

## Public Archaeology in Romania: a Review.

Radu-Alexandru BRUNCHI<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract.** *The present paper aims to highlight the Public Archaeology endeavors that were conducted in Romania. Although, at the first glance we cannot identify many papers or platforms that promote Public Archaeology, we will focus our attention towards the archaeological research that was conducted by the public or by the specialists, but with the help of the community. The typology elaborated by Moshenska & Bonacchi in 2015 represents the backbone on which our study will be built upon, as it provides a clear distinction between all the categories that the vast domain of Public Archaeology reaches.*

**Rezumat.** *Lucrarea își propune să evidențieze stadiul actual al Arheologiei Publice în România. Deși, la prima vedere, nu putem identifica multe lucrări sau platforme care să promoveze Arheologia Publică, ne vom concentra atenția asupra cercetărilor arheologice care au fost efectuate de către public sau de către specialiști cu ajutorul comunității. Tipologia elaborată de Moshenska & Bonacchi în 2015 reprezintă baza studiului nostru, întrucât oferă o distincție clară între toate categoriile pe care vastul domeniu al Arheologiei Publice le atinge.*

**Keywords:** *Public Archaeology, Romania, amateur archaeology, open archaeology, community archaeology, Cultural Resource Management.*

### Introduction

*Public Archaeology* has been developing, at a sustained pace, since the early 1970s. As a result, a large number of academic institutions abroad offer specialization courses in this field, and the number of publications is constantly growing, having also a journal dedicated to *Public Archaeology*. However, we can see that archaeologists have not yet found a middle ground in setting the domain's objectives, purpose and methodology. Most likely, this is due to the multitude of topics targeted by this "discipline".

The present scientific approach cannot start otherwise than by defining the field that constitutes the subject of the research. Unfortunately, this attempt lies in connection with perhaps the greatest reproach that *Public Archaeology* has received over time from the global scientific community, namely the lack of a clear and concise, widely accepted definition. Thus, starting from this shortcoming, I will present some of the definitions that were proposed by the specialists.

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<sup>1</sup> Arheoinvest Centre, Department of Exact and Natural Science, Institute of Interdisciplinary Research, "Alexandru Ion Cuza" University of Iași County, email: [radu.brunchi@uaic.ro](mailto:radu.brunchi@uaic.ro).

First of all, it is worth mentioning the definitions offered by Tim Schadla-Hall (1999) and Akira Matsuda and Katsuyuki Okamura (2011). The first one presents the domain from a practical perspective, as "any area of archaeological activity that interacted or had the potential to interact with the public - the vast majority of whom, for a variety of reasons, know little about archaeology as an academic subject"<sup>2</sup>. Twelve years later, Matsuda and Okamura define the same field but, from a theoretical perspective, "as a subject that examines the relationship between archaeology and the public and then seeks to improve it"<sup>3</sup>.

In addition to these two definitions, it is worth mentioning the journal *Public Archaeology*, which first appeared in England in 2000. The journal's website provides a brief description of the topics of interest, namely: "research on archaeological and heritage issues related to politics, ethics, government, social questions, education, management, economics and philosophy"<sup>4</sup>.

### Short history of the domain

- **United States of America**

During the '60s-'70s, archaeology developed at an accelerated pace, which led to the creation of several subdisciplines. However, the emergence of public archaeology had a different route. Unlike other new disciplines related to archaeology, which were largely extensions of the field itself, *Public Archaeology* did not want to study the material past, but rather the relationship between the domain and modern society because archaeological study, as it is well-known, cannot be detached from the cultural, economic and political aspects of contemporary society. The power relations that exist within the society would inevitably influence the methods and objectives of archaeological activity. In this context, in the year 1972, the work of Charles R. McGimsey III is published, marking the field of *Public Archaeology* through citations and presentations in the preamble of most studies targeting this topic. Charles R. McGimsey III was an important figure in world archaeology, in general, and American archaeology, in particular. He was not only the pioneer of *Public Archaeology*, but he represented also the force that set in motion the legislative mechanism in the United States of America. Also at his initiative, was established the Society of Professional Archaeologists (currently the Register of Professional Archaeologists). At the same time, a large part of the laws and regulations aimed at protecting archaeological heritage and managing resources for this purpose. Charles R. McGimsey III laid the foundations of what we now call *Cultural Resource Management* (CRM), and his work aimed to highlight the importance of CRM in the context of a huge, burgeoning state structure with important infrastructure projects that could have endangered archaeological sites<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> SCHADLA-HALL 1999, 147.

<sup>3</sup> MATSUDA & OKAMURA 2011, 4.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/ypua20/current> (Accessed: October 2021).

<sup>5</sup> [https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007%2F978-1-4419-0465-2\\_1236](https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007%2F978-1-4419-0465-2_1236) (Accessed: 11.2021).

- **United Kingdom**

In the British area, what we call *Public Archaeology* today, is based on the concept of *community archaeology*. The term was first used by P. Liddle (1985) in his work *Community Archaeology. A Fieldworker's Handbook of Organisation and Technique*. At that time, P. Liddle was an archaeologist in the museum in Leicester, and the group he coordinated began to create the so-called "*local archaeological fieldwork groups*" (local archaeological groups)<sup>6</sup>, with the main purpose of researching large areas of land. These groups of volunteers were autonomous and generally carried out surface research with the help and guidance of specialists. Unauthorized excavations were not encouraged, and P. Liddle incorporated into his work all the steps that should be followed, from the different types of research to the documentation work.

- **Romania**

In the last ten years, the ideas promoted by *Public Archaeology* have begun to appear in the Romanian space as well. Thus, in 2013, Alexandra Ion publishes a study in which she tries to introduce "*the concept of public archaeology within the contemporary debates within the archaeology in Romania*"<sup>7</sup>. On this occasion, the author makes a review of the main topics addressed by the field of public archaeology, as well as of the reasons why the Romanian archaeology needs it. Subsequently, Sorin Nemeti publishes the article *Manifesto for the Romanian public archaeology*<sup>8</sup>, written from the perspective of a member of the National Commission of Archaeology. The author wanted, thus, to systematize the discussions that took place during the meetings of the National Commission of Archaeology, while also drawing attention to the need to introduce interdisciplinarity in the work of the archaeologist.

In the same year, T. Szabó Csaba, through his study on *Public Archaeology in Romania*, aims to identify the elements, from G. Moshenska's typology, existing for the Romanian space and also to establish the directions to be followed in the development of the field<sup>9</sup>.

Unfortunately, these are the only works that appeared in the Romanian space that deliberately target *Public Archaeology*, referring to theoretical aspects. At a first glance, the small number of publications could contribute to drawing hasty conclusions regarding the presence or importance that the researchers in Romania grant to the relationship between the public and archaeology. But on a closer look, we can identify articles, most of them case studies, which aim, among other things, at facilitating public access to archaeological information<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> LIDDLE 1989, 44.

<sup>7</sup> ION 2013, 255.

<sup>8</sup> NEMETI 2017, 5-7.

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.academia.edu/35321397/Arheologia\\_public%C4%83\\_%C3%AEn\\_Rom%C3%A2nia](https://www.academia.edu/35321397/Arheologia_public%C4%83_%C3%AEn_Rom%C3%A2nia) (Accessed: 12.2021).

<sup>10</sup> COMES et al. 2019, 71-77.

In order to be able to follow more clearly the activity undertaken by the public or oriented towards it, within the territory of Romania, I will appeal to the model proposed by Moshenska<sup>11</sup>. The motivation for the choice was represented by the fact that, although some projects are not an approach subscribed to the *Public Archaeology* domain, they "reach" important points regarding the relationship between the archaeologist and the public. Next, I will try to offer as many examples as possible, many of them coming from the archaeological activity undertaken by the staff of the Arheoinvest Research Center of the "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iasi of which I am a part of.

1. *Archaeologists working with the public.*

As mentioned before, this category refers to the possibility of participation of members of the community in projects carried out under the patronage of museums, universities or research institutes. It is worth mentioning the work of *reenactment* groups. An easy example is that of the Geto-Dacian Cultural Association of Moldova, with whose activity I have intersected many times: they were present at *reenactment* events, where they attracted a large number of people, but also responded to the invitation of archaeologists to actively participate in various archaeological excavations, in order to better understand and present as faithfully as possible the archaeological information, in *reenactment* camps<sup>12</sup>.

In Romania, most of the archaeological excavations are coordinated by museums, universities or research institutes, and the human resources used are those available to each of the institutions, rarely making an appeal among students to carry out the specialized archaeological practice, or among the general public, interested in the field of archaeology. For now, I will focus on the activity coordinated by researchers dr. Felix-Adrian Tencariu and dr. Andrei Asăndulesei, in the summer of 2021, an activity in which I have taken part since the planning/organization stage. Thus, between June 21 and July 4, 2021, an archaeological survey was organized in the Chalcolithic settlement from Cucuteni – *Cetățuie*<sup>13</sup>. It was attended by both students of the Faculty of History in Iasi and people interested in archaeological activity. In march 2021, the announcement was launched, allowing the public passionate about archaeology to fill in a form and, depending on the available places (the number of places was limited to 15 participants for each series, due to pandemic conditions), to participate in the archaeological survey organized by the Arheoinvest Center and the Faculty of History, both entities being under the patronage of the "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iași. The announcement generated a lot of interest among young people passionate about archaeology,

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<sup>11</sup> BONACCHI & MOSHENSKA 2015, 2.

<sup>12</sup> The Association participated in the archaeological excavations coordinated by the Institute of Archaeology of the Romanian Academy, Iasi branch (<https://fb.watch/hJ0eyICPn7/> accessed: 12.2022).

<sup>13</sup> This represents the eponymous site of Cucuteni culture, considered exhausted, from an archaeological point of view. Non-invasive researches carried out by the Arheoinvest team revealed, however, a continuation of the settlement. <http://cronica.cimec.ro/detalii.asp?k=6053&d=Cucuteni-Iasi-Dealu-Laiu-2017> (accessed: 09.2021).

with people from Craiova, Bucharest and Iasi participating in the excavations, along with students during archaeological fieldwork from the Faculty of History in Iasi.



Fig. 1. Typology of the Public Archeology domain (Bonacchi & Moshenska 2015, 2, figure 1)

2. *Archaeology by the public* also known as *amateur archaeology*<sup>14</sup>.

For the Romanian space, this subject is an extremely controversial one, due to archaeological poaching. However, we have many positive examples that I will list below. Through *archaeology by the public*, we mean the archaeological activities started at the initiative of associations, amateur clubs or independent researchers. Also, in this category we fall into the activity of metal detectors users. Examples can be found since the end of the nineteenth century, one of the most outstanding figures being that of Zsófia Torma, one of the first archaeologists in the Romanian space. In 1868 she became a member of the "Society of Geography of the Hungarian Homeland", and shortly after, at the urging of the Secretary General of the "International Congress of Prehistoric Archaeology and Anthropology", Flóris Rómer, she began the archaeological research (in the autumn of 1875 in Turdas), thus being

<sup>14</sup> I mention that the term *amateur archaeology* does not refer to the quality of the archaeological activity performed, but to the fact that the person who performs this archaeological work does not have a certificate of archaeologist or academic training in the field, but had contact with the archaeological excavation in the past.

among the first researchers to turn her attention to the Turdaş-Vinča culture. Zsófia Torma is also one of the founding members of the "Society of History and Archaeology of Hunedoara County" and author of several scientific articles<sup>15</sup>. Being very active in archaeological conferences abroad, Zsófia Torma establishes links with researchers of prehistoric archaeology such as A. Voss, R. Virchow and H. Schliemann, and after discussing with them, she comes to the conclusion that the Neolithic populations had a writing system, proposing their deciphering<sup>16</sup>.

Another example worth mentioning is related to the activity of the Society of Physicians and Naturalists among whose members we find Nicolae Beldiceanu and Dimitrie C. Butculescu. The personality of Nicolae Beldiceanu, an amateur archaeologist, is also linked to the first attempts to research the eponymous site of the Cucuteni culture. He received from the Society of Physicians and Naturalists, on August 20, 1885, the sum of 300 lei to carry out archaeological research in Cucuteni, the objects that were discovered being exhibited at the Museum of Natural History in Iasi<sup>17</sup>, while the results of these researches were published in the same year<sup>18</sup>. Although the exact details regarding the manner in which the archaeological researches started from the point called *Cetățuie* still raise controversies, it is certain that the Society of Physicians and Naturalists<sup>19</sup>, along with its members (amateur archaeologists), was present in the first archaeological surveys, which it also subsidized.

Another amateur archaeologist, who positively marked the Romanian archaeology and who made many important contributions, is the priest Constantin Matasă. His work in this area is extensive. Thus, since 1935, the priest Matasă has conducted numerous systematic surveys or excavations, alone or in collaboration with professional archaeologists, in sites such as: *Piatra Șoimului (Calu)-Dealul Horodiștea*; *Traian-Dealul Fântânilor* and *Dealul Viei*; *Bodeștii de Jos-Frumușica*; *Ghigoiești-Trudești*; *Tg. Neamț-Pometea*; *Dobreni-Mătăhuia*; *Costișa-Cetățuia*; *Cândești - Dealul Varniței*; *Târpești - Râpa lui Bodai*; *Tg. Ocna - Podei*; *Piatra-Neamț - Văleni*, *Cozla*, *Curtea Domneasă*, *Bîtca Doamnei*, *Lutărie*, *Dărmănești* and *Izvoare - Dumbrava-Roșie*<sup>20</sup>. He also published a series of scientific papers and articles<sup>21</sup>, and his name is also linked to the Piatra-Neamț Regional Archaeological Museum, founded in 1934. Thus, Constantin Matasă, through his activity, had a consistent contribution to the knowledge of the past of Neamț County, and not only, contributing with numerous archaeological researches and a consistent bibliography, facilitating public access by establishing the Archaeological Museum in Piatra Neamț.

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<sup>15</sup> TORMA 1879; 1880; 1882; 1886a; 1886b; 1896; 1897.

<sup>16</sup> DRĂGHIA 1998, 162.

<sup>17</sup> VĂLEANU 2006, 202.

<sup>18</sup> BELDICEANU 1885.

<sup>19</sup> The Society of Physicians and Naturalists is a scientific and medical society from Iasi founded in 1833, thus being the oldest scientific society in Romania.

<sup>20</sup> NICOLA et.al. 2014, 8.

<sup>21</sup> MATASĂ 1938; 1940; 1946; 1955; 1959; 1964.

As Gabriel Moshenska stated, *amateur archaeology* is the first form of *Public Archaeology* but is currently increasingly difficult to practice due to restrictive legislation and the reluctance of professional archaeologists<sup>22</sup>. However, positive examples can still be identified. Thus, in 1998, Dr. Romeo Dumitrescu laid the foundations of the "Cucuteni for the Third Millennium" foundation, which had as main objective the financial support of archaeological projects dedicated to Cucuteni culture and Chalcolithic civilizations, on the territory of Romania. The association tried to solve a problem that archaeologists met more and more often in the field, namely the ownership of the land on which a potential archaeological site is located. In this regard, the foundation bought the lands on which there were sites of interest to archaeologists: the first step consisted in acquiring the land on which the site from Poduri-Dealul Ghindaru was located, which facilitated the resumption of archaeological excavations after a 4-year stagnation. Later on, he also bought the lands on which the sites Isaiia-Balta Popii (Precucuteni) and Crețești, jud. Vaslui (Cucuteni A) were located. With the same objective, of attracting the public to archaeological research, the foundation also made two film productions: *Adam's Grandchildren* (2004) and *Built to be burned* (2008), the latter representing, at the same time, an extensive archaeological experiment, carried out in order to determine the manner of arson of the Cucutenian dwellings. Also, a series of thematic exhibitions were organized, both in Romania (Targoviste, Piatra Neamt, Sibiu, Brasov, Tulcea, Timisoara) and abroad (British Museum, Vatican City, Beijing). Last but not least, in Iasi, a section dedicated exclusively to Cucuteni culture was built, within the Museum of the "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iasi, through the foundation's collaboration with the University, some of the most "valuable" exhibits being donated even by Dr. Romeo Dumitrescu. He has also published studies, which exemplify very well why the interpretations coming from the amateur public should not be ignored<sup>23</sup>. Thus, R. Dumitrescu formulated hypotheses based on his knowledge, as a MD, without being influenced by previous archaeological interpretations.

### 3. *Public archaeology sector*

This vast category includes all research "controlled" or supported by the state or public institutions, with the aim of inventorying, conserving, studying and publishing the archaeological heritage. In the case of Romania, most archaeologists are employed in the public domain: universities, museums, research institutes, subsidized by the Romanian state, the number of archaeologists working exclusively in the private environment being very small. Being a developing country, especially in terms of infrastructure, the number of rescue excavations is increasing from year to year, providing jobs for many archaeologists, both amateurs and professionals. It is also important to mention the *National Program for financing systematic archaeological research*, with the help of which the "traditional" sites, in which

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<sup>22</sup> MOSHENSKA 2017, 7.

<sup>23</sup> DUMITRESCU 2008; 2011a; 2011b,

systematic excavations are carried out, can access research funds, granted by the Ministry of Culture.

At the same time, this category, of the rescue / preventive excavations, has "tarnished" the image of archaeology in Romania the most, the specialists being blamed for the delays produced in the case of major infrastructure works.

In 2019, I took part in such a project, namely the Bacau ring road. The project was carried out without delays from archaeologists, making important discoveries on its route, discoveries that were capitalized for scientific purposes<sup>24</sup>. This is probably the most important result of such research, namely the number of unpublished sites, the huge amount of information and archaeological material that would not have been researched, in any other way, due to lack of funds.

#### 4. *Archaeological Education*

This category arose as a result of the responsibility of the researcher to share the knowledge with those who can appreciate and use it. In this category we can fit special programs in schools, museums and various brochures or textbooks. Unfortunately, in the Romanian education system, in the primary, secondary or high school cycles, we do not find any course / subject / optional that would refer to archaeology, the only way in which a person could contact with archaeology, in an organized educational environment, being represented by enrollment in a Faculty of History. In recent years, however, with the introduction of the program "Școala Altfel" (*Different School*), many teachers have organized as an activity within this program, visits to museums, which brought students closer to the field in question. There are, however, also some programs organized in schools / high schools, where students can actually take part in archaeological excavations or lectures by professors / archaeologists from the university environment. An example of this is represented by the collaboration between the high school "Varlaam Mitropolitul" and the Arheoinvest Center, which allowed students to participate in archaeological excavation campaigns in the sites from Isaiia – *Balta Popii* (2018) and Stroești – "*Pietrarie*" (2021), on this occasion taking part in lectures of the coordinators of the two excavations: dr. Felix-Adrian Tencariu and dr. Andrei Asăndulesei (Fig.2).

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<sup>24</sup> BRAȘOVEANU et al. 2020.





Fig.2. Details of the archaeological campaign from Stroiesti - Pietrărie, 2021.

### 5. *Open archaeology*

Unlike other sciences, archaeology has the opportunity to be "open to the public" and interact with it directly. A good example of this is the "Open Days" organized by the research teams from various archaeological sites, but also the online viewing platforms. In Romania, there are sites with tradition in organizing the days of free access for the general public (the sites from Sultana or Sarmizegetusa Regia), this type of manifestation benefiting, in general, also from a good promotion in the mass-media<sup>25</sup>.

With the development of technologies for digitizing and three-dimensional transposition of objects, a series of free platforms have begun to be created, which can host 3D models and facilitate their viewing, in an intuitive way, by the public. Basically, in recent years, the idea of virtual interaction with archaeological artifacts has been intensively promoted, with the help of photogrammetry and LiDAR scans. The goal is to obtain digital models of artifacts, using virtual reality or augmented reality equipment as an interface for interaction. In the Romanian

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.replicahd.ro/ziua-portilor-deschise-la-sarmizegetusa-regia-4/> (Accessed: 11.2021); <https://www.historia.ro/sectiune/timp-liber/articol/ziua-portilor-deschise-pe-santierul-arheologic-de-epoca-dacica-cetatea-zanelor> (Accessed: 11.2021); <https://www.bistriteanul.ro/ziua-portilor-deschise-azi-la-situl-arheologic-figa-cel-mai-cel-mai-important-sit-din-europa-sud-estica-si-centrala/> (Accessed: 11.2021); <https://realitateadebuzau.net/ziua-portilor-deschise-pe-santierul-arheologic-pietroasa-mica-gruiu-darii/> (Accessed: 11.2021); <https://jurnalul.ro/cultura/arte-vizuale/ziua-portilor-deschise-pe-santierul-scoala-de-la-costesti-cetatuie-877399.html> (Accessed: 11.2021).

literature, the tendency to focus on 3D digital models is more than obvious, most of the scientific articles whose beneficiary would be the public / visitors based on the promotion of heritage in the virtual environment<sup>26</sup>. It is also necessary to mention the section dedicated to *Public Archaeology*, on the website of the archaeological research journal, located under the aegis of the National Museum of History of Romania<sup>27</sup>. This section appeared on June 30, 2021, with the aim of "*facilitating access to the scientific publications of the journal and understanding the importance that archaeological research has for society*" but, on a closer look, each entry represents an extract from extensive scientific articles, the information usually referring to the type of discovery, some technical data and a historical shield of the research. I believe that, although the initiative is one to be commended, the manner in which the information has been exposed is not much different from an extensive scientific article.

#### 6. *Popular Archaeology*

This category has also been described as *media archaeology* or *pop-culture archaeology* and is represented by the dissemination of archaeological information through facile environments to the public, unlike detailed archaeological descriptions, which characterized the previous categories. Although this category produces the greatest impact within the archaeologist-public relationship, specialists avoid interacting with the media, this being perhaps the basis of the portrayal of the archaeologist as a treasure seeker. In general, sensational discoveries with a high material value are promoted in the media, without the emphasis being placed on the archaeological research itself.

However, in recent years, positive examples have also emerged in terms of promoting archaeology among the public. Thus, Cătălin Pavel started his activity of promoting archaeology in the daily environment through the columns held in newspapers, such as *Dilema Veche* or *Suplimentul de Cultură*. He is also the author of two important works, which have enjoyed the appreciation of the general public: *Arheologia iubirii. De la Neanderthal la Taj Mahal* and *Animalele care ne fac oameni. Blană, cozi și pene în arheologie*<sup>28</sup>.

#### 7. *Academic Public Archaeology*

This category was characterized by G. Moshenska as a disciplinary self-reflection: the study of archaeology in the economic, political, social, cultural, legal and ethical context in which it finds itself<sup>29</sup>. As we could see from the previous examples, in the Romanian space one cannot talk about a systematic study of *Public Archaeology*. We do not find in the curriculum of any university courses aimed at *Public Archaeology*. The only articles I found to study the relationship between the public and the archaeologist, but also the economic, political and

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<sup>26</sup> COMES et al. 2014; COMES 2016; NEAMTU et al. 2016; COMES et al. 2017; 2019; 2020. The most popular platform of this type is Sketchfab.

<sup>27</sup> <https://cercetari-arheologice.ro/cercetari-arheologice-arheologie-publica/> (Accessed: 12.2021).

<sup>28</sup> PAVEL 2019; 2021.

<sup>29</sup> MOSHENSKA 2017, 6.

social tensions that arise between investors, archaeologists, public bodies and the interests of the public, are related to the name of Nona Palincaș<sup>30</sup>.

### Conclusions

Thus, following the model exposed above, we were able to identify some steps that, although not carried out with *Public Archaeology* as a starting point, have reached important points in what this field promotes. Nowadays, the archaeological work seems to focus on two coordinates: interdisciplinarity and data, which are beneficial to our efforts to promote the archaeological results to the general public<sup>31</sup>. The new methods of data gathering (3D Modelling, Photogrammetry) and non-invasive prospections (Magnetometry, Ground Penetrating Radar, Electrical-Resistivity Tomography, LiDAR scanning etc.) provide a more visual driven experience that attracts the public. Also, the recent development in technology led to the popularization of these equipments among the archaeological community due to the low cost of purchase, so more endeavors to promote archaeology to the public will appear in the next couple of years.

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<sup>30</sup> PALINCAȘ 2011; 2016.

<sup>31</sup> MOSHENSKA 2017, 11.

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