

ARCHON RESEARCH CONFERENCE ‘SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCE OF PAST HUMAN SOCIETIES’

CALL FOR PAPERS

The national Research School of Archaeology ARCHON is preparing concrete steps towards closer collaboration of Dutch research institutes and societal partners in archaeology and the historical, social, natural, earth & life sciences. The ultimate aim is to apply for research grants on behalf of the whole of Dutch archaeology and related disciplines, rather than by individual researchers and institutes. In particular, we aim to set up a consortium to apply for a Zwaartekracht (Gravitation) grant with NWO, to be submitted by 2023.

As a first step in this process, ARCHON will organize a conference to debate how archaeology contributes and can continue to improve our knowledge and understanding of the causes, developmental trajectories, and long-term effects of environmental and societal issues in the past in order to better inform science and society about strategies and pathways for the future. We are calling on all Dutch academic institutes specializing in archaeology, together with colleague-institutes with a background in the historical, social, natural, earth & life sciences to explore with us the deep history of a number of urgent environmental and societal issues that relate to resilience and sustainability. The conference will address two sets of research questions that are labelled under the umbrellas of “Human impact on the Earth System” and “Social resilience and people’s responses to change”, and asks the question how to synthesize these. These themes are outlined in more detail below.

Because of the continuing uncertainty regarding the Covid-19 crisis, we will organize this conference as a series of online meetings in the period September-December 2021, each meeting featuring position papers followed by moderated discussion. These meetings will also serve to identify potential partners for preparing the Zwaartekracht grant application.

If you want to present a position paper on one of these topics, we invite you to submit a max. 300-word abstract to secretary@archonline.nl for review by the Archon board before 30 June 2021. Accepted papers will be used as the starting point for discussions on how to develop the questions addressed into new, long-term agendas for interdisciplinary research that will further deepen our understanding of the environmental and societal issues outlined above. The final planning of the conference will depend on the number of contributions accepted.

THE POSITION OF ARCHAEOLOGY

Over 99 percent of the history of humankind and the evolution of human society, including its influence on the environment and the Earth System, is predominantly covered by just one scientific discipline: archaeology. For the remaining < 1 percent - the last three millennia, archaeology is still of crucial importance for the study of past societies because of its long-term perspective, its expertise in human-environmental interactions and its focus on the social construction of material worlds.

For this reason, the discipline of archaeology – as an interdisciplinary field – increasingly contributes to our understanding of the roots and historical backgrounds of current

environmental and societal problems, dilemmas and challenges. The topics of environmental sustainability and societal resilience have largely been dealt with separately in the last two decades, each being covered by different clusters of scientific disciplines – namely the natural, earth and life sciences in the first case, and the social sciences and the humanities in the latter case, with the medical sciences bridging the gap where needed and possible. However, both scientists and policy makers increasingly acknowledge that these issues are closely related: a more resilient and healthy society is a necessary condition for a sustainable human ecosystem and planet, whereas a healthy and sustainable planet is essential for societies to develop in more resilient ways.

CONFERENCE THEMES:

A) HUMAN IMPACT ON THE EARTH SYSTEM

1. *How did the human niche evolve?* How did successive developments of the human niche interactively change human microbiomes (the human body), strategies of food production and provisioning (subsistence economy) and -eventually- entire ecosystems? What was the role of fire in this process? How have people dealt with water and water systems through time? What were the roots of human architecture and the ‘built environment’?
2. *How sustainable were human land use systems in the past?* Many (pre)historic forms of land use have proven not to be sustainable. Others show long sequences of trial and error and improvement, surviving for centuries or even millennia. What explains the failure and success of these systems? How can an archaeological understanding of these systems contribute to the revitalization of existing forms of land use or the design of new land use strategies for the future? Given that the long human history of water management in the end also created uneven access to water resources, what lessons can present-day and future society learn from the (deep) past?

B) SOCIAL RESILIENCE AND PEOPLE’S RESPONSE TO CHANGE

3. *How have human forms of social, political and spatial organization evolved over the long-term?* What were linear and non-linear dimensions of this development? What power-relations characterized different social and political systems in the past and how did these contribute to the emergence of social segmentation and social and economic inequality? How large was the variation in terms of dynamics and stability and how did these different temporalities affect people’s perceptions and valuation of environmental transformations and changes in “lifestyle”? How did people in the past use landscapes, places and monuments to anchor and reproduce/revitalize their cultural identities and social memories?
4. *With the benefit of hindsight, what can the discipline of Archaeology reveal about the origins and historical backgrounds of current societal processes?* How can we characterize and define different forms of “globalization” in early political, social and economic settings, like the Roman Empire? Why and how did people in the past develop, design, use and adapt technologies in order to (better) interact in functional and meaningful ways with nature, its resources, and with other people? Is migration – or even mass migration - of all times? How did human diseases and pandemics evolve and spread over time? What kinds of processes, factors and actors were involved in the emergence of war, terror and genocide?