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Brave new worlds

Dutch archaeology in search of inspiration abroad

From October 2020 till January 2021, an international investigation was carried out aimed at finding inspirations abroad for a number of issues encountered in post-Valletta archaeological heritage management in the Netherlands (Knoop et al. 2021). It was commissioned by the Dutch National Heritage Agency RCE in response to concerns raised by Parliament. In this paper, we discuss some of the themes which were encountered while studying the “archeoregimes” in England, Sweden, Denmark, Flanders, and Rhineland.

Introduction

Following the implementation of the Valletta Convention (Council of Europe 1992), Dutch lawmakers adopted a decentralized system of archaeological heritage management. This implies that local authorities decide on the execution of archaeological research in the context of building and infrastructural projects, following the “developer pays” principle with most of the research carried out by a private sector contractor (Van den Dries 2019). Since 2016, an all-encompassing Heritage Act has regulated the “archaeological market” through a quality assurance system using private certification. The rules and regulations were set and kept up by a private body in which all stakeholders (contractors, polluters/planners, academia and government) are represented. Already in 2019, Parliament alerted the administration of some concerns regarding the execution of archaeological heritage management.

The issues raised by Parliament concern: knowledge gain, public benefits, and municipal capacity. First of all, reports on developer-led archaeological investigations are felt not always to be useful in subsequent academic research. Knowledge gain in contract archaeology, in other words, remains suboptimal. Secondly, the results of archaeological rescue excavations are not easily accessible to a wider audience. Results tend to be confined to the realm of contractor-commissioner transactions, with little regard for their significance for neighbourhoods or local communities. Thirdly, decentralized heritage governance on a municipal level is under stress for lacking capacity. Moreover, the new planning legislation will add to the caseload. Based on these issues, Parliament motioned for “an international

comparison with a view to learning from alternative approaches”.

The National Heritage Agency framed the request for international comparisons in terms of the Valletta Convention principles, briefing our research as an inquiry into the effects, abroad, of (i) in situ preservation policy and (ii) the information gain resulting from the boom in archaeological interventions since the ratification of the Valletta principles with regard both to academia and public access and use. As researchers we added funding as a separate category. The four themes will be discussed in the following.

Our survey started with desk research of the regimes (legislation, practice, reflection) in five neighbouring countries. A series of in-depth interviews with half a dozen stakeholders in each region allowed for an assessment of their working. A group of international reviewers provided external validation of what these regional “archeoregimes” were. The outcome was then validated by representatives of the Dutch professional community.

In situ preservation

In situ preservation is the aim which lies at the core of all archaeological heritage management systems that are based on the many charters and conventions drawn up during the second half of the 20th century (e.g., UNESCO, Council of Europe). Ever since the Venice Charter of 1964, conservation as well as the notion of authenticity have dominated the mainstream discourse. Generations of heritage managers have been trained to work with the directive of in situ preservation

as the first option (Gregory & Matthiesen 2012). Frameworks for the future of heritage management, like the Cultural Heritage Strategy for the 21st century of the Council of Europe, also encompass the overall aim of preservation. The Dutch government takes it very seriously as the main objective of archaeological heritage management and monitors its success rate closely (RCE 2020).

In the regions we surveyed, however, in situ preservation is only a minor discussion topic. Quantifying and evaluating preservation policies is not a practice we found elsewhere. Assessments of the policies' successes in various countries seem to run along parallel lines. Many of our interviewees noted that the majority of non-registered sites discovered during development are not preserved in situ. In Denmark this situation has been ascribed to the late phase in which archaeological heritage management is integrated into the planning process; in Flanders, it is connected to the fact that most of the land is held in private property. In England it was mentioned that the cost of relocating construction is much higher than the funding of the necessary archaeological interventions. In all surveyed countries, policies relating to safeguarding non-registered sites are not perceived as very successful. It makes a huge difference whether sites are previously known or not for their chance of survival. Whereas in situ preservation is the main objective of archaeological heritage management in the Valletta Convention, we found it remarkable to find that it is not a topic of discussion abroad, in stark contrast to the situation in the Netherlands.

A second observation regards the directive, in various countries, of considering in situ preservation as the first option. Some English colleagues stated that whilst it may be the first option, it is not always the best option. Among the reasons given is the fact that preservation may not be effective in some cases, or that priority is given to societal benefits and academic research (see also Anderson et al. 2014; Willems 2012). In this discussion, a shift may be noted in the justification of the policy relating to the criticised notion of "authenticity" and the wish for increased societal value. Williams for instance states that "The future of archaeology must lie in demonstrating it has relevance to twenty-first century communities." (Williams 2015: 39).

Furthermore, we noted a discussion on the contribution to in situ preservation with the use of innovative techniques in the fields of remote sensing (Denmark, Flanders) and with monitoring programmes targeting urban deposits (England). We reported these as important inspirational considerations for Dutch archaeology.

Scientific progress

The volume of and manner in which development-led archaeology contributes to scientific progress is a much debated topic in the countries we examined. Formerly the exclusive domain of academia, performance by commercial contractors in archaeological work has been critically followed by academia right from the start. Formal assessments are independent from national choices for either a commercial or a state-led system (Anderson et al. 2010). In most surveyed countries, placing the execution of the work at a regional, i.e. supramunicipal, level is perceived as a critical success factor for carrying out post-excavation, synthetic studies. It leaves room for combining the complexity of urban archaeology with a deeper understanding of the region. In the Netherlands, all developer-led archaeology is organized at a municipal level based on its integration into planning. In Scandinavian countries, however, we see that a similar integration of archaeology into municipal planning has not interfered with analysing archaeology at a higher, regional level, avoiding too much fragmentation (Bazelmans 2012).

In our survey, we noted a wide range of diverging governmental measures aimed at improving scientific outputs of the various archaeological regimes. The most positive assessments were heard in Sweden. There the legal introduction of the "Polluter-Pays" principle dates from 1942, well before any other European country. It may well be the case that the "maturing" of the system plays a role here. Quite a number of Swedish arrangements stand out internationally. First of all, both research synthesis and public outreach have (also) been brought under developer funding, leading to a triple output of commissioned projects. To wit: a technical report, an academic publication, and output aimed at the general public. Moreover, briefs explicitly state qualitative requirements. Because of this framework, PhDs are highly appreciated in the commercial practice as they

are considered money-makers, indispensable for winning tenders. A third provision is the research school GRASCA (GRADuate School in Contract Archaeology), founded in 2015. It bridges the gap between development-led archaeology and academia. The researchers of GRASCA (PhDs), who are employed with archaeological companies, focus their research on innovation, enhancing the impact of developer-funded archaeology.

In the countries we researched, much attention during the last decades has been paid to implementing archaeology into planning and to professionalising a range of organisational conditions needed for running businesses. The impression is that archaeological regimes are highly dynamic, be it at different paces and along various lines (Knoop et al. 2021, Annexes A and D). A convergence, however, is seen in a more recent trend which focuses on *significant* knowledge gain, creating a so-called “knowledge ecology” (England) based on cooperation between companies, museums and universities. A quest for relevance seems to resonate in all countries. Examples are the National Strategies of Denmark, the government fund for archaeological synthesis in Flanders, and structural cooperation with academia in the Rhineland. Governments are thus seen to step in to enhance the contribution of development-led practices to scientific progress.

For the Dutch situation it has become clear that the system designed for development-led archaeology shows some gaps (Knoop et al. 2020). It is focussed on the seamless integration of archaeological heritage management into planning and on the organisation and technical execution of archaeological interventions that go with it. In order to perform according to the main aims (scientific progress and dissemination) stated in the Heritage Act, we advised to arrange for additional provisions regarding the knowledge production.

Dissemination and societal value

As with preservation in situ, other primary Valletta objectives also fail to figure prominently in current thinking about the role and position of archaeology in the regions we studied. Although most of the Valletta Convention’s individual principles are well institutionalised, its main goal seems neglected: “To protect the European archaeological heritage as a

source of European collective memory and as an instrument for historical and scientific study”. In every country, interviewees observed that visibility of archaeology for the public was lacking (e.g., the recent manifesto by the Society of Antiquaries of London 2020). All acknowledge a need for further incorporating and addressing public benefits and public participation. Particularly in relation to development-led archaeology, they stress that current practice should produce a broader public benefit besides knowledge: the second and third domain of the Council of Europe’s Cultural Heritage Strategy for the 21st century regard the social and developmental goals. The Convention’s Article 9, on the dissemination of research results and capitalizing archaeology’s societal value, hardly receives attention in national regulations, a fact already noticed by the European Archaeological Consilium (Olivier and Van Lindt 2014).

Interestingly, many interviewees reported a high interest in archaeology among members of the public. This observation is supported by a representative public survey carried out in nine European countries, including England, Sweden, the Netherlands and Germany (e.g. Marx, Nurra and Rossenbach 2017; Kajda et al. 2018). In addition, among the general European public, there is not only genuine interest in archaeology but also a broad support base for it (e.g. Marx, Nurra and Rossenbach 2017; Kajda et al. 2018).

Some archaeological practices go further than public outreach and dissemination. They relate to participation and using archaeology for wellbeing goals, while sometimes including people in decision making processes. In two of the countries we surveyed, the leading perspective on archaeology is taken by a broader societal discourse, including democratisation and localism. This is the case in England and Sweden, where societal value and public benefit take centre stage. It is interesting and inspiring to see how, in these two countries, articulating public value has even been made a prerequisite for any archaeological work (Arnberg and Gruber 2014; Belford 2020; Trow 2018). Explicit statements of public benefits are mandatory, and investigations must be proven significant before they can be carried out. Such approaches clearly lean towards the principles of the Faro Framework Convention (on the role of heritage for society, Council of Europe 2005), without however explicitly referring to it. In fact, even when explicitly asked, only a few of our

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interviewees showed an awareness of this latest Council of Europe heritage convention and its implications for archaeology.

Should “Faro” notions be adopted (out of all five countries only Flanders has currently signed it), they will surely impact systems at the level of their guiding principles. Seen from a Dutch perspective, this may well constitute a paradigm shift, as currently archaeological heritage assets still form the focal point. The number of participatory practices is increasing but they are primarily a goal and not yet an instrument for achieving economic or social goals (Van Londen, Van den Dries and Landskroon 2021). Moreover, the broader discussion on accessibility and inclusiveness in archaeology has only just started. These issues, rife with postcolonial challenges, seem delicate. But once archaeology and participation enter the realm of local, social and economic development, they become a matter of ethics. Discussing who is included and who is not, who is benefitting and who is not, will become unavoidable.

To sum up our inventory of inspiring practices regarding the social benefits and value in the archeoregimes studied, we noticed four main developments: 1. (basic) dissemination and outreach are brought under the “Polluter Pays” principle (Sweden, Denmark); 2. social benefits can be demanded by local authorities (England); 3. dissemination and participatory usage will be funded by national authorities, via a tendering system (Flanders); 4. there is a consistent outreach for including metal detectorists (Flanders, England, Rhineland, Denmark).

Funding

Across the regions surveyed, we found different arrangements that cover the gap between what is felt as needed and what is made available under each region’s interpretation of the Valletta principles. Several instruments are put into place for offering financial relief to planners, including bonuses (Sweden) and compensation (Sweden, Flanders, Rhineland). Sometimes dissemination is stimulated by support from charities (England, Rhineland), direct government funding (Flanders), or legal provisions (Sweden). Underlying most archeoregimes, however, is a narrow reading of the Valletta financial provision. Its Article 6 not only covers rescue excavations and in situ

preservation; it also addresses developer funding in addition to establishing a more general role of governments in assuring adequate finances.

In our analysis we have attributed the divergence in financial arrangements to different normative considerations. We have discerned four positions: market (Polluter Pays), society (public good), system (government safety net) and private initiative (charity). When a country focuses on separating responsibilities, relying on the power of market forces, the “Polluter Pays” principle will appear the main variable to obtain a balance. Depending on the extent to which the polluter is part of the archeoregime’s decision making, the boundaries of what is covered by developer funding are negotiated (whether or not to include synthetic study, outreach etc., sometimes with compensations). When heritage, and dealing with it, are (also) considered a public good, however, direct government funding is appreciated in its own right – this is mainly the case in Denmark. It is then seen in surplus of developer-funding, contributing to the creation of societal significance (funds for synthesis in Flanders; PhD programmes and specialized labs in Rhineland). A third position, easy to combine with the previous ones, is to regard the role of government as a safety net, e.g. in cases of erosion or costs in excess of what is reasonable (Germany: fair and appropriate). Lastly, in some regions recourse is made to funding by third parties like private foundations or charities to target specific areas (participation, PhDs).

In conclusion, we were left with the impression of a broad array of funding measures for bridging a few gaps in the improved protection of the archaeological heritage. They do not need to be hefty in order to “provide oxygen” to the system, in the words of one of our interviewees.

Concluding remarks

Reflecting on an intensive confrontation with alternative archeoregimes present in the countries “just around the corner” (for which see our full report, Knoop et al. 2021), our team was struck by the growing role of societal significance. In addition to a classical position where the intrinsic value to archaeology is underlined, which drives most academic research, archaeology is now increasingly also seen as representing values relating to identity and collective

memory. The living environment and planning then form a platform for shared narratives. In some areas and contexts, however, social benefits of archaeological practices and their significance for society are now beginning to take centre stage. Across the regions surveyed, we noticed shifts between these positions, mostly from the first two towards the third.

Inevitably, questions arise with regard to both the purpose and the process: Who's to decide? Who will be heard? These questions require an agenda for a new

ethos and action (Dutch: *handelingskader*) in which the goals of the Valletta principles deserve new scrutiny, aligned with those from the Faro Convention. What was it, in the time leading up to Valetta, that we tried to achieve by improving the protection of our archaeological assets? And how relevant is that now, or does that have to be, to society as a whole in order to be successful?

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