

Do you CARE? Raising awareness for Community Archaeology in Rural Environments in Austria

Bernhard ARNOLD, Verein zur Erhaltung und Erforschung der Burg Ried am Riederberg, Austria

Keywords: *public participation — community archaeology — test-pits*

CHNT Reference: add full reference here: Authors names. Year. Title of the CHNT Long abstract. Editorial team. Title of the conference (Proceedings of the...). DOI:xxxxxx. <style CHNT_Text>

Abstract

Like in many other continental European countries there are hardly any opportunities for people to take part in archaeological research in Austria. Although the Austrian government ratified FARO convention in 2015 (Hebert et al, 2019) and also a recent survey showed that 74% of Austrian citizens indicate a moderate, high or very high interest in archaeology (Karl, 2016) there is still a very limited number of small projects actually involving the public. Most notable initiatives are the senior courses from Urban Archaeology Vienna (Gaisbauer, 2019) targeting archaeological finds processing and recording, Archaeo Publica targeting geo-physical and fieldwalking surveys (ArchaeoPublica, 2020) and the association for preservation and research of the castle Ried am Riederberg focused on medieval archaeology (Ried Castle, 2020).

A common challenge in all projects is the quite limited number of public participants, especially for small projects like at Ried castle. This is where test-pit based community archaeology comes in handy, making it possible to interact with rural communities and including also young and elder people (Arnold, 2019). This impulse talk provides a short overview of ongoing community archaeology projects in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands and raises the question on how to catch the interest of universities, faculties, institutes, individual researchers while overcoming the still present ivory tower (Peter, 2019) and get things rolling in Austria?

Of CORS and CAREs in the UK

Test-pit based community archaeology projects are an important part of public participation in archaeology in the United Kingdom (Lewis, 2014). The tried and tested method offers an uncomplicated way in involving participants of any age. Between 2005 and 2019 the University of Cambridge involved several thousand students and local residents in east England digging more than 2000 test-pits for its Currently Occupied Rural Settlements (CORS) and Access Cambridge Archaeology (ACA) programs, the Higher Educational Field Academy (HEFA) and the Independent Learning Archaeology Field School (ILAFS).

In 2019 University of Lincoln's EU-funded project Community Archaeology in Rural Environments - Meeting Social Challenges (CARE-MSoC) started and applied the experience made in the United Kingdom also on three European countries on the continent, the Netherlands, Poland and the Czech republic. Among the research goals of CARE-MSoC is the development of a model or toolkit to enable heritage practitioners to deliver successful projects in different countries with different social contexts (Lewis et al, 2018).

A new playground - the Netherlands

While there is still very little information available about the ongoing projects in Poland and the Czech Republic, CARE-MSoC already went wild in the Netherlands. With currently eight participating towns located in northern Brabant near Eindhoven in the region Het Groene Woud (The Green Forest) the first campaign executed in 2019 seemed to have been a notable success.

In addition the project is accompanied by its own dedicated website providing information about the participating towns, the results of the test-pit campaigns and also acts as a medium to recruit local residents. The website is held in simple language targeting a broad audience, trying to raise public awareness (Gemeen-

schapsarcheologie, 2020). Yet localizing content to a non-English audience brings in the challenge of language barriers which can affect sharing research data.



Fig. 1. Work at North Warnborough 2014 Higher Education Field Academy (HEFA). Photo by Access Cambridge Archaeology (<https://www.access.arch.cam.ac.uk/news/north-warnborough-2014-higher-education-field-academy-hefa>) is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>).

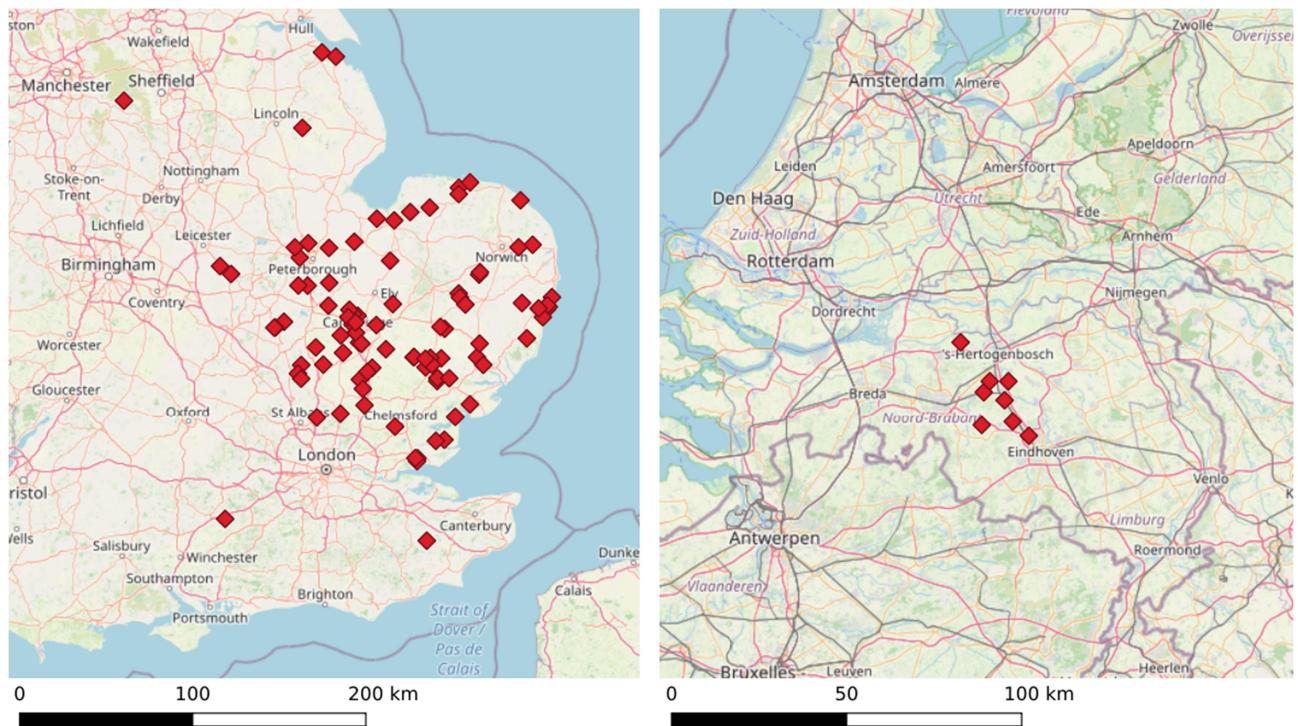


Fig. 2. University of Cambridge CORS project sites in the UK (left) and University of Lincoln CARE-MSoC project sites in the Netherlands (right), (base map © openstreetmap.org contributors).

Conclusion

While CORE provides a successful and promising model for the United Kingdom and CARE-MSoC now started to spread the experience to continental countries too, there is still no comparable community archaeology project available in Austria. So what can we do to change this? What factors could change the current situation? How to catch the interest of university and academic institutions, individual researchers and the public? While University lead projects clearly benefit of solid funding and a professional management it does

not help if nothing is happening at all. Might a dedicated bottom-up citizen science initiative consisting of aspiring members of the public together with like-minded scientists bring in a change? Would it be beneficial to establish an interdisciplinary association championing community archaeology in Austria and trying to get in touch with leading members of existing projects like CORS and CARE-MSoC? What can be done to exchange and link different local projects from different European countries? Could a dedicated international web portal help linking and getting in touch with projects located in different countries?

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