From Archaeological Education to Protection of Cultural Heritage Sites: campaigning on Archaeology and Cultural Heritage in a rapidly changing social context

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Introduction – This paper focuses on the Albanian experience with campaigning for some important issues of archaeology and Cultural Heritage. It does this by paying special attention to the social context in which this process has unfolded, particularly in the last decade; namely, a society which has changed dramatically since the end of the last century, and still is struggling its way through, towards a stable and prosperous liberal democracy. As such, we hope that through some case studies and several Lessons Learned from them, to be able to provide some more colors to the European mosaic of diverse experiences with this rather neglected aspect of our disciplines.
The final version of the paper has benefited greatly from the information, discussions and viewpoints expressed by the participants of the EAA session in Budapest. They widened the scope of our analysis and provided a context for the interpretation of the Albanian experience with campaigning for Archaeology and Cultural Heritage. Before discussing some case studies, we briefly analyze the context of campaigns and the place that Archaeology and Heritage occupies in the contemporary Albanian society.

Key words – archaeology; cultural heritage; public; campaign; Albania

Titel – Von archäologischer Bildung bis zum Schutz des Kulturellen Erbes: Kampagnen für Archäologie und kulturelles Erbe in einem sich rasch verändernden gesellschaftlichen Kontext

Zusammenfassung – Dieser Beitrag fokussiert auf Erfahrungen in Albanien mit Kampagnen für einige wichtige Themen der Archäologie und des Kulturellen Erbes. Dabei schenken wir dem sozialen Kontext besondere Aufmerksamkeit, in dem sich diese Prozesse vor allem im letzten Jahrzehnt entfaltet haben – nämlich in einer Gesellschaft, die sich seit dem Ende des letzten Jahrhunderts dramatisch verändert hat und sich immer noch auf dem Weg zu einer stabilen und wohlhabenden liberalen Demokratie befindet. Wir hoffen, dass wir durch die Fallstudien und einige daraus gezogene Lehren das europäische Mosaik der vielfältigen Erfahrungen mit diesem eher vernachlässigten Aspekt unserer Disziplinen etwas bunter gestalten können.
Die endgültige Fassung dieses Aufsatzes hat sehr von den Informationen, Diskussionen und Standpunkten der Teilnehmer der EAA – Session in Budapest profitiert. Sie haben den Umfang unserer Analyse erweitert und einen Kontext für die Interpretation der albanischen Erfahrungen mit Kampagnen für Archäologie und Kulturerbe geschaffen. Bevor wir einige Fallstudien diskutieren, analysieren wir kurz den Kontext der Kampagnen und den Platz, den Archäologie und Kulturerbe in der heutigen albanischen Gesellschaft innehaben.

Schlüsselwörter – Archäologie; Kulturelles Erbe; Öffentlichkeit; Kampagne; Albanien

Campaigning for Archaeology and Cultural Heritage

Campaigning for an archaeology and heritage connected issue is a recent development in Albania. It has no tradition, no precedents, and consequently no experience on which to build. However, the relatively high status of Archaeology and Cultural Heritage in Albanian society (Bejko, 2020, 288–290), as well as their active role in the public discourse has been an important starting point for launching the campaigns and securing them some degree of popularity and success. It must be said though, that campaigning for something is certainly not one of the most consolidated traditions in Albanian society. Even less so within the Archaeological and Heritage community. It was not a known social practice within a centralized society such as that of Albania during the second half of the 20th century. Quite to the contrary, the

friendly approach to the state authority and a reliance on the powerful connections or even family ties have traditionally been more secure paths towards achieving a goal. The status of Archaeology and Cultural Heritage in the political agenda of the central government was a solid basis towards promotion of Heritage Rights in the 20th century. The nationalist narrative and the highly competitive environment for historical perspectives within the Balkans (Bejko, 2020, 289) made simple lobbying, or networking very effective tools for success. It is the social transformation of the last three decades that has radically modified the dynamics between public and private interests and has reshaped the landscape of the stakeholders and interested parties in the matters of Archaeology and Cultural Heritage. New social practices and new ways of affirming group interests have gradually, but progressively emerged, including the use of lobbying, campaigning, manifesting

dissent, or other forms of social engagement in a structured fashion. Political and election campaigns have particularly occupied a central stage of social life in the last three decades, providing thus a model to discuss, analyze, and potentially replicate. Their evolution through time, their sophistication and effectiveness in reaching out and influencing large number of people have also been object of public debates. Political campaign managers and strategists have continuously invented symbols, slogans, messages, and communication techniques that have impacted the public discourse. Their influence on the heritage community is also felt in the sense that understanding the dynamics of campaigning is important for achieving certain goals in the contemporary society. Particularly those goals that serve social development and the public good in circumstances dominated by a wide diversity of overlapping, legitimate interests.

The case studies selected for the discussion here illustrate the new trend that is emerging among the archaeology and heritage community to influence the policy makers and the public opinion on heritage issues through proper campaigns, beyond the traditional lobbying or networking. They also illustrate the role of the know-how in putting an archaeological campaign together, identification of the right message, the right language, and of the right channels for reaching out to as many agencies and individuals as possible. We believe that the case studies effectively illustrate the numerous flaws and weaknesses that characterize heritage campaigns. It is the analyses of these later features that we hope will inform future developments in Albania and potentially the wider region.

The importance of the social context

We believe that the social context is an important factor in understanding the quality and effectiveness of campaigns. For its own nature, this context is fluid and ever evolving based on several socioeconomic and political variables, but we think that some general features can be identified.

1. The first important element of the social context in Albania is the traditionally high status of Archaeology and Cultural Heritage in public discourse. As explained by several authors (CABANES, 1998; BEJKO, 1998; 2020; GALATY & WATKINSON, 2004; ABRAHAMS, 2015; VICKERS, 2001), the strong interest for the past is generated by the need for strengthening the na-

tional identity among the Balkan and European nations. This makes discussions of heritage connected issues easy to attract attention, but on the other hand, runs the risk of being continuously trapped in nationalistic arguments.

2. Stakeholders and interest groups connected with archaeology and heritage in the country are currently much more numerous, with more complex relationships and interests, and most importantly their roles seem to be changing continuously. State institutions are particularly fluid since their boundaries of competences in heritage matters are sometimes vaguely defined and, in most times, overlapping and even contradictory. Identifying stakeholders and their respective roles and interests is not only extremely important for the success of a campaign, but most of the times complicated and a difficult task.

3. Even if campaigning is part of the social action, it does not have deep roots in the Albanian social traditions. This remains particularly true among the archaeologists and heritage operators in the country. Campaigning has not been always necessary! The right of heritage has been gained traditionally by reference to its social importance through direct access to higher state authorities, lobbying and networking. The natural reaction to situations in which heritage voices are not heard is not necessarily campaigning, but rather the consolidated tradition of 'going one level up', lobbying and networking. It takes unusual determination, competence, and visionary thinking to launch a successful heritage campaign in this culturally defined social context.

4. National identity and the depth of national history are usually seen as the very reason for social investment in Archaeology and Heritage. Consequently, the populist and nationalistic approach to heritage issues is always easier to acquire public support. Staying implicitly or explicitly away from such approaches requires usually careful planning and sophisticated messaging.

5. The role of the individual and individualism in any social action (campaigning included) is of prime importance in the Albanian social context. The individual protagonism and self-promotion are difficult to be separated from the content of many campaigns and pose a potential threat to their success and effectiveness.

The above listed characteristics of the local social context influence the way campaigns are thought, planned, and executed. They are not only condi-

tioned by the tradition and the world views of the social actors, but their effectiveness and their potential success is visibly embedded in the matrix of social realities of the country today.

Case Studies

Campaign for the new Department of Archaeology and Heritage Studies at the University of Tirana
Archaeology in Albania has been taught until recently in an unsystematic way as part of the program of History at the University of Tirana. The lack of a formal program of higher education dedicated to the discipline has required professional studies outside the country or practical formation of future archaeologists through temporary courses by the Institute of Archaeology (a research institute of the Academy of Sciences from 1972 to 2008). This circumstance had put for a long time (at least since the end of the WW II, when the institutional archaeology was formally established) the discipline of archaeology in conditions of incompleteness. Missing formal education, a fundamental block of the structure of archaeology, meant for a long time missing the most dynamic component of the scientific discourse and the basis for the sustainable future development. This condition has been mitigated through rigid planning from the centralized government during most of the second half of the 20th century, but the free, liberal society that started its long walk since the 1990s, and the socioeconomic dynamics that came with it required a totally different response. Young professionals that would face the enormous transformation of the Albanian landscape and infrastructure were urgently needed. Their education was also required to meet the contemporary standards of the discipline as well as the needs of a development-led archaeology. A break-away from the traditional approach to the study of the past was also required, embracing at the same time all the methodological and theoretical developments of archaeology since the 1960s, when the Albanian scientific community started a long experience of almost total isolation from the rest of the world.

Founding a new Department of Archaeology and Heritage Studies within Albania's main public university - the University of Tirana - was considered as an absolute need of time (in the later years of the first decade of the 21st century) by a core group of active archaeologists (led by the two authors of this paper). However, the reality of institutional and individual scholars' approach-

es to this much needed development unfolded quickly as very complex and at times extremely difficult. There were many players involved in a rather complex process of approvals, almost as many different interests, and an intricated mix of power structures and relations that started at the lowest levels of university departments, all the way up to the Senate of the University and eventually to the Minister of Education and Science. Beyond the demanding paperwork and the feasibility study for the new department, a clear path for its sustainable development needed to be shown. The cultural heritage system managed by another Ministry of the Government - the Ministry of Culture - needed to be involved in the process and potentially support it with the arguments that the young professionals were needed to support its development strategy. But more than everything else, it became very clear that many interest groups and power structures within the discipline itself and within the university saw the birth of the new proposed department with a great degree of suspicion. Their current interests were potentially threatened. Under these circumstances it became clear that lobbying was not enough. There were simply too many issues to handle, so launching a proper campaign was necessary involving institutions, communities of professionals, and the public opinion. The campaign had to find few main messages able to get the attention of the politicians and the government, that the university administrators would consider useful, and the heritage community would consider reassuring. We decided to put the interests of the younger generation into the center of our messages. Statistics of students' opinions were made public and impacts on employment, income and regional development were formulated. Diversification of educational offer from the University of Tirana, in line with its own development strategy was chosen as the main talking point with the UT structures (the Council of the Professors, the Senate, the Dean, the Rector). Strategic alliances were also necessary to build all the way through the complicated approval process. This involved the organization of dedicated public talks or individual discussions, stimulating debates in mainstream and alternative media that targeted students, heritage professionals, university professors and the public.

The campaign was greatly helped by a road map created with the goal of focusing on individual targets, one at a time, that eventually helped mounting the right pressure to the decision makers. This was a rather long process, but it was

Fig. 1 Fortification walls of Lezhë. Photo by L. Bejko.

structured and practical, backed up with clear theoretical arguments and offering solutions to several existing problems of archaeological system. The arguments in support of the jobs market, employ-

ment rate, and boosting the Archaeological Impact Assessment tasks resonated widely with the policy makers. In order to achieve success in certain stages of the process, lobbying and individual discussions were enough. However, the impact of the campaign was such that it is not always easy to clearly distinguish these cases. Being flexible helped save time, energy, and resources.

By 2012 the entire process was successfully completed and the new Department of Archaeology and Heritage Studies was up and running in the Faculty of History and Philology of the University of Tirana. During the last ten years more than 800 students have been part of the new programs that are offered at under-graduate and graduate levels. As envisaged at the beginning of the process, these students have been and continue to be the real engine that runs almost all heritage institutions (both central and local) in the country, as well as the development-led archaeology, heritage education, museology and other related fields and activities.

Fig. 2 View from the acropolis of Lezhë. Photo by L. Bejko.

Fig. 3 Activity of the campaign with the national and local mainstream media in the castle of Lezhë. Photo by Anisa Mara and Zhaneta Gjyshja.

Transforming an important heritage site into a tourist attraction

This is case of the castle at Lezhë, an important multi-phase archaeological site that became subject of interest from a local business with the aim of transforming it into a tourist attraction. The site is located on a series of hills, of which the highest has been identified as a small hill-top prehistoric settlement enclosed with a modest drystone masonry wall. A Hellenistic urban center developed by the 3rd century B.C.E. on a lower hill, to the west of the prehistoric site. During the Roman period the city extended its fortification walls further down to include aa significant part of the lowland, on the banks of the river Drin, where the modern city has developed. The acropolis of Lissus (its name in antiquity) has been reused and transformed during the Medieval period (**Fig. 1-2**) into a castle that has accommodated a military unit and has also served as center of command for the wider area (Prendi & Zheku, 1972, 215–244; Karaiskaj, 1981, 41–43). Several historically signif-

icant events involving prominent figures of Albanian high Medieval history have taken place in Lezhë, raising thus the profile of this place in the cultural and historic conscience of Albanians.

In 2010 an early proposal of a local business was approved by the decision making bodies of the Ministry of Culture that in essence envisioned a long term rental contract of the site's acropolis, and the approval to reconstruct the ruins of the Medieval structures and transform them into tourist facilities (hotel, restaurant, meeting venues, exhibition spaces, and so on). The Medieval castle of Lezhë was the first of more than ten other similar sites across the country that were identified as potential sites to be treated similarly. Several professional bodies had banned such idea in the previous years, so the favorable re-consideration of this proposal caused a lot of opposition among the heritage professionals. However, now was the decision of the Government to proceed with the Lezhë proposal that needed to be reversed, and this required a well-organized and

effective campaign in order to acquire some success. In this case, a large group of professionals, university professors and students, civic associations active both in the region of Lezhë and nationally, residents and amateurs were easily gathered around an organizing committee of the campaign. Messages and arguments of cultural, economic, and social character were formulated and located in the center of the campaign. They included: 1) the severe threat to the authenticity of the monument; 2) the irreversible transformation of the historical landscape; 3) the permanent loss of the "*spirit of place*"; 4) the economic and social un-sustainability of the proposal; 5) the lack of transparency in the decision-making process. The core activities of the campaign included meetings with professionals and the local residents, public debates in the most visible mainstream media and social networks, formal protests and gatherings in the castle and in front of the Ministry of Culture, as well as signing of petitions and other forms of expressing dissent (**Fig. 3**).

We found this campaign to be very easy to manage since it quickly acquired the attention of the public. As the result of the campaign a large number of written articles appeared in the daily newspapers, many reports were prepared and shown on prime-time national and local TV stations, an impressive number of people participated in the organized events and finally, many state authorities expressed sympathies with the arguments of the campaign. The decision of the Ministry of Culture was not pursued even if the developer and the Ministry had signed a contract to implement the project. The following Minister of Culture in 2013 went even as far as challenging legally the previously signed contract and effectively put an end to the idea with a new decision of the National Restoration Council.

It is worth noting that not all contributions to the campaign were coherent with its central arguments. Some of them could be easily considered as 'pathetic', but that was all due to the high status of the site in the national history and to the strong role the historical myths constructed by the narratives of the past. Destructing the monuments of the national history proved to be a sensitive issue for the public opinion and did not let indifferent many of its members.

Lessons learnt

Following the brief analysis of the nature and role of the campaigns as organized social actions as well as the social context in which they take place, and after having discussed two case studies, we try to provide some conclusions. They take the form of lessons learnt here, which we hope to be easier to compare with other European realities and contribute to identify strengths and weaknesses of particular cultural contexts. We also hope to contribute to whatever degree possible in identifying those structural weaknesses that could be common for the heritage communities across cultures and socio-economic conditions, thus helping to fix them and equip ourselves with better tools to effectively campaign for archaeological and heritage issues in the future.

1. Finding the right issue is certainly of central importance for a successful campaign. It needs to be clearly defined and crosscut the interests of as wide groups of the society as possible. The status of archaeology, heritage, or the past in more general terms within the society could become particularly important. Otherwise, the campaign needs to spend much more time and energy in informing the public on the importance of the issue at hand than in a well-informed and well-aware social context. Sometimes, unfortunately the public is more easily attracted by issues that impacts their nationalistic views of the past and touches their nationalistic feelings. The Albanian context is certainly one of these cases. Avoiding nationalistic approaches to the past might at times be not easy, but necessary. Campaigns are in this sense particular opportunities to educate the public and promote cultural diversity and peaceful co-existence among people and cultures.

2. Identifying all the relevant stakeholders is never underlined strong enough. It is of crucial importance in planning the campaign and targeting the right groups with the right approach. The practice of things tells a clear story that even the most peripheric stakeholder can play at the right place, at the right moment a determining role for the success or failure of the cause. No one deserves neglect. It certainly weakens the campaign.

3. Building the right alliances is also of fundamental importance. They need to be flexible, but also make on such basis the secure integrity of a campaign. Any signs of compromised integrity of the social action could have serious consequences starting with the loss of other potential allies.

4. Finding the right language. As in any public communication, the language should be simple, clear, but also engaging and inspiring.

5. The right message can mark the campaign and give it significant chances of success. The wrong message, in contrary, may compromise it fatally and keep away many precious stakeholders and potential allies.

6. The right communication strategy. The campaigns can be perfectly prepared, with the right issues, messages, and allies, but can be irreparably damaged by a non-proper communication strategy. It is important to understand the communication problems and fix them along the way. There is a lot the members of our heritage community can learn in terms of public communication.

7. Timing is important. Certain conditions should be right and matured for the required change. Valuating the time for launching a campaign is among the important things to get right. Valuable and right causes can sometimes fall short of receiving the deserved support only because the time and circumstances are not right for them, or other issues are higher up in the center of public attention.

8. Individuals, personalities, and the search for self-promotion. Archaeology and Cultural Heritage are arenas for social action, but also for personal protagonism and self-promotion. In the course of a campaign there is a potential risk of personalization the cause by one or few individuals. It is the very nature of heritage that stimulates strong personal feelings and links with the past, and on the other hand, it is the very nature of the heritage campaigns that bring potential visibility to its main actors. There should be, however, a boundary between the promotion of the campaign goals and the promotion of oneself. If the audience senses that this boundary is crossed, a loss of attention and participation can follow. The lack of careful management of such circumstances can cause great damage to the campaign, arriving to its refusal by many potential allies.

9. Defend the campaign from its politization. As social actions, campaigns are also real political actions. In most of the cases they need to reach the politicians and policy makers. However, transforming campaigns into actions for political gains could become a secure path towards irrelevance and failure.

The lessons learnt discussed here are only a reflection of a rather limited experience of campaigning for Archaeology and Cultural Heritage in a particular social context (Albania) that is characterized by profound and continuous transformations. This particularity needs due consideration when generalizations or comparisons are drawn. However, they underline the importance of learning from the errors, lack of experience and lack of vision which hinders our goal of making archaeology and Cultural Heritage relevant in the contemporary society. Campaigns are not only particular social actions, they are exciting, intense, and valuable experiences that bring archaeology and Cultural Heritage closer with their real owners: the public.

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