
Evaluating the Value of Community Archaeology: The XArch Project

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Received: 30-01-2009

Accepted: 14-04-2009

Abstract

Over the last decade the UK has seen a boom in community archaeology projects. These projects have taken many different forms and have stretched from the public-face of research and developer-funded programs to projects run by museums, archaeological units, universities and archaeological societies, as well as the communities themselves. Community archaeology claims to offer the public an opportunity to become engaged with and involved in the interpretation and understanding of the past. It has been claimed that this interactive approach, one of participation in the archaeological process, develops both intangible and tangible values from the past for individuals and communities in the present. Such values range from educational to economic and from political to social, however these supposed results of community archaeology have yet to be critically analyzed.

This paper will focus on accessing the values of the University of Exeter's, Heritage Lottery Funded XArch Community Archaeology Project. It sets out a self-reflexive, ethnological methodology for evaluating what community archaeology really does. Drawing on research from a variety of community archaeology projects in the UK and US this paper will aim to propose a future model community archaeology projects, enabling them to become integrated within a community and in turn more sustainable.

Keywords: Community Archaeology; Methodology; Archaeological heritage.

Resum. Avaluant el valor de l'arqueologia comunitària: el projecte XArch

El Regne Unit ha experimentat des de la darrera dècada, una explosió pel que fa a projectes sobre arqueologia i comunitat. Aquests projectes adopten formes diverses que comprenen des de presentacions públiques de projectes d'investigació afavorides per universitats i promotors fins a projectes desenvolupats per museus, serveis arqueològics, universitats i societats arqueològiques, passant per iniciatives de les mateixes comunitats. Els projectes d'arqueologia i comunitat pretenen oferir al públic l'oportunitat de poder participar i implicar-se en la interpretació i la comprensió del passat. Defensem la idea que aquest apropament interactiu de participació en el procés arqueològic desenvolupa valors tangibles i intangibles en les persones i les comunitats del present. Aquests resultats afecten tant valors educatius com econòmics, valors polítics com socials; no obstant això, aquests suposats resultats estan encara pendents d'unes anàlisis més crítiques.

Aquesta aportació pretén fer evidents els valors del projecte XArch d'arqueologia i comunitat dut a terme per la Universitat d'Exeter i finançat per l'Heritage Lottery Fund. Planteja una

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metodologia autoreflexiva i etnològica per tal d'avaluar el que fan realment aquests projectes. A partir de la investigació realitzada sobre una sèrie de projectes d'arqueologia i comunitat, en el Regne Unit i els EUA, aquest té com a objectiu proposar un model per a futurs projectes d'arqueologia i comunitat, amb la finalitat de poder integrar-los dins la comunitat i resultar més sostenibles.

Paraules clau: arqueologia comunitària; metodologia; patrimoni arqueològic.

Resumen. Evaluando el valor de la arqueología comunitaria: el proyecto XArch

En la última década el Reino Unido ha experimentado una explosión de proyectos de arqueología y comunidad. Estos proyectos han adoptado formas diferentes y abarcan desde la presentación pública de proyectos de investigación auspiciados por universidades y promotores hasta proyectos desarrollados por museos, servicios de arqueología, universidades y sociedades arqueológicas, pasando por iniciativas de las propias comunidades. Los proyectos de arqueología y de comunidad pretenden ofrecer al público una oportunidad de participar e implicarse en la interpretación y comprensión del pasado. Se defiende que esta aproximación interactiva de participación en el proceso arqueológico desarrolla valores tangibles e intangibles en las personas y las comunidades del presente. Estos resultados atañen desde los valores educativos a los económicos, de los políticos a los sociales; sin embargo, estos supuestos resultados están aún pendientes de ser analizados críticamente.

Esta aportación se centra en evidenciar los valores del proyecto XArch de arqueología y comunidad llevado a cabo por la Universidad de Exeter y financiado por Heritage Lottery Fund. Plantea una metodología autorreflexiva y etnológica para evaluar lo que hacen estos proyectos realmente. A partir de la investigación realizada sobre una serie de proyectos de arqueología y comunidad en el Reino Unido y en Estados Unidos, tiene como objetivo proponer un modelo para el futuro de proyectos de arqueología y comunidad, con la finalidad de que puedan integrarse en la comunidad y resultar más sostenibles.

Palabras clave: arqueología comunitaria; metodología; patrimonio arqueológico.

SIMPSON, Faye. «Evaluating the Value of Community Archaeology: The XArch Project». *Treballs d'Arqueologia*, 2009, núm. 15, p. 51-62.

Introduction

Recent discussions by archaeologists and politicians have explored the values and subsequent benefits of community archaeology in the UK and the USA (Howard 2004; Moshenska *et al.* 2008; Merriman 2004; Accenture 2004; Tully 2007). There is a clear consensus: public and community archaeology is a «good

thing» (Ascherson 2000), including the use of archaeology as a learning tool in formal and informal education (Henson 2004; Thomas 2004); as an alternative means of translating knowledge about the past and enabling people to acquire a broad range of historical knowledge and practical and social skills (Little 2002; Marshall 2002; Jameson 2004). Community archaeology is also thought to create

a «sense of place», even a «sense of pride», for communities. The benefits for communities are multifarious and operate on many registers, extending from reducing crime to providing support for those with mental and physical impairments. However, these «socially improving» qualities of community archaeology are almost always externally controlled and promoted values. It is often unclear and sometimes manifestly evident that the communities involved have not been consulted about what they value about community archaeology. When analyses have taken place, they have focused on statistics generated from numbers of visitors and participants rather than the perceptions and opinions of community members. It is this appraisal of community opinions discerned through in-depth immersion in community projects and garnering the opinions of local people that this paper aims to address.

First and foremost, the perceived social, educational, economic and political values purported to inhabit community archaeology and those afforded by the discipline of archaeology itself. More specifically, the values assessed are those regarded as important in the heritage management and interpretation of archaeological sites. In particular they can be viewed as brazen attempts to legitimize the existence and funding sources of the relatively new sub-discipline and paradigm of community archaeology in relation to the wider discipline of archaeology itself and funding bodies. Yet is there clear evidence that community archaeology actually is affecting how local people engage with their archaeological heritage? This paper will offer a possible methodology for the analysis of community archaeology projects.

Methodology

If community archaeology has failed to move beyond the theory and methods to assess the effectiveness of community projects, how might this situation be remedied? Recent studies have attempted to quantify the responses of communities to archaeological projects through visitor and participant surveys (Merriman 1991; Rosenfeld 2006; Streeter 2005). These have provided some important generalisations about how different groups respond to community projects. However, their weakness is that they do not provide rich and textured insights into what people are getting out of them. How, does archaeology affect community values or is community archaeology simply a means for archaeologists successfully to secure funding for their fieldwork.

Against this background, a qualitative approach has been developed, drawing upon both a self-reflexive and ethnographic perspectives (Simpson 2009; Simpson and Williams 2008). This incorporates many of the methodological ideas from the self-reflexive approach to archaeological fieldwork developed by Hodder for Çatal Höyük (Hodder 2000), using anthropology —inspired research methods and assessing community values by observing and conversing with participants. Observation involves immersing within the project for its full duration or a substantial number of days. Conversations consist of informal, flexible and context-specific interviews with archaeologists and local people during their involvement in community projects.

This approach has numerous advantages over formal questionnaires. Not only does this enable the observer to assess both intangible and tangible values attached to

projects (Edgeworth 2006) but it reveals them through not only their discursive articulation, but also through their implicit adoption and repetition.

As part of my doctoral research, this approach has been applied to seven community archaeology projects both in the UK (Brayford, Chester, Hungate and Shoreditch) and in the USA (Annapolis, Mitchell, Muncy). The principal aim is to determine what community archaeology really does offer its multiple audiences. Yet the study also aims to evaluate different kinds of projects and their effectiveness in meeting their self-defined and aspired outputs (Simpson forthcoming). The full results of this study are forthcoming but for the purposes of this study, I will appraise one of my case studies; archaeological research conducted at Brayford, Devon, UK in 2008 as one element of the X-Arch project.

Brayford

The site of Welcombe Farm is located on the outskirts of the small village of Brayford, Devon. The community excavation on the site started in May 2008 (fig. 1), and stemmed from the results of the geophysical work carried out by XArch during the previous year, at the request of Jim Knight (a local resident and amateur archaeologist). The 3-year XArch project (2006-2009) is a University-based community project funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. This project aimed to build on the previous success of the University of Exeter's HLF funded Community Landscape Project (Brown et al. 2004) and mirrored it in aspects of its approach (Simpson and Williams 2008). XArch supported one fieldwork project that simultaneous-

ly involved community archaeology, student fieldwork training and archaeological research at Stokenham, Devon (Williams and Williams 2007; Williams & Simpson 2008). Yet the other focus of the project was to facilitate a range of «bottom-up» projects directed by local societies and communities themselves. The decision was made to support strategically local archaeology projects situated across Devon and already initiated by the communities themselves (Simpson and Williams 2008). The nature of XArch support required by each community varied and was directed by the perceived requirements of the communities themselves.

Espoused Values

My role in the project was as a site supervisor, through being project assistant to XArch project as part of the PhD funding and graduate fellowship, which was funded by the HLF. Furthermore, this specific community excavation provided a case study for this PhD research, which was part of the larger XArch Project; this research was regarded valuable to the HLF to appraise the progress of this project and relationships with other projects in the UK and US (Simpson forthcoming).

The XArch project organized and directed the community excavation, to tie in with very specific aims laid out in the HLF bid document. These aims included:

- Raising awareness of archaeology
- Empowering the community
- Provide archaeological support for interested individuals and groups
- Long-term appreciation of heritage
- Encouraging involvement and participation in heritage (where lacking)

Furthermore, the HLF document specified that this would be done by giving people the opportunity to experience archaeological thought, methods and the sciences by providing «doorstep» archaeological training and assistance. This would be provided through «self-seeking» demand (i.e. requests for help from existing community groups) aimed at increasing awareness and benefits for the region's heritage management. So interestingly the major value placed on this community excavation was not the knowledge value of the recovered artefacts and the contexts in which they were found, but rather the social value of community participation.

Existing community involvement in archaeology was also a pre-requisite for the professionals as part of their HLF project. It required the project to be opened up to

and encourage engagement with a broader social audience —the whole community in the village. Therefore, XArch involved and encouraged a more diverse local demographic to engage with their archaeological heritage and to utilize existing projects to facilitate community experience of the past.

It was espoused that the practical focus to the project would have an education value by enabling school children and adults to learn by watching and doing. It also aimed to fit into the national curriculum syllabus; firstly by providing an activity for children to learn about their local environment, and heritage; and secondly to learn about Roman life. This specific period-based output related specifically to Brayford given the existing discoveries on the site of Roman-period



Figure 1. Community Excavation at Brayford. Photograph: Faye Simpson.

activities pertaining to iron extraction and process in the vicinity. Furthermore, institutions including Taunton Museum and the University of Exeter perceived their involvement in the project as outreach work; providing an opportunity to reach new audiences and encourage more diversity in visitors or applicants into their organizations. These also meet current government and political demands upon Universities to expand their provision beyond the teaching of undergraduate and postgraduate students.

The XArch excavation at Brayford was perceived to have clear knowledge value, principally to disseminate good and appropriate archaeological methods and practice to amateur groups. It also had research aims linked to previous excavation and fieldwalking work on the site, providing a comprehensive understanding of the archaeology of site itself and local area. It planned to locate and determine the nature, function, and date of the two ditch features identified by geophysical survey (resistivity and gradiometry) in 2007. Previous excavation work had been carried out on the site by amateurs, who had recovered Romano-British pottery. Against this background, the aim was to prove conclusively through further work that this related to a Romano-British rural settlement of the site. Because of the nature of the evidence found previously, it was believed to be associated with the previously identified iron smelting sites by the Exmoor Iron Project at Sherracombe Ford, Mill Lane and Bray Vale (<http://www.brayford.org/history.html>). This previous work meant there was a pre-existing link between local people and the University of Exeter, who ran the Exmoor Iron Project, but this was more research based, and community elements were minimal.

The amateurs hoped that involvement in the XArch project would enable them to gain experience and knowledge of archaeology. The opportunity to work alongside professionals, was hoped would offer them validity, accreditation and recognition for their previous (unpublished) and subsequent archaeological work. This had a perceived political value for the local archaeological societies, and the ability to have support for future work.

During the Brayford community project, there was the opportunity for the community members to take part in a range of activities, which included, excavation, finds processing (including identification), pottery making and geophysical survey work.

Values achieved

The research value aims of the Brayford community excavation indicated that they are disparate from the actual values attained as outcomes (Table 1). The critical assessment of the community excavation at Brayford highlighted some interesting points. This was a project initially led from the bottom-up, a grass roots project, which was initiated and led by the enthusiasm of one individual. It therefore had research and knowledge value to select members of the community, and in some senses an individual political and social value. XArch's involvement explicitly attempted to broaden the value of this project, and interlink these values with the HLF predetermined agenda's.

The amateurs (members of the local archaeology society) and professional archaeologists, including XArch Staff, had high expectations as to what values this project could achieve, which were unachiev-

able given the time span of the excavation, location and nature of the site and issues of individuals relinquishing control. This project indicated that the process of researching sites with community staff can be a very slow process. This time issue produced tensions between the archaeologists and amateurs in techniques used to excavate, and obtainable goals, which led to a degree of disappointment in the results and a feeling of lack of commitment from the archaeologists by the amateurs. It was believed by all that with a longer excavation period, more sustainable values would have been achieved.

One of the more successful aspects of this project was the social value which related to the ability of the public to excavate. The skills acquired by local people had long term sustainable values, in enabling them and encouraging them to continue to excavate, giving them the confidence and skills to excavate with minimal professional involvement. The excavation also captured the excitement of the archaeological process and the increasing knowledge of those who already had an interest in archaeology. To the amateurs, involvement in excavation increased the desire to be involved further excavation and partake in more training, including college and university courses. This was also evidential in the Hungate and Chester excavations, in which many of the amateurs went onto run their own excavations with their local archaeology groups (Simpson 2009).

Other aspects of the project proved to be less satisfactory in relation to the project aims. The Brayford fieldwork failed to capture the excitement and interest of those who did not have a previous interest in archaeology. This and the results from a the fully participatory community exca-

vation at Shoreditch; supports the suggestion that participation in excavation rather than non-intrusive field methods and post-excavation work is vital element in creating community values through the project (Simpson & Williams 2008; Simpson 2009). This research, which is backed up from the analysis of Hungate and Mitchell indicated that the majority of the public who visited these projects did not want to dig, but came to experience visually an excavation, and principally attended in order to be entertained, rather than to be educated. It was the social value of being entertained, and making friends, which was perceived to be the most significant value that these projects had to the communities. This was already noted as a weakness of the Stokenham fieldwork element of the X-Arch project and there it was noted that this resulted from the specific motives of local people (Simpson and Williams 2008; Williams and Williams 2007). When discussing Stokenham, it was argued that the project elements in XArch that supported existing community fieldwork projects would be more successful; this is clearly not the case with the Brayford excavation.

These results offer confirmation of our society's desire and demand for immediate gratification and answers to puzzles and historical debates (Holtorf 2005). The long process of archaeological excavation does not often provide this and certainly did not at Brayford where pottery was recovered but no evidence of settlement, i.e. buildings. This may have been regarded as having only a negative impact on the values attached to archaeology. Rather than the prevailing espoused knowledge value, it was the social value that was most prevalent in the actual values of this project and for the individuals involved.

Participation in excavation was key to the learning potential of organized groups such as schools and amateurs. Yet, the educational success of this community archaeology project was limited due to the nature of archaeology on the site. For Brayford

this comprised of the lack of visually stimulating remains (buildings and walls) and finds. It is worth mentioning that sites that offered a more recent temporal framework, which the community could relate to and understand, had more cultural relevance,

Table 1. Summary of major findings of research

Value	Espoused value claims	Actual value outcomes
Social	To encourage proactive and direct involvement by members of the community in their heritage	Involvement was often superficial and partial: a select demographic (amateurs, retirement age) Diversity was not achieved
	Build communities (pride of place)	Did not build communities, already existed. Rather led demographic separation between those involved (amateurs) and not (general public/wider community)
	Meet public desire to dig	Frequently did not meet public desire to dig: The majority of the public did not want to dig
	Encourage a more diverse audience and participation in Archaeology	Opened up dialogues between archaeologists and the public Provided entertainment and social activity
Education	Increase knowledge and awareness of archaeology	Increased knowledge and awareness of archaeology for those participating
	Increase desire and ability to learn	Increased/maintained desire and ability to learn, in those actively participating in excavation and in a select demographic: school children, students, local volunteers (amateurs)
	Research of site	Enabled new archaeological research. Involving UG students?
Economic	Save community cost of commercial excavation	Saved community cost of commercial dig
Political	Increase political awareness of importance of archaeology: change agendas, support and increase funding for archaeology	Created political interest, awareness and appreciation of archaeology locally, through media attention and public pressure
	Increase awareness/support for local government by communities	Has not (to date) directly affected political agendas and financial support for archaeology Met corporate responsibly/patrimony agendas of the University

for instance, Shoreditch and Hungate. These offered the most constructive learning experience for both the community and the archaeologists, in part through their ability to incorporate historical and oral history into the projects (Simpson 2009).

The difficulty in meeting the theoretical aspirations of community archaeology projects often relates to balances of power, and the particular and varied agendas of the local community and archaeologists. This research has indicated that research excavations taking place under the guise of a «community» project, frequently struggle with serving the public and archaeologists simultaneously, often one group's value overshadowing another. In Brayford amateur demands took precedence over community involvement, with the community angle serving as a means to engage in personal research agendas.

Achieving the aimed outputs and values of community archaeology projects requires a more sustainable approach. This would enable them to become more firmly established within the community, learning and adapting along the way. This was the aim at Brayford. Yet like the majority of the community archaeology projects in the UK, which are supported by short-term Heritage Lottery Fund grants, it may be unable to aspire to such expectations. It is long-term and locally-integrated projects like the University Binghamton Community Archaeology Program (Versaggi 2007) and Leicestershire County Council's Community Programme (Liddle 1989) which give some indications for long-term effects on community values attached to archaeology and heritage, which is further backed up by my investigation of

Hungate and to a degree (politically) Annapolis (Simpson 2009). These projects have also encouraged more proactive involvement with the management of the heritage, through the community taking on stewardship roles and forming local interest groups.

These projects offer models for future community archaeology programmes. It could be suggested as such that programmes which are based within institutions, including museums, commercial archaeology units, and County Councils provide a model for sustainability; In part, through their ability to receive direct and indirect funding from within and outside institutions, and both commercial and non-commercial occupations. Furthermore the perceived private investment and charitable donations, i.e. Exeter's privately funded exploration fund provides money to archaeological research; receiving this funding could require a community outreach element, including funding for students to attend these projects and be trained, like the Mitchell Project (Simpson, 2010)

These institutions could provide funding sources, as well as a location for a more permanent project and staff; employing archaeologists with specific training. Such centres can provide appropriate supervision of fieldwork projects exposed to the landscape itself. Furthermore working within an archaeological institution enables support from other research and professional staff, and volunteer labour including students. Although acting as a «top-up» initiative it would aim to influence and support «bottom-up» initiatives, providing appropriate support based on demands of the community rather than just the demands of the professionals, and politicians.

These suggestions, of the integration of community archaeology projects and policies into broader archaeological practice, and of placing them firmly within archaeological organisations and institutions, aim to move community archaeology away from a reliance of HLF and government grants, enabling them to be more sustainable, and culturally and contextually relevant. Furthermore this study aims to fully incorporate community archaeology projects within the public domain, making them part of wider heritage management, providing them with a permanent presence within a community (Holtorf and Hogberg 2005).

Conclusion

It is apparent from the assessment of Brayford and other case studies that community archaeology and community archaeology has value. It is undeniable that excavation forms an intrinsic and vital component in this process in creating a personally relevant and valued past in the present, but it is also only one part of this process which can and should, where appropriate, include fieldwalking, surveying, historical research and oral history work, as all intrinsically linked. This would produce a multi-dimensional community archaeology project, making it truly inclusive to the wider community. It is also important that the focus is not just on the benefit to children, which to date has been the focus of many of these projects and their assessment (Smardz and Smith 2000; Curtis and Curtis 1999), but rather to the community as whole, as values of these multidimensional community archaeology projects are not just restricted to education about the past and knowledge transfer.

Suggested Guidelines for Community Archaeology

Context/location are vital to understanding and attaining the espoused values. Understanding that the political environment plays a key role to these values. Produce a cost benefit analysis before initiating project based on an understanding of these espoused values. This research asserts that in relation to larger, higher cost projects the smaller, lower cost projects can be more successful in obtaining social and educational values, and furthermore can be more sustainable.

Produce contextually specific projects: Through consultation and engaging in critical analysis of the espoused values; revising proposed values and methods based on community relevance and opinion (topic, research, practicalities).

Marketing and communicating the project are vital to achieving actual values from espouse.

Excavation is a key component. Physical involvement in this process is not key value to the majority of members of the community, but watching and being entertained is. Projects which had open physical involvement were more successful in achieving a broader spectrum of actual values.

This research highlights that community archaeology does not work in isolation; rather it is affected directly and even controlled by current political trends and research agenda of museums and universities. Many of the espoused theories are too broad to be taken seriously by academics and in part this relates to the fact that this research highlights community archaeology is directly affected and even controlled by current political trends, being driven by external agendas of politics and research, rather than internal agen-

das of the communities themselves. Yet just because the espoused theories and actual values are disparate from one another does not make these actual values any less relevant or important, it merely indicates the vital nature of research like this and the critical analysis of these projects. It is important that self-evaluation should happen before, during and after community projects are completed in order to enable them to be more contextually rel-

evant, democratic, and relevant to the communities they work within, both in the present and the future. This research indicates the importance of taking an anthropological approach to assessing community archaeology, and how this can produce qualitative data that is more relevant and insightful than merely quantitative analysis, moving community archaeology projects towards providing quality rather than quantity.

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