Outlook for the World Archaeological Congress

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This article is part of the Antiquity coverage of the Fifth World Archaeology Congress (WAC-5), held in Washington DC in June 2003. Please see our other articles from WAC-5

I have been asked to write about my vision as the incoming President of the World Archaeological Congress (WAC). This is an exciting but challenging task, given the kinds of changes that are occurring within WAC. We are going through a major period of growth, one in which many people's individual visions are being realized. This growth was apparent when some 1,200 people attended at the Fifth World Archaeological Congress (WAC-5), held in Washington DC in June, 2003, under the leadership of Dr Joan Gero, of American University. The 300-odd sessions and activities at WAC-5 highlighted our core strengths, which are our diversity and international representativeness (as outlined in the WAC statutes, see WAC 1990), our dedication to redressing inequality and our commitment to innovation, critique, experiment, and excellence. An appreciation of the richness obtainable from global diversity and a willingness to face the challenges of engaging in social justice issues are integral to WAC and, in fact, were fundamental to the birth of WAC itself. While the genesis of WAC may have strained relations with some organizations, such as the Union Internationale des Sciences Préhistoriques et Protohistoriques (UISPP) and the Society for American Archaeology (SAA), we now have very positive, cooperative relationships with these organizations, making WAC an integral part of what has become a truly world archaeology. As President of WAC, I believe my first task is to preserve and foster those very special qualities of WAC that previous Officers have worked so hard to develop. In doing so, I hope to see WAC become more cohesive, better funded, and more politically effective, able to connect archaeologists throughout the world and support them with practical measures that will benefit their regional communities.

Why have WAC?

WAC is an international non-profit making organisation concerned with all aspects of archaeological theory and practice. Its main concern is with academic issues and questions which benefit from a widely oriented and comparative approach (WAC 1990). Organised into fourteen regions from around the globe, WAC is the only archaeological organization that has elected global representation. But why do we need a global organization of archaeologists? To my mind, a global organisation is justified by three, inter-related factors. The first of these is the study of the *commonalities of human existence* and comparisons of how those commonalities play out the same or differently in different cultures and over time. The second factor is obtaining comparative perspectives on the contemporary *practice of archaeology* including its methodological and theoretical bases, ethical demands, views on the political appropriation of the past, and need for global advocacy for conservation and preservation. The third factor is an ability to bring to bear *global power* on issues of importance to archaeologists. Engaging with the social and political implications of archaeological work is fundamental to WAC. This is made clear in the second article of the Statutes which states that 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' (see WAC 1990). Since its inception, WAC has been very effective in this area. It has consistently taken a leadership role in supporting local archaeologists in advocacy for conservation and ethics around the globe. Moreover, it has consistently supported the growth and nurturing of archaeological communities and values in areas where economic and political conditions make it hard to sustain.

What is so special about WAC?

What is it that makes WAC Congresses so different to other archaeological meetings (see comments from

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WAC-5 delegates)? To my mind, WAC has two special qualities. The first is the sheer diversity of people who attend WAC Congresses. At WAC-5, we had people from 75 countries - and this does not include the diversity of views that are put forward by people from First Nations. This mix produces an extraordinary range of experiences and knowledges. Emerging from this is a commitment to multi-vocality. Clearly, the views of people from 75 countries cannot be transmitted in one voice only. This acknowledgement of multiple views may prove to be a key that opens archaeology as a discipline and career path to members of Indigenous communities. Instead of being a single-voiced, single-minded pursuit of the past, the WAC approach not only recognizes the worth of Indigenous views, it welcomes the addition of new perspectives, and in doing so, may be making archaeology more useful for Native peoples worldwide.

The second thing that is so special to WAC Congresses is our commitment to social justice, apparent not only through political action but also through the manner in which we address such issues. Our direction in this respect was established long ago by WAC's original and early visionaries, in particular by Peter Ucko, Jack Golson, Robert Layton and Larry Zimmerman. We are especially strong on Indigenous issues (see WAC 1989, 1991) and this serves as a model for the decolonisation of other kinds of archaeology. The WAC community is one of likeminded, caring people who are committed and effective, and who are sensitive to the social and political ramifications of archaeology. The degree to which this binds us crystallized for me during WAC-5 when several people commented that they felt they were among friends at WAC, even though they had met many of the people for the first time.

Publishing WAC

In order to achieve our aims during this period of growth we are identifying and pursuing some new objectives. One of our most important goals is a broadening our publication base. Since it was established in 1986, the backbone of WAC has been the Congresses, which are held every four years, the One World Archaeology Series (OWA), which arises from these Congresses and is published by Routledge, and the *WAC Bulletin*. After WAC-5, other publication opportunities arose and several new World Archaeological Congress book series are emerging. The big difference is that the OWA series of edited books will be complemented by other series featuring both authored and edited books that target key market niches. Foremost amongst these are two new series that are being developed with Altamira Press. The Indigenous Archaeologies Series is committed to the promotion of Indigenous Voice and the empowerment of Indigenous peoples. The Worlds of Archaeology Series not only presents new data but also focuses on how the lived experience of doing archaeology in different parts of the world affects how that data are generated, analysed and presented. What is emerging for WAC is a heightening of our profile, an increase in our impact, the empowerment of our members and the creation of internationally recognised and respected standards of excellence.

If a global organization is needed, it must be more than episodic. It must have a regular constituency, membership, and continuous channels of communication to its member and other stakeholders. We need avenues for on-going dialogue and debate, involving scholars from across the broad range of WAC's constituency, so we can address topical issues in a timely manner. With this in mind, we plan to establish a refereed journal, the *World Archaeological Congress Journal*, which will be a vehicle for regular communication and outlet for much of our intellectual work. This journal will communicate the latest discoveries and ideas to the wider world and, in particular, act as a forum to bring together the voices of Western and non-Western, Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars, and other interested stakeholders, wherever they are located. This new journal will replace the *World Archaeological Congress Bulletin*.

WAC web site

In the immediate future, we need to be strategic in accessing the electronic capabilities of an interconnected world. We need to make more effective use of the Internet in order to promote a sense of group

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membership and to challenge some of the global inequities about which archaeology should have a voice. WAC sets a foundation for international collaborations and for mentoring across national borders. We all have much to learn from each other. This process broadens our understandings of archaeological method and practice, and can only increase the quality of our work. One of the core successes of WAC has been that of putting like-minded people in touch with each other. WAC has always encouraged archaeologists from diverse backgrounds to share their ideas with others - archaeological self-determination through archaeological interaction. Introductions obtained through WAC are not contingent upon established hierarchies or networks. To build on this, the WAC Executive decided to establish a list-server for WAC members and friends (see http://listserver.flinders.edu.au/mailman/listinfo/wac [URL no longer available, checked 2018]), which will facilitate global communication in archaeology in all areas of archaeological research and act as a forum for disseminating information relating to WAC.

A new WAC website (http://www.flinders.edu.au/wac) is being developed, guided by a Web Task Force. The new site is being designed to celebrate our global diversity, make information accessible and visible to users and to create a community of practice. Our new web image is a little more institutionalised, reflecting an increased professionalisation that is inevitable, and needed, when an organization grows as quickly as WAC. While we need to be aware that too great a dependence on electronic communication has the potential to disenfranchise some of our membership, the internet also can be a vehicle for 'bottom-up' initiatives. In a sense, activity at a regional level is an ultimate test for this organization, and how we can identify and support regional initiatives has a permanent item on the agenda of foregoing Officers and Executives. A possible answer lies in the new technology, especially if it is backed up by funding at the grassroots level.

Running WAC

Since WAC is going through a period of expansion, our administrative structure has to be shaped to meet new needs. As with all international establishments of this scale, effective organization is a key. One of the changes we are introducing is a series of Standing Committees which will address core issues such as archaeological ethics or teaching and learning. Task Forces will continue to address topical issues such as the illicit trading of artefacts, heritage preservation in regions affected by war, or the coordination of international efforts in repatriation. These task forces are our means for action in political arenas. They are one of the principal ways in which we are able to focus specialist knowledge and provide informed, high-quality advice to governments and other bodies.

Many of the goals of WAC members will continue to be achieved from the bottom-up. Our capacity here needs to be strengthened. In a sense, we have to create a situation in which we can become ourselves. What constitutes 'ourselves' will vary enormously according to the parts of the world in which we live and work. WAC in Japan, for example, will have different needs and a different shape to WAC in India, or Argentina or Nigeria. This diversity is something to be celebrated and encouraged. It can be supported through helping people develop regional alliances and access the resources they need to grow in their own ways. Part of the WAC mission has always been to redress global inequality through making funds held in high-income countries accessible to people in low-income countries. This is a two-way process of educating both funders and fundees. The WAC-5 workshop 'U.S. funding sources for non-U.S. scholars' was a first, important step in this direction. Hosted by the Wenner Gren Foundation, this workshop brought together representatives of six U.S. organizations (Earthwatch International Research, the Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, the L.S.B. Leakey Foundation, the National Geographic Society, the World Monuments Fund and the Wenner Gren Foundation for the Anthropological Research) who summarised their grant programs in which non U.S. citizens and residents are eligible to compete. This workshop was a practical way of breaking down information barriers and encouraging people from all parts of the world to empower themselves. Future WAC meetings could host a series of workshops on issues such as 'How to approach funders', 'Writing successful grant applications' and so forth. These are simple measures but they

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have the potential to generate great benefits, and WAC is the right organization to make this happen. As a group we have the expertise, the experience, the networks and, most importantly, the will.

In addition, we are planning to formalise our internal system of grants and awards. WAC needs to provide financial support for a wide range of activities and programmes. It can do so only when we have raised substantial funds, so fundraising and income generation is an urgent concern of the new Executive.

In summary, what new things can we expect for WAC?

The main initiatives are:

- Several new book series.
- The World Archaeological Congress Journal.
- A new web site.
- The WAC list-server.
- Standing committees.
- A formalisation of our grants and awards programs.

These initiatives will be added to our existing programs, which include:

- Congresses.
- Inter-Congresses.
- The One World Archaeology Series.
- Task forces.

The World Archaeological Congress is a diverse and dynamic, forward-looking community. Our future provides us with both enormous opportunity and enormous responsibility. The vision I present here has been formed through eight years as a member of the Executive and through close and extensive collaboration with my colleagues in the diverse and dynamic community that is the World Archaeological Congress. It is one that can easily be shared by all who are members of WAC and all who should be members of WAC. By working together, we can achieve a more equitable archaeology. Beyond this, a well-structured, properly funded and politically effective WAC has the potential to be a model for the decolonisation of disciplines other than archaeology. Let's see what we can do.

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