THE VALUE OF DEVELOPING A RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Prepared by Inge van der Jagt, Daniel Miles, Adrian Olivier & Gabriel Cooney

eac European Archaeological Council

INTRODUCTION

Archaeology offers a unique perspective on human evolution, cultural development, and history. Undertaking **archaeological research** helps us understand how we became who we are today, and these insights into our past make research a fundamental part of the social value of archaeology. Research is thus vital to the archaeological process that underpins and informs better heritage protection.

Research frameworks help shape more effective archaeological research and are therefore a valuable tool to support the management of the historic environment. The value and role of research frameworks is to foster a coordinated research culture and embed a research/evidence-based approach into heritage management, regardless of the political, legal, administrative and economic contexts of individual states. Research frameworks support decision-making and broaden public benefit to include social and communal values as well as the research dividend.

This document provides the **strategic framework** for the accompanying guidance that sets out practical steps, principles and case studies for consideration when undertaking the process of creating or updating a research framework. It is targeted at people who are responsible for commissioning, funding or developing research frameworks. It can be used to support the creation of a business case for developing a research framework and sets out the key principles that should be considered in doing so.

It forms one of several interlinked resources developed to provide EAC members with tools to help them manage their archaeological heritage:

- Developing National Research Frameworks (EAC website)

- The Benefits of Development-Led Archaeology (EAC Guidelines 4 and EAC Guidelines 5)

- Articulating the Significance of Archaeological Sites (EAC Guidelines 9)

This document and the accompanying guidance has been developed by the Working Group on Research Frameworks of the European Archaeological Council.[1]

---

[1] See p.14 for the members of the Working Group.

THE ROLE AND VALUE OF RESEARCH FRAMEWORKS

Research frameworks provide an overview of current understanding, research questions and strategic objectives.[2] They enable the archaeological profession, public decision-makers and other audiences to identify and review what are currently regarded as the most important or significant aspects of the past as reflected in the material record.

They provide a mechanism to promote a more effective research culture by helping to coordinate and focus archaeological work across different heritage sector disciplines and stakeholders, and to maximize the public benefit of that work.

Research frameworks are key tools in making choices: they help us to make informed decisions that are backed by an evidence base and a set of research goals and strategies. For example, they can inform the research focus for large scale research or infrastructure projects; mitigation strategies for development-led investigations; funding priorities of a state cultural heritage department; or support the management strategy for a World Heritage property.

The ability of research frameworks to help us in making choices is important because the loss of knowledge resulting from both natural processes, particularly the climate crisis, and human interventions is inevitable, and it is impossible to investigate and analyse everything that is at risk. Today there is a growing, although by no means universal, recognition that not all elements of heritage have the same value and significance; that not everything can (or should) be protected or conserved (there's simply too much); and that not everything can (or should) be recorded or excavated (there are insufficient resources). A much greater emphasis is now being placed on the importance of promoting research (knowledge recovery) as the fundamental objective of development-led archaeology so that unavoidable loss can be mediated by increased knowledge and understanding derived from active and coordinated research.

Research frameworks can be extremely valuable tools in many more ways, including creating, supporting or in some cases restoring the archaeological research cycle and building partnerships across and beyond the heritage sector.

---

[2]The three stage model for Research Frameworks was developed in Olivier, A *Frameworks for our Past: A review of research frameworks, strategies and perceptions* (1996).

THE VALLETTA CONVENTION
DEFINING THE LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT FOR THE ROLE OF RESEARCH FRAMEWORKS

The role that research frameworks play in supporting archaeological research is embedded within the implementation of the articles of the European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (Valletta, 1992) (commonly called the Valletta Convention). The Convention makes straightforward and (relatively) strong provisions for archaeological research in general; it defines archaeological excavation as a scientific research process and makes no qualitative distinction between archaeology carried out in the context of heritage management, and excavation purely for the purposes of research.

   In the context of the Convention, research is regarded as an essential, if not the essential, component of the archaeological process that underpins and informs better management of the archaeological heritage and protection of the historic environment, as well as providing the source material that can be used to build public engagement and support.

   However, beyond the general principles established in the Convention, it does not concern itself directly with issues associated with archaeological research at the individual state level – which has led to a great deal of variation in archaeological research and heritage management practices. This is where research frameworks can play an important role as they can be adapted and applied in different ways to meet the specific needs and requirements of the individual European states.

THE VALUE OF RESEARCH FRAMEWORKS IN HERITAGE MANAGEMENT

Research frameworks are an important tool to support the management of the historic environment. They provide up-to-date resource assessments to inform decision-making and provide questions and strategies to guide new research. Heritage managers use the product of archaeological research on a daily basis to help them make informed decisions as they curate and care for the historic environment. Good understanding of the archaeological resource helps heritage managers to assess its different values (including significance) in various practical and administrative contexts and to deliver advice on priorities and / or the need for further action (such as mitigation).

The number of archaeological investigations is rising, as a result of the integration of archaeology into spatial planning, and this generates substantial new knowledge and understanding. This invaluable research resource can (and should) contribute to the development of new regional and national syntheses. Such syntheses significantly enhance existing understanding and contribute to the updating of research questions, strategies and frameworks and the development of new ones. These will in turn inform future heritage management decisions and lead to the generation of new research. This is known as the research cycle and is at the core of heritage management. If we do not continue to feed the research cycle with new information the heritage management process will stall and the opportunities for research, and public support for heritage funding, are lost. Research frameworks provide a vital mechanism for incorporating new information into the existing body of knowledge; they are in fact the 'engine' which drives the heritage management process forward in new directions.

THE RESEARCH CYCLE

Decision-making

Investigation

Research Frameworks

Knowledge creation

Synthesis
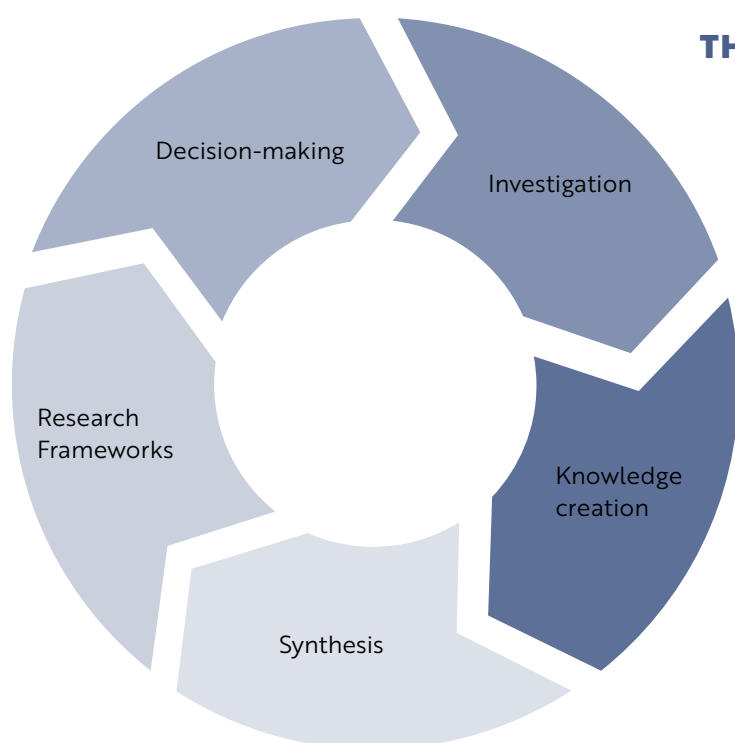
Although all archaeology is deeply rooted in research, heritage management practices have supplementary objectives that extend beyond those of the research environment, and which bring a range of different pressures to bear on such projects. In some cases, the stresses induced by commercialisation and competition (in one form or another) influence the nature and quality of the archaeological work undertaken. This may have a negative impact on the relationship between fieldwork and research and the delivery of research outcomes. Research frameworks can support heritage managers to justify why development-led investigations are required by highlighting their contribution to delivering public benefit through knowledge gain (regional or national) and contributing to broader social value. They are an effective way of maximising public value from limited resources.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PROCESS IN DEVELOPING RESEARCH FRAMEWORKS

The process of building a research framework can be as valuable as the resulting product. The direct and indirect benefits that accrue from this process mean that undertaking it can embed an effective research culture across the whole sector.

The process of developing a research framework can be complex. This is because research frameworks often need to serve multiple users and stakeholders with different requirements; and at the same time they may need to integrate with several organisational systems, including different levels of management plans, priorities and strategies.

To maximise the benefits and navigate the complexity of the process there are some key principles that should be considered in the development of any research framework. These include:

- build upon existing knowledge and ongoing work for maximum effect.

- use broad-based partnerships across the heritage sector and beyond to encourage inclusivity and as wide a sense of ownership as possible.

- engage actively with specialist communities of interest, including local communities, to cassess and understand values, and to stimulate direct public participation in understanding and caring for the archaeological heritage.

- avoid making research frameworks prescriptive, so that there are always opportunities to undertake independent or serendipitous research.

- ensure research frameworks are dynamic, iterative, and constantly evolving, ensuring scientific quality and relevance.

- use digital formats to help provide widespread dissemination of, and access to, research frameworks to increase impact, utility, and participation.

- ensure that they are actively managed, resourced, and regularly reviewed in the light of new evidence, theories or participation by new partners.

Although the process can be reduced to a number of key principles and stages, there is no single template that fits all circumstances. This is due to the different needs of the multiple users that vary from context to context (for example; subject, topic, state, region, locality). Instead each research framework should properly reflect the circumstances, considerations, and requirements which led to its development whether they are:

- increasing knowledge and understanding of the past

- providing more effective spatial planning

- making the results of investigations more accessible

- securing maximum value from private sector investigations

- developing joint working approaches to address strategic and front-line priorities

- extending responsibility for research and knowledge sharing to national and local communities

- increasing public access to knowledge and information

- supporting funding decisions

- or any combination of these.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ENGAGEMENT, PARTNERSHIP AND SOCIAL VALUE

Collaboration between archaeological stakeholders is key to the successful creation and embedding of a research framework into practice. There needs to be engagement across and beyond the profession to agree on the approach, to work within an overall strategy, to identify the most important objectives and agree on the right mechanisms to ensure sustainability. Engagement within the sector, between heritage management organisations, research and educational institutions and other academic and special interest groups, has the potential to increase the value of research frameworks for all parties through the exchange of new knowledge and for the benefit of future learning. Engagement outside the sector (for example, at a strategic level with other state departments or agencies and disciplines) provides the opportunity to broaden the impact of archaeology for the community. This can contribute to increased benefits for wellbeing, economic growth agendas, place-making and tourism. This is why it is important to make the results accessible, particularly for non-archaeologists, so that the public and social value of the research framework can be readily identified.

During the first two decades of the 21st century there has been a growing awareness of the relevance and importance of social and community values to heritage management.[3] This means being able to identify and express public benefit through dynamic and genuinely collaborative partnerships that incorporate local and community values into the decision-making processes of heritage management. We need to extend our understanding of the social value of heritage held in the public and community realm and add it to the traditional intrinsic and material values of heritage that archaeologists are most familiar with. By doing this, we enable heritage managers to make wider and more balanced assessments of importance and significance. In turn, this informs their decisions to ensure that they serve both professional and public interests and articulate public benefit in a clear and demonstrable fashion.

Research frameworks help achieve this, by providing a focus for extended and dynamic partnerships and joint working between relevant interested parties, including heritage managers, the academic sector, the commercial sector and different communities (local and research interest). Together, they can use a research framework to identify and find practical ways to address strategic and front-line priorities. Research frameworks can also be of specific value to the contributing partners themselves, for example academics can demonstrate the relevance and impact of their research to society, peers and funders.

---

[3]Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (2005), known as the Faro Convention; Olivier, A, 2011: 'Socialising Heritage: Policy and Praxis', *European Journal of Postclassical Archaeologies* vol 9, 9-34.

BUILDING IN EVALUATION AND INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

Evaluation of the success of an individual research framework depends on the aims and objectives that were established when it was developed, and the context in which it is used. For that reason, there is no standard list of success criteria. However, it is essential to define (in advance) clear criteria for success for every research framework. These criteria should reflect the core principles that underpin the development of the research framework and reflect any reporting requirements of the funders.

These criteria will enable its users to evaluate how successful the research framework has been in delivering its original aims and objectives and will help shape its future development.

Excavation of a Roman cremation grave surrounded by the foundation of a wall and a L-shaped ditch in the 'Beuningse plas' sand extraction area, Beuningen (The Netherlands)
© erfgoedfoto.nl | RJ Stöver

BUILDING TOMORROW'S RESEARCH CULTURE

Research frameworks are an effective mechanism to promote a better coordinated research culture; build partnerships across and beyond the heritage sector, for example with research institutes or parallel public agencies; and recover the best research value from funded investigations. However, there is no universal approach and research frameworks need to be tailored to their specific context, subject, and purpose.

Engaging the multiple voices of heritage managers, the research community and the public is key to producing a research framework that is valued, used, and has purpose in delivering research and broader public benefit. Furthermore, to maintain the validity of, and confidence in, what has been produced, the research framework must be able to evolve, so it reflects new developments, new understanding and importantly cultural and societal change.

To be able to respond to change and promote the widest use, it is important to consider the format of a research framework, and ensure there are no barriers to their active use beyond the interests of cultural heritage managers. For example, traditional print/publication formats are difficult and costly to update and eventually lose their currency and value in the long term. A solution would be to embrace the benefits of web-based technology so that research frameworks are published as webpages. This would make them more accessible (and therefore useful), interactive (open to a wider range of users and able to incorporate user-values), current (timely and ongoing integration of knowledge, for example from the results of developer-led/ investor-funded investigations) and interoperable (developing standards to enable different frameworks to connect together and to other heritage management tools, for example sites and monuments inventories). An online research framework also provides opportunities to include mechanisms to map the outputs of research to its questions and strategies. This would highlight the regional or national contributions of investigations and bring the research cycle full circle with the incorporation of new knowledge into the research framework.

In a dynamic and evolving research framework, research questions and topics might change over time. It might be good to realise that these can also expand beyond what we would consider traditional archaeological themes and periods and incorporate broader topics like landscape, climate change, environmental sustainability, cultural diversity and inclusion. However, it is important to note that the development of themes and topics needs to be undertaken through a rigorous scientific evidence based and consultative approach to ensure that they find support with the diverse range of stakeholders whilst not becoming a tool reflecting political or ideological agendas.

A web-based research framework can also integrate with the online tools of aligned sectors, to create a more holistic approach linking archaeology and the historic environment with the research and management of culture, the arts, the natural and built environment, as well as health, wellbeing and social prescribing initiatives. This not only leads to the broadening of the social impact of archaeology for the community but also ensures that research frameworks are integrated and not just considered as specialist tools, only used by the archaeological community. This will help promote their use and result in increased sustainability and value of archaeological research. By widening the social value and impact of research frameworks, the research culture of tomorrow will take shape.

---

[4]Social prescribing is 'a means of connecting patients to a range of non-clinical services in the community to improve their health and well-being'. *A toolkit on how to implement social prescribing* World Health Organisation (2022) www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789290619765

CONCLUSION

Research frameworks bring multiple direct and indirect benefits to states, organisations, institutions, individuals, and to the discipline of archaeology as a whole. Direct benefits include facilitating or speeding up decision making processes; better justification for decisions; and advancing understanding and knowledge gain. These benefits can be appreciated in the context of funding or grant making decisions or in the mitigation strategies used to coordinate investigations. There are also indirect benefits, for instance in improving the research culture; bringing together different parties to a common purpose; and influencing policy. This could be in the context of implementing an overarching tourism or management strategy, when a research framework provides input on important/valued elements from the local past.

However, the adoption of a research framework does not by itself create an active sector-wide research culture. Responsibility for building an active, successful, and unifying research culture across the whole sector lies with everyone, regardless of their specific role. Active and dynamic dialogue is an essential prerequisite of a positive research culture, and research frameworks provide an effective mechanism to achieve this.

The EAC Working Group for Developing Guidance on Research Frameworks:
Dan Miles (Chair; UK, England)
Inge van der Jagt (Chair; Netherlands)
Ulla Kadakas (Estonia)
Adrian Olivier (UK, England)
John O'Keeffe (Ireland)
Katalin Wollák (Hungary)
Sandra Zirne (Latvia)
Hrvoje Potrebica (Croatia)

eac European Archaeological Council

Managing Europe's Archaeological Heritage

Cover: Excavation of a Roman grave monument located within an area of approximately 72 hectares that is intended for sand extraction in Beuningen (The Netherlands). © erfgoedfoto.nl | RJ Stöver