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Imprint of action : the sociocultural impact of public activities in archaeology

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Conclusion

This chapter concludes this study by answering the main research question stated in the Introduction; **what are both the depth and breadth of the sociocultural impact of public activities in archaeology?** It will also conclude the secondary objective, which was to connect sociocultural impact research with Sustainable Development.

This explorative research took place within the European NEARCH project and analyses survey data gathered from three case studies within a sociocultural framework. Each case study has its own *research* and activity goals; the former linked to specific research questions, the latter based on goals set by the initiators of the activities. Both goals were translated into relevant indicators and, ultimately, into survey questions for each specific case study. Together, these goals form the offset against which impact is analysed. They are contextualized within a methodological framework, which was heavily based on the works of François Matarasso (1997) and the North East Regional Museums Hub Tool;⁴⁹ the divide between social aspects and educational aspects is based on the values typology created by Randall Mason (2002).

In total, five specifically tailored surveys were performed; three for the DOMunder case study, one for the You(R) Archaeology case study, and one for the Invisible Monuments case study. Although a substantial dataset was obtained, none of the surveys received enough response for the data to be fully representative of the entire corresponding population. This means that the analysis of the data, including discussions and recommendations based on that data, are indicative rather than absolute, and warrant careful interpretation.

In terms of demographic composition, each activity attracted a different type of public, an observation which can be attributed to the fact that each activity had a different aim on public outreach; You(R) Archaeology, for example, attracted more children, probably because there was a specific children's category in the contest, and the Invisible Monuments activity attracted many scholars – they were actively invited by the initiator of the activity. DOMunder can be seen as the most 'traditional' of the three activities, in the sense that it is based on an archaeological exhibition. It also attracted the oldest audience, more than 40% of the visitors being older than 61+. While the other activities also attracted more older than younger individuals, most of them were aged between 36-60. Surprisingly, as the NEARCH poll-survey shows

49 <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/generic-social-outcomes/additional-gso-resources>

that females are less active in participating in archaeological activities⁵⁰, all activities attracted more female visitors; however, this pattern is not followed by the DOMunder volunteers. In comparable studies, we see older, higher-educated men visiting heritage activities most often of all demographic categories (see for instance Kajda *et al.* 2017; Van den Dries and Boom 2017; Maeer *et al.* 2016). Only DOMunder seems to come close to following this generally observed pattern, and even then, only in terms of age. Other activities seemed to attract an audience which differed from what we usually see in terms of demographics. A non-demographic defining factor of the participants was that they were already interested in archaeology and heritage, which was their primary reason for joining these activities. Therefore, none of the activities drew an 'unprepared' audience (which is in contrast to the before mentioned Landau case study which had 'collateral visitors', see Boom *et al.* forthcoming).

Overall, both the type and levels of impact seemed to differ per case study and per audience. However, there were also some common observations. One of which is that it seems that impact in connectedness to a certain locality, in this study defined as local, national, and international, is dependent on the locality of the archaeological subject. In other words; a focus on local archaeology, even when it is connected, narratively, to a broader geographic context, results in people feeling more connected to that specific area. This feeling of connectedness is also possibly mirrored in civic pride, as it too shows a relationship with locality.

All three case studies had a positive impact on the knowledge of the participants, but it seems that the level of impact for this aspect is dependent on both the goal(s) of the activity and the type of audience. You(R) Archaeology generated the least impact on knowledge, the Invisible Monuments activity the most. The impact on knowledge for DOMunder visitors is comparable to Invisible Monuments, if somewhat lower. You(R) Archaeology had as goal for people to express their creativity; in contrast, both Invisible Monuments and DOMunder wanted to inform their participants. The difference in audience between DOMunder and Invisible Monuments, with the former having much more older and, possibly, less higher-educated visitors, might be the cause for the difference in impact on knowledge. From the surveys, it cannot be deducted why this is the case. It can be ventured that older people already know more about archaeology and heritage, which results in them being impacted on less for that aspect. However, it seems that older people feel less impact overall. Perhaps they have a different sense of perception when it comes to impact. Time investment does not seem to be a causal factor for impact in knowledge between activities; shorter activities, such as Invisible Monuments, engender a higher impact. This finding can be of value to creators of public archaeological activities. Furthermore, there seems to be a connection between impact in knowledge, and the impact on people's emotions, such as happiness and usefulness, as people who indicate a higher impact on knowledge also indicate a higher impact on those aspects. However, from this data alone we cannot deduct whether a stronger impact on knowledge creates a stronger impact on personal emotions, or vice versa.

50 http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/catalogue/adsdata/arch-2749-1/dissemination/pdf/NEARCH_Image_of_archaeology_Europe_OK.pdf

The impact on people's motivation and creativity appears mostly dependent on the nature of the activity and the opportunities it brings. A creative context, such as the You(R) Archaeology contest, provides opportunities for people to work on their skills, apply them, and reflect on their capabilities. As a result, it had the highest impact on many of the attributes studied. Age wise, it seems that an activity focussing on creativity affects mostly children and teenagers, whereas a more traditional setting and activity, such as DOMunder, impacts young adults. Interestingly, participants of the You(R) Archaeology contest scored highest on impact in 'understanding of the past', followed by Invisible monuments visitors and, lastly by visitors of DOMunder. This leads to the conclusion that for people to better understand the past, activities do not have to take place in a specific location. Rather, it seems that it helps people when they see different locations, either physically by following a trail, or digitally by performing desk research. This hypothesis can also be attributed to the impact on people's ability to better understand the value of archaeology. It appears that a more diverse setting causes people to extrapolate local information to a broader context, and allows them to better connect this with their own identities.

People joined primarily because of the archaeological and historical theme, but also might have other reasons for joining. This implies that it is mainly the subject that attracts visitors and participants, but that these participants might have multiple motives. DOMunder volunteers, for example, joined because they would like to socialize and work together with other people, and to increase their skills. This, then, resulted in them feeling the most impact in these factors. You(R) Archaeology provided participants with a reason for working together; children created artworks together with their parents. While DOMunder provides visitors with ample opportunity to meet new people, this is not the goal of the activity. Visitors are not urged to work together, nor do they seem to want to, and this is reflected in the impact scores. In this sense, cultural heritage does indeed provide a platform for impact, dependent on the nature and goals of the activity as well as peoples personal motivations. In this sense, I agree with Pendlebury *et al.* (2014, 3), who state that cultural heritage provides a stage for societal regeneration.

The impact on people's emotions, such as happiness, usefulness, and on healthiness, turned out to be dependent on the nature of the activity. A creative context, such as You(R) Archaeology, evokes a stronger impact on whether people feel creative and inspired, whereas an outdoor activity such as Invisible Monuments creates a stronger impact in the physical sphere, such as feeling healthy and energetic. DOMunder visitors scored lowest on all personal emotion aspects, including the negative ones. From the survey, it cannot be deducted as to why this is the case; it can have several reasons, such as the overall older age of visitors, their motivations, or the setting of the activity. What is noted in all three case studies, however, is that people aged 11-40 feel a stronger impact in the emotional sphere than people aged older than 40. From this, we can conclude that a stronger impact in personal emotions does not result in attracting more visitors, as the cultural heritage sector in general struggles with attracting younger people (see also Kajda *et al.* 2017; Van den Dries and Boom 2017). It seems that people do not realize that participating in a public archaeological activity creates a variety of positive impacts; it is worthwhile to put more effort in attracting especially younger people as they are impact the most.

Impact studies provide the heritage field with qualitative as well as quantitative data to base their argumentations on and shows that archaeology, through cultural heritage, can contribute to Sustainable Development. Impact of Action shows not only that public activities in archaeology engender positive impacts on people, both on a social and a cultural level, but also that these impacts can be quite substantial. Archaeology, then, forms more than just an interesting pastime for people – it also contributes to societies current issues.