

## Archaeological Park Viminacium – Changing Perception of Cultural Heritage in the Local Community: From Looting to Active Participation

Archaeological Park Viminacium was established in 2006, representing remains of the Viminacium Military Camp and the administrative capital of the Roman province of Moesia Superior. The vision behind the opening of the archaeological site for the public had a double aim. Firstly, to physically protect the site from the advancement of the strip-coal mine of the Power Plant Kostolac B and secondly, to raise awareness among the local population about the values of cultural heritage to stop century-long looting activities at the site.

Viminacium had a status of cultural property of exceptional importance in 1979. Still, after the Park's opening, the process of its institutional protection was completed in 2009, with the adoption of the Decision on the Determination of Viminacium Site in the Village of Stari Kostolac as an Archaeological Site, with clearly defined boundaries and protection of the surrounding area. The Park was equipped with physical security and surveillance cameras, but it turned out that the real protection from the looting actually was the constant presence of tourists. Afterwards, the dialogue with the visitors and general public opened new areas of collaboration based on the scientifically created interpretation and the site storytelling, via various activities oriented towards a hands-on approach and participatory workshops, new employment opportunities for local people, constant presence in media, application of digital technologies in interpretation, etc. Participation in, as well as organisation of, international conferences enlightens the efforts in making Viminacium results visible on an international level, empowered by the shift of the research itself, from 'just' archaeology to cultural heritage. Thus, the researchers from various scientific fields (architects, art historians, conservators, together with archaeologists) opened a new, interdisciplinary area of research at the Institute of Archaeology, which in 2024 resulted in the establishment of the Cultural Heritage department. Participation in several EU co-financed projects simultaneously contributed to Viminacium's international visibility and acceptance by the local community. The results of these projects opened new possibilities for dialogue with locals from all generations. They improved the site accessibility, inclusion, and green future, leading to the overall territorial development. Some of the best initiatives from EU projects will be shared with students as examples of Viminacium's good practices.

*Deputy director of the Institute of Archaeology (since 2022); Head of the Cultural Heritage department (since 2024). Coordinator of the Transformation team for the project 'Serbia Accelerating Innovation and Entrepreneurship' project of Serbian Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation, funded by the World Bank and EU (since 2022) Jelena Anđelković Grašar obtained the PhD in Art History at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, in 2016. Since 2011, she has worked at the Institute of Archaeology, currently holding the position of Senior Research Associate. Dr Anđelković Grašar has published more than 50 scientific papers and book chapters in Serbian or English, as an author or co-author. She is dedicated to the research of visual culture in the period during and after the Roman domination, focused on the visual testimonies and material remains related to the themes of women's history and gender studies. Her research interests and activities are associated with cultural heritage and the methods of its presentation, interpretation and popularisation, as well as the possibilities for its implementation in education. Dr Anđelković Grašar is actively engaged as a project manager, managing six international projects in the period between 2020 and 2025, co-funded by the EU (Creative Europe, Erasmus+).*

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