

Enhancement of archaeological sites and human remains in decentralized areas: territorial expansion and ethical education through the involvement of students.

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Abstract. The enhancement of archaeological sites with human remains is an essential practice to preserve and understand our past, but these realities also constitute a unique opportunity to involve both the community and especially the students in stimulating and interdisciplinary lessons. The “Archaeological Itinerary of the Valcuvia territory”, with its focus on the recovery of human remains from peripheral archaeological sites, is a virtuous example of the use of innovative teaching strategies, activating information and training courses on the various historical, archaeological, anthropological and ethical problems, through the history of ancient populations.

Keywords: bioarchaeological sites; minor cultural heritage; peripheral archaeological sites; teaching

The enhancement of archaeological sites with human remains is an essential practice to preserve and understand our past. However, in addition to historic preservation, these sites also offer a unique opportunity to engage students in stimulating and interdisciplinary lessons. These sites reveal valuable information about ancient civilizations, their beliefs, social and cultural practices, including burial rituals. Archaeological excavations allow us to uncover the details of past life, diseases, dietary and lifestyle habits, developments in medical knowledge, practices associated with death and the cult of the dead (1,2). Exploring and delving into these aspects of the past allows us to understand the different perspectives on life and death and connects us with our cultural roots. The valorization of these sites represents a unique opportunity also to revitalize the territorial development of small communities that have not been able to express their potential yet and, unjustly from the cultural point of view, we labelled as “minor sites” from a cultural standpoint, inaugurating alternative archaeological-historical-artistic routes and redirecting tourist flows.

A virtuous example of this new perspective is the “Archaeological Route of the Valcuvia territory”,

an innovative tourist route that aims to connect small archaeological realities of northern Italy. It focuses on the possibility of involving the local community and attracting students to provide qualified education on historical, archaeological, anthropological and ethical themes related to the management of human finds and the past, re-functionalizing sites that have been underutilized or forgotten by the community itself for years (2, 3).

Through the preparation of interactive educational materials, the organization of workshops, discussions and seminars with experts from various disciplines (such as archaeology, biology, anthropology and ethics), students can deepen not only the technical aspects, related to the understanding of archaeological sites and human remains, but also the broader historical, cultural and ethical implications of the “present” surrounding the custody, management and display of such remains, in a comprehensive and integrated approach (4, 5).

The Archaeological Itinerary provides a platform for students where they can participate in hands-on learning experiences, such as participating in archaeological excavations or studying osteological remains.

They can explore the significance of these sites within the context of ancient civilizations, gaining a deeper understanding of past social and cultural practices. In addition, by involving experts from different fields, students can learn about the scientific methods used in archaeological research, the ethical considerations involved in the study and display of human remains and the importance of preserving and respecting cultural heritage.

This cultural perspective, in addition to aiding the development of greater sensitivity and respect for the beliefs of others, offers an important opportunity to discuss and delve into current issues associated with the use of human remains in research and education, the value of the body, its symbolic and evocative meanings or, again, to understand how the donation of one's own body can contribute to scientific knowledge and to the training of future healthcare professionals. It also encourages reflection on the meanings and ethical implications associated with death and human memory (6). This approach stimulates curiosity, promotes respect for different traditions and teaches young people to understand and evaluate the significance of these practices in the cultural context in which they were carried out.

At the same time, the specificity of the location will be able to stimulate new and more innovative teaching strategies (7).

This model can promote local tourism, through the rethinking and decentralization of tourist itineraries, enhancing the dynamism of these contexts during and after the period of study.

The Valcuvia project was born as a territorial reality, but its virtuous model could be an example for other

regions or countries to create increasingly long and interconnected bioarchaeology itineraries.

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