

Archaeology in an urban historical context

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Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,

I first want to thank the organizers for their kind invitation.

● I want to start this talk with a picture which is a perfect illustration of what an urban historical context can be. The picture has been taken on top of the tower of the Brussels' Town Hall: in the front you can see the Grand-Place with its 17th and 18th century buildings with underneath sequences going back to the 10th century, and in the far end of the picture the recent architectural developments that Brussels has known, and everything in between... it is a view that many European cities can show... The city has a history, a thick layer of history, literally and metaphorically: she evolves through space and through time and every urbanization project takes a position towards the traces of this evolution.

For today's workshop I will only use pictures originating from the Brussels Capital Region, even if the various topics discussed will of course concern all of us... I hope you will excuse me for this.

I will structure this talk around 4 main topics.

The first is the opposition between urban development and archaeological research and how we can change this? Secondly the in-situ preservation, followed immediately by the ex-situ preservation and the current opportunities in European legislation and policies.

● Urban development ⇔ archaeological research?

In order to prosper in the future, towns must continue to change and develop, as they have always done in the past. This means that a balance must be struck between the desire to conserve the past and the need to renew for the future.

But what about the opposition between urban development and archaeological research? How did this happen? Why do we still, after all these years of development of urban archaeology and the gradual successful evolution towards laws integrating heritage and archaeology, why do we feel as if we still have to justify our presence on a building site; why do we excuse ourselves for being there ? We, archaeologists and managers of archaeological heritage, should go to these people with a positive message, not in an underdog position. But how do we do this in times when urban archaeology is mostly a project of urban preventive archaeology, where we try to save and document our archaeological heritage as much as possible within more and more restricted time limits and operational means.

- First of all, we shouldn't be using negative words like "archaeological risk" – this is not about a risk-factor, it is about a potential, heritage that is there and that should be saved from destruction, be it on-site or off-site. If we start using the vocabulary of the building contractors, than we go along with their reasoning of risk-factors that you have to evince as quick and as easy as possible. Urban archaeology tells us how the town has developed throughout its history, and introduces concepts such as empty/full, inside/outside, rich/poor, monumental/vernacular, planned/spontaneous, dense/diffuse, etc, concepts shared by archaeologists, town planners, architects, and developers. This is the language we have to use.

Another difficult point that is haunting today's urban archaeologists: there seems to be no time anymore to develop correct scientific strategies. Is this really the case? Shouldn't we consider preventive urban archaeology as a scientific strategy in itself? It goes together with the problem of selection, before, during and after an archaeological project, which I will develop later. The problem arises when the developer can choose himself the archaeological firm, without any back up from a scientific and/or administrative authority: the developer will ask for the cheapest and/or shortest intervention – he is not interested in the added value of the archaeological results.

- But maybe, we shouldn't blame the developers only, because it is up to us archaeologists and archaeology-managers to do some "pushing", to express this in web-environment terms – it is all about communication: we should go to the building developers and explain them that the archaeologist has his rightful place in a building project, with the same professional authority as has the engineer in stability, the architect, the roof maker or the mason. Every time and again – it is never ending – We should be part of the general planning, often at the very start sometimes coming in during the building process, but completely integrated. Only

when the developer sees here a certain benefit in terms of time and of money will he accept us fully. He has a building site to run, we have to fit in, BUT this does not mean that he does not have to respect our professionalism. It is up to the archaeologist to apply a deontological code, such as the one adopted in 2000 by the Cultural Heritage Committee of the Council of Europe, that sets out some high level principles, such as, and I quote: “providing all necessary information to other relevant authorities and to the developer at the earliest possible stage in the consideration of the development, with the archaeological authorities advising on any evaluation required to determine to full extent the importance of the archaeological deposits. The archaeologists should be aware of development costs and adhere to strict timetables, that the archaeological works adds value to the development, contributing to the overall concept and architectural design. The archaeological work will thereby contribute to the urban landscape of the future.” (end of quote).

- So is there a role for Urban Planning in reconciling archaeology and urban development? Yes, absolutely, but therefore we archaeologists have to offer them the tools they need. This means at the very least an Archaeological Atlas. You need an objective instrument, an inventory of the known archaeological sites to be able to obtain an integration into the building and renovation process. You can see here an extract of the Archaeological Atlas of the Brussels Capital Region published on the cartographic website of the Region, called BRUGis. In red are the sites with a precise localization, in grey the ancient churchyards, in blue the ancient hydrographic system. Everything is georeferenced on the actual cadaster. Once you have such a system, that it is publicly available, developers can see that they are in an archaeological zone and they can directly contact us to know what are the consequences of this localization for their project. In that way, and certainly for the bigger projects, already during the incidence studies the developer knows that he will have to build in an archaeological intervention of some sort in his general planning. The next step being the systematic integration of an archaeological clause into the building permit.

- But we should be aware not to talk solely about subsoil archaeology in cities. All cities have, hidden underneath layers of plaster and wallpaper, treasures of history. Building archaeology should be handled in the same way as subsoil archaeological excavations, the distinction being of minimal relevance in an urban context organized around an ancient urban nucleus originating in the Middle Ages or the Roman times and even earlier.

Emerging from his trench, the urban archaeologist does not see the sky: he sees buildings. The archaeological interventions in an urban environment should therefore be twofold: the

so-called “classic” sub-soil archaeology and the building archaeology or *Bauforschung*. Both should be combined in order to obtain a complete picture of the history of a place.

The starting point should therefore be “today”, no longer only looking at the mere historical chronology of a city but also at its physical development: how did we arrive at the present day situation? How can we explain the actual map of the city, the layout of the streets and the buildings? Are the actual buildings built on top of older ones or did they integrate, fossilize the older ones inside their new walls? How was the internal circulation? How did people live in the house and use and transform the space?

- While subsoil archaeology has slowly made its way through urban archaeology in general and today is mostly accepted by the different partners during the various building phases on a plot, building archaeology remains a difficult item. The existence of numerous older, fossilized building phases, hidden underneath layers of modern plaster, is difficult to apprehend for many owners and project architects, haunted by the idea that archaeology equals the obligation to preserve the newly discovered remains.

It is therefore extremely important that interdisciplinary teams should be put in place right from the start of the project. This team should not only include architects and engineers, but also, and at the same level, archaeologists, building archaeologists and art historians. Only by working together and establishing clear procedures, avoiding at the same time the various difficulties presumed by the building companies, one will obtain a project with a high heritage value. But it is our role as archaeologist to explain this approach to the private and public town planners, and convince them of the added value of archaeology and especially building archaeology.

Which brings us to the chapters of *In Situ* and *Ex Situ* preservation.

1. In situ preservation

- The best way of preserving the archaeological heritage is of course not touching it, not destroying it, not excavating it. But the continuing urbanisation of our cities is a threat to this very vulnerable heritage. By documenting it before its destruction or transformation, we will safeguard its memory.

Once the archaeological remains excavated, which criteria will nourish the decision to safeguard, restore and eventually open them to the public? If the archaeologist puts the

traces of early medieval agriculture on the same level as the remains of a duke's palace, the latter has the merit of being probably easier to present to the public than the little bits of "dark earth". Nevertheless, archaeological goods lack, more than any other heritage form, information and necessitate often heavy restoration options in order to preserve them. In most cases, they also need a didactic angle, sometimes only a hypothesis. However, the decision to conserve is mostly less one of the archaeologist than of the proprietor, cultural organisation or political deciders.

- If the remains of a roman villa in the countryside are sometimes easier transformed into a site museum, urban sites are often considered as a nuisance, as a hindrance in the development of the city because literally considered as "in the way". The site museum of Bruxellae 1238, located next to the Stock Exchange is actually in the heat of the discussions around the renovation of the Stock Exchange and its environments – somebody literally said: "the archaeological remains are a hindrance in the 19th century reading of the city".

- There are however other ways of preserving in situ than the traditional site museum. During the 2011 Icomos meeting, Jean-Paul Jacob and Marie-Odile Lavendhomme, both from the French Institute for Preventive Archaeology (INRAP) described that only the integration of the results of preventive archaeology and the acceptance of the fact that a city has an evolution in time can guarantee a sustainable urban development. Urban archaeology becomes thus the drive of sustainable development. It makes it possible to create a project for the future based on the remnants of the past by integrating in the urbanisation project the archaeological imprints and remains and the knowledge of the city evolution.

- A special attention here again for a specific part in the urban building archaeology: the carpentry. Through a large research project together with the University of Liège and the Belgian Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage, the roof frames of all buildings dating to the 18th century and older, located in the historical city center of Brussels, are examined. The owner is systematically involved in the process. It is a form of bringing awareness of the presence of our heritage in a day-to-day living environment.

2. Ex situ preservation

- While in situ preservation is the lead idea in the Valetta Convention, the absence of any coherent governmental policy on in situ preservation and the simple fact that you cannot stop

a city from developing and growing, means that ex situ preservation will then be the most applied form of preservation of the archaeological heritage.

Many criteria will enter into the discussion: e.g. the earlier mentioned excavation strategy and the issue of selection on site and off site.

If we go into the excavation strategy, many questions arise: Some think that we cannot save everything – no, indeed, an archaeological excavation is already selective: we cannot excavate everything, the city and its structures being their own limit; Some say that we should only excavate where there is a potential: in that case we need tools such as an atlas describing this potential – and isn't every city potentially one big archaeological site?; Some say we should only dig a site if it is large enough: what is large enough? Urban archaeology is often about some square meters only – it is not about large sites where you need a bicycle to go from one end to the other; Some think we should only dig a site if it has scientific value, that we should put the ordinary sites into balance: but then, what is the scientific value of a site? You cannot know what you miss until you dig it – who are we to say that we know everything about e.g. 17th century cesspits? How can we be sure that the site sample is a microcosm of the whole, how can we select portion of sites or site types to be excavated without bias?

- It brings us to the issue of selection: Some say we cannot keep everything: probably, but why would we invest in an excavation if we throw everything away afterwards? We cannot afford a selection on an archaeological time period or choose only certain kinds of material. Re-interpretation is only possible if you keep your raw material. And isn't selection often only a problem of money: money to create the necessary space, the personnel needed for caring the collection?

If you select on site or off-site, it should be clearly described, it should be part of your project description right from the start, eventually adapted during the project. This is too often forgotten. We should also be aware that if we make a first selection, any manager can ask for a 2nd one and a 3rd one... Then who should do this selection, is the scientific method always the best or the only way of doing it? We should be careful not to fall into feel good archaeology or only into selection for practical reasons such as a publication.

Selection should probably be a state of mind: we have to make a model, we need a vision about what we want to achieve with archaeology, we have to think about the consequences of selection because it is our daily job and we should be fully aware that what we choose today is for today with the information we have today, not really for the future...

3. Current opportunities

- What are the current European legal opportunities to give new impetus to archaeological management, and specifically urban archaeological management?

While articles 2 to 6 of the Valetta Convention deal mainly with the implementation of the convention in local laws, the identification and protection of the archaeological heritage, the procedures of archaeological excavation, the finances and integrated conservation, articles 7 to 12 deal with public awareness and the dissemination of our knowledge. While during a review by the Council of Europe concerning the Valetta Convention, most countries still had difficulties implementing correctly the articles 2 to 6, they seemed to have no problem whatsoever with articles 7 to 12. There are 3 options: or there are no real problems, or probably the problems have been moved to the future, or there is not enough attention paid to it. This brings us naturally to the 2005 Faro Convention, officially called the Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society. We know what Valetta means to us, but are there elements in the Faro convention that could give new chances to the archaeological heritage – and the answer is yes. As Graham Fairclough said: “we dig up dead people but how far do we engage with living people”? Faro is about a heritage community, has wider concerns than Valetta with a wider definition of heritage, with a cross-disciplinary concept of cultural heritage and individual and collective responsibility towards cultural heritage.

I have picked out 4 elements from the Faro Convention for comment. Even if they are valid for archaeological research in a whole, they are particularly interesting for urban archaeology.

- ● **Promote high-quality work through systems of professional qualifications and accreditation for individuals, businesses and institutions.**

Many countries and regions have installed a system of accreditation describing the professional experience wanted before an archaeological excavation can take place. So did we in Brussels. These accreditations can be attributed to firms, institutions, universities, but also private persons. It is apparently a necessary step to obtain and maintain high-quality work at all times: the archaeological source cannot be excavated a second time, so better do it good. But, did we succeed? There are so many other factors influencing the quality of the delivered product, like shorter and shorter periods of field work, hardly any research is done

anymore during the post-excavation stages, etc. Even with the necessary accreditations, we see that the archaeologists need continuous back-up from the authorities (whoever they are) to ensure a continuous quality delivery. This back up should be on various levels: they need a research framework, they need to benefit from collaboration between the consultants, the academics and the authorities, etc... There is however another reason for the fall back in quality we are feeling: the archaeological profession seems to be in a profound crisis – short period contracts, harsh working conditions are only some of the problems encountered by the archaeologists. The preventive archaeology in wanting to accommodate too easily the developers has lost track of its own professionalism and needs.

Vincent Négri, in his paper published in 2001 in the 9th volume of the Study Series of the ICOM International Committee for Museums and Collections of Archaeology and History, mentions the need for a code of professional ethics for archaeologists. He refers to the earlier mentioned Council of Europe Code of Practice, and to various American and British Codes of Deontology. But above all, he stresses the fact that, and I quote: “the act of drawing up a code of professional ethics is an expression of a profession’s self-endowed power to impose its norms.” Could a deontological code, like the ones lawyers and architects have, help the archaeologist to transgress the practical problems encountered during the preventive archaeology?

Such a code would contain the rules of conduct adopted by the professional community in order to serve its clients, organize the professional relationships and set the framework to exercise the profession. This code should define the intangible principles that the archaeologist has to follow and promote in order to ensure the scientific research and the protection of the archaeological heritage. It would have to encapsulate the international global principles. It must not only have an influence on the professional practice of the archaeologist but also on the perception that the archaeologists has of his discipline: the archaeologist must show his responsibility towards the object of his research. Only then can we promote high quality work.

- ● **Raise awareness and utilize the economic potential of the cultural heritage.**

In Situ preservation of large heritage complexes or even small windows into the soil can help raise the awareness on the potential of the archaeological heritage of a city. Indeed, these last years, the urban archaeological heritage has become an important generator of economic progress. On a global scale, many studies show the appeal of the larger public,

even mass tourism in some cases, for urban archaeology and its results. A public survey led in France and the Netherlands, presented by Monique van den Dries of Leiden University during the last European Archaeological Council General Assembly, shows that the public wants in general more information on archaeological research, that more than 50% of the audience is more interested in visiting and participating on a site than reading a book about the subject. The archaeological heritage is however actually primarily attractive to highly educated persons, mostly female, around 40 years old. So there is a lot of work still to do...: we have to find our stakeholders, see what they expect, and give them answers without losing our own identity.

- ● **Take steps to improve access to the heritage, in order to raise awareness about its value, the need to maintain and preserve it and the benefits which may be derived from it.**

This is clearly an appeal to closer collaboration with and involvement from the citizen. It is true that the main goals of preserving archaeology are for a broader reason than science only. But we tend to keep the public at a distance – during the urban archaeological excavations, the archaeologists are fenced in – some explanatory panels will help the interested citizen to understand what is going on, but this is not archaeology for and with the Community. Often the reasons are just very practical: permits are needed, professionalization has developed strongly these last years, and research is now development led (small scale and of short duration). So how can we involve the local population without betraying our scientific values? The breach between the amateur archaeologists and the professional archaeologist has started with the implementation of Valetta. Can we turn this around? I am sure we can: but then we have to check with the public to see what they want, look outside archaeology, we have to train volunteers, we have to inform the public right from the beginning of the project – not afterwards – it is their story. It is about pay-back to the public: archaeology is paid by the public even if developer-paid. But this needs a stronger organization for involving the public. It is also about bringing archaeology into the classroom: raising awareness and care for the archaeological heritage through education, and therefore the organization of collaborations with educational institutions.

- ● **Develop the use of digital technology by encouraging initiatives which promote the quality of contents, supporting internationally compatible standards for the study, conservation, enhancement and security of cultural heritage, seeking to resolve obstacles to access to information relating to cultural heritage**

Several subjects can stick to this point, the first one being our archaeological archives. These archives are twofold: the documentary archive (both analogue and digital) and the materials archive; both should be stored together or fully-cross-referenced. It is the only source of primary data that we have been excavating or have recorded during the excavation. These data are extremely vulnerable and we unfortunately do not pay enough attention to it. The European funded ARCHES project has published this week on the web in English and will publish next week in pdf-format a “Standard and Guide to Best Practice for Archaeological Archiving in Europe” in several languages. This Guide is a tool for making the archaeological data, information and knowledge available, stable, consistent and accessible for present and future generations. It will enable the archaeologists to archive properly the material and the documentary results. Please have a look at it, use it and distribute it as largely as possible.

● A second subject that can be attached to this item is the grey literature. Especially in urban preventive archaeology, so many research projects remain without publication. As administrations in charge of the archaeological heritage, we have to force ourselves to publish these reports, be it on paper, digitally or any other form of public presentation. Without the publication of the results, the universities cannot play their role in the education of the future archaeologist, and the gap between the academic world and the preventive archaeology will only grow bigger. The publication or presentation is also a way of pay-back to the citizen. He has the right to know. Only then can you start to raise the awareness for his heritage.

4. Conclusion

● In conclusion: we have a lack of confidence and a lack of clarity (what is archaeology actually for?). We need to communicate more, with developers, with the citizen, with the many stakeholders we have; we need to set out standards and rules of conduct that aim for a higher quality of service but which do not confine us within a rigid unalterable framework. Only then will we be able to achieve an archaeology of the city instead of an archaeology in the city.

Thank you for your attention.