



Refit

Resituating Europe's first towns: A case study in enhancing knowledge transfer and developing sustainable management of cultural landscapes



Project Summary

Understanding and integrating stakeholders as active creators and beneficiaries of cultural landscapes is an essential but under-developed element of heritage research. Through research focusing on some of the most significant monuments in European history (Late Iron Age oppida: c.200BC–AD60), this project will explore how communities (including farmers, small-medium enterprises (SMEs), wildlife organisations and residents) understand and experience cultural landscapes. Despite their significance (arguably representing Temperate Europe's first urbanism), oppida are poorly recognised and underdeveloped as foci for cultural and economic sustainability whilst their large size (e.g. Bagendon, UK: 200ha; Bibracte, Fr: 200ha) ensures they are a challenge to manage.

The REFIT project maximises existing expertise on oppida through cooperation between three project partners: Durham University (UK), Bibracte EPCC (France) and Universidad Complutense de Madrid (Spain). The project recognises that the ecology, heritage and wildlife of these landscapes cannot be divorced from each other or their economic value. Working directly with our associate partners – Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust (UK); Réseau des Grands Sites de France (France); Parc naturel régional du Morvan (France), Regional Government of Avila (Spain) and Cotswold Archaeology (UK) – we aim to develop a broader understanding of the perceptions and needs of stakeholders whilst integrating them into archaeological research. Building on best-practice we are implementing a range of engagement strategies and resources (including digital open-access field guides; workshops; participatory field-work events) for 4 case study sites: Bibracte (France); Ulaca (Spain) and Bagendon & Salmonsbury in the UK. Through this, the REFIT project aims to enhance knowledge transfer and develop the sustainable management of these cultural

landscapes by addressing the following research questions: RQ1. Awareness and Understanding: How do heritage users & stakeholders understand the significance of 'oppida landscapes'? To what extent are they aware of/ participating in agri-environmental schemes and management frameworks?

RQ2. Management: How does the management of these cultural landscapes relate to contemporary land use? What conflicts are there between farming, economic sustainability, public access, wildlife diversity, landscape character and heritage protection?

RQ3. Engagement: How can constructive dialogue situate stakeholders within research to develop alternative strategies to enhance engagement with the cultural heritage of integrated landscapes to ensure its sustainability?

RQ4. Knowledge Transfer: How might we transfer knowledge and expertise in ways of enhancing the cultural and economic impact of oppida across Europe through integrating stakeholders, whilst ensuring their sustainable management?

Application and impact

Sustainability: This project directly addresses the call for sustainable strategies for managing cultural heritage and the use of this heritage. It does so by focusing on the need to marry the requirements of sustainable landscapes whilst protecting heritage and disseminating research knowledge. Rarely have projects researched how non-heritage stakeholders perceive and interact, not just with understanding heritage, but the modes and methods of sustainable protection. By working on core European heritage assets, forging links with key non-heritage stakeholders, the project develops strategies and mechanism, which will be sustained in the long-term.

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Bibracte from the air

Addressing societal challenges: The project directly address the aim of meeting social challenges by developing methodologies to integrate frequently neglected stakeholders (rural SMEs, ecologists, NGOs) in the presentation and management of cultural landscapes. The project's methodologies will enhance benefits to these stakeholders addressing issues of rural economic decline and lack of constructive dialogues between cultural landscape stakeholders. Though engaging all groups (and the wider public) in presenting cultural landscapes as cultural ecosystems, this aims to enable the sustainability of these landscapes, ecologically, culturally AND economically.

Narrowing the gap. Directly integrating NGOs and SMEs within the project as Associated Partners and as Advisory board members reflects the call to narrow the gap between heritage research (in this case archaeological) and the values/interests of other stakeholders, to solve the problems

faced in managing, protecting and engaging people with cultural heritage.

Interdisciplinary and collaborative: the project fits the aim to maximise the value of research by integrating organisations outside the academic community, including SMEs (e.g. County Landowners and Businesses Association), voluntary groups/Charities (Wildlife Trusts) and ecology focused bodies (e.g. National Parks) as Associate Partners and Advisory board members.

Interactions and partnerships: through workshops & engagement events, a prime focus of this project is engaging and communicating between cultural heritage researchers and a variety of user groups and stakeholders.

New and exciting knowledge exchange opportunities: Participatory workshop and engagement events targeted at SME and stakeholders will develop strategies to exchange knowledge between heritage managers, business and core stakeholders (such as wildlife) groups. Innovative tools such as digital field guides that integrate other value information (wildlife, ecology, farming strategies) represent opportunities for local business to explore ways of situating the identity of their products and services as part of cultural ecosystems, in a novel and transferable way.

Coordinator

Durham University, (UK).

Participants

- Bibracte EPCC (FRANCE),
- Universidad Complutense de Madrid (SPAIN)
- Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust (UK)
- Cotswold Archaeology (UK)
- Réseau des Grands Sites de France (FRANCE)
- Parc naturel régional du Morvan (FRANCE)
- Diputacion Provincial Avila (SPAIN)

Dates

01/07/2015 - 29/02/2018

Budget

Total project funding: € 508578,56

Funding awarded: € 354.079,00

Subject area(s)

Cultural-landscapes; oppida; sustainability; engagement; ecology

Project website

www.refit.com



Excavation at the oppidum of Ulaca