

THE STONE AGE PARK DITHMARSCHEN (STEINZEITPARK DITHMARSCHEN)

Concept and Development of a Visitor oriented Educational Center for Sustainable Development

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Introduction

What does a Stone Age village or Stone Age house look like? (Almost) every person that we happen to randomly meet can answer this question with (subjectively recognized) certainty. Since the early research about the prehistoric lake dwellings in the circumalpine region in the 19th century, the knowledge people assume to have is based, not lastly, on images or “projections,” in psychological terminology, that, through ethnology, through the branches of archaeology that are well recognized in public media, and through the standard method of analogy from ethnological examples, are available in our cultural memory to our modern minds. These images are even somewhat encouraged these days by audience-oriented, economic interests. An important role of our museum and pedagogic work is to critically reassess and to check the validity of these images through practical experiments and trials within the framework of the model “Stone Age village” at the Steinzeitpark Dithmarschen (Stone Age Park Dithmarschen). But first, here is some basic information about the Stone Age Park in Albersdorf.

The Steinzeitpark Dithmarschen – Self-Understanding and Activities

The Steinzeitpark Dithmarschen in Albersdorf, in the county of Dithmarschen (Schleswig-Holstein, Germany), is an archaeological, open-air museum that integrates the surrounding landscape. Since 1997 the park has been developed on a plot of land over 40 hectares large, with nine original archaeological monuments under the mission statement into a “neolithic” cultural landscape. The Stone Age Park consists of the Museum of Archaeology and Ecology in Dithmarschen, which has original, on-site structures, as well as a reconstructed, model-like Stone Age settlement of the early through late Neolithic periods (“Stone Age village”). They are there to convey archaeological research results. The Steinzeitpark aims to teach the public about the relationship between the natural environment and the development of the land. It also wishes to gain public support for the protection of our natural and cultural inheritance, which is less abundant today. The Steinzeitpark Dithmarschen attempts to teach people in a way that integrates



theory, practice, intellect, and feelings. We believe that a knowledge of the past that has been reflected upon, can help us to understand the present, and that, as a result, the visitors will develop a desire to delve deeper into the presented topics. The Steinzeitpark Dithmarschen helps to work toward lasting ecological, cultural, and business development as a certified educational center in the region of Albersdorf (KELM 2006).

With the help of a scientific committee an experience-oriented, educational concept was worked out for the expansion of the outdoor park area, which was realized in stages from the end of 2009 to the end of 2012 with support from the regional government of Schleswig-Holstein (from the EU-funded programme “Zukunftsprogramm Wirtschaft”), from the Metropolitan region of Hamburg (Förderfonds Nord), and from the “Bingo Environment Lottery.” Two newly built Stone Age house models (in original dimensions according to dig discoveries in Schleswig-Holstein) were erected in cooperation with the State Service for Archaeology of Schleswig-Holstein. The results included a “ritual house“, an area dedicated to “sacrifices” with a boardwalk, and a wooden platform by a newly created pond. The pond area also has an erosion simulation where the provable phenomenons of loss of the fertile soil of the Neolithic period can be seen. New additions to the park include: info-pavilions in the forest, an audio guide system for the entire park grounds, the reconstruction of various large stone grave formations, and a reconstructed Bronze Age burial mound that can be visited from inside (KELM 2011). In the spring of 2009 a new service building was opened at the parking lot, from which a shortcut to the Stone Age village was created. This path also leads visitors chronologically in a looping fashion along reconstructed, ar-

archaeologically proved house structures. Alongside these building projects which seek to extend the content of the park and also make it more attractive to tourists, the park regularly supports archaeological and historical research of the countryside. Belonging to that group are: historical countryside research of the Institute for Ecosystem Research of the University of Kiel (among others REISS 2005), pollen analyses (DÖRFLER 2004), and excavations of megalithic graves in the region and of a causewayed enclosure from Funnel Beaker time at the Dieksknöll near Albersdorf in cooperation with the Institute for Pre- and Protohistory of the University of Kiel, within the framework of the multiyear project called “Early Monumentality and social differentiation,” sponsored by the German Research Association (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft / DFG) (see the article of H. Dibbern in this volume and MÜLLER 2009 and DIBBERN u. HAGE 2010). Additionally the entire park is available for archaeological experiments, for example, since 2004 in the case of simulated Stone Age living in cooperation with the Archaeological Institute of the University of Hamburg (see the article of B. Meller and T. Friedrich in this volume and MELLER 2004 and FRIEDRICH et al. 2008) or since 2007 with the experimental slash-and-burn of forest area (KELM 2011).

In the medium-term a new exhibitory and educational center is being planned for the entrance area of the Stone Age Park (KELM 2007). This will replace the current museum rooms housing the permanent exhibit, which are further away (circa 2 km) and need to be rented.

Since the beginning of the project, various programs, press releases, and events for different target groups have taken place. The public nature of which has been done in consideration of the respective theme or period specific matter at hand. These efforts have significantly contributed to the grounds projects (KELM 2005).



Ethnology and Experimental Archaeology as the Source of Archaeological Analogies

Archaeology (as a discipline) with its methods and expressive possibilities and the scientist, who is only sometimes aware of the fact that he/she is “time traveling,” so to say, are both on a trip to the past that is merely incomplete. Thus, the picture we have of the past is blurred. Archaeology is therefore reliant on analogies and analogical conclusions for almost every interpretation, as finds neither “speak” by themselves, nor for themselves or their past (BERNBECK 1997, 85ff.). The difficulty here should be stressed of making broad interpretations of archaeological results based on an analogical conclusion. Because of the limitation of the reliability of the sources, one must always realize that one is theorizing instead of proving one’s ideas (EGGERT 2001, 324). On the other hand using analogies, e.g. from ethnology and experimental archaeology, has clear and important advantages in terms of relating archaeological results and work methods, as long as the problematic issues pertaining thereto are openly pointed out. This is a foundation of methods and content that can and should justifiably be presented to the public, as in the case of institutions with archaeologically involved themes, as well as results and data from ethnology, and from the practical application of archaeology, e.g. in the area of museum pedagogy.

In archaeological institutions like the Steinzeitpark Dithmarschen, reconstructions of finds and results are often shown and displayed or used. The scientific perception of prehistoric tools and their functions often occurs in an unspoken manner on an evolutionary influenced basis. Even if this procedure can be understood as a “protest against every revival of mythology,” (CHILDE 1975, 25) there is still an ethical problem. The evolutionary perception of the tools is all too often uncritically transferred to the perception of the groups and peoples who used (or who are using) the tools in different time periods (WINIGER 1990, 39 ff; EGGERT 2001, 311 ff.). If you understand (archaeological) culture (groups) as a material expression of a functional adaptation to the environment, then there is a large probability that similar (living) environments in the past and in the present were and are similarly manipulated. But in order to state such a hypothesis to compare different culture groups, a large enough amount of provable data should be presented through the formal analysis of finds and results (EDDY 1984, 25). This can be done through detailed maps of archaeological findings and their structures, through experimental (production of particular) models and replicas, as well as through analogies with indigenous peoples living today. This procedure prevents an assumption from being falsified or at least be able to attribute it a high probability of accuracy. Also from the analyses of most of the archaeological results of central Europe, like for example for the reconstruction of the Stone Age houses from the Funnel Beaker Culture in Albersdorf which were designed from concrete information from excavations in Flögeln and Pennigbüttel in Lower Saxony (ANDRASCHKO et al. 2004), no concluding answers as to the exact form and organization of the houses can be offered – especially concerning the form of the upper structures of the building. In cooperation with AGIL, The Office for Practical Ar-

chaeology, Reppenstedt/Lüneburg, other excavation results and finds from similar time periods were taken into account, examples from ethnographic sciences (e. g. also house research) were searched for clues, and results of archaeological house re-building experiments were considered during the planning of the reconstructions (ibid.). Not only C. AHRENS (1990), the former head of the Association of European Open Air Museums, has warned against the problems with the methods. According to Ahrens, any attempts at reconstruction will most probably communicate a more reliable image of the particular present time than the past which is trying to be represented.

All of the model houses, the reconstructions on-site, and the furnishings in the replica of the house from Pennigbüttel and its positioning were made on the basis of diverse archaeological results predominantly from central Europe from the Middle Neolithic period around 3000 B.C., and further excavations were also cited in these results (MELLER 2004). In order to furnish the Stone Age house, an array of quintessential models were developed and chosen from the spectrum of high probability options. The models built include: Neolithic walls, floors, ceiling structures, separating walls, seating, looms, ovens, millstones, doors, interior furnishings, stoves, storage spaces for food and supplies, and doorsteps. Such renderings are, from a scientific and puristic point of view, to be seen critically. But they can still offer visitors an idea as to the first northern German farmers' living conditions – even if the general terms of ongoing, long-term use cannot be communicated to the visitor on their short visit.

The Steinzeitpark Dithmarschen strives to make it possible for groups of people, whether it be adult, children or school groups, to have direct contact with ancient



monuments and their proper “neolithic” cultural landscapes. These include old forms of living and settlement, old breeds of domesticated animals, and much more, which can offer perspectives into past ways of life. Ethnological precedents are also very often used in practical, pedagogical work.

In all of these areas – whether it be the reconstruction of tools, models of houses or particular forms of exhibiting in the museum – the problem of reconstruction and rendering of prehistoric societies is always quietly looming in the background. It is possible to form stereotypical interpretations of the past in our mind’s eye – which can take root – and that are more or less congruent with the present as we know it (BERNBECK 1997, 101 ff.). The responsible archaeological institutions should regularly ask themselves whether this really is or can be the case in each situation, and also communicate the matter to their visitors.

On the Imparting of Key Competencies in an Archaeological Context

As disciplines, both archaeology and ethnology deal with people’s natural necessities of life, with the consumption of resources, and with the possibilities to adapt to or manipulate these resources. At many environmental education centers and at the Steinzeitpark in Albersdorf the practical and methodical program called “Education for Sustainable Development” has recently been implemented. In combination with ethnology, this imparting of archaeological themes allows new access to the meaningful, basic questions of existence, which are also significant to modern mankind. It can result in an elevated respect for physical work and takes timely dimensions into consideration, which are often neglected by the “Education for Sustainable Development” program. Particularly archaeology’s view of “the foreign,” which happens in time, and not necessarily in space, can lead to understanding, to awareness, and, in the best case, to tolerance of other (past) cultures (VAN DÜLMEN 2000, 93).

How can such an expectation be concretely realized in an archaeological institution? At the Steinzeitpark Dithmarschen each educational event consists of a hands-on and an experience oriented part (KELM 2006). These offers take place



at the mostly authentic “problem-oriented learning environment” (RUSTEMEYER 2004, 115) of the Stone Age village and include an instructive introduction by the “Stone Age curator” and a practical, constructive experience for the participant. Through these programs at the Steinzeitpark, which deal with specifically conceived themes, the participants are meant to improve their personal competencies in profes-

sional skills (knowledge and insights), method competence (skills and techniques), social competence (group behavior and interactive negotiation), as well as self-competence (self-responsible behavior). All these competencies are key competencies of the “Education for Sustainable Development” theme. They can improve the quality of life, be applied to various essential aspects of life, and are relevant to every individual. These competencies should enable one to successfully overcome complex challenges, by mobilizing psychosocial components like cognitive skills, knowledge, value orientations, emotions, and motivations.

With different types of tools and raw materials that were typical of the time, the Steinzeitpark Dithmarschen presents the daily work of Stone Age people (in terms of labor and production) in the most authentic way possible. Pedagogically acceptable copies of tools and equipment are also made, these sometimes being influenced by ethnological precedents. All of which can make the historical relationships of life and nature more easily understood. Grasping and understanding are some of the primary concepts in terms of information transfer. Through the right kind of motivation before the start of the practical hands-on section and an age-appropriate difficulty level, considerable attention is given to the subjective probability that children will feel that they succeeded during the programs. In individual cases a normally below-average student can improve their own learning results, because the positive observation of their own successful learning encourages positive feedback, which, in turn, sometimes without eliciting it, is passed on to other students in the group. The learning is meant to be as cooperative, participatory, and self-organized as possible. This kind of self-driven learning motivation (RUSTEMEYER 2004, 33) is the best guarantee for lasting learning success through method competence.

Quality Service as the Foundation of a Visitor-Focused Approach at the Steinzeitpark Dithmarschen

The “friendliness toward innovation” at the Steinzeitpark and the variety, quality service, and visitor-focused approach, all of which aim toward building a base of repeat visitors (HAUSMANN 2011, DEUTSCHER MUSEUMSBUND 2007), are major contributing factors to the success of the institution from the beginning and are presented as follows. The principle of “quality service” is connected to the different work areas in the institution and is the all-around motto inside and out. The individual areas achieve this through the structurally conceptualized basis, the “liveliness” and variety of how we convey information, and the way the employees are integrated into the development of the museum. In our opinion the following elements are necessary at the Steinzeitpark for quality service that is visitor-oriented:

- *The Scientific Basis of the Museum*
Generally through a (when possible, institutionalized) exchange of information with external partners, the connection to research, for themes relevant to the respective museum, should be continually guaranteed. Research on a museum’s

own collection or on local and regional topics would be desirable in enhancing the profile and can also be realized in smaller institutions in cooperation with larger ones. At the Steinzeitpark there are, for example, cooperations with various institutions at the universities of Kiel and Hamburg that have existed for years.

- *The Basic Concept of Museum Work*

The foundation of work in the institution is laid through a written statute of self-understanding, the goals of the museum, and a mission statement with a motto and a vision of the museum, which is contractually accepted by the employees (and which is internalized in the course of our work). The motto of the Steinzeitpark and its financial supporters is, for example, “Experience Nature – Culture – History, and keep it safe for the future.” An ongoing discussion concerning the mission statement is of major concern for the vitality of an ever evolving institution. For separate museum departments (e.g. for the museum collection) there should also be work plans and development concepts in written form, which would also pertain to special projects.

- *The Organization and Financing of the Museum*

To be able to offer the highest quality service, stability in finances, organization, and personnel is of great significance. If it is necessary to repeatedly discuss and argue over structural and financial frameworks, a lot of energy, ideas, and motivation go to waste. On the one hand, clearly regimented responsibility for particular work areas can be accounted for purely through organization. On the other hand, it should allow for enough flexibility and allow employees (especially the ones who have direct contact with visitors) some decision-making power. If it becomes necessary to come up with spontaneous solutions, they should, in retrospect, be discussed with the management and should usually be accepted. The Limited business model (AÖZA gGmbH), which must fulfill certain criteria and functions, has been successful at the Steinzeitpark (OSSOLA-HARING 2004) since 2007. It has proved itself by allowing us to operate in a managerial style and to act quickly and on our own responsibility. The Steinzeitpark Dithmarschen is also financially backed by the County of Dithmarschen and the town of Albersdorf, which makes it, so to say, communally owned with its formal goal being to serve the public. The raising of external funding (which are mainly used for separate, temporary, and thematically limited projects) and help from the Support Society of the Steone Age Park, the “Förderverein AÖZA e. V.”, are also important financial props.

- *The Principle of the “Dynamic Museum”*

A museum being “dynamic” should entail regularly expanded or newly equipped exhibits, the variety and attractiveness of program activities that can be booked at any time, and special events. Regular visitor surveys and statistics in these areas are, in my opinion, absolutely necessary (as is the use or inclusion of those results in the planning). Another meaningful instrument for the quality development of museums is the so-called “balanced scorecard,” a term



borrowed from the business world. It helps cultural institutions to stay on track with statistical goals, to better judge their own position, and to identify weaknesses (WOLLESEN 2011). In Albersdorf, we were able to complete the above mentioned extensions of the “Stone Age village” by mid-2012. Additionally we offer around 2 to 3 new educational programs for various interest groups per year. To make room for these, we remove attractions which were less successful and/or popular.

- *Museum Publicity*

Alongside the “classic” informative PR work (for the press, subject specific media, posters/billboards, etc.), also the form of the “outward presentation” of the museum is very significant (i.e. especially addressing specific target groups, such as families with children and school or youth groups). This has to do with the institution’s image as a whole and its corporate identity and how they influence people inside the institution as well as people outside of it. Badges or vests with the museum logo, serve to identify museum employees. And when special events take place, the appropriate “Stone Age clothing” is worn, which helps to enhance the atmosphere in the Stone Age village.

- *The Certifications of the Museum*

Certificates or seals of quality are also highly significant for museum institutions, as they guarantee standards and validity of performance for the visitor. The standards for receiving particular certificates can serve as corrective feedback and as a source of ideas for the staff. Additionally they also serve as (expanded and very target group oriented) advertising platforms. This applies to



the Steinzeitpark in cooperation with the Institute for Management and Tourism of the University of Applied Sciences in Heide (Fachhochschule Westküste) with its recognition as “Quality Service Institution, Germany” (since 2009) by the DEHOGA (the German hotel and gastronomy society) and the IHK Schleswig-Holstein, the Chamber of Industry and Commerce. The Steinzeitpark has also been recognized as an “Educational Center for Sustainability” by the Department of the Environment of Schleswig-Holstein (since 2007). It has been certified as a “Wunnerland-Partner” for families with children through the tourism agency of Schleswig-Holstein (since 2010). And it has been placed on the “Route of European Megalithic Culture” (since 2014) – an official cultural route of the Council of Europe. The very considerable effort to obtain the particular certifications began, in our experience, to pay off in the middle term in the improvement of our offers and in the rise of visitor numbers.

- *“What’s Special” about our Museum?*

Every museum offers something “special” through its collection, its own theme and/or through its connection to the region. It is the museum’s task in the exhibit and in the PR work to enable the visitor to discover and recognize this specialness and uniqueness. Additionally, this also means that on particular occasions something unexpected should be offered (that the stakeholders/operators of the institution initiate themselves). In the future museums will have a great potential to serve as, for example, forums for (societal) discussions or generally as a social meeting place (e.g. for older people in rural areas). With the above in mind, opportunities to come in contact with new target groups are, in my opinion, easily had without having to exert a great effort.

- *The Staff*

The (main and voluntary) personnel of the museum is always the “face of the institution for the outside world” and needs to be trained and motivated as such. Training should be based on specialized knowledge in the subject area (which should regularly include current research results), as well as competencies in dealing with visitors (e.g. conflict management, communications, or security exercises). On top of the museum personnel organizing seminars for themselves, external subject knowledge should be added, and wishes for further education or training should also be taken into consideration in order to be able to meet these standards. This newly learned subject knowledge combined with efficient and all-encompassing communication within the institution can increase the general motivation of the entire museum staff and can also help to generate new ideas.

Experiences and Perspective

One way to continually examine the effective implementation of plans and quality offer of an educational institution that one visits in one’s leisure time, which is what an archaeological open-air museum is, would be to use checklists to regularly supervise the progression of work on-site, as shown by F. KOBBE’s example (2004, 90 ff.). The same principle can be utilized for the development of the Stone Age village and the museum concerning monument care, lay-out, and pedagogic-didactics. This is how a “quality assurance” in work and how a project management, which is acting rather than reacting, can be achieved. Through the Steinzeitpark working intensively with various specialized institutions (where international cooperation like the Open Arch Project is included) and through scientific conferences, publications, and the above-mentioned certifications, the quality of the subject matter can be maintained and continually built upon. It should also be mentioned that the population and local and regional (environmental) history are placed together in an exciting and informative context at the Steinzeitpark, which is why the institution receives so much support from regional volunteers (in addition to the over 600 active members of the Support Society, the AÖZA e.V.). This makes favorable conditions for the Steinzeitpark to receive repeat visitors from the local and regional population.

In order to secure an ongoing quality of content and attractiveness to visitors in the future, regular evaluations of work and educational programs at the Steinzeitpark need to be carried out by way of dialogues between visitors and staff. The following types of evaluation have, thus far, been used:

- visitor questionnaire/visitor observation
- questionnaire for staff (including “Stone Age volunteers”)
- regular analysis of visitor statistics
- committee meetings between the supervisory board, the head of their financial support group, and other involved people

To work out an individual, scientific, and publicly accepted profile for an institution like the Steinzeitpark Dithmarschen, evaluations, which are performed within the context of dialogues and which consider one's own limitations, are highly significant. Out of concern for quality and continuity, it is important for regular staff and volunteers, to receive ever ongoing practical and theoretical training, which specifically pertains to an employee's particular job. It is also important to motivate them for their work and for the standards pertaining thereto. A communicative work atmosphere, an ease of accessibility to the management or whoever may be in charge, project-oriented work, a sensible and "fair" division of labor, flexibility in work times, and clear-cut job and task descriptions are necessary. Another component, which should not be underestimated (also considering its time commitment), is a well-placed "culture of recognition" within the financial support group. The most important "ingredients" for the success of the Albersdorfer Steinzeitpark were and are the clearly and scientifically based foundation, persistence during the plan realization, the use of various cooperation options, the openness to innovative approaches (and the willingness to try them), and the enthusiasm and engaging nature of those involved for both the topic in general and the institution in particular.

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