



Archaeology and Public Benefit: moving the debate forward

EAC Symposium, Prague, Czech Republic, 5-7 March 2020

CONCEPT NOTE

The provision of public benefit through archaeology has long been a focus for EAC, drawing on previous symposia in Paris (2010), Lisbon (2015) and Athens (2017) within the frameworks of both the Valetta and Faro Conventions. This work has provided us with the rationale, and the discussions have been wide-ranging in both scope and subject matter. Now we need to move the debate forward.

Development-led archaeology is at risk of being seen as a negative value attached to the development which triggers it than a positive benefit. We need to create a much stronger case for its continued support. This case needs to prove it creates public value in terms of tangible benefits to state, public, developer and archaeologist. Having demonstrated this proof, we need to try to innovate the way archaeology is conducted to ensure that these benefits become 'operationalized' through standard procedures. EAC members will have received the survey on 'Making the Case for Development-led Archaeology', circulated in August 2019. This will contribute towards the Symposium in 2020, which takes as its theme Archaeology and Public Benefit. As outlined in the Valletta Convention (Article 9) the public must be the key beneficiaries of archaeological work and the theoretical concept of public benefit has become well recognised across our profession but there is still some way to go to fully understand and maximise its potential.

Public benefit should be defined by the public (in all its forms) and we should engage in a two-way process to ensure archaeological work is seen as as a socially inclusive legacy rather than merely a stage in the planning process. When undertaken with widespread participation and consultation at all stages, archaeology has the capacity to fundamentally alter perceptions of the past and present. Decisions made with full consideration of the different values of all stakeholders will lead to better understanding of the value of archaeology and, ultimately, lead to enhanced protection for cultural heritage. The challenge now is to positively shape the future and embed the concept of public benefit into our practice; from project inception through design and implementation to dissemination.

Themes under consideration at the 2020 Symposium within the umbrella of public benefit are wide-ranging and could include social cohesion and place making, wellbeing, the importance of local or regional values, as well as the acknowledgment of particular artistic or cultural treasures. We should also consider current political debates, fluid populations, social media and the need to engage with new communities on a participatory level. The educational benefits from archaeology may be simpler to define but equally difficult to assess and traditional methods of dissemination are inappropriate for a general audience. Technological innovation introduces new audiences to archaeology and encourages digital participation.



The economic impact of development-led archaeology has not been well researched although it may be significant. We should also consider whether public benefit can provide additional value to developers, particularly involving publicly-funded projects, and if so, how we can achieve this within existing legal frameworks. Ultimately we need to get to a position from where we can progress this concept on a practical level.

The Symposium will address the strategic and practical implications of the following themes:

- Public benefit from development-led archaeology
- Opportunities and challenges of public benefit provision
- Proposals and Mechanisms for measuring aspects of public benefit (with presumed emphasis on economic benefit)

In all sessions papers presenting case studies within a more general context of archaeological heritage management are particularly encouraged, to showcase current considerations of public benefit from across Europe.

Questions that we would like to explore include, but are not limited to:

- How has the local aspect to development been reflected in the public benefit?
- Are there examples where other cultural aspects (ecology, social or political history) of a development site/locality were combined with archaeology?
- Are there examples of inclusive participation in both the project design and implementation stages?
- Are there examples of successful inclusive engagement with more diverse audiences?
- Is it possible to provide details of the financial implications of public benefit provision?
- Can legal frameworks specifically require public benefit from archaeology? Are there specific requirements of publicly-funded projects?
- What are the particular challenges associated with provision of public benefit within the development-led sector?
- How can we manage any conflict that may arise through participation? Have opposing debates occurred between fellow archaeologists?
- Do existing networks (local museums, heritage professionals etc) increase participation? Or perhaps do they act as a barrier for non-traditional audiences?
- Are there existing ways that archaeologists can measure public benefit (in all its forms)? Should we interpret public benefit in any other ways?
- Do some aspects of archaeology offer more public benefit than others (specific chronologies, artefacts, standing monuments etc)? How can we challenge this?
- Are there some aspects of public benefit that are largely unmeasurable?

Following discussions we will ideally have formulated a series of best practice examples, with specific case studies leading towards evaluation of social impact. The most searching question might be: 'are we prepared to cede control over some aspects of archaeological projects in order to facilitate sustainable, meaningful public benefit?'