

# “Know thyself”

## A Scandinavian idea conquers the world

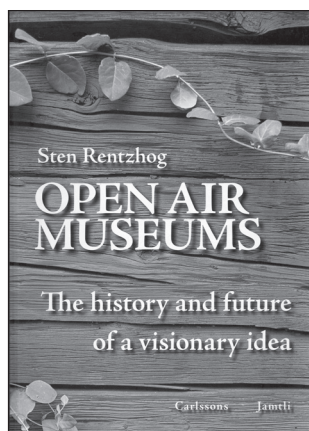
■ Roeland PAARDEKOOPER  
(NL)

In 2004, 1/3rd of all European Union museum visits (166 million of the 500 million) were to ethnological open air museums. These successful museums could benefit from more (professional) attention and that is why Sten Rentzhog, former director of such a museum wrote a book about them.

“*Know Yourself by studying your colleagues*” is the approach Rentzhog chose. For people involved in archaeological open air museums, looking at their ‘brothers’ and ethnologic counterparts would be a very smart move and this is where this book comes into play. From the perspective of a museum director, Rentzhog describes the ideas he has encountered in the past decades when visiting colleagues. He puts the ‘tips & tricks’ into context – something which worked for Ford in North America may not necessarily be successful in say Bulgaria or the other way around. But if one thing does become clear, it is how large and diverse this family of museums is.

### History

“Know Yourself” is the motto of the most famous museums of all, Skansen in Stockholm, founded by Hazelius and an inspiration to many others, although seldom copied in its essential concept. By the end of the 19th century and up until the 1920s, Hazelius and other museum founders in and around Scandinavia were taking advantage of the ‘fashion’ of national romanticism. Many ethnologic open air museums date back to the period 1880-1920. The museums were relevant to the society of those days and corresponded to a political need. This hasn’t



changed much up to present, although by now maybe less conspicuous. In a changing society these museums answer a need to recognise where ‘we’ come from. The question “*who do we want to have been*” is clearly important here. We should not forget however that although at present these museums are regarded as mainstream and even old fashioned, 100 years ago, they were totally unconventional and the visionary founders were considered daredevils who were not part of the usual group of museum colleagues – sounds familiar?

Many of those museum initiatives radically changed after their founding fathers (hardly ever women) left the organisation and open air museums became part of the local or national establishment.

In the beginning ethnologic open air museums played a role in keeping up (folk) traditions and were in a sense living museums. Already back in the 1910s, Skansen in Stockholm had over 800,000 visitors per annum, clearly reaching a large public. Large crowds gathered there for national or folk celebrations but this image changed drastically with the World Wars.

In the post war period, the second phase for ethnologic open

air museums, founding new museums or keeping open old ones were more a result of political decisions than a charismatic initiator. Scientists concentrated on items/houses and on reconstructing biotopes. The buildings themselves were to be display objects themselves, not show cases for other objects or even worse, for activities.

The 1970s was the time when the Association of European Open Air Museums (AEOM) was founded, the largest organisation of such museums at present in the world and is together with The Association for Living History, Farm and Agricultural Museums (ALFHAM) from North America, the main sponsors of Rentzhog’s book. The close cooperation between these organisations led to less variation between museums. It was not until quite recently that the focus shifted again from hardware to people – both the people the houses represented as well as to the visitors. In the Zuiderzeemuseum in the Netherlands, focus on the (presumed) wishes of visitors have become more important than the original *raison d’être*: the houses and parts of the landscape are furnished with modern art, ‘playing’ with what is thought to be ‘typically Dutch’.

### Present Days

The second surge of founding new ethnologic open air museums seemed to have come to a standstill by 1980, exactly when the ‘big boom’ in archaeological ones started. In the present day, it is becoming more fashionable to not address the public simply as intellectual beings. In many museums, including the ‘classic indoor museums, experiencing and engaging the audience in move important in getting a message across. These were notions, Hazelius had already brought into practice over 100 years ago.

“*By now, there are some thousand local open air museums, museums in every sense, except that they are run voluntarily and do not usually have trained museum staff*” (Rentzhog 2007: 59).

The strong point of open air museums are that they combine cultural institutions, educational centres and tourist attractions – not only being run by scientists, but also by artists.

“*An open air museum had superior educational potential. Here there was no need to see visitors strolling past museum display cases without proper*



■ Houses in the Norsk Folkemuseum, Oslo. Photo author.



■ **The Gol stavkirke** (1212 AD) in the Norsk Folkemuseum, Oslo. Photo author.

*understanding. Open air museums came much closer to reality. The difference between them and conventional museums was somewhere between seeing a play at the theatre and only reading it in a book*” (Rentzhog 2007: 92).

## Comments

The important Danish archaeologist, Sophus Müller (1846-1934) was one of the fiercest (and first) critics of open air museums: original buildings should not be moved or made into museum objects, they should be preserved in situ. Moving them away from their original context would be like stripping them of their significance – museums should be about preserving; moving houses or monuments is a kind of destruction.

Probably, Müller would also vehemently react against “reconstructed” houses, based on nothing more than bits of archaeological evidence; there are hundreds of such locations across Europe nowadays. Aren’t these museums either? Does that mean all open air museums, ethnological or archaeological, are useless? They create a ‘new’ context, hopefully by well informed scientists, architects and others. The story told is more important than the product, the artefact, the building.

This is an important discussion also for public archaeol-

ogy in general: can one combine acquiring knowledge (science) with presenting it (recreation)?

## Future

Rentzhog sees some key factors for the future for ethnologic open air museums. He is very fond of role play or living history. Not all of his colleagues see it that way. The aforementioned Zuiderzeemuseum (NL), once a good example of using this technique now writes: *“if history is dependent on others, so is the pretention of keeping history alive in a museum. Living history as used to be practised in the Zuiderzeemuseum produced an image which by far did not fit with the reality of back then. It doesn’t smell bad there, people are not hungry, one does not see any illness, no death, no poverty or rotting teeth. Everything is nice and friendly. Well fed people tell stories about fishermen and Dutch Glory. The same problem you saw all over the open air museum. It was a sentimental one-dimensional post card with the pretention of history. But except stones, the wood and the roofing tiles of the homes, there was nothing historical about it.*

*The Zuiderzeemuseum is a museum in the present, a place where people like to come together who live, think and feel right now. If the museum intends to inspire those people, one will have to tell the story, starting in the present world. With modern theatre, instead of fake historical plays.”*

Opinions are clearly divided within the museum world. Other hints by Rentzhog can work well in some cases, like for example the comment that visitors will think that whatever buildings they can see at any point in the museum all represent the same period (or even moment) in the past – meaning that one should group houses in ‘landscapes’ which are not in plain sight of each other. The

book is full of interesting tips, some of them repeated too often, but any open air museum manager will recognise lots of things in it. Rentzhog is honest enough to also describe things failing here and there. He offers a large catalogue of ideas and philosophy which are found at different open air museums and with this, he shows the value of these institutions, not only in the past, but for the future. What you can’t find here, is a ‘travel guide’ for interested tourists, with descriptions sorted by country. This book clearly is not meant for day trippers – such a catalogue of places would lead away from the message. Whoever wants such listings can go on line and find them. Strangely enough, the author refrains from any referral to websites. This would have been an enrichment, even if internet is an ever changing medium.

The book is extremely readable, with lively depictions of the museums and characterisations of their directors, without becoming too subjective. All chapters are well documented, mainly with sources of the respective periods themselves. It is a guide book for any public archaeologist, working with open air presentations of any kind.

**Sten Rentzhog, 2007.**  
**Open Air Museums – the history and future of a visionary idea**

528 pages, hardbound  
Östersund: Jamtli Förlag  
ISBN 978-91-7948-208-4



■ **Live interpretation** in the Bokrijk Museum, Belgium. Photo author.

## Other literature

*Inger Jensen, Henrik Zipsane (eds), 2008: On the future of open air museums, Fornvårdaren 30, Östersund: Jamtli Förlag.*

*Adelhart Zippelius, 1974: Handbuch Der Europäischen Freilichtmuseen, Association of European Open Air Museums. Köln.*

## Summary

### “Connais-toi toi-même”

Le point fort des musées de plein air est qu’ils associent une institution culturelle, un centre pédagogique et un point d’attraction touristique – non pas dirigés uniquement par des scientifiques mais aussi par des artistes. Rentzhog les décrit à travers les points de vue des directeurs de musées récoltés lors de visites à de nombreux collègues et remises ensuite en contexte. L’ouvrage est rempli de conseils intéressants, mais décrit aussi ce qui n’a pas marché. Cela donne un vaste catalogue d’idées et de philosophies que l’on peut rencontrer dans les différents musées de plein air.

### “Sich selbst kennen”

Die Stärke von Freilichtmuseen ist es, dass sie kulturelle Institutionen, Bildungszentren und touristische Attraktionen miteinander kombinieren – und nicht nur von Wissenschaftlern, sondern auch von Künstlern betrieben werden. Rentzhog beschreibt diese Anlagen aus der Perspektive der Ideen mehrerer Museumsdirektoren, auf die er bei Besuchen von Kollegen getroffen ist und welche er in einen Gesamtzusammenhang setzt. Das Buch beinhaltet eine Fülle von interessanten Tipps, beschreibt aber auch Misserfolge und Fehler. Es bietet dem Leser einen großen Katalog von Ideen und Philosophien, die es in den verschiedenen Freilichtmuseen gibt.

# Archaeology and Education / L'archéologie et l'éducation

■ Camille DAVAL  
(FR)

Dans cet ouvrage, archéologues de terrains, médiateurs, personnels muséaux et autres intervenants dans la transmission de l'archéologie font le point sur l'éducation à l'archéologie des scolaires, de l'école primaire à l'Université. La période préhistorique tient une place majeure dans des articles de deux types : des témoignages critiques sur des animations et des ateliers réalisés en cadre scolaire, ou des réflexions plus analytiques sur les objectifs, les moyens et les limites de nos pratiques actuelles en matière de médiation.

Toutes ces réflexions nécessitent d'abord de régler la question suivante : qu'apporte l'archéologie aux plus jeunes et pourquoi a-t-on recours à cette science qui n'est pourtant pas une matière inscrite aux programmes scolaires ?

Les arguments avancés ne sont pas nouveaux, mais ont déjà prouvé leur justesse : l'archéologie permet en premier lieu d'aborder l'Histoire, un enseignement qui ne semble pas avoir la faveur des scolaires. Source de questionnements sur la nature de l'Homme et de son évolution, elle offre aux enfants un moyen de se situer au sein de cette grande chronologie, d'y trouver leur place et de comprendre l'impact qu'auront leurs choix sur le futur. L'archéologie est une science humaine par excellence, qui contribue à créer une identité collective et universelle et sensibilise à l'avenir.

Par les différents processus de la recherche archéologique, les enfants bénéficient également d'une stimulation de leur esprit critique, de leur autonomie et de leur ouverture d'esprit, tout en conservant une appro-

che émotionnelle et sensorielle. Cette responsabilisation aura des effets sur leurs comportements sociaux et personnels. A noter également que l'apprentissage en archéologie doit se faire dans une optique de sensibilisation à la conservation du patrimoine, un objectif qui est étrangement assez peu exprimé dans les articles des auteurs français, alors que d'autres auteurs n'hésitent pas à avouer l'impact touristique et donc économique sous-jacent.

Les intervenants à cette Xe session de l'Association des Archéologues Européens (EAA) démontrent par la diversité de leurs points de vue la richesse des moyens et des outils dont on dispose aujourd'hui en matière de médiation.

Dans un contexte où la participativité et l'interactivité semblent s'être complètement imposées comme cadres indispensables à toute intervention, deux grandes tendances se dessinent : la reconstitution, qu'elle soit visuelle ou pratique, et la fouille pédagogique, réelle ou fictive.

L'intérêt de la reconstitution réside dans la concrétisation du passé. Mannequins, maison reconstitués et fac-similés d'outils ou d'arme offrent à la médiation l'un de ses supports principaux : l'image. Offrant une approche plus tangible, qui stimule à la fois l'émotion et la curiosité, la reconstitution peut être un atout considérable dans la transmission de connaissances. La reproduction de gestes anciens ajoute à ce cadre une implication directe des spectateurs, et renforce l'attractivité.

La fouille pédagogique porte d'autres objectifs vis à vis de l'éducation des élèves. Par la répétition de la procédure scientifique et intellectuelle

des archéologues, les enfants acquièrent de nouveaux outils pour percevoir leur monde. La démarche hypothético-déductive est recréée pour inciter les scolaires à stimuler leurs capacités d'observation et d'interprétation, de la fouille de terrain à l'analyse post-fouille, voir à l'expérimentation des hypothèses déduites.

Les spécialistes s'accordent sur les bénéfices qu'ont ces deux grandes pratiques pour tous les objectifs, assumés ou non, de l'éducation à l'archéologie, mais avec des réserves et des recommandations. La nécessité d'un encadrement de qualité, le respect des connaissances mais aussi des inconnues, l'honnêteté dans les limites de la sciences, la connaissance des niveaux de lecture et de réception des discours sont indispensables pour une médiation de qualité. Il faut trouver un équilibre entre cette volonté de donner à voir une vision concrète et le risque de transmettre une image statique et figée, emprunte de nos à-prioris modernes. Certaines des réponses à ce problème résident certainement dans le maintien de l'accompagnement muséal plus classique, dans l'implication des chercheurs dans l'élaboration des programmes d'animation pour les scolaires, et le recours à des animateurs et médiateurs réellement formés en archéologie.

Malgré toutes les meilleurs intentions et la plus grande rigueur dans la réflexion scientifique, nous sommes prisonniers de notre regard d'homme moderne, qui nous empêche et nous empêcheras toujours d'avoir une image fiable de ce qu'ont été les civilisations du passé. C'est une limite que reconnaissent tous les auteurs, sans malheureusement réellement appliquer ce regard critique à leurs propres idées et pratiques en éducation et en

médiation. Cet ouvrage laisse finalement un peu indéci; il se crée une sorte de malaise entre le contenu des articles appelant à l'honnêteté sur les limites de nos connaissances, et le descriptif d'animations et de projets qui manquent parfois d'un peu d'auto-critique.

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In this book, field archaeologists, animators, museum personnel and other people involved in archaeological communication assess the situation of archaeological education in school, from primary school to university. Prehistory takes a major place in these articles, which are of two kinds: some are critical accounts of animations and workshops in a school context, and some are analyses of the aims, means and limitations of current practices in communication.

Such analysis necessarily starts from the following question: what does archaeology have to offer to (very young) children, and why put to use this science which is not included in any national school programme?

The arguments given are not new, but have already been proved correct: archaeology serves, before all else, as a way to interest children in History, which is not generally a favourite study of (young) schoolchildren. It is a starting point for questions about the human being and about evolution, and it can help children to understand their own place in this long chronology, to see themselves as part of it, and to assess the impact of their own choices on the future. Archaeology is very much a social science, and as such it contributes to the creation of collective and universal identities, and raises awareness of the future.

Trough the different processes of archaeological research, children may also benefit from a stimulation to critical thinking, autonomy and open-mindedness, while the approach remains emotional and sensory. This sense of responsibility will impact on their social and personal behaviour patterns. Archaeological education ought also to aim to make children aware of heritage protection issues; the French authors do not put much stress on this objective, whereas others openly admit the underlying touristic and economic interests.

The speakers at this 10th session of the European Association of Archaeologists (EAA) demonstrate, by the diversity of their viewpoints, how wide an array of tools and means is available for educational purposes today.

In a context where participation and interactivity seem to have become essential to every activity, two tendencies emerge: reconstruction, in two or in three dimensions, and instructional excavation, real or artificial.

The strength of reconstruction is its ability to give a concrete image of the past. Reconstruc-

tions of human appearance or houses, replicas of tools or weapon, furnish one education's mainstays: images. Being so tangible, and stimulating both emotional and intellectual and curiosity, reconstruction can be a big asset for knowledge transmission. Reproducing ancient gestures or acts implicates visitors in a very direct way and heightens the attractiveness.

Participation in an archaeological dig has different educational goals. By repeating the scientific and intellectual processes of archaeologists, children acquire new tools to understand their world. The hypothesis-deduction method is recreated for the children, to stimulate their use of their capacities for observation and interpretation, from the field to the laboratory, and sometimes experimental archaeology.

The specialists agree on the benefits that these two approaches offer towards all objectives, conscious or not, of archaeological education, but they also express reservations and recommendations. A good educational programme demands excellent teachers, demands respect for what is not known as well as for current knowl-

edge, an honest perception of the limitations of science, and a thorough understanding of the level at which the children are capable of understanding and integrating the material. A balance needs to be struck between the wish to provide a concrete image, and the risk of feeding the children with a static point of view generated only by our contemporary preconceptions. This problem may be addressed in part by continuing to offer schoolchildren the more "classical" museum visits, by involving researchers in the elaboration of educational programmes and by calling on educators who have very serious grounding in archaeology.

In spite of the best of intentions and the strictest scientific discipline, one cannot escape one's own view, the eye of a person from our time, and this will always impose a limit on the fidelity of our perception and understanding of past civilisations. Every author recognizes this limitation, but - and in our opinion this is a flaw - they never seem to apply this realisation in a critical way to their own ideas and practices in the educational field. In the end, this book seems somewhat inconclusive. We are left with an uncomfortable tension between

the content of articles that call for rigour and honesty on the one hand, and on the other the description of projects and animations that could often do with a dose of self-knowledge and self-criticism.

**BAR S1505 2006: Archaeology and Education/L'archéologie et l'éducation From primary school to university/De l'école primaire à l'université** – edited by Jean-Claude Marquet, Caroline Pathy-Barker and Claude Cohen. ISBN 1841719404, ix+105 pages; illustrated throughout with maps, plans, drawings and photographs

## Summary

### Archäologie und Bildung

In diesem Buch bewerten in der Vermittlung von archäologischen Inhalten tätige Fachleute die Situation der archäologischen Bildung in Schulen, angefangen von der Grundschule bis zur Universität. Es beinhaltet zwei Arten von Artikeln: einige sind kritische Bestandsaufnahmen von Animationen und Workshops in schulischem Zusammenhang, während andere sich der Analyse der Ziele, Bedeutungen und Begrenzungen derzeit angewandter Vermittlungspraktiken widmen. Im Buch ist eine Spannung zwischen den Artikeln, die zu wissenschaftlicher Strenge und Ehrlichkeit auffordern, und jenen, die Projekte beschreiben, die etwas selbstkritischer mit ihren Aktivitäten umgehen sollten, zu spüren.