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Unreviewed Mixed Matters Article:

Conference Review: Archaeological Open-Air Museums: Reconstruction and Reenactment – Reality or Fiction?

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An amazing golden Autumn day greeted us on our first visit to Trzcinica, South Eastern Poland, where last October Terramara Park representatives had been invited to the conference "Archaeological Open-Air Museums: Reconstruction and Reenactment – Reality or Fiction?". It was an honour to have be selected by the Polish colleagues of the Carpathian Troy Archaeological Open-air museum, and in turn we were attracted by the opportunity to

develop new partnerships, the European dimension being one of the main topics at the heart of our ethos.

> The hosts were among the main scholars and archaeologists representing Polish Universities and cultural historical institutions alongside younger researchers, all of whom had been gathered by the urgency of defining what an archaeokansen is nowadays in Poland and, partly, in the neighbouring Slovakia.

Upon arrival we were not surprised that although the **Carpathian Troy museum** is so geographically distant from **Terramara Park** they had many points in common. They are both archaeological open air branches of public museums located in towns (Modena Archaeological Civic Museum in Italy and Krosno Sub-Carpathian in Poland) which focus on villages dating to the Bronze Age (Carpathian Troy displays both Early Bronze Age and Early Middle Ages discoveries). Philologically they are both based on archaeological data gathered from excavations conducted under scientific direction of the museums, which have led to rigorous reconstructions for visitors built directly on the sites at the end of 1990s and beginning of the 2000s.

The conference was opened on Saturday the 18th of October by Director Jan Gancarski, who is responsible for both the research and the development of the museum, which is now managed by Dr Pawel Madej. The meeting took place in the congress hall of the main building, which also includes spaces dedicated to the hospitality, a cafeteria, and of course the exhibit rooms. The magnificent 8 hectare archaeological open-air museum with reconstructions of both the Otomani-Füzesabony settlement (3500 BC) and the Slavonic village (9th century AD) were visible outside.

The hosts were among the main scholars and archaeologists representing Polish Universities and cultural historical institutions alongside younger researchers, all of whom had been gathered by the urgency of defining what an archaeokansen is nowadays in Poland and, partly, in the neighbouring Slovakia. Presentations were made by our Slovakian colleagues (PhDr. Víťazoslav Struhár - *Living Archaeology in Liptov region, Northern Slovakia*; PhDr. Mária Kotorová - *Archaeological Park Live Archaeology in Hanušovce nad Topľou, the place of experiment, cognition and fun*).

In Recognizing that “archaeology is no longer so sexy” (Dr Janusz Budziszewski, Cardinal Stefan Wyszynski University in Warsaw) the question concerning Archaeological Open-Air Museums has focused on finding a shared strategy for continuing the process of communicating and disseminating of archaeological data to visitors. While preserving a balanced relationship between the truth of the research and the evocation of the attraction.

Experimental archaeology activities have been identified once more as a means to both reveal otherwise unknown technological process and communicating them to the public (Lara Comis MA, PhD candidate - *Experimental Archaeology and research in European Archaeological Open-Air Museums. A survey on best practices: preliminary results*. UCD School of Archaeology, Dublin).

The international network EXARC was called on to contribute the long experience of its numerous members from around the world and as a guarantor of the quality of interpretation developed by archaeological open-air museums with the aid of experimental activities (Roeland Paardekooper PhD - *What is the past you feel comfortable with? Archaeological Open-Air Museums and their role in modern society.* EXARC).

There was talk of the need to communicate extraordinary discoveries, like the mammoth bone boomerang belonging to the Neanderthal site at Obłazowa with a museum project to enhance and preserve the surrounding environmental context (Prof. dr hab. Paweł Valde-Nowak - *The Stone Age at the foot of the Tatra Mountains – Obłazowa Archaeological Park*. Jagiellonian University, Institute of Archaeology. Kraków).

A possibility has been suggested of giving a primary role to the educational dimension rather than to the evocative one when communicating with younger audiences. Trying to involve schoolchildren in the research path of the archaeologists in order to give them an acquired awareness of ancient technological and cultural processes (MA Alessia Pelillo - *Evocative or educational? The case of the Archaeological Park and Open-Air Museum of Terramara Montale*. Terramara Park of Montale and Archaeological Ethnological Museum of Modena).

It is essential to underline the fact that the redefinition of Skansen cannot occur without a deeper reflection on their role in protecting and managing the historical-archaeological sites involved. This is necessary in order to identify standards and perspectives in a country which, like many others, does not always have coherent legislation on the protection of sites (Mgr Agata Byszewska - *The image of the past. Standards of reconstruction and presentation of archaeological heritage from the perspective of archaeological heritage management.* National Heritage Board of Poland, Warszawa).

In looking for new ways to communicate with visitors the scientific contents of rigorous research while exciting them. The training of re-enactors should also be improved, by a greater involvement of the specialists, so as to make them better prepared to field an historical and emotional authenticity. (Dr Kamila Baraniecka-Olszewska - *Neither Reality nor Fiction. On the practice of authenticity in historical reenactment.* Polish Academy of Sciences, Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Warszawa).

Archaeological open-air museums should also become unique places, between academics and general public, revealing not only the results but the methods of Archaeobotany and

Archaeozoology, disciplines that are now essential to complete archaeological historical research (Dr hab. Aldona Mueller-Bieniek, Dr hab. Maria Lityńska-Zając Prof. PAN - *Archaeobotany as a source of information about past economy and landscape – possibilities and limitations*. Polish Academy of Sciences, Institute of Botany, Kraków; Polish Academy of Sciences, Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Kraków; Dr Magdalena Moskal-del Hoyo, Dr hab. Maria Lityńska-Zając Prof. PAN - *Wood resource use - tracking prehistoric human activity and reconstructing woodland vegetation.* Polish Academy of Sciences, Institute of Botany, Kraków; Polish Academy of Sciences, Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Kraków; Dr Jarosław Wilczyński - *Faunal remains in archaeological context and their usefulness in animal husbandry reconstruction.* Polish Academy of Sciences, Institute of Systematics and Evolution of Animals Department of Vertebrate Zoology, Kraków).

We returned home with the great experience of a full professional immersion in the topics concerning the dynamic and diversified world of archaeological open-air museums', which are also of fundamental importance in Italy.

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