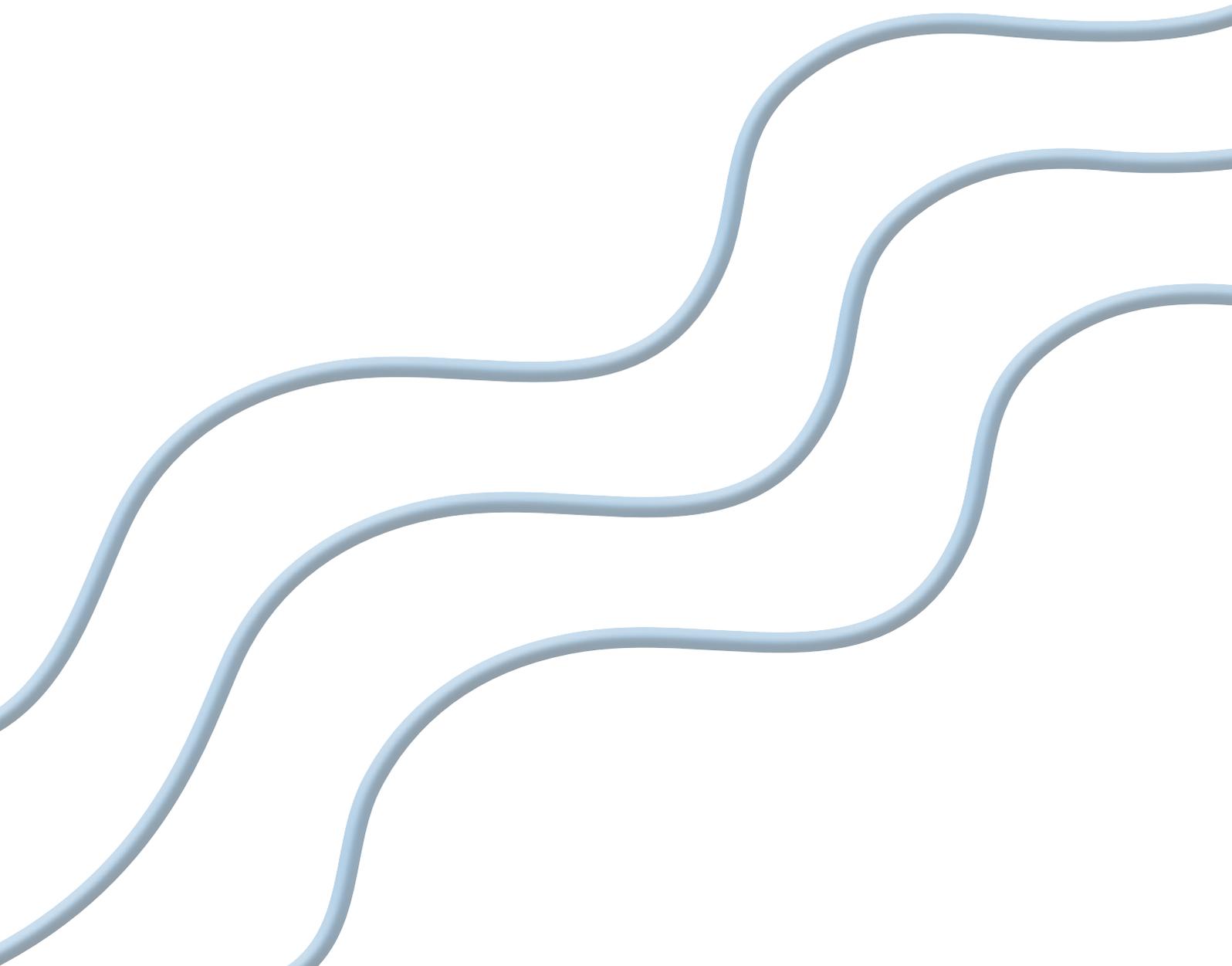


Rivers - lines of time



Rivers - lines of time: you
can never dip your hand in
the same water twice

By Judy E. Macklin and Mark G.
Macklin



Context

'Intervention' can be variously considered as 'interference', 'involvement', 'intrusion', 'interpolation' and 'mediation', and as a practising artist (Judy Macklin), geoscientist (Mark Macklin) and educators we approach art-landscape transformation or intervention (as here defined) from differing viewpoints arising from our contrasting experiential and working paradigms. To collaborate effectively and harmoniously required adopting a common point of departure and our working methods had to dovetail, in order that our joint intervention became greater than the sum of its component parts. This short essay articulates our different starting points in tackling a potentially highly complex interdisciplinary project, and how these were resolved to our mutual satisfaction, (or not!) and to the perceived benefit of the school children and teachers of the village of Măgura. It is structured around the themes of interference, involvement, intrusion, interpolation and mediation, in the context of exploring self, place and time with the school children of Măgura through the vehicle of its past and present riverscape.

Starting points

Judy Macklin: "For my part, I am quite uncomfortable with the notion of implementing change in a circle of influence outside my 'home ground' especially if it appears abrupt and invasive. However, to be involved in a process which is given more time, presents gentle introductions, and has the opportunity to alter perceptions even before it begins then please count me in! I was fortunate to be introduced to the village of Măgura during a visit one year ahead of the main activities planned for artists, which gave me a useful insight into the context of this project. It was crucial to see the people and the settings in which they worked and to gauge where they come from (historically, geographically and academically) and where they are going (culturally and

politically). It was only at this point that I could see value in working to facilitate change turning 'home ground' into 'common ground' for all participants."

Mark Macklin: "Rivers can transform the local and wider landscape on a temporary or permanent basis. They do this by erosion and movement of soil and sediment around river catchments during floods, and through deposition in new forms such as bars or islands. These landforms are not only aesthetically pleasing but can also be analysed and interpreted to reveal how and when they were created, thereby providing an environmental history. Rivers produce a palimpsest of 'marks' in the landscape commonly in the form of abandoned channels (palaeochannels) that display a wide variety of geometrical shapes and patterns. These can be 'read' using aerial photographs, satellite images, Google Earth, old maps as well as on the land surface using GPS and field walking. Their 4D (space-time) relationships can also be deciphered by analysing and dating sediment, wood, bone and artefacts that infill these abandoned river courses. These materials record and preserve changes in the landscape resulting from both human activity and climate-related changes in flooding regimes. One important and potentially controversial topic that I wished to address explicitly through the Măgura riverscape intervention was how its inhabitants, who live adjacent to and use the Clanița and Teleorman river valleys for farming and water, perceive change in their local river landscape and understand the factors that control it. Given the growing concern of the effects of global warming on extreme events, particularly the occurrence of catastrophic floods and droughts, it was considered timely to explore these issues with the local children and their relatives. Greater localism and community involvement in managing the worst effects of climate change is being increasingly advocated by environmental managers worldwide. I saw the Măgura intervention as an opportunity to test the reality of this approach using art as a medium by which to explore contemporary people-river interactions and as a means of better communicating complex 4D concepts."

Common ground

Our joint intervention had three primary objectives and each was realised through a series of artworks created by the school children. First, we wanted to inspire in the children a sense of self. This was obviously contingent on them growing up in a rapidly changing agricultural community, in a small Romanian village at the beginning of the 21st century. Second, to research and develop with them a greater awareness of the local riverscape highlighting links with pre-history and human responses to environmental change in the past. Third, using modern and ancient found objects collected from the Clanița river, to explore the concepts of uniqueness and cultural change using the river as a metaphor – a line of time.

The venue for our intervention was the village school and the adjoining Clanița valley, and a four day workshop was run from 17th to 20th July 2010 involving 30 children and their teachers. The following participatory activities were used to explore the issues of self, place and time in Măgura and its riverscape, and to create a shared cross-generation experience.

A sense of self

The children initially made their own concertina sketch book in which to complete activities as well to record information they had collected. These books proved to be an exceptionally useful tool for translation when copying down tasks from the black board).



This was greatly helped by the fact that our translator was the English teacher at the school. To develop ownership of the sketch book, portraits of friends and self-portraits were completed on the first few pages; drawing from direct



Telesgă
Alexandra

Aucuta

Minghir Roxana



FERARU
MĂDĂLIN

STĂNICĂ DOINA



CĂPĂȚÎNĂ
PAUL
ALEXANDRU

TURBATU
MĂDĂLIN

observation to facilitate individual expression and to establish a common visual language. Feathers, discarded by the large local population of geese, and ink were used to encourage a relaxed approach to drawing as well as to develop mark making skills. To reinforce the notion of 'self' the children were given a number of replica Neolithic figurines from the local museum at Alexandria and invited to create their own version using self-hardening clay. This promoted an investigation of identity to fire up their imagination and to get them to focus on form, shape and pattern. Wood and flint tools were used as a further reminder of what it might have been like to work with clay during prehistory. Drawings of the figurines were made in the childrens sketch books and notes on why and who first made these types of objects.





A sense of place

To begin with the children looked at a large-scale colour air photograph of Măgura and the Claniţa valley and were asked to interpret what they saw and to point out any manmade or natural features in the landscape. We then outlined how river landforms were created in the Claniţa valley and how we can 'read' and produce cultural and environmental narratives using air photographs and satellite images. The children put themselves geographically in context by identifying and marking on the photograph where they lived. Virtually all of the children, with very little guidance from us, could do this and demonstrated a surprisingly (to us) high level of 'innate' (none of them had seen



an aerial photograph of this kind before) spatial awareness and abstraction. Building on this exercise, a larger-scale group piece was created, in which the children worked in willow charcoal and chalk to produce their own interpretative aerial representation of the village and its surrounding landscape. Searching for a shared visual language to describe sight and sound, we then took all of the children on a walk along the banks of Clanița river, and across the adjoining Islaz (floodplain-common land), in order to collect contemporary manmade or 'special' (to the children) natural objects, to view Neolithic artefacts





preserved in river deposits and to discuss favourite haunts for playing and fishing. The walk began with a brief explanation of the geomorphological development of the river and its archaeology. Children completed activities along the way, settling for a while at their favourite spots to make sketches or to gather plastic, ceramics, glass, shells and other contemporary finds for the mosaic. At the end of the guided walk the children were shown a Neolithic site where contemporary river bank erosion had exposed a vast array of broken pottery, bone and worked flint.

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For homework the children were given the task of asking the oldest member of their household to note down their memories of the Clanița river, particularly how it had changed and recollections of notable past floods.



A sense of time

The primary purpose behind the children making their own figurines and gathering 'finds' from the Clanița river was to represent themselves as well as the past and present Măgura landscape, in the form of a group mosaic. This depicted the river walk and was strategically constructed from 12 small (20 x 20 cm) wooden tiles that allowed the children to work in pairs or groups of three.



To connect individual tiles the course of the river was sketched and then marked by shiny, blue-coloured, glass tesserae. Next, the children washed and cleaned the contemporary found objects, laying them out carefully to inspect them in a fashion reminiscent of archaeologists working at an excavation.





These, together with their own figurines and small Neolithic pottery shards donated by the Alexandria museum, were then carefully glued onto the wooden tiles. The separate mosaic tiles fitted together in a form to constitute the river walk along the Clanița as experienced individually and by all of the children.



Last, we wanted to leave a more permanent legacy of our riverscape workshop at Măgura and after discussions with both children and teachers a new school sign was made using the remaining glass tesserae. The children's art work was displayed as part of an exhibition in conjunction with a major international archaeological conference held at the Teleorman County Museum in Alexandria held in November 2010. Both children and teachers attended the opening of this meeting.



Postscript

Judy Macklin: "As an artist it is the people encountered during a new project that sparks engagement, and ultimately, aims and results. It was a pleasure for me to meet experts in very different fields and to seek insight through conversation and joint investigation. The crossover between archaeology, art and geomorphology was particularly rewarding. It enabled linking research that unearthed fragments of the past with contemporary practice, through handling clay for pots and figurines, baskets for making moulds, pits for firing, land art to alter the landscape of the present and geomorphologists to interpret the landscape of the past. It strikes me that nothing should stand alone in seeking to understand the transition from prehistory to present; how the touch, the smell and the sound of the human being must resonate gently from the buried earth and be uncovered by river erosion or archaeologists scratching for evidence. I wonder at the optimism of disciplines which seek to understand cause and effect but only reveal a reverberation that transmits a sensation which is audible and tactile, embodied in flint, beads, barley, fire pits and figurines. Imagining it all embraces eternity and transcends the individual by reaching out towards understanding our globally shared human condition back into deep time.

My intension to was purposively slight. and grow a sense of and a sense of time meeting people and ground. Creating in various media spent together but different experiences

intervene or transform I sought to discover self, a sense of place as a response to discovering common words and pictures commemorated time ultimately I hope that were experienced

differently. You can never dip your hand in the same water twice!"

Mark Macklin: "My lasting impressions of the intervention were primarily threefold. First, the boundless enthusiasm and energy of the children who participated in the workshop. Second, their complete lack of self-consciousness in creating a huge range of novel and sometimes idiosyncratic artwork that managed to capture the essence of Măgura and its surrounding landscape. Last, but not least, the very strong sense of community in the school fostered by a group of highly dedicated, caring and professional teachers who gave the children the support and confidence to fully engage and benefit from the workshop. Albeit from just a four day 'snap-shot', Măgura appears to be a resilient community that on the basis of its human capital and spirit, as well as its 7000 year long history as a settled and special place, has the capacity to successfully adapt to rapid environmental and economic change. However, as is often the case, I may see this more clearly as an outsider looking in and the ultimate challenge for Măgura may be seeing and realising its own potential. If our intervention fostered this self-belief, in any way, then it can be judged to have been a success."

