Introduction

Archaeological Open-Air Museums (AOAM) are a successful reply to the rising experience society. The museums use basic techniques which are as old as the first archaeology and cannot be seen separately from archaeological findings. EXARC, with over 220 members in 30+ countries, is the international umbrella network for such museums and is an ICOM affiliated organization (www.exarc.net).

Characteristics

It is hard to define what archaeological open-air museums really are. Most authors writing about AOAMs 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, 33, translation RP). More recently, López Menchero Bendicho has expressed the view that archaeological sites open to the public, which include AOAMs (re)constructed in situ ‘can be construed (and consequently analysed) as a tourist destination, a marketing product, an identity element, a political instrument, a show of erudition, an
In the UK archaeological open-air museums are rarely characterised as museums, but rather as centres, farms, parks or villages. In Germany, the most widely known descriptive phrases are either ‘Museum’ or ‘Park’. Fantasy names are not used much. In the French speaking area, AOAMs are generally catalogued together with site museums and ruins. Therefore, cha-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Centre</th>
<th>Farm</th>
<th>Park</th>
<th>Village</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the Ancient Technology Centre</td>
<td>Butser Ancient Farm</td>
<td>the Irish National Heritage Park</td>
<td>Dark Age Village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the Peat Moors Centre (ended 2009)</td>
<td>Bullace Hill Farm</td>
<td>Murton Park</td>
<td>Iceni Village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the International Shakespeare Globe Centre</td>
<td>Treworthy Bronze Age Farm</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cosmeston Medieval Village</td>
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<tr>
<td>the Scottish Crannog Centre</td>
<td></td>
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<td>West Stow Country Park and Anglo-Saxon Village</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Fig. 2: Designations of a range of UK AOAMs with examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UK</th>
<th>centre, farm, park, village</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Museum, Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>préhistosites, parcs archéologiques, archéosites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>historiske værksteder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>fornbyar, forntidsbyar, arkeologiska friluftsmuseer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the Netherlands</td>
<td>centrum, museum, erf, boerderij, kamp</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Fig. 3: Words in the UK, Germany, France, Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands

educational tool, a space for leisure, a source of inspiration…” (LOPEZ MENCHERO BENDICHO 2011, 423).
acterisations are used like prehistosites, parcs archéologiques or archéosites. This fits well with ICOM terminology, ICOM being originally French speaking. The name the Danish use is historiske værksteder or historical workshops. One of the first people with a concept of outdoor education in prehistory in all its forms was HANSEN (1964). In contrast to working in schools, where the only tools were characterised by academic and verbal skills, a historic workshop offers three other tools: manual skills, mental skills and historical consciousness. In Sweden AOAMs were called fornbyar or forntidsbyar [prehistoric villages]; more recently arkeologiska friluftsmuseer.

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.

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 re-

Fig. 4: Activities at AOAMs may include for example iron smelting, like here in Biskupin, Poland.
sources, is the collection. Thus, archaeological open-air museums, like science centres and heritage visitor centres are ever more accepted in the international museum family.

However, the differences between an archaeological open-air museum and a traditional ‘showcase’ museum are apparent. A museum – even in modern commercial exhibitions – tends to be artefact based, while archaeological open-air museums are activity based.

Most artefacts at an archaeological open-air museum are to be touched and used. In many cases, tourist visitors think that what they see is the exact way it was. The image of such a “Stone Age house” is such impressive, that people take it for real, for original. And we can tell again and again that what they see is just one of the possibilities of how life might have been back then, but will our visitors even hear us?

A museum in the traditional sense of the word has as tasks collecting, preserving and presenting. An archaeological open-air museum looks at it differently. The five key words are: education, presentation, experiment, commerce and Living History. That does not make them having a worse or less successful approach than the archaeological museum around the corner. Thankfully, there are more and more “crossovers”: a combination of indoor and outdoor. In my opinion, combining the two approaches is the very best to do.

For many children (an important group of visitors) our museums are attractive as we have so much and so much different life. Using this is a way to get in contact with your visitors, to help transfer the story behind the product. The people first
see a goat or a pig, but when they leave, they might see it as a “prehistoric” kind of animal instead of just a pet.

Are archaeological open-air museums more commercial than a museum? Yes. But much less than theme parks are. Theme parks make imaginations, based on some romantic past which never existed, like for example on the “Pirates of the Caribbean” or on the “Wild West”. As our kind of museums have to earn most of their own income and are in no way protected for ‘bad years’, commerce was introduced, besides science, education and presentation. When a National Museum in the Netherlands earns 80 % of its budget from governmental funding, for archaeological open-air museums, it usually is the other way around. And if you then think that income is only generated in summer time, one understands, these museums usually are heavily in debt by February. They need to be very flexible.

So what is an archaeological open-air museum?

The international federation EXARC has come with a 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.

A Museum

“A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.” (ICOM Statutes, approved in Vienna (Austria) – August 24, 2007. Art. 3, Section 1).


Archaeological

Archaeological data are the primary source of information of what is reconstructed and interpreted.

1 "Non Profit" refers to a legally established body-corporate or unincorporated – whose income (including any surplus or profit) is used solely for the benefit of that body and its operation. The term ‘not-for-profit’ has the same meaning (ICOM Code of ethics for museums, ICON 2006: http://www.icom.museum/ethics.html).
The History of Archaeological Open-Air Museums

Different goals have led to the reconstruction of archaeological remains through the last three centuries (see for example AGACHE u. BREART 1982, AHRENS 1990, BARROIS u. DEMAREZ 1995, SCHMIDT 2000, SCHÖBEL 2008, PAARDEKOOPER 2012). One can divide the history in themes, but those are not entirely chronological. Many themes of the past are still important: the past never ends. Romanticism and nationalism can be recognised today; science, education and tourism are still quintessential.

The early days of archaeological open-air museums can be recognised in the construction of staged settings, loosely inspired by a view on the past. These settings were used for purposes of transferring a political message or transferring an image of a nostalgic and idealised past, in order to legitimise the position of elite,

True to scale architectural reconstructions in the open-air
Archaeological open-air museums deal with outdoor true to scale reconstructed buildings. These can be constructed and interpreted 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” (ICOM declaration: 9th July 1956/1957 Geneva, section 6).

The authenticity of materials and techniques used should be clearly accounted for through written and accessible records, quoting the sources of information on which the reconstructions are based. An honest assessment of each reconstruction should be feasible.

Collections of intangible heritage resources
The overall presentation of an archaeological open-air museum can be regarded (classified/defined) as a collection of intangible heritage resources which provides an interpretation of how people lived and acted with reference to a specific context of time and place.

Connected to scientific research
The connection between scientific research and any specific archaeological open-air museum is provided by the active role of a trained archaeologist among the staff or an archaeological counsellor belonging to an affiliated organisation.

Appropriate interpretation with organisation of activities for visitors
Depending on the nature and amount of visitors, different kinds of interpretation can be appropriate. These activities can involve (but are not limited to) guided tours, educational programmes, presentation of experimental archaeology research, demonstrations of ancient crafts and techniques, live interpretation and living history activities.
or to confirm myths or any kind of ideology. At present the political elite (read: the EU) finance archaeological open-air museums and sometimes the royal family serves as protector.

In the first decades after the Second World War, not many new archaeological open-air museums were conceived across Europe, people changed back to ‘safer’ methods of science. Sooner or later this lead to a tendency towards experimental archaeology. The past was gladly seen in a technical context, a museum context, showing products and techniques, not people and their stories.

Not much happened until experimental archaeology became fashionable with as most famous examples the early years of both Butser Ancient Farm and Lejre Experimental Centre. It is remarkable to note that although the phrase experimental archaeology as stereotype is often used in archaeological open-air museums, relatively few museums actually execute experiments. Reconstruction and experimental archaeology seem to be linked with each other for eternity but it is very important to state that a reconstruction is no experiment. At best, that (re)constructed house is a side product of experimental research. The real product of an experiment is data. Scientists do not take advantage of these (re)constructions as much as they could. There is no structural approach from the museums to science. Archaeologists ignore them, as the museums do the archaeologists: when the museum needs ‘a new building’ they come to archaeology to pick an idea from an excavation catalogue: “it must fit 20 school children in two separate rooms” – and that sometimes is all. Archaeologists can extract a huge dataset from these buildings and see to it this is flowing back into archaeology. Data must be extracted from the different stages: planning & building, using & maintaining

Fig. 6: Ard ploughing experiments on an 18 year old grassland in the 1970s at Lejre. Photo: Hans-Ole Hansen
and the end of existence. Where experimental archaeology needs to move beyond one-off experiments, the archaeological open-air museums are a perfect tool to collect big data over a longer period. Education and learning represent the most important reason for existence of archaeological open-air museums. Experiences need to challenge and stimulate the visitors, turning thoughtless hands-on activities into minds-on challenges. These experiences should always fit in the framework of teaching about the past to better understand the present. The hands-on archaeology approach of archaeological open-air museums is a type of non-formal education outside the established formal education system.

Archaeological open-air museums are heavily dependent on self-generated income, mainly from tourism. Visitors however, and their interests change over years, think about the baby boomers disappearing. The post-baby-boom generations are different:

• They are the first who grew up with computers and gadgets and the online world.
• They feel more individual and often have stronger bonds with friends than with their family;
• They believe in transparency and do not accept authority just because they are told to.

Culture tourism is no longer the domain of an elite: museums are about to see a group of tourists who usually do not visit cultural or heritage places, but will do so only if these museums adapt to them instead of the visitors needing to adapt to the museums.

There are three trends in tourism (KING 2009):
1. Higher quality, greater choice and greater competition:
   a) museums will need blockbusters or at least some quality and distinctiveness in their activities;
2. Personal choice and participation:
   a) not only does a tourist like to choose bits and leave out other bits of what is offered,
   b) … they also expect to be able to participate.
   c) Engaging the visitor means one should include a menu of options and not a unilinear experience with a start, middle and end;
3. Something for everybody: not everybody can be treated similarly; the market gets much more segmented in special interest groups.

The last development to mention is live interpretation. The open-air museums cannot easily use text plates or modern equipment; their information carriers must remain ‘in tune’ with the rest of the museum, so they need to use people. Live interpretation is at least as old as open-air museums, with examples from the 1890s in Skansen, one of the world’s first ethnographic open-air museums. Live interpretation can work well if the following three ideas are taken into account:
1. Using competent people (they need to unite three professions in one: teacher, actor and archaeologist);
2. Using education programmes which encourage questioning of what is historical truth;
3. Verification of role plays/scripts which help to value the collected and decontextualised world of objects and do not merely use it as a room of props or illustrational backdrop.

**EXARC**

EXARC originally focused on archaeological open-air museums. There are close to 400 such museums in Europe and probably a similar number in the United States and dozens more scattered over the world. EXARC keeps an overview at www.openarchaeology.info/venues.

The second leg of EXARC is experimental archaeology which can be simplified to “any serious attempt to understand the past by means of experimentation using archaeological sources”. We have an online bibliography with over 11,000 titles at www.openarchaeology.info/bibliography. Both these resources are maintained and updated with help of the EU project OpenArch.

EXARC also works with archaeotechnique: many people are involved in old techniques of production or follow up questions raised by archaeology like for example: how did people make fire in the Stone Age? These are exactly the stories which are explained in archaeological open-air museums.

![Fig. 7: Live Interpretation scene at Bachritterburg Kanzach, Germany](image)
EXARCs final leg is interpretation – not just live interpretation or living history but it also includes museum education and museum theatre. America has great experience but is it really true that whatever works brilliantly in Colonial Williamsburg will reach a similar resonance in Munich, Germany?

The EXARC Journal is published every quarter online and twice per year in hard copy. This too is supported by OpenArch. EXARC published about the latest developments, new open-air museums, research, conferences and more. The EXARC Journal – and actually EXARC itself – bridges between Science and museums.

One can find EXARC online at www.exarc.net as well as on social media where we manage several groups and channels, with over 13,000 subscribers.

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.

References


