

EAC Occasional Paper No. 16



Archaeology and Public Benefit

Moving the Debate Forward

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Edited by Sadie Watson

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UKRI Future Leader Fellow, MOLA, London, UK

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Introduction/Foreword

SADIE WATSON

UKRI Future Leader Fellow, MOLA, London, UK

When we assembled in Prague for the 21st EAC Symposium in March 2020 we could never have imagined how the rest of the year would develop and it is with gratitude to the various authors, editors and EAC colleagues that I can present this volume of the papers on behalf of the EAC. The event was kindly hosted by the National Museum in Prague. Over the two days of papers twenty one speakers presented, their presentations are available for download here: <https://www.europae-archaeologiae-consilium.org/presentations-eac-2020>.

The theme of the Symposium was 'Public Benefit from development-led archaeology: moving the debate forward' and the papers here reflect the challenges and opportunities this presents. As outlined in the Valletta Convention (Article 9) the public must be the key beneficiaries of archaeological work and the theoretical concept of public benefit has become well recognised across our profession but there is still some way to go to fully understand and maximise its potential. The concept note for the 21st Symposium asked attendees to reflect upon the challenge of positively shaping the future and embedding public benefit into our practice; from project inception through design and implementation to dissemination. The papers are a fascinating illustration of how public benefit is viewed across the member states, incorporating honest acknowledgements of some of the entrenched challenges involved with creating a new way of working.

This volume naturally follows on from the volume which reported on the 20th Symposium held in Dublin (Corlett 2020), with the focus moving from the responsibilities of a state body to ensure public benefit from sites and monuments to the various complex issues surrounding private development, public regulatory frameworks and the role of archaeologists in embedding and providing meaningful public benefit.

Within all these papers is the thread of the political context of archaeological heritage management, whether development-led or not, which may be different in national settings but nevertheless is similar in that different stakeholders will require different things from us as archaeologists and we must navigate this responsibly. Papers included here highlight the need for communication and collaboration with others to ensure a successful range of benefits are provided, with an additional focus on the need to persuade clients and developers of their obligations when engaging with a shared past. Although many states have yet to ratify the Faro Convention there is growing awareness of the need to enable public engagement and enjoyment of archaeological heritage, and the EAC's work developing online resources and guidance is intended to provide a wider perspective on archaeology (see Sloane, this volume).

There are significant attempts at innovation within this volume, which reflects the concluding session of the Symposium and the wide-ranging discussion around changing current practice to ensure public benefit. I hope that future meetings of the EAC can go ahead safely and successfully to continue this vital work.

Acknowledgements

The Prague event was characterised by a collegiate and collaborative atmosphere and that has continued during the production of this volume. I am grateful to all the authors for adapting their presentation into the papers here, and for achieving this in the chaotic year of 2020. From a personal perspective the opportunity to collaborate with European colleagues is something I intend to continue despite the wider political context, which has brought our obligation as archaeologists to represent the past responsibly into sharper focus than ever before. I would like to thank the team at the National Museum in Prague for their wonderful hospitality. In particular, my grateful thanks as always to Desislava Gradinarova and Barney Sloane of the EAC for their advice throughout my involvement with the Prague Symposium.

References

Corlett, C. (ed.) 2020: *Archaeological Sites and Monuments in the Care of the State: Sharing Our Experiences, Proceedings of the International Conference Dublin, Republic of Ireland, 28 February : 2 March 2019*. EAC Occasional Paper 15. Budapest: Archaeolingua.