Explorers of The Lost Treasures of my Homeland, a Conservation-Restoration Educative Workshop for the Youngest

Josipa Marić, Ivana Vukadin
Mentor: Joška-Tea Katunarić Kirjakov, senior lecturer
Department of Conservation-Restoration, Arta Academy of the University of Split
elektra.gudelj@gmail.com, ivana.vukadin9@gmail.com

Introduction

In June 2014 the authors participated in the workshop Explorers of The Lost Treasures of my Homeland, which was a part of the Ministry of Culture’s program "A Backpack (Full) of Culture".

"A Backpack (Full) of Culture" is a national complementary program for elementary and high school curricula related to art and culture. The project is carried out by writers, fine art associations, theatre groups as well as music and dance groups. It is a joined initiative of The Ministry of Culture and The Ministry of Science, Education and Sports which enables the acquisition of art and culture in the part of children and youth who live in communities with limited access to culture and art contents. The idea of the program was to bring children and youth closer to art and culture and to develop their aesthetic and culture standards and to increase their sensibility for art and culture in general.1

With the aim of popularization of the conservation-restoration profession, in June 2014 the authors of this lecture participated in the workshop entitled Explorers of The Lost Treasures of my Homeland as a part of a broader program named "A Backpack (Full) of Culture". Similar workshops are being held in schools and kindergartens across Croatia.

This conservation-restoration educative workshop for the youngest was devised by Joška-Tea Katunarić Kirjakov, professor at the Arts Academy of the University of Split. The aim was to get children of the youngest age acquainted with objects of cultural heritage and the basic methods of archaeological excavation, conservation-restoration treatments and the concept of a live museum in which children participate as both curators and protagonists. The workshop was carried out with the participation of students of the Department of Conservation-restoration and students of the Department of Visual Culture and Visual Art.

1. Historical Background

The theme of the workshop, held at the local elementary school in Dubrava was a legend about the Roman emperor Diocletian. He came to his homeland Dalmatia to spend the last decades of his life there. The retired emperor lived in his palace with his wife Priska and his daughter Valeria in today’s Split. The legend has it that he occasionally visited Dubrava for hunting. Dubrava was known for its woods and a large variety of wild animals. Each time he went hunting, he was accompanied by his vassals and royal guard who were responsible for his safety and comfort. The after hunting scenario was the one we were going to follow.

2. The Realisation of the Explorers of the Lost Treasures of my Homeland Workshop at the Local Elementary School Dubrava

The workshop was divided into three thematic constituents: little school of archaeology, little school of restoration and founding a Little Living Museum. The aim of the first two parts of the program is to educate children about archaeology and restoration and to teach them about past times and ways of living. By talking to children about these professions, the basic investigative methods and their effects on our understanding of the past, along with costume design, they will have a far better understanding and experience of Ancient Rome. The third part of the program envelops a presentation of a Little Living Museum which should be organized and presented by the very participants of the program with a public showing of the accrued knowledge, lore and skill. The purpose of a living museum is to engage the audience and the participants into a museum exhibition. Founding such museums is of great importance for communities which have no museum collections. Children kept their pottery from the workshop to exhibit it as a part of their Little Live Museum of Elementary School Dubrava.

2.1. Preparation for the Workshop

Since the workshop was very thoroughly planned, there were some preparations that needed to be done. There were different kinds of things that needed to be provided such as digging tools, small pottery, ingredients for simple Roman dessert, armor, fibulae and togas. The preparations took place at the Archaeological heritage conservation-restoration studio. There were signs to be

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made in Latin which were to be used in order to separate four thematically different sections of a classroom. They were named Vestarius as tailor, Ornatix as decorator Armatius as armourer and Figulus for potter. They were cut and painted with tempera by one of the students. Sewing fabric and children’s sand kit were brought. Plans were made for sewing tunics, cutting ribbons for belting and making fibulae. Two of the students brought their sewing machines to the workshop and sewed 22 tunics. Decorative ribbons were also applied on five large ones. Measures were taken in order to create right sized tunics. A Decree from the emperor was also typed, printed and prepared in a paper tube with a lid. About 20 pieces of fibulae were also made, using a pack of toothpicks along with 20 corks split in halves and painted in different colors using tempera and glitters. After preparing and packing all the supplies in boxes, they were boarded into the trunk of the car. The Backpack Team was ready to go. Preparations took place not only at the studio, but in Dubrava as well. The teachers of the school were instructed to collect laurel, ivy and thin branches with their pupils, which would later be used for making garlands, bows and arrows.

2.2. Arrival at the Local Elementary School Dubrava

2.2.1. The Big Welcome

It was a wonderfull sunny morning when the Backpack Team arrived at the local elementary school Dubrava. Choosing the right road and making the correct turn were a challenge, but at last they made it. There they met pupils of the school for the very first time. Children were extremely excited to meet their guests and curious about what new games and stories they bring. After all, all classes were canceled because of this special occasion. Right after saying hello they've immediately taken their positions – it was time for their opening recital. Guests were very impressed by their performance and presentation of their folk cultural heritage, attires and dance. Three girls were dressed in their traditional locan attire of Dubrava which they've inherited from their grandmothers. Their warm welcome was awarded with a thrilled applause. They've presented the guests with their local foods and drinks, as all generous hosts in Dubrava do.

2.2.2. Diocletian's Decree

It wasn't long before a decree came from the emperor himself. It was handed to a girl who volunteered to read it out loud and clear for all to hear. The emperor had announced his arrival and demanded his vassals make preparations for the ceremony and feast. They were asigned to dress in togas, put garlands on their heads, find the buried treasure, prepare delicious food, produce bows and arrows. After completing these tasks, vassals were to welcome their emperor with a procession and armed soldiers. Children were then dismissed while their guests and teachers made preparations necessary for performing the tasks.
2.3. Excavation Campaign

2.3.1. Preparation of the Archaeological Site

The Backpack team and teachers along with school handyman were preparing their excavation site while children were playing at the school yard. The school handyman had previously prepared a sandbox made out of wood and a few large sacks and buckets filled with sand. After pouring first half of the sand inside the sandbox, students and professor had unpacked their fragments of ceramics and layed them in the sand. On top of the ceramics came the remaining sand. The archaeological site was ready for research. Tools were also prepared. Alongside children's sand kit, a couple of professional archaeologist's spatulas could also be used.

2.3.2. Excavation of the Lost Treasure

The excavation began with great enthusiasm. Children were shown the proper way of archaeological excavation. They were already familiar with the importance of a good spatula but now they've learned that all the dirt must be sifted through a sieve so the fragments found would remain on its top. Since they were extremely eager in finding the treasure, the site very quickly became very crowded. Rate of work had soon changed from slow and careful to rapid. The sand was everywhere, even in their hair. Children were explained that each is due to collect fragments of a single vessel. After excavation the fragments they've compared shapes trying to match them and asking their colleagues if they could exchange in order to complete each his own vessel.

2.4. "Conservation-Restoration Treatments"

2.4.1. Cleaning of the Fragments

After completing the search of matching fragments, children were explained about the next procedures. With assistance from students the children had taken their fragments and cleaned them from dirt by gently brushing with paint brushes. The importance of this phase was explained to them. If fragments were not adequately cleaned, especially alongside fractures, the glued joints would not hold. This step was carried out thoroughly and successfully.

2.4.2. "Restoration"

Next step was to apply adhesive along the fractures. Students had helped children in finding the matching fragments, which can be a challenge when recomposing an entire vessel. After mending fragments together they were put vertically in sand filled bowls. This way the weight of the fragment itself is used in
pressuring the glued joint thanks to the influence of gravity. The adhesive used was Magnetin, which is easily soluble in acetone. In places of missing fragments that weren't found, the reconstruction was carried out using clay. Recomposed ceramic vessels were left in sand for the adhesive to set, and children were led inside the classroom to dress for the emperor.

2.5. Dressing Like Romans

Before painting their pottery, Prof Katunarić Kirjakov invited the children to dress like Romans. The classroom was organised in themes by sections named in Latin and paper signs were previously prepared by students at the Art Academy. Section for tailoring and dressing was named Vestarius, florist and decorative section was Ornatix, armour section was Armatius and table for dried fruit and nuts presented in earthenware was Culina. Children first came to Vestarius to dress in togas, which they had then pinned with fibulae made of toothpicks and coloured corks on both sides. Then they were belted with ribbons and the work of their tailors was done. Then they proceeded to Ornatix where students and teachers made them custom made garlands. While girls got additional flowers in their garlands, boys had plain laurel and ivy ones. At this point girls were all done and ready, and boys proceeded to Armatius to receive their gilded shields, previously made by students at the Art Academy. The teachers and school principal had also put their togas on. When everybody had their Roman makeover done, children went outside to examine their vessels. Adhesive had set and ceramic fragments had firmly bounded. Now it was time to paint.

2.6. Painting the Pottery

Children were lead inside the classroom where they had their painting supplies ready. In painting their vessels they used Atlas water temperas and painting brushes size one to 12, along with pallets and water containers. Depictions were not exactly duplicates of Roman pottery painting. They were left with freedom for each to decorate by his or hers will and taste. Children had used intensive bright colours in painting their ceramic vessels. There were all sorts of motifs starting from geometric and symbolic to motifs such as houses, landscape, flowers or sunny sky. After painting the vessels were set aside on paper and left to dry.

2.7. Preparing for the Emperor

2.7.1. Arming the Army

Not to waste any time while waiting for paint on pottery to dry, children were escorted to the school yard in order to make bows and arrows so their combat gear would be complete. They were already provided with gilded cardboard shields and now they made their bows and arrows from rope and sticks they have prepared the
earlier day. After completing a few pieces, boys had a shooting challenge in order to test their new weapons. The aim was to shoot an arrow from the school yard to the soccer field below. Since arrows were made of plain sticks they were not of high performances but they have managed to serve their purpose on this occasion. Maximum range of such an arrow was about 8 m. After the army was armed and trained enough, preparations for the procession began.

2.7.2. Forming the Procession

Children had completed their tasks in time for the emperor’s arrival. It was time to form the procession. Teachers, girls and students had taken their positions at the school’s hallway and boys went to take their positions as the emperor’s royal guard. As the only male adult, the school principal had kindly accepted the role of Emperor Diocletian, and one of the teachers took the role of his wife Priska. A moment before the ceremonial entrance silence took over school.

2.8. The Emperor Arrives

The emperor and his empress came in accompanied with guards. At the first sight of the emperor’s ceremonial appearance, his vassals saluted him with a loud shout: “Ave honourable Caesar Diocletian, children of Dubrava salute thee!” The emperor and his wife saluted back and asked if they had completed their tasks, to which they replied confirmingly. The emperor his position at the head of the procession, followed by teachers, soldiers and girls. Entering the school the Emperor was very pleased with tasks his vassals had very successfully completed which they were, of course, very happy to hear. Procession was then dismissed so the feast could begin. Tables were filled with delicious traditional food of Dubrava such as prosciutto, cheese and homemade bread, several sorts of cakes, domestic liqueurs and natural juices. Of course, there was also the inevitable Poljički soparnik, a dish nominated for intangible cultural heritage of UNESCO. Everything was prepared by school teachers and children’s parents.

2.9. The Departure

With indulging in tasty dishes time flew by and the friendly visit was approaching its end. Students had packed togas they’ve brought and the rest of their things and teachers helped them in clearing the classroom. Everybody was very satisfied with the work done. The Backpack Team left with a warm farewell from their hosts. It was a lovely day in Dubrava.
3. Conclusion

During the Explorers of The Lost Treasures of my Homeland workshop, children had the opportunity to meet the work of archaeologists and restorers while having a lot of fun. They had also experienced the ancient Roman period and the legends of ancient Dubrava and also gained an insight into how the Roman population and their soldiers lived. They have excavated the ancient remains, painted pottery, made bows and arrows. All of the children happily participated in dressing into Roman tunics and wearing garlands on their heads. Children kept their pottery from the workshop to exhibit it as a part of their Little Live Museum of Elementary School Dubrava at Čišla. The Children were extremely happy with the way the workshop was carried out and still mention the day as "the best day at shcool ever".

School teachers have gained new ideas which they can use in everyday class to get the children more interested and engaged in the curriculum.

Students had gained a new experience while working with the youngest in collaboration with their fellow colleagues. They have experienced from first-hand that the key to every successful project lies in interdisciplinarity and team work. Students got the opportunity to get familiar with the educative part of popularization of cultural heritage and also with techniques of producing Roman attires and reviving their customs.

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