

# Chapter 15

## The eScape Project: Combining Archaeology and Art to Merge the Past with the Present



Lene Høst-Madsen, Marianne Purup, and Nina Bangsbo Dissing

### Introduction

Aarhus is the European Capital of Culture in 2017, which has generated a wealth of new projects. eScape can be characterised as such a project. From the very beginning of eScape in 2013, the concept was developed as a collaboration between specialists within the fields of archaeology, art and tourism. Later on, the group expanded to include developers, locals, volunteers and children.

After a brief introduction to the area in which the project takes place, the different parties involved will be described as well as the general outlay of the concept. Finally, a description of the events that have taken place until this point and the ones that have been planned for the near future will conclude this article.

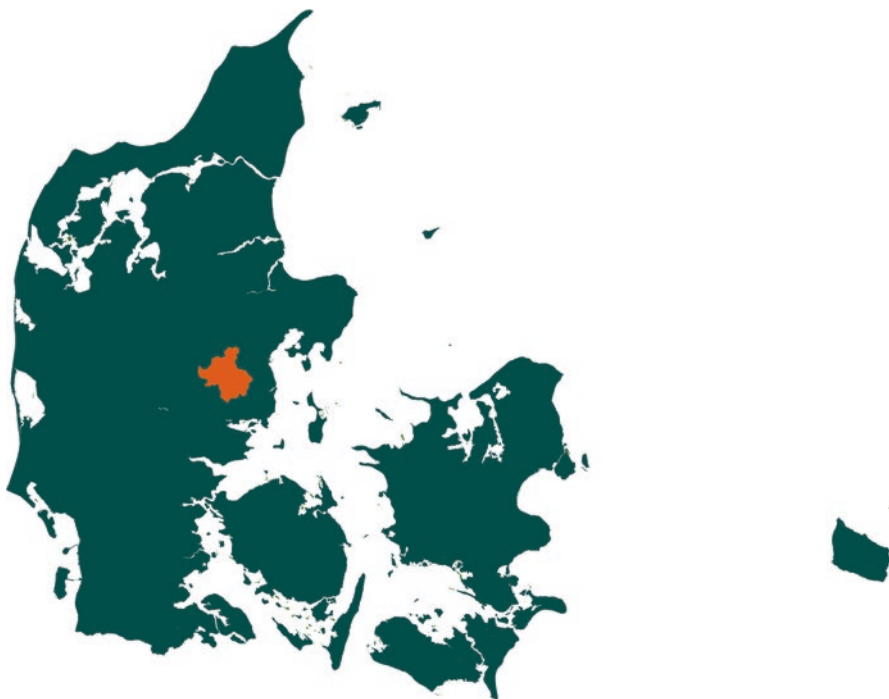
Skanderborg Municipality is a small municipality, situated in Denmark in the middle of Jutland, 30 kilometres southwest of Aarhus, Denmark's second largest city. The municipality covers an area of approximately 400 km<sup>2</sup> and has about 60,000 inhabitants. The area is known for its beautiful and rather hilly nature with lakes and rivers. A tourism marketing strategy from 2016 points out the area's high potential: "There are great opportunities for the tourism industry in Skanderborg Municipality. If we can inspire the large number of people visiting the area to come

---

L. Høst-Madsen (✉)  
Museum Skanderborg, Skanderborg, Denmark  
e-mail: [lhm@museumskanderborg.dk](mailto:lhm@museumskanderborg.dk)

M. Purup  
VisitSkanderborg, Skanderborg, Denmark  
e-mail: [mp@visitskanderborg.com](mailto:mp@visitskanderborg.com)

N. B. Dissing  
Kunstråd Skanderborg, Skanderborg, Denmark  
e-mail: [nina.bangsbo.dissing@skanderborg.dk](mailto:nina.bangsbo.dissing@skanderborg.dk)



**Fig. 15.1** Denmark with Skanderborg municipality in orange. (Museum Skanderborg)

back, stay a little longer, or spend more money in the local area, we can make the industry grow significantly. This might be achieved through the branding of the Lake District as one of Denmark’s major outdoor areas with the potential for unique nature experiences” (Søhøjlandet under åben himmel 2016).

This is the setting of the eScape project, and as such, this beautiful area serves as an inspiration for the partners on the project (Fig. 15.1).

The partners on the project include:

- **The Skanderborg Municipality Administration for Culture** is a very important partner on the project that provides financial and administrative support. In the Skanderborg Municipality, the cultural life has its momentum in the communities and the beautiful scenery around us, and it is in the interaction across these fields that we create a unique, diverse and meaningful cultural life for all.
- **The Museum Skanderborg** is a cultural historical museum under the Ministry for Culture.
- Danish museums are located in 40 administrative districts distributed across the country, and each is responsible for archaeological work in the local area (Høst-Madsen and Harnow 2012). The Museum Skanderborg manages the protection of monuments as well as historic heritage and is in charge of several archaeological excavations in the area. The Museum Skanderborg mission is to be a transformative, important cultural player in a local as well as national and global perspective. The partnership with the museum is essential in terms of expert

knowledge and work force, and as the project is rooted in archaeology, the museum is a key player as it runs the archaeological projects. Furthermore, the museum is the basis for disseminating and teaching history to children.

- **The local tourist** organisation, **VisitSkanderborg**, has the overall responsibility for promoting the area to attract tourists. The vision of VisitSkanderborg is to ensure that the Skanderborg area is known as a scenic outdoor destination, where everybody takes part in activities and experiences, enjoys life and can be a part of living history.
- VisitSkanderborg has close relationships with all parts of the tourism value chain and collaborates on a joint marketing effort with tourist organisations from other municipalities in the Lake District and Business Region Aarhus. One of the foci is dissemination of certain key narratives that relate to the area. eScape benefits from the collaboration with VisitSkanderborg, as the organisation contributes with labour and expert knowledge in their field.
- **The Art Council** is a selected group of local artists and experts that initiate art projects. As there are no art museums in Skanderborg Municipality, the Art Council is in charge of ensuring high-quality art. The vision of the Art Council is promoting and highlighting visual art in the Municipality and creating activities that stimulate development and networking and create cultural leverage based on the local, professional visual arts. In addition, the Art Council is partially financing the project and is essential to eScape due to their expertise.
- **Developers** play an important role in eScape, and the project collaborates with both private and public developers. Both types have to pay for archaeological excavations and, more often than not, get nothing out of it. When the archaeologists leave the site, all archaeological remains are gone; the site is cleaned for historical testimony. However, as one of the aims of the project is to bring life and energy back to archaeological sites, the project holds the potential to dramatically increase the value of a property. When people look for places to settle down and live, a strong historical brand is one of the parameters that increases the value and interest of specific sites, especially when it comes to newly developed suburban areas.

The eScape project is partially financed by developers; furthermore, these developers provide labour and expert knowledge to the project.

- **Locals, volunteers, children and tourists** constitute the last and most important group. This group is fundamental, as it establishes both a local and a global perspective on the project as well as functions as a barometer for success. These people contribute with expert knowledge, and, most importantly, participate in the project, which makes them crucial to eScape.

## Concept Description

The eScape concept conveys the historical context of an area and brings energy to newly developed suburban sites. When an excavation site has been “emptied” for historical data by archaeologists, and the area has been developed for modern life,

it is crucial to tell the place's unique story to newcomers, to people who already live close to the site and to tourists.

There are many ways to do this. Our experience shows that bringing art into the process elevates the storytelling to a higher level. Furthermore, an art installation, as well as the presence of an artist at work, may result in increased local interaction and can make the site a notable tourist attraction. The eScape concept combines art and archaeological science through the creation and communication of art on archaeological sites. This merges the past with the present through a unique medium.

Specialists in tourism, art and archaeology work together and combine the three on equal terms. This is done with the participation of locals and children. eScape makes a crucial difference in terms of changing the mindset of the public and creating a sense of ownership, thus battling an indifferent, non-participatory attitude towards the cultural heritage of an area.

The project is devoted to engaging people; therefore, it is important to define the target groups. Tourists are here defined as people without direct connections to local cultural history, who show up because of an event. They do not necessarily live far away.

Locals are defined as people living nearby the site. They often have a direct interest in local history and feel that it has special meaning to them.

Volunteers can be local or non-local. University students participating in the events as volunteers in the hope to gain experience fall into this last category.

A series of elements shape and define the concept:

- The project leaders represent archaeology, art and tourism with equal representation.
- All participants have equal voices and importance.
- The starting point is a specific site with considerable archaeological significance.
- Finding the right artist or artists to mediate the dialogue between the archaeological site and the public is key.
- Another important element is the participation of local schoolchildren, who engage in dialogue with both artists and archaeologists.
- The developer, i.e. the host/owner of the property, should be involved and encouraged to participate in the project.
- Locals and volunteers play important roles as partners on the project. The aim is to create local/global branding of the area.
- There is a production period when all partners are engaged in the development and communication of the art and archaeology.
- The production period is followed by an event.
- The art installation is on display for a short and defined period. However, decomposition of the art installation may be also part of the process (Fig. 15.2).



**Fig. 15.2** An example of educational learning and participation of the local schoolchildren who are in dialogue with both artists and archaeologists. (Museum Skanderborg)

## Financing

The project is financed by the local developer, Aarhus, European Capital of Culture 2017 and Skanderborg Municipality. The contributors acknowledge that this project increases the site's value, both culturally, as it offers exceptional cultural experiences, and financially, as it makes unattractive suburban development areas more attractive and easier to sell. In other words, the project can be viewed as a way of attracting successful families with children to the area.

The eScape project generates money that benefits the entire municipality. Not only the participating institutions – i.e. the museum, the municipality and the tourist organisation – benefit financially from the project; this is also the case for local businesses such as the baker providing bread for the participants.

More importantly, eScape revitalises the municipality and the community. Local volunteers that participate are fundamental to the project's success because they provide labour and ensure local anchoring. Local participation has another advantage: it promotes communication both within the community and between the community and the partners on the project. A nice example of this was when some of the neighbours to the archaeological site made some hot soup for the participants on an exceptionally cold day.

After this short description of the project partners and the concept, it is time to outline the specific events that have been organised within the eScape framework.

## The Events

The first project took place in Alken Enge in Denmark in 2014. The project was called “eScape – Ring of Bones”.

Since the end of the nineteenth century, human bones have regularly been unearthed in the wetlands of Alken Enge by the lake of Mossø in Denmark. Then, as now, the numerous human remains fascinated and mystified the local inhabitants as well as specialists. When archaeologists excavated the area from 2005 to 2014, the astonishment increased. The results from these excavations provided the specialists with new and surprising information about this spectacular site dating to ca. 0 AD, which yielded skeletal remains of hundreds of warriors that had been deposited into the lake.

Ten artists, led by Jørgen Hansen, moved to the Alken area and created a clay sculpture at the site. The sculpture represented their interpretation of the landscape and the archaeology that was being unearthed. The artists stayed in the nearby village, and while they were there, the locals helped them in many ways; among other things, they provided old bicycles for the artists to ride and made them a special dinner.

Schoolchildren from the local school visited the archaeological excavation and were taught about the archaeological remains and the research. Afterwards, they were introduced to the artwork and the technique behind clay sculpting. Finally, the students made their own clay figurines inspired by what they imagined the sacrificed warriors might have looked like.

When the sculpture was finished, it was covered by a sheet and fired for 24 hours. This was part of a large event that almost a thousand people attended. The local schoolchildren that had been part of the process also exhibited the clay figurines they had made as part of the event. They were positioned as though they were in battle. The finale of the evening was when the large sculpture was uncovered, lighting up the dark night. It was indeed a magical moment! For the next 6 months, the clay sculpture stood by the lake while being slowly eroded by wind and rain. This was part of the project; the decay was another form of art. The only slight issue was that it took longer than expected for the sculpture to degrade, so the official permits had to be prolonged (Fig. 15.3).

In 2015, the second project was called “eScape – collaboration and experimentation” and revolved around a unique Viking warrior’s grave containing at least one horse. Based on golden fittings from a bridle found during the archaeological survey, the burial is presumably exceptionally rich (Bagge 2016). The grave was found when a new residential area was being developed in the town of Hørning in Jutland. The grave has not been fully excavated yet, so the work is still in progress and has been prolonged for various reasons. One of them concerns the great expenses connected to the excavation of the grave because of its delicate contents and another



**Fig. 15.3** eScape Ring of Bones. The sculpture after it was burnt. (Jørgen Hansen)

one the fact that the grave is so rich in contents that the museum is afraid of robbery. The third and final reason is that the area is still under development and houses, gardens, pavements and streets are in progress. It is not possible to place the installation in an environment that is changing so rapidly, as it is the case for the time being.

On this location, the art piece is to be of a more permanent character, which will remind the new inhabitants of the area about the history connected to the site. The artist, Kate Skjerning, will create a trail of glowing hoofprints that demonstrate how the Viking's horse has moved through the landscape. Because of the above-mentioned development in the area, the installation has to wait until 2018.

As of spring 2017, the Viking grave will be excavated. At the moment meetings with all involved partners – i.e. the artist, locals and children – are in progress to confirm their involvement in the project. The excavation will be succeeded by workshops and other projects this year, and the installation will not be finished before sometime in 2018. It is still a work in progress.

In 2016, the third project took place at the site of Skovby Nygaard. The name of the project is “Skovby Nygaard – My Home Ground – Past and present”. The site is, once again, a suburban development for new housing – this time just outside a small town called Skovby. Here, a rather large area was under development, and the archaeologists excavated several large, rich Iron Age villages (Jensen 2015). This eScape project was actually initiated by a letter from a fourth grade class to the Mayor of Skanderborg in which the children asked for a sign that conveyed the story of the archaeological finds. Prior to this, the children had visited the site with their teacher, while excavations were still going on. The excavating archaeologists introduced them to the archaeological results, and this sparked the children's interest in the history of the area.

The mayor forwarded the request to the Museum Skanderborg, who produced a sign in collaboration with the children. The sign still stands in the area, and both sign and area are under the children's protection. These schoolchildren became the most important ambassadors for this eScape project, and since then, they have received special invitations to all eScape-related events.

Several projects took place throughout the year because of the rich archaeological finds at this site. The first was a piece called "Antiquities to go". The artists Bodil Sohn and Else Ploug Isaksen created a portable installation inspired by a number of archaeological finds that could fit in a suitcase. The art piece was first exhibited at the Museum Skanderborg and later at the tourist agency, at the library and at the local school, and it will continue travelling around the area.

This project was followed by on-site art installations, i.e. land art. Once again, two artists were appointed by the art council. Artist, Michael Bredtved, envisioned an Iron Age house out of thin, white and red wooden planks, called the "Skeleton House Project". The other artist, Morten Barker, created a fully accessible modern mound with a poetic interior and an observation post on the top called "New Views and Forgotten Horizons".

The two installations were situated in the landscape next to the finds. During the art creating process, all the children from the nearby school visited the site and were introduced to both the archaeological findings and the art. The children also made their own pieces of art under the guidance of Michael Bredtved. In total, more than 400 schoolchildren visited the site. When the installations were made, there was a grand event attended by among others the Danish Minister for Culture, who opened the site. More than 3000 people visited the site during the 3-month period when the installations were open to the public. After this period, everything was removed from the site except the sign.

This project ran alongside a sales exhibition of houses on the site, and it was evident that each project benefitted from the other. People who came looking for modern houses became aware of the long history of the area and the developer sold far more plots than expected (Fig. 15.4).

Thus, the projects that have been carried out so far have been briefly introduced, but this is not the end of the story. Aarhus' status as the European Capital of Culture in 2017 had the eScape team generate ideas for events connected to this great, cultural event.

In 2017 May, a project took place in the ruins of the medieval monastery of Øm. The site is the best documented monastery in Denmark due to a long series of archaeological excavations, but it doesn't have actual buildings preserved. In collaboration with locals, the French artist, Olivier Grossetête and his team of two, rebuilt one of the impressive gables of the monastery in cardboard boxes. With a height of 17.5 metres, this was an extraordinary installation that generated national and international interest. More than 4000 people participated in the event – and this will give rise to a completely new focus on the Lake District's unique monastery landscape. In the following autumn, there will be yet another project that will have a spiritual focus instead of a monumental one, and it will be phenomenologically





Fig. 15.4 Logo from eEscape at Skovby Nygaard. (Museum Skanderborg)

experienced through the use of light effects and silence (Guldhammer and Dissing 2011) (Fig. 15.5).

In 2017, we will also continue our work on the Viking warrior grave in Hørning.

## Final Remarks

The eEscape concept has been developed and refined during the last 4 years, and we have created a model that enables us to create meaningful and sustainable cultural experiences for both locals and tourists. Branding of the area is a common goal for the partners on the project. Key issues for success are mutual respect for all partners on the project; it is also important to embrace the fact that there are many forms of expert knowledge, both among scholars and among locals. Formulating this concept will help us keep focus and continue to develop and refine the product instead of merely reinventing the events every year.

Feel free to be inspired and adopt the concept of eEscape.

We have made a few small films

- Timelapse Øm Abbey: <https://vimeo.com/221583394>
- The concept eEscape: <https://vimeo.com/179773097>
- My Home Ground – Skovby Nygaard – past and present: <https://vimeo.com/179861359>

**Fig. 15.5** The impressive gables of the Øm Monastery rebuild in cardboard boxes. (Museum Skanderborg)



- Art and Archaeology – Ring of Bones: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H8hxXj7rA5Y>
- Facebook – <https://www.facebook.com/eScapeSkanderborg>

## References

- Bagge, M. S. (2016). Ryttergraven i Fregerslev – et uopklaret mysterium. In H. Lyngstrøm, & J. Ulriksen (red.), *Død og begravet i vikingetiden*, Artikler fra et seminar på Københavns Universitet den 26. februar 2016 (s. 87–94).
- Guldhammer, A., & Dissing, N. B. (2011). En oplevelse med sanserne på Sculpture by the Sea. *Liv i skolen*, Årg. 13, nr. 3, 6–9, Via University College.
- Høst-Madsen, L., & Harnow, H. (2012). Historical Archaeology and archaeological practice in Denmark. In H. Harnow, D. Cranstone, P. Belford, & L. Høst-Madsen (Eds.), *Across the North Sea later historical archaeology in Britain and Denmark, C. 1500–2000 AD* (pp. 39–50). Copenhagen: University Press of Southern Denmark.

Jensen A. V. (2015). Skovby – Galtens glemte forgænger. *Museum Skanderborg Årbog 2014*, 77–86.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (1969). *Tegn: udvalgte essays*. Rhodos.

Søhøjlandet under åben himmel. (2016). *Søhøjlandet under åben himmel, Vision for VisitSkanderborg*.

**Lene Høst-Madsen** Director of Museum Skanderborg since 2013. Before this she was curator in archaeology at the Museum of Copenhagen (2000–2013). During these ten years, Lene conducted large-scale excavations in Copenhagen. Her research interest lies within the post-medieval and later historical archaeology with special interest in material culture and politics. She has published articles and attended international conferences giving papers regarding these themes.

Chairperson of the Archaeological Advisory Board for Archaeology at the Danish Cultural Agency under the Ministry of Culture (2009–2013).

(2006–until now) Editorial advisor for Post-Medieval Archaeology.

Since 2006 Examiner at the University of Copenhagen, Aarhus and Southern Denmark in Archaeology.

Since 2014 Examiner of Medieval and Renaissance Archaeology at Aarhus University.

**Marianne Purup** Director of Tourism at Visit Skanderborg since 2008 with responsibility for branding/storytelling/marketing of the destination as well as innovation/development of new products and optimisation of good hostmanship. She has also been and is a board member for Museum Skanderborg for most of this period. Earlier head of communications at the Danish Agricultural Council, Skejby (2004–2008), Aarhus Festival Week, Aarhus (2002–2004) and Bang & Olufsen, Struer (1999–2002), among others.

Marianne Purup has worked with international public relations and internal communication, as a journalist at the daily newspaper in Aarhus, Århus Stiftstidende (1994–1999), with focus on retail, lifestyle and children's culture, and as a freelance communication consultant, for example, helping to brand the small Danish islands and developing East Jutland tourism. She went straight from journalism school (1977–1981) to various leading posts within pr, information and communication (1982–1994).

She is an excellent journalist, communicator and mentor. Among her interests are language, literature and philosophy. You could say that she has a way with words and people.

**Nina Bangsbo Dissing** Work experience: Project Manager, eEscape – Art Council and the Skanderborg Municipality 2014. Since 2013: Culture Consultant, the Skanderborg Municipality 2013. Education Coordinator and communication at Sculpture by the Sea, Centre of Children Culture 2010–2013. Teaching Art history and Visual Culture, Senior folk high school for Art 2011. Intern Sculpture by the Sea, Centre of Children Culture 2009. Information and communication employee and guide at ARoS – Aarhus Art Museum 2005–2013. Organiser and coordinator Up with People, USA and Europe 1998/1999 [www.upwithpeople.org](http://www.upwithpeople.org)

## Education

Cand. Mag. Art history and Visual Culture, Aarhus University 2010

Art history, Università degli Studi di Firenze (4 month), 2007

Project Management 2011