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Autor: Lassau, Guido
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Outreach is an opportunity for archaeology

Modern outreach ensures broad-based public support for preserving our archaeological heritage





By **Guido Lassau**, Kantons-archäologe Basel-Stadt, guido.lassau@bs.ch

According to the 2016 statistics on cultural behaviour published by the Federal Office of Culture, the people of Switzerland hold the country's archaeological sites and monuments in high esteem. These sites and monuments rank third among the most visited cultural sites after museums/exhibitions and concerts/musical events. The 2016 federal statistics on Switzerland's built heritage underscore how much people appreciate their cultural heritage. Switzerland has a unique cultural and historical treasure of around 311 000 monuments of national, regional and local importance, including 39 000 archaeological sites.

Fig. 1:
Weekly tour as part
of the Year of Cultural
Heritage 2018
coinciding with the
Spiegelhof excavation.

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*a*s authentic ambassadors of bygone times, excavations and finds exert a profound fascination. From the vantage of a globalized world, looking back can provide a sense of direction, identity and of being rooted in a region. The changed media consumption of people today poses a major challenge for outreach. At the same time, digital media have great potential: hidden worlds of the past can now be visualised thanks to modern technology.

Public visibility in Basel

The results of the Archäologische Bodenforschung des Kantons Basel-Stadt have been very well received. The people of Basel have a keen sense of history and culture. The medieval bishopric and its modern urban extensions, together with outstanding historical sources, lend themselves to ongoing, hands-on outreach programmes that enjoy widespread support. In this dynamic city, the work of archaeology is carried out at the crossroads of memory and oblivion. Things long forgotten come to light and stimulate people's imagination, giving rise to a nuanced sense of home and identity (Fig. 2).

In order to increase its visibility both in the public sphere and with respect to other cultural institutions, the Archäologische Bodenforschung partnered with New Identity Ltd. to create a modern corporate design. In organisational terms, the agency gave more weight to public relations by creating an «outreach» department at the expense of other activities. The department currently has about 14% of the agency's human and financial resources at its disposal. The corporate design is now consistently applied in all public relations activities and publications. It is based on barrier tapes, such as those used by the fire brigade or police at the scene of an incident. The coloured tapes indicate that the detailed documentation of a historical «crime scene» is in progress. In 2010, the design and content of the annual report – previously large an anthology of



Fig. 2: Archaeology in front of Basel City Hall.
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scientific studies – were overhauled. Besides the review of administrative activity and the chronicle of finds, the report now contains only a much-shortened science section. Yet the report still signals that science is at the heart of all archaeological outreach. The focus of the annual report is a richly illustrated cover story in the genre of science journalism. It is devoted to a specific find or result and is intended to address a broad public (Fig. 3).

Outreach activities at various locations

The Archäologische Bodenforschung's work takes place in public, and excavations are clearly marked. Passers-by have what amounts to an exclusive, front-row seat to lessons about Basel's past and the work of the agency. For larger excavations, mobile poster stands serve to convey information. Like other advertising media in the public realm, they are professionally designed. At the same time, updates on ongoing excavations are posted on Instagram and Facebook,

Fig. 3:
Archaeological Soil
Research Agency
barrier tape.

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Fig. 4:
The Archaeological
information point
opened in 2019 in the
crypt beneath the Basel
cathedral crossing.

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as well as on the website, and disseminated via the Archäologische Bodenforschung's newsletter (Fig. 1).

Major excavations are made accessible to the public through regular guided tours. For example, some 4000 people visited the excavation of the music hall in the Stadtcasino, where they learned more about the eventful history of the Barfüsserkloster (Franciscan friary) below. Strikingly printed construction hoardings drew attention to the excavation work. Interesting facts about the city's history were shared with the public by means of 30 press reports, five television and radio reports, as well as numerous social media posts and a pop-up exhibition in the neighbouring Basel Historical Museum.

Archaeological information points: windows into the past

Like the presentation concept for the excavations, a tour of archaeological monuments aims to help visitors understand Basel's history. A trilingual GPS app leads



visitors to original Celtic, Roman and medieval historical sites. Permanent archaeological information points bear titles such as «Basel, 80 BC / Murus Gallicus, the Celtic wall» or «Basel, AD 300 / Roman perimeter wall». The original finds are highlighted by means of special lighting (Fig. 4). The quality of the presentation and explanations is intended to be comparable to that of a museum. The information point «Basel, AD 820–1500 / Crypt under the cathedral crossing», opened in May 2019, describes the remnants of cathedrals from the time of Charlemagne to the Reformation. Original finds from 1200 years, 3D reconstructions of the four main building phases of the cathedral, exhibits from the bishops' tombs of the 13th and 14th centuries as well as a 270° media production make it possible to experience the long history of this mystical place. Every day about 150 people of all ages undertake a journey through time to the origins of the cathedral enabled by this experience-oriented scenographic outreach concept (Fig. 5).

The number of visitors to the offerings of the Archäologische Bodenforschung make it clear that providing resources for modern outreach is worthwhile. These efforts are the basis of broad public support for preserving archaeological heritage and, consequently, support for archaeological work.

Society's demands on archaeology have changed over time. It is no longer enough to invoke legal provisions to safeguard cultural heritage or to target outreach activities to a specialist public. The general public needs to be reached as well. At the same time, attention must be paid to attractive, modern outreach based on science. In this way, policymakers will ultimately also be made more aware of the importance of archaeological sites as sources of historiography. ■

Fig. 5:
Archaeological Tour –
3000 Years of Cathedral
Hill History app in three
languages along with
informative images.
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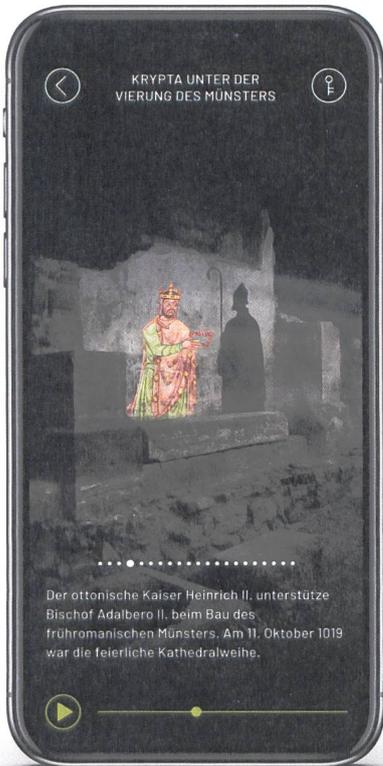
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Archaeological Tour – 3000 Years of Cathedral Hill History app on Google Play <https://play.google.com/store/apps/> and in the Apple App Store www.apple.com/chde/ios/app-store/

www.archaeologie.bs.ch > Vermittlung > Archäologische Informationsstellen

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Resümee

Die Archäologische Bodenforschung des Kantons Basel-Stadt misst der publikums-wirksamen Vermittlung der Resultate ihrer Grabungs- und Forschungsprojekte grossen Stellenwert zu. Sie wendet dafür 14 % der personellen und finanziellen Ressourcen auf. In den Vermittlungsangeboten wird der gesellschaftliche Wandel berücksichtigt. Um ihre Visibilität in der öffentlichen Wahrnehmung zu erhöhen, arbeitet sie mit einer professionellen Agentur zusammen. Mit Vermittlungsinterventionen im öffentlichen Raum sowie dem Einsatz digitaler Mittel und kompetenter Medienarbeit soll die gesellschaftliche Relevanz der Archäologie in der Öffentlichkeit zur Geltung gebracht werden. Damit wird die gesellschaftliche Akzeptanz für die Anliegen der Archäologie gestärkt.

Résumé

Pour le Service d'archéologie du canton de Bâle-Ville, il est essentiel de présenter de manière attractive les résultats de ses recherches et de ses fouilles. Quatorze pour cent de ses ressources humaines et financières sont consacrées à cette tâche. Ce travail de transmission prend en compte l'évolution de la société. Afin d'accroître sa visibilité auprès du public, le service coopère avec une agence spécialisée. Grâce à des interventions dans l'espace public, au recours à des moyens numériques et à de bonnes relations avec les médias, la portée sociale de l'archéologie est mise en valeur et le public est sensibilisé aux intérêts de la discipline.