

Lifelong Learning in Open Air Museums – A fascinating part to play in Europe

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When proposing lifelong learning as the main approach to improving skills and knowledge in Europe, the European Union chose to quote on the cover of its planning document a Chinese proverb that is more than a thousand years old:¹

”When planning for a year, plant corn. When planning for a decade, plant trees. When planning for life, train and educate people.” Chinese proverb: Guanzi (c. 645 BC)

In using this proverb, the European Union demonstrated its insight into the relationship between learning and true ability on the one hand, and the importance of humanistic values for economic growth on the other. The European Commission expressed it even more explicitly:

“This Communication contributes to the establishment of a European area of lifelong learning, the aims of which are both to empower citizens to move freely between learning settings, jobs, regions and countries, making the most of their knowledge and competences, and to meet the goals and ambitions of the European Union and the candidate countries to be more prosperous, inclusive, tolerant and democratic”.

The European Union sees lifelong learning as an important instrument in achieving its aim, articulated in the Lisbon Process, of becoming the most dynamic, knowledge-based economy in the world. The EU states clearly that the development of an individual’s abilities covers a lifespan from pre-school to retirement and constitutes – and this is vital- the whole spectrum of formal, non-formal and informal education. It can be expressed as follows: the achievement of the desired improvement in true abilities is not confined to the formal educational system, but includes, in the EU perspective, even vocational training and what we can broadly designate as cultural learning processes. At the meeting of Heads of State in Stockholm in March 2001, three overriding goals and thirteen associated concrete objectives for the initiatives in the EU on improving knowledge and skills were formulated, and in Barcelona the following year the Council of Ministers was able to determine a strategy of action. The first interim report, in 2004, from the Commission and the Council of Ministers concerning this aspect of the Lisbon Process stressed clearly the need of learning both skills and values and not simply to focus on factual knowledge:²

¹ Commission of the European Communities (2001); “Making a European Area for Lifelong Learning a Reality”, COM (2001), 678 Final, Brussels 21.11.2001

² Commission and Council of the European Community (2004); “The success of the Lisbon Strategy hinges on urgent reforms. Joint interim report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the detailed work programme on the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems in Europe”, (2004/C 104/01), Official Journal of the European Union 30.04.2004 and Talvi Märija; “Learner-centred lifelong learning policies”, in “LLinE – Lifelong learning in Europe”, 1/2005, Helsinki.

“In this context, it is essential to build stronger relationships between the education and training world and employers so that each has a better understanding of the needs of the other. At the same time, the knowledge-based society generates new needs in terms of social cohesion, active citizenship and personal fulfilment to which education and training can make a significant contribution”.

The proposals from the Commission for the EU structural programmes for the period 2007-2013, include a renewal of the Comenius, Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci and Grundtvig programmes so that together they constitute an integrated commitment to lifelong learning in the EU. Furthermore, the Commission considers these four programmes to be integral “parts” of a programme for lifelong learning. It is apparent from the way the Commission formulates its objectives for this integrated programme that the influence on and development of a number of normative conditions is continually in focus.³

“The Integrated Programme shall have the following specific objectives:

- (a) to contribute to the development of quality lifelong learning and to promote innovation and a European dimension in systems and practices in the field;*
- (b) to help improve the quality, attractiveness and accessibility of the opportunities for lifelong learning available within Member States;*
- (c) to reinforce the contribution of lifelong learning to personal fulfilment, social cohesion, active citizenship, gender equality and the participation of people with special needs;*
- (d) to help promote creativity, competitiveness, employability and the growth of an entrepreneurial spirit;*
- (e) to contribute to increased participation in lifelong learning by people of all ages;*
- (f) to promote language learning and linguistic diversity;*
- (g) to reinforce the role of lifelong learning in creating a sense of European citizenship and encouraging tolerance and respect for other peoples and cultures;*
- (h) to promote co-operation in quality assurance in all sectors of education and training in Europe;*
- (i) to exploit results, innovative products and processes and to exchange good practice in the fields covered by the Integrated Programme”.*

The four individual programmes that constitute the integrated programme each have their own main aims. The Comenius programme is concerned with actions for pupils in the formal educational system, from pre-school to high school. The Erasmus programme, at the moment, is concerned with actions for students in higher education and advanced vocational training. The Leonardo da Vinci programme is concerned with students in all vocational training and the Grundtvig programme is concerned with all forms of adult education. In addition, these four programmes are supported by research into lifelong learning funded by the Jean Monnet programme. Here it is possible to find all the prerequisites for the additional strengthening of various initiatives, provided one examines carefully the Commission’s proposal for the Culture 2007 Programme, with its opportunities of stimulating both mobility and the creation of networks, and provided one examines the

³ Commission of the European Communities (2004); “The new generation of community education and training programmes after 2006”, COM (2004), 156 Final, Brussels 09.03.2004 and Commission of the European Communities (2004); “Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing an integrated action programme in the field of lifelong learning”, COM(2004), 474 Final 2004/0153 (COD), Brussels 14.07.2004.

proposed Youth in Action programme, with its expressed aim of stimulating active citizenship and social cohesion.⁴

It is clear that in recent years the EU has considerably widened its view of the development of abilities. It is noticeable that after several years in the wilderness cultural policy is now once again coordinated with educational policy and together these constitute ingredients in the development of individuals' abilities. This cultural dimension in the general educational policies of the EU has not been so clearly expressed since the end of the 1990s.⁵ As I see it, the formulation of the aims and objectives of all these programmes should open the way for the participation of open air museums in this field. I also believe that it is vital for the future standing and survival of open air museums, as something significantly more than pleasure parks, that we show initiative and a willingness to participate in a task that binds us to the development of the Community. Adopting this perspective of lifelong learning is in no respect in conflict with our normal priorities in the production of cultural heritage, the preservation of this heritage and its propagation.

Our full-scale, three-dimensional museums with all their ambience of authenticity, authority and professional representation are a perfect instrument for the learning processes implicit in the aims and objectives of the previously mentioned programmes. Does this involve political opinions? The answer is yes, that is not to be denied, but my feeling is that none of us objects to initiatives which contribute to democratic citizenship, social inclusion, tolerance etc. My own view is that just now open air museums are in an interesting position. It is a position we share with other types of museums, but it is particularly noticeable for open air museums. My argument is as follows: when open air museums first appeared they were ideal instruments for the propagation of a national identity thanks to their potential as meeting places with a three-dimensional, cultural and historical quality. Simple and interesting efforts were made to restore collections of buildings in a manner that provided the proper atmosphere of national romanticism.⁶ This task is no longer a priority in society. As I see it, open air museums can now choose between becoming museum relics or creating a new niche for themselves. In this context, the idea of learning in itself becomes of interest.

When we talk of learning, it is as a superior concept in relation to education. Learning covers both the goal-oriented and non-goal-oriented influences all human beings are subject to in their daily lives. It can be argued that life is a learning process where our experiences contribute to the formation of our knowledge, skills and attitudes. We speak therefore of lifelong and lifewide learning.⁷

Open air museums have an excellent potential here and have something unique to offer in the acquisition of knowledge, skills and values. A few examples are in order. Naturally, open air museums cannot assume to do that which secondary schools, high schools and universities do well or even better. The formal educational system is unsurpassed at teaching general knowledge. Schools, high schools and universities are types of institutions created

⁴ Commission of the European Communities (2004); "Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Culture 2008 programme", COM (2004) 469 Final 2004/0150 (COD), Brussels 14.07.2004 and Commission of the European Communities (2004); "Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council Creating the 'Youth in Action' programme for the period 2007-2013", COM (2004) 471 Final 2004/0152 (COD), Brussels 14.07.2004.

⁵ David Anderson; "A conceptual framework", in Alan Chadwick and Annette Stanett (ed.); *"Museums and Adult Learning: perspectives for Europe"*, Leicester 2000.

⁶ Henrik Zipsane; "Friluftsmuseerne som nationalismens monumenter", i *RIG*, nr. 1, 2005, Lund.

⁷ Mats Ekholm och Sverker Härd; *"Lifelong Learning and Life wide Learning"*, Stockholm 2000.

simply to achieve their aim of teaching knowledge. In this area, they have a tradition stretching back hundreds of years. But open air museums can often create more interesting teaching situations for both teachers and pupils through the appropriation of our three-dimensionality or, as it has been called "reality-based learning". At Jamtli, we have recently experimented with the learning of mathematics at the open air museum whereby school pupils have been able to learn about both old units of measure and have also been able to work with mathematics in practical situations.⁸ In this context, the open air museum acts as a resource for the formal educational system by providing an alternative or complement learning environment. The open air museum functions as an alternative classroom, thus providing a setting for the formal acquisition of knowledge. This is nothing unusual. Open air museums have been able to do this for decades. Without resorting to magic, the open air museum provides a potentially attractive atmosphere for school teaching. Many people working in open air museums recall with pleasure the many comments received from teachers that confirm that at our open air museums they see pupils, who otherwise have not been able to concentrate or become involved in the classroom environment or academic environments in general, manage to learn with us.

Naturally, open air museums function also as learning environments through lectures, guided tours on building technology for adult groups etc. and in these ways contribute to the acquisition of knowledge in a lifelong learning perspective. Often, such learning processes form part of the normal programme offered by open-air museums. Open air museums also have many years experience in the learning of skills which can be valuable in a lifelong learning perspective. Local industrial skills and crafts, traditional handicrafts -- not least related to building -- traditional farming methods, cooking etc. belong to the skills-related areas of competences to be found at open air museums. Here there is a rich tradition of creating events, arranging courses and organising festivities. Courses in handling a scythe and a handicraft café are two of the most recent events of this type I have become acquainted with at Jamtli. But in addition to these traditional processes of skills acquisition, new ones are also appearing at museums. These can be drama, role-play, dance and many other kinds of initiatives which reflect the new areas of competence at open-air museums.

The major objective for learning at open air museums can, however, be found in the formation of values among our visitors, either as organised groups or as individuals. This is a main objective since it is just the influence on attitudes that has been the area specifically developed by open air museums. The traditional working methods of the indoor museums -- i.e. the production, management and propagation of a cultural heritage -- strengthened by presentation in a three-dimensional, full-scale form, turned out, right from the beginning, to be unsurpassed as a means to systematised informal learning.⁹ In the past, demonstrating the roots of national identity was the rationale behind many collections and representations of traditional farmsteads. Regional identity was represented at the open air museums as a variation of the national pattern. When the need for our inhabitants to learn a national identity became less prominent -- and that was as late as 1970 -- the open air museums often found a new role as tourist attractions. Instead of open air museums being places where visitors could learn enough to be able to understand and identify with the image of the nation, the three-dimensional, full-scale representation of times past was placed at the

⁸ Kerstin Wallin och Karin Andersson; "Temaslingor – självlärande program för skolor, exemplet Matematik för yngre elever", [Thematic trails – a selflearning programme for schools: the case of Mathematics for young pupils] Östersund 2004.

⁹ Henrik Zipsane; "Refugees at the Open Air Museum: the museum as a place for informal life-long learning. A case study" i Harry Cameron (ed.); "Conference proceedings for Management, Social Capital and Lifelong Learning. An International Conference at Stirling University, 25 – 28 October 2005", under publication.

service of marketing for the tourist industry. In the worst instances, the differences in the presentation of history from open air museum to open air museum were gradually obliterated. Open air museums were in the risk of becoming 'look-a-likes'. But if we explore the rich history of open air museums, we cannot avoid discovering a completely different strength in their potential for the acquisition of values. This strength is linked to the qualities of a three-dimensional, full-scale representation deriving from a knowledgeable understanding of the conditions of life both past and present. It is here that open air museums have a potential in relation to the European aspiration. The history of open air museums demonstrates our great potential in relation to all ages and types of people. We can stimulate learning and we can contribute to formal, non-formal and informal learning. Lifelong and lifewide learning are already known truths for those involved with open air museums. That we recognise this is, however, not enough in itself. If open air museums in the future are to be seen as potentially attractive recipients of grants and capital investment, then we have to attach our initiatives more explicitly to the formulations in the above mentioned European objectives. Some examples can usefully illustrate what this can mean in practice.

The European Union has expressed the need for more people to participate in activities that raise the levels of skills and knowledge. There is a search for, among other things, a means to ensure that fewer young people leave high school with incomplete qualifications.¹⁰ A number of studies by both the OECD and the EU have shown that young people with incomplete qualifications from high school constitute a group that is in danger of becoming socially marginalised, with all that entails, only five years after they have left school. It is an expressed aim of the EU in the Lisbon Process to reduce the extent of incomplete high school studies. The official goal is to ensure that by 2010 at least 85% of an age group in the whole of the EU should have successfully completed a high school education.¹¹ This should be seen as a cautious but significant rise from the 82.8% achieved in the 15 old member countries in 2000.¹²

The EU refers to "drop-outs" from basic high school education and of the need not only to prevent this but also to attract these drop-outs back into high school. It is possible that here open-air museums can play a vital, concrete role. On the one hand, a more active utilisation of open air museums by high schools as a supplementary learning environment to the formal learning processes in the acquisition of knowledge could be something that can be experimented with. The three-dimensional nature of the work of open air museums can be stimulating to learners as it appeals to several senses and can provide an enhanced learning experience for some pupils. More important is the potential open air museums offer, in an almost Montessori spirit, for the stimulation of a fundamental inquisitiveness among drop-outs and thereby increase their desire to return to formal education. Within our daily activities and their cultural-historical based representations, we, at the open air museums,

¹⁰ Council of the European Union; "Press release 2639th - Council meeting - Education, Youth and Culture", 6079/05 (Presse 20) Brussels, 21 February 2005.

¹¹ Commission of the European Communities (2004); "Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. Report on the Implementation of the Commission's Action Plan for Skills and Mobility", COM (2004) 66 Final, Brussels 06.02.2004.

¹² Commission and Council of the European Community (2004); "The success of the Lisbon Strategy hinges on urgent reforms. Joint interim report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the detailed work programme on the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems in Europe", (2004/C 104/01), Official Journal of the European Union 30.04.2004

can create the prerequisites for a working environment that stimulates people to seek new wisdom, skills and values.

Another example is in the area of reminiscences. Since the late 1980s in England, people have been working on so-called "age exchange" where through conversations with old people their memories have been stimulated by photographs and museum artefacts. It is argued that by stimulating recollection, it is also possible to stimulate short-term memory and, thereby, communicative ability, or what can be understood as everyday skills for the elderly. In recent years, this has developed from being a single initiative only for the established museums to become an official task for museums from the government and the regions of England. Think of the potential if we employ our three-dimensional, full-scale representation with the opportunities for empathy that we can create the conditions for. Think simply of experiencing living through smells or old linguistic expressions.

The stimulation of drop-outs and the work on reminiscences are only examples of concrete initiatives from a lifelong learning perspective which are fully in keeping with the European agenda resulting from the Lisbon strategy. Other suitable areas for open air museums in this context could be tolerance in a multi-cultural Europe or active democratic citizenship.

However, it is vital that the EU focus on employability should be taken into consideration in the majority of activities planned for lifelong learning in open air museums. Study after study has pointed to the importance to the EU of employable skills and knowledge and, in its widest sense, this perspective has become a central component of priorities in learning initiatives in the EU.¹³

On 14-15 February 2002, educational staff from a number of open-air museums in Estonia, Lithuania, Hungary, Romania, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway and Sweden met at Jamtli, the open air museum in Östersund, for a seminar on pedagogical initiatives at open air museums. This meeting was most fruitful and we met once again for further stimulating discussions at Domein Bokrijk, the open-air museum in Belgium, 7-8 September 2004. Here we formulated, in a more goal-oriented manner, our desire to make our pedagogical initiatives more attractive from a European perspective. Furthermore, since the first meeting at Jamtli, two more open air museums have joined the group, one from Russia and one from Germany. Consequently, there are now 14 open air museums in the network which we have called LLOAM, Lifelong Learning in Open Air Museums.

A colleague in Tallinn– Triin Siiner – and I have promised our colleagues in this very loose network that we will act as coordinators in terms of meetings and the formulation of project proposals which can be attractive to the EU. In this respect, of the programmes mentioned above, we are particularly interested in the Grundtvig, Leonardo da Vinci and Youth in Action programmes. Our aim is that we can soon submit a project application with the working title "What Do You Learn in the Open Air Museum?" The aim of the project is to develop a terminology for the academic description of in part the goals of the learning process and in part the effect of the learning process in a number of our very varied pedagogical activities at the open air museums in the network.

In addition we plan to bring the members of the network together in Tallinn in the latter part of 2006, and I hope to be able to report on the above mentioned project at the next

¹³ Eugenia Kazamaki Ottersten; " Lifelong Learning and Challenges Posed to European Labour Markets", in *"European Journal of Education"*, Vol. 39, No. 2, 2004.

meeting of European Open Air Museums in 2007. The LLOAM network– which should be seen as a loose cooperative network for the pedagogical area of the work of open air museums – has room for more participants from other museums who are particularly interested in the development of the pedagogical activities of their open air museums.

On behalf of the network, I would like to stress the importance of management support for those participating in the network and who are seeking to improve their abilities by cooperating with colleagues at other open air museums in Europe. This is important in maintaining the progress in the kind of cooperation we are seeking to achieve and this also means a constant adaptation to the rapidly changing European Union. As I have argued here, there is a great potential and excellent opportunity for open air museums in the cooperation made possible in the European Union. Primarily, it gives us the opportunity of coming closer to each other without losing the characteristic qualities of each individual open air museum – or its identity.

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