


Managing archaeological parks with *in situ* mosaics in Ljubljana, Slovenia



evaluation, conservation and maintenance

Continuous archaeological research of the Roman colony of Emona (modern-day Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia) from the 1960s till the present have revealed a number of mosaics now kept in the City Museum of Ljubljana. They are stored in the museum depot and occasionally exhibited. Their condition is stable, so little maintenance is needed over the years as interventions are only performed when they are necessary.




The main challenge are the mosaics presented *in situ* in two archaeological parks, managed by the City Museum. The *in situ* mosaics, although covered in the winter, are exposed to changing temperature and humidity levels throughout the year. In the summer months they are open to the public and therefore exposed to some deterioration due to the numerous visitors. Therefore, the monitoring and maintenance of *in situ* mosaics is extensive, and regular maintenance is demanding in terms of both financial resources and specialists available. One of the key missions of any museum is communication, making heritage objects – such as mosaics – widely available to the public, which is also a recommendation of several international heritage conventions. Our goal is balancing those two aspects: to preserve and maintain the mosaics and to make them available to the public, thus enabling people to share in and marvel at the heritage of Roman Emona.





Maintenance of mosaics in the Early Christian Centre archaeological park is demanding. Many of the tesserae are made of ceramics, not stone, thus making the mosaic more susceptible to climatic and other influences. Moreover, no visitor paths have yet been built to prevent visitors walking on the mosaics. The photo shows the regular mechanical cleaning of the mosaics, which is fully documented by a camera suspended beneath the roof.




Several Emonian mosaics are not exhibited *in situ* but stored in the depot. They have been carefully documented during the archaeological excavation, and then lifted and consolidated. Some of them have already been conserved and prepared for exhibiting. Others remain stored in protective packaging in a controlled environment


During the archaeological excavation, the decision to preserve the Early Christian baptisterium with adjoining mosaic was made. The mosaic was temporarily lifted, the baptisterium and the surface consolidated, and a drainage system installed. Then the mosaic was mounted on the pre-prepared surface. After 35 years, the presented baptisterium with mosaic is still in a very good condition.



We endeavour to contextualise mosaics and other archaeological remains at the Early Christian Centre park for our visitors using panels, guided tours and workshops, plays and performances. In this way we aim to make the mosaics and the archaeological parks as a whole available to the public, thus enabling people to share in and marvel at the heritage of Roman Emona.


Ljubljana's climate is continental, and between October and April night temperatures can fall below freezing. Rain in autumn/spring and snow in winter are also common. Between October and April both archaeological parks are closed to visitors, the mosaics covered with a special film and stone walls protected with wooden covers.



Late Roman mosaic in the Emonian House archaeological park. In 1964 the mosaic was lifted on several panels and put back in place after structures and consolidation had been completed. Today, cracks on the seams between panels are visible. The roof has proved inadequate in terms of both function and design, and we plan to replace it with a larger one.

The Emonian House archaeological park was opened to the public in 1966, the Early Christian Centre archaeological park in 1975. The decision to establish both *in situ* parks was made partly on the basis of the mosaics found during the archaeological excavation at both sites.



Not all endeavours to present Roman mosaics *in situ* have been successful. The photo shows the mounting of a mosaic in one of Ljubljana's public parks in the 1970s. Due to the poor implementation and unsecured location, the mosaic was dismantled shortly afterwards and today is kept in the museum depot.