

"Honest Presentation"

Open Air Museums want to mark themselves out from the "proliferation" - Conference in Uhldingen



In the Pfahlbaumuseum in Unteruhldingen, representatives of archaeological open air museums from six countries convened, to exchange with each other.

Uhldingen-Mühlhofen (hpw) Keeping quality up high is the wish of a growing group of archaeological open air museums, who joined in 2001 to exchange experiences and to work together on concepts for an honest presentation of scientific insights. About 20 representatives of institutes of the "Organisation European Exchange on Archaeological Research and Communication", short EXARC, have come together in the Pfahlbaumuseum Unteruhldingen for a conference. They discuss among others the theme "Archaeology and interpretation".

This is an area for which exactly the new construction of the Pfahlbaumuseum with its lively scenes offers a lot of observation material.

Today, the museum experts from Sweden, Holland, Poland, Latvia and Germany learn to know other examples of presentation of cultural history in the framework of an excursion to Überlingen, Constance and Friedrichshafen. "There is more and more proliferation ("*wildwuchs*" ed.), formulates the host, the museum director of Uhldingen, Gunter Schöbel, the worries which unifies the engaged institutes. More than 300 open air museums try by now to ensure a place for themselves on the growing "experience market". That is the exact reason to give more thought to standards of quality.

The own claim has been made more concrete by the eleven members of EXARC in statutes last spring. In there, they commit themselves not only to a scientifically correct presentation. The open air museums furthermore need to do archaeological experiments which should be documented and repeatable. "We have to be honest towards our public" stresses Schöbel.

This formed as well the background of the theme "Archaeology and Interpretation". What is necessary to make the information and results using historically founded exposition objects understandable to the public? What is still acceptable, without questioning the authenticity of presentations? With such questions, the members want to learn from each other and find a common base. The Uhldinger museum director promises even much more, concerning the border crossing cooperation between archaeological open air centres - namely a European self-awareness based on cultural history.

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“EXARC” is an association for cooperation of 19 archaeological open air museums and institutes, who are working all over Europe with the lively mediation of archaeology and history from the beginnings up to 1492. EXARC’s members have just convened in the Pfahlbaumuseum in Unteruhldingen. SZ-editor Hildegard Nagler has sought more information with Gunter Schöbel, the leader of the Pfahlbaumuseum.

SZ: Mr Schöbel, what was the issue at your conference in Unteruhldingen?

Schöbel: EXARC exists since February 2001. At that time, we had given ourselves standard for quality management. We have discussed these now another time, tested and reworked. A brochure on this subject has been published as a result of our conference in Unteruhldingen.

SZ: Standards for what?

Schöbel: Standards for archaeological open air museums. In this area in the museum landscape, there is a lot of proliferation. The development is more and more towards generating effects, creating events. The actual tasks of a museum of the founded scientific working and a qualitative mediation fall to the background because they cost a lot of personnel and money. We are for example fighting against that a mayor goes to Brussels together with his chief of tourism and claim there, they want to build an open air museum for which they then get supporting money – without a scientific base needs to be shown. We concern ourselves with the seriousness of open air museums and for that reason, we developed guide lines. In that is described how an open air museum should be equipped, in order to be accepted in our European network, which should guarantee quality.

SZ: Many museums complain about decreasing numbers of visitors.

Schöbel: We all are in a crisis. Meanwhile, some people think museums as part of our European culture are superfluous. However, we are doing better than some other colleagues. Our goal in open air museums was always in the tradition of the reform pedagogy of the Twenties, that we address all layers of the society – after all, we should finance ourselves for the larger part through the entrance fees. Other museums were happy when they reached specific groups of interest, for example those professionally interested in art and the educated layers of society. This avenges itself in a time when the numbers of visitors partly decline dramatically.

SZ: You criticise the development towards events. Shouldn't you also create events to keep the numbers of visitors up?

Schöbel: No. In our places, the development is more again into the other direction, meaning: we for example we refrain from digital techniques of presentation, museum discos, shoptainment, bathtainment, artificial worlds, we return very consciously to the traditional methods.

SZ: What do you mean with "traditional methods"?

Schöbel: We invest in humans and we support all senses. For example in the Pfahlbaumuseum, we have 35 visitors' guides and no audio visual edutainment head sets with a screen. To the original finds, we have shields and showcases, educational movies and a 1:1 interpretation of history. In our place in Unteruhldingen, like in all open air museums, you can hear, smell, taste and feel. Just try and see if you can do the same in a classic museum.

SZ: Is that a declaration of war to the classic museums?

Schöbel: No, not at all. We need them to do research, to collect, keep and the abstracting mediation. Only: we want to prevent that our museums will be nibbled on by the event and fun sector and possibly be replaced in a few years.

SZ: Maybe a heretic question: will museums – seen on the long term – still play a large role at all?

Schöbel: if they dear to put their cultural historical meaning for the region and Europe opposite to the pure scientific thinking at risk, yes. We do not fear the future, I clearly want to state that. In contradiction to the Arbeitgeberpräsident Dieter Hundt, we have the opinion, that history and the deep knowledge of archaeology are very important for tomorrow's society. We look back on millennia, during which in Europe there were wars, conflicts, but solutions as well. The world of today forgets this. We can in retrospect – with all reservations – say, what was making sense and what not and we can learn something fundamental. There are conditions, mechanisms, developments which took place time and time again over the millennia and from which we can learn, even must learn more. We show them and created with EXARC a network which mediates daily towards a large and growing public in the Netherlands, Poland, at Lake Constance, in France, Italy or Greece. It serves the understanding between peoples between Vikings, Russians, Celts and Germanics, Italian, Slavs and Hellenes. For Europe, something better than this cannot take place.

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Ehrliche Präsentation

„EXARC“ ist eine Vereinigung für die Zusammenarbeit von 19 archäologischen Freilichtmuseen und Einrichtungen, die sich europaweit mit der lebendigen Vermittlung von Archäologie und Geschichte beschäftigt. Im November 2002 trafen sich die Mitglieder dieser Vereinigung im Pfahlbaumuseum Unteruhldingen, um unter anderem über das Thema »Archäologie und Interpretation« zu diskutieren. Gefragt wurde etwa danach, was notwendig ist, um den Besuchern die Informationen und Erkenntnisse anhand von historisch fundierten Exponaten verständlich zu machen. Die Mitglieder wollen in dieser wie in anderen Fragen voneinander lernen und eine gemeinsame Basis finden.

Eine Broschüre mit Kurzbeschreibungen der 10 EXARC-Freilichtmuseen etwa in Schottland, Schweden oder Lettland sowie weiteren 190 web-Adressen ist für 2,50 Euro beim Pfahlbaumuseum Unteruhldingen erhältlich.

(Bestellung www.pfahlbauten.de, Mail: info@pfahlbauten.de, Tel.: 07556 / 8543).

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Honest presentation

“EXARC“ is an association for the cooperation of 19 archaeological open air museums and institutes, which is concerned with the living presentation of archaeology and history over Europe. In November 2002 the members of this association met in the *Pfahlbaumuseum Unteruhldingen* to, among others, discuss the theme “Archaeology and Interpretation“. It was discussed what is necessary to make information and results understandable to the public using historically based exhibition items. In this and other themes, the members wish to learn from each other and find a common base.

A Brochure with short descriptions of the 10 EXARC-open air museums in for example Scotland, Sweden or Latvia as well as further 190 web addresses is available at the *Pfahlbaumuseum Unteruhldingen* for € 2,50

(Order www.pfahlbauten.de Mail: info@pfahlbauten.de , tel: +49 [0] 7556 – 8543)

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