Field Archaeology, Responsibility and Public Outreach

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One could argue that one of the most important aspects of archaeology is the public outreach. We have an obligation to share our growing knowledge with our community in order to give credibility to our work. What would be the point otherwise? Usually, the public comes into contact with archaeology through museum exhibits, lectures, daily news, scientific articles and books. The last ones are rarely aimed for the public and the museums are struggling with exhibiting more than just artefacts. Since our source material is produced in the field by field archaeologists I believe that it is here the meeting (real or metaphorical) between the public and the archaeologist should take place. If it's through guided tours or a local journalist doesn't really matter. What matters is what is said.

In the last 5 years or so there has been a positive change when it comes to public outreach in archaeology, at least in Sweden. This is, I think, largely due to the breakthrough of social media and the use of smartphones. An archaeologist can now easily give a brief report of what she or he is doing with a photo and a few lines of text. Several of the archaeological institutions also have blogs where they continually write about their projects, with content written and aimed for the public.

In 2009 I did a study of the conveyance of medieval archaeology in a journal called "*Populär Arkeologi*". This is the only popular archaeology journal in Sweden and it has been coming out quarterly since 1983. By studying the content of every issue for two periods of time: 1983-1989 and 2003-2009, and comparing that content with the development of medieval archaeology at the university, I was able to see if the articles in the journal reflected the development of the subject. This empirical study acted as a foundation for the study of responsibility and lead up to the question: *What is the situation of responsibility when it comes to field archaeology and public outreach?*

In Sweden the law states that an archaeological survey or excavation must take place if a contractor wants to build something that is suspected to affect archaeological remains, visible or hidden beneath the topsoil. The contractor must report to the County Administrative board and they, in their turn, decide whether it's necessary to start up an archaeological project or not. **The law also states that the contractor must pay for the archaeology.** This system results in an abundance of archaeological projects where a lot of information is produced continually.

Table 1. Hierarchy of responsibility. Note that this is based on Swedish circumstances.

Politicians/Government	Has the ultimate responsibility. Can make actual changes that enables more funding to public outreach in archaeology.

County administration	Makes the decisions for contract archaeological projects. Could demand more effort in public outreach and approve higher costs.
University	Could include more systematic training in public outreach.
Contract archaeological institutions and companies	Has the responsibility to manage the competence in public outreach.
Archaeologists	Is in direct contact with the public and has the responsibility to convey archaeology in a responsible way.
Popular archaeological journals	Could, as an independent actor, raise the issue of archaeology being integral in the development of our society.

Several of my fellow archaeologists claims that they are working with public outreach as much as they can. But then we must ask ourselves, what kind of archaeology are we conveying? Well, basically it is the history or prehistory that we focus on in our outreach. In our communication with the public, directly or via a journalist, our message boils down to *facts about human life in history and or prehistory.* That's not bad in any way. Our job is to produce these kinds of facts. But there is more to archaeology - especially field archaeology.

The responsible way to convey archaeology is not only to focus on these facts but all the stuff surrounding archaeological science. In my opinion we have to include the following two aspects in our public outreach:

1. *The development of archaeological research.* Archaeology is more than artefacts. It develops with our society and scholars are influenced by the current zeitgeist, which in itself is constantly changing. It's not treasure hunting.
2. *The roll of field archaeology and the physical development of our environment.* The field archaeologist in Sweden plays a vital role when it comes to urban and rural planning and it's crucial that the public is aware of how the system works.

My hierarchy of responsibility (see table above) tries to summarize the complexity of the situation where everyone has a part to play. My opinion is that it should begin at the universities with the education of future archaeologists in how to deal with the more complex sides of archaeological public outreach. If we can establish a routine and a sense of comfort in conveying all aspects of archaeology, at the departments and in the field, we can do our subject justice.

To summarize, I want to stress the fact that we ourselves, as archaeologists, have a responsibility to our own collegium and to the public equally, to convey not just the dating of artefacts but also our methods and research thesis. What are the particular questions we're looking to answer when we are writing our reports? The public has the right to know and I think it will benefit the archaeology in the long run.

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