

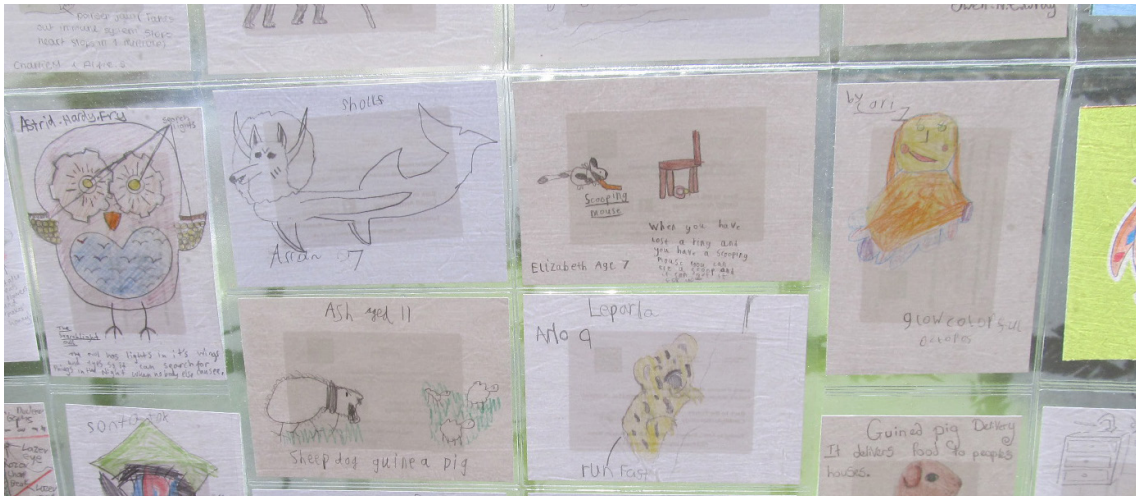


Editors:
Elizabeth Wright & Matt Law

AP:

Online Journal in Public Archaeology

The How and Why of
Archaeology Outreach



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*The How and Why of
Archaeology Outreach*

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Can 3000 schoolchildren make history?

How to involve a community in exploring its late medieval roots; field report from an ongoing slow archaeology project

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Abstract

Many archaeological excavations leave behind great amounts of unresearched cultural layers ready to be cleared when the bulldozers move in to start new construction at the site. This can be due to parts of site falling outside the main scientific focus or soil removed due to development without any prior proper excavation taking place. These soils, often rich in artefacts are later lost when new area use takes place. The project presented here shows how such cultural layers can provide valuable teaching grounds for young people even when they have been removed from the site. By creating a program where large numbers of schoolchildren from the region near to a particular site annually participate in excavations of a cultural layers rescued after the scientific researchers have left the site, we have put local history on the agenda. The children come with their teachers to a local museum and they all become 'archaeologist for a day' by participating in sifting through the soil, catalog the artefacts and add their understanding of their region's history. All guided by archaeologists on the spot.

Involving schoolchildren in a long lasting excavation project gives a rare opportunity to develop a constructive relationship with a community.

Keywords

Labo-project, Community Archaeology, Schoolchildren, Norway

The Labo-project is an ongoing outreach-program that started in 2007 and has so far included 130 cubic metres of soil, several thousand schoolchildren, a local population with serious interest in the history of their region, the local municipality administration,

a large number of eager volunteers, national, regional and local press and some enthusiastic local politicians, a small regional eco-museum, large amounts of water, patient teachers, and a handful of archaeologists from the Archaeological Field Unit in Akershus County Council, Norway. This is a field report from a *slow archaeology* community project. By using this term we suggest a quite different work method that we usually associate with archaeological excavations, where budget and time are limited. In this project, time is not a driving force. On the contrary we see the value of things moving slowly, and in that way adding little bits and pieces of new knowledge created by the children to the region's inhabitants' self understanding.

First a little background to Norwegian heritage management and its legal framework:

All archaeological and architectural monuments and sites that predate 1537 are automatically protected by the Cultural Heritage Act. Buildings predating 1649 are also protected by this Act. Anyone who intends to initiate measures which may affect an automatically protected monument or site must notify the competent authority. It will make a decision about what kind of measures may be carried out. Costs for surveys, excavations or protective measures will in general be met by the initiator of the project. When less extensive private projects are involved all or parts of the costs are met by the State. In our case, at Labo, the costs for the survey and the following excavation were paid by the State as it involved a private person planning to build a single house for his family. The county council is in charge of the surveys and smaller excavations whereas the larger and more complex excavations are being carried out by the regional archaeological museums.

The site at Labo, in Son, Akershus County, Norway

The site at Labo was discovered during a survey carried out by archaeologists from our field unit in 2005, excavated a year later by Museum of Cultural History in Oslo. The site was found at the farm Labo, just outside the small town Son. It consisted of a great number of artefacts dating back to 12th century, various traces

from buildings and even a few surviving wooden house-remains. In many ways this was a typical material culture found in cultural layers in medieval towns like Oslo and Bergen, but rarely found at a place considered 'countryside'.

During the winter of 2007, metal detectors and hobby archaeologists raided the leftovers from the excavation. They made several interesting finds, weights and coins – artefacts that pointed to a late medieval trading activity at the site. To save what was left, Akershus County *rescued* some 130 cubic metres of soil from the site just before the planned construction of a new building began. But for what kind of use? An unexploited resource?! What about involving schoolchildren in a project and let them help do the rest of the *job*?

The tiny seaside town of Son where the site of Labo is located, is situated 50 km south of Oslo, at the east side of the Oslo fjord. A trading port that came in to being in late medieval time, that is about 15th century in a Scandinavian context.

Son is one of several small trading-ports along the Norwegian coast. The ports exported timber, fish, soapstone, iron-bars, meat, and antlers. For Son, it was the timber export that made its base – Norway was at the time a poor nation, with a tiny elite. Landownership was concentrated in a few hands. As the economic situation was poor, there were also few buyers for imported goods. The boats that shipped the timber, returned with more ballast soil than goods for sale. Several ballast sites are found around Son, underwater and in the fields.

In some rare events luxury items like decorated pottery and glasswares were brought back home. The Labo-project has discovered remnants of luxury artefacts more commonly found in our medieval towns.

This project's little marketplace, Son is by some believed to be mentioned by *Arab Al Idrisi*, (<http://www.henry-davis.com/MAPS/EMwebpages/219mono.html>) in a map drawn at the Court of King Roger the second of Sicily. This is a debated document, but an interpretation much favored by the local community.

Other written sources are more trustworthy; in the year 1316, there is a notice about storehouses at the farm Labo, written down on parchment, and now part of the collection called *Diplomatarium Norwegicum*, a series of books containing the texts of documents and letters from Norway older than 1590, verbatim and in the original language, containing the texts of approximately 20,000 documents. Searches can be made via this address: http://www.dokpro.uio.no/dipl_norv/diplom_field_eng.html

Iceland has a similar collection, where Son is mentioned as *Sona-kaupangen* – the marketplace at Son, later in 1357 there is a new reference to the storehouses at Labo, and in 1390, the farm Labo was referred to in the book called *Bishop Eysteins Red book* - This is a register of what the church and church-institution owned by the Oslo-diocese at the time (1388-1401) information was first collected by the Bishop Eystein, and over the years updated information was added. In 1548 King Frederic II' mentions the market in Son, as it should no longer be held as it is harmful to the crown's interests (http://www.dokpro.uio.no/perl/middelalder/diplom_vise_tekst.prl?b=3465&s=n&str=).

In 1604, Son was granted trade privileges under the city of Oslo.

The cultural rucksack – filled with cultural heritage curiosity

Having *rescued* the 130 cubic metres of cultural layers from Labo and agreed with the local museum director, it took 13 truck loads to bring it all to Follo Museum. As an important contributor to teaching children about local history this eco museum already had several programs running to meet the schools' demands. Since the soil brought from Labo was so very rich in artefacts, the hope was that it could compensate for not being *in situ* – when we were to use this for educational purpose.

Over some months a new program was developed that could be integrated in *the cultural rucksack*. This a national program for art and culture provided by professionals in Norwegian schools, and in this case archaeologists from the county's field unit. The program helps school pupils to become acquainted with all kinds

of professional art and cultural expressions. The objectives of the program are to enable children and young people in primary and secondary school to enjoy artistic and cultural productions provided by professionals. To facilitate the pupils' access to a wide range of cultural expressions, so that they can become acquainted with and develop an understanding of culture in all its forms. To assist schools in integrating different forms of cultural expression with their own efforts to attain learning goals.

Cultural Rucksack has been part of the government's cultural policy for primary and lower secondary schools since 2001, and has recently been extended to upper secondary school. This means that all pupils from the ages of 6 to 19 will be able to benefit from the program. The Cultural Rucksack will offer cultural opportunities representing a wide variety of cultural expressions, such as the performing arts, visual arts, film, music, literature and *cultural heritage*. The Cultural Rucksack is a joint venture between the educational and cultural sectors at the national and local level. The county cultural and education departments are responsible for coordinating the program in their own regions, and individual program are also designed by the municipalities. This assignment of responsibility to local authorities promotes enthusiasm and a sense of ownership among all parties and provides room for local variation. The Cultural Rucksack is mainly funded by the surplus from the National lottery (Norsk Tipping) but the regional authorities and many local authorities contribute substantial sums from their own budgets.

Our project let the schoolchildren participate in excavating real cultural layers, with real finds. So far, more than 3000 children have taken part. Everyone finds something, artifacts like pottery, silver coins, shoes, flint, weights, drinking glass, window glass, parts from buildings, everything that belongs to a marketplace with medieval roots.

School excavation gets assistance from the County's archaeologists. As part of the program they are also introduced to the subject of archaeology, to different methods in use, the history of the region where they live, learn more about the origin of the finds, in what cultural context they came to this place, about how particular artefacts give significant new knowledge that helps

understand the history of Labo and the contemporary society. And not least, the children are invited to tell their own story about the objects they have found, placing it in their own context. They are in this way included in the shaping of the understanding of our past, based on their own preconditions.

What the children have learned, they take home as knowledge and enthusiasm. Together with wide press coverage and other media attention this fuels and contributes to engage the population in the region, make them take initiatives to cooperation over projects within the broad field of cultural history. Up until now that has resulted in exhibitions, a number of lectures for the interested public and politicians, and even a theater production.



Figure 1: Children sifting soil at Follo Museum.

An important artifact becomes a lucky charm and exhibitions on demand

In the spring 2011 an exhibition opened in Son, displaying the children's finds – placed in a context of cultural history. The exhibit tells the story about the Labo-project, stories of the artefacts

excavated by the children, and of the trading place where King Haakon V's brass horse was discovered. This was one of the metal detector finds that fortunately was handed over to the cultural heritage authorities, and has become an important clue to the understanding of Labo/Son. The little brass horse, only 4 cm tall and just less than 100 grams is a weight dated to King Haakon V's reign 1299-1319.



Figure 2: Brass horse found during the works.

There are less than a hundred of them known in Scandinavia, one in UK and one in Greenland. They all look different. The weight is either about 50, 100 or 200 grams. Our brass horse weight has been copied by a silversmith working in the region. In a short while it has become very popular as a gift – and it comes with a story – the story of Labo.

It plays an important role in a children's theatre. Copies are now owned by ministers, politicians and the Mayor of Berlin. The owner of such an object is in possession of a luck-bringing charm!!

A new exhibition in 2012 – *Son a small town in Europe* - exhibited more of all the children's excavated materials from Labo relating them to development of Son. Showing the pottery, coins, glass and other artifacts connections to the world outside our local waters. Placing Son on the European map, with a large network based on the great variety of the archaeological artifacts excavated.

Media interest

Interest from the media has been big, both in regard to the way the children are involved and about the new knowledge that has come out of it. Wide coverage in national media, numerous articles in local and regional papers, even one episode about national history, made by national broadcasting at the Follo Museum with the schoolchildren playing important roles.

The Labo-project has shown that it is possible to be part of a very interesting knowledge-production process – with simple means! We had, as in very many post-excavation situations a lot of *leftovers* which is in most cases a very under-utilised resource.

At the same time it was the golden combination of this rich material with eager children, (and teachers) who are always keen on 'hands-on' experience in their studies (our many, many schoolchildren felt so sad when the day was over – and the bus came to pick them up).

As the news of all the finds have spread in the local community and the region – this has given rise to a great interest in many other questions concerning Son and the wider region as well. The re-claimed past stories about Son and the trading port are now also helping in other projects where surveys are ongoing in Son and its surroundings. Recently there has been an excavation in the harbour-area, that has discovered important part of the seafront. There is an ongoing excavation of the town square in Son that has brought an unforeseen amount of new knowledge about its layout in the 16-18th centuries. This new data will also result in a rehabilitation of the square that will make it appear more like what it was during the seventeenth-eighteenth century, than the very modern expression that was first planned by the council.

The attention about the Labo-projects have opened doors for further surveys in cases where new area consumption is being planned – surveys that often were criticized and administratively and politically obstructed earlier.

Even if it is early to say, the positive attitude to Son's historic roots, proved by our Labo excavations has contributed to positive development of property value, local identity, local and regional ownership as well as political engagement to how future development must safeguard important traces of cultural heritage.

Slow archaeology – when time matters

There are many important lessons to be learned from community archaeology – our experience is that it is to a great extent a two way process – and that it is of vital importance that this aspect is kept in mind at all times. If one does not give room for the participating public's curiosity, (children and adults alike), their contribution and critic, the results will be more limited and the joint ownership will not be experienced to the same extent.

Archaeologists as a lot of other professionals tend to be just that, often too professional to be considered relevant when we meet the public. In our Labo-project the aim is not to recruit as many future archaeologists as possible, but rather we hope for a variety of 'effects' this can have in the children: fuel their curiosity about past, present and future, making them questioning how knowledge production happens, extending the understanding of the history of the place where they live, adding value to local identity. As well as bringing it all home, to their parents, siblings, grandparents and friends. A result we already have seen, as many of the children bring their family back to Follo Museum's activity days – so they too can get the hands-on experience with the Labo site material.

The ultimate goal of the Labo schoolchildren project has not even been to carry out an effective excavation, fast and within budget and publishing the results in advanced academic journals but rather – a sort of *slow archaeology*, that takes the time it needs

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to become an integrated part of the regions youngsters education, a contributor to a small towns identity development and a lot of things that only the future will show.

See also:

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Arkeologi-i-Akershus/293438470701801>

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