



## **Adult Education and the Museum**

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## **The Archaeology for Senior Citizen's Initiative of the Vienna City Archaeological Research Society**

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### **The idea**

The "Archaeology for Senior Citizens" initiative is currently one of two successful cultural education programmes for particular target groups run by the Vienna City Archaeological Research Society. The aim of the initiative is to involve adults in the work of city archaeology. Although most of the participants are retired – of course there are exceptions – the label "senior" does not mean "aged" in this context but is an honorific to be applied to those who are prepared to devote their free time to archaeology and to make a useful contribution to exploration in the Vienna area. It is intended that no membership subscription should be levied now or in the future for this voluntary work on city archaeology.

By the beginning of 1995 the planning of the Archaeology for Senior Citizens initiative was sufficiently advanced to allow a pilot project for adults to be started. A free, three-day introductory seminar was provided in association with a Viennese Community Adult Education Centre, addressed to students in the so-called "Senior Citizens' Academy". All 30 participants joined in active work as 'senior archaeologists' as a result of this seminar. At the same time, a quarterly newsletter, '*Lorbeer*' [Laurel] was launched. This contains up-to-date news about city archaeology and archaeology for senior citizens, and a small calendar of events provides information about forthcoming lectures, excursions and seminars.

### **Implementation**

Given the rapid progress of building work and the relatively small staff of the City Archaeology Department, senior archaeologists were soon engaged in prospecting and were working on selected digs. Once a week they had the chance to wash and restore finds at the Archaeology Department workshop. Excursions to selected sites enabled them to become acquainted with the Archaeology Department and its staff. From May, interested participants were permitted for the first time to take an active part in a City Archaeology Department research dig. The introductory seminar was repeated in October for some 40 new recruits. In November, once people's interests had begun to become clear, three pottery restoration courses for a maximum of 12 participants each were run by a restorer.

The number of senior archaeologists had grown to around 90 by the end of 1995, largely through word of mouth and to a lesser extent as a result of press and radio coverage. By June 1996 the number of people interested in becoming senior archaeologists had grown to around 220, including a score of institutions wishing to receive '*Lorbeer*' regularly. About 50 senior archaeologists are working on digs and in the workshop, and about 100 remain in touch with the City Archaeology Department through the various events that are organised. Some of them are still in work. The Archaeology for Senior Citizens initiative



has now been presented at the conference of the Older Persons specialist group of the Vienna Association for Popular Education, "Education for Older People – Education with Older People", and made known through the Socrates project "Adult Education for Culture", and the occupational therapy in-service training course of the Austrian Red Cross, "Now! . . . en route to a new age".

The continuous rise in numbers of members makes the shortage of accommodation an urgent problem, but continued support for the initiative may also be endangered by the fact that the staff are employed on ten-month temporary contracts.

The greatest problem for the initiative was, and still is, finding suitable accommodation. Since the beginning of 1996, it has a workshop in a basement room of the Landstrasse District Museum. Much hard work was put into adapting the archaeology workshop, and it was formally opened in January with an address by the City Archaeologist. It was possible to use the museum lecture room in spring 1996 for seminars on technical drawings of pottery in an archaeological context. Two days a week, finds are now being washed, labelled, restored and drawn there by senior archaeologists under the guidance of a restorer and an archaeologist. There are plans to mount an exhibition on archaeology for senior citizens in 1997 and to show it first in District museums.

### **Future aims, effects**

Besides the practical work, social factors are important in the Archaeology for Senior Citizens initiative. The prospect of making new contacts is a significant attraction of intensive work for two days a week, alongside an interest in archaeology. As this concept of voluntary work might not be completely undisputed, it has to be emphasised, that the time spend by the participants for the archaeology is of mutual benefit. The participants can be sure that their occupation has a meaning and the archaeologists can see the results of work which could not be done otherwise. The fact that senior archaeologists bring with them experience of life and work is an additional source of potential ideas and ability which goes beyond the tasks that they are actually asked to do.

In view of the huge response from people and institutions with an interest in archaeology, it is to be hoped that this successful co-operation will continue and will not fail for want of funds or support staff.

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