

FORUM

Investing in Urban Studies to Ensure Urban Archaeology's Future: A Response to 'The Challenges and Opportunities for Mega-infrastructure Projects and Archaeology'

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In reading J. J. Carver's excellent suggestions for how to better enable archaeology and large urban infrastructure projects to progress to mutual benefit, I found myself in enthusiastic agreement with his point that 'professional working relationships are the most important challenge for archaeology in mega projects' and that we must convince project directors, engineers, and site teams that archaeology 'can enhance the value of the project they are building' (4). This is especially crucial in cities like New York City (NYC), where government protection of cultural heritage is weaker than in London and where the city's identity is tied more to its future than its past. In future-oriented cities, it is thus necessary to take Carver's point even further and to engage people involved in all levels of urban planning and development, both at project sites and within the academic programs that train them, to help bring about a cultural shift in attitudes towards the value of archaeology. Connecting with urban studies, urban planning, or architecture students and faculty, for example, is an important contribution that

academic archaeologists, who might not be familiar with large infrastructure projects, can make to help bring about this change and ensure archaeology's future in cities.

With the US (and the world) becoming increasingly urbanized, urban studies programs have grown dramatically in popularity and influence, training more and more future urban leaders and workers. These programs appeal to students because they are interdisciplinary, accommodate a broad range of interests, and encourage practical applications of method and theory to solve urban problems. Despite most urban studies programs in the US incorporating history or historic preservation into their curricula, they very rarely include archaeology. This absence likely stems both from their initial growth out of architecture and planning schools and from their focus during the last few decades on contemporary urban political, social, and economic problems (Klemek 2011). As an archaeologist and a new professor in Barnard College and Columbia University's Urban Studies Program in NYC, I have been trying to make archaeology more important to my students and colleagues and a more integral part of the curriculum.

Carver points out that both speaking to the concerns of non-archaeologist collabora-

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tors and using the language of their field are critical to the success of the collaboration (3). This I have also found to be true. Discovering the concerns of urban studies students and faculty and learning their language has meant learning more about the other disciplines that contribute to urban studies and doing a lot of reading, listening, observing, and conversing. In other words, it has required me to conduct research and informal ethnography outside of archaeology.

One thing I quickly discovered at Barnard - and I think this is true for most urban studies programs - is that the students and faculty use much of the same language and theories that archaeologists use to describe human interactions with the contemporary built environment. They do not, however, readily extend these ideas to objects or to the past. So, I try to meet them where they are, by using the ideas and sites they are already familiar with, like place attachment to discuss the World Trade Center site, for example, before very slowly nudging them to contemplate older sites, artifacts, or unfamiliar concepts like materiality. This takes time.

Addressing the concerns of urban studies students and faculty at Barnard means showing them how archaeology can be part of solutions to social, economic, and/or planning problems in the urban environment, instead of a costly hobby for a few ivory-tower eccentrics or adventurous Indiana Jones-types. Examples from NYC that I have presented to my students range from the more conceptual, like using the Five Points site to denaturalize the construction of class inequalities in the past and present (Reckner 2002), to the more concrete, like showing how the African Burial Ground site mobilized the descendant community and its allies to fight against racism in the present (LaRoche and Blakey 1997). The community's efforts, moreover, were successful in creating the African Burial Ground National Monument, which has brought jobs and tourism. Generating a list of more examples from other cities around the world would help archaeologists both in having more of

these kinds of productive conversations with non-archaeologists and in developing ways to make their own field-sites more relevant to a broader audience.

Of course, the ways in which we present examples of archaeology's benefits matter, even beyond the language we use. Not surprisingly, the more multi-sensory I have made my examples, the better students and colleagues have received them. Using images or video in lectures and talks is a good start, but bringing artifacts for them to touch or taking them to visit sites or the handful of artifacts displayed at city museums has had a bigger impact. (Unfortunately, NYC does not have a museum that showcases the city's history through archaeological finds, or even a dedicated repository for artifacts, like most other global cities. This is, obviously, an immense drawback.)

Inviting urban studies students and faculty to participate in archaeological fieldwork or lab work so that they can become acquainted with our language and participate personally in our concerns and discoveries might be the most effective way to motivate them to consider archaeology's benefits. Archaeologists in NYC have had many positive experiences involving construction crews and engineers in their work, thereby transforming them into advocates for archaeology. I have had great success convincing urban studies students with a quantitative bent of the value of qualitative research by involving them in ethnographic fieldwork. Involving them in archaeological fieldwork in NYC, admittedly, is much more complicated. It requires finding property owners interested in having students tear up their backyards or convincing cultural resources management firms under strict budget and time demands to take on untrained volunteers, for example. The high cost of including tomorrow's planners and politicians in fieldwork today, however, is an important investment in archaeology's future.

The need to create more advocates for urban archaeology will become even more pressing in the future, as cities continue to grow and

government budgets for cultural heritage continue to shrink. Meaningfully engaging urban studies students with archaeology, both in the classroom and in the field, is an important long-term approach to help resolve what Carver identifies as urban archaeology's most important challenge.

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