LA GESTIONE DEL PATRIMONIO CULTURALE
CULTURAL HERITAGE MANAGEMENT

Turismo e Beni Culturali e Ambientali

ATTI DEL III COLLOQUIO INTERNAZIONALE
PROCEEDINGS OF THE 3RD INTERNATIONAL MEETING

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a cura di Maurizio Quagliuolo,
Alessandro Amato, Sabina Addamiano

DRI - Ente Interregionale - Roma
Finito di stampare nel mese di luglio 2000
per conto della Editrice Le Balze di Montepulciano (Si)
presso la Grafica Universal di Città di Castello (Pg)
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Progetto grafico:
Riccardo Fabio Catani

Traduzioni:
Lenore Rosenberg

Fotolito e stampa:
Le Balze
Montepulciano (Si)
www.lebalze.com

Ai sensi delle normative vigenti, è fatto espresso divieto di riproduzione o duplicazione con qualsiasi mezzo della presente pubblicazione e di quanto in essa riprodotto.
Il III Colloquio Internazionale sulla Gestione del Patrimonio Culturale si è svolto sotto l’Alto Patronato del
Presidente della Repubblica Oscar Luigi Scalfaro

con il cortese supporto della
Commissione Europea - Ufficio per l’Italia

e in collaborazione con
Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri - Dipartimento del Turismo
Ministero per gli Affari Esteri - Direzione Generale Relazioni Culturali
Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali
Ente Sardo Industrie Turistiche
Provincia di Cagliari
Ideazione e Segreteria organizzativa:
DRI - Ente Interregionale

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Marco Fiorletta (responsabile), Silvia Inghirami, Valerio Ricciardi

Organizzazione generale:
Alessandro Amato, Miguel Ruiz Ramirez;
Paola Mancuso, Vittoria Marotta, Antonella Murru

Si ringraziano:
Stefania Manca (ESIT), Lucio Mascia (Provincia di Cagliari)
e tutto il personale degli Enti che hanno collaborato
PREFAZIONE
Monica Baldi

APERTURA DEI LAVORI
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Making the Iron Age accessible: The castro de Elviña (Coruña, Spain) initiative

THE GENESIS OF THE PROJECT

The city of A Coruña is the most urban capital of the four Galician provinces. It is also one of Galicia’s most densely populated cities, and second only to Vigo in number of inhabitants (250,000). Like any city of a certain size, Coruña has a wide range of cultural services and infrastructures. It is one of the Iberian peninsula’s best equipped cities with regard to museums and Heritage centres. It even has two centres of scientific-biological interpretation, with a third about to be opened. It also has five museums of different contents, including an archaeological museum. Coruña also contains the Tower of Hercules, an internationally known lighthouse of Roman origin.

Despite having a number of attractions related to historical heritage, Coruña does not have any prehistoric site which may be visited. Accordingly, the municipal council took the initiative to complete the range of cultural services by incorporating the Elviña hillfort, an Iron Age site which has been known for many years. Excavation on the site began in the 1940’s, and it was declared a national monument in 1962, although today it is inaccessible and completely overgrown by vegetation. The choice of the Elviña hillfort for a process of renovation and opening to the public is derived from a series of circumstances:

- It is one of the few remains of prehistoric occupation in the council, and is particularly relevant for its condition, the beauty of its surroundings and its cultural value.
- It is a humanised space with a considerable history whose previous occupation, the Roman city of Brigantium (the origins of the present-day city), means it has been a privileged witness to more than 2000 years of history.
- It is a site with visible and easily understood structures for the general public, which add to its attractiveness.
- It belongs to and exemplifies one historical period which is the most popular
among the Galician public, as hillforts are traditionally associated with the Celtic world.  
- Simultaneously, and paradoxically, the historical period from which it dates, the Iron Age, is little known by the general public in its historical and sociological aspects.  
- It is found on the outskirts of an urban area of great ethnographic interest, as in its vicinity there are the few remaining examples of agriculture and traditional rural life which exist in a city as large as A Coruña.  
- It has been the object of several excavation projects which have produced some information and structures which have been consolidated.  
- Despite these past efforts, and being a Monument of National Interest, it is today hidden and inaccessible to the public due to its dense cover of overgrown vegetation.

STARTING CONDITIONS FOR ELABORATING AN ENHANCEMENT PROGRAMME.

Municipal authorities: They have the clear intention of enhancing and opening the Elviña hillfort to the public, as well as converting both, the hillfort and its surroundings, into a park. They have therefore:
1. Started to purchase the land surrounding the site (until now private property belonging to several owners).
2. Commissioned a project to design and organize the necessary work and construction in order to convert the site into an archaeological park, and to undertake all other essential work to enable the programme to take shape.
3. Commissioned the definition of a special urban protection plan in order to protect the site and its vicinity.
4. Initiated the search for necessary sources of financing for the programme to be drawn up and put into effect.

The Public: Many inhabitants of the city of A Coruña have a vague knowledge of the location of the hillfort; another smaller number of them are unaware of it, and only a minority have a fairly clear idea of what the site actually is. Outside of Coruña the site is known by a more specialised public, above all thanks to investigations carried out in it.

Regarding our Research Group: Once having accepted to design a programme to recover and revalue the Elviña hillfort, the following general objectives were determined:

1. Recovering the Elviña hillfort and its ruins, meaning starting a strategy of documentation and investigation. Similarly, to put into effect a protection procedure by way of defining and achieving a special urban protection plan.
2. Transforming the Elviña hillfort into an urban archaeological park, which implies:
   - Defining a conservation strategy.
   - Deciding on the park's content, requiring a narrative strategy or script which illustrates the park’s different elements.
• Converting the park into a museum and making it attractive to the public using a strategy of exhibition and diffusion.
• Designing an exhibition and services centre which, more than just being a centre for interpretation, is fully integrated within the park and the contents it deals with.
• Converting this infrastructure into a project which is socio-economically profitable, meaning making the public’s experience of visiting something significant and suggestive.

WORKING PLAN

Regarding the previous objectives, the working plan for designing and implementing an archaeological park is organized in different plans, each of which is established and defined based on achieving a particular objective. The plans are:

• **Documentation plan.** With the objective of recovering the information and documentation which exists about the hillfort, with the aim of creating a documentary, graphic and textual foundation upon which later studies may be elaborated.

• **Investigation plan.** Its objective is to achieve new and better information about the hillfort, about its cultural period and the hardships the site has suffered throughout history. This is aimed to create new conceptual and intellectual values which give meaning to the illustration offered to the public of the site.

• **Intervention plan.** With the triple objective of:
  – Taking on the necessary work to make the site accessible to the investigators and designers of the plan, and the public in general (a botanical study, clearing undergrowth and consolidating the remains which have been excavated).
  – Isolating the most intensely occupied areas of the site, finding signs of occupation and use of the area outside of its ramparts and evaluating and correcting the impact on the site that may result from conditioning work (intensive prospecting, physiochemical and electrical investigation, and evaluation of archaeological impact).
  – Have more exposed remains in order to understand and then illustrate the site’s domestic space and urbanism (excavation).

• **Consolidation plan.** With the objective of analysing the conservation state of the uncovered structures and, where necessary, consolidating them.

• **Information plan.** Aimed at presenting the plan to the public and making it accessible to them from the beginning of the work on elaborating a plan of action, and informing about future activity.

• **Exhibition and museum plan.** Dealing with designing the group of elements, and material and immaterial elements which comprise the Elviña hillfort archaeological park.

ENHANCEMENT & DISPLAYING STRATEGY

Once the general working plan has been presented, given that this will revolve around designing a recovery and enhancement strategy for the site, we should con-
sider its background, particularly the principles upon which the displaying strategy will be based. As would be expected, this strategy has to be based on the founding principles of the work of Landscape Archaeology.

Landscape Archaeology, as we understand and practice it, has as its basic objective the study of archaeological remains regarding the spatial co-ordinates within which human action has occurred (CRIADO BOADO, 1988; 1993). From this perspective we understand landscape as the conjunction of three specific kinds of distinct circumstances:

- The environment, surroundings or system in which man develops his activities.
- Society, which transforms previous physical space into a transitive reality, a social construction.
- The culture which configures space as a cultural category, as a result of concepts resulting from the thought of a human group.

If the investigation of landscape archaeology is based on the study of these three types of instances, with the objective of reconstructing social landscapes, then when proposing to define a strategy of presenting the archaeological elements under study, the question is: how should this work be presented, and what resources should be used?

**PROPOSALS FOR ENHANCING ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERITAGE**

- Starting out by recognising that archaeological elements, as material remains of a distant past (not only chronologically but above all culturally and socially) mean nothing, and have become disconnected from our present-day society (LOWENTHAL, 1998).
- This lack of meaning is parallel to the lack of contact with the surroundings, the landscape, and a loss of the sense of place (WALSH, 1992) fundamentally derived from the modern understanding of space as a territory in which economic and jurisdictional components occupy a more important position than cultural elements.
- We offer that, fully recognising the previous faults, it is possible to recover the symbolic and significant capacity of elements from the past, illustrating the actual space as a result of human thought and action being applied to the land, leaving elements which are still visible.
- The aim is to offer the public the interpretations and reconstructions of the past given through archaeology using a narrative or script which makes the elements intelligible and meaningful (CRIADO BOADO, GONZÁLEZ MÉNDEZ, 1994; GONZÁLEZ MÉNDEZ, 1995; 1997).
- From Landscape Archaeology, we particularly study the relationship between the environment, social processes and system of cultural symbols of all society. Then, when it is possible to reconstruct past periods, it should be possible to reconstruct past spaces. This is what we propose in Elviña.
- In order to illustrate past times and spaces we have a basic archaeological resource on hand, which may be highly didactic: the visibility conditions of archaeological remains. This implies demonstrating that these conditions do
not appear by chance, but that their very nature informs us about the sociocultural environment to which they belonged.

- To implement this proposal, it is sufficient to bring together four resources: information, signs, walks and observations which direct the visitor’s perception.
- Returning to the case of Elviña, *Information and signposting*, to both indicate and give meaning to the actual landscape of the hillfort, underlining that this is formed by the visible remains of an anterior landscape, upon which the later action of mankind was imposed together with the passage of the years, to form the present landscape.
- *Walking and observing*. Which allows us to experience space as it was in the past. To do this it is necessary to exchange merely looking at the remains for a dynamic experience of walking through and entering the archaeological and natural elements of the present landscape.
- From this perspective, the exhibition and information centre should illustrate the elements and circumstances which define the landscape of the builders and inhabitants of the hillforts. The walks and paths through the Elviña hillfort should enable the public to perceive and experience the elements of the hillfort landscape still contained therein.

All this, conveniently organized, will make it possible to not just show the Elviña site as excavated, with its structures free of earth and signs of life, but instead as part of the hillfort landscape, by coming into contact with its elements and perceiving how these are integrated into surroundings which give them meaning. The idea is not to show Elviña as it was in the past, but to offer the possibility of imagining how a past landscape looked. This type of experience, based on the understanding and perception of the elements which configure present-day space, to evoke past time and space, will enable visitors to enter into the cultural dimension of space and give meaning to some of the elements which indicate that cultural dimension.

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1 In fact, the site is surrounded by cultivated terraces, some of which could be from the same period as the site’s occupation, a fact which could be resolved through the proposed investigation.

2 Since the appearance of Galician nationalism in the XIX century, the Celts were assimilated as an ethnic category which had been settled in the N of the Iberian peninsula since prehistoric times, allowing the Galicians to be distinguished from other Iberian nationalities.

3 Investigation work on this site began in 1947 with D. L. Montecayoso and D. S. Parga. It continued until 1953 with J. M' Luengo. In 1962 the site was declared a Historic-Artistic Monument of National Interest. However, by the end of the 1970's the site was completely deserted. At this time, F. Senén began conservation and investigation projects, which lacked the necessary continuity in order to save the site from its present-day state of abandon.

4 Work carried out on the site was in close contact with A Coruña’s archaeological museum, the *Museo Arqueológico e Histórico Castillo de S. Antón*, an institution which has for years been calling for greater attention to the site.

5 The authors of this communication are in charge of this project which involves more than twenty specialists. Representing the local Council are Jesús Arsenio and Xan Vázquez.

6 This disconnection is fundamentally derived from the substitution of the discourse which traditional rural societies had elaborated about elements from the past (fully integrated in their daily life through folklore and legend) with a scientific discourse imposed by an educated elite through teaching, history and writing.

7 Similarly, a lack of contact with the land, with the environment, with the surroundings which are increasingly travelled, used, exploited or perceived through technological appendages (cars and other machines) making space something anodyne, a mere distance, an obstacle, a trajectory.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Gli autori presentano, attraverso il caso di studio del Castro de Elviña (Coruña, Spagna) e del suo territorio, la proposta al pubblico di un bene culturale attraverso la creazione di un Parco archeologico. L'obiettivo è quello di un miglioramento della conservazione e della fruizione sociale del sito, sostenuto dall'Amministrazione Municipale interessata. L'articolo affronta gli aspetti dello stato di fatto, delle strategie necessarie e dei principi teorici, basati su una specifica definizione della cosiddetta Archeologia del paesaggio (Landscape archaeology), da tenere presenti perché il progetto raggiunga il proprio scopo.