

Living amid the ruins

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In December 2016, the British Institute at Ankara launched a new project within its cultural heritage management strategic research initiative, titled ‘Living amid the ruins:

archaeological sites as hubs of sustainable development for local communities in southwest Turkey’ (LAR). The programme is supported by a grant from the British Academy’s Sustainable Development Programme and will run until March 2018. The project concentrates specifically on the ancient region of Pisidia, where the BIAA has a long-held interest (see the following article) and has three aims:

- (1) to investigate the relationships that people living close to archaeological sites have with these places;
- (2) to build capacity by creating social and economic benefits and sustainable growth for – and in dialogue with – local rural communities;
- (3) to intensify the relationship between archaeological sites and the local communities in their vicinity, in order to secure a better future for the cultural heritage itself.

LAR aims to achieve these aims by utilising the newly established long-distance trekking route, the Pisidia Heritage Trail. This 350km-long trail connects a series of archaeological sites that were investigated by archaeologists affiliated with the BIAA – Stephen Mitchell and Lutgarde Vandepuit – over the course of almost 30 years (for more information on the trail, see last year’s *Heritage Turkey*; a short video of the trail is available on the BIAA’s YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u8i7JTwt0kw>).

Pisidia is not only rich in terms of archaeological assets; it is also home to beautiful mountain villages where elements of traditional lifestyles have been preserved. However, younger generations are now leaving their villages in search of a better standard of living and, as a result, the population of the region is both decreasing and ageing. Thus, the primary motivation to create the trail was to contribute to the generation of economic benefits for those communities which live in close proximity of these archaeological sites. It is hoped that these benefits will lead to better protection of the sites as well as prompting a reversal of the recent trend to migrate from the villages.

Research scope

During the fieldwork for the construction of the Pisidia Heritage Trail, we spent significant amounts of time in the villages of the region and had the chance to talk at length with people from these settlements. As a consequence of these encounters, two lines of enquiry emerged: to understand the local communities’ approaches to archaeological sites and to map their expectations, if any, from this resource. More insight led to more questions, especially in relation to the assessment of what could be

valuable for these communities versus our own perspectives. Specifically, the definition of social and economic benefits clearly needed more consideration through a series of questions. Which benefits matter most to the local communities? Do economic benefits always outweigh other benefits? Is it possible to define local communities as homogeneous groups?

Thanks to the British Academy funding, it has been possible to appoint a LAR postdoctoral researcher to conduct anthropological and ethnographic fieldwork in order to shed light on the questions posed above. Designed as a multi-sited ethnographic research programme, LAR focuses on the relationships that the local communities of seven villages along the trail have built with the archaeological sites that they live close to: Akkoç (ancient Ariassos), Kovanlık (Döşemeboğazi), Karaot (Sia/Taşdandam), Kocaaliler (Melli), Haspınar, Kozan (Pednelissos) and Altınkaya (Selge).

Following a formal application, ethical permission to conduct research with these local communities was granted by Istanbul University, and anthropological fieldwork started at the beginning of June 2017; at the time of writing this article – November 2017 – it is coming to an end. Three different questionnaires were prepared and employed for the purposes of this research. The first is a standard form that is applied to every respondent (all over 18 years of age). It is structured around nine themes: household demographics; settlement; migration history; economy; agriculture; animal husbandry; forestry; spatial imagination, memory and experiences; and, lastly, ancient ruins, ecology and sustainable development. The second was prepared in order to facilitate the recording of oral history and with the aims of compiling an intangible cultural heritage inventory as well as understanding how the settlements have changed over time. The target group for this form of interview is the elderly residents of the villages. The last questionnaire was prepared as a focus-group form to be applied to young people who had migrated from the villages. It aims to understand what motivated them to migrate and also what conditions are necessary for them to return to their villages. All the data accumulated through these questionnaires are entered into a Statistical Package for the Social Sciences in order to be analysed.

Putting research into practice

The aims of LAR extend to the use of the data that has been accumulated in the course of the anthropological fieldwork. After identifying which benefits matter most to which communities, we will design ways to meet these expectations within our capacity. In this regard, two cases are particularly worth mentioning. The first is the community that lives – literally – amid the ruins of ancient Selge. Since the village is located in an archaeological conservation area as well as a national-park zone, the residents of Selge have only very restricted use of the land. This means that they can not build



The ancient theatre at Selge (photo Ekin Kazan).

any additions to their houses, including something as basic as a toilet. As a consequence, the village itself has become a zone of struggle where resistance against the implementation of land-use rules and regulations is a daily activity. Under these circumstances, the occasional tour bus that arrives at the site represents a source of indispensable income. Many village women surround the tourists and try to sell them souvenirs by employing their best selling techniques. They wait for customers in front of the monumental theatre throughout the day, even when there is no sign of tourists. In Selge, there is both a need and a demand from the local community to expand the economic benefits generated from the archaeological heritage. The local conflicts and the limited options for the use of land impose serious obstacles to the range of solutions that can be proposed. Nonetheless, changing the variety of products for sale – which currently ranges from handmade wooden spoons to cheap plastic souvenirs bought from the market – and the sellers’ general approach have been identified as priorities.

For the purpose of crafting possible strategies to help communities like that at Selge to set up their own businesses, we invited Paul Burtenshaw from the Sustainable Preservation Initiative to be a consultant on this project. Paul visited the Institute at the beginning of October and ran a three-day workshop. We are planning to put the ideas generated via this workshop into practice in Selge, and will be applying for funding for this purpose.

To our surprise, our fieldwork demonstrated that in some cases economic benefits are not what villagers expect to get out of the archaeological heritage that lies in their backyards. Karaot, adjacent to the ancient site of Sia, is located in the middle of a dense forest with an almost fairytale-like atmosphere. The interviews with the residents of Karaot have indicated a desire to learn more about the site. They identified their lack of knowledge about the remains as a source of shame. Once we realised that an interest to know more about the site existed, we organised a community day with the archaeologist Stephen Mitchell. During this event we toured the site with the villagers, who asked many questions. Such activities fulfil the third aim of LAR: to

intensify the relationship between archaeological sites and the local communities, in order to secure a better future for the cultural heritage itself. In this particular case, the benefit that the villagers expect from living in close proximity to an archaeological site is to use their site – Sia – as a signifier for their village; they want to be recognised as the village located close to this important archaeological site. Having varied sources of income, the idea of gaining some sort of economic benefit from the site is neither needed nor desired.

Expected impact

Many experts from different backgrounds are working with the project’s principal investigator, Lutgarde Vandeput, and co-investigator, Işlay Gürsu, on this programme, including Nadide Karkıner (postdoctoral researcher, sociologist), Güldem Baykal Büyüksaraç (social anthropologist), Ümit Işın (tourism expert and archaeologist), Gökhan Deniz (botanist), Melike Gül (Director of Antalya Regional Conservation Council) and Paul Burtenshaw (expert in economic development through archaeology). A first workshop bringing together many of these experts, as well as other researchers with similar interests, was organised as part of the LAR project on 5 October 2017. This event, titled ‘Archaeology, society and sustainable development’, saw a full house at the Institute, where it was hosted. It is hoped it will be the first step towards the production of an edited volume or series of articles.

Besides such academic impacts, the results of LAR’s anthropological work is expected to feed into the creation of a new model in which archaeological heritage can be used as a sustainable development tool for rural areas of Turkey. Once the fieldwork elements of the project are completed, we will be able to integrate the results into the on-going Pisidia Heritage Trail project. This will offer the opportunity to see the impact of this academic research on real communities.



Community day at Sia (photo Işlay Gürsu).