

10 years

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Online Journal in Public Archaeology

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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

HOW DO I SEE PUBLIC ARCHAEOLOGY IN TEN YEARS IN PERU

Daniel SAUCEDO SEGAMI

While thinking about how Public Archaeology would be in ten years from now in Peru, I just realized that it has been almost ten years since we held the first International Symposium of Public Archaeology in 2011 in Lima city. At that time, the concept of Public Archaeology was mostly unknown by local researchers, but there was an increasing interest, especially among young scholars. This interest contrasted with the few spaces to discuss the situation of archaeological remains in the present, their use and their relation to modern population. All these topics were considered outside of the idea of "academic archaeology", regarding them as just practical issues relate not worthy of deep analysis, and usually related to outreach activities like education or heritage management. Therefore, this Symposium became an important milestone to open a new world of possibilities for the archaeological field in Peru, especially after the creation of the Ministry of Culture in 2010.

Although Public Archaeology contributed then to the discussion of what to do with archaeological remains in the present, it also became obvious that it was just one of the perspectives where this discussion took place. Peru has been directing their policies about archaeological remains to make them "useful", especially through tourism. Initiatives from the government as well as the private sector have praised examples where archaeological projects have changed the image of abandoned sites full of dust and garbage to important beautiful tourist spots that can be appreciated while enjoying local cuisine and drinks on expensive restaurants built near them. By making archaeological sites become part of tourist routes, they became important economic assets, boosting local economies and improving the quality of life of neighborhood communities. Archaeologists have become very active in these activities, usually having wide coverage from local media about new

discoveries without being afraid of designating them with superlatives ("the oldest", "the richest", etc.) that may mislead the actual information obtained through research.

Now in 2020, we can perceive a more critical approach influenced not only by Public Archaeology, but also by the fields of Historical Archaeology, Feminist Archaeology, and Cultural Anthropology, mainly from a postmodern perspective. In these fields, the economic value of archaeological remains is contested while looking for new ways of understanding the past and connecting it to the present. Moreover, the access to more information from sources like Internet have helped the gathering of social actors avid to participate in the discussion of what should be considered heritage or not, how it should be managed and who should be in charge of this management. This Public is becoming increasingly aware that defining something as cultural heritage should be a shared enterprise among several actors and not just specialists. They are even defying the position of archaeologists as stakeholders of archaeological remains, making it obvious that it is a right and a duty of any citizen of the country to protect and study these remains.

From this context, how can we see Public Archaeology in ten years from now? I believe its aim to understand the relationship between archaeological remains and the Public will be more popular than now, especially because defining, managing and using these remains give the Public a chance to become visible in a society that usually makes invisible those who did not have the opportunity to receive superior education. Challenging the privileged position of archaeologists towards interpreting and managing these remains is becoming an important topic discussed now in social media, and it is reaching a larger audience every year. The Public is no longer a passive actor in this context, and it will demand that archaeological remains fit its needs and interests. It is yet to be seen, though, if this power relation will become a new space to encourage a horizontal relationship between archaeologists and other stakeholders, or if it would become a conflictive space between these social actors to control archaeological remains.

I also believe that Public Archaeology is increasingly changing with new information from developing countries like those in Latin America, becoming something different from what it used to be in

developed countries like UK, the European Union and USA. Previous attempts to work with the Public in this region developed along history, usually related to political discussion, like the Latin American Social Archaeology of the sixties. This initiative was based on an antiimperialist agenda over the study of archaeological remains in this region, encouraging local archaeologist to become more active in repelling interpretations that come from abroad and developing their own ideas about past societies. In a region where politics are extremely important in everyday life, Public Archaeology faces the challenge of keeping a multivocal perspective about the past and the present not determined by political agendas.

The economic differences in these countries and how they influence the access to information, as well as to the decision-making of cultural heritage, have prioritized a scientific over other discourses about the past. By studying and identifying other ways to relate to these remains, Public Archaeology is contributing to add other perspectives that may not rely on scientific facts to understand these remains. In this sense, Public Archaeology in Latin America is becoming an important tool to decolonize history of local people and give value to their own beliefs. I believe the main role of Public Archaeology in the next decade will be to help local people rediscover by themselves their roots in the past.

Finally, Public Archaeologists in Latin America still have many challenges to face to make this field relevant in an environment where other fields -like Cultural Resource Management and Tourism- are gaining more adepts to make archaeological remains useful in a free-market economy. For instance, the main problem is language. Public Archaeology would never become popular in this region until more publications are made in Spanish and they reach a wider public. I think that the next ten years will become the boom for Spanish publications in this field, giving this field a whole new environment to be reevaluated and redesigned.

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