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SHARING STORIES: STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES IN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

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Abstract

Society of Archaeology Students (SAS), in Polish: Koło Naukowe Studentów Archeologii (KNSA), is one of the oldest student societies working within the Institute of Archaeology of Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń. In recent years SAS began to work in cooperation with other archaeological, historical and educational organisations, as well as with museums and open-air archaeological reservations. Most of our work is focused around building and maintaining the archaeological consciousness in contemporary society – not only through participating in various mass events but also through preparing workshops for people from local communities, as well as through adding archaeological impressions to various museum events and mass outdoor reenactment festivals. Within the current outlook on archaeological methodology, those actions are linked to so-called public archaeology – the concept that is still somewhat new in many areas of archaeological activities in Poland.

The following article concerns strategies that are present in the SAS' archaeological popularisation initiatives, as well as our reflections and inquiries on the topic of archaeological education in contemporary reality, with its numerous homogenised, standardised or idealised concepts of the past, often mirrored in many historical festivals' conventions. Through our observations based upon various experiences, we would like to try to determine how the archaeological education and popularisation could be more widely recognised not only as a valuable but rather as an inseparable part of being an archaeologist – university scholar or a field-working one.

Introduction

The Society of Archaeological Students (SAS) – in Polish Koło Naukowe Studentów Archeologii (KNSA) – is one of the oldest student societies started over twenty-five years ago within the structure of the Faculty of History of Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń

(later NCU), working in connection with the Institute of Archaeology. As the oldest archaeological student society in Toruń campus, the SAS has undergone many changes throughout the years, depending on students' archaeological and reenactment interests. Our current activities are inspired mostly by various aspects of everyday life in the European Late Middle Ages, for

example, medieval cooking, weaving, embroidering or pottery making.

1. In recent years, following changes in the NCU promotion strategy, the SAS began to work in co-operation with other archaeological, historical and educational organisations, as well as with museums and open-air reservations. Nowadays, most of our activities are focused around creating and maintaining the archaeological consciousness in contemporary society – mainly through archaeological lessons, workshops and other events we prepare for children, students and members of local societies in our region. The SAS also participates in various museum events and mass outdoor reenactment festivals, making academic archaeology, or archaeology in general, available to the public. From 2016, we are regularly present at the most celebrated international reenactment events and festivals in Northern Poland, such as Great International Knights' Tournament at Golub Castle, Days of Grunwald Festival or the annual festival of medieval culture „Siege of Malbork”.
2. Archaeological education and popularisation were becoming more and more critical for the SAS, occupying our actions more often with every passing year. Participating in outdoor festivals was a new challenge to take on – to work with the broad and diverse audience, to talk about archaeology to people of various age, interests, backgrounds and professions was something we needed to learn. That proved to be more difficult than was thought at first. That is why it was decided to have a closer look at concepts such as public archaeology and relationships between archaeology and society. Finally, also to share our thoughts on those matters concerning our experiences.

Socially involved archaeology

Although fluid society treats (e.g. Bauman Z. 2012) most of the time can be perceived as having the negative outcome they also open some possibilities for the heritage management branch of services. The need for experiences of different is what empowers all reenactment movements – although not only – (Pawleta M. 2011) and it also opens the window of opportunity for selling archaeology as a product (Kobiałka D. 2011; Pawleta M. 2011; Rudnicki S. 2013). However, many researchers point out mostly negative effects of taking

archaeology into festivals or market itself and difficulties with maintaining a scientific level of performance (Byszewska A. 2016; Kobiałka D. 2018, p. 31; Pawleta M. 2011; Zalewska A. 2011, p. 126–127). Nonetheless, public archaeology cannot happen without this sensibility over non-existing realities and curiosity for unknown that characterise society nowadays.

Contemporary, the connections and relations between archaeology and society are a subject of numerous discussions and polemics. Cornelius Holtorf presents three models of communication between archaeology and society (2017) – the educational model, in which the society is a somewhat passive recipient of archaeologists' work, the public-relations model, in which society perceives archaeology as beneficial and archaeologists as constructive figures, and the democratic model, according to which archaeology should be more responsive to society's needs and demands. Those three aspects create an axis around which the entire archaeological education and popularisation seem to revolve, though that is crucial to remember that many factors such as society's expectations, people's level of interest in archaeology or popular image of archaeology can vary across time, regions and social groups.

The term “society” used in connection to socially involved archaeology is much more elusive than we are ready to admit. The SAS experiences with outdoor events and festivals, with dozens of people visiting our stall each day, seems to confirm that. We had learnt that we never know who is going to approach us – someone who already has an opinion about archaeology or someone who does not have any yet; someone who already has some questions in mind, or maybe someone who wants to look at our materials out of idle curiosity. At times it is hard to tell if we are meeting with “people” in general, since it feels more like meeting with hundreds of individuals, each of them having their motivation, opinion and interests (Elias 2010).

Individuality seems to be a distinct trait in contemporary culture and society, and individual experience is gaining importance in various forms of social involvement (Krzychała S., 2003, p. 33). That influences public archaeology in many ways. Taking the aspect of individuality and individual experience into consideration could improve the effects of archaeological education and popularisation efforts. In SAS experience, even simple archaeological workshops and lessons are excellent occasions for working not only with a group in general but also with individuals. When a person

feels that their thoughts, reflections and questions are treated more individually, they usually become more open and curious (Cudowska 2013) – and often engage in friendly dialogue with an archaeologist.

A place for archaeological education

In the current situation in Poland there is much antagonism between metal detector users, conservators, historians, local administrators, politicians, investors and archaeologists. Some of the most crucial issues are legal restrictions about archaeological site preservation, common usage of metal detectors, pre-investment excavations and funding research obligation, artefacts storage and accessibility to research outcomes. This animosity grows further within “alternative” archaeology/history topics such as Slavic presence before middle ages or aliens influence on Earthian civilisations (for a more detailed description of types of alternative archaeologies see: Moshenska G. 2017a). Most of those matters are common for archaeologists working all over the globe, but as we do not have to negotiate with native communities or neopagans over graveyards excavations, in Poland, there is a lot of political pressure on Second World War and socialism regime victims (e.g. Frąckowiak M. 2018; Zalewska A. 2016). A recent study shows that Polish society regards “teaching the history of Poland is one of the main roles of archaeology” (Kajda et al. 2018, p. 106). As it is a great opportunity (the same study shows that there is a vast gap between the need for archaeological knowledge and access to it – p. 108), it is also a problematic issue. After all, archaeology is not only about occurrences from historical times and not for clearly nationalistic purposes. That cold attitude on one side and the hunger for knowledge on the other lead to bipolar outlook on archaeology. For example, archaeologists can be seen as people who delay the investment realisations and cause an investor a headache – or as people who do their work, struggling with time pressure and challenging weather. Some metal detecting users perceive archaeologists as adversaries who prevent them from freely enjoying their hobby – while many other detectorists work along archaeologists during fieldwork in perfect companionship. Some people know archaeology only from popular books, movies or archaeological documentary series, and people who observed or even worked as volunteers during archaeological excavations near their living places.

Summarising – it does not matter if archaeologist conducts fieldwork in the middle of nowhere or at town's market or if he/she appears on an interdisciplinary conference or a festival. There always be a question about pyramids, beginning of Piast' state or recent development of Indomitable Soldiers graves survey. Sometimes about dinosaurs, regrettably, too.

On the other hand, archaeology can create a common ground for social integration. Archaeology is often present in local spaces – the majority of archaeological excavations is conducted in public spaces of cities and towns, sometimes near tourist attractions or near other objects that are important in local context. That creates many opportunities for educational and popularisation projects that involve the local community (see: Czeraniak 2011).

The SAS members participated in similar activities. We were preparing meetings and workshops for local people, giving them a tour around the excavation site, showing our findings and sharing stories about the past. Through the contact with archaeology, local communities can re-discover and reinforce bonds that exist within them – for example, through better understanding their past, learning more about their common archaeological heritage and discovering the history of the place they are living (Reetz, E., & Quackenbush, W. 2016).

Creating and maintaining archaeological consciousness in the local context can also be very beneficial for archaeologists. Members of local communities often support archaeological excavations as volunteers, working on site and helping with washing, sorting and marking findings. They can also be an invaluable source of information about the site and the region in general, for example, remembering where there were conducted earthworks in recent years or where someone incidentally dug up an archaeological finding. It is a piece of crucial information sometimes, as often it remains unreported to the local officials.

Concluding, archaeologists need to educate society not only to improve their image and restore archaeological consciousness, share knowledge about past occurrences or help within building bonds across boundaries but also to be part of that society and actively participate in its actions, shaping not only past or present but, mainly, future. Gonzalez-Ruibal and team even stated „we need archaeology that provokes” (2017) to highlight how important it is for an archaeologist to work over difficult for social matters.

Public archaeology paradigm

According to Moshenska (2017 b), public archaeology is not only opening fieldworks for amateurs or allowing the public to lurk inside archaeological investigations during its lasting. It is also inviting them to a discourse of past occurrences and its preservations. The archaeology meeting with society can take place on many levels and in various circumstances although one thing does not change – to call it public archaeology both side have to actively participate, exchange opinions, to put it simply: discuss selected issues (Merriman 2004). Copeland (2009) called it a more constructivist approach. For example, a typical lecture performed for ordering facility hardly could be called as one of the examples of public archaeology. It is a way to educate a specific group about archaeological discoveries, but the form of presentation does not allow a more extensive exchange of thoughts, even if there is a short time for question after a lecture.

On the other hand, a project held by a local artisan, with the archaeologist as a consultant during restoration work hardly can be called archaeological (Rios 2014). However, without any doubts can be described within the public archaeology paradigm. Drawing a line between archaeological education and public archaeology is not possible. Probably the best way to define their relationship is to categorise public archaeology as one of the ways of educating society about archaeology. Nonetheless, public archaeology is much more than a mere didactic strategy – it is a way of performing research, interacting with society etc.

Characteristic of recipients

The SAS collaborate with other students organisation during outdoor mass events under the suspicion of the NCU. As representants of the study of the past, we participate mostly in reenactment festivals as mentioned before. Performed on a smaller scale are two science festivals organised by Toruń municipal, research and popularisation facilities – one held during spring, second in autumn. During the autumn one the SAS with the collaboration of other archaeology student societies, similarly to summer outdoor festivals, prepare reenactment stall. On the other hand, during the spring science and art festival, the SAS members organise workshops at the Institute of Archaeology of the NCU. While there

are lessons in school, it happens that representants of the SAS conduct workshops for elementary and high school' students. Summarising, there two types of SAS performances – workshops designed for small groups and stalls during outdoor mass events.

When speaking about workshops – participants are mostly teenagers and kids, except for spring science and art festival, when whole families can register and rare occasions when facilities taking care of more needing students, seniors or disabled invite us to collaborate. As the opposite, reenactment stall catches the attention of representatives of all age groups, with various social standing and different level of interest and knowledge about archaeology. To the booth comes families with kids who are fascinated by historical setting, adults who recently heard about some archaeological discovery, other reenactors and even archaeologists themselves.

Strategies

There are many sayings about food. For example, James Beard – a well known American chef from the 20th century – stated: „Food is our common ground, a universal experience”. There cannot be anything more adequate for the SAS winning strategy during outdoor events. While walking for many hours through a battlefield, castles or research facilities, everybody gets tired and hungry. Nothing more catches the attention of such person than the smell of food. Especially if it is a cold September evening or a rainy summer day and there is a fireplace to sit nearby too. Lured by snacks and the possibility of regaining some energy people gather nearby or at the NCU's tent. If they already entered, they ask about the food, about the recipes and source for them, about our clothing, tent and fireplace equipment, copies of artefacts and photo stories from excavation sites presented on people stoppers.

However, during mass events, our visitors prefer to spend a minute or two and move on to another attraction. It is crucial to seize the opportunity and gain their attention – the first step is to help passersby to notice the University's stall among others, second – to encourage them to stop by, third – to start a conversation about archaeology and hand over “a package”. For kids, it mostly would be puzzles (designed by the SAS) and historical paper figurines (designed by S3design by order of the NCU's Centre for Promotion and Information). For adults, there would be recipes based

on historical cookbooks and results of archaeological investigations.

On the other hand, workshops participants – depending on age and preferences – would work manually with the surroundings of all gathered in the Institute's museum room artefacts and ecofacts, trying themselves as archaeologists. Methods that base on manual work are typical for archaeological workshops and incorporating copies of finds as well enabling participants to interact with the real ones are specific for the studies of the past (Olbrot, Zając & Waclawik 2017; Reetz, E., & Quackenbush, W. 2016.) In case of the SAS workshops, those activities include: filling paper sheets imitating archaeological field documentation, working in a staged trench filled with artefacts copies or restoring shattered copies of artefacts back into original shape for example.

As archaeology is extraordinary multidisciplinary, it allows us to work with groups of different interest – those concerning science and humanities (Reetz, E., & Quackenbush, W. 2016). It is especially useful when disciples in classes or stall visitors do not share the same interest. It is also a way to broaden participants outlook on archaeology from a method of gaining knowledge of polish history to amazing science enabling to look into the past.

Summary

It is challenging for the SAS members to manage all those types of events. Planning logistic, valuing possible risks, responding fast to quickly changing environment, engaging within public into a dispute about various aspects of archaeology – all of these circumstances encourage the SAS members to open their minds for new opportunities, to learn how to manage the risk and polish their soft skills. This way the ones taking new lessons are not amateurs or passersby but people who soon will start their independent business or start working within bigger facilities. In both cases, skills and experiences gained through participation in the NCU popularisation policy wider their field of expertise and prepare better for challenges of nowadays market.

Possibilities of performing research within public archaeology paradigm are still not many in Poland, although the situation change for better steadily. Archaeologists have been becoming more and more aware of the need for their ACTIVE presence within the general

public (e.g. Czerniak 2011). In many cases on the polish ground, it seems more like an action-reaction situation though, as many archaeologists decide to take action as a response to many alternative narrations. Thanks to those changes as well as an answer for market needs access to educational events containing archaeological knowledge is easier.

In a short paper, Thurley (2005) noted that thanks to enjoying interactions with the heritage the people will more readily understand its meaning, start to value it, and as an outcome, they will care about its preservations. So preserved monuments and related finds should be a source of enjoyment if treated in a correct way (etc.) This circle of processes is a good base for any archaeological education activity. Although to not pass by society's need and be part of it archaeologists have to debate with the people continually.

In recent years, socially involved archaeology became very important for the SAS. We try to apply this concept in our educational and popularisation practice, learning something new every year. It seems that the key to successfully share archaeology with society is to be open for people – not only the society in general but also for people as individuals. Although, through our work, we try not only built sensibility over archaeological heritage within the general public. We also want to raise awareness among archaeologists themselves – that they need to participate in the social construction of the past (both distant and past). As the next generations graduate, we hope that activities performed in the SAS will prepare them for that dispute.

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