

10 years

Editors:

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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

PUBLIC ARCHAEOLOGY IN 10 YEARS? WE WILL HOPEFULLY LEARN TO SHARE MORE, AND BETTER

Sarah DE NARDI

Do we need a roadmap to the future? Or do we 'wing it', making it up as we go along? Big questions, but never more important than now, in this current time of uncertainty.

Let's start small, and refocus the question on our professional and scholarly area of interest and activities. While the future of the world of work certainly looks different – *will robots do digging, recording and interpretation work in 2030?*– I think that the key to prepare suitable strategies for going forward is to be clear about our purpose(s). For what, and for whom, are we and will we be doing research and knowledge sharing? With whom will we operate and work in our capacity as scholars, practitioners, teachers? Even asking why *do* archaeology may seem straightforward now, but it isn't. At least, it shouldn't be.

I suppose we need to think about what is really meaningful to us, and to the communities and social groups we work within. Again, we think of the social aspect of what we are trying to accomplish. A good gauge to work against, then, may be a redrawing of the disciplinary boundaries to become more porous, ever more relevant to the world outside academia and the museum. A helpful notion to pin down on our operational roadmap may be cultural wellbeing. Cultural wellbeing has been defined as "the vitality that communities and individuals enjoy through participation in recreation, creative and cultural activities [and] the freedom to retain, interpret and express their arts, history, heritage and traditions' (Ministry for Culture and Heritage NZ, 2017). There is already research on the positive impacts of archaeology and heritage on key wellbeing indicators (see for instance Sayer 2015; Pennington et al. 2019). This is good news! We want to generate more of this cultural wellbeing in order to share it around, to branch out, to

share good practice if something we are doing works well. And we also want something that is going to be socially useful, and that responds to frameworks like the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals - especially Goal 4 (Quality Education), 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) (UN, 2018).

Beside the enjoyment of culturally meaningful activities and things, archaeology and heritage can do actual practical good in the community, and beyond. Arguably, if suitably conceptualised and actualised, the arts and cultural heritage engagements can offer opportunities to develop an extraordinary range of transferable skills. With some targeted planning, thought and preparation, activities and processes that we devise and facilitate may help draw communities together in establishing meaningful links to pasts and place. Collaborative projects drawing on the processes of archaeology and heritage, perhaps embedded in fluid ways within indigenous and local arts practice and storytelling, can positively impact physical and mental wellbeing, whether through fieldwork, co-curation of exhibitions, and lifelong learning.

A caveat is in order. We need to do this the right way—in ways that are meaningful and useful to the communities we lift up and engage with, not to us and our academic promotion portfolios or metrics fetishism. Consider this: even the expression ‘the right way’ is limiting. Why one way? We need to go multiple ways, by trial and error, to find the suitable balance between passion and need, between format and activism. This invitation to collaborate, to open up, to welcome other voices to the conversation, is not about ticking outreach or the ever fashionable university ‘impact’ boxes. I think the nurturing and transformative potential of archaeology and heritage can only be tapped if archaeologists embrace challenges: using creative arts to express archaeological findings, decolonising modes of knowing the world, accepting that diverse publics have agency as co-creators and co-curators of knowledge and interpretation. Ultimately, this commitment to inclusion entails the acknowledgment of the centrality of co-creation and co-production as an integral and vital aspect of the discipline.

Moreover, exploring creativity promotes wellbeing and reinforces a sense of community (McKay, 2014). The rapport built

through engagement with others, with materialities, with stories and with places may provide a sense of accomplishment for communities, boosting active citizenship and facilitating the active and empowering inclusion of migrant communities.

In an increasingly connected world, the disciplines and fields of research entangled in the archaeology-heritage nexus will need to provide a workable space for a range of other participants to showcase and share their online and offline knowledge-making methodologies. The archaeological engagement project will offer space for an ever more diverse community of creative grassroots and activist practices. The underpinning philosophy should be based on a community of practice model which importantly acknowledges the need to decolonise the ways in which individuals, communities and organisations engage in their creative practices. The archaeological community should not only diversify and become less structurally bounded by aspects of role and income, but it should seek out, build on and celebrate grassroots methodologies and ways of knowing.

I argue that we would need to expand definitions of expertise and competency. To do this, we should work to enhance social learning and democratise contribution to knowledge-building. The learning activities we could develop may come in the form of online learning resources and methodologies that apply outside the halls of the university to benefit the wider community. A future-fit framework for engaged learning and active citizenship (Ryan and Tilbury, 2013) would have to complement research and engagement. Why? Activist and future-fit pedagogies are central to the development of a more inclusive archaeology that's fit for purpose, as they actively decolonise education. This synergy of approaches may be a way to deconstruct dominant Western ontological frames to foreground more diverse experiences and extend inter-cultural understanding.

Cultural wellbeing, activist pedagogies, multivocal production. Using these ideas for communicating research and promoting engagement in archaeology could enable all interested parties to think and work using globally-sensitive frames and methods. What we should privilege is a suite of methodologies of storytelling (and tangible processes) that can be co-created, that are meaningful to non-professionals, that can expand local capacity and enable

upskilling. These initiatives must be accessible and free to avocational users, activists, humanitarian actors and communities, and they should be dynamic, easy to replicate and adapt in many ways depending on cultural context, language and interest.

This is what I envision and what I am passionately working towards in the collaborative **Museum of Community Creativity (MOCC)** project. This is a initiative currently in its inception and funding scoping phase, developed alongside artist and education academic Karin Mackay of Western Sydney University and colleagues in the not-for-profit partner organisation SydWest, Western Sydney's social enterprise and migration services hub. The first iteration of the MOCC project is an emerging web portal, designed to invite straightforward collaborative action and built on proactive sharing and co-production, mentorship and feedback. The project seeks to be truly inclusive of efforts across the board: from academics to artists and human rights advocates. A dynamic on-line showcase that enables ideas and interests to emerge, free of charge to the community and activists. Once the portal is up and running, it will branch out well beyond Western Sydney and Australia. The journey is multiple, as are the agencies we hope to attract and involve. In line with future-fit archaeologies, we need to grow this as part of a network of endeavours to open up practice and knowledge, together with an ever more diverse public. This needs to be inserted in the ethics of tomorrow, shaped by the agency and vision of grassroots community groups, advocates and humanitarian and artistic voices that can bring more insight and new breadth of meanings to our disciplines. Everyone is a storyteller in this framework. Everyone is meaningful. Watch this space!

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