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Reviewed Article:

The Use and Relevance of Archaeological Open-Air Museums

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Archaeological open-air museums form a colourful and varied assemblage of heritage institutions. These are places where stories about the past, inspired by archaeology, are presented. Their obvious use is for experimental archaeology, ancient crafts and live interpretation. However, these museums can be more relevant to society than meets the eye. They can teach newcomers about the past of their new habitation region; they can teach people fundamental learning in order to better cope with society and can show the big picture of environmental sustainability spanning millennia. Finally, archaeological open-air museums can teach their visitors a valuable lesson about political conscience and citizenship,

including a debate on fake news. International cooperation is increasingly important for archaeological open-air museums and a necessity to survive and thrive. EXARC is an important network helping exactly with this. These museums need to improve, to believe in their strengths and unique selling points, and find new directions. A previous version of this article was published in German (Paardekooper, 2019).

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>
> International cooperation is increasingly important for archaeological open-air museums and a necessity to survive and thrive. We have our strengths, our unique selling points and an important role to fulfil in society.

Introduction

Characteristics

It is hard to define what archaeological open-air museums really are. Most authors writing about archaeological open-air museums refer to the diversity in presentations and the resulting difficulty of precisely defining these sites. Ahrens, for example, in his key overview, stated: 'one will very soon realise that no single place resembles another, but each in one way or another is something special' (Ahrens, 1990, p.33, translation RP).

Although the differences between archaeological open-air museums are large, they have more in common than at first sight but when referring to each other, these museums more readily note their differences than the attributes they have in common. Archaeological open-air museums are united in having an outdoor facility with reconstructed buildings, a scenery or stage so to say, for their activities. In most cases, the facility is themed with prehistory, the Roman Era or a medieval scene (Paardekooper, 2012).

At these places a wide variety of matters is presented, ranging from archaeological workshops, school excursions up to spectacular events. Archaeological open-air museums usually have no collection of tangible artefacts. If their houses burn down – they are fake anyway – it is not the end of the museum. They collect information, stories if you like, which they present in the prehistoric or medieval scenery. The information itself, the intangible cultural heritage resources, is the collection.

Definition

EXARC has established a working definition: "An archaeological open-air museum is a non-profit permanent institution with outdoor true to scale architectural reconstructions primarily based on archaeological sources. It holds collections of intangible heritage resources and provides an interpretation of how people lived and acted in the past; this is accomplished

according to sound scientific methods for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment of its visitors" (EXARC, 2008).
Archaeological open-air museums fall into the definition of a museum of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) and obviously, archaeology is the main source of information for the stories these museums bring to the public (the intangible heritage and its interpretation). The 'true to scale reconstructions' are the house models these museums hold.

Archaeological open-air museums should aim to find common ground with their visitors, they should answer the question: why is the story my museum is telling relevant to visitors? This can lead to artful exhibitions but also to presentations about drugs in the past or war and peace. All of what is told should be relevant to society; it should mean something to visitors, something they can take home, think about, and put to good use.

The obvious Use of Archaeological Open-Air Museums

Archaeological Open-Air Museums are useful in many ways. These sites are very accessible, both for the public and for scientists.

1. Here, universities can execute archaeological research. Museums like Sagnlandet Lejre (DK) have the long breath to for example build an Iron Age type house, burn and bury it and have it excavated a generation later (Rasmussen, 2007). In open-air museums, academics can combine their knowledge of the archaeological data with the experience of (ancient) craft specialists for experimentation and public outreach (Heeb, 2019).
2. Another use of archaeological open-air museums is to showcase ancient crafts. These demonstrations for a tourist public can best be defined as archaeotechnique. Here, for example, somebody presents bronze casting or flintknapping to a wider audience, explaining to them how these techniques were executed and the context of these techniques, materials, and tools in past societies (Hein, 2000). Archaeotechnique also includes ancient or primitive technology (a phrase used widely in the United States, for example by the former Society of Primitive Technology). It is part of the Maker's Culture where old crafts are cherished so they do not disappear. Archaeotechnique is more than a mere demonstration in museums, it is not just polishing the tools, but using them for anything useful. An archaeotechnician usually is a skilled craftsperson with a good knowledge of the archaeological sources. These activities are very important, and many of these specialists also execute experimental archaeology. However, archaeotechnique and experimental archaeology are two different activities, with different purposes and conditions.
   Compared to other museums where an artifact pinpoints a specific time and place, in archaeological open-air museums we see the processes behind these, how they were made and used, and what role these artifacts played in people's lives. In the end, our museums are about people and actions. Archaeological open-air museums are a process

repository, and these museums help us preserve the understanding of these (Welsch, 1974).

3. Archaeological open-air museums bring well-funded stories about the past of their region, mainly based on archaeology. An important method these museums use to bring these stories to the public is live interpretation. This is a better way of teaching than the use of screen-based technology as well as using books, as research from Hungary shows. "The Live-Interpretation method has a better, long-lasting effect on their learning outcomes, as well as having a creative impact on them, relative to the ICT method" (Vasszi, 2018). When looking back after a year, the results are even more striking and live interpretation even wins from traditional teaching methods using books. Getting people away from smartphones and social media for a while is good for their health and people tend to remember things better if they experience it live. Live interpretation is an interactive way of working, often custom fit to whoever is the public of that moment. It is demanding, but has a huge impact on the visitor. This is how archaeological open-air museums can make themselves useful.

EXARC a Bridge between Museums and Science

All these three points (experimental archaeology, ancient technology and interpretation) are strengths of archaeological open-air museums but need to be improved in order to have better quality museums. That is where EXARC comes into play. One needs to look beyond their own museum territory to realise this. With this idea in mind, EXARC was founded in 2001. Museumsdorf Düppel is one of its founding members. We need each other to see what is on the horizon for all these museums; that is the added value of international cooperation. EXARC builds bridges between the museums, offering a structure to lean back upon and a common language between museum professionals. We offer tools for improvement and advance science (experimental and other archaeology).

EXARC also offers a long term perspective beyond the daily madness, an overview of what is done, who is involved, and what is published; EXARC effectively match makes between colleagues and museums.

EXARC members tell stories inspired by archaeology. These are about the daily life, against the backdrop of the larger political and economic frame. The stories contain elements which are comparable to the present and with that, these stories are extremely relevant to our public. Those who can listen well will learn from the past for the here and now.

The Relevance of Museums

Applying the three methods described above does not influence society very much. Museums must become relevant to society. It is not so much: "what can society do for museums", but "what can museums do for society". Some museums are a club house for the neighbourhood.

In some other cases one can assert the therapeutic value of these museums for their volunteers. But we can do better than that.

The International Council of Museums (ICOM) has 40,000 members worldwide. Their General Conference in 2013 had as theme “Museums (memory + creativity = social change)”. This was a good start to wake museums up, to come out of the ivory tower and understand that museums are effective instruments. The world is globalising rapidly, and all museums should play a significant role in these changes, not just open-air museums.

The theme of ICOM’s 2019 conference (“Museums as Cultural Hubs: The Future of Tradition”) may sound traditional, but it is a continued appeal to museums to step out of the glass case that surrounds them and bridge with other entities in society, both with an eye on cultural identity and on the future of this.

Example: Where do we come from?

In this current neoliberal reality, all that counts is the present, not yesterday or tomorrow, and as such, it may be that politicians will look after museums less and less. The museum is no longer the temple of culture it used to be. Museums should be part of a network with other organisations where the public is in the centre, not the collection, helping people take root in society. Like ICOM, the Network of European Museum Organisations (Nemo) is at the forefront of developments in the museum world. In 2016, they published a guidebook that aims to help museums work more effectively with diverse communities, including migrants and refugees (NEMO, 2016). The publication was originally produced by the German Museums Association. We have seen migrations in world history before and we always have been able to cope with it – our museums can show just that. Also, with a language barrier, our museums are the perfect place to explain, in a hands-on manner, about the past of the region around the museum: New Land to the refugees, Old Land to others. Our museums are relevant to society, for cultural learning and to help the newcomers feel at home, where we all learn cultural understanding of each other.

Nemo highlights a range of models of how museums can work with migrant groups and help to support intercultural dialogue. “Culture can prove how valuable it can be to society. Culture, cultural heritage and museums can offer flexibility and individual, tailored answers to the challenges of integrating migrants and refugees in society” say Nemo chair David Vuillaume and secretary general Julia Pagel.

The Swedish open-air museum Jamtli cooperates in an international project addressing migrants, called REHAC Learning (Reinventing Europeans through History, Art and Cultural Learning) (Jamtli, 2018). The project brings together organisations from Greece, Italy, Slovenia, Norway and Sweden. Where Jamtli was already a leader in developing adult education skills,

the aim of the REHAC Learning project is to develop new teaching methods, materials and tools that support refugees in navigating their lives in their new countries.

Example: Problem-Solving Techniques

Archaeological open-air museums are a place to better understand the local past. In places like Archeon, Butser and Düppel, the public learn about the history of Europe. However, these museums offer something very useful besides this: a unique way of non-formal education where adults and children alike learn problem-solving techniques which can be applied in society on a daily base. School groups visiting archaeological open-air museums become, like our society, increasingly diverse. This leads to new challenges for educators who need to meet the needs of students with different educational backgrounds and often traumatic life experiences.

The methods used by archaeological open-air museums, are very much focused on participation, offering critical thinking as well as problem solving, using non-verbal education. As Luke Winter (Winter, 2016) puts it: “we are the people who make history and archaeology ‘cool’—who make it accessible to those many people who have an interest in who we are as humans, where we came from, how we got here, what the journey was like.”

Children have become more shielded from the natural environment than ever before, not knowing where things come from, how things are made and where this may involve ‘ugly’ bits.

Archaeological open-air museums offer a type of fundamental learning, different from the formal learning path so much emphasised at school and university. Children need to learn how to handle risk, even if parents and school teachers aim for a utopian risk-free environment. The more you erase risk from children’s lives, the more difficult it will be for them to cope with it once they encounter it. Think, for example of avoiding letting children play with knives. When I was the manager of the archaeological open-air museum at Oerlinghausen (DE), one of our programs deliberately included children needing to work with sharp knives. Imagine not having any such experience and then needing to cook your own dinner?

Fundamental learning in open-air museums means children learn more and learn better (Winter, 2016) and as Dillon (Dillon et al., 2005, p.27; in Winter, 2016) recognises, they also learn differently, experiencing improvements in four specific ways:

- Cognitive Impacts (greater knowledge and understanding),
- Affective Impacts (attitudes, values, beliefs and self-perceptions)
- Interpersonal and Social Impacts (communication skills, leadership and teamwork)
- Physical and Behavioural Impacts (fitness, personal behaviours and social actions).

Example: Environmental Sustainability

An important link open-air museums can make is comparing the relation with people with their natural environment both in the past and in the present. Several education centres in the Netherlands (Buitencentrum Wilhelminaoord), Germany (Steinzeitpark Dithmarschen) and in Denmark (Guldager) are based on this very concept. Also, by using the concept "the past is a foreign country, they do things differently there" (Hartley, 1953), these museums aim on creating empathy for people who act differently from the visitors to their museums.

In 2017, Steinzeitpark Dithmarschen was the stage of a project of the Weltgarten: an exhibition about sustainability and globalisation (Belle & Ina 2017). This was a cooperation with the Bündnis Eine Welt e.V. (BEI) and AÖZA gGmbH. The exhibition focused on the changing world as well as resource consumption / life style. It included many different stations on for example pollution and energy consumption. Also, several workshops were presented about inequality and financial dependence. Comparing things with the Stone Age included questions like "from what part of the body did they make this" to teach children about not creating too much waste.

Of course, the way humanity has handled its environment in the past has not always resulted in an idyllic, harmonious and happy life for everybody, but by referring to different ways in how we handled the natural resources around us in the past, museums can show alternatives for the present. One example is the identification of the application of insulation in double walls in Bronze Age houses (Staeves, 2016).

Also, teaching people time depth is important: we tend to look at today, or maximum at the current political term of four years. Therefore, most people do not look at solutions which do not bear fruit until later or do not look back too far in order to understand the mechanisms which are behind many current events.

As part of his PhD research, in 2012 Daniël Postma built a house of grass sods, using ideas from the Iron Age and Early Middle Ages in Northern Netherlands (Postma, 2015). He did research into constructive data like strength of the material, isolation value, water permeability and product life. Here lies the scientific, economic and social value, which goes well beyond plain archaeology.

The construction sector soon showed interest in the old techniques, used by Postma. It is a case study at the technical University in Eindhoven for sustainable building. Living in such a house is a way of life, embraced by the self-build, slow build and eco build communities.

However, Postma sees some concepts are also used in more mainstream ways of building. At the University of Edinburgh, archaeologists and architects jointly look into how knowledge

about old building traditions and modern building, paired with the omnipresent safety regulations, can inspire each other.

Example: Political Conscience and Citizenship

An important lesson our museums can teach the public is how people frame the past to influence the present public opinion. From 1784, Romanticism began to evolve into Nationalism with the concept of an organic folk nation, complete with a Volksgeist [national spirit], emphasising people's own folklore, language and identity.

The situation in Germany in the 20th century serves as an example of mechanisms which can also still be found elsewhere. In 1922, in Unteruhldingen at the Bodensee a lake dwelling open-air museum opened (Schöbel, 2001). From 1933 onwards the emphasis changed to presenting this not as some Romantic past, but as the German people's own past. From this moment the presentation changed: there was no more talk of lake dwelling people, but of lake dwelling soldiers (Schöbel, 2001). The Village Chief was soon called the Village Führer. At other locations similarly used sites opened:

1936-1946	Oerlinghausen (Germanensiedlung, Iron Age)
1936-1945	Lübeck (Freilichtmuseum auf dem Stadtwall, Neolithic and Iron Age)
1938-1954	Radolfzell-Mettnau (Freilichtmuseum für Deutsche Vorgeschichte, Mesolithic and Neolithic)

This was a systematic policy to influence the German population, directed straight from Berlin. AFM Oerlinghausen currently is one of the most active museums in Europe, warning for the influence of exactly such ideas (Banghard, 2016).

There are many examples, albeit less straightforward, of framing the past by means of archaeological open-air museums. In the early 1980s at Castell Henllys, Wales, a tourist attraction was created, themed around the glorious Welsh past, the Celtic Sprit, to contrast with the several periods of domination by Romans, Normans and English. The education programmes were tailored to meet the requirements of the National Welsh Curriculum, for instance by echoing stereotype figures like 'the fierce warrior males' and 'the placid domesticated women'.

Groβ Raden and Kaiserpfalz Tilleda, both founded in the 1980s in the then DDR are examples how the government attempted to influence the image about their own country in the past, and thus help to legitimise the State's ideology.

A recent example is from the Ukraine where on Independence Day 2015, 30 soldiers who had protected the integrity of the State received medals and visited the “Park of Kyiv Rus” together with the deputy Minister of Culture.

When visitors are confronted with manipulations of the reconstructed past in an archaeological open-air museum, they may better understand the way modern society is manipulated for different purposes, and understand there is no neutral information, every story has a purpose. The phrase ‘fake news’ gets more meaning.

Conclusions

Archaeological open-air museums need to do three things:

1. Improve their direct links with science
2. Improve quality (in all respects)
3. Get away from too much fantasy and commerce

Archaeological open-air museums are more important than they realise. There are however some challenges for archaeological open-air museums. One value does not guarantee another: the archaeological open-air-museums with the best scientific reputations have not converted these reputations into financial sustainability. Archaeological open-air-museum managers will have to measure their benefits and value in the language of government policy makers and funding bodies. There is a lack of intellectual development in archaeological open-air-museums. Museums and universities together should work harder on professionalising the science and research behind archaeological open-air-museums. Museums should be managed more effectively, using proven management techniques. Overall, archaeological open-air-museums need to learn from other disciplines and using their toolkits: the museum world, the tourism world et cetera. There are very few academic posts focusing on archaeological open-air-museums making it difficult to raise standards among new entrants entering the profession, making career development a matter of chance, not strategy.

We are not alone; there are probably about 1,000 archaeological open-air museums worldwide, most of which are in Europe and North America (exarc.net/venues). There is a lot of literature; EXARC manages an online bibliography with over 11,500 titles on experimental archaeology and archaeological open-air museums (www.experimentalarchaeology.net). Museumsdorf Düppel is one of the leaders in the debate on saving information from archaeological open-air museums before the first generation of employees is gone and such valuable information is lost. There have been several European cooperation projects with a focus on improving archaeological open-air museums (liveARCH, OpenArch) and there are ideas for a self-assessment for such museums in order to find out where the weak spots are. EXARC has several online manuals for such museums, covering subjects like PR, live

interpretation and museum management. The EXARC Journal is an open access resource of information. on open-air museums, research, conferences and more (exarc.net/journal).

International cooperation is increasingly important for archaeological open-air museums and a necessity to survive and thrive. We have our strengths, our unique selling points and an important role to fulfil in society.

Keywords archaeological open-air museum

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FIG 1. A TYPICAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL OPEN-AIR MUSEUM, BUTSER ANCIENT FARM (UK). PHOTO BY ROELAND PAARDEKOOPER.

FIG 2. A DECAYED RECONSTRUCTED ROUNDHOUSE AT THE IRISH NATIONAL HERITAGE PARK, WAITING FOR SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH. PHOTO BY ROELAND PAARDEKOOPER.

FIG 3. ANCIENT CRAFTS AND MODERN TECHNIQUES; MEDIEVAL TYPE BEER BREWING IN PREHISTORISCH DORP EINDHOVEN (NL). PHOTO BY ROELAND PAARDEKOOPER.

FIG 4. MUSEUM THEATRE, A LIVE INTERPRETATION TECHNIQUE AT LOFOTR VIKING MUSEUM (NO). PHOTO BY ROELAND PAARDEKOOPER.

FIG 5. POLITICALLY GERMANY POLICY ASYLUM REFUGEES GIRL, SOURCE: HTTP://MAXPIXEL.FREEGREATPICTURE.COM

FIG 6. FUNDAMENTAL LEARNING WITH CARDIFF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AT AFM OERLINGHAUSEN (DE). PHOTO BY ROELAND PAARDEKOOPER.

FIG 7. ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AT STEINZEITPARK DITHMARSCHEN (DE). PHOTO BY ROELAND PAARDEKOOPER.

FIG 8. RECONSTRUCTION OF HOUSE 16 OF THE WASSERBURG BUCHAU AT THE PFAHLBAUMUSEUM AND ITS DESCRIPTION IN THE MUSEUM GUIDE BOOKS (1ST PRINT 1931: 'THE LEADER'S HOUSE', 3RD PRINT 1938: 'THE FÜHRER'S HOUSE', 9TH PRINT 1951: 'THE HOUSE OF THE VILLAGE CHIEF') (SOURCE: SCHÖBEL 2001, P.55).