



Learning Villages International Network working on European Citizenship

LVIN #C | Project ID: 101091134 | Call: CERV-2022-CITIZENS-TOWN

The first European workshop on rural resilience | Albești commune

Albești Commune, Constanța County, Romania

September 10, 2024

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**Archaeology and Resilience: from antiquarians, universities,
and research centers to communities, civil society, private
institutions, and digital humanities**

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Humanities, despite being undervalued today, continue to represent, in essence, a field of knowledge centered, naturally, on the study of the so-called human experience, our cultures, and our societies, and above all, the artistic and intellectual manifestations throughout history.

Humanities, as everyone knows, differ greatly from the natural sciences, as they generally do not seek to understand or study the world through empirical and experimental methods, but instead address more subjective and qualitative aspects of human life. They are, in short, fields like philosophy, which aims to study fundamental questions about existence, knowledge, ethics, the mind, and language; history, which seeks to analyze and interpret the human past using sources like documents, artifacts, and oral records, aiming to understand how societies formed and evolved over time; linguistics, which explores human language, its structures, functions, and evolutions; literature, which studies literary works and the art of writing, analyzing texts to understand their meanings, contexts, and cultural impact;





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anthropology, which investigates human cultures, their social practices, beliefs, rituals, and social organization; sociology, which aims to study societies, their institutions, structures, and relationships, examining how humans interact with each other within specific social contexts; the arts, which promote the study and practice of visual, performing, and musical arts; and the study of religions, which seeks to analyze religious beliefs, spiritual practices, and their cultural and social influences.

In essence, humanities play a crucial role in understanding ourselves and the world around us, fostering critical reflection, empathy, and an understanding of cultural and historical differences. Furthermore, they contribute to the formation of conscious and engaged citizens, capable of thinking critically about ethical and social issues.

The humanities also have practical value, helping to develop skills such as communication, argumentation, and critical analysis, which are essential in various professions and in everyday life.

But I'm not here to talk to you about humanities. You would all agree that I neither have the time, the desire, the credentials, nor the capability to develop this topic, even briefly. However, I will talk a little about archaeology and resilience.

First of all, what do we mean when we talk about archaeology? Archaeology, a method or science intrinsically linked to history, promotes the study of human societies through the recovery and analysis of material remains,





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artifacts, structures, and biological remains, among others. The discipline has a long and complex history, which can be divided into several phases, from its roots in antiquity to its development as a modern science.

What we call "Archaeology" originated in classical antiquity, within civilizations like Greece, Egypt, Sumer, and Babylon, where artifacts, statues, and ancient objects were sought, recovered, and appreciated not only for their aesthetic value but also for their symbolic and historical significance.

In the Middle Ages, we see a real decline in interest in the search for the past, mainly due to religious emphasis and the destruction of many ancient sites. However, in other regions, such as the Islamic world, there was a continuity in the study of ancient texts and, to a lesser extent, archaeological sites.

One of the turning points was, without a doubt, the Renaissance, where the beginnings of so-called modern archaeology can be observed. It was in the 15th and 16th centuries that interest in the past reemerged, as European scholars began to rediscover and study ancient civilizations. Archaeological excavations started to occur more systematically, especially in places like Rome and Pompeii. It was during this period that the collection of ancient artifacts, often without scientific methodology, began to gain popularity.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, the practice of archaeology gradually began to professionalize. The beginning of modern archaeology is associated with the development of antiquarianism, where scholars and collectors began to classify and study artifacts more carefully. This period also saw the creation





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of some of the first archaeological societies and museums, such as the British Museum, founded in 1753.

I won't talk about 19th-century archaeology because there are so many significant changes that we would have to stay here for another 5 or 6 hours... However, I would like to discuss contemporary archaeology a bit, as advanced technologies, methods such as ground-penetrating radar (GPR), satellite imagery, DNA analysis, and 3D digital modeling have revolutionized how archaeologists investigate and interpret remains from the past.

On the other hand, I find it important to mention a type of archaeology that significantly interests me: public and community archaeology... Archaeology has become more inclusive, with increasing involvement from local communities and a focus on preserving cultural heritage. Public and community archaeology seeks to make the practice more accessible and relevant to society at large.

Now shifting to a more personal approach and focusing on the title of the talk I bring you, based on my experience, from the tons and tons—literally—of books, articles, sentences, ideas, words, drawings, photographs, experiences, and paths archaeologists have been taking since the aforementioned classical antiquity, we can, in part, organize some ideas about the issue of archaeology and resilience... not simple or specific topics.





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In this short essay, archaeology and resilience are distributed across two distinct themes or fields. First, the resilience of people through the archaeological record, and second, the resilience of the archaeological practice itself.

The relationship between archaeology and resilience involves the search for significant evidence of how past human societies faced challenges, adapted to changes, and survived crises. Archaeology obviously offers a unique lens for studying resilience, as it allows archaeologists to analyze how different cultures and communities responded to environmental, economic, social, and political pressures over time.

The resilience of societies, visible in archaeological contexts, is actually a fascinating subject of study. Environmental adaptation is one of the main focuses of so-called resilience archaeology. This involves studying how ancient populations adapted to environmental changes, among others. This includes responses to climate changes, such as prolonged droughts or cooling periods, which required societies to adjust their agricultural methods, irrigation techniques, and even the locations of their settlements, villages, or cities.

In short, archaeology—the study, safeguarding, appreciation, and promotion of historical heritage—is under significant pressure today from modern lifestyles, from the way the world is viewed, and from how society as a whole perceives the so-called archaeological phenomenon.





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My experience, through over 20 years of public archaeology, allows me, with firsthand knowledge, especially in Portugal, to discern the problems and consequences of public and private archaeological practice in Iberia, if you will. What I will describe here is, essentially, a subjective view but generally grounded in facts.

Archaeology in Portugal is currently somewhat resilient, though it used to be more so. Archaeologists, trained in somewhat outdated universities considering the winds of modernity, starting in the second half of the 1990s, temporarily awoke to a new phenomenon: the creation of an institution that, in general, would deal with the so-called issues surrounding modern archaeology.

The IPA (Portuguese Institute of Archaeology) marked a significant shift in the archaeology landscape in Portugal. However, the creation of this institution stemmed from an engineering project, a dam—the Foz Côa dam—which was planned for one of the world's most important archaeological sites: the Foz Côa rock engravings. In fact, the custodians of archaeology in Portugal, that is, the universities, were no longer capable, resilient, of meeting a new demand: the demand for the study and safeguarding of archaeological heritage on a national scale.

This fact is evidenced by the turning point of the Alqueva project, a dam in the south of the country, which required hundreds, even thousands of





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archaeological interventions for which the universities had no capacity to respond.

However, it is in the genesis of the IPA, founded in 1997, that a new stage in archaeological resilience can be seen. The beginnings of modern public archaeology in Portugal can be traced back to the 1980s, with the creation of the Portuguese Institute of Cultural Heritage. Many institutes, services, offices, centers, and other organizations were created, altered, and modified. In reality, the resilience and adaptation were not, at all, significant.

The legislation regarding archaeological and cultural heritage is complex, bureaucratic, and impractical. On-the-ground oversight is almost non-existent, human resources are scarce and not being renewed, universities are increasingly exposed to a lack of funding, budgets, and strict hiring criteria for faculty. In short, the path is very arduous, and the economic and social pressure on archaeology is becoming more complex and insensitive.

The practice of public archaeology, in short, the archaeological practice in Portugal and across much of Europe, is exposed to criteria of urban pressure, a planning system where the preservation of heritage and historical study are relegated to a place that shames professionals in the sector and citizens alike. However, the conveniences brought by new technologies, by digital humanities, by time and budget savings in project development seem, in fact, irrelevant when juxtaposed with the demands of the modern urban and rural world.





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Humanities, archaeology, and similar fields are exposed, at risk, dependent on a world where influences, power, GDP, banks, interest rates, and unchecked profits are, in my view, the bread of our daily lives. I see no hope for methodological salvation.

Resilience in the human and social sciences is increasingly vulnerable to decay. Along with them, rural areas, rurality, public archaeology, humanities, and societies must naturally adapt, walking the long road of resilience.

Thank you all for your attention.

