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The Archaeological Landscape Park of Aguntum - an Alpine Roman Town in East Tyrol. Synergy between cultural heritage, landscape protection and biodiversity

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The archaeological site of Aguntum is located near Lienz in East Tyrol. Around ten years ago, Aguntum was not attractive to visitors, had an inconsistent appearance, and no clear policy for future development. In 2014, this led to the initiation of a broad-based process to define a mission statement for Aguntum. The goal was to create a common, homogeneous strategy that would serve as a future 'big picture' for all decision-makers to orientate themselves by. Based on this, a master plan was developed. Over the years, it has been possible to implement many measures, defined in the master plan, while still sticking to the actual basic tasks of scientific excavation work and preservation or conservation of the monument. Aguntum is a good example that cultural heritage and biodiversity are very closely related.

1. Introduction

The archaeological site of Aguntum, the only Roman town in Tyrol, is located near the city of Lienz. It is managed by the association '[Curatorium pro Agunto](#)', has its own museum, an excavation building and landscape park. The total area of the site is approximately 3 hectares, of which c. 2 hectares make up the Archaeological Landscape Park (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Aerial overview of the Roman town and Landscape Park of Aguntum (Image credit: Oberrainer)

Around ten years ago, the archaeological site of Aguntum was not attractive to visitors, had an inconsistent appearance, and no clear policy for future development. A broad-based process to define a mission statement for Aguntum was initiated in 2014, in cooperation with the Tyrolean company 'REVITAL Integrative Environmental Planning', the association 'Curatorium pro Agunto' and other institutions like the Federal Monuments Authority Austria. The goal was to create a common, homogeneous strategy that would serve as a future 'big picture' for all decision-makers to orientate themselves by.

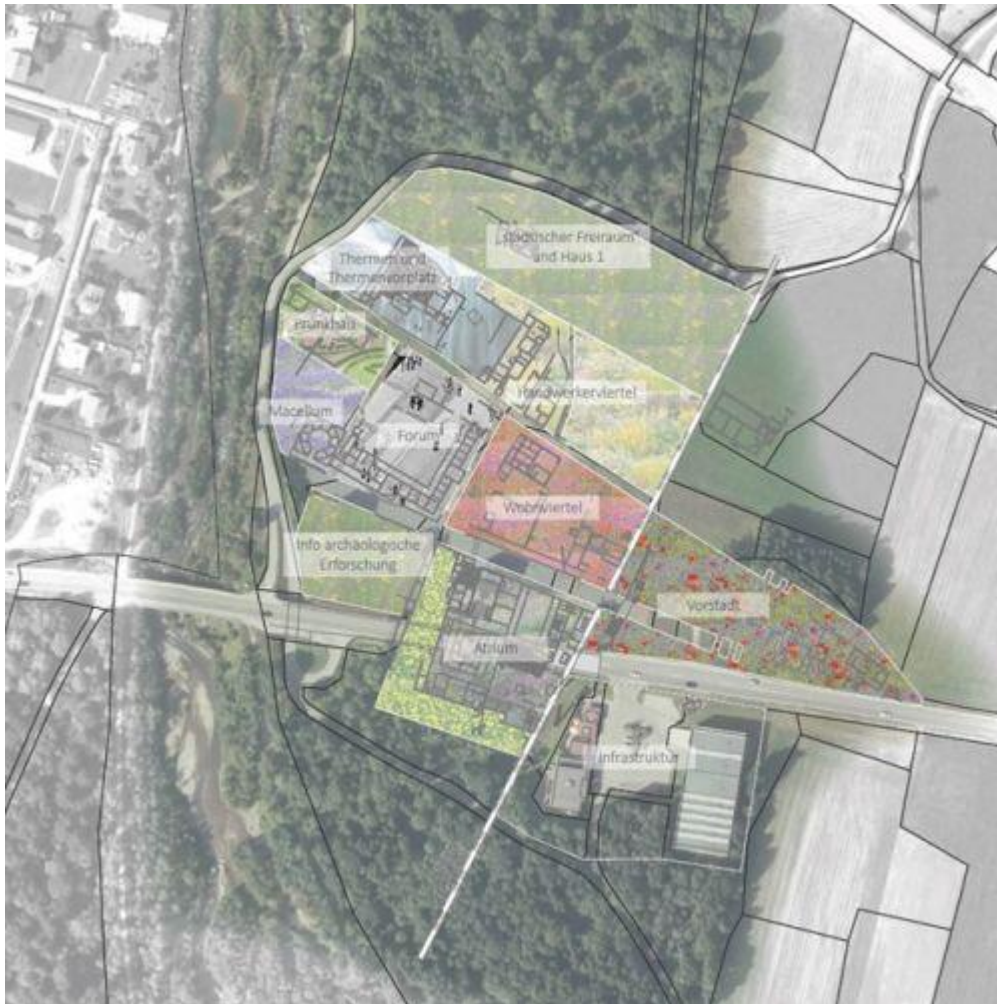


Figure 2: The different districts of Aguntum (Image credit: REVITAL)

Macellum: market place; Wohnviertel: residential area; Vorstadt: suburb; Handwerksviertel: craft district; Therme und Thermenvorplatz : Thermal bath complex; 'Städtischer Freiraum': urban space; Prunkbau: magnificent building

2. Implementing the vision

After one year of discussions and workshops, the commonly-developed mission statement still valid today was defined as follows:

'Visitors enter an Arcadian landscape, between the ruins of the Roman city a flourishing archaeological park opens up. The sometimes lush, sometimes sparse vegetation symbolizes life in the city's districts in the past. Today, the historic site presents itself as a large, extraordinary archaeological landscape and experience space.'

Based on the developed mission statement, implementation to increase the attractiveness of the archaeological site began. To reduce the complexity of the implementation, it was divided into three 'stacks': design, restoration and conservation, and maintenance.

The aim of the stack design is to increase the attractiveness (elegance and ecology) of the outdoor area. The Tyrolean company REVITAL Environmental Planning is



responsible for the coordination and local construction supervision. In the last few years, a visitor guidance and information system has been set up; structures like the Macellum viewing platform, the city gate, side city gate, or the forum entrance were constructed. Smaller infrastructure projects were also undertaken, such as seating and rest areas or planting to provide shade. Massive terrain modelling works, like removing a dam at the city gate/entry to give a better view inside Aguntum, were also carried out.

Every summer, restoration and conservation work takes place in Aguntum. The work is done according to urgency, schedule and the results of a prospection done in 2014. Acute damage also has to be remedied where, for example walls and buildings restored many years ago are in danger of collapse owing to the effects of weather. New and innovative ways to conserve these elements had to be developed while also giving visitors an idea of the dimensions of the buildings. Several ways were tested and implemented, but they all follow the same strategy - to protect the important archaeological features with soil and reproduce the layout with new low walls, hedges or small hills.



Figure 3: New vegetation and restored walls at Aguntum (Image credit: REVITAL)

The third stack deals with the maintenance of the archaeological site of Aguntum. The daily maintenance work on site is done largely according to the ecological aspects of extensive care, and the right time and frequency to cut the grass. To support those doing this work in Aguntum, a maintenance concept was set up, where both the overall measures for the site and separate measures for the different areas (and their individual needs) were defined (Figure 2). In order to increase appeal, different plants were used in different areas of Aguntum (Figure 3). For example, the area of the market place was planted with herbs, while the area of the thermal spa was planted with water-loving plants.



In 2019, the association [NAGO](#) carried out a biological study to get an overview of the current state of the natural environment in Aguntum. The study showed the occurrence of numerous valuable animal and plant species, many of which were protected and/or endangered, with drought-loving species being particularly well-represented. The endangered dry open land habitats are of particular relevance, with biodiversity considered great for such a small space. NAGO documented almost 1000 different animal and plant species and Aguntum shows much potential for an even greater diversity of species and habitats.