

Henrik Zipsane

CULTURAL LEARNING IN THE TRANSITION FROM SOCIAL CLIENT TO LEARNER

Can an exposure to cultural heritage give us anything other than simply knowledge about the “old days,” about how things were “once upon a time”? I believe it is important to ask this question when discussing the aims of educational initiatives based on cultural heritage.

For the most recent generations of historians and museum curators, the usual response would be one that argued for the importance of knowing and understanding the relationship between the way things were then and the way they are now, and, possibly, how they can be (Aronsson 2004). Implicit in such an argument there is, as I see it, an assumption—quite general and natural—that our understanding and awareness of the past enables us to shape an optimal present and future—that the civilising process need not be re-discovered by each generation.

When we understand why something is the way it is, by understanding how it has become the way it is, then it is easier for us to accept it and relate to it. Cultural heritage becomes quite simply a means to educate or foster. Whether the educational process is intended as a means of inculcating citizens with national or regional identity or whether it is exploited to project the defining qualities of a cultural heritage that distinguish a particular class, gender, ethnic group or possibly generation is, I would argue, essentially unimportant, since in all of these cases it is still a question of education and fostering.

Similarly, whether we characterise the teaching of history in schools as “the lack of history” in the 1970s, as a focus on thematic studies in the 1980s, as the learning of “important” dates 40-50 years ago or as the learning both of important dates and lists of sovereigns before then, is relevant only in the sense that it draws attention to changes in teaching techniques. In reality, the knowledge of the past has always been taught for the benefit of the community. To express it differently, learning by heart was an attractive way of teaching history when it was a question of one—for most mortals—indisputable history (Zander 2001).

Today, there is a tendency for a national defence of a nation’s cultural heritage and its importance, even in schools. This trend is most apparent in England, The Netherlands and Denmark, but traces of this attitude are to be found in other places. In the countries mentioned, history as a school subject has been allocated more time, has been upgraded—i.e. the value of a good grade in history has become more important—and, furthermore, “national” identity has been given greater emphasis, even if the discipline itself has become more international. However, this is almost certainly, despite the shift in official attitudes, a question of the “swan song” of the old national narratives. The period of the “grand narrative”, the narrative that unifies the nation is probably over, just as Francis Fukuyama proclaimed almost 20 years ago when he wrote *The End of History* (Fukuyama 1989).

However, it is clear that cultural heritage is not just the 'grand' narratives. We are not limited to producing only the 'grand' narratives, we are also, naturally, entitled to tell the minor ones and the minor narratives within the realm of cultural heritage can be used as well as the 'grand' ones. To my mind, our focus should be, to a greater extent than is the case today, on what we want to achieve in our production of both 'minor' and 'grand/major' cultural heritage experiences. This is my simple, and for many surely obvious, point in the following.

Competences – supply and demand.

Today, there is no automatic assumption that we need to know anything about world history or about the past in our cultural sphere, country or locality. Thus, as practitioners in cultural heritage, we need to be able to explain convincingly the worth of our efforts. We owe this to two groups, partly to those who pay our wages, and partly to those who are the recipients of our cultural heritage initiatives.

Furthermore, it is valuable for our professional status if there is a high demand for the cultural heritage activities we have to offer. For about 20 years we have been successful at my museum – Jamtli situated in the middle of Sweden and Scandinavia – in producing cultural heritage experiences which could be exploited to attract tourists to both the town and the region. In this regard, one can argue that there has been a demand for the product made available by the museum. Interest has been significant from both the tourists and from the public bodies who finance the museum. This interest/demand continues and, naturally, we do our best to continually improve the product and to attract more visitors.

The worlds of the grand narratives and the minor narratives are in state of constant flux and have altered radically, in many fields at the beginning of the 21st century. Today they are fundamentally different from what they were when cultural heritage production for tourists was begun at Jamtli more than twenty years ago. Requests for diverse goods and services appear all the time. For the cultural heritage sector, some of these requests are worth examining in greater detail. As with all other areas of production, many questions are raised. How is the good or service characterised? Who wants it and who will finance it? Can we produce this good or service at a competitive price?

To meet this demand in an effective manner, it is important for cultural heritage institutions, as learning environments, to be precise about what they can produce and also to be able to express this in a manner that is easily understood by those whose demands are to be met. At Jamtli, our point of departure was **competence**. With this notion we could see more clearly what the effect would be of a meeting between the learner and cultural heritage. Museums, like archival institutions, offer no formal qualifications. We are not a school. But the learners—visitors, participants, customers, users—can improve their competences (skills, attitudes and knowledge) with us. Since the second half of the 1990s, the world of education and educational policies has discussed the notions of competences, real competences, key competences etc. Competencies are the product of life-long learning (Anderson 2000 & Eurydice 2000).

A competence in demand – learning to learn

In recent years, work at a number of levels has tried to specifying which competences are vital in a post-modern, global world—naturally, all of this work is from a primarily Western perspective, but this is the material we have to work with (Ehlers 2006 & Edwards 2006). UNESCO, OECD, the E. U. and the Nordic Council of Ministers have all been involved and there is a good deal of agreement in their conclusions.

One of the vital issues they have raised is that which goes under the label of adaptability. The ability, willingness and courage to adapt to irregularities in life – i.e. in working life—is essential in relation to "employability"—the possibility of gaining profitable employment. In terms of the western world's social logic, with its emphasis on the information society and knowledge-based production, it is essential to place adaptability on the agenda, with a particular focus on the quality of learning to learn. Internationally, the focus in the discussion on learning competencies is on "learning to learn".

It is from this almost market-economy approach that our interest in whether we, in the cultural heritage sector, can offer anything of interest here is best understood. If we dig somewhat deeper the humanist arguments begin to appear. In contemporary political terminology these notions are labelled as "social inclusion", "social cohesion" or even "a society for all". Of course there in this social, economic and political agenda about learning to learn also lies a European agenda and even an agenda of creating a European identity (Negt 2000 & Ottersten 2004). But in this essay I solely focus on the learning agenda as such. Learning how to learn is a necessary prerequisite for adaptability. It means that as early as possible everyone, as far as possible, should be involved in life-long learning. This is a vital political, economic and social principle and we are exploring this field to see if there is an interesting market here for the cultural heritage sector.

"Early school leavers" or "Dropouts"

On the political and educational agendas—which are difficult to distinguish in reality—the whole development of the notion of competences has been closely linked to a focus on certain concerns in the West.

One such concern is the problem of young people who have not acquired the necessary basic skills and qualifications—created a proper foundation—before leaving compulsory secondary school and upper-secondary school. Naturally, the internationalisation of research and politics is reflected in the debate on this issue in the Nordic countries where concepts from the Anglo-American and international debate are appropriated, which means that we often describe these young people as "early school leavers" or use that dreadful term, "dropouts". When the E. U. initiated the Lisbon process in 2000, there was a focus on these young people. Reports from the OECD and the member states had disclosed that more than 15% of each year group of young people in the E. U. had not

achieved a satisfactory basic education by the time they had reached the age of 20 (EU 2001, 2004 & 2005 & OECD 2005). The aim of the E. U. was to reduce this to 10% by 2010. Already in its follow-up report of 2004, the E. U. Commission wrote that, by all accounts, this aim would not be met and an even more depressing prognosis came the following year. Therefore, in 2006 the E. U. Commission and Heads of Governments/States decided that extra stimulatory measures should be available to the member states, with the result that the problem was pinpointed as a special priority area within the frame-work of the new programme for life-long learning, covering the years 2007 to 2013.

A closer reading of the literature on this issue discloses that initiatives will come, naturally, from two directions. On one hand, efforts are to be made to ensure that the fall-off from compulsory secondary schooling and upper-secondary school is to be mitigated. Or, to express it slightly differently, the secondary education system is good, but can be better. During this period member states in the E. U. will exchange experience on what can be done to help so-called weak pupils, how school fatigue can be avoided etc. Progress is being made all the time (Field 2006 & Jarvis 2006).

However, on the other hand it is not to be expected that secondary and upper-secondary schools will solve the problem entirely. In part, this is because, as most people agree, the educational system is designed for mainstream people. The system is constantly getting better in keeping the young people within the system. However almost certainly, there will always be young people who do not entirely fit into the system. Some of these young people have already abandoned the educational system. Here, it is quite evident for most people that secondary and upper-secondary schools are those institutions that are least capable of attracting these young people back to the classroom. If an individual has abandoned the classroom because of what is known as "school fatigue"—a term that surely covers a multitude of problems—then this person has definitely abandoned the classroom. If these young people are to gain a basic education, it must be in a different manner. In the Nordic countries we have experience of voluntary schools, youth schools and folk high schools which, with slightly different rules and potential in the individual countries, have experience in offering somewhat different forms of learning and learning environments. However, it is especially the social context of the forms of education that is different from compulsory secondary schools and upper-secondary schools. The actual core of education is often the same; and it works for many young people. But even here there is a residuary group which these complementary systems of education do not attract. In the Scandinavian countries about 6-8% of young people are not attracted to this system. It was in this context that we conceived the idea that the cultural heritage sector might have something to offer. The "Xpress on tracks" project in Östersund was an initiative based on this thinking. It was launched in the spring of 2006 and the preliminary results are quite informative.

Xpress on tracks

The NCK (The Nordic Centre for Cultural Heritage Learning) has, through Jamtli Museum and the State Regional Archives, who are its parent bodies, initiated a project of cooperation with Birka Folk

High School, which lies approximately 10 kilometres west of Östersund and the archive and museum. The steering committee for the project also includes Östersund Municipality and the Employment Service, who act as joint- financers of the pilot project.

A maximum of 12 young people in the age range 20-25 participate in the project at any one time. They are young people who, in addition to lacking a basic education, are also unemployed. At the national and the European level we know, from the figures, that nearly two thirds of the members of this target group are young men, but our project has not had such an overwhelming majority of young men.

Currently, the project has three members of staff with pedagogical and curator qualifications and experience, each one of whom works part-time, 50%. The aim of the project is to stimulate the participants into re-starting their education, possibly, but not necessarily, at Birka Folk High School, or to work more intensively at applying for jobs and finding work, hopefully permanent, not for a limited time, and not subject to government subsidies. In accordance with the issues addressed by the international studies, our primary aim is to encourage these young people to improve their basic education, as it is clear that without this step they almost certainly will find it very difficult to gain a foothold on the labour market.

So far, the results show that a third of them have begun basic education, another third have found employment – unfortunately mostly short-term and with one or another form of government subsidy—and the final third are either still with the project or have left it for various reasons. One young person has left the project in protest! It was “too much”!

We asked a senior lecturer in education at Mid-Sweden University to interview a group of participants on completion of the first six months of the project in order to get an indication of how the participants were reacting to the project (Augustén 2006). A clear feature of the observations made by these participants was their need to stick to their decisions. It is they who have to decide whether they want to continue from the project into education or other activities. A typical statement that captures their attitude is “I would have started education without this project, but not right now!”

On condition that the third who have begun courses to supplement their basic education actually complete their courses, which we will only know in one or two years' time, one can ask whether the transition of 1/3 of the participants from passive recipients of welfare with a poor basic education to being individuals in a position to partake of life-long learning is a satisfactory result. As far as we know, this figure is probably something of a breakthrough! Financially it is a question of major savings for the municipality and the employment service in the short term, but even more so in the long run. The financial arguments alone make this initiative interesting.

If we think in terms of social cohesion and social inclusion, then the results are even more interesting. Young people without a proper basic education and who do not acquire such an education before the

ages of 25 are greatly over-represented in the statistics on social marginalisation. Here, social marginalisation means crime, dependence on social welfare, and apathy with regard to social organisations or political involvement. From a human perspective, it is a great victory each time one of these young people decides to apply to an educational institution. If this turns out to be a relatively profitable investment, then there is a commercial potential for the cultural heritage sector in this area.

But what happens to the young participants?

What then happens to young people when they become involved in institutions of cultural heritage? How can we understand and explain why changes take place in some participants but not in others?

In attempting to answer these questions we need to understand the situation these young people find themselves in. They are individuals with all sorts of personalities and personal histories, but as a group it is possible to discern some similarities when they begin the project (Augustén 2006 & Nilsson 2006a & 2006b).

They have often changed their daily routines so that day becomes night and *vice versa*, which makes it difficult for them to be punctual or appear at all at the project. This means that a certain amount of time has to be spent initially in getting them to re-adjust. This is more difficult than can be imagined, as they often believe they can continue with their old life style and routines after they have become part of the project.

Another characteristic is their introvert nature. They are entirely focused on themselves, have difficulty in seeing similarities with others in a similar situation, and have difficulty in becoming involved with other people. They find it hard to conceive that they should engage in activities with other people in the project and find it hard to realise that the involvement of others in project activities is dependent on just their contribution.

A third experience typical of these participants is their inability to plan. At the beginning of the project it is often impossible for some of these youngsters to plan for a whole week, several days or even for a single day at a time. For many of them, they must begin by following a schedule for just a couple of hours, possibly a morning at a time.

Expressed very simply, it appears that their absence of self-discipline and self-awareness is, in one way or another, linked to their lack of empathy and concentration. This should not be mistaken for the general characteristics of the new generations of young people since the 1970ties (Ziehe & Stubenrauch 1982)

Naturally, the degree to which these features are present in each individual will vary, but they demonstrate quite well that in addition to their abilities as antiquarians the staff on the project shall

have socio-pedagogical abilities. We have chosen to employ relatively young staff of both sexes, which has turned out to be the right approach. In this situation, the participants are able to relate to them as potential role models or confidants with special qualities. The project is housed in its own building in Jamtli Park. All activities are planned from and are based on this building. It is important that they realise that they are at Jamtli and the County Archives as participants in a project and not as a form of labour. The project exploits the general characteristics of the museum and the archives, making use of their creativity, coexistence of different perspectives, continual and integrated working historically – looking back - their very complicated composition of staff etc.

The participants observe how bookbinders preserve old records, try their hand at genealogical research, search for photographs of their own or their parent's homes, make their own contributions to an exhibition, look for diagrams of gardening and horticulture from the past, visit an archaeological dig or site of cultural interest, see how role plays work, prepare a film script for making a video, etc. And at all time the experts are near by. Archaeologists, photographers, archivists, curators and conservationists can be called on when the project staff are unable to answer a question that suddenly arises.

In this environment, empathy and concentration are fostered, because the activities are interesting and they stimulate curiosity. But the young people are not allowed to become too complacent with life in the project. This experience we share with other similar projects (Lumley 2006 and MLA 2006a, 2006b & 2006c). The group of young participants continually receives visits from the Employment Service whereby they inform the youngsters about their opportunities and listen to their views. In the same way, Birka Folk High School tells them about educational opportunities in which they can combine creativity with the acquisition of a basic education. Very simply, one can say that the concrete aims of the project are to bring the individual youngsters to a point where curiosity and competence – knowledge, skills and attitudes—may not exactly coincide, but where the idea of acquiring the necessary qualifications is both possible and feasible. We do not claim to have found the answer with a capital “A”, but there appear to be elements of this pilot project that are of interest (Zipsane 2007b). It is quite clearly a question of exploiting cultural heritage production for learning purposes by generating experience linked to both the minor and major narratives of cultural heritage production. It is learner-centred activity where the environment of heritage production is used as classroom (Henriksen & Frøyland 1999, Padro 2004 & Märja 2005). This lies very close to the essence of learning not by but through “history” (Clarke et al. 2002 & Sandell 2003). On a community level cultural heritage production creates a win-win-win situation where the participants acquire competencies; the community saves resources and the unique possibilities in the heritage institutions are used. For the later it is here indisputable that they contribute to the much demanded growth and cohesion (KEA 2006). The community reproduces sustainability by investing special time and efforts in the young people (Parkin & Sankey 2005). For a humanist though it is most important that we create transition for the young participants from potential lifelong social marginalization to active learners.

Literature

- David Anderson (2000): "A conceptual framework", in Alan Chadwick and Annette Stanett (ed.); *"Museums and Adult Learning: perspectives for Europe"*, Leicester 2000.
- Peter Aronsson (2004): *"Historiebruk . att använda de förflutna"*, Lund 2004
- Harriet Augusén (2006): *"Xpres on trax. Report from a participant perspective"*, Mid Sweden University, Östersund september 2006
- Amanda Clarke, Jocelyn Dodd, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, Helen O'Riain, Llewela Selfridge & Frazer Swift (2002): *"The Department for Education and Skills Museums and Galleries Education Programme: A guide to good practice"*, Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG) University of Leicester 2002
- Bonnie Dudley Edwards (2006): "New Key Competences – The European Certificate in Basic Skills", in *Lifelong Learning in Europe* No. 2, Helsinki 2006
- Lars Egeland (2004): *"Det handler om läring"*, Oslo 2004
- Sören Ehlers (2006): "Four Danish strategies towards adult learning", in Sören Ehlers (ed.): *"Milestones towards lifelong learning systems"*, Copenhagen 2006
- Sören Ehlers (2007): "En kulturarvspædagogik må rumme mere end det nationale" in Mikael Eivergård & Henrik Zipsane (ed.): *"Friluftsmuseer, kulturarv och lärande"*, Östersund 2007
- EU (2001) - Commission of the European Communities (2001); "Making a European Area for Lifelong Learning a Reality", COM (2001), 678 Final, Brussels 21.11.2001
- EU (2004) - Commission of the European Communities - Directorate-General for Education and Culture: *"Implementation of 'Education and Training 2010' Work Programme – Key Competences for Lifelong Learning – a European Reference Framework"*, Brussels November 2004
- EU (2005) - Commission of the European Communities: *"Proposal for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on key competences for lifelong learning – a European Reference Framework"* Brussels 10.11.2005 COM (2005) 548 final – 2005/0221 (COD)
- Eurydice (2000) - *"Key Competencies. A developing concept in general compulsory education"* Eurydice, Survey 5. October 2000
- John Field (2005): "Social networks, innovation and learning: can policies for social capital promote both dynamism and justice?", in Chris Duke, Mike Osborne and Bruce Wilson (ed.): *"Rebalancing the social and economic – Learning, partnership and place"*, Leicester 2005
- John Field (2006): *"Lifelong Learning and the new educational order"*, 2nd ed. London 2006
- Francis Fukuyama (1989): "The End of History?", in *"The National Interest"*, vol. 9, 1989
- Bjarne Sode Funch (2005): "Kulturarv i psykologisk perspektiv" in Bruno Ingemann & Ane Hejlskov Larsen (ed.): *"Ny dansk museologi"*, Århus 2005
- Mary Hamilton (2005): "Just do it: Literacies, everyday learning and the irrelevance of pedagogy", in *"CRLI – Centre of Research in Lifelong Learning – Conference Proceedings"*, University of Stirling 2005
- Ellen Karoline Henriksen & Merethe Frøyland (1999): *"Hva vet vi om läring i museer?"*, Oslo 1999
- Peter Jarvis (2006): "Lifelong learning: a social ambiguity" in Sören Ehlers (ed.): *"Milestones towards lifelong learning systems"*, Copenhagen 2006
- KEA (2006): "The contribution of the creative & cultural sector to European growth and cohesion", Brussels http://ec.europa.eu/culture/eac/index_en.html, 13.11.2006
- Janet Lumley (2006): *"5 Famous Southend People – A Joint Project Focussing On Transition"*, Colchester Museums, Colchester 2006
- Talvi Märja (2005); "Learner-centred lifelong learning policies", in *"LLinE – Lifelong learning in Europe"*, 1/2005, Helsinki.
- MLA (2005) – Museums, Archives and Libraries Council (ed.): "GLO - Generic Learning Outcomes", from homepage "Inspiring learning for all – What are the Generic Learning Outcomes?" http://www.inspiringlearningforall.gov.uk/measuring_learning/learning_outcomes/why_do_we_need_glos/217/default.aspx (051018)
- MLA (2006a) – Museums, Archives and Libraries Council (ed.): *"Renaissance – Museums for changing lives – A ground-breaking investment in England's regional museums"*, London 2006
- MLA (2006b) – Museums, Archives and Libraries Council (ed.): *"Renaissance – Museums for changing lives – Thriving regional museums"*, London 2006

- MLA (2006c) – Museums, Archives and Libraries Council (ed.): *“Museum Learning Survey – Final Report”*, London 2006
- Oskar Negt (2000): “Learning throughout life – the Contribution of Adult Education to the Establishment of European Identity”, in *“Adult Education and Development”*, No. 54, 2000
- Mia Nilsson (2006a): *“Delrapport – Xpress on traX”*, Jamtli, Östersund juni 2006
- Mia Nilsson, Mikael Bohlin & Johan Brånäs (2006b): *“Halvtidsrapport Xpress on traX”*, Jamtli, Östersund oktober 2006
- OECD (2005) *“From Education to Work. A different transition for young adults with low levels of education”*, Paris 2005
- Eugenia Kazamaki Ottersten (2004); ” Lifelong Learning and Challenges Posed to European Labour Markets”, in *“European Journal of Education”*, Vol. 39, No. 2, 2004
- Carlo Padro (2004): *“Mapping Learning Theories in Museums”*, Collect and Share Rapport, Barcelona 2004
- Sara Parkin & Kate Sankey (2005): “Sustainable Development” in Chris Duke, Mike Osborne and Bruce Wilson (ed.): *“Rebalancing the social and economic – Learning, partnership and place”*, Leicester 2005
- Viviane Reding (2001): “Lifelong learning in Europe”, in *“Adult Education and Development”*, No. 58, 2001
- Richard Sandell (2003): “Social inclusion, the museum and the dynamics of sectoral change”, in *“Museum and Society”*, nr. 1, Leicester 2003
- Ivar Selmer-Olsen (1993): ”Barn, kultur, kulturformidling og barns kultur”, in Ivar Selmer-Olsen: *“Kulturens fortellinger”*, Oslo 1993
- Ebbe Westergren (2006): ”Holy Cow – This is Great! Historic Environment Education, How did it all start?” in Ebbe Westergren (ed.): *“Holy Cow – This is great! Report from a Symposium on Historic Environments Education and Time Travels in Vimmerby, Sweden, November 2004”*, Kalmar 2006
- Ulf Zander (2001): *“Fornstora dagar, moderna tider. Bruk av debatter om svensk historia från sekelskifte till sekelskifte”*, Lund 2001.
- Thomas Ziehe & Herbert Stubenrauch: *„Plädoyer für ungewöhnliches Lernen, Ideen zur Jugendsituation“*, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1982
- Henrik Zipsane (2005): “The Open Air Museum and its new role as a museum of many cultures”, in *“Papers from 21st Conference of the European Association of Open Air Museums August 2003 in Scotland”*, Glasgow 2005
- Henrik Zipsane (2007a): “Lifelong Learning in Open Air Museums - A fascinating part to play in Europe”, in *“Papers from 22nd Conference of the European Association of Open Air Museums August 2005 in Finland”*, in print
- Henrik Zipsane (2007b): “Heritage learning: Not so much a question about the past as about the present, here and now!”, in Heribert Hinzen (ed.): *“Journal for Adult Education and Development”*, Nr. 68, Bonn 2007 (in print)