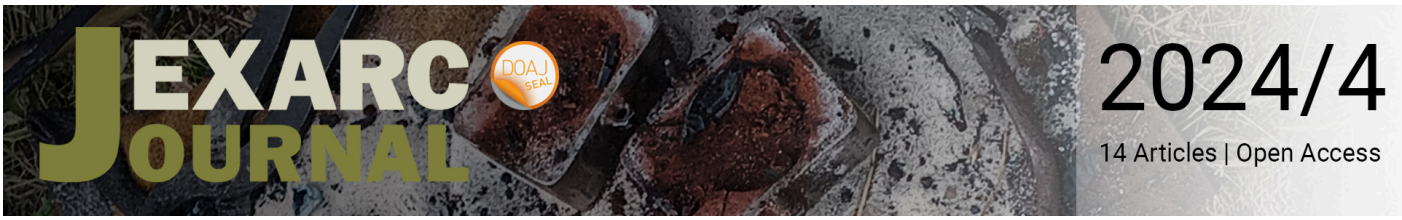

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Unreviewed Mixed Matters Article:

RETOLD: Review of the Meeting at Batavialand, Lelystad, September 2024

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Author(s): Federico Cappadona [1] ✉

[1] Independent researcher, address withheld by the editors (GDPR), Leiden, the Netherlands.

This year between September 1-3, EXARC held a conference specifically focused on the topic of Digitalisation in Open-Air Museums and the cultural sector. Co-organised by the Batavialand Museum in Lelystad (the Netherlands), the event brought together the RETOLD partners and several professionals from around the world. RETOLD is a four-year project coordinated by EXARC and supported by the European Commission that aims to develop a documentation system designed for archaeological and ethnographic open-air museums.

> Overall, the conference was a great success, featuring strong online participation. EXARC's experience in conducting hybrid events proved invaluable once again, thanks to the support of a dedicated team of volunteers who monitored the social media platforms and uploaded the presentations on YouTube session by session. Open-source content remains a cornerstone of EXARC's values, aiming to make knowledge as accessible as possible.

As in previous years, the conference was hybrid, with both in-person and remote participation. All the online presentations were streamed during the conference and uploaded onto EXARC's YouTube channel. A significant virtual audience engaged with the event on YouTube and on a watch-along party hosted on the EXARC Discord server. The web-based community was particularly active, sharing ideas and asking questions in real time.

The conference opened on September 11th, with a focus on the challenges and preliminary results of the RETOLD project. **Session 1A** started with some introductory words from Roeland Paardekooper and his presentation on the issues, challenges and results of the RETOLD project. Next, Julia Heeb explored the documentation of reconstructed buildings in the Museumsdorf Düppel (Germany), stressing the importance of implementing standardised documentation practices. The session then continued with the contributions from Clara Masriera Esquerra and Paloma González-Marcén. Their talk highlighted the role of research institutions in digital cultural heritage and the experience of the Prehistory department of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona in developing a network of digital humanities and heritage. Finally, Cordula Hansen offered an overview of approaches aimed to facilitate museums in adopting digital and 3D visualisation technologies.

Session 1B began with two presentations from the ASTRA Museum (Romania). The first one focused on the relevant sections of craft documentation forms and the advantages of integrating them with digital tools (George Tomegea). Then, Ioan-Cosmin Ignat examined how the museum identifies local craftspeople from different Romanian regions to involve them in the reconstruction and maintenance of the museum's monuments. The presentations by the Romanian speakers sparked a debate surrounding the accessibility of traditional materials and the challenge of living craft, where the boundary between tradition and innovation is not easy to define. Rüdiger Kelm shared the experience of the Steinzeitpark Dithmarschen (Germany) in creating 3D models of some of the museum house reconstructions. A great emphasis was placed on the challenges of endorsing in 3D models projects for small institutions with limited resources. The session concluded with Magdalena Zielińska, who discussed the main features of the RETOLD website and the documentation system. The contribution accentuated the ongoing nature of the project and highlighted its collaborative nature, which involved discussions and experimentation from all the RETOLD partners.

After the lunch break, the in-person participants joined **Session 2**, a workshop led by Guillaume Auvray and Cordula Hansen. The workshop was very interactive and started with an exploration phase via the platform Particify, where attendees exchanged insights on how technology was used in their organisations. The second part transitioned into a lecture on digital innovation and how it can generate new financial and operational opportunities, providing tools needed to design, manage, and implement projects in the cultural sector.

Guided Tour Day 1 - Following the workshop, the conference participants were divided into two groups. One visited the Batavia, the reconstruction of a 17th-century ship moored in the outdoor area. The second group took a guided tour of the Batavialand Museum, an exhibition space dedicated to Dutch maritime archaeology and the history of the Zuiderzee. The guided tour of the Batavia was livestreamed on Discord, allowing online participants to join in on the experience.

The second day opened with **Session 3A**. The first presentation by Kate Fernie and Henk Alkemade featured several inspiring examples from Europe on how standards and metadata for 3D content can be applied to cultural heritage. Stephan Engelhard showcased the digital experience developed by the LVR-Archaeological Park Xanten (Germany) where interactive riddles and in-game activities have been used to communicate the Lower German Limes in a playful way, enriching the educational offer of the museum. The third talk (Elin Tinuviel Torbergsen) presented an AR-simulated prototype that once completed will complement the communication tools of the Lofotr Viking Museum (Norway), creating a virtual relationship between some archaeological materials of the museum and its landscape. Annenies Keur then introduced the VR experience developed at Archaeon (Netherlands), which uses visors to virtually recreate the context of an ancient Roman supper (cena) in the museum's Roman dining hall. The next contribution (John Ertl, Yasuyuki Yoshida, Corey Noxon and Yoko Ikari) shifted focus outside of Europe, demonstrating how the project Tateana is recording pothouse reconstructions in Japan, stressing how digital documentation helps understand changes over time in these buildings. Finally, Maura Stefani's online presentation described how virtual and augmented reality are being used to complement the educational offer of the Parco Archeologico Didattico del Livelet (Italy).

Joran Smale from Batavialand inaugurated **Session 3B** by sharing the museum's experience with the 3D scanning of some maritime archaeological finds in its collection. This presentation echoed the earlier contribution from Rüdiger Kelm, offering further insights into the challenges faced by small museums undertaking such projects. Suzanne Rus followed with an introduction to Labyrinthia, an innovative way to present the collections of the Drents Museum (Netherlands) through an immersive experience spanning fifteen rooms. Next, Thomas Bremer and David Witzgall illustrated the striking project Düppel: 3D, which digitally reconstructs the medieval village that inspired the design of Museumdorf Düppel (Germany). Once completed, the project will allow visitors to virtually explore the village and interact with

its inhabitants via a chat system. Peter Watson concluded the session outlining the efforts of the Association for Living History, Farm & Agricultural Museums (ALHFAM), to document different trade skills in a database collecting themed papers and technical articles. The medieval village reconstruction project Düppel: 3D has sparked a lively debate, particularly through its chat system, where participants discussed the potential role of artificial intelligence. A central topic of discussion revolved around how the historical figures or villagers can engage with modern visitors while maintaining historical accuracy.

Session 4 featured four online contributions. Matilda Siebrecht and Eva Götting-Martin explored how vlogging, podcasts, and digital platforms can be used to disseminate archaeological knowledge. Next, Bangcheng Tang proposed digital applications for archaeological open-air museums, with a particular focus on hybrid solutions that merge virtual reality with reconstructed environments. Vasyl Rozhko reviewed the history of research at the Tustan fortress (Ukraine), detailing the laser scanning and photogrammetry of the medieval fortifications and the rocky outcrop they were built on. Furthermore, the presentation touched on how the Ukrainian Heritage Monitoring Lab is currently undertaking enormous efforts to document the heritage damaged due to the war. Finally, Foteini Venieri and Rebecca Shelley focused on online museum theatre and how the Heterotopia Museum Theatre (Greece) has used historical personas to organise virtual tours and deliver diverse learning experiences.

Guided Tour Day 2 - At the end of the session, participants were again divided into two groups, each visiting the part of the museum they had not seen the previous day. The guided tour of the Batavialand Museum was livestreamed on Discord, providing the online participants with a full overview of both the museum and the Batavia ship. During the lunch breaks of each day, participants could also visit the museum deposit, with a guided tour from the curator Joran Smale.

The third day was a boot camp. The in-person attendees travelled by bus to the Swifterkamp Stone Age Open-Air Museum, located in Lelystad, just a few kilometres from the Batavialand Museum. At Swifterkamp, the RETOLD system was tested, documenting some of the reconstructed buildings of the museum. The morning was focused on collecting data from the buildings, with two hands-on sessions, while the afternoon included a discussion on how the gathered data could be integrated in the system. Eventually, the outcome was discussed and evaluated.

Overall, the conference was a great success, featuring strong online participation. EXARC's experience in conducting hybrid events proved invaluable once again, thanks to the support of a dedicated team of volunteers who monitored the social media platforms and uploaded the presentations on YouTube session by session. Open-source content remains a cornerstone of EXARC's values, aiming to make knowledge as accessible as possible. Even in-

person attendees had their experience enriched by the numerous questions from the virtual audience, that stimulated debates and discussions.

The conference took place in cordial and friendly environment, with a program that included presentations, workshops, guided tours, hands-on sessions, and numerous breaks for sharing ideas and networking. It delivered a good balance of both theoretical and practical learning experiences.

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Corresponding Author

Federico Cappadona
Independent researcher
Address withheld by the editors (GDPR)
Leiden, the Netherlands
E-mail Contact

Gallery Image

FIG 1. THE CONFERENCE OPENED ON SEPTEMBER 11TH, WITH WELCOME FROM THE DIRECTOR OF BATAVIALAND, ARIANE HOOG. PHOTO BY FEDERICO CAPPADONA

FIG 2. THE CONFERENCE OPENED ON SEPTEMBER 11TH, WITH A FOCUS ON THE CHALLENGES AND PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF THE RETOLD PROJECT. PHOTO BY FEDERICO CAPPADONA

FIG 3. EXARC'S EXPERIENCE IN CONDUCTING HYBRID EVENTS PROVED INVALUABLE ONCE AGAIN, THANKS TO THE SUPPORT OF A DEDICATED TEAM OF VOLUNTEERS WHO MONITORED THE SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS AND UPLOADED THE PRESENTATIONS ON YOUTUBE SESSION BY SESSION. PHOTO BY MATILDA SIEBRECHT

FIG 4. LUNCH AND DINNERS WERE HOSTED IN TAVERNE. PHOTO BY MATILDA SIEBRECHT

FIG 5. FOLLOWING THE WORKSHOP, THE CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS WERE DIVIDED INTO TWO GROUPS. ONE VISITED THE BATAVIA, THE RECONSTRUCTION OF A 17TH-CENTURY SHIP MOORED IN THE OUTDOOR AREA. PHOTO BY FEDERICO CAPPADONA

FIG 6. DURING THE LUNCH BREAKS OF EACH DAY, PARTICIPANTS COULD ALSO VISIT THE MUSEUM DEPOSIT, WITH A GUIDED TOUR FROM THE CURATOR JORAN SMALE. PHOTO BY FEDERICO CAPPADONA

FIG 7. AT SWIFTERKAMP, THE RETOLD SYSTEM WAS TESTED, DOCUMENTING SOME OF THE RECONSTRUCTED BUILDINGS OF THE MUSEUM. PHOTO BY MATILDA SIEBRECHT

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FIG 9. AT SWIFTERKAMP, THE RETOLD SYSTEM WAS TESTED, DOCUMENTING SOME OF THE RECONSTRUCTED BUILDINGS OF THE MUSEUM. PHOTO BY MATILDA SIEBRECHT