

## EAC 26th Annual Meeting and Heritage Management Symposium

27-29 March 2025, Gdansk, Poland

### CONCEPT NOTE

#### **Life after life of archaeological archives – accessibility and re-use of archaeological collections in heritage management**

10 years ago, the European Archaeological Council set out on a mission to embed archaeology in the society. As stated in the [Amersfoort Agenda](#), heritage managers across Europe wanted to:

- “Stimulate and facilitate society’s involvement in archaeology, while at the same time encouraging archaeology’s involvement in society by linking it to other policy domains and the societal challenges of today’s world
- Know the public: analyse the wants, interests and expectations of stakeholders in society regarding their involvement in archaeology, preferably through interaction with those stakeholders
- Integrate archaeology into education for children and young people” (EAC 2015, s.16).

Within the theme of “Managing the sources of European history”, they expressed a need to “aim for the greatest possible access to digital archaeological resources for various user groups and exploit digital databases to their full potential, including uses for the greater public” (EAC 2015, s.21). All this in the spirit of the Council of Europe [Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society](#), which states that a prerequisite for cultural heritage is its recognition as a reflection and expression of the constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions of people (CoE 2005, Art.2).

With regard to the EAC mission, it should be recalled that the signatories of the Faro Convention have decided to place people and human values, sometimes contradictory, at the heart of an enhanced interdisciplinary concept of cultural heritage. They recognize everyone's right to benefit from the cultural heritage and to contribute towards its enrichment, while respecting the rights and freedoms of others. Respect for the heritage of others as part of the common heritage of Europe is henceforth an obligation. “In return”, the Convention gives people a voice to assign their own meanings and values to those remains of the past that they consider heritage. The parties to the Convention are also convinced of the need to involve everyone in society in the ongoing process of defining and managing cultural heritage (CoE 2005, Preamble).

In order to fulfil its ambitious plan, the EAC’s work in the following years concentrated around the broad topic of making choices, resulting in the development and publication of [EAC Guidelines 3-10](#), tackling the issues of significance, public benefit, research frameworks, and archaeological archiving. In the broader strategic context, an increasing number of parties have ratified the Faro Convention and there has been a general increase in the attention given to cultural heritage and its potential. For example, from 2017 onwards, [Strategy 21](#) and related activities were undertaken, and in 2018, the European Year of Cultural Heritage was celebrated.

At the forthcoming symposium, we intend to conduct a more detailed examination of the current state of the heritage management and archaeological sectors with regard to archaeological archives. This examination will take place 10 years after the formulation of the Amersfoort Agenda and 20 years after the Faro Convention. Do archaeologists perceive themselves as one of heritage communities? To what extent are the general public and other stakeholders regarded as actual partners by national or regional systems of archaeological heritage management? Does the archaeological community enable and facilitate the reuse of archives?

The 26th EAC symposium invites submissions of papers addressing the following themes. Prospective speakers are encouraged to consider the broader implications of their research beyond the scope of individual case studies. This entails a focus on the needs of systemic archaeological heritage management, including the scalability of presented case studies.

NOTE: the term “**archaeological archives**” is defined as in EAC guidelines 3:

“any documents or materials (finds) produced during an archaeological project and selected for archiving” (Perrin *et al.* 2014, 19). “An archaeological archive comprises all records and objects recovered during an archaeological project and identified for long term preservation, including artefacts, ecofacts and other environmental remains, waste products, scientific samples and also written and visual documentation in paper, film and digital form” (Perrin *et al.* 2014, 20).

## **Theme 1: What is FAIR archaeological heritage data and are we there yet?**

Chair: David Novák

The past three decades have witnessed a significant shift towards digitalization in the management of archaeological heritage. A number of initiatives and individual projects have been established with the objective of digitizing, enhancing, and sharing data. Since 2016, the FAIR principles ([www.go-fair.org](http://www.go-fair.org)) have served as a gold standard for this endeavour. It is worth noting that ARIADNE RI and SEADDA represent two significant examples of projects addressing this issue on a large scale. A European overview of existing solutions provided during short interventions by the delegates and guests to the thematic session "[Archaeology and Artificial Intelligence](#)" organized in 2021 by the CoE's Steering Committee for Culture, Heritage, and Landscape, revealed a vast collection of GIS database and archiving systems throughout Europe.

It is imperative that archaeological heritage data should be made FAIR, but is it? Do all the relevant stakeholders have an adequate understanding of the heritage assets that we possess and where it can be found? Is there sufficient clarity and explicitness in the communication of the value of our archives? To what extent can archaeological data and systems be made understandable, interesting, and user-friendly for the general public, and not only heritage professionals and developers? How can we ensure and measure that users are satisfied with the product? How can we ascertain the extent of our digital success and what novel methodologies can be employed to enhance it? Are our digital solutions sustainable?

## **Theme 2: Unlocking the potential of physical archaeological archives and the (changing?) role of modern archaeological repositories**

Chair: Kaat De Langhe

The EAC guidance thus far has concerned archaeological projects that conclude with the transfer of properly prepared and studied archives to permanent storage facilities. Archaeologists were advised to collaborate with curators from selected repositories, and the necessity of ensuring access to the gathered materials was emphasized. However, the role of repositories as modern archaeological institutions was not sufficiently addressed. Should they, and do they, have enough capacity to reach the public outside the archaeological sector, either directly or through collaboration with museums and other organizations specialising in outreach activities? How can repositories contribute to the integration of archaeology into society, specifically, how can they facilitate access without compromising the heritage in their care? In what way can archaeological repositories most effectively be used to highlight the participatory potential of archaeology? How can the sometimes contradictory needs of different heritage communities be accommodated in the use of archaeological collections?

## **Theme 3: Beyond archaeology – the value of archaeological archives**

Chair (tbc): Barney Sloane

Engaging the wider public by the re-use of archaeological archives should not be focused solely on studying the past. The report entitled *“The Benefits of Development-led Archaeology”*, published in 2024 as “EAC Guidelines 4” lists several substantial public benefits that can be achieved and maximised through careful consideration and planning. How can we use archaeological archives for science and innovation, medicine, education, health and well-being, etc.? Within this theme we welcome papers presenting already operational solutions or ideas for developments, as well as proposed directions in heritage studies. The latter two should be supported by data from scalable case studies or research projects.

