

10 years

Editors:

Jaime Almansa Sánchez and Elena Papagiannopoulou



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INDEX

Editorial	1
Jaime Almansa-Sánchez and Elena Papagiannopoulou	
An interview with Tim Schadla-Hall	3
Tim Schadla-Hall and Jaime Almansa-Sánchez	
Points of You: Is archaeology becoming a bullshit job?	19
Jaime Almansa-Sánchez	
FORUM: Chatting about the future of public archaeology	29
Indigenous views on the future of public archaeology in Australia	31
Kellie Pollard, Claire Smith, Jasmine Willika, Vince Copley senior, Vincent Copley junior, Christopher Wilson, Emily Poelina-Hunter and Julie Ah Quee	
Dealing with a hangover of Public Archaeology: Scattered thoughts on the Italian 'Archeologia Pubblica'	53
Francesca Benetti	
For a solidary and activist [public] archaeology in the Amazon	59
Marcia Bezerra	
From present to future. An academic perspective of Public Archaeology in Spain	65
Alicia Castillo Mena	
Public Archaeology in Nepal: Now and in the next 10 years	73
Neel Kamal Chapagain	

Public Archaeology in 10 years? We will hopefully learn to share more, and better	75
Sarah De Nardi	
When divulgation reaches us	81
Jaime Delgado Rubio	
Archaeology in the public space in Nigeria	87
Caleb A. Folorunso	
Toward a Decolonial and Denationalized Public Archaeology	97
Rafael Greenberg	
Public Archaeology: the loss of innocence	101
Reuben Grima	
Archaeology for the public in Greece minus/plus ten	105
Stelios Lekakis	
“Let’s send millions of qualified public archaeology cadres to the new museums and field units!”	109
Gabriel Moshenska	
After the Pandemic: Reflections from an uncertain present on the futures of public archaeology	117
Alejandra Saladino and Leonardo Faryluk	
How do I see Public Archaeology in ten years in Peru	123
Daniel Saucedo Segami	

FORUM:

CHATTING ABOUT THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC ARCHAEOLOGY

With the tenth anniversary of the journal we wanted to take a deep breath and look into the future.

This forum consists of short pieces from colleagues around the world that discuss general and specific issues regarding public archaeology in the coming years. We asked for an open format, trying to grasp a fresher approach than the one usual academic writing permits.

As with other forums in the journal, we will keep it open from now on in case any of you want to participate too. It is a good occasion to debate the current and coming role of public archaeology and we hope this selection of papers helps to foster it.

We originally invited 50 people to participate. However, these difficult times made it difficult for some to do so. Nevertheless, we have a good set of contributions that will be of interest to you all.

Enjoy it (and participate if you feel you have something else to say).



Laugh now,
but one day
we'll be
in charge.

BONESY

**FORUM: Chatting about the future of public archaeology
FROM PRESENT TO FUTURE. AN ACADEMIC PERSPECTIVE
OF PUBLIC ARCHAEOLOGY IN SPAIN**

Alicia CASTILLO MENA

Ten years seems little time to assess the future of such a relatively young topic as Public Archaeology (PA) is, in special in Spain and in the academic arena. I divide my answer into two classic parts: present and future. By understanding the present (based on the past) we can try to guess (more or less) the future... Even if we think in the context of a pandemic, predicting the future of anything becomes really uncertain and reckless. If I may write, there is a high level of uncertainty and luck in getting it right.

From present...

Public archeology in Spain is hardly practiced today. The reasons for these circumstances are several.

First, there is a lack of "true" professionalization in Public Archaeology. It is a consequence of the fact that the majority of active archaeologists have not received specialized training in the topic. There are no official studies in Public Archaeology in Spain. Sometimes it is taught in a class, with luck there is a subject as part of a degree, and eventually it exists a specialized course. That is relatively reasonable if you consider that only three Spanish universities offer degrees in Archaeology. One opportunity for some training could be through a master degree in cultural or archaeological heritage. In spite of this kind of studies being common in Spain, there are few archaeologists willing to take them.

For example, my university offers degrees in History, Art History and Archaeology. My department is in charge of teaching Cultural Heritage Management, Archaeological Heritage Management and Museology in two of those three degrees. Consequently, the students of archaeology, at least, have heard some basic concepts

of Public Archaeology—in History and Archaeology. I am the coordinator of a master degree in Cultural Heritage Management and I can ascertain that only one or two archaeology students decide to study this kind of master every year, compared to the 5/6 students from History, the 10 students from Art History and the remaining students who come from different fields such as Architecture, Anthropology or other Social Sciences (Law, Economics, International Relations, Journalism, etc.).

My conclusion is that most archaeologists are not interested in this topic, at least, as a specialty. I have learnt it after 15 years of academic teaching and after having observed the profile of students, personalities and interests (around 1000 approx.). As it is clear, archaeology—as a discipline to interpret the past—requires many studies, time and specialization too. Thus, it is not easy to specialize in several topics. It is particularly so with these topics requiring such different types of knowledge. I haven't decided whether this conclusion is good or bad yet. I only know they were "my" students for over a decade, and consequently, they are part of the professional body of Archaeology today. I would like to specify that Museology has more tradition in my university, but archaeological heritage started to be taught in the 90s, only 10 or 15 years before I became a faculty member. The degree in archaeology started only in 2010. Consequently, if I may, I would sustain that today a little number of archaeologists are public archaeologists or consider this matter as a crucial knowledge for working in Archaeology.

Yet, the real problem is not the specific interest in it, but the assumption of this topic as a minor topic by most archaeologists. Probably it is because most of my academic colleagues ignore or do not address the topic in their classes as others such as Geology, Latin, etc. They don't explain these other topics either, but they cite them and present them as an important part of Archaeology. Nowadays, PA is not familiar for many of these academics.

I suppose that most people writing for this book consider that PA must be absolutely essential to work in Archaeology. It doesn't mean that PA is more important than other subjects in the field (for example, for a specialist in the Neolithic period), but it is always necessary when we work with Archaeology. We have to assume the social role of our profession and the importance to get some skills in Public Archaeology as necessary to be active in the archaeological profession.

On the other hand, a growing number of professionals know and consider Public Archaeology or Archaeological Heritage as necessary every day. Anyhow, I would divide the profession into four groups:

The 5%

They are public archaeologists and they are proud of it, write about these topics and try to apply and use Public Archaeology in their archaeological studies and fieldwork. With some exceptions, especially when they are women, with more or less modern and postmodern attitudes, they have a colonial and paternalistic position with lay people in general.

The 75%

They have heard about Public Archaeology, but they think it is something about the dissemination of Archaeological Heritage. They consider it to be not exactly archaeology and they believe they have always made this. I think this last thought is truth in part... but certainly, in a minimum part.

They have little or no training in Public Archaeology, but try to empathize with it. They have no specific resources in most of their works and they do not "have" time for studying it or making strategies or actions based on it.

Some (50 % of this group, maybe less), use their social networks or publish their work in a classic webpage/blog, etc. With more or less modern and postmodern attitudes; they also have a colonial and paternalistic position towards lay people in general.

Most of them are preventive archaeology workers or heritage officers/curators. These profiles are 90% of the professionals in Spain.

Another 5%

As specialists, they can offer a good visit of the site, to share or involve people, even to disseminate and divulgate via interviews with journalists or other mediatic presence. They sometimes give conferences or talks for lay people. They consider that a special training in this topic or Archaeological Heritage is not necessary. They are an elite that have close and exclusive circles, focused on impact journals, conferences or congresses

with their colleagues and don't have a lot of relationship with most of the other professionals in the country.

They consider the topic of PA as a vulgarization of the archaeological science.

Some of them fear the loss of importance of the scientific objectives in Archaeology related to the interpretation of the past in favor of heritage or the professional topics defended by public archaeologists.

With more or less modern and postmodern attitudes, they have a colonial and paternalistic position in general.

Most of them are academics.

The other 15%

There is a group of professionals who are completely part of the neoliberal culture. They have forgotten the basic principles of Humanism and have a productive business, which is the pure merchandising of archaeology. I think they have no problem with PA, if PA can be used to make money. The mercantilist use of PA is just another of the ways how they use Archaeology in general.

I think it is necessary to highlight this group, which will always exist, because they transmit a message about the objectives of our science, the profession or the social aspects that we could consider highly distorted and bad for the sustainability and quality of our profession.

...to future

Before continuing, I just wanted to clarify the previous percentages are only my opinion, based on my professional and personal experience... It is not statistical data of any sort. I am aware that it is a simplification of reality, but it is a good exercise to understand where we are and what we can expect in 10 years. I think there will be more hope than reality.

Despite the interest and increase of information about the subject, the consequences of this lack of professionalization in PA, the results of implementation of strategies of dissemination, community involvement etc. could be not that good and produce the

opposite effect in some cases: the rejection of archaeology by the local community, or vice versa, archaeologists without this professional knowledge may feel that engaging communities is a difficult task and try to avoid them.

If academia is constituted by that group of professionals who are hardly interested in or detached from Public Archaeology, the changes needed to increase and improve the quality of our Public archaeology will take longer than we would like. We need, at least, a change in the interests of academics or new archaeologists more sensitive to the topic in the academic context. If I insist in the paternalistic and colonial positions is because this is an urgent change too. To overcome this kind of visions and change them for others with more horizontal relationships and with gender perspectives, less nationalist and positivistic points of views are basic, and we are clearly in this process. Still, 10 years probably are not enough time to achieve it. These changes are part of my desires for the future of our profession in general.

Capacity building is absolutely necessary, but we can look for other important actions that Public Archaeology is positioned to conduct. Practice is more complex to reach and must be part of the near future.

One of those actions is informative transparency and constant dissemination of the practice of Archaeology. It constitutes a very important—but not easy—goal. For example, the academic sector has a lot of problems to apply this because it is very competitive and needs to manage information for publication. On the other hand, preventive archaeologists face conflicts of interest with the civil work sector, issues of security during the excavation, etc., when trying to show their works to the public. Finally, most projects around PA in Spain are related to heritagization processes, but, certainly, in this context, archaeology must be less a protagonist in favor of cultural heritage (CH) values, storytelling, etc. To work with the legal context and to create opportunities to improve the dissemination in general will be a challenge, and probably a usual activity in the following years.

Another interesting topic is our transversal actions and connections with public policies as an opportunity to improve. Our cooperation with the environmental sector is maybe paramount among

these activities. Parallel actions, between the rest of environmental professionals and us, are the present; the future needs to develop joint actions, as for example, for a topic like the Sustainable Development Goals (Agenda 2030), or circular economies and the establishment of management strategies from ecosystem methodologies in urban, peri urban and rural areas. Communication skills have to be further developed in order to achieve a better interaction with other social values and professionals who work on them.

The encouragement of a care network among archaeologists and other collectives or communities is very positive and probably will increase in the future.

The cultural sector is a good area to reinforce in our relationship with experts who have similar interests. As for Spain, as a consequence of the pandemic crisis, it has emerged a platform of professionals in CH where a group of archaeologists were involved. Although the specific results are pending, this was a good initiative.

The platform resulting from the archaeological ecosystem project has a slightly longer trajectory. Several meetings around Spain (Andalusia, Madrid, Cantabria) for two years (2019 and 2020) have allowed many archeologists to get to know each other better, to share their interests and to try to develop more democratic and ethical relationships in a harsh liberal sector. They took good steps in a long fight for improving our rights and duties, rethinking our ethics and archaeology in general.

Concerning our relationship with lay people, I would like to highlight that the Spanish government has signed the Council of Europe's Faro Convention in 2018. Yet our country needs to ratify and adapt it to the national and regional regulations of CH to implement it in better conditions. Probably, Public Archaeology will be benefitted and can improve and increase activities in relation to community involvement.

Finally, if we think about "my proposals of percentages" in ten years from now, I want to think that a 25% of Archaeology in Spain will be Public Archaeology. Most of it will come from the previous 75% group and, I hope, half of the professors of archaeology degrees will understand and teach the importance of PA at the same level that, for example, a good ethno-archaeological or carpological study.

I would like to think this would entail improvements in the professional sector. One improvement would be better salaries and stable jobs. This last topic is in the agenda of the important fights of public archaeologists today. I only introduce it to underline the value of high quality communication and activities in our socio-economic context. PA can help a lot in this way.

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Editors:

Jaime Almansa Sánchez & Elena Papagiannopoulou
Email: almansasanchez@gmail.com

Assistant production editor:

Alejandra Galmés Alba

Edited by:

Asociación JAS Arqueología
Website: www.jasarqueologia.es
Email: jasarqueologia@gmail.com
Address: Plaza de Mondariz, 6, 28029 - Madrid (Spain)

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