The Value of an Archaeological Open-Air Museum is in its Use
Understanding Archaeological Open-Air Museums and their Visitors

Submitted by Roeland Pieterszoon Paardekooper to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Archaeology in February 2012

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Abstract

There are about 300 archaeological open-air museums in Europe. Their history goes from Romanticism up to modern-day tourism. With the majority dating to the past 30 years, they do more than simply present (re)constructed outdoor sceneries based on archaeology. They have an important role as education facilities and many showcase archaeology in a variety of ways. Compared to other museum categories, archaeological open-air museums boast a wide variety of manifestations.

This research assesses the value of archaeological open-air museums, their management and their visitors, and is the first to do so in such breadth and detail. After a literature study and general data collection among 199 of such museums in Europe, eight archaeological open-air museums from different countries were selected as case studies. They included museums in a very varied state with different balances between public versus private funding levels on the one hand, and on the other the proportion of private individuals to educational groups among their visitors. The issue of ‘quality’ was investigated from different perspectives. The quality as assessed by the museum management was recorded in a management survey; the quality as experienced by their visitors was also recorded using a survey. In addition on-site observations were recorded. Management and visitors have different perspectives leading to different priorities and appreciation levels.

The studies conclude with recommendations, ideas and strategies which are applicable not just to the eight archaeological open-air museums under study, but to any such museum in general. The recommendations are divided into the six categories of management, staff, collections, marketing, interpretation and the visitors. They are designed to be informative statements of use to managers across the sector.
List of Contents

Abstract 3
List of Contents 5
List of Figures 13
Acknowledgements 23

Chapter 1. Introduction 25
  1.1. The Goal of this Research 25

Chapter 2. The History and Development of Archaeological Open-Air Museums 29
  2.1. Introduction 29
  2.2. Definition 29
  2.3. Deconstructing the Literature Sources 33
  2.4. Themes 38
     2.4.1. Romanticism 39
     2.4.2. Nationalism 42
     2.4.3. Germany in the 20th Century 43
     2.4.4. Science and Experiment 46
     2.4.5. Education and Learning 49
     2.4.6. Tourism, Leisure and Events 53
  2.5. Typifying the Museums - what is their Role? 55
     2.5.1. Traditional Showcase Museum / Exhibition on Site or elsewhere 58
     2.5.2. Archaeological or Historical Site / Site Museum 59
     2.5.3. Traditional (Ethnographic) Open-Air Museum / Historic House 60
     2.5.4. Natural Park or Cultural Landscape 62
     2.5.5. (Re)constructed Boat / Ship 63
     2.5.6. Living History Museum 64
     2.5.7. Animal Farm 67
     2.5.8. Theme Park 68
  2.6. Conclusions 69

Chapter 3. Methods and Sources 71
  3.1. Introduction 71
  3.2. Deriving Precise Questions 71
  3.3. Critical Incident Analysis 72
  3.4. Setting Research Parameters 72
  3.5. Data Collection 73
     3.5.1. Parameters and Practicalities 73
Chapter 5. Eight Archaeological Open-Air Museum Case Studies

5.1. Introduction

5.2. The Scottish Crannog Centre
   5.2.1. Introduction to the Scottish Crannog Centre
   5.2.2. Education
   5.2.3. Map
   5.2.4. Management and Finances
   5.2.5. Collections
   5.2.6. Interpretation
   5.2.7. Visitor Service
   5.2.8. Understanding the Visitors to the Scottish Crannog Centre
      5.2.8.1. Tourist Visitor Characteristics
      5.2.8.2. The Decision to visit
      5.2.8.3. Rating the Facilities, Services and Experience
   5.2.9. Key Strengths and Challenges for the Scottish Crannog

5.3. HOME
   5.3.1. Introduction to HOME
   5.3.2. Education
   5.3.3. Map
   5.3.4. Management and Finances
   5.3.5. Collections
   5.3.6. Interpretation
   5.3.7. Visitor Service
   5.3.8. Understanding the Visitors to HOME
      5.3.8.1. Tourist Visitor Characteristics
      5.3.8.2. The Decision to visit
      5.3.8.3. Rating the Facilities, Services and Experience
   5.3.9. Key Strengths and Challenges for HOME

5.4. The Pfahlbaumuseum
   5.4.1. Introduction to the Pfahlbaumuseum
   5.4.2. Education
   5.4.3. Map
   5.4.4. Management and Finances
   5.4.5. Collections
   5.4.6. Interpretation
   5.4.7. Visitor Service
5.4.8. Understanding the Visitors to the Pfahlbaumuseum 154
  5.4.8.1. Tourist Visitor Characteristics 154
  5.4.8.2. The Decision to visit 155
  5.4.8.3. Rating the Facilities, Services and Experience 156
5.4.9. Key Strengths and Challenges for the Pfahlbaumuseum 157

5.5. Lofotr 160
  5.5.1. Introduction to Lofotr 160
  5.5.2. Education 162
  5.5.3. Map 162
  5.5.4. Management and Finances 164
  5.5.5. Collections 164
  5.5.6. Interpretation 165
  5.5.7. Visitor Service 167
  5.5.8. Understanding the Visitors to Lofotr 168
    5.5.8.1. Tourist Visitor Characteristics 168
    5.5.8.2. The Decision to visit 169
    5.5.8.3. Rating the Facilities, Services and Experience 169
  5.5.9. Key Strengths and Challenges for Lofotr 170

5.6. Parco Montale 172
  5.6.1. Introduction to Parco Montale 173
  5.6.2. Education 173
  5.6.3. Map 174
  5.6.4. Management and Finances 176
  5.6.5. Collections 177
  5.6.6. Interpretation 178
  5.6.7. Visitor Service 179
  5.6.8. Understanding the Visitors to Parco Montale 180
    5.6.8.1. Tourist Visitor Characteristics 180
    5.6.8.2. The Decision to visit 180
    5.6.8.3. Rating the Facilities, Services and Experience 180
  5.6.9. Key Strengths and Challenges for Parco Montale 180

5.7. Araisi 183
  5.7.1. Introduction to Araisi 184
  5.7.2. Education 186
  5.7.3. Map 186
  5.7.4. Management and Finances 187
  5.7.5. Collections 188
  5.7.6. Interpretation 189
  5.7.7. Visitor Service 190
  5.7.8. Understanding the Visitors to Araisi 190
5.7.8.1. Tourist Visitor Characteristics 190
5.7.8.2. The Decision to visit 191
5.7.8.3. Rating the Facilities, Services and Experience 191

5.7.9. Key Strengths and Challenges for Araisi 191

5.8. The Matrica Museum 194
5.8.1. Introduction to the Matrica Museum 195
5.8.2. Education 197
5.8.3. Map 197
5.8.4. Management and Finances 197
5.8.5. Collections 199
5.8.6. Interpretation 200
5.8.7. Visitor Service 201
5.8.8. Understanding the Visitors to the Matrica Museum 201
   5.8.8.1. Tourist Visitor Characteristics 201
   5.8.8.2. The Decision to visit 203
   5.8.8.3. Rating the Facilities, Services and Experience 203
5.8.9. Key Strengths and Challenges for the Matrica Museum 203

5.9. Fotevikens Museum 206
5.9.1. Introduction to Fotevikens Museum 206
5.9.2. Education 208
5.9.3. Map 209
5.9.4. Management and Finances 210
5.9.5. Collections 210
5.9.6. Interpretation 212
5.9.7. Visitor Service 212
5.9.8. Understanding the Visitors to Fotevikens Museum 213
   5.9.8.1. Tourist Visitor Characteristics 213
   5.9.8.2. The Decision to visit 214
   5.9.8.3. Rating the Facilities, Services and Experience 215
5.9.9. Key Strengths and Challenges for Fotevikens Museum 215

5.10. Conclusions 218

Chapter 6. Understanding the Museums 221
6.1. Introduction 221
6.2. Data Collection Issues of the Management Assessment 221
6.3. Management of the Eight Archaeological Open-Air Museums 222
   6.3.1. Parameters and Practicalities 223
   6.3.2. Management and Finances 224
   6.3.3. Staff 231
   6.3.4. Collections 233
   6.3.5. Marketing 240
6.3.6. Interpretation 241
6.3.7. Visitor Service 246
   6.3.7.1. Visitor Service before the Visit 247
   6.3.7.2. Visitor Service during the Visit 248
   6.3.7.3. On leaving the Museum 250
6.4. Collecting Information about Visitors 251
6.5. Conclusions 252

Chapter 7. Understanding the Visitors 255
7.1. Introduction 255
7.2. Data Collection Issues of the Tourist Survey 255
7.3. Tourist Visitor Characteristics 260
   7.3.1. Introduction 260
   7.3.2. Repeat Visits 262
   7.3.3. What is their Permanent Residence? 264
   7.3.4. How far have Tourists travelled? 267
   7.3.5. How far have Tourists travelled that Day? 268
   7.3.6. With whom are Tourists visiting the Museum? 269
   7.3.7. How long are Tourists staying in this Area? 270
7.4. The Decision to Visit 273
   7.4.1. How did Tourists hear about the Museum? 273
      7.4.1.1. How did Tourists hear about the Museum and
           were they satisfied? 277
   7.4.2. Why do People choose to visit an Archaeological Open-Air
           Museum? 278
7.5. Length of Stay at the Museum 281
   7.5.1. Length of stay and were they satisfied? 283
7.6. Visit Evaluation 284
   7.6.1. Ratings 284
      7.6.1.1. Rate the (Re)construction 287
      7.6.1.2. Rate the Tour Guide(s) 287
      7.6.1.3. Rate the Exhibits 288
      7.6.1.4. Rate the Craft 288
      7.6.1.5. Rate the Hands-on Activities 288
      7.6.1.6. Rate the Signs/Brochures/Guides 289
      7.6.1.7. Rate the Gift Shop 289
      7.6.1.8. Rate the Café 289
      7.6.1.9. Expectation Rating 289
      7.6.1.10 Conclusions of the Ratings 291
   7.6.2. Fees 292
   7.6.3. Rating grouped in two Shares 293
7.7. Conclusions 295
Chapter 8. Key Factors for Archaeological Open-Air Museums  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.1. Introduction</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2. Reflection on Methods</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2.1. Broad Scale Observations</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2.2. The Eight Case Studies, the Management Assessment</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2.3. The Eight Case Studies, the Visitor Survey</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2.4. Archaeology and Archaeological Open-Air Museums</td>
<td>302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3. Analysis, Recommendations, Ideas and Strategies for Archaeological Open-Air Museums</td>
<td>302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3.1. Management and Finances</td>
<td>302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3.2. Staff</td>
<td>305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3.3. Collections</td>
<td>306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3.4. Marketing</td>
<td>308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3.5. Interpretation</td>
<td>309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3.6. Visitor Service</td>
<td>311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4. Understanding the Visitors</td>
<td>312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4.1. Tourist Visitor Characteristics</td>
<td>312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4.2. The Decision to visit</td>
<td>312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4.3. Visit Evaluation</td>
<td>312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.5. Conclusions</td>
<td>314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.5.1. Not Theory only</td>
<td>314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.5.2. Basic Outlines of the Recommendations</td>
<td>314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.5.3. Back to the Aims</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendices

Appendix A. Terminology                                                  317
Appendix B. List of Personal Contacts referred to                        321
Appendix C. Description of [www.exarc.net](http://www.exarc.net)          323
Appendix D. List of Archaeological Open-Air Museums having answered the First and / or Second Survey 325
Appendix E. List of Archaeological Open-Air Museums visited by the Author 331
Appendix F. The Visitor Survey Form used for this Research               335
Appendix G. The standardised Visitor Survey Form                          337
Appendix H. The Management Assessment                                     339
Appendix I. Recommended Literature on Archaeological Open-Air Museums    375

Bibliography                                                            383
List of Figures

Chapter 2

Figure 2.01: The Iron Age type farm at Orvelte, the Netherlands.
Figure 2.02: Gallo Roman temple built at Archeosite d’Aubechies, Belgium.
Figure 2.03: Some of the stone walled houses at Eketorps Borg in Sweden.
Figure 2.04: The entrance gate, with merlons, of Saalburg in Germany.
Figure 2.05: Overview over Julianehøj at Jægerspris in Denmark.
Figure 2.06: The oldest (re)constructed houses at the Pfahlbaumuseum, Germany, dating to 1922.
Figure 2.07: The central gate and long wooden barracks of Biskupin, Poland.
Figure 2.08: The Longbridge Deverel House at Butser Ancient Farm, England, built in 1992 and based on an excavation at Cowdown, in Wiltshire.
Figure 2.09: The wool dyeing corner at Sagnlandet Lejre.
Figure 2.10: Education material at a typical archaeological education centre at School in Bos, Wilhelmiaard, the Netherlands.
Figure 2.11: Designations of archaeological open-air museums and such in the British Isles with examples.
Figure 2.12: Schematic overview of the different (re)constructed sites in the Netherlands grouped by influence.
Figure 2.13: Indoor exhibition at the Archeopark Schnalstal, Italy.
Figure 2.14: The Ciutadella Iberica at Calafell, Catalonia is built on top of the original archaeological site.
Figure 2.15: The entrance area of Skansen in Stockholm, Sweden; the best known ethnographic museum in the world.
Figure 2.16: The Archaeological-Ecological Centre at Albersdorf, Germany combines the natural and cultural landscape in an instructive way.
Figure 2.17: A (re)constructed medieval cog like boat / ship at the Malmö Kogg Museum, Sweden.
Figure 2.18: Living history at the Bachitterbrug Kanzach in Germany.
Figure 2.19: At the Museumdorf Düppel in Berlin, Germany they have a long experience in breeding a medieval type of pigs, the Düppeler Weideschwein.
Figure 2.20: A past which never was, fairy-tale building at Theme Park Efteling in the Netherlands.
Chapter 3
Figure 3.01: Matrix for analysing critical incidents Lockwood (1994, 78).
Figure 3.02: Variables for selecting the eight case studies. Many of these are described in detail in chapters Five to Eight.
Figure 3.03: Selection descriptives for the eight case studies.
Figure 3.04: Example of listing of points for Danish Tourist Attractions (DTA 2007).
Figure 3.05: Sample question in section 4.3.2 of the Management Survey, about the (re)constructed houses and structures.
Figure 3.06: The questions of the Management Survey about the visitor service from the section ‘before the visit’.
Figure 3.07: Two-cycle model, Source: Brogowicz et al. (1990).

Chapter 4
Figure 4.01: The first survey among archaeological open-air museums - December 2005.
Figure 4.02: Overview of sites with (re)constructed prehistoric houses in Denmark, adapted from Lund (1988, 48).
Figure 4.03: The second survey among archaeological open-air museums - May 2006.
Figure 4.04: Several quotes of archaeological open-air museums’ managers referring to how their museum had started. Source: the second survey.
Figure 4.05: Keyword approach with seven frequently used keywords and four less often mentioned ones. Source: the second survey.
Figure 4.06: Several quotes of archaeological open-air museums’ managers referring to their mission and goal. Source: the second survey.
Figure 4.07: One-liner examples from 2008 of several archaeological open-air museums. Source: the second survey.
Figure 4.08: Type of museum display. Source: the second survey.
Figure 4.09: Totals of archaeological open-air museums, archaeological education centres and the combination thereof per country. Only countries with four sites or more are shown.
Figure 4.10: The ethnographic open-air museums in Europe which also have archaeological (re)constructions.
Figure 4.11: Founding dates of the oldest architectural (re)constructions of current archaeological open-air museums. Dates are known for 225 museums.
Figure 4.13: The division of Europe in six regions.
Figure 4.14: Age of current archaeological open-air museums, divided by European regions. In dark grey the highest numbers per region, in light grey the second highest numbers. Only numbers above nine are marked.

Figure 4.15: Number of current archaeological open-air museums per country. Countries with 2 or less museums are omitted. In grey you will find the 5 highest scores in each column. Source: EuroStat and own research.

Figure 4.16: Number of times an archaeological period is depicted in an archaeological open-air museum, divided over European regions. In grey the highest numbers per period.

Figure 4.17: Age of current archaeological open-air museums, divided into broad groups based on the periods depicted. Note that many museums depict different periods at the same time. In grey, the highest number of each archaeological period depicted.

Figure 4.18: Visitor average in 2005 over archaeological open-air museums, divided into categories of age. Totals are given including and excluding crowd pullers.

Figure 4.19: Frequency of keywords as recorded from the archaeological open-air museums. Source: second survey.

Figure 4.20: Archaeological open-air museums, grouped by country by governance category. In grey numbers referred to in the text.

Figure 4.21: The financial independency from third parties for archaeological open-air museums.

Figure 4.22: Number of archaeological open-air museums with and without EU / EEC funding, grouped by period of founding.

Chapter 5

Figure 5.01: Europe, showing the position of the 8 partners in the liveARCH group. Source: Google.

Figure 5.02: The Scottish Crannog Centre at a glance.

Figure 5.03: The Crannog at the Scottish Crannog Centre.

Figure 5.04: The entrance area of the Scottish Crannog Centre.

Figure 5.05: Showcase at the exhibition of the Scottish Crannog Centre.

Figure 5.06: Aerial view over the Scottish Crannog Centre. Source: The Scottish Crannog Centre.

Figure 5.07: The interior of the crannog at the Scottish Crannog Centre.

Figure 5.08: The demonstration area of the Scottish Crannog Centre.

Figure 5.09: A tour guide at the Scottish Crannog Centre.

Figure 5.10: A 3D puzzle of a crannog roundhouse in the exhibition at the Scottish Crannog Centre.
Figure 5.11: The gift shop at the Scottish Crannog Centre.
Figure 5.12: Key strengths and challenges for the Scottish Crannog Centre.
Figure 5.13: Comment from the Scottish Crannog Centre management when looking back in 2011.
Figure 5.14: HOME at a glance.
Figure 5.15: (Re)constructed Iron Age farm at HOME.
Figure 5.16: Exterior of the Craftsmen house at HOME.
Figure 5.17: Interior of the Craftsmen house at HOME.
Figure 5.18: Map for visitors of HOME (Boonstra 2004).
Figure 5.19: (left) Living history at HOME: a volunteer.
Figure 5.20: (right) Living history at HOME: an employee.
Figure 5.21: The restaurant at HOME.
Figure 5.22: Street entrance of HOME.
Figure 5.23: The gift shop at HOME.
Figure 5.24: (left) Signs at HOME.
Figure 5.25: (right) Active participation in the 2008 event called Knights and Ladies at HOME.
Figure 5.26: Key strengths and challenges for HOME.
Figure 5.27: Comment from the HOME management when looking back in 2011.
Figure 5.28: The Pfahlbaumuseum at a glance.
Figure 5.29: Series of (re)constructed Bronze Age houses at the Pfahlbaumuseum.
Figure 5.30: An employee of the Scottish Crannog Centre interacting with the public during the H8 event at the Pfahlbaumuseum, 2009.
Figure 5.31: One of the houses of the TV series Steinzeit das Experiment relocated.
Figure 5.32: Map of the Pfahlbaumuseum. Source: Pfahlbaumuseum.
Figure 5.33: One of the many restaurants on the boulevard next to the Pfahlbaumuseum.
Figure 5.34: Indoor exhibition at the Pfahlbaumuseum.
Figure 5.35: The entrance to the Pfahlbaumuseum.
Figure 5.36: Interior presentation behind bars at the Pfahlbaumuseum.
Figure 5.37: (left) Crafts demonstration at the Pfahlbaumuseum.
Figure 5.38: (right) Automatic vending machine with post cards and guide books at the Pfahlbaumuseum.
Figure 5.39: Key strengths and challenges for the Pfahlbaumuseum.
Figure 5.40: Comment from the Pfahlbaumuseum management when looking back in 2011.
Figure 5.41: Lofotr at a glance.
Figure 5.42: One of the Viking ships at Lofotr.
Figure 5.43: The (re)constructed chieftain’s farm at Lofotr.
Figure 5.44: Interior of the (re)constructed chieftain’s farm at Lofotr.
Figure 5.45: The map for visitors of the area belonging to Lofotr. Source: Lofotr flyer.
Figure 5.46: (left) Interior presentation at the longhouse at Lofotr.
Figure 5.47: (right) Tour guide in the crafts area in the longhouse at Lofotr.
Figure 5.48: A creative playground with wooden animals at Lofotr.
Figure 5.49: Part of the living history theatre show for Hurtigruten visitors at Lofotr.
Figure 5.50: The entrance area with gift shop and café at Lofotr.
Figure 5.51: The gift shop at Lofotr.
Figure 5.52: Key strengths and challenges for Lofotr.
Figure 5.53: Comment from the Lofotr management when looking back in 2011.
Figure 5.54: Parco Montale at a glance.
Figure 5.55: Two (re)constructed Bronze Age houses at Parco Montale.
Figure 5.56: Interior of one of the (re)constructed houses at Parco Montale.
Figure 5.57: Map of the visitor area of Parco Montale. Source: Parco Montale flyer.
Figure 5.58: The indoor archaeological exhibition at the Civic Archaeological Ethnological Museum of Modena.
Figure 5.59: The indoor archaeological exhibition at Parco Montale.
Figure 5.60: (left) Ceramic (re)constructed items at Parco Montale.
Figure 5.61: (right) Detail of a (re)constructed wooden door at Parco Montale.
Figure 5.62: (left) Craft demonstration at Parco Montale.
Figure 5.63: (right) Uniformed tour guide at Parco Montale.
Figure 5.64: Key strengths and challenges for Parco Montale.
Figure 5.65: Comment from the Parco Montale management when looking back in 2011.
Figure 5.66: Araisi at a glance.
Figure 5.67: The (re)constructed lake village at Araisi.
Figure 5.68: One of the (re)constructed houses at Araisi.
Figure 5.69: A living history actor weaving at Araisi.
Figure 5.70: Map of the visitor area of Araisi. Source: Araisi flyer.
Figure 5.71: Interior of some of the (re)constructed houses at Araisi.
Figure 5.72: Roof construction details of some of the (re)constructed houses at Araisi.
Figure 5.73: (left) Costumed tour guide at Araisi.
Figure 5.74: (right) The small shop for refreshments at Araisi with the picnic area.
Figure 5.75: Entrance building with cashier, shop and guard area at Araisi.
Figure 5.76: Key strengths and challenges for Arai.
Figure 5.77: Comment from the Arai management when looking back in 2011.
Figure 5.78: The Matrica Museum at a glance.
Figure 5.79: Entrance to the grave mound presentation at the Matrica Museum.
Figure 5.80: Presentation of (re)constructed ceramics in one of the houses at the Matrica Museum.
Figure 5.81: (Re)constructed Bronze Age house at the Matrica Museum.
Figure 5.82: Map of the open air area of the Matrica Museum. Source: Matrica Museum Flyer.
Figure 5.83: (left) Mannequin dolls in one of the (re)constructed houses at the Matrica Museum.
Figure 5.84: (right) Interior of one of the (re)constructed houses at the Matrica Museum.
Figure 5.85: House exterior with kiln (left) at the Matrica Museum.
Figure 5.86: The Matrica Museum is well signed out in the nearby area.
Figure 5.87: Gift shop at the Matrica Museum.
Figure 5.88: Key strengths and challenges for the Matrica Museum.
Figure 5.89: Comment from the Matrica Museum management when looking back in 2011.
Figure 5.90: Fotevikens Museum at a glance.
Figure 5.91: Entrance to Fotevikens Museum.
Figure 5.92: Entrance to the Viking Reserve at Fotevikens Museum.
Figure 5.93: Encounter with an education group (in a kind of period costume) at Fotevikens Museum.
Figure 5.94: Map of the Viking reserve at Fotevikens Museum. Source: Flyer Fotevikens Museum.
Figure 5.95: One of the (re)constructed houses at Fotevikens Museum.
Figure 5.96: Interior with shields of different European living history Viking groups at one of the (re)constructed houses at Fotevikens Museum.
Figure 5.97: (left) Interpretative panels explaining the landscape around Fotevikens Museum.
Figure 5.98: (right) Living history Vikings camping at Fotevikens Museum.
Figure 5.99: Living history volunteers during the tourist season at Fotevikens Museum.
Figure 5.100: Gift shop at Fotevikens Museum.
Figure 5.101: Key strengths and challenges for Fotevikens Museum.
Figure 5.102: Comment from the Fotevikens Museum management when looking back in 2011.
Chapter 6

Figure 6.01: Size of the museum grounds in hectares, physical length of the guided tour (distance) and the average duration of it (minutes).

Figure 6.02: Instability descriptives in the eight museums concerning the years 2003-2008.

Figure 6.03: Overview of the items included in the 2008 action plan, collected from the management surveys (Keywords adapted from Manneby 2002).

Figure 6.04: Visitor numbers of each of the eight archaeological open-air museum and kinds of visitors.

Figure 6.05: Number of tourists per day per museum and number of days per year open. The average of all eight museums is 195 tourists per day and 206 days open per year.

Figure 6.06: Income and expenses generated by Sagnlandet Lejr in 2010. Source: Sagnlandet Lejr 2011, 10.

Figure 6.07: Number of affiliations of each of the eight museums, divided into categories.

Figure 6.08: The regional and national influence of each of the eight museums on a scale of 1-5, where 1 is little and 5 is maximum.

Figure 6.09: Overview of museum finances, indicating expenses by percentage for those museums which provided sufficient data.

Figure 6.10: Overview of museum finances, indicating income by percentage for those museums which provided sufficient data.

Figure 6.11: Number of visitors per museum per staff FTE.

Figure 6.12: Modules and extra features of the eight archaeological open-air museums. For more information see section 2.5.

Figure 6.13: Background information on the (re)constructed buildings in the eight museums.

Figure 6.14: Collections registration of the eight museums, following the minimum demands of the Dutch Museum Association (Stichting Het Nederlands Museumregister 2001, 8-9).

Figure 6.15: Research into their own collections by the eight museums.

Figure 6.16: Reasoning (quotes) of the eight archaeological open-air museum directors for furnishing their (re) constructed houses or not, paraphrased from interviews with the respective directors.

Figure 6.17: Number of publications per museum. In blue, by museum staff, not about the museum (source: the museums); In red and green publications by museum staff and other researchers about the museum (source: www.exarc.net).

Figure 6.18: Description of the interpretation in the eight museums.
Figure 6.19: Ways the museums deliver their educational and interpretive content, ranked by frequency.

Figure 6.20: Interpretive activities offered at the eight museums.

Figure 6.21: Overview of the visitor service in the eight museums: before the visit.

Figure 6.22: Overview of the visitor service in the eight museums: during the visit.

Figure 6.23: Overview of the visitor service in the eight museums: leaving the museum.

Figure 6.24: Overview of how the museum management collects information about their visitors.

Chapter 7

Figure 7.01: Margin of error calculation for tourist surveys 2008. Total number of Surveys: 4,204. The total number of tourists in the eight museums in 2008 was 346,408. Margin of Error: 1.50%.

Figure 7.02: The total numbers of answers per question combined of all eight museums and their surveys.

Figure 7.03: Percentage of tourists per museum per month in the year 2008. Green = high season, Red = shoulder season, Blue = off season.

Figure 7.04: Percentage of tourists in off, shoulder and high season per museum, 2008.

Figure 7.05: Number of responses per language at Lofotr. Total amount: 387.

Figure 7.06: Main tourist groups of the museums according to the self-assessment. In grey the main missing ones as perceived by the management.

Figure 7.07: Frequency of repeat and non-repeat visitors per museum.

Figure 7.08: Frequency of repeat and non-repeat visitors (totals).

Figure 7.09: Description of local regions and countries for the eight museums.

Figure 7.10: Numbers and percentage of respondents, divided by local, national and international responses.

Figure 7.11: Percentage of respondents of the total local and national population.

Figure 7.12: Origin of visitors divided between first and repeat visits.

Figure 7.13: Frequency: How far have you travelled today (total number of answers 3,410). Percentages above the average are in grey.

Figure 7.14: Travel distance per museum divided between first visits and repeat visits.

Figure 7.15: Composition of the visits divided between first and repeat visits.

Figure 7.16: Frequency: How long are tourists staying in the area from day trip till more than seven days.

Figure 7.17: Length of stay in the area divided between first visits and repeat visits.

Figure 7.18: Total amount of the respondents by day of the week, sorted by visitor group.
Figure 7.19: How did visitors hear about the museum, in percentages. Multiple answers are possible. The two pairs of grey boxes (HOME and the two belonging to Fotevikens Museum) are added up as two sums and referred to in the running text.

Figure 7.20: Number of files and size in megabytes of the websites of the museums, retrieved 13 September 2008 compared with Internet availability in the eight countries 2007 - 2009. Source: www.internetworldstats.com.

Figure 7.21: Cross table answering how did people hear of the museum and what is their interest.

Figure 7.22: How did people hear about the museum at first visit and at repeat visit by museum.

Figure 7.23: How did people hear about the museum versus their satisfaction with the museum.

Figure 7.24: Visitors motivation at the first visit, divided by museum.

Figure 7.25: Visitors motivation at repeat visit, divided by museum.

Figure 7.26: Reasons why tourists visit the museums by percentage divided between local and national combined and foreign tourists. More than a single answer is possible per tourist.

Figure 7.27: Number and percentage of responses per season divided by the motivation to visit. The combination of light and dark grey in each row shows the largest differences between the seasons.

Figure 7.28: How long did visitors of each museum stay.

Figure 7.29: How long did the total number of visitors stay, divided between first visit and repeat visit.

Figure 7.30: Length of stay sorted by museum and divided between first visit and repeat visit.

Figure 7.31: Visitors divided by satisfaction rate compared with the time they spent in the museums.

Figure 7.32: Score per item per museum on a scale between 1.0 and 10.0, where 1 was poor and 10 was excellent: ‘score’, percentage of visitors giving a lower score than 6.0: ‘score lower than 6.0’ and total numbers of scorers: ‘total’. Dark grey, the highest score on that theme, light grey the lowest score on that theme, Fotevikens Museum is left out from the top scores because of the low number of replies.

Figure 7.33: Average rating per aspect all eight museums combined.

Figure 7.34: Percentage of people per aspect, giving a score of under 6.0, combined of all eight museums.
Figure 7.35: Satisfaction of the visitor experience divided by museum. In grey the highest percentage per museum.

Figure 7.36: Satisfaction of the visitor experience at the first visit versus repeat visit.

Figure 7.37: Average score per museum on all items which could be rated.

Figure 7.38: Visitor evaluations of the entrance fees per museum.

Figure 7.39: Overall visitor satisfaction rate divided by satisfaction with the entrance fees.

Figure 7.40: Number of people evaluating two themes equally high (score 10).

Figure 7.41: Pearson product-moment coefficient between theme group one.

Figure 7.42: Pearson product-moment coefficient between theme group two.

Figure 7.43: Rating grouped in two shares.
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