

“INTELLECTUAL STRABISMUS” OR BEING AN ARCHAEOLOGIST IN 2015

July 24, 2015 Anna Paterlini Explore Posts, Grants and Funding, Italy, Public Archaeology accounting, archeostorie, business administration, cultural heritage management, intellectual strabismus, managerial finance, Public archaeology

As I am an archaeologist and it is 2015, today I am about to start my very first class of the course “Accounting and Managerial Finance”.

Wait.

What?

I know, people have always cringed when they saw words such archaeology and business in the same sentence, without a vs. to separate them.

But, as I said, it is 2015 and being an archaeologist today entails having many different skills and responsibilities. And they are not always taught in the archaeology faculty.

Deep down, I’ve always known it. But it is only thanks to the book “Archeostorie. Unconventional handbook of real-life archaeology” that I became fully aware of how many archaeologists in Italy over time felt the need to ‘crossbreed’ with other professions.

“Archeostorie” provides a window into the daily lives of archaeologists in Italy: 34 professionals gathered together to tell the world their own experience. The resulting picture is basically a statement: being an archaeologist today implies and refers to much more than the classical archaeologist brandishing a trowel!

During the past two decades, archaeological practice has been transformed by internal and external forces, requiring archaeologists to develop new skills and ethical principles for the practice of archaeology in all its applications. This also means, that at some point in his/her career over the past two decades, every archaeologist has found his/herself lacking in some area of vital importance.

For me, that I have a background in cultural heritage management, that area is business administration.

Fundamentally any museum or archaeological site is a business, in the sense that money (or in most cases, the lack of) is part of any decision taken. You can’t (and shouldn’t) run an archaeological site just with volunteers. And even if you did, you would still have boring bills to pay.

There you go, money is everywhere.

Particularly in this historical moment of political uncertainty, economic recession and social pressure – exactly when the global community would need its cultural resources more than ever – money is the major constraint.

Someone could argue that this is no job for an archaeologist, to manage money – you have professional financial managers that can do that for you.

Of course, I am not saying we don't need them at all –we do! – but my reply, however, would be: they are not cross-eyed.

They are not trained to look at the books and at the same time considered which wall of that *domus* is to be prioritised for a conservation intervention. And they are not trained to put together a budget for a proposal while looking at the long-term goals of the community engagement strategy either.

There is a need for a hybrid.

Being able to use our resources wisely, being creative in the way we traditionally fund archaeology and being able to maximise benefits produced by archaeology are, to me, the most pressing issues of my profession.

And this is also the reason why I spend summer days in Rome indoors, playing the CFO of imaginary companies on Excel spreadsheets (and I enjoy it!).

I want to be a cross-eyed archaeologist!



The library of an archaeologist affected with "intellectual strabismus"