Creation of Cultural Routes

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Experiences from the Danube's Archaeological eLandscapes Project

Interreg
Danube Transnational Programme
Danube's Archaeological eLandscapes

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Developing the Neanderthal Route through the iNEAL Network

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Homo sapiens
neanderthalensis —
Mr. N
(Ausschnitt mit Mädchen)
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THE ENERGY INVESTED INTO THE CREATION of cultural routes through the work on the Danube's Archaeological eLandscapes Project will certainly not be lost once the project has ended. As regards the work on the establishment of a cultural route dedicated to the Neandertals, this endeavour will continue within the framework of the iNEAL Action. But, what is this Action and how it came into being? Also, what it stands for and what are its goals? Let us first explain, and then also invite you to join its ranks.

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As a direct beneficiary of a century and a half's research on Neandertals, our present-day scholarly community has at its disposal a vast amount of data pertaining to an incredibly diverse spectrum of facets of this long-lost relative *and* predecessor of ours.

Let us remember that the Neandertals are the first human population that can be truly recognized as a pan-European phenomenon. Since the discovery in a small cave in the Neander valley in Germany in 1856 (thus giving us both scientific and colloquial name for this ancient group of humans) the sites with their skeletal remains and/or cultural finds have been discovered all over Europe (and parts of Asia) and cover a period of more than 250,000 years.

However, in over the 150 years of Neandertal research, scientific methods, technological and methodological aspects, theory and practices have developed at different paces — and sometimes followed several trajectories — in different countries. As such, it can often be difficult to evaluate and compare various datasets dealing with Neandertal legacy, whether biological, cultural or other. Likewise, for numerous reasons, problems exist in relation to access to data and information for various sites and finds. In addition, the research questions asked by different groups and scholars from not only separate disciplines, but sometimes from the same disciplines but following diverse traditions, as well as from a variety of countries, are often difficult to compare, even if their goal is the same.

These overall shortcomings in Neandertal research and in the general management of Neandertal heritage have recently been addressed by an international initiative — a COST programme Action entitled '**Integrating Neandertal Legacy: From Past to Present**' — which aims to collate a long-term network of scientists with the goal of creating a usable and inclusive, inter- and multidisciplinary database and data sharing platform for all those interested in Neandertals.

Visiting Vindija,
DAeL Mobility Action &
iNEAL training school
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Recent decades saw a rapid rise in communication of scientists from, for example, former “Eastern” and those from the “Western Bloc”. However, this is very much still based on individual connections and related to specific analyses and work. Thus, in order to compare data on various aspects of Neandertal legacy from Europe, it is crucial to build a long-term network of scientists that, in turn will help create a usable and inclusive, inter- and multidisciplinary database and data sharing platform for all interested in Neandertals.

In addition, iNEAL Action seeks to promote dialogue between scientists (with special attention given to early career investigators), and invite scientists from all relevant fields and disciplines, beyond the core group (such as scientists interested in dating methods and chronology, paleoenvironmental analysis, palynology, trace analysis etc.). In such a way, datasets will be created with a specific purpose of inclusiveness, thus providing data from various disciplines that can be incorporated to create a more detailed picture of Neandertals in temporal and spatial dimensions.

Another important aspect of the iNEAL Action is promoting awareness among various stakeholder groups of the importance of Neandertal heritage as an asset in education, tourism as well as other broader socio-economic spheres. At present, a lot of effort is being invested in research, presentation and interpretation of Neandertal heritage sites and other tangible remains like museum exhibits, however, there is a palpable lack of networking at higher-order levels, as well as across the stakeholder spectrum, which this Action aims to remedy.

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The intention is to build on the existing initiatives, including localized success stories in the heritage sector, like the Mettmann Neanderthal Museum, or the Krapina Neanderthal Museum, as regards musealised sites or interpretative centres and museums, to collaborative endeavours that would bring together a number of partners across Europe.

What all these efforts are lacking is the inclusion of stakeholders other than academia, i.e. those that would create a more tangible link with real life: local communities, local and regional governments, private sector, SME's, tourism sector etc., who have long been disenfranchised in matters of management of archaeological heritage in general, and Neandertals in particular. In education, primary and secondary-school curricula in many countries might greatly benefit from more elaborate and school-children friendly didactic tools, which are at the core of the Action's agenda.

Training
school
Mettmann

In summary, iNEAL brings together a wide variety of researchers, both from different countries, as well as from different fields of research in order to:

— get a more detailed and much broader insight into various aspects of Neandertals (biology, including genomics, cultural aspects, geographic, environmental settings etc.) across space and over time;
— create a data sharing platform, making it easier to detect data of interest, as well as identifying major gaps, resulting in new research questions, collaborations and projects;
— stimulate international collaboration of scientists and create a wide network and platform for communication;
— build a new outreach platform between scientists and scientific research and other interested parties (general public, small and medium enterprises, local communities, tourist workers etc.) creating a positive environment and basis for integrating Neandertal legacy into present;
— address the career development of early career investigators. Through participation in working groups, a number of short-term scientific missions and training schools, they will get training in various disciplines and develop a firm understanding of specific current practices that will help them in their future research.

iNEAL members during
the 2nd Working Groups meeting
at Eberhard Karls University
in Tuebingen, 11–12th October 2021

And, last but certainly not least, it is within the iNEAL that we intend to bring together all those interested in creating a **European cultural route on Neanderthals**, as a means to best preserve, promote, present, manage and valorize the heritage of these First Masters of Europe!

Neanderthalerin
Nahaufnahme
Outdoor
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