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Jaime Almansa Sánchez & Elena Papagiannopoulou



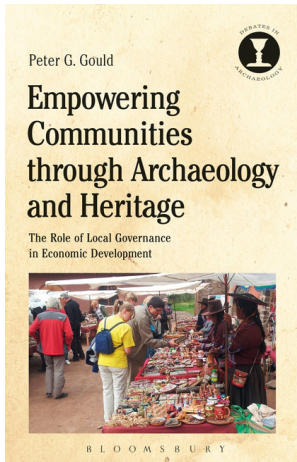
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REVIEWS



Jaime ALMANSA-SÁNCHEZ

Empowering Communities through Archaeology and Heritage: The Role of Local Governance in Economic Development

[Peter G. Gould]

Bloomsbury, 2018

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182 pages

"Sustainable outcomes that truly benefit communities are more likely if we trust, empower, and support local people to take responsibility for the heritage that matters to them."

The opening statement from Peter Gould is hardly debatable. Logically, if something matters to someone, any action to keep this something will be more sustainable. But *Empowering Communities through Archaeology and Heritage* is not about that horrible debate about values. It is a well-oriented work that touches on the intersection of economic development, governance and heritage management. The opening chapters paint a very clear background on these topics, with a fair description of the current reality. Gould's approach is well-argued, largely due to his experience in the field.

The structure of the book is simple. The first three chapters outline a theoretical framework in three specific topics. Chapter 1 focuses on communities and archaeology within the economic development paradigm. Chapter 2 delves into the top-down system that prevails in heritage management, and chapter 3 into the

alternatives for governance that arise against this system. Then, Gould provides four case studies—the first three (in Peru, Belize and Ireland) from his 2014 dissertation, and the fourth (Italy) from a parallel project.

Without going into the case studies at length, they do portray different models of governance, and the complexities that affect their running history and success. Gould also cites some other examples in the literature, but the picture is not really complete—although it must be said that most cases do not appear in in academic (or any other) literature, so it would be absurd to just list blindly whatever is happening out there. Here, I would like to highlight the approach taken by Cristina Sánchez-Carretero, José Muñoz-Albadalejo, Ana Ruiz-Blanch and Joan Roura-Expósito in 2019, which appeared after *Empowering Communities through Archaeology and Heritage* was published. This is originally in Spanish, although there are some short overviews in English (Cortés-Vázquez et al., 2017).

Throughout the book, Gould consciously uses a simplified definition of 'community' as those living in the surroundings of a heritage site. This is indeed the definition that is commonly used when not considering the conflicts implicit in the term. In this case, however, these conflicts are not hidden; the case studies and general analyses are very conscious of the complex reality of communities. This is perhaps one of the greatest strengths of this book—bypassing debates on concepts, and going straight to an analysis of the reality of the situation.

However, there is one concept that I believed is used unfairly in *Empowering Communities through Archaeology and Heritage*, and in Anglo-Saxon literature generally. When we speak about a 'public good' in the broad South, we do not necessarily mean state-owned, or privative of the state, even if that does occur in most cases. The general interest derived from French law (see *Réflexions sur l'intérêt général - Rapport public 1999*), is about granting, in this case, no particular will to appropriate something that belongs to all. It is true that in many cases, the state use of heritage may be dubious, but it would be untrue to base criticism on that instead of the actual meaning of the concept, which is closer to the commons than usually stated in the literature.

My main concern is with the third chapter. I do agree, in general, that local forms of organisation need to occur and be involved into the management of heritage. But—at least in places where we still try to keep some form of the not-so-liberal state—the dismantling of public services also affects cultural heritage in a broad sense. There seems to be an underlying philosophy of Anglo-Saxon liberalism in the text that proffers the nonprofit solution to make up for the privatisation of public services.

Most constitutions in the broad South recognise that access to culture—encompassing archaeological heritage—is a right granted by the state, which is directly linked with the concept of public domain addressed above. In this sense, we need to defend and reclaim this right. In many cases, the state grants this access in a top-down approach from sites and institutions under its direct management. They will do better or worse, with higher or lower, more or less positive impact, caring either for tourism or people, but that is another story (that, by the way, I will tell soon with the outcomes of my current project). There is a need to address public management and things are slowly changing for the better.

My concern is with sites that are abandoned, both by competent administrations and the people. Then, the approach comes from two directions—side actions to publicly managed sites and direct management of abandoned sites. Interestingly, most of the success stories of economic development through heritage are from the first approach—i.e., cooperatives or larger companies that use the touristic impact of a site to promote heritage-related businesses. My question would then be whether the governance strategy is for the sites themselves or just the organisations. There are also some examples of the latter approach, even with ‘funny’ outcomes, like the reappropriation of the structure from the state once it is successful.

Coming back to the book, I would like to highlight what Gould terms the “conceptual approach to working with communities to design effective governance institutions.” Even though I am sceptical of the efficiency of this model for successful management in most contexts, I fully agree with the proposal. This conceptual approach begins with context—defining where things will happen,

and making all the possibilities visible. Second, capacity—whether these possibilities are realistic. Third, governance—finding the best way to manage the chosen option. This is not a recipe for success, but is a realistic approach to take to achieve the best possible scenario.

But is this approach bottom-up? I keep seeing the hand of an external body interfering in the construction of these institutions. Again, there is the prior step where we have to make the decision to stop imposing an idea of heritage, or to make our idea matter to others.

There are very few examples where these initiatives come straight from below. Normally, in contexts where the Occidental concept of heritage is totally assimilated, other factors come into play. As I said earlier, many such cases are not in academic literature, especially in English, but from my experience I would highlight just one, the Naples Catacombs,¹ where a group of young, unemployed professionals from the neighbourhood recovered a site, with one eye on conservation and management, and the other on the development of a larger community in the city. Despite the challenges they faced and minimal external intervention, they managed to make it a success.

Returning to Gould's opening quote, 'we' have to be careful. Supporting local initiatives is essential, but this must be from a position of honesty about the resulting changes and impact. I believe that this position is present in *Empowering Communities through Archaeology and Heritage*, and the tools it brings to the table can actually help 'them' decide which direction to go in, with or without us.

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¹ Catacombe di Napoli. <https://www.catacombedinapoli.it/it>

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Sánchez-Carretero, C., Muñoz-Albadalejo, J., Ruiz-Blanch, A. and Roura-Expósito, J. (Eds.) (2019). *El imperativo de la participación en la gestión patrimonial*. Madrid. CSIC.

BLOG REVIEWS WITHIN VOL 9

There were no blog reviews during 2019

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Book

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Edited book

Durbin, G. (ed.) 1996. *Developing Museum Exhibitions for Livelong Learning*. London, GEM.

Section in book

McEwan, C., Silva, M. I. and Hudson, Ch. 2006. Using the past to forge the future: the genesis of the community site museum at Aguablanca, Ecuador. In H. Silverman (ed.), *Archaeological site museums in Latin America*. Gainesville, University of Florida Press, 187-216.

Internet reference

United Nations 1992, *Agenda 21*. Retrieved on 29 January 2010 from WWW [http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/agenda21/res_agenda21_00.shtml]

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Work reports and reviews will not need to pass the peer-review process, but will be commented by the editor.

We will be publishing one volume per year (first trimester) and although we are willing to receive papers the whole year, full articles for next-year's volume should be sent before October in order to complete the process with time.

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact the editor at: jasarqueologia@gmail.com

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AP: Online Journal in Public Archaeology

Editors:

Jaime Almansa Sánchez & Elena Papagiannopoulou

Email: almansasanchez@gmail.com

Assistant editors:

Amanda Erickson Harvey

Reviews editor:

Alexandra Ion

Assistant production editor:

Alejandra Galmés Alba

Edited by:

JAS Arqueología S.L.U.

Website: www.jasarqueologia.es

Email: jasarqueologia@gmail.com

Address: Plaza de Mondariz, 6, 28029 - Madrid (Spain)

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