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

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Summary

The opening section of this thesis describes how it forms part of the European NEARCH project. It outlines how the value of heritage, its multifaceted importance, its growing role in today's society, and the increasing pressure on the heritage sector to account for the spending of public funds are combined in this study. The section further delineates how this research uses a newly developed methodological framework as its basis of analysis. The introductory chapter ends with a description of the research objectives and deliverables, and a summary of the contents of the following chapters.

The second chapter covers both the theoretical and methodological framework. As part of the theoretical framework, it describes the concept of cultural heritage, and how archaeology fits into that concept. For this thesis, the general classification of cultural heritage by Klammer and Zuidhof (1998) is used, which places archaeology within the tangible variant of cultural heritage, both in the movable and immovable sections. Chapter two also discusses why the typology of heritage values by Mason (2002) is used as a frame of reference, which distinguishes between Economic and Socio-cultural values (Mason 2002, 10). Furthermore, this section describes the shift from historic/preservation values to the more societal values, as the main current interest in the value of heritage lies in its importance for today's society (Cultural Heritage Counts for Europe Consortium 2015; Blessi *et al.* 2014; Ander *et al.* 2013). The chapter also covers the importance of participation in public archaeological activities and distinguishes between Public Archaeology and Community Archaeology. After describing the importance of value in cultural heritage, the chapter proceeds to discuss the difference and overlap between value and impact, and how they form two sides of the same coin (Bollo 2013). The fundamental notion is that cultural heritage does not generate impact *per sé*, but must be considered as an "opportunity space in which regeneration occurs" (Pendlebury *et al.* 2004, 12). This presupposes that heritage is used as a conduit to create impact, rather than that the subject of archaeology creates impact by itself. This notion is used as a hypothesis for the remainder of this thesis and forms the offset against which results were analysed in the discussion chapter. The chapter furthermore describes the methodological framework for this thesis, adopted from Matarasso (1997), which distinguishes seven sociocultural 'headers': Personal development, Social cohesion, Community empowerment and self-determination, Local image and identity, Imagination and vision, and Health and Well-being, which form the basis for the creation of impact indicators and survey questions. The chapter then describes the data collection process, discussing why online and face-to-face surveys

were used as a means to gather data and how the methodological approach by Bollo (2013) was used to generate survey questions on the basis of *activity* goals and *research* goals. Lastly, the chapter conveys which statistical test were used to analyze survey data.

Chapter three, the first of three case study chapters, focuses on DOMunder. Located in the center of the Netherlands, DOMunder provides its visitors with a unique archaeological activity. Three different stakeholders were selected; the DOMunder visitors, the residents living close-by, and the volunteers working at DOMunder as tour guides. Based on a combination of *activity* specific and *research* specific goals, impact indicators were selected and surveys were created. The analysis of the surveys provided insight into the impact of DOMunder for the three individual groups, with marked differences between both contents and results of the surveys, especially between visitors and residents and volunteers and residents. The sociocultural impact varies per stakeholder, but overall DOMunder generates a moderate amount of impact on its stakeholders. We see that a local focus is important in generating impact, as both visitors and residents seem to be more interested in the archaeology and history of Utrecht than that of the Netherlands and feel more connected to the former. The reasons for people's involvement in the activity, combined with their expectations and perspectives, seem to be in the dominant factors in impact generation. Visitors are mostly impacted in their education, involvement, inspiration, and motivation, but experience less impact on social aspects, including personal attributes such as self-confidence and self-consciousness. This is different for the volunteers, who seem to experience much more impact for these issues. Volunteers are also more motivated, happy, and satisfied than the visitors, especially those volunteers who are new and younger. Residents living close to DOMunder have visited, or want to visit, DOMunder mainly because of their interest in the history of Utrecht. However, if they do, they would rather visit with someone else than alone.

Chapter four covers the second large-scale case study: You(R) Archaeology. It describes how this project, as part of the NEARCH project, aimed to connect people with their past through an art contest. This would enable them to show their personal connections with archaeology and heritage. Participants were e-mailed a survey for this research project to analyze the sociocultural impact of such a contest. Just as for the DOMunder case study, a combination of *activity* specific and *research* specific goals formed the basis for indicators selection and survey creation. Results show that most participants used an international archaeological subject for their artwork; they felt most impact on pride for international archaeology. Furthermore, many people learned something about archaeology. However, for some the archaeological topic was less important; they seemed to join mainly to create (and showcase) art – alone or together with someone else (for instance, their children). Results show that people are impacted differently depending on their age (strongest impact was seen in the youngest age category, least in the oldest age category) and (somewhat) their gender, but it is not clear whether this impact is different because of different perceptions or because of different standards. Furthermore, there seems to be a connection between impact on personal emotions and impact on knowledge. In conclusion, it seems that a creative activity with an archaeological subject, while not having education as its main goal, still increases people's knowledge. Arguably, the impact on education is more linked to the

subject of the contest – archaeology –, whereas for several other ‘side effects’, such as social cohesion and health and wellbeing, the nature of the activity was key.

The next chapter covers the last case study of this research project, Invisible Monuments. This event took place in Thessaloniki (Greece) over the summer of 2016 and just as the You(R) Archaeology art contest, it formed part of the NEARCH project. The aim of this public activity was to connect people with forgotten monuments in the center of Thessaloniki. Participants were asked to fill out a survey, asking them about the sociocultural impact of the event. Just as for the previous two case studies, a combination of *activity* specific and *research* specific goals formed the basis for indicator selection and survey creation. Participants felt motivated and many of them indicated that the activity impacted their knowledge in a positive way. This increase in knowledge was noted mostly among higher educated people. Interestingly, knowledge increase and time spent were not correlated. There does seem to be a connection, however, between knowledge increase and the impact on people’s emotions. Furthermore, it seems that the fast pace, inherent in the use of digital mobile technology in this activity, did not prevent participants from learning about the monuments or connecting them to the local archaeology. In conclusion, Invisible Monuments, successfully helps people connect to their past; to some it even provided an opportunity to meet (other) inhabitants of the city. There are indications that the activity created a longer lasting impact on the participants, hopefully leading towards a lasting impression and a ‘living memory’.

The sixth chapter compares the case study data, revealing and discussing interesting patterns. Comparison between the three case studies is done on the basis of their corresponding activity goals, as per Bollo’s (2013) methodological approach. These comparisons are divided over the six sociocultural ‘headers’ provided by Matarasso (1997) where possible (as not all case studies covered exactly the same topics, and for some different scales were used). It seems that overall mostly older and high-educated visitors participated; and the activities attracted more women, except for the DOMunder volunteers. Visitors from all case studies indicated that their interest in heritage and archaeology was the main reason for joining; other reasons, such as social reasons, were less important. Overall, these activities had a positive impact on people’s lives. We see that younger participants indicate a higher impact on several indicators. It seems that the context, or nature, of the activities and the opportunities they bring does engender impact. However, perhaps sociocultural impact is not a determinant for attendance but a side-effect of visiting. Furthermore, while the contexts of these activities are based on their activity goals, not the goals themselves, but rather the way the activities aim to meet these, are important in determining the level of impact. This is concurrent with what Pendlebury and colleagues (2004) stated in chapter two. These findings present important considerations for heritage managers who want to organize similar public activities. Based on these findings, a model is created to provide future researchers and cultural heritage managers with a tool to predict and steer sociocultural impact. The chapter ends by connecting the topic of this thesis – sociocultural impact – with the concept of Sustainable Development. It is argued that sociocultural impact analysis of cultural heritage can contribute as means to validate cultural heritage as an important asset for a sustainable future.

Finally, the seventh chapter summarizes the vital points from the previous chapters, within the perspective of the future of heritage activities and how they (should) be organized. Impact studies such as this research provide the heritage field with qualitative as well as quantitative data to base their outreach strategies on; it shows that archaeology, through cultural heritage, can contribute to Sustainable Development. Archaeology forms more than just an interesting pastime for people as it also contributes to societies' current issues.