

THE CAVALLINO WIDESPREAD MUSEUM. ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE, LANDSCAPE, COMMUNITY

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Abstract

The Cavallino Widespread Museum is one of seven Museums that make up the Museum System (SMA) of the University of Salento. It was created and inaugurated in 2003 on the site of an important Messapian settlement. From the middle of the 6th century BC onwards, the settlement developed into a real city, criss-crossed by a dense network of roads and a complex water system consisting of canals and cisterns. The settlement thrived for just under a hundred years and was suddenly abandoned in the first quarter of the 5th century BC. The name Widespread Museum is intended to remind visitors that the Museum does not focus solely on the Messapian archaeological area, but on all the transformations that the territory has undergone from the beginning of anthropic frequentation to the present day. Since its inauguration, the Museum has hosted many activities aimed at promoting awareness and appreciation of local Heritage, land-use planning and management, and Landscape protection and conservation.

Keywords

Widespread Museum, EcoMuseum, European Landscape Convention, Faro Convention, Community, Territory, Landscape, Community Map, Messapians.

1. Introduction

The role of Museums within the Communities that inhabit their territory has been constantly evolving in recent years. Museums are seeking to become more interactive, Community-oriented and flexible to the needs of users. They are thus transforming themselves into centres where creativity and knowledge go hand in hand and where visitors become protagonists of the experience, by sharing and interacting with specialists.

Today, Museums address contemporary social issues by seeking to establish dialogue between cultures and contribute to dealing with territory development issues in a sustainable manner.

They represent a place of important cultural exchange, enrichment of cultures and development of mutual understanding, cooperation and peace among peoples.

Moreover, they contribute to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals such as: ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all, building resilient infrastructure, promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialisation, and fostering innovation. (Rota, 2022).

2. The Cavallino Widespread Museum

The Cavallino Widespread Museum is one of seven Museums that make up the Museum System (SMA) of the University of Salento. (Fig.1).

It was created and inaugurated in 2003 on the site of an important Messapian settlement, identified in the second half of the 19th century by Sigismondo Castromediano. Since then the site has undergone a great number of archaeological investigations, thus highlighting its great importance.



Fig. 1: Map of the Cavallino Widespread Museum

Research activities, which began in the 1950s and have continued intensively over the last 30 years, have revealed an extremely interesting archaeological palimpsest.

3. *Archaeological evidence*

The earliest phase of frequentation dates back to the Middle Bronze Age (16th-15th century BC) and consists of a modest settlement of huts uncovered in the northern part of the site. The dwellings had an ovoid layout and were built with low stone walls into which wooden poles were inserted to support the roof that was made of branches and twigs. (D'Andria, 2025).

After a long period of abandonment, the area was inhabited again starting in the Iron Age, specifically from the mid-8th century BC.

A new settlement of the hut type but much larger in size was established with the construction of dwellings made of dry stone, with a circular or ovoid plan. The post holes found on the rocky outcrop reveal the shape of the structures and show how the roofs of these buildings were still made with lightweight materials (straw and mud).

The archaeological materials found associated with the huts consist mainly of fragments of locally made ceramic pots decorated with geometric patterns. However, there are also finds of vases produced in Greece (particularly in the Corinth area) and imported into the settlement by the local Elites, who must have had close and continuous relations with the populations living on the other shore of the Adriatic sea. (Polito, 2005).

Around the middle of the 6th century BC, the Messapian world underwent a radical transformation in settlement patterns, driven by considerable dynamism within Society, probably also due to the arrival of external groups from the Balkan area.

This led to the formation of power groups that directed the social base towards the creation of a complex settlement that we can define as a proto-urban type.

The settlement area was symbolically enclosed within a fortification consisting of a large dry stone wall, approximately 4 metres wide, and defended by a moat dug into the rocky bank.

The fortification, more than 3 kilometres long, enclosed an area of approximately 69 hectares of land on which roads, squares, houses and water channels were built. (fig. 2).

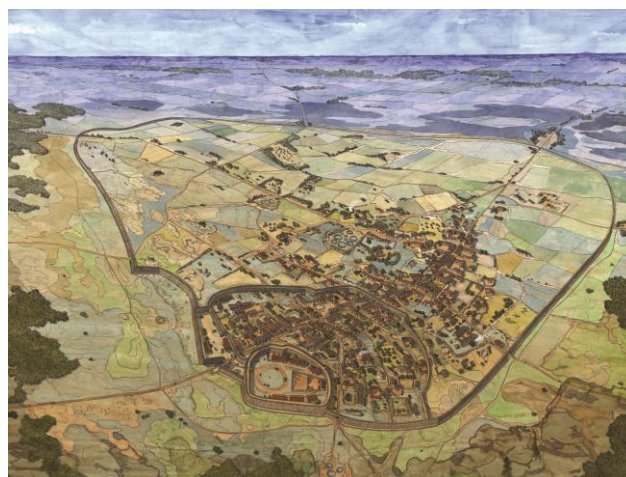


Fig. 2: Graphic reconstruction of the Archaic Age settlement (J.C. Golvin)

The housing structures differed radically from the previous hut-like structures.

The houses had now a regular shape. The rooms, with a square or rectangular plan, were built with foundations made of large blocks of limestone quarried on site. The walls were raised with small stones and the heavy roofs were covered with semi-curved tiles, which rested on solid wooden carpentry systems. (fig. 3).



Fig. 3: Graphic reconstruction of a dwelling from the 6th century BC (J.C. Golvin)

It is now clear, from the progress of archaeological research in the area, that these structures were created as a result of the evolution of the construction techniques used by the inhabitants.

Archaeologists have identified a small single-cell building (oikos H2) with a square plan and walls 3.5 metres long located in the central area of the settlement (Casino fund).

The foundations of the walls were built with small pieces of rough-hewn limestone that were used to support a high wall made of small stones bound together with clay.

The roof appears to have been made of thatch, given the total absence of terracotta tiles beneath the collapsed masonry structures.

The materials recovered from the collapsed walls make it possible to date the abandonment of the building to the late 7th – early 6th century BC.

It is a small *oikos* whose existence can be dated to the second half of the 7th century BC. It is the first example found in Cavallino of the transition from Iron Age settlements, with ovoid-shaped huts covered with straw and mud, to Archaic Age settlements, with quadrangular dwellings built on foundations made up of large square blocks, with walls raised with small stones and covered with tiles. (Notario, 2005; Notario, 2012).

Its location, somewhat set back from a large adjacent building from the Archaic period (building H1), has allowed its preservation.

Inside the room there was a hearth for heating and a stove for cooking food, bordered by small limestone blocks fixed vertically into the carefully laid flooring that was made by pressing crushed tuffaceous material. (D'Andria & Notario, 2010; Notario, 2012; Notario, 2016) (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4: Oikos H2, dwelling from the second half of the 7th century BC.

From the middle of the 6th century BC onwards, the settlement developed into a real city, criss-crossed by a dense network of roads and a complex water system consisting of canals and cisterns.

The individual housing complexes vary greatly in size and layout: single-cell buildings with a square floor plan are flanked by more complex dwellings with two or three covered rooms with a small adjoining courtyard. Large buildings with an

elongated rectangular floor plan, divided into two or three rooms, are flanked by large dwellings with numerous rooms arranged around a large central courtyard. (Fig. 5).

All these different types of construction seem to coexist chronologically and therefore reflect the social structure from which they derive; they are a true mirror of the complex and segmented society that lived within the archaic city. (Notario, 2005).



Fig. 5: The Messapian settlement from the Archaic period. Fondo Pero area (drone photo)

The archaeological materials found in the area represent the new way of life within the settlement. Contacts with the other side of the Adriatic sea continued, but ceramics were now mainly imported from the markets of Athens, which was the city that dominated trade in the Archaic period.

Metal objects (ornaments, vases, armour, etc.) are evidence of a society that was becoming richer by the day, while the discovery of artefacts with inscriptions documents a world in which writing was becoming increasingly widespread. (Valzano & Mannino, 2020).

The settlement thrived for just under a hundred years and was suddenly abandoned in the first quarter of the 5th century BC.

The abandonment bears traces of a traumatic event: signs of fire are frequently found in houses, water cisterns were deliberately filled with stones so that they could no longer be used, and the fortifications themselves seem to have been deliberately knocked down into the moat so that they could no longer serve as defence works.

Since then, the settlement was never rebuilt, while the area became countryside used for farming and grazing animals, as evidenced by the presence of small agricultural structures

(farmhouses) dating back to the Hellenistic period (4th–3rd century BC).

It was only in 1400 that a new settlement was established, and has developed into the present-day town of Cavallino. Fortunately, it was built in the least densely populated part of the ancient Messapian settlement, allowing archaeologists to unearth a large area of it today.

4. *Landscape and Community*

For a long time, the land on which the ancient settlement had been identified remained privately owned. In many cases, after archaeological research, the ancient structures that had been uncovered were covered up and the land was returned to the owners, who continued to use it for agriculture.

Since 2000, with the resumption of investigations by the University of Salento, the area has gradually been acquired by the public sector.

Part of the land is now owned by the Municipality of Cavallino, some by the Union of Municipalities of Messapia (Cavallino and Lizzanello) and some by the University of Salento. Today, just under 30 hectares of land on which the ancient Messapian city stood have become public property and have therefore been definitively saved from destruction and degradation.

In 2003, the Cavallino Widespread Museum was created in this area and opened to the public (Fig. 6).

The very name given to the structure indicates how the underlying design concept aims to open up the archaeological area to the rest of the territory.

In most cases of musealization of archaeological areas, the structures created (the 'Archaeological Parks') tend to uproot the ancient reality from the territory in which they stand, focusing above all on protecting the Asset and thus removing it from the surrounding degradation of the territory.

By contrast, the name Widespread Museum is intended to remind visitors that the Museum does not focus solely on the Messapian archaeological area, but on all the transformations that the

territory has undergone from the beginning of human settlement to the present day.

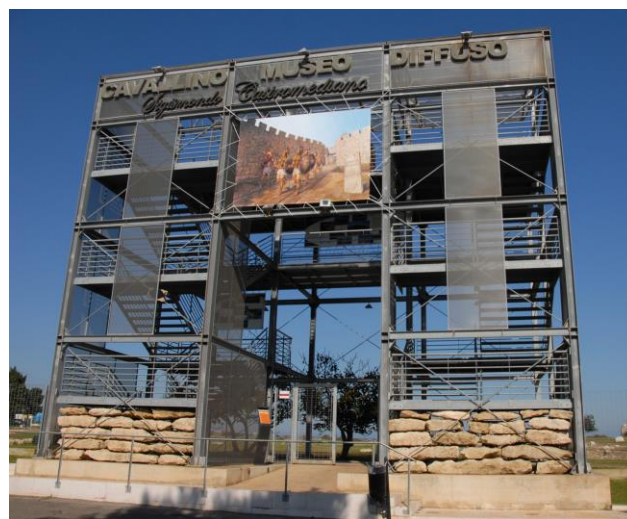


Fig. 6: The "Balcony on History", entrance to the Widespread Museum

The design intervention was inspired by the text of the European Landscape Convention¹ that highlights the importance of restoring the historical and natural Landscape as an element of identification and connection between local Communities and their places of reference. The project had the aim to activate processes of development and economic enhancement through the conservation and reinterpretation of particular aspects of cultural and environmental Heritage.

Theoretical and methodological approaches to environmental and Landscape analysis and assessment were followed in the context of the processes of transformation of the territory that are daily affecting ever larger areas of the historical Landscape that surrounds us and constitutes an extraordinary resource of our territory.

The Widespread Museum, therefore, aims to represent the passage of time and the transformations that have taken place in its territory. The interpretation offered to visitors begins in the past, travels through the centuries to arrive in the present through a Museum representation of the space in which the remains of the Messapian settlement with its houses, roads

¹ The European Landscape Convention was adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg on 19 July 2000 and was opened for signature by the member states of the organisation in Florence on 20 October 2000.

Italy ratified the European Landscape Convention with Law No. 14 of 9 January 2006. For the full text see: http://www.convenzioneeuropeapaesaggio.beniculturali.it/uploads/2010_10_12_11_22_02.pdf.

and fortifications, but also the 18th-century quarries, vegetation, *specchie* (piles of stones raised by farmers during the laborious work of cultivating the fields), sinkholes, and rural buildings, are places where visitors can linger, observe, and then move on. (Baratti, 2005) (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7: The current Landscape in the EcoMuseum area

In this way, through an appropriate methodological approach, it was possible to fully grasp the interaction between the urban, archaeological and environmental data of the area and, at the same time, to protect an important ancient settlement by removing it from environmental degradation and sheltering it from uncontrolled urban development.

Right from the design stage, discussions began with residents living in the area surrounding the archaeological site. Immediately, in fact, there was a perceived need to make everyone understand the advantages for the Community of an operation such as the one being carried out.

The opening of the EcoMuseum Laboratory in the town centre has made it easier to engage with local residents and to make them supporters of and active participants in the experience (fig. 8).

Long and fruitful meetings between experts, scholars, local historians, artists, free thinkers, and ordinary citizens interested in the life of their country, have created profound transversal knowledge. The experience proved extremely engaging and enriching in terms of awareness and values for everybody.

The project was not imposed from above but developed together with the Community. Citizens were both promoters and beneficiaries, therefore playing a key role in every aspect of the project and its implementation.

The activities of the EcoMuseum Laboratory resulted in the drawing of the Cavallino Community Map, a sort of illustrated account of the Community's tangible and intangible Heritage. It serves to launch concrete proposals for improving the quality of life of residents by identifying the development models best suited to the resources of the area (Baratti, 2012; Baratti, 2019).

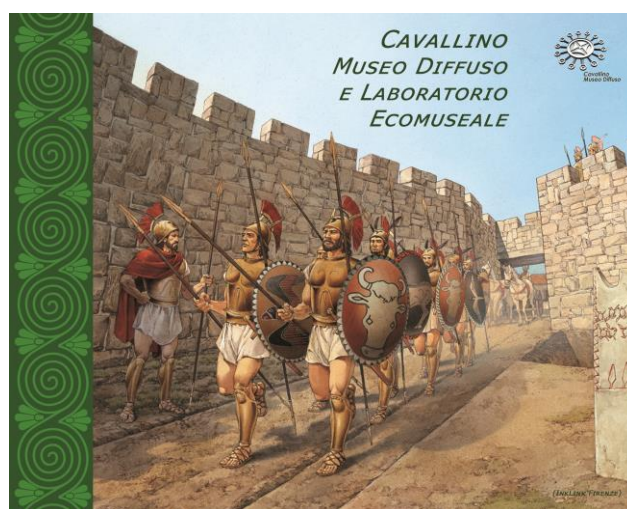


Fig. 8: The Cavallino EcoMuseum Laboratory

The members of the Community took active part in a participatory reading experience of the territory, which resulted in a drawing, a true conceptual and ideal representation of what it means to everyone (Fig. 9).

All these efforts led to the recognition, issued by Regional Council Resolution No. 48 of 29/01/2015², of the Widespread Museum as an EcoMuseum of Regional Interest in accordance with the provisions of Regional Law 15/2011 of the Region of Apulia³.

The EcoMuseum can be defined as the thread that holds together and allows interaction between all the actors present in the territory: the Landscape, the places, the territory, the memories,

² The European Landscape Convention was adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg on 19 July 2000 and was opened for signature by the member states of the organisation in Florence on 20 October 2000. Italy ratified the European Landscape Convention with Law No. 14 of 9 January 2006. For the full text, see

http://www.convenzioneeuropeapaesaggio.beniculturali.it/uploads/2010_10_12_11_22_02.pdf.

³ Regional Law No. 15 of 06/07/2011 Apulia Region - Establishment of Apulia's eco-Museums 'Official Bulletin of the Apulia Region' No. 108 of 08/07/2011, pp. 20094 ff.

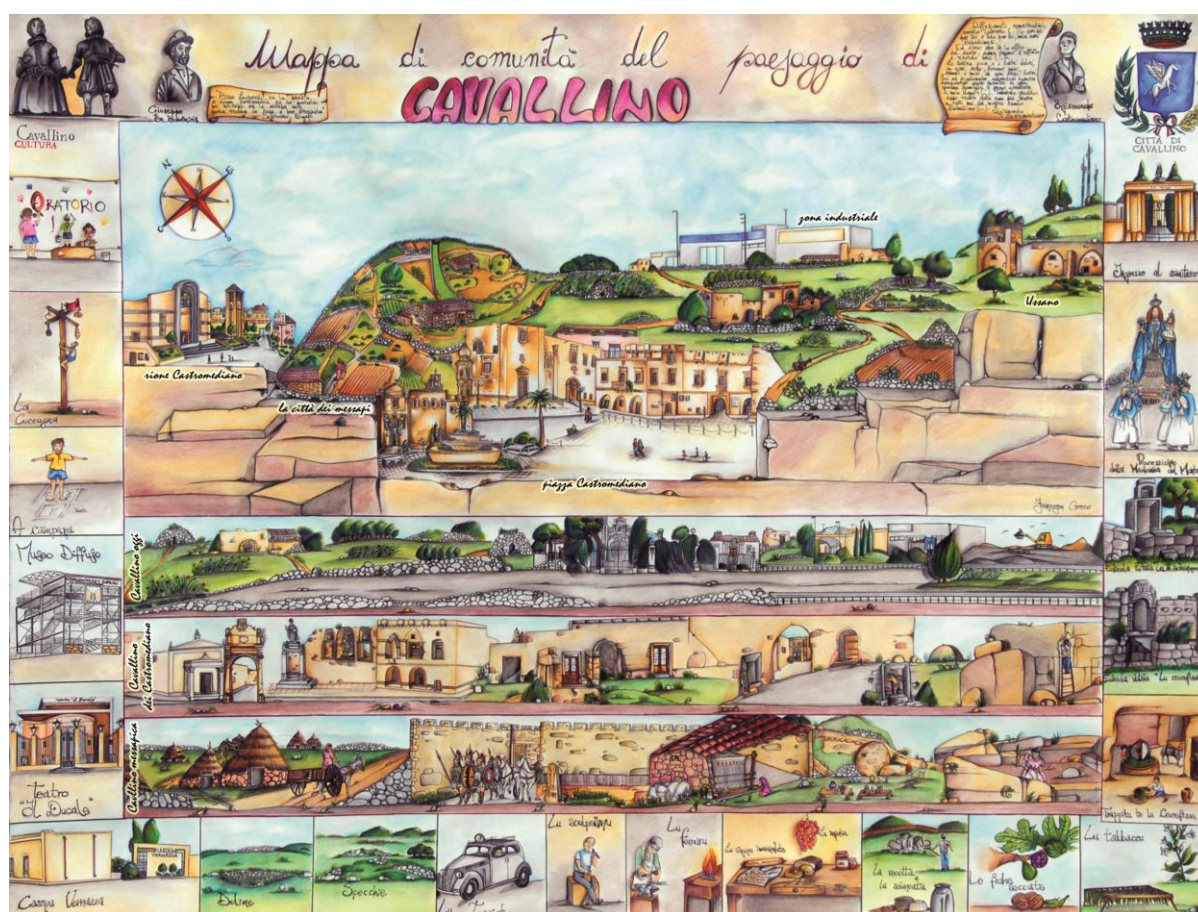


Fig. 9: Community Map of the Cavallino EcoMuseum Laboratory

nature, traditions, cultural Heritage, and the Community⁴.

Since its inauguration, the Museum has hosted numerous activities aimed at promoting awareness and appreciation of local Heritage, land-use planning and management, and Landscape protection and conservation.

Today, the principles of the Faro Convention⁵ govern the strategy for promoting and communicating with users of the area in the Widespread Museum. The Convention is based on the principle that cultural Heritage is an inalienable human right and a resource for the entire Community, with strong links to democracy and sustainable development. Its key principles include the individual and collective right to benefit from and contribute to cultural Heritage, shared responsibility for its protection, broadening the definition of Heritage beyond

tangible assets, and the importance of participation by all and collaboration between the public and private sectors.

Therefore, significant attention has been paid to the Community that inhabits the territory, in addition to scientific research activities in the archaeological area, which over the last 25 years have seen the participation of around 2,000 students from numerous Italian and foreign universities (France, Germany, Spain, Austria, United States, Canada, Turkey, etc.).

The Landscape Days, established in the Widespread Museum in 2007 and held annually, are aimed in particular at residents who are accompanied within the area in which they live to make them more aware of the beautiful Landscapes they possess as a Community and the problems that can arise from improper use of the land.

⁴ *"Tu parles de perles. Mais les perles ne font pas le collier; c'est le fil"* Gustave Flaubert, lettera a Louise Colet, 1° febbraio 1852.

⁵ “The Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, COUNCIL OF EUROPE - (CETS NO. 199) FARO, 27 October 2005, was signed by Italy in 2013 and ratified in 2020 (Law No. 133 of 1 October 2020).”

Within the archaeological area, it was possible to include a series of iron and stone reconstructions created by local artisans who were involved in the Project from the outset: the Messapian warriors positioned outside the reconstruction of the West Gate (Fig. 10) and the Tree of the Hesperides placed near the Primary School (works designed and created in iron by Ferruccio Zilli) as well as a reproduction of the Messapian column with capital in Lecce stone (created by Marco Calogiuri).



Fig. 10: Messapian warriors fighting (Ferruccio Zilli)

The realization of events such as theatrical and musical performances attracts a wider audience and allows for greater awareness of the venues.

For children, in addition to guided tours specially designed for a younger audience, there are Museum Games and recreational and sporting activities such as the Messapiadi, a sort of Olympic Games for primary school pupils.

Poetry Readings at the Museum, regional and national running events, and Family Days at the Museum complete a rich offering that seeks to expand every year in order to reach the widest possible audience.

Since its establishment, the Widespread Museum has become part of the Salento EcoMuseum System (SESA) and has therefore joined forces with other ecoMuseums in the area, with which it has collaborated on numerous occasions to organise joint initiatives (Landscape Days, regional Workshops on ecoMuseums, walks and bike rides in the area, etc.).

Furthermore, the Museum is part of the Mondì Locali network ("Local Worlds" Italian Network of EcoMuseums) and has hosted and is in constant contact with representatives of EcoMuseums from other regions of Italy (Trentino, Piedmont, Friuli, etc.).

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