

ExpoTime!

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Educational work in museums does not only mean dealing exclusively with originals, truth and facts

For centuries, museums have been concerned with depicting the world, i.e. collecting, researching, exhibiting and interpreting what is and was. Some still do so that way today – they know nothing else. There was just one problem: “Real” are also manifestations of broad areas of human social activities that are located in the field of philosophy and religion: they are based on nice but false assumptions, illusions, fictions and beliefs. Museums could treat the objects permeated by these non-facts in a museum-like manner, classify them and interpret them referentially – but only in a system-immanent way. An objective interpretation of objects permeated with religion, for example, is still denied to museums today – not only out of respect for the respective believers, but also for epistemological reasons.

But there is one level that museums should definitely deal with again and again. The first museums have already done this very successfully in recent decades. I mean dealing with forgeries, fake news, false narratives, conspiracy theories and targeted disinformation. Museums absolutely have to deal with these phenomena in large exhibitions, as they are increasingly shaping our daily lives. We live in an age of great confusion – and

our confusion is also becoming increasingly automated and digitalized. Whole societies are currently being kept misinformed because those in power can better exercise violence on their critics, others are breaking down into an informed and a misinformed part that believes in conspiracy theories, false assumptions, stupid enemy images and distorted self-assessments. Racism, murder and wars are the result.

The family is a microcosmic image of the societies and cultures in which we live. Many problems in families arise precisely because family members are not trained to comprehend and to come to terms with the false narratives of their youth. Museums could have a great impact as a corrective on these micro- and macrocosmoses. But this would mean that our museums would employ the most intelligent and committed young people, not necessarily those who think they can just try out this or that or who replace a sound museological background with phoney CVs, hollow promises and modernistic speech bubbles.

Christian Mueller-Straten, PhD

Editor of EXPOTIME!, member of ICOM Germany

German Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier gives a speech at the opening of the exhibition “Conspiracy Theories – Past and Present” in the State Museum for Monastic Culture, Dalheim Monastery in Lichtenau, 2019. Photo: Ute Grabowsky



Front cover: The “Katharinen Tower” is reminiscent of the former second tower of the Fraumünster in Zurich, a project by NÜSSLI in honour of the creative power of women throughout the city and the last abbess of the Fraumünster, Katharina von Zimmern, who handed over the Fraumünster Abbey to the city of Zurich 500 years ago. The temporary art installation is on display until December 10. Photo: Federico Farinatti Fotografie. MORE: <https://www.nussli.com/en/news-pr-and-media/current-news-and-media-releases/nussli-builds-the-katharinen-tower-in-zurich/> and <https://www.katharinenturm.ch/home> See also p. 28 of this issue!

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Gunter Schöbel

The New *Pfahlbauten* Museum [„Pile Dwellings“] in Unteruhldingen at Lake Constance: The oldest archaeological open-air museum in Germany invests in the future.

Museum history

The museum, founded in 1922 by a citizens' association, is widely known. The basic idea was to build a museum for everyone, directly at the site of the lost villages of the Stone and Bronze Age (4,000-850 BC), the prehistoric pile dwellings, that would appeal broad swathes of the population. A museum for the distant past 3,000 years back in history. But it was also about the promotion of tourism in the area. The idea was developed by the district administrator Hermann Levinger from Karlsruhe who had a Jewish background. The driving force had been the Unteruhldingen mayor and pile dwelling researcher of the third generation, Georg Sulger. The basis had been finds from archaeological excavations at Lake Constance and at the silted-up lakes of the moorlands of Upper Swabia.

To date, 16.5 million people have visited the complex. With 270-300,000 visitors annually, the pile dwellings are one of the biggest attractions of Lake Constance and are a must-see for school classes, families and tourists.

From the point of view of museum communication, the museum has experienced a lot. As part of the local history museum movement, it started didactically in the Weimar period immediately after World War I, according to the Scandinavian model of open-air museums with scenographed and reconstructed living environments. Initial attempts to establish such a museum failed due to the First World War. A UFA silent film with „Stone Age scenes“ ejected the museum into the new world. During the Nazi era, it was instrumentalized as a propaganda tool based on racist ideas. As with all open-air museums in Germany, it took some time after WWII to regain the



acceptance it had lost in the historical sciences and to restore its strengths of multiple and objectively differentiated history teaching within the museum family. But this internal problem did not affect the flow of visitors.

In its function as a „state-recognized place of learning“ from 1990 and part of the network of over 400 open-air museums worldwide, numerous new museum units were created between 1996 and 2010: a Stone Age experimental garden, buildings for the collections of over 2 million individual pieces, the research institute, technical workshops. Two new villages were added following recent excavations, a museum building in 1996 and experimental houses for long-term observations.

2011: the „Pile dwellings around the Alps“ become a world cultural heritage site

The listing of the underwater remnants as a UNESCO world cultural heritage site also marked a turning point for the museum. From 2011, 111 sites in six countries, Switzerland, France, Austria, Italy, Slovenia and Germany, represented a common, international heritage of millennia-old lakeside villages. This led to new exhibition formats and cross-border cooperation. The cultural asset, which had been underwater for thousands

of years and was deprived of atmospheric oxygen, was valuable and unique. It was therefore often compared to the pyramids in terms of its preservation, especially in Switzerland. Until today, however, it cannot be presented to the general public directly on the lake bottom, but only on land, either by reconstruction of single elements like building components resp. whole houses or by exhibiting selected finds on land. This museographical problem constitutes a difficult task for all sites belonging to this serial, cross-border world heritage. It also requires new ways of presentation.

A master plan for communicating the world cultural heritage is taking shape

The considerations for the new installation were not only based on the curatorial ideas of the museum's specialist scientists. The project was helped by the involvement of external museum suppliers. Annual visitor evaluations were additionally important for the assessment, which asked about the acceptance and future wishes of our guests. This made it possible to develop a script for the desired innovations. The plan envisaged defining steps for a systematic expansion in stages after purchasing a municipal property and implementing it within a period







of ten years. A conventional „world heritage exhibition“ with original finds was the start in 2012. A „Stone Age course“ for families (2011-2019), a „Green Classroom“ for school classes with hands-on offers (2020) and a „3-D installation“ to explain diving archaeology as a research method – the **ARCHAEORAMA** – (2013/2024) followed. The completion of the measures was planned in time for the 100th anniversary in 2022. But then, COVID-19 got in the way. A special exhibition on 100 years of pile dwellings in the oldest houses in the open-air complex bridged the pandemic-caused situation (2022). The opening of the New Museum, after eight years of planning and 18 months of construction, took place by Minister of State Claudia Roth on June 20, 2024.

nities to understand historical working methods, excavation areas for children and a „pile dwelling cinema“ with educational films aimed particularly at school classes, for whom we offer new opportunities for curriculum-related project events in our „green classroom“.

The „legacy“ of the pile dwellers

During the conception phase, 1,000 selected original finds from Lake Constance excavations, the Upper Swabian Lake District and the neighboring world heritage sites were shown in display cabinets and thematically organized showcases in the special exhibition room of the Old Museum which dates from 1934/1954. The visual material helped to explain the finds and findings from



The outdoor area of the open-air museum is being expanded

On the northern Lake banks, adjacent to the *Seefelder Aach-Niederung* nature reserve, a zone was initially created for open-air experimental archaeology and a new workshop for woodcraft. For museum education, pottery, smelting and baking ovens under shelters were added. Since then, these facilities allowed hands-on programs and demonstrations of old crafts by specialists from Germany and abroad. Our „do-it-yourself“ opportu-

the under water excavations over the past 170 years of research. They formed the introduction to the educational topic and, as authentic objects, prepared the visit of the open-air museum with its reconstructed houses.

The multimedia show **ARCHAEORAMA**

Particular attention was paid to the young audience in future planning. Our surveys indicated that other learning paths based on generation-specific perspectives had to be identified. A „pre-show“ was developed with the scenographer Steiner, Sarnen (CH). It allowed visitors to

feel like underwater-archaeologists. The visitors wander in small groups through three chambers following a fictive archaeological story. Here they learn about the basic methods of diving archaeology, accompany the researchers underwater – without getting wet – and then emerge in front of the open-air museum – in a magical moment – to experience the recreated living environments of the Stone and Bronze Ages under the friendly guidance of an expert. ARCHAEOGRAMA can be switched from German to French and English.

The new permanent exhibition was developed in an architectural competition

A museum that has grown over a hundred years cannot simply be torn down and replaced by a new one. If it is successful and popular, one should proceed with caution. The always critical evaluation of existing communication modules should be followed by a careful redefinition of a successful museum experience. Expert help was important for this. In retrospect, a dispute between those responsible, planners and experts, always willing

to compromise, was also indispensable here. The basis for adjustments had to come from the client, and finding the right approach was a joint task – that was the credo. This affected the building construction and the scenography inside equally. A functional building was to be built as a modern visitor centre for the world heritage site, but also serving the open-air museum as the central and strongest element of visitor communication. The start and end of the visit was to take place here. The aim was to have a large exhibition area with appropriate facilities for the originals.

Upon request from the surrounding chambers of architects, a handful of experienced wood architects from up to a 200 km radius were selected and invited to a building construction competition. The key points of the requirements for the building were presented to all those involved in advance. The same was achieved in cooperation with the Association of Exhibition Designers for the area within a two-hour drive. The spatial proximity of the contractors was important. For the structural engineering, the jury ultimately chose the office of *a+r* Ar-



chitekten, and for the scenography, *jangled nerves*, both companies from Stuttgart, because in the jury's opinion they had best solved the competition task for a world heritage museum directly next to the pile dwellings.

Content and objectives of the new building, the „New Museum at the Lake“

On the basis of a project-related development plan and in view of the location on the sensitive shore area, the scope for the planners was defined. This required special solutions. The location on former lake land required a special deep foundation. 85 concrete piles, each 20 m long, provided support for the massive base plate. A wooden skeleton made of several hundred wooden elements, none of which was the same length as the neighboring one, spans an impressive 12.40 m high interior space.

A butterfly-like twin building with a connecting intermediate section was planned in advance – although to date, for cost reasons, only the left wing and the connecting foyer with a ticket office in the middle have been built.

From the foundation to the ridge, a real pile building has been created on the outside. With its sustainable construction, it also fits well into the protected shore landscape with the newly designed museum courtyard and its Stone Age planting. The vaulted roof resembles an upside-down logboat used by Stone Age people and is fascinating with its slightly curved shape and spatial depth effect. It significantly protects the world cultural heritage inside and appears as an archaic-looking building element. A central service wing in the west connects the old and new buildings and ensures the accommodation of the facilities in the entrance hall. It accommodates the sanitary facilities, staff rooms, lockers and the technical rooms. Accessibility is ensured by ground-level access to the entrances and exits, ramps, an elevator and handrails on both sides of the stairs as well as a „Toilet for All“ for the severely disabled visitors.

The high main room is accessed via the ground floor. This is the start of the museum visit. It contains original piles from the pile dwellings and themed display cases with archaeological finds. Information about the world cultural heritage and insights into diving research and the underwater world through media stations and large-format viewing windows introduce the topic. The impression of being directly under water at the bottom of the lake is supported by a light installation that draws fine ripples of bright light on the floor and display cases, a light sculpture that leads into the ARCHAEOGRAMA and the next underwater experience.

Conceptually, the new entrance hall opens a tour with an emotional image that begins with the fragile originals and first names the evidence of archaeological work. Children's texts in yellow, wheelchair-accessible viewing angles and NFC codes on all exhibit display cases for foreign languages and having them read aloud using your

own cell phone are the new standard in the museum. The first insight is followed by a walk into a diving chamber and the underwater world to get to know the examination and communication methods. The history of the landscape since the Ice Age and the use of the pile dwellings are presented in a virtual 3D experience and then in the analogue open-air museum. This is where the tried and tested personal interactions between the museum guides and visitors take place through guided tours.

After visiting the open-air complex with its 23 reconstructions and the adjacent Stone Age course, the visitors return to the entrance hall. They have seen original and often inconspicuous remains that have survived thousands of years from the Stone and Bronze Ages. And they have been given a clear overview of the research methods used by science and their results.

A recapitulation of this overall experience is composed on the return to the New Museum in the visitor gallery of the building on the upper floor. There, the guest can devote himself to the remaining mysteries of the pile dwellers and deepen his acquired knowledge. How do we know all this? Did pile dwellings actually exist or are they a myth? The world of research above water, presented on the gallery above the entrance floor, has answers in 17 display cases, media stations and large-format images of pile dwellings all over the world. 170 years of varied research can be viewed there. Thunderbolts made of stone – what are they? Strange finds, what do they mean? Citizen scientists in the lake – what do they do there? What are their motives? Or what are the current enemies of the pile dwellings on Lake Constance? What are the climate change, the quagga mussel and the spiny-cheek crayfish as invasive species doing to our underwater heritage? Even small pieces of „chewing gum“ made of birch tar 6,000 years ago can help to answer still unsolved questions in pile dwelling research using genetic methods.

Some hard facts

After a long period of preliminary planning, construction work began in November 2023. 32 trades were involved. After the supporting piles were driven in, the foundation slab was poured and the service wing was erected. The construction of the building was finished in January 2024.

The cornerstone ceremony took place on April 19, 2023, and the topping-out ceremony on July 27, three months later. Work on the outdoor facilities and the design of the museum courtyard began in spring 2024. The interior finish followed immediately afterwards. Particular attention was paid to the topics of exhibit showcases, object placement, cash register and admission systems, signage, and visitor guidance. Fire protection and environmental requirements had to be taken into account. The reformatting of the ARCHAEOGRAMA, the construction of the media stations, the lighting of the individual



objects, the hanging of a dugout canoe and the installation of the light sculpture were completed exactly as planned about one week before the opening on June 20, 2024.

A total of 14.38 million € were used for 1,300 m² of additional usable space, with 1,973,500 million € coming from BKM from the federal program „Investments for national cultural institutions in Germany“ and 300,000 € from the ERDF program Innovative Timber Construction from the state of BW. Other funding providers were the *Landesbank Baden-Württemberg* for the redesign of the ARCHAEOGRAMA, the 3D pre-show with 30,000 – and the Ministry of Social Affairs Baden-Württemberg with 11,340 € for the „Toilet for All“ project and the improvement of accessibility. The German Association for Archaeology contributed 25,000 € for a new photovoltaic system for a more sustainable power supply. The largest part, around 12 million €, was contributed by our own association, the Pile Dwelling Association as the private provider of the museum. This association employs around 50 people for the open-air museum and the research institute on site.

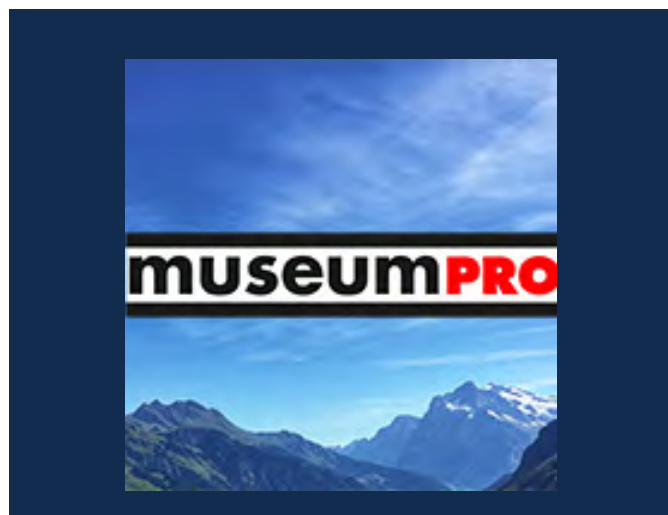
A look into the future

As mentioned before, the binding site plan already included approval for a future twin. However, the realization of the expansion area is dependent on further funding. Ideas for form and content are already in place. The presentation of regionally significant finds, including from private collections in southern Germany that have not yet been shown, would be an option. The presenta-

tion of modern scientific methods to solve the still open questions could also be seamlessly linked to what already exists. In the end, however, further development also depends on the wishes of future visitors and the development of society – as the first 100 years of the museum on Lake Constance have already shown.

Photographs:

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