

# **Policy Document for Learning Activities at Open Air Museums in Sweden**

## **Introduction**

FRI is the organisation through which open air museums in Sweden cooperate. The nature of these open air museums varies widely and their differences arise from the nature of their owners, commissions, sizes and compositions of their collections. Museums can be national, regional or local in their scope.

Common to all open air museums, however, is their specific quality of enabling learning activities in the reconstructed milieu which emerges from cultural heritage and living collections. Furthermore, they reach a number of different target groups. This provides a basis for new approaches to learning for all ages and in periods of life.

## **Vision**

Our aim is for all open air museums in Sweden to be recognised widely as valuable resources for lifelong learning and which contributes to a sustainable, democratic development of society.

## **Aims of this document:**

- to define and clarify the specific learning potential of open air museums,
- to inspire and assist the work of individual museums in promoting learning activities,
- to provide a means of strengthening cooperation among the museums that constitute the FRI and to support developments in the field of learning.

## **Aims of learning activities:**

- that open air museums will decide consciously on what is to be communicated, to whom, how and why, and that this approach to learning should permeate all aspects of the museums;
- to ensure quality in learning activities by developing new methods and techniques, in-service training, documentation and evaluation;
- to adapt the work of museums to a changing world; and
- that each open-air museum defines and documents its own learning aims.

## **The specific potential for learning at open air museums**

### **Context and wholeness**

At open air museums experiences arise from context. The museums have full-scale buildings which visitors can enter and explore and these are furnished with life-sized objects set in context. In addition, fields, meadows, animals grazing and gardens contribute to an understanding of context and process. This milieu provides the staff with the right learning

conditions for working thematically and over disciplinary boundaries. They also provide an excellent milieu in which to problematize and examine values and behaviour. Here, there is a unique environment in which visitors can explore issues of both an immaterial and existential nature.

### **Learning through cultural heritage**

Learning is the process where an individual's experiences and actions are converted into knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. The aim of learning is self-awareness, to understand the world around you and to see a context. Through interpretation, we convert information into knowledge and gain an understanding of ourselves and our place in the world. The stimulating environment of the open air museums supports different approaches to learning. Research shows that stimulating environments encourage learning.<sup>1</sup> Learning activities are not just for children and youngsters, but also for adults of all ages and backgrounds. Learning takes place throughout our entire lives, learning is lifelong.

### **Sensory experiences**

Open air museums enable their visitors to respond with all their senses, strengthened as they are by natural and cultural milieus. Opportunities are provided for experiences and activities which encourage both formal and informal learning.<sup>2</sup> Imagination, curiosity, creativity and play stimulate enjoyable learning. This enables open air museums to work with both traditional and emotional intelligence.<sup>3</sup> Both theoretical and practical knowledge is acquired.

### **Meeting places**

Open air museums reach a wide range of visitors,<sup>4</sup> especial with regard to age composition.<sup>5</sup> Open air museums can also provide a limitless meeting place between cultures and across generations in terms of ethnicity, class, gender/sex, sexuality and the functionally disabled. With time for talking, reflection and responding to the here and now a positive interaction with visitors is generated.

### **Quality assurance**

To guarantee the quality of learning activities, qualified staff are required in the fields of education, cultural history and other relevant disciplines. It is important that each open air museum defines, documents and adopts its own aims and goals.

---

<sup>1</sup> 'Museum visits showed pupils a world beyond their everyday experience, and successful learning within this new cultural world enable pupils to begin to find ways to claim this world as their own'. Eileen Hooper Greenhill, London 2007

<sup>2</sup> Formal learning takes place in a planned educational environment with articulated goals. Informal learning takes place all the time, outside of the formal educational system.

<sup>3</sup> Gardner, H. (1983). *Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences*. New York, NY: Basic Books.  
Gardner, H. (1999). *Intelligence reframed: Multiple intelligences for the 21st Century*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

<sup>4</sup> Friluftsmuseerna (The Open Air Museums) 2007, Sten Rentzhog

<sup>5</sup> FRI visitor questionnaire, 2005

Not every open air museum will be able to provide all the educational qualifications, skills and abilities it needs. In this respect, it is vital that the open air museums cooperate with each other and provide mutual support. It is also important to maintain and sustain the learning/educational network that exists within FRI, by meeting at least once a year.

### **Important areas for learning activities**

We have defined four vital areas for learning activities: accessibility, diversity, sustainability and the quality of life. One way of tackling these issues is to work across sectors.<sup>6</sup> This means we will also have to relate to the key competences defined by the EU as absolutely essential for all citizens. These key competences are not static but must be adaptable in a life-long learning perspective.

#### **Accessibility and diversity**

Accessibility is concerned with physical, economic, geographic, cognitive and virtual aspects. Swedish cultural history/heritage needs to be approached in a more nuanced manner and should be placed in its global context. The structure of learning activities has to be dynamic, critical of accepted norms and values, and display an awareness of different aspects of diversity in order to be able to relate to a changing society. Among identified areas suitable for educational initiatives, xenophobia, high levels of youth unemployment and low levels of educational achievement can be mentioned.

#### **Sustainability**

A sustainable society means ecological sustainability, social justice, and economic security. Open air museums through light on natural and cultural heritage from an ethno-biological view point.<sup>7</sup> This is why open air museums are excellent places for learning, motivation and inspiration with the intent of achieving a sustainable society.

#### **Quality of life**

The milieus created by open air museums in themselves promotes good health as they stimulate context, participation, accessibility, security and human interaction across the boundaries of culture and generations. Rich social interaction, for the elderly for example, in the activities of the museums can be essential in improving the quality of life and wellbeing.

---

<sup>6</sup> EU 2020

<sup>7</sup> Ethno-biology is the interdisciplinary study of how human cultures interact with and use their native plants and animals now and in the past and their importance in the shaping of the landscape and the preservation of biological diversity.