

Unforgettable Encounters

Understanding participation in
Italian community archaeology

Francesco Ripanti

Access Archaeology





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“Natural and cultural heritage are the assets of this territory and it is of key importance that they are promoted together, looking at the big picture” -

Marcello Labase

Figure I: The lake of Massaciuccoli is included in the Natural Park of Migliarino, San Rossore, Massaciuccoli since 1979.

(Anna Saini, via Wikimedia Commons-2015)



“The model of archaeological society that we managed to design [here in Massaciuccoli] supports a fruitful and peaceful coexistence between archaeologists and citizens passionate about the cultural heritage of their territory” -

Francesco Ghizzani Marcia

Figure II: GAM celebrates wedding ceremonies within the Venulei’s Roman villa.

(Amici di Massaciuccoli Romana Facebook Page - 2016)



“The collaboration with the scientific director was awesome: [...] we used to propose our ideas to him. He evaluated and checked the ideas and we tried to develop them together [...] Each one of the GAM members had his own role [...] and we needed to be prepared to accomplish it” -

Gino, GAM director

Figure III: GAM members and the scientific director Francesco Ghizzani Marcia during a re-enactment event in Massaciuccoli Romana.

(Amici di Massaciuccoli Romana Facebook Page - 2016)



“The curator does not feel as if he is in his own home; if so, things start to be out of your control and, in that moment, you are not a good host [...] I feel to be more welcoming if I am more... detached, but this is not the right word.” -

Stefano Genovesi

Figure IV: Stefano Genovesi talks to the public during a conference in the Pavilion “G. Lera”

(Area archeologica di Massaciuccoli Romana Facebook Page - 2019)



“Citizenship does not give much consideration [to the archaeological area]. It is most considered by tourist facilities like restaurants, hotels and the motor vessel Burlamacca.” - Linda Frati

Figure V: The motor vessel Burlamacca provides visitors the opportunity to explore the lake of Massaciuccoli from another perspective. (Debora Checchi, retrieved from Burlamacca Massaciuccoli Facebook Page- 2019)



“The active involvement of citizens needs time and good preconditions: mainly dialogue, communication and an open-minded attitude” - Enrico Arrighini

Figure VI: Visitors filling the pavilion “Il Cantiere” during the inauguration in March 2016. (Photo: Giulia Osti - 2016)



“We have decided to open the doors of scientific research to the public, simply noting what is already happening in many fields: volunteers are employed in data collection”. -

Carolina Megale

Figure VII: Carolina Megale conducts a guided tour in Poggio del Molino as part of the project outreach strategy.

(Francesco Ripanti - 2017)



“We picked it [a project] for its impact, ability to reach a particular Earthwatch demographic, and its smooth logistics and low overall risk”. -

Kyle Hutton

Figure VIII: Some volunteers coordinated by an archaeologist are ready to start fieldwork in the 2015 excavation season.

(Poggio del Molino Facebook Page - 2015)



“It’s like a big puzzle. It’s a kind of exciting and, at the end of the day, you are tired but happy” -

K.

Figure IX: American students and volunteers working with pottery under the archaeologist’s supervision.

(Poggio del Molino Facebook Page - 2017)



“Obviously, we have much more to learn but I think we learnt a lot. We have really been immersed in the science and we are really satisfied” -

K.

Figure X: In Poggio del Molino, volunteers are involved in a number of different tasks and, day after day, they learn the basics of archaeology.

(Poggio del Molino Facebook Page - 2015)



"I believe I have contributed, although in a small way, to the success of this excavation."-

Anonymous

Figure XI: An American volunteer shows a brick tile with a dog's footprint after washing.

(Poggio del Molino Facebook Page - 2019)



"[I don't feel a separation with archaeologists], they were very welcoming, very supportive and they helped us a lot. It has been a wonderful experience, especially because of the people." -

K.

Figure XII: Group photo of the 2015 field team with archaeologists, students and volunteers.

(Poggio del Molino Facebook Page - 2015)



“What I like most is the continuous state of flux of the research. If the work were already concluded, it would always be awesome, but it would be not the same. [...] It is like a television series: year after year, the audience and the participants wait for the start and the conclusion of the series to know the new developments. Moreover, here people can have an active role!” -

Matteo Tagliabue

Figure XIII: Each excavation season, the field team and some associations based in Riotorto organise the event “Una notte a Vignale”. Through storytelling, the event aims to tell the audience the latest news from the research.

(Francesco Ripanti - 2014)



“Ongoing research is an opportunity because it enables the association to conduct practical activities with children and adults that you could not perform in another context” -

Elisabetta Giorgi

Figure XIV: The cultural association M(u)ovimenti manages the outreach activities in Vignale. The photo shows an activity with 7-year old schoolchildren

(Giulia Osti - 2016)



“Each excavation season, I present the works in progress a million times and each time I manage to extract new pieces of information, to make new associations, enriching research” -

Enrico Zanini

Figure XV: The field director Enrico Zanini presents the mosaic of the Master of Time, unearthed by the field team in 2014.

(Uomini e Cose a Vignale archive - 2015)



“Community involvement is not limited to inviting people to an event and telling them what you have already understood. You share with them also the knowledge process, with its pros and cons [...] I think people are more involved because they feel you share with them your hypothesis and your doubts” -

Elisabetta Giorgi

Figure XVI: Oral memories are really precious for archaeologists. On the left, Lino Tani and on the right Mr. Vinicio, both of whom provided a great deal of invaluable information about the recent history of the mosaic of the Master of Time.

(Uomini e Cose a Vignale Archive - 2011 and 2015)



“I often say to other people: ‘Go visit the excavation!’, and they reply: ‘It sounds nice, but maybe we will disturb the archaeologists’. And I reply again: ‘Oh no, go! They are very nice, they won’t dismiss you!’.” -

Mario Lari

Figure XVII: Some people started to follow Uomini e Cose a Vignale many years ago and still keep on following it. In these photos, Mario Lari visits the site with his nephew in 2008 and in 2016.

(Uomini e Cose a Vignale archive - 2008 and 2016)



“I come back because each time we meet they remember who I am” -

a student

Figure XVIII: At other initiatives, like the Sagra del Carciofo (the festival dedicated to the artichoke), archaeologists supported locals with the logistics, integrating themselves in the community.

(Francesco Ripanti - 2016)

Introduction

Far from being a discipline focusing on the past, archaeology has boundless potential for engaging with people in the present. From the involvement of citizens as excavators and re-enactors to the co-organisation of research campaigns and outreach activities with archaeologists, there is no shortage of methods for incorporating public participation in archaeology.

This book links the nearly universal fascination of individuals to engage with the material past together with the role of archaeologists in promoting, managing and evaluating different forms of public engagement. However, it is not only an account of collaborative endeavours between archaeologists and citizens, nor it is a dry description of outreach activities. The core focus of this research is an evaluation of public participation activities and strategies. Although this may sound less captivating and academically less relevant than the discovery of a new object or site, the reality is quite different. To perform an evaluation means interacting with people, collecting data through surveys, interviews and focus groups, as well as gathering stories of their participation. Children, entrepreneurs, passers-by, retired persons, students, and teachers all have given lively accounts of (un)anticipated motivations – why they participated in archaeological activities –, (un)expected values – what the interaction with archaeology means for them –, and (un)likely emotions – what the effects of this engagement are. These accounts demonstrate that the engagement of non-academic individuals with archaeology is more than a passing encounter. Each person finds something in archaeology that resonates with their personal history, fostering a specific form of involvement. An entrepreneur may look at possible links between their business and evidence of ancient wine or oil production, while a writer may be inspired to imagine the personalities lurking within an ancient burial of a family. Encounters with different pasts as well as with different forms of archaeology have the potential to foster diverse participative dynamics. Although the scientific value of evaluating public participation has been underestimated so far, archaeologists need to study, understand, and critically address these dynamics to facilitate an ethical enforcement of participative principles, as outlined in the Faro Convention.

The data supporting the theme of this book come from ongoing research projects where archaeologists conduct fieldwork in rural or urban environments only during some months every year. Especially in countries where collaborative programs and community archaeology studies have been implemented in the last few years, the main focus of these kinds of projects is academic research. They are planned and funded to increase the academic understanding of the past, with no specific commitment to public engagement. However, they usually succeed in generating specific kinds of participation because many kinds of people are interested in knowing more about the ongoing investigations and simply due to daily encounters between archaeologists and citizens on a daily basis. This may lead to the implementation of top-down initiatives, such as guided tours and educational activities, which are designed and delivered by the archaeologists for the public. More rarely, project management, research, and outreach are the result of grassroots initiatives. These are more likely to happen in archaeological parks and museums, which already have a more stable structure, are open for most of the year, and where research is rarely the main activity.

In countries where community archaeology has more recently developed, these efforts to engage with the public are rarely planned in advance and are often the result of impromptu or short-lived initiatives. This study's evaluation of the participative commitment implemented by these projects will help in getting feedback on the activities delivered and will subsequently improve their results. This evaluation will clarify which groups are involved (and those who are excluded), together with the interests and expectations of each group, and as a result, can inform methods for resolving any conflict

arising among different groups. Moreover, such an evaluation has the opportunity to provide critical elements for understanding how the ongoing research project could evolve in the future, targeting specific objectives and questioning its sustainability. To this extent, conducting this kind of evaluation forces archaeologists to reflect on their participative efforts, to acquire an awareness of the associated benefits and risks, and to enrich the practical requirements of fieldwork with theoretical thinking. A critical understanding of participative dynamics can help to address what the practice of archaeology entails in terms of sharing knowledge, as well as how it provides services to people and benefits to a territory. To this extent, it defines the role of archaeology in modern society. This role can easily change depending both on general factors — such as the definition of the concept of “public” in each country¹ and different legislation systems² — as well as context-specific facets — such as diverse participative strategies adopted by each project or the willingness of citizens to collaborate with archaeologists (and vice versa).

Despite the recent interest in public participation in archaeology, only a small amount of research to date has focused on evaluating the specific participative dynamics fostered by ongoing research projects.³ However, it is a topic which deserves more attention. While traditional qualitative research tools and existing evaluation frameworks form the core of evaluation strategies for collaborative projects,⁴ more refined tools and steps are needed to address public participation. The diverse pathways along which community archaeology projects can develop require different approaches, which need to be flexible enough to inform individual case studies. This book proposes an operational workflow for such an evaluation that considers the abovementioned issues relevant for countries where collaborative programs have been recently implemented. The workflow is based on a value-based stakeholder analysis and aims to provide a snapshot of the selected project in a specific timeframe by outlining its essential facets and most evident issues, while also providing feedback on the activities delivered and ideas for future development. This is possible thanks to the combination of traditional data collection methods—like semi-structured interviews, focus groups and questionnaires—and some tools developed by this study—such as participation maps and a participation polarised chart. Together they are intended as visualisation boards aimed at deepening the investigation of the participation promoted by excavation-based projects.

Being a country with a strong tradition of outreach activities and where community archaeology studies has only recently developed, Italy is one of the best place to tackle the issue of evaluating public participation in excavation-based projects and to test this study’s workflow. Rather than focusing on specific topics already tackled in literature for other countries (e.g. the relationship of community archaeology with identity and memory), this study addresses the evaluation of Italian public participation that stems from excavation-based projects, which is one of the most popular types of projects where Italian archaeologists are testing collaborative approaches. An operational workflow was applied to three case studies with the purpose of understanding the participation they have promoted and the unfolding of parallel issues. The three case studies chosen for this research — Massaciuccoli Romana, Poggio del Molino, and Vignale — are in Tuscany and present different participative approaches. Of course, they are not deemed to represent all the specific traits of Italian community archaeology. However, they are a useful sample to address research questions such as: what is the importance of excavation-based projects in fostering participation? what kind(s) of participation does Italian community archaeology promote? how can the evaluation of public participation inform the future management of archaeological sites? In order to answer these questions, this study is structured as follows.

¹ Matsuda 2004.

² Benetti and Brogiolo 2018.

³ Thomas and Lea 2012; Marx et al. 2017; Lewis et al. 2022.

⁴ Hamilakis and Anagnostopoulos 2009; Moser 2002; Guilfoyle and Hogg 2015; Simpson and William 2008; Tully 2007.

Chapter 1 presents the theoretical framework of this study, exploring participation by introducing several fields of study—such as cultural heritage and public participation—and then by delving into the terminology used in its assessment. There are many terms used interchangeably to refer to participation, but all of them are associated to “the role that the public is perceived to be playing and the nature and role of the disciplinary knowledge”.⁵ Given their paramount importance, specific concepts such as stakeholders and values are described in detail. In the last section, excavation is presented as a contact zone,⁶ a concept that is deepened through encounters that ongoing research may foster: between archaeologists and the audience; between archaeologists and the digger; between archaeologists and the devotee. All these encounters are then addressed from a psychological perspective that is key to interpreting participation in excavation-based projects. The chapter ends with the presentation of the forms of sustainability that participation in community archaeology needs to address.

Chapter 2 outlines the renewed commitment of Italian archaeology to civic engagement, starting with an overview of the first attempts made by Italian archaeologists to deal with contemporary society in the late 1970s. Moving to the present, the second section describes the development in the discipline over the last ten years, while the third section presents a more detailed overview of projects currently interacting with the public and the main activities conducted. The chapter ends with a short outline that examines three specific traits of Italian public archaeology: a great variety and creativity in the initiatives, an unbalanced relationship between theory and practice, and the lack of evaluation and critical approach. Chapter 3 presents a workflow to address public participation in ongoing research projects and to be tested through case-study research. It presents data collection methods, analyses and visualisation boards. Specific attention is dedicated to explaining the objectives of each step, how each step relates to traditional data collection methods, as well as what the various steps entail in terms of tools and outputs. The chapter describes tools developed by this project, such as a participation map and polarised chart, and how they contribute to the research objectives.

Chapter 4 introduces the three Italian case studies — Massaciucoli Romana, Poggio del Molino, and Vignale — and presents details of each archaeological settlement and research project. Since all three examples cover more than a decade of research, much attention is dedicated to the account of different phases of the projects’ evolution. Chapter 5 presents data, analyses, and related insights for each case study. Different issues concerning participation arose and were addressed through qualitative research methods. For example, the results from Massaciucoli Romana focus on the conflict related to the management of the area; at Poggio del Molino, the central issue concerns citizen science in archaeology, with an overview listing strengths and weaknesses; at Vignale, the analysis identified topics focusing on the interaction between archaeologists and the locals, such as archaeology as a way of cultural production and stewardship as a specific dynamic of participation promoted by the project. Specific participation milestones for each case study help in wrapping up the main elements to inform a critical discussion.

Chapter 6 aims to critically address the case studies in terms of participation. To this extent, the participation polarised chart provides a brief comparison of three profiles, building upon some dimensions of participation informed by the interviews. The profiles show relevant differences that are addressed, referring to the kind of encounters and the psychological perspective described in Chapter 1. This focus aims to define the real participation promoted by each case study beyond rhetoric, by identifying the dynamics and motivations at the roots of encounters. Promoting, limiting or excluding some dynamics, encounters shape and describe the profile of participation of an archaeological project. Moreover, the chapter explores how participation can inform the future management of archaeological

⁵ Moussouri 2014, 11.

⁶ Hamilakis and Theou 2013.

sites, specifically by addressing participatory governance. Considering the three forms of sustainability for community archaeology—social, intellectual and economic— some recommendations for the case studies are outlined. Besides, the ideas for the futures presented by the stakeholders of the three case studies are assessed according to the dynamics resulting from the previous analyses, with the aim of understanding if the futures they proposed are in line with the actual participation or not. Chapter 7 offers a conclusion to the main themes addressed in this study, approaching evaluation as a journey which may help orient archaeologists to take a fresh look at well-known paths and to explore new routes for public participation. This final reflection invites archaeologists to use the evaluation process as a map to situate and direct their commitment to civic engagement. By zooming in on unexplored territories it provokes new initiatives and encounters to critically question the role of archaeology in modern society.

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