

Going local? The World Archaeological Congress and effective action

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The starting point for this discussion needs to be a re-affirmation of WAC's founding purpose. This is set out clearly in Article 2.2 of the Statutes: "WAC is based on the explicit recognition of the historical and social role, and the political context, of archaeological enquiry, of archaeological organisations, and of archaeological interpretation". From this follow two "distinctive aims" for the organization: "to discuss themes which truly reflect the interest of its worldwide membership", and "to make explicit the relevance of its studies to the wider community".

In pursuit of these "distinctive aims", WAC is defined as broad in both intellectual and geographical scope, and is "concerned with all aspects of archaeological theory and practice. Its main emphasis is on academic issues and questions that benefit from a widely oriented and comparative approach. It attempts to bridge the disciplinary divisions of the past into chronological periods (such as prehistoric or protohistoric or historic archaeology), and to avoid exclusive, particularistic regional concerns" (Statutes, Article 2.1). Appropriately, membership is not restricted to professionally qualified archaeologists (although only those in archaeological employment, or in a related discipline, are eligible for election to WAC's Executive). Article 4.1 specifies that "institutions or individuals with a genuine interest in, or concern for, the past who support the principles set out in Article 2 hereof may become Members of WAC by completion of an application form and the payment of the appropriate subscription".

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President's Statement

Going Local The World Archaeological Congress and Effective Action

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Editorial note: The supplied scan contains only the odd-numbered journal pages. The intervening text has been restored from the World Archaeological Congress's official online transcription. Obvious OCR errors in the scanned pages have been corrected against that transcription.

It is time to take stock of the World Archaeological Congress as an organization – to take a critical look at its organizational structure and to ask whether this way of doing things still serves to further WAC's primary goals. In offering this personal perspective, I hope to start a wider discussion that will lead to some concrete proposals that can be considered by WAC's Council when it next meets in Washington in 2003.

The starting point for this discussion needs to be a re-affirmation of WAC's founding purpose. This is set out clearly in Article 2.2 of the Statutes: "WAC is based on the explicit recognition of the historical and social role, and the political context, of archaeological enquiry, of archaeological organisations, and of archaeological interpretation". From this follow two "distinctive aims" for the organization: "to discuss themes which truly reflect the interest of its worldwide membership", and "to make explicit the relevance of its studies to the wider community" (WAC's Statutes, as well as the Vermillion Accord and the First Code of Ethics, discussed later in this paper, can be found at <http://www.wac.uct.ac.za>).

In pursuit of these "distinctive aims", WAC is defined as broad in both intellectual and geographical scope, and is "concerned with all aspects of archaeological theory and practice. Its main emphasis is on academic issues and questions that benefit from a widely oriented and comparative approach. It attempts to bridge the disciplinary divisions of the past into chronological periods (such as prehistoric or protohistoric or historic archaeology), and to avoid exclusive, particularistic regional concerns" (Statutes, Article 2.1). Appropriately, membership is not restricted to professionally qualified archaeologists (although only those in archaeological employment, or in a related discipline, are eligible for election to WAC's Executive). Article 4.1 specifies that "institutions or individuals with a genuine interest in, or concern for, the past who support the principles set out in Article 2 hereof may become Members of WAC by completion of an application form and the payment of the appropriate subscription".

These formal principles of association need to be understood in the context in which they were framed. WAC was founded in 1987, following the conference in Southampton in 1986, and on the basis of the work of an international steering committee. The central issue (and the reason for the breakaway from the International Union of Prehistoric and Protohistoric Sciences, which had originally promoted the Southampton Congress) was whether scholars should be banned from attending an academic meeting because of the policies of their country; whether academic practice should be linked to issues of power and politics. The organizers of the IUSPP Southampton conference banned South African and Namibian participation, and the World Archaeological Congress was established by people who believed that this was a legitimate action. Many others

disagreed, withdrew from the Southampton meeting, and in their turn boycotted WAC. A detailed account of this issue – one of the major turning points in the history of archaeology – is given in Peter Ucko's (1987) *Academic Freedom and Apartheid: The Story of the World Archaeological Congress*.

Given this history, the key phrase for understanding what WAC is, and can be in the future, is that the organization is “based on the explicit recognition of the historical and social role, and the political context, of archaeological enquiry”. WAC is a broad association of those, from all parts of the world, who share a common position about the nature of our understanding of the past.

My argument in the paragraphs that follow will be that this position is as important today as it was in 1986. Through the years, WAC has evolved as an organization, taking account of changing circumstances, and this process of change needs to continue into the future.

Strengths and Opportunities

Peter Ucko's account of WAC's founding Congress in 1986 well captures the sense of enthusiasm and common purpose which brought participants to Southampton. Similar enthusiasm marked participation in the fourth Congress in Cape Town in January 1999, attended by some 900 participants from more than seventy countries. The Cape Town meeting was symbolically important for many, marking the success of international pressure in contributing to South Africa's transition to democracy in 1994. The African National Congress in exile played an important role in the decision to break away from the IUSPP in 1986 and, appropriately, Nelson Mandela was Patron of the Cape Town meeting thirteen years later.

This continuity demonstrates WAC's strength as an organization – its ability to pursue free academic enquiry, expressing diverse intellectual positions, within a common frame. Because WAC is not professionally ring-fenced, and welcomes the active participation of those with diverse backgrounds and academic affiliations, it has been able to move out of the confines of a narrowly-defined archaeology and to gain the advantages of what has been termed “transdisciplinarity” (Gibbons et al. 1994). This potential has been realized in the *One World Archaeology* series published in partnership originally with Allen and Unwin, which has since become Unwin Hyman, and now Routledge. *One World Archaeology* now comprises forty-five edited and refereed volumes with more than 800 individual papers by authors from around the world (see full list in this issue of WAB). A grab sample from the bookshelf illustrates the reach of this series:

- Volume 1: *What is an Animal?* (Ingold 1988), a volume that takes an interdisciplinary perspective on the way animals are understood in human societies.
- Volume 4: *State and Society: The Emergence and Development of Social Hierarchy and Political Centralization* (Gledhill, Bender and Larsen 1988), with contributions from around the world on the Pacific, the Americas, Palestine, Africa, Mesopotamia and Europe.
- Volume 18: *From the Baltic to the Black Sea: Studies in Medieval Archaeology* (Austin and Alcock 1990), which opened up the neglected traditions of Eastern European Medieval archaeology to English language readers.
- Volume 21: *Archaeology and the Information Age* (Reilly and Rahtz 1992), which set the stage for computer-based techniques in archaeological research in comparative perspective, with case studies from Africa, Poland, Hungary, Japan, Russia and other areas
- Volume 28: *Early Human Behaviour in Global Context* (Petruglia and Korisettar 1998). Fifteen chapters that, together, provided a global overview of the Palaeolithic
- Volume 39: *The Archaeology of Drylands* (Barker and Gilbertson 2000) – a specialized volume that looks at the archaeology of communities living in marginal situations in Southwest and

Central Asia, the Sahara and Sahel, Eastern and Southern Africa, North and Central America, and Europe.

No other archaeological association has produced a comparable resource. As an organization that is founded in a set of principles and which embraces diversity, comparative studies and multiple intellectual traditions, WAC promotes better science than exclusionary groups that defend the perimeters of their disciplines.

This commitment to contextualised knowledge, taking historical, social and political factors as active determinants of the way in which the past is shaped, is subject to the exigencies of changing circumstances, precisely because such changing circumstances are themselves historical, social and political. For example, in 1986 the Zimbabwe government was a frontline state in the fight against apartheid. Today, Zimbabwe is widely condemned for human rights abuses. In 1986, Hindu nationalists were welcomed as participants in the multicultural festival that was WAC. But in 1994, when the third World Archaeological Congress in New Delhi almost collapsed mid-session and the plenary ended with tussles in the aisles, Hindu nationalist politicians seriously compromised WAC as an organization. In 1998, the WAC Executive met in Croatia, with lobbying by Croatian government representatives for their interpretation of cultural atrocities committed during the war in Bosnia. In 1999 the Executive met in Greece amidst anti-American protests but nevertheless decided that Washington would be an appropriate place for the Fifth World Archaeological Congress in mid-2003, enabling a re-affirmation of WAC's alignment with Native American groups. But in September 2001, the political landscape changed dramatically, putting the issue of Native American participation backstage to whether participants from Muslim countries would feel able to travel to the US.

An organization that is committed to a global perspective requires an appropriate organizational structure. Based on well-tried models for international collaboration, WAC's governance is vested in its Council. Article 7.1 of the Statutes specifies that Council will consist of "one National Representative per country, members from which are attending the International Congress, selected by the individual members from that country attending that International Congress". The Executive, which governs WAC between Congresses, comprises two members elected by postal vote by WAC members in each Regional Electoral College, as well as eight indigenous representatives. There are currently fourteen Regional Electoral Colleges: Central Africa, Eastern and Southern Africa , Northern Africa, Western Africa, Central America and the Caribbean, Northern America , Southern America, Eastern Asia, South-eastern Asia and the Pacific, Southern Asia, Western Asia, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Northern Europe, Southern Europe. And although membership of WAC is open, Article 9.2 of the Statutes requires that the twenty-eight regional representatives on the Executive must be "in permanent employment within archaeology or a related discipline".

While this system of governance continues to be appropriate as WAC's framework, the increasing diversity of, and rapidity of change in, the political and social situations to which WAC ought to respond requires additional, flexible approaches to organization and decision making that allow WAC to take positions that are appropriate, informed and timely, and which reflect a broad consensus. Increasingly, new forms of communication open up possibilities for such ways of doing things, although it will be some time yet before all WAC's members have adequate access to such means of communication.

A changed world

My premise in addressing this issue is that the world has changed since 1986. Reading the WAC statutes along with Peter Ucko's account of the Southampton Congress evokes a time now passed.

This is particularly the case as one of the twenty-six South Africans and Namibians whose invitations to Southampton were cancelled, and who is now President of WAC (and was Academic Secretary of the Fourth Congress), working and living in a South Africa with black majority rule and an ANC government. Few who participated in WAC in 1986 – including the ANC in exile – would have predicted that the apartheid government would collapse just four years later.

South Africa's moment – marked by Mandela's release from jail in 1990 – was part of a series of global transitions that included the collapse of the Soviet Union, the rise of information technology, the new American hegemony initiated by the Gulf War, the emerging dominance of multinational corporations and the consequent rise of new forms of resistance, marked by protests in Seattle, Prague, Gothenburg and other 'world cities'. This new order – captured in writing by Arjun Appadurai (1996), Manuel Castells (1996, 1997, 1998) and Hardt and Negri (2000) – is best described as the 'network society'.

What does this new politics and social context mean for an organization like the World Archaeological Congress?

In the first place, the old categories that were used to understand the world are more problematic. WAC was founded following a clear typology of 'First', 'Second' and 'Third' Worlds. But this system is increasingly dated. There is no longer a 'Second World'. The distinction between the 'Third' and 'First' Worlds has little geographic reality. There are elites in Manhattan, London, Lagos and New Delhi that share common characteristics of broadband connectivity, enclave living and global travel, and there are ghettos in Washington, Bradford, Johannesburg and Nairobi. Nor is 'developed' and 'developing' anything more than an inappropriate simile that salves the conscience. The digital divide is ever widening, and it is more appropriate to think in terms of a 'Dominant World' and a 'Subordinate World'.

In addition, WAC is founded on the concept of a 'Fourth World'. This is enshrined in Article 9.2c of the Statutes, where eight members of the Executive are to be "representatives of indigenous peoples/the Fourth World", and in WAC's "First Code of Ethics". But in the new politics of identity which are characteristic of the network society such easy distinctions are all but gone. Our current world is characterized by massive diasporas and complex claims to identities which are subject to continual redefinition (Appadurai 1996). In many cases – if not most – these identity claims evoke the past and its material culture, whether burial sites and temples, or ethnic cuisine and table manners. Who is to say who is 'indigenous' and who is not, and who can claim first right to the land (if any such claim had ever been feasible)? In 1986, the rights to the land in South Africa were unambiguous to those meeting in Southampton. Black, Bantu-speaking indigenes had been wrongfully displaced by White, Afrikaans-speaking settlers. Today, it is clear that 'White' is a social construction and that all Afrikaaner families that preceded the British annexure of South Africa in 1795 are of mixed descent. Today, First Nation status is claimed by Afrikaans-speakers of mixed descent who claim oppression by a black, Bantu-speaking majority. There are complications similar to this everywhere in the world, fired by the new politics of ethnicity. It would be a brave soul indeed who tried to use WAC's "First Code of Ethics", which sets out procedures for archaeology's relationship with the 'Fourth World', as a practical instrument of policy.

Secondly, and related to local identity politics such as these, regional issues are more complex. In the 1980s, South Africa was symbolic issue, separating those who believed in WAC's fundamental principle that politics and power imbue the study of the past from those who did not accept this principle. But can there be the reasonable prospect of such a consensus today? Archaeological evidence is continually invoked to make claims and counter-claims for specific rights, and there are often no general principles of human rights that can provide a yardstick for resolving these issues. Nor, indeed, is there any clear consensus about what such claims mean; witness the catastrophic

indecision of NATO in Bosnia, swayed by ‘expert’ arguments that such expressions of ethnic difference were somehow innate and inherited ‘ancient hatreds’ (an interpretation which would have delighted Hendrik Verwoerd, apartheid’s architect).

Thirdly, the economics of the new world order are massively increasing wealth differentials, and accentuating marginalization. It has long been the case that a member of WAC working in Nairobi and paid in Kenyan shillings has been unable to afford a single volume of *One World Archaeology*. Now, as wealth is sucked into the financial centres of the European Union, North America and Japan, such financial differentiation is becoming endemic. ‘Developing economies’ (that simile again!) all took a beating in 2001; South Africa’s currency, for example, depreciated more than 40% against Sterling and the US dollar. This is structuring, in turn, the distribution of intellectual resources essential for academic life. British and Australian universities, for example, have an aggressive marketing policy in South Africa, recruiting students who can afford to pay premium fees, and thereby increasing the proportionate burden that South Africa faces in addressing the needs of students disadvantaged by the continuing consequences of apartheid. Africa is offered ‘heritage expertise’ from Europe, leading to new forms of structural underdevelopment and dependency rather than a respect for existing local expertise. As wealth differentials increase, the advantages that European and North American research institutions hold over those in subordinate economies are magnified. It may soon be the case that the only universities – and archaeologists – with the resources to research human origins in Africa are in North America and Europe. Ironically, African archaeology in the twenty-first century may return to resemble the discovery years of the nineteenth century, when the continent was an open book for European fieldworkers, who could employ local labour at rock bottom prices (Hall 2001).

Fourthly, cultural capital has become immensely important in itself. Rather than being part of the ‘ideological superstructure’ in a classic model of political economy, the new world order thrives on cultural capital as a primary resource. This is apparent in the new political economy of heritage and global tourism. UNESCO’s imprimatur of World Heritage Site transforms an archaeological site into a financial magnet that attracts a host of secondary service industries, job creation and revenue generation for regional and national authorities. The ‘exotic’ periphery, given added value by the authenticity of its tombs, temples and treasures, is the relaxation zone for the fast-lane ‘information elite’ of the new world cities. Simple ‘wilderness politics’ of earlier years – in which the Amazon was for the Indians and the Kalahari for the San – are no longer that simple. Many ‘indigenous’ communities want to be part of the global action, and beneficiaries of the premiums that their intellectual capital can now yield. Again, these new complexities of the network society are captured nicely by a South African example. Gauteng’s newly opened Apartheid Museum – widely praised for its aesthetics and for confronting the issues of the immediate past openly and honestly, and designed with the advice of academics with impeccable credentials – is a mausoleum for the material culture of segregation. It is, as well, part of a casino and entertainment complex, and an investment by corporate interests that made their money from selling skin-lightening products in the apartheid state.

In reaffirming its founding purposes, then, WAC needs to adapt to a new world in which conceptual categories have changed, in which there are new – and urgent – issues of local and regional identities that constantly invoke archaeological evidence in their causes, and where there are new economic limitations and possibilities.

Situating Ethics

WAC’s governance structure was carefully designed in order to further the organisation’s founding objectives. However, it has always been difficult to convene meetings of the full Executive, usually

because of financial constraints, and this is exacerbated by the frequency and rapidity with which new issues arise in our contemporary world. Since the 1998 meeting in Croatia, the Executive has met only twice (in Cape Town in January 1999, and in Athens in November of the same year), and it is not clear that it will be able to meet again before the Fifth Congress in Washington in mid-2003. It seems clear that, in addition to the formal governance structure that was established in 1987, WAC needs flexible ways of doing things, supporting and interconnecting local energy with central resources.

This does not imply a departure from WAC's founding position. On the contrary, it is to reaffirm these principles. This can be seen by turning – briefly – to the more general debate about the role of ethics in the social sciences and, most usefully, to Bent Flyvbjerg's comprehensive discussion of the issues. Building on the philosophical tradition of Nietzsche and Foucault, Flyvbjerg shows how social science research must inevitably align itself with a reference group within the society being studied. In making this alignment, the social scientist asks questions about power, politics and historical context – WAC's founding concerns: “who gains, and who loses? Through what kinds of power relations? And is it desirable to do so? Of what kind of power relations are those asking these questions themselves a part?” (Flyvbjerg 2001:131). The goal of such alignments is to empower contextualised reference groups to make judgments and decisions that are more deeply grounded in rational and empirically-supported arguments, rather than being dominated by instrumental needs and surface understanding.

In practice, WAC has always practiced ‘situational ethics’. For example, the Vermillion Accord is a classic charter for situational ethics. The six points of the Accord set out a procedure for dealing with the remains of the dead. In the first place, the Accord sets out the terms for negotiating with the local community – what Flyvbjerg would call the “reference group”: respect for both the remains of the dead and their wishes before their death, and for the views of the local community; negotiation about the disposition of human remains; and the explicit recognition of local values. Secondly, the Accord establishes the researcher as a legitimate party in such negotiations: respect for the value of scientific research; and the explicit recognition of the rights of enquiry of the scientist. The Vermillion Accord does not legitimate absolute statements or universal truths – negotiation following its clauses could well lead to a mutual agreement either to rebury a skeleton, or to display it in a museum. The values that are promoted are contextual but also, because they legitimate scientific practices, rational.

A recent example illustrates such situational ethics in practice. In joining a broad consortium of groups bringing pressure on the British Government to withdraw support for the construction of the Ilisu Dam in south-east Turkey, WAC was aligning itself with a local reference group – the Kurdish population, already subject to documented abuse by the Turkish government – which would be resettled and which would lose major aspects of its cultural heritage. This alignment was based on the recognition of the realities of politics and power, and on asking the sort of questions advocated by Flyvbjerg: “who gains, and who loses? Through what kinds of power relations...?”. In the spirit of the Vermillion Accord, WAC also represents the interests of general intellectual inquiry in entering the public debate about Ilisu, because of the threat to the area's extensive Neolithic, Chalcolithic, Neo-Assyrian, Late Roman, Byzantine and later medieval archaeological record. Rather than seeking to rank the Ilisu case against competing priorities for action across the world, and to test it against absolute ethical criteria, it is sufficient that the necessary situational conditions were met (full details of the Ilisu Dam issue are on the WAC web site: <http://www.wac.uct.ac.za>).

Key requirements, then, for dealing with situations such as Ilisu are flexibility, responsiveness and the ability to deal with multiple issues. This suggests that WAC should nurture regional chapters that exercise considerable local autonomy but which are bound by the common principles expressed in Article 2 of the Statutes: “the explicit recognition of the historical and social role, and the political

context, of archaeological enquiry, of archaeological organisations, and of archaeological interpretation". WAC should concentrate on building its local strength, providing a structure for like-minded people passionate about local manifestations of contextual archaeology, whether these be Ilisu, Stonehenge, human remains in the British Museum, or First Nation land rights in South Africa.

In 'going local', WAC's 'centre' would continue to be of key importance, and would serve as a network connecting local chapters with one another. This conforms with the successful models of the 'network society', whether these be multinational corporations that have discovered the power and rewards of local franchising, or protest movements such as those responsible for the effective coordination of local groups in street demonstrations in Seattle, Prague, Gothenburg and elsewhere. The four-yearly Congresses and focused Inter-Congresses – WAC's distinctive feature – would continue to be of primary importance; the source of renewed energy, new contacts, the interdisciplinary cross-over of ideas and interpretations, and the generator of new intellectual capital.

In order to complement WAC's formal organizational structure with the flexibility needed for it to be responsive to the myriad social and political issues that characterize the world today, we should consider some changes to the statutes. I suggest the following:

1. The present Council becomes the Assembly, and the present Executive becomes the Council of WAC. The new-style Council would comprise members from different electoral regions (following the principles set out in the existing statutes), and would be responsible for determining WAC's policies, and holding the officers to account. The Assembly would be convened at each of the four-yearly Congresses, and would consist of the Executive meeting with one representative elected from among each country's participants at the Congress. The Assembly's tasks would be to elect the President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer, and to consider resolutions brought by its members for Council's consideration.
2. In future, the Executive should comprise the President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, Chief Executive Officer, Editor of the World Archaeological Bulletin and two members from different electoral regions elected from and by the Council. This Executive would run WAC between meetings of the Council, within the policy framework set by Council. This group of eight people should meet at least once a year. The Executive would be accountable to Council, which should meet at each full Congress and at least one Inter-Congress held between full Congresses.

While respecting the long-established structure of WAC, this new arrangement would allow WAC as an organization to be more responsive to contingencies while remaining faithful to its broadly representative constitution. Such an arrangement provides an appropriate framework within which strong regional chapters can be nourished, because of the streamlined decision-making that will be possible with a far smaller Executive, able to meet more frequently and to react to diverse needs.

Both the importance of full Congress meetings in the spirit of 1986, and the potential that lies in effective communication and integration of pockets of effort was demonstrated in the opening event of the fourth meeting of the World Archaeological Congress in Cape Town in January 1999. When we were finalizing our plans, it was suggested that we should start the plenary opening session with a 'drum event'. We were told that within fifteen minutes, one 'conductor' would have every participant in syncopated rhythm, beating on drums, sticks and pieces of plastic tubing and that the conductor would achieve this without uttering a word. This seemed highly improbable, but we decided to try it. And it worked. Within a few minutes, 900 people – everyone from the government Minister who opened the event and the Vice-Chancellor of the university to the most cerebral of archaeological theorists – was in alignment.

This seems to me to be a suitable metaphor for WAC's future. WAC's success lies in its breadth and diversity, and in passionate engagement with the rhythm of local engagements between archaeology

and its communities. The task of the central coordination is that of turning this local energy into a volume of organized sound.

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