

One Man's Trash is Another Man's Treasure: multiple contributions of Archaeological Heritage

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Introduction

This is the title of an exciting exhibition (Rotterdam and Williamsburg Virginia, 1996) about the recycling of European products in the totally different setting of the New World. Native Americans gave these products or better discarded products (such as discarded pottery fragments which were turned into jewellery e.g.) in the 17th century new functions and meanings. This process can in some way be compared with the new functions and meanings given to archaeological (and in general heritage) features studied, preserved and exhibited from previous societies in the present-day world. Heritage conservation is in fact in a lot of cases about reusing elements from a previous or former culture.

In the past generally considered as a nuisance, archaeological remains are today more and more considered as an asset/as a resource notwithstanding the cost involved in taking care of them. Frequently indeed these archaeological remains in a way consist of trash or trash-related structures (household refuse dumps, cesspits, wells, sewers, foundations...).

This changing attitude is I believe in itself a result of the changing approach by archaeologists which are nowadays more and more looking for 'meanings' and less for the objects themselves. Archaeology is notwithstanding this in the media still mainly considered as 'finding lost objects'. Archaeologists are still too often considered as a kind of professional people dealing with since long lost objects: the so-to-speak 'holy Antony of Padua' of our society. Getting rid of the link archaeology- and the quest for objects is indeed a necessity.

Meanings offer indeed a lot more opportunities for further (re)use of these structures **in situ** but also **ex situ** in education, lifelong learning, public outreach, providing leisure activity, tourism, research, town planning,...

This contribution will seek to explore the specificity and the number of contributions to society from heritage conservation of especially archaeological remains. By putting the focus on archaeological remains I will try to extrapolate the viewpoints of Donovan Rypkema to this type of heritage, hoping to be able to demonstrate that what can be said of built heritage in some way also holds true for archaeological heritage in particular taking into account the specificity of archaeological features.

I'll consider the three levels of heritage conservation's contribution discussed by Donovan Rypkema:

- impact on local economy
- usefulness as public policy tool
- contributor to sustainable development.

Impact on local economy

1. **Reusing archaeological heritage** in a similar way to reusing built heritage is in most cases completely **impossible due to the specific nature of archaeological heritage**. You can't reuse in situ neither the 14th century merchant ship found during harbour works in Antwerp e.g. (it is not a ship anymore). nor the archaeological remains from Bronze Age burial mounds detected in the Belgian sandy region to give only two examples. The one on one relationship between archaeological structure and reuse which

can be frequently observed with built heritage and reuse is exceptional or nearly non-existent. However some reuse is possible and thinkable.

Distinction can be made between two cases: public space versus private space. First the private space.

Where such type of **in situ** reuse by individuals/in a non-public situation is possible the archaeological heritage concerned resembles indeed built heritage and is in fact a below-ground extension of a formerly above-ground structure: it is indeed possible to reuse formerly lost medieval cellars, a medieval or even Roman well in private house. I know even of a lost medieval or early modern brick cesspit recycled as an underground storeroom for wine. I could also imagine the reuse of underground mineshafts for growing mushrooms, storing liquids,... Here again the archaeological structure can in fact be classified as a below-ground building. I have also observed situations where huge brick foundations of 18th century buildings in Ostend e.g. were (partly) recycled as support for the foundations for the new building. The cutting away of them would be very costly and senseless. In this case the old brick foundations were reused as a starting point to construct a new building and are in fact reused as such.

In these cases the contributions mentioned for built heritage can be extended to archaeological heritage (household income, property values), keeping in mind that these cases represent only a small – I would nearly qualify it as marginal - fraction (a few %) of the existing archaeological heritage present in a region.

Another type of reuse is the conservation of archaeological **structures in situ in the public** domain such as musea, underground car parks, hotels ...like the medieval castle (le Donjon de Philippe August) preserved in the Louvre museum, the medieval town wall integrated in the museum of medieval Stockholm, the Roman structures integrated in a below ground car park in Cahors (France), medieval archaeological structures integrated in hotels a.o. in Bruges The museum or the other infrastructural work is built around the archaeological remains.

Another type of reuse has been applied in the archaeological reconstruction at Raversijde, where all the during the archaeological research gathered bricks were reused in the visible parts of the reconstruction. Instead of making new 'handmade' bricks it was decided to reuse the ones that were found during the archaeological research. This was an exceptional coincidence that shows that also such type of reuse is possible.

The optimal example of reuse of archaeological structures in situ is the 'reuse' of underwater archaeological heritage as a tourist attraction in underwater heritage trails. The heritage is left as it is found in situ on the sea- or riverbed or is in some cases regrouped and is under control to be visited by divers. In this situation only a small investment is needed to control and monitor the visits and the heritage. Such type of reuse is however only available for a small fraction of the population (divers).

Indeed in these situations household income, property values, center city revitalization, heritage tourism, small business incubation can all be at play. This type of reuse is also rather exceptional but worldwide applied.

2. Carrying out archaeological research/excavations can in fact be considered as a **heritage conservation** act **ex situ** and as such all the mentioned contributions for heritage conservation are also at play.

Archaeological heritage has an important particularity: it has to be looked for, studied and analysed as it is in general not visible. It is not just available like built heritage is. Just the fact that the archaeological heritage has to be looked for and studied by archaeologists and other scientists who preferable are acquainted with the regional archaeological features, has already through job creation an impact on local economy.

It frequently comes by surprise and as a consequence plans sometimes have to be changed such as was the case in the Louvre museum. Nobody had anticipated that the 16th century townwall was that well preserved. A trial excavation was located on a spot where the townwall was completely demolished in the past.

On another level: the results of the archaeological excavations are translated into newspaper articles, brochures, photographs, visitor guides, websites, books, exhibitions, conferences, television programmes,...with these it is clear that the same aspects are at work. When these exhibitions are furthermore permanently integrated into musea/visitor centres: heritage tourism enters the scene and I agree is only the top of the iceberg of the contributions.

Archaeology has as a strength a great potential to detect and unravel new and unheard stories which are potentially interesting in the interaction with the public. It provides also new content for musea, visitor's centres. In a time when more and more people have more and more leisure time to spend, this is an important factor.

The aspects related to ex situ are much more interesting as they are more widely applicable I guess than the effective reuse as mentioned before in the private and public space.

The five major measurables of economic impact of heritage conservation mentioned by Donovan Rypkema can be applied to archaeological heritage: **jobs and household income, heritage tourism and small business incubation and less important center city revitalization and property values.**

To apply these measurables to archaeological heritage is however much more difficult (in opposition to the possibility to apply this to nearly every item of built heritage) and can only be the case in specific situations as indicated above. So I'm glad to come to the conclusion that it is a yes, but must admit to a far lesser extent than with built heritage.

It would be useful to make a list of the existing examples of in situ reuse of archaeological features as well in the private as in the public sphere as a guide of good practice that could inspire others. In most cases one doesn't even think of the possibility e.g. recycling a lost cesspit as a storeroom for wine.

The usefulness as a public policy tool

What is developed by Donovan Rypkema in relation to heritage conservation of built heritage under this heading can be entirely applied as well to conservation of archaeological heritage. Archaeology also helps a town keeping its status of 'someplace' and not degrading to 'anyplace' and even worse to 'no place' at all and thus **mitigates cultural globalization.** A good example of this is given by the city of Stockholm where a 1628 Swedish warship (the 'Vasa') raised from the water in the sixties of the previous century is a must for the tourist to visit. You can't have seen Stockholm if you didn't see the Vasa.

Archaeological heritage as a major contributor to a sustainable development strategy

It cannot be applied as explained in relation to built heritage. Archaeology can, I believe, contribute in another way.

Reusing elements of the **spatial organisation** of the past at a macro- or mesoscale can be very valuable and is referring to the long term. Knowledge of the former spatial organisation contributes in avoiding surprises/negative effects for present-day projects: avoiding e.g. construction of buildings above former ditches which brings about a lot of unforeseen additional costs (cultural centre in Aalst built on the 13th century town ditch: as a result additional costs for pumping resulting in damage for the buildings in the immediate neighbourhood, avoiding constructing cellars in areas with impressive brick foundations, avoiding cutting roads through former burial grounds,...

As the just mentioned examples show they mainly deal with avoiding negative effects. Knowledge of the archaeological past helps to give a certain activity or plan the best possible location. Reusing former spatial organisation features avoids additional costs and makes maximally use of embodied energy: e.g. recycling a former railway-track as a cycling-track is indeed a sustainable solution: a lot of the preparatory work (filling in depressions, cutting away slopes,...has all been done in the past). It is much better than

taking this zone out of the landscape to be used for housing e.g. and making the cycling-track elsewhere and having to start again with the preparatory from the beginning. Activities in the past and especially those related to infrastructural works (digging of canals, constructing bridges, town walls, roads,...) were in most cases solidly based on knowledge of the environment, geology, soil,... these factors are in most cases still extant today.

Conclusions of an archaeologist having gone through and inspired by the works of Donovan Rypkema

Impact on local economy: yes, but compared to built heritage less through in situ conservation, more via ex situ conservation and indirectly as **content provider** for media in its broadest sense.

Minor note: A book with good practices and examples of in situ conservation from all over the world would be very useful and could be inspiring.

Usefulness as a public policy tool: yes archaeology can surely help in mitigating the cultural globalization: the Vasa is a splendid and self-explaining example of this. I think that archaeology has in this field even an advantage over built heritage. Unravelling untold/unknown stories is the core business of archaeology. Archaeology is mysterious/tends to attract people interested in cultural matters. So we as archaeologists have to exploit this strength more. The power of finding stories embodied in material remains of the past is a crucial characteristic of archaeology.

A contributor to sustainable development: yes, but on another level than related to built heritage. The knowledge of the archaeological soil archive is instrumental for sustainable development in avoiding losses in energy.

Positively the inspired reuse of the spatial organisation of the past leads automatically to sustainable development and better projects.