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Local and Regional Development through Heritage Learning

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Local and Regional Development Through Heritage Learning

The starting point of all thinking about the past and our relation to the past must be that it is irreversible. This sounds almost ridiculously self-evident. Nevertheless it is exactly this fundamental characteristic which is creating the problems as well as the possibilities in the use of history.

The irreversibility of the past somehow plays with us. On the one hand it is in the nature of the irreversibility that we cannot get into the time which has passed. It has just gone. Finito! There seems to be absolutely nothing we can do about it. Then on the other hand we sense the traces of the past everywhere. It begins with our own memories and normally goes on with family memories, and then the collective memories of the community, the country and so on. In this way the past becomes extended to time before our own and therefore also before our personal memories.

It is somehow the sensing of the past which provides the possibilities for heritage learning. The sensed past can be described, discussed and even criticized but is impossible to prove in any scientific meaning.

Historically our possibility of sensing the past has been used by society in different ways. We can identify two main uses for the human ability of sensing the past. The first one is the way by which a group identity can be created through the relation of all members of a group to a mutual sense of the past. This is easiest to recognize when we think about a history written for a nation or a minority culture. But of course the method can also be



recognized when we think about the history of a certain family or for example never existing nations like *History of the English speaking People*. It is easy to understand that this sort of history production has been popular when people have wanted to create and sustain a nation, but of course the method has been mutually powerful when for example an 18th Century king or a 20th Century dictator has put it in use. In older times this sort of history use often had the form of a book or was told from generation to generation. In later centuries we have seen the use of literature, theatre, museums, and movies and today of course also television and the internet. The main characteristic of this form of history use is its power of identity production. This power

should not be underestimated, but has to be understood as equally strong in both including and excluding people.

The second main way of using our ability to sense the past has been developed through the last three centuries in the western world, and has conquered the world through the last century. The use of cultural heritage as a tourist attraction is taking new forms all the time and has grown to very powerful importance in industrial, economic and cultural terms. Many people today find their economic income through exploitation of the cultural heritage and the histories about it. The people who sell the medals and buttons and other pieces from Soviet times in present day Moscow are living on the past, so to speak, as much as chauffeurs in the tourist buses in the deserts of Egypt.

With ever greater expectations from governments and visitors during the 20th Century we have seen how throughout the world these two mentioned exploitations of the ability to sense the past has been combined. Monuments, all sorts of houses and archaeological sites, together with other places with “history” and collections in museums have been used to shape national or regional identity, at the same time making a living for many people through all types of related enterprises.



Maybe the best example of this combination of shaping identity and earning money is the Open Air Museums which first appeared in Scandinavia in the last decade of the 19th Century, then spread to other parts of Europe in the 1920s and 1930s and then to North America and in the second half of the 20th Century to all other continents (Rentzhog 2007). The Open Air Museums illustrate some of the strongest characteristics within the field of modern exploitation of the concept of history.

In the Open Air Museum in the days of Arthur Hazelius at Skansen in Stockholm around 1900, as well as in the many such museums today, people of all social classes felt welcome. In particular, these museums were very attractive especially for young families with children, and with retired people. In the Open Air Museum right from the beginning we find meetings of both labour movement and conservatives and all sorts of other antagonists. In reality Open Air Museums are just good examples of identity production on the basis of something other than class. The attraction of the national or regional historical environments in these museums underlines the effectiveness by which for instance nationalism suppressed class identity as the most important social ideological system. One might actually claim that this unwritten contract between the need for national identity to suppress class identity and the museums, and most of all the Open Air Museums, was a key factor when such institutions came about.

The Open Air Museums can also serve as an illustration of another point from the modern development of the concept of history. Right from the beginning these museums have had great visitor numbers and have earned money through entrance, food, sales and entertainment for which the visitors have normally paid. Today some Open Air Museums have free entrance as part of national politics, but in general the Open Air Museums have been special within the museum family in their ability to earn money, even doing this to such a degree that at least their financial reputation has earned respect in society. Even today we find good examples of Open Air Museums that are run as private enterprises, with great commercial interests attached. At the beginning at the 21st Century it seems that the best examples are Beamish Open Air Museum in Newcastle, UK, and Sovereign Hill Open Air Museum in Victoria, Australia (Jensen & Zipsane 2008). It is historically interesting that these two Open Air Museums are relatively young. They were founded at the beginning of the 1970s. They are thereby able to use the commercial mechanisms of theme parks, and not become buried in the swamp of collections, preservation and research.

I have used the Open Air Museums as an example of how the human ability to sense the past has been used in recent times. One might argue that these museums have been successful as socially inclusive and as creators of coherence, and at the same time they have been able to create revenue. For a long time it looked like that. Even now we find examples of Open Air Museums which are interesting from the perspective of national or regional governments, as they are willing to be arenas for such national or regional identity production. Such is the case in Europe with Open Air Museums in Budapest, Tallinn and Arnhem now. These of course are national reactions to the process of European integration. In North America it seems that the market for nationalism has reached its limits for the time being, and the current visitor numbers of the Open Air Museums there are reflecting that. The establishing of new Open Air Museums has slowed down in recent years.

All in all, today we claim that we see some problems with accepting the Open Air Museums in the traditional meaning as creators of coherence and as motors in development, in a world which moves slowly but surely away from a nationalist agenda. The problems come from globalization and the upcoming multicultural societies. These problems are shared with other traditional activities based on the human ability to sense the past. That is why we cannot simply take traditional ways of exploiting heritage thinking, and implement them into post-modern regional and local development.

Post-Modern Heritage Learning

One might claim that instead of having one history to fit a lot of people, we see it being normal today that each person lives with many histories. The many different histories coexist without creating visible problems for the individual. By this practice it is possible for the individual to have many partial identities at the same time. You can and will belong to many social groups, and you will feel that you share identity with each group, and with all the groups at the same time, but you will probably be alone with this particular sum of identities and exactly that mixture, which in terms of identity will be what constitutes your personality. This possible flexibility of identities forms a central characteristic of modern or post-modern man and woman today.

The fact that a person, at least in the developed parts of the world, today has to adapt to a life characterized by change creates great demands on both basic and continuing education and learning. As we are all different as learners, and as learning needs also differ from person to person at any given time as well as over time there is of course a huge demand for a great diversity in learning provision. On a national and even more at an international level, organizations such as UNESCO, OECD and EU have proclaimed lifelong learning policy to be essential to continuing development. The EU, for instance, with very little hesitation presented a list of key competences with elements of knowledge, skills and attitudes which can all be traced back to thinking within UNESCO and OECD (Reading 2001, OECD 2002, EU 2005, Euredice 2000 & Rasmussen 2006).

It seems very likely that, as one consequence of this educational and labour market policy, we will see a continued rise in public demands for output from the traditional systems of formal educational institutions (Field 2006). Today, and even more in the future, we will also see the achievable competences from various educations and learning systems described in ways that make them transnationally comparable (Edwards 2006). To meet the demands from EU or other policy-makers about key competences, comparability and outcome from learning it will not be enough in the future, as neither has it been in the past, for society to rely on the formal education system.

Historically, learning has been an area which many different institutions and organizations in society have divided among themselves (Ehlers 2006 & 2007). Even today there will be competences which are better learned – that is more efficiently learnt – in different learning environments; but we may even realize that some people – children as well as adults – learn better in some environments than in others (Ekholm and Hård 2000, Jarvis 2007).



The possibilities for cultural heritage institutions in relation to post-modern thinking about learning have only to a small degree been subject to research (Insulander 2005 & Illeris 2006). Even in a leading country in terms of heritage learning research and development such as the United Kingdom, we have seen very little research about the learning possibilities for adults in heritage institutions, or even the possibilities of learning *through* cultural heritage and not *about* heritage (Clarke 2002 & MLA 2006). If we choose the broader meaning of the term learning where the individual is a more or less active learner 24 hours a day, we find that the role played by heritage is studied in the sense that history is used for leisure (Jensen 1994, Aronsson 2005 & Zipsane 2005b), and is often seen as in opposition to using the construction of history for purposes of power (Zander 2001). This is however still a long way from studying visitors as learners. That difference in perspective might explain why for example rather little academic attention has been shown to adult learning in museums (Anderson 2000 & Funch 2005).

If we choose to see museums and other heritage institutions as learning environments in the broad sense of learning, it is suddenly easier to realize how learning in such environments has nothing or at least very little to do with learning about the past. Instead we can open learning doors by using chosen experiences and interpretations about the past and exploit the possibilities in the transformation of these experiences into cultural heritage. This makes possible a very special learning process which deserves attention (Henriksen & Frøyland 1998 & Anderson 2000 & Clarke, Dodd, Hooper-Greenhill, O'Riain, Selfridge & Swift 2002 & Gibbs, Sanni and Thompson 2007).



We who know the museums from inside also know and feel under our skin from our own experience how we can be overwhelmed by the feeling of the possibilities we just “know” are there, and of course it stimulates this feeling when we meet our users and their often heard remarks about how nice and user-friendly they find our museums. But it is not enough to say that the museums are nice when we want to understand them as learning environments. The same thing can be said about archives, art galleries and heritage sites.

To give an impression of what I gladly call the post-modern possibilities of heritage sites as learning environments, I will here just discuss some small cases, and focus on the relation between the possible learning outcome in the cases and the concept of key competences. The cases have different target groups, hereby in different ways indicating the possible lifelong learning perspective in heritage learning. Let me stress here that these examples are symptomatic of what is going on in quite a few heritage institutions and organizations throughout the world. It is a development which can make bottom-up change in the way in which society can and will exploit the human ability to sense the past.

Heritage Learning at Work in a Preschool Environment

When mothers or fathers come to Jamtli – a Cultural History and Art Museum and an Open Air Museum in Östersund in the middle of Sweden – and participate in special activities with their preschool age children, we may indeed ask why. More than fifteen years after the open preschool at the museum site started its work, it is still in public demand. The demand is even growing. Two pedagogical staff members from the museum lead activities in the old farmhouse environment together with some twenty children, and as many parents and sometimes even grandparents.



The small children participate in activities where they wash, bake, milk the cow or the goat, take care of the harvest from the fields and the timber from the forest, and other sorts of activities which formed part of everyday life in the later part of the 19th century. They borrow a dress or a sweater in 19th-century style and suddenly they belong to another time, another place and

another world, where the fantasy becomes real. The old farmhouse timber building together with the specially designed 19th century environment in the surroundings, and their borrowed dress as well as the pedagogical staff also dressed up in 19th-century costumes, form a world of its own. The small children's imaginative competences are enormous, and therefore it is relatively easy to bring the children into a fantasy world of special time and space.

To function in that world the children need some help. This is where the parents come into the centre of the activities. These often young parents know enough, or at least they think so, about the "old days" to help their children in the play activities.

In such surroundings, it is possible to create learning situations where an important outcome is about mutual learning experiences between two or three generations. But the learning outcome also concerns some of the specific abilities that you can learn from activities in a 19th century environment. Such specific abilities one might expect to be about the actual skills of that historical time. However, these skills probably only form one part of the new competence. At the centre of the competence might be the outcome from the experience that you can only do certain things if you do them as team work. Or it could be the simple experience that people can live in a different way from what we do now, and the child learns that certain things belongs together in order to create a full picture in the imagination (Selmer-Olsen 1993). The horse, the cow, the hens and the goat all belongs to a picture of a farm for the children who have participated in these preschool activities at the museum.



The use of possible imaginative so called "time travel" is quite developed as a pedagogical method in its own right and with its own traditions for both children and adults, even though the international spread of the method has its focus on school children and young adults (Westergren 2006). The probably more sensitive nature of children in preschool age, and therefore also an existence in that target group of stronger fantasy and sense of imagination, does however indicate that the method of time travel is most efficient with the youngest children (Borgström 2003). Time travel in the three dimensional representation of the past in a heritage environment can be a very strong experience. Because of its realistic nature it cannot be

compared to much else, making use as it does of pedagogical use of both physical and mental experiences.

The use of heritage learning for this young age group in the form described above does not produce any fixed identity related to the region or nation. Instead we find that the children participate in activities which they will in the foreseeable future relate to Jamtli as an environment in itself. As the activities only claim to be about “old times” and not any specific place or time, all children regardless of ethnic or cultural background participate with equal possibilities and feelings of ownership over the activities.

Heritage Learning Competences and Development of Attitudes

The special competences concerning role-play methods and the possibilities of this method which is developed within heritage learning can be used in a great variety of ways which differ from normal live-play in being based on a feeling of authenticity. But it all seems to come down to a learning outcome which is about stimulating the development of attitudes.



When 9th grade school children (ordinarily 15 years old) participate in the pedagogical programme called “On the run!” at Jamtli, the pedagogical staff at the museum have told the ordinary teachers that this programme will probably change some attitudes for some of the children in three to four hours’ time. That does not keep either the children or the teachers away. In the pedagogical role-play the children will be refugees and then asylum-seekers. They will each have a personal identity of the person described in their individual manuscripts, and they will be smuggled in different ways into an imagined country very similar to Sweden. Many of the children lose their few belongings on the way and some will unfortunately lose contact with a fellow refugee or another family member on the way to this country.

Well into the country, the participants will experience several interviews and the uncertainty natural to a life with no guarantee of the outcome. Even a short time of about half an hour spent in boredom in the refugee camp is experienced as too long. In the refugee camp you can watch television in a language you do not understand, and some of the pieces in the chess game are missing.

The participants will come to realize that the interpreters in the asylum centre may not at all time translate their answers or their questions in a way that satisfies their needs or expectations. At the end of the pedagogical programme the participants are told whether or not they will be granted the right to stay in the new country and, as in real life, only about 10-15 percent of the applicants – that is about 1-2 out of the 20-30 participants in each programme – will get the green light.



The purpose of this pedagogical programme has been to stimulate attitudes of understanding about the difficult situation for both refugees and the officials who handle these cases about asylum-seekers. The programme actually seems to be very much in demand, and is experienced as both stimulating and effective (Zipsane 2005a & 2005d). By questioning the young people before, during and then again some weeks after participation in this programme, it has been found that the effect on the attitudes of the participants is profound. It also seems that the impact on the attitudes of the young women is much stronger than on the young men (Löfstrand & Zakrisson 2006).

We have the impression that the participants in a pedagogical programme like “On the run!” are learning through activation of their sense of empathy. It is the experience of being angry, nervous, excited, bored, happy, and unhappy that the participants talk about, when we have asked them about their memories from the experience later.

Of course they do get some knowledge about the legislation and the statistics when the pedagogical staff from the museum introduce the programme. And of course the participants develop their skills as role-players or actors through the activities of the programme. But it is the change in attitudes that we have focused on both in our description of aims and in evaluation of the programme.

So far our experience indicates that the way to stimulate attitudes goes through the experience that the learners get through their feelings. The practical experience underlines that the key to success in this type of pedagogical programme is the use of the typical pedagogical competence of a museum which is familiar to role-play method, and the right composition of learning aims in terms of knowledge and skills to balance attitudes.

We have now had four seasons with “On the run” experiences and the pedagogical programme has so to speak its own history. We now meet young people who have their own personal experience about immigration and refugees, based on their participation in the programme some years ago at Jamtli.

Heritage Learning and the Production of Positive Learning Experiences

The environment of heritage institutions like archives, art galleries and museums has been developed through many years to places with a special atmosphere. Very often the institutions seem to forget what has made them so special, and what it is that makes them unique.

In the museum, the visitor as well as the employees experience many different formal competences in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes, a creative environment, a strong impression of creativity, and a sense of tranquillity coexisting with a productive atmosphere.

This special atmosphere is the strongest factor in shaping the museum as a learning environment with specific possibilities. People who have learning difficulties in other environments suddenly become more efficient learners in a museum (Henriksen & Frøyland 1999). This means that the museum can create positive learning experiences for people who under other circumstances actually are seen as losers. *“Museums are a non-threatening environment in which to learn. The adults they meet are not their teachers and can talk to them in a non-threatening way. By practising patience, observation and listening skills, the student emerge with greater confidence and self-esteem”.* (Lumley 2006).

The museum becomes a free zone with possible positive learning experiences, especially for some of the young people otherwise often described as “misfit youth”, who because of their alienation processes are easily marginalized (Ziehe & Stubenrauch 1982).



The formal school system is getting better and better in the sense that it produces a higher quality of education and ever more complicated competences. The critical media focus on the education system often seems to forget that the school system actually works and that it works very well (OECD 2001 & Knoll 2004). What deserves more attention is the group of young people who leave the school system without adequate basic competences.

Early school leavers have been in the focus for Jamtli for some time. Together with the Regional State Archive and a local Folk High School, the museum has been engaged in creating positive learning experiences for young people. The aim of the work has been to stimulate the participants to re-engage with the formal system of education or otherwise to achieve basic competences. The results have been very positive. Of the participants, one third has re-engaged in school, or has begun complementary studies at the Folk High School or in other semi-formal institutions.

The exact reasons why some of the participants become learners differ from person to person. It is quite normal for the successful participants almost to defend themselves by explaining that they naturally would have begun their studies with or without participation in the heritage learning activities, even though they would probably have waited a little longer (Augustén 2006). But the impression from the activities so far is that what the participants learn at the museum and the archive is to concentrate, to produce some self-discipline, and to engage with other people. The actual way to such learning experiences goes through stimulating curiosity and making the fulfilment of that basic curiosity dependent on concentration and engagement, which, they discover, is based on self discipline (Zipsane 2007c).

The results in this local project are not very different from results in similar projects in other regions and countries. With support from PASCAL we now compare the methods and results in such programmes in Tuscany, Scotland, Niedersachsen and Jämtland. The outcomes of these

comparisons are expected to help us to understand better why what is working for the target group. If the heritage sector has the competence and will to stimulate early school leavers to return to formal education, the society will be able to save a lot of money.



Heritage Learning and Interaction with the Social Capital of Senior Citizens

The Jamtli Open Air Museum has the good fortune to have many friends. Some of these friends are organized in an association. They are mostly retired people who seem to share one interest, namely affection for Jamtli. In the Regional State Archive, many people gather in their mutual interest in genealogy. These people are also mostly retired from normal working life and they are also often members of the local or regional association of genealogists. Such associations of genealogists indeed also share affection for the archive.

All these elderly people are engaged in activities in the heritage institutions which may very well be described as learning processes (Davoren & O'Donoghue 2000). The difficulty in the task of description comes from the fact that the activities point in two different directions of learning. On the one hand, the elderly people through their activities become the maintainers of knowledge, skills and attitudes which they transform into something which other people from an often younger generation may learn. This is interactive intergenerational learning in its finest sense. On the other hand, the elderly people themselves become learners in the heritage institutions as they participate in the activities. This learning goes in many different directions, and differs from person to person.

One person in the archive may have to learn how to use the internet in order to get interesting information on genealogy. Through the actual genealogy, the person also learns something about structure and the advantages in structured searching both manually and in databases. The same person may also learn and relearn social competences in the relations with other people in the archive – fellow participants or staff.



Another person is active in the Open Air Museum and is participating in the group of people sewing and repairing costumes. This person is both learning and/or relearning skills and social competences by the activity, in the same way as the person in the archive.

These people are in the heritage institutions because they want to participate in the activities. There is nothing about these activities which does not deserve to be described as heritage learning activities. The learning may consist of knowledge, skills and attitudes. One way or another, the learners here both produce and consume social capital as they learn.

When asked, elderly participants in activities in heritage institutions mention two reasons why they come several times a month or week. First, it is important that they experience that they have competences which are in demand. They have left working life, and instead of experiencing that an employer pays them a salary for their work, they can now experience an organization that shows gratitude and appreciation for their efforts, based on their personal competences. Secondly, the elderly participants express the feeling that they can come to the archive or the museum and be quite certain that here they will meet other elderly people of their own generation, who share the same interest and more or less the same life experiences (Zipsane 2007d). As the vast majority of the older participants are women who have become widows, the possibility for re-socializing is probably important. One may even suggest that the widows and some widowers also see the possibility to safe re-socializing, in the sense that in the heritage sector they can expect to meet senior participants with more or less the same educational, cultural and social background. This I must underline is just suggestions based on my personal experience from professional work in the heritage sector for two decades. There are however not relevant and updated studies on the elderly participants in the heritage sector.

Why This is Regional and Local Development

When people are asked in Sweden why they choose to live where they live they mention many different reasons. One of the most important for families with children is good childcare, school, and access to nature. For young men it is also very important to have possibilities for being

active in sports, and for young women cultural activities are very important. For most people – both men and women – it seems that the job comes second to all the above.

For older people it is often mentioned that it is important to have a variety of good cultural possibilities, and of course caretaking for elderly people.

It is a contribution to real regional and local development when we use heritage learning to produce and deliver experiences which stimulate both the individual and the collective imagination of the youngest citizens. It is also real development when we stimulate tolerance in young people who are about to produce basic elements in their lifelong understanding of ethics. It is indeed regional and local development, when heritage learning experiences are so inspiring that they can tempt young people to re-engage with education. And it is developmental and beneficial for society when elderly people keep up their personal competences and spirits, and thereby manage to take care of themselves better and for a longer period of time.

We may in a very simple way argue that by such activities we save resources for the community. Foremost and above all else, these above-mentioned examples of using heritage learning all contribute to a higher quality of life.

One may argue that this has little if anything to do with “history” in a more traditional meaning. I certainly agree. I am convinced that the people who want to be taught history in the traditional way will all find their way to that.



Heritage learning is about something else. In the museums we used to produce national identity for many people, and we were very good at it. The demand for national identity is declining, even though we experience some setbacks by certain governments promoting national canons and so on. In the long run politicians and professionals responsible for the archives, museums,

art galleries, cultural historical and archaeological sites will realize that by engaging heritage learning in practical daily life, people and the community gain.

Many people are engaged in the creation of social coherence. Local and regional authorities save money, and many people earn their actual living through heritage learning activities. The creation of social coherence through heritage learning in the 21st century setting implies a whole new perspective on the function of heritage organizations and institutions such as archives and museums. The guiding principle will be the possibility of contributing to regional and local development.



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