2. ASSESSMENT OF THE LOCAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERITAGE

2.1 Introduction: assessment objectives

The assessment process is a key phase in designing the LAP because it is allowing the initiators of this project and the designated working group to understand the local archaeological heritage and to identify its significance and potential. The resulting assessment report is intended to be the starting point for a comprehensive feasibility study (see Chapter 3), which in turn will guide the designing of a coherent LAP (see Chapter 4), based on a set of realistic objectives, and in accordance with the local social and economic conditions and interests.

Therefore, the main objectives of the assessment process are:

- To identify the main components and characteristics of the local archaeological heritage, and their precise location within the urban landscape;
- To collect and synthesize relevant information regarding their research and conservation status, including the eventual knowledge gaps;
- To provide an initial estimate of the cultural, social and economic importance of the local archaeological heritage based on specific **value indicators**;
- To identify its potential for cultural tourism based on existing local resources;
- To identify the existing legal, administrative, social, and economic framework within which the future archaeological park will operate.

The **assessment process** must be grounded on concrete, relevant and up-to-date information, coming from credible sources. Accordingly, the working team could include a number of other experts who are familiar with the local archaeological heritage and its current status, besides archaeologists and site managers (see subchapter 1.4). However, the language of the resulting assessment report has to be as accessible as possible to a non-specialist public, without compromising its scientific quality and reliability.

Another equally important element is to maintain a rigorous and systematic approach that is taking into consideration all of the relevant features of the local archaeological heritage, as well as the related social, cultural, administrative and economic factors that would facilitate its successful development into a viable local archaeological park. This approach should also pay attention to the wider potential for cultural tourism within the community in question, which will contribute to a solid strategy of value creation in social as well as economic terms. Still, the assessment process should not be conducted to just compile all of the available primary data about the existing local archaeological heritage, since this could prevent the articulation of a clear and convincing proposal that would appeal to non-specialist stakeholders and decision makers. Instead, the assessment process should be based on a data collection strategy that is targeting the essential information related to three key aspects (Demas 2002, 34-38):

- Significance – identification of the historical, artistic, cultural, ecological, social and economic importance of the local archaeological heritage, and including the identification of the social groups and organizations for whom this is important;
- State of preservation – identification of the physical condition of the local archaeological remains, including known and/or presumed spatial extensions, past and/or still required research and conservation works, and threatening environmental, administrative, social and economic factors;
- Potential – identification of the social, cultural, touristic and economic potential, and the current and future interest and ability of the local community and administration to maintain it.

Accordingly, the systematic collection and analysis of primary data should focus on three main sets of value indicators that will inform each of the above-mentioned key aspects of the assessment process:

- Archaeological, historical, artistic and cultural value indicators;
- Social value indicators;
- Economic value indicators, in particular those related to the tourism industry.

A successful assessment process requires a number of key actions:

- Selection of an efficient working team;
- Development of a work plan with clearly stated tasks and objectives;
- Identification of the stakeholders and of the best ways of engaging with them;
- Identification of the local archaeological heritage and its state of preservation;
- Analysis of its significance;
- Analysis of its potential;
- Production of an initial synthesis report, including the estimated cost of the feasibility studies;
- Review and decision-making process based on the final assessment report.

2.2 Identification and analysis of the local archaeological heritage

Usually, a significant part of the local archaeological heritage is already highly visible, either as more-or-less well preserved open-air standing structures and monuments, or as portable artefacts kept in various museums and collections. Other traces of human habitation from the past could be more discrete, either because these are still buried, so their existence is only attested by non-invasive archaeological surveys or historical documents, or were reburied after being investigated by archaeologists in order to protect them (for this practice and its conservation value, see Demas 2004).

Scientific information about these remains is often publicly available in published archaeological or historical monographs, specialist articles, exhibition catalogues and archaeological field reports. Depending on the national legislation, unpublished field reports resulting from preventive archaeological excavations can be found in the archives of the local or regional heritage protection office, or of other institutions responsible for this kind of archaeological investigations. This is a common occurrence especially in urban settings where preventive archaeological excavations are frequently contracted by property developers, producing a significant amount of primary archaeological data. If the targeted archaeological site is part of an ongoing or recently concluded systematic research project, a form of collaboration should be agreed with the leading institution and the site director. In this way, relevant information can be obtained even if the respective results are not yet publicly available. Again depending on the national legislation, archaeological projects of this kind are often required to draft a conservation proposal for the site as part of the research project, and this would also provide valuable information for the assessment process.

Other sources of useful primary data are the conservation and restoration studies or projects proposed or commissioned by various authorities and institutions. This kind of documents could allow the assessment team to understand the current state of preservation and the factors threatening the local archaeological remains, while also proposing possible conservation and enhancement solutions that could be later incorporated into the LAP.

The local archaeological or historical museum can also provide useful primary data regarding the local archaeological heritage, including finds inventories, archive documents, and impact reviews of their current and past exhibitions or other public activities.

A step-by-step **work plan** should be designed to collect and analyse efficiently the necessary primary data. This should seek to:

- Identify the relevant published sources of information;
- Identify the relevant unpublished sources of information and get access to them;
- Conclude collaborative agreements with past or ongoing archaeological projects to get access to their unpublished data;
- Develop and use a standardized template to collect the relevant archaeological data for each monument/structure; any knowledge gaps, as well as the state of preservation, should also be included;
- Assemble a set of relevant illustrative materials (photos, drawings, plans, digital 3D models, previous conservation/reconstruction proposals) for each monument/structure;
- Commission a geo-referenced orthophoto map of the area taken into consideration for the future archaeological park, indicating the location and extension of all archaeological remains within the existing local landscape;
- Develop and use a standardized template to assess the historical and cultural relevance of each monument/structure using value indicators;
- Produce a synthesis report containing the results of this analysis.

At this stage, the initial proposal of a central theme or story of the future archaeological park should already take shape. This objective could be best achieved through a contextual analysis of the ways in which the targeted area has been used and transformed by the local community throughout its existence.

To produce a comprehensive inventory of the existing local archaeological heritage, and to identify its state of preservation and its evolution through time, the following key questions have to be considered:

- Which categories of archaeological remains exist locally (e.g. compact settlements/ parts of settlements, single standing built structures, foundations, roads, installations, other traces of habitation/use from the past, free-standing statues, significant portable artefacts)?
- Are these archaeological remains still visible in the landscape or buried/reburied?
- Are these belonging to a single historical period or to several ones?

- Are these occupying a single unitary area or separate areas within or outside the modern town/city?
- Are these remains well documented archaeologically, or significant knowledge gaps still exist, thus requiring further investigations?
- Which is their state of conservation and restoration?
- Are these remains included in planned or ongoing conservation or restoration programs?
- Are these still investigated by archaeologists/are part of ongoing archaeological excavations?

The identification of the **significance of the local archaeological heritage** is a quite complex task, because aside from the scientific or economic significance resulting from standard specialist investigations, there are also social and symbolic meanings arising from the diverse ways in which various individuals and social groups interacted with the archaeological remains and the area which they occupy through time. As a consequence, their perceived significance among the non-specialist stakeholders is largely subjective, being usually shaped by personal or collective experiences, behaviours, real or invented traditions, and interests (Plestenjak, Stokin, Zanier 2014, 182-183; Egri 2020). This is one area in which meaningful consultations with various categories of stakeholders are strongly recommended.

The scientific (archaeological, historical, artistic, cultural) significance is normally determined by specialists using a number of objective value indicators:

- Degree of scientific relevance – local, regional, national, international – and uniqueness;
- Completeness of the preserved archaeological, historical, and artistic information;
- Current state of conservation and potential for improvement and enhancement;
- Ability to convey a coherent historical, cultural or/and artistic message;
- Future scientific potential.

The ecological significance is another important aspect that can be determined by analysing the relationship between the archaeological remains and the surrounding environment. This will inform both the assessment of the current state of preservation and the range of future protection, restoration and enhancement works which will be required by the archaeological park. It will also help to identify possible sources of conflict in the case of archaeological parks which will be established within, or in the close vicinity of, existing natural parks or nature reserves. The analysis should seek to:

- Identify the current environmental conditions and their impact on archaeological remains;
- Determine the existing degree of integration into the local natural landscape and the relationship with natural parks/nature reserves (if any);
- Identify the existing or already planned landscaping works;
- Assess the degree of compliance with local, regional and national green policies.

One useful way of assessing the social significance is to identify the ways in which structures or areas occupied by archaeological remains are used by locals and visitors. This will allow a better understanding of their current perception among various social groups, while also pointing to potential sources of conflict. The necessary information can be obtained through consultations with the stakeholders, including the use of questionnaires, though some data can be sourced directly from existing economic, touristic, social or demographic statistics, urban planning documents, and periodical activity reports produced by various local institutions and organizations.

The following table provides an example of potential activities conducted in structures and areas occupied by archaeological remains. This can help to synthesise the information needed to identify the social significance of the local archaeological heritage.

Types of activities conducted in structures/ areas occupied by archaeological remains	Yes	No	Permanent	Occasional / seasonal
Habitation				
Movement/traffic				
Agriculture				
Other economic activities				
Touristic activities				
Recreational activities				
Cultural activities				
Educational activities				
Religious activities				
Other public activities				

Another questionnaire (see the example below) can be used to get a more detailed perspective on the current economic significance of the local archaeological heritage by identifying the types of economic activities that are directly and indirectly related to the area occupied by archaeological remains, and the corresponding stakeholders.

Type of economic activity	Permanent	Occasional / seasonal	Organizers
Exhibition	yes		Museum
Souvenir shops	yes		Private company
Guided tours	yes		Tour companies
Re-enactment festival		yes	Museum, NGO
Traditional crafts festival		yes	NGO
Concert		yes	Orchestra X
....			

It has to be noted that, while the existing economic activities that are directly related to the local archaeological remains are more easily identifiable, those that are indirectly related require a holistic approach that takes into consideration the ways in which the local business environment operates, in order to get a correct estimate. For example, a re-enactment festival that was organized in connection with the archaeological remains by the local museum can be considered a directly related economic activity, bringing in access fees and other direct revenues, though its functioning would have required various support services provided by local enterprises (e.g. catering, accommodation, temporary signage, garbage collection etc), which can be classified as indirectly related.

Actual financial data are also important to assess the current economic impact of the local archaeological heritage. Though this kind of analysis would primarily be part of the feasibility study, some preliminary information can be obtained from publicly available sources, in order to produce some estimates.

Accessibility is another important feature which defines both the social and the economic significance of the local archaeological heritage. This has two major components, one concerning the degree of physical access, and another concerning informational access.

The degree of actual physical access can be assessed using the following indicators:

- Presence of gated/fenced areas;
- Access for pedestrian, bicycle and/or motorised traffic;
- Access for people with mobility, hearing or sight issues;
- Connectivity with the public transportation system;
- Existence of lighting and security systems;
- Availability of resting areas, including bins, toilets, benches, free drinking water fountains etc;
- Availability of recharging stations for electronic devices and vehicles;
- Type of the ticketing system.

The degree of informational access can be assessed using the following indicators:

- Availability of explicative panels, posters, banners, printed guidebooks and maps in different languages;
- Internet connectivity, including free WLAN access;
- Availability of a dedicated webpage/website in different languages;
- Availability of other digital information sources, e.g. dedicated apps, QR codes, infopods, audio-guides in different languages;
- Availability of site guides and guided tours;
- Presence of a site museum/exhibition.

The existing legal and administrative framework of the structures and areas occupied by archaeological remains will play a major role in the development of the archaeological park, so this has to be clearly identified during the assessment phase. This will also allow the identification of several relevant stakeholders. At the same time, the existing management characteristics of the local archaeological heritage, as well as its main budgetary components, including the maintenance costs and the existing revenue sources (if any), are also important for the assessment of its economic potential. This is especially valid in the case of archaeological sites and monuments which are already integrated into touristic circuits or are hosting other types of social, economic and cultural activities that are bringing revenue. The aim should be to identify:

- Existing landowners, both public and private;
- The institution(s) responsible for its administration and maintenance (if any);
- The management structure (if any);
- The available budget (if any), and its source(s);
- The inclusion into the local, regional or national plans/strategies for the protection, promotion and valorization of local archaeological heritage, including cultural tourism programs (if any);
- Past or current preservation, conservation and enhancement works (if any), and their financial support;
- Degree of integration into existing touristic or cultural networks;
- Use as a marketing tool/brand by local authorities, companies or other entities (if any).