

Projects for the Presentation of the Natural and Cultural Heritage in Hungary

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Abstract. The paper summarizes the projects for presenting cultural heritage sites in Hungary, at Szeleta cave and Sopron. It then describes the potential impact of such archaeological presentations on tourism.

1. Introduction

Vértesszőlös was the first prehistoric archaeological site in Hungary where an open-air visitor centre was opened. The open-air site that was excavated between 1963–1968 is the only authentic Lower Palaeolithic settlement in the country (Kretzoi and Dobosi 1990). Its primary significance lies in the fact that it was considered to be one of the oldest human settlements in Europe and that a *Homo erectus* occipital bone came to light in 1965. On the area of the calcareous tuff mine, the informative posters and two original details from the excavation site provide the general public a clearer picture on the culture and environment of Prehistoric man, as well as its place in the history of evolution (Vértes and Dobosi 1984).

Thanks to the special geographical features of the Carpathian Basin, a varied natural environment with diverse habitats and a colourful wildlife on the area of present-day Hungary. In order to protect the natural treasures of the vast flatlands of the Hortobágy, the moving sand dunes of the Kiskunság, the limestone cliffs of the Bükk Mountains and the reeds of Lake Fertő, in the 1970s national parks were established one after the other: after Hortobágy National Park (1973), further ones were created in the Kiskunság (1975) and the Bükk Mountains (1977); today the number of such parks has risen to 10 throughout the whole country. Fertő-Hanság National Park is a shared, Austrian and Hungarian world heritage site. Apart from the protection of biodiversity, these parks also ensure ongoing scientific research aimed at discovering the changes that have undergone in the fauna, flora and natural environment of the various habitats (Mahunka 2004). Moreover, the parks also inform and educate the general public about the natural heritage.

The development of the archaeological sciences resulted in a paradigm shift in the 1960s. The lives and cultures of past generations were examined within the context of their ecological environment. As a consequence, research cooperation between archaeology and the natural sciences strengthened. In addition, there was a growing desire to inform the general public about the life and the natural environment of

Prehistoric man not just in the museums but also at presentation sites. Archaeological parks are a means for the joint presentation of the archaeological and natural heritage, where the reconstructions – based upon the excavation of prehistoric sites and data derived from multidisciplinary analyses – are placed within the cultural landscape, which guarantees that the visitors have a “hands on” Prehistoric experience.

The first park in Hungary with such an objective in mind was opened in 1996, in the town of Százhalombatta (Poroszlai 2003). The Prehistoric archaeological heritage of Százhalombatta includes a Bronze Age/Iron Age hillfort and an Iron Age cemetery. Based on recent aerial photos, the latter comprises more than 130 burial mounds. One of the mounds has been preserved very well, and after the on-site conservation of its internal wooden structures, the mound has been completely restored and opened to the public. Reconstructed Bronze and Iron Age houses have been erected in the park surrounding the burial mound, and the recultivation of prehistoric flora is under way (Jerem et al. 2001; Poroszlai 2004). The park functions as a research centre as well, where Bronze and Iron Age husbandry and handicraft is examined by experimental archaeology (EXARCH meeting in 2003 at Százhalombatta). The special performances, family weekends and educational programmes inform the general public about the latest scientific results in an enjoyable way.

The linking of the natural and architectural heritage received further impetus from the general public’s growing interest and desire for modern, spectacular presentations. The development of archaeological tourism placed the question of presenting heritage sites to the forefront. The majority of such sites are located in conservation areas, national parks or the immediate vicinity of these. Such a state of affairs allows for the joining of the natural and archaeological heritage in the form of a complex tourist attraction (Jerem et al. 2004 b).

At the moment, two archaeological park projects are in the planning phase in Hungary that have taken up the double role outlined above right from the very beginning: the Szeleta Museum and Archaeological Park, and the Sopron Visitor

Centre and Lookout. The Szeleta Cave is situated in the Bükk National Park, where a number of the key Hungarian Palaeolithic sites can also be found. The city of Sopron and its environs, in the vicinity of the Fertő-Hanság National Park, was an important centre of commerce and handicraft in the Iron Age. It is rather fortunate in both cases that the exhibition and architectural conceptions have formed a harmonic unit right from the very beginning, starting with the planning phase. The projects were presented on poster at the CAA 2004 conference in Prato.

2. The Szeleta Museum and Archaeological Park Project: Cultural Heritage and Landscape Management

The Szeleta Museum project was launched in 2002, on the initiation of the Foundation for the Szeleta Culture (based in the city of Miskolc). The original plan has been to create a complex visitor centre (Jerem et al. 2002), with a double function. First, the centre would function as a museum, presenting the development of the natural environment and human cultures of the region in the last 140,000 years. Second, it would also function as a visitor centre, where the general public could learn about the world of Palaeolithic Man in an enjoyable way, with the help of multimedia applications and the adjoining archaeological park. Third, the complex would also serve as a research centre, where modern lecture halls, laboratories and a library would promote the scientific work of researchers.

The first plans of the project were presented at the CAA 2003 conference in Vienna. We have written extensively on the scientific background of the professional conception in the proceedings (Jerem et al. 2004a). The Bükk Mountains are especially abundant in Palaeolithic sites. Thanks to the scientific analyses of the open-air settlements and caves, the history of the past 140,000 years is very well documented, a period which incorporates the last Interglacial and Glacial (that is, the Upper Pleistocene). Variation in warmer and cooler periods characterises climate history towards the end of the Ice Age. Consequently, major changes happened in the natural environment as well (surface deposits, flora and fauna). This period coincides with the Middle and Upper Palaeolithic in the development of human cultures.

The exhibition aims to present the development of the natural environment and human culture in close proximity. From the Neolithic onwards, humans have also played an increasingly important role in this interaction, through agriculture and animal husbandry – therefore man becomes one of the shapers of the environment. In the Palaeolithic, however, the hunter-gatherer groups adapted to their natural environment, so that they could exploit natural resources in the most optimal way. The Palaeolithic of the Bükk regions is an ideal opportunity for presenting this adaptation process.

The majority of the rocks that make up the mountain contain SiO_2 ; yet their geological origins differ.

Some originate from the marine deposits of the Mesozoic (flint, radiolarite, chert), some have been created by the



Fig. 1. The hydrogeological conditions of the Bükk Mountains.

volcanic activities of the Mesozoic (opal, jasper, hydro- and limnoquartzite), while others are of metamorphic origin (quartzite, quartzporphyry). These siliceous rocks formed the raw material for the stone tools of Neanderthal man. However, raw materials originating from distant lands can also be found at the various Palaeolithic sites of the region, such as obsidian (80–120 km), radiolarite from Slovakia (150–210 km), flint from Silesia (250–300 km), and Poland and Ukraine (350–400 km). The presence of these stones at various sites of the Bükk Mountains suggests that wide-reaching connections have already been established between Palaeolithic groups.

Since the Bükk Mountains is made of limestone, caves and springs abound in the area. Their location, as well as the valleys that dissect the mountains have contributed directly to human settlement patterns (Fig. 1).

The most significant sites are located close to valleys which – as parts of major routes – lead out of the mountains. More-



Fig. 2. The ecological zones of the Bükk region; mountains in the Pleistocene.

over, these areas were the meeting points of different ecological zones, which made them especially important with regard to hunting and acquiring food. The archaeozoological analysis of the bone remains found at the sites has shown that the inhabitants of the settlements hunted in more than one ecological zone (Fig. 2). The pillage included mountain species (ibex, chamois, cave bear, badger), animals characteristic of the hills surrounding the mountain range (red

deer, roe deer, wild boar, marten), and the larger herbivores of the plains and river valleys further away (mammoth, woolly rhino, reindeer, aurochs, wild horse, bison).

The exhibition takes the visitors on a journey back in time, through the last 140,000 years. As it proceeds in time, it slowly approaches the present – a conception that fits in perfectly with the planned architecture. Inside the building, the exhibition rooms are situated along a spiral, which rises in space as well, thereby making use of the mountain's elevation (Fig. 3).

At the end of the exhibition, the visitors can enter the museum's garden, where the reconstructions of the archaeological park – in close interaction with the surrounding environment – allow for a truly “hands-on” experience of the Palaeolithic world. The interactive, multimedia applications in the other rooms of the building provide the visitors with plenty of unforgettable moments. The conference room can be used for screenings (Fig. 4).

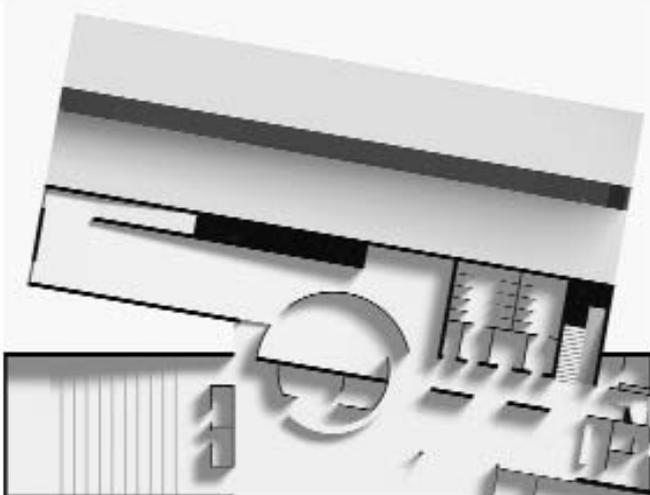
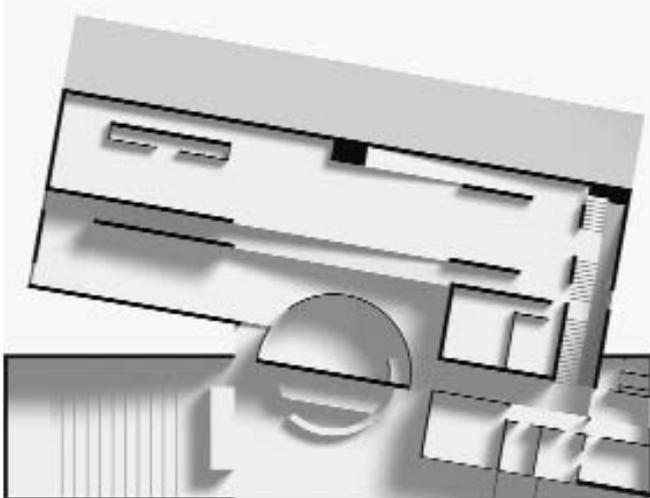
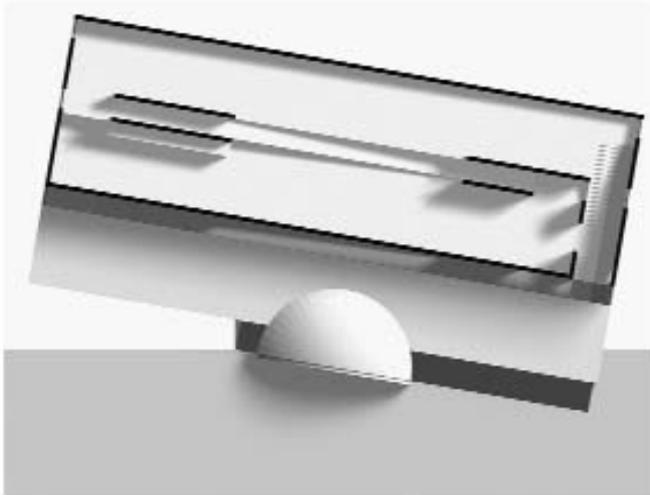


Fig. 3. Szeleta architectural plan no. 1 – various views.

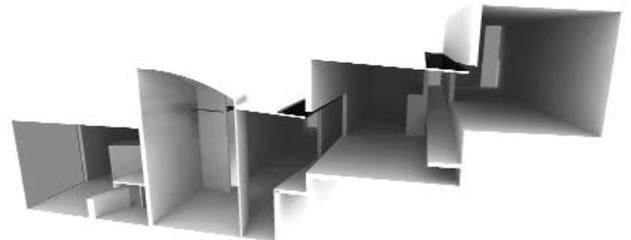
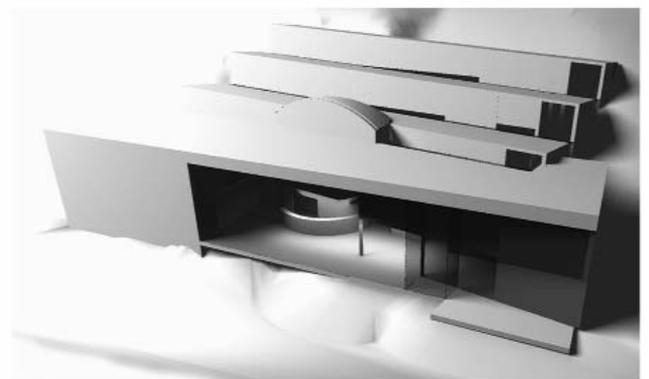


Fig. 4. Szeleta architectural plan no. 2 – groundplan.

3. Display Sopron: A Project for the Presentation of the Natural and Cultural Heritage of a Region in NW Hungary

Thanks to its archaeological heritage, Sopron, at the foot of the Sopron Mountains has enjoyed considerable international fame. The town of *Scarbantia* stood here in the Roman period, as one of the stops on the Amber Road. The Iron Age urns found at the Burgstall (hovering just above the town) depict weaving and spinning women – the oldest illustrations of this occupation on the Continent.

The region of Sopron is abundant in archaeological sites, which suggests that the area had been an important centre from the Late Bronze Age onwards. The dense settlement patterns are well reflected in the hillforts (Burgstall, Varischberg), the villages of the valleys (Krautacker) and

cemeteries (Bécsi-domb, Burgstall, Krautacker). From the 1970s onwards, the archaeological survey of the region intensified. The first publications appeared on the denticulated urns of the Burgstall, kept in the Naturhistorisches Museum, Vienna (Eibner-Persy 1980), later on E. Patek published a long paper on the Burgstall expeditions conducted between 1971–78 (Patek 1982). At the same time, the excavation of a multilayered Iron Age settlement and cemetery, on the terrace of the Ikva stream at Krautacker, was also in progress, the results of which have been published in many reports (Jerem 1981 a, 1981b, 1984–85, 1986, 1987).

Plans of the on-site presentation of finds have emerged from the middle of the 1970s onwards – the reconstruction of one of the burial mounds has been realised on the Burgstall. We have conserved a furnace found in pretty good condition at Krautacker, which is the oldest and most beautiful relic of Celtic pottery production in the Carpathian Basin. However, due to financial difficulties, we were unable to erect the protective building that was planned for its presentation (Jerem-Vasáros 2005). Thanks to the development of the Százhalombatta Archaeological Park in 2000, we have managed to build some of the reconstructions of the houses found in the Iron Age village at Krautacker (Jerem et al. 2001). The plan of the Sopron visitor centre emerged in 2004. Its basic conception differs from previous ones, as instead of the presentation of a single Palaeolithic site, it aims to become a navigational centre, where visitors can get an overview of the region's archaeological heritage. At the same time, it can serve as a starting point for visits organised to these heritage sites. According to the initial idea, the visitor centre will be located at the site of Sopron-Krautacker, on an area that has not been yet affected with construction work. Therefore it will occupy a truly central position, which will offer a panoramic view of all the other sites of the Sopron region. The basic conception was that the visitor centre would stand “in situ”, i.e. in the place of the Iron Age settlement. The Palaeolithic remains, the houses that have come to light from the excavations, the workshops, the agricultural buildings and the one-time environment would be present only virtually in the exhibition. The structure of the latter would follow the geographical location of the sites, thereby taking the visitor on a virtual tour of the region. The experience would be similar to that of surveying the region from a lookout tower.

The exhibition conception is complemented architecturally by a round space, from which the surrounding area can be seen through sections cut into the walls. This helps the visitor to place the presented archaeological heritage into reality (Fig. 5), thereby experiencing the structure of the region's Prehistoric settlement and the spatial connection of the settlements and hillforts. Multimedia and virtual reality applications aid the presentation of the Prehistoric natural environment, through which the relation of man and the environment becomes palpable. Thanks to the environmental archaeology analysis that complemented the excavation work at Krautacker, we have ample knowledge of the Iron Age flora and fauna of the mountains and the Ikva Valley. The link between the reconstructed Palaeoenvironment and reality is enforced by the view of the mountains and the Fertő-Hanság National Park.

We presented the plans of the visitor centre at the CAA 2004 conference in Prato. However, during the first steps towards the realisation of the project, it became evident that the location we had originally selected was not suitable for the envisaged functions. After the completion of the excavations, most of the area was quickly built in by apartment blocks, which made it inappropriate for such a tourist attraction/cultural centre. Furthermore, the untidy, vacant lots on the fringes of the town, which lacked even the most basic infrastructure, were not too appealing either. Our exhibition conception,

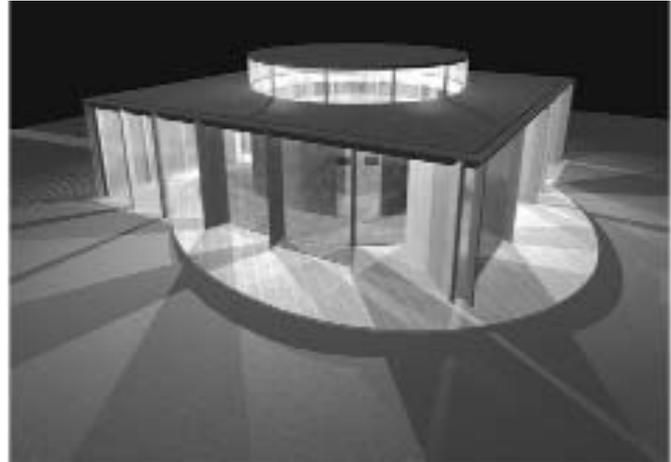


Fig. 5. The first plan of the Sopron visitor centre.

aimed at the real and virtual presentation of the region's heritage sites proved to be unrealisable, due to the surrounding low-lying area. Therefore a new location had to be selected.

After coordinating with the council on the town's future touristic and architectural developments, and conducting several field surveys, we have selected the empty area right next to the Roman Age amphitheatre on Bécsi Hill as a possible location. The new location seems to be more than suitable for a number of reasons: its topographical features are excellent, and it offers magnificent views of the town and the famous Prehistoric (Iron Age hillforts on the ridge of the

Sopron Mountains), Roman and Middle Age sites. The proximity of the Vienna-Sopron road and border crossing is of special significance. Nevertheless, the new location required a new architectural conception. The building, due to its location and external appearance, attracts attention anyhow, and serves as a navigational base. It also fulfils the role of an information centre, by presenting both the natural and the cultural heritage, and the tourist attractions of the region. It serves as an orientation point 24 hours a day, since the floodlit building will be easily spotted at night as well. The emblematic, iconic shape will attract plenty of attention, making it highly suitable to become one of Sopron's symbols (Fig. 6).

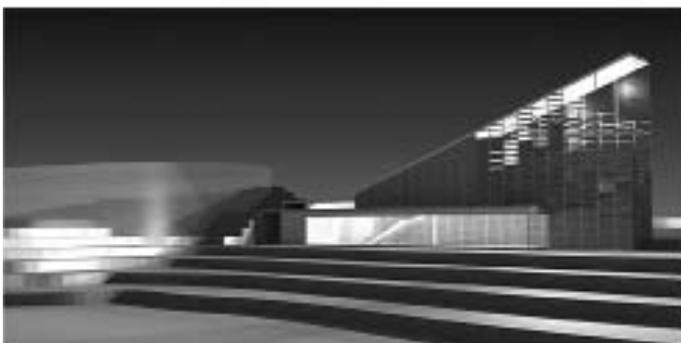
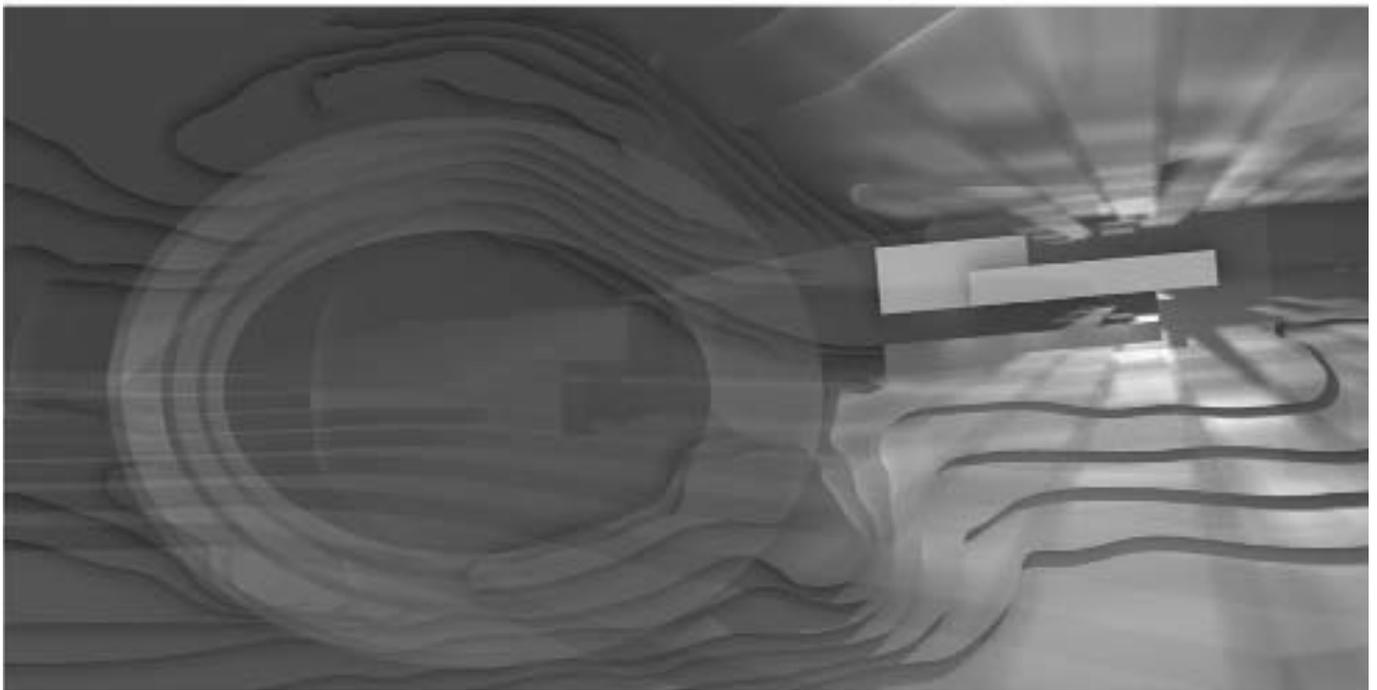
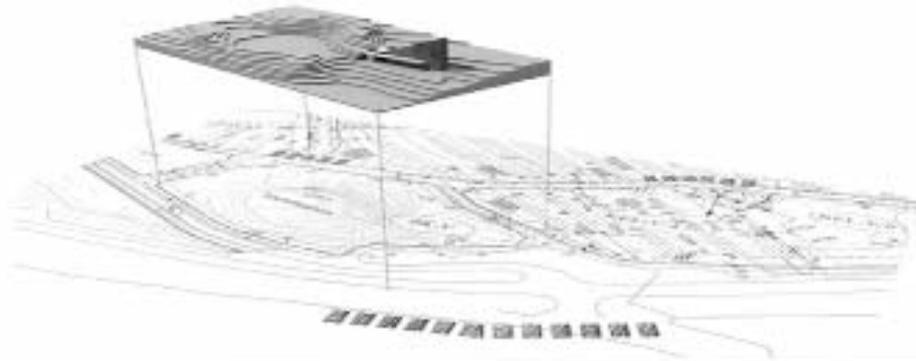


Fig. 6. The second plan of the Sopron visitor centre.

4. Archaeological Heritage and Tourism

The planned visitor centres of the projects outlined above are able to fulfil, however, a further role. They can serve as bases of heritage trails aimed at visiting the sites of the region. Apart from satisfying the demands of the increasingly popular archaeological tourism, the integration of other attractions also becomes possible. The natural heritage of the national parks, the flora of the various regions of the Bükk, the incredibly rich and colourful birdlife of Lake Fertő are very appealing for many. Age-old occupations which have survived through the centuries (or have been recently revived) in and around the parks, such as coal burning, traditional forestry, fishing; or the folklore heritage of the regions, manifested in the traditional architecture and traditions, attract a lot of people each year. Those with an eye on outdoor activities also find something to their taste: the mountains offer skiing and mountain biking, while the lakes and rivers abound in watersports. Both areas are considered among Hungary's most important wine regions, which does attract plenty of tourists after the pleasures of gastronomy.

Therefore, making use of the various possibilities outlined above, the planned visitor centres are also suitable for functioning as complex information centres, catering for the needs of tourists as well. They bring together various activities, orient visitor needs towards suitable locations, and raise people's interests for trying out other activities. Linking the natural and the cultural heritage creates a novel perspective for edutainment, that is, for education by entertainment, in the interest of guaranteeing the future of heritage protection.

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