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Editors:

Jaime Almansa Sánchez & Elena Papagiannopoulou



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Online Journal in Public Archaeology

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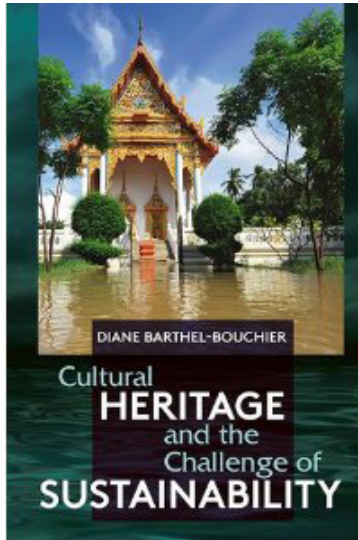
Online Journal in Public Archaeology

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REVIEWS



Jaime ALMANSA SÁNCHEZ
JAS Arqueología S.L.U.

**Cultural Heritage and the
Challenge of Sustainability**
[Diane Barthel-Bouchier]

Left Coast Press
ISBN: 978-1-61132-238-5
235 pages

Sustainability. Since I finished my MA thesis I tremble just by listening to this word. It has been a while since I wrote it and my perspective is now a little bit different than it was back then. It sounds obvious that we need to seek for sustainable management in order to survive as a species, whatever sceptic reactionary ultraliberal thinkers say (what an insult here). When I say management I mean everything, and among this 'everything' we find cultural heritage. Is this the premise of the book? Well, not only.

I have to start by saying that Diane Barthel-Bouchier writes a sensational piece about the need to conserve (not preserve) cultural heritage and the threats that climate change and unsustainable management bring.

It is said that we are never happy with the weather. If it rains, we complain. If it is hot and sunny, we complain again. For the English expression "we can't please everyone", in Spain we say "it never rains to everyone's liking". The problem is not the weather, but the timing. We just have to watch the news to see how droughts or floods affect people... and cultural heritage.

Why am I always saying 'cultural heritage'? I do, because the book starts with a reflection about cultural heritage as a human right. We started constructing the idea of 'heritage' over memory and history. Soon, international organizations applied outstanding values (even universal) to protect and preserve some places. Nature was easily understood, but culture has been more complex and, in some cases, a failure from our perspective as managers. Chapter two delves into the concept of value. Chapter three overviews the role of different NGOs, closing the circle of what is probably the most interesting part of the book, even if you disagree with the author in some terms.

Chapters four to six expose natural threats related to climate change: sea level rise, river flooding, desertification, deforestation, polar melting and (green) energy. These issues should not sound strange to us, especially when dealing with public archaeology. There are plenty of examples showing that these threats have already become real and there are more to come. However important it is to be aware of these issues, the most important point of this block of chapters is in chapter 5 with the underlying idea of 'the other', a classic debate in anthropology that raises Western guilt about the problems of these hundreds of 'tribes' (and other 'others') directly affected by our impact, thousands of people living under natural threats triggered by our unsustainable way of living.

Chapter seven deals with tourism, a topic that is especially interesting when it comes to sustainability. This was actually the topic of my MA thesis and other further works. Perspectives are different depending on the experience and maybe the author lacks some of them, but the core of the discourse is very similar to what I would have expected and said; a raw critique of international institutions and the fake expectation of economic growth. Tourism is a very sensitive topic, mainly when talking about World Heritage. Without the real involvement of all stakeholders (private and public, international and local) and a well-planned management, it is easy to fall into bad habits. While I am writing these lines, a national newspaper in Spain denounces how a 30% of Spanish soil is protected as a natural reserve but a large amount of these extensive declarations are violated for the benefit of the Capital (Sevillano 2014). Cultural heritage suffers from the same problem.

Finally, the last chapter recapitulates the main ideas of the book with some final thoughts. I would like to highlight a sentence, "If Marx drew our attention to the social relations of production we need now also to pay attention to the social relations of conservation" (189), and a reference (Collins 2008).

Many researchers say that a book can be judged by its bibliography. As a sociologist, Diane Barthel-Bouchier offers us some new interesting texts to take into account as public archaeologists (or sociologists of archaeology). That is, per se, an important point to take into account when we are absorbed with archaeology.

But coming back to the topic of the book, I would like to focus this review on two aspects: the value of cultural heritage and the threats of sustainability. We are again debating whether what we do is backed by society. 'Value' is a complicated concept that we normally associate with economy. However, even apparently useless things happen to be essential. Cultural Heritage is a broad topic that covers archaeological remains of the ancient past, but also multiple representations of our present societies. As a changing matter, culture evolves into very different things, creating conflicts. Where do we stop? Or what is more intriguing... where do we start? Maybe climate change is a cultural product too and we have to 'conserve' it. These radical thoughts come from the mouth of an archaeologist that has seen how contemporary heritage is often destroyed in seeking for past remains. But Collins' article reminded me of my own experience in Ethiopia (Almansa 2013), or more likely, the experience of local communities affected by our interest in cultural heritage. The sustainability of cultural heritage is sometimes unsustainable for people.

This step beyond the book brings us back to a real problem affecting cultural heritage and society. My concern is not the destruction of an archaeological site, but the consequences of this same threat for the local communities living around it. The Human Right is not enjoying the site, but living. This is probably my only critique of the book, and I am sure the author agrees with it. In our specialization we tend to defend our subject of study. I, as an archaeologist, will always feel responsible for an

archaeological site over other conceptions of culture. However, as a public archaeologist, my devotion is not to heritage but to people. This is probably the best definition of public archaeology I have ever written.

In sum, those of us who get paid to manage, research or protect cultural heritage need to be aware of this book and the topics represented in it. Sustainability is a challenge we have to face today, not in the future. The consequences of climate change are affecting us now and, if there is a positive conclusion to draw from all this, it is that we can work together to combat this growing threat. Our primary goals will probably be different, but the result will be good for everyone. This is not a book to read; it is a book to adopt, reflect upon and put into practice.

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BLOG REVIEWS UNTIL VOL 4

Almansa-Sánchez, J. Audiences... A review of the CASPAR session at TAG-on-Sea 2013 (Bournemouth University) - 11 February

Papagiannopoulou, E. Multivocality and Technology: Review of a lecture at the Irish Institute of Hellenic Studies at Athens (IIHSA) - 14 February

Touloupa, S. A 30-year retrospect of the Greek Ministry of Culture educational programmes: an insider's insight - 25 April

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Book

Demoule, J. P. 2007. *L'archéologie préventive dans le monde. Apports de l'archéologie préventive a la connaissance du passé*. Paris, La Découverte.

Edited book

Durbin, G. (ed.) 1996. *Developing Museum Exhibitions for Lifelong 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.

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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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Cover Image: *What are you looking at?* (CAC)

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ISSN: 2171-6315

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