

The Finnish impact – public engagement with archaeology in international projects based in Finland

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Abstract

Multiple archaeological projects based at the University of Helsinki are creating a lasting impact on the perception of community archaeology and public engagement in Finland. In this chapter we describe three projects, which engage different communities, both in Finland and abroad. Specifically we discuss the Centre of Excellence in Ancient Near Eastern Empire community project in Jordan, the Yamnaya Impact on Prehistoric Europe public outreach in Romania, Bulgaria and Finland and the Lapland's Dark Heritage project results.

Keywords: community archaeology, public outreach, Finnish impact.

30.1 Introduction: Mika Lavento, public archaeology, and Helsinki

Mika Lavento's research interests and contributions to archaeology and relative public engagements have impacted the ways in which we think about community and public archaeology in Finland. His works on Finnish prehistory and the area connecting with the neighbouring regions provided an important theoretical framework for young Finnish archaeologists working in Finland and abroad (Cramp et al. 2014; Kriiska et al. 2005; Oinonen et al. 2013).

Under the aegis of the University of Helsinki, multiple archaeological projects are creating a lasting impact on the perception of community archaeology and public engagement in Finland. Community archaeology is born out of the need for collaborative and inclusive engagement between archaeologists, local communities and the wider public (Thomas 2014; 2017). The involvement of multiple stakeholders who often have diverse and diverging interests creates a stimulating and fruitful environment to discuss aims and goals of archaeological research, their impact on the communities and perspective for sustainable developments (Hekkuriainen 2018; Näser & Tully 2019).

In this chapter we outline some of the key means by which researchers working in archaeology at the University of Helsinki have found ways of engaging different communities, both in Finland and elsewhere. We present case studies connected to Jordan and Finland (through the Ancient Near

Eastern Empires Centre of Excellence, funded by the Academy of Finland); Romania, Bulgaria and Finland (through the Yamnaya Impact on Prehistoric Europe ERC Advanced project); and to northern Finland (through the Lapland's Dark Heritage Academy of Finland project). This has included hands-on opportunities to participate in archaeological fieldwork but has also involved branching out into digital methods and effective use of press and media communication. Especially in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, alternative methods to maintain contact with people even during periods of physical isolation have become crucial (Jones & Pickens 2020).

30.2 Case study 1: ANEE's contribution to community archaeology and open data

Public engagement is an integral part of the work conducted by Team 3 “Material culture and Community Heritage” of the Centre of Excellence in Ancient Near Eastern Empires (ANEE, <https://www2.helsinki.fi/en/researchgroups/ancient-near-eastern-empires>) based at the University of Helsinki. Team 3 focuses on analyzing material culture to study past and present dynamics of empires in the Middle East and North Africa region, building on previous experience of the Finnish Jabal Harun project (FJHP) in which Mika Lavento was the survey team director (Kouki & Lavento 2013). One essential component of our research is to involve local communities to formulate research questions, develop a sustainable practice of archaeological engagement in the region and create a constructive debate regarding the preservation of material culture. The emphasis on engaging local communities ethically and meaningfully with their archaeological heritage has been a core element of the ANEE research plan from the initial application-writing stage to the present time (Fig. 30.1). Our community project plans to involve local communities in the Northern part of Jordan, specifically in the Tell Ya'moun region, in connection to our fieldwork, but also includes the creation of a museum exhibition in Finland on the impact of the Empires in the 1st millennium BCE and a series of spin-off projects focused on developing awareness in the Finnish public (Lorenzon & Miettunen 2020; Lorenzon et al. forthcoming).



Figure 30.1. ANEE Team 3 during an early trip in Jordan to initiate the community project. Photo A. Lahelma.

In the preliminary discussion with our partner at Yarmouk University, we agreed on the need to involve local communities in drafting our research questions and proposed activities. Initial steps were made but the project came to an abrupt stop due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Specifically, the pandemic affected our ability to travel and conduct fieldwork, creating an effective obstacle to our capacity to directly interact with local communities and be present in the field (Lorenzon & Miettunen 2020). As physical presence is particularly important in the initial steps of community-driven archaeological projects to be able to create effective, inclusive and long-lasting partnerships, our inability to do so has put the project in abeyance. The progress of the vaccination campaign both in Finland and in Jordan has allowed us to go back into planning and constructive interaction with local partners and communities. As a silver lining, the pandemic opened perspectives in using digital tools to interact and create new networks within our research group and wider public, pushing forward the need for open data and open-source policies in archaeological research (Marchetti et al. 2018).

The importance of making archaeological data openly available and easily accessible has been a topic of interest in the last decade and the increased use of new digital technologies has facilitated this process making open repositories more accurate and accessible (Kansa & Witcher-Kansa 2013). Although this is not the case for all archaeological projects, open science has become a pillar of most funding agencies as public funding should correspond to open access archaeological data as a matter of transparency and public accountability (Kansa & Witcher-Kansa 2013; Lorenzon & Nelson-Viljoen 2016; Marchetti et al. 2018). In community archaeology, creating open data can also incentivize local communities to look at heritage through different lenses and become an active mechanism of decolonization and local empowerment (Beck & Neylon 2012; Bernbeck & Pollock 2005; Lorenzon et al. forthcoming).

Advocating for open data and open science, the question of protection of cultural heritage arises as often this argument has been brought forward as a reason not to have archaeological sites part of the public domain (Bernbeck & Pollock 2005). This attitude clearly implies a negative view of local communities and their ability to exercise any agency towards their archaeological heritage, while in fact creating an actual gatekeeping attitude towards the data (Bernbeck & Pollock 2005; Abu-Khafajah 2010). Although these concerns must be taken seriously, especially regarding looting and trafficking of cultural heritage, we must not forget that the key point of community archaeology work is to fulfill public interest and connect the communities with their heritage. Decolonization of archaeological practices by advocating for a more inclusive and multivocal relationship with local communities fully addresses these two aspects of public engagement. Thus, communities should have a direct input on what cultural material should be defined as heritage, its management, preservation and eventual publication (Thomas 2014; Lorenzon et al. forthcoming;). Team 3 community project aims at creating open data repositories as well as collaborating with the local communities in Northern Jordan to advance the idea of cultural heritage as a source of empowerment, decolonization and sustainable developments to progress in partnership with Jordanian archaeologists and Tell Ya'moun local communities.

30.3 Case study 2: The Yamnaya Impact and the popularisation of science

The Yamnaya Impact on Prehistoric Europe (YMPACT) project is a European Research Council (ERC) Advanced grant that started in 2019 at the University of Helsinki. The project aims to delve

deep into the massive changes taking place in Europe during the 3rd millennium BCE focusing on Yamnaya burials in their westernmost distribution area, in current-day countries of Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, and Hungary, but also on their wider impact beyond the steppe-like landscapes of south-eastern Europe (Heyd 2011). The project is inter/cross-disciplinary, and besides the core funerary archaeology studies of the Yamnaya kurgans and their material culture several other components are involved. Bio-sciences, i.e. genetics/ancient DNA, bio-anthropology and isotope biogeochemistry analyses, provide information about the ancestry, physical appearance of individuals and population dynamics; diet, occupation and lifestyle of people buried under Yamnaya kurgans. Geo- and environmental sciences are contributing with palaeoclimatology, climate change research, soil formation processes and environmental chemistry in order to understand the interplay with the environment[i].

As a project funded by the ERC, outreach activities and public engagement are crucial to YMPACT[ii]. Communicating the aims and results of the project to wider audiences raises the specific challenges of public engagement of mortuary archaeology, since graves and human osteological remains are the main research focus (Williams & Atkin 2015). Furthermore, the project being interdisciplinary and involving bio- and geo-sciences, the existing gap between this highly specialized research and the general public needs to be bridged by making scientific results available in an accessible manner. Another concern is to familiarize the Finnish audience with research that is not focusing on Finland, but on south-eastern Europe. Finally, yet importantly, engaging with local communities that are impacted by research done within the project, especially archaeological excavations, was another aspect we focused on. In order to promote the research and engage the audience with the project a strategy following several directions was developed:

a. Social media channels

Activities (sampling, fieldwork, laboratory analyses) and results (publications, presentations in conferences) of the YMPACT project are communicated via the website of the project (see footnote i), but also using social media networks such as Facebook (the name of the page is: The Yamnaya Impact on Prehistoric Europe), Instagram and Twitter (username: yamnayaimpact). Additional materials are posted on the University of Helsinki social media channels as well, especially fieldwork experiences from Romania, in 2019, and Bulgaria, in 2021, with a gap in 2020 caused by the current Covid-19 pandemic. In this way, the project can share the fieldwork activities with a wider audience, and not only with people able to visit the sites.

b. Press/media coverage and public lectures

Adding to the social media channels presented above, research and results of the project have been covered by popular science journals in Finland and abroad. Several materials written in Finnish helped popularize Southeastern European archaeological research and activities of the project among the Finnish speaking audience. For example we have talked about the general scope of YMPACT[iii], presented the Yamnaya Interactions Conference organized in Helsinki in April 2019[iv], and students from the University of Helsinki have shared about their excavation experience in Romania[v]. Archaeological excavations conducted within the project are presented at the end of each year at the Arkeologian iltapäivä/Archaeology afternoon, a public event organized in Tiedekulma at the University of Helsinki and streamed live online.

However, given the current interest in archaeogenetics research and results regarding 3rd millennium BCE genetic changes in Europe, coverage of the topic of Yamnaya impact on prehistoric Europe is much wider. Articles have been published in popular science journals with a worldwide audience, such as *National Geographic*[vi] and *New Scientist*[vii], while the array of languages in which people can nowadays read popularization materials about Yamnaya covers most European countries. Additionally, a filming crew working on a documentary accompanied the project expedition in Mogila (Bulgaria) for several days in 2021.

c. Bonding with local communities

Fieldwork done within the project has so far included the archaeological excavation of burial mounds (kurgans) in Romania and Bulgaria. In 2019, excavations that lasted for one month were carried out in the locality of Boldești-Grădiște, Prahova County in Romania, in a small community of about 1800 people. During these weeks, the people from the village became interested in the excavation and since burial mounds are common presences in the regional landscape, it was an opportunity to engage the local community with the materiality of their archaeological heritage: kurgans, graves and osteological human remains. This could enhance the understanding of the landscape and maybe even its protection, given that the mound that was researched had been earlier in danger of being destroyed by illegal excavations (Frînculeasa et al. 2020). During the entire month we received visits at the site from people living in Boldești and Grădiște villages. Furthermore, this interest led to a collaboration between members of the YMPACT team and teachers from the local school, organizing together activities meant to make archaeology more popular among primary-school pupils. A visit to the site was organized for them to be introduced to the practice of archaeological excavation and a short bio-archaeology workshop was held at the school, with Martin Trautmann, the anthropologist of the project explaining the methods of analyzing osteological human remains (Fig. 30.2). The project's fieldwork in Romania was covered by the main news televisions[viii], but also several journals, increasing the local and national visibility of research.



Figure 30.2. YMPACT team members giving an introduction to bio-archaeology and archaeology to primary-school pupils from Boldești-Grădiște. Photo C. Barlaboi.

30.4 Case study 3: Lapland's Dark Heritage and public archaeology in Finland

Community and public archaeology in Finland have also been developing positively over the past decades (e.g. Äikäs et al. 2016; Soininen 2018). The fact that public archaeology is becoming more

significant for archaeological practice in Finland is also demonstrated by the presence, since 2017, of a dedicated funding stream provided by the Finnish Cultural Foundation called “Mullankaivajat” (En: “Dirt diggers”, a play on words from “kullankaivajat” meaning “gold diggers”). The discussions before this call was first announced, which so far focuses on giving small grants to enable archaeological work that engages schoolchildren in Finland, indicate that an increase in Finnish academic engagement with public archaeology research had likely influenced the development of this and other initiatives due to the raised profile afforded to public archaeology in Finland.

Archaeologists and cultural heritage scholars at the University of Helsinki, in collaboration with researchers from the University of Oulu, were involved in an Academy of Finland project from 2014 to 2018, which incorporated methods from archaeology, ethnology, museum studies and geography alongside a very visible public archaeology element. Called “Lapland’s Dark Heritage: Material heritage of German WWII military presence in Finnish Lapland”, or Lapland’s Dark Heritage for short (e.g. Koskinen-Koivisto & Thomas 2017), the project was groundbreaking in the context of Finland for not only including public archaeology from the outset as a core goal and method of an academic research project, but also for the attention it gained both nationally and internationally.

In field seasons in 2016, 2017 and 2018 the research team opened up excavations in Inari and Hyljelahti, inviting would-be volunteers to register their interest to participate online. The appetite for an opportunity to engage with archaeology of the Second World War in Lapland (or perhaps just to engage with archaeology of anything!) was so that registration filled within hours each time the call was announced. Participants included a mixture of local residents and those who had travelled further afield, for example from southern and central Finland and even in one case from Sweden. The voluntary archaeologists (Fig. 3) received introductory training on-site and constant supervision from the research team, including also public archaeology specialists from the UK, Canada, Brazil and elsewhere as well as the Finnish team. Students from the University of Helsinki and other universities also took part in the project, with some going on to write their MA theses on material from Lapland’s Dark Heritage (e.g. Hekkurainen 2018; Suutari 2018).

One successful way in which Lapland’s Dark Heritage field seasons in particular reached audiences beyond those in the locale, was through intensive use of social media. With a dedicated blog, Facebook page, Twitter account and Instagram account, the project garnered followers and interactions from across the world. Entries have been primarily in English and Finnish, but the project has also included information in Northern Sámi. It was clear that the visuality of the project lent itself particularly well to social media, with images of objects such as frostbite salve and mosquito spray (with the brand of the German Wehrmacht clearly visible) proved popular with social media followers, as well as images of recognizable conflict heritage features such as wartime trenches and foxholes. A hashtag of #InariDig allowed for Twitter and Instagram updates to be easily found (Fig. 30.3). In addition, the project produced several short videos, available on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC6NjPopBtMEIzuCJvDdl5UA>).

In the second field season, investigating a possible prisoner-of-war camp in Hyljelahti (although it transpired during the excavation that the actual PoW camp was likely in a slightly different location than originally thought), one particularly curious discovery made with the public archaeology volunteers led to an unexpected opportunity to put social media connections to good use in order to solve a mystery. Archaeologist Oula Seitsonen, having drawn blanks with enquiries to academic specialists, turned to a Facebook group in order to find out if non-professional or amateur enthusiasts might be able to help him with identifying some fragments of vinyl records that had been uncovered. The pieces found in Hyljelahti included a fragment with a master number. Seitsonen shared this to a Facebook group interested in German Second World War records, who were able to identify that the fragment came from a recording of “Eine kleine Mondscheinfahrt” (En: “A small moonlight trip”)



Figure 30.3. #InariDig public archaeology participants in the 2016 season - excavating a wartime military hospital site close to the Siida museum in Inari. Photo S. Thomas.

sung by Rosita Serrano – a Chilean singer popular in Germany at that time. This was one organic crowdsourcing example in which the knowledge of enthusiastic hobbyists – situated far from Lapland physically – was able to contribute information that could not be found otherwise. Thus, we gained an idea of at least some of the music being listened to – the soundscape – of Hyljelahti site during the Second World War. (A fuller description of this instance available at <https://blogs.helsinki.fi/lapland-dark-heritage/2017/12/05/first-record-mystery-solved-ensimmainen-levynysteeri-ratkaistu/>).

Although the Lapland's Dark Heritage project has now ended, individuals involved with the original project continue to explore research possibilities to continue avenues that were opened up by the project. Furthermore, it seems to be becoming more common in the years following this project for public archaeology to be included as an essential element of archaeological research, as with the other two case studies mentioned in this chapter.

30.5 Future perspective: Public engagement in archaeology at the University of Helsinki

These three diverse case studies present a range of engagement modalities that scholars from the University of Helsinki have employed in developing inclusive public engagements in their archaeological projects. The capability to adapt to different geographical areas, audiences, forms of interactions (i.e., social media, face to face contact, digital app) and successfully network with local communities well showcase the development of Finnish community archaeology and its meaningful impact on the discipline. While the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted our work, it has also pushed us to find new ways to interact with each other and with communities, helping us to develop new forms of social interaction to engage the public in our research. As scholars who chose to come to Finland from abroad

to practice our archaeology, we have had the benefit of being involved with high profile research that has not only advanced knowledge but also found multiple ways of engaging different groups and individuals – both in Finland and elsewhere. The environment of Archaeology at the University of Helsinki, under Professor Mika Lavento's gentle and supportive leadership, has proven a welcoming forum for innovating in public archaeology.

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[i] <https://www2.helsinki.fi/en/researchgroups/the-yamnaya-impact-on-prehistoric-europe>

[ii] <https://erc.europa.eu/managing-your-project/communicating-your-research>

[iii] https://www.tiede.fi/artikkeli/tilaajille/olemme-jamnakansan-jalkelaisia?fbclid=IwAR1Jl32QCZK4-jBJ_1a_mQnWG-ddpiox6uFfOScceZD7U58R34e68PJ-t83I

[iv] <https://kalmistopiiri.fi/2019/05/27/international-workshop-yamnaya-interactions-25-26-4-2019-hautatutkimusta-eurooppalaiseen-tapaan/>

[v] https://kalmistopiiri.fi/2020/12/01/alla-aroauringon-helsingin-yliopiston-arkeologian-opiskelijoiden-kokemuksia-kaivauksista-romaniassa/?fbclid=IwAR0VpdKYzMR62AGWYjVMJJ40ZMYXpidRIL_4QNFw2_UMD3F-ncuQsb-vY_P4

[vi] <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/first-europeans-immigrants-genetic-testing-feature>

[vii] <https://www.newscientist.com/article/mg24132230-200-story-of-most-murderous-people-of-all-time-revealed-in-ancient-dna/>

[viii] <https://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/stiinta/descoperire-arheologica-uluitoare-in-romania-specialistii-straini-au-venit-sa-vada.html>