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Reviewed Article:

Archaeological Open-Air Museums in the Netherlands, a Bit of History

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This article is a result of my interest in, and experience with, archaeological open-air museums. With the start of HOME Eindhoven in 1982, I became actively involved in these museums and I was one of the people involved from the first moment in EXARC. From 2005 onward, I have been conducting postgraduate research at the University of Exeter into archaeological open-air museums. This paper was presented at the farewell conference for Ernest Mols, 30 January 2010.

> There are many people interested in (re)constructions, and that possibilities for new archaeological open-air museums are favourable.

Context-Space

There are about 300 archaeological open-air museums in Europe (see for a listing of most: exarc.net/venues). In North America, there are at least 150 and the worldwide total may be up to about 600-750. EXARC is the international organisation of archaeological open-air museums and experimental archaeology, affiliated to ICOM, representing this type of museums in the international museum world. EXARC has regular conventions on their two themes, publishes a journal and keeps a website for the online community.

Context-Time

The first archaeological open-air museums are over 100 years old. In the 1930s, these museums seemed to flourish: education and presentation was more evocative than before. Although examples are known from Germany and England, no examples are known from the Netherlands of those days. After World War II, the museum approach became much more careful and conservative, focusing more on collecting and preserving (Keefer 2006).

The History

There are different ways to get a grip on the history of Dutch archaeological (re)construction. If the focus is on the archaeological open-air museums only, then there are only five case studies to discuss, yet so much more has happened. Another popular approach to studying the history or reconstruction would be to divide it into the themes of education, tourism and experimental archaeology – but once again there is so much more!

For this research, a choice was made to describe the way the sites started and progressed. These topics cross each other often (See Figure 1):

- The De Haas Family (Floriade, Lelystad, et cetera)
- Environmental education (Wilhelminaoord, Oldebroek, Apeldoorn)
- Archaeology (Groningen University / RCE Amersfoort)
- Tourism (Archeon 2, HOME)
- Associations (WEA, historical association, workgroups)

The 1970s

The oldest, traceable, full-size (re)constructed house was constructed in 1971 at a lifestyle fair at Jaarbeurs Utrecht. This fair was a total failure, although the theme would draw the masses decades later. An LBK farm was constructed by the National Museum of Antiquities (RMO) as contrast to the modern 1970s solutions for easy living. According to archaeologists, the ‘balance between archaeology and the modern society had gone completely wrong’ (personal

communication L.P. Louwe Kooijmans, 6 July 2008).

Roelof Horreüs de Haas (1904-1988) was a world traveller and, taking people and nature as his focus, he was a good photographer and very interested in ethnography. He also taught biology, and after he retired he started conducting life experiments, with family, friends and colleagues in the early 1970s. He started at the Group around the Kees Boeke School in Bilthoven over the years 1973-1975.

In 1976 the so-called Oer Project attracted a huge amount of attention (See Figure 2). It was a challenge, a seriously performed game in the wastelands of the Netherlands. Not only popular attention was aroused concerning this Stone Age group. Many leading professionals in experimental archaeology also got in touch with Roelof and his group, among whom were Errett Callahan, John Coles and Hans-Ole Hansen. The long lasting effect was that the ideas and approach of the De Haas family caught on, and many education projects using outdoor (re)constructions were started.

Groningen

In the early 1970s, at the University Groningen there was a lot of interest in experimental Archaeology, especially in house (re)constructions. In 1978, at Orvelte in Drenthe, the University built a field station, an open air laboratory in the shape of an Iron Age house and annexes. The possibility was open to use it for educational goals, but, in the end, the house and area was hardly ever used by the university or by school groups. It was restored in 1992 and replaced in 2007 by Hans de Haas, son of Roelof de Haas.

It is said for decades that, in the Netherlands, archaeological science and archaeological open-air museums do not go together well. However, it is not so black and white. For example, Professor Waterbolk from Groningen was a pupil of Roelof de Haas.

Wilhelminaoord

The year is 1974 when teacher Jan Wartena, is sent by the city of The Hague to the countryside in Drenthe, to Wilhelminaoord. The old nursing home there needed to be developed into a hostel for hosting work weeks for the city children who had ‘never’ been in nature before. School in Forest was born. This project had early ties with the University in Groningen and the Drents Museum in nearby Assen. It was the start of a trend, and other examples are the Haps Project in the forests near Apeldoorn (See Figure 3), and, in 1978, the Utrecht Outdoor Centre in Oldenbroek.

In 1976 first contact was made between the Wilhelminaoord staff and the Sagnlandet Lejre followed by participation in flint working and other courses given at Lejre by, among others, the American archaeologist Errett Callahan and, of course, with Roelof and Hans de Haas. Discussions between the Danes and the Dutch led to the conclusion in Wilhelminaoord that

‘the reliving of prehistory must have a goal and should not be a goal in itself’ (personal communication J. Wartena, 16 July 2008). The goal was and remains becoming conscious of one’s own natural environment. Over the 1970s, there was little contact between these education centres as their staff thought they had different goals.

In 1978 the Foundation Exparch started. The goal of this group was setting up a large archaeological open-air museum, later named the Archeon. Two initial members were archaeologist professor Louwe Kooijmans and Roelof de Haas. Roelof soon left because he was frustration about the sheer size and costs of the project; he thought education and experiment would suffer too much from a large-scale approach. For about a decade, the foundation worked in silence.

The 1980s

In 1982, a field trip was planned from Sagnlandet Lejre to the Netherlands. It was paid for by the Dutch ministry, and the official goal was to aid a feasibility study for Archeon. It is remarkable how these foreigners balanced between the officials and the archaeologists, between teachers and biologists and between those who were old friends and new kids on the block. The Lejre colleagues of course were good friends with the people they visited on the field trip, but with their report for the Ministry, they need to present an honest view on the feasibilities and weaknesses of any archaeological open-air museum in the Netherlands.

1982 was also the year of the Floriade in Amsterdam Gaasperplas, a national flower and garden show held every decade (See Figure 4). Like at garden shows places such as Austria, as part of the event a Bronze Age-like house was built, of the Bovenkarspel type. The building was led by the De Haas family and involved many volunteers. Between them was a group of young adults interested in archaeology (NJBG), some of whom had been involved in the construction of Iron Age houses in Denmark at Vingsted years before. This led to the founding of the Workgroup Experimental Archaeology (WEA), which consists only of young adults, and is still running.

Also in 1982, a few teachers in Eindhoven founded what is now known as HOME Eindhoven. Some of those teachers had gained experience in (re)constructions at Floriade. This project was different from any of the existing education centres because they focused on ancient technology and not on the natural environment. From the very beginning, the site was open to tourists and with this, the first archaeological open-air museum in the Netherlands started. HOME Eindhoven has an important social character: there is room for many people who otherwise would not have, or be able to keep, a job. In 2010, there were about 60,000 visitors yearly, of which about 40% were school children coming in groups. Living history has slowly become more important.

In 1987 the State Archaeological Service got involved in building a (re)constructed house in

their home town Amersfoort. The house was built in a fashion similar to the way houses might have been like in early medieval Dorestad. From its beginning, the project had an educational goal and was especially meant for the schools in the city. Environmental education also played a large role. From the end of the 1990s, there was a notable shift towards the application of living history. The farm got a name 'de Bergkamp' and was made accessible to tourists on set days. The site, which is in the middle of town, also has a petting zoo. Unfortunately, in 2010 the administration building was destroyed by fire and planned to be rebuilt after.

In the previously submerged part of the Netherlands, Flevoland, is the site of a large nature park in Lelystad. It is closely connected to the Artis Zoo in Amsterdam. In 1987, somewhere in the far back near the garbage dump where no visitors would come, a Bronze Age house was built. Such a house has no connection to this local history of Flevoland, but it was the most popular type of (re)construction in the Netherlands during the 1980s. Fifteen years later the Bronze Age (re)construction was dismantled, and the project was moved to the front entrance of the park. The project was then called Swifterkamp, referring to a period that does have ancient ties to Flevoland; it is the last time before the present period that the area was inhabitable). Now, the project focuses on education, but is open on Sundays for small scale visits.

The 1990s

In 1994, under much public attention, Archeon-1 opened its doors. Two summers later, it went bankrupt and most Dutch archaeologists turned their back on both archaeological open-air museums and experimental archaeology. Why did it go bankrupt? One of the reasons is that it did not attract one million visitors but only 450,000 in 1994. Compare this to the National Open-air Museum in Arnhem, which had 460,000 visitors in its best year ever – or to the National Museum of Antiquities with 125,000 visitors in their best year. The ex-director, Dr. IJzereef, once said it was hard to get a bank loan for € 450,000, but much easier to ask for € 31 million. Archeon went down from 55 hectares to the present six, but still attracts about 250,000 visitors a year. It changed from focusing on experimental archaeology towards a focus on living history. At present, Archeon is building an indoor museum, which will make it even more attractive to visitors.

The 2000s

For a decade, nothing seemed to have happened in terms of the development of AOAM in the Netherlands – perhaps the devastating effect of Archeon's bankruptcy? Then, in Dongen in 2004, a historical association started an archaeological open-air museum, although it is mainly focused on school education (See Figure 5). It is 100% run by volunteers, a small but effective museum.

In Zupthen, in 2006, a combination of local archaeological service, social workshop and education centre was constructed under the name de Kaardebol. The people constructing the early medieval buildings were Arjen de Haas (grandson of Roelof) and Leo Wolterbeek, both active in wooden (re)construction for a long time. The centre is mainly attended by local groups. By 2012 a serious reorganisation is discussed, mostly because of budget cuts.

The Hunebedcentrum in Drenthe is now a successful archaeological museum with not only an indoor show case museum, but also an archaeological site (the largest megalithic tomb in the country) and an archaeological park with reconstructions. In 2002, a small wooden storage building was made by volunteers. Four years later, Hans de Haas and Jeroen de Groot built a so-called Flögeln house known from previous (re)constructions at Archeon and Albersdorf (Germany). It was supposed to encourage experiments and education. The combination of many different approaches to archaeology has led to success for the museum: not only did they win the National Museum of the Year Award 2008, in 2010 they won the Europa Nostra Award.

Conclusions

There are many freestanding (re)constructions across the country, such as a Roman watch tower at Vechten and a Roman Nehalennia Temple at Colijnsplaat. Many new plans exist, sometimes these go well, sometimes one never hears of them again. EXARC advises projects when needed: nobody needs to reinvent the wheel. Seeing the new initiatives, like those around Nijmegen, Vlaardingen or Alkmaar, it is clear there are many people interested in (re)constructions, and that possibilities for new archaeological open-air museums are favourable, even with the present economic climate.
It was, is and will be very much about education in the open air, as well as environmental education. The Dutch follow national and international trends like sustainability and the growing interest in experiencing instead of simply consuming. Much has depended, and still depends, on just a few individuals.

The Dutch Association of Archaeological Experiments & Education (VAEE) is the, often invisible, link between the different sites and people in the Netherlands working in this profession. If you need to know more, you need to get to know VAEE (www.vaee.nl).

Keywords archaeological open-air museum
history
construction of building

Country the Netherlands

Definitions

The definition of archaeological open-air museums, according to EXARC, is as follows

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 (www.EXARC.net).

This article deals with other types of (re)constructed settings in the open air.

Experimental archaeology

Experimental archaeology is important at archaeological open-air museums, but it is not a decisive element. In some cases, what is presented as experiment is rather a type of archaeotechnique. There is so much that is referred to as experimental archaeology but does not strictly fit the definition when viewed objectively. For example, a (re)constructed house on its own is not an experiment. This article is not about experimental archaeology but about archaeological open-air museums.

Education

Education is the reason for the existence of many archaeological open-air museums, or at least in their starting phase. This often is a type of hands-on education – an informal type of education and way of experiencing that is not possible at school in an indoor classroom. It is not necessarily about knowledge and abilities but, for example, it is often about the developing of creativeness, relaxing, having fun and playing games. Often training of social abilities, as well as dexterity, are important learning goals. It is a problem when neither the teachers nor the education officers are ambitious enough to go beyond simply entertaining the kids without a lesson to be learned or without transferring a message (Schmidt).

Recreation

Archaeological open-air museums often need to cover a large part of their budget by themselves. Take for example Archeon in the Netherlands, which covers almost 100% by themselves (See Figure 6). When compared to the nearby National Dutch Museum of Antiquities one will notice that the latter receives about 80% of their budget from national subsidies. Archaeological open-air museums are performing in a niche: a mixture of experiencing, being outdoors, education like entertainment, a combination of an environmental, cultural and local approach.

Living history

The oldest living history is almost as old as the first skansen type ethnographic open-air museums, like the 1890s Skansen in Stockholm. From the 1950s onwards, it starts developing away from presenting a past which was still known to the actors and their public, and towards presenting an invented past (Tilden 1957). Living history really started booming since the

1980s. Its success is still growing, but so are the dangers. Some living history, especially when it takes the shape of live interpretation (www.imtaleurope.org) is very professional, but for many actors, it is a weekend hobby. This amateurism can be a positive trait, in some other cases one starts to wonder about the authenticity of what is presented.

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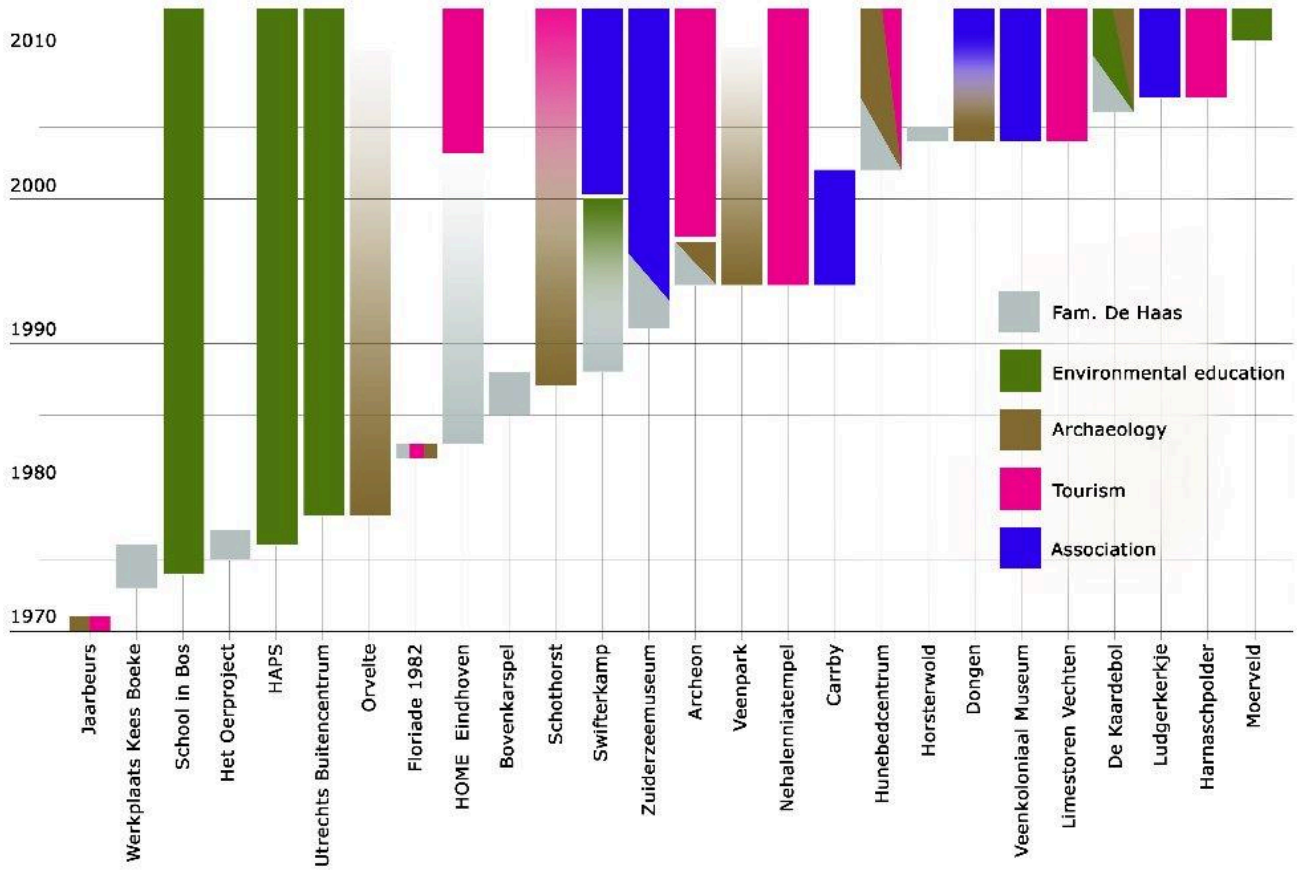

FIG 1. SCHEMATIC OVERVIEW OF THE DIFFERENT (RE)CONSTRUCTED SITES IN THE NETHERLANDS GROUPED BY INFLUENCE.

FIG 2. IMPRESSION OF THE SO CALLED OER PROJECT, SOURCE: DE HAAS.

FIG 3. THE HAPS PROJECT AT APELDOORN IN WINTER TIME.

FIG 4. THE BRONZE AGE BOVENKARSPEL TYPE HOUSE AT FLORIADE, SOURCE: DE HAAS.

FIG 5. THE IRON AGE TYPE HOUSE AT DONGEN.

FIG 6. MAP OVER ARCHEON, THE WAY IT WAS ORIGINALLY PLANNED.