

HOW IT'S MADE? ARCHAEOLOGICAL PARKS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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The workshop on the research, protection, and presentation of archaeological sites, organised jointly by the ELTE–RCH Archaeological Institute and the Hungarian Association of Archaeologists and Art Historians, was held on 10 November 2025. The need for such a forum – for creating a space of discourse among professionals – arose during the discussion of the numerous unresolved issues related to the community archaeological research and presentation of the Roman villa estate at Hosszúhetény (Baranya County).

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- What principles should be followed when starting an archaeological research, if the creation of an archaeological park is also one of the goals?
- How can the local or wider community be involved?
- How should we think about a ‘good’ place or a ‘backwater’ location?
- What constitutes an exciting, informative exhibition space today?
- How can we use the achievements of the 21st century in all this?
- And how can all this be achieved sustainably, so that we don’t just leave a ‘problem’ behind?

The basic ideas of the workshop began to take shape in parallel with the research of the Roman *villa* site of Hosszúhetény (Baranya County), where the beauty of the surrounding landscape, its hidden openness, the inevitability of preserving the ruins, and the strength of the community shaped our ideas about how it is worth starting to explore historical monuments in a way that guarantees the safety of the remains. Where should we draw the line between showing the spirit of a place and hiding its tangible past? How should we see the big picture when we only know a few details – while we see that our knowledge can be expanded continuously and often in huge steps? Is it possible to provide an attraction, an experience, and a story in a way that every step we take is reversible, transformable, even completely demountable, does not damage the ruins, but is captivating and attractive in its details?

The methodology of archaeological research, the quantity and quality of information that can be extracted, the possibilities of preserving and displaying ruins, as well as site management are constantly evolving fields. The aim of the workshop was to give a platform for the experiences and emerging thoughts that are often only shared in a narrow circle, and to launch a broad discourse on the topic through presentations of ongoing research and a roundtable discussion. Although this introductory initiative primarily addressed projects dealing with the Roman period, it still wanted to address the issue in a much more general way, as developing directions and good practices requires the active participation of representatives of archaeology, architecture, and monument protection and management.

In the first part of the [programme](#), participants could listen to eight lectures. The topic of the workshop was explicated in an opening lecture summarising the research of the Roman *villa* site of Hosszúhetény and the issues of transforming it into an archaeological park (Máté Szabó – Gergely Sági – Natália Ferenczi – Viktória Gyömbér). The 1940 included an intent to transform the unearthed ruins into an archaeological park, at least as indicated by the surviving correspondence between excavation leader János Dombay and István Paulovics (LENGVÁRI 1998, 335–336). That, however, has not been realised eventually, and the unburied ruins have become severely damaged since. New plans to save, re-document and preserve them in 2018 were soon overridden by the local government and the emerging civil community, who demanded

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Fig. 1. Hosszúhetény, a Roman villa in the middle of nowhere

the utilization and presentation of the site. The owners, the Sáfár family, donated the plot of the main *villa* building to the local government, and **received** the Imre Henszlmann Prize in 2024 for saving the main building and for the selfless donation. Thus, Dombay's initiative could be progressed and developed into a presentation concept. Research on the site could be continued in small steps in recent years as the available resources, grants, and the work of our enthusiastic volunteers allowed it, which provided an opportunity to think carefully, rather than rushing, about the possibilities and limitations of presenting the site and the emerging questions and problems—these were discussed in detail in the workshop presentation (*Fig. 1*).

The first session included presentations on sites in a similar research and concept development phase: Zsolt Mráv shared with the audience the plans for the excavation and presentation of the late Roman luxury villa in Nagyharsány (Baranya County), a site similar in space and time; Bence Simon and Lőrinc Timár presented the evolving presentation plans for the remains of a Roman settlement located in a forest on the outskirts of Pilisszentiván (Pest County); while Katalin Boruzs described the situation of the late Roman fortress located on Sibrik Hill in Visegrád (Pest County), which functioned as the comital seat in the early Middle Ages. The common point in the research and presentation of sites with different ownership structures and touristic features was the strong civic background, which typically manifests itself in the intention to assist the research with voluntary work. The projects, independent of each other, outlined similar ideas of modern presentation with the least possible intervention, keeping in mind site preservation and researchability.

The second session comprised lectures on projects in a more advanced state of research and presentation work were presented. First, Orsolya Láng and Adrienne Szalkai shared their alternative ideas for the development of the park that is the western part of the Aquincum civil town today, an unbuilt but also abandoned area (Budapest). Orsolya Heinrich-Tamáskai presented the concept developed for the late antique site of Keszthely–Fenékpuszt (Zala County), which has an outstanding tourist potential, while Orsolya Szilágyi showed how the archaeological park in Mikháza (Maros County, Romania) was established and

developed—an example mentioned multiple times during the workshop as one worth learning from. The closing presentation of the section was given by Tibor Rácz, who illustrated the exemplary implementation of the plans to develop a site from a different era: the research on the Árpád Age church of Kiskunlacháza (Pest County), initiated and implemented by the local government and community, and the creation of the belonging archaeological park.

Although these projects are in different stages of development, the research of all is relatively advanced and, accordingly, planning and implementation for preserving and presenting the related ruins are too. In the case of every site, it is important to have adequate archaeological information for implementation and to create a presentation plan acceptable and supportable for the local community (which is often not an easy task). The key importance of having the support of the owners, maintainers and, increasingly, the civil community for the development of archaeological parks has become clear lately. All presentations highlighted in relation to the success of implementation of any plan the importance of dialogue and openness, and that the related tasks include establishing balance, adapting site conditions to the needs of customers and visitors, and facilitating the creation of concept plan(s).

The presentations highlighting the possibilities and problems of developing exhibition venues created a good basis for continuing the discourse in the framework of the afternoon roundtable discussion moderated by archaeologist and museologist Orsolya Láng, archaeologist Bálint Havasi, expert on community museums and museum marketing, and architect Zsolt Vasáros. The dynamics of the discussion gave good example of the transformation of the topic, as well as the emergence of new ideas and opportunities.

While the representatives of different disciplines have numerous ideas, suggestions, and even implemented examples, their integration and application have not yet taken place; there is also room to develop how this knowledge is conveyed to the clients, maintainers, and visitors. Many people still think of open-air exhibition spaces as visible, solidly structured ruins, which can also raise problems from the perspective of site protection, research, maintenance, and didactics, while transforming and communicating this conceptual background poses serious challenges.

The preservation of ruins – whether by covering or reburial – played a central role in all presentations and discussions, typically in the form of alternative presentation ideas. It was suggested that it might be useful to compile these diverse experiences and good practices into a ‘sample book’, an aid to coordinate the aims and needs of professionals, clients, and visitor.

Community initiative and volunteering work have opened a new chapter in the research, preservation, and presentation of archaeological sites. Civilians and the community are no longer just shaping projects from the perspective of visitors or clients/maintainers, but are also becoming the engines and storytellers with their own needs and aims behind each site. Their activity is an important mirror of professional approaches, helps assessing aims and focusing on demands, while their enthusiastic participation and support also serves as a good example for maintainers. This kind of need for involvement is generally observed in museum work and cannot be ignored in developing open-air exhibition spaces. The participation of civilians gives life to archaeological sites; besides, field research and opportunity of participating and gaining personal experience for them has become a key aspect of the related fieldwork aimed at evoking the ‘spirit of the place’. The so-called ‘catalyst people’ are the engines of the community and a foundation facilitating the maintenance of these systems.

It is also clear that there is an increasing demand from local governments and custodians across the country to search for heritage elements to increase the self-awareness and historical knowledge of the local community. The idea of creating a common platform for these typically isolated initiatives where they could share their experiences and good examples with other settlements and communities, thus creating a group of ‘proud custodians’, arose during the roundtable discussion.

One should not forget the potential of digital solutions, the measure and character of which is difficult to determine. One of the most important conclusions drawn from the diverse range of applications is that even the most remote location can be ‘content’ present on a global scale in real time today, and that all future projects must be aware of and exploit that.



Fig. 2. Participants of the workshop

In summary, from a professional perspective, the transformation of concepts of archaeological park and open-air exhibition space development is noticeable —reflecting a change of demands of the participating community, maintainers, and visitors (experience-centered presentation, involvement, identity formation, the inclusion of site-specific elements, etc.). In contrast to the difficult-to-sustain reconstruction of ruins, which often complicates research and site presentation, today's alternative directions, which in each case must take into account the unique characteristics and maintenance possibilities of each site and its surroundings.

While the workshop was a direct and meaningful programme with a great atmosphere, it could not find answer to many arising questions; however, hopefully, it was only the first step in expanding/continuing the related discourse so that archaeological sites in the future may be preserved and presented in ways using all suitable possibilities of the 21st century (Fig. 2).

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