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Exploring the impact of participative place-based community archaeology in rural Europe: Community archaeology in rural environments meeting societal challenges

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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the aims, context, approach and early outcomes of a new transnational participative archaeology project focussed on rural village communities. ‘Community Archaeology in Rural Environments Meeting Societal Challenges’ (CARE-MSoC) includes three European countries where participative community archaeology is new- the Czech Republic, the Netherlands and Poland. CARE-MSoC aims to explore the feasibility, value and impact of excavation by rural residents within their home communities by using a method which can be deployed anywhere and which in the UK has been shown to advance knowledge of the past while also delivering a wide range of social and heritage benefits: multiple test pit excavation within inhabited villages. Data presented here from the Czech Republic, the Netherlands and Poland show the activity to be popular and effective here in benefitting people while also attracting, sustaining and growing local interest in heritage participation in all three countries.

KEYWORDS

Archaeology; community; public participation; social impact; Netherlands; Czech Republic; Poland

Introduction

‘Community Archaeology in Rural Environments – Meeting Societal Challenges’ (CARE-MSoC) is a three-year project funded through the European Union Horizon 2020 Cultural Heritage Joint Project Initiative (JPI) by national research councils in the Czech Republic, Netherlands, Poland and UK. The aims of the CARE-MSoC project reflect the participatory emphasis of the 2005 Council of Europe ‘*Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society*’, otherwise known as the Faro Convention,¹ a theme also prioritized in the ‘*Strategic Research Agenda for Cultural Heritage and Global Change*’ (JPI Cultural Heritage 2014). Similar emphases are foregrounded in the European Commission 2018 policy review ‘*Innovation in Cultural Research: for an integrated European Research Policy*’ which identified co-creative methods, rural heritage and participatory practices as three of twelve key research themes (Sonkoly and Vahtikari 2018, 40). The new EU ‘*Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda 2020*’ (JPI Cultural Heritage and Global Change 2020) (which features CARE-MSoC [14]) sustains these themes and responds to the 2015 United Nations goals for sustainable

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development,² asserting in one of seven key principles underpinning research and innovation and heritage that ‘public and community engagement as well as participatory approaches should be at the core of activities and thought should be given to who creates knowledge, narrative and the role of communities in identifying, understanding and caring for heritage’ (24). Although CARE-MSoC was underway before this new agenda was developed, the project aims are in tune with these principles and aim to help deliver on them.

Aims and context

The CARE project (as we tend to abbreviate it, an acronym which works in most European languages) aims to advance understanding transnationally of the benefits, obstacles and enablers of participative community archaeological excavation. Spanning four European countries, it uses the same basic archaeological method each time in order to focus on understanding the mechanisms by which it achieves its impact. It will also scrutinize how approaches need be adapted to different pre-existing circumstances in different countries. CARE-MSoC will disseminate this knowledge and create toolkits to help heritage practitioners deliver such programmes more widely in the future.

The CARE proposal was developed at a time when opportunities for members of the public to take a part in local community archaeological excavation were widespread in countries like the UK (Greer, Harrison, and McIntyre-Tamwoy 2002; Historic England 2019a; Moshenska and Dhanjal 2012; Thomas 2010) due to a permissive legislative system and funding being available, not least from to the UK National Lottery (Maeer 2017). More slowly and more recently, evidence for the *benefits* that interaction with heritage bring to people and places is accruing (e.g. Power and Smyth 2016; Pennington et al. 2018; Price and Keynes 2020), including in the context of archaeological excavation (e.g. Finnegan 2016; Everill, Bennett, and Burnell 2020; Lewis 2014b; Mitchell and Colls 2020). This has shown that benefits span all five pillars of psychological wellbeing (Aked et al. 2008): connecting with others; being physically active; learning something new; mindfulness; and giving back (Fujiwara, Cornwall, and Dolan 2014; Lewis 2016b; Paddon et al. 2014; Sayer 2015; Reilly, Nolan, and Monckton 2018). That said, the evidence base for the benefits of participatory archaeology is mostly relatively small-scale, while understanding of causal connections between activity and wellbeing impact (in particular) remains limited (Gould 2016; Gradinarova and Monckton 2019; Pennington et al. 2018; Reilly, Nolan, and Monckton 2018, 42; Price and Keynes 2020, 77), with few ‘before and after’ studies using standardized measures (e.g. Waterloo Uncovered 2019) and none including control groups of non-participants.

Notwithstanding exceptions such as the UK, opportunities for wider publics to participate in community archaeology are rare in many European countries and the evidence base for impact there is accordingly almost non-existent (e.g. Benetti and Brogiolo 2018). This is in spite of surveys showing people across the continent to be very interested in heritage and to want a closer relationship with it (CHCfE Consortium 2015; Kajda et al. 2018; Marx, Nurra, and Rossenbach 2017). Participative community archaeology in many countries thus finds itself in a ‘Catch 22’ situation where the lack of opportunities to take part make it impossible to acquire the very impact data needed to make the case for providing such opportunities – data which needs to be robust if a persuasive case is to be made for changes in heritage practice or legislation.

Accordingly, the CARE project aims to run and rigorously evaluate 12 new participative archaeological excavation projects in four different countries – the Netherlands, Czech Republic, Poland and UK (Figure 1). The situation regarding participative community excavation is different in each of these countries. In the Czech Republic, public archaeology has been continuously developing since the late nineteenth – early twentieth centuries, with traditional museum approaches, public lectures and societies including amateurs interested in the discipline, such as the Society of Companions of Czech Antiques (est. 1888), the Society of Czechoslovak Prehistorians (est. 1919) and since 1991 the Czech Archaeological Society (Bureš and Vařeka 2000). These have been supplemented by new approaches introduced in the last decades such as archaeoparks, living history, workshops and



Figure 1. Location of main places mentioned in the text where participative community test pit excavations took place in 2019-20 in the Czech Republic, Netherlands, Poland and UK as part of the CARE-MSoC projects.

educational programmes for primary and secondary schools (Bureš and Vařeka 2004; Šmidtová et al. 2013; Bureš, Šmejda, and Šmolíková 2014). There have however been no hands-on community archaeology projects in the Czech Republic.

In the Netherlands, community archaeology is slowly entering heritage practice but mainly with an emphasis on activities for and with the general public, not so much by the public (van den Dries 2014). The Netherlands have a predominantly 'authorised' heritage practice, dominated by experts and policy makers. The social value of participatory action research in which members of rural communities are involved in building new inclusive narratives will be innovative and the potential to contribute to place making, tourism and place branding is increasingly recognized (van Londen 2016).

In Poland the most common context for excavation and fieldwork in rural communities remains development, but this is sustained and enhanced by a strong latent interest in archaeology in Poland. Most Polish citizens engage with archaeology in some way, such as watching films about archaeology, visiting archaeological landscapes or exhibitions or reading books or magazines about archaeology; 90% perceive archaeological heritage as advantageous for towns and villages and 82% as something that should be supported and developed (Kajda et al. 2018). There are however hardly any opportunities for people to actively participate in community archaeology projects in Poland.

In the UK community archaeology is well-established and funded by organizations such as the National Lottery Heritage Fund (Maer 2017) with thousands taking part each year (Thomas 2010; Brown, Miles, and Partridge 2018). Its capacity to contribute to academic research and heritage asset management is increasingly recognized (Hedge and Nash 2016; Belford 2020) and progress is being made on understanding its impacts and benefits (e.g. Everill, Bennett, and Burnell 2020; Finnegan 2016; Lewis 2016b; 2016d; Mitchell and Colls 2020; Paddon et al. 2014; Pennington et al. 2018;

Power and Smyth 2016; Reilly, Nolan, and Monckton 2018; Sayer 2015; Simpson 2008; Simpson and Williams 2008). However, UK community archaeology still needs to increase its reach to younger people, some ethnic groups and lower socio-economic demographics (Historic England 2019a; Historic England 2019b; Gadsby and Chidester 2012; Woolverton 2016) and to evidence its outcomes more effectively (Gradinarova and Monckton 2019; Price and Keynes 2020; Watson 2020).

Target audience

The target audience of the CARE project is rural communities, encompassing people of all ages and backgrounds regardless of how long or short a time they have been resident. Rural communities across Europe are faced by a number of challenges in the twenty-first century. As the 2014 JPI Strategic Agenda for Cultural Heritage noted, these include demographic, social, economic and technological changes over the last century – challenges made greater in recent years by the widespread loss of local workplaces, schools, colleges and other amenities, and by widespread cutbacks in public sector funding for social, educational and place-making programmes and infrastructure development. These reduce opportunities for rural residents to connect (with people or place), be active, aspire, learn, work or contribute to the community. At a personal level these challenges erode social and cultural capital and depress wellbeing; at a community level they erode cohesion, resilience and shared capital. Challenges vary in pace and character in different places, but all European states are affected in some of the above ways.

While community archaeology projects in the UK take place in both urban and rural places, most of those giving closest attention to evaluation of their impacts have focussed on urban communities (e.g. Nevell 2013; Sayer 2015). In the majority of cases excavations have targeted known heritage sites (former halls, farms, bandstands etc.) and opportunities to participate thus rely on such ‘authorised’ heritage sites being available for excavation, and risk the impact being affected by the presence or absence of anticipated ‘headline’ finds. This is not necessarily an issue in respect of the individual project under evaluation, but it does make it more difficult to extrapolate recommendations for future activity in places lacking known archaeological targets.

Most rural communities in Europe do not have any known archaeological ‘sites’, but they nonetheless have considerable potential for place-based archaeological investigation as they occupy locations used for centuries or even millennia in which previously undiscovered evidence can be accessible at shallow depths (Lewis 2005–19). The ‘atomised’ character of rural communities, spatially defined and separated from each other by open spaces and (usually) long-established boundaries confers a hyperlocal sense of place-based identity: people know the name of the place they live in, regardless of how attached they may or may not feel to its community, and all of these places have histories. Community archaeological investigations offer a collective focus for purposeful physical activity making new discoveries adding to place-based time-deep knowledge which connects people with place as well as with each other (Belford 2011; de Nardi 2014; Lewis 2016d; Pennington et al. 2018).

The aims of the CARE project have been rendered even more pertinent by the Covid-19 pandemic which is not only causing a major global economic recession that will exacerbate the difficulties faced by rural communities, but is also focussing people’s lives more closely on their local community as movement reduces and home-working increases. The hyperlocal focus that the CARE methodology offers is attuned to these desperately difficult times.

Excavation methods

CARE is a participative place-based community archaeology project. ‘Participation’ in the context of community archaeology can encompass a range of activity from involvement in project design to contributions to museum interpretation (Tully 2007; Moshenska and Dhanjal 2012; Thomas and Lea 2014), but the CARE project is interested in the direct physical participation by local people in

the archaeological process of excavation (including field documentation and finds processing), within and about a rural settlement where they live or with which they have a connection.

The specific method used in CARE MSoC is the excavation of standardized one-metre square ‘test pit’ excavation on multiple sites throughout volunteers’ home villages ([Figure 2](#)). Systematic trial excavation as a means of studying inhabited rural settlement was used in Germany in the 1970s ([Hinz 1996](#)), but much more extensively so in the UK since the late 1990s where it has widely been shown to deliver useful new historic insights in scores of settlements ([Gerrard and Aston 2007](#); [Jones and Page 2006](#); [Lewis et al. 2020](#)). As a sampling process, it requires the same standardized method to be carried out each time: each pit is the same size and excavated to a maximum depth of 1 m in 10 cm spits, with all spoil sieved through a 10 mm mesh (or hand sorted to equivalent if spoil is not suitable for sieving). In the CARE project, these procedures are detailed in handbooks designed for use by volunteers, who record their observations in pro-forma A4 sized booklets to help ensure nothing is forgotten. Professional archaeologists (attending from participating university departments or local heritage organizations) rove around the test pits to provide advice and encouragement and to identify and discuss the finds made. After all test pits are complete, the excavation data are analysed by appropriate specialists, the finds are mapped and their distribution analysed, a technical report is written by the university team, and the outcomes are shared with volunteers at events within the local community, usual in social settings, and reported each year in *Medieval Settlement Research* ([Lewis et al. 2020](#)). The CARE project aims to complete c. 25 test pits in each of the 12 participating communities, with this usually requiring two or more weekends of community excavation, usually over two or more years.

Many UK initiatives have involved members of the public in community test pit excavations including a small number of high profile television-linked projects ([Cooper and Priest 2003](#)) and many quieter local projects, some as part of university research into rural settlements ([Gerrard and Aston 2007](#); [Jones and Page 2006](#)), others community-driven local interest projects, many



Figure 2. Rural residents carrying out CARE test pit excavations. Clockwise from top left: Vanovice (Czech Republic); Gemonde (Netherlands); Myslinka (Czech Republic); Woensel (Netherlands); Old Dalby (UK); Vanovice (Czech Republic); Chycina (Poland); Gemonde (Netherlands); Woensel (Netherlands) (centre).

funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund (Lewis 2016d). Test pit excavation has specific characteristics that are well-suited to community archaeology, and while few projects to date have explored its broader impacts, many of these characteristics help it achieve wider societal benefits (Lewis 2014b). Community test pit excavation uses a co-produced participative approach which integrates lay and expert knowledge and resources giving communities an equal, democratic hand at all stages from finding sites for excavation through carrying out the excavations to exploring the outcomes (Lewis 2016b). Community test pit excavation umbilically connects rural communities to their own local heritage because people are excavating in familiar everyday domestic locations such as village communal space, gardens or other unbuilt-up land within villages or small towns they live in (Lewis 2016d). The excavations make genuinely new and important discoveries about the long-term development of rural communities (e.g. Lewis 2016c) whose heritage is the epitome of subaltern, enhancing the value of volunteers' contribution to others (including the local community, researchers, and the heritage sector), and thereby to themselves.

Importantly for the CARE project (which seeks to build capacity for beneficial participative community archaeology by showing how this can work in different contexts regardless of prior conditions), a strategy using test pit excavation – in which all pits are the same size and excavated using the same methodology – is able to offer broadly the same opportunities to different people in different places. Controlling dependent variables in this way, such as site type and methodological variation, brings CARE as close as any community archaeology project is likely to get to an experimental approach. This strengthens the validity of observations and inferences based on comparison of the data (social and archaeological) from different communities.

Project locations and progress

The CARE project aims to include 12 different rural communities in four countries. This paper reviews data on the social outcomes of the excavation to date (October 2020) of a total of 80 test pits by around 350 local residents in ten communities in 2019 (Lewis et al. 2020) and 2020 (the latter somewhat disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic) in the Czech Republic, Netherlands and Poland. In the Czech Republic CARE test pit excavations took place in 2019–20 in Myslinka (district of Pilsen North) where 17 test pits have been excavated by c. 20 local people; Předhradí in Eastern Bohemia (district of Chrudim) where 12 test-pits were excavated in 2020; and Vanovice (district of Blansko in Moravia) where 19 test pits have been excavated. In the Netherlands 31 test pits were excavated in 2019 in four villages in the Het Groene Woud area of Brabant in the south of the country: four in Aarle (near Best) excavated by c. 20 local residents; 14 in Gemonde by c. 150 volunteers, seven in Liempde by c. 50 volunteers and six in Woensel by c. 30 volunteers. In Poland 12 test pits were excavated in 2019 by 30 residents of Chycina (western Poland) and 13 in Sławsko (central Pomerania) in 2020 by c. 70 local residents. In the UK nine test pits were excavated by c. 50 volunteers in Old Dalby Leicestershire. Space precludes the inclusion here of information about the history and archaeology of each of these participating communities, or of summaries of the archaeological discoveries from the CARE excavations, but these can be found on the project website³ and outcomes are published annually in *Medieval Settlement Research* (e.g. Lewis et al. 2020).

Overall, progress towards the CARE project aims has been good, but excavation plans were severely disrupted in 2020 by the Covid-19 pandemic which prevented all excavation in the Netherlands and UK and reduced activity in the Czech Republic and Poland where fieldwork could only be carried out during short viral lulls in the summer.

Evaluation methods and cohort

Three different methods are being used by CARE researchers to evaluate the impact of participation: (a) post-participation paper feedback forms with questions about attitudes to the activity and its impact on skills and knowledge; (b) quasi-experimental before-and-after survey with control

groups using approaches from Social Identity Theory to explore the impact on wellbeing; and (c) post-participation semi-structured in-depth one to one interviews coded and analysed using a Grounded Theory approach to more organically elicit other, potentially unforeseen, relationships between project and impacts. Only the data from the first of these – the post-participation forms⁴ – will be reviewed in this paper, with the other outcomes to be published elsewhere. This review will accordingly focus on participant engagement and the impact on participants.

The post-participation feedback forms replicated questions previously used extensively in the UK (Lewis 2016d), translated from English into Czech/Dutch/Polish by native speakers fluent in English and familiar with the CARE project context, aims and methods. Questions sought to elicit qualitative and quantitative data, with responses including tick boxes, likert scales and free-text write-in sections. Responses were provided either by participants completing paper forms (the majority), or by project staff asking questions verbally and entering participants' responses on paper forms. Data from 47 completed forms are included in this review, 20 from the Czech Republic (from Vanovice and Myslinka); 14 from the Netherlands (from Woensel) and 13 from Poland (from Sławsko). Respondent numbers have been kept relatively low by a need to avoid discouraging participants by overloading them with paperwork and to allow space for different evaluation methods. The responses do however represent between 25% and 50% of participants in each of the places where the feedback surveys were conducted. The cohorts in each country were demographically quite different: the Dutch group was equally balanced between genders with an average age of 54, ranging from 27 to 77, while the Czech and Polish adults were predominantly female and respondents included larger numbers of children. The Polish cohort included nine female and four male, the Czech cohort seven female, one male and 12 children, with an age range from 6 to 63 years, averaging 23 years with the average age of children 10 and of adults 42. Overall, across the 47 respondents, 66% were female, 34% male. In Poland, around 85% of female responders had a higher education qualification, which is considerably higher than the average of c. 20% for the entire country. Their involvement in the project was certainly more pronounced than women with lower level of education. This may be due to the socially inbuilt anxiety of the latter group around confronting the unknown or interacting with people from outside their own social niche.

Outcomes

Participant engagement

Observation shows that the response of local residents to the opportunity to take part in this entirely new activity in countries where there is no established tradition of participative community archaeology has overall been remarkably positive. In the Netherlands, several of the villages have seen considerable numbers of recent incomers and suburbanization, resulting in some loss of connection between residents and place histories, but in all four Dutch villages, the idea of participative archaeology exploring local communities has been taken up with a considerable degree of enthusiasm, helped by an existing network of local history societies. In the Czech Republic many villages remain very rural and some have seen extensive remodelling in the last century after World War II and during communist collectivization. In Myslinka and Vanovice the project generated enthusiastic engagement with some adults who were too busy to participate (needing to cultivate rather than excavate their gardens) sending their children to take part in the excavations while they worked at home (more than 50% of the feedback respondents from Vanovice were children, and in Předhradí five local primary school classes were involved in 2020). In Poland, the most rural of all European countries, a remarkable 25% of the entire population of 120 residents of the village of Chycina took part, again including many children.

In written feedback, 100% of respondents said they would recommend the activity to others. This positive endorsement is reflected in action in the Netherlands, as the number of participants grew exponentially as the project moved between neighbouring communities over four months in 2019

as a result of word spreading: there were 20 volunteers on the pilot in Aarle/Best in April, 30 in Woensel in May, 50 in Liempde in July and by August the excavations in Germonde attracted 150 volunteers. The University of Amsterdam team had to recruit more archaeologists to accommodate the demand.

Overall, 89% of all feedback respondents rated the experience 'good' or 'excellent' and 64% reported enjoying it more or much more than they expected (81% of Czech respondents, 36% Dutch and 62% Polish). It should be noted that the apparently cool Dutch responses may be explained by higher initial expectations being met, rather than less enjoyment, as the remaining Dutch responses, reporting they enjoyed it as much as they had expected to, included enthusiastic free-text comments. Their enjoyment was also reflected in an observed pattern of residents who had participated in excavations in one village volunteering again on the next (a major factor in driving the growth in numbers in the Netherlands).

Asked to tick boxes to show which (if any) specified aspects participants had particularly enjoyed about taking part, 66% ticked 'learning something new'; 40% 'working independently'; 77% 'meeting/working with others'; 57% 'doing valuable research'; 60% 'finding things from the past' and 72% 'learning about the past' (Figure 3). It is notable that when UK participants have answered the same questions about their community test pit excavation experience, the same categories consistently score highest (learning something new, working with others and connecting with the past) (e.g. Lewis and Ranson 2014, 55). Free-text written-in comments showed recurring themes. Dutch participants asked what else (if anything) they had enjoyed about participating in the excavations included 'Speculating about stories', 'Enjoying (physical) activities' 'To be working on such a project with so many people' and 'The joy that the participating children experienced'. Polish respondents appreciated 'The openness of the archaeologists and their willingness to answer all sorts of questions', 'Good atmosphere', 'Getting children involved in the project' and 'Better understanding of the place of origin'. Czech comments included 'It's interesting to get information about archaeology work – very interesting experience', 'Meeting fantastic people', 'Great atmosphere' and 'Surprising finds of old artefacts'. Asked if there was anything they hadn't enjoyed, most people offered no response, with most of those who did respond referring to the hard physical work and the weather (too wet in the Netherlands and too hot in Poland) – although one Dutch respondent followed their pithy comment 'The weather' with a smiley face emoji. We can infer these issues are of

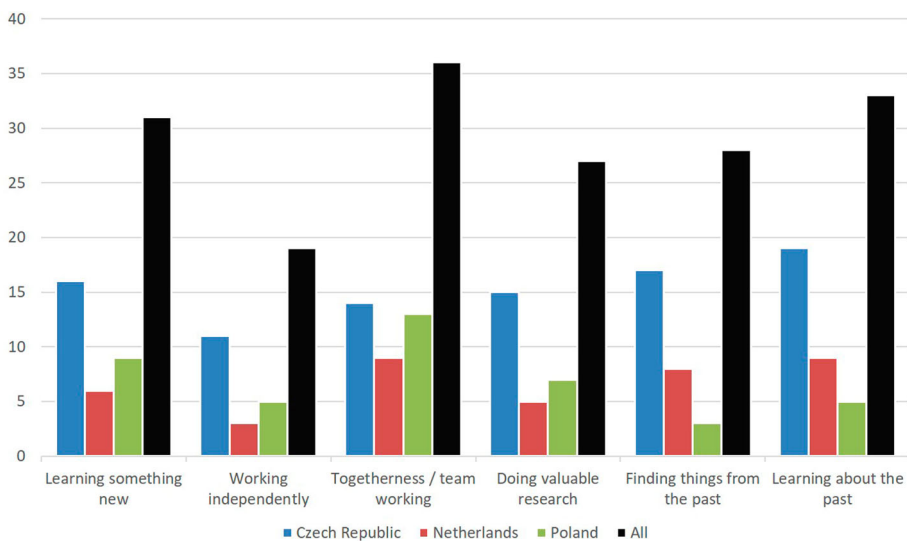


Figure 3. Aspects of the excavations particularly enjoyed by feedback respondents 2019-20 ($n = 47$: Czech Republic 20; Netherlands 14; Poland 13), showing totals for each country plus overall totals in black.

minor importance not least because, as noted above, all respondents said they would recommend the activity to others.

Thus, we can infer that opportunities to participate in local community archaeological excavation are transnationally appealing and enjoyed in many different ways by participants of all ages, even in places where participatory excavation is entirely novel.

Impact on participants

CARE participants were asked about the impact of the experience on attitudes and skills using 5-point likert scales. Asked about their knowledge and interest in archaeology and history⁵ (Figure 4) 77% agreed/strongly agreed that the experience had increased their *knowledge* of local archaeology and history, and 70% that they felt more *engaged* with this than before. Responses were very consistent across the three countries. Asked about the impact the experience would have on their *future* interest, 55% said they would be more interested in *local* archaeology and history, and 57% in archaeology and history *generally*. Dutch responses tended to be lower (29% agreeing or strongly agreeing for both questions, compared with 70%/80% in the Czech Republic and 61%/54% in Poland). This may be explained by a higher baseline level of local historical knowledge and interest amongst Dutch participants, many of whom were active members of their local historical society (a similar phenomenon has been noted using the same questionnaire in the UK). In free-text responses, one Dutch participant commented 'If you are interested in history, it is certainly recommended to take part; if you are not interested, then it is also recommended, it could increase the interest'.

The CARE feedback questionnaire also asked respondents about the impact their participation had had on a range of transferrable skills, again using a 5-point likert scale ranging from 'helped a lot' to 'hindered a lot'⁶ (Figure 5). Over the entire cohort, 68% of respondents agreed it had helped or helped a lot to develop skills in verbal communication; 63% in working to set standards; 77% in creative thinking; 60% in reflective learning; 60% in resilient working; and 70% in team working. In the Czech cohort the proportion agreeing ranged from 70% to 85%, in the Polish from 70% to 93%, but the Dutch responses were considerably lower, ranging from 29% to 57%.

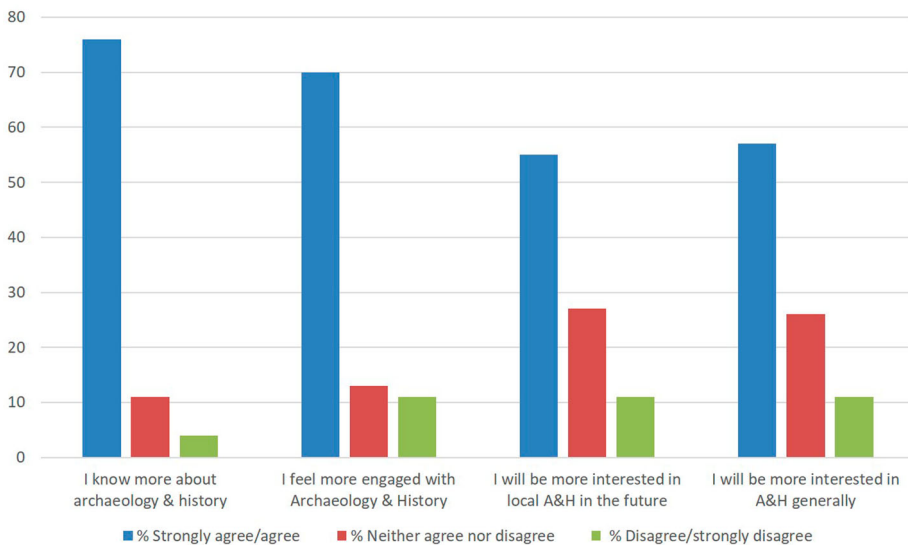


Figure 4. Impact of CARE participation on knowledge or attitudes to Archaeology and History amongst feedback respondents 2019–20 ($n = 47$: Czech Republic 20; Netherlands 14; Poland 13) using 5-point likert scale showing percentages agreeing/strongly agreeing (blue); neither agree not disagree (red) and disagree/strongly disagree (green).

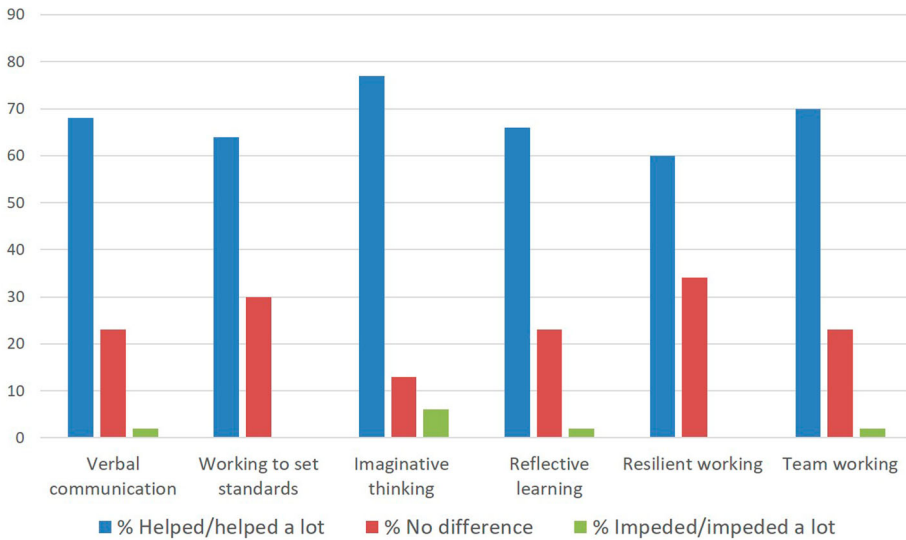


Figure 5. Impact of CARE participation on transferrable skills knowledge or attitudes to Archaeology and History amongst feedback respondents 2019-20 ($n = 47$: Czech Republic 20; Netherlands 14; Poland 13), showing percentages saying the experience helped/helped a lot (blue); made no difference (red) and hindered/hindered a lot (green).

The reasons for this are not clear. There is no significant correlation with gender, but it is possible that the younger age of Czech and Polish respondents may be a factor.

Another source of evidence for the impact of participation are free-text comments in which respondents were invited to expand on whether they would recommend the activity to others (which all did, as noted above). The responses radiate enthusiasm, and again recurring sentiments are expressed across the different countries. Dutch responses included 'Just do it, undergo it, experience it'; 'Get to know real archaeology!'; 'It's cosy and you get to know your neighbours better'; 'Nice to meet / speak to other people with the same interest'; '[I enjoyed] working on such a project with so many people'; 'Fun experience ... interesting to see how it goes, fun to find things'; 'It is of intrinsic value, to get to know the ground under your feet better, it makes history, and thus the stories we learn and tell a lot more tangible'. Czech comments included 'It's interesting to get information about archaeology'; 'Discovering new experiences'; 'It's great to work together with archaeology experts'; 'It's very entertaining – it's like travelling in time'; 'Now we are able to recognize archaeological traces in our own flower bed!'; 'Great chance to meet interesting people'. Polish responses included 'Everyone had a chance to see how complex the work of archaeologists is'; 'Great fun'; 'Getting to learn perseverance and patience'; 'Enjoyment of working together as a group'; 'A great way of learning about history of the village and the region'; 'A man feels important', 'Archaeology unearths identity'; 'Everyone should take part in the project to know he/she literally walks on the past'; 'Getting to know the past'; 'Learning new skills and acquiring new experiences'.

We can infer from this that the activity does confer new knowledge and skills, as well as enjoyment. In addition, although this feedback survey was not explicitly intended to explore the wellbeing impact on participants (we explore this using other methods), we can in fact see in the responses above how the experience is supporting all five NEF pillars of psychological wellbeing (Aked et al. 2008), that is: connecting with others (e.g. 'Good chance to talk and discuss things with other people' (CZ)); being physically active (e.g. 'It was pretty intense in terms of physical exertion' (NL)); learning something new (e.g. 'Getting familiarized with archaeological techniques' (this was the most frequent Polish answer)); mindfulness (e.g. 'it was nice to just dig and think about nothing' (NL)); and giving back (e.g. 'it makes history, and thus the stories we learn and tell a lot more tangible' (NL)). We also see impacts on identity, self-esteem and place attachment. In some



Figure 6. Connecting CARE with local communities and wider publics throughout the project lifecycle. Top: Czech project lead Pavel Vařeka introduces the concepts and methods of CARE test pit excavations to rural residents in Vanovice (Czech Republic). Middle: Filming the excavations in Woensel (Netherlands) for broadcast on Dutch TV programme *Goud van Brabant* (Netherlands). Bottom: Project archaeologist Dawid Kobiálka introduces children in Sławsko (Poland) to the finds they have just helped excavate.

responses wellbeing conditions are clearly linked, with the Dutch responses about physical exertion and enjoying thinking about nothing while digging coming from the same person. The Polish participants stressed an importance of transferable skills they acquired (learning something new), such as the ability to express themselves, to formulate accurate and precise opinions and the impact of increasing self-esteem. In all three countries, many comments related to the enhanced awareness they had gained about their local place and the physical survival of its past. In all communities,

the projects made important contributions to knowledge about the past (Lewis et al. 2020), and the value of this to volunteers appears to transcend very different recent histories (Figure 6).

Reflection

The CARE project is focused on rural communities in Europe and the places where they live: the excavations take place within rural settlements, with the intention of advancing archaeological knowledge about those same settlements, through archaeological activities carried out by residents of those settlements, on sites they may own, choose, excavate, debate, research and care for afterwards. While our project introducing participatory home-based archaeological excavation and evaluating its impact is still at an early stage, some reflections on this can be offered.

Gaining traction

Networks have been vital in getting the novel idea of community test pit excavation started. In the Netherlands the involvement of local history societies has been crucial to the project's success. Each of the villages where excavation took place in 2019 has such a group, and all had been contacted early in the process of developing the project, at the proposal stage as early as 2017. By the time the project was able to begin, there was considerable pent-up enthusiasm for the idea of excavating. The Dutch projects have also had a lot of support from local politicians, which has even leveraged additional funding. In the Czech Republic, support from village councils and local mayors has been of great importance in encouraging people to engage with the project. This varies in different places, stressing the importance of embedded local knowledge when originating projects: in Vanovice, support from influential local families (farmers with family history going back to the post-medieval period) who are highly respected by the community is crucial – if they are supportive, others will follow them, but this does not apply in Myslinka, where all are post-WWII newcomers. Also stressing the importance of personal connections, we have noted how interest often spreads organically once excavations have taken place in one community, with new volunteers and communities expressing interest after hearing of or seeing the activity in other villages.

Leadership and communication

Leadership and good interpersonal skills by archaeologists has also been important. Enthusiastic in-person introductory 'evangelising' meetings within communities are very effective in raising interest while also providing an opportunity to forestall misconceptions. In the Czech Republic, there has been great interest in both villages about this project, however many people remain cautious. They appreciate research regarding the history of their village and the possibility of learning something new but can also be puzzled by outside interest ('Why was just our village chosen? Is it somehow interesting?' represents a typical question).

Good interaction by archaeologists during the excavations is also essential, with high value placed on the chance to work with and learn from archaeologists featuring strongly in feedback comments from all countries. In Poland, project leaders noted how the level of satisfaction and enjoyment was systematically increased as volunteers got to understand the process through the encouragement and support from a friendly team of archaeologists. Social 'end of dig' events are also an important element, with volunteers appreciating the chance to get together to see what each other have found and share experiences over refreshments.

Historic resettlement, movement and connection with place

A significant number of communities in all three countries have experienced population changes over the last century, and these have had a range of impacts on their response to the opportunity

to explore its past. Many Czech villages remain very rural and have faced fundamental ethnic, social and economic changes in the last century due to the impact of World War II (annexation of border regions, occupation by Nazi Germany and post-war expulsion of three million inhabitants of German nationality) and the communist era with its 'class struggle' (aimed particularly at wealthy farmers called 'kulaks', according the Soviet ideological model) and collectivization that have dramatically changed the traditional social structure, land tenure and built environment of rural settlements. Attempts to introduce the CARE project in one Czech village in Bohemia situated close to a former ethnic/language border failed because although the mayor was keen, residents were uneasy about outside interest in the history of the village, a sensitive subject in a region where the repeated ethnic removals and replacement of village populations during and after World War II are still remembered. A very different process, urban expansion in the 1960s and 1970s, saw Woensel in the Netherlands incorporated in the suburb Woensel-Zuid with most of the old houses replaced by modern high-rise buildings. The village community has changed as a consequence and it was unclear how many of the current residents still had ties to the historic village or even knew about it. It is thus interesting to see the number of feedback comments focussing on the impact participation had on volunteers' knowledge of and connection with history. In Sławsko in Poland the value of the contribution to knowledge about the village and its past made by the active participation of residents was particularly valued by a community that are descendants of migrant groups relocated to Pomerania after WWII. Here, only the fourth generation seem to have started to feel at home here and want to get to know a local history that was completely unimportant to their parents and grandparents. The CARE experience enhances place attachment independent of deep personal ancestral roots.

Making a valued contribution

Observation and comments in feedback alike showed the value volunteers placed on knowing their finds were of genuine value for understanding the past. Volunteers in Poland reported enjoying the balance between individual responsibility of digging individual test pits and the need to produce results that can be compared with the work of other project participants. They appreciated a sense of belonging to the newly formed group, they felt privileged in becoming important members of the team discovering the history of their own village. Similar sentiments are expressed explicitly in Dutch feedback comments on the 'intrinsic value of getting to know the ground under your feet better [which] makes history, and thus the stories we learn and tell a lot more tangible'. Physical work, including 'digging', is nothing new for Czech rural residents, many of who work regularly in gardens, keep farm animals (chicken, rabbits, pigs, cows, horses) and some are involved in farming. While they may not have much time during spring – autumn (when they do their normal job during working days and work physically in their house/farm/garden/fields during weekends), many were keen to send their children along to participate. There has been considerable disappointment in many villages that winter social events planned to celebrate achievements and discuss plans for next year cannot take place because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Wider public and media interest

The potential for wider public interest is considerable and recognized as so by some volunteers, with one Dutch respondent advising 'the local newspaper could be approached with reports that appeal to the imagination of the wider public'. This comment was made after the first Dutch event, and the public profile of the project has increased steadily during the 2019 season in the Netherlands, with promotional banners made using the project logo (also developed by the Dutch team), a TV programme made about the excavations (for a program called 'Goud van Brabant' (*Gold from Brabant*), a feature in *Het Parool* magazine,⁷ interviews on national radio and shortlisting for two archaeology awards, one local and one national. The project was even included in an on-stage

performance as part of a regional carnival. In the Czech Republic, there is also considerable media interest in the CARE project, with test-pitting in Myslinka covered by Czech Radio (national public radio broadcaster of the Czech Republic) and local media before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Likewise in Poland a programme about the field work in Sławsko in summer of 2020 was produced by the Szczecin branch of Polish national TV Station⁸ and the fieldwork was also presented on local Polskie Radio Koszalin.⁹ We hope this high profile will sustain interest in recommencing excavations 2021 after the anticipated relaxation of anti-pandemic measures.

Engagement with heritage authorities

The CARE project activity has had a range of interactions with and impacts on local and national heritage agencies. In the Czech Republic the National Heritage Agency and Institute of Archaeology the Czech Academy of Sciences have expressed satisfaction at the opportunity to find out more about village archaeology, as little of this is generally reported through the development process, especially in private premises such as farms and gardens. In Poland, on the other hand, the bureaucracy around securing permits for this novel approach to participative excavation was slow and very time-consuming in 2019, and the local forestry authority refused permission to excavate at all on state-managed land in Chycina. Encouraged by the 2019 results, however, the authority had become much more encouraging when re-approached in early March 2020 after the success of the 2019 season, although the office was unfortunately closed by the pandemic before any further work could be organized in Chycina in 2020. In a very different response, the local heritage office in West Pomerania Voivodship was more positive from the outset about the opportunity the CARE project offered, and the process of gaining permits for excavation there was quick and straightforward – helped by the CARE team being able to cite the positive precedent set by Chycina and refer to the excavation permit issued there by Lubusz Voivodship heritage authorities in 2019.

In the Netherlands the CARE project has been enthusiastically welcomed by local authorities and the concept of participative community archaeology is also gaining considerable interest from the National Heritage Agency (RCE). RCE have invited the CARE team to cooperate with them in their Faro programme exploring how to implement the Faro Convention in Dutch heritage policy, the outcomes of which will be used to inform the Minister of Education, Culture and Science. They have also granted additional funding to expand CARE's planned community archaeology work, adding a further exploration of the concepts of public participation and public initiatives as stated in the main aims of the FARO program. This enquiry, using questions on local history raised by the villagers themselves, has initiated some small fieldwork projects within the regulations set by the National Institute for Public Health, which are already leading to interesting results. In addition, a new national fund to support community involvement and participation in archaeology and heritage, Archeologie Participatiefonds,¹⁰ has been established, and the Dutch CARE team have helped secure €6000 to €8000 for each of the participating history clubs which they can use to hire extra archaeologists to support more participants during CARE events, fund social end-of-dig activities and make a professional video of the discoveries made by the CARE volunteers.

Managing evaluation

The challenge of not only introducing a new type of activity – participatory community archaeological excavation – into three countries, but simultaneously attempting robustly to evaluate its impact, is not to be underestimated. In the UK members of the public have been taking part in archaeological excavations in or near their home communities for more than a century (considerably longer, in the case of some wealthier estate owning families), yet only within the last decade or so have we begun to attempt seriously to evaluate their impact and benefits. The CARE project involves trying, in effect, to fast-track this process by introducing evaluation at the same time as the activity itself, and by doing so in robust, novel ways involving three different methods. This is not easy, and

CARE project teams have found that a compromise needs to be made to ensure newly enthused volunteers are not discouraged from taking part by the prospect of seemingly over-bureaucratic or over-intrusive data collection. In Myslinka and Vanovice, around 40 people participated in the community archaeology activities but only 20 filled the forms, indicating that we need to find some other way, perhaps using a tablet, to collect more responses. When this does recommence, it will be interesting to see if there is any indication that the Covid-19 pandemic has affected responses.

Covid-19 – impact and future

The 2020 Covid-19 pandemic severely impacted the CARE project, significantly restricting the amount of test pit excavation that could be carried out and impacting on related research activity as university campuses closed and staff worked from home or were redeployed. In Poland and the Czech Republic the spring-summer 2020 outbreaks were less severe and some fieldwork was possible. The Netherlands was badly affected from the outset of the pandemic, especially in the Brabant area where CARE villages were located, and no test pit excavation was possible at all throughout 2020. Interestingly, this did however open up other options. In Kasteren the Dutch CARE team helped the local history club organizing a field survey to explore the assumed Roman origins of one hamlet. At this point the Covid-19 restrictions had been in place for several months, and at first we thought people might be reluctant to take part in an community archaeology event, even with all the necessary precautions. But the contrary was true. The Covid-imposed limit of 40 participants was reached in no time, even before the invitation could be published in the local newspaper and we had to make a reserve list. Many of the participants told us they were keen to go out and do something, and CARE was one of the few activities on offer. It was interesting to see this additional demonstration of the social relevance of community archaeology projects.

Nonetheless, forward planning remains difficult. With waves of Covid-19 cases in autumn 2020 leading to new or re-imposed restrictions, planned additional Czech work was put on hold while the Dutch team had to postpone a planned survey in Best to avoid risks for the senior members – and then turned to looking at organizing something for high school students, a low-risk group for Covid-19, with a teacher of the Elde College in Schijndel keen to participate with their pupils as part of their history classes. In the long term, however, the extension of the CARE project by a year to make up for a year's lost fieldwork may usefully give the concept of participative local community archaeology longer to embed, and ultimately increase longer-term sustainability. We shall see.

Conclusion

In spite of the challenges, we have gained substantive data, from observation and feedback, to indicate that participative community archaeology with, within and about rural communities can be transnationally both popular and beneficial to people and places.¹¹ Based on UK experience, we expected it to be so, but the question we needed to answer was whether this would actually prove to be the case in countries lacking long-standing traditions of community archaeology; or in communities whose attachment to place has been impacted by recent history; or where local authorities may be unsupportive. We now believe the answer to this is 'yes', as our evidence shows participative community archaeology enhancing skills, knowledge and wellbeing; binding, bonding and bridging communities; and adding further value through heritage attachment, place attachment, place-making and place-branding. One longer free-text feedback comment can be cited here to show the impact of participation on one Dutch participant, highlighting the impact of participation on perceptions of connections between place, people, past, present and future:

It's great! Very rewarding experience + well managed. I think it's important for us to be aware of how our current objects and man-made materials have an effect on the future. They tell our story, who we are as a group and what kind of things were important part of our lives.

We look forward to further advancing our understanding of the societal impact of the CARE project excavations through analysis of data collected using our other two approaches and expanding our dataset using all three approaches as fieldwork recommences (we hope) in 2021–22. And we hope that this evidence will ultimately prove sufficiently robust to encourage heritage authorities to support participative community archaeology much more widely across the continent in the future, thus helping achieve the aspirations of the Faro Convention.

Notes

1. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/culture-and-heritage/faro-convention>.
2. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/>.
3. <https://archaeologyeurope.blogs.lincoln.ac.uk/>.
4. All participants gave informed consent for their answers to be collected, either by ticking a box on the feedback form or verbally before completing the form, having read or had the reasons for data collection explained. Ethics approval for this study was granted by the Human Ethics Committee at the University of Lincoln reference 2020_4176.
5. The question was 'How has the test pit digging affected your knowledge of and attitudes to the archaeology and history of the village you've excavated in, and archaeology and heritage more generally? For each of the following statements, circle one of boxes below to indicate the extent to which you agree with the statement, where 1 = "strongly agree"; 2 = "agree"; 3 = "neither agree nor disagree", 4 is "disagree" and 5 = "strongly disagree". The statements were: 1. I know more about the archaeology & history of the place I excavated in than I did before. 2. I feel more engaged with the archaeology and heritage of the place I excavated in than before. 3. I will take more interest in the archaeology and heritage of the place I excavated in in the future. 4. I will take more interest in archaeology and heritage generally in the future.
6. The question was 'For each of the skills described below, circle one number to indicate the extent to which you feel that the time you've spent has helped you develop the skill sets described below, where 1 = "helped a lot"; 2 = "helped quite a lot"; 3 = "not made any difference"; 4 = "hindered"; and 5 = "hindered a lot". The skill sets for each question were described as: 1. Discussing your own and other people's ideas and talking about what you have done and discovered to different people. 2. Completing an investigation looking for new data by correctly following a set procedure and working to set standards. 3. Using your imagination intelligently to come up with ideas to explain your team's findings or solve problems. 4. Assessing how you and others approach set tasks, and using this to make necessary changes to your working. 5. Working with persistence and maintaining a high standard of work and a positive attitude to tasks. 6. Being a good team member by completing your own tasks effectively and giving others any help they needed.
7. <https://www.dpgmediagroup.com/en/our-media/het-parool>.
8. https://szczecin.tvp.pl/49337193/badanie-przeslosci-wsi-warsztaty-archeologiczne-w-slasku?fbclid=IwAR0wkTDTcVO1E9fBCMRXf-8TgUvmRNMZA1AePbiU_keU7sX-nz2vzZyb690.
9. <http://prk24.pl/49301793/archeologia-wspolnotowa-katarzyna-kuzel?fbclid=IwAR0ZWhf4mjqlB5goFbTxuFy-O3LLqCKpkzmHnt24WnsWCczfrf77cvaiZTc>.
10. <https://cultuurparticipatie.nl/subsidie-aanvragen/1/archeologieparticipatie>.
11. Data and analysis of the finds from the test pit excavations are summarised each year in *Medieval Settlement Research* (Lewis et al. 2020).

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