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Unreviewed Mixed Matters Article:

120 Years of Strategies and Experiences in Educational and Handicraft Skills

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Report on a Study-visit to Skansen Open-Air Museum, Stockholm / Sweden, Summer 2013. One aim of the five year **EU-funded Culture Project OpenArch** is to encourage cooperation between archaeological open-air museums in Europe and ethnological open-air museums who have a long history of presenting and handicraft to the public in practical ways. It is not only interesting what and how they present different skills, but also how museums manage and organise the whole educational work.



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For this reason the OpenArch Project Partner Albersdorf (Germany) travelled to the famous open-air museum Skansen in Stockholm, Sweden. Skansen is the oldest institution of this kind and has broadest experience and programs in presenting traditional and ancient handicraft skills and educational activities for different target groups (www.skansen.se).

Skansen is the world's oldest open-air museum, funded by Artur Hazelius in 1891. It is one of the most famous traditional (ethnographic) open-air museums in the world and could be described as "a kind of archetypical mother to all open air museums, a perpetual starting point for all discussion" (Rentzhog 2007, 4). Here started the "democratisation of history" (ibid., 5).

Skansen is situated on the island of Djurgården in the city centre of Stockholm. Visitors to Skansen meet a historical Sweden reflected both in the buildings and their surroundings

- from the Skåne farmstead in the south to the Sami camp in the north (a Sweden in miniature). The venues illustrate the different social conditions in which people lived in Sweden between the 16th and the first half of the 20th century. In the houses and farmsteads there are historical interpreters wearing period dress. They explain to visitors how people lived in earlier times, and they demonstrate traditional activities such as spinning, weaving, knitting and other crafts.

The official task of Skansen (by appointment of the Swedish Government) is to give insights into the cultural and natural history of Sweden and offer possibilities for the visitor to experience Sweden's past. This is to be done with respect for the present time and also with a perspective to the future. Skansen should make educational programmes and activities for the general public and should operate with engagement and joy as a national meeting point. The 'overall' vision, the guideline for the work of Skansen is to be a world class open-air museum that is a joy to visit for all everyone.

An important part of the work of Skansen is not only to demonstrate traditional skills, but also to keep them alive through practical use. Here the different and sometimes long existing cooperation with external partners - such as like crafts organisations - play an important role.

With the questions and interests from the OpenArch partners and a concrete concept in mind, we got into contact with Skansens Administration, where our contact person was Charlotte Ahnlund Berg from the Cultural Historical Department of Skansen (which includes the Educational Department). She prepared the following programme for the study visit from the 1-3 July 2013.

The programme consisted of discussions/talking rounds with responsible staff from the different departments and activities/visits on my own in the open-air museum, where I could observe a wide range of educational and craft activities.

The following lesson from the study visit at Skansen is, in my opinion, of great practical importance, especially for other archaeological open-air museums:

The core of the educational work in Skansen is the dialogue with the guests (all visitors are named and seen in Skansen as guests). The personal interaction between the guest and the educator is of the greatest importance.

Skansen recruits new (educational) staff every year by advertising this position in different newspapers in Stockholm. There are special demands for new staff, which have to have an academic background (students, of course, are also recruited).

The (active) educators in the open-air museum are at foremost educators and craftspeople second. This shows clear that mediation, information and education are most important (not production of craft products or sale).

There exists a special training for these new educators. Every educator has to take part in a general course, then every one has to take part/observe the activities at the main educational stations at Skansen. After this, each new educator can choose other stations of own interest. This period of observation is followed by a practical course in skills and crafts, which is undertaken together with a trained 'old'/permanent employed educator as supervisor (so that their experiences can be passed down).

The main information and principles for the educational work at Skansen can be found in the little, pocket-sized Skansen passport (Skansenpasset), which every educator gets before she/he starts practical work at the museum. Detailed information for all educators is available also available a 53-page-long brochure that is revised, published and distributed every year. This is where you can find information about educational and internal cooperation principles, the practical issues concerning daily work, technical information, regulations, problematical situations (et cetera), but also a photo gallery of all the permanent staff in the Cultural Historical Department.

A principle component in the Educational Department is the 'Morning Meeting' (Morgonsamling), which takes place every day for about 30 minutes. This is where new information is passed on from the administration, where short lectures and discussions take place and where every one can meet the active colleagues of the day. Besides that, there are also regularly meetings for all educational staff (both permanent and seasonal workers), one time in the spring and one time in the autumn, where general things are discussed or presented.

The planning of new (permanent) programmes often starts with a test-phase in form of an open activity. The ideas for the content of new programmes are - based upon the educational strategies of the government - taken from ideas and discussions of the staff.

A very successful and regularly used activity (for children) is the programme *Helping in daily life work* (this includes collecting wood, piling up hay, et cetera). These are, very often, easy and safe activities where the educator can be very flexible in the handling of the programme and can, take into consideration things such as the weather, et cetera. For safety reasons, there are always two educators in one programme-area.

The educators regularly change their working places (and colleagues), so there is a certain exchange of experiences and skills between the educators.

To get new people interested and involved in the (educational) work of Skansen there are regular 'information-days' about old skills and handicrafts, which are organised together with the official handicraft societies.

The organisation of regularly repeated events is quite new; an example is the theatre for children, which shows the same programme three times a week. The engagement of the theatre-players for a whole season has a financial advantage and has the potential to be used for marketing: visitors who view the programme are able to tell friends who can then visit that season to see the same event. After three years you can see if a programme/event is successful or not.

A recent way of advertising and informing the public is the internet-based 'Skansen-TV' (www.skansen.se) where you can see short films about different topics (also about different handicrafts and skills); this obviously motivates a lot of people to visit Skansen and to try out traditional crafts

To summarize the results of this study visit, I can only say that it is always very important to look at what the colleagues in other open air museums are working with and have experiences on, so do not hesitate to use contacts and ideas you have. And I have to say a very warm "Thank You" to all friendly colleagues at Skansen!

🔖 Keywords **open-air museum**
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| Gallery Image



FIG 1. THE NORDIC MUSEUM (NORDISKA MUSEET) AND THE SAMI CAMP IN SKANSEN.



FIG 2. PRESENTATION OF THE ACTUAL ACTIVITIES AT A FARMHOUSE.



FIG 3. CHILDREN HELPING TO PICK UP THE HAY.



FIG 4. HAY, COLLECTED IN THE TRADITIONAL WAY – FUNCTIONING AS “ORIGINAL” FOR THE CHILDRENS ACTIVITIES.



FIG 5. SUMMER PASTURE WITH CATTLE AND GOATS.



FIG 6. SIGN FOR THE HANDICRAFT SHOP – SELLING AND USING THE TRADITIONAL PRODUCTS.



FIG 7. VISITORS WAITING A THE MAIN ENTRANCE OF SKANSEN, CA 30 MINUTES BEFORE OPENING.