

A TALK WITH THE WINNER OF THE
2015 MUSEUM HORIZON PRIZE,
DR ROELAND PAARDEKOOOPER



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The Archaeologist, Dr. Roeland Paardekooper from the Netherlands has been awarded the Museum horizon international prize for 2015. He has been working in the field of archaeological reconstructions and open-air museums since 1981. In 1998 he graduated with a thesis on modern ship reconstructions of the medieval Hanse Association. He has worked both with archaeological education and archaeological tourism over the years and he got ever more attracted to solutions across Europe for reaching out to the public. In 2001, this led to his involvement as one of the founders of EXARC of which he has been Director since. From October 2013 he is an Interim Director / Stellvertretender Museumsleiter of the Archäologisches Freilichtmuseum Oerlinghausen (Germany).

The awards ceremony took place at the Book and Library Fair in Gothenburg on 27th September 2015.

Since 2009 *Hans Manneby Memorial Fund for Museum Development, Museum horizon*, awards an international prize to a person who has contributed in an innovative manner to develop and change the role of museums in contemporary society, locally and globally. The prize has been awarded to *Mr Paul Msemwa*, Museum and House of Culture, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, *Ms Teresa Morales*, Union de los museos comunitarios, Oaxaca, Mexico, *Ms Elizabeth Codova La'O*, Museo Sang Bata Sa Negros, the Philippines, *Mr Stephen Inglis*, Aanischaaukamikw Cree Cultural Insitute, Ouje-Bougoumou, Canada, *Suad Amiry*, Riwaq Centre for Architectural Conservation, Ramallah, Palestina and *Giane Vargas Escobar*, Museu Comunitário Treze de Maio, Santa Maria, Rio Grande do Sul, Brasil.

The Board of the Foundation Hans Manneby Memorial Fund for Museum Development has five members: Bertil Falck, president, Göteborg, Elisabet Olofsson, secretary, Stockholm, Inkyung Chang, Iron Museum, Sydkorea, Elina Nygård, Ájte, Svenskt Fjäll- och Samemuseum, Jokkmokk and Anita Modin, Västarvet.

On a seminar at the Museum of Antiquities in Gothenburg the 28th of September Dr. Roeland Paardekooper introduced his long time work within the field of public archaeology, education and experimental Archaeology across Europe. Discussant was Anita Synnestvedt, coordinator of the Heritage Academy, University of Gothenburg.

The seminar was arranged by Museum horizon, The Heritage Academy at the University of Gothenburg and the EU project NEARCH.



In late September, the archaeologist Roeland Paardekooper visited the University of Gothenburg to talk about his work with archaeological open-air museums, the importance of using the help of competent scholars in these projects, and how the Nazis tried to falsify history. We met with him for a chat!

What are you actually working with?

I work with so-called archaeological open-air museums, and I am also involved in EXARC. EXARC is an organisation that works with a lot of things surrounding experimental archaeology.

What is an archaeological open-air museum?

An archaeological open-air museum is a site where you have built an entire setting in real size and from a chosen era. The construction should be based upon both existing archaeological remains and linked with the latest scientific results.

Usually, it's not the archaeologists who want to build this sort of museum; instead it's the politicians who make these decisions. Archaeological open-air museums are usually paid by EU-contributions, and the reason why many people want to invest in these sites is that they increase tourism and create work possibilities. Another main reason is the wish to give visitors a personal experience to share with others at a place, which in itself already tells a story.

What are the differences between this type and indoor museums?

You can absolutely compare an archaeological open-air museum with regular museums but with a little bit more focus upon the practical aspect -- a bit like a petting zoo, maybe. Some people think that an archaeological open-air museum is a bit like an amusement park, say Disneyland, but that's not accurate. It's important that an archaeological open-air museum consists of *real* things.

What are the duties for the employees at an open-air museum?

For the employees, the days can look very different. One week the main focus can be to guide and tell stories to the visitors, and the next week you spend your time doing experimental archaeology. Or you might live in the reconstructed houses and spend your days like the people in the past did. This is called life-interpretation. This is a "happening", and the results can contribute with new important data to researchers.

It's of the greatest importance to use really competent personnel at the site. The employees have to simultaneously be teachers, actors, scholars, and

historians, as well as also socially capable in order to encourage the visitors to ask questions and stay interested. It is also important to be clear which of the site's reconstructions are based on either guesses or research. The visitors should be inquisitive and remember the importance of source criticism. It is always important to remember to whom you're telling a story.

What can you experience as a visitor at an archaeological open-air museum?

The visitors can come to the site to explore what it looked like during a certain era and, through different workshops, try out the techniques that the people of the past used in their everyday lives. It is important that things happen at the site, otherwise I wouldn't call it a museum.

The activities at the site might vary a lot, and are favoured by the fact that they take place outside. The visitors get to try things like Roman fighting techniques or how to make a fire, something that wouldn't be suitable inside a regular museum. It is also easier to show the visitors the archaeological process and the research behind it. Since the visitors, who are mostly schoolchildren, can try all of the different activities, they also come up with a lot of good and thoughtful questions. The younger visitors do not only learn about history and archaeology, they also learn how to develop their social skills and cooperation abilities.

What role do the archaeologists play at this sort of museum?

Many of the sites are built more or less by informed guesses. In Europe, the reconstructions from a certain era usually look the same, but of course it could have varied a lot depending on the geography.

Archaeologists usually don't want to be too committed to a particular construction of a site, since they think the information the sites are based upon is too vague. But it is always important to involve archaeologists to make the constructions more serious and robust.

Are there any possible risks involved in how the sites are perceived?

If you don't involve archaeologists enough in the projects, there is a risk that biased parties, who want to gain things for themselves, choose which story is to be presented at the site. This will result in projects that only benefit a certain political view and not the latest research. The biggest risk with that is that it might serve nationalism.

An example of this was found in Germany during the 1930s. The Nazis understood early on that using an archaeological open-air museum as PR was beneficial, and, therefore, they rewrote many events in history books. Where

there had earlier been a village leader, it was now a village *führer*. The people that in the past had lived in a certain historical place of importance were now mentioned as soldiers instead of farmers, and so on.

Another example from the same time period is the museum that the Nazis opened in 1936 in Oerlinghausen, which became a kind of propaganda machine for Germany. The museum re-opened in the 1960s and even then had many rules, such as that all of the guides had to be blonde, which served only to promote the self-image of Germany during this time. In the late 1960s, this second version of the museum burned to the ground, and when it was re-opened, it was with a whole new purpose. Today, the staff have built a small Iron Age village, and they bring the visitors out into the landscape around the site to show them what was important in nature for the people of the past. In addition to this, the museum also covers the subject of teaching about its own past during the Nazi period. It is one of few museums that can teach us something about a place in the middle of society during the Nazi era, far away from the concentration camps.

Hopefully, we can still learn something through all of this. Since the 1950s and 1960s, the focus has shifted from the site, as a historical monument in itself, to the people who actually lived there. Museums can be closed or burned down, but in the end it's not the museum that tells the stories. The people do.

For further information about the prize and fund: www.museumhorizon.se

For further information about the Heritage Academy: <http://criticalheritagestudies.gu.se/clusters+and+heritage+academy/heritage-academy>

For further information about NEARCH: <http://www.nearch.eu/>

For further information about EXARC: <http://exarc.net/>

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