

THREE DECADES OF CULTURAL AND ECONOMICAL POLITICS, AND ITS EFFECTS ON ARCHAEOLOGY AT MUSEUMS

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From a regional point of view that is based on the development of archaeological activities in the region of Bohuslän and Western Sweden during the last 15–20 years, I can note major changes for my museum, contract archaeological activities and the archaeological system. The changes that affect how contract archaeology is performed and how it is integrated into the museums operating in the region are not isolated phenomena that only touch on archaeology, but also convey to how the surrounding community relate to county museums and contract archaeology. County museums have long been struggling with decreasing budgets since public spending has been consistently lower than cost increases in recent decades, adding the new way of allocating appropriations through the portfolio model. This means that regional administrations (county councils, regions) allocate government and regional allocations to the entire cultural sector. The advantage that the funding comes closer to the receiving cultural institution through decentralization is offset by the fact that the appropriations, which cover less of the costs each year, cause internal competition between different cultural disciplines such as theatres, opera houses and museums for example. Another social development that has also affected the situation is the perception of museums.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s museums were questioned politically and were most often seen as rigid, outdated colossi. Cultural politics was rarely spoken of, which is also reflected in the fact that most of the county museums were not mentioned in cultural programmes or the like; rather they were mentioned as a stakeholder among many others. Within regional boards, cultural amenities departments and politics, a need arose to change the museum landscape, preferably by incorporating the museums into regional administrations and dissolving the foundations representing the organizations of many county museums. Another contributing factor was that the county landscape had changed following discussions and the formation of large regions.

Another piece of the puzzle in understanding how and why contract archaeology has come to be an accessory to the main museum activities is the attitude toward public funds, private alternatives and competition. Society as a whole has moved towards increasing competition, increased privatization, outsourcing, which also led to the tightening of the procurement system (SFS 2007:1091 *Lag om offentlig upphandling* 2007, as an effect of Direktiv 2004/18/EG *Om samordning av förfarandena vid offentlig upphandling av byggtreprenad, varor och tjänster* 2004).

It is within this context where political ideas about reducing the major archaeological costs for infrastructure projects through competition combine with the museums' internal changes and increased need for cost-efficiency. It could be said that before competition emerged during the late 2000s contract archaeology was the regulator museums needed to avert the difference between cost and allocation increases. When legislation and regulations opened up the market, it created two issues: a fear of losing income and an ideological problem.

The concern of lost income, or the understanding about this, differed between county museums depending on how exposed the museum was to competitors. One solution, for example, was to distinguish contract archaeology from other activities, partly to show that the business was not subsidized, partly not to confuse the county museums' building permit referrals with the contract assignments, but also to control the revenue against costs. Depending on where in the country, competition took a long time to emerge and when it did arrive museums were often poorly prepared. Museums were not organized as businesses, project or consultancy organizations and therefore found it difficult to quickly adapt to the new landscape. Meeting a market that operates in cycles requires that other organizations can profit in times of abundance and save for harder times. The effect on museums was dismantling in times of financial hardship, resulting in a lack of staff and skills when the business cycle turned upward, causing an inability to grow again. Further-

more, there is the ideological difficulty of having a department that is competitive and profit-dependent within a public non-profit organization. When problems arose for contract archaeology, it was too often perceived by management boards as an economic risk, an outsider being a consultancy and extraneous to the museum's other activities. There was also an opinion that existed, and still exists, within the museum that competitiveness and revenue requirements excluded contract archaeology from other museum activities. Some museums then took drastic steps such as corporatization or closure.

Yet, it is not so that we who are active in contract archaeology at museums and who are both affected by and dependent on society and social change, passively awaited the inevitable. Many in the museum sector began to understand the problem of competition and the new so-called market quite early on. Initially, the focus was on the ability to compete and obtain assignments, by extension the financial condition for its existence. Cooperation with other museums became a way to meet the challenge and in 2008 the museum archaeology sector organization (M-ark) was founded. Early in this collaboration the need arose to connect contract archaeology and museum activities, and that question has been addressed with varying successes among the museums. And society has also begun to change its view of museums and archaeology. The loss of knowledge and relevance that comes with ending contract archaeology has influenced other museums in attempting to legitimize and strengthen their business. Politicians also speak more about museums and their role, which is increasingly relevant when contract archaeology needs to be communicated. The ill wind that affected the museum sector has, nevertheless, begun to change direction (see for example the new Prop. 2016/17:116 *Kulturarvspolitik* 2017) and has also brought with it a need to deliver more to society from the contract archaeological system.

The contract archaeological system that has emerged is in many ways one that is hastily unfinished and inconsistent regarding processes and market understanding. It simultaneously wants and does not want a competitive market. Policy does not allow free and direct procurement by developers, either at market-adjusted prices or with the certification of operators. The system, instead, allows *Länsstyrelsen* (County Administrative Board) to be the supervisory authority, the licensing authority, the contractor and the archaeological quality guarantor, all at the same time, but without giving the administrative board the necessary skills and resources to implement this. On the other hand, the system created a need for professionalism and long-term management of skills for the contract archaeology actors. In general, I would say that

the archaeological quality has been significantly improved in terms of implementation since the system has been opened to competition. The same system, however, has most likely led us to excavate less and worse for the same cost. It may seem inconsistent to state that we have a higher quality of implementation while doing worse and less archaeology, but what I mean is that the archaeology that we do, we do better and more efficiently but we do not, or usually do not, have the chance to investigate as much. As a result, we risk investigating the archaeological site unsatisfactorily despite better techniques. Correspondingly contract archaeology loses social relevance when archaeological science and knowledge production suffer.

What that system is missing in practice is precisely archaeology's relevance and its need for knowledge development. With less archaeology conducted on a site we will sooner or later end up in the situation where we do not know whether we have gained new knowledge or not, whether we have understood the archaeological site now destroyed, or if we can guarantee the understanding of the cultural heritage for the future. The system also largely disregards who is responsible for the long-term knowledge building, either because it does not support *Länsstyrelserna* or they lack the ability, nor is it possible for individual actors who are dependent on project funding. In view of this, an excellent solution would be to ensure the role of museums in their mission as managing institutions to take care of and be responsible for this long-term knowledge building, a role largely expected of museums in any case. Unfortunately, the system excludes museums in everything except as archives and keepers of finds, disregarding the capabilities of the museums such as resources and economics. Nor do the authorities wish to perceive the museums as anything other than one of many actors in the contract system.

The fact that from a socio-economic perspective the system only benefits from the short-term economic cost of development and not the long-term loss of cultural heritage, heritage sites and cultural environments is exactly what is incompatible with today's market-adapted systems and the intentions of the legislation. Today's system fails with the wasteful mismanagement of museums as the guarantor of knowledge building, knowledge management and knowledge mediation. I would like the system process to be reviewed, with the aim of ensuring that the system first and foremost takes care of utilizing the knowledge from ancient sites that would otherwise be lost, to ensure knowledge production, that management structures for this knowledge are in place, and that the knowledge and results are accessible and promoted through mediation.

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