

Inovācija un radošas  
kultūrvēsturiskās vides  
izglītības metodes  
mūsdienu muzejos

# CEĻOJUMS VAIKĀ

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# TIME TRAVELS

Innovative and Creative  
Methods of Historic  
Environment Education  
in Modern Museums

Tukums museum

## Time Travels

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Methods of Historic  
Environment Education  
in Modern Museums



Tukums

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## Introduction

Again and again I find myself thinking about a discussion that occurred during an ICOM General Assembly in Vienna. The ICOFOM (International Committee For Museology) and the CECA (International Committee for Education and Action) met in joint session to hear a representative of the ICOFOM, Martin Schärer, talking about the educational aspects of museum work. He was quite strict in arguing that a museum is not a school, and this surely made all of the CECA delegates sit up and pay attention. "The goal of a museum is not to teach knowledge," said Schärer. "That is something which can be done far more professionally and in a much more targeted way by a school. The strength and uniqueness of the museum rests in a fundamentally different type of education." He called this a "merry discovery" – when a museum engages in educational functions, it must devote all of its abilities to ensuring that visitors just love their adventure or experience at the museum. Of course, this does not have to involve just fun and games – satisfaction can also be provided by complex ideas which can be absorbed when people overcome their own innate inertness. Then we can really talk about a merry discovery.

I think that Time Travels are specifically this kind of merry discovery. The time has come to look for new forms and methods in our dialogue with society. I particularly welcome the fact that this educational method is the result of international co-operation. Each participant is contributing his or her experience, knowledge and creativity. Is that not the route toward new merry discoveries?

Jānis Garjāns, head  
State Authority on Museums



"Time Travel". Training day. Sweden. 1900

Ebbe Westergren

## Time Travels as a Component of Historic Environment Education: Educational Methods for Museums and Schools

### History is everywhere

History is always present and all around us at the places where we live. At local sites, we can find national or even international history. It doesn't matter whether you live in a big city or in the countryside. History is present everywhere – in physical forms such as buildings, foundations, agricultural trails, roads, etc., but also in non-material forms such as stories, traditions and people's memories.

Is local history of importance to people today? Does it have a role in the work of schools, other educational institutions and

museums when they deal with people or their everyday operations? Is history perhaps something that is only present at a museum exhibition, in history books, in schools, castles or mansions? Have we locked up history in an exhibit or a book, thus creating a gap between it and reality? Is history something which was of meaning to people at one time, but is of no meaning to me in my everyday life, home or work? Are the traces of history which are all around us something that we view without seeing and pass by without understanding?

In January 2007, I attended a tourist conference in the sparsely populated mountains of northern Sweden. I delivered an address about how local history can be used in the tourist business, and then someone from the audience posed this question: "It's easy to show slides of burial grounds from southern Sweden and mansions from Mälardalen, but what can we present about history here in the North? Here we just have wilderness and nature. That's just about all that we can show our visitors. We don't have much in the way of cultural remains that would be worth mentioning." The answer to the question can be found in something which was written down by a mineworker in a letter which he sent in 1890: "Don't for a second think that I have ended up in the wilderness. No, here we have one of the oldest civilisations in the world, a rich heritage."

Last year, our team from the Kalmar County Museum was doing some work down in South Africa, and we were able to trace the history of a mountain rift that is located very much in the middle of nowhere. In this, we were joined by our South African colleagues. We found no physical remains and expected little of the historical document which existed, but we were proven wrong. Historical events had taken place there from the Stone Age and right through to the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century – events that were of great importance at the national level.

Each place has its own history, and it is always history that is worth describing. It is not obvious which places are more historically interesting than others and which historical perspectives should be highlighted, but that is something which we can decide today.

### A new educational method

Why is it so difficult for us to notice the historical sites that are near to our homes? We tend to travel considerable distances to study history. We visit the "great monuments", and we go to

museums to see their exhibits, but the fact is that history is lurking just around the corner, in our local environment and in our town. Sometimes it's worth wondering whether the point of museums is to lure in visitors so that they study their history at the museum, or whether museums should instead provide people with the tools that are needed so that they can discover their own local history.

Some 20 years ago, I was a curator at the Kalmar County Museum, and I met a teacher from the school in Trekanten, which is a village just to the West of Kalmar. She was teaching her nine-year-olds about the Stone Age, and she was very careful in following along with the curriculum, the schoolbooks, and the things that she had studied at university. She taught her pupils about "significant" Stone Age discoveries in "central" Scandinavia – at Mälardalen and at Själland in Denmark. When I asked why she hadn't taught her students about a Stone Age site located one kilometre from her school, she replied, "What Stone Age site?" She was quite unaware of the fact that there were Stone Age remains in the vicinity of her school. Perhaps these were remains which were just as significant as those that are discussed in history books.

This single encounter triggered the start of the Historic Environment Education programme and the Time Travel method in the Kalmar region. The school in Trekanten became a pilot school for this new educational method, which is based on the local environment. The questions of students are at the focus of attention, and all of the different human senses are involved. In May 1986, the Kalmar County Museum conducted the first Time Travels to the Stone Age – more than 5,000 years back in time. Two classes from the Trekanten school took part at the project which was organised at the local Stone Age site. This was a new method for bringing local history to life.

### History of all ages

After three years of pilot activities with three schools from 1985 until 1988, the Kalmar County Museum invited all of the schools in the region to participate in the Historic Environment Education programme and the Time Travel method in 1989. There was huge interest at first, with some 60 schools declaring their interest in taking part during the first two years. Several museum curators worked full time on organising Time Travels to the Stone Age, the Bronze Age, the Iron Age and the Middle Ages. In 1997, the Kalmar Union was celebrating its 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and the activities were expanded in scope as a result of this. Costumes were sewed. Films, television programmes and books were

produced, and historical activities both large and small were organised – several major historical feasts among them.

In 1998, the Kalmar County Museum established an educational department that is called "History of All Ages". It employs 15 people, and they offer Time Travels that focus on the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, too. Each year some 120 Time Travels are conducted, along with six or seven historical events for the public at large.

In 2000, representatives of the museum were appointed to a national government commission which sought to spread the Historic Environment Education programme and the Time Travel project all across the country. People from the Kalmar County Museum toured all of Sweden over the course of three years, conducting historical education projects, training sessions and Time Travels. The museum was also made responsible for activities at the Eketorps fort, a reconstructed Iron Age fortress on southern Öland Island. The site attracts some 45,000 visitors a year.

### International activities

Also in 2000, it became evident that people in other countries were also interested in the Historic Environment Education programme and the Time Travel project. The museum organised a co-operation project with people in Finland and the state of Minnesota in the United States. This co-operation has continued, with new projects each year.

International activities have since then spread even further to Italy, Iceland, Estonia, Latvia, the American state of New Mexico, and even Kenya and South Africa.

### Bridging Ages

In November 2004, representatives of some 20 schools, museums and universities from various countries gathered in Vimmerby, Sweden, to talk about Historic Environment Education and Time Travels. It was decided at the symposium that a new network for the process would be organised, and this network would be called Bridging Ages. The Kalmar County Museum and this author were appointed as co-ordinators of the network.

In June 2006, the Bridging Ages network held a second three-day seminar, this time in Rome. Subjects that were discussed included research and communications, methods for Time Travels, and organisation of the various processes. It was also decided to take further steps toward the establishment of a formal

organisation. Today, in 2007, the network includes people from some 30 institutions in 10 different countries – Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Iceland, Sweden, the UK, Italy, the USA, Kenya and South Africa.

### **“Now this campsite has meaning!”**

The effects which Historic Environment Education has on its participants are obvious in several different ways. Many children and adults have said that Time Travels have offered them a different perspective of their own history. Historic Environment Education provides a new perspective of history, as well as pride and a sense of identity in the local community. Some 10 years ago, a participant at a Stone Age feast in a small village north of Kalmar had this to say: “I’m proud to live here – a place with such a wealth of history.” Similar statements have been made by others who have taken part in Time Travels and other historical events. People suddenly notice that their place of residence is not as dull as they had thought. On the contrary, it may have a very exciting and fascinating history. Historical remains are given a fresh look, and they take a more central position in people’s minds.

Another workshop and Time Travel were organised at a historical site in Cape Winelands, South Africa, which dated back to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. As it happens, the site today is a popular campsite, and one of the instructors noted that “now this campsite has meaning”. Suddenly the site had taken on a completely new historical meaning.

Time Travels can also contribute to self-esteem: “I’m a different person after the Time Travels and role-playing, and I have a lot more self-confidence. Time Travel taught me to respect myself and others around me, and it gave me courage to live in 1853 and 2006,” said a 17-year-old student after Time Travels back to 1853 at Bain’s Kloof Pass in South Africa.

Of course, it should also be mentioned that apart from all of this, it is a lot of fun to take part in Time Travels.

### **Dark history and the history of victors**

Some aspects of history make us proud. We choose to emphasise these parts of history, we want to discuss them. Perhaps the people revolted against injustice at one time. Perhaps a large and famous building was erected. Other aspects of history, however, are shameful – slavery, dictatorships and oppression. The point is

that there is a dark side and a light side to history, and the things that we categorise as dark or light can change over time.

Winners write history – that’s the way it has always been. We create our own images of history, and this is a process which is often controlled by political and financial powers. Our ideas about history can change – what’s true today won’t necessarily be true in 10 or 20 years’ time.

It is important, however, not to avoid the darker sides of history. They can offer valuable lessons, and they can help to achieve reconciliation among various groups in society. There can be new dialogue between the oppressor and the oppressed. We have things to learn from all ages of time – sometimes because the past serves as a model for us today, and other times because it issues a warning to us.

### **History is diverse**

There is always more than one way to describe an historical event or process. It is wise to ask many different people to discuss history. Let everyone participate, irrespective of skin colour, religion or language. Let new images emerge all the time.

History can be used to define solutions to problems today. An historical perspective can make us realise that the origins of our problems are rooted far back in time. The building of our nation, indeed, may be made up of many different histories.

### **The perspective from below**

History is best perceived from below. It is easier to relate to the experiences of slaves and servants and their perspective than it is to relate to the experiences and perspective of their masters. This is the perspective that is used in most books and films. It creates touching history which engages people and creates emotions to which many people can relate and identify.

Historical remains from the upper classes remain more intact than those of people who lived in simple cottages, but even these sites can be seen from the perspective of the servants who once worked there. The perspective from below is important if people are to understand what is being presented to them and to feel that this is done in an engaging way.

There is an obvious interest in local history which affects and touches us. Not everyone is interested in going to museums or

reading complicated history books, but we are all interested in our local heritage, particularly if our history has meaning and if it is presented in an interesting way.

Which institutions are helping people, historical societies, schools and other institutions which want to learn about their local history and the environment around them? Who can direct them to the proper path? Who can make history more interesting and meaningful? Surely it is not the case that local history is available only to those people who are researching it, or that the only people who can describe history in an exciting way are journalists and filmmakers! What part do museums perform in this context?

### **What is the point of museums?**

Museums are often associated with buildings and exhibitions. Far less often do people associate them with regional activities and historical events. Often we think that the main task for a museum is to encourage people to visit the museum building. Given that museums often depend on entrance fees, this can be the result of financial pressures. We can ask, however, about the responsibility of museums when it comes to local historical sites and the interest of local residents in their local history.

### **Education at school**

Schools are directed and ruled by their curricula. History books which are sold by large publishing houses are often a key part of educational costs. These books often reveal a history, however, which is very distant from the everyday lives of schoolchildren and the places where they live.

Another way to study history is to ask children to look outside the schoolroom window. Perhaps they can even venture beyond the schoolyard. What history can be found here? What are the local environments? How can we learn about this history? How do we understand what we see? Can we discover a local perspective in addition to the national or international perspective?

"I think that this is the first time that the students realised that history is not a fairy tale," said one teacher in Trekanten after she taught her class about local Stone Age history and went on Time Travels at the local Stone Age site. "Now the students understand that the history which they've been studying actually happened, and it happened right here, but 5,000 years ago. History is not

something that took place once upon a time. It is reality which occurred right here where they live."

### **Why don't we learn from history?**

It sometimes seems that we never learn from history. We make the same mistakes over and over again. Could it be that this is because our knowledge of history is more or less superficial and we don't have a deeper understanding of that which happened long ago? Could it also be that things which happened in the past seem to be irrelevant today – they're things that we have read or heard about, but we have never understood or experienced them? Why is it that those whose profession is related to history often fail to make history meaningful for people in the here and now? Why can't we stir their emotions? Are we using the wrong methods? Is it possible that Historic Environment Education and Time Travels might be a good way to ensure deeper experiences and understandings?

### **Historic Environment Education**

Historic Environment Education refers to education that is provided in a local environment. It makes use of local historical sites and nearby history as an active means for teaching and inspiring people and communities about the past.

Historic Environment Education has many directions, and one hopes that new ones still remain to be discovered. The cornerstone for the method is made up of historical sites and what they can tell us. Participants can document and investigate the site, search for information in archives, and conduct relevant interviews. Sites can be made more accessible via signs, maps, guided tours and historic paths. One can write books or brochures, produce films or TV programmes, arrange training courses, study circles, lectures, workshops or history-related events. Buildings and landscapes can be renovated or restored.

It is, however, important in this context to remember that history is not about buildings or discoveries as such. History is about the people who lived at that time and influenced the location. History is always about people with whom we can compare ourselves. Sometimes people from history deter us, sometimes we are quite smitten by them. These are people who were once made of flesh and blood, and we hope that we can all learn something from them.

### The magic of a place

There is magic to a historical place. Something important happened there at a specific time in the past. Visiting the site can stir feelings and create experiences that no exhibition, book or lecture can provide.

### Educational methods in the future

When history is brought to life, the process must be of meaning to people if they are to care about the issue and take an active interest in it. The process must be relevant to people in today's society if the past and the present are to meet.

Educational methods must be adjusted on the basis of target audiences and age groups. Different methods will be needed for senior citizens than for teenagers. Small groups will have different needs than will people who are attending a major feast. Students from school groups may have more information in advance than tourists do.

Educational methods which involve all five human senses provide insight and empathy in a way which one-way communications can never achieve. What do people remember from a guided tour or lecture? Stanford University conducted a study which shows that listeners, on average, receive only one-third of the central ideas which a lecturer or guide wants to communicate. Just a few weeks later, only one-tenth of what has been said remains in people's minds. Something similar is mentioned in a 1992 issue of *New Horizons for Learning*. The article, "The Beam", reports that we remember 10% of what we read, 15% of what we hear, and 80% of what we experience. If all of the senses are engaged during an experience, the likelihood of in-depth learning is far greater than is the case with a lecture or exhibition.

Participation is essential to experience insight and empathy. When people research and discover history and even travel back into another era for a single day, they can receive a deeper understanding both of history and of today's society. It is easier to learn about the daily life of a Stone Age man by trying to make stone tools yourself than by watching a skilled flintknapper work.

The concept of time is difficult for people to understand. When did the "olden days" take place? Were they 10, 100 or 1,000 years ago? One way to understand the concept of time is to freeze history. What was it like to live in Stockholm in 1483, in Tukums

in 1928, or in New Mexico in 1776? By locking in the year, a point of reference is created, one which makes it easier to define individual people and events. It also triggers curiosity – what happened before and after the date that is being considered?

### Time Travels

Time Travels are the ultimate way to experience an historical time. They engage all of the senses, create an understanding of the past and the location, and help us better to comprehend our own time. Time Travels allow people to visit a specific site to take part in what happened in Rome in 404 AD or in Kalmar in 1956. They can meet people from the era, and they can discuss and reflect on what they are experiencing. Time Travels provide knowledge far beyond that which can be read or heard. If the process is organised in the right way, participants will gain skills, understanding and familiarity. Knowledge will go not just to the head, but also to the heart, and certain emotions will be evoked. This will be an experience which will last for a long time – maybe even for a lifetime.

Time Travels always take place at an actual historical site, not at a museum or school. Time travels require preparation in the form of historical knowledge that can come from archives and other sources. Participants must also form their own historical character.

Time Travels are never meant for others in the sense that there are no spectators. All participants take part in the process. When one takes on the role of an historical character, one preserves one's gender and age so as to be able to identify with oneself and one's life.

Time Travels have seven steps to them:

- 1) Choose the historical site;
- 2) Conduct research in archives and via other sources;
- 3) Study the landscape;
- 4) Ensure that the museum or a university offers training for teachers and other interested parties;
- 5) Provide education at the school or organisation;
- 6) Conduct the Time Travel to the actual site;
- 7) Evaluate the process.

A publication called "Seven Steps Toward In-Depth Teaching" offers further information about each of these steps. Schools which

want to organise Time Travels work with a museum or university, focusing on research, in-service days and, perhaps, even historical costumes and props. These institutions are the ones that will conduct the Time Travels process at the relevant site.

Time Travels require extensive education. Students can study the chosen site and then visit it. Life consists of as much biology as of religion, history, languages, physical education, home economics, science and mathematics. Preparatory work may occur for a few weeks or a few months, depending on interests and opportunities. It is, of course, part of the curriculum, not an added factor in the children's day.

After the research is conducted, a scenario for the project can be created in terms of the story that will be told at the actual site. Organisers must choose a specific year and a specific event that has been of importance. Children and adults can write up their own roles and give life to their own characters. Upon arriving at the site, participants live lives that could have been lived at that specific site in a specific year – the Dominican monastery in Reval in 1406, the town of Vimmerby in 1906, or the Edblad log cabin in Minnesota in 1872.

The framework of Time Travels is composed of:

- The historical site;
- Facts from archives and oral sources (a critical approach to sources is of great importance);
- A scenario that is based on facts, scientific evaluation and the specific year;
- Roles for the participants;
- Important issues and questions to discuss (relevant both now and then);
- Activities (what did people do, what kind of food did they eat?);
- The time plan, showing the beginning and the end, when the food is served, when a stranger enters the scene, etc;
- Costumes and props – historical dress is of key importance to capture the feeling and one's own character. Props and activities are to be conducted in reality. There's no need to go in to exacting detail, however – Time Travels are an educational process, not a re-enactment.

### Responsibilities for museums

Historic Environment Education and Time Travels require time and effort on the part of their organisers, and these are processes

which offer long-lasting results, ones that will affect the way in which participants think and perceive things. Who can undertake responsibility for supporting schools and individuals who are interested in Historic Environment Education and Time Travels? Can such projects be part of a museum's activities? Can the museum support schools and organisations in terms of research, workshops, Time Travels, props and historical clothing?

Historic Environment Education and Time Travels can affect societies by influencing the way in which people think and change their attitude. Do we want to play a part in influencing people by telling the stories of history? Where there is a will, there is often a way, too. In this case, it is important to begin on a small scale, to determine methods and ways of organising the processes.

### Conclusion

Historic Environment Education and Time Travels involve pedagogical methods which require greater responsibilities, but also create nearly limitless possibilities. Evaluations show that these methods preserve historic perspectives, skills and understandings while creating identity and joy. It is also perhaps true that divided societies can be healed through the bringing together of the past and the present.

"I really didn't know anything about the past, but this Time Travels project was educational and understandable," said one participant. "I had a chance to feel and think like people did back then, and I learned about the experience of being a servant."

Added another: "A strong bonding with my own character occurred. I was unable to distinguish her personality from my own. In fact, I felt at one with her, because her feelings flowed through me."

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