

Of preserved ruins and ruined castles

An example of public participation and monument preservation in Austria

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“Verein zur Erhaltung und Erforschung der Burgruine Ried am Riederberg”

The “Verein zur Erhaltung und Erforschung der Burg Ried am Riederberg” (Burgried, 2019) is an unique project in Austria as a bottom-up citizen science association. It was founded in 2010 by interested citizens and has about 35 members, about ten of those are actively working at the project. The aim of the association is to preserve and do research in an old castle ruin in Lower Austria, a historical monument which is protected by Austrian law. “Burgruine Ried am Riederberg” is a medieval castle ruin with a momentous history: In the 13th century, historically noteworthy persons owned it, for example the noble house of Kuenring, an important family of ministerial officials in medieval times. It was probably erected in the second half of 12th century and in use until 1420.



Fig. 1. Castle ruin Ried am Riederberg (© Verein zur Erhaltung und Erforschung der Burg Ried am Riederberg).

The association is financed by contributions from members and by government subsidies. There exists a close cooperation with the Federal Monuments Office of Austria as well as with archaeologists, art historians, geologists and educators. This wide range of participants illustrates an interdisciplinary research approach. There are two advisors from the Federal Monument Office: Mag. Dr. Martin Krenn for archaeological issues and Dipl.-Ing. DDr. Patrick Schicht for questions of preservation of ruins.

For the association, the main focus lies in three areas: First of all, there is a strong focus on interdisciplinary research, which is starting with citizens. They are posing research questions and attempt to get answers to them, working together with academics. Another focus is on the preservation of the object. Members work together with a curator of monuments and try out old and new technologies to achieve the best preservation

of the object. Last but not least, the association imparts newly acquired insights to the common populace by organizing exhibitions or having “open dig”-days for local people.

About Research, Heritage, Education and cooperation with academics

Supervised by professional archaeologists, members of the association conduct archaeological actions every year. Those actions include all parts of an usual excavation, including digging trenches, documenting finds, sorting and washing them and working with GIS. In 2019, a German version of the British Archaeology Skills Passport was published and will be put to use during the next campaign. The experience by working together is very valuable: If an academic is open to working with citizens, the cooperation achieves very good results and a wide range of insights, eliminating a lot of misconceptions on both sides. An open communication is extremely helpful for better understanding our heritage.



Fig. 2. Members on an excavation (© Verein zur Erhaltung und Erforschung der Burg Ried am Riederberg).

In ruin preservation was an intensive examination of the right way – which includes all kinds of mistakes and errors people are able to do and the beginning. 2010-2014 there were some discrepancies about the “right” way of preservation and the “right” material. In 2014 the association get in touch with Robert Wacha (†) and Hannes Weissenbach at the “Informations- und Weiterbildungszentrum Baudenkmalpflege – Kartause Mauerbach” (Kartause Mauerbach, 2019). Both explained the right usage of lime mortar, ruin preservation and point some members of the association in the right direction of restauration works to preserve the appearance of the ruin. They also told them to establish a long-range monitoring for ascertainment of damage. Another point of heritage is side care around the ruin. Since 2019 there is also a good contact with the initiators of the Interreg-project “Bürger retten Burgen”.

Last but not least there is also an educational focus: In the last years there were some open dig days during an excavation. In some years the association organized activities for children at the summer holidays. In 2017 was a museum exhibition at “Wienerwaldmuseum Eichgraben” (Wienerwaldmuseum, 2019) about “Die Burg Ried am Riederberg und die Kuenringer im Wienerwald” (Peter, 2019). Last year was the “Tag der Archäologie” in St. Pölten/Lower Austria where members of the association gave visitors information about

the project and the work. As well there are talks on conferences of experts and in the near local area for population about the project.

Workflow with troubles: Challenges and benefits

Overall the project is working and after about ten years it needs to be said that there were some intern troubles at the beginning. After building the association members were formed at two groups of interests, which had several points of opinions at the heritage management of the object. On the one side some members wanted to excavate the ruin, on the other side some of them wanted to preserve the stock. Another question brought conflicts between the members: Is a heritage monument a kind of cultural heritage and research project or can it be (also) a playground? The last but most important reason of differences were about long-range monitoring or a fast renovation because of panic? After all, today the object is preserved, there is also a well monitoring and it is seen as cultural heritage monument and as a research project.



Fig. 3. Assembling of pottery fragments (© Verein zur Erhaltung und Erforschung der Burg Ried am Riederberg).

Another challenge is the language barrier between academics and commons. Professionals prone to a high language level which is often not understanding by the public. This emerges misunderstandings in a natural way. Further science and heritage are two very complex domains which partially hardly understands by non-academics, so sometimes it is difficult to reach the public. On the other side common people have less appreciation for archaeology and heritage. Last there exist a lot of different expectations between the local population and researchers. Members of the association are often frowned by scientists, although they work on a high scientific level and make a point doing of a high-quality standard.

Beside some challenges there are also a lot of benefits: Citizens have the possibility to be part of an innovative project. They are able to work side by side with scientists and get involved of interdisciplinary research approach. As public they participate on the whole research process and get know-how in archaeology, heritage and ruin preservation. Last but not least there is also a lot of fun and a wide range of socialising by working together.

References

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