

### VISITOR CENTERS AS A MEANS OF PRESENTING CULTURAL HERITAGE IN OPEN-AIR MUSEUMS

*New developments as visitor centers in the open-air museums can be of increasing importance today, in order to enhance, maintain and improve the quality of the environment. Suggestion of such facilities as visitor centers of in the vicinity of open-air museums can be of successful integration. Thus attention is directed to providing a framework for undertaking visitor center function in archeological sites and further attempt to outline some desirable practices to fulfill these functions.*

**Keywords:** *visitor centers, heritage, exhibits, environment*

Archaeological open-air museums prove the human activity in the past, and it's perhaps one of the primary way that help understand the development of human activity throughout the years and centuries, their relations and creations. Especially those territories and areas are in the limelight of archaeology, which were inhabited in the ancient times. In this regard, Armenia, the history of which dates to thousands of years ago, is of utmost interest with its cultural heritage, and it could be even said, that is a real treasure not only for specialists of the field but also for the entire humanity. Most of the cultural heritage, especially the majority of open-air archaeological museums of Armenia such as city of Artashat (pic.1), Dvin are in vast demand to be used for future activities.

Today it is a matter of concern to use this cultural heritage in the open-air museums in Armenia more actively and freely for the contemporary culture. Better public understanding of cultural interpretation and the nature of cultural resources, considering, in many cases, their fragility, can enhance cultural preservations in the open-air museums of Armenia. It is necessary to mention that cultural heritage is observed as a kind of code, due to which historical memory is included in modern life of the society. It is direct carrier of information about the past. The role of heritage is the preservation and transmission of historical memory.



*Pic. 1. City of Artashat, Armenia*

Cultural heritage as part of the natural, historical and archeological environment provides stabilizing factor for the development of the region, of the country, and society, and therefore acts as a basis for sustainable development in all related systems. Thus, historical, cultural, as well as archaeological heritages are significant part of the true culture.

Nowadays investigations are being opened to the public, through community presentations, site visits, and popular articles, but more can be done for their use. One site with good promise is the improvement of ties with visitors and tourism industry. Public participation activities, that visitor can take advantage of, is to visit the sites with good quality of interpretation, to visit excavations sites in progress, having opportunities to participate in those excavations. One of the prerequisites for these activities to occur is the increase in communication between the specialists and the visitor to provide for a broader, more direct and accurate exchange of information [1]. A large part of the cultural heritage requires the creation of a special environment to adapt ancient historical layers in modern life, transforming encrypted information for the modern understanding as we can witness it in Gallo-roman ancient theatre Fourvière in Lyon, France (pic. 2). The traditional form of work with the visitors in the open-air museums as protected areas is the presentation and exhibition of artifacts in museums.



*Pic. 2. Gallo-roman ancient theatre Fourvière in Lyon, France*

Today there are new demands and principles for operating open-air museums. Some new phenomenon is coming forward. A number of analyses and researches show that ordinary museums are gradually replaced with so-called visitor centers in open-air museums.

A full definition of the differences between a museum and visitor center is complicated. The name "museum" implies a commitment that is on a different scale from that of a visitor center. Museums Association's definition is the following: "Museums enable people to explore collections for inspiration, learning and enjoyment. They are institutions that collect, safeguard and make accessible artifacts and specimens, which they hold in trust for society." This definition includes art galleries with collections of works of art, as well as museums with historical collections of objects [2].

Meanwhile the name “visitor center” carries the widest definition. A center may hold some artifacts of the open-air museum, but its prime function is to inform the public about the present situation, background history, and future plans. It provides an excellent opportunity to promote a restoration project as well [3].

The functions of visitor centers are promotion of the area, orientation to and enhancement of the area’s attractions, control and filtering of visitor flows and substitution for on-site visits [4]. Here visitors can obtain expert advice on the major attractions and accommodation options, to make an excursion around the open-air museum, to visit the cafe, buy booklets, maps and souvenirs. It is obvious that the visitor centers have several functions and are designed to solve a number of problems. Nevertheless the focal function of visitor centers is to provide information by means of permanent and temporary exhibitions of the open-air museum, leaflets and brochures, video and multimedia products, etc., which are organized to provide the visitors with memorable meetings within open-air museum, its nature, history, and heritage.

Well-organized, acceptable and beautifully presented information is captivating, which makes the visitor return to it again and again. For example, Stonehenge visitor center's audio, visual centers provide an excellent opportunity to exhibit models, words, pictures and maps to tell its story (pic.3).



**Pic. 3. Stonehenge.**  
**a. monument**  
**b. interior of the Stonehenge visitor center**

Moreover, it should give people an idea of what in the world there are other open-air museums - other heritage areas, the unity of which form a national and global system of protected areas. It is also important to give information about the protection of the area as an intercultural phenomenon inherited from all times. Collecting, keeping, developing and interpretation of the information in which visitor centers are engaged, focused primarily on the visitors who attend open-air museum as tourists. Consequently, at least it must include information about tourist attractions, infrastructure facilities, accommodation and food, as well as all the services in the field of tourism, which are available on the protected area. At the same time the visitor center can offer a certain package of tourist services such as guided tours, bike rentals, sales of products produced by local population.

All information and services provided by the center should promote the development of tourism in open-air museums and economic development of the region as a whole, and the center should be integrated into a regional network of tourism. The next most important motivation for planning visitor centers is the organization of environmental education that is connected with peculiarity of the open-air museum as a conservation, research and environmental area. This work is done through discussions on environmental issues; excursions in the surrounding area; competitions and exhibitions, etc.

All this is intended to encourage education, raise the general cultural level of the visitors. Finally, the visitor centers should be a part of social institution - a place to meet and communicate and even for psychological rehabilitation. For this purpose in visitor centers there may be libraries, children's rooms, playgrounds, etc. In accordance with the above mentioned objectives visitor centers may include not only one building but also various structures on the surrounding area. Visitor centers can hold permanent and temporary exhibitions, classes with children, and lectures. Exhibits or interpretive area, as well as external exhibits in the open-air museums are an integral part of the visitor center. Visitor center of the ruins of the Roman city of Baelo Claudia, Spain (pic. 4), is divided into two big areas: the public spaces with permanent and temporal exposition spaces, and secondly the internal areas, with rooms for conservation, investigation (pic.5).



*Pic. 4. The visitor center of the ruins of the Roman city of Baelo Claudia, Spain*



*Pic.5. The interior of visitor center of the ruins in the Roman city of Baelo Claudia, Spain*

Besides depending on the location of the protected area, the visitor centers should provide transportation facilities. Thus Stonehenge Visitor Center (pic.6) now is on a site 1,5 miles west of the stone circle, within the World Heritage Site, but is out of site of the ancient monument. Visitors are transported by shuttle bus from the venue to see the stones [5] (pic.7).



*Pic. 6. Stonehenge visitor center*



*Pic. 7. Stonehenge visitor center transportation facilities*

Visitor centers attempt to provide wayside exhibits, trails or landscaped areas, parking lot or/and road access, information stands on the territory of the visitor center with greetings at the entrance, eco-trail near the visitor center; children's playground (it is important to give children the opportunity to not only move, but also to learn something new, get a unique experience), original gazebo area, cafe, toilets.

The process of making the design of a visitor center, requires to analyze the uniqueness and importance of this historical area, its place in the system of protected areas, as well as the social and economical life of the region. It is true that the most important factor in the process of using the site is the complete understanding of its landscape context. In order to establish the landscape context for a particular project, there should be a look beyond the boundary of a particular project area to better understanding the regional patterns that influence the site.

To understand how a particular location relates to these regional influences is essential to understand how the built environment should respond to the site, and helps ensure that the design will be well integrated into broader patterns of landscape and culture.

When studying the landscape of a particular site, identifiable patterns emerge which help to define the character of the built environment. Responses to these patterns can be expressed in the built environment through both the architecture and the site design. Planning and design solutions, which respond appropriately to this specific character result in a quality, built environment. The following examples reflect a successful response to ecological, cultural, and landscape character influences.

Taking into consideration the mystic uncannily well-ordered hexagonal columns, architects of the visitor center at the Giant's Causeway. Heneghan Peng imitated the towering basalt columns of the volcanically formed Giant's Causeway. "It is a carefully sculpted intervention," say the architects. "It is visible and invisible; invisible from the cliffside yet recognizable from the land side".



*a.*

*Pic. 8.*

*a. Giant's Causeway, Northern Ireland*

*b. The visitor's center at the Giant's Causeway*



*b.*

Created around 60 million years ago by the movement of basalt lava, Giant's Causeway, Northern Ireland, declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1986, today the causeway is the most popular tourist attraction in 47 Northern Ireland and comprises over 40,000 columns that step down from the foot of the cliff to the sea (pic. 8). Careful study of the relationship of the proposed facility with nature, as well as site analysis will result in a successful idea, as the visitors' center in Murça, Portugal was designed. The archaeological site is located on a hill with 590m elevation on the ridge, southeast of the village of Haystacks, and the area of the "hot land" of the county Murça. Here the back wall of the interior is nestled into the rock face at an archaeological site and is formed by the rock itself, while a glazed facade affords views down the hill (pic.10). It nests in the depression between two hills, squeezing his hard parallelepiped shape against the rock mass and seeing the gross cubic structure torn threads against the laminated shale. It is designed to harmonize with the environments it is located within, fully integrating with the unique natural and cultural settings.



*Pic. 10. The Visitors' center in Murça, Portugal*

Analyzing all the possibilities of operating visitor centers we can come to conclusion it is important to understand that unfortunately open-air museums are often in adversary situation, it is far preferable for the relationship between the open-air museums as protected areas to be viewed as an asset offering both positive

and productive benefits. The relationship between visitor centers and nature conservation is thus highly political issue, which is need of much greater research attention if the natural recourses upon which visitor centers so heavily rely are not to be degraded or destroyed.

New developments like visitor centers pressures on nature conservation will continue to grow, and a clearly established and widespread balance between new developments and nature conservation will never be universally accepted, this being perhaps most problematic in wilderness and very sensitive areas. That is why visitor centers in open-air museums areas must be environmentally sensitive and consistent with long-term nature conservation; otherwise, it presents risks to the sustainability of the industry itself and more generally the natural environment.

As conclusion it is necessary to say that successful integration of visitor centers and nature conservation objectives in the open-air museum of Armenia can be of increasing importance, because it can enhance the choices of people and help maintain or even enhance the quality of the cultural site.

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**Ք.Ս.Ստեփանյան**

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*Այցելությունների կենտրոնները որպես նոր կառույցներ այսօր կարող են լինել չափազանց կարևոր՝ բարձրացնելու, պահպանելու և բարելավելու շրջակա միջավայրի որակական հատկությունները: Բացօթյա թանգարանների հարևանությամբ այցելությունների կենտրոնների կիրառման առաջարկությունները կարող են հանդիսանալ որպես հաջող ներդրում: Ուստի ուսումնասիրվում է այցելությունների կենտրոնների գործառնական նշանակությունը հնագիտական վայրերում, ինչպես նաև նախանշվում է վերջիններիս հետագա կիրառման որոշ փորձերը:*

**Առանցքային բառեր.** *այցելությունների կենտրոններ, ժառանգություն, ցուցանմուշներ, շրջակա միջավայր*

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### **ВИЗИТ-ЦЕНТРЫ КАК СРЕДСТВО ПРЕДСТАВЛЕНИЯ КУЛЬТУРНОГО НАСЛЕДИЯ В МУЗЕЯХ ПОД ОТКРЫТЫМ НЕБОМ**

*Такие новые объекты как визит-центры в музеях под открытым небом сегодня могут иметь большое значение для того, чтобы расширить, сохранить и улучшить качества окружающей среды. Предложения по проектированию визит-центров в непосредственной близости от музеев под открытым небом могут стать успешной инвестицией. Изучается функциональное назначение визит-центров на территориях археологических раскопках, а также намечаются некоторые попытки для их применения в дальнейшем.*

**Ключевые слова:** *визит-центры, наследие, экспонаты, окружающая среда*

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