

ARCHAEOLOGY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE PUBLIC EYE

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Abstract. *Researchers have pointed out that public perception of archaeology has generally changed in the past few decades. Increasingly archaeology has been credited with the capacity to contribute to sustainable (local) development in many ways. It contributes mainly to increased prestige for the community, social and cultural development, and attracting investments leading to more prosperity. Controversial relationships could be observed also between archaeology the infrastructure investments. All these dynamics determine certain perceptions of archaeology in the eye of the wider public. The present paper covers a gap by documenting how the Romanian public perceived the contribution of archaeology to sustainable development. Quantitative research at a national level, comprising both the general public and archaeologists, has been developed to shed light on four aspects: evaluation of archaeology, perceived contribution to sustainable development, the relationship of archaeology with investments, and the personal relevance of archaeology. The findings reveal a positive evaluation among archaeologists, women, and young respondents. On specific aspects, some regional differences also have been identified. Archaeology as a science tends to be more appreciated as the actual impact that archaeology might have on contemporary society and sustainable development.*

Keywords: *archeology; archaeology and society; sustainable development*

Introduction

Archaeology might seem a very specific domain, relevant only for the people working in the field, or for those with special interests in archaeology or history. Still, the development of contemporary society, as well as the interest in the past makes it relevant for the wider society, with many types of implications and interactions, having in mind economic, social, cultural, and political implications (Meskell, 2002; Smith, 2004; Pyburn, 2011; Atalay, 2012; Atalay et al., 2016). We would mention only a few arguments here.

The EU-financed infrastructure programs, as well as various public or private construction investments, are rapidly changing the landscape of Romania and will, therefore, impact the archaeological and immobile cultural heritage. We believe that public awareness of archaeology and its role/importance will become important, influencing these investments and how the public sphere is designed. The great issues in public perceptions of archaeology are first concerning preservation (integrating cultural management into every form of planning and development in both rural and urban contexts and the control of excavations) and second concerning fulfilling public interest in archaeological objects/ places/ excavations. A particular aspect of the former is that public awareness can limit the big business impact on the archaeological landscape. Big builders (realty developers, infrastructure tycoons, etc.) often see archaeological discoveries as a nightmare that delays their projects and increases their expenses. If done properly, big business can have a positive impact on archaeology. In countries such as Spain or England most rescue excavations are undertaken by private companies whose qualified workforce can only be maintained by continuous employment in the private sphere. In other countries, there is little hope of maintaining such an expensive qualified workforce.

Another aspect we mention is that there seems to be an ever-increasing interest in archaeology and history. Documentaries, historical films, books, or various products (such as games, and clothing) inspired by the past are increasingly numerous. Re-enactment festivals and organizations seem to be increasingly popular, with more people attending the events and more volunteers/associations of amateurs involved. This evolution is probably the cause of the increase in public awareness of archaeology and the perception of its relevance to society.

Considering this context, there is increased interest in mapping the perception of archaeology by the wider public. For instance, in the US, a complex survey nationwide developed by the Society for American Archaeology (Ramos & Duganne, 2000) was structured into four sections: awareness, perceptions, and knowledge; interest and participation in archaeology; importance and value associated with archaeology; and attitudes about conservation, laws, and management. The study revealed that archaeology is perceived as valuable and relevant for understanding society, even shaping it with a scientific and educative value, but is less relevant for the economy (Ramos & Duganne, 2000, pp. 25-26, 31-32). The most comprehensive and largely implemented survey was developed under the NEARCH project for the EU in ten countries (Marx, Nurra, & Salas Rossenbach, 2017). It investigates the perception of archeology and its role, how respondents related to archaeology, and how archaeology contributes to economic development. This survey has been considered the base for our investigation, allowing us to better contextualize Romanians' opinions within the EU.

Seeing public awareness as a process rather than a definitive result opens new paths to explore the ways and means that influence the construction of public perception of archaeology in a changing society. The way in which we look at the importance of preserving and communicating about archaeological heritage has widened during the last decades, integrating topics related to current concerns of societies. In other words, the public perception of archaeology changed alongside archaeology as a discipline. Delving into how the general public regards archaeology and its purposes is therefore relevant to any conversation about the core values of the discipline and about sharing its results with the general public and future generations. To this end, we organized the

present study around four main current conversation themes related to public perception of archaeology and its link to sustainable development aiming to shed a light on this topic in the case of the Romanian public.

Literature review

Commonly, there is a perceived contradiction between archaeology and economic development (Marliac, 1997). While archaeology and history are credited with being relevant to identity, knowledge, and connecting people and communities with their past, they are also subject to being used to manipulate the public and partisanship, despite their scientific profiles. At the same time, archaeological capital could be valorized to increase the community's prestige, determine social and cultural development, and attract various investments leading to more prosperity. Therefore, we could consider different scales to evaluate the value of an archaeological site and its contribution to communities and economies.

Public awareness concerning the preservation of archaeological heritage might be considered as old as the discipline of archaeology (in its modern understanding). The invention/construction of archaeological heritage gained momentum during the 19th century through a combination of cultural and political actions aiming either to legitimate the interest of various powerful European nations in "classical antiquity" or, in the case of smaller nations, to share the effort in building-up national narratives based on a common past whose existence had to be proven by all kinds of archaeological evidence supporting claims of precedence and ancientness of such and such people in a given territory (Diaz-Andreu, 2001; Murray & Evans, 2008). It follows that public perception about what archaeology is supposed to be, and is supposed to stand for, had evolved alongside the discipline itself. Actions such as displaying archaeological artifacts in museums in order to convey larger narratives (Moser, 2003), publicizing archaeological findings in media (both old and new - Ascherson, 2004; Clack, 2007; Wahlgren & Svanberg, 2008; Huvila, 2013; Maldonado, 2016) and also in school textbooks (Ruiz-Zapatero & Alvarez-Sanchís, 1995; Davis, 2000; Vijand, 2018) and including archaeological sites in larger visitor attraction programs (Della Corte et al., 2009; Poria et al., 2011) had their contribution to the construction of a degree of public awareness in relation to the preservation of archaeological heritage.

Sustainable development and broader benefits derived from the existence of an archaeological site nearby a community/city are now often at the core of many studies and experiences involving activities such as field research and preparing/managing an archaeological site for touristic exploitation, both in south-eastern Europe (Musteață, 2020; Nikolić, 2011; Lazarević et al., 2022), as well as in other parts of the world (Fleming, 2014; Repetto Málaga & Brown, 2019; Hemo, & Linn, 2017). No surprise, the more prestigious the site, especially if included on the World Heritage Site list, the more consistent the socio-cultural and economic benefits for locals and tourists (Zbucnea, 2020). Additionally, archaeologists have been credited with being independent mediators and facilitators between communities, residents, tourists, and various stakeholders (Pacífico & Vogel, 2012). Getting together all the stakeholders of an archaeological site is no simple endeavor considering their diversity and various interests (Zbucnea & Anghel, 2016). Therefore, although many options for managing an archaeological site are available to mediate the public's access to its value, finding and implementing the right mix is a great challenge (Zbucnea & Anghel, 2016).

Closely related to the benefits of investing in archaeology are the efforts to research and preserve findings made during large-scale infrastructure projects that unearth previously unknown human sites (most often prehistoric settlements or burials) as well as ruins or human remains in known locations (including early modern buildings, industrial sites, modern war sites, etc.). Established and organized under the framework of the la Valetta Convention in 1992 (Novaković & Horňák, 2016) and known under different names - rescue archaeology, salvage archaeology, preventive archaeology, or even development lead archaeology (Demoule, 2012, Novaković & Horňák, 2016; Watson & Fredheim 2022) these activities have produced massive amounts of knowledge about past societies, visible everywhere, from publications to large museums and accessible archaeological sites. They also contributed a lot to increase public awareness of matters related to archaeology (Hofman & Hoogland 2016). Sometimes framed by the media as a break to infrastructure development or a financial burden whose benefits are unclear (Sloane, 2021), preventive archaeology had a major impact on the profession. It is worth investigating its contribution to conveying a more nuanced image of archaeology in public opinion.

Last, but not least, archaeology appeals to individuals on a personal level. This personal dimension also alters public perception. Two main themes are lately part of the general conversation around how archaeology can actually contribute to a larger impact on people's lives: the quality of life and its attractiveness for tourist-related activities (Timothy & Tahan, 2020; Walker & Carr, 2013).

Methodology

All these topics have been grouped into four main themes and explored, the scope of our investigation being to document the perceptions in Romanian society related to archaeology's role in sustainable development. The study aims to observe several dimensions associated with this topic:

RQ1: How is archaeology generally evaluated when considering its relationship with contemporary society?

RQ2: Does archeology contribute to sustainable development, in the view of Romanian society?

RQ3: What is the relationship of archaeology with the investments and realty developers, according to the respondents?

RQ4: What is the personal relevance of archaeology, in connection with the quality of life, in the view of the respondents?

For each dimension, several items have been considered, as presented in Table 1. Each item was tested using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 represents the minimum/negative evaluation while 5 represents the maximum/positive measure.

Table 1. Items investigated

Research question	Item	Scale
RQ1	Utility	How do you rate the utility of archaeology?
	Present-day relevance	When you think about archaeology, how do you rate it in relation to its degree of present?
	Utility for society	How do you rate the general usefulness of archeology to contemporary society?

	Importance	Personally, you would say that: Supporting and developing archeology is important to my country.
RQ2	Sustainable development	Evaluate to what extent you think archeology contributes to the sustainable development of an area, local or national economy.
	City advantage	Personally, you would say that: The existence of archaeological remains is an advantage for a city.
RQ3	Priority	Personally, you would say that: Construction of roads and buildings should be delayed when archaeological remains are found nearby.
	Preventive archeology	Personally, you would say that: Preventive archeology supports economic investment rather than heritage conservation.
RQ4	Life quality	Rate to what extent do you think archeology contributes to the development / improvement of the quality of life.
	Tourism relevance	Personally, would you say that: Archaeological sites are very attractive tourist attractions for the general public.

The survey aims to observe if there are significant differences between the general public and archaeologists & professionals in the heritage field.

The questionnaire has been pre-tested and then filled in during August 2022. It was distributed online, mainly via Facebook, and on numerous FB groups dedicated to archaeology, tourism, or heritage. A national sample has been considered, comprising of 412 respondents (table 2). As the respondents were voluntary, it is assumed that they were, from the start, positively predisposed toward archaeology.

Table 2. Structure of the sample

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Woman	165	40.0
	Man	247	60.0
Age	18-24 years	26	6.3
	25-34 years	77	18.7
	35-44 years	121	29.4
	45-59 years	159	38.6
	60+ years	29	7.0
Education	high-school at most	64	15.5
	Undergraduate	121	29.4
	Postgraduate	227	55.1
Residency	Bucharest and the metropolitan area	158	38.3
	Muntenia, Oltenia, Dobrogea	89	21.6
	Moldova, Bucovina	55	13.3
	Ardeal, Maramureş, Crişana, Banat	110	26.7

We mention that more men answered voluntarily the questionnaire, which is contrary to the usual behavior for online self-administered surveys. It suggests that the topic of archaeology is stimulating men more than women. We also observe that adults aged 35-59 are more interested in the topic than other age categories. Additionally, regarding geographical distribution, we registered more respondents from Bucharest and its metropolitan area, as well as from Transylvania and Banat. Nevertheless, overall, the sample is quite balanced, and the number of respondents is high enough. Even if it is not

representative of the entire population, it reflects the opinions of those who are to some degree interested in archaeology, lay persons, or professionals.

Considering the professional status, archaeologists, historians, and professionals in heritage preservation present some differences from the general public. This group includes more women; it is more educated and tends to be older, as presented in the bar charts in Figure 1 below. The number of professionals in heritage consists of 132 respondents, representing 32% of the total sample.

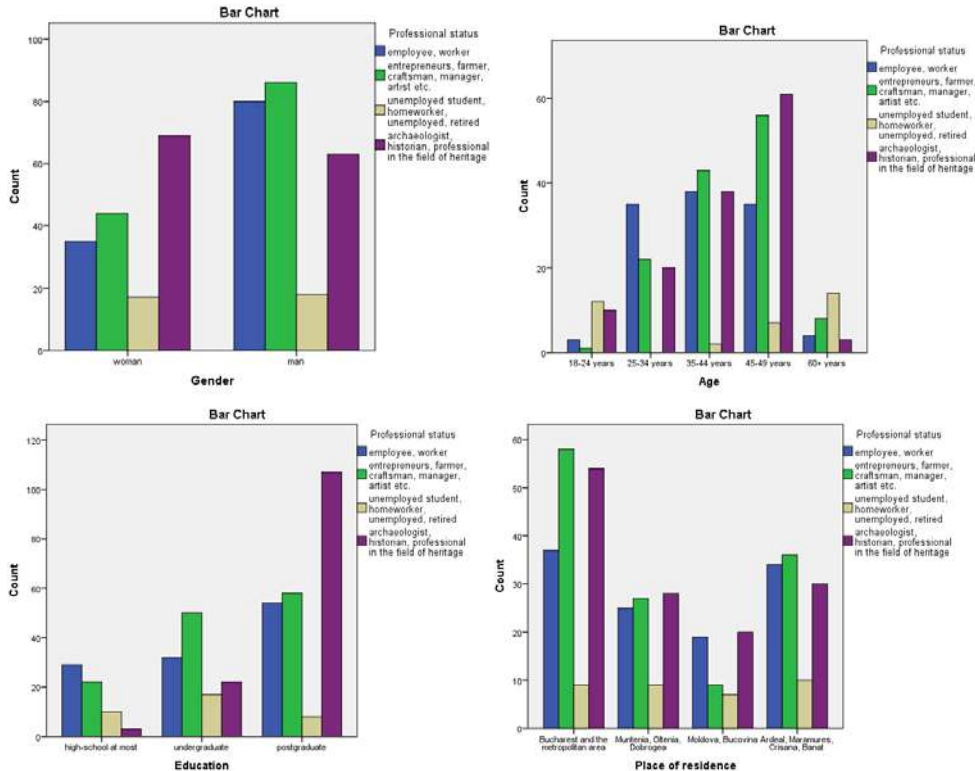


Figure 1. Structure of the sample, by professional status

Analysis of findings

General evaluation of archaeology

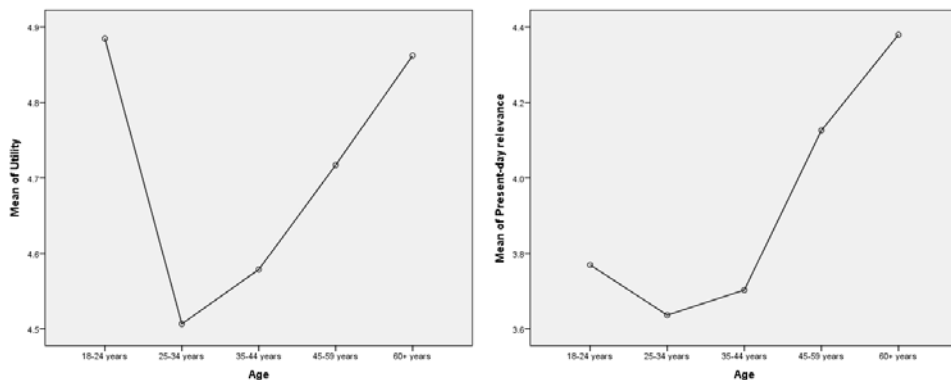
All respondents consider that archaeology is an important concept, as revealed in Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics presenting the view on archaeology

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Utility	412	2	5	4.66	.659
Present-day relevance	412	1	5	3.91	1.156
Utility for society	412	1	5	4.23	.958
Importance	412	1	5	4.59	.780
Valid N (listwise)	412				

We observe that the abstract utility is perceived as being higher than the actual practical utility. Also, it is interesting to mention that the importance of safeguarding archaeological heritage is perceived as a little higher than its practical utility. Women received that the present-day relevance of archaeology ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 1.043$) higher than that reported by men ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 1.205$), with T test score $t(410) = 3.221$, $p = .001$. Similarly, women consider that the utility for society ($M = 4.41$, $SD = .883$) is higher than that perceived by men ($M = 4.11$, $SD = .989$), with a T-test score $t(410) = 3.070$, $p = .002$.

The ANOVA test showed significant differences in the utility and actuality of archaeology by age (see Figure 2). We mention that differences between age groups are registered for all investigated variables, but they are not statistically significant.

**Figure 2. Means plots for utility and present-day relevance**

In terms of educational level, the only statistically significant difference has been registered related to the perception of archaeology's present-day relevance (Figure 3). The more educated the respondents, the more they consider that archaeology is connected to contemporary society. We also mention that the more educated tend to consider archaeology more useful for society, but the differences are not statistically significant.

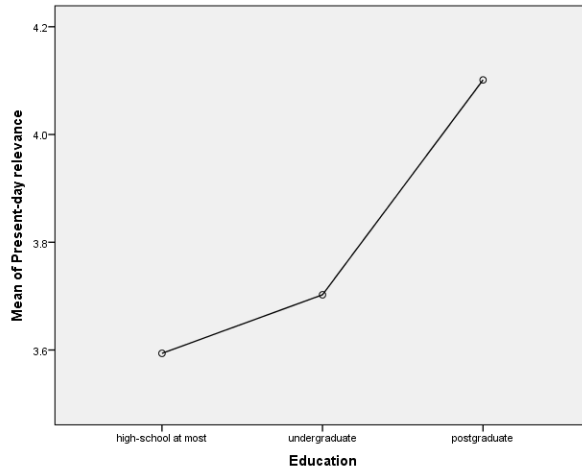


Figure 3. Means plot for present-day relevance

Some significant differences in perceptions are also registered among respondents considering their residency (Figure 4). Generally, respondents from southern Romania evaluate higher all dimensions investigated than the rest of the country.

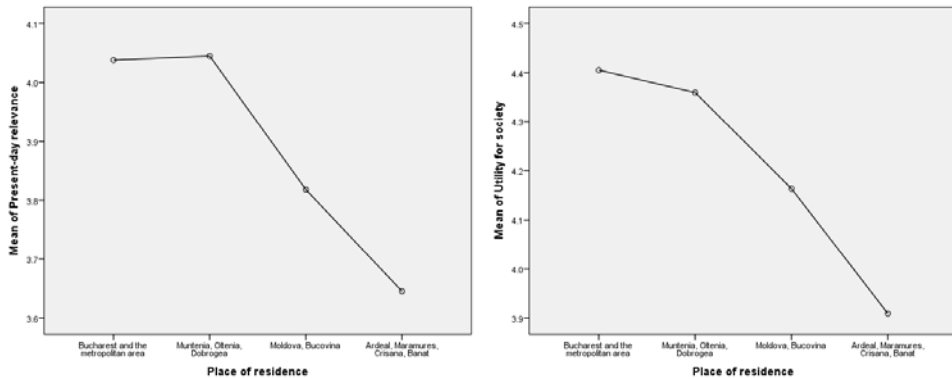


Figure 4. Means plot considering the residency place

When considering the professional status, Archaeologists and other professionals in the field of heritage tend to have higher scores than the other groups. The highest differences are generally in reports with entrepreneurs, managers, artists etc. See Figure 5 for details, considering that the relevant statistical differences are mostly in relation to the Present-day relevance of archaeology.

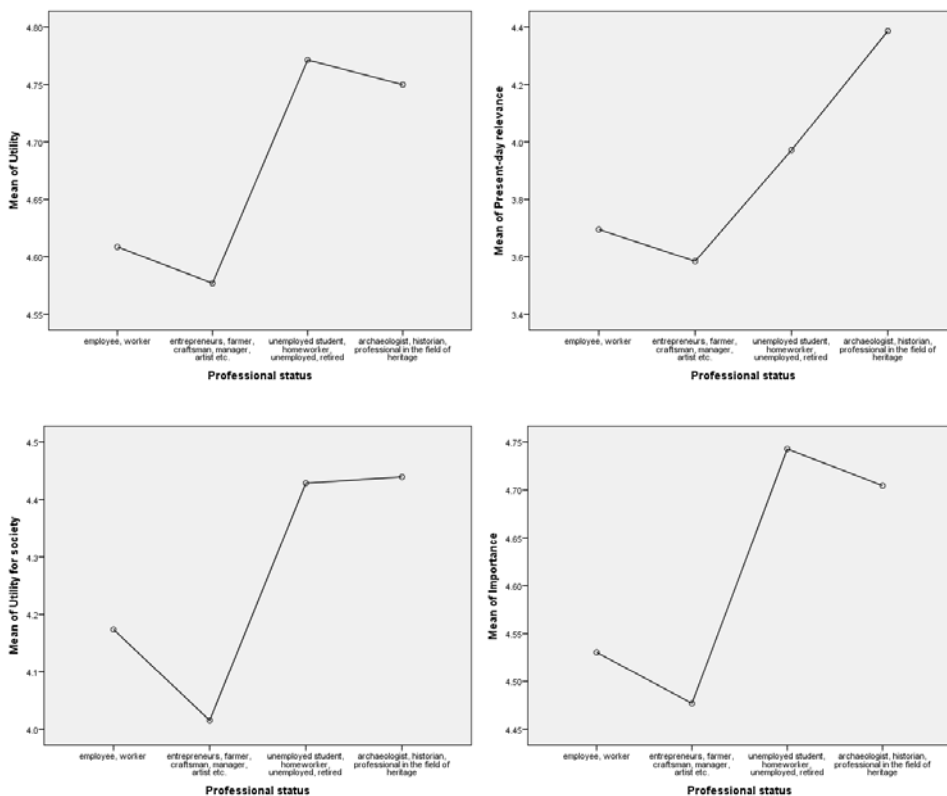


Figure 5. Means plot considering the professional status

Lastly, we document medium correlations among all the four items investigated, with the strongest one between the perceived utility for society and importance to support and development (Pearson’s $r = .54$).

Archaeology’s perceived contribution to sustainable development

We tested two items: a general evaluation of the contribution of archaeology to sustainable development and the advantages that archaeological heritage would have for a city. Table 4 shows a positive evaluation in both cases, especially considering the actual advantages for a city.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics presenting contributions to sustainable development
Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Sustainable development	412	1	5	3.78	1.206
City advantage	412	1	5	4.63	.738
Valid N (listwise)	412				

The two items are mildly correlated to each other (Pearson’s $r = .42$). They are also positively correlated especially with the declared utility for society and importance of development. The correlations are a little stronger in the case of city advantages, especially connected to the perceived importance (Pearson’s $r = .64$).

Archaeologists and other heritage professionals tend to evaluate the impact more, especially compared to entrepreneurs and managers, etc., as presented in Figure 6.

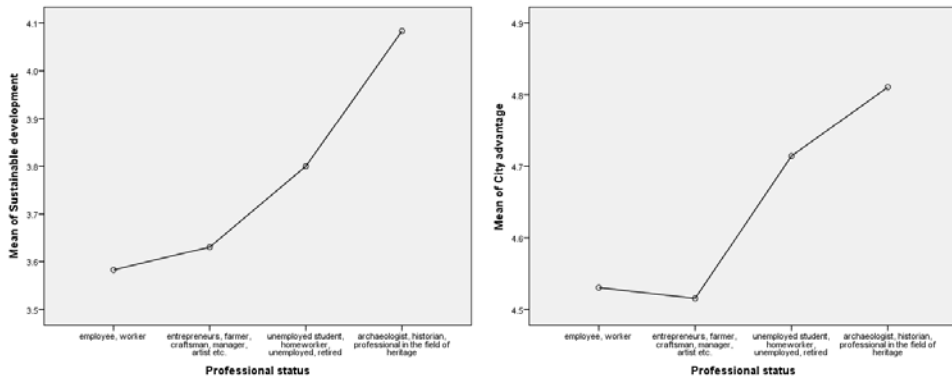


Figure 6. Means plot considering the professional status * contribution to development

Gender is a factor influencing the evaluation, with women being significantly more appreciative than men (see Table 5).

Table 5. Perceived contributions of archaeology to sustainable development by gender

Group Statistics					
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Sustainable development	woman	165	4.06	1.040	.081
	man	247	3.59	1.272	.081
City advantage	woman	165	4.75	.657	.051
	man	247	4.55	.779	.050

Age does not statistically influence the evaluation, although there is a tendency for the youngest and the oldest to evaluate the two dimensions. Education is not a significant influencer, as is the place of residency. We only mention that the greatest differences in evaluation are registered between respondents from Bucharest and the surrounding area compared to those living in Transylvania and Banat.

Archaeology and investments

We considered two dimensions. One is the perceived priority – either archaeological research or constructing roads and buildings. The second is the perception of preventive archaeology’s role in supporting economic investments rather than conservation of archaeological heritage. Results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Descriptive statistics presenting the relationships with investments

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Priority	412	1	5	4.21	1.114
Preventive archeology	412	1	5	3.01	1.293
Valid N (listwise)	412				

There are weak correlations between the two dimensions (Pearson's $r = .13$), between priority and importance to support archaeology (Pearson's $r = .29$), as well as between priority and utility for society (Pearson's $r = .30$).

Gender is influencing the opinions in terms of setting the priority of archaeology by postponing other investments. Women ($M = 4.40$, $SD = 1.005$) consider to a wider degree than men ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 1.166$) that the construction of roads and buildings should be delayed when archaeological remains are found nearby, with a T-test score $t(410) = 2.873$, $p = .004$. No differences between women and men are documented to evaluate preventive archaeology.

Age, place of residency, and education are not significant influencers for the two items. Nevertheless, we mention a slightly surprising tendency for postgraduates to evaluate both dimensions less. There are no significant differences between the archaeologists, those working in the heritage field, and the other professional groups considered.

Relevance of archaeology for the quality of life

We investigated two aspects. One item is Life quality, which measures the perception regarding the contribution of archeology to the development / improvement of the quality of life. The second item is Tourism relevance, referring to the perceived attractiveness of archeological sites as tourist attractions. The perception is presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Descriptive statistics presenting the relevance of archaeology in relation to the quality of life

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Life quality	412	1	5	3.15	1.319
Tourism relevance	412	1	5	4.17	1.061
Valid N (listwise)	412				

The relationship between archaeology and quality of life is perceived as mild. But respondents consider that archaeological sites are attractive tourist destinations, generally. For both dimensions, women gave higher scores than men. The two dimensions are also weakly correlated (Pearson's $r = .37$). Other significant correlations have been documented between life quality and sustainable development (the strongest relationship, with Pearson's $r = .75$), life quality and importance to support archaeology (Pearson's $r = .44$), tourism relevance and importance to support archaeology (Pearson's $r = .43$), tourism relevance and sustainable development (Pearson's $r = .35$), life quality and utility for society (Pearson's $r = .53$). Other relevant correlations are with the perception of city advantages associated with archaeological heritage. The correlation between tourism relevance and city advantage presents a Pearson's r of $.41$, while between city advantage and life quality present a Pearson's r of $.39$.

In terms of age, one observes a statistically significant polarization of opinions between the young and old respondents on one hand, and those aged 25-44 on the other hand (Figure 7). The age group 45-59 considers archaeological sites more attractive than other age groups, but the differences are not statistically significant.

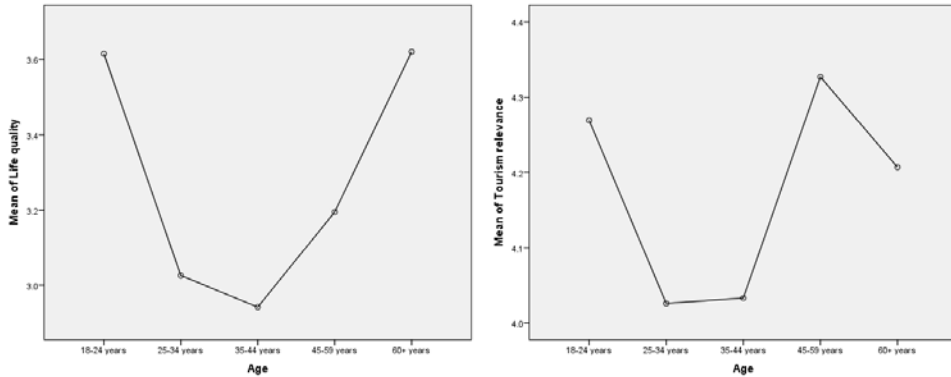


Figure 7. Means plot considering the age of the respondents

The place of residency also is correlated with the evaluation. There are some statistically significant differences between respondents in Southern Romania and those in Moldova + Bucovina, respectively those in Transylvania + Banat (Figure 8). In relation to the perceived impact on the quality of life, the largest gap is between the evaluation of respondents in Muntenia, Oltenia, and Dobrogea ($M=3.35$) and those in Transylvania and Banat ($M=2.82$).

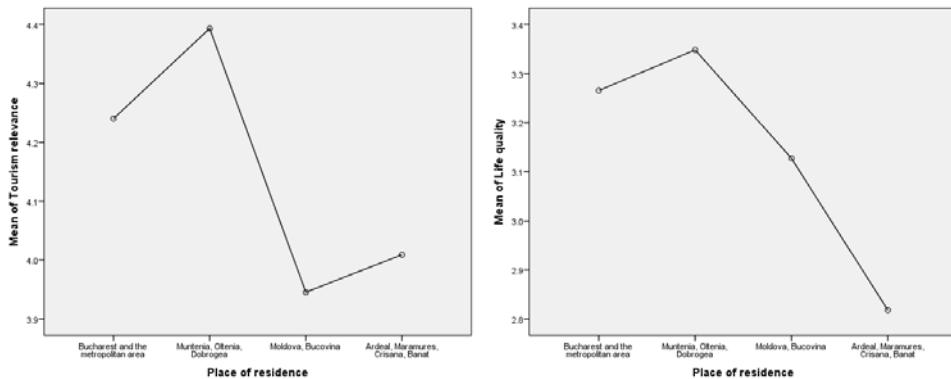


Figure 8. Means plot considering place of residence

Educational level does not determine significantly different perceptions, but we observe a tendency of those more educated to consider that archaeological sites are not a popular tourist attraction. In other words, they tend to consider that the general public is not interested in archaeological sites.

As expected, there are significant differences between archaeologists and other professionals in heritage, compared to other employees, as documented in Figure 9.

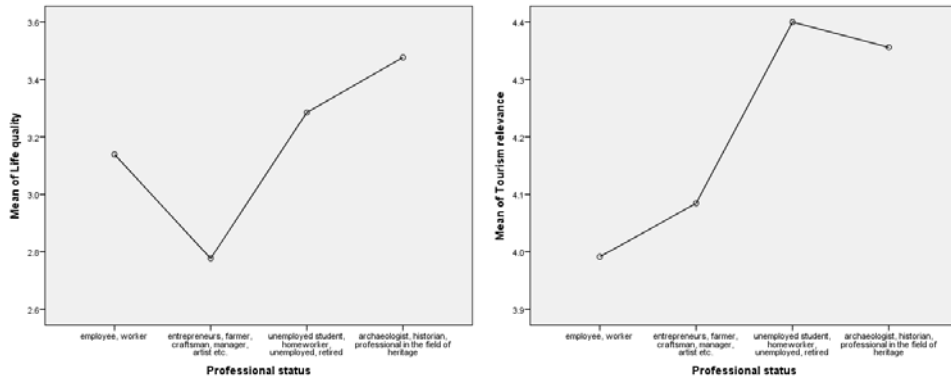


Figure 9. Means plot considering professional status

Conclusions

Archaeology has become increasingly more important for the wider society, being relevant outside the core group of those interested in archaeology and history as cultural manifestations and representatives of the past. The economic value of archaeology, its contribution to economic development, has been increasingly acknowledged by professionals and researchers. A few investigations have also mapped the perception of archaeology in the eyes of the wider public. The present study takes further this initiative, by investigating how is perceived the role of archaeology in sustainable development in Romania.

Considering the first line of investigation followed by this study, referring to how is archaeology evaluated in general, when considering its relationship with contemporary society, the findings highlight that archaeology is prestigious, important, and considered useful in a general way, but less connected to the present society and its needs. Women and older respondents tend to be more favorable when considering the actual concrete value of archaeology today.

Romanians consider that archeology contributes to sustainable development, especially by offering local advantages. In all dimensions evaluated, archaeology is, not surprisingly, crediting more archaeology considering other categories of the public. The most skeptical seem to be the group of entrepreneurs, managers, craftsmen etc. Women are also more supportive than men.

Referring to the third dimension investigated, the relationship of archaeology with the investments and realty developers, the perception of Romanians is that archaeology should prevail in front of the construction of infrastructure and edifices. Somewhat contradictory, preventive archaeology has a lesser relevant perception. This might be related to a weaker understanding of preventive archaeology, a low level of trust, or/and the lack of knowledge referring to the associated mechanisms.

The last dimension considered the personal relevance of archaeology, in connection with the quality of life. While seeing the more direct/pragmatic connection with tourism, the respondents tend to consider the relationship between archaeology and the quality

of life as negative. The respondents with more nuanced views on archaeology, who consider the positive connections of archaeology to sustainable development, also credit it more with contributing to increased quality of life. Women are, again, more favorable than men. Young, as well as older respondents, are also more supportive of this contribution. Archaeologists are also more appreciative than the rest of the respondents.

Interpreting the study's results, one should also consider the study's limits. The main aspect is the relevance of the sample. The study includes a rather wide and diverse sample, nevertheless, the respondents have chosen to answer the survey with no incentive or pressure, and therefore, it is probable they are already interested in archaeology more than other segments of the population. The results are reflecting the evaluations and opinions of highly educated people. Another aspect to consider is the subjectivity of perceptions, depending on the personal experiences and values of the respondents. The present study does not measure in any way the actual contribution of archaeology to sustainable development, but the contribution with which it is credited.

The study contributes to a better understanding of the perception of archaeology among educated Romanians, considering the lay public and archaeologists. It has revealed a certain gap between the two groups and between women and men considering the investigated topics. Showing a relatively high appreciation of archaeology in a conceptual sense, together with a lesser positive perceived actual contribution to sustainable development and the quality of life, it suggests a need to better communicate the relevance of archaeology to the public, as well as to the actual impact it has proved in various instances. We mention that the same gap between the conceptual and cultural value of archaeology and its perceived contribution to sustainable development has been identified by the NEARCH study developed in 10 other EU countries (Marx, Nurra, & Salas Rossenbach, 2017), but the values identified were somewhat higher than in Romania.

The study also suggests a low understanding of preventive archaeology. Generally, archaeology needs to be better communicated, especially since the sample reflects higher evaluations than the rest of the population. For future research, we would recommend qualitative investigation for unveiling in a more detailed way the perceptions of the general public and the aspects leading to these perceptions of the relevance of archaeology for contemporary society.

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