Heritage Management in a digital era
Speech on the occasion of the final conference of the ARIADNE project.

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Ladies and gentlemen

We have entered into a new era.
For long our daily question has been: How do we obtain some food?
Today we ask ourselves: what shall we eat tonight. It has been a long way from ancient times to the modern supermarket. It has been a long way to the digital era where everything is or can be connected to everything.

It took us millions of years to evolve into human beings; 200.000 years ago our ancestors -homo sapiens- appeared in Africa. Modern man stood up. Brains grew, fur became skin, the first words were spoken.
Nomadic tribes were hunting and collecting food in all kinds of ways. Although some romantics want us to believe this: these circumstances were far from paradise. Live was short and harsh.
On a timescale of 200.000 years it was a relatively recent event that a big revolution came upon us: the discovery of agriculture, some 10.000 years ago. It always fascinated me that it has taken us so long to think of the simple things like growing your food and keeping useful (edible) animals. I would like to think that live improved for most people as a result of this agricultural revolution. The world population grew as a consequence.
Then thousands of years went by. An society based on agriculture led to civilizations like we saw in China, Mesopotamia, Egypt, the Americas. Writing became a necessity. And culture deprived from it.
Then hundreds of years went by and we saw the rise of natural sciences which found its application in technique. An industrial revolution came over us and changed our way of living drastically. Roads, railroads, waterways were build. The airplane made our world smaller and smaller. Almost every place on this world can be reached from every other place within one or two days. Urbanization is dominant. In the year 1800 three percent of the world population lived in the city. Today its more than 50 %, and its rapidly growing.

What is happening to us? For 200.000 years we were nomads, for thousands of years we were farmers, now we live in the city. What comes next?
Well… as if this was not enough to handle for us slowly evolving homo sapiens: only few years ago we entered into a new revolution. The digital revolution is changing the way we live, the way we are organized, our system of government, the world order of nation states? In the middle of this turmoil we have no idea where this is leading to. We only can guess or philosophize about it. What does it mean when all information, every scientifically proven fact, but also every opinion, every lie, can be shared with everybody. Who can we trust?
Karl Marx came to my mind. In the middle of the 19th century Karl Marx thought very deeply and thorough about the consequences of the industrial revolution, and made predictions on how society would develop because of it. In fact he was trying to do what we are trying right now. Make some sense out of what is happening. I am so curious how historians will describe the time we live in. What will be written in the history books fifty years from now. Will there be books, will there be writing, will there be history?

One thing is very likely. Unless we learn to travel in time, our understanding of the largest part of our history, the part I just have been describing very, very briefly, still will depend on one source only: archaeological information in situ or by record.
To get more understanding of our past it is essential that we have access to the information which is generated during archaeological research. The chances and possibilities to do so in the digital era are overwhelming, but getting this to work is actually very hard work and needs perseverance and stamina.

So ladies, and gentlemen, these thoughts and these facts makes us, here gathered in Florence, December 2016, very important. And it makes the ARIADNE project very important. It forms the raison d'etre for the ARIADNE project, which is tackling the sizeable task of developing an infrastructure for networking archaeological research across the whole of Europe.

Earlier this year – in march 2016 - EAC held its annual symposium in Brighton. The topic was – surprise, surprise - Digital Archaeological Heritage.
The 17th EAC Symposium in Brighton was convened under a concept note which recognized that digital technologies are developing at an unprecedented speed. As they do, they are opening up many new possibilities for the conduct and presentation of archaeological research and investigation.
The symposium had three sessions. One about 'Measuring and sensing'. A second on 'Data to knowledge'. And a third about 'Visualizing the past'. During the second session prof. Julian Richards gave an introduction on the good works of ARIADNE and the importance of long term data preservation and re-use. During the same session we had the following presentations:
- Archaeological data in the GIS portal of the national Heritage Board of Poland;
- Digitizing the archaeological process in Sweden;
- Switching to digital tools for preventive archaeology in Hungary;
- Saving treasures (digital archaeological documentation) in The Netherlands;
- The new digital mapping system in the Czech republic;
- The open source Web GIS application in Albania.

If we would have wanted to we could have had presentations from all over Europe, from Iceland to Azerbaijan. Most of these initiatives on documentation systems are government led or sponsored. Apparently all over Europe we think it is a public task to deal with the safeguarding of archaeological data, information and knowledge. This is unfortunately not synonymous with doing a good job. But still.. it is an important finding, and very relevant for EAC which is an organization of governmental organizations who are responsible for archaeological heritage management.

At the occasion of the Brighton symposium mr Franco Niccolucci came to me and asked me a question which made me think. First mr Niccolucci stated that –as a heritage manager - actually I was his client. So – being his client – he put forward the intelligent and sensible question. 'What do you want? What do you want me to do?'
I was more or less caught by surprise and immediately I felt some pressure. I realized I had been a lousy client up till now, surely not living up to expectations.

I think I gave him an answer which more or less satisfied him (or he was just being polite) and my answer proved that I had some understanding of what ARIADNE could do and mean.
But preparing for this talk I rethought Franco's question. Are – we archaeological heritage managers of Europe – really his client? What kind of client only shows up at the final conference?
I come to that…

So when overlooking the situation I want to highlight two points, which might be helpful to move on from here.

1.
As I said: lots of governmental organizations are busy with GIS, data preservation, new systems etc. Big efforts are being made and a lot of money is spent. And success is not guaranteed. Recently, in The Netherlands, we had major problems with the modernization of our GIS-based central archaeological information system. We are probably not the only ones.
In essence we are all doing more or less the same thing: storing relevant data and making is available via GIS or other digital means. And we are probably all making the same mistakes and we have to solve the same problems. So… I think we are in desperate need of some guidance, some good advice on how to do the right thing, and how to do the right thing right. Of course the so called FAIR-principles are helpful, but what are the more specific findings of the ARIADNE-project, working with so many organizations? What are good examples and what should be avoided?
See mr Niccolucci… I am beginning to behave as your client.

2.

We must deal with the European intergovernmental organizations who are very relevant for archaeological heritage management.

The **Council of Europe** is the home base of the heritage conventions: Granada, Valletta, Florence and Faro. The council has more members then the European Union and it can promote the protection of heritage in a way the EU will and cannot do. This is very meaningful. The Valletta convention for the protection of the archaeological heritage has been ratified by 45 countries! That is really something and makes it into one of the more successful conventions. And I have no knowledge of countries who want to leave the Council.
Alas… the Council has limited powers to enforce the conventions and no money to encourage this to happen. So what is happening in reality?

The **European Union** is becoming more and more important for heritage management. But beware. The EU will never come up with any rules or directives for harmonization of heritage protection. That is for the member states to organize. It's all subsidiary, you know. In the current political climate this will not change easily. But the EU is entitled to do other things which may prove far more useful.

I am a legally trained civil servant, and at moments like this I find it useful to mention the legal bases for my allegations.
Dear people, present here today in Florence… read the preambule, read article 3.3 and read article 167 of the EU Lisbon treaty. Read it over and over again. It's the base for a lot of what the EU can do for heritage management.
And then – when you have internalized this piece of EU-legislation, you are going to read the recent conclusions and recommendations of the European Commission, the European Parliament and the European Council on the importance of cultural heritage for the Union. Then you will realize that we, as heritage sector, are not in bad shape. At least… in theory we are not in bad shape. It's all words, words, words. It's all about stimulate, enhance, promote cooperation, exchange of information etc. etc.
It is up to us to brings these words to life. Apparently we are not alone in realizing that the current borders within Europe are of a very recent date when put on the time-scale I have been talking about. Apparently we are not alone in realizing that the sources and remains of our common past can unite us in the present. Let's bring these words to life!

The EU has money to spend and is promoting exactly the thing that is being realized by the ARIADNE-project. So… this is not going to stop today. We are not yet where we want to be. A follow up of ARIADNE will be fully supported by EAC. And that should come as no surprise, because the project is actually doing what the joined heritage agencies of Europe should do themselves. Connect archaeological data an make them available .
If I put it like that mr. Niccolucci, yes we are your client and we are your supporter at the same time.

If I have some time left, there is one more issue I would like to address.

It is all very fine if we succeed in getting the available archaeological data save, available and connected to each other… Chapeau! Well done!
But… the process which leads to the generating of data is far from perfect. What is the quality of what we store? And what should have been stored, but has been lost?
We have come a long way. Forty-five countries have ratified Valletta. Thanks to this and the efforts of many far less valuable archaeological remains are being lost unseen then before. The development led archaeology has become a big thing throughout Europe. But 25 years after Valletta it is time for a new impetus in the system. EAC is trying to give that impetus, together with EAA and others. And it might be a good idea to use the European Cultural Heritage Year 2018 for that purpose. In order to do so we are in need of information on how the archaeological process throughout Europe is really working.

This is information that ARIADNE will not generate. Research needs to be done, which can lead to new impetus, new initiatives and actions.

Last year EAC has worked out a research-proposal together with the Council of Europe. Right now we are examining the ways to finance the research.

In the meantime we go ahead with a topic which is known to be relevant (even if we haven't got a research to prove so).

Side note: Every law-student learns about the judicial adagium: things which are generally known need not to been proven…

Well… I consider it is generally known that archaeologist have a problem with the theme 'making choices'. Some of them don't even know that choices have to be made. Others don't know how to make choices. Even the simplest of principles aren't common good. For instance the principle that if you have to make choices in the archaeological process, you have to know what you are talking about.

If you are into the business of development led archaeology this might prove a very useful starting point. It helps you in the discussion with developers and responsible authorities.

So EAC is moving on with this topic, which is part of the so called Amersfoort Agenda. It will be the topic of our annual symposium in March 2017 in Athens in the Acropolis museum. At that occasion the proceedings of the 2016 Brighton symposium will be presented.

Later on an EAC working group will come up with guidelines to help the process of making choices. These guidelines might get a legal status if they are accepted by the Council of Europe. At this point I think it is wise to make a connection with the follow up to the ARIADNE project. If you are into the process of making choices it is vital to feature the relevant information. The digital era is going to help us do so. At least… if we make it happen.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have entered into a new era. We are in the midst of a digital revolution. Let's make use of it. Winston Churchill once said "never let a good crisis go to waste".

I would like to say now 'never let a good revolution go to waste' .

Thank you very much.