

The project aim is to unravel the mysteries of the Neolithic world of the earthen long barrow builders, who are identified with the archaeological unit - Funnel Beaker culture. The subject of the study will be the Neolithic cultural and natural landscape of the Niemcza-Strzelin Hills, a part of the Sudeten Foreland, in south-western Poland, where, in 2012, fifteen monumental cemeteries with the earthen long barrows have been unexpectedly discovered. To achieve this aim in-depth analysis with the use of an archaeological and palaeoenvironmental evidence of the environment and the land use changes in the Neolithic is necessary.

The main focus of the research will be the Muszkowice Forest with its surrounded area. The Muszkowice Forest is a unique place in the Niemcza-Strzelin Hills (commune of Ciepłowody, Ząbkowice district, Lower Silesian voivodship), with the presence of dozens of prehistoric and early mediaeval burial grounds. It seems to be, for that reason, one of the most interesting archaeological places in Poland today - an exceptionally well-preserved and fine example of a sacred landscape marked by dozens of ancient and mediaeval burial mounds.

The proposed research activities will focus primarily on the remains of the cemeteries and settlements related to the community of the monumental barrows builders, inhabited the microregion of interest. In order to achieve the planned results of the presented project, a broad spectrum of archaeological, geo- and bioarchaeological, palaeoenvironmental, pedological and sedimentological, geographical, geological and geomorphological methods will be applied. It will encompass interdisciplinary study of the past landscape, in its both natural and cultural dimensions, performed by systematical investigation with the broad spectrum of research methods of archaeological study, as excavation, surface survey, air photographs, geomagnetic prospection, and paleoecological study, as malacology, paleobotany, phytoliths and Calcareous tufas analysis, geomorphology, geology and soil investigation. In effect, a picture of the transformations of the natural and cultural landscape will become available, that will give us an opportunity to interpret properly past reality of the monumental barrow builders time.

The extended field of observation, due to previous archaeological studies in area of interest, created opportunity to broaden the investigation to the cultural landscape within which the Neolithic cemeteries were located. That broad scope of archaeological observation, comprising the entire landscape with sacred space, marked by many extraordinary funeral features, and the settlement background of the Funnel Beaker culture communities, determines pioneering nature of the proposed project. Additionally, a widespread use of multidisciplinary methods and the adoption of an interdisciplinary approach to the recognition of the past natural and cultural landscape also determines innovative character of the proposed project. For that reason, planned complex investigation does not find easily the counterpart in the Polish studies on the Neolithic monumental cemeteries. Applying an interdisciplinary approach to investigation in the project is of fundamental importance for the appropriate reconstruction of palaeoenvironment and human impact on it, as well as for the reconstruction of land use changes resulting in the landscape alterations. Multi- and interdisciplinary approach adopted during the project realisation process will result in significant findings. They will broaden our knowledge about two dimensions of the Neolithic landscape in the Niemcza-Strzelin Hills on the Sudeten Foreland: those related to the social perspective of perception, being in and creation of landscape by the Funnel Beaker culture communities, as well as those related to the environmental conditions for the cultural landscape formation in the Neolithic.