Present messages from the past:
Archaeology didactics at the Museum of Prehistoric Art of Mação (Central Portugal) and the example of the Andakatu Project

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ABSTRACT

Heritage education, although still often set aside, has assumed an increasing role in current mindsets, regardless of the different realities in terms of geography and socio-cultural frame. The Andakatu Project based at the Museum of Prehistoric Art of Maçāo (Portugal) is aimed at wide audience and presents a programme, activities and contents arising from multiple archaeological research programmes conducted at the Museum and its partners (namely universities and research centres). Archaeology, being the starting point, is intertwined with various scientific and artistic aspects in order to encourage questioning, learning and citizenship through a communication based on interactive experimentation.

KEYWORDS

Heritage education, Archaeology, Experimentation, Andakatu

Present messages from the past

When studying Prehistory, it becomes clear that humans developed various landscape management strategies under different time and space constraints but mostly living in a sort of harmony and balance with their environment, eventually disrupted by climatic or environmental changes. Sadly, the present state is one of enormous problems and even possible catastrophic consequences. Such unbalance is due, among other causes, to the ecological systemic impact of our actions, the enormous geographical expansion of our species throughout planet Earth and, above all, the lack of integration of the landscape manage-

* Сара Кура, в качеството си на гостуващ лектор по програма Еразъм, изнесе цикъл лекции в НАИМ–БАН. Поради интереса към представените успешни примери за музейна стратегия и практика, предоставяме на читателите ни кратка версия на една от лекциите (бел. гл. ред.)

* As part of her activities as an Erasmus guest-speaker Sara Cura gave a series of lectures in NIAM–BAS. Due to the high interest in good practice and successful examples of museum strategy, we offer a summarized version of one of the lectures (ediror note).



Fig. 1. Didactic activities in the Museum (rock painting)
Обр. 1. Дидактична активност в музея (възпроизвеждане на скални рисунки)

ment policies (Oosterbeek & Scheunemann 2010). Even more worrying is the fact that we are loosing consciousness of our dependence upon the environment (Oosterbeek 2010b).

Currently, archaeological practice combines a variety of complex technologies together with a growing involvement of untrained people - largely children and youngsters - attracted by the opportunity to participate in some stages of research (survey or excavation) where, to a certain extent, they can be a part of the process of knowledge construction. In doing so, Archaeology emerges at the crossroad of knowledge, giving a major contribution for the enhancement of youngsters in understanding cultural diversity (Bastos 2007).

Having all this in mind, we argue that there is a set of "present messages from the past" that can be part of a non-formal scientific and cultural education and passed on to the community, especially children and youngsters:

Awareness that knowledge is built through a combination of rigorous disciplines, methods and a dialogue involving often-contradictory points of view;

The necessity of a better understanding of the social and cultural differences of the present world and stimulation among children and youngsters of the notion of intercultural and mutual understanding;

Instill awareness and concern for the sustainable exploitation of natural resources;

The need to reflect and develop a critical knowledge about the unnatural climatic changes, motivating the struggle against them.

Within the here presented Andakatu project, we have developed didactical tools strongly grounded on experimentation, capable of enhancing the knowledge of diversi-

ty and complementarity of cultural adaptations in Prehistory, effectively transmitting the aforementioned concepts. The core concern of such an educational programme is not Prehistory alone as in other project (e.g. Sampaio & Aubry 2008 a, b), but mainly to render understandable and usable such concepts as time, space and causality, considered crucial for any humans to survive. In this sense, the didactics of archaeology becomes a didactic programme on the relevance of technology and all its related processes, namely knowledge, environmental awareness and economics.

The Prehistoric Art Museum and the Andakatu Project

The Museum of Prehistoric Art of Mação (Central Portugal) acts in different areas, from research to heritage management, but its main role is to be a space for meeting, reflection and building of critical knowledge and concepts (Oosterbeek, 2009, 2010a). The Museum is focused on the meaning of human interaction with the landscape, but also its transformation throughout Prehistory, mostly within the transition from the last hunter-gatherers to the first farmers' communities, their dwellings, burials and art. The overarching theme of Prehistoric Art is a major educational component in all practical and creative activities, having in mind that a synaesthetic stimulation is the best way to educate and pass on a message (Gonçalves *et al.* 2002).

Within this context, the educational services of the Museum of Prehistoric Art developed a didactic project where a character named Andakatu leads children, youngsters and adults into the path of human evolution, while transmitting the above-mentioned messages. The goals are largely achieved through experimentation, both performed by the character and by the children and youngsters. But it also includes fieldwork and laboratory activities involving the participants in a "learn by doing" process with a predominant performing attitude, favouring a bridge between culture, science, technology and arts.

Dressed in a Paleolithic hunter disguise or as a Neolithic farmer, Andakatu's activities and communication are in direct relation with the research on the transformation of landscape, technology and rock art, in the transition from hunting-gathering-fishing to agro-pastoralist communities, also considering the social changes and the sustainability of environmental resources. These activities are a practical extension of a dialogue with the museum visitors, which is dynamic and contextualized within the interpretations of what might have been the experienced reality of human communities throughout Prehistory; additionally it attempts to be an instrument of civic education (Oosterbeek *et al.*, 2007).

Activities: experimentation and dissemination

The workshops made by Andakatu are based on direct experiences but the technological experimentation with various materials assumes a central role in the development of a deeper understanding and enduring of the transmitted themes (Cura *et al.*, 2008). These experiences, however, are not only entertaining but also structured in a direct connection with the archaeological experimentations, carried out under the research projects that the Museum develops with its partners, mainly the Polytechnic Institute of Tomar and the Earth and Memory Institute. Thus, the heritage education does not separate theory from practice, or research from didactics, and does not risk to be reduced to a simplistic popularization of the research results. There is an obvious constant concern to differentiate between Experimental Archaeology and activities of experimentation (Reynolds, 1999; García Munúa,



Fig. 2. Didactic activities (prehistoric paiting)
Обр. 2. Дидактична активност (пресъздаване на праисторически рисунки)

2008). However it is precisely the fact that the Andakatu Project is developed in direct articulation with the archaeological research that ensures a proper transmission of scientific knowledge. Moreover, it is an assurance of its continuity, since scientific knowledge hardly finds a wider meaning if it is only understood and supported by its skilled professionals (García Munúa, 2008). In current society, the "way of doing" awareness has been lost, and despite that people appreciate the results of science and technology while using their end products, they hardly understand the complexity involved in their production. Andakatu is about learning the processes, the complexity and the radical usefulness of science and technology, and of how these and the understanding of past processes and contexts have to be tackled together.

The practical link between the project and the research is well defined in the activities of creation and later modification of artefacts and representations. From different raw materials (rock, wood, clay, bone, vegetables, various pigments), Andakatu creates numerous experiments resulting in the elaboration of usable artefacts (lithic utensils as sickles, bone implements as arrow points, various vessels and inks) and their practical use (in paintings, cooking, using of bows and arrow) within safe and responsible conditions.

The public follows the entire technological process from the choice of the best materials for specific tasks, to their elaboration bearing in mind the scientific data and, in a "learn by doing" way. Furthermore, the reciprocity is evident in the sense that there exists a constant questioning and acquisition of data from both the public and the specialists in a win-win situation.



Fig. 3. Didactic activities (history of human evolution trough experimentation)
Обр. 3. Дидактична активност (експериментално онагледяване на етапи от човешката еволюция)

Once again, the aim is to engage visitors of all ages, without specific training in Archaeology, in the problems of scientific research in order to create a link of reciprocity. This is the main reason why we do not only disclose the final results, but rather the questions and methods at our disposal to search for answers (and questions), assuming that in Prehistory, as in any other discipline, communication with the general public is inseparable from the promotion of a critical spirit and interrogative reflection.

The project also takes place outside the physical space of the Museum, mainly in primary and high schools. In these workshops, as well as in other conducted in the "Andakatu space" in the Museum, direct experiences are provided that "summarize" experimental research, as well as reproductions that are not related with research programmes, but allow illustrating "our" evolution, thus conveying the present messages from the past.

Final remarks

Heritage education at the Museum of Mação is successful, both in terms of requests and efficiency in the transmission of messages and contents. We believe this is due to the care taken in its preparation, the existence of a permanent link between the programme and the specific needs of its users and mainly to the fact that in the didactic team researchers play a core role (in presentations, execution and preparation of contents). With such a practical and experimental approach, complex processes become understandable without being over simplified.

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Послания от миналото: Археологическа дидактика в музея за праисторическо изкуство в Масао (Централна Португалия) и проектът Андакату

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Образованието, свързано с културното наследство, макар и все още често пренебрегвано, придобива все по-голямо значение в съвременния свят, независимо от географските и социо-културни дадености в различните райони. Проектът Андакату на Музея за праисторическо изкуство в Масао (Португалия) се стреми да привлече широка публика с помощта на програма, чиито дейности и съдържание са изцяло повлияни от многото научни археологически проекти, осъществявани от музея и неговите партньори (главно университети и научни центрове). Археологията е представена в светлината на различни научни и артистични аспекти с цел да стимулира интерес и желание за по-задълбоченото ѝ проучване, както и да внуши граждански ценности чрез общуване, основано на интерактивно експериментиране.