Park as Educational Centre for Sustainability (582.77 KB)

Link(s)

<https://steinzeitpark-dithmarschen.de/>

📖 Keywords **archaeological open-air museum
management**

📖 Country **Germany**

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Certificate Educational Centre for Sustainability in Schleswig-Holstein: www.nun-zertifizierung.de

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| Corresponding Author

Rüdiger Kelm

Steinzeitpark Dithmarschen

Süderstraße 47

25757 Albersdorf

Germany

E-mail Contact

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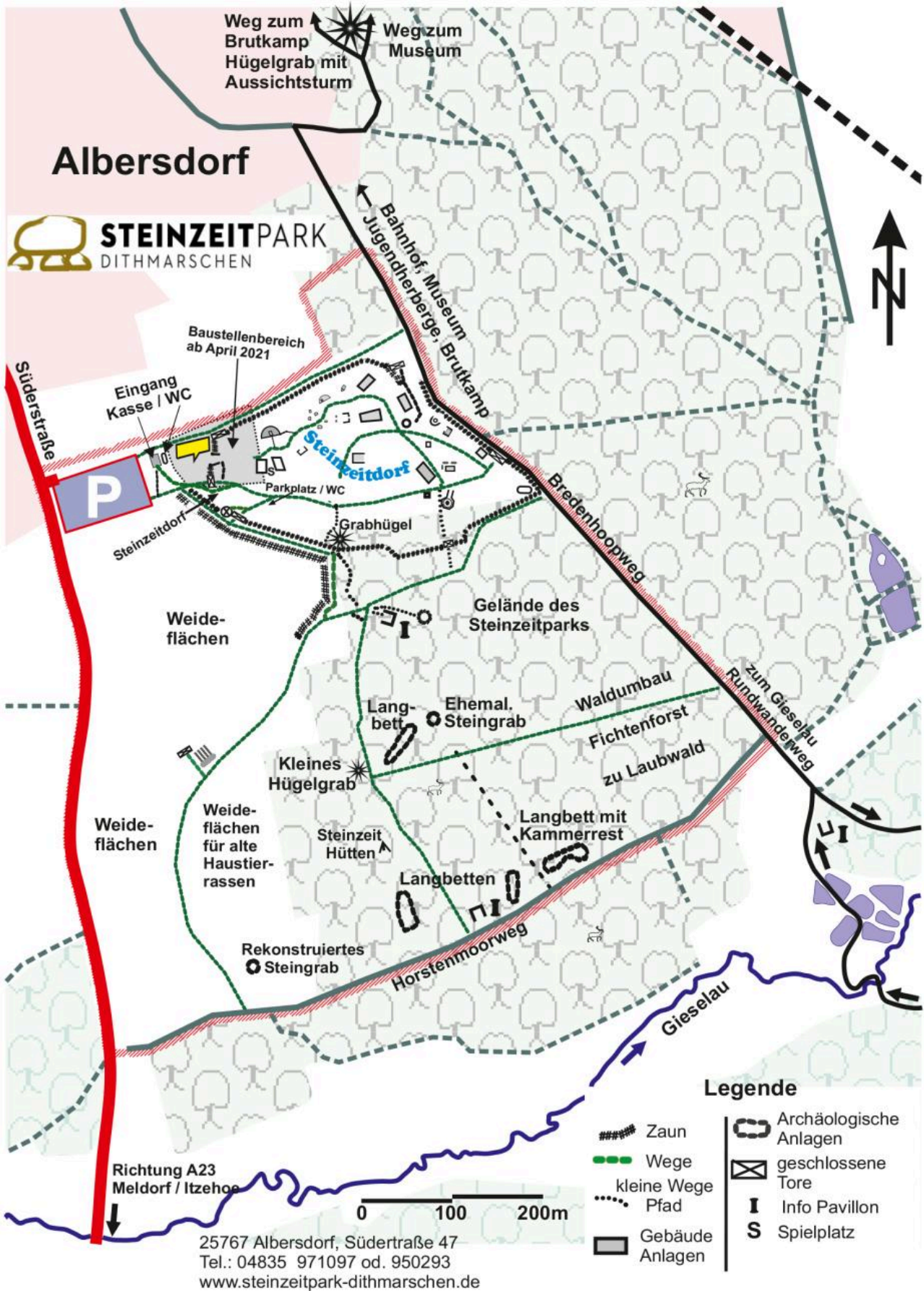


FIG 1. MAP OF THE STONE AGE PARK, WHICH HAS A SIZE OF 80 ACRES. PHOTO BY RÜDIGER KELM



FIG 2. THE MESOLITHIC CAMP SITE IN THE STONE AGE PARK. PHOTO BY RÜDIGER KELM



FIG 3. THE NEW MUSEUM „STONE AGE HOUSE“ AT THE ENTRANCE OF THE PARK. PHOTO BY RÜDIGER KELM



FIG 4. ALSO SHEEP, CATTLE AND OTHER ANIMALS ARE LIVING IN THE STONE AGE PARK IN THE SUMMER SEASON.
PHOTO BY RÜDIGER KELM



FIG 5. RECONSTRUCTED STONE AGE TOOLS. PHOTO BY RÜDIGER KELM