

Building Engagement

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Guests

Luke Winter (UK) and Zsolt Sári (HU)

Introduction

Open-air museums are always looking for ways to engage the public. What is the best way to offer visitors a glimpse into the past? How can open-air museums be used to address issues of interpretation and social responsibility in the modern world? Luke Winter and Zsolt Sári discuss their views on how museums can engage with the public, providing authentic storytelling, and the social responsibility of museums and heritage centres in the modern world.

Transcript

Matilda: Hello and welcome to #FinallyFriday! This chat session is run by EXARC, the society for archaeological open-air museums, experimental archaeology, ancient technology, and interpretation. My name is Matilda Siebrecht and today I am joined by two specialists from our EXARC community focussing on public outreach and communication at open-air museums. Dr. Zsolt Sári is the deputy director at Skanzen, the Hungarian open-air museum, which is a predominantly ethnographic museum, focussing on life in the 19th and 20th centuries. His work revolves around the communication of traditional Hungarian culture, focussing on the social responsibility of museums to engage with past cultural traumas and modern world issues. Luke Winter is the founder of Historic Concepts Ltd., which focuses on the construction of historic and prehistoric buildings for open-air museums and heritage centres. As well as the more practical aspects of his work, he is also specialized in education, focussing on the communication of archaeological and traditional knowledge through hands-on volunteer programmes and demonstrations. So, welcome to Szolt and Luke. So, I have a quick question to start you off. Both of you are involved with the communication of archaeological, ethnographic, historical knowledge, so

heritage knowledge shall we say, why do you think it is so important that people in the modern world learn about their pasts, perhaps Luke, you might start?

Luke: Yeah, this is sort of a common theme in archaeology, in the kind of work that I do, and it is a really critical one. I suppose essentially the question is: why do we do what we do? For me there are some crucial points about the importance of people learning about their past. We now live in a very modern world, with lots of technology, and without realising it, I think we're losing touch with who we are as human beings and where we've come from. And we're losing touch I think, really with what it takes to achieve basic things. So it's very easy to go on to YouTube for example and watch a film of somebody building a timber frame in 2.5 minutes, or somebody casting a bronze axe in 2.5 minutes, or somebody making a beautiful dye colour in 2.5 minutes. And everything is very polished and sped up, but we're really missing and forgetting those incredible processes of thought and practical knowledge and skills, which are required to achieve things. The point of transferring our distant past to modern humans is to really put them back in touch with what it is to be a human in a world which we affect, and the sheer hard work and sweat that is required to achieve things. Nothing is actually ever achieved by the press of a button, that the work that goes in behind it is epic, but we tend to in the modern world really hide those things, so for me it's really important to bring those to the fore and really show the sheer hard work and commitment and sacrifices of our ancestors to get us where we are now.

Matilda: Ok, thank you, so talking about basically trying to reconnect with our past in that respect. Zsolt, do you have anything that you would like to add from your experience?

Zsolt: I think Luke is absolutely true. About the open-air museum, I think one of the best examples in the museums world, because even at the time when open-air museums were being formed, they did not only take responsibility for safeguarding and presenting the built and object heritage, the natural heritage, but the intangible cultural heritage it was also the subject of the museum research. And now, in my mind, the museum is an agora, the agora aspect of open-air museums emerged quite early. It took on the role of forming local, personal and the national identity with their exhibitions. They offer otherwise typical conflicts between the classes of society as they developed into a kind of museum where members of society with different backgrounds would discover their own cultural characteristics. And that is, on the one hand, the identity and [...] building, with the museums, and on the other hand we can present, with examples and practice in the modern world, what does it mean: biodiversity, what does it mean: to live close to nature, and of course, I know what the museum means because sometimes mostly the museum presents the past, but present for nowadays, and I hope not just for the nowadays, but for the next generation, for the future also. We collect material of the past and the present also but focus for the future. We have a big challenge and big possibility with the local communities to give a lot of answers for the questions of society.

Matilda: So you mentioned talking about how important it is for the future that we learn about our past. I know especially, Luke, you mentioned that before you have worked a lot with children, education of children, and the younger generations in this respect, so for both of you, do you think that there's a difference in how we project the past to children or to the younger generations as opposed to older individuals for example?

Luke: I find this really interesting. I've worked with many many thousands of children over the years and many many thousands of adults in very similar roles. I've done projects where children have felled trees with flint axes and adults have done the same. We built enormous structures, but what I've found and – feel free to disagree with me – is that I don't tend to approach those two different age groups differently in any way, when it comes to education. I think the key is, in the line of work that I do, the key is to kind of really get them involved. I always use correct terminology, I never dumb-down regardless of age, and I think it's really important that we don't with children, I

think, personally I think children are incredible things. I've always said, if you had 10,000 seven-year olds you could sort of conquer the world, which is probably inappropriate, but actually they're entirely vibrant, they can absorb information in a huge way. I might be talking to a group of retired individuals or a group of seven-year olds about humanity and our earliest existence, and I really don't change what I say between the two groups, and I think so far in my 25 years of doing this, that both groups get an equal amount from it. You might have to – I think the biggest issue is the context of what you're saying. The biggest issue in our field - full stop - is 'deep time' and the comprehension of that. But to be honest, if you're talking about 20,000 years ago to a seven-year old, or to a seventy-year old, both of those individuals will have the same difficulty in comprehending what that is and what that means and how long that is and what humans have done in that time. So no, in short, I very rarely, if ever, change the way I approach those two groups.

Matilda: Would you agree with that, Zsolt?

Zsolt: Yeah, it's really interesting. Sometimes the museum presents different methodologies and different possibilities for the different generations, and when we meet with the young generation, school groups, sometimes I understand how difficult the visuality with this generation, they need high quality visuality in the museums, they use different tools, gadgets in the everyday life, and we need to make a compromise between the old technique, old technology and the modern technology. And some for educational programs, they use more modern tools, digital tools, but the young like, if they use not just the multi-media, not just the modern tools, but the historical also. And we focus in the last few years for the intergenerational education. It means, different generations use the museum together, sometimes with the family also. But sometimes we manage the programmes for the different generations together. We invite for the same programme school groups, and people from the elderly house also, and it's fantastic because in some conversations the young generation look like the teachers, they teach for example how to use the iPad, how to take photographs with a mobile phone, and the old people tell about how it was just after the war, how managed the conflict between the different minority groups, and there is a good possibility to involve the different generations in the museum. And they believe, as I told earlier, the museum as an agora has a possibility to give a possibility to meet the different generations, and yeah, I think it is really important for us to collect the communities in the museum, and on the other hand, all educational programmes are not a formal educational programmes. We like informal educational programmes and the museum don't give just the answer for the young, but we give more and more questions and the discussion is really important in the work with the young and the school groups also.

Matilda: Do you have anything to add to that, Luke, any further thoughts?

Luke: Yeah, I think it's interesting – this is why discussions are so good – I think we're coming at it from quite different perspectives. My background involved the management of an open-air museum for 15 years, the Ancient Technology Centre, and I suppose the sort of point of what we did at that particular site was, for example, there was no sort of paper or pens allowed on site, it was purely about experience and about what you did with your hands, and with your brain, but I totally take the point that younger people access the past in a very different way to older people in terms of technology and sort of immediate access with phones and iPads and things. From my experience I think, regardless of that sort of modern technology, it's almost an imposition because fundamentally I believe that although technology is a wonderful thing and can enable us to access amazing things, it also inherently removes us from real life, it segregates us from those real experiences, such as touch and smell and doing and sweating – sweat is common in my line of work – so coming back to what I was saying about children and older people: even if I take a seven-year old child who has only ever really interacted with modern technology, when they have the chance to do something very practical and physical with their bodies and hands, concerning the past, they very quickly sort of realign themselves with what we are as humans, which is people that do things, as opposed to pressing

things, or swiping things. So yes, I totally take the point that different age groups might have different perspectives on what they learned when they were children, how they learnt it, but for me, I would happily march down the street with banners saying that in a way technology should be – I'm being flippant here - I think what I truly believe is probably that technology should be really – what's the word – technology should be controlled, this is the wrong word, but it should be limited, especially in our younger people, because it really removes them from the real act of engaging with the world, which I think is a real mistake.

Matilda: Do you have a response to that, Zsolt?

Zsolt: I think the modern technology is absolutely just a tool for the reach museum goes, but I think the most difficult thing with the young generation to reach the museum, if they involve the youngs in the museum, we can be successful, but the most difficult, how can we invite the youngs, of course not with the school groups, because the school groups are arriving to the museum, but how can we invite the secondary school youngs to the museum, alone, with their friends or with their families. The most difficult work in the museum to communicate with this generation, to invite them to the museum, because in the museum I think my colleagues find a lot of solutions to involve the people with the good programmes and in the museum they realised: "oh, a museum is sometimes sexy and not a boring institution". That is my focus point in the museum, to think the young generation that the museum is sexy, really sexy. We would like to make something there, the museum is an absolutely open place where we can discuss, where we have a good time, good eating, good programme, meet together with our friends, so, it's a really hard work.

Matilda: Moving on from that little bit, so, because of course museums, especially open-air museums are very permanent, well, permanent I mean, they can't usually travel as easily because they're made of buildings or historic monuments or something like that, so as you were saying, visitors have to come to you, so you have to encourage visitors to come. Do you think there is a greater interest from local visitors – obviously at the moment with coronavirus, people are travelling less, so it's more from local, but in general, do you find there is a greater interest from local visitors or is the museum equally relatable to people who have travelled there from abroad for example? Perhaps, Luke, you could start?

Luke: My personal experience with this, with the Ancient Technology Centre, was that the majority of our visitors were more local, so probably within two, three hours drive of the centre itself. But we did have visitors from much further afield as well, and in terms of the importance of that I think, if any of us go on holidays, we do, and we tend to seek out museums and explore those sort of past ways of life, simply because in general it tends to be quite different to the culture we're familiar with. And this is one of the crucial roles I think of museums like ours, is that you are showing in a sort of physical and practical way the origins of the culture that you see before you now, and I think in terms of sort of expressing to other cultures, you know, like how our culture has begun, and is transformed over time, I think it's nothing but relevant in the modern world, in any world really. When you look around the modern world and the issues that we've had, in the last many millennia actually, in terms of cultural conflict, and cultural segregation, I think it can only be good, to show not only the differences in cultures but of course what underlie those differences are the communalities of humanity. So, again, what we are as humans, where we've come from, the struggle that we've had for the last 2,5 million years. And I think it's a very powerful tool to be able to show local people, who think they know where they come from, and people from further afield who think they know where they come from, that actually we all have very common roots, regardless of what we've now become in terms of segregation, and in terms of cultural differences, we are all human and we should respect each other as that and I think that's absolutely critical in what we do.

Matilda: Would you agree, Zsolt?

Zsolt: In my museum 60% of the visitors are local, and 40% come from abroad. These two groups see to the museum in a different way. We define the museum as a community museum, and for the tourist people the museum is a touristic attraction. But for the local people we would like to be a community museum and the local people, most of the local people, come to the museum not just one time in a year but more times, and I think we need to be the community place, the community museum. The question always arises, how the community can be integrated into the life of the museum, how they can become participants when they were just passive onlookers in the past, and we need a good common communication with these groups, and if we speak about the museum as a permanent institution which are staying in a place, in the same place, how can we reach the people for whom it is not possible to come to the museum, we have two interesting outreach programs: the first is a suitcase museum programme, it means the education department travels a lot, in the country to visit schools, are from the museum and sometimes these regions in the country are the most poor, really poor regions, and sometimes they don't have the possibility to visit the museum, there are the one possibility to reach the museum and the technology of the museum. The other programme, it was started in 2017, the year when was the 50th anniversary of the museum, and the jubilee programme included an interesting feature, travelling exhibition, this means travelling exhibition actually means that we go round the country in a converted and renovated minivan/bus and we stop at the settlements where our translocated buildings come from. And the museum returns the communities what we earlier received from them in a symbolic digitalized form, architecture, surveys, photos, objects photos, and ethnographic collections, and that was a real point when we meet again with the communities, the different communities, and we rebuild again the bridge between the museum as a national museum and the different local communities over the country.

Matilda: Wow yeah, they sound like some great initiatives. I suppose also there is also a bit of a... not a difference, but a difference in approach perhaps compared to...because you're both involved with different time periods, so the Hungarian open-air museum is more an ethnographic museum than necessarily archaeological, whereas Historic Concepts and the Ancient Technology Centre was more involved with like you said the sort of 'deeper time' of human history, and Luke, do you think that that affects how much you can engage with the public, in that respect?

Luke: I think it definitely raises issues, one of the sort of biggest issues in my line of work in the last years has been evidence. The issue we always face is a lack of evidence, so regardless of what experiment you're running, or what you're reconstructing or what you're teaching people, you're always starting from a standpoint of maximum 5% evidence surviving. So this immediately throws lots of spanners into the works, and you have to really work around that that issue. I never try and hide that issue from my volunteers and from the projects and the people that I teach, and in fact that is a really important part of what I do is to try and engage people with the questions that surround archaeology and how you can attempt to navigate those issues. Ethnography is something that I have obviously drawn on in the past, and of course what it supplies you with is evidence that we no longer have in our archaeology, so you can understand some of the finer cultural details that are imbued in an object for example, or a structure, and you have hard evidence for it, although of course it's never quite that simple because there are many different opinions and many different sort of investments, emotional investments in a single object from individuals, but certainly in terms of the work that I do it's a really tricky balance between navigating using as much evidence as you can find to its best effect. But at the end of the day you have to draw upon what is, again, sort of common human experience, and common human knowledge, looking at far more recent historical traditions of working materials and processing materials and gathering materials to kind of end up with a finished picture. Obviously, the issues that surround that are that we could spend six months building an incredible structure and at the end we make it really clear to the public that then visit and the groups that have been involved, you know these are the bits that we are confident about, we know where the posts were placed, we know that there is evidence for this kind of cordage and that type of knot and

that kind of joint, but really obvious things like the height of a roof or the pitch of a roof or the soft furnishings that might have gone inside a building are still really up in the air, so ethnography gives you that other dimension, to be able to say but, we can say that cultures living elsewhere are using a similar set of materials in a similar climate have this in their buildings, we don't know that would have been the case in the archaeological record, but you can sort of try and bulk out what is missing in the record. Because the risk is that if you don't do that, you then present the past to those people you're trying to engage with it as a very dry and very Spartan world, and of course it wasn't, because if we only used the five percent evidence we have about a roundhouse for example, you would then present the public with a really basic structure without much decoration, without much sort of fine carpentry and I think that's a lie, I think that's misinterpreting the past. When you look at any other culture around the world that lives in a traditional ways, their worlds are full of colour and design and music and story-telling and all the things that we cannot find in the archaeological record. So for me it's really essential that we sort of combine those two things. I understand, as everyone else who is listening will do as well, that the issues with using ethnography and archaeology, and you can't simply state that because it happened over here a hundred years ago, that means it happened over there 5000 years ago. It's really not that simple. But I do think it's important to attempt to blend the two things.

Matilda: Balancing the amount of evidence that you have and how authentic you can be to what we know was there, with kind of engaging visitors and suggesting, shall we say, I mean suggesting is a very creative word, but sort of other situations or how it could have been in that respect. Zsolt, do you experience similar issues in kind of the balance between shall we authenticity or the presentation of just bare facts, with kind of engaging exhibitions?

Zsolt: The last few years or twenty years many things have changed. When the museum was opened in the sixties and after in the seventies, most of the visitors thought about the museum as a real part of their history, their memory. Because the buildings, the furniture situation was friendly and known. But now, for the young generations the whole museum are time pages from history colour books. And we need to give some examples to understand, what does it mean the furniture culture, the buildings. Never forget when the, some old people walk around the museum and speak about "oh, do you remember our grandfather's house, it was absolutely similar like that", but the young generation know nothing about it, because the sixties was the time in Hungary when changed everything in the countryside. That was the time after the modernization of the communist period, when the older houses were destroyed and built the new one, and the old furniture changed for a new one, and the open-air museum, as a museum institute, present the exhibition.. peasant life was so nice, sometimes I think our presentations they are the...the colourful pink glasses...

Matilda: rose-tinted glasses...

Zsolt: Everything was really clean, everything was very nice, these people were always just singing, dancing and enjoy their life, and we don't speak about the backside. How was the hygiene, how was the children work, how was the sixteen hours work, hard work on a field? And the museum's communication, the museum's interpretation changed the last few years. That's the one hand. On the other hand, understanding and experiencing the historical events is assisted by the museum education session of a private history series in a different part of the museum. We tried to reconstruct the life story of the individuals or families on the basis of original documents, locations and situations, together with the students, by counting on their creativity and empathy, and there is a real good job, because I think the museum needs to stay a really authentic institution and the people of all society believe the museum, that is really important for us.

Matilda: Yeah, I think that is a good point, so showing just the rose-tinted part of history but the kind of what really happened, the bad side as well as the good. In that case, would you have anything to add on that part, Luke?

Luke: Yes, I think, this is something that I've experienced many times, actually, and it's really interesting. I've witnessed on many occasions people walking into an incredible Viking longhouse or an Iron Age roundhouse or a Neolithic longhouse and people that weren't involved in its construction will walk into a space like that and look around and go: Wow, I can really feel the vibe of this building, the sort of the emotional impact. But it comes from a perspective of almost as if the building grew from the earth, with no effort involved, and it's sort of almost presented from the gods. Whenever I've heard this, whenever I've been present, I've sort of sidled up to some people and said "it's really interesting that you get that sort of emotional experience from it, but for me, what I remember is the sweat and the occasional blood, and the relationships that built this structure, because it doesn't just spring from the earth, it's actually a huge amount of hard work, again, that's the fifteen hours in the field everyday. And I think it's really easy for people to view the past as a sort of Utopia of people, yes, the crops somehow grew, we drank a lot of cider, we sat in sunny fields with fluffy bunnies, but of course the story of human history is of course nothing but sheer hard work for 99.9% of the time. So yes, I've definitely experienced that sort of perspective of "wow, isn't it beautiful!" which it is, and "isn't it wonderful!" which it is, but, again, and that is why I do what I do, because if people are physically involved in those projects, they can stand back at the end and say "wow!" But they will always remember the hard work, the sweat, the incredible ingenuity that's required, the knowledge of materials and skills, but as important as all of those things, every building that I've ever constructed or designed, when I look at it now, I remember the people involved. And so a building is almost a testament to the team, and to those incredible individuals that gave up a lot of their time and learned a huge amount for many months, sometimes years, to enable that building to happen. It's a very different perspective, it's a perspective you'll only get when you've done it. You can't get that from a screen.

Matilda: Do you have any final words to add to that, Zsolt?

Zsolt: I think no matter how much we wish it was, the future will not be like the present. The museum needs to give a more quickly answer as in the past, because I think this year as pandemic period was as a good example how quick we have the museum for the situation to make a lot of online programmes, online material, for education virtual exhibition as well. The museum needs to live together with the society, and react quickly and point... For me and for my colleagues it is a big challenge to changing the mind and think about yes, you have some really good answers for the questions and we would like to share it for the audience.

Matilda: I think that this is a good stage, we're sort of almost out of time here, so maybe for a final question: what are your plans for the future, either in terms of yourself, your work, the museum and how can the EXARC community who are listening in today, help to make a difference in regards to the points that we have discussed today. So maybe, Luke, first?

Luke: I think the future is a really interesting question, and I know I've probably sort of banged on about my objections to technology. Of course I use technology every day of my life, as does my family and everyone that I know, so I'm not against it per se, I just feel that the sort of, the seesaw has swung to far in one direction. That doesn't mean I can change it, either, and I know where the future is heading but I think it's been really interesting with the pandemic, which we're all sort struggling through at the moment, is that for the first sort of two or three weeks of the first lockdown in the UK I think everyone was amazed, and they looked at skies that weren't full of aeroplanes and they heard birds singing in their garden for the first time in years, and the streets were clear of cars and their children could play without danger. It was a real sort of eyeopener, I think, in terms of what we've

become in the last sort of century or two, in terms of the sort of incessant drive to own more and to have more, as opposed to experience more and to really sort of value the world we live in. So in terms of future it's interesting I'm getting more interest in terms of projects, which I'm sort of focussing on, for example education spaces for outside, so obviously people are saying that the potential for a much higher degree of teaching and learning outside the classroom and away from indoor spaces, obviously that is pandemic-related, and it will really be interesting to see what happens in the next sort of three or four years. At the moment it's sort of looking quite hopeful in terms of projects that really shift people to the outside to understand their environment and to sort of using materials. So essentially, looking into the future all of us probably as a community we need to consider really seriously, yes, how we can engage people possibly outside our current understanding, so yes, we currently understand education in terms of going to museums or visiting historic sites, but I think things like the pandemic have really made us have to think, which is a good thing, about how that happens and yes, I can see a lot more sort of interactive online resources happening, but I would like to think that that will come hand in hand with a lot more outside learning and real learning within our local environments.

Matilda: Ok, thank you for that. Zsolt, do you have any ideas or sort of plans for the future, either in the museum or your own work, and how people like the EXARC community can help to make a difference in regards to all the things that we've discussed today.

Zsolt: For our museum it is not acceptable if a great number of people in our country or in our local community are not in touch at all with our museum. So our aim is that everyone, all the different communities regard the museum as one of their own. To achieve this it is necessary for the museum to embrace some elements or memories of their history. The museum can become relevant for everyone, whatever interesting in the museum if it contributes to their identity. This approach requires to do a lot of work, together with the communities. One of the most important issues is that for example the ethnic minorities are to be represented in the collection of the museum, so that they meet their own past memories and stories in the museum, so we need to collect the heritage of these communities, to discuss together with these communities, and to find a different platform to meet with their communities in the real and in the virtual as well. And for the network of the museums and heritage institutions, I think it's really important to build the network, discuss together, find the possibility to work together, and change the experience because sometimes we are in the same stage and we have the same problems also.

Matilda: Ok, thank you, so yes, similar ideas in terms of engaging more with our humanity, with our history, with our past, with our heritage, but also engaging more with others within our community, which I think is an important message today.

And I see that we already have a couple of questions. First one is from Roeland: In how far can we share authority of what a museum presents to the public? Can the public help in designing an exhibition or decide what building is reconstructed? So what's the limit of the involvement of any public, who is the owner of a museum, shall we say. Perhaps Zsolt you can start.

Zsolt: I think it's a great question because it's not easy for the museum to give answer, because, where is the limit of our authority, but I absolutely believe, the participating museum. And I think we can find the solution to involve the communities in the museum's work. For example, in the past, sometimes I feel the museum was like a theatre, the curators and the exhibition are on the stage and the visitors are just sitting and open their eyes and look what we say. And sometimes I think we need to give more and more questions and involve the visitors for many museum's work. Of course, we need to realize, what is the scientific aspect? What is the curatorial aspect, and we need to learn the visitors, to our aspect. I had a really interesting experience when I made an exhibition for young

people. First I wrote the scenario and the text of the exhibition, and I asked my colleagues to invite some young people from the school. And we had a really good workshop about my text. And, first I asked the young: please underline the words that you don't understand in my text. And when I got back the papers, I saw a 'red forest' because lots of words were underlined in red. And after that we started to discuss about the text and, what does it mean, what is the message of the exhibition, the final text was edited by school groups and me together. And it was my first example how can I involve, not just the young, but the communities to my work. So I absolutely believe to the organization and the participating in the museum life.

Matilda: That's a really interesting example. Luke, do you have anything to add?

Luke: Yes, so it's interesting. I've been sort of trying this for a number of years. I think it's difficult for people when they see buildings, the kinds of things that I do, large buildings being reconstructed, I think the assumption for most people is that I sit in a room and I work through archaeological evidence and I come up with drawn concepts and then I tell people what we're building and that's what happens. But actually it's quite a different interaction because what I try and do with the teams I work with is I try and give them as much information as I have on that project or that time period or the evidence that we're following. And what actually ends up happening is that the building, although I start with an idea of how it can work structurally, so it won't fall down, the building inevitably morphs through the direct input of those people that are helping to build it. For example, on a project I ran last year at Beeston Castle, we built a Bronze Age roundhouse and one of the volunteers who was really into it and getting really into the sort of the deeper questions of how you interpret the evidence, he said to me one day: why do the walls stop there, why can't there be an extra space where we would consider the eaves to be, for example. And I said to him, you know what, that's a really good idea. I never would have thought of that because I've been trapped within my own sort of circle of thinking. And so we had materials and I said to him, try it, do it, and he and a team went off and they thought about it and they tried a section of sort of enlarging the roundhouse beyond its natural boundaries. And it worked really well. And I learned a huge amount from it. They learned a huge amount from it, so it was a genuine exchange of ideas and input from what we would consider to be 'amateurs'. And you know, that's in inverted commas, because of course everyone has opinions. If you can inform people to a high degree with the evidence that's out there, everyone will have different opinions as to what that evidence means. And I think it's really important, in terms of not presenting a finished version of the past, that is not what we're here to do. We are here to help people to think about the past and everyone will have a different opinion and a different perspective on the same set of evidence. And I think it's really important to recognize that and to welcome those ideas.

Matilda: Okay, thank you. And actually we have a bit of a further comment from Roeland about the concept of ownership, because I guess what you're saying as well Luke, that if people have built it themselves and know the information themselves, they almost feel like they have an ownership of it as well, I suppose. Roeland is mentioning, "I know several museums where local people would take their foreign visitors to that open-air museum, proudly showing them their museum and their story." So the local population is a good fan base, which also, I guess, Zsolt, that's very, very much the case with your museum, I can imagine.

Zsolt: Yeah, it's really interesting because, we are a national museum and it's a great question, how can we involve the different local communities? Many people meet, their knowledge, their identity, their past, in the museum. So it's easy to open for this society, but the next years we need to give more aspects and that's for the minority groups, for different minority groups because, sometimes they're missing the museum and you need to collect from their identity, from their history, items, documents, photographs to the museum, because if they meet their identity, their history in the museum, they will have a more close connection to the museum. And I think the local communities,

many local communities together give us power. I'll never forget, many years ago, in Holland, one open-air museum, was just on the door of closing the museum and the director gave many interviews: if you feel this museum is important for you, please, on the next Saturday come to the museum, and thousands and thousands of people went to the museum and that was the message for the politicians. The local community needs this museum and their museum was not closed, and the museum is exist now and very thriving museum. So I think there is another point, when the politicians understand the communities need the museum and they are backbone of the museum.

Matilda: That's a lovely memory to have, showing the importance of these things. And, this sort of relates a bit to the idea of how can open-air museums or museums react to all of the restrictions and the problems that have been associated with the current global pandemic. So you both mentioned some plans for the future in that respect, but, for example, Sanda Salmina says: I liked the thought that museums, especially open-air museums are the place where you can show real life, real actions, so this authenticity you were talking about before, and this is the kind of experience that is needed in museums, but how can we continue to do that in these days when we have to stay distance, we can't meet. Do you have any thoughts about how not to lose this quality? I know Luke, you mentioned already doing more outdoor activities. Do you have anything further to add to that?

Luke: It's such a tricky situation we're in at the moment. I think we're all finding our feet, and my intention in the last couple of months was to literally sit down for a week and think about the direction of my company and where I'm heading in the future. Because a lot of things have changed and I think it's really made us have to think in a serious way about what we do and how we can still deliver the things that we want to deliver to the public. So no, I mean, to be honest at the moment, I'm still thinking in terms of outreach. I'm in a very different position from running an open-air museum and I realize having done that, that it's a very different sort of perspective and a very different set of goals, but certainly from my sort of project-based work I intend to do more projects with a wider range of people looking at a sort of much broader base of evidence and experience. I'm really sort of beginning to finally, after too many years, realize that people's experiences, which are very difficult to record and sort of record archaeologically, are as important as the hard evidence that we use, and I want to pursue that in some way. Having done lots of large scale projects and recorded them in detail, it's easy to focus on sort of the tight detail of what things mean and how you construct them and how you build them. But actually what I've been missing, although people have been shouting it at me for many years, is that personal experience and yes, at the moment, I'm thinking more work outside, larger spaces, more people can see it and engage in it without being confined indoors.

Matilda: Do you have anything, any ideas for yourself there, Zsolt?

Zsolt: I think, this year was absolutely a financial disaster, for the museums, not just the building museum, but the open-air museum as well. In the beginning of the year, in Hungary, the museums were closed. And when we opened the museum, we see the people, the visitors, came back just slowly, absolutely slowly to the museum. The people were more open to the open-air museums. I saw visitors, in the different museums, and the open-end museum was absolutely on the top. But I think there was a fear among the people to visit cultural institutions, museums. And I don't know, really, I don't know, what will happen next year. How will the financial situation be next year, how many people lost their job? How will be the family budget next year...possible to visit the museum? How changed the thinking about the museum? For example, in this year, we lost more than 70% of the school groups in my museum. We hope next year the schools will be open again for the museum's visit, but I think we need more and more work to invite the people again to the museum. At the moment, for me, the future is not so nice, but I think we have a possibility to build again our audience group.

Matilda: It does indeed seem there's a couple of people working in museums or open-air museums who are worried about the future, as of course are a lot of people in heritage work. We will move on to a slightly more positive question. But I think this is an important point. From Roeland we have another question. Is there a clear difference between real and fake buildings in a museum context? Does the public respond differently? Do people question at all what they see and what is presented to them? Perhaps, Luke, you have a lot of experience with building things, you can answer this?

Luke: Yes, from my experience the visiting public have become far more savvy over the last sort of 20 or so years, and it's really clear to see. I've done various work at historic festivals over the last five years, and the sort of reenactment groups that sometimes turn up, and they bring, and I have to say, I'm not knocking this, this is not me having a go at reenactment, but groups that turn up and through necessity, they bring plywood buildings, which can be sort of screwed together in an evening before the show starts. And it's interesting, 20 years ago, I think the public were content with that. I think they would sort of understand that, that's kind of what a Roman Villa would have looked like or a Roman bath house or whatever. But I think with, because open-air museums themselves have become much, much better in the last 30 years and have really sort of pursued authenticity to the nth degree in some cases, then I think the public have sort of become far more picky in terms of what they are prepared to look at. And they question far more, in my experience, than they ever have done before. And I think that's a good thing. My mission statement really is to try and do things as authentically as possible, but, you know, we live in the real world and one of the biggest issues I have is health and safety in terms of accessing great heights and lifting heavy timbers. So, although some projects I've done have been entirely authentic, it's very difficult depending on the client I'm working for. You know, if it's a large heritage organization, they are not prepared to lift a half ton piece of timber into place by hand, or if they are, then it needs to be on scaffold systems that are modern and are testable, to be safe. So the difference between real and fake is a sort of fuzzy line, I suppose. You can have an authentic building, but actually you've cheated to get it to that stage by using modern access methods. And sometimes you've increased the speed of the build using some steel tools, as opposed to always flint, for example, or bronze, because you're working with volunteers and you're trying to keep a momentum behind the project. I think there is a difference between authentic buildings and fake buildings. And I think when the public walk into a real building and they encounter somebody who has built it and can tell them the stories of that construction and the issues that surrounded that construction and the debates that went on about how to interpret that piece of evidence, I think the visiting public gets a much deeper, meaningful experience of that building than when they're strolling around a plywood constructed or a fake building, because it is more real, it is as simple as that.

Matilda: Thank you. Zsolt, you mentioned already the fact that people recognize certain buildings as being in the same style as their grandparents' house or something like that. Do you find it almost goes too much the other way? People start saying, oh, but we didn't have something like this, or...
Zsolt: I would like to say something from the museum aspect, from the curatorial aspect. The authenticity is our identity. And I don't want to change this point. We are not a scenery, the authenticity is our fundamental. And I think if we changed something, in this stage, it would be the start of the end of the museum. So I don't believe this [...] and the visitors, need to know what is real and what is a fake. And I think we can show what is the difference between the movies and the art of the history, the real part of the history. We need to see what is the difference between the museum and the scenery.

Matilda: Roeland actually made a point about that as well, talking about the influence of like Netflix games and all of these things where people have an idea of what the past should look like, and that might differ as well from what it actually was like.

Luke: It's interesting. Can I butt in? So for many years, again, I taught children of all ages, and one

of the things we did on a daily basis was blacksmith, and make real items with seven-year-olds and upwards, and they would pump the bellows and they would hammer the hot metal and they would shape it and make penannular brooches, and Roman nails and a whole host of things, but what was really interesting was with the advent of Minecraft, the game, people would, children would walk into the forge and they would look around the forge. And of course, you know, the forge fire is burning at 1200 degrees and the sound of the bellows are pumping and there's a hammer ringing on the anvil and they would look at all this stuff and say, oh, I know this. I've done this on Minecraft and you put the metal in the forge and you shape it. And many, many times I said, you're absolutely right, that is basically the process. Now come over here, hold this hammer and have a go. And always at the end of that, of an actual session of practically blacksmithing I would say to them: so is it like Minecraft? And they would always look up at me and say, no, it's nothing like Minecraft. So although a game and a film can show you the principles behind things, and again - this goes back to my rant about technology - you can see how things are done, but until you've actually tried it yourself, you only then do you begin to understand the subtlety, the complexity, the smell, the taste, all of those things that you can't get by playing a game or watching a film and that is why we do what we do, I think, that's why open-air museums are so important because, again, I know I'm repeating myself, but it gives you a real world experience and in some way, which is probably difficult to fathom, but in some way, puts you in touch again with, with people in the past that had a similar experience.

Matilda: Do you have anything to add to that, Zsolt?

Zsolt: I think we, in the open-air museum, we need to give the possibility for the visitors to be included in our presentation. So the visitor needs to participate in the actions in the museum, and that is why we are really friendly, and we have many visitors because they are involved in the exhibitions and they meet with the real history and this background is absolutely important for the museum.

Matilda: We have a very good question here, from Kate: I am particularly interested in how museums can make positive changes in today's society. How do you think museums can help the community and visitors move from looking critically at the past to thinking about those same themes in the present and the future? Perhaps Zsolt, you could start, because I know you've done a lot of work with this.

Zsolt: Yeah, I think in my museum we focus on the 19 and the 20 century and the last hundred years we've had lots of absolutely negative historical background. And former exhibitions in the museum focused on the nice view of the peasant life. And the last few years we changed some exhibition and we focused on what was the black part of this history and we involved the visitors and the communities to speak about what nowadays is problematic. What is the gender question nowadays, what is the ecological thinking, what is the nature-close life and the peasant society. The peasant history is a really good example for the visitors and we can manage this question in a different way in the museum, not just in the exhibitions, not just in the publications, but in the educational program also. For example, we have a really interesting program for old people who live with dementia. And that was an absolutely fantastic, when the museum program, give for these people a good experience and help for good moments in their life, and I think that is our mission, to give a good example for the nowadays life, the eaten, seasonal, natural materials used, the historical experience for the nowadays conflict in society. So I think our ethnographical open-air museum has a lot of possibility to give answers and give questions also for nowadays society.

Matilda: I remember Zsolt that you mentioned another initiative that you were doing in terms of homeless people, maybe you could just describe that, because that's also very relevant to the point that you're making now.

Zsolt: It was really interesting because when we started to speak about, what about the homeless people in the museum? In the part of the museum which presents the homes, the houses, and it was fantastic when we meet the homeless people in the museum. And after the visit to the museum some homeless people come to the museum for volunteer work. And that was the first step for them to get involved again in society. And after they spoke about how this volunteer helped work to give again back to the working society and after that they found a job, and it was a good step for them for a real life again.

Matilda: Yeah, that's I think that's really an amazing initiative. Luke, do you have anything to add there...

Luke: Yeah I agree entirely with what's been said so far, but it's reminded me of lots of things that we've sort of done in the past on projects, but one of the most successful things that we did, which was really sort of putting back into the community, I suppose, was working with children who were not engaged at school, at normal sort of school. And these students were sent to what are called 'learning centres' and they were not succeeding at all in a traditional school setting. So if you sat them at a desk and expected them to do a 45-minute lesson, it would be a complete failure. And I developed a sort of connection with our local learning centres in Dorset and we started running projects with these students in mind, where they would come to us for one day a week or two days a week, sometimes three days a week, and we would sort of develop them as human beings, but the focus was a project. It might be building a Roman forge or another structure, but actually that was just an excuse to get them on site in the open air, working hard and working with people that were positive role models, who were reasonably fit and reasonably healthy and who thought a lot about the world and who had interesting conversations. And we had some incredible success stories. And, again, I think this is a real lesson and an advantage for things like open-air museums. One student I can think, I won't mention it, but one student who came to us and when he came to us at 15, he was obese, and his file told us that he had no attention span and could not focus on anything for more than four minutes or something insane. And this student stayed with us for three years and he ended up coming three or four days a week. And he became an integral member of the team. He was a volunteer and he found an absolute love of carpentry and of timber and of being outside and of working hard. He lost a huge amount of weight. In fact, his mum phoned me one day and said, I'm really, I'm really worried about him. He's losing weight and he's looking different to the way he's always looked. And he was becoming muscular and he was proud of how he looked and how he felt and how hard he could work. And he went on from us and he went on and did college courses, which was never expected of him. And it was, that's just one example of really positive stories that we've had, in terms of doing real things with people. Because again, we forget that our society tries to cover all bases, doesn't it, it tries to go with a sort of a model that fits all. But of course, what that does is it fits quite a few people really badly and education is the same. We know, and the literature is there that shows that people learn in very different ways, we still expect everyone to learn in a way that involves a school and a classroom and a teacher. And I think what the kind of projects that we run are a really good example of expanding that educational resource, that educational experience into very different areas. And it can really open people's eyes and develop them as people and set them on a far healthier track in terms of mind and body. I've seen it work really well for many years and I think that's a potential way forward.

Matilda: Thank you. Yeah, another really interesting example, it's not just presenting certain parts of the past and using that to think critically about things, but also using issues of the present and the future and in museums. I'm afraid we're out of time. Thank you very much, Zsolt and Luke, for joining us today and sharing your experience, expertise, we've definitely learned a lot and covered a lot of different bases. So thank you very much.

Thank you to everyone else for listening to this episode of #FinallyFriday by EXARC. If you would

like to become more involved with EXARC, why not become a member? Alternatively, you can make a small PayPal donation through the website to help support EXARC in its future endeavours. Because as we've heard today, it's going to be tough for, you know, open-air museums and archaeologists. But anyway, enjoy the weekend, everyone, and see you next month for another episode of #FinallyFriday.