

# PARTICIPATE IN A BROADER SENSE?

## Thoughts on Swedish Contract Archaeology and Approaches to the Public in the Light of the Excavations in Motala 1999–2013

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Whether and, if so, how archaeology can create meaning and value in society is a long and ongoing debate. Due to a rewriting of the Swedish law on cultural heritage, and the rhetoric of the national authorities stressing society's extended expectations of the practice, the topic is more current than ever for Swedish contract archaeology. In a case study this paper addresses the subject from a local perspective, focusing on the use of archaeology and approaches to the public. It is argued that contract archaeology has better potential to fulfil its public assignment than is utilized today, but will need to upgrade its self-image and embrace more varied approaches to the public.

*Keywords: contract archaeology, public archaeology, Swedish law on cultural heritage, culture policy, stakeholders, narrative*

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On 1 January 2014 parts of the Swedish law on cultural heritage were rewritten. Now the County Administration (Sw. *länsstyrelsen* abbreviated as *Lst*), i.e. the regional decision-making authority in the cultural heritage sector, can demand that the findings from archaeological investigations caused by development must be *mediated* (Sw. *förmedlas*) to the public (SFS 1988:950 2 kap. §13).<sup>1</sup> This means that developers can be made responsible for the cost of public activities in connection with projects in contract archaeology (CA).

In Swedish CA there is a long tradition of making excavation results publicly accessible, for example, through guided tours, exhibitions, lectures, and texts (Ersgård 2009). Meanwhile, what is expected of this activity has gradually changed. The National Heritage Board (Sw. *Riksantikvarieämbetet*, abbreviated as RAÄ), i.e. the national supervisory authority, has for instance recently stated that CA must “become more communicative and respond to society’s demand for information, knowledge, and relevance. To achieve this requires a shift of focus from the intradisciplinary results to the public assignment in a broader perspective” (RAÄ 2012:6).<sup>2</sup>

Parallel to this shift posed by the RAÄ, there has been a long and lively academic discussion within the Swedish archaeological field about the meaning and societal relevance of the subject. It has been emphasized that, alongside public enlightenment, which traditionally has been the aim of public mediation in CA, there are other ways to perceive what archaeological knowledge is, how it arises, and what value and meaning it brings to the people (e.g. Burström 1999; Karlsson & Nilsson 2001; Högberg 2003, 2004; Petersson 2003; Svanberg & Wahlgren 2007; Gill 2008; Synnestvedt 2008; Persson 2014). The debate has occasionally been viewed as conflict-fraught partly since it concerns the relationship between professional experts and citizens (Grundberg 2000; Pettersson 2003).

The archaeological field here connects to more general discussions concerning the values attached to cultural heritage and the establishing of value systems (e.g. Beckman 1993; Carlie & Kretz 1998; Unnerbäck 2002; RAÄ 2014). It also connects to international debates on how cultural heritage and archaeology are attributed value, and how this affects the practice of archaeological management. It has been stressed that the

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1 Sweden is divided into 21 counties, each with a County Administration ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/County\\_Administrative\\_Boards\\_of\\_Sweden](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/County_Administrative_Boards_of_Sweden)). Swedish Contract Archaeology uses *förmedling* (literally, mediation) as an umbrella term for different types of public activities, although there is awareness that the word is above all associated with one-way communication (Petersson 2005:78).

2 All quotations are translated from Swedish to English except when stated.

relation between archaeology and the public is a contextual and socially meaning-making process that creates a great number of values in addition to conveying a narrative about cultural history (e.g. Lipe 1984; Darvill 1995; Faulkner 2000; Marshall 2002; Derry & Malloy 2003; Merriman 2004a; Holtorf 2007; Matsuda & Okamura 2011a).

The rewriting of the Swedish law on cultural heritage, in connection with the rhetoric of the RAÄ, can be viewed as having increased demands, but also improved opportunities, for CA to broaden its public assignment and thus to better satisfy society's extended expectations (SFS 1988:950; KRFS 2007:2; RAÄ 2012). This in turn is in line with the government's overall policy that the state's work with cultural heritage should promote a sustainable society, people's participation, an inclusive society, and a holistic view in which the cultural heritage is considered in societal development (Prop 2012/13:96).

The problem addressed in this paper is evident when we turn to the practice of CA, a context that both authors are part of. Despite the increasing demands for broader perspectives we (the authors) find that still very little of this is reflected in our everyday activities. On the contrary, in many cases it is clear how both the County Administrations and we as contract archaeologists have found it difficult to develop methods in which the aims go beyond the antiquarian and scholarly framework of our activities. If the goal of CA practice is to address society's various interests in archaeology, it is essential to find ways to develop greater awareness of the wider range of possibilities that public work involves in relation to the citizens.

The purpose of this article is therefore to illuminate the great variety of ways in which CA creates meaning and values in local contexts, and in doing so to highlight some areas with development potential. This is done through a case study based on a series of CA projects in the town of Motala, Östergötland, Sweden, in which we have taken part (Gruber on behalf of RAÄ and Arnberg for Stiftelsen Kulturmiljövård, KM).

In the case study we analyse methods of mediation used by CA to communicate the findings to the public, the variety of stakeholders met due to public activities, narrative figures created through these meetings, and how the narratives acquire meanings as a consequence of the situations they are used in. This is a reflexive empirical study where historical and ethnographical approaches are used, such as text analysis (official documents, newspaper articles, oral presentations, websites, etc.), participatory observations (mainly through our public activities), and interviews and informal discussions (Alvesson & Sköldbberg 1994:11). In the case study phenomenon, contexts, situations and narratives are used to discover, describe, understand and interpret the variety of values and

meanings ascribed to CA within a local context (Flyvbjerg 1991:159ff). It is shown that, due to the CA projects, a large number of meaning-making narratives have been initiated. We argue that increased awareness about what makes archaeology meaningful in different contexts, and for different stakeholders, is important for CA to better satisfy society's expectation of this field.

The case study is presented against the background of a national and international discussion about the relationship between archaeology and the public, and in the light of the changed Swedish legislation.

## THE PUBLIC POTENTIAL OF ARCHAEOLOGY – PERSPECTIVES AND APPROACHES

In Swedish CA, public engagement has traditionally proceeded from the perspective that the archaeologists, i.e. the professionals, are the producers of knowledge and the public the receivers of such. Public contacts have chiefly been intended to educate, while there has simultaneously been an interest in legitimating work done on behalf of the citizens, largely financed by public funds (Holtorf 2007:108–119; Petersson 2005; Svanberg & Wahlgren 2007).

The notion that the role of the profession is as a guarantor and communicator of knowledge is part of a larger context in the theory of knowledge (see e.g. Merriman 2004b:5f). In a critical study of the institutionalization and self-confirming practice of heritage management, Laurajane Smith (2006) refers to what she calls the authorized heritage discourse (AHD). This discourse focuses attention on the aesthetic value and the knowledge that are believed to be concealed in the heritage. It can be seen as a moral outlook that has developed around notions of authenticity. The duty of present generations is to protect and preserve the material objects, sites, places, and landscapes so that they can be passed on to coming generations, for their education, and to create a sense of shared identity with a foundation in the past (Smith 2006:29ff; Smith & Waterton 2009:27ff). The proper care of the fragile and non-renewable artefacts is guaranteed through the practices developed by the AHD, i.e. by the professional experts:

The AHD constructs not only a particular definition of heritage, it also provides the parameters within which authorized discussions about the heritage can take place (Waterton & Smith 2009:14).

In this way ideas are created about common sense in the treatment of ancient monuments, that is, a mechanism for social control. This in

turn leads to the rise of power relations in which, as described above, the public are regarded as passive receivers of the narratives mediated by the professionals (Waterton & Smith 2009:12).

In the Swedish context, AHD has its roots in the seventeenth century, when several interlinked mobilization techniques, still active today, were established: legislation, administration, education, professions, field surveys, archaeological excavations (Grundberg 2000; Jensen 2006). The narrative of the governmental responsibility and ownership of the heritage was emphasized especially during the nineteenth century (Hillström 2006:72ff). After World War II, CA was formed as part of this social mechanism and as a consequence of the massive physical expansion of society. Professionalized archaeology became an instrument of culture policy and public education as the practice valued the ancient remains in relation to a national narrative (Pettersson 2003:241; Ambrosiani 2009:11ff).

As demonstrated by the discussion cited in the introduction, the more traditional approach to the public, based on the notion of enlightenment, is thus only one way to address the subject. From this perspective the purpose of engaging the public with archaeology could equally be “to encourage self-realisation, to enrich people’s lives and stimulate reflection and creativity” (Merriman 2004b:7). It has been stressed that archaeology is an exciting and meaningful practice generating significant stories about the present, as well as the past (Holtorf 2009:182).

As a way to promote a more inclusive archaeology, the concept of *community archaeology* has been established. This can broadly be described as partnership between archaeologists and the communities. The purpose is to achieve co-creation, and the approach requires that the profession at least partially relinquish control of the archaeological process and to a greater extent get local stakeholders participating in the meaning-making processes of archaeology. This requires involving the citizens’ perspectives and narratives (Marshall 2002; Derry & Malloy 2003; Simpson & Williams 2008; Simpson 2010). In a Swedish context there are examples of projects inspired by community archaeology, although they are still unusual in CA (Svanberg & Wahlgren 2007; Högberg 2008; Synnestvedt 2008; Persson 2014; for CA see Högberg 2003, 2004 and for CA in Motala Engström & Gruber 2011 and Arnberg & Gruber 2013).

To include both traditional forms of outreach and other perspectives, we have chosen in this paper to adopt Akira Matsuda and Katsuyuki Okamura’s broad and inclusive definition of *public archeology* by them used when approaching the subject from a global perspective (Matsuda & Okamura 2011:4a, 2011b:4). Drawing on and refining the models of

Merriman (2004b) and Holtorf (2007), Matsuda and Okamura identify four approaches to public archaeology: (1) *the educational approach*, which sees the public as a subject of education; (2) *the public relations approach*, which suggests that archaeologists should try to improve the public image of archaeology and thus sees the public as a subject of lobbying; (3) *the critical approach*, which is grounded on a critical epistemology and focuses on the question of whose interests are served by a particular interpretation of the past; and (4) *the multivocal approach*, which is based on hermeneutic epistemology and seeks to identify and acknowledge various interpretations made by different social groups and individuals in different contexts of contemporary society (Matsuda & Okamura 2011b:5ff). To capture this diversity Matsuda and Okamura define public archaeology as a subject which examines the relationship between archaeology and the public, and seeks to improve it (Matsuda & Okamura 2011b:4). It is from this broad perspective we have chosen to address the topic, in our case with a focus on how Swedish CA can develop its public work.

## SWEDISH CA IN POLITICS AND RHETORIC

If we turn towards Swedish cultural policy and the National Heritage Board, RAÄ, we see that the national and international discussions about the broader goals of archaeology have affected public inquiries (SOU 2005:80), policy documents (RAÄ 2012), instructions (KRFS 2007:2), parliamentary bills (Prop 2012/13:96), and the new wording of the Cultural Heritage Act (SFS 1988:950).

RAÄ stresses the importance of communicating the results to the surrounding society:

*Scientific documentation is no longer the aim but the means. The aim should be to transform and present the results of the investigation for the different target groups in an interesting and relevant manner” (Andersson et al. 2010:19, English and italics in original).*

Concepts such as target-group orientation and a clearer dialogue with the citizens are linked to an ambition to strengthen the legitimacy of the work. It is considered that citizens and politicians want to see *relevant* results, participation, and accessibility (RAÄ 2012:6).

These changes in turn follow a general shift in the concept of culture in society, towards something broad and anthropological – culture as it is lived. Whereas the goal of work with the cultural heritage used to be at a national level, today it is ascribed values that are supposed to fur-

ther both individual and social welfare, and to promote the economically sustainable development of society (Beckman 2005).

## SWEDISH CA IN PRACTICE

RAÄ monitors the work of CA and has a guiding, supporting, and coordinating role. It formulates instructions in relation to the County Administrations, which are the regional authorities which issue permits to excavate and which commission archaeological excavations (SOU 2005:80).

In practice, the Swedish CA system is based on a tripartite relationship in which the stakeholders involved have different roles and responsibilities: (1) the *County Administrations*, i.e. the regional authorities in the cultural heritage sector; (2) *the developer* performing the construction work and responsible for the cost; (3) *the excavating institution* (SOU 2005:80; KRFS 2007:2). In this context the County Administration has an important public mission. This is to implement the goals of parliament in the field of cultural heritage, and thus to create opportunities for increased participation and contribute to long-term sustainability in a society characterized by diversity and democracy (RAÄ 2012:5).

In certain cases we see how the County Administrations, for example through seminars and target group analysis, have started the search for ways to translate the goals into practice (Malmlöf 2013; Skyllberg 2013). In general, though, we believe that the changes called for by RAÄ still do not permeate the practice of CA to any great extent. Public work, in our experience, is still largely about quantifying and consolidating established ways of working rather than about a qualitative broadening of the goals.

In 2005, when Bodil Petersson published a study of the public sides of Swedish CA, she described the work as being rather standardized and well tested. Common forms of mediation were lectures, exhibitions, school activities, media contacts, websites, and newsletters (Petersson 2005:90). When we ourselves did spot checks in some County Administrations' inquiries and in the contract archaeologists' excavation plans from recent years, we were able to draw similar conclusions.<sup>3</sup> The methods called for are largely the same as those listed by Petersson, with the addition of social media. The target groups are mainly of

3 Examples from different County Administrations: Lst AB län, Sigtuna, dnr 431-23745-2011; Lst AB län, Nynäshamn, dnr 4311-31798-2012; Lst C län, Heby, dnr 431-400-13; Lst C län, Fältskären, dnr 431-7817-12; Lst E län, Mjölby, dnr 431-9356-13; Lst E län, Linköping, dnr 431-3304-12.

a general character, which in part can explain the forms of mediation used.<sup>4</sup> The mediation forms often reflect the ambition to convey information to and educate as many people as possible, whereas methods for promoting concepts such as participation, citizen influence, and co-creation are less well developed (see also Svanberg & Wahlgren 2007:54ff).<sup>5</sup>

## THE MOTALA CASE

In the following case study we illuminate how the practice of CA is interwoven with various processes in society, and the variety of situations where it has been used to create meaning and value in a local context. The analysis concerns the *methods of mediation* used by CA to communicate the findings, the *stakeholders* met due to public activities, the *narrative* figures created through these meetings, and how the narratives acquire meanings as a consequence of the *situations* they are used in.

The study is based on a series of excavations conducted in Motala because the Swedish Transport Administration decided in 1995 to increase rail capacity through the town. The archaeological fieldwork was carried out in two phases (1999–2003 and 2009–2013) and at three places in the town: Strandvägen, Verkstadsvägen, and Kanaljorden (Figure 1). Most of the remains uncovered were from the Mesolithic (Carlsson 2008; Hallgren 2011a, b; Hallgren & Fornander 2014; Molin et al. 2014).

Motala is a municipality with about 42,000 inhabitants. The town, which received a borough charter in 1881, is situated where the waters of Lake Vättern flow into the river Motala Ström and Göta Canal. The canal was built at the start of the nineteenth century to link the Baltic Sea with the ocean. The construction of the canal led to a need for an engineering workshop, and Motala Verkstad was established in 1822. During the twentieth century several large factories were founded, some by major companies such as Luxor and Electrolux. Motala acquired the character of an industrial town and participated in the growth of modern Sweden (Bolinder 1981).

Today a majority of the industries have closed down or moved out, followed by high unemployment rates. Just like many other small towns in Sweden, Motala is seeking new ways to provide jobs, to brand itself, and to work actively with visions for the future. The employment issue has

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4 The target groups defined are often the general public, media, municipalities, schools, and local heritage associations.

5 For exceptions see for example Lst C län, dnr 431-7817-12 and [www.stadennya-lodose.se](http://www.stadennya-lodose.se).



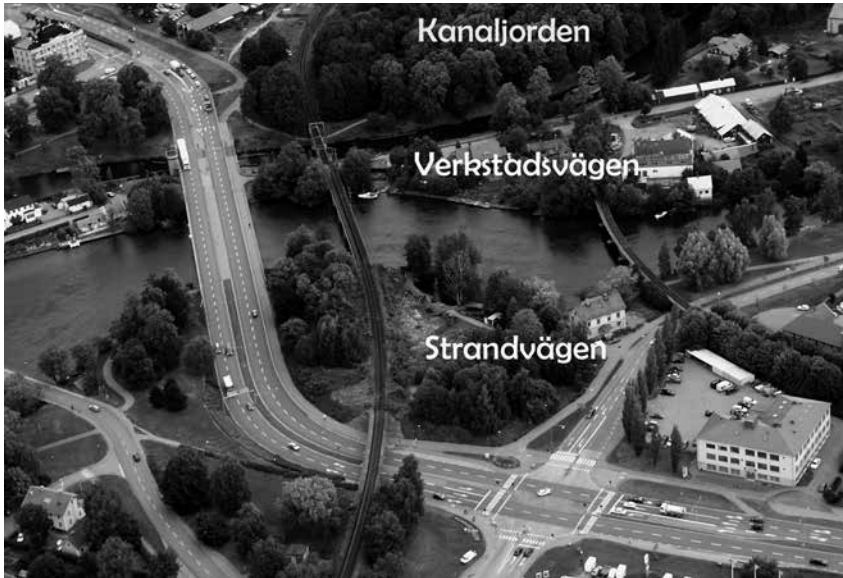


Figure 1. Aerial photograph of Motala marking the three sites where excavations were undertaken in 1999–2003 and 2009–2013. Photo: Jan Norrman (RAÄ).

“top priority” in the Motala town council’s development programme, which states the political direction to be taken. The programme contains ideas about the attractiveness of Motala as “a welcoming and innovative setting with a high cultural pulse” intended to draw new investments, entrepreneurs, and inhabitants (Holmqvist 2011:2).

In recent years the municipality has also planned a flagship project entitled Kulturstadsdelen Gamla Motala Verkstad, to fill the now empty industrial buildings with scenic art and a new town museum. According to the project description, the museum will “make Motala’s proud national history come alive in every sphere for different target groups and be a useful resource in teaching, tourism, marketing and profiling the municipality” (Skoghäll 2011:2). In this context, municipal officials are investigating the conditions for establishing a Stone Age Centre geared to research, school teaching, and tourism, and also storing the finds from recent years’ excavations.

## METHODS OF MEDIATION

The archaeological projects in Motala were accompanied by large-scale public activities. The County Administration commissioned the work in the following terms: “Continuous educational activity, such as guided

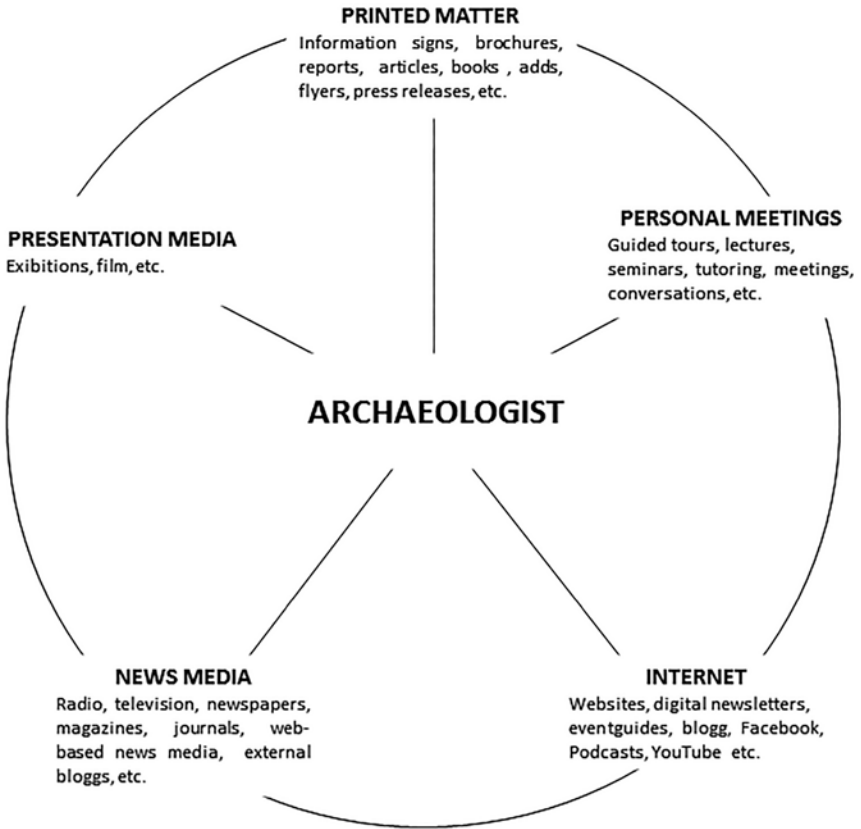


Figure 2. The methods used when interacting with public during the excavations in Motala.

tours, contacts with the media, and presentation on websites are deemed by the County Administration to be important in this connection”.<sup>6</sup> The methods of mediation we as excavating institutions used to fulfil this commission can be divided into five subgroups, each containing a number of different interfaces: (1) *Personal meetings*, (2) *Printed matter*, (3) *Presentation media*, (4) *Internet*, (5) *News media* (Figure 2).

*Personal meetings*, that is, physical interaction between people, are the most common method. These are often linked to activities where archaeologists tell people about the site and the archaeology, such as guided tours and lectures. Another type of personal meeting has the character of a planning meeting, that is to say, meetings that are not *per se* situations for communicating findings but more intended to stage educational activities, among others things together with guides, muni-

6 Lst E län, förfrågningsunderlag, Dnr 431-4688-09 and 431-27696-09.

cial officials, or teachers. In these situations we, the archaeologists, are above all consulted as experts, not necessarily as the obvious leaders of the envisaged activities. In addition there are interactions that we perceive as spontaneous, often arising on individual initiatives. On these occasions we do not steer the dialogue; we respond to someone else's questions or narratives.

*Printed matter* includes information signs, brochures, reports, articles and books. By *presentation media* we mean, above all, temporary exhibitions in museums or libraries. Both categories consist of texts and pictures produced by ourselves, which lead to meetings where we are not personally present.

The *Internet* has functioned as an instrument for several purposes: informing about the past, discussing archaeological discoveries and connections, building the brands of archaeology and the archaeological enterprises, and opening up a field that many felt had been accessible only to professionals (Gruber 2013).

In encounters with the *news media* we have been active ourselves and informed the editors about the excavations through press releases or telephone contacts. It has also happened that journalists have come to us. As a rule, the news media produce their own stories. They are therefore not just channels for our mediation, but also stakeholders with interests of their own. This is also valid for external bloggers, who during the latter part of the projects have played an increasing role in the creation and mediation of narratives.

Though many of the forms of mediation were initially chosen by us archaeologists to reach out with results of the excavations, it is clear that in the actual situations they also initiated more dynamic relations in that stakeholders outside the system of CA came to affect and participate in the creation of narratives.

## STAKEHOLDERS

When the County Administration specified the target groups for the excavations, it highlighted, besides the parties in the CA system, also research, local heritage associations, and the general public (Sw. *allmänheten*).<sup>7</sup> The general public is frequently used a target group in CA contexts, yet it has been pointed out many times that the phrase is problematic as the umbrella term has a tendency to conceal the variation among the people it describes and thus, if anything, makes it more

<sup>7</sup> Lst E län, förfrågningsunderlag, Dnr 431-4688-09 and 431-27696-09.

difficult to achieve the target group orientation expected by RAÄ. It also tends to consolidate an excluding attitude to the citizens (Svanberg & Wahlgren 2007; Arnberg & Gruber 2013; Högborg 2013, see also Merriman 2004b).

The chart in Figure 3 illustrates the main types of stakeholders with whom we interacted through the methods of mediation listed above. By stakeholders we mean individuals who represent themselves and/or institutions with whom we have interacted and who take part in the processes created by the projects. The survey does not claim to be comprehensive, but the conclusions are still clear. First and foremost there is a large number of stakeholders, far more than the three who are directly linked to the system of CA through the legislation. In addition, the stakeholders can be sorted in different sectors of society, whether public, civil or private.

We also note that the relationship to these varies greatly. In the encounter with some of them the ties are strong and intensive, since they have directly affected, in different ways, the antiquarian or scholarly work. The relation to others is much weaker and more temporary. This does not necessarily mean that these contacts are less important either for us or for the actor in question. For example, the news media have

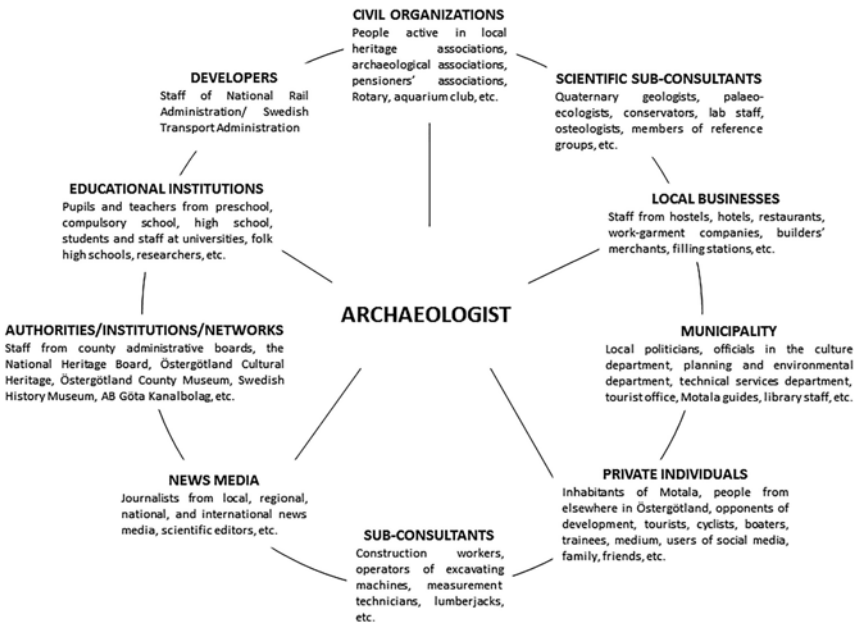


Figure 3. The stakeholders with whom there was interaction as part of the archaeological excavations in Motala.

been important independent stakeholders in communicating information about the Mesolithic site, even though relations with them have been sporadic.

Based on the survey it is quite clear that the general public in our case comprise a heterogeneous group of interests that, if a more qualitative approach is called for, requires various kinds of actions.

## NARRATIVE

In 1999, when the projects were initiated, little was known about Motala's prehistory as no archaeological excavation had taken place there since the 1920s. Since then excavations have been shedding light on a hitherto unknown Mesolithic settlement site. The excavations have been comprehensive, covering different aspects of people's lives in the past. In recent years the dominating narratives mediated by us archaeologists have been based on the idea of a central place in the landscape, linked to the traces of houses, fishing, craft work with stone and bone, ritual deposition, and burials that have been excavated (Hallgren 2011a, b; Hallgren & Fornander 2014; Molin et al. 2014).

As Bella Dicks has stated, to make sense of the past and imagined communities, cultural heritage must be mobilized around ideas and discourses circulating in the present. The narrative structures that we archaeologists use when mediating information are thus never expressions of individuality. Instead they are part of a broader, well-established grammar that governs how narratives are shaped and communicated. This means that the narratives we have created from the excavations in Motala have no meaning in themselves. They only take on meanings in encounters with others. In these interactions everyone has personal frames of reference which affect the interpretation processes (Dicks 2000:75).

In this case study the analysis of narrative figures is based on local groups, in particular: Motala municipality (politicians/officials), schools, civil organizations, inhabitants of Motala, and local/regional news media. This is an extended and independent processing of the work Joakim Andersson did on the early years of the Motala project. He used digital newsletters and local newspapers to analyse how different narratives were established. These were sorted according to four basic historical-cultural tropes: *Nothing new under the sun*, *History does not repeat itself*, *Progress*, and *Golden age* (Aronsson 2004; Andersson 2008:51).

The tropes should be understood to show that meaning in a statement is created through the narrative figure in which the content is in-

corporated. This means that the form also becomes an important part of the meaning of the narrative, that is to say, the way the connections between past, present, and future are represented. This classification is based on logical ideal types. The tropes *Nothing new under the sun* and *History does not repeat itself* have no perspective on change: the first says that nothing changes, the second one that everything is changed. *Progress* and *Golden age*, on the other hand, see continual change but in different ways: as development or as decay (Aronsson 2004:77–85).

## Progress

A frequently used starting point for the narrative about the Mesolithic site in Motala is the official archaeological discovery of the remains in 1999. This idea can be juxtaposed with the fact that people living in the excavation area up to the 1980s had found stone axes, although they had not defined the finds as parts of a Stone Age site (Carlsson 2004:128). News media reported on the discovery early on, emphasizing the consequences for the history of the town. In November 1999 the local daily *Motala & Vadstena Tidning* (MVT) printed the following placard: “Unique finds change the history of Motala” (MVT, 19 November 1999), Figure 4. The narrative figure of change and development recurs frequently, associated with a cliché about archaeology as a method of discovery and revelation (Holtorf 2007:84).

The reinterpretation of the local history moreover created rival narratives. Andersson illustrates this in a quotation from the regional daily *Östgöta Correspondenten* (ÖC):

Motala: the workers’ town, the gangster town, the scandal town. Outsiders tend to perceive the place where the water flows out of Vättern as a fairly tough place on earth [...] But something happened last summer – when Motala unexpectedly showed itself to be a part of a different kind of flow from the purely concrete one – of events and, if you wish, of human heritage [...] The flow of the place, or call it the new-found historical insights, placed in the people in a completely new context. [...] Motala: the Stone Age town (ÖC, 25 July 2002; Andersson 2008:151f).

The new-found historical insights also entailed a change in the relation of the people of Motala to the neighbouring town of Vadstena. There is a locally established notion that Vadstena is the older, bourgeois town of culture whereas Motala is perceived as the younger, run-down workers’ town (Gruber 2010:19ff). When the archaeological excavations showed that people had lived by Motala Ström ever since the Mesolithic, this became an argument for *Motala being older than Vadstena*.

# Motala Tidning.

Fredagen 19 november 1999

# UNIKA FYND ÄNDRAR Motalahistoria

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Figure 4. “Unique finds change the history of Motala.” Placard for *Motala & Vadstena Tidning*, 19 November 1999.

## Nothing new under the sun

The narrative figure of progress is contrasted with the one about continuity, that there is nothing new under the sun. “People have lived here for a long time” is a headline in MVT that exemplifies this (MVT, 21 August 2000). Another text cites an archaeologist in connection with Archaeology Day in 2000: “not only Stone Age finds were discovered here but also finds from the Viking Age and the Middle Ages and right up to the present day” (MVT, 17 August 2000). In other words, there have

always been people in this place. Andersson sees this narrative figure as a way to link the two narratives about the town, and to bridge the difference in time between the Stone Age and today (Andersson 2008:152).

In an attempt to place the ancient remains in a familiar context for today's inhabitants of Motala, we archaeologists invoked parallels between Stone Age craft and the industrial era in the town. "The excavations bear witness to a people of hunter-gatherers from the Stone Age who settled down by the river and made arrowheads, spears, and other objects – in a way it was the first step towards Motala Verkstad" (ÖC, 3 November 2000). The analogy of the engineering industry was intended to bridge the time gap and establish a *we* perspective between people in the Mesolithic and the inhabitants of the industrial town. On that occasion it did not immediately catch on among the people of Motala, but when we returned to the site in 2009, we noted similar statements in meetings with municipal officials.

### History does not repeat itself

This narrative figure concerns the past as a completely different place. In the case study the difference between *present* and *past*, between *us* and *them*, chiefly finds expression in exoticism. This was visible, for instance, in the dominant newspaper narrative in the early years of the project. The Stone Age was portrayed as a mystic world; although it could be explored by archaeology, it was in terms of adventure and excitement, as an exotic place (Holtorf 2007:63ff; Andersson 2008:152f).

Narratives that present the people of the past as aliens and simultaneously describe the past as exciting were also common in the later years of the project. In 2009–2010 a ritual site was excavated at Kanaljorden. The bottom of an ancient lake was found to contain several skulls, two of which had been mounted on stakes as part of a ritual (Hallgren 2011a, b; Hallgren & Fornander 2014). The find was unparalleled in northern Europe and we informed the news media of this through press releases (KM 2010; 2011). In interviews about the find we spoke about distinctive rituals and presented a relatively complex picture of Mesolithic society which include both war and violence, but where also care of the nearest and dearest was displayed in different rituals.

When we later examined the news media texts the contents mostly followed the press releases, but with significant differences in nuance. Value-loaded words such as "mysterious", "macabre", and "horrifying" had been added to the texts.<sup>8</sup> "There is a mystique about this that makes

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8 [www.aftonbladet.se](http://www.aftonbladet.se), 20 September 2011; [www.history.com](http://www.history.com), 20 September 2011; [www.mvt.se](http://www.mvt.se), 19 September 2011.



one think of a film in the best Hollywood style” (MVT, 19 September 2011). The choice of wording reinforces the sensational cliché of archaeology as a source of astounding discoveries (Holtorf 2007:84). Exotic excitement is added, creating a change in the meaning even though the factual content has not changed. Indirectly, a clear distance is reaffirmed between people today and people in the Mesolithic.

## Golden age

This narrative figure is above all linked to the objects that were found during the excavations, which are seen as evidence of the existence of the prehistoric remains. Several stakeholders have narratives concentrating on the finds in the form of real objects. Newspaper articles contain wordings such as: “Unique finds uncovered by excavation”, “Finds galore at Strandvägen”, “Great finds on the last day” (Andersson 2008:153). In many of the stories the artefacts seem to mediate a sense of contact with the past. Through the Mesolithic arrowheads, for instance, the past is tangible. They bring history to life by evoking the individuals who manufactured and used them. This notion was especially reflected in statements during the guided tours. The visitors articulated a fascination by the craft skill when they were able to hold a leister point. Through these finds the past was viewed as a golden age.

## SITUATIONS

For local stakeholders in Motala the narratives about the Mesolithic site gain meaning through the ways in which they choose to use them. Below we have selected examples where local stakeholders (public, civil, private) use the narratives about the place, the archaeology, and the antiquities in situations that are significant for them. By extension this enables a discussion of the meaning-making processes associated with CA. An important empirical demarcation in the text below is that the focus is especially on the institutional level and does not consider the individual use of history connected with the narratives of private life.

The educational perspective recurs in a great many situations. In the encounter with teachers, the Stone Age antiquities mainly acquire their meaning through the knowledge about the past that the narratives provide. The teachers emphasize the aspect of authenticity when the pupils visit the excavation sites and come into direct contact with *authentic* finds. Other significant aspects are that the archaeological narratives assist in resolving the teachers’ problem of having outdated schoolbooks. These give new perspectives on the past, moreover with an important

local foundation (see also Andersson 2008:177; Skyllberg 2013:16). Indirectly, the methods and interpretations of archaeology grant legitimacy to the school subject of history by revealing the professional dimensions (Engström & Gruber 2011:212ff).

In a town that has been associated with a *post-industrial trauma* as a consequence of industry moving out, an important role is given in the public rhetoric to the business perspective and to questions of identity. “Motala – the dwelling site with great potential!” was a headline one could read in a supplement to ÖC (Motala C-Media, 26 September 2012). Here the narrative figure *Nothing new under the sun* becomes an instrument for showing the attractiveness of the town in relation to *competing* towns. There is political consensus about this kind of statement, as manifested by a photograph of the chairman of the municipal council and the leader of the opposition, joining in the following statement: “Motala is a historic place. We know that people have lived here since the Stone Age. We who are living and working here now are not surprised – Motala has a high quality factor.” The quotation is also aimed inwards, as a way to strengthen the self-esteem of the townspeople.

For officials of the municipality, the narratives about the Stone Age remains are instruments in the mobilization of stakeholders around the idea of a new town museum and a Stone Age Centre. The rhetoric emphasizes the authenticity of the finds and the new knowledge created by archaeology, as they seek support for their idea among politicians, citizens, and financiers. This is linked in turn to economic goals for tourism and to educational goals in relation to schools in the municipality. Another important question concerns where the finds from the excavations should be kept. The officials expressed a wish that scholars should come to Motala and analyse the finds. They want the material to stay in the town and not end up in a store in the Stockholm area. The argumentation reveals aspects of local self-esteem in relation to national authorities.

One aim behind the idea of a museum is to enable local experiences. Similar ideas are the driving force for a group of people in the town with an interest in aquariums. In 2012 the Motala Aquarium Association, a civil organization, opened the *Vättern Aquarium*. This displays fish species from Lake Vättern, and the ambition of the association is to be “Sweden’s biggest lake aquarium” and one of the biggest tourist attractions in the town.<sup>9</sup> To emphasize the continuity of fishing in the river, they use texts and pictures illustrating the Mesolithic site.

Some stakeholders choose to employ the narratives about the Stone Age as a way to establish their own organization’s sense of belonging in

9 <http://www.motala-akvarieforening.se/index.html>.

the local space. In the instructions for Motala Congregation we find an example: “Motala means the meeting place. The place has been known for a very long time, as it was here people crossed the river. People have met and worked here for more than 9,000 years. Archaeological finds show that the area was inhabited back in the Stone Age.”<sup>10</sup>

Motala’s private landlords see a value in the past, not only for creating a sense of belonging but also for the business potential: “Hunting and fishing attracted the first settlers to Motala Ström 8,000 years ago. And nature and the water are still high on the wish list for newcomers. For here there is a chance to find the location that you may perhaps just have dreamed about before. At prices that are far more down to earth than in the big cities”.<sup>11</sup>

This brief sketch shows how the local community in Motala has used the past and archaeology as tools to solve problem that the various sectors of society are grappling with. This concerns everything from the endeavour to make the place more competitive to teachers’ lack of teaching material, and was played out in multiple situations parallel to the ongoing archaeological excavations. CA here surely contributes to society in more ways than the traditional educational outreach (Jeppson 2012:596). The stakeholders use CA, and the narrative figures, for their own particular purposes and gain concrete benefits beyond those deriving from stories about past and present as such (Holtorf 2009:182).

## CONTRACT ARCHAEOLOGY AND APPROACHES TO PUBLIC ARCHAEOLOGY

In Sweden the CA process is formulated in three distinct steps: (1) *antiquarian documentation*; (2) *scholarly interpretation*; (3) *popular presentation*. In this linear process, the general public are viewed as receivers of the knowledge popularized by the archaeologists, and has no active role in the processes of archaeology (Gruber 2010:254; see also Svanberg & Wahlgren 2007:17).

When we survey the mediation efforts in Motala, it becomes clear that both the County Administration, and we, the excavating institutions, are part of this notion of knowledge production and communication. With our foundation in the AHD, we planned the public activities against the background of archaeology’s claim to truth, its educational perspective, creating national narratives, and its duty to society with

10 <http://www.motalaforsamling.se/documents/Forsamlingsinstruktion.pdf>.

11 <http://ledigalagenheter.org/hyresvardar/ostergotlands-lan/motala/>.

the aim of disseminating the archaeological results to as many citizens as possible (Andersson et al. 2005:102). The work can thus be said to follow, in the terminology of Matsuda and Okamura (2011b:5ff), *the educational* and *the public relations approach* in interaction between CA and the public.

When we analyse the Motala projects in retrospect to see what happened in the actual situations, and the spin-off effects generated locally by the excavations, the processes that emerge are more complex than portrayed by the three steps defined in the rhetoric. Already in the field-work phase, several parallel narratives were established, and we as archaeologists played everything from a crucial role to a peripheral one in these processes. It becomes clear that it is not just we ourselves, the experts, who create and communicate narratives based on the archaeological work.

Among the narratives mediated by different stakeholders we find down-to-earth themes concerning handicraft, but also themes touching on pious, macabre, and violent aspects of the place and the past. Sometimes these are based on recognizing ourselves in the people of the past, but there are also narratives emphasizing their exotic character. There are narrative figures stressing continuity, while others reveal change and progress. The narratives are both parallel and contrasting in character. As archaeologists we need not necessarily like all the narratives. It may even be the case that we have to take a stance against them for ethical, democratic, professional, or personal reasons.

Further, when we survey the interactions resulting from the CA project, we find stakeholders that can be sorted into different sectors and levels in society. The general public that the County Administration highlights as a target group are very clearly not a homogeneous mass with uniform interests and goals for the encounter with archaeology. Here this umbrella term instead covers a wide range of stakeholders whose needs are varied and hence must be satisfied in different ways.

The analysis thus shows how CA is involved in a great many societal processes alongside the antiquarian and scholarly contexts. What attracts stakeholders to archaeology can just as well concern knowledge and education as business, identity production, and the creation of legitimacy. The goals proceed from existential questions and self-reflexive ideas as well as from ideas about how one can shape socially and economically sustainable societies.

An important conclusion to be drawn from the case study is that the practice of CA must be understood as a network, rather than a linear process with distinct steps in the production and mediation of knowledge. In Motala we see how a wide range of stakeholders are interwoven

in these processes. The stakeholders are driven by different premises and goals. To better capture the potential offered by these networks, our work towards the public needs to strive more to identify and establish an understanding of how different social groups and individuals use archaeology in ways meaningful to them. In this respect, our analysis indicates how CA can come closer to the *multivocal approach* by broadening its perspective (Matsuda and Okamura 2011b:5ff).

Broader, more varied and interacting public activities are rarely explored in the practice of CA, however. When we archaeologists invite the surrounding society it is mainly so that people can learn about the work and knowledge of CA. This attitude, in our opinion, creates unnecessary boundaries that hamper the potential of the practice to extend its public engagement. If we want to get nearer to the goals of the policy and the supervisory authority, we must have greater recognition for the public's own perspective, get them involved in the meaning-making processes of archaeology, and assign power to them.

Another problem is that, although the survey of stakeholders demonstrates a large number of encounters, and hence great possibilities for various kinds of public engagement, it is clear that the encounters do not represent the population of Motala as a whole. The survey has led us to understand that, despite the great number of public efforts and interfaces, there have been blind spots in relation to the citizens. This is not unique for our case nor for the Swedish context, but still a phenomenon the CA system, in our experience, rarely addresses when drawing up the frameworks for its projects (cf. Svanberg & Wahlgren 2007; English Heritage 2011). An important democratic challenge for the future is therefore to develop methods which include and engage groups in society who are not reached by the established methods. CA must more actively expose and challenge the socio-political structures that shape archaeological practice and interpretation, and in this way explore and fulfil a more *critical approach* (Matsuda and Okamura 2011b:6).

To sum up, to us the work of Swedish CA quite satisfactorily fulfils the perspectives of education and public relations. On the other hand, there are still areas that need further development. In order to fulfil society's wishes for participation and accessibility we would like to see Swedish CA upgrading its self-image of what mediation is and how it contributes to broader perspectives in relation to the citizens and society. The requested changes presuppose a practice that expands its relations with the public and develops approaches based on critical and multivocal perspectives, alongside the educational and the public relations approach.

Based on this case study, our conclusion is that CA has far more potential than what is utilized today. But if this potential is to be realized,

the practice must be willing to open its doors and step out into society, get to know the surrounding world by actively include the needs and wishes of the public. And what time could be better to act than now, given the opportunities provided by the new legislation?

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