Making futures from the remains of the distant past

Archaeological heritage, connective knowledge, and the promotion of well-being

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Willlem Willem's outstanding contribution to archaeological resource management over the past forty years is widely recognized and internationally celebrated. His interest in making the most of archaeological resources, both academically and in terms of their contribution to wider societally relevant agendas, was especially important and provided the prompt for this short paper. In a prescient comment on the future of archaeological resource management in the Netherlands he noted that in response to accumulating data from archaeological fieldwork 'the need will grow to convert this information into relevant knowledge about the past by critical analysis and syntheses' (Willems 1977: 13). Such a need is not confined to the Netherlands as commercial archaeology across Europe and the US creates data sets of unprecedented scale. All represent considerable investments of time, resources, and intellectual endeavour; archaeology as a discipline has a duty to make something useful from the resulting information.

Knowledge-building in archaeology needs to be creative. Constructing narrative accounts of the past is certainly one obvious, immediate, and important use of new data. But, as I have discussed elsewhere, this is only part of the picture. Narrative knowledge is just one of several equally valid kinds of knowledge that exists alongside, for example, strategic, indigenous/native, and contemplative knowledge (Darvill 2014a). In this short paper in appreciation of Willem's life and achievements I would like to explore another kind of archaeological knowledge which I identify here as 'connective knowledge'. It relates to the way that archaeologists help forge attachments between present-day communities and elements of the archaeological heritage, often by enhancing the power of place, in order to satisfy deep-seated human values such as identity, tradition, social solidarity, and the legitimation of action (see Darvill 2005: 28-32). In particular I would like to examine the link between connective knowledge and the wider understanding and promotion of well-being, happiness, and the quality of life.

Connective knowledge and well-being: philosophical considerations

Ontologically, connective knowledge can be identified as a distinct if slightly shadowy category of understanding or justification. It derives from an actual, constructed, or perceived chain of physical or experiential relationships extending geographically outwards and chronologically backwards in time from an individual's here-and-now state of being in the world. It is grounded in the idea that, once explained to individuals, the existence and nature of archaeological or historical features within a landscape, townscape, or seascape can yield the kind of experiences that trigger systematic neurobiological responses, including a sense of well-being and security. Why, we might ask, if not for hedonic reasons, do people in such large numbers return again and again to places such as Stonehenge (England), Avebury (England), Newgrange (Ireland), Carnac (France) or Maes Howe (Scotland) to name just a few amongst umpteen examples? For many people, standing inside such monuments equipped with a well-formed pre-knowledge of the place prompts powerful feelings that are almost impossible to describe, yet from the perspective of the observer, seem authentic, deep-rooted, and somehow resonant with the very DNA of their existence. Such things might, and often are, simply written off as 'spiritual' and considered of fringe interest and rather too 'New Age' for serious consideration. But archaeologists ignore this constituency at their peril; if we cannot provide the kind of insights that such communities desire based on real archaeology then we should not be surprised when they celebrate concocted edifices such as the 'Bosnian Pyramids' or 'The Holy Grail'. Dismissive views often focus only on the authenticity of the sites or objects rather than on such matters combined with the desires and responses of the subjects (or agents) in relation to the chain of inferences and associations linking the two. Consciously or not, creating narratives of historic landscapes, emphasizing the significance of authentic features and objects, and promoting the importance of the past for life in the present, archaeologists create powerful places. Bundled together, such information constitutes a connective knowledge as a route-map for the cognitive realization of pleasurable experiences in emotionally charged *locales*.

Epistemically, the starting point for creating well-structured connective knowledge relevant to the archaeological heritage lies in a phenomenological framework in which human experiences of familiar and unfamiliar materials, objects, and structures provide triggers for emotions and behavioural responses. Developing Heidegger's (1936) vision of how art is created we can ask what exactly the 'heritageyness' of heritage is all about? Is it a mental state, or a state of the world? How does the experience of heritage relate to belief-forming capacities and processes? And how, within western societies at least, can it be used to articulate and negotiate notions of identity and meaning? Inevitably, in starting to address these questions, the socio-political dimensions of knowledge creation come to the fore.

Political context

Archaeology and the pursuit of archaeological knowledge(s) is inextricably linked to politics and public policy. Since the early 1990s archaeological endeavour in Europe has found itself being asked to play a purposeful role within the prevailing political philosophy of 'instrumentalism': actions or activities undertaken not because they are useful or interesting in their own right but because they are tools or instruments of the state in the attainment of wider ambitions in the realm of human experience. In this perspective 'heritageyness' is seen in terms of the strong aesthetic, experiential, associative, and integrative dimensions of the historic environment. Heritage assets, literally 'our inheritance', are broadly defined in terms of archaeological remains, built structures, curated collections, and an assortment of traditions and events forming the intangible heritage. Taken together these create and facilitate engagements between past and present, enriching shared cultural values, and underpinning distinctiveness and identity.

Such instrumentalist thinking was first articulated in European legislation under Title IX (Culture), Article 128 of the Maastricht Treaty on European Union, signed by the 12 member states in 1993, which stated that 'The Community shall contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States, while respecting their national and regional diversity and at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore.' This clause remains unchanged in the controversial Treaty of Lisbon signed by the 28 member states in 2007 where it appears as Article 167.

Similar intentions can be found fairly widely in other European agreements of various kinds, for example Article 1 of The Council of Europe's Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (opened for signature in Faro on 27 October 2005), emphasized that the conservation of cultural heritage and its sustainable use has a key role to play in human development and the quality of life. More recently, the communication document 'Towards an integrated approach to cultural heritage for Europe' adopted by the European Parliament on 22 July 2014, calls for member states to enhance the intrinsic value of heritage and take advantage of its economic and societal potential.

Heritage and well-being

A general link between heritage, environment, quality of life, and well-being as made implicit in the European agreements is widely accepted, but the detail and theoretical underpinnings are only just beginning to be explored. One key development was the concept of the 'Therapeutic Landscape' as expanded by Wil Gesler in the early 1990s as a framework for the analysis of natural, built, social, and symbolic environments which can contribute to physical and emotional healing and general well-being (Gesler 1993). Although some early work in this area included the study of traditional long-lived sites associated with health-giving (*e.g.* Asclepian Sanctuary at Epidauros, Greece; Lourdes, France) recent work has tended to focus on places relevant to particular sectors of the population and their

special needs (*e.g.* Williams 2007). Other research suggests that taking museum objects into hospitals and other healthcare contexts has a positive impact on well-being (Ander *et al.* 2013).

On a different track, studies commissioned by English Heritage and reported in the 2014 edition of 'Heritage Counts' use data from a large sample of the UK population to consider the relationship between life satisfaction (a standard measure of well-being in academic and policy literature) and visits to heritage sites. Controlling for a range of socio-economic factors it was found that visiting heritage sites (especially historic towns and buildings) had a slightly higher impact on life satisfaction than participating in sport or the arts. And when a well-being

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valuation approach was used the amount of money that provides the same impact on well-being as visiting heritage was calculated as £1,646 per person per year, well above estimates of £993 as the value of sport in terms of its impact on well-being.

In practical terms, creating connective knowledge means building meaningful and robust bonds of association between recognized dimensions of cultural heritage and present-day populations. Such links may relate to known sites and landscapes or emblematic places demonstrably associated with particular people, events, or beliefs. Many archaeological fieldwork projects promote popular accounts of their work foregrounding exactly these kinds of insights; they represent a first step in building constructive knowledge and should be encouraged. The rising popularity of community archaeology shows another approach in which investigation provides the tool through which people connect themselves to elements of their past.

Another direct application of connective knowledge through heritage management is through culturally-driven regeneration. In 2005, the UK's Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell issued a policy discussion document on such matters under the title 'Better Places to Live'. This set out the case for strengthening the relationship between communities and the built environment in order to promote cultural identity and recognize that historic places still form part of peoples' lives. Making places matter is far from easy, but using both tangible and intangible heritage in place-production has already been successful in some areas (Darvill 2014b) and holds considerable potential for expansion into more archaeologically-based situations.

Looking forward

Diversifying the way archaeological data are used, especially in relation to resource management practices, increases the overall value of hard-won information and strengthens support for our endeavours. Across the sector there is considerable

scope for expanding the kinds of knowledge that we create and recognizing their legitimacy and utility in support of public policy as well as academic interest. The idea of 'connective knowledge' outlined here certainly needs further development in respect to its philosophical underpinnings and practical applications, but it has considerable potential. By creating theoretically robust frameworks for the deployment of archaeological data in ways that are relevant to contemporary societal issues it should be possible to secure a bright future for archaeological resource management, meet some of the challenges thrown down by Willem and others, and make futures from the remains of a distant past.

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