

S05 Unstable futures/potential pasts: Scenarios for digital computing 2020

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Building on the CAA Siena "Challenging Digital Archaeology" Round Table, the 'Open Archaeology' publications stemming from CAA Paris, and the recent Ariadne Expert Forum in Athens, we now ask "what are the plausible digital futures of our [digital] past and how might we prepare for them?"

This session will build on a series of stories or 'scenarios', developed using a technique called Scenario Planning, using an expert forum, to drive an action orientated agenda.

In this Round Table we do not attempt to forecast the impact of introducing any particular technology. Our aim is to direct attention to plausible future contexts in which digital technologies are likely to be introduced into archaeology. Scenario planning is not predictive, and unlike forecasting, in which the flow of time progresses linearly from the past through the present to predict a future, time flows can be multidirectional and iterative to reflect plausible, possible, anticipated and probable futures.

After inviting an expert panel to present some grounded scenarios, the key discussion point for this Round Table is: "what do we need to do now to be ready for all scenarios?"

S05-01 Everyday reality and the multidirectional digital future in urban archaeology—The Brussels challenge

Ann Degraeve

Preventive urban archaeology in Brussels, Belgium, is, as elsewhere in the world, coping with a mass of (analogue, digitized and born-digital) data generated by the ever increasing pace of documenting the city's past before it disappears. While digital techniques offer archaeologists various possibilities of harvesting, producing and safeguarding data, an offer so wide some archaeologists feel completely lost, the next question already arises: how can we stay in control of this continuous flow of data? How can we share these primary data in an innovative way with researchers as well as the general public so as to give the possibility to generate new data? And how will this have an impact on the act of the preventive archaeology itself? This presentation brings a critical analysis of everyday reality vs a multidirectional and very uncertain future: a small but creative team wanting to use various techniques in the long process from gathering data up to sharing them and the reasons that drive or block them such as technological investment and quality of knowledge vs general politics, control of data and fear of loss of context vs open access, and fragility of transdisciplinary data vs standardization. The examples span the wide field of sometimes painstaking data capture in the field towards our first steps in a 4D GIS platform, the use of 3D visualization techniques for understanding data extracted from ancient drawings and maps and the resulting interpretations, the access to huge amounts of grey and often chaotic and unstructured data lingering in the cupboards, the tension arising around transforming standardized procedures to adapt to the new methods, and the sharing of data with the various stakeholders in such a way that archaeology as a whole gains added value in an everyday context and thus it's mere subsistence.