

REPORT ON THE FIRST NATIONAL COMMUNITY ARCHAEOLOGY CONFERENCE

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Community archaeology researchers and curious civilians came together in the assembly room of the city hall of Szentendre on 12–13 November 2021, on the first nationwide Community Archaeology Conference (Fig. 1). The event was hosted by the Local Government of Szentendre and organized by the Ferenczy Museum Centre and the Community Archaeology Association. The Hungarian Association of Archaeologists and the Hungarian Society of Archaeology and Art History contributed to the preparations of the event as co-organizers. The conference was in the focus of avid attention, more than 110 people visited the venue during the two days, and due to live streaming, several dozen online viewers joined in as well. The significance of the event is marked by the fact, that live streams and videos published on social media platforms were viewed by thousands in the short time that passed since the meeting.



Fig. 1. The poster of the conference

The primary goal of the conference was to bring together researchers and civilians involved, in a forum of countrywide relevance, providing opportunity for introductions and communication, as well as fostering discussions. Community archaeology in Hungary was bolstered by impulses outside the professional sphere, and it has been developing ever since, through a series of successful collaborations with civilians throughout the country. It keeps on shaping in response to various non-professional requests and even today it lacks universal protocols. Due to increasing attention and activity, it has a highly eventful and colourful story, consisting of a chain of consecutive and interrelated field archaeology projects and their museum-re-

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lated aftermath. From a perspective of multiple years, the main trends and milestones of this complex process can be discerned. Research programmes sprung to life from sporadic actions and experimental fieldwork. Every project, every story and every challenge has lessons of its own. The aim of the conference was to register and digest these new impressions, to think them through and discuss them together, and progress after a professional standpoint was created. There are experiences worth sharing and protocols worth unifying. The high number of participating colleagues attests, that the profession has realized the potential of community archaeology and is open towards acquainting itself with and applying this new method of research.

On the first day we were presented methodological lectures. On the second day actual research results achieved together with non-professionals were recounted on one hand by fellow archaeologists, and on the other hand, by a joyfully large number of civilians who partook in the research. A total of 23 presentations were held during the course of the two days (<https://www.femuz.hu/kozossegi-regeszeti-konferencia-program/>; recorded videos are available on the [Facebook page](#) of the Community Archaeology Association). Unfortunately some presentations were cancelled due to illnesses and the pandemic. In the first session, fellow archaeologists from different parts of Hungary presented and evaluated the position of their respective institutions and the challenges faced on the field of community archaeology. Most presentations were held by associates from municipal museums with county level jurisdiction: Frigyes Szücsi presented the programmes of Fejér county, Gábor Bakos those of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county, István Eke those of Zala county, Attila Czövek those of Tolna county and Tibor Ákos Rácz those of Pest county, which hosted the event. The area thus “covered”, constitutes almost a quarter of the entire country, with other promising initiatives known to be going on elsewhere. These talks revealed, that in the past five years community archaeology became systematic, yet professional challenges differ from region to region. Nonetheless, every presentation factually justified the utility of nonprofessional contributions in heritage protection as well as countering illegal metal detecting and the illicit trade of artifacts. In most of these counties, initiatives came from civilians, yet it was exciting to hear, that it is not always so. In Zala county for example, the museum announced a public call-to-action for joint work, which was answered by a fewer and narrower social group than in Pest, Fejér or Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén counties. Telling data from Frigyes Szücsi and Gábor Bakos revealed that their collaborators did not necessary came from their respective counties. It seems, the interest from the civic sphere is much greater in volume, than what the institutions working in a county framework can support at the moment. It is worth noting, that on a general level, archaeologists working in regional museums did not volunteer for presentations, although it could have led to a helpful discussion on how an institution with limited resources might benefit from a collaboration initiated by non-professionals. Concerning potential solutions, Tamás Péterváry, Zoltán Rózsa and István Vida raised theoretic points in their joint presentation. The speakers outlined a possible model for a centrally managed, countrywide coordinating institution, as well as its major tasks, plausibly a prelude to the strategy of the Hungarian National Museum.

Methodological questions in a broader sense, less closely related to community archaeology were discussed in the second half of the first day. We were presented legal case studies concerning treasure troves, from the decrees of Roman law up to present day legislation. The talk by Eszter Szatmáriné Bakonyi and Eszter Tóth focused on fundamental questions of restoration and artifact preservation. A presentation by József Laszlovszky revealed the role community archaeology plays in the remarkably complex research of the battlefield of Muhi, which involves numerous different disciplines. It touched upon the position community archaeology, and discussed how the work of professionals and civilians joins together, comprising a single extensive research body of numerous branches. The last presentation of the day demonstrated how an IT specialist as a volunteer might contribute to the operation of an Austrian archaeological park with digital techniques.

On the eve of the first day, visiting the temporary exhibition titled “Treasure hunting, adventure, science. Community archaeology projects in Pest county” and the formal presentation of the printed catalogue with the same title, were complementary programmes to the conference. It was not only the curator who guided visitors in the exhibition spaces, but colleagues too who participated in building the exhibits or

related research projects. Associates from several participating institutions expressed their wishes to borrow certain artifacts from the exhibition representing research from Pest county and the display seemed to encourage visiting professionals to organize similar events. The catalogue of the exhibition was appraised by Gabriella Kulcsár, director of the Institute of Archaeology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (the edited text of the book presentation is available in this issue).

Posters were presented together with the catalogue. Authors summarized their research or thoughts on community archaeology in 5–10 minutes. It is worth noting, that in this section, mostly non-professionals presented the results of their scientific research and the outcome of their collaboration with heritage protection institutes. The Paleolithic was also represented there: civilian researcher Attila Péntek and archaeologists András Markó and Krisztián Zandler presented their research aimed at mapping previously unknown sites. The poster by Bálint Havasi and Livia Simmer recounted the research of Pauline monasteries in Zala county, which began as a local nonprofessional excavation initiative and developed into a veritable programme. Anita Kocsis created a poster on the georadar survey of a Roman villa at Dorog. Hella Mag, Balázs Nagy and István Kóka demonstrated the community archaeology collaboration behind a coin and treasure hoard from the time of Béla IV of Hungary discovered at Szokolya. Tibor Győri, who has been working with elementary school students, engaging them in excavations, presented his experiences and the importance of his work. Regarding the poster of Zoltán Vilnis, the citation of the title is sufficient “From community archaeology to vocation”.

The first two presentations of the second day guided participants into the world of Paleolithic research. This epoch was evoked both in talks and on posters, reflecting the increasing role committed non-professionals play in related research, by way of discovering numerous new sites for archaeological sciences. The talk by Gábor Váczi and Gábor Szabó discussed examples from Bronze age research. The presentation by Gábor Váczi was a telling example why it is necessary to examine an area as many times as possible. How can one hope to at least partially restore former archaeological structures, past activities and rites (e.g. Bronze age scattered burned remains), which would be utterly lost during the shearing away of the topsoil on a development-led excavations, without the systematic collection and precise localization of stray metal finds? Gábor Szabó presented two research programmes: one was a series of events aimed at researching and rescuing Bronze age hoards, which has already been concluded. The other is an ongoing research revolving around Iron age sieges. Both yielded spectacular results, yet they differed in terms of applied methods. In the latter programme, civilian collaboration played an increasing role. There were also two presentations concerning the Roman era. Alexandra Kiss presented the current state of the excavation at Bodajk, where field walks were complemented with metal detecting and geophysical prospection. This presentation called attention to the following dilemma: two Late Roman belt buckles discovered via metal detecting turned out to originate from the same grave. Although the two finds were dislodged from their original setting, this led to the discovery and excavation of a grave, thus the remaining part of belt outfitted with numerous fittings, was documented in situ, ultimately saving it from complete annihilation by next year’s ploughing. Opinions were voiced on how and when a leading researcher should follow-up the discovery of a find cluster during metal detecting fieldwork, with a rescue excavation. István Steuer, who collaborates with county museums in Pest county and Jász-Nagykun county, shared the results of his own research, based on the analysis of numerous coins discovered in the vicinity of the assumed line of the Csörsz Trench.

The following three presentations evoked the Árpád era. Anna Herbst recounted an intriguing object, a so-called “virtue plate” (a bowl depicting the figures of the cardinal virtues) discovered at a site identified by volunteers near Pusztavacs. A case study by Zoltán Rózsa, Judit Szigeti and István Vida presented a joint rescue excavation between the Buda Castle Heritage Management Ltd. and the Hungarian National Museum at Kisbárkány. The topic of this talk was rather methodological: the site was registered by multiple researchers and although they documented their findings, the site was not recorded in the central registry. The presentation also brought to light the difficulties of communication between different, yet otherwise perfectly functional community archaeology programmes. Afterwards Orsolya Gálvölgyi and Balázs Tóth presented the circumstances of discovery concerning a Late Árpád period coin and treasure hoard alongside

its evaluation. The last section included another talk related to numismatics: Balázs Nagy presented the new results of his research on the coin hoards of Pest county hidden after the defeat of the Hungarian army in the Battle of Mohács in 1526. Boglárka Debródi approached these questions from the point of cultural heritage research, comparing the Hungarian collaboration between archaeologists and civilians for rescuing the castle of Szádvár with a similar Spanish excavation that also used volunteers. János Dobos gave an account of the Szádvár project, which was launched following a civilian initiative and has been ongoing for fifteen years, and has recently won an award. The final presentation gave an account of the research of the Chapel of the Holy Cross on Nagy-Eged Hill at Eger. Although not an archaeological site in terms of current legislation, it can be surveyed (also) by archaeological methods.

The event concluded with a panel discussion, with select speakers focusing on the most pressing topics of the conference and in a broader sense, community archaeology. Some lessons were phrased, yet the discussion focused mainly on the future of community archaeology. The straightforward issues of the moderated discussion alongside valuable comments from the audience acutely reflected diverse viewpoints, differences registered on a national level, exceptional successes and shortcomings, as well as concerns about future development and institutionalisation. There is no consensus concerning the coordination of these generally bottom-up initiatives, neither their potential central organization, nor the addressing or including of institutions with archaeological catchment areas, that at the moment neglect community archaeology. Nor is there agreement on how the government should engage or whether it should at all.

This was an experimental conference, much more an extended workshop, than a series of presentations. It consisted of avid discussions, numerous comments, nonetheless it took place in good spirit. The issues that surfaced during the conference evoked further shared thinking, which participants shall continue in workshops, that are becoming a tradition so to speak. The impacts of the conference are manifold. Agreements were reached both between institutions and individual researchers concerning the launching and continuing of community archaeology programmes. Methodological progress is as important as the coordination of fieldwork: dedicated researchers present each other with different, yet working models, effectively overcoming the initial difficulties of newly established programmes.