

REVITALIZATION OF THE EARLY IRON AGE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE OF SÜTTŐ: Developing an archaeological-cultural educational trail

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INTRODUCTION

Even today, the slowly disappearing mounds that rise from cultivated fields, as well as the former fortified settlements surrounded by earthen ramparts above the steep riverbanks that are now used as hayfields recall the intensive prehistoric use of the loess plateau around the present-day village of Süttő. Finds and relics are known in the area from the Neolithic era, the Early, Middle and Late Bronze Age, the Iron Age and the Roman period. The most spectacular monuments, which introduced striking changes to the landscape, can be linked to the Bronze and the Early Iron Age. In the area of Nagysáncetető, there is a fortified hilltop settlement, established probably in the Bronze Age and used in the Early Iron Age, too. During the latter period the nearby tumuli, which are partly still visible, were erected (*Fig. 1*).



Fig. 1. Aerial photograph of the Süttő Early Iron Age archaeological site complex, with the Gerecse Mountains in the background. 25 June 2018 (photograph: Zoltán Czajlik)

The archaeological site complex has been known and researched since the 1930s, possibly due to the visible Iron Age landscape elements (CZAJLIK et al. 2015). In the second half of the 20th century, Erzsébet Patek and Amália Mozsolics led a minor excavation here; later, the topographical research conducted by István Horváth and István Torma presented a more complex understanding of the prehistory of the plateau and its surroundings. The most important results are linked to the excavations undertaken by Gábor Vékony and Éva Vadász between 1978 and 1990. As a result of these investigations, it became clear that the population of the Early Iron Age Hallstatt culture inhabited two hilltop settlements on the plateau (Nagysáncetető and Nagysánc) in the period of 750–600 BC, and they buried their dead in the nearby cemeteries, in flat graves and tumuli (HORVÁTH et al. 1979, 311–313; VADÁSZ 1983; VADÁSZ 1986; KOVÁCS 1988).

Research into the site received new impetus in the 2010s, and it became one of the key topics of the European *Interreg Danube Transnational Programme*. This program of the European Union, which had the objective of researching the monumental landscape elements of the Early Iron Age in the Middle Danube Basin with the cooperation of various institutions from five countries, operated between 2017 and 2019 and it was co-funded by Hungary. In addition to the comprehensive topographical research, the project analyzed nine key sites (in the territories of Austria, Slovenia, Croatia and Hungary), including that of Süttő. The aim of the various interdisciplinary investigations was to map the individual site complexes and the micro-regions surrounding them (CZAJLIK et al., 2018; CZAJLIK et al., 2019). Alongside the archaeological research, the program placed great emphasis on social utility, that is, on providing access to the research results for the scientific and the non-scientific community, and particularly on linking the sites to cultural tourism.

CULTURAL TOURISM AND REVITALIZATION – THE IRON-AGE-DANUBE PROJECT

Cultural and archaeological heritage has played an increasingly important role within the context of 21st-century tourism (HARRISON 2013; JÁSZBERÉNYI 2014). The Iron-Age-Danube project, building upon the

principles formulated in the *European Heritage Strategy for the 21st Century*, is aimed at creating plans and taking actions in the selected micro-regions in order to revitalize prehistoric cultural landscapes.

This project originally included nine Hallstatt-period sites in Austria, Slovenia, Croatia and Hungary (Großklein and Strettweg in Austria, Poštela and Dolenjske Toplice in Slovenia, Kaptol and Jalžabet in Croatia, and Százhalombatta, Sopron and Süttő in Hungary). There were different challenges in the preparation of the revitalization plans that needed to be overcome at each of these sites, since archaeological parks and educational trails already existed at certain sites (e.g. Százhalombatta, JEREM et al., 2010), while others lack any touristic infrastructure.

In every case, virtual and on-site solutions were expected from the project, and at the same time the least invasive actions were preferred, keeping in mind the preservation of the heritage.

The prehistoric monuments of Süttő were not only known for professionals, but the local community also knew a little about them, although there is still no local museum or small exhibit to display the archaeological heritage.

In addition to scientific research, assessing the local possibilities as well as the building of relationships with the landowners, the local government and cultural associations, and thus with the residents of Süttő themselves, was amongst the most important steps for the realization of the plan. The primary goal when drafting the recommendations was to present both the visible and non-visible elements of the archaeological heritage, providing accessible and reliable knowledge, protecting the cultural heritage and performing actions that would not affect the appearance of the landscape.

The revitalization plan was elaborated by colleagues at the Eötvös Loránd University, Faculty of the Humanities, Institute of Archaeology, working alongside the researchers of the Hungarian National Museum, Department of Archaeological Heritage Protection.

POSSIBILITIES OF INTEGRATING SÜTTŐ INTO TOURISM

There are certain factors and conditions at each site that are of key significance not only from the perspective of heritage tourism, but for all kinds of tourism. The village of Süttő is located on the Danube bank in Komárom-Esztergom County in the Northern Transdanubia region. It is situated in a picturesque natural environment between the slopes of the Gerecse Mountains and the Danube and has a population of about 2,000 inhabitants. According to statistical data, the settlement and the Central Transdanubian region itself are not amongst the most popular tourism destinations for either foreigners or domestic travellers,¹ and furthermore, the cities of the region (e.g. Komárom, Esztergom or Tata) easily exceed Süttő in name recognition and the number of visitors. Despite this, there are possibilities in the village and in its immediate vicinity, which, if linked, could make Süttő into a recognizable, attractive touristic destination.

Good infrastructure is essential for exploiting touristic potentials. It is most easy to get to the present-day village by car; Highway 10 crosses the riverside part of Süttő. Unfortunately, train traffic is not significant, with only two trains stopping at the stations here. A possible alternative is provided by long-distance bus lines, connecting Süttő with the surrounding towns. From the perspective of visitors, it will also be possible to count on bicycle traffic, if the section of the EuroVelo6 cycling route, which will link the Atlantic Ocean to the Black Sea, running along the right bank of the Danube between Bratislava and Esztergom, is completed.

The Early Iron Age site is located atop the loess plateau on the western side of the village on the border of Neszmély – in part extending over into Neszmély – on private property that is used for agriculture. Presently only one dirt road leads safely there, which in good weather conditions seems to be passable for pedestrians, cars and bicycles, although due to the cultivation it is mostly used by heavy vehicles.

Süttő is bounded by the slopes of the Gerecse Mountains to the south and by the Danube and its numerous islands to the north. The Danube and its floodplain are nature conservation areas of great signifi-

¹ Cf. Central Statistical Agency data: https://turizmus.com/html/data/cikk/116/5169/cikk_1165169/ksh_2018.pdf (accessed 6 February 2020).



Fig. 2. The Danube at Süttő (photograph: Tamás Novinszki)

cance, while the Gerecse Mountains with the high riverbank are Natura 2000 special bird conservation areas with a unique flora and fauna. Therefore, Süttő and its vicinity can provide a good setting for various outdoor activities for nature lovers (hiking, camping, boating), although the designated tourist routes do not pass through Süttő and the area of the Iron Age site, just the neighbouring towns. Moreover, it is also of significance that this micro-region is a destination for wine and hunting tourism as well (Fig. 2).

Besides, the village can also be proud of a few beautiful and interesting historical relics. The 18th-century Saint Leopold Church (Fig. 3) and Saint Helena Chapel can be visited; the 400–450-year-old Rákóczi Linden and the Small-Gauge Railway Memorial Site in the village centre are also hard to avoid. The latter pays tribute to what was once one of our country's most significant small-gauge railways, which linked the forests of the area. There are also two imposing manor houses (the 18th-century Reviczky Manor and the 20th-century Serédi Palace) on the outskirts of the town (in private ownership).



Fig. 3. The tower of the Saint Leopold Church (photograph: Zoltán Czajlik)

THE REVITALIZATION PLAN FOR THE EARLY IRON AGE REMAINS

Beside the survey of the area and the scientific research, we were seeking to build an active relationship between the locals and the archaeological site, as well as to develop a plan encompassing the tourist attractions in the neighbourhood.

Through the several years of research, it was possible to form a close connection with the landowner and the local government, and we tried to link the archaeological activities in the field with local community events. Included in this was that in both years we invited the schoolteachers and students from Süttő and the vicinity (Neszmély, Lábatlan) as well as interested adults and representatives of the press to the site, where we organized several open-house events. The visitors to the excavation could not only look into the open trenches and see the work going on in them but could also tour the entire archaeological site complex, guided by archaeologists. The events drew great interest in both years (Fig. 4).

Proposing the plan of an archaeological educational path was also amongst the goals of the project. The largest problem connected with this is that the territory of the entire archaeological site complex is in private ownership and under cultivation. This restricted not only the possible routes of the trail, but



Fig. 4. Visitors at an open-house day in Süttő (2018)
(photograph: Eszter Fejér)

also the placement of potential information materials. Thanks to cooperation with the owner of the area, certain sections of the cultural educational path could be laid alongside the cultivated areas. The five stations planned on the loess plateau would present the Early Iron Age remains and some elements of the research. Plans for richly illustrated information boards in Hungarian and English have been prepared, and these present images about the Early Iron Age hilltop settlements, the results of the excavations conducted there, the materials from the excavated flat graves, the construction of the tumuli, the landscape archaeological research performed, and the non-invasive archaeological methods used (Fig. 5). However, at the end the planned boards could not be set up at the site for several reasons. On the one hand, the project failed to finance the

actual construction of the educational path, and on the other, we wanted to avoid installing disturbing elements in the landscape. At this point, we were able to call upon another output of the Iron-Age-Danube project for assistance, which is an application developed for mobile phones. We uploaded all the data of the planned archaeological trail (GPS points, tracks, images, texts and 3D information) onto the Iron-Age-Danube GUIDE@HAND application (PÁLINKÁS et al., 2019). This mobile phone guide application that can be downloaded for free and be used both online and offline makes it possible to transfer our knowledge to those interested on site, but without signage that does not fit in with the surroundings.



Süttő-Nagysánc

Süttő-Sáncföldek régészeti tanösvény 1.





A két magaslati település (piros) térképen és madártávlatból (foto: Czajlik Z.)
The two hilltop settlements (red) on map and from the air (photo: Z. Czajlik)



Nagysánc és Nagysáncető napjainkban. (foto: Novinszki T.)
Nagysánc and Nagysáncető today (photo: T. Novinszki)



A Nagysáncető bejárata (balra) az erődített sánc és annak ásatása, valamint a vaskori erődítés rekonstrukciója. (foto és rajz: Vékony G., Vadász É. (1982), Novinszki-Groma K.)
The entrance (left), the fortification of Nagysáncető and its reconstruction (photo and drawing: G. Vékony - É. Vadász (1982), K. Novinszki-Groma)



Ásatás Nagysáncetőn az 1980-as években. Egy feltárt vaskori ház (lent) és restaurált edények a lelőhelyről (foto: Vékony G., Vadász É.)
Excavation at Nagysáncető in the 1980-s. Remains of an unearthed iron Age house (down) and restored vessels from the site (photo: G. Vékony - É. Vadász)



Nagysánc a vasút felől nézve (foto: Vékony G., Vadász É.)
View to Nagysánc from the railway (photo: G. Vékony - É. Vadász)



A Nagysáncető bejárata (balra) az erődített sánc és annak ásatása, valamint a vaskori erődítés rekonstrukciója. (foto és rajz: Vékony G., Vadász É. (1982), Novinszki-Groma K.)
The entrance (left), the fortification of Nagysáncető and its reconstruction (photo and drawing: G. Vékony - É. Vadász (1982), K. Novinszki-Groma)



Kora vaskori kerámia darabjai az ásatás anyagából (foto: Novinszki-Groma K.)
Early Iron Age sherds from the material of the excavation (photo: K. Novinszki-Groma)



Bronzkori edények Nagysáncető lelőhelyéről és a bronzkori erődítés rekonstrukciója. (Rajz: Kovács 1988, Vékony-Vadász 1982)
Bronze Age vessels from Nagysáncető and the reconstruction of the Bronze Age fortification (Drawing: Kovács 1988, Vékony - Vadász 1982)



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The entrance (left), the fortification of Nagysáncető and its reconstruction (photo and drawing: G. Vékony - É. Vadász (1982), K. Novinszki-Groma)



A Vaskor Duna projekt a Duna Transznacionális Együttműködési Program keretében, az Európai Regionális Fejlesztési Alap támogatásával, az Európai Unió és a Magyar Állam társfinanszírozásával valósul meg. (The Iron-Age-Danube project is implemented under the Danube Transnational Programme (DTP), funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and co-funded by Hungary.) (ERDF: 206000, DTP-1-1-240-2-2)



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HUNGARIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM

Fig. 5. One of the information boards for the planned archaeological educational trail (Eszter Fejér – Katalin Novinszki-Groma)

This educational path is supplemented or introduced by two information boards that were installed in the centre of Süttő in November of 2019 (NOVINSZKI-GROMA, 2019). These display general information on the archaeological and cultural relics of Süttő, and also have a QR code that leads people to the aforementioned application for the 6–7 km long tour.

The actions taken to revitalize the Süttő site outlined here represent the start of a long-term, multistage process. The development of infrastructure that is essential for success in realizing the plan goes far beyond the framework of an archaeological project, but the results up to this point clearly show that there is a demand for becoming acquainted with archaeological heritage and cultural tourism also in this area.

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