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## INTERPRETATION OF SIRMIUM ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERITAGE: CASE STUDY OF ARCHAEO DANUBE PROJECT

**Abstract:** This paper is an attempt to introduce the wider public to results and work in progress on new ways of interpretation of archaeological heritage in Sremska Mitrovica, in regards to the Roman town Sirmium that lies beneath the modern town. Understanding the interpretation of cultural heritage like actually all kinds of actions and activities that are done, primarily, by the museums and in the case of Sremska Mitrovica, by the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments, new ways of interpretation that are a product of digitalized age will be discussed. Special focus is given to the current running *Interreg* project "Archaeological park in urban areas as a tool for local sustainable development" with the acronym ARCHEODANUBE in which the Museum of Srem is participating. Its most important part represents a pilot project which introduces new ways of interpreting Sirmium's heritage in the Museum of Srem that will include 3D reconstructions and animations of sites in Sirmium, presentation of luxurious samples, storytelling, and archeo tales, new info boards and tablets with additional information on exhibited items. Also, the special focus is on the representation of site no.14 with *in situ* remains of one room with the mosaic floor, with the aim of creating a closer connection between the local population, as well as visitors of Sirmium, with its extraordinary archaeological heritage.

**Keywords:** Sirmium, ArcheoDanube, pilot project, site 14, 3D reconstructions, digital data

### INTRODUCTION

Interpretation of cultural heritage is, by no means, not a new thing. However, in recent times it is increasingly the focus of archaeological experts since the modern age together with new technologies brings numerous innovations in terms of site presentation and interpretive methods. Thus, the interpretation is progressively viewed as the way to create a relation between the elements of a heritage site or collection on the one hand and the meaning-making value frame of the visitors on the other.<sup>1</sup> Though each exhibition done in museums represents the author's interpretation of the cultural heritage, it also reveals deeper meanings, relationships, and, insights from first-hand experience and by means of illustrative media, rather than by simple communication

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<sup>1</sup> Tilkin 2016, 7.

of factual information, containing a structural element of learning. It is very important that archaeological sites reflect community identity, maintain memory, and that they have significant tangible and intangible values because they become attractive settings for tourism.<sup>2</sup> Regarding the fact that archaeological sites are indivisible from the context

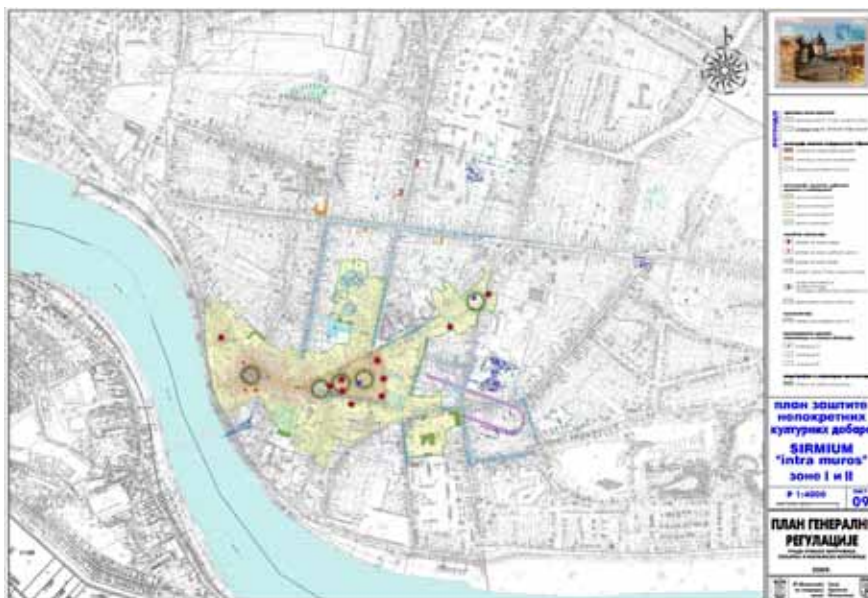


Fig. 1. Map of Sremska Mitrovica with zones of protected archaeological sites (official city document)

they belong to and their meanings are shaped together with the place, one of the common challenges of heritage values assessment is to adapt and find ways to appreciate and incorporate the local community in the management process.<sup>3</sup> For that reason, this paper focuses on new ways of interpretation, through the example of the archaeological heritage of Sirmium and the project ARCHEODANUBE, as opportunities to achieve an appropriate symbiosis between the value of the heritage itself i.e. its authenticity communication with both the local and the wider population.

## MODERN INTERPRETATION OF SIRMIUM ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERITAGE

Archaeology in Sremska Mitrovica has a central role mainly because underneath the modern town lie the remains of a Roman town, called Sirmium, conquered by Romans at the end of the 1st century and lasted until 582.<sup>4</sup> Sirmium was a seat of the province *Pannonia Secunda* and also one of the capitals of the Roman Empire.<sup>5</sup> Together

<sup>2</sup> Aplin 2002; Butland 2009; Ababneh 2016, 41.

<sup>3</sup> Ababneh 2016, 46.

<sup>4</sup> Mirković 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Милошевић 2001.

with Iustiniana Prima (Caričin grad), Felix Romuliana (Gamzigrad), and Mediana (near Niš) it was one of the first researched sites in the 19th century and excavation is ongoing even today with a lot of new exquisite finds.<sup>6</sup> This also means that the preservation of the Roman remains is almost always in collision with the development of Sremska Mitrovica, so the task to interpret heritage is constantly met with huge problems. However, as our late academic, Vladislav Popović, very wisely said in 1973: "The coexistence of Sirmium and Sremska Mitrovica is not the existence of one next to the other or one opposite the other, but the consolidation of both into an indivisible whole."<sup>7</sup> Today we have to think about this collaboration that can be beneficial for all parties, archeologists, developers of the town, and ordinary people interested to have economic gain from our cultural heritage (**Fig. 1**).

New digitalized interpretations of cultural heritage in Sremska Mitrovica are introduced by two public cultural institutions, one is the Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments via Visitors center – the Imperial Palace and The Museum of Srem. Funds were provided either by our Ministry of Culture and Public Information, then by different European projects on the preservation and presentation of cultural heritage, and also by local financial support.

Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments in Sremska Mitrovica has been in charge of managing the visitors' center 'Imperial Palace of Sirmium' since 2009. The first attempt to give a new interpretation of one room with a mosaic floor (Room 16) started with an idealistic reconstruction of the fountain in 2012. However, although remains of this marble fountain were kept in the Museum of Srem the fountain was reconstructed without any existing elements by Michael Werner, a professor from State University in Albany, New York, USA, and it was funded by our Ministry of Culture and USA Embassy fund for cultural preservation. Another project "Sirmium – City of Emperors and Imperial City" was realized inside the program 'Eurostart' with the following partners: Fondazione Aquileia and The Provincial Secretariat for Culture and Public Information Novi Sad. During 2013. and 2014. the possibilities opened for applying to European projects and it was a very important step in that direction. Among the first, was the project ARCHEST – developing archaeological audiences along the Roman route Aquileia – Emona – Sirmium – Viminacium co-financed by the CULTURE with the main objective to present these archeological sites through 3D reconstructions and way of augmented reality to attract visitors to understand how was life in Roman time (**Fig. 2**).<sup>8</sup> The Museum of Srem was not a partner but participated in the organization of Open Archaeological days by organizing our workshops on making Roman mosaics, oil lamps, women hairstyles, games, and blowing glass vessels and also presented all workshops at the conference.



Fig. 2. Logo of ARCHEST project (obtained from the webpage of the Institute for Protection of the Cultural Monuments Sremska Mitrovica)

<sup>6</sup> Ђорђевић 2018, 234.

<sup>7</sup> Popović 1973.

<sup>8</sup> Institute for Protecting of Cultural Monuments Sremska Mitrovica.

The next project is again connected with new ways of interpretation under the name Techcooltour – technology and tourism. This European project had the objective promotion of Roman and Byzantine archeological sites through the usage of IT and research on the potential of new media in 2014 and 2015. For this project augmented reality program was made with emperor Constantius II's presentation that can be seen either on a computer or mobile phone. The project "TECHCOOLTOUR Technology and Tourism: Augmented Reality for Promotion of Roman and Byzantine itineraries" aims to promote two historical transnational EU cultural routes exploiting developed ICT tools and exploring the new medium's potential in the promotion of cultural heritage. Retracing the history of influences, exchanges, and developments of two great empires, Roman and Byzantine, which shaped the cultural landscape of Europe, the project aims at defining the common thread that links places and regions and helps represent the richness and uniqueness of European cultural identity. A project where Sirmium was also chosen to be one of five sites in Serbia to represent the Roman heritage is "The Roman Emperors and Danube Wine Route" together with sites from Romania, Bulgaria, and Croatia.<sup>9</sup>



Fig. 3. Hologram of the golden belt (Documentation of the Museum of Srem)

New interpretations and presentation of the site of the Imperial Palace (2009 – building a structure for covering the site) and site 28 (open-air solution with an amphitheater for modern events with the grant of the foundation *Cities in focus*), was funded by the state and local authorities, and commissioned and implemented by the Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments in Sremska Mitrovica, under supervision of Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments in Belgrade. The Museum of Srem in 2014. acquired hologram projection of 10 parts of the golden belt from the 6th and 7th centuries (Fig. 3).<sup>10</sup> Also in 2019, the Museum of Srem participated in the European project

<sup>9</sup> Institute for Protecting of Cultural Monuments Sremska Mitrovica.

<sup>10</sup> Popović 1997.

VICtours by putting their hologram presentation of the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius Probus, who was born and died in Sirmium, as a part of the museum's permanent exhibition.

This huge discrepancy in the number of European projects between the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments and the Museum of Srem is from 2020 slowly coming to balance, starting with the participation of the Museum of Srem, as a city partner in the DTP Interreg project no. 413 named *Archeological park in urban areas as a tool for local sustainable development* under the acronym ARCHEODANUBE with the lead partner of City Municipality Ptuj, Slovenia.

### ARCHEODANUBE PROJECT

Archeological sites are becoming the most important tourist destination worldwide. With the development of cultural and archeological tourism as an important world industry, tourists are no longer limited to displays in the nation's capital institutions.<sup>11</sup> These sites include ruins and monuments, buildings, museums, and interpretive centers. Although this kind of tourism is at its beginning, more and more small or medium towns are becoming aware of endless possibilities in that regard. Although there are huge costs in marketing and packaging of the past, the idea is to, with government support for local urban museums, provide educational and other means for locals (especially children) but also for visitors from all around the globe. This idea is the core of the ARCHEODANUBE project and for the proposition of a new way of providing complete sustainable development of one archaeological site. As stated on the site of the lead partner this project is defined as 'an international project with 22 participating partners from 11 countries of the Danube region. The main purpose of the project is to preserve and promote cultural heritage through the development of archaeological parks within towns. The archaeological parks will form the basis for future cultural activities and archeological tourism. The project ARCHEODANUBE is co-funded by the European Union (ERDF, IPA, ENI) in the frame of the Interreg Danube Transnational Programme (Fig. 4).<sup>12</sup>



Fig. 4. Logo of Interreg  
(property of Archeodanube project)

As one can see from the project summary Danube's cultural heritage in the cities is rich and diverse, but under pressure due to a lack of common policies, know-how, and resources. All the partners are confronted with the same challenges: how to incorporate and present the archaeological heritage into the contemporary social environment, how to incorporate it in the urban parts of the cities, how to integrate the preserved remains

<sup>11</sup> Winter 1997, 128.

<sup>12</sup> The Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia, Projects.



within buildings and areas of the towns for presentations (example: integration of sustainable mobility), how to provide the sustainable development and how to achieve the economic impact and visibility beyond the local level (cultural tourism). The project will improve and intensify cooperation among relevant actors in DTP to preserve, support, and valorize cultural heritage through archaeological parks as products in cities for the development of archeological tourism. The project paves way for the preparation of concrete plans, training, tools for preservation and presentation, and concrete small pilots, for improving the effectiveness of heritage site management in supporting the implementation of new initiatives in tourism (archaeotourism). All results are representative of other Danube regions and relevant to the entire area. Having said this, the consortium convenes in understanding archaeological parks as a tool through which the local communities can manage, control, and protect their heritage resources. Moreover, they are good to connect the local culture, which represents an important period of human history, with the global culture. For our heritage values to remain preserved and be accessible to contemporary and future generations, it is imperative to develop and advance an integrated planning concept. The project will provide an understanding of archaeological parks as an integrated concept between archaeological heritage/urban development of the city and cultural tourism.<sup>13</sup>

This project will last 30 months and work is divided into five periods, each lasting 6 months. At the moment the project is in its fourth period and the results until now are done in accordance with the assignments and all planned work packages. The main goal of the project is to improve the effectiveness of heritage sites with special attention to archaeological parks in urban areas. The idea of the project is to help small/medium city management with an accent on the preservation and development of archaeotourism.

Our project team in the Museum of Srem consists of 2 archeologists (of which, one is in the training), 2 historians, and 1 archeozoologist, as thematic providers, 2 persons for financial support, and 1 for communication. Our team participates in all working



Fig. 5. Workshop with stakeholders June 2021 (Documentation of the Museum of Srem)

packages, some as knowledge providers, but mostly as partners who give information or feedback, ask questions, give remarks, and so on. We were knowledge providers in writing an electronic book with the title *Guide for Designing Local Archeological Plans*.<sup>14</sup> The team from the Museum of Srem also took part in the two-day training session to teach

<sup>13</sup> Summary taken from the AF document of the project.

<sup>14</sup> Egri 2021.

others on the project how to use the book. That was the first step in making actual Local Archeo Plans (LAP) and design of the future local Archeological park. The project also developed skills in recognizing and liaising with the stakeholder through contacts and workshops (Fig. 5). Providing the baseline study<sup>15</sup> was the beginning of collecting all necessary information on all partners in regards to managing cultural heritage in each partner country (Fig. 6).

After that, work was centered on one of the most important products of this project i.e. *Guide for designing LAP*.<sup>16</sup> This Guide offers help with making a local archeo plan for each city partner which is closely connected with making the pilot project. It can be used by anyone else outside this project and where it will be presented in detail. The Guide is an excellent tool to enable all local interested parties to formulate a new approach to making archeological sites touristically alive and sustainable. The Guide starts with an explanation of the goals and objectives of your LAP should be, explains what are Archeological parks, and provides directions on how to start with LAP with a clarifying point on who can be initiators, who has to be in your work team, and who are the stakeholders. The next stage is producing the details of the existing situation by the assessment of the local archaeological heritage. A very important part of the LAP is to make a feasibility study providing feasibility objectives, identification of the legal and administrative framework, design and development options, estimated implementation and maintenance costs; potential funding options, and also identifying the target public and their expectations. After these two introductory chapters, the Guide explains through detailed instructions and



Fig. 6. Local presentation of the project (Documentation of the Museum of Srem)

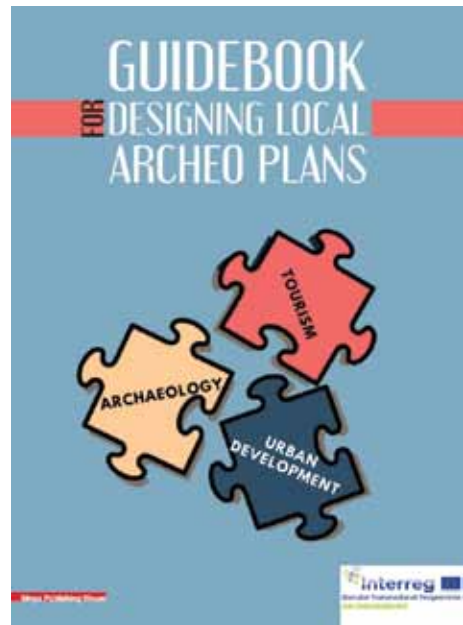


Fig. 7. Title page of a Guide for designing LAP (property of Archeodanube project)

<sup>15</sup> Baseline study of the ArcheoDanube project 2020.

<sup>16</sup> Egri 2021.

numerous possibilities for actual designing of the local archeological plans with a focus on integration within local urban planning, in situ display, conservation and restoration of archaeological remains, surveillance and monitoring systems, landscaping, mandatory infrastructure and services, interpretation and interpretive media, commercial infrastructure and services, communication, branding and promotion, networking and integration with other local and regional archaeological and cultural attractions, cooperation with the tourism industry and research activities. Then is time for implementation and maintenance, done through activity planning and execution of the required works, operation, maintenance, and improvement activities, monitoring process and periodical evaluation, and recruiting and training of necessary staff (and volunteers). At the end of this electronic book, there is a template of LAP with a lot of questions to be answered and a lot of provided answers that can help a great deal in making the plan (Fig. 7).

A Guide is followed by an E-handbook for the management of enhancement projects of urban archaeological sites and integration with sustainable tourism guidance for public authorities, local communities, landowners, developers, project managers, museum curators, archaeologists, conservators from discovery to sustainable display. This book is still a work in progress. In both of these work packages, the Museum of Srem was a knowledge provider. At the same time, there was work on Good practices<sup>17</sup> for archeological tourism, where we introduced the example of the archeological site Viminacium, which was accepted as one of 16 examples around Europe (Fig. 8).

All these steps led towards making our own LAP with, in our case, an attempt to brand Sirmium and its open-air sites as an archeological park. For this authority in Sremska Mitrovica will have to rethink some already proposed and accepted solutions for some of the extremely important sites, like site 29 – the so-called Licinius’ thermae, public granary (site 30) and to try to revive, although buried in 2004 as a protective measure, site 4 – *villa suburbana* with private *thermae*. Our suggestion with LAP is to find a



Fig. 8. Infographic for Viminacium as a good example (property of Archeodanube project)

<sup>17</sup> The ARCHEODANUBE Strategy for Successful Archaeological Tourism 2021.



new life for all of the sites, especially sites 29 and 30, for which we planned conservation, light roof covering of the sites, and introducing a bicycle route that includes a path for visitors and riders to stroll and bike and see both sites. So, we are introducing actually a heritage bike route with a lot of sites to stop and visit, but with special attention given to the sites aforementioned, of which is planned preservation by covering and leaving for the future generation to solve the problem.

Some of the city partners in this project are also included in their own pilot projects that bring a new interpretation of the cultural heritage. Our Museum is one of the rare museums in the world that has in situ remains of an archeological site in its territory, in the area popularly known as a lapidary. With archaeological research and excavations remains of some sort of *villa urbana* (site 14) were discovered in the yard of the Museum. One room with a huge mosaic floor was left open and preserved for visitors. Above this room, a modern covering building in brick and glass was erected in order to protect the mosaic floor, which was conserved, but missing final touches (cleaning of tesserae and fulfilling the missing parts is not done yet – grant was obtained from the French city of Nevers, but works are not finished yet). Also, with the help of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Serbia walkway around the mosaic floor is built. However, there are no info boards or any additional information on the site there. For that reason, we decided that our pilot project be connected with the new interpretations in the Museum, especially to site no. 14, but also with the rest of the permanent exhibition (Fig. 9).



Fig. 9. National presentation of the project in Paraćin June 2021 (Documentation of the Museum of Srem)

In order to implement our pilot project, we planned to use ARHEODANUBE developed tools "Preservation vs presentation tools", which include:

**1) Yesterday-today-tomorrow tool** which focuses on historical, social, and economic aspects. Methods of presentation for use for tourism: Reconstructions (partially or in reality), digital 3D reconstruction, digital displays, problems with preservation of original substance, problems with conservation, storytelling, info boards, an exhibition of specific material etc.

**2) ICT Tool 'ArcheoTales'**. ICT Platform combines statistical data from open source platforms, qualitative data from openly accessible social media contributions, and moderated expert data to create narrations about archeological sites and facilitate dialogue between key stakeholder groups also beyond the project. The ICT application builds on 'CityTales' and allows archeosite operators to analyze statements and actions of visitors and dwellers on the one hand.

Our project includes, as already stated, the enrichment of site 14 with informative boards (Fig. 10), one tablet with additional information on both sites (1 and 14), and

3D reconstruction and animation of site 1 – domus (for site 14 that was not possible because of the small area excavated). We will also put an exhibition on luxurious marble from Sirmium on the walkways with a huge map of the Roman world with all mentioned quarries with specific stones used in Sirmium to decorate the Imperial town. Frescos



Fig. 10. Site 14 with the mosaic floor (Documentation of the Museum of Srem)

from the walls of site 21 will also be explained with info boards and this site will be also presented with 3D reconstruction and animation on one of the tablets. The storytelling will be introduced by two video beams with sound equipment. Four tablets will be strategically placed in other areas of the Museum offering information for our information-hungry visitors. Information will be in Serbian and English.

Topics will be all with the photographs and if possible, 3D reconstructions of the objects:

- Roman military equipment and armament
- Roman sculpture (with a special focus on porphyry portraits of the emperors found at site 85 in a temple – also 3D reconstructed),
- Early Christianity in Sirmium
- Germanic and Avaric tribes in connection with Sirmium

Along with implementation, which includes acquiring the equipment necessary to finish what is planned, such are 5 tablets, 2 video beams, 1 3D scanner, 2 photo cameras, 15 info boards, and 2 sets of sound equipment marketing, special attention will be given to the managing of the archeological park by making management plan. Marketing through different cards, leaflets, and also digitally, by the website, Facebook and Instagram will provide a wider scope of visitors.

## CONCLUSION

Today, more attention is paid to the activities of Public archeology as a sub-discipline aimed to open the archaeological heritage to the wider public through receptive forms of interpretation.<sup>18</sup> Together with proper management models, it forms the basis of a modern approach to heritage usage as a resource. Additionally, at a time when new technologies are present in everyday life, almost in all its segments, archeology is also increasingly using them, contributing not only to the quality of research but also to site protection through interpretation directed at the general public. Although in Serbia the experts are still working on the development of tourism and commercial content based on archaeological heritage, it is clearly understood that modernization of the site is paramount. It involves not only the development of necessary infrastructure but also an attractive presentation that will lively depict the life of former times. It can be said that thanks to international cooperation, there are more and more examples of good practices in our environment that pave the way for the establishment of sustainable archaeological tourism, while such benefits regarding the heritage of Sirmium and the results of the ARCHEODANUBE project can only be expected.

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<sup>18</sup> Matsuda, Okamura 2011.

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#### **Rezime:**

#### **INTERPRETACIJA ARHEOLOŠKOG NASLEĐA SIRMIJUMA KROZ STUDIJU SLUČAJA PROJEKTA ARCHEODANUBE**

**Ključne reči:** *Sirmium*, ARCHEODANUBE, pilot projekat, lokalitet 14, 3D rekonstrukcije, digitalni podaci

Ovaj rad predstavlja pokušaj da se šira javnost upozna sa potencijalnim rezultatima novih načina interpretacije kulturnog nasleđa u Sremskoj Mitrovici, u odnosu na rimski grad Sirmijum koji se nalazi ispod savremenog grada. Najpre su predstavljene inovativne aktivnosti međunarodnih projekata u kojima je učestvovao Zavod za zaštitu spomenika kulture Sremska Mitrovica, dok je poseban osvrt dat na aktuelni Interreg projekat u kome učestvuje Muzej Srema - *Arheološki park u urbanim sredinama kao alat za lokalni održivi razvoj* sa akronimom ARCHEODANUBE. Najvažniji deo ovog evropskog projekta za nas čini pilot projekat koji se odnosi na upotrebu novih tehnologija u interpretaciji arheološkog nasleđa Sirmijuma, poput 3D rekonstrukcija i animacija pojedinih lokaliteta u Sirmijumu, prezentacije luksuznih primeraka, pripovedanja i arheoloških priča, uz nove info i interaktivne vodiče na tabletima sa dodatnim informacijama o izloženim artiklima. Takođe, posebna pažnja će se posvetiti lokalitetu br.14 sa *in situ* ostacima jedne prostorije sa podom od mozaika. Kroz pomenute implementacije u prezentaciji arheološkog nasleđa, odnosno prijemčivije načine njegove interpretacije posebno za mlađe generacije, cilj je da se ostvari jasna komunikacija vrednosti baštine bilo sa lokalnim stanovništvom, bilo sa širom populacijom, te doprinese realizaciji potencijala za razvoj održivog arheološkog turizma u Sremskoj Mitrovici.