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The archaeologists within: Uniting different interests in heritage within a contentious setting

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ABSTRACT



In this article, I argue for the value of community inclusion, transparency, and engagement in efforts to change attitudes towards archaeology, using a case from Åland, an autonomous archipelago in the Baltic Sea. With its own legislation concerning the protection of archaeological sites, archaeology on Åland has been a contentious subject for decades. This culminated in 2013 with the controversial trial and conviction of a family for severely and knowingly damaging one of the Stone Age sites on Åland. Against this backdrop, I initiated a project concerning an Iron Age settlement site. I discuss my experience of setting up an independent research project with a focus on publicly engaged archaeology and storytelling within an initially hostile framework, and in a region where archaeology is highly professionalized. The article also illustrates how friction around a community-oriented project can arise between stakeholders as a result of the social dynamics of archaeology itself.

KEYWORDS

Public archaeology; conflict; collaboration; cooperation; relations; storytelling; the Åland Islands

Background

While finalizing my doctoral thesis at Uppsala University, Sweden, in 2012, staff from the Museum of Åland, Finland, sent me an infrared aerial photograph dating to the late 1970s. The photo depicts the field immediately north of the medieval St. Maria church of Saltvik parish, in the village of Kvarnbo, located centrally in the Åland Islands (Figure 1); however, the photo also contains a number of anomalies. The contours of a longhouse, convex in shape and approximately 45 m long and 15 m wide, clustered together with several circular features, are visible on a large, dark patch of soil on the field. The longhouse feature bears very strong similarities to the outlines of large Iron Age house-structures known from Scandinavia that are often associated with elite-class feasting-hall functions; no comparable structures were known from Åland. In fact, the overwhelming majority of the Iron Age houses known from Åland are quite small (Ilves 2018, 308–310), and the society at that time has been generally considered egalitarian. Therefore, the infrared aerial photograph indicated a discovery supporting an exciting new idea that altered understandings of the islands' geo-politically peripheral status during the Late Iron Age.¹ I wrote a research project proposal to study the site in Kvarnbo, received funding to start the field investigations, and moved to the Åland Islands in 2013.

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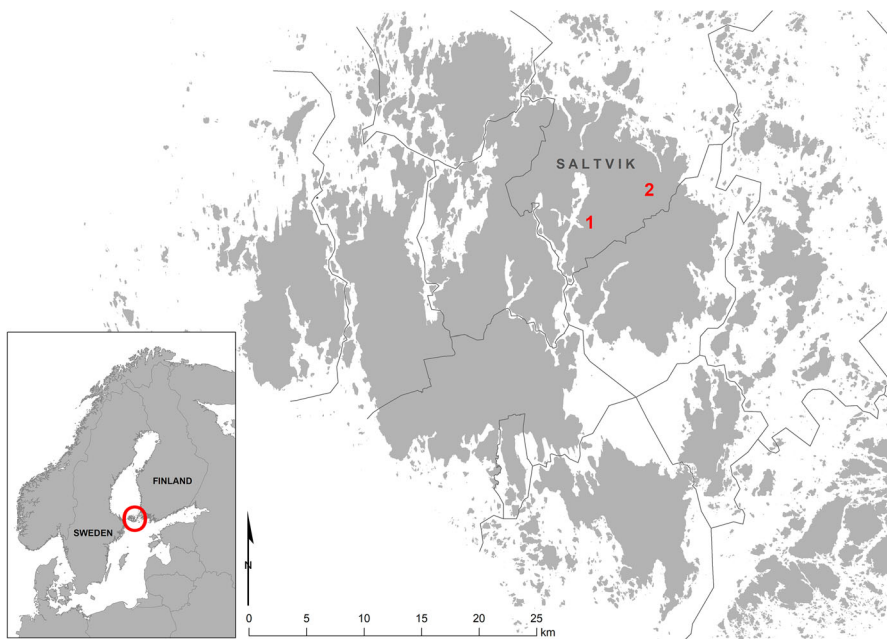


Figure 1. The Åland Islands and the sites mentioned in the article: Kvarnbo (1) and Långbergsöda (2) in the parish of Saltvik. Maps by the author.

The setting

Situated in the northern part of the Baltic Sea halfway between Finland and Sweden, the Åland Islands are one of the world's largest archipelagos. The archipelago is made up of nearly 7000 islands larger than 0,25 ha, with a present total land area of just over 1580 km² (see also Figure 1). Åland is an autonomous, demilitarized, monolingually Swedish-speaking region of Finland that today has a population of 30,000 people. It has its own government and parliament that, among other things, has the right to pass legislation on ancient monuments; the central Finnish government cannot unilaterally abrogate or curtail the legislative competence of the Åland Parliament. The Bureau of Heritage Management of the Government of Åland is responsible for the cultural heritage on Åland. It monitors, protects, maintains, preserves, and makes all decisions on ancient monuments, which are defined as 'permanently abandoned remains of human activity during ancient times' (Ålands lagsamling 2017, Landskapslag (1965:9) om fornminnen, 1 kap: 2§). Thus, there is no clear dividing line between the political power- the Government of Åland, and the executive administration- the Bureau of Heritage Management. This arrangement has made the management of cultural heritage a quasi-democratic issue on Åland, because people can easily influence and direct the public debate that governs the work of the politicians, and through that, the heritage management sector (Löndahl 2012). However, despite the potential this offers to further the understanding of cultural heritage as something beyond sites, buildings and artefacts to be possessed and managed (Waterton and Smith 2009), the way heritage is thought about on Åland is shaped by the self-confirming practice of heritage management, the regional authorized heritage discourse (see closer Smith 2006, 2012). Being not exclusive to Åland, it is the heritage management sector, a professional discourse that defines and regulates what is valuable and how heritage should be accessed (Waterton and Smith 2010, 12); the Bureau of Heritage Management at the Government of Åland is seen as the main 'protector' of the ålandic past and heritage.

When I arrived on Åland, the Bureau of Heritage Management was the plaintiff in a serious conflict with landowners from the village of Långbergsöda. In 2010, at the peak of a long-standing dispute over land use, the latter had intentionally damaged one of a handful of known pioneer settlements

on the islands, situated in the same parish of Saltvik where my research site is located. On September 11, 2013, the District Court of Åland convicted the landowners, a father and son, of the deliberate destruction of a protected Stone Age site, sentenced them to conditional imprisonment for one year and eight months, and ordered them to pay 62,000 € to the government (Ålands Tingsrätt. Dom 1311140 12, R 12/302).²

The conflict between Ålandic heritage management and the landowners in the village of Långbergsöda and its surroundings goes back generations and involves several families. The Långbergsöda region contains Åland's largest concentration of Stone and Bronze Age settlements, which are known for their complexity and great importance for research, not only locally (e.g. Hallgren 2009) but also from an international perspective (e.g. Vanhanen et al. 2019). Therefore, the Bureau of Heritage Management considers the preservation of the overall environment of the area very important. However, since the 1970s there has been open conflict between conservational and exploitative interests. The preservation of the region's ancient monuments has been set against the desire to exploit the area's rock, gravel, and sand deposits. Conflicts are also frequent regarding questions of forestry as well as economic development. The disputes revolve around a combination of issues related to the spatial extent of the ancient monuments and legally protected areas, as well as questions of compensation to the landowners burdened by the limited use of their properties due to mandated conservation. A perceived arbitrariness in these matters has worsened the situation, which has always been debated publicly and covered with ample interest by the local media. The newspapers' reports often have an emotional overtone and portray the landowners as victims of the unjust power of the heritage management sector, imposing what they see as severe restrictions on the use of their own land (e.g. Lampi 2011, 2013; Widing 2015). Nevertheless, not all of the newspaper articles preference the landowners' claims; the importance of valuing and preserving the oldest history of Åland has been also accentuated (e.g. Fellman 2013).

There is probably not a single adult person on Åland who would not be aware of the long-standing conflict between the Bureau of Heritage Management and the landowners of the Långbergsöda region in Saltvik. Furthermore, considering the small size of Åland and the tight family as well as community ties characteristic of insular and/or peripheral communities (Marshall 1999; Jackson 2006; Lowenthal 2007), it is not an overstatement to say that archaeology and archaeologists are not popular amongst many people on Åland, especially in rural areas and in the parish of Saltvik. While dealing with the landowners in Långbergsöda regarding archaeological heritage in the region, it is an unwritten but strictly followed rule that the archaeologists and the representatives of the heritage management sector never visit the region alone. More than a matter of safety, it is done in order to avoid legally complicated word-against-word situations.

Upon my arrival to Åland, the Bureau of Heritage Management also had an open case involving the farmer in Kvarnbo who owned the field upon which my research site was situated. There are many ancient monuments from the Late Iron Age on the lands of this farmer, including the largest burial ground of the period, which is today used as a pasture. The matter at hand concerned the renewal of the fence surrounding this burial ground. The antiquarian of the bureau invited me to join the field visit in this matter, mainly to help me to become acquainted with the landowner relevant to my planned investigations. It instantly became clear that there is a severe mistrust towards heritage management representatives. The landowner did not want the bureau to do the work on the fence, but instead insisted on doing this independently, so as to guarantee that the spatial extent of the burial ground was marked in the same way as before and not altered at the expense of the surrounding fields. After this visit, the Bureau of Heritage Management recommended that I postpone the investigations in Kvarnbo due to the unresolved issues regarding this farmer.

Creating crucial connections

Unexpectedly, I was in a situation in which the will *and* funding to study a potentially significant site existed at the same time that the Bureau of Heritage Management cautioned me against the investigations, and the landowners in the region were perceived to be hostile towards archaeologists. It was

at this point, in order to proceed with and succeed in implementing my plans, that I made the decision to redefine my project to become publicly engaged archaeology. Furthermore, I had to discard my admittedly uncritical assumption that people appreciate archaeology and automatically value an archaeologist who wants to work in their 'hoods' and reveal new information about the history of the region. Moreover, connected to the latter and triggered by what seemed to be an unfriendly setting, I realised that – being an archaeologist from outside the community – it was my professional and ethical responsibility to reach out not only to the institution enabling the research through permits, but also to the community within which the project was based (Pyburn 2009).

The very first step in fostering social relationships was to establish a connection to the landowner. Starting with the initial contact when I asked the farmer's permission to conduct a field walking survey on the ploughed soil of the field in the early spring of 2014, I made it my priority to talk to the landowner first in every matter related to planned work, implementation, and results at the site. One of the issues focused on through this approach was the question of value. For me as an archaeologist, archaeology had the greatest value, but for the landowner archaeology lacked any value, while the land containing the ancient monument had an economic importance and was thereby valued through the possibility to conduct agricultural activities. Through this reliance on dialogue, we had no issues in timing our respective work in the field; on the contrary, the non-destructive archaeological work actually benefitted from the agricultural activities. After the field walking survey, we conducted the first metal detecting campaign following the second ploughing of the season, and timed the geophysical survey immediately after harrowing, which created a nice flat surface for working with the ground penetrating radar. Following the farming cycles, we conducted archaeological test-excavations in early autumn, after the harvesting season.

Results from every investigation phase were presented to and discussed with the landowner on a daily basis during the fieldwork, and it was often the farmer who walked out to the field to talk, curious about the day's developments, yet, never interested to actively participate in the investigations. Most importantly, after the metal detecting survey identified an assemblage consisting mostly of jewellery – many of quite extraordinary character (Ilves 2015a) – I presented every single find to the landowner's family and contextualized the different artefact types over several cups of coffee in their home thus acting as a mediator between object and the authenticity of it (Jones 2010, 182). This was a crucial point in the development of the project, as after these findings it was clear that the site would receive a lot of attention, including from the media, which would also result in people starting to visit the field. I deliberately spent a lot of time with the family at this point, emphasising that they were the first ones to see and touch the finds introducing an important tactile aspect to their past in the present (cf. Jones 2016, 140), clarifying what the finds might entail for the future, and explaining how interesting they were for me as an archaeologist and for understanding the history of this region and the Åland Islands in general. I never forced my evaluation of the site's archaeological importance on the landowner, as this was what I had perceived to be one of the main issues in the conflict between the Bureau of Heritage Management and landowners in the Långbergsöda region. Furthermore, our communication was all about gaining trust and maintaining a relationship; there was no direct message that I sought to communicate. I did hope, of course, that knowledge of my fascination would trigger a more hospitable attitude towards archaeology. At the end of it all, however, rather than creating shared epistemologies, forging a personal relationship imbued with respect towards the difference in outlook was paramount for the project's continuation.

Through firmly anchoring the investigations, results, and plans for the future with the landowner, an increasingly positive attitude towards this project was developed. That attitude also spread through the wider community and had beneficial implications for the continuation of the project. An attitude can be a positive or negative, favourable or unfavourable, likable or unlikable appraisal (Madden 2009, 12); after initially careful scepticism from both sides, consciously putting the landowner first resulted in us having a good relationship and prolific communication. However, the farmer's existing set of attitudes towards the Bureau of Heritage Management remained the same. More often than not, I was

there to listen to the farmer's cemented frustration directed towards people working at that institution and (in terms of feasibility, groundless) statements that they would not be allowed to do archaeology at this site. Ironically, I had part-time employment at the Bureau of Heritage Management during this time, although the project was conducted outside of this engagement. The bureau itself diligently emphasized the separation of the project from the institution. Whether that was done to protect the project from negative associations related to heritage management on Åland, or because the institution was not behind the funding, this constant distancing between the bureau and the project eventually led to an unexpected dichotomy between the attitudes of the larger public and those of the heritage management sector (see below).

Shift through storytelling

After news of the discovery of the elite-class settlement site in Kvarnbo hit the media following the metal detecting campaign, I encouraged the public of Åland to contact me and announce their interest in participating in the archaeological test-excavations through a newspaper interview (Smeds 2014). With this invitation, I wished to increase the local social anchorage on one hand, and interest in and understanding of the archaeological process on the other (Ilves 2015b, 12). The interest was surprisingly strong; with permission from the Bureau of Heritage Management, we could allow a total of 15 adult volunteers to gain practical experience in archaeology and excavate alongside two professional archaeologists, and four volunteers worked during the entire two weeks of excavation. More importantly, however, the openness led to a notable growth in media interest. Since presenting the very first results in the spring, the local media continued to follow the project and produced around 20 stories in 2014 (see Ilves 2015b, 13). This led to a wealth of invitations to talk about archaeology, including from the Government of Åland, that I chose to accept to the greatest degree possible. The conscious focus on storytelling became an integral part of the project. Being a combination of performance and conversational interaction continuously updated to reflect developments within the project and contextualised meaning of them, the storytelling combined specialised knowledge of relevant facts, an ability to narrate these in a cohesive manner, and a passionate delivery.

The presentations led the project to establish an important co-operation with the non-profit association Fibula. Fibula was founded in the early 2000s in the parish of Saltvik by the Viking Age enthusiasts of varying social, professional and economic backgrounds, and has grown to be focused on re-enacting and presenting the Late Iron Age on Åland. The founding of Fibula took its inspiration from the saga, *The Heimskringla: A History of the Norse Kings*. The saga mentions a Viking called Hlodver Lange from Saltvik – believed to be the Saltvik on Åland³ – who sailed in King Olav Tryggvason's fleet. I anticipated connecting with Fibula, which aims to recreate the Viking experience. Fibula is the main organizer of the yearly Viking Markets in their so-called Viking village, which are very popular both locally and in the Baltic Sea region and are located just a few hundred meters from the site in Kvarnbo. For the members of Fibula, the archaeological discovery of an elite-settlement in Saltvik was a welcome opportunity to claim further legitimacy (Smith and Campbell 2016). For the archaeological project, the co-operation with Fibula was a way of establishing interplay and interconnection between professionals and their different audiences. Historically, the Bureau of Heritage Management has not had any co-operation with Fibula; according to Fibula, there were attempts made to collaborate, but these were, for unexplained reasons, unsuccessful (Lundberg 2007, 17).

I presented the project and talked about Late Iron Age Åland on several occasions, also, at events organized by Fibula and directed towards a larger public. Although only few members of Fibula participated in the test-excavation, during these investigations we jointly organized an evening event at the site (Figure 2). The contours of the longhouse as visible on the infrared photograph were marked with torches. Within the outline of the building, archaeologists presented the excavations and worked together with re-enactors from Fibula to set up a scene from the Eddic poem that takes place in an Iron Age feasting hall. The evening ended with a barbecue. About 70 people attended

the event that evening; however, visitors also frequented the excavations daily, which gave the archaeologists more opportunities to explain their work. No one left the field without information about our doings.

Increasingly, especially during the presentations after the test-excavations, questions about the future of the fieldwork emerged. This led me to state the fact that in order to gain new knowledge from the archaeological point of view, there was a need for much larger excavations. However, further excavations would be dependent upon proper funding, which that at the time was lacking. Probably due to the public popularity of the project and the media inquiries, the Minister of Culture and Education of Åland declared that the government would support the project by providing some salaried research time. Furthermore, a local insurance company decided to support the fieldwork in Kvarnbo as part of the company's upcoming 150-years anniversary, with the only requirement being that I continued with the publicly engaged archaeology and outreach. The insurance company also rented the land containing the site from the farmer in order to pro-actively compensate for any possible disruption in the land-use caused by archaeology.

The Bureau of Heritage Management was not involved in making these decisions. This aspect of sidestepping the institution ultimately responsible for decisions on ancient monuments on Åland became further pronounced at a subsequent meeting. During a meeting called by the insurance company that included the Minister of Culture and Education, the insurance company specifically sought an affirmative agreement to the project from the Bureau. The political nature of that gathering was undeniable. Furthermore, the starting premise of the meeting was clearly the understanding that the heritage management sector is largely to blame when archaeology-related matters are not popular among the larger public. This meeting also contrasted research archaeology with heritage management, thereby adding a further variable to an already blurred entanglement of public understanding, political power, and executive administration. The Bureau of Heritage Management had been initially supportive of the project, but distanced itself from the project in practical terms. The continued project, however, did not enjoy similar support, getting caught in drawn-out, over-judicialized decision-making processes and over-complicated procedures for acquiring further fieldwork permits. The project had, to my mind, ended up caught in a power play.



Figure 2. Members of Fibula, dressed up in Late Iron Age style, have outlined the contours of the longhouse with torches during an evening happening organised at the excavation site in 2014. Photo by Kim Darmark.

Regardless of the administrative challenges that occasionally threatened the continuation of fieldwork despite the existing funding, which is usually the greatest obstacle to receiving the permits for the excavations, the work carried on. In 2016, I directed a two months long, large-scale research excavation in Kvarnbo. Adult volunteers from Åland, mainland Finland, Sweden, and Norway worked alongside four professional archaeologists (Figure 3).⁴ People from different backgrounds of different gender and with different experiences signed up as volunteers. There were archaeology students as well as pensioners, people in-between jobs and participants who had decided to use their vacation for participation, both blue-collar and skilled-service backgrounds, and people from urban and rural areas. As was the case during the test-excavations in 2014, despite the interest in the time period, only few members of Fibula joined the actual investigations. Up to 10 volunteers per day (often less) were involved in a range of activities comprising the whole process of archaeology – from de-turfing to backfilling, and from washing to cataloguing finds. Having a strong training element and a high ratio of experienced staff to volunteers was much more time-consuming than conventional excavations (also Atalay 2012, 264); however, it was considered essential to making volunteers feel part of the project. The high ratio of experience staff to volunteers also guaranteed that the excavation plans proceeded as intended in practice, and that there was still time left for guiding the site visitors on a daily basis.

Thanks to the guestbook at the site, we know that approximately 1000 individual visitors came to the site; not a single working day during these two months went by without someone dropping by after having read in the newspapers or heard from ‘someone’ about the dig. Furthermore, archaeology became part of the tourist season that summer. Visitors from far-away places such as the USA and New Zealand, as well as from the UK, Belgium, Germany, Hungary, and Russia found their way out to the excavation site during their stay on Åland. As during the previous fieldwork, every visitor received a presentation while we were working at the site. In addition, there was an information wall with posters set up close to the field, so that the visitors could obtain information even when we were not at the site ourselves (Figure 4). Many Ålanders were curious about the weekly developments and became regular visitors to the site, while the local media continued to produce stories about archaeology in Kvarnbo (see Ilves 2017, 17–18). However, the power of



Figure 3. Volunteers working at the excavations in 2016. Photo by the author.



Figure 4. The excavation site from the visitors' perspective including the information wall with posters and the mail box with guestbook. Photo by the author.

inclusion and storytelling was truly demonstrated during the Viking-style birthday party for the insurance company sponsoring the fieldwork (Figure 5). In cooperation with Fibula, the company invited its customers to Fibula's Viking village during the excavations for food and drinks, to spectate and participate in different activities inspired by the Viking Age and archaeology and, most of all, to



Figure 5. The biggest birthday party on Åland, celebrating the local insurance company's 150-years anniversary. Photo by Therese Andersson.

listen to presentations about the Late Iron Age on Åland given by the archaeologists working in Kvarnbo. Almost 4000 people, 14% of the then registered population of Åland, attended.

Before and after the large-scale archaeological excavations, I visited elementary schools (6 schools in 2016 and 5 schools in 2017) and talked about the Iron Age on Åland. Furthermore, as initiated and supported by the sponsor, we set up a webpage intended for schools to use during their history lessons when dealing with the period (see Grahn 2016; Persson-Bru 2016). Beginning in 2014 and running parallel to this, I maintained a blog in English ('The hall at the crossroads of Baltic waterways', <https://kvarnbohall.wordpress.com>) to reach out to the international audience as well. In the first year following the discovery, the blog had about 18.000 individual visitors and an average of 50 visits per day (Ilves 2015b, 13). Thanks to the clear focus on outreach from the very beginning of the project, there was also a lot of video footage accumulated throughout the years, which allowed me in the end to tie the public-oriented aspect of the whole project together with a 15-minute movie about the archaeological work conducted in Kvarnbo. I made the movie in collaboration with an Ålandic moviemaker who had also volunteered during the archaeological fieldworks from their very beginning. Although I as an archaeologist narrated the script, it followed the vision provided by the moviemaker who directed the work. Our film idea and execution benefitted substantially from the participation of enthusiastic members of Fibula, who were happy to act for this cause (Figure 6). Furthermore, we involved Ålandic musicians who readily took up the challenge to write music for the movie. We also received support with the equipment and rooms from Fibula and different museums on Åland. This movie, distributed for free use, fulfilled its aim to become the final piece in the successful attempt to deliver stories and experiences that would include and be of value to local communities.

Discussion

Archaeology on Åland has been strongly associated with the Bureau of Heritage Management, which has created a situation where the potential usefulness of archaeology for the local society has become embodied in that institution. This discourse regulates how the heritage is produced and represented (Waterton, Smith, and Campbell 2006). Archaeology seems, therefore, to stand separate from the community, and is instead focussed on data collection and management, which might also reflect the general development of archaeology and heritage management in Finland (see



Figure 6. Members of Fibula in a scene from the movie made at the end of the project by the author and Rasmus Olin. The film is also available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rHyppgPA7jYU>.

Immonen and Taavitsainen 2011, 163). Furthermore, the paradigm shift of the 1980s and 1990s whereby many archaeologists began to realize that they could no longer afford to be detached from the general public (Matsuda and Okamura 2011, 1) had not, in practice, had any major impact on the cultural heritage management on the Åland Islands. Although successful efforts have been made to collaborate with landowners and the community, especially in terms of exhibiting archaeology, in the highly professionalized setting of archaeology in Åland the idea never emerged of systematically and strategically doing archaeology *with* the public, i.e. with people who consume knowledge (Merriman 2004). At the same time, the archaeology that takes place on Åland under the auspices of heritage management is either development- or maintenance-driven and often very short-term in nature, causing the number of projects to be disproportionately large compared to the size of the staff and the budget. In such circumstances, it is difficult to argue for a shift towards a more publicly engaged archaeology.

The idea of communication as a solution in archaeology for reaching out to the larger public has been and will remain one of the main methods for facilitating an understanding of each other (Moser et al. 2002) and maintaining social relations (Kobińska 2013). According to Cornelius Holtorf (2007), there are three distinct strategies of communication between archaeology and society: educational, public relational, and democratic. Of these, the Bureau of Heritage Management on Åland, like many others, have employed the first of these strategies, the educational one, where the dominant understanding is that the public needs to be told about archaeology and be grateful for receiving the information delivered to them. This means that there is only one true understanding of archaeology: the one delivered by the Bureau, often with a specific value attached. However, society relates to archaeology from different perspectives (Almansa-Sánchez 2018, 203). Presupposing the same level of interest and, most importantly, enforcing archaeological value as understood by heritage management has not worked with the landowners in Saltvik. Given this situation, I never employed the educational strategy of communication with the landowner in this project; I left that approach for the visits to the elementary schools and for other presentations in front of a public audience. Instead, I employed a combination of what Holtorf (2007, 150) calls the public relations and democratic models, meaning that on one hand, I used an approach aimed at improving the image of archaeology in order to secure the possibility of doing archaeology to start with, and on the other hand, I pursued a strategy of facilitating the participatory role of the farmer.

Opening up participation in the excavations to the public aimed to create even stronger local social anchorage; however, the opportunity to participate had low importance for maintaining the public values of the project. Except for a number of archaeology students who wished to expand their archaeological fieldwork portfolio, most of the volunteers joined the project to *experience* archaeology, with no ambition to contribute to the interpretation of the past on the Åland Islands. They were searching for entertainment, often triggered by childhood dreams. However, feedback from volunteers involved in the fieldwork identified an increasing knowledge of the revelatory process of archaeology, of the variety and nature of the find materials, and a more diversified fascination and understanding of the time depth dealt with by the discipline. Although the majority of the volunteers' feedback was gathered through informal comments during fieldwork, a number of participants of the 2016 campaign also contributed to the blog through their written reflections. Taken together alongside the entertainment aspect, a greater understanding of the archaeological process was of central value to the participants. According to the Swedish blacksmith Peter: *'It was really exciting to work next to the excavator, cleaning up after the machine, and watching the archaeological features appear. This is really what makes archaeology – to see the traces of more than thousand years' old houses, hearths and cooking pits emerge in front of your eyes.'* Many volunteers reflected on how their previous understanding of archaeology was governed by famous and magnificent sites or finds but, through participation in the excavation, their understanding had become much more nuanced. As described by Pasi, a volunteer with an engineering and computer science background: *'I was not at all surprised to find out that it was not very glamorous work (no complete golden necklaces), but just really about paying attention to details, finding – or sometimes as*

importantly not finding – small, insignificant things that would not necessarily be important as themselves but that would contribute as a sample to a bigger picture about the site. The amazement at archaeology was evident; in the words of art educator Hannele: *'It is simply just mind boggling to think that some small items have been silently rolling around in that same small field for a thousand years!* Alongside an appreciation of archaeology, its material and processes, the social benefit of fieldwork was emphasized by most of the participants, and the clear connection with learning was accentuated as well – according to Kåre, a teacher from Norway: *'Talking to, learning new things and getting to know the other people at the site made the work even more rewarding. I learned quite a lot from all of this.'*

The public values of the project as described in this article were clearly created and maintained through inclusive storytelling – this sparked curiosity and engaged the public from the very beginning. Admittedly, entertainment was also central, as the public had an opportunity to witness the literal unearthing of new stories over several years. However, storytelling proved to be very successful in reconnecting people with the history and heritage of their islands. Storytelling brought people together in a way that was new to the region in the sense that it included an archaeologist running an excavation project as an active partner. Although Fibula and their outreach had been running for several decades it became evident that they had been lacking the perspectives of professional archaeology in an equal dialog and focussed on the local Iron Age heritage. Furthermore, judging by how strong and immediate the interest in the project was, it became clear that there was an underlying wish for more positive communication regarding archaeology in a more general sense in a region that had otherwise been coloured by the years-long conflict between Ålandic heritage management and certain landowners. For different reasons, the Bureau of Heritage Management on Åland has preferred their own monologue, generated in isolation and surfacing mainly in conflict situations where the Bureau imposes their values on the community. I would dare to speculate that a change in strategy that combines a pedagogical approach with more active outreach and, most importantly, empathy for the variety of relations towards heritage by different strata of community, would also lead to changing attitudes towards development- or maintenance-driven archaeology on Åland. It is impossible to value what you do not know. By systematically, continuously, and with knowledgeable enthusiasm activating the public in a dialog about archaeological remains and practices, there is a great potential of forging a personal connection to the past (Johnston and Marwood 2017, 821; Mills, Simpson, and Geller 2019). Ultimately, this might result in a positively engaged community.

The research project discussed in this article was not so much about teaching people about the past of their region. Rather, it was more about treating the local community as a partner in a dialogue about archaeology and its practices, as well as the past and its value in the present. I believe that if each archaeological project would be, up to a point, inclusive, participatory, and local-community oriented, attitudes towards archaeology would start to turn towards a (more) positive direction, even in socially challenging settings. The development- and maintenance-driven archaeology that characterizes the heritage management sector has its own unquestionable value. However, in order to build bridges with local communities, archaeologists need to take responsibility and proactively re-position themselves in a manner that will promote inclusiveness (Greenberg 2009, 46).

Epilogue

While discussing the fieldwork set-up with the farmer who owns the land containing the archaeological site before the excavations in 2016, another person joined us for coffee at the invitation of 'my' landowner. After the meeting, the Kvarnbo-farmer asked me if I knew who that person was. I did not. To my surprise, I learned that it was the member of the family from Långbergsöda who had been convicted for damaging the Stone Age site. Apparently, he attended our meeting because the Kvarnbo-landowner wanted to demonstrate what a good collaboration with an archaeologist looks like. Summarizing my experience of having been in the midst of changing attitudes of such

magnitude, I do believe that my focus on inclusion, transparency, and engagement coupled with the research-driven archaeology was the solution to the challenge, specifically the standstill and animosity created by the years-long opposition between the local people and the interests of heritage management on Åland. Although case studies are not necessarily generalizable or applicable beyond supplying anecdotes (Gould 2016, 2), the project discussed in this article is an example of community-facing project on Åland, evaluation of which is further indicating that a potential societal and social value of heritage lies in storytelling. In all honesty, I am sceptical of bringing any change to the dominant, heritage management driven archaeology discourse on Åland, but I do hope that new research projects will be shaped from this experience. Academic archaeology can answer people's needs without conflicting with scholarly values.

Notes

1. The Nordic Late Iron Age is dated to c. 550–1050 AD and consists of two sub-periods: the Merovingian period (550–800 AD) and the Viking Age (800–1050 AD).
2. As a result of appeals, the verdict was later reduced.
3. Despite the claims made by the prehistoric society Fibula (cf. <http://fibula.ax/foreningen/>), Saltvik whence the Viking Hlodver Lange who is mentioned in the Heimskringla saga originated was most probably situated in Northern Norway.
4. The information about the possibility to attend spread through a presentation given in 2015 at The Nordic SF & Fantasy Convention in Mariehamn, Åland (25–28.06.2015), after which a number of international volunteers reached out to express interest.

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