

Jana Puhar<sup>1</sup>

# Public Archaeology and Local Public Involvement in Slovenian Museums

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper examines the current state and key characteristics of public archaeology in Slovenia, with a particular emphasis on evaluating the degree of involvement of the local public as both partners and interlocutors in heritage processes. Drawing on theoretical frameworks from museology and heritology, the study highlights the importance of participatory and multiple-perspective models in democratizing heritage interpretation and management. The research is based on qualitative methodology, including semi-structured interviews with archaeologists working in regional and municipal museums. Preliminary findings indicate that public archaeology projects in Slovenia are predominantly shaped by the deficit model, in which knowledge flows mostly in one direction and is led by professionals. Although some elements of participatory practice and democratic intent are present – particularly through voluntary engagement – the design and conceptualisation of projects remain firmly within expert domains. The study identifies a lack of systemic support for the implementation of inclusive approaches, despite a strong awareness among professionals of the value of public collaboration. Recent attempts to weaken heritage protection legislation further underscore the need to cultivate stronger public alliances. The findings suggest that while individual efforts towards participatory practice exist, a shift towards institutional and policy-level support is necessary to realise the full potential of public archaeology as a socially responsive and democratically grounded field.

**Keywords:** Public Archaeology; Heritology; Participation; Museology; Slovenia; Museums

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<sup>1</sup> Jana Puhar is a PhD candidate at the University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Arts (Aškerčeva 2, 1000 Ljubljana). Email: jp0725@student.uni-lj.si.

## 1 Introduction

This paper focuses on the analysis of public archaeology and the involvement of the local public as a partner and interlocutor in the research and interpretation process in Slovenian museums<sup>2</sup>. Different models of public involvement, as described in the paper, have proven successful in protecting heritage and restoring the social credibility of archaeology (Merriman 2004, 3–13; Okamura and Matsuda 2011, 4). In the museum field, they also serve to connect communities, which is one of the key tasks of a contemporary museum. The process begins with ensuring accessibility and enables individuals and communities to experience and understand heritage according to their specific cultural contexts, personal and social needs, and existing knowledge (Merriman 2004, 4; Perko 2014, 187). Access to information about archaeological materials, sites, research results, and heritage meanings constitutes a right of the contemporary public (McGimsey 1972, 5) and one of the important collective rights (Sandell 2011, 129–145). Moreover, there is a legitimate expectation that this information will be presented in an attractive and intellectually accessible manner (Carrada 2024, 22, 179–182). Scientific interpretation alone is insufficient to fully meet public needs (Gadamer 2009, 196). Heritage interpretation extends beyond science, involves social objectives, is interdisciplinary, and falls within the field of hermeneutics (Perko 2021a, 129; 2022, 139). As will be demonstrated, heritage interpretation is rooted in museological theory and requires a clear understanding of contemporary societal needs, public involvement, and interdisciplinary integration (Maroević 1993, 77; Hooper–Greenhill 1996, 35–53; Šola 2003, 28; Van Mensch 2015, 76).

In Chapters 2–3, we will review the definitions, origins, and objectives of public archaeology, while also considering them from the museological perspective of the public and its expectations. In Chapter 4, we will examine the approaches that so far have been used and recognized for making archaeology more accessible to the public, as well as for involving local

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communities in activities related to archaeology, which are the fundamental tasks of contemporary museums.

In Chapter 5, we will present the results of preliminary research conducted in 2024 and 2025, which includes the identification and characterization of the predominant models of public archaeology currently used in Slovenia.

## **2 Public Archaeology, New Museology, and Participation**

Archaeology has become increasingly concerned with its position in public discourse and its relationship to various segments of the public (Nicholaou et al. 2023, 1–5). Public archaeology has grown steadily since its inception in the 1970s (Matsuda 2004, 66). Today, it is a recognized field or at least a subject of study at many universities, with extensive literature and a dedicated periodical, *Public Archaeology* (ibid.).

Public archaeology overlaps significantly with museum activities (Merriam 2004, 85; Perko 2014, 250; Curk 2022, 319). Museums, as media and institutions that engage with the public to preserve collective memory, possess the knowledge and resources to connect archaeology and the public (Šola 2003, 174–179). Traditional museums operated as closed institutions serving academic interests more than those of the wider public (Maroević 1993, 76–80; Perko 2014, 47–53). The emergence of the ecomuseum (Varine 1996, 21–26) and the new museology (Krstović 2020, 128) coincided with the development of public archaeology (Perko 2014, 67–68) and should be understood in the context of democratization and the postmodern shift in society, which fostered a greater degree of participatory engagement with heritage.

The concept of participation originally emerged in other societal spheres – particularly in the fields of social inclusion, environmental protection, and the monitoring of scientific development (Schiele 2020, 47–48). During the 1970s, and even more so in the 1980s, it gradually entered the field of heritage as well (Pierroux et al. 2020, 27). Participation refers to the decision-making process on issues that concern the community, wherein greater influence is granted to those social groups most directly affected by the issue at hand. It can be observed in various societal processes wherever there is a need to bypass classical structures of authority, and is not limited to the field of heritage alone.

To this day, Arnstein's scale of participation (Arnstein 1969, 217) remains a widely referenced framework for understanding the levels and dynamics of participatory processes. Originally developed in the context of social policy, her typology was later adopted in science communication and, by the 1980s, also gained relevance in heritage studies (Simon 2011, 91). In Western societies, particularly after 1980, a noticeable increase in public demands for participation emerged (Pierroux et al. 2020, 34–35). These demands are closely linked to democratic movements and new currents of empowerment, rooted in the profound societal transformations that marked the second half of the 20th century.

It is important to recognize that the 19th and the first half of the 20th century were periods during which science enjoyed uncontested authority (Schiele 2020, 47). At the time, its influence on people's everyday lives was not yet as pronounced. However, the 1960s – and even more the 1970s – witnessed a conceptual shift: this was the moment when the transformative and destructive power of science and new technologies (from nuclear energy onwards) began to surface. The societal reckoning with the consequences of both World Wars undoubtedly played a role in this shift. These transformations coincided with the transition from modernity to postmodernity, as defined by the philosopher and sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (2016, 33–38, 135–138), and affected all aspects of human activity, archaeology, and heritage.

Schiele (2020, 49–51) emphasizes the paradigmatic difference between the so-called deficit model, which assumes one-way communication (i.e., simply informing the public), and models in which communication becomes two-way, meaning that authorities listen to and integrate public feedback.

A key work that addresses participation in museums is *The Participatory Museum* by Nina Simon (2011), who defines participation as a mutual exchange of knowledge and experience. The museum invites the audience and places trust in their contribution. This implies a relinquishing of control and the democratization of the interpretation of shared heritage. A participatory museum is an audience-centered institution, equally important, beneficial, and accessible as any other public service. It is a place where visitors can shape their meanings; where the voices of users inform and inspire the development of projects intended for the public.

This stands in contrast with more traditional, educational approaches, in which the museum defines the knowledge it wishes to communicate and transmits it to the visitor, who receives it passively, without questions or commentary.

Contemporary museological paradigms emphasize user-centered approaches (Miklošević 2015, 58–59). Museums are increasingly embracing accessibility, active participation, and the inclusion of socially marginalized groups (Hooper–Greenhill 1996, 54–68, 33–107; Van Mensch 2015, 90–95). This shift is partly due to the influence of community museums and ecomuseums, as well as the growing expectation that public institutions serve all citizens and remain accountable to taxpayers (Perko 2014, 67–81). Museums now play a more explicit social role (Sandell 2002, 18–21). They are expected to develop projects that involve local audiences, and to remain relevant and accessible not only to regular visitors, but also to those who typically do not engage with museums (Šola 2003, 52–55).

As we will discuss below, public archaeology has evolved alongside new museological approaches and the rise of participatory practices, gaining increasing relevance and recognition within contemporary society (Curk 2022, 223). Henson (2017, 45) defines four core tasks of archaeology: learning about the past, learning from the past, managing the heritage of the past, and enabling public engagement with the past. Archaeological education goes beyond dates and events. It offers knowledge and skills from the past, insights into the connection between the past and the present, and an appreciation of the complexity and societal value of heritage. This process entails both intellectual and emotional engagement, which makes archaeology appealing to diverse audiences or public. The public is demonstrating growing awareness of the value of archaeology and is willing to engage actively in safeguarding these benefits (Little 2002, 7).

Our relationship to the past depends on how we perceive the links between the past and the present (Gadamer 2009, 183–211). Henson (2005, 44) argues that studying human behavior fosters empathy and a sense of shared humanity. Archaeological knowledge can help us understand the diversity of cultural expressions and practices throughout history. The hermeneutic circle helps us understand contemporary society and our place within it (Gadamer 2009, 183–211). These insights are highly relevant

to contemporary issues such as identity, environment, conflict, economy, and politics, as noted by Henson (2017, 45–46).

To summarize the potential of archaeology for public engagement, it is important to recognize that the definition of public archaeology is still a matter of debate (Moshenska 2017, 5–11). When McGimsey coined the term in the early 1970s, it primarily referred to the recording and preservation of archaeological remains threatened by development, supported by and serving the public. This definition is still dominant in the United States, where public archaeology is closely tied to cultural resource management (CRM) (Smith 2004, 1–15; Curk 2022, 119). Elsewhere, however, the term has taken on a broader meaning (Okamura and Matsuda 2011, 3–4).

As summarized by Moshenska (2017, 4–6), public archaeology encompasses a variety of aims. None of its definitions is entirely precise, as the concept of heritage is socially and historically conditioned, and changes over time and across space. Around the world, multiple, overlapping, and at times divergent interpretations have emerged. The most significant differences are observed on both sides of the Atlantic (Curk 2022, 122–124). As Matsuda (2004, 68) observes, public archaeology is best understood as a broader socio-cultural study of the relationship between archaeology and the public.

### 3 Conceptualizing the Public in Public Archaeology

Carman (2002, 96–114) emphasized the need to consider who constitutes the public<sup>3</sup> in public archaeology. This provoked further studies by Merriman (2004), Matsuda (2004), and Nikolau et al. (2023).

Any attempt to define ‘the public’ must begin with Habermas, who introduced the concept of the public sphere in his 1962 work *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. The public sphere emerged in the 17th and 18th centuries in countries with developed bourgeois classes, notably Britain, France, and Germany (Habermas 1989, 26–39). Habermas defined

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<sup>3</sup> As Carman (2002, 96), Merriman (2004, 1–2) and Matsuda (2004, 68) have noted, the meaning of ‘public’ varies across cultures. In English, the word carries dual connotations: ‘officialdom’ and ‘the people’. This ambiguity has complicated translations of the term in non-Anglophone contexts, influencing how public archaeology is conceptualized.

it as a space in which private individuals engaged in rational-critical debate about public affairs and held authorities to account.

These societies gradually developed modern state institutions, granting them abstract and impersonal authority. The bourgeois expanded its influence into finance and commerce, and the educated elite began to articulate their views publicly. In doing so, they redefined the concept of 'the public' as distinct from authority. The public sphere thus emerged as a conceptual space between the private and the public (Habermas 1989, 32).

Habermas saw the public sphere as ideally open and inclusive. While historically limited to privileged men (Calhoun 1992, 3), he noted that its permeability prevented it from becoming a closed clique (Habermas 1989, 51). Thus, openness and inclusivity are fundamental to the public sphere.

From this perspective, public archaeology should aim to create a democratic public sphere within archaeology and to encourage critical reflection. It should function as an open forum (Harrison 2013, 230–231), allowing for participation and rational-critical debate with clearly defined goals for community integration. The task, which is much more clearly defined in contemporary museums, demonstrates the need to integrate public archaeology with museology.

The information age has significantly changed the habits and needs of the public, further complicating the definition of the public spheres and the recognition of authority within it (Yuan 2020, 1–2). Contemporary public spheres are composed of multiple publics in dynamic relationships, rather than a singular unified entity. This notion of multiple publics, rooted in the Chicago School of Sociology (*ibid.*), contrasts with concepts such as the crowd or the mass. Scholars such as McManamon (1991, 123), Yuan (2020, 5), and Nikolaou et al. (2023, 1–5) highlight the diversity and multivocality of publics. The same view was also recognized by the University of Ljubljana's Department of Archaeology (Perko and Pirkovič 2025, 30).

#### **4 Models of Public Engagement in Public Archaeology**

In this section, we will explore possible models for addressing contemporary public(s) and examine those that are already in use locally. A broad and inclusive definition of public archaeology allows for multiple approaches. Merriman (2004, 5–8) and Holtorf (2007, 105–129) identify distinct models

of engagement. Merriman proposes the *'deficit model'*, where archaeologists seek public support for their work, and the *'multiple-perspective model'*, which fosters self-fulfillment, reflection, and creativity among the public.

Holtorf describes three models: the *'educational model'*, which informs the public; the *'public relations model'*, aimed at gaining support and improving archaeology's public image; and the *'democratic model'*, which encourages active public interest and participation (Holtorf 2007, 105–129). Merriman's multiple-perspective model aligns with Holtorf's democratic model, while the deficit model in Holtorf's framework is divided into an educational and a public relations model (ibid.).

Okamura and Matsuda (2011, 5–7) further distinguish the progressive (multiple-perspective or democratic) approach into two types based on theoretical foundations. The *'critical approach'* employs critical epistemology to question whose interests are served by specific interpretations of the past. This approach, seen in critical and postcolonial archaeology, exposes power structures underpinning dominant narratives.

The *'multivocal approach'* adopts hermeneutic epistemology to explore how diverse groups interpret material culture. It seeks to understand the multiple meanings the past holds for different communities. While the critical approach emphasizes specific reinterpretations to challenge dominant groups, the multivocal approach prioritizes inclusive understanding. However, in practice, they are most often used together. All four models aim to bring archaeology closer to the public, albeit through different methods and with varying outcomes. Together, they reflect the broader societal role of archaeology.

Preliminary observations suggest that public archaeology initiatives in Slovenian museums predominantly follow the educational and promotional models, with the advancement of archaeological science and its social reputation as the main objectives. These models are closely tied to practice rather than theory, and may be linked to the limited presence of post-processual archaeology in Slovenia (cf. Smith 2004, 41–57; Perko and Pirkovič 2025).

Follow-up research will examine a broader sample of public archaeology projects in Slovenia to determine which models are most prevalent, why this is the case, and what implications could arise. The second part of the research will include observations on the implementation of a project based on the multivocal model and an analysis of the changes it initiates within the community.

## 5 Public Archaeology in Slovenia

### 5.1 Research Background

The aim of the research was to determine the extent to which public archaeology is present and established in Slovenia, and to identify its specificities. The implementation of a specific practice in the field of public archaeology in Slovenia has not been the subject of detailed or systematic research in recent times. However, several overview contributions on the topic do exist (Perko 2008; Pirkovič 2012, 2016, 2022; Plestenjak 2013; Pita da Costa 2021; Curk 2022; Perko and Pirkovič 2025). Since 2011, Public Archaeology has been offered as a course at the Department of Archaeology of the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, where students are introduced to theoretical concepts and examples of good practice in public archaeology. Notably, the programme is designed at the intersection of museology and conservation practices related to the preservation of heritage in its original environment, with the aim of directing archaeology – through collaboration with museums – towards humanistic goals (Perko and Pirkovič 2025, 22–23). Since no existing dataset was available, we began collecting new data on public archaeology projects in Slovenia. The research, which started in 2024, is still ongoing. This paper presents preliminary findings based on the interviews conducted to date.

### 5.2 Hypothesis

If we were to define public archaeology in Slovenia through the prism of the four models discussed in the previous chapter, it appears that the so-called *deficit model*, as defined by Merriman, would be the most prevalent. The initial hypothesis is that public archaeology in Slovenia primarily serves the purpose of informing and educating the public from the perspective of archaeological science and practice, and that significant efforts have been directed toward gaining public support for archaeological research. The second hypothesis assumes that practices aligned with the *multiple-perspective* or *multivocal model* are largely absent from Slovenian public archaeology. This assumption is based on the persistence of the Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD) (cf. Smith 2006, 29) within Slovenian heritage institutions on the one hand, and on the absence of a holistic understanding of heritage studies, on the other (Perko and Pirkovič 2025, 31). Another key factor is the

predominance of the processual paradigm in Slovenian archaeology, which is influenced by natural science research and positivist methodology, often at the expense of humanistic aspects of archaeology.

### 5.3 Methodology

Since no prior study of this kind had been conducted in Slovenia, data had to be collected anew and in accordance with the research objectives. A qualitative method was used, specifically a semi-structured interview. The interview included seven questions, with the last two being more complex in structure. The questions were designed to encourage discussion and extensive responses, while also ensuring that all key topics would be addressed and that the answers could be compared to some extent. The interviews lasted from 40 to 90 minutes, depending on the experience and engagement of the interviewees. The sample included curators -archaeologists whose professional duties were assumed to involve aspects of public archaeology.

It is important to note that this paper presents preliminary results, and that the interviews have not yet been conducted to the planned extent. As of 7 July 2025, six interviews had been conducted with museum-based archaeologists working in regional and municipal museums<sup>4</sup>. In the future, the research will be expanded to include public archaeology initiatives within national museums, the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia, and private institutions active in archaeological research.

The interviews were conducted in person, via the Zoom platform, or by telephone, depending on the preferences and availability of the interviewees. All participants were informed verbally and in writing about the aims and implementation of the study, and they provided written informed consent. The interview questions were shared in advance to allow time for reflection. Interviews were recorded when permission was granted; otherwise, answers were recorded manually. The recorded interviews were transcribed. The transcripts were processed qualitatively using conceptual coding: abstract features were extracted from specific statements and grouped into thematic categories through a coding system (Mesec 2023, 114–140).

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<sup>4</sup> These are museums that the state has authorized to perform national public museum service.

The coding process resulted in several recurring conceptual categories, including education and knowledge transfer, public image and legitimacy, community involvement, collaboration with schools, heritage as a common good, and digital engagement. The most frequently appearing themes were related to educational outreach (present in all interviews) and institutional communication (e.g. exhibitions, lectures, publications). Categories linked to reciprocal engagement or public co-creation were less prominent and mostly limited to two responses (R5 and R6). These categories were interpreted in relation to the theoretical models of public archaeology presented earlier, primarily the deficit and multivocal models.

#### 5.4 Questionnaire and Results

The first set of interview questions (*What does the term public archaeology mean to you? Does your institution implement projects that could be considered public archaeology? Can you list some examples? Which of your public archaeology projects do you consider the most successful? Please describe the project.*) aimed to define what, according to Slovenian experts, constitutes the field of public archaeology. Respondents were explicitly asked to explain what public archaeology means to them. As discussed in previous chapters, the understanding of this branch of archaeology varies significantly from country to country. We also assume that the work of professionals in public archaeology is shaped by their own understanding of what public archaeology is and what it entails – an understanding that is closely tied to their knowledge of heritage theory.

The following question (*Does your institution implement projects that could be considered public archaeology? Can you list some examples?*) addressed whether they implement such projects and invited them to provide specific descriptions. Based on the subsequent set of questions (*Which of your public archaeology projects do you consider the most successful? Please describe the project. How would you define the main objective (goal) of the project described in Question 3? What is the main message of the project for participants/users/visitors?*), which focused on the aims and content of public archaeology projects, we anticipated that we would be able to identify the main models in use.

In the case of the deficit model, we expected to detect concepts such as *inform, present, explain, educate, or instruct*, which indicate a one-way flow

of knowledge from the expert to the public. The core premise of the deficit model is that heritage knowledge is transferred one-way – from experts to the public – without reciprocal or two-way exchange. (Curk 2022, 160–162) In contrast, for the multivocal approach, we expected concepts such as *with the public, discover, discuss, reflect, and exchange*.

The last two questions (*On a scale from 1 to 5, please evaluate the extent to which your project is oriented toward the following specific objectives, Who carried out the following phases of the project implementation?*) consisted of several sub-questions and directly invited the interviewees to self-assess the content they develop within public archaeology projects. These sub-questions listed specific objectives, some of which correspond to the deficit model (e.g. informing the public, gaining public support) and others to the multivocal model (e.g. raising awareness of multiple interpretations, understanding the roles and meanings attributed to heritage). Respondents were also asked to evaluate the extent to which the public was included in the various phases of content development.

These final questions were adapted to match the content of the project we sought to evaluate. The following sections present the interview questions, the responses received, and a preliminary analysis of the answers. The responses have been anonymized, processed, and coded, with conceptual categories assigned to them.

#### 5.4.1 Coding Categories and Frequency

The qualitative coding process was based on a conceptual approach, where recurring abstract ideas were identified across interviews and grouped into broader thematic categories (Mesec 2023, 114–140). The process was guided by theoretical models in public archaeology (Merriman 2004; Holtorf 2007; Okamura and Matsuda 2011), and focused on identifying dominant narratives, objectives, and perceptions reflected in the interviewees' responses.

Several key categories emerged during the coding process. The most frequently coded themes included education and knowledge transfer, institutional communication, and improvement of public image, all of which correspond to the deficit model of public archaeology. Less frequently, interviewees referred to concepts aligned with multivocality, such as pub-

lic co-creation, community involvement, and reflection on social issues. Table below presents an overview of the main coding categories and the number of interviews in which they appeared.

**Table 1:** Coding categories and frequency

Code/Theme	Description	Present in Responses	Model
Education and knowledge transfer	Public lectures, workshops, school collaboration, content adaptation	R1-R6	Deficit
Institutional communication	Exhibitions, workshops, publications, guided tours	R1-R6	Deficit / Mixed
Public image and legitimacy	Gaining public support, justifying archaeological work	R2-R6	Deficit
Community involvement	Collaboration with artisans, volunteers, vulnerable groups	R5-R6	Multiple-perspective
Public co-creation	Joint development of materials, content input from non-professionals	R5	Multiple-perspective
Reflection on social issues	Heritage and consumerism, environmental awareness	R5	Multiple-perspective
Digital engagement	Use of ICT, creation of interpretive products	R2	Mixed

While all respondents referenced the educational and communicative functions of public archaeology, only two (R5 and R6) explicitly described activities that suggest participatory practices or multivocal engagement. This indicates that while the discourse of participation is present, its practical implementation remains limited.

**Question 1:** What does the term public archaeology mean to you?

R1	Accompanying activities and events; children and adult education programmes.
R2	Exhibitions, media publications, lectures, guided tours.
R3	Presenting archaeology to non-archaeologists; simplifying and transforming information to make it more appealing to the public.
R4	All activities carried out by museum professionals; everything broadly related to archaeology; museum users who come to access information.
R5	Bringing archaeology closer to the public in a way that changes perceptions; archaeology as a common good; everything we should be doing in museums.
R6	Transferring knowledge about the archaeological profession; making content understandable; community involvement; knowledge sharing; and heritage protection.

**Result:** Respondents without exception identify the work of museum professionals (specifically curator-archaeologists) as largely overlapping with the field of public archaeology. A strong emphasis is placed on the educational role (lectures, presentations, knowledge transfer, provision of information). Slightly less, but still significantly present, is the goal of gaining public support (changing perceptions, stimulating interest). In R5 and R6, archaeological heritage is expressed as a common good, a shared resource, and a collective right. R6 even lists concepts (community involvement, knowledge sharing) that may belong to the *multiple-perspective model*.

**Question 2:** Does your institution implement projects that could be considered public archaeology? Can you list some examples?

R1	Yes. Lectures, workshops, reconstructions, demonstrations; emphasis on adult education programmes.
R2	Yes. Exhibitions, publications, events, European Archaeology Days, workshops, lectures, and development of a video game
R3	Yes. Public tours, educational workshops, European Archaeology Days, classroom lessons, and exhibitions.
R4	Yes. Exhibitions, guided tours, public tours, lectures, workshops.
R5	Yes. Exhibitions, volunteer involvement in museum work, participation in exhibition content and materials, festivals, and events.
R6	Yes. Workshops, lectures, events, living history days, presentations, publications, and collaboration with vulnerable groups.

**Result:** All respondents associate public archaeology with already well-established (conventional) forms of museum communication with the public: exhibitions, publications, workshops, and lectures. These are typically carried out on a regular basis and are cited in institutional planning and reporting. In R5, public archaeology also includes volunteer engagement and their contribution to project content through collaboration on materials.

**Question 3:** Which of your public archaeology projects do you consider the most successful? Please describe the project.

R1	Adult education programme; workshop including a hands-on component; active role of participants; creative participation; a well-known (public) figure among invited facilitators.
R2	Educational; creation of an interpretive product; integration of digital technology; secondary school students; co-participation; collaboration with the school.
R3	Educational; classroom lesson; tactile objects; adaptation for different age groups; collaboration with the school.

R4	Exhibition; interdisciplinary; accompanying activities and events; workshops; educational; collaboration with the school.
R5	Festival; dramatic interpretation; culinary elements; workshops; collaboration with artisans and heritage interpreters; a wide range of activities; large attendance; diverse audiences, including families
R6	Educational; workshops; lectures; practical component; active participation; interaction with materials and tools.

**Result:** R2, R3, R4, and R6 identify educational workshops as their most successful projects. These were conducted in collaboration with schools and included practical elements (tactile components, interaction with materials and tools). R2 differs slightly due to its focus on secondary school students and the use of information and communication technology in the creation of an interpretive product. The project described in R5 is the only one aimed at the general public and reports a wide reach among participants. It includes collaboration with artisans and heritage interpreters, as well as engagement with diverse audiences. R1 is the only project primarily oriented toward adult education, with an emphasis on creative participation.

**Question 4:** How would you define the main objective (goal) of the project described in Question 3?

R1	Encouraging creativity, participation, learning something new, preserving, and reviving traditional knowledge.
R2	Discovering archaeological periods, using heritage in contemporary society, and everyday life.
R3	Popularizing archaeology, learning about heritage as a value, appropriate handling of archaeological finds.
R4	Presenting archaeology and different time periods; introducing the concept of time orientation and the passage of time.
R5	Fostering identification with heritage; promoting respect for heritage; raising awareness that heritage belongs to everyone.
R6	Bringing archaeology closer to young people; deepening knowledge; gaining hands-on experience.

**Result:** R2, R3, R4, and R6 define their objectives as raising awareness, popularization, accessibility, and presentation of archaeology or heritage to the public. These goals align with the *deficit model* as outlined by Merriman, focusing on public education. R1 emphasizes creative engagement, and R5 suggests greater public inclusion in heritage-related topics. Both of these may indicate a step toward multivocal or multiple-perspective models of public engagement.

**Question 5:** What is the main message of the project for participants/users/visitors?

R1	It is possible to enjoy a distant culture and learn something new in the process.
R2	Archaeology is a broad field. Much remains unexplored.
R3	Archaeology is not irrelevant. We did not appear here overnight. The past helps shape who we are.
R4	People once lived here before us. To inform visitors about how they lived.
R5	We should reflect on consumerism in today's society. Discarded material goods burden the environment. What kind of material legacy will we leave to future generations?
R6	Archaeology is important because it helps us understand our society and ourselves. Why do we need knowledge of the past, and what happens if that knowledge is lost?

**Result:** The initial observation is that most of the proposed messages are not structured by interpretive theory, which states that messages or themes are formulated as complete sentences containing a verb (Ham 2013, 121–138). Nevertheless, the core intent of each message can be reasonably inferred. R2, R3, R4, and R6 share a similar emphasis on the importance of archaeological knowledge for understanding contemporary society. These messages are relatively general. R1 also fits this category to some extent, highlighting the potential for learning from heritage while also expressing enjoyment of it. R5 stands out by addressing the concrete issue of modern consumerism and seeks to reflect on it through the lens of heritage.

**Question 6:** On a scale from 1 to 5, please evaluate the extent to which your project is oriented toward the following specific objectives (a to h):

- a) Gaining public support for conducting archaeological research
- b) Informing the public about the results of archaeological research
- c) Informing the public about the work of archaeologists
- d) Improving the public image of archaeology / increasing public support
- e) Encouraging individuals/ the public to acquire knowledge and develop an interest in archaeology
- f) Promoting and exploring diversity in the understanding of the past, its meanings, and its relevance for the present
- g) Identifying and raising awareness of different interpretations of archaeological material sources
- h) Documenting and understanding the roles and meanings that the public attributes to material culture and archaeological heritage

	<b>a</b>	<b>b</b>	<b>c</b>	<b>d</b>	<b>e</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>g</b>	<b>h</b>
R1	1	1	3	5	3	3	3	2
R2	4	4	3	5	5	2	4	2
R3	1	3	4	5	5	1	1	1
R4	4	5	5	5	4	5	5	3
R5	5	5	4	5	3	5	3	3
R6	3	5	5	4	4	5	4	3
total	18	23	24	29	24	21	20	14

**Results:** Based on respondents' assessments of the extent to which the projects are oriented towards specific stated objectives, we attempted to link the projects to concrete approaches in public archaeology. Objectives a) – c) are associated with educational activities, while objective d) relates to public relations. According to Merriman (2004, 5), all objectives from a) to d) fall under the deficit model. Objectives e) to h) are classified by Merriman as goals of the multiple-perspective model (*ibid.*). Among all the objectives, the highest scored was improving the public image of archaeology or gaining public goodwill, which Merriman categorizes within the deficit model; Holtorf (2007, 107, 114–119) even defines this as a distinct public relations model. From this, it can be understood that archaeology in Slovenia is largely concerned with its public image and the justification of its activities. The objective that received the lowest score was the one that involved documenting and understanding the roles and meanings that the public itself assigns to heritage.

**Question 7:** Who carried out the following phases of the project implementation?

- a) Selection of the topic
- b) Concept design
- c) Information gathering/research
- d) Implementation
- e) Interpretation
- f) Evaluation

	a	b	c	d	e	f
R1	curator	curator, invited facilitators	curator, public	curator, public, invited facilitators	curator, public, invited facilitators	/
R2	curator	curator, invited facilitators	curator	curator, public, invited facilitators	curator, public, invited facilitators	the project is still in the preparation phase
R3	curator	curator	curator	curator	curator	/
R4	curator school teachers	curator	curator	curator, school teachers	public	/
R5	curator/ the museum's expert team	curator/ the museum's expert team	curator	curator, public, invited facilitators	curator, public, invited facilitators	school teachers, public
R6	curator	curator, school teachers	curator	curator, public	curator	school teachers

**Results:** For the seventh question, we deconstructed the implementation of the project into individual phases in order to more precisely define the actual role and scope of public engagement in the project's implementation. The responses indicate that public archaeology projects are theoretically and conceptually shaped predominantly within professional circles; the same applies to the collecting of heritage information and the study of content. Greater involvement of the public is observed during the implementation phases of the projects. A noticeable weakness is the limited practice of project evaluations, which also indirectly suggests a deficit model. Evaluations were reported in only two cases, specifically within projects conducted in collaboration with schools, where the evaluation questionnaires were completed by teachers rather than the target users of the project (in this case, students).

## 6 Discussion

The aim of the ongoing research, whose preliminary findings are presented here, is to offer a critically informed account of public archaeology in Slovenian museums and to assess the degree and scope of public involvement through the lens of heritage and museological theory.

Preliminary results are limited to regional and municipal museums that hold archaeological collections and employ curators specialised in archaeology. Interviews were conducted with six archaeologist-curators from six

different museums. Of the currently 66 museums listed in the register<sup>5</sup>, the six museums represented in the interviews account for a small, 9 % share. It may be more accurate to consider the percentage based on all museums that house archaeological collections, have archaeology curators, and consequently also carry out public archaeology programs. There are only 18 such museums in Slovenia, which means that the representation of institutions through the interviews is 33 %. The representation in terms of the total number of curators-archaeologists is around 15 %, considering the fact that there are approximately 40 archaeology curators in Slovenia in total. The exact number depends on the method of counting, as some of them also perform other tasks such as documentation or educational work, according to their official job classifications.

The results indicate that archaeologist-curators are highly aware of the value of public archaeology as a potential intermediary between experts and the public (Q1 / R3–R6). Some recognise heritage as a right belonging to all (Q4 / R5) and acknowledge the need for its democratization (Q1 / R6). Some respondents already report using participatory approaches (Q4 / R1).

However, the planning and theoretical development of public archaeology projects remain largely confined to professional domains, revealing the persistent influence of the Authorised Heritage Discourse (Smith 2006, 29–34). This is evident in responses to Q7, where the public is generally excluded from conceptualisation and research. Collaboration with school-teachers – who themselves represent institutional authority – was often noted, but this does not replace the involvement of the wider public.

Based on respondents' descriptions of goals (Q4) and project messages (Q5), most projects fall within the deficit model. However, when participatory objectives were explicitly offered among the answer choices (Q6), respondents demonstrated more openness to multivocal approaches. This contrast suggests that experts are sympathetic to participatory approaches but lack the institutional frameworks to fully implement them.

The most democratised forms of engagement – those involving reciprocal knowledge exchange – remain rare. Despite this, the professionalism and dedication of museum experts are evident. It is likely that efforts towards democratization are unfolding on an individual, perhaps even intuitive, level. Still, systemic support is lacking.

As demonstrated in Chapter 2, an appropriate theoretical framework for establishing collaboration with the public can be meaningfully sought within museological theory and heritology, both of which inherently involve the study of the relationship between the public and heritage, as well as close cooperation with the public and the implementation of participatory practices (Sandell 2002; Simon 2011; Van Mensch 2015; Perko 2008). However, comprehensive and socially recognised approaches to achieving these goals undoubtedly go beyond individual commitment. The implementation of participatory and more democratic approaches within the profession requires systemic support. This support should be ensured at the national level, both in terms of strategic policy directions and through theoretical and professional backing for heritage institutions, so that they are empowered to implement participatory approaches.

The community of Slovenian heritage and archaeology experts should have learned – especially in light of the unresolved attempts to erode cultural heritage legislation in 2024 and 2025 – how vital public support truly is. This period was marked by attempts to undermine institutional frameworks for heritage protection, particularly in the field of archaeology. Since 2008, the Republic of Slovenia has had excellent systemic solutions for the protection of archaeological heritage as a spatial potential, ensured by the Cultural Heritage Protection Act (ZVKD-1). Archaeology is protected and taken into account in spatial planning acts, while archaeological sites are safeguarded as monuments. This protection regime has been consistently challenged by interest groups advocating for more cost-effective and expedited procedures during spatial interventions. In 2024, however, for the first time, the Ministry of Culture – tasked with establishing systemic frameworks for heritage protection – proposed amendments that would have significantly reduced archaeological safeguards in spatial planning, effectively prioritising economic interests over heritage preservation.

The professional community responded strongly and may have temporarily prevented the changes. Most professional responses, legislative comments, and open letters to the Ministry of Culture are collected on the website of the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana (Filozofska fakulteta Univerze v Ljubljani 2025) and some were also published elsewhere (Pirkovič et al. 2025). The episode also prompted some self-reflection within the field, highlighting the need to improve communication with the public and to better articulate the value of archaeological work. Despite the importance of public support at such times, the resistance to the proposed changes was driven primarily by experts, while wider public engagement remained limited. The response from the museum professional community remained equally limited, despite the fact that the proposed legislative changes also inadequately address the issue of museum organization, stripping them of autonomy and museum functions. The reasons for this acquiescence – and even apparent subservience (Černelič Krošelj and Babšek, 2025) to the authorities – may stem from the structural dependence on political decision-making and funding mechanisms.

Regardless of any possible outcome of the negotiations concerning legislative changes, we must recognise that attempts to weaken heritage protection – to simplify and accelerate procedures for the removal of heritage under the pressure of capital – are not yet over. In the future, the professional community may find itself less unified – and heritage might ultimately depend on public outcry for its defence.

This raises the necessary question: who constitutes the public, what kind of relationship do we maintain with it, and what have we actually done to engage and support it? Slovenian archaeologists have relied heavily on the aforementioned law (ZVKD-1), which ensures proper management of archaeological sites and safeguards archaeology as a heritage asset in the spatial domain. Recent experiences should serve as a reminder of how rapidly circumstances can change and reflect on who truly protects heritage: the law or the people – a question that should remain central to any reflection on the social mandate of archaeology. The events of 2024–2025 have demonstrated that professional silence is rarely neutral – it too shapes the conditions under which heritage is protected or neglected.

In order to preserve archaeology and our heritage as a humanistic value, the public can and must be an ally. However, it is up to archaeologists to answer a fundamental question: What do we contribute to society – and do we truly share the values, visions, and responsibilities with the public?

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