CONTEXTUAL NARRATIVES IN ARCHAEOLOGY: REFRAMING HUMAN HISTORY through SUSTAINABILITY

Master thesis by

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Dedicated to those who didn't made it to their thesis dissertation, and to those who didn't —and won't- have the chance to start their studies at all.

«"For a human being, nothing comes naturally,' said Grumman. 'We have to learn everything we do."»
— Philip Pullman, *The Subtle Knife*

«Ignorance is no longer an excuse, and inaction no longer an option.»
(Brightman & Lewis 2017, 28)

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Introduction

This thesis proposes a contextual approach to the elaboration of narratives in archaeology, suggesting to reframe the history of humanity via parameters of sustainability, negotiated together by experts and their broader public in terms of social and environmental well-being.

My suggestion is a shift in perspectives about our past and present, away from the destructive discourses majorly responsible for the current ecosystem crisis. Therefore, the aim is to encourage meaningful alternatives and different paradigms favouring the radical actions required today to deal with this existential threat.

To do so, I go through the deconstruction of familiar concepts of 'progress' and 'heritage' as well as acknowledging the role of archaeology into the making of such dominant narratives, in order to possibly lay the ground for a critically aware stance on true sustainability via the discipline.

The text and ideas you are going to read about below are one of the many consequences of the 2nd cycle university's master degree course in "Applied Critical Archaeology and Heritage" (ACRA for short), which I attended at the *Alma Mater Studiorum – Università di Bologna*, between the academic years 2020-2021 and 2021-2022. Among many other events and occasions, happened during and before these two years, my study path remains undeniably one of the main reasons I have ended up producing this dissertation.

Nevertheless, I would also like to acknowledge the other causes which led me to write this thesis, unsurprisingly not reducible to an academic course alone and thus non-exclusively due to it. Moreover, through the time I have spent into academia as a student, I have grown more and more critical not only of the discipline of archaeology –which could be taken as an accomplishment of the very name of my master degree, but I have also matured my own personal and long-since started critique of the education system in the present context. This process left me with several questions unsolved, many of which do not make for an honourable mention of the operative status of public teaching infrastructures as well as universities and research centres, in Italy and in all the other countries prevalently adopting so-called 'western world' models which did not sufficiently elaborated far from such bases. The very superimposition of the Western countries with the idea of a 'developed world', passing through paradigms for the transmission of knowledge I have found so defective, calls for a very critical stance to be taken on the hegemony we –as people living and studying in these self-proclaimed 'developed countries'- define and

produce knowledge through. Without a similar stance, I am left all but confident we will change for the better what we have operated for worse till now, although as we all should I also recognise that we still have all the means to achieve this change –as short as we are falling out of time.

Such a preamble is relevant to look at the very topic of my research and at the current conclusions I have come to, along with the proposals I have outlined, passing through the very processes of elaboration of ideas. The aim of this introductory chapter is therefore to present the work done, namely outlining a brief summary of the structure of the dissertation, collecting a short but comprehensive overlook of the contents, aims and outcomes of each chapter. More importantly, I will make clear the standpoint my reflections stem from, consequently delving into the motivations which lead me to face such an overwhelming topic as our climate and ecological crisis with its social implications and the ways archaeology is already and can be further involved.

Zero-Summary

This first additional section do not actually adds up much to the final sum of my reasoning. Nonetheless before getting into the underlying reasons for this work, it might be worth to provide a summarised preview of the contents which will be found below, as well as the way I structured the order of arguments and their role within the thesis.

As seen from the table of contents, this dissertation was made up of three main chapters, enclosed by introduction and conclusions.
Each chapter, similarly to this very introductory section, has been subdivided up to two times in order to nest the topics and arguments dealt with into it following a hierarchical ratio in second level sub-chapters while maintaining a horizontal presence of contents between first level one. For instance, this means that a primary section within Chapter 1 and another from Chapter 2 hold the same importance in terms of topic debated, while secondarily nested chunks of text (actually occurring in Chapter 3 only) are more detailed accounts of their parent thus not as crucial for an overall understanding of the flow of the thesis.
On this regard, while different sections might be at similar levels of relevance, tiers do not apply interchangeably to the consequential organisation of the text –which is ideally meant to be read one chapter after the in the given order. Consequent parts are in fact often referred one after the another and tend to progressively build up arguments and themes, although as will be argued in the very dissertation I do not exclude a different reading workflow and rather acknowledge I did not have time to curate and encourage diversity of approaches in these terms.

Presented here as a quick tour, my work settles its background the next two sections, one focused on broader and collective bases to proceed with this project and the other giving more attention to the personal motivations and backstory of the author myself.

Following, the main body starts off with a deconstruction of dominant ideas of 'progress' (§ 1.), contextually illustrated in its making from common imaginaries (§ 1.1.) and skimming through literary lineages and clashes of influences (§ 1.2.). These interactions interweaves with scientific institutions (§ 1.3.) which definitely had a role, focusing here in particular on archaeology, and aims at recognising various responsibilities so to open at the end with a more nuanced landscape of possible trajectories (§ 1.4.).

The consequent chapter (§ 2.) stems from previously made claims and embarks in a journey to re-contextualise the concept of 'heritage' (§ 2.1.), in turn leading to the re-frame of the archaeological discipline as a narrative in itself (§ 2.2.). A similar preposition proves crucial to introduce the topic of 'sustainability' as applied and debated within archaeologists (§ 2.3.) and concludes the chapter with my critical stance on the matter of 'unsustainability' (§ 2.4.).

Finally, I leave room to the more propositional part of the dissertation, where further reflections are expressed in the open (§ 3.). A first section there is dedicated to the author's own positioning in regard of the previous topics, in particular around archaeology and sustainability (§ 3.1.), while the following sub-chapter actually sets up my proposal thesis (§ 3.2.). Two further next sub-sections try to systematically go through related features and implications of the proposed ideas (§ 3.2.1.) as well as the possible critiques and their resolutions or acknowledgement (§ 3.2.2.).

The conclusive primary part of this chapter (§ 3.3.) introduces the limited ethno-archaeological survey I carried out, an initial step towards a project which could put my theoretical propositions into practice, along with its preliminary results and observations in a secondary section (§ 3.3.1.).

Ultimately I draw a necessarily brief conclusion and express my gratefulness to everyone and everything helped me to elaborate this dissertation and go on with life so far.

As a disclaimer: the present text is intentionally peppered with puns as well as arguably spicy comments, the latter functional to enhance personal critical stances, the former added in the hope of making it even a little more enjoyable as a food for thoughts also outside academic halls.

A further and due disclosure is the formal use of the Chicago "Author-Date" referencing style in its most recent 17th edition, to which I tried to stick as much as possible while not actually having the latest official proprietary manual at hand, thus necessarily resorting to more openly accessible resources such as guidelines found on the web.

State of the Earth (and humanity with it)

To introduce the motivations leading me to embark into this journey, I would first like to go through a needed acknowledgement of the global situation we are currently in, namely the climate and ecological crisis. As unnecessary as it may seem in an academic context, I will rather argue it remains an extremely crucial starting point, in order to have the causes clear in mind while problematising any possible form of denial, and furthermore efficiently discuss about the issues and reiterate what can be done to deal with it.

The next paragraphs are meant as waypoints to walk through this stance of mine, by illustrating the crisis we are already in and which we can not deny in its gravity and causes, so to recognise we can –and have to- do everything possible right now with little regard of what seems apparently 'feasible' or not according to our often flawed perception of the actual urgency.

In fact, we as humanity are nowadays already facing a planetary crisis, despite how little is actually being done to deal with it compared with the urgency and gravity of the situation. Even though our response is nowhere near proportionate, "climate change is a threat to human well-being and planetary health" as repeatedly warned by the "cumulative scientific evidence" (IPCC 2022a, 33) namely the most complete collections of scientific literature on the topic to date, which are peer-reviewed by hundreds of scientists and approved by representatives from almost 200 countries through the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Assessment Reports.

Although the urgency of the situation requires measures even more radical than those taken for other global-scale emergencies, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, it has to be reminded this is unlike any other regular 'emergency'. By definition emergencies are extra-ordinary thus temporary statuses of things meant to end at some point, while the state of the Earth is going to persist, or more precisely it will continue its trend until the climate system reaches a new state of equilibrium. The whole ecosystem will meanwhile have to adjust according to the changes we caused until the moment we stopped forcing it, meaning life for humans and other species will get worse due to the mismatching climate trends, of which we are yet to see the full consequences.

Even now though science should leave little room for doubts: life on Earth is already on track for the 6th mass extinction according to the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES 2019) and, although our own species' chance to actually get extinct are relatively low, at stake is catastrophic societal collapse as humanity is nonetheless heading for a reduction of its ecological niche up to 19% (Xu *et al.* 2020) with population negatively affected going by the number of billions (IPCC 2022a, 12). In fact, climate

trends and their consequent ranges of impact have been duly projected by the IPCC, building up solid scenarios via the "Shared Socioeconomic Pathways" (SSPs) and "Representative Concentration Pathways" (RCPs) developed throughout the last (sixth) Assessment Report in subsequent instalments by the three main Working Groups.

Hence the status of 'crisis' assigned here to the current state of the Earth and humanity with it, thus consistently adding a 'social' to the usual 'ecological and climate' specifications as integral parts of the system unavoidably threatened. This denomination has to be kept in mind when discussing the topic, and will be preferred in this text against potentially misleading and simplistic apparent synonyms, such as 'climate emergency', 'climate change', 'global warming' and so on.

From this standpoint it is easily argued that the scientific community, having clear knowledge about the gravity of the situation, is understandably reluctant to level with the rest of the public thus holding back from transmitting the actual urgency of acting about it. However genuinely protective or rather deeply paternalistic this might be, and as justifiable or not this is as argued later in this section, there are also other factors to take into account when dwelling in similar commonplaces. First of all, the only apparent unity of the 'scientific community' and its socio-cultural dimension; not last the underlying psychological tension in front of a similar existential threat, which does not only apply to 'uneducated masses', but to academics as well.

"Is the mean temperature of the ground in any way influenced by the presence of heat-absorbing gases in the atmosphere?": this question was written down echoing one that "long attracted the attention of physicists" as far back in time as the 19th century, by the soon-to-be Nobel prize for chemistry Svante Arrhenius (1897, 14). In later works he also hypothesised the relation with human emissions by burning fossil fuels, mainly coal at his time, as far as to say it could have been a factor for the future human extinction and the theory even made it to the public as a piece of news (Selma Morning Times 1902). Nowadays, climate science confirmed these hypotheses of anthropogenic contributions to atmospheric warming and started warning about the perils as seen with the IPCC, also collecting evidence along the way for the many different impacts of humans exceeding planetary boundaries, due to unsustainable socio-economic models and furthermore pondering their many consequences (Meadows *et al.* 1972). However, it is still in my direct experience – and I would bet of most reading this text - to have heard many people outside but moreover even inside of academia denying or downplaying the first basic acknowledgement of human-induced climate change underlying the current crisis.

The first instalment of the IPCC (2021, 4) sixth Assessment Report took the stance of calling

"unequivocal" the human contribution to current climate change, majorly (more than 50%) driven by anthropogenic greenhouse gases emissions and the consequent global warming. It was not a sudden implementation, but rather part of a methodical evolution of statements allowed into the Summary for Policy Makers since the 1990's first report (Freedman 2021), resulting in an even stronger confirmation inside the Technical Summary by stating that "Human influence on the climate system is now an established fact" (IPCC 2021, 41). A similar slow process of approval highlights the structure of consensus in science, meant to guarantee trustworthiness of claims by a peer-reviewed system. Nevertheless individual authors of the IPCC have even found themselves to defend against deceiving allegations through time, namely regarding a supposed 'scientific cleansing' of uncertainties (Santer 2010), despite the IPCC followed protocols of transparency right from the beginning and later even deployed publicly accessible interface to explain and ensure them on its website (https://www.ipcc.ch/documentation/procedures/).

This rigorous, though inherently conservative methodology, also has major expectable drawbacks, in particular when applied to certainly dangerous situations requiring precautionary measures. One of such is focusing on the uncertainties and inhibit a clear stance on the topic by academics, as illustrated in the next paragraphs, while I would later argue that above all is the consequent risk to make room for further delays.

Here I would therefore like to view at the last decision by the IPCC, namely to include definitive terms such as "unequivocal" and "established", to be considered as a stance through which this institution is trying deal with the phenomenon of so-called 'soft-denialism'. Hence what can and has been negatively dismissed as a 'political statement', as opposed to allegedly 'purely scientific' ones, gains a different value by trying to get the actual recommendation of science finally followed over short-sighted economic interest.

The latter are supported against the former through a mechanism of "disavowal", included in soft-denialism, which is one of the stronger and possibly most common forms of denial. This because it often does not recognise itself as such, as the person actually is aware of the issue, but finds ways to remain undisturbed by the implications (Weintrobe 2012, 7–9) effectively justifying the lack of proper reactions. In other words, as also contributed by the same author in the Handbook of Climate Psychology for the Climate Psychology Alliance (2021), this psychological state takes a moderate position by remaining on cognitive grey-zones where

> «[...] the reality of climate change is **accepted but in a purely intellectual way**, resulting in no psychological disturbance: cognition is split off from feeling. Disavowal can be **supported by** a wide variety of psychological processes, including the diffusion of responsibility, perceptual distortion, **rationalisation**, wishful thinking and psychological projection.» (*emphases mine*)

Therefore academia is far from being immune to these dynamics, rather it provides a fertile ground for similar disavowal, as academics in the western tradition of scientific research are professionally encouraged to rationalise, not considering that structurally conservative contexts favour the acceptance of moderate positions and are ill disposed to their problematisation.

Such a possibility demonstrated right by making climate science actually "erring on the side of least drama" with the IPCC as an indicative example of it (Brysse *et al.* 2013), a tragically inadequate approach in front of similar life-or-death threats. Indeed nowadays "delay means death" as stated by António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United States, who also warned about missing a "rapidly closing window" to act and he was backed up by the last UN Environment Programme (UNEP 2022) report named with a similar sentence.

As observations confirm and exceed projected scenarios, even the best consensus within climate scientists (Myers *et al.* 2021) seems not to be able to present a call for adequate reaction, as international pledges fall short in addressing climate change and publications did not manage to fix an arguably broken science-society contract (Glavovic, Smith, and White 2021). Especially among scholars and their institutions, all of this generates the widespread situation where theory and words are not followed by practical actions (Borgermann, Schmidt, and Dobbelaere 2022). On the increasingly needed stance for academics to 'walk the talk', there are only few but effective and encouraging exceptions, taking the path of non-violent civil disobedience (Racimo *et al.* 2022) among academics, precisely built to increase pressure on decision-makers and trigger a response to the climate and ecological crisis – as admittedly late as it already is.

A valid conclusion for this section would in fact be to stress how important it is to tell the truth about the state of the Earth and humanity with it, namely without giving up and jumping to fatalistic or so-called 'doomist' conclusions, also given scientific findings on the topic. As already mentioned, authoritative sources told us we are in critical situation, so much so that during the press release of the latest IPCC (2022b) instalment was openly declared that "Without immediate and deep emissions reductions across all sectors, limiting global warming to 1.5℃ is beyond reach". This sentence refers to the medium global temperature increase identified as a threshold to limit climate change at a safe level, during the Paris Summit in 2015. Beyond it, the intensity and consequences of the crisis will be out of control, henceforth potentially triggering so-called tipping points. Through self-reinforcing feedback loops, this could lead to chain reactions only stopped when equilibrium is reached, at inevitably catastrophic costs for humanity.

That said, climate change communicators are still debating whether to present this disconcerting acknowledgements, or if adding a positive spin to it would rather be a better strategy. The aforementioned movement of scholars engaging in civil disobedience (named *Scientist Rebellion*,

after the sister-movement *Extinction Rebellion*), followed the suggestion from a paper by Morris (*et al.* 2020) by adopting a pessimistic –though not fatalistic- stance, taking into account their conservative audience of reference *i.e.*: academia. The first of their demands has therefore been to declare remaining under 1.5℃ "dead" as an actual aim, given the political and socio-economic context demonstrated chronically incapable in spite of any theoretical possibility.

Here I have similarly meant to acknowledge the actual state of things as disconcerting as it is, but I would rather like to take an optimistic stance, stemming from the idea of "active hope" (Macy and Johnstone 2012, 2022) to conclude with practical actions as the main and only driver of the possibilities we left ourselves with.

If in fact the latest report by the United Nations Environmental Programme (2022) warns us about "the closing window" for hope, it is to actually reiterate how the "climate crisis calls for rapid transformation of societies", so it is an actual call for action. Hoesung Lee, as Chair during the already mentioned press release of the latest part of the sixth Assessment by the IPCC (2022b), unambiguously reported they have managed to outline "options in all sectors to at least halve emissions by 2030" also given the definitive convenience – even in economic costs only- of energy from renewables over fossil fuel sources. There are no more excuses to not try and avoid things getting worse, as the "tools and know-how required" are already set, but only if we act now with no 'passive hope' for someone else or some further technology to save us later.

The syn-thesis

Why to write this thesis in the first place? Apart from a requirement for completing a study path costed much in resources to me and my family, thus to repair for a sort of 'sin' of mine, the greater idea is to synthesise the system of arguments as well as pragmatic beliefs I advocate for.

At this point I would like to finally introduce the reasons which brought me to try and deal with the climate and ecological crisis through archaeology. The previous section of this chapter served to lay the background of this existential issue, some way representing the journey into awareness I have personally went through, so the outcomes of it are functional to draw the continuation of this path into what was my main focus of interest and field of study until now.

I was mostly unaware of the facts presented above myself, despite how vitally relevant those notions about our planet are to me and to everyone else as a human living today, regardless of their field of expertise. It would have therefore been arbitrary to assume other scholars, among those not directly concerned with climate science studies, to be fully aware of this crisis. Furthermost, it would have been baseless to expect them being any better up-to-date with latest

acknowledgements, especially best approaches to deal with such a huge issue and its complex landscape of coping mechanisms. Thus the importance of the various preambles.

- In particular we have seen how, in the case of the climate and ecological crisis, minimal degrees of 'uncertainty' in the anthropogenic contribution – or in the percentage of human-induced global warming- have been and are still used, consciously and unconsciously, to justify disavowal regarding the issue, delaying necessary and radical systemic shifts to the current *status quo*.

- For me it seemed clear that in order to enable such changes, a response involving everyone from any socio-cultural background is needed and urgent, but it grows more radical as the risks we all are exposed to increase with delay. One of the consequences, similarly to procrastination, is the coping mechanisms presented above and dangerously having the potential to enable a self-reinforcing loop of inaction from the wider moderate flank of population to academia.

On April 25th 1969, for the *Symposium on Atmospheric Pollution: Its Long-term Implications*, Charles Keeling brought forward the intention "to inquire into what might be the response of scientists, philosophers, and decision-makers if specialists assert that accelerated use of fossil fuels may be harmful". He was however requested to modify the title of his talk from "If carbon dioxide from fossil fuels is changing man's environment, what will we do about it?" to just "Is carbon dioxide from fossil fuel changing man's environment?". This admittedly "either because a shorter title might suggest a shorter, more acceptable talk, or because I obviously cannot answer the first question. I cannot answer the second question either" (Keeling 1970, 10). As we have seen, today the first question has become an established fact thanks to climate science, while the second remains unanswered despite the certainty of the threats and of the chances to implement the many things we know we could do about it.

It is not a matter of "more acceptable" talks today but rather to turn knowledge into action and, as predicted at the end of the paper recording the aforementioned speech by Keeling (1970, 17):

> «This action may be less pleasant and rational than the corrective measures that we promote today, but thirty years from now, if present trends are any sign, mankind's world, I judge, will be in greater immediate danger than it is today, and immediate corrective measures, if such exist, will be closer at hand.»

Since then, scientists have been found responsible of using their authority to help corporate lobbies selling denialism to permit polluter industries going on with their "business as usual" (Oreskes and Conway 2010), making yet another clear point for the relation between power and knowledge. Similar evidence calls for recognising the role and privileges held by scholars on a planet in crisis, beyond the academic silos and into cultural and political concerns. This is inherently encompass all disciplines and sub-field of academia, with a particular request to

involve humanities to counteract current discourses, as "natural scientists have done their job effectively, but [...] powerful political and cultural forces are standing in the way of effective climate change mitigation and more social science and humanities research is needed to expose and address these power structures" (Cologna and Oreskes 2022, 839).

Stemming from the aforementioned paper by Keeling (1970, 15–17), "divergent views" show how deep these power structures run into world-views, as even when the once "possible peril" has now been confirmed the necessary reactions are not implemented efficiently or embraced at all. From the standpoint of an archaeology student, I have got used to pay particular attention to cultural narratives regarding the past, hence I could not but notice a recurrent framework easily spotted in the image of the vehicle running into a precipice and often associated to climate inaction. An example of this metaphor was presented almost 60 years ago by college students, according to Luten (1964: 45), where the people who noticed the slope becoming steeper desperately ask to turn but "–how, they cannot say, and usually they indicate a direction somewhere along the receding track". This warning demonstrated unable to convince enough people to make the necessary changes possible so far as 2023. The leading questions for me at this point were: what is still so impossible, wrong or irrationally scary in going back, and moreover is this turn even pointing to the "receding track" at all?

My hypothesis is that one of the factors, contributing to the tragical failure to convince other passengers and drivers of 'mothership Earth' to change route, actually is in the way these changes are presented as "receding track" and their uncertainties. In fact a similar suggestion clashes with the comfortable certainties offered by the current hegemonic idea of progress, guardian of most of the positive and universalised features of humanity, thus inherently opposed to anything which is perceived as pointing 'backwards' from our current direction and seemingly known position.

In the light of this contrast I could then see different shades of denialism, as those justifying inaction might believe the vehicle either cannot turn any more, or that it would necessarily be a negative move to change despite any 'possible' fate lying ahead – and we could rather take "expedients to hold the vehicle together for a few moments longer, in the hope that the slope will level off." (Luten 1964: 45). Instead today, we are fully aware that what was once this "possible peril" is now a fate we brought upon us, with the further certainty being the fact we can turn it further into its worst case scenario by not changing tracks. Far from being comfortably doomed though, we should acknowledge this shift as not even being like it is depicted by the power discourse, rather as the alternative to a catastrophic situation where only then we would be forced to make these changes by actual loss. We are still screaming to "Turn, turn!" –how, we can finally say, and now it is indicated everywhere in scientific reports: we must do it, no delay is acceptable.

Therefore this is ultimately also a matter of cultural narratives, rather than scientific or technological development only, in particular where the idea of development itself should be put into discussion and questioned in its historical framework.

The humanities and social studies seemed to me indeed fit for this quest, anthropology being the first entitled to apply such a process of deconstruction, while I had the chance to deepen my critical perspective of archaeology as one of the discipline more responsible to have tied its process of knowledge creation to narratives of human progress through time. Finally my pressing concern became not only to better define what has been the role of archaeologists in a climate, ecological and social crisis, but also to find out if and how could I have further helped in this situation consistently with the critical stances taken so far.

To me one of the most interesting aspects of this discipline, applied in historical periods (*i.e.:* when there are written records), is about building knowledge and value in the difference between what people wanted to be recorded and what remained of their material culture. One question is popularly wondered among the public and practitioners alike, not necessarily those from the field of so-called reflexive archaeology, namely what will people in the future think of us. When I found myself asking the same, I ended up thinking that I am interested to tell the story of what we will show to archaeologists of the future, to make clear that we are not doing enough to avoid them studying data in which is clear we knew everything but we kept on not changing anyway.

However, the point now truly is that there will not be any archaeology in the future, as the discipline periodically kept struggling to remain alive and relevant in a society with so little regard with long-term concerns, even when that society seemingly lived in times of 'prosperity' – meant as social rest and supported by environmental conditions and natural resources; henceforth, there is little to no doubt about the fate of archaeology in a dying society struggling for mere survival, as it will definitely not be the first concern in the short-term.

This is why I asked myself if –and what- could archaeology truly do in the present to give a second chance to this story of self-fulfilling tragic fate. It was an article written by Graeber and Wengrow (2018), with no surprise respectively an anthropologist and an archaeologist, to actually present me with an interesting new perspective on how to do so: namely on "How to change the course of human history (at least, the part that's already happened)". After that piece, my research continued on this path, trying with the current project of thesis on the proposal to reframe human civilisations from the standpoint of their social and environmental sustainability as a different paradigm to evaluate and categorise them.

My idea is to further develop and disseminate a different narrative of the past, one which could positively inform our society before and potentially even after it would collapse, by involving

communities to view their own histories in this framework so to encourage a better care of natural, cultural, and social resources at once.

To conclude on a further critical note about the impacts and expectations for this thesis and the related project, though my wished purpose is of course that it may help the situation with the ecological, climate and social crisis, I do not expect it to be a contribution which would work alone as a scholarly experiment only.

Thus I reiterate, for myself in archaeology as well as researchers in other disciplines, that similar efforts must be accompanied with other direct actions –as the variety of strategies, in such urgent emergency and crisis, should be as wide as our position grants us to deploy. If as citizens we retain the duties derived from the rights we enjoy, even more as academics a deeper responsibility to act should derive from our privilege to know and get access to and create knowledge.

1. Making Progress:
roles and responsibilities of Archaeology

The initial step of deconstruction is a crucial tool to deal with the topics introduced so far. By starting to apply it to the concepts of 'progress', my intention is not only to bring down constructs flawed with biases, but also to humbly rebuild other views on their ruins. As will be read later in this text, the aim remains that of proposing constructive and active approaches driven with awareness, rather than leaving with glooming conceptual standstills.

In this chapter I will carry on such a deconstruction in-between anthropology and archaeology. Acknowledging my limited experience with the former, I also recognise how conceptual tools and paradigm shifts in anthropology influenced archaeological thought through time and vice-versa (Gosden 1999), pushing for more critical and constructive approaches. Therefore, I borrow frameworks and other familiar concepts from the anthropological toolbox aware of the limits of this yet-to-be cross-disciplinary study, nevertheless confident of the potentially fruitful outcomes.

First of all, I could not have though about my proposal without questioning familiar ideas of 'progress' and 'development', nor present this thesis in an informed way. Such a process, given the main subject of my studies, involved the role of archaeology in the making of this construct – as well as in its more recent deconstruction. Doing so, I could not but also engage with the broader field of cultural resource management, or rather all of the different disciplines dealing with the somewhat elusive concept of 'culture'. Not to loose too much focus, and knowledgeable of the very struggle by cultural anthropology to define what a 'culture' is at all, I have secondarily decided to concentrate my efforts on one more precise aspect, namely that of 'heritage' and how deconstructing it as well could water the roots of my proposal.

Therefore this chapter inevitably includes archaeological theory and practice in relation to the main topics and their intersections, in so far as the discipline influenced the discourse around them, while on the other hand it has also been shaped along with them. Consistently with the aims of this dissertation, the chapter would likely end with a different perspective on archaeology, not only questioning previous definitions of it but hopefully opening avenues for more constructive standpoints.

Henceforth, this first process of deconstruction is instrumental to discuss the socio-cultural –as well as political- responsibilities of archaeology in its (un)making and to introduce a different

framework for its operative definitions. This will take us to a further critical stance, ultimately relevant for the active and hopefully efficient deployment of my proposal.

1.1. The construction-in-progress

To deconstruct the idea of progress is to first and foremost acknowledge its status of construct. As such, the concept has been built over time inside a different set of contexts, with histories on their own right. Consistently with the aim of being one step toward my main argument and proposal, in this text I do not purport to provide a full account on the contextualisation and history of progress. While keeping an informed stance on its features and changes through time, the construct will be outlined in a rather concise excursus, focusing over the key elements to effectively present my perspective. Nevertheless, some relevant bibliography will be referenced in order to offer a more comprehensive set of resources around the topic, starting from the book *History of the Idea of Progress* by Robert A. Nisbet (1994).

The construct of progress is a matter of myths, histories, socio-political agendas and collective events as well as individual beliefs. Ultimately, as will be illustrated also for other key concepts of this dissertation, the study and observation of such ideas revolves around narratives and the people telling or being told about them.
For myths it is actually meant the founding tales of different traditions, in our case mainly limited to the Western ones, based on Classical literature and Abrahamic religions. At the same time, socio-political agendas also take the form of myths when met with sociological dynamics and the psychology of each one of us. From assumptions on the origins humankind to the idea of social development, the writing and telling of histories and "historicities" (Bantigny 2013) shaped broader discourses about humanity, on our features as living beings and the paths we should take. Therefore, tracking such a process of cultural construction requires passing through a varied set of topics, some more more concisely featured than others in this chapter, due to their wide conceptual nature. For instance some of these concepts are: 'time' in the patterns and chronologies assigned to it; 'humanity' in its imagined origins and core behavioural features; 'social organisation' in the way communities interacts through collective and individual agency.

The role of archaeology in shaping such narratives lies in its very "scientific study of the material remains of past human life and activities" from prehistory to "the present day" (Daniel [1999] 2023), hence a practice infused with matters of identity stretching towards the present, due to its mission to define human productions. Indeed, one of the most acknowledgeable uses of this discipline is to provide a categorisation (actually 'classification'), thanks to which even a broader

non-expert public can assign knowledge about human civilisations to chronological or typological sequences. As a cornerstone later illustrated on focus in this section, the so-called 'Three-Age System' distinguishes ancient times in three 'Ages' named after the technological advancements implemented in the manufacture of tools, namely 'Stone', then metals, 'Bronze' and 'Iron'. This terminology provided neat boundaries -temporal or at least material- to identify humans and their cultures in the past, successfully making into one of the first notions about the history of humanity taught to children –at least in Italian elementary schools.

Moreover, the same system is still being adopted as a basis for more complex sub-classifications by Western archaeologists nowadays (Renfrew and Bahn 2016, 28). Henceforth other than just a useful mnemonic device to better assimilate and organise knowledge about the past, such a discourse has clear implications on the construct of progress in the present. It permeates both sides, experts and the rest of the public, in building narratives for chronologies of humanity and consequently on our possible origins and 'original' features.

So what are these 'origins' and 'chronologies'? Before coming back to the role of archaeology, it may be worth to give a context to these concepts as well, delving into the narrative literature which formed our perspectives and world-views over such apparently familiar terms.

As previewed, Western discourse on progress have been rooted in the literary legacy of ancient Greece and Rome (Edelstein 1967; *see also* Richard 1994 on American Enlightenment and Marchand 1996 on archaeology and Classicism in German political thought), through time influenced by other contemporary traditions such as the Abrahamic religions, in turn falling into the dominant framework of Christianity.

According to their myths on the origin of the world, respectively Hesiod's *Works and Days* and the book of *Genesis* from the Old Testament, humankind is a godly creation made from or cast on Earth at one point. Our original features are naturally weaker than other animals by design of the Classical Gods, somewhat compensated through the wonder of our intelligence, a feature otherwise implemented by the Christian God at the modest cost of the 'Original Sin' making us spiritually flawed by default. Other than the common distinction from any other living creature, either with positive or negative consequences as well as natural or spiritual characteristics, similarities are also found between the biblical ban from the Gardens of Eden and the myths of Prometheus and Pandora (Teggart 1947, 46–50). Although the Classical model did not necessarily feature an "original sin" or flaw to the core, it definitely makes the point for some "state of nature", arguably even two contradictory ones of joyful innocence on the one side and ignorant brutishness on the other (*ibid.,* 45-46).

Furthermore, in the lines following the two myths, the *Works and Days* (109–201) presents the

"Five Races of Men": from a blessed Golden one, to one of Silver, then Bronze, followed by an Age of Heroes, concluding with their contemporary phase of Iron. The division in Ages by metals is also found in other literary tradition, stretching back to lore and religions from the Ancient Near East (Teggart 1947, 51), while Hesiod's model is echoed in later texts such as Lucretius. The Roman author, no more an arguably mythical figure, features the Ages in his *De Rerum Natura* (V, 1011–1241), refining them with a naturalistic approach exactly fitting the current classification of the Three-Age System as presented early in this section.

The initial paradigm of human history has been defined as "a picture of human development in five ages" featuring a "continuous degeneration" by Griffiths (1956: 109–110), in a paper trying to give an actual archaeological context to such myths. With such a research question and framing, it could be seen as symptomatic that one of the arguments is Lucretius' elaboration of the paradigm of human history. It is said to differ in the measure it starts with a brutish state of nature, lately corrected with the discovery of technologies and values, but ultimately corrupted by the institution of propriety and wealth in urban civilisation (Griffiths 1956, 114–115).

As coming to discuss civil and political matters, a further special mention would be Polybius, who deals with another key topic: namely social organisation through the constitution of Republican Rome. He described the 'mixed constitution' of the Roman government as the one virtue resilient to the phenomenon of 'ἀνακύκλωσις' [transliterated 'anakyklosis'] (*Ἱστορίαι* [Histories], VI, 57), for which every form of constitution turns into its degenerated status before getting to its next stage cyclically. Democracy is thought to be naturally declining into ochlocracy, to be later reorganised by a virtuous monarch, eventually doomed to leave incompetent tyrants by next generation; in turn, the tyranny is to be replaced with good aristocrats, who will just make space for oligarchy –and so on. As a narrative, it features both a 'natural degeneration' as seen in Hesiod's paradigm and a cyclical time, hence not necessarily setting this process at the origin just as in Lucretius. Overall Polybius provides a synthesis of varied models in the literature of ancient Greece and Rome, one with direct political implications, drawn from by Enlightenment thinkers and modern democracies (Hansen 2010).

Back to the questions posed at the beginning of this section, chronologies according to monotheistic religions are found to be cyclical but finite as awaiting for the advent of their messiah, while Classical traditions present a mix between a linear and cyclical decline with chances (or rather hopes) for improvements. Such narratives inevitably told us assumptions on our origins, mythical accounts of mainly two possible 'states of nature', followed by patterns of change in human history laid through stages or phases of either "Races" or "Ages" articulated in

qualities or employment of technological and organisational devices.

Insofar it should be clear how this constitutes a first step into my main argument, as this almost exclusively literary excursus unravels collaterals concepts towards the construction of recent ideas of progress. A double-bind is already exposed with aspects of social organisation, which are at the core of paradigms of development of human history, as found in later political though.

Crucial here is the reprise of the various concepts presented so far in founding pieces of Western literatures. An example is Vergil's hope for the coming of a "boy" who will bring back the "Golden Age" in a cycle back out the "Iron race" (*Eclogae,* IV, 4–11), passage which was retrospectively taken as a prophecy for the advent of Christ, granting the Roman literate a honourable role into the first epic of the Italian language.

In Dante's *Inferno* (XIV, 94–119; Dante [1321] 2004, 153–159), it is in fact Vergil himself who describes the image of a giant old man encased in mount Ida on the Isle of Crete, thought to be the centre of the world at that time. His body is made out of different materials, namely gold for the head, silver for the arms and breast, brass or bronze is the lower abdomen, below that is iron except for the clay of his right foot. This imaginary representation is taken from the biblical Book of Daniel describing Nebuchadnezzar, used as yet another rhetorical devices in the *Comedia*, interestingly for our argument as the allegory and actual materialisation of the history of humanity. Once more, it is one made of a familiar fall from the grace of good virtues, a fall the giant is literally risking due to a crack on his clay foot. Despite Dante here is once again warning about the risks of vices from a Christian point of view, this detail represented for him the very corruption of the Roman Church. A more nuanced perspective is thus suggested, given his contrasted political background as 'White Guelph' along with the intellectual context of his times. Although ancient Greece was known only through Roman literature, Classical values were second-hand circulated within literates who were mostly Latin speakers, providing a set of laic and almost pre-humanist concepts –though synthesised with Faith. Such were the influence of the "Ages of Man" and the value of intelligence or 'megalopsykia', roughly translated as 'great soul' and meaning a more nuanced goodness of intellect, a virtue granting pre-Christian great thinkers from ancient Greece and Rome a somewhat 'happy' corner in the poet's Hell (a castle on a verdant landscape in the Limbo).

This represents an important bridge from medieval times towards the construction of recent ideas of progress and collateral concepts. Other than the evident reference and legacy of Classical models, crucial are is the influence on geopolitical ideas circulating at that time, given Dante's role as a key Western intellectual. Relevant for this dissertation is the fact that he takes a step further from an assumed 'State of Nature' and directly connects the abstraction of the different

stages of humankind to a matter of social organisation. The image of the giant made of the degenerating materials, other than literally forming the rivers of Hell out of his tears, figuratively cries for the hope of stopping evils by hand of an 'enlighten ruler' ante-literam. Such role the poet personally struggled to see fulfilled by the emperor Henry VII of of Luxembourg, as inferred also from other Dante's works tracing his political projects and thoughts (Honess 2015, 134–137). Here he fundamentally questions the ability of societies to organise peacefully and suggests "a great monarch" to come and finally bring an end to the continuous warring between the lands of the world. In his case 'the world' surely included Italy and, by extent given the Holy Roman Empire was 'German-based', probably the whole of modern continental Western Europe.

1.2. A Neverending (Hi)story?

Another perspective, arisen from similarly contrasted political background of warfare, serves as cornerstone for the construct-in-progress in the 17th century CE: the *Leviathan or The Matter, Forme and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil* by Thomas Hobbes. With his text the author aimed to make a point for the substantial unification of the temporal and spiritual power into the figure of one ruler, a personification of human history in the monstrous concept of the 'Leviathan'. Hobbes choses this biblical image also to criticise an almost familiar corruption of the Church and basically calling for a tyrant ruling over the will of humanity to organise over fights between monarchs, while showing no actual expectations on governments by the people. In fact, as a prerequisite for his argument our most brutish and violent behaviour is embraced as an accurate 'State of Nature', leaving behind any narratives of fall from grace. Simply enough, such are humans without the restrains of laws, hence not only the need but the ultimate benefit of an institutionalised civilisation to prevent us getting back into our 'natural' chaos and barbarism.

This main thesis of Hobbes, in the interest of my argument limited to the origin of our species and its consequences on social organisation, is commonly opposed to the hypothesis of an original state of innocence. Graeber and Wengrow (2018; 2021, 2–20, 63–70) have exposed in a critical way how the *A Discourse on Inequality* by Jean-Jacques Rousseau is perceived as a later counterpart, however they found it just as flawed, deeming the whole dichotomy ultimately a symptom of a simplistic perspective. Without delving into details here, as I could no better express nor summarise the critiques presented about the two opposed ideas, it was demonstrated that both "as accounts of the general course of human history, they: 1. simply aren't true; 2. have dire political implications; 3. make the past needlessly dull" (Graeber and Wengrow 2021, 3).

Furthermore, the whole critique Rousseau moved (or which was allegedly attributed to him), is argued not to be his original contribution at all. Again are Graeber and Wengrow (2021, 27–63) who trace back not only his critical stances in the *Discourse* but most of the progressive ideas in the Enlightenment to the indigenous critique of Native Americans. This acknowledgement, other than making intellectual justice to indigenous thoughts still going unheard today, is relevant for my dissertation as extended to the argument that the very myth of progress presented by Rousseau may just have its roots into the Western reaction to different world-views (*ibid.*, 63–77).

Namely so, from Jesuit's evangelisation accounts to anti-clerical aristocrat's travel notes, the populations of 'Turtle Island' (as Iroquois populations call North America as Earth) definitely appeared able to organise in even healthier ways than the Europeans –and the former did not miss chances to notice the latter of so, with a richness of argumentations colonisers did not reportedly expect (*ibid.*, 37–40). Among native Americans, Kandiaronk of the Huron-Wendat is taken as an example to track the influence of the indigenous critique to Europe (*ibid.*, 48–56), through direct accounts and later re-elaborations of the Baron de La Hontan (Basile 1997).

The reflection over this exchange aims to reject any idealisation of native people both in terms of just 'noble savages' as well as yet another literary invention by Europeans, a self-directed 'exotic gaze': it rather demonstrates respects over the nuanced perspectives and rhetoric of the humans involved on both sides, both primary and secondary sources, acknowledging their seminal contribution to those enlightened ideas which would have later criticised the very institutions of Western thought from inside (Graeber and Wengrow 2021, 28–37, 56–58).

As argued in the same reference, Lahontan's books were so much of success within intellectuals of the Enlightenment to spread even more famous imitations, among which was *Letters of a Peruvian Woman* by Françoise de Graffigny ([1747] 2009) who made her heroine stand against the contradictions of European society as well as of patriarchy.

For the second edition of the book, she requested feedback by correspondence to a set of acquaintances, provoking the reaction of a young economist by the name of A. R. J. Turgot. Suggesting radical changes, his response stated that inequality was an inevitable consequence of societies becoming complex and that this feature –already acquired by modern European society- was to be considered a sign of superiority, an ascent rather than a degeneration over the course of human history (Meek 1976, 70–72). In later lectures and works he ended up elaborating a full-fledged theory of social change, driven by technological progress in successive stages of economic development from barbarism to commercial civilisation, which for him obviously were indicators of social improvement.

His paradigm was already circulating after the 1750s among other intellectuals and friends such as

Adam Smith, making it a common notion in the debate over different forms of human organisation (Graeber and Wengrow 2021, 60–61; *see also* Meek 1976, 5–36). We could see how, other than a valuable asset to counter critiques such as the indigenous one, it could also be the base for politically disempowered thought experiments to be exclusively attributed to the Enlightenment.

Finally we have come to draw a proper frame –of history of thought- to Rousseau's writing of the 'Second Discourse', which would have been a rather poor counterpart to Hobbes' thesis, given the French author himself declared it as not a search for truth "...but solely as hypothetical and conditional reasonings" (Rousseau [1754] 1984, 78). Here was also set the stage for another concept, that of "inequality" (Graeber and Wengrow 2021, 27–29), which is later in this section examined as the main legacy framework for current narratives of human history. The dichotomy between Hobbes and Rousseau can arguably be spotted in examples of recent grand narratives, still featuring "States of Nature" with or without the support of archaeological evidence.

To be noted remains a substantial difference between the indigenous critique and its later re-elaboration by Rousseau and the Enlightenment, namely the lack of vision for any other viable alternative to a necessary restrain of individual freedom (*ibid.*: 62–66) –as if after all our current human history, despite still representing a negative course, was just as inevitable a fall to take.

Like this, it almost seems like it was perhaps a bad choice of our ancestors to run from innocence into chains, but the vagueness of other narratives leaves open to the idea that this was the only actual possibility to make things change from perpetual blissful ignorance. Rather than envisaging aware choices for different social organisations, not necessarily going in the direction of commercial progress, Rousseau embarked in a thought experiment effectively disempowering other paradigms just as Hobbes through a matter over the essential nature of humanity. This assumption shifts the debate over existential questions, the ones already discussed by Graeber and Wengrow (2021, 44–48, 67, 515) as the actual core arguments between Europeans and native Americans, on one hand the religious and institutional submission to laws while the individual freedom on the other. For the Western discourse, the contest on what was better depended on whether or not free-will existed at all, bringing once again into discussion core perceptions of reality such as our presence on Earth through time.

Although Classical literature has been extensively revived with the Renaissance and humanist scholars with further speculation on ancient human history spurred due to the European "Age of Explorations" (Heizer 1962, 260), theological intellectual debate still had the upper hand over notions of time during the early Enlightenment period, as we can see in Turgot himself (Meek

1976, 73). Going back to the thread of chronologies, we left Dante as assuming the validity of cyclical time, given that: "With intellectual matters of a theological nature replacing the classical authors' accounts of human and natural history, the accepted view through the Middle Ages becomes that of special creation as set forth in Genesis." (Heizer 1962, 261).

This meant presenting a world theoretically not older than around 4000 BCE, with no evidence to be possibly found earlier than the biblical Deluge, nothing "antediluvian" should have remained and stone tools where hardly accepted as human artefacts. The first acknowledgement of this can be attributed to Mercati already by the end of the 16th century, however his classification was not held in consideration until the basis for colonial pushback of native Americans were set, given direct accounts of their techniques of stone working.

It is only with John Frere in the year 1800 which the incongruence in antiquity for Palaeolithic tools was questioned against Christian chronologies (Heizer 1959, 216–218), while accounts for older geological strata were associated with organic fossils, ultimately resulting in Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* in the 1830s (Heizer 1962, 262). Along with previous publications on the same topic, this realisation about the geological time of the world highly influenced Western thought, not only having the power to emancipate it from religious standpoints but also providing new laic myths and metaphors (Gould 1987) –thus of narratives and meta-narratives.

The potential to extend the most ancient course of the history of humanity over an indefinite timespan, quantitatively studied by physical anthropology, left much room for scholars of the Humanities to debate over the qualitative features of our past. Moreover, the archaeological stratigraphic method gained an even stronger scientific validation as coming from the natural sciences, a pre-requisite needed to introduce before grasping the entity of responsibilities for the discipline. The impact of geology on archaeology in fact can hardly be overstated, from later applications such as Harris' *Principles of archaeological stratigraphy* (1989) to more immediate validation of paradigms, as illustrated soon in the next paragraphs. It has been maintained the very image of successive steps, found in geological stratigraphy a well as in palaeontology, became a common motif in natural and social sciences and allied with the idea of progressive change (Sherratt 1989, 169). As an example for a more comprehensive account, as also one not necessarily in agreement with arguments presented in this dissertation, the Western idea of social development is explored in its sources and contexts by Nisbet (2009).

We should nonetheless figure out this discourse as increasingly intertwining with new narratives on patterns of time and assumed essence of humans, on which some disciplines had more privileges to deal with –thus more responsibilities- than other in terms of scientific accountability.

Here we laid all of the context in which the Three-Ages system, mentioned at the beginning, was formulated by Christian. J. Thomsen. As head 'antiquarian' of the National Museum of Denmark since 1818, his paradigm started to take form as a classification for already acquired artefacts, while the final publication in 1836 signed an archaeological landmark in practices (Thomsen 1848). Despite later authors praised the centrality of his proposal for the discipline (Daniel 1943; Childe 1944), he was definitely fond of the earlier literary background, thus his theory made it out from being yet another abstract speculation only thanks to Jens J. A. Worsaae stratigraphical validation (Heizer 1962, 264). Thomsen's success should therefore be attributed not to originality but rather to contextual conditions: the very social acceptance which made his paradigm to stand out historically (*ibid.*, 259, 266) is the key to also understand its implications.

The first of such, pivotal to the birth of academic archaeology and its definition, is exactly the scientific approach who validated not only his system but stratigraphy applied as a method to this discipline. Through it was possible to seriate masses of artefacts and produce a neat set of results, to be categorised and assigned to temporal horizons with actual rules on the field (Rowe 1961, 324–330), demonstrating the analytical value of archaeological research. Insofar, an intellectual void was left by biblical chronologies, proved wrong against an antiquity of humankind which went back far more than thought by Western knowledge. Now academics were offered with an acceptable device to produce their knowledge, to build up a discourse not only over the course of human history but rather its whole pre-history, a timespan which hitherto has come to be discovered as covering more than 98% of the existence of the *Sapiens* species.

One of archaeology's more distinctive definition to date is its exclusivity in being the only science able to tell us something about the cultural course of humankind when written records were not yet invented (or adopted or simply found): namely the whole of Prehistory. The incredible epistemic power the discipline has gained at that moment, keeping it to date, cast us into a world where archaeologist now held the only secular title authorised to 'scientifically' speak on most of the human experience on Earth. This because other than a humanity in theory, it can also be considered a science in practice, as the experts have to collect evidence with the method illustrated, then formulate hypothesis and test them against more data. Moreover this very process, dealing with material documents as proofs, is a distinctive traits from History for example (Renfrew and Bahn 2016, 13).

As archaeology gained validation and identity in the study of material culture, the paradigms of classification should not be underestimated, proving us once more their critical importance in the inbound definition of the discipline –and its role in presenting narratives on the outside.

1.3. Evolution is (not) the answer

Henceforth, the application of the Three-Age system made prehistory shift from an imaginary driven by the Romantic movement, still having its legacy in popular representations such as Asterix and Obelix or the Flintstones, towards an agenda of positivism due to the growth of science in the 18th century and biology in particular (Sherratt 1989, 168). In fact one might ask: what could possibly go wrong other than politically instrumentalised narratives, which would not need for scientific validation to impact societies anyway, but could strongly be helped by a naturalisation of paradigms of progress through 'hard sciences'?

This help might have been provided right after the period of Thomsen's re-proposal of the Three-Age system, with the (in)famous elaboration of *The Origin of Species* by Charles Darwin first published in 1859, from studies he carried out during his previous travels and early career (Darwin 1872). His work has prompted subsequent theories of social evolution, which are to be found at the beginnings of modern archaeology blended with the history of thoughts and practices presented so far, as strictly referring to the newly acquired authority of the discipline to investigate the human past back to our origins (Renfrew and Bahn 2016, 26–29; Guidi 2009, 3–12). Although it is more a matter of evolutionary anthropology, an exhaustive inspection of which is beyond the scope of this dissertation, evolutionary theories applied to societies definitely have to be taken into account along with the public acceptance of deriving models and paradigms.

These ideas were at first accepted for congruence with familiar schemes unravelling during that historical period, referencing to ethnographic comparisons from an Eurocentric perspective, where American Indians were living representatives of an uncivilised humanity (Heizer 1962, 161). Along with the naturalisation of European identities (Neve 2016, 112), the Western discourse fed also on the concept of *Prehistoric Times* (very title of the 'bestseller' by John Lubbock in 1865) as part of a growing scientific endeavour of scholars applying the ethnographic approach, associated with the rise of new academic institutions. As Andrew Sherratt (1989, 169) wrote "Comparative studies of the native peoples of the colonies began to flesh out some of the generalizations of the Enlightenment: recent hunting and simple farming peoples became evidence for successive transformations of human economy and society". Enlightened ideals, such as 'all humans are born equal' (even with a less inclusive language in the American Constitution), could therefore be encased by colonialism in narratives of 'push-back' and 'lacking behind' of an assumed evolution of natural progress – now with the epistemic validation of science.

During the 1870s, first attempts of synthesis between social evolutionary theories and the history of humanity have been made by the British anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor, although

perhaps most known is the publication of *Ancient Society* by the American scholar Lewis Henry Morgan ([1877] 1974). According to their schemes, human societies had evolved from a state of primitive hunting defined as "savagery" through another of "barbarism" consisting in simple farming, to end up with the most refined form of society –unsurprisingly identified with their current "civilization" (Renfrew and Bahn 2016, 29). What we are presented here is a complete paradigm of stages, meant to fit different cultures on a linear chronology of progress in human history, directly drawn from advances in material culture.

It is important to notice how, despite culminating with a positive(ist) stance on modern society, Morgan's idea on our origins was mainly an egalitarian one, thus once again echoing the state of innocence by Rousseau, where people in small groups shared resources equally. This idea interested Karl Marx to the point of making a highly annotated copy of *Ancient Society* flow into the publication of *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* by Friedrich Engels ([1884] 1909). Based on Marx's notes, it is an historical materialist account of human history until the inception of private property, and become a basis for the disciplinary approach of Marxist Archaeology –influencing, among the others, Vere Gordon Childe as explored later below.

Back to the Three Age system, it can be seen how the consequent narratives were widely accepted widely despite lacking confirmation by archaeology, as it was enough they were congruent with ethnographic observations which treated native societies as representatives of earlier stages of human progress (Sherratt 1989, 169). Nevertheless, as one of the major impacts of the idea of evolution on archaeological thought, the discipline started to produce knowledge reinforcing such discourses with the elaboration of "typology" classes. These were systemic schemes of organisation of artefacts, already under way due to the basis provided by the previous validation of the Three-Age system, now assuming a further evolutionary flavour. Darwin's idea suggested that human cultures may have evolved in a similar fashion, a paradigm further refined and adapted to artefacts by archaeologists such as Pitt-Rivers, John Evans and ultimately the Swedish scholar Oscar Montelius (Renfrew and Bahn 2016, 28).

It is here once more remarked how crucial a paradigm of categorisation could prove in this case for the archaeological discipline, which in turn played its role to produce and validate narratives, given its contextual epistemic power. It in fact disseminated within Western industrial societies a framework to imagine the most remote past of humans, rooting our history as well as our social development in successive stages of technological advancements. The refinement of archaeological typologies realised what Heizer (1962, 266) already put in a note quoting A. L. Kroeber, in reference to the success of Thomsen's system, writing that as any invention it "actualizes historically only with its social acceptance".

Moreover, despite being "counterposed to humane, nationalistic history", prehistory as a scientific discipline served just as well the purpose of the socio-economic trends of its times: "both the growing success of science and industry at home and the changing nature of the colonial encounter, as it moved from adventurism to systematic exploitation" (Sherratt 1989, 169). The consequences of this first flare of 'Evolutionary Archaeology' did not end just with the belief of an unilinear cultural evolution. This approach tried to explain an assumed disparity of development between different societies, landing on the idea that environmental factors and "physical conditions in the Old World were naturally more conducive to cultural progress" (Trigger 2006, 166–167) –a vision adopted in recent bestseller accounts of human history (Diamond 1997). The very association of social development with characteristic traits of populations, divided in a geographic *frame* of climatic sectors, historically played a crucial role in Europe's own inbound design as part of a broader nation-state's political agenda (Neve 2016). Such a discourse is also sadly found at the core of the justification for foreign imperialistic project, once more pretending to export up-to-date forms of civilisation and ultimately instrumentalised in the rise of racism (Trigger 2006, 167–170), actualising tragic events based on the political implications of the state of nature and positivist thought encountered so far.

As much literature has devoted to this topic, one more detailed inspection of the impacts of and into imperialism, colonialism and nationalism on the development and institutionalisation of archaeology can be found among the others in Diaz-Andreu (2007, *e.g.*: 278–313). Such accounts make yet another point for the close interest of the discipline to produce congruent narratives on the human past, which in turn have been demonstrated tightly entangled with the idea of progress as social evolution –a cultural and historical assumption we should rather ask why has it become so intrinsically 'natural' in many discourses today.

To question the construct of 'progress' nowadays is in fact to question ideas of social evolution, on which I would like to take the same stance as Marc Brightman and Jerome Lewis (2017b, 20) in their search for an anthropology of sustainability, later on focus in the following chapter. They adopt the rhetorical device of the "ethnographic present", specifically noting:

> «It also resulted from the discipline's **rejection of the ideas of social evolution** that had been central to Victorian anthropology, and which modern practitioners realized were **so flawed and biased that they were unsuitable as a framework for study**. The solution was to study cultural systems on their own terms, challenging any attempt **to place a specific social group at some point along a predetermined historical trajectory**.» (*emphases mine*)

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Insofar, the roots of this notion have been found in a Western discourse gaining motion since the eighteenth century, maintaining that "human societies could be arranged according to stages of development, each with their own characteristic technologies and forms of organization" –as defined by Graeber and Wengrow (2021, 5) also as "a conservative backlash against critiques of European civilization" itself. My argument is in line with the shift aspired by their last book, as an attempt to uncover narratives which still want to define past as well as alternative ways of human organisation by the things they lack, at least from the standpoint of the dominant paradigm. Namely, an evolutionary metanarrative of progress with the teleological (or finalistic) tension of "gradually filling out a checklist of civilization's predetermined accomplishments", which Severin Fowles (2010, 34) wished for anthropology not to underestimate and rather counter with a viable alternative. Questioning this myth of progress the scholar, in a parenthetical element on the same page of previous quotation, notices the compulsion to acquire missing things and asks "Are not premodern societies still being defined by what they lack, that lack simply now having become "modernity" itself?" –foreshadowing the ultimate critique presented in this section.

As we have seen, the basic idea of material economic progress was already sold by Turgot since the 18th century, where advancements in technology were the drivers for overall social improvement (Graeber and Wengrow 2021, 59–60). He was already supporting an explicit theory of economic development by writing at the eve of the Industrial Revolution, while social evolution directly leaned toward the contemporary stage of urban "commercial" civilisation (Meek 1976, 71). This framework was built without even the actual support of ethnographic evidence, as "no pastoral society actually existed in the New World, but somehow early evolutionists never seemed to consider this a problem" (Graeber and Wengrow 2021, 536), thus resorting to the exploitation of archaeological interpretation to validate such knowledge.

As Trigger (2006, 175) concisely summed Lubbock's ideas, spread through the already mentioned *Prehistoric Times*, arguably one of the most influential book on the topic before the 20th century:

> «The growth of a capitalist industrial economy, in conjunction with the operation of natural selection on human beings, was clearly seen as leading to an earthly paradise. By offering evidence that such progress was the continuation of what had been occurring ever more rapidly throughout human history, prehistoric archaeology bolstered the self-confidence of the middle classes and confirmed the crucial role they were playing in world history.»

Archaeology reaffirmed itself "as a discipline of and for the bourgeoisie" (González-Ruibal, González, and Criado-Boado 2018, 509) contemporary to the rise to power of middle classes in the Western societies, helping social Darwinism to shift inequalities from the political to the natural ground, a biological consequence with little chance to be altered (Trigger 2006, 19, 176).

In the light of such a close cooperation should be seen the idea of progress put forward by paradigms of technological evolution, more so when naturalised or ultimately deemed inevitable, as pushed by the our current socio-economic system of neo-liberal capitalism. Its coming to actualisation in this early period is synthesised in a memorable quote, ambiguously attributed to both Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek: "It is easier to imagine an end to the world than an end to capitalism" –here in focus as a narrative I ultimately aim at countering.

Here have been outlined the responsibilities of the discipline in building such paradigms of progress and barriers to change, having a broader impact on the political framework of its inception as a modern science, which ironically enough went full circle and "influenced the interpretation of archaeological data in many parts of the world" (Trigger 2006, 176).

Now, what was the immediate legacy of this troubled beginning of archaeology, during and after a time when the shadows of colonialism and racism grew more and more? Much like for any other field of study and society, the discipline at scrutiny could not be said to have got over with its dark materials, rather stalling at an incomplete process of redemption which might only have served these phantoms to linger and take new forms.

Since the Cultural-Historical approach conventionally started already at the end of the 19th century, archaeologists formulated hypotheses and schemes on a wider scale to trace the history of different cultures around the world, drawing on newly elaborated typologies of artefacts. In particular V. G. Childe valuably provided organic interpretations of prehistory, applying a vast knowledge gained through one of the most comprehensive analysis of his times, directly studying archaeological evidence sparse through most European museums and sites and thus by proof of the actual material remains. As mentioned before, his coinage of Neolithic and Urban Revolutions in prehistory was based on Engels stages of progress, deriving from Marx materialistic view of human history and therefore tempering Childe's stance with the evolutionist approach more and more toward the end of his career (Guidi 2009, 6–7). At that time, coinciding with the end of the life he consciously took from himself, the scholar defined his own theoretical framework as "shaky" and it was arguably the legacy of the 19th century which affected "his otherwise sophisticated and well-informed descriptions [with] a painful simplicity: it was not so much technological determinism but a technocentricity" (Sherratt 1989, 182). There we can clearly see, other than a perhaps faulty research choice, the continued elaboration of previous models and paradigms without the critical approach to the implications and consequences on narratives of progress outlined so far in my argumentation.

So Childe had his own story, but was also an eminent example of a wave of scholars reappraising the Three-Age System (Daniel 1943), so far to acknowledge it as "the beginning of scientific

archaeology" while recognising it was time to move away from "Thomsen's trinity" (Childe 1944) –as much as Culture History could. It has not be forgotten in fact the wide breadth of this phase of the archaeological thought, as both referenced scholars agree that a classification "to be scientifically valid" should also be significant of wider relations (*ibid.*), dangerously tending to universalising categorisations so precious to the colonial agenda.

Nevertheless Childe himself represented a personal exception: while carrying out research in archaeology as the science it become, he kept a distinctive "humanistic approach", which the successive positivist enthusiasm in archaeology almost discarded as a sociological model to make sense of prehistory (Sherratt 1989, 183).

Henceforth, the scholarly praise for the scientific affirmation of the discipline could be considered symptomatic of the next to come 'New Archaeology' phase, when scholars enjoyed matters of classifications even more –other than just reinforcing stages of human history they fostered a resurgence of evolutionary models of social development all along.

We are here speaking of the so-called Processual Archaeology "revolution" (Renfrew and Bahn 2016, 40–41) and as such I would better like to contextualise it for the argument so far. In fact, as important as it was to finally emancipate archaeology from Art History or being considered into Humanities "only", this period also turned revolutionary methods (such as radio-carbon dating) and paradigms into parables of almost neopositivist faith. Therefore these are better contextualised with awareness of the processes behind 'scientific revolutions' (Kuhn 1970) and the very critique to the method of science from different theories of knowledge (*e.g.*: Feyerabend 1975), duly framed as changes in the history of archaeological thought by Trigger (2006, 5–17).

Despite a similar phase has been definitely superseded by the next one, known as Post-Processual not just for chronological reasons, I maintain that it was crucial to briefly mention it as perhaps the most relevant one to back-up current discourses over progress. Since the rapid employment of scientific aids for archaeology after the World War II (Renfrew and Bahn 2016, 37), the costs of analyses and tools required funds to be attracted from big corporates, thus research institutions and practitioners had more and more been involved in matters of political as well as ethical concerns. These should have been more central than they had, given the very academic structure nor the underlying dominant paradigm of science was never exhaustively addressed under the critical standpoints already presented. In times when profit is pushed above all, easily destructive narratives always await a comeback such as evolutionary phantoms, without other theories as much palatable or advertised as those sustaining the *status quo*.

In similar contexts scholars have been found guilty of bringing forward marketing strategies to avoid prominently responsible corporations being held accountable to prevent timely actions

(Oreskes and Conway 2010). As previewed in the introduction, our responsibility as scientists in a world in crisis should not be underestimated and rather be a primary stance, in order not to turn from genuine seekers of knowledge to full-fledged "merchants of doubts".

Casting such discourse into the main construct at stake, energy consumption has often been used as a measure of progress, thus presenting an unsustainable paradigm of development apparently based on thermodynamics. Moreover, this is plainly a way to interpret science as a deterministic key to read reality, imposing one rule such a "general law of struggle for existence of living beings" as Boltzmann (1919[1906]: 40) wrote. Not by chance, he considered the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics "to be as important to understanding life as Darwin's principle of evolution", which made Mauro W. Barbosa de Almeida (2017, 273–275) elaborate a "thermodynamic critique of development" and once more points at the risks in applying evolutionism to societies.

Clearly here one of the most basic bias (*i.e.:* to see a pattern influenced by the research questions), even within a scientific method which requires to have no fixed patterns as everything should be verified, when applied to the very history of humanity once more opens up to rather ethical questions: is our history predestined to follow a certain line of progress? Should we consider time cyclical and determined, or else? Is there free will at all, so I will not have to worry about long-term consequences of my actions? What stance should I take as an academic, citizen, person?

Despite its mission and privilege to harness knowledge compared to the rest of society, most of the scientific community is not prepared nor trained to answer in theory –let alone in practice- to such critical and ethical enquiries. On the contrary, the question may quickly turn into: what is the easiest answer which can get me back doing science without worrying? Not coincidentally I believe, we find the quote "I am happily too busy *doing* science to have time to worry about philosophizing about it. [Arno Penzias, Nobel Laureate, 1978]" as the incipit of Kent Flannery's (1982, 265) parable for the archaeology of the 1980s, period depicted as a landscape of opportunists and slackers. Some of the reactions to the ethical demands presented above, and namely the easiest ones rather requiring to turn a blind eye and get along without answering, also provided research funds. Here is sadly fleshed out another core motif of this dissertation, making the point for the complicity of research in soothing the early warning for global disruption due to fossil fuels: "Whom shall we heed? The sober individuals with the bailing wire, just emerged from conference, speak with authority as they point out that, although the slope is becoming steeper, it cannot yet be considered a precipice" (Luten 1964, 45 *quoted in* Keeling 1970, 17). From this we can easily recognise a familiar sick pattern, the one which has brought and still can bring some academics to authoritatively lead part of society down the slope of economic interests, at the cost of willingly crush into an ever worsening crisis –now potentially with no return.

Back to Flannery's account, it however also is a cry for the 'good old' unifying concept of culture, veiled in sarcasm as he remarks most of the discipline practitioners do not value it any more or have definitively turned into pure theorists. Ironically though, the moral ending of his story contains a set of stark contradictions, as the main character would "like to establish an award just for commitment to plain, old fashioned basic research *and professional ethics*" for "a kid who still believes in culture, and in hard work, *and in the history of humanity*" (Flannery 1982, 278; *emphases mine*). The clash of the highlighted excerpts with the frame given to the terms in so far should be evident, as ethics are a synonym of getting the required handwork done without much questioning and the history of humanity is mentioned as some set paradigm taken for granted. With the discipline becoming aware of its sociological context, since the 1970s a certain "loss of innocence" (Clarke 1973) was detected, which in similar cases took the shape of an almost nostalgic reaction claiming back a unifying definition of 'Culture' such as Tylor's ([1871] 2010). Given its imperialist background, this is a dangerous claim to make in particular over ethical concerns, and yet another example of academic 'schismogenesis' with other scholars who in the end did not wish to put "behaviour" above culture (Flannery 1982, 273–274).

For some archaeologists instead this meant a reflexive turn, a call to rethink the methods of the discipline along with the very role of its practitioners, also thanks to influences of other disciplines involved in the construction of the idea of progress.

1.4. Turn Around current trajectories

A crucial turning point of view is the very questioning of the biological validity of evolutionary theories, with the idea of "punctuated equilibrium" presented by Niles Eldredge and Stephen Jay Gould in the '70s, which in turn also influenced the elaboration of new paradigms of social development (Guidi 2009, 29). Furthermore, Gould (1987) examined the myths and metaphors of time as having much to do with historical narratives over chronologies, whether from pre-chronic biblical accounts to modern authors the course of human history is following a cycle or a line – the "circle" or "arrow of time". Also Historical Studies countered (neo)evolutionary theories, as Nisbet (1969, 211–239, 240–304) identified a third metaphor for time in unlimited progress already coexisting in contemporary imaginary, while also warning against prescriptive patterns of social change deriving from any possible historical narrative. A more recent account which contextualises the "images of history" questioned by the late scholar, is offered by Nathan Harter (2015) for a reflection around leadership studies, insofar relevant to the argument as discussing the impact of actions (and the education towards it) over deterministic schemes.

A key point in the history of humanity is agency, both individual and collective, where historical narratives actually shape our view of the world and can encourage or undermine beliefs around the potential of active engagement in society –ultimately generating self-fulfilling prophecies. Such sociological considerations have derived from the very philosophy of science, as an underlying strata of theory for other fields in the Humanities. Although the mention of "archaeology" refers to a method of historical analysis, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* by the philosopher Michael Foucault (1970) present critiques to academic knowledge and power which is hardly missed by cultural anthropologists such as Bruno Latour, who is soon mentioned for his contribution in alternative paradigms for the discipline.

As for archaeology in particular, what Flannery lamented in the 1980s actually referred to a comeback of the importance of culture, ironically not as he wished but rather with an alternative approach already foreshadowed by one of the main proponents of Culture-History. In fact Sherratt (1989, 184) noted:

> «As [Processualist] enthusiasm for the deterministic models of ecology and systems theory has waned, interest has shifted back to the artefacts themselves and to how culture works. Childe's approach has been seen as foreshadowing a current concern with culture as a socially constructed reality and the historically specific conditions of its creation.»

Here it is directly referenced Ian Hodder (1982), proposing such a perspective on culture along with the other authors contributing to the edited volume, most notably Christopher Tilley (1982) who dealt with social change in relation to material culture and its formation. Being perhaps even more scientifically accurate (as also seen from the perspective of other disciplines), this phase of Reflexive or Post-Processual Archaeology was embrace by some scholars with Hodder remaining a prominent figure, as a further reaction to neopositivist stances.

As it prompted different approaches, a quick overview is outlined in Guidi (2009, 16, 29–34) following the critiques to the to evolutionary paradigm, which comprehend first of all the works by Norman Yoffee (1979; 1993) and Sherratt (1995) with focus on "Grand Narrative" and archaeology for long-term change (*see also* Renfrew 1984; Glendhill 1988; Tosi 1994). The first mentioned paper by Yoffee (1979, 22) is also crucial when, criticising identifications for the birth of archaic states in clear and limited time-frames, he makes a point for a progress in human evolution which "though nonpurposive" can be seen as a slow increase in complexity.

In this alternative view can finally be found the seeds for later elaborations in the field of archaeology for theories of "Entanglement", once again proposed by Hodder (2006; 2012), while also taking from Latour's (1993) ideas on non-humans. This is openly stated by Hodder (2018, 68) recognising that, other than the calls for symmetrical archaeology, the notion of sociomaterial

networks studied by the late French anthropologist influenced material entanglement approaches. Through their frameworks, both scholars apparently managed to present coherent paradigms of progress which finally do not respond to deterministic laws of social development. Already presented by Yoffee (1993) as an option, stages previously seen as evolutionary steps toward an improvement of the social structure can rather be considered non-consequent trajectories in a non-linear history. Basically, different forms of organisation do not need to be anthropologically categorised in hierarchies, in order to remain consistent within such new narratives.

Insofar the common denominator is the relational nexus with 'things', a factor crucial to create a sort of 'entangled progress', which can be driven by an ever growing combination of interactions between and within non-humans as well as humans. Under this aspect, a "thing theory" can be tracked back to the elaboration of Bill Brown (2001; *see also* 2004) and inserted in a broader phenomenon transversal to the social sciences and the humanities, known as the "ontological turn". Examples in the literature are the works by Tim Ingold (*e.g.*: 2007) and Tim Dant (2006) which, among the many other features, dealt with the dimension of post-colonial encounters and the status of subalterns extending discourses of power relation to the very objects and studying their status as full-fledged subjects.

At this point though two further critical and almost conclusive stances can properly be introduced, namely the lucid observations operated by Fowles (2010; 2016), here chronologically inverted by reason of my argument.

In his view this "object-oriented focus" has not to be framed as yet another an epistemological question, but as an historical one (Fowles 2016, 10). In another work, Latour (2004) is claimed to force the undertaking of post-humanism and post-colonialism to be understood as conjoined, just as colonialism and Europocentrism were part of the same imperial project (Fowles 2016, 22). Furthermore, the undoing of the subject-object divide is noted as a comfortable undoing of rather insidious matters of human inequality, given in the earlier elaboration by Latour (1993) objects were assigned the status of subaltern humans. With a further critical parallel on academic subjects which "salvaged scholarly authority" through the course of anthropological studies, he concludes that "Objects emerged, in other words, as anthropology's perfect subjects because, as subjects, they can so easily be objectified" (Fowles 2016, 24–25).

What I similarly maintain is at stake here is the diversion of focus from the agency of humans, as still part of the subalterns trapped into disempowering narratives of (un)change, perhaps not as much desirable as subjects instrumentalised to sustain academic epistemology.

Henceforth, it can still be detected the permanence of an 'old' imaginary of time tied to metaphors of cycle, arrow and continuous growth, also in both the 'new' paradigms of progress

presented before –despite the possibly most genuine efforts by Latour and then Hodder (who did not however provide counter critiques even in later publications *e.g.*: 2018). It was in fact again Fowles (2010) to duly report how an underlying patter of increasing accumulation would not escape the gravity generated by the Western discourse so far, rather falling into a deterministic hole or towards a teleological trajectory. The critique starts mentioning how Latour (1999, 201) acknowledges the rhetorical nature of his own proposal as a narrative of history to counter the hegemonic one, a parallel easily drawn with the *Discourse on Inequality* by Rousseau (Fowles 2010, 34), which we already discussed in previous sections. In contrast with the more recent account of Graeber and Wengrow (2021), Fowles (2010, 34–35) notes how instead Latour's theory implicitly tends to prove its empirical validity without actual evidence. Finally Hodder (2006) is also taken into account in a footnote, surprisingly backing up "The notion that the world has somehow become thicker with things over time" as archaeology is considered the one discipline which "truly makes this explicit", thus again representing somehow deterministic narratives:

> «Today's world is thick with such quasi-objects, while the premodern world, Latour contends, was less burdened.[6] Be that as it may, the more general conclusion that humans have come to inhabit increasingly heavy and entangled material worlds over the past 40,000 or so years is taken by many to be inescapable,[7] Ever more things, it would seem.»
> (Fowles 2010, 35)

Here Dant (2006) is mentioned to maintain that social "material heaviness" is measured by the quantity of artefacts, giving a constructive turn to the critique to open up the chance of proposing its own mean of value, namely the concept of *absence*. Comparing Latour's (and now we have seen also Hodder's) projects to the paradigm of social development presented in Morgan's *Ancient Society*, he demonstrated a stark failure to oppose the current myth of progress, even more considered such was the initial aim (Fowles 2010, 36). Under these terms, the author invites not just to try and understand societies that lack of present "quantities", but to approach the "missing things of society", not ignoring *absences* by giving them *presence*, as features evaluated by exploring the material effects they have by missing or not being present.

> «The challenge presented by this second option is not just to overcome the materialist impulses of contemporary social theory in which our only meaningful encounters are with the hard, present things that press against us. We must overcome the insidious affiliation of absence with *longing* and *desire* as well. That is, we must do away the assumption that every absence in the world is a void in need of being filled. As noted above, this assumption has, in part, a Freudian heritage, but its sources can also be traced in the deeper progressivist discourse of colonialism. Europeans clearly took it for granted that native people on the colonial frontier, once they were made aware of their nakedness, would naturally desire to clothe themselves. […]
> The alternative to this sort of conceit is to acknowledge that absence need not be a source of

longing at all. Quite to the contrary, absence can be aggressive; it can be cultivated; it can mark the *overt rejection* of that which is not present.»
(Fowles 2010, 37)

Furthermore, this way the Western discourse is deconstructed under the light of nation-states' agenda, revealing inconsistent once societies can be considered organised by virtue of their active political choice to 'lack' of governments. The deliberate absence of certain institutions can make us re-frame communities with different social organisation by how they efficiently provide their social and environmental means of well-being. This all the while approaching questions of power in alternative ways (Clastres [1974] 1989, 198–207) rather then "lacking" of them: "primitive cultures", like the ones living in the past, might be recognised just by their 'full diversity' and are finally to be considered in no need to be fixed in a trajectory of progressive stages. Via such meta-narrative can now provide a whole different ranking –if meaningful at all- depending on the contextual parameters we evaluate each present or past as well as near or distant community. Similarly, our own social structure is once again reminded of the agency to get away with things, instead of suffering an inevitable growth in complexity or a somewhat natural reduction of choices as we get bog down due to the inherent heaviness of the world.

Fowles (2010, 37) effectively reframes communities "certainly engaged in their own work of elimination, but instead of an act of disrobing that results in an image of deficiency, here one encounters elimination as a constructive act aimed at building greater levels of individual autonomy and ecological sustainability". Referencing the works of Paul Shepard (1998) and John Zerzan (1998), the constructive approach presented here is also relevant later to propose my own idea for a possible "servant narrative", as a shift not necessarily to "primitivist" imaginaries.

On the other hand of such a liberating framework, we have seen the consequences of not being suspicious when theories takes for granted matters of absence and longing, even with the best intentions in academic research. As a recurrent warning throughout the text, I have inserted the reflection according to which "without a viable alternative to the myth of progress, the old evolutionary metanarratives tend to linger in the shadows" (Fowles 2010, 34). At this point though, one might ask: are all of these critical stances and concerns actually useful outside the 'Ivory Tower' and into popular narratives nowadays?

I deem yes, given the current uses and abuses of theories and practices permeated with the legacy of outdated paradigms, uncritically supporting the *status quo* of unsustainable approaches to reality –or, to call it by its name, the entirety of the neo-liberal capitalist discourse.

The very discourse about "social inequality" has been tracked since its inception to its more recent adoptions and implications by Graeber and Wengrow (2021, 6–8. 27–29, 32–33), and from their

account it is highlighted how as convenient re-frame it operated on intellectual and political grounds. Told as an innate propulsion towards accumulation and the possibility this implicit feature just got out of hands, it fits narratives reassuring those who benefits of such inequalities. Just as in Rousseau's *Discourse*, the current system can be criticised but it is ultimately not clear whether are there any chances to solve social problems, deriving from such a vague term somehow even intrinsically tied to our history through technological advancements. The naturalisation of similar paradigms, along with the conceptual focus on "inequality", makes it obvious to reaffirm the *status quo* as an inevitable effect of the course of humanity –a perfect narrative efficiently locking us in a dichotomic (thus simplified) version of reality.

Within this framework, it is only reasonable to accept the veracity of popular arguments such as "the Tragedy of the Commons" (Hardin 1968), infamously setting the stage for a moral perspective over the consumption of resources in the ecological debate. This way pessimism is not instrumental to doomist campaigns of disavowal, funded by corporates with vested interests into individual blaming, which should rather called out as responsible. No: it is just a matter of "realism" every person can accept, even as a *wise* way to survive through their everyday life. No matter if they are not actually poor or endangered people, struggling for survival, but even middle to high class citizens with much more political power to try and pressure their governments for policy changes.

Beyond the boundary of individual as well as collective responsibility, technological discoveries are then entrusted with the solution in a somewhat paradoxical faith into science, waiting for a new shining innovation coming from some genius messiah. The 'real' issue with the ecological crisis are human incursion into the field of nature, thus a "natural" solution would be a better control over the two spheres, creating absurd proposal for a neat division of the two in conservation programs (Wilson 2016). "Overpopulation" in turn calls for birth control in "developing countries" or even better, a rather post-humanist approach, not at all put forward by venture capitalists representing the 1% of the world population and conveniently glossing over the fact their own personal wealth and resource consumption alone scores for the remaining 99%.

In fact this façade of narratives stands true until the very shaky pillars of such arguments are put into discussions, usually requiring less than a scientific paper to exhaustively fall down (Mildenberger 2019; Monbiot 2020), while of course internal reports demonstrates shady market strategies (Supran, Rahmstorf, and Oreskes *2023*; Bonneuil, Choquet, and Franta 2021) and the IPCC reports repeatedly called for current technologies of energy production (even just renewable ones) to be enough if coherently applied –as already wrote in the introductory chapter.

Moreover, when social and political implications of these 'realist' projects are considered (Büscher

et al. 2017; Brightman and Lewis 2017b, 6–7), even fantasies pushed by hegemonic actors are culturally appropriated by their subalterns in a phenomenon easily associated with Gramscian cultural hegemony. As Donna Haraway in fact noted "posthuman is much too easily appropriated by the blissed-out, «Let's all be posthumanists and find our next teleological evolutionary stage in some kind of transhumanist technoenhancement.» Posthumanism is too easily appropriated to those kinds of projects for my taste" (Gane 2006, 140).

Nonetheless, the current imaginary is still dominated by 'grand narratives' which had more success than their punctual debunking, unsurprisingly as they dwell in the range of comfortable assumptions –both to the 'everyday' person used to them and the 1% actually profiting from it.

An example from the 1970s is the ethnography carried on the Yanomami people by Napoleon Chagnon (1968) which spread all sorts of popular dissemination, where he "tended to define them primarily in terms of things they lacked", thus making his case a rather infamous one which got many attentions for bad and for good (Graeber and Wengrow 2021, 15–16). This happened despite and because of the framework of "ethnographic present", illustrated before as anthropology already used to apply in that period, making his conclusions take essentialist values ultimately calling for an inherent state of violence between human communities.

Exemplifications of a similar tendency is found also in a foundational publication for the success of Jared Diamond (1997), *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*, an all but modest synthesis of the history of humanity. As such it has been already criticised by Trigger (2006, 166–167), who pointed out how it still supported the centuries old position that temperate climate set the pace of cultural primacy of the Old World over the Americas, summoning the whole phantom of colonialism. Another bestseller by Diamond (2012) is further symptomatic of the lucky reception of this legacy, analysed in this case again by Graeber and Wengrow (2021, 11-14) along with Francis Fukuyama (2011) book tellingly named *The Origins of Political Order: From Prehuman Times to the French Revolution*. The critique over these texts, presenting their pontifications over the "unrealistic dreams" of viable alternatives to the current *status quo* (a dismal, Hobbesian, thus naturally cruel world –as a Joker would say "that's life!", and yet, is that so?), is easily countered by the fact they are not actually based on any kind of scientific evidence as their authors have little to say over key disciplines such as archaeology (Graeber and Wengrow 2021, 11).

One might therefore be tempted to see this tendency somewhat due to an usual oversimplification in popular media, while there are instead recent examples of academic works (Flannery and Marcus 2012; Scheidel 2017). The same permanence of outdated models is still being detected and pushed by those archaeologists and anthropologists, trying their offering on grand narratives, but not truly detaching even from the overarching Rousseau-Hobbes dichotomy (Graeber and

Wengrow 2021, 528). In the broader landscape of the social sciences, it is the case of Steven Pinker (2012; 2018) to exemplify the "contemporary Hobbesian", flawed in both his perspective on the original violence of humans as well as on his neopositivist paradigm of progress (Graeber and Wengrow 2021, 13–14). Ultimately, Ian Morris's (2015) *Foragers, Farmers, and Fossil Fuels: How Human Values Evolve* offers a genuine experiment, though exemplifying the effect of modern narratives of inequality when reported to prehistory: holding no actual information if not producing assets for *New York Time* articles to impress people and reassure investors (Graeber and Wengrow 2021, 527).

Yet again, through all of this assumed 'realism' and related stories, at last:

> «...we are supposed to believe, is just the inevitable effect of inequality; and inequality, the inevitable result of living in any large, complex, urban, technologically sophisticated society. Presumably it will always be with us. It's just a matter of degree.
> [...]
> The ultimate effect [...] is to make wistful pessimism about the human condition seem like common sense: the natural result of viewing ourselves through history's broad lens»
> (Graeber and Wengrow 2021, 7–8).

So far, I hope to have illustrated the role and responsibilities held by archaeology as a discipline and archaeologists as practitioners in the making of this perspective on the course of human history. At this point of my argument and personal journey throughout the topic, the focus can finally turn to the agency we still detain and therefore have the duty to explore.

In the search for other narratives, better being at least not set-in-stone, we can consider as Graeber (2004) presented a frame which even Fowles (2010, 38) acknowledged for his concept of absence. Luckily (or rather actively) this feature marks the approach taken by collaborating with an archaeologist in his last work (*i.e.*: Graeber and Wengrow 2021). Namely, *The Dawn of Everything* duly tries to contextualise in a theoretical as well as practical framework *A New History of Humanity*, dealing with as much up-to-date evidence as possible, in clear in contrast to previous accounts mostly presented as rhetorical experiments. In this spirit the quest for different approaches to our collective history of self-creation, to restore the full-humanity of our pasts (*ibid.*: 8–9, 24–25), is far from closed.

In fact Graeber and Wengrow only provided a meta-narrative, though potentially even the one Fowles longed for in his latest critical standpoint, almost completely fitting the preposition which let me to embark in the journey for this dissertation. However, as the authors premised, it is by no mean a complete elaboration: it may take years to fully disclose and needs to be filled with actual narratives. These should effectively try to counter discourses based on destructive paradigms and provide aware as well as practical proposals towards actions with positive social impacts.

My conclusive stance for this chapter is first and foremost to reaffirm the status of construct for our current paradigm of progress, demonstrated by its very deconstruction to be an artificial device actively or passively adopted by humans but by no mean 'natural' or even 'inevitable'. Such an acknowledgement would already be a great success as a take-home, consisting in a yet more constructive standpoint than accepting the dominant idea, unable and rather opposing any meaningful agency towards the changes required by our times of crisis. If progress, from being a rhetorical device making hard to imagine "an end to capitalism", instead becomes somehow less inescapable in the human imaginary, it would be clear this: that any less compliant and alternative narrative is better suited for well-being. worth all we still have to lose in the case we would just accept the current discourse and wait idle for an apparently easier "end of the world". Henceforth I would like to open a new question which is addressed later as part of my proposal, namely, is progress to be any good at all, and if yes, what could be a *good* paradigm to frame it? Or rather, as reframed in the following sections, are there any *sustainable* –meant as both environmentally and in a broader social sense- narratives to tell the history of humanity?

2. From Heritage to Sustainability: Archaeology as Narrative

Before proposing an answer to the questions just posed, and doing so through archaeology as already unmasked culprit of progress construction, the discipline itself can be similarly reframed by another of its victims. That is to say as material culture was key to archaeology, so did the discipline shape discourse around cultural heritage, the deconstruction of which may in turn suggest a more constructive framework to look at our archaeological materials.

From this further ground of problematisation, I will then directly pass into the core redefinition of archaeologists as a community of practice and what does this mean for the current discourse, in particular for the intersection and engagement with the topic of sustainability.

Similarly to the disclaimer put forward in the deconstruction of progress, here as well 'heritage' is not going to be historically contextualised in details, rather taking the humble approach of acknowledging the necessary limits of the present dissertation. Again, it is not my pretension to provide a complete review of the history of the term and idea of heritage, but rather to present the most relevant passages of its construction without losing focus with the main purpose of this work. Nonetheless more exhaustive accounts on the topic can be found in the works mentioned throughout this section. Consistently with the rest of the arguments, I mainly draw from the field of Critical Heritage Studies, in particular the publications written or edited by Rodney Harrison (2010a; 2013) which are often referenced in their entirety as respectively dealing with crucial aspects such as *Understanding the politics of heritage* and *Heritage: Critical Approaches.*

The focus on a physical dimension of the past is found at the core of Western studies in the Humanities, perhaps because of the mere bulky presence of remnants or a fascination with the tactile aspect of exotic narratives, distant by definition in their oral or written accounts. Consistently the idea that *The Past is a Foreign Country*, coined by David Lowenthal as a title in 1975, can therefore be considered an almost obvious though extremely needed acknowledgement. Whether the causes, we can historically track the prototypes of an archaeological method itself to interests and expeditions related with private collections and later museums, antiquarians being the first form of professionals (Schnapp and Kristiansen 1999, 8–15).

As early as the 1650s, through the efforts of the intellectual Jean-Jacques Chifflet, Childeric I (5th century's King of the Francs) burial ground discovery could be said to have served as mean of

propaganda for the Empire of France. Depending on the interpretation of the goods found in the grave through time, the identification of the king have pushed an agenda of monarchic-imperial-national unity far back in the past, already making the point for the secondary role of material clues over the actual context of study. In fact, despite a flawed interpretations of some artefacts, it mattered which had better endorsed the current interests of the funders of the research. That made possible the publication of one of the earlier most complete series of documentation of an archaeological discovery, first by Chifflet then by the antiquarian abbot Jean Cochet under Napoleon. Their attention to details and drawings almost foreshadows later analytical approach, to the point they are the most trusted source for this lost heritage −as most Childeric's grave goods are gone in a series of unfortunate events (Augenti 2018, 136–138, 146–147).

2.1. In-Heritage

The modern meaning of heritage was therefore inherent to a matter of inherited identities and, like archaeology, it went through changes questioning the material aspects of it. Although a more comprehensive idea of 'cultural heritage' surely included traditions and knowledge *per-se*, the sense of belonging driven by national agendas needed to materialise this identity into monuments of patriotic significance, more easily recognisable into artefacts with 'outstanding' visual feature.

In fact as premised, materiality can also be considered a core element since the very inception of the term 'heritage'. For instance we first find it in the concept of 'patrimoine', employed again in France to build the identity of its nation in the very *Constituent Assembly*, as set of the proprieties passed down from generations to generations from the past and towards a unity with the present population (Vecco 2010, 321–322). Around this period, materiality and identity strengthened their bond with heritage also thanks to the origins of public museums (Abt 2006, 127–129) with the example of the Grand Gallery of the Louvre Palace, newly renamed the *Muséum Français* in celebration of the success by the revolutionaries. This gallery, just as reported in the very name the other famous of *Musée des Monuments français*, was mainly revolving around the monumentality of artefacts and meant to visually impress with their tangible density of objects.

The rise of museums during the 19th century had its crucial role in the history of archaeology (Schnapp and Kristiansen 1999, 28–32), since we have seen how categorisations of collections pushed for the elaboration of evolutionary paradigms, also backfiring in critical reflections when effects of typology were considered in Museum Studies (MacDonald 2006b, 87–88; *but see also the complete volume* MacDonald 2006a). Hitherto, we reported the path followed by archaeologists to validate their epistemological exclusivity in the interpretation of prehistory, so the focus of the

following paragraphs rather remains on the construct of heritage passed through its tangible features. As we remind how material culture formed archaeology as a scientific discipline (Schnapp and Kristiansen 1999, 32–36), the acknowledgement of the role of this field of study in the definition of what was considered 'Heritage' lies in the institutions which validated and spread knowledge under such lights.

Examining the object-oriented approach in art museums, in the words of Donald Preziosi (2006, 52–53), we can see how:

> «…the course of the nineteenth-century **evolution of academic and professional fields was** nothing less than **the disciplining of whole populations through a desire-driven interaction with objects** […] **as documentary indices of a (narrative) history of the world and its people, construed as teleological dramaturgy ("evolution"), a "story" having a direction and point and leading up to the spectator in the present, at the apex of this development**»
> (*emphases mine*)

All of this was also made possible through a dominant narrative in the intellectual circles of the Enlightenment which, other than the paradigm of progress and human history successfully proposed by Thomsen, sociologically accepted the interpretative framework of another fortunate scholar. Namely where antiquarians simply "sought to explain objects", Johann Joachim Winckelmann "claimed to explain culture through objects, a formidable change of perspective that appealed to scientists as much as to artists" (Schnapp and Kristiansen 1999, 23–24); he also managed to imbue an essentialist trait of beauty to ancient artefacts coming from Greece, as an emblem the liberty achieved by their idealised form of social organisation, a 'maximum' form of democracy (or liberalism?) so dear to the very same intellectuals of the period.

A similar approach to the interpretation of material past is useful to contextualise the already mentioned influence of Romantic movements in popular imaginaries and their role in the formation of nation-states, both through built-up geographies of boundaries and artistic representations of 'landscapes' as Mario Neve (2016, 200–203) pointed out. The cultural geographer defines 'landscapes' as coherently framed social constructs, environments consisting in their "local natural traits" within a national imaginary as well as in human-made structures. Not by chance the buildings represented often are ancient ruins, remnants of an ancestral past, providing exactly the required romantic identification for populations with 'their' lands. Governments and their citizens were inserted as part of a nation-state discourse of identity, made of apparently sealed boundaries, materialised by shifting merely cultural to social and finally environmental borders in people's shared and rather unified imaginary.

Now the historical context cannot pass unobserved, this time from perspective of 'heritage', which has been more and more recognised taking also intangible shapes such as traditions of managing ways of living even older or just different from national agendas.

In fact the naturalisation of some constructs preferred against others can clearly be appreciated, both happening in the artistic field and sciences alike, even when the latter came to pretty much different conclusions from the 'authorised discourse'. Since then it was national institutions enforcing narratives which have seen:

> «...primarily governments, rather than scientists or development practitioners, that routinely dismiss customary production and land use systems. The claim that customary activities such as pastoralism or swidden agriculture are archaic and unsustainable is not supported by sound science, but it persists among decision makers whose ideas of progress and modernity are part of the legacy of the social evolutionary ideology of colonialism.»
> (Brightman and Lewis 2017b, 7)

More than prescriptive rules and incentives on national territories in fact, similar discourses impacted policies abroad, once again reminding us of the Eurocentric and imperialist agenda also carried out by Western countries in the last centuries. This in fact has much to do with the colonial framework, previously discussed in this dissertation, which from a broader perspective of cultural anthropology has been better contextualised in famous corpus of critiques *e.g.* Edward Said's (1978) *Orientalism*. Encounters with 'other cultures' in the present as well in the past is still arguably echoed in our biased imaginary, where for instance a *Black Athena* (Bernal 1987) suffers the prejudices (Thapar 1975) of racial perception by dominant groups within western societies. These discourses "were instrumental in forming the academic categories within which we still organize our knowledge", as noticed by Sherratt (1989, 60) more than thirty years ago already, in a disciplinary categorisation between classical studies or orientalism mostly unchanged today.

While today's past can still be considered a "foreign country", though with substantial differences which was worth a revision of the classic by Lowenthal (2015), nationalistic agenda have been investigated in details also informing critical studies in archaeology (*e.g.*: Kohl and Fawcett 1995).

On the other hand the push for financial internationalisation, as a primary form of globalisation mainly passing through communication networks for economic purposes, made it possible for European countries an arguably peaceful hundred years due to common interests to inter-operate capitals worldwide (Neve 2016, 217; 224–228). As such a peace was going to crush under the same economic interests it was built upon, the impulsion for legislative standardisation resisted and advanced through both 'World Wars', as a legacy of Western universalising projects.

In the field of heritage we see this clearly in the legal efforts to define the status of material culture, from objects in museums and private collections to monuments and entire landscapes, developing since the 1931 with the Athens Charter (Vecco 2010, 321). After a period of experiments for international institutions like the International Bureau of Intellectual Cooperation (ICIC in 1922) and the International Bureau of Education (IBE in 1925), the formation of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO in 1945) represented a specialised agency of the UN to produce directives, charters and resolutions around cultural heritages. As a consequence other groups of similar intents and statute formed, such as the International Council of Museums (ICOM in 1946) and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS in 1965), the latter as a direct consequence of the Venice Charter in 1964, considered the first to try and define 'Heritage' as a concept (*ibid.,* 322).

The common denominator is the already mentioned effort to provide a valid definition of "common heritage", mentioning "the unity of human values" possibly even for humanitarian purposes in international cooperation. Nevertheless, such projects cannot but summon ghosts of a familiar grand project, rooted as we have seen in the Enlightenment, with its burden of dire political implications. The main argument against similar universalism has been in the focus of many studies, considering for instance the very World Heritage List by UNESCO (Tucker and Carnegie 2014), which generates several stark contradictions in trying to assign any "universal value". Even more to a concept so varied around the world, universalising discourse can suppress local contingencies as well as different forms of culture, effectively enforcing top-down decisions while bottom-up are left forcefully to conform through phenomenon of hegemony in the sense meant by Gramsci (Hoare and Nowell-Smith 1971, 12; Gerratana 1975, 1519).

When the authority of the issuing institutions is in fact considered in the equation, the result might just be the enforcements of these standards and values, effectively excluding ideas on one hand and influencing practices in the other, as in a full-fledged "Authorised Heritage Discourse" (or AHD) described by Harrison (2010b, 26–35). The instrumentality to different agendas is further explored in the *Uses of heritage* by Laurajane Smith (2006), from mere commercial to coercive ones still present today. Valid framing of "state heritage crime" were also drawn for archaeology in collusion with 'development' projects (Hutchings and La Salle 2017), further demonstration of the roles the discipline can take to shape and be affected from similar discourses.

As I illustrated before, political exploitations of the concept of progress happens as abuses in the idea of human history for mere economic 'development', here perpetrated also through another way to approach material culture –namely Cultural Resource Management (or CRM).

Now, although it has a wider breadth than this particular argument, we could not talk about heritage without taking into consideration broader ideas of 'Culture'. In such terms, it is therefore relevant to detect the crucial shift happening from a static conception of it as defined by Tylor (in a period of colonialism we already encountered) to a more fluid one. Along with other fields of humanities, archaeologists presented to themselves this new approach again in the 1980s (Hodder 1982), confronting now with an idea of cultures which were socially constructed realities concerned with the historically specific conditions of their creation.

Henceforth, as even considered by professionals on the cutting edge of the trowel and who's practice could potentially augment the basin of cultural resources, the legislative framework outlined before had to rethink and amend on consequent critiques on the very materiality of 'heritages'. In the decades right before and after we have seen new conventions admitting different approaches and definitions, shifting from the tangible to the intangible features at the core of a varied scenery of values from all around the world (Vecco 2010: 323–324). In that same period heritage underwent an actual "boom" (Harrison 2013, 68–94), while one might have asked "what is heritage?" and not getting one official answer. Years later the same question is demonstrably still relevant, as Harrison (2010b, 9–13) dealt with it without getting a unique answer: not a case for poor scholarly work, but rather a more deep turn into critical studies (Harrison 2013, 95–114). What I took home from the lines of such academic researches, valuable for the current dissertation, is how the intangible reconsideration of heritage made it possible for scholars to embrace more relational approaches (*ibid.*, 217–220), while substantially maintaining the cores of Western discourse. That to say the ominous presence of an inherent universalism, here meant not as an essentialist but rather constructivist feature, built-in the very institutions involved in the definition of the concept. This characteristic remains in the various projects operating at international levels, while not effectively deconstructing conflictual dichotomies still perceived as such within the majority of the public, namely the primitive-modern and nature-culture divide (*ibid.*, 205–213) as well as the tangible-intangible one.

Unsurprisingly, the argument revolves around the responsibilities of archaeology too, along the deconstruction of the dominant idea of progress undergone earlier pointing at the epistemological hegemony of the discipline over our prehistoric past. Biased towards the present organisation of a (neo)colonial and neo-liberal society, the authority it held served the naturalising and essentialist interpretation of a 'primordial state', justifying our status quo through typological elaboration of paradigms. Consequently, heritage is intertwined inasmuch its definition is influenced by the very classifications and studies carried out by archaeologists, part of a broader Authorised Heritage Discourse. An example of this entanglement is still found in recent definitions of archaeology,

though not coming from texts on the field, nevertheless relevant as academic and popular literature. Namely, I refer to the *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus*, reporting the discipline to be "the study of the buildings, graves, tools, and other **objects that belonged to people who lived in the past**, in order to learn about their culture and society" (Cambridge University Press n.d.; *emphasis mine*). The legacy of the dichotomic models presented above is pretty clear in such definition, rendering valid the critique to evolutionary approaches by Graeber and Wengrow (2018; 2021), one which calls for diversified and more plausible perhaps –or less biased at the least- interpretations and accounts on the course of human history.

Ultimately I point out once more that we are facing a matter of narratives, eroding the very bases of various disciplines concerned with them, potentially rendering them meaningless (what use is an archaeologist if there is no heritage to recognise as such?). Professional ethics are then to be questioned in practice and request theories of a certain amount of awareness or compromise, where room is given to take critical stances and chances to elaborate counter-narratives.

However despite all the efforts and critiques, the Western hegemony on cultural heritage management at large (Byrne 1991) can still be seen in place and operating, acknowledgment which brings us directly to Hodder's (2010) critique and proposal for "cultural heritage rights". In his view, as already previewed in bits and pieces along the previous sections, heritage should not only be considered a human right from a legislative perspective, as this global framework sets 'absolute' limits the author himself does not see a path through (Hodder 2010, 864–866). Rather, he holistically calls for a shift in the idea of cultural heritage rights, one which should move from ownership and descent –as we have seen in Cambridge's formulation- to justice and well-being. Hence it is via a re-frame of the very definition, concept and perception of what 'heritage' might be that he suggests a human-centred approach, one where rights are not just paperworks but should actively see the participation of affected people.

In this way, the management of cultural resources can be seen no differently than natural ones though not in a perspective of exploitation, but rather of complex interaction negotiated by socially constructed values, organically put into practice by a community towards its own well-being –an approach not dissimilar to that proposed by Harrison (2013) in his *Dialogical Heritage and Sustainability*. Moving focus from the universal values of artefacts, one expected effect is to also stick more true to an overall social justice in the field and not only in theory, as benefits can directly be enjoyed by people involved in projects.

Moreover with this proposal, we can now welcome the perspective supported by evidence telling us "heritage is continually being reproduced and reinterpreted, human groups and cultures are in the long term open and in flux" (Hodder 2010, 870), to keep moving forward in this dissertation.

The contextual background of cultural heritage is finally lied down now, acknowledging its status of full-fledged construct as well as the possibility for many different "heritages" to be socially validate, despite they escape a unique definition. The thought-provoking question rising at this point "is there any heritage at all?" can here be replied with a nuanced "no, there is no such thing as heritage" (Smith 2006, 11–13), as in fact the concept does not hold any inherent feature (Harrison 2010b, 25–26). My stance on the topic is therefore to choose a redefinition of heritages, namely that of a symbol which is sometimes –but not necessarily- wrapped around physical entities, as long as a community consider it valuable to participate into such knowledge creation. In other words, I deem heritage as part of a culture meant as a collectively built construct, resulting (though not in a finalistic sense) from different participative processes.

Such definition is instrumental to my main argument, given the question about heritage can now be rebounded to archaeology itself: "then, studying an undefined set of cultures and heritages, what is archaeology after all?". Indeed, my answer came to be that it is no different from heritage, not in the sense of uniformity but rather in diversity: varied sets of cultural and social processes of knowledge creation, between tangible practices and intangible theories which are basically not separated, "constituted by the discourses that simultaneously reflect these practices while also constructing them" (Smith 2006, 13).

2.2. Archaeology as Narrative

The Nara Conference marks the first recognition by international institutions of "authenticity" in diverse cultures, one not based on fixed criteria and instead contextually evaluated by each community to build their own cultural identity, where finally heritage "is not just tangible but also intangible, and therefore is not closely linked to the physical consistency" (Vecco 2010, 323).

The twofold purpose I aimed to have achieved so far is to have exposed the construction of familiar ideas of progress and heritage, while having also focused the relevance of archaeology as a narrative framework. Going through this process, we have briefly reminded what the discipline has been, the responsibilities still held as well as the many way it can be defined –including the one I advocate it should be in order to have a truly benefic role during present and future crises.

A long-standing struggle for archaeology is that to maintain its relevance to the rest of society, a concern possibly undermining one of the most critical points for its complicity in greenwashing, as will also be noted later in this text. One of the most appealing calls of such a quest is found in Mortimer Wheeler's (1954, 191) *Archaeology from the Earth*, who was drawing a parallel from G. M. Trevelyan's early concerns in the exclusivity of historic education, deemed "valueless" if

historians failed to "interest intelligently" and "educate the public" about the past. To limit both the elitist tone of the historian quoted and Wheeler's infamous sexism, here I directly feature the same quote the latter made –namely Jacquetta Hawkes (1951, 198), writing as part of the scientific community of archaeologists in the twentieth century, who:

> «...must take deliberate pains to make it add something to the life of a democratic society. **Our subject has social responsibilities and opportunities** which it can fulfil through school education, through museums and books and through all the instruments of what is often rather disagreeably called "mass communications"—the press, broadcasting, films and now television. **If archaeology is to make its proper contribution to contemporary life and not risk sooner or later being jettisoned by society**, all its followers, even the narrowest specialists, should not be too proud to take part in its diffusion.»
> (*emphases mine*)

Decades later another example of this struggle is detected in a paper already discussed, where Flannery (1982, 272) was in its own sarcastic way fundamentally complaining for a discipline too concerned with its relevance "to the world", while he cried for the good ol' days of unconcerned "legitimate" intellectual curiosity. In his further "suspect that if we just try to do a good job at that, the more general contributions will follow naturally", we see both a removal of the responsibilities and a somewhat neo-positivist stance. In fact on the same page he comments on the "unself-consciously" discoveries by Newton or Mendel, "out of their efforts to satisfy their own curiosity", as outright ignoring the context of practice –crucial in Kuhn (1970) for scientific revolutions in general and in Trigger's (2006) introduction to the very history of archaeology. Instead the reflexive turn of some archaeologists provided us with the acknowledgement of the framework complex framework practitioners move in, trying to shift the very narratives at the core of our archaeological matters, just like already illustrated in the case made by Hodder (2010, 864). Not only archaeology is recognised as interfacing with the public perhaps more than any other social science, but he deems it is "history making" protruding in people's life, concluding it "is a duty, then, to think about the rights of those affected". Therefore relevance of the discipline is reshaped around the well-being of communities and towards to social justice, engaging with the public in countless ways, some collected in the definitions of Public Archaeology (Moshenska 2017, 1–13) and the rest forming as concerns rise in the present for the future.

Nowadays, I could not agree more with the call of many authors in the same publication (Brightman and Lewis 2017a), given the most pressing and underlying situation of crisis anyone informed enough can recognise we find ourselves in (*i.e.*: the climate, ecological and social crisis as one). As Brightman and Lewis (2017b, 25–26) summarised "...the key struggle of our time is to support alternatives to neoliberal definitions of 'progress and development' among diverse

societies and cultures" as we have seen such constructs are pushing for destructive narratives. In fact, we are awfully doing anything but pulling the brakes and quite literally pushing the gas pedal still, disempowering any possible chance to roll the steering wheel towards different trajectories while instead accelerating the fall and effectively making it more and more ruinous.

Such a disheartening picture therefore finds a regenerative seed in Graeber and Wengrow's project for a new history of humanity, one which has to be watered as well as hardened with harsh critiques such as those of Fowles (2010) in order not to rot. As already mentioned few times now, the latter's scholar warning for not backing up old evolutionary meta-narratives asks for counter-narratives, hence I find the duties other than just the responsibilities of archaeology into its possible narrative building form. When the hegemonic grand discourse makes us wonder about the end of the world rather than an end to the current *status quo*, as enunciated before, the struggle to find relevance can be channelled into providing different course of history to imagine –reminding imagination can be a form of resistance when coupled with our agency.

Similarly to the countering of progress, I illustrated the efforts made to tackle the essentialist core of the very definition of heritage, from the critical standpoints of many disciplines. Nevertheless the Western universalising tension further reached its peak in the last centuries, when actually global projects of hegemony uncritically or willingly 'authorised heritage discourses', approving definitions often in the genuine or guilty aim to presumptuously state 'what is best for humanity' from a rather stark paternalistic perspective.

Despite ethical stances have been adopted through time and diversities somehow implemented in directives and legislations, Western thought landed on the tangible-intangible dichotomy, eventually going further only in academic circles thus far for being matter of public domain. Namely not considering binary aspects as separated, as heritage might also be considered an integrally abstract value wrapped in material, as well as the relational processes itself of creating, defining and studying the various forms culture can take (Smith 2006). This can also be seen as a struggle to "free heritage" from the exclusivity of academic communities of practice, as now it should be something inevitably participated by everyone, included the people who are affected in projects and could practically benefit from it. Archaeology, among the many ways of doing and narrating heritage as a process of knowledge creation, could therefore join these exchanges from the tangible to the intangible and struggle to stay true to its purpose –nowadays identified with a greater effort to produce "sustainable heritage" (Harrison 2013) first in a social sense.

Given the premise reiterated in the course of this dissertation and section, this approach should not be isolated from a most prominent need to be truly and holistically sustainable, to the public

first as well as a contribution in knowledge ultimately encouraging effective actions to mitigate the crisis. More explicitly in doing so, other than a 'narrative' archaeology could then be considered a meta-narrative, both process of knowledge creation and intangible piece of heritage itself, which operates as an "interface": for the public and practitioners alike to confront with the past, within a certain set of methods and imaginaries, elaborated and negotiated through time.

When we pair this to the relation between natural environments and human societies, as considered by Laura Rival (2017, 183–185) for ethnographic researches, we can basically consider the discipline itself a tool to mediate actions and to elaborate values towards sustainability. By focusing on what people *do* other than what they talk *about*, archaeology has once more a relevant set of tools to read and represent this interface between actions and values. In other words, we could also say that this discipline, made whole of its indispensable "public" and "social" duties, is not only "concerned with" (González-Ruibal, González, and Criado-Boado 2018, 507) but can actually *serve as* an interface between the public –archaeologists included- and sustainability.

To introduce the next topic around a 'Sustainable Archaeology', I would like to mention Michelangelo Alesi (2021), who presented a visual thesis project on "narrative ecologies" asking about the "honesty" of interfaces (mainly digital in his case). Since the matter there was about questioning their 'ethical and socio-political sustainability', meant as the "trustworthiness" for the representation and maintenance of data, I amend his question as a critical stance for our topic: "Can archaeology be an honest interface for sustainability" also given its past faults?

2.3. (Su)stain Archaeology?

As exposed so far, the stains in reputation accumulated by the discipline might be too much to be bleached out, so rather than trying to be eligible for redemption as an initial stance I would argue we as archaeologists should learn how to bear with this guilty crown.

In 2016 during its 8th meeting, the World Archaeology Congress granted a separate Session to sustainability, which however made it through only two points of a bullet list in resolution n° 11 (WAC-8 2017, 376). Nonetheless, the discussion has been willingly harvested by John Carman (2016), in a paper examining the main critical questions on the topic, also by trying to draw from previous literature. Sure enough other instances the discipline dealing with sustainable matters can be found before that moment, but one –not mentioned by Carman- stands out as presenting a grand claim, namely calling for "Sustainability out of the past: how archaeology can save the planet". This is the title of the paper of by Erika Guttmann-Bond (2010) who, among other reflections, argues that for instance it is past knowledge in agriculture rather than new

technologies which better fit the purpose of sustainable practices, those aimed at by many international pledges, as supported by other research reports. Unsurprisingly, her early stance on the topic was ill-welcomed, despite the scientific evidence already in place, by "an elderly professor" dismissing it as "pie in the sky" (Guttmann-Bond 2010, 363–364). Once again, not even commenting on such a condescendingly patronisation, this episode gives us yet another sample of both internal academic discourses of authority and external processes of narrative hegemony.

However, to limit the same bias towards one standpoint, we have to critically acknowledge the application of 'sustainability' to archaeology –as it do actually presents its own set of issues. It is in this case Sarah Howard (2013, 9–11) who describes how not obvious this concept is when applied to archaeological heritage, often without reliable practices and leaving room for diminishing discourses, recently unravelled by the same author more in deep (Howard 2019). Henceforth, concerns should rise around the elaboration of the concept within disciplinary fields in order not to miss the chance of providing actual benefits to the public and the practitioners themselves, education being for instance at focus of enquiries like the one by Carman (2016, 134):

> «**If sustainability is a topic that we need to take seriously**, it is perhaps one to be included in archaeological curricula and one **we need to consider quite deeply in our own terms**. [...]
> **We need to ask ourselves: is it** an area we should be concerned with only in relation to archaeology as an area of academic and professional activity in the present (ie. **'sustaining' archaeology as a practice**); **or** can the ability of archaeology to give insights into the human past **offer something distinctive to a wider 'sustainability' debate** (eg. about climate change, environmental degradation, or the nature of community)? Or is it a concept we need only engage with in order to meet the requirements of external bodies (governments, intergovernmental agencies, UNESCO, etc.)?»

Moreover, parallels can be drawn with the broader debate on natural resources such as energy and fuels, from the particular point of view looking at the discipline as a framework of knowledge creation and interface with the past already outlined before. Archaeology can actually be considered a "renewable source" of heritage, under the perspective that each of its interpretations of the past produces new narratives (Holtorf 2001), or even as Gavin Lucas (2000) materially intended when excavations do not destroy but rather "transform" sites.

The points made by Carman (2016, 139–142), regarding the questions he posed over what is being "sustained" within a "sustainable archaeology", ultimately focuses on the relatively recent invention of archaeology itself by our society. In other words, the discipline is a social construct, with its own history and an institutionally sanctioned set of values, which can be threatened on a "rhetorical" level (Cooper 2008) and thus may also try to preserve (or 'sustain') themselves on the

same battleground. This particular consideration was suggested by a provocative position paper, which lit an almost harsh academic discussion, one I am going to review below more in details as much relevant to the current argument of this dissertation.

The debate on focus here stems from a critique by Richard M. Hutchings and Marina La Salle (2019a) published on *Antiquity*, eloquently entitled "Sustainable archaeology: soothing rhetoric for an anxious institution". Several scholars subsequently replied to the critiques posed, in form of other papers delivered on the same journal. The responses have been mostly critical, with at least one overall positive reception by Cristóbal Gnecco (2019), who even expanded the critique into the broader framework of ontology and epistemology of the discipline into the ground of academia. Two authors strongly opposed the ideas expressed by Hutchings and La Salle, namely E. Guttmann-Bond (2019b) and Innocent Pikirayi (2019), but both sides seemed to be confronting the topic on a certain level of misunderstanding, as the final response of Hutchings and La Salle (2019b) seemingly pointed out. The only paper to critically praise some aspects and constructively disagree on others can be considered the one by Anders Högberg and Cornelius Holtorf (2019), nonetheless receiving a negative feedback from the authors of the initial critique.

The main argument of Hutchings and La Salle (2019a, 1658) is that "sustainable archaeology is not principally about sustainability in the past, nor is it about sustaining a liveable Earth into the future", but rather that "The primary objective of sustainable archaeology is to maintain the profession of archaeology" (*ibid.*, 1653). Not coincidentally, they start off the paper by quoting the volume edited by Brightman and Lewis (2017b), as a reflection on the very terming of 'sustainability' –as will be dealt later on this dissertation as well. Thus, the point made by the authors is to expose a rhetoric mechanism in theory (*i.e.:* talking about 'sustainability' without actually implementing it) used by archaeologists to cover up injustice ongoing in practice (Hutchings and La Salle 2019a, 1653–1655).

They however depart quite enough from the spirit of their initial quote, in which Anna L. Tsing (2017, 51) does actually notice how "this use has become so prevalent", but "Rather than criticize the word" she has it "repurposed". In fact from the standpoint of considering archaeology "a government project", the two scholar instead discuss of sustainable archaeology as basically "Orwellian doublespeaking" (Hutchings and La Salle 2019a, 1657). Concluding that the discipline "can be described as state heritage crime" (*see also* Hutchings and La Salle 2017), they affirm the way they have encountered this new sustainable rebrand of it is by no way a redress for these major ethical issues (Hutchings and La Salle 2019a, 1658).

Two other scholars as Guttmann-Bond and Pikirayi, active within the debated field of study, replied firmly to those radically critical stances. Both stated the lack of considerations about the actual results of this new approach to the discipline, criticizing the way the other definitions of 'sustainable archaeology' (namely studying sustainability in the past and sustaining a liveable Earth into the future) have been quickly dismissed to focus on the aspects of sustaining the profession only (Guttmann-Bond 2019b, 1666; Pikirayi 2019, 1669).

They further present case studies to back their argument and criticise the view of Hutchings and La Salle as "probably unrepresentative of the true state of archaeology around the world" and as "a narrow, anti-intellectual outlook that casually dismisses the great benefits that are gained by understanding the past—and at a time of environmental crisis, we are going to need all the information that we can gather" (Guttmann-Bond 2019b, 1666–1667) and ultimately an

> «archaeology which does not resonate with the public, including local and descendant
> communities, is irrelevant (*see also* Pikirayi 2015). It is irrelevance that is the source of anxiety
> for all archaeologists, hence the references to sustainability"»
> (Pikirayi 2019, 1669)

On the other side, Gnecco embraced the critical stance, stemming from it to deepen the critique on adjectives applied to academic disciplines, added in order to serve as rhetoric device to ease the disruptive potential of their related topics and ultimately preserve the ontological integrity of the discipline and its social authority (Gnecco 2019: 1664–1665).

Although not directly addressing the previous papers, Högberg and Holtorf (2019) seems to provide a mid-way between previously presented standpoints, by trying to reply to Hutchings and La Salle (2019b) in a critical as well as constructive way. In fact, by only discussing of the main paper, this second pair of authors openly appreciate the standpoint from which the critique poses relevant questions, but at the same time are able to decisively point out where and why they disagree (Högberg and Holtorf 2019, 1661). Also, they expose in the initial debate piece the same behaviour Hutchings and La Salle first deemed to archaeology as "self-interested", namely that they as well focused on aspects that could serve and ultimately impose the own scholars' ideology. Högberg and Holtorf clearly notice so by considering the authors' philosophical, theoretical and practical background, but rather than attacking they pose a critical question back to them: "why are your political preferences and your view of the field of archaeology less time-bound and less problematic than any other?" (*ibid.,* 1662).

Stemming from Hodder's (2010) idea on cultural heritage rights, in the conclusion to their paper Högberg and Holtorf (2019, 1662) propose to insert the debate on sustainability into the

framework of a broader review of what heritages are, who they serve as well as by whom they are made and should be sustained.

Hutchings and La Salle (2019b) afterwards published a final paper (entitled with a proverb I will explain later) replying to each of the previous responses, which dealt with different intensity to the criticism or approval expressed on their initial debate piece. This detail is already crucial if we are to consider it a benchmark of their critical stance, as it is difficult to understand why some points have been hardly commented while others have been harshly dissected. For example, the idea expressed by Högberg and Holtorf (2019, 1662) on cultural heritage rights and the observation expressed by Pikirayi on the source of anxiety within the institution, have been completely ignored in this final reply. At the same time, Guttmann-Bond (2019b) was criticized for every case study presented and even for other ideas expressed in previous papers (above all Guttmann-Bond 2010) as "doomed", as far as addressing to her and her beliefs in what seemed more like an assault on a personal level rather than a professional critique:

> «Given that archaeology is her "love" (2019b: viii), it is understandable that she rejects our argument. Instead, she is selling the idea that "archaeology can save the planet" (2010, 2019b), a notion that critics have decried as 'fanciful', 'romantic', 'pie in the sky', 'impractical' and 'doomed to failure'. [...] her views (2010, 2019a & b) constitute what sociologist Anthony Giddens calls 'sustained optimism'.»
> (Hutchings and La Salle 2019b, 1672–1673)

Nonetheless, one clear point made by the latter pair of scholars is to notice both Guttmann-Bond and Pikirayi focused their replies on aspects they were closely involved into, rather than pondering the philosophical standpoint from which the critique was posed. In turn however, this same criticism of diverting the focus to ideologically safe grounds for the writers, was already spotted by Högberg and Holtorf (2019, 1661) in Hutchings and La Salle's initial paper.

This way, "Like a chicken talking to a duck about a kettle of fish" ends up being a fitting title for the final reply (Hutchings and La Salle 2019b) with an unintended self-reflective value rather than a salty tone, since it seemingly expose part of its own authors' pitfalls. As a context, the sentence is a freshly coined idiom, mixed from the Chinese "Like a chicken and a duck talking" referring to two people who cannot communicate due to a language barrier and the English "kettle of fish" to point at any given situation or issue, thus trying to criticise how the core argument has not been debated at all. The main concern expressed in this brief essay is that not only those who replied, but also both the authors of the first debate piece, mostly kept on discussing by themselves rather than engaging in a truly dialogical way.
On one hand, we have a critique aimed to dismantle yet another supposedly unethical rebranding

of archaeology, paired with no actual operational proposition, but rather with a prediction (Hutchings and La Salle 2019a, 1658). A constructive part still lacked in the same authors' final reply, despite a call for active solution to the shared environmental crisis and the counter-questions posed by other scholars, while they only added new and somewhat unnecessary critiques. On the other hand, criticisms made from the side of Guttmann-Bond and Pikirayi similarly missed the chance to confront the philosophical argument of greenwashing, while Gnecco deepened this perspective without raising any critical observation on the stance itself.

As already presented, the only exception seems to be that of Högberg and Holtorf, thus having a consequent reply from them would have served as a possible advancement in the debate, but that is out of the reach of this essay. Nonetheless, the questions they posed remained unanswered in Hutchings and La Salle's last reply, along with other points left uncommented, may at least be a valid ground to think of the outcomes of such a critical debate.

Without going yet into a synthesis of the positions taken by the different contributors to this debate, as my personal opinion and observations are present later as part of my proposal to move beyond the rhetoric impasse, I take the chance to point at the clear phenomenon of 'schismogenesis' operating here. Best practice in such case thus suggests us to reach for more comprehensive works, written on the topic by the main contestants, namely Hutchings (2022) and Guttmann-Bond (2019a). Since it is not my primary aim to further delve into the history of thoughts of this particular group of scholars, as I have already took it as an exemplification to present the nuances around the topic, I nonetheless redirect to their contributions –although not going any closer to a resolution of the stalemate. What can be further taken in consideration however, is a rightfully troubled ethical and disciplinary background, one which –genuinely or ill-intentioned- underestimated its role and is responsible for complicity (Hutchings 2022) rather than active participation of archaeology in the countering of our current crisis.

On the other hand, by focusing mainly on this critical debate, I may have not honoured the efforts of the many scholars engaging with the sustainability "out of the past", at least in the sense Guttmann-Bond (2010) meant in her first paper. Namely, I refer to those researching and participating in projects aimed to re-discover and re-enable past management practices and even technologies, within affected communities. Among the many I have happened to encountered during my studies, the MeMoLa Project José M. Martín Civantos and M. Teresa Bonet García 2015) would represent a a fair sample of fieldwork, while a valuable academic account might be Torben C. Rick and Daniel H. Sandweiss (2020) introducing the subsequent contributions in PNAS Special Feature "Archaeology, Climate, and Global Change".

Nevertheless, the previous philosophical dialogue on sustainability in our field of studies raised crucial questions, ones which have to be taken into consideration and ultimately "has led us to a much wider question: what is archaeology?" (Hutchings and La Salle 2019b, 1674). Since I have already provided my vision on the discipline in previous sections, henceforth now I would rather address the other main core issue brought into this conceptual and practical struggle, namely: what is 'sustainability'?

2.4. (Un)sustainability

I would now like to present my own elaboration of 'unsustainability', in a sort of provocation to the claim by Hutchings and La Salle (2019a, 1654, 1656) on the unsustainable use of the very term, while also taking in serious consideration their critical stance. Nevertheless, before getting into this personal reflection, a further background to the underlying ideas is due.

Here anthropology helps us to track some of the history and the most up to date critiques on this concept, which inevitably has to be treated as a construct as well, therefore providing some meaningful insights from its very deconstruction and contextualisation. Therefore, the volume on *The Anthropology of Sustainability: Beyond Development and Progress* is the main source chosen here for the purpose, edited by Brightman and Lewis (2017a) and already extensively mentioned in the course of this dissertation as core resource.

First of all, I am not missing the chance to reiterate the stance of an active hope summoned by Tsing (2017, 51) at the beginning of her chapter: "Still, there is reason to dream—and to object— and to fight for alternatives, and that is the purpose of this volume". Although acknowledging the prevalent use of the term as a destructive cover up, in contrast to previous critiques she frames the status of "dream" for the common definition of sustainability, to repurpose it "as a radical argument in the face of hegemonic practice". This call is echoed through the volume and summarised in the introductory chapter by Brightman and Lewis (2017b, 11–14), who refer to matter of narratives around current destructive "anthropos", a dominant discourse to be confronted through diverse and non-human stories (*e.g.*: Coates 2017; Aït-Touati and Latour 2017). The two editors ultimately reframe the term of sustainability as a process "supporting and encouraging diversity in all its forms" (Brightman and Lewis 2017b, 3; da Cunha 2017), decoupled from economic development and technological progress, while rather caring for a mutually biological and cultural diversification. This is found consistent with other insights illustrated in the volume, like "multispecies resurgence" (Tsing 2017), as evidence tells they are more efficient to deal with the unpredictability of changes than the current projection of human-only ambitions.

Other frameworks such as "resilience" are therefore rejected as diverting the attention from the causes by focusing on come-backs to pre-crisis statuses, while also sustainability is not spared from an historical critique, from its origins to the essential separation between nature and human spheres (Brightman and Lewis 2017b, 2–4). Instead the "anthropology of sustainability" they propose should oppose claims of universalism, which we have encountered in the construction of progress and yet again reminding us the biased philosophical bases stemming from the Enlightenment.

The persistence of similar approaches is echoed in the very first definition provided by Western institutions over the concept of sustainability. Namely, the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) with the so-called *Bruntland Report*, pairing the term in the infamous form of "sustainable development" and thus naturalising economic growth within the concept. An example of legacy can still be seen in the UN "Sustainable Development Goals" (SDGs), with all of the contradictions of the case (Homewood 2017, 91–93), arguably rooted in the institutionalisation of international communities. These in fact tend to hierarchically structure so to end up to care more for funds (Lewis 2008, 14–16) and in turn influencing the decision-makers, developing forms of self-sustainment (Moore 2017, 69) rather than actual conservation.

Regarding conservationism, I have already illustrated how far into extremes such approaches can push academic theories (Brightman and Lewis 2017b, 5–6), which represent an absolute division of the natural and cultural argued to be based in the major religious traditions of the West (Strang 2017, 212) –elsewhere found in Fowles's "absence" as Abrahamic roots for teleology. Perhaps ironically, a similar separation was detected also in the strategies employed by disciplines in different fields, namely a "split" between the technicist and humanist approaches (McNeill 2000, 17–18), rendering both sides potentially inefficient. Now, I have personally experienced this divide, trying to bridge my humanistic background with students and even professors who were taking a more technical approach on the topic. Hence I have ended up asking myself how counter-productive and thus 'unsustainable' this issue renders the outcomes of our studies and practices.

Here I resort to an event, happened during one of the classes of "Anthropology of Sustainability" held by professor Brightman, when we came exactly to this (not uncommon) level of self-reflectivity and another student asked: "Is Anthropology sustainable?".

Indeed, for me this echoed the critical position over the unsustainability of archaeology, but this time it also made me think how other fields (even one I have considered the most ethically mature as cultural anthropology) may end up just with the same existential doubts. Therefore I doubled down it, asking the class if at this point one may even wonder any discipline to be sustainable at

all, as I was curious about different insights which could release me from my own disciplinary conundrum. Furthermore, I was tempted to question whether even seeking for knowledge is a sustainable quest at all –as, in the end, is it the seek of knowledge itself not doomed to sustain its intellectual practitioners over their actual broader benefits?

Of course, as I am arguing now, it is not and I have to thank how attending that class made me react to such an easily dismal formulation. Rather my standpoint here went through the realisation I was projecting a destructive narrative, and the very one I was trying to oppose, namely the instrumental rhetoric device to protect the current system –framing the situation as, if the *status quo* cannot be maintained, then nothing else would work anyway.

On the other side, the mechanism of rhetorical destruction applied for example in anti-heritage discourses (Cooper 2008, 20–21) can more broadly be used by economic sectors with vested interests, instrumentalising waves of anti-intellectualism for mere profits rather than genuine constructive critique. Acknowledged such extremes, the focus should be kept on different paths to walk other than the dominant highway.

Hence my personal take on the matter: it is not knowledge seeking *per-se* the source for unsustainability, but rather *our current* academic settings. The previous approach was about to ask whether the very seek of knowledge is sustainable at all, however this can be considered a flawed question from the start. The bias also stems from how the scientific community have surrounded itself in Western imaginary, some way necessarily detached from the subjects of its studies and so limited in the impacts of its findings due to a dichotomic need for specialisation of the research.

Far from being an original idea, as rooted into critiques of compartmentalisation of academia, I stand for a knowledge seeking which is after all a sustainable practice just as any other activity critically looking for actual improvement –while 'true' unsustainability is to be found in the scientific silos both between disciplines and the rest of society. Other than an arguably necessary strategy due to the increase of scientific knowledge, the very division of expertise may have initially sought to avoid single scholars to have the dangerous pretension of self-sufficiency, thus calling for more collaboration rather than detachment.

Now instead, just as Alfredo González-Ruibal along with Pablo Alonso González and Felipe Criado-Boado (2018, 507) pointed out for the case of archaeology, dominant political systems did never really matured into ones fit to critique their own socio-economics for true improvement. This contrast with the very ideals of knowledge seeking was not fought for, but rather removed through soothing solutions, as we have seen with the rhetoric of adjectives added to a discipline (Gnecco 2019). Such a mechanism may give the illusion of academia critically addressing crucial socio-economic issues, but the overall political disempowerment already in place (González-

Ruibal, González, and Criado-Boado 2018) renders efforts in vain. This goes so far as serving to sustain the discipline through time, as it actually deals with relevant issues, although ultimately not presenting meaningful insights rather than caring for the actual sustainability of the system it is comprehensively part of (Hutchings and La Salle 2019a).

In the rare cases political implications are not left untouched, we have seen how this starts inconclusive internal fights, such as the very one taken as an example regarding a possible archaeology of sustainability. There a tendency to 'schismogenesis' between academics is even more functional to create impasses and render knowledge harmless to any matter outside of the 'Ivory Tower'. Pretty tragically even when scholars believe they have ripped the tower apart, and might be found discussing on the streets, they are still perceived as academics arguing against each other rather than collaborating with people in action. Although I recognise this as my impression on the topic of sustainability, it was built on both personal experiences as activist trying to address the academia in particular and from my studies, mainly inside the humanities.

To back up this hypothesis also on the outside, here it is one simple opinion paper lamenting the same issue in the very field of political sciences, accidentally not sparing a somewhat too external and outdated but still painfully accurate opinion for our particular scenario of focus:

> «**Specialization** is both necessary and troublesome. It is necessary because it allows us to study problems and theories closely; it **is a problem because it takes our minds off broader questions and cuts us off from findings and perspectives in other areas**. It also **encourages the development of arcane concepts and terms that make communication difficult within social science and impossible outside it**. But **these problems are not unique to science**. The reigning ideology **in the humanities** is both "antiscientific" and **involves jargons that seal off most of the discourse from the outer world**, which is **particularly ironic considering that for many people in these fields the goal of their study is to change society.**»
> (Jervis 2002, 188; *emphases mine*)

Insofar, we are still barely debating on social change and politically not joining the fight for it, although –more than other academic fields as noted in this case- we are not staying true to our own disciplinary commitments: in other words, not being sustainable, on a social level.

'True' unsustainability thus seems to lay in the fragmentation and lack of effective communication and understanding between academic disciplines. An interesting parallel which can be drawn is the capitalisation of academia as some sort of Fordist 'assembly line', where the atomisation of tasks to maximises the profitable results, while lifting researchers from responsibilities. This also causes the argued loss of political charge in research outcomes, reducing agency and inhibiting changes to maintain the *status quo*, even at the cost of contaminations from

other fields which may have proven effective for the very advancement of disciplinary sectors. Ultimately this connects with matters of psychological disavowal, passing through intellectual and scientific distancing from the crisis at hand as illustrated in my introductory chapter, instrumental part of a broader "culture of uncare" ideologically functional to the current neoliberal agenda (Weintrobe 2019). As such a process aims to disempower scholars in their individual response, and limit their effective collaboration, I therefore already called for kindness (Fitzpatrick 2021) as yet another form of resistance within an oppositive approach to academia.

It is in fact communication difficulties which can be considered one of the major frustrations in collaborative works, as noticed by Jenny Walklate and Adair Richards (2012, 458–459), while their whole paper stresses the importance of non conflictual and rather symbiotic academic settings. It consists in a due synthesis after having criticised specialisation as disempowerment, defining interdisciplinarity as a better approach while of course not running to the other extreme and rejecting forms of specialisation. Instead the stance here is to accept both in a more informed and organic framework, perhaps requiring even more radical changes throughout academia, given the difficulties encountered so far with rather several different approaches like inter-disciplinary, multi-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary –to further cross-disciplinary- ones. Now given these words are not exactly synonyms, a brief reflection is needed for the choice and way they are used in the present text, as among the others "crossdisciplinarity" should be the one most affine to the intents of my dissertation. In fact this term came to be a synthesis of the other two, while also being characterised with an integrated approach with the public, according to the guidelines of a recent paper specifically focused in sustainability and collaboration (Klein 2020). The same research also traced an interesting review of the use of the words "sustainable" and "sustainability", consisting in a more accurate counterpart to the rather raw statistics brought up by Hutchings and La Salle (2019a) on the same topic. While it is not my intention here to compare the two, I nonetheless still value their critique as well as the one by Gnecco (2019) in exposing the lack of philosophical and ethical awareness in the use of words and adjectives around sustainability, where shape might take predominance over practices and vice-versa. Therefore I reserve my right to employ the terms interchangeably as long as the textual context defines their features, while I also re-address to the more in-depth account recently provided by Jan Cornelius Schmidt (2021) involving the philosophy of all the umbrella notions in relation to sustainability.

To conclude, Latour (2017) already pointed out the opportunities for anthropologists to give meaningful insights during this era of the Anthropocene, going beyond the boundaries of academic disciplines. Provided instances of different approaches demonstrated successful in

archaeology too, even further elaborated in "collaborative synthetic research" (Altschul *et al.* 2018, 21–22), archaeologists are called to "transgress time" with their evidence of this era (Edgeworth 2021) and possibly have a truly positive impact rather than an unsustainable one.

At this point, my perspective on the latter case can be summarised by framing unsustainability as a matter of uniformity and individuality, where theories and practices are used to isolate and disempower agency. On the contrary 'true' sustainability is both diverse and collective, in an almost *organic* sense of not-artificially-separated, where actions are encouraged *and* awareness is raised over diversifications happening in all the spheres of reality *also* because of us. As the environment is changing in disruptive ways mainly due to our actions, so we can change the socio-cultural and economic settings driving the crisis. Quoting the main anthropological source for this section (Brightman and Lewis 2017a), who's editors have chosen this contribution as the last chapter on purpose (Brightman and Lewis 2017b, 28), I could not better transition to the next section of this dissertation than noting how proposals towards change can no more

> «…be dismissed as regression, as it would be based on recently emerging, trans-disciplinary understandings of economic processes and on new digital technologies.
> **History is not reversible, but we can take stock of millennia of historical experience in order to envisage our future**.»
> (Hornborg 2017, 304)

This historical framework, debating and moreover supporting an idea of sustainability towards diversity of approaches and alternatives, was indeed a fertile ground for me and clearly resonating with the metanarrative of Graeber and Wengrow (2018; 2021) which is indeed posed at the core of my own proposal unravelled further below.

3. Proposing sustainable narratives in Archaeology

The actual proposal of this dissertation can now be illustrated with humbly adequate awareness of the situation, without the presumption of being a completely original thesis, but rather drawing from the ideas presented so far and further below.

Henceforth, stemming from the critique of sustainability and its application to the discipline of archaeology, I will further problematise it according to the previously undergone deconstruction of progress and development.

Afterwards I argue that the apparent impasse resulting at this stage should be associated with the deconstruction of heritage, as well as with different ways to approach cultural rights.

This will once more make relevant the quest on how to tell a different history of humanity which could change the course of its current trajectory toward an unlivable planet.

To do so, I draw from various stances to move forward this impasse, as the matters at stake are too urgent and pervasive to dwell exclusively in theoretical debates any longer.

I subsequently present my proposal to address this issues from the standpoint of archaeology, namely calling for sustainable narratives in archaeology.

On this regard I will illustrate the main concept and its primary implications, trying to contextualise the features integrated into it.

Ultimately, the process of elaboration of this proposal is further informed by the critiques gathered from the relevant literature and preliminary feedback.

This is done in view of addressing research questions for the actual deployment of this proposed idea in the ethnographic survey project, also in order to point out its possible limits and problematising its outcomes.

One further preamble might be taken into consideration, that is the very propositional nature of this thesis, meant to suggest different paradigms and perspectives to look at both the issues and tools to address them –rather than trying to impose new tools or advancing sterile critiques to win over other approaches. I feel like this disclaimer is particularly needed in a context so fond of competition and which I personally experienced as being so little prone to welcome good practice in communication. Rather, once again I believe in radical kindness as a form of resistance which should be at the core of academic collaboration (Fitzpatrick 2021), starting from granting myself the chance to fail gloriously (Graham 2019) in the attempt to present my ideas.

3.1. Beyond rhetorical impasse: Keep Moving (Forward)

The deconstruction of ideas such as progress and development, as further elaborated from the standpoint of archaeology, previously seemed to lead us to a very dangerous dead end as, "without a viable alternative to the myth of progress, the old evolutionary metanarratives tend to linger in the shadows" (Fowles 2010, 34).

As illustrated before, the underlying construct of presence (as opposed to absence) has not been properly addressed, along with the drawbacks of a short-sighted teleological perspective. As a consequence, even groundbreaking paradigms focusing on material/relational complexity, such as the ones presented by Latour (1993) and Hodder (2012), could not but fall back to historically biased agenda of unsustainable progress echoing Morgan's *Ancient Society* ([1877] 1974).
According to Fowles (2016), not even a more recent "ontological turn" within social sciences actually presented a better way to look at human societies in the past, as perfect subjects (be them subaltern humans or objects) keep repurposing at the advantage of hegemonic structures.
Furthermore, Graeber and Wengrow (2021, 2–15) unravelled an apparently eternal return of discourses over a supposed State of Nature contended between Rousseau and Hobbes, in a dichotomic trend demonstrated to be as both dull and dangerous.
Similarly, the case for sustainability in archaeology seems to have been left unsolved, with a strong opposition on two fronts making the most radical critiques (Hutchings and La Salle 2019a; Gnecco 2019) standing against the discipline's best intents and hopes (Guttmann-Bond 2019b; Holtorf and Hogberg 2019; Pikirayi 2019). If, on the one side, an over-problematisation of the adjective 'sustainabile' seems to lead to an unnecessary halt of any archaeological effort, on the other side responses diverted the core of the critique thus confirming a self-sustaining trend of such contributions (Hutchings and La Salle 2019b).

At first glance what we are presented here is a two-fronts impasse, which I came to confront with several times in the course of my studies, ultimately deeming it to be 'just' an apparent – though extremely crucial for an informed discussion- conundrum. Moreover, the very theoretical aspect of the latter debate helped me to elaborate a strategy moving forward the appearance of both dead ends, as philosophical matters personally trigger me to seek for practical applications.

What I suggest in the end is in fact to move into action, in both the cases of different ways to look at progress through history and the matter of sustainability in archaeology, by putting them together in order to potentially have better chance to deal with their related critical issues.
The necessity to confront with this impasse directly connects to the other deconstruction process

undergone earlier in this dissertation, operated in regard to the idea of heritage, as one of the inevitable drivers is the advocacy for better definitions and practice impacting human well-being.

On this particular matter I have taken one paper by Hodder (2010) as a compelling call to make cultural heritage rights an integral part to reframe narratives, around the topic of both archaeology and sustainability, making it a cornerstone of this work. He argued that if we are to seriously talk about social justice, then human rights and cultural heritage discourse should get closer (*ibid.*: 863) –and ultimately a radical reshape in cultural heritage rights would be needed. Namely, from pillars of ownership and descent built upon a problematic colonial world-view, we should rather nurture roots based on the short and moreover long-term social well-being of people engaged with their heritages. Calling for this shift, Hodder consistently advocates for justice, as such represents an alternative for communities to fulfil their capabilities while also recognising their responsibilities over others with conflicting interests. The broader public is affected by the outcomes of the archaeological community of practice and by our processes of knowledge creation, in ways which can be productive or destructive, thus we have the duty to think about the consequences in terms of rights of others as well (*ibid.*: 863–864).

One of the claims in this paper is to expose the lack of training for heritage managers as well as archaeologists on how to make such crucial concerns pivotal in their activities, rendering these almost trivial by missing the point of their own social relevance as research works. Even more, this holds true in front of the climate and ecological crisis, considering the consequent social disruption we are nowadays undeniably facing and are but yet to witness at its worst.

Stemming from the possibility outlined by Hodder for a successful shift in cultural heritage rights, I therefore argue that the discipline of archaeology and its practitioners can –and have to- move forward from this theoretical impasse. Violent disruption in the lives of billions of people requires to be addressed by putting aside anything preventing meaningful actions, from the bare standpoint of human rights, while remaining even more valid for cultural heritage experts and archaeologists in particular. Given the responsibilities and opportunities previously illustrated, our discipline has the narrative potential for presenting alternative discourses and the duty of limiting the proliferation of those threatening humankind and the majority of other species.

In my studies, this had once more made relevant the quest on how to tell a new history of humanity, one which could possibly change the course of its current trajectory toward an unlivable planet –or rather the self-fulfilling disaster prophecy pushed by the neoliberal narrative. At this point I was presented with the preliminary findings of the joint effort by Graber and Wengrow (2018). They were arguing for several of the biases pointed out so far, against the

dominant 'grand narratives' on human past reflected on our present progress towards the future. Such came as yet another support to my critical stance, drafting the potential for new points of view, but mainly questioning further the *status quo* of research in history and prehistory. Nonetheless expanding from it, the same authors later proposed an actual alternative to the myth of progress, "one that restores our ancestors to their full humanity" (Graeber and Wengrow 2021, 24–25), hence addressing the pivotal point around 'absence' generating part of the impasse I went through. Their intention was to set in motion a new metanarrative about the of human history, also animated by an active faith in direct action.

As this standpoint met the ones I have anticipated before, my own proposal for this dissertation consequently draws from their work too, as already made explicit in previous chapters. One of the main acknowledgements for me, given the path described so far, was the very existence of other projects proposing an informed path out of similarly overarching conceptual impasses.

Now, finally some lights have been shed over the stalemate on how to present the history of humanity, as well as on the matter of narratives around cultural heritage. What still remains apparently unsolved is the debate on sustainability and archaeology, which I will subsequently deal with as another step towards my proposal.

As a reminder, the debate started by Hutchings and La Salle (2019a) revolving around the term 'sustainable' applied to archaeology, calling for a radical rethink of the discipline rather than a gradual approach as advocated by responses such us that of Holtorf and Högberg (2019). The latter pair of authors however also provided a fertile middle-ground by referring to the importance of social justice as meant by Hodder (2010), thus fundamentally agreeing with their contestants on seeking actual well-being for the people involved in heritage-related projects.

While the debate is still ongoing, as already stated by some authors it is crucial to keep confronting on it. This in order to "avoid" and avert certain dangerous and hypocritical trajectories of the phenomenon –at least major ones such as the 'greenwashing trend'. As suggested before, from the author's own perspective, one useful move would be not to separate social and environmental sustainability. When discussing of the applications and critiques of the term itself in archaeology, this non-dichotomic approach helps develop a deeper and more just understanding of the concept as outlined by Hodder. Therefore, talking about sustainability in archaeology should take care of environmental application of the discipline as well as at its social impact on the public (meant as both affected communities and archaeologists themselves), in order to both be relevant and actually sustainable through time.

On these terms Guttmann-Bond's (2019b) call for "more archaeology", if properly informed, does not necessarily clash with the urgency of actions as recommended by Hutchings and La Salle

(2019b, 1673). They in turn risk to inhibit practical counter-measures, by remaining on the philosophical field of debate themselves.

As a synthesis by rephrasing key sentences in both papers, I see a viable solution could therefore be to "do more archaeology with philosophy", acknowledging the need for direct action on one hand, and deeper critical and political stances on the other. However, if we have to stay true to both positions, then we should consistently conclude that what is at stake is the very continuation of research making.

In other words, the middle-stance enabling to move forward the impasse is also a "go big or go home" mechanism, with necessarily ambitious requirements preventing –in case of failure- to turn into a detrimental tool. In practice, if an application of best theories and practices results possible and efficient, then research must and can be continued, otherwise an outright abandonment of any project not meeting these requirements would be the most honest and moreover useful choice. As radical as it may seem, if we want to summarise the compelling risks of failing in such enterprises and actively worsen the situation (as so clearly stated under the philosophical standpoint of Hutchings and La Salle), we should admit this is the most consistent position a research project should take when dealing with an archaeology of sustainability.

Ultimately rather than keep on competing rhetorically, the two positions do not necessary clash with one another as one critically informs the other, but the final outcome must be to consistently act or give up with unethical ways of seeking sustainability. Positive outcomes can only be achieved through collaborative and synthetic research, recognising the dimension of archaeologists as a community of practice and including it in a broader crossdisciplinary set of approaches (Altschul *et al.* 2018). Among all are probably ethical and anthropological studies as, drawing from the discussion on the anthropology of sustainability, we found out how the unsustainability in academia may ultimately lay in the compartmentalisation of research fields. Thus, the same over-specialisation plays an important role as an index to tell if a project is truly meeting its core commitments, producing knowledge with actual positive impact on different scales and related people. Moreover proceeding this way out of the impasse definitely requires an active engagement of the very same critical debate and practices together with a broader public, as once asked by Holtorf (2007), in particular that of affected communities.

Once again, apparent contrasts are not so irreconcilable and conceptual bases already provided ways to move forward, yet proportioned reactions seems to lack behind despite the gravity of the situation. This may seem a direct consequence of the radical stance one could end up with, as outlined right above, but I argue unwillingness operates at other levels. First of all, the

psychological one already hinted at the beginning of this work, arguably pushed by socio-cultural and political pressures in the context of each community of practice.

At this point in fact, a common conundrum comes on stage, namely the involvement of experts from research and cultural resource management into a public dimension of economics, politics and laws. Why risk so? Although all the connections, responsibilities and duties may be clear, which role can we −as a community- take in pushing for such 'sustainable projects' outside the academic ivory tower?

On this regard, particularly given the very pressing reasons why to present this topic as a dissertation in the first place, the need is for "an archaeology that is ready to intervene in wider public debates not limited to issues of heritage or of local relevance, is not afraid of defending its expert knowledge in the public arena, and is committed to reflective, critical teaching" (González-Ruibal, González, and Criado-Boado 2018, 507). Such a call was made against "reactionary populism" in archaeology, calling for different critical heritage studies. It both questioned the relations of power archaeologists are involved into, arguably mid-way between not being so "fearsome agents of consensus" while also having an ethical duty to exploit their positions. Nonetheless in the paper they enquire who "the People" we refer to actually are, going into deep philosophical problematisation, without indiscriminately criminalising any research. One further consideration, tailored on Hutchings and La Salle critique, is that "predatory capitalism does not need archaeologists, simply because it does not need legitimising narratives" (*ibid.*, 509–510). Thus, despite the ethical need to address philosophical issues, such an approach has not prevent to engage with critical heritage studies and practices by retiring to rhetorical debates only.

In fact, drawing after Mark Pluciennik (2015), their vision for a socially committed archaeology asks for neither submitting as tools of ultimate oppression nor retreating to position of spectators. While such a stance radically challenges the systemic implications of heritage, to its very definition, it does not mean being anti-heritage as that would have yet other negative impacts (González-Ruibal, González, and Criado-Boado 2018, 513). Nonetheless, they also point out the function of interface of archaeology as well as other social disciplines and argue for their instrumental uses, to diminish their impacts:

> «It can be argued that many social archaeologists (and cultural anthropologists) have
> ***promoted an agenda*** during the last decades ***that has left us politically and theoretically***
> ***disempowered***. By social archaeology we mean all archaeology that is concerned with the
> ***interface between the discipline and society***, including community and indigenous
> archaeologies, and heritage studies (Merriman 2004; Smith & Wobst 2004; Smith 2006).»
> (González-Ruibal, González, and Criado-Boado 2018, 507)

Clearly then it is not a matter to prevent cultural heritage management to happen, or putting research against the need for preservation, though the tensions in the discipline have a long tradition creating yet another unnecessary dichotomy with its commercial sector. However, even there, critical literature suggested solutions which even appeal to legislative codes –either enforcing or exposing the limits of a basically unsustainable hegemonic system.

Therefore, the practice of involvement of heritage professionals into this kind of debate opens up for unsettling ethical question: for example, how should archaeologists behave and stand for, in the case of threats and destruction of heritage brought up by any supposed 'economical development' project?

A quote on the spot for such a dilemma would be Meskell (2005, 123) stating that archaeologists "have traditionally operated on the assumption that they are not implicated in the representation and struggles of living peoples and that all such political engagement is negatively charged". Instead debates about archaeology, in the words of the same author, are indeed about identity and culture in the 'archaeological present', where the past is part of contemporary society. As further elaborated by Shoup (2007, 251) "Archaeology's power in contemporary politics therefore offers archaeologists two choices: to allow others to dominate the public portrayal of archaeology, or to create an advocacy agenda that reflects their professional goals and ethical responsibilities.".

Hence one of the possible conclusions might be to have heritage workers standing for strong ethical codes, set by archaeological societies and integrated by individual professionals, as already suggested by Shoup (2007, 250–252) with a dedicated paragraph on environmental norms consistently referring to the *Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* (UNESCO 1972) and the so-called *Valletta Treaty* (Council of Europe 1992).

Finally another suggested approach, based on the critical literature around indigenous cultures and processes of decolonisation, brings the discussion a little further by claiming that the heritage discourses should go "beyond the code" in order to avoid obvious pitfalls in the bureaucratisation of social values (González-Ruibal 2018, 346–347) –and I would add 'environmental' as well.

A sad example is the management of natural heritage frequently made by mere evaluation of the ratio of built surface over wild areas within administrative borders. Such terms inevitably are limited, not accounting for the comprehensive and interdependent nature of ecosystems, as these do not comply to legal agreements nor to disciplinary areas of academic competence.

In front of such internal and external pressure, the discipline of archaeology should in my opinion reframe itself and along with other field of studies it can and thus should overcome academic boundaries to foster collaborative research. As we have seen so far, for archaeology this could

mean to focus more on interpretation and communication, hence presenting various critical issues related to the narrative discourses produced. Given the suggestions elaborated by literature and case studies, research can deal with such a deeply problematised context, without giving up to its scientific method by explicitly adopting ethically informed approaches in studying and presenting its processes and outcomes.

All of this is why I agree and am trying to apply a provoking stance, calling out the academics retiring higher in their ivory tower as the very foundations of our society crumble, instead of either running downstairs to sustain the pillars or to bring them down altogether – so to help building new and actually more sustainable architectures. Positions of disavowal to engage in direct actions have to be challenged in particular, so I cannot but fully quote the words of Giuseppe Delmestri, written in the *Impact of Social Science* blog for the London School for Economics. To the proposition "Can research have impact without losing neutrality?" he replies with a bold "yes", referencing to the arguments made in his latest paper (Delmestri 2022a), ending up the blog piece with a direct call:

> «**Speak up**, **join a movement**, or **engage** creatively with the existential challenges we are confronting: **you will be no less 'neutral' than a colleague hidden behind the political shield of the ideology of value-neutrality**.»
> (Delmestri 2022b; *emphases mine*)

This is quite an occasion, for me as a master degree student, to bring up the topic along with its share of critical reflections to the attention of an academic committee. Finally, as written in the next section, I am further taking the chance to elaborate and propose my personal approach in order to gain more insights and potentially deploy them into a better informed research project.

3.2. My proposal: Go Big *and* Go Home

Moving forward the impasse and passing through the standpoints illustrated right above, I have in fact inevitably asked myself: what can *I actually do* about this crisis right now?
As already stated, I am exploiting my privilege as part of the academic community, however I would also like to involve the very condition of citizen I benefit of as well as the position I hold into the local community where I was born. Therefore, the core of this proposal stems from the academic knowledge I have gathered in my path, given the local background I came from (i.e.: my village of birth Canavaccio) and the personal rights I have enjoyed as part of a broader social structure (*i.e.*: the nation-state of Italy from the '90s to today).
It is through these acknowledgments that I have elaborated and am now proposing this thesis,

believing I should do whatever it takes given the gravity of the global situation and its consequent impacts, at the very least on the various contexts around me and which I care for.

Despite breaking through various notional stalemates, from my perspective a proper pathway out was still lacking, one which could take advantage of the role of archaeology in such an overwhelming crisis. As the centrality of the narrative framework in the discipline was evident to me, the struggle was to find out a possible pivotal concept around which to introduce different perspectives on human history.

The familiar way I looked at human history was flawed, I have concluded since then, rooted as it is in a system of evaluation of 'progress' in turn born within a strongly colonial and overtly positivistic context. Such paradigm fails to represent the complexity of the past in favour of a linear retrospective, pointing at our current and globalised *status quo* in the present as the last stage of such a progression. Namely, such a model for progress have the influence of backing up ideas of universal values in arts, technologies and social organisations, highly criticized for their biased and insufficient bases to frame human diversity. My claim here is that, while experts in the field seems very aware of the limitations of such models (Graeber and Wengrow 2021, 4–5), the conservative tendency of academia is preventing the broader public to emancipate from such almost 'naturalised' perspectives in looking at the past.

The parallelism drawn following archaeological categories is: as crafting metals may require more steps to produce a materially more efficient tool than one made with stone, mere technological and resource complexity is somewhat assumed as an 'objective' parameter to compare societies, deeming those which accumulated more of it as 'more advanced' or 'developed'. One such example is how we consider our Contemporary Age against previous times and Pre-historic Ages, as well as how we define the so-called 'First World' compared with 'Least Developed Countries'.

In a similar fashion, the course of human history has been integrated with 'natural' development of social organisation through narratives unsurprisingly justifying the current *status quo*, as again Graeber and Wengrow (2021, 498–499) draw in their conclusions reminding the role of sciences:

> «Why does it seem so odd, even counter-intuitive, to imagine people of the remote past as making their own history (even if not under conditions of their own choosing)? Part of the answer no doubt lies in how we have come to define science itself, and social science in particular. [...]
> This is one reason why most 'big histories' place such a strong focus on technology. Dividing up the human past according to the primary material from which tools and weapons were made (Stone Age, Bronze Age, Iron Age) or else describing it as a series of revolutionary breakthroughs (Agricultural Revolution, Urban Revolution, Industrial Revolution), they then assume that the technologies themselves largely determine the shape that human societies

will take for centuries to come – or at least until the next abrupt and unexpected breakthrough comes along to change everything again.»

Ultimately, a similar framework downplays the potential for diverse and inclusive narratives which could be employed to deconstruct rather deterministic ways of looking at history, instead empowering societies to imagine possible futures from more critically constructive perspectives.

Despite some theories pointed at these flaws, even those apparently more progressive fail to avoid an underlying retrospective approach, although trying to apply different parameters to evaluate human complexity through time.
Stemming from the idea of 'absence' (Fowles 2010) to problematise the studies in material culture, this could be a more productive way of looking at different civilisations in time as well as in space. This way, the very absence of a feature in a certain culture –as perceived from one's own- should be evaluated a a simple difference and whether it implies a different approach to same issues (material, social, conceptual *etcetera*...). Depending on critically contextualised answers to this proposition, only then could we say similar features in different cultures are compensated (or rather 'dealt with') somewhere else, or whether there is no need in the observed community to contemplate such aspect (thus granting value to the absence *per se* rather than framing it as a 'lack'). However, to avoid falling into another simplistic form of determinism, not all of 'absence' necessarily imply compensation or else, as we would then biased thinking that every civilisation always tends to optimize itself at the best possible. Such would be yet another error of retrospective, as we pointed out human cultures and communities do not fit into any 'natural' trajectory of evolution –arguably not following the 'best fitness' rule itself.

Then again: how to evaluate these possible differences? How can studies tell if absence has its role and value, instead of representing an actual lack of features, without falling into essentialist drawbacks? Ultimately: how to consistently identify and study differences by also limiting retrospective at its best?

The answers suggested to me by the literature seemed to either point at totally giving up into 'evaluating' civilisations on a comparative scale, or to openly declare a parameter, recognising its political value in the context of study. This means making transparent an always –and necessarily- not fully objective background of the research and knowledge creation process, to revolve the evaluation around with a logical sequence of observations, aiming to be consistent to the context taken into consideration (*i.e.*: an aware and almost self-contained evaluation model).
As this approach seemed very comprehensive to me, I could not however overlook its level of theoretical elaboration, being very similar to the structure of the scientific method actually. In fact

to a broader public which was made used to a very different historical narrative by the hegemonic discourse, also supported by archaeology, a consequent struggle would be expected when presented with such counterproposal. Thus I have started thinking of an actual alternative to the way we employ the idea of 'progress', one which could first-hand satisfy the current habits of still having to comparatively evaluate societies, while also providing a necessarily disruptive perspective –one practically able to turn 'upside-down' usual rankings starting from present days.

To sum-up, the dominant discourse on the history of humanity resulted both inconsistent and ultimately unsustainable in itself as it generates the very causes for its collapse. Thus, there is the need for a re-frame at the very least and a different constructive approach to the underlying philosophical debate, first of all to recognise its theoretical nature risking to remain inside of academia only –with the complicity of mainly social sciences and archaeology in particular. Different terms of evaluation were long suggested by Hodder to better frame cultural heritages as human rights, as shifting to justice and well-being in affected communities would be the only way to make it relevant while respecting diversities. His reflexive approach reminds us once more how "universal outstanding values" are

> «...defined by the scientist, by the archaeology specialist evaluating evidence in objective terms. Science and cultural value here are hand in hand.
> **The danger** with such estimations, h**owever scientific and objective they may appear** to be **is that they derive from a western tradition of scholarship** (Byrne 1991). The monuments are evaluated in terms of objective and abstract knowledge about cultural variation, types, and norms. The **heritage is surrounded in expert knowledge**, or rather it is defined through practices of expertise that have a distanced universalizing character. Valuation of heritage in these terms **cannot deal with the different claims on the past that are today made by a wide variety of diverse communities**.»
> (Hodder 2010, 862–863; *emphases mine*)

Now, an alternative metanarrative has already been made available, one dealing with the very roots of the science of history in a way that corresponds more closely to our current state of knowledge, while also advocating for the systemic changes we need. As extensively illustrated this was the aim of the book book by Graeber and Wengrow (2021, 24–25), presenting a new history of humanity and science alike, namely a way of studying history which doesn't reduce human complexity –or as I would say now: also without making it pivotal for progress- and actually speaks for the "full humanity" of our "ancestors".
Hence, my efforts focused into finding an approach more directly addressing the impelling matter of climate and ecological disruption. All of this without forgetting, and rather making central, the

socio-cultural impacts and roles of this existential crisis and making this narrative a meaningful tool of study and practice in a local context.

In order to support critical reflections over implications and responsibilities, as well as possible alternatives to our current paradigm, my choice now quite obviously fell onto 'sustainability'. This was a keyword which would both be familiar and at the same time quite groundbreaking, once properly contextualised against its own conceptual traps and instrumentalised misuse.

I argue that, re-framing narratives of human history towards a critical notion of sustainability, could effectively support the shift from merely sustaining archaeology to provide actual positive impacts on human well-being first. A similar switch has nonetheless to recognise the 'habitus' of evaluating civilisations, as part of a construct fostered by the humanities as disciplines complacent to hegemonic discourses, which proved to be detrimental to achieve their own goals of granting a continued story of knowledge creation processes for humans. In this behalf, seeking a true form of crossdisciplinary approach –as opposed to academic silos as potential origin of ultimate unsustainability- is deemed as a vital core of this paradigm's proposal.

The main parameter I would like to set is thus sustainability meant as both social and environmental, as a way to evaluate 'how advanced' a civilisation is, only at a first stage of comparison to raise awareness of the matter. Then this would work as a waypoint for further problematisation, as comparing communities by their employment of organisational tools and technologies requires further acknowledgement of diversities. This process is meant to constructively re-contextualise the possibility of maintaining such diversities through time, while also achieving the possibility to sustain diverse socio-cultural relationships between communities and continuous environmental exchange with natural resources.

Sustainability as a parameter is consistently declared here to be rooted in our present days' need, namely to provide different narratives on how to look at societies according with their many different socio-cultural and material tools of organisation and sustain. These communities could still be considered and value themselves as 'advanced', despite the radical changes already required as consequences of unsustainable paradigms followed so far, shifting the focus from economic growth to an holistic idea of well-being while also facilitating processes of de-growth.

Such an approach, comprehensive of the shift proposed in narrative and paradigm, is in fact meant to be applied together with actual groups of people in local communities as yet another "attempt to begin to tell another, more hopeful and more interesting story" (Graeber and Wengrow 2021, 4). My focus is not to actually build anew their alternative metanarrative, but rather to present a possible paradigm to follow along that line of stories, namely not simplifying

human complexities through time nor evaluating diversities through accumulation. As we have seen Fowles (2010) warned us about such a possibility, here the work of experts is required to be critically formed of cutting-edge stances, in order to mainly serve as a facilitator to build new contextual and local narratives. These are in turn to be continuously negotiated to maintain their meaningfulness and actual benefit for the affected communities, mitigated for their 'sustainability' through time as well their resilience to adapt beyond schemes of predictability which poorly suits ever-changing contexts.

Not surprisingly, my critical research for a 'true sustainability' somewhat coincides with the words of Graeber and Wengrow (2021, 24–25) about their own project, namely being of it necessarily uneven and incomplete, a quest to discover the right question, ultimately asking "What does it imply about possibilities for social change today?". In fact as stated before, my aim is not only to look at the narratives of the past: rather, acknowledging their roots and relevance in present discourses, it is to encourage alternative ways of living for communities to be seen as valid. This need arisen to contrast the negative outlook assigned to systems which differ and thus may threaten the hegemonic pillars of Western *status quo*, as we have seen it can result easier to imagine the end of the world than an end of capitalism. It would be an achievement to even present alternative narratives as at least not intrinsically characterised within a shared imaginary, meaning to re-frame ways of living chronologically 'going back' with success, so that moving in that direction is not seen to have intrinsic value and rather evaluated case-by-case.

In the Introduction chapter I have presented why I have decided to embark in this topic and, repurposing the metaphor of the vehicle heading down a precipice (Luten 1964 *quoted in* Keeling 1970, 16–17), I have asked myself what was so scary about moving to the "receding tracks" and moreover if such turn would even point *back* and not just 'somewhere else'. Now I can knowledgeably say this is one of the aims, or rather questions, I would like to pose in order to help and imagine stories where we fully express our humanity and do not inevitably need to take the fall –one we cannot afford to risk.

In fact the purpose is not only to look at the narrative framework in the past, but also to acknowledge its roots in present discourses and the relevance for the broader public, as well as for singular individuals. The idea is to encourage alternative ways of living life, different from the ones pushed as 'best' by hegemonic models, and nonetheless make these alternatives be seen as positive or at least not inherently negative. Even when chronologically pointing behind us, moving in that direction should be seen with no intrinsic value and rather evaluated case-by-case, contextually in a complex relationship between the local and the global, collective and individual. To suggest such a different paradigm of evaluation, means for me to start building on the

alternative history of humanity already outlined by Graeber and Wengrow. I propose this paradigm as a tool to first apply on the broader discourse on 'civilisations', considered as familiar macro-categories of cultures attributed to populations in different ages, to consequently deploy at the local level of 'communities' and their self-identifications. Hence, from a rather generic approach looking at social and environmental levels of sustainability, the concept should take into account its most critical stances to build contextually relevant perspectives. Namely, the aim should be that of enabling a particular community to reflect upon its processes of knowledge creation and socio-environmental organisation.

The ultimate goal –or, better, a continuously negotiated input- is for the community to find their way of maintaining the very possibility to further develop a diversity of approaches, being accepted to change over time, addressing at their best the unpredictability of social and natural conditions (Brightman and Lewis 2017b, 17; Hastrup 2017). As a perhaps less ambitious expectation, or initial stage, my aim is to present my argument so to make a community look at themselves with more curious eyes: to rethink different ways of living, in order to foster effective actions on the regard of a climate and ecological crisis, finally recognised as a social issue too.

Therefore I would like to follow the quest for practices which are more 'sustainable' not just sustaining what already exists, but rather sustain the capacity for changes (Brightman and Lewis 2017b, 20) trying to put into practice a positive loop of feedback from indigenous knowledge and engagement. This, according to Graeber and Wengrow (2018; 2021), influenced the history of humanity and led them to try and 'change' its course at least for the part which has already happened and such are the tracks I am pointing at with the presented proposal.

3.2.1. Features and implications

The implications of my proposed shift in evaluation are therefore varied and not necessarily 'safe' in terms of consequences, both in the social sphere and policies as well as politics, This is meant onsistently with the idea of making "provocation" out of archaeology, in the way it is called to engage with society in the political ways it has the possibility and duty to do (González-Ruibal, González, and Criado-Boado 2018, 513–514; *see also* González-Ruibal 2013).

My proposal is aware of the very discipline framed as a narrative, seen in historical perspective where the process itself of engaging with the past demonstrated to have political implications (Graeber and Wengrow 2021, 6–7). I would like this to make a positive difference on how we see (or don't see) possible alternatives and widen our choices. In fact this kind of broader approach was overlooked by professionals "mostly concerned with gaining specific intellectual insights about the past" as Holtorf (2005, 548) noted, despite "Incidentally, emphasizing methodical human

inquiry and idealizing persistence in adverse circumstances is also closely related to the spirit of the Enlightenment and thus the modern scientific worldview." He then continues with an advice I deem here relevant after almost two decades and serving as a bridge to next paragraphs:

> «**We are thus well advised to encourage any inquiries** about the world **and not just those that resemble the methods and practices favoured by the scientists of our time**. I therefore advocate **a commitment to multiple approaches and values** simultaneously brought to bear on archaeological landscapes, sites and objects, **whether by professional archaeologists or others**.»
> (Holtorf 2005, 548; *emphases mine*)

Furthermore from the relational standpoint of knowledge negotiation, we have seen how this call was recently echoed in anthropology by prescribing locally engaged and collaborative approaches for a truer sustainability (*e.g.*: Adams 2017; Almeida 2017) extending a shared imaginary even to activism (Rival 2017) –as already backed up in the introductory chapter of this dissertation and personally experienced through the communicative efforts by Scientist Rebellion. The outlined approaches in my field of study implicate that a project like mine would inevitably have to draw from the field of research of Archaeological Ethnography, in its early definitions (Hamilakis and Anagnostopoulos 2009), as well as from Community Archaeology (Thomas 2017) in the broader framework of changing of long-lasting Public Archaeology studies (Moshenska 2017). In particular though, it better pertains to the features of crossdisciplinary and multi-temporal perspectives in public engagement, while also focusing on the critical aspects of the discipline. Namely the potential to elaborate diverse narratives, not necessarily sanctioned through the epistemology of experts but rather deployed by various groups of people (Hamilakis and Anagnostopoulos 2009, 69–70), also made the authors of the referenced paper take a stance to acknowledge the political framework explicitly running in such practices.

However, what could be some possible practical approaches in archaeology, stemming from creating different narratives around sustainability? Pivotal surely is public engagement, thus the dissemination of knowledge along with the actual involvement in its creation, which I have confronted myself with since I first saw Gabriel Moshenska's (2017, 6, *figure* 1.1) graphical rendition of "some common types of public archaeology". The first I deepened my studies on were mainly involving the use of digital frameworks, holding a wide potential for dissemination as well as a possible horizontal deployment of narratives, from "Digital Public Archaeology" (Richardson 2013) to the field of study but also application and dissemination defined by Andrew Reinhard (2018) as "Archaeogaming". Some notable instances collecting all of these different involvements of electronics go from the early experiments by Maurizio Forte (*et al.*, 2012) in the use of 3D

virtual reconstructions for the Çatalhöyük site, passing from the UK-based *DigVentures* social enterprise (Wilkins 2020; website: https://digventures.com/) and the Italian *Let's Dig Again* community project by Andrea Bellotti's (2015; website: https://www.letsdigagain.it/), to the *ArchaeoSoup* productions by Marc Barkman-Astles (2019; website: https://archaeosoup.com/).

Soon enough though and contextualising them in the broader framework of Digital Humanities, I had the chance to problematise this field of studies with critiques going further their superficial non-conventionality, delving into issues of digital ethics (Richardson 2018). Thus I have further discovered critical aspects, from those more particularly tied to the front-and-back-end use of algorithms for commerce and the ethical implications in the entertainment industry (Graham 2020a, 2020b), still influenced by some degree of "digital colonialism" (Avila Pinto 2018), to the very (in)accessibility of the web as reported by the Alliance for Affordable Internet (A4AI 2020).

Therefore, I started checking at the same narrative approaches though with more 'material' features, or rather the ways involving 'tools' more widely accessible and diffused within human communities. Easily forgotten in their simplicity, these could be expressed in their full potential to gain as much appeal as digital elaborations, considering different practices have refined them in millennia of traditions. Namely here I refer to the various ways humans approached storytelling, even without the necessary involvement of written language and other methods of mass dissemination, like enacting stories and history itself. Among the most experienced contributions in scientifically reconstructed material productions and life-styles by Experimental Archaeology, are for example the whole EXARC network (Paardekooper 2016) or the case of the Poggibonsi Archeodrome (Valenti 2019), whereas further alternatives like actual theatrical enactments involving people affected by their heritage may result even more accessible. To open my eyes on this disarmingly simple but powerful possibility was a comment, made by Paloma Berggren during the first conference by the UnArchaeology community, constructively critical on regards of inclusivity outside of digital and mostly European-written records. She rather suggested:

> «…that is not the truth for a big part of our planet. So, the ways in which communities in general can engage with this, it must be a bit more visual […]. And I was thinking when I was **working with rural communities, it doesn't matter if they are indigenous or not**, the issue is that we come from very visual cultures (and people who have been probably in South America and the Caribbean, they know that) that we learn by looking and by listening. So, **we are very musical and visual cultures. So, what we did then, was engage in theater**. We created with the youth, the Aymara youth, **they were starting to tell their own narrative about their own heritage**. […] We weren't the archaeologists saying 'Oh, no, this is what happens." Here, it was more of **an assemblage in between what the archaeological records say and what the oral history said**. So, **people started constructing their own narratives with the findings, but also putting much about oral history**…»
> (UnArchaeology 2021, 4; *emphases mine*)

On a later reading of the performance of Gaia (Aït-Touati and Latour 2017), such an approach resonated in my proposal as something crucial to take into account, as yet another –if not one of the most- powerful tools to achieve the aim of encouraging narratives in any way which may better fit the context while including and being accessible by as many people as possible.

Therefore another suggestion, coming also from the various approaches explored in climate change communications during my learning program within the Terra.do platform, definitely is that of literary storytelling. A spotlight example, which I happened to discover in a geographically close context to Bologna, is the project of trans-medial engagement by one member of the writers collective *Wu Ming*. He went back to his birthplace, near Ferrara, to hold a series of itinerant meetings (roughly translated "Blues for the New Lands") in nearby cities and hamlets and tell the climate and ecological crisis in a narrative way taking into account the actual impacts it has on local landscapes and people's lives.

From the initiative to make the very communities part of the creation process for these stories, it stemmed the call for an open laboratory of collective writing for those from the affected territories, in turn resulted in a narrative anthology published under the group pseudonym of Moira Dal Sito (2020). The aim of this laboratory, and thus what is found the final book, is to actually imagine different local stories unravelling under the same timeline of humanity trying to deal with the climate and ecological crisis. Other than being a valuable option to re-adapt to interested local contexts, an interesting remark was made in the introductory chapter by the editing writer Wu Ming 1, which might be of further relevance for my argument. Basically he called out a certain complicity of the fiction genre in literature, presenting safe scenarios as compliant to what their readers expected to be believable given the dominant discourse, as developing at the same time the fossil system (Dal Sito 2020, 14–16; *see also* Ghosh 2016).

Similarly we discussed of the responsibilities of archaeology, born in a bourgeois environment and thus sustaining itself by supporting the capitalist agenda, as compliant narratives and values were generated accordingly unwrapping around such a discourse. Instead, writers of the fiction genre, as well as I have argued do archaeologists, find themselves to have particular enhanced chance and thus responsibility to dare more in imagining different paradigms and provide alternatives –to tell stories of the present and future which do not necessarily confirm the idea of a unique trajectory for the course of human history.

Once again, a quote by Holtor (2005, 548; *emphases mine*) fits the argument in relation with archaeology, also projecting it into my proposal as:

> «Archaeological readings of the landscape enrich **the experience of inhabiting or visiting a place.** Those readings **may well be based on science but even non-scientific research**

contributes to enriching our landscapes. Whatever approach is followed, the subject of **archaeology brings several potent and popular themes together** [...]. These **evocative terms and narrative elements**, although usually employed as figures of speech rather than literal descriptions, distinguish archaeological practice and, I suspect, make it so appealing.»

In this way, as the same reference goes one, we can frame multiple approaches and values "...that formerly seemed very distinct thus converge into a single, shared project and engagement.". This should be meant not in the sense of a "One-World World" model, but rather of an ontological struggle to maintain a plurality of worlds together (Escobar 2017, 239, 245), recognising diversities, valorising them not to divide but to focus on their capacity to change (Moore 2017, 74) and deal with conflicts –such as Western dichotomic traditions.

A practical example in archaeology is the similar situation, appearing to be hardwired in a long-lasting clash, between those who recognise the discipline as a science and those who fundamentally consider it an art. Sharing my opinion with Martin Carver (2011, 11–12), we simply have to deal with the fact it can be both and as fieldworkers "reconcile these aspects, the factual, the imaginative, and the social, and because of them, or in spite of them, to make archaeology happen": this is exactly the occasion to acknowledge all features and valorise them, rather than creating further sterile impasses. Furthermore from a similar standpoint, what was a flaw can instead be exploited as a tool. For instance the 'artistic' aspect can better support the presentation of alternative narratives to the social sphere, despite being actually elaborated through a scientific method, making archaeology potentially play a role of bridge between science and society. Minding the gap created by academia with the public, whether it is a "broken contract" or a matter of communication (Glavovic, Smith, and White 2021; Cologna and Oreskes 2022), practitioners could find themselves in a favourable position to propose alternative narratives. In my experience with and without holding the role of 'authority' in the discussed field, setting a safe environment where epistemology can be broken at the crossroad of art and science as well as method and fantasy can heal the lack of trust between a non-expert person and the very process of scientific knowledge production, so to continually recreate and try to improve society through negotiated meanings.

As an internal disciplinary outcome, Brightman and Lewis (2017b, 25) found that many contributions to their edited volume emphasise how the very "seeking of 'sustainability' has intensified collaborations, the sharing of concepts, technical terms, narrative devices and metaphors between scientific disciplines and the humanities". I thus argue that sustainable narratives in archaeology could have similar and further outreach, where the discipline can also serve as medium for the sharing of concepts between academia and the rest of the public.

More consistently with its own contextual approach, archaeology has in fact many chances to be a process of knowledge creation with positive impacts, among which could also be a more efficient communication of the crisis and a truly sustainable response. This would only be possible when the discipline removes itself from being yet another piece of inherently universal heritage, sanctioned by a destructive dominant discourse, to rather encourage varied cultures around what I would like to call "our cared heritages" as opposed to the already mentioned "culture of uncare".

Insofar the proposal outlines an holistic approach, chosen as focused on the impact of storytelling on society and aimed towards the shared although diversified forms of heritage which could generate social well-being through cultural welfare. Narratives elaborated in this context would also point at raising awareness and acceptance about more environmentally sustainable ways of living, opposing the current paradigm of progress calculated over universal means of economic achievement and ultimately undermining agency at the cost of dooming alternative trajectories for the future. Acknowledging archaeology is made of communities of practice itself, opened instead to the consideration of the discipline and its theoretical framework as a valuable "interface", in the terms already introduced through Alesi (2021).

Embracing an approach to academia like that of "narrative ecologies", meant as an eco-systems of knowledge creation aware of themselves and their multiple interrelations, archaeologists can take radical places in a cross-disciplinary landscape –which can be paralleled with the call for "multispecies resurgence" (Tsing 2017) as an occasion within the Anthropocene to heal wounds running deep in the system. Again, we can start encouraging new ways of evaluations of history in itself and in this sense I suggest to reframe meaningful knowledge around true sustainability and disseminate it by presenting different narratives and their possible outcomes. Aware of the processes which make the present shaping the past, as well as how discourses on the past can meaningfully influence present imaginary, the struggle should thus be to engage with different forms of knowledge by affected people and inform better choices for their future.

I reckon my proposal of sustainability as a parameter of evaluation could have a great impact on the narratives the discipline develops, moving steps away from a century more of old evolutionist boxes for categorisation, potentially uprooting common vision of heritages and other societies. Nonetheless the social benefits, both external and internal by considering archaeologists part of the public as well as future students, are in my opinion worth the radical effort of changing. What could be achieved is in fact a more flexible and inclusive framework in a sense that enhances critical systemic thinking and environmental awareness through one of the core principles of archaeology itself –namely context. Thus proposing sustainability as a tool I once more acknowledge the constructive purpose of this reframe, while also declaring it to be no less a

construct, living in its times with the critiques raised to be fully aware of the outlined context of institutional anxiety and greenwashing risking to fall into the mere sustainment of careers.

Nevertheless, the potential outside critical stances and actually out in the actual fieldwork should be credited as well, given research projects struggling to uncover resilient ways of adaptation in the past and thus making a further point even for material benefits: such are again some of the cases presented in the Special Issue opened by Rick and Sandweiss (2020). Among the contributions of this issue, as a further proof of its relevance, is the paper by Marcy Rockman and Carrie Hritz (2020, 8297, 8299) particularly advocating for the very social environment to change in order to expand the currently "underdeveloped" archaeological tools for using "histories and experiences into the present day" –or, in other words, narratives as I called them so far.

As in their paper the authors recognise barriers raised (mainly in the US) to this extended deployment of archaeology in its role to tackle climate change, such a resistance might well be related to the fact that different paradigms as the one in my proposal would actively counter dominant myths related to progress. Just a reminder from the final sections of the chapter on its deconstruction is enough, as similarly to the way Graeber and Wengrow (2021) had to oppose dull and simplistic narratives on the origins and history of humanity, here from an ecological point of view I found discourses preventing actions on the ecoclimate crisis. However as already pointed out, such non-arguments as 'overpopulation' or a 'tragedy of the commons' are not supported by evidence, if not those pointing at their vested interest in preserving the status quo over imagining different perspectives. We have seen how alternative possibilities are marginalised, to the point of justifying neoliberal endless growth of capitalism as inevitable even from the very people affected negatively by such toxic models, whereas diverse paradigms are more sound and offer ways out a resigned end of the world. Sentences like "There is little to be done: that's life!", when said in a defeatist way, are now contextualised in a broader discourse which rather than to comfort is aimed at disempowering people and fostering narratives of inaction.

Even in my personal experience, academic-archaeological included, I have been told similar dismal conclusions in the guise of 'advice' –thus yet again from the very people in the humanities who more than others benefit from a utopian project of knowledge seeking and should be at the edge of contextual-historical critiques and at the very least envision better futures. Instead, I have heard further commonplaces, from "mind your stuff only" passing from "it has always been like this" to the very "it's in the thing". Now, such statements result even more inconsistent given my academic background, as respectively showing a flagship for over-specialisation, a manifesto of social immobilism, and the intrinsic implicitness. On the contrary, archaeologically speaking the study of the discipline is base on contextual considerations, aiming to look at the big picture

without losing the human timelines. These are made of a past which is not static, rather a set of historicities and not all of them are necessarily 'conservative', whereas even those believing to be such do actually change to continue to build up their sense of 'remaining the same' throughout contextual inevitable changes. Consequently, heritages (re)created along the way cannot be 'universal' and are better identified in what we care for, not proprieties but means of well-being potentially kept meaningful inter-generationally through the past, present, and future.

The construct of progress is thus better rebuilt not as an accumulation of ever increasing complexity, ultimately unsustainable in the long run, but rather as the very ability to change over time and space to sustain our community –able to mitigate and adapt itself while aware of diverse possible contexts. As advocated so far, archaeology can conceptualise and valorise these values against the current levels of indifference and distraction, towards cultures of awareness and action which contextually approach our ever-changing reality in seek of systemic well-being.

I maintain that the way we look at the past influences our future, but also the way we look at our future influences how we see the past, thus not making 'History' an inherent 'magistra vitae', better reframing it as contextually constructed and almost psychological dimension –then again why not to recognise its framework and nonetheless use the experience to envisage our future?

3.2.2. Critiques and possible resolutions

Here some space would be better dedicated to the critiques to my own proposal, counter-theses accumulated mainly through critical self-reflections (given the impostor-syndrome I might well be affected by), but also from external feedback I received –some more constructive than others. Hence to render this section not destructive in itself, my intention as well is to outline how to address them, not only imagining the weaknesses of my arguments or defending their validity but more humbly also acknowledge potential flaws while modifying initial propositions accordingly.

I would nevertheless anticipate the main blind-spots in my proposal by reminding the conditions which brought me to elaborate in the first place. That is moving forward a radical (or even 'political') impasse, the conundrum I tried to solve laterally rephrasing it as "go big *and* go home", in order to propose a possible practical response we cannot delay any more –as necessary today in front of such a pressing crisis where inaction and delay represent the actual unsustainability. Given that dwelling into the status quo actively fuels the toxic system of our dominant fossil imaginary, my re-framework for the discipline and shift in evaluating history should not be regarded as much more political in the sense explained before, but rather it is an attempt. Indeed I would like to give it a try, although I recognise the limits of the proposed alternative paradigm, thus acknowledging and reiterating I already know it may not be the best approach possible and

no one should think it would solve anything alone. This is crucial to reinstate as me myself I have continued and will continue to make different things other than writing this dissertation, as for instance collectively taking part into non-violent direct actions. Namely, diverse strategies are key to take this seriously as we must support ways out of the current path, an apparently inevitable self-destruction we are ultimately making true only by not putting critical efforts otherwise.

Henceforth, my proposal in the current thesis could more constructively be framed as "yet another perspective" to look at evidence, namely to see development valued on social and environmental sustainability. As an extension of the interpretative phase, it holds its potential alone even without disrupting earlier methodological phases, given that the underlying theme is about how crucial perspectives and points of view are as having the possibility to enhance narratives and thus make the discipline of archaeology relevant at a broader level as well.

Now though the meaningfulness of this role can exactly be helped by opening to diverse field practices, as argued before even through those not based on scientific methods, but rather relying on traditional knowledge and ideals of social justice to recognise as equally valid points of view influencing how archaeological data is interpreted. Moreover it has been noticed how present artisanal knowledge can enhance our understanding of the past (Botwid 2016) and even encourage decolonisation (Chipangura 2019) while critical gender narratives can rectify legacy biases as the patriarchal tendency in the interpretation of contexts (Frieman, Teather, and Morgan 2019). Similarly I argue the proposed shift in categorisation through sustainability as parameter and paradigm could turn out to be beneficial also if applied in documentary phases, thus not only for external communication but properly as an internal insight to favour academic advancements against overall unsustainable stances –there again only via a truly crossdisciplinary environment. The catch here is that proposing this new paradigm as a narrative, rather than a method of research. would result as an almost safe move. On the other hand, pushing for the possibility to implement the evaluation through different categories also at the documentation (data collection and processing) level of the archaeological discipline (superseding the Three Age and subsequent systems), would automatically raise a handful more of critiques. I already discussed and acknowledged the benefit of such paradigms along with its responsibilities and the call for diverse approaches, thus I am not coming back to it here, and nevertheless this matter reveals crucial to the current argument. Again in fact the point is not about deny the roles taken by other perspectives, but rather try and reconcile them contextually with the well-being they can generate, so this is yet another case I would suggest a different paradigm like the proposed one to be applied alongside previous ones –on different degrees depending on its very reception and impact. Although conflictual, in this way both ways can be presented as equally valid to affected

communities, efficiently providing an alternative in the sense it could either substitute or not the other while still at least making people aware of the non-deterministic choice of models and rather focusing on the ever-changing negotiated context.

Therefore to embed this perspective could mean for instance to push it only in communication (dissemination phase) if not wanting to be somewhat 'revolutionary' by proposing it directly for documentation. At the same time, it can nonetheless be recognised the validity of trying it to better entangle the collection and processing of data before communicating them, thus having impacts within fieldworkers and practitioners. This can be considered an alternative experience to present as it is, namely a possible way to make it more spontaneous and enrich methodology with a different perspective as well, after having duly explained the underlying meta-narrative of why does it matter to develop different narratives along with the contextualising other possible communicative criticism (such as it feeling 'forced' on usual research ontologies).

A final remark on this matter, would be to understand the very level of knowledge transmission for the proposed model of progress, considering it maintain in itself that all social stages have all of the features but at different levels in the society. In other words, I have critically asked myself whether it should diffused in a top-down or bottom-up fashion, also given the acknowledgement that the former has already been found guilty of undermining the latter in terms of hegemony. Even here, trying to keep an approach as open as possible, my stance is to say that it contextually depends on where this alternative perspective is more easily accepted. Examining the different operational conditions in fact, within field experts we can found typological categorisation to be better or worse received as a process of methodological knowledge creation. On the other hand, within the state-nation institutions, advocating for systemic educational awareness can be conveyed through history books for school, depending on the socio-political background of the times. Finally, more safely and better put into practice experimentally, interactions in the cultural sphere can be tried within the public through media outreach and different projects as the one I would like to try to approach my local birthplace community.

At any level this is applied, 'experts' should put effort in leading the agenda, if they truly believe and can consistently sustain the benefits and values of their scientific methods in front of the rest of society and particularly affected people. Otherwise, as claimed before, the indicted unsustainability of their current disciplinary approach must be plainly recognised and dropped rather than moving it on a detached Ivory Tower of indifference and ultimately inaction –backed up through a void epistemological power of academic authority alone.

More or less obvious critiques further spring from the implications illustrated so far, for instance noticing that the proposal at hand might be seen as yet another simplification of reality,

in the sense meant by Graeber and Wengrow (2021, 21). Here I can admit that yes, mine would indeed be a simplification, although it has to be noted how it is not dissimilar from any other social theory on this point. Additionally, the core intention is the actual negotiation of different systems of values depending on each context of consideration, simplifying not uniform but rather encourage diversity while remaining aware and making explicit the overall reductive operations. The spirit of this stance of mine is better conveyed in the adagio "we always are, and have been, the same: always different" which ultimately renders valid also for the next critical note.

By this I refer to a feedback indirectly collected again thanks the classes of professor Brightman, namely that the initial paradigm I proposed –as I was willing to apply it alone without any particular context of reference- was thus a 'global' parameter to apply everywhere in the same way. The obvious risk is to be no different from any other project of universal ambition, with all of the corollary of connected domination biases, from the already mentioned top-down approach to the neocolonial and neopositivist agenda stemming from the legacy of the Enlightenment. To try and deal with this tendency, instead of denying it as a whole, I once again resort to the possibility of considering diversity by building different perspectives on sustainability depending on each local context through its past human frequentation. This way, the struggle would not be to elaborate a global ranking of the whole course of humanity based on just one idea of sustainability, but rather diverse local scales for what is negotiated as 'sustainable' community-wise. After all the aim is to raise a more critical diachronic perspective, on both ancient and recent relations between humans and their socio-natural surroundings, so to also encourage evaluation under the lens of sustainable synchronic relations happening in the present place.

Hitherto, my project relied on the chance to engage with 'communities' and 'the public', but since I am illustrating all of the possible criticalities also these terms can be framed more neatly. Even more, they ought to be problematised for a deeper understanding of the context where this project could be applied, otherwise the very purpose of my proposal can be put at stake. Drawing from a stance "against reactionary populism" in archaeology, the main caveat is to operate the idealisation of "People" too often operated by our field, which I would like to quote extensively:

> «Communities have been equated with specific groups defined by gender, ethnicity, race or sexual orientation, and described almost invariably in positive terms (Brass 2017). This had led to dichotomies between authorised and official vs non-authorised and informal heritage, or top-down vs bottom-up initiatives (Smith 2006). Authorised, top-down archaeology and heritage are described as authoritarian and conservative, their opposite as spontaneous and democratic.
> Archaeologists have been expected to be always aligned with 'the People', to understand their needs and advocate their cause (Atalay et al. 2014). This has often led to the assumption that every person, every community, can spontaneously reclaim their heritage. Gramsci, however,

explained that in modern societies, hegemonic projects tend to be presented as bottom-up and result from social negotiation and consensus (Gramsci 2011). Thus, archaeologists have helped communities throughout the world to understand and generate their own linear views of time and to have a 'past'; they have taught them that their past belongs to them as heritage, that heritage is an intrinsically valuable part of their identity, and more recently, that the universality of heritage makes it a good tourist product.

In summary, archaeologists have invented the People that they need: a People that might challenge old-fashioned perspectives of heritage and archaeology, and may even refuse access to certain sites or reclaim certain things; but not a People lacking a notion of heritage, with no interest in the past. [...]

Many people, on the other hand, seem intent on disappointing archaeologists by behaving in the wrong way: being greedy, patriarchal, xenophobic or uninterested in the past.

At work here is an idealisation of community and heritage. Communities—the units into which the People are organised—are diverse, fragmented and complex. Some are progressive, some are not; some are cohesive, others are divided by internal conflicts.»

(González-Ruibal, González, and Criado-Boado 2018, 508)

Their critical analysis on the topic wraps up almost all of the issues confronted during this dissertation, from matters of heritage discourse to linear views of history. As it makes a clear point on how forcing research questions into subjects may render vain the true purpose of my own project, I would therefore stand in this concern at the least as an ethical acknowledgement.

Moving to another perspective, perhaps a 'traditionally' academic one, a major flaw of this dissertation can be asked like this: why not test the proposed paradigm with evidence and data? An impostor as I always feel, this simple question still unsettles me, despite the various demonstrations that many other work –even with more relevant expectations and impacts-proved just as valid without necessarily testing all of their claims in the standard grounds. This because such might not even be the final aim, since a rather more respectful one for any argument should not be that of imposing as an absolute truth over others, in particular when trying to offer alternatives to current narratives of domination. Moreover, data alone are renowned not to be enough to drive effective change, here drawing a crucial parallel with climate change communication: most evidence often is already there (at least 'academically') to make clear that things are definitely not as depicted by current hegemonic discourses, but such an acknowledgment falls short to enable any meaningful reaction.

To fully debate on evidence and have a complete view in the way as the "search of truth is normally conducted in academia" was out of the range of my thesis. Furthermore, the narrative presented would require years to unravel just as the meta-narrative it stems from, arguments reminded me by the kick-starting remarks and final conclusions of Graeber and Wengrow (2021, 3–5, 514–515), almost comically though somewhat painstakingly, as otherwise their "book would have been two or three times the size, and likely would have left the reader with a sense that the

authors are engaged in a constant battle with demons who were in fact two inches tall".

Hence to oppose similar critiques it has to be reiterated the scope of this dissertation, which rather is to propose a paradigm which may fit with alternative narratives, also to best keep focus in convey its main message. That is: what surely lacks to date –and not as a deliberate and constructive choice as we have found in the concept of 'absence'- is the wide adoption of an efficient framework to embrace new ways of looking at human history, thus I believe the proposal of a narrative reframe holds perhaps more fruitful insight than a bare compilation of data.

Now though my project seeks for the involvement of fieldwork, so how to reconcile this aspect further given my take on sustainability, or rather on unsustainability? Under such light in fact, other than a certain amount of data to compile, there would be processing phases I should recognise as exceeding my expertise. This way I would be guilty of an unsustainable approach as lacking of the true collaboration I myself deemed so crucial: an easy reply would be to say that the research itself is first put forward in order to deal exactly with the critique of just 're-compartmentalise' within archaeology, or in other word saying it is a call for more collaboration. In practice though, I am presenting the theoretical framework as well as a reduced case study carried out almost all alone by myself, so: how is this cross-disciplinary at all?

Apart from the obvious though pervasive statement of the current work as a preliminary proposal and the attached survey an admittedly limited inception, I am foremost coming to the compromise of being a single individual, fond of its own degree and institutionally specialised field of research, who however struggled to be open and draw fully from other expertises. Despite trying with best intentions, thanks to my path of study as broadened as possible, rather than deny I would rather prefer to state I in fact could never be able to carry a full-fledged project like this alone.

Then this point remains a valid critique, which could only be addressed by acknowledging it first in this preliminary step of dissertation and then involve other collaborators with similar approaches in the next phases, enriching and updating critical stances along the way. On this I mention again the potential of archaeological professionals, as communities of practice which could be particularly prone to efficient collaboration given the very 'hybrid' core configuration. We saw how the discipline can both feature theories and history from science and story-telling alike, using scientific methods and narratives to build interpretations of the past (Martinón-Torres and Killick 2015). This could be valid in general, as well as considering research focused on the current climate, ecological and social crisis of this era (Edgeworth 2021). By acknowledging all of this I am not fixing this aspect in any way, but rather stating again the incompleteness of my proposal so far, symptomatically necessary due to the structure of university degrees and of my dissertation in the conditions I came to elaborate it. Although not a comprehensive form of

crossdisciplinarity, understandably the very struggle to have a supervisor from a different discipline (anthropology instead of archaeology) can be framed in that direction, but the stress here goes on how I sought this specifically and found it by chance while institutional procedures even hindered it.

Keep focusing on this self-critical review, the observations of Fowles (2010, 34) over the mainly rhetorical exercise behind most alternative narratives to look at the history of humanity have got me puzzled. I deem this relevant as my own reframing, rather than imposing a 'more efficient' paradigm, still could be meant a "thought experiment". This is the very same way Graeber and Wengrow (2021, 11–12) also reiterated how Rousseau and Hobbes were explicit in calling their 'Origin' theories mainly a matter of intellectual discourse −as the two recent scholars proved those to be much so. As a matter of fact, such critical framework got me into saying I, as well, am instead implicitly recognising my proposal is 'political' in stance while not pretending it to be valid and thus trying to somehow play it safe. On the other hand I'm proposing an actual approach in the practices of public engagement, rather than just a rhetorical exercise, thus my conclusion on this point is to state mine is in fact a counter-narrative which requires to be put into action and precisely avoid to remain a philosophical internal debate in order to be fulfilled.

The clash presents itself as my approach strives not to be prescriptive of any actual way of implementing the paradigm of evaluating human history based on sustainability, while the overall proposal is deemed to be pragmatic in order to actively move forward a theoretical impasse. This is why in practice I strived to make a feature out of the preliminary conditions of this project, in which even a small online survey in a local context −as suggested by my supervisors- is not only necessary for me to point at pragmatical resolutions to this conceptual puzzle. Rather, it also renders crucial to avoid imposing any more top-down approaches into the proposal, which should instead be developed as a bottom-up one. In this sense I would like to consider the very absence of strictly prescribed paths to implement the shift in paradigm as an aware choice, meant to be a further open space for the sprouting of other ideas and practices out of my own control.

All of that said, even one of the last possible critiques can be welcomed within this (meta-)narrative ecology of my arguments. Namely, shifting parameters like I suggest can be seen as yet another construct involving a judgment of values. All the more, although not on a chronological order, it still involves a timeline and assigning communities through history to it.

My counter-argument, quite simply, is again about doing this acknowledging the way the discourse on judgement of others is unfortunately the hegemonic paradigm of the current era among many present society, at the very least those influenced by globalisation. Particularly

speaking about narratives on our human past, as I have illustrated in previous chapters this was also caused by archaeology ventilating the Western agenda to get used to apply parameters of progress such as technological advancement.

First of all then, my choice was to practically exploit this 'habitus' rather than theoretically purging it from previous narratives to make it perfectly fit my purpose. Aware of the risks of using the "master tools", I also refuse the arrogance of trying to be above criticism and rather prefer to avoid an unassailable conceptual framework which is however set for failure on the field. In my opinion, this is also a further field left fallow from the lawns of strict academic methods, moreover encouraging the independent blooming of actual local ideas in terms of 'true' sustainability –which also makes a good point to enhance diversities.

Once again informed by the critical insights raised by Brightman and Lewis (2017b, 20), I have nonetheless decided to go for this 'evaluation' (*i.e.*: apply the conceptual tool of placing different communities in history in a sort of timeline) so to first approach a generic target with a familiar scheme. Then only secondarily the main point would be to negotiate within each local culture, meant as present communities affected by the heritage through which the first step is elaborated, in order to build custom scales of sustainability to "evaluate themselves through their own sets of values". This is the part were the expertise of academics involved should be put at the service of the engaged people, for instance archaeologists could keep an eye on long-term well-being as a parameter featured and potentially to be granted within and around a person's group of care.

In other words, I am not denying the label of 'discourse of evaluation' for this proposal, so to recognise its core nature and be able to efficiently reframe a way of thinking to the history of humanity which is in fact rooted in the hegemonic grand narratives –this only to avoid immediate rejection and rather exploit it as a launching pad to present alternative paradigms.

Drawing near the conclusions of this section, rather than presenting one I would just like to report a critique, as it was already countered without fail by Fowles (2010, 37). In a "radical example" he notices how those people, advocating to do away with by-products of current neoliberal world (from things to institutions such as the very concept of civilisation), would be seen as "primitivists". Now this very term conveys a lot of what has been discussed so far, while the whole argument resonates greatly as presenting communities "engaged in their own work of elimination, but instead of an act of disrobing that results in an image of deficiency, here one encounters elimination as a constructive act aimed at building greater levels of individual autonomy and ecological sustainability". Here the scholar refers also to other fundamental works on the topic (Shepard 1998; Zerzan 1998) and concludes drawing a parallel vision on colonial encounters in ethnography, which have been indeed framed as historical pushback, only to

observe that under the new paradigm of deliberate absence "we no longer find ourselves confronted by a congeries of unevolved societies lacking government". As his argument goes on with the mention of Pierre Clastres ([1974] 1989) *Society against the State*, I would take the chance to remind how the ultimate aim of my proposal might as well be to undo perspectives which automatically discard or frames as conflictual the possibilities to stop or change tracks from our current trajectory. Given this is undeniably heading for a more and more ruinous fall, currently the status quo ventilates any alternative as unrealistic or backward, while they actually are the only realistic political acts toward social well-being and ecological sustainability. It is in this context that I propose sustainable narratives, as a mean which could make us shift the current parameters, over to contextual evaluation of the past for the actual care of the present and future.

Once again I credit Graeber and Wengrow (2021) who in their conclusions reinstate the greater plausibility of a deliberate coming back and forth in the experiments of social organisations, through most of human existence, which my dissertation accepts as the basic metanarrative to maintain a course of history still open-ended today. From this, if we still want to make use of 'progress' as no more than the rhetorical device we are used to apply, my suggestion therefore is to acknowledge such a practice –surely not coming down with master thesis in 2023- while "recalibrating those scales" of destructive paradigms running beneath and presenting alternatives:

> «…reminding us that people did actually live in those ways, often for many centuries, even millennia. In some ways, such a perspective might seem even more tragic than our standard narrative of civilization as the inevitable fall from grace. It means we *could* have been living under radically different conceptions of what human society is actually about. It means that mass enslavement, genocide, prison camps, even patriarchy or regimes of wage labour never had to happen. But on the other hand it also suggests that, even now, the possibilities for human intervention are far greater than we're inclined to think.»
> (Graeber and Wengrow 2021, 524)

As they undeniably achieved with their contested work, my humble purpose is to intensify the ripples of the debate inside and moreover outside academia, although in terms of constructiveness and meaningful communication. So, as Hodder (2010, 866) aimed at with his argument on heritage rights, this "debate is not about absolutes, but about social negotiation, nowadays at the global scale, over what is right and wrong in the particular historical contexts in which we find ourselves". And further rephrasing on the same paragraphs, this may lead to the change in the climate regarding what is seen as acceptable behaviour, in relation with other people and environmental resources or, at the very least, it could take us away from discussing "in terms of the universal outstanding value of things as defined by the academy" alone.

To conclude, with my dissertation I tried to bring together the path outlined by both Hodder

before and Graeber and Wengrow afterwards, thus proposing 'true sustainability' as a fruitful paradigm to evaluate in a way that might encourage historical narratives towards an empowerment of social justice at the scale of interested and affected communities.

The paths through which this would be achieved are yet to be fully traced out, consistently with the need of a full-fledged crossdisciplinarity as well as of a truly diversified set of approaches, which should be elaborated along with the affected communities in their own contexts. Henceforth, my project so far is to be considered an intended preliminary draft –and so is the case study, in the form of a mini-ethnographic survey, attempted and presented in the next section.

3.3. Mini-Ethnoarchaeological Survey: An hamletic Case Study

To do or not to do the following survey, presenting it as a case study even, was for me a great dilemma. At the beginning though I did not even have a context to study, given my topic was more fitting theory than practice, so it is admittedly a coincidence which took me out of yet another impasse. This one however was the main consequence of the stance I stood in by deciding my own argument for this master dissertation –in contrast with the documentary thesis on a site I was presented the chance to study during the bachelor. Luckily enough then, the hamlet of my origin got me covered just in time for the choice of the dissertation, as I have accidentally happened to discover its very archaeological appeal only during the last year or so.

The village of Canavaccio I am referring to is in fact attested for the frequentation of humans since prehistoric times, bringing evidence of an almost continued occupation until present date, throughout Roman times and the Middle Ages (Fucili 1997; Ermeti 2022; Fucili 2023). To this latter period belongs the only monumental feature still visible to date –the Torre Brombolona up on the hill behind the village, but I lived more than 20 years of my life under its shadow mostly unaware it is part of the ruins of an actual medieval castle.

This seemed all the more surprising to me, as I graduated in Cultural Heritage without a clue of it, only to be taught about even earlier chronologies by a newly formed local association, namely the *Circolo culturale Pieve di Gaifa*. Such was in brief the story of how I got the chance to even think of a possible application of my proposal, finally taking back my interest from distant case studies (as the town of Firuzabad in Iran for my bachelor dissertation), to one I was even too familiar with. Thus from the general bases already studied in chapters 13 to 15 of the textbook by Renfrew and Bahn (2016, 507–584) I sought for more locally relevant and updated studies on the situation of Public Archaeology in my country (Nucciotti, Bonacchi, and Molducci 2019) and finally regarding some instances of almost ethno-archaeological projects in Italian communities (Ripanti

2022). All this notwithstanding the underlying caveat of recognising diversity, which can be generalised only as much, and therefore is so highly contextual to require the case-by-case approach already outlined.

As stated before though the case study is a necessarily reduced version of a broader project, the one that would instead be required to put into practice the best stances requested in my proposal. In particular, it would be needed to achieve the collaboration of as much people as possible within the target community, as well as involving a varied team of disciplinary and knowledge expertise. Namely, the project would be meant to deploy into a full-fledged ethnographic research, as deemed necessary in order to hold true to the very critical reasons why I made this dissertation. Therefore for the moment the methodology applied was a preliminary online survey (accessible at URL https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/runner/CanavaccioArcheologiaSostenibilita_preliminare), to fill in by a reduced sample of people. This target has been individuated within the local cultural association of the village I was born in, located in the countryside of The Marches region, thus represents a community already committed to heritage dissemination in such geographic context. The structure and contents of this survey are written by me following the ideas and relative aims of my proposal for this thesis, also drawing from feedback received by a few person inside the same target sample I have happened to interact with and presented my basic ideas already.

The main research question, being the survey but a preliminary step towards a potentially more complete project, is to test how the re-frame of narratives on the history of humanity via a paradigm of sustainability would be taken by this community. The basic aim is to collect feedback about this approach and test the potential efficiency of a similar proposal. Expected results may include a positive or negative reception, along with feedback and insights to reshape the whole broader project around, as well as its very research questions and structure.

This first internal structure of the survey includes first the context of the dissertation work, made explicit to provide an informed introduction, followed by some brief preparatory paragraphs regarding the conceptual bases and aims for my proposal. Right after, is the ethical disclosure for consensual participation (*i.e.*: privacy policy) followed by the rights granted to participants, namely the choice to remain anonym, to sign out of the survey at any time and to be informed of the results. Next are some brief instructions on how to complete the survey, the preferred deadline to accept contributions, and then the actual questionnaire. Notably at the end of it, along with details about the timeline for processing data and presenting the results of the survey during and after the graduation session, my personal contacts were provided for any further feedback – as will be briefly discusses again later in next sections.

After some further considerations on the overall structure and features of the survey, this chapter

will consequently collect and present the results of the survey, in a form adapted for human-readable simple inspection. As well, better machine-readable formats are made available for possible later reuse and processing, as spreadsheets and Portable Document Format (.pdf) files exported as-is from the platform software employed for the survey –the former attached to the dissertation file itself and the latter pasted as appendices after the last chapter and bibliography. Results have also been archived through the Internet Archive (web.archive.org) from the related page https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/publication/CanavaccioArcheologiaSostenibilita_preliminare. Before proceeding with such conclusive part, a section will also be dedicated to frame a preliminary elaboration of the survey data collected compared with initial aims, expected results, their implications for the broader project proposal and conceptual bases of the dissertation.

Now then, it could be appropriate to go into details for certain aspects of the survey described so far, also given that the definitive version was actually presented in Italian according to the sample target and so it will be reproposed here in its English translation in detached parts.

On this last regard, also acknowledging to be short of time and resources given the critical requirements outlined in previous chapters, I had to re-elaborate the content several times and rely on the very local and familiar context I laid down this preliminary survey with. Namely, I first had the chance to meet in person with three active members of the Circolo culturale Pieve di Gaifa, specifically to talk about the questionnaire and to have their overall approval as well as some preliminary feedback to draft it at the best. Secondarily, but crucially for a bare matter of time given the deadlines for dissertation and online form, I relied on a professional translator to 'trans-create' queries back and forth from English to Italian as well as from technical to more accessible phrasing. This person actually happened to be my mother, Silvia Di Profio, who's field of expertise is not cultural heritage nor anthropology, thus other than thanking her for the extra effort I take on all the responsibilities for rephrasing academic references and repurposing them in an almost free-hand way for the survey's questions.

Nevertheless, I still applied all of the other appropriate measures for methodology, starting with the very tool used for the online survey. This choice has been driven by concerns on digital and privacy aspects, which I had the opportunity to deal with for personal interest as well as by attending dedicated courses at the university. Specifically the course of Monica Palmirani on "Open Access and Digital Ethics" informed my decision to search for an online form software compliant with European standards, which ended up with the *EUSurvey* platform (https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/) supported by the very European Commission's *ISA²* programme focused on interoperability within European public administrations. Moreover, I declared this privacy feature at the beginning having a box to be compulsory ticked for consent if the

participant wanted to proceed filling the form. The text reads "By accepting to continue, you will help me carry on this project. At the end of the survey you will be able to decide whether to provide your contact or remain anonymous." and has a further pop-up text-box which can be clicked to display the following message:

> «The current questionnaire guarantees the privacy of participants according to the "GDPR" Regulation (EU) 2016/679. Even if you would be willing to provide me your contacts, I will never make them public without asking for further explicit consent from you. Furthermore, you have full rights to access to the results of the survey and to the elaboration of it that I will do later. Thanks for your attention and support!»

Among other disclaimers which were made explicit, the very structure of the survey implicitly was set in a way to provide an informed participation, as well as trying to minimise my own view on the topics and the elaboration I proposed of them.

On one hand in fact, the title clearly mentioned the name of the target village associated with the two central aspects ("Canavaccio: Archaeology and Sustainability - Preliminary Survey"), which I also unravelled as a sentence in the subtitle: "Preliminary Survey for the project on archaeology and sustainability in Canavaccio".
On the other hand though, as already previewed, after briefly introducing myself as well as the broader context and scope of the questionnaire I have just outlined a general description of my actual elaborations on the topics –to quote:

> «My name is Matteo Bartolucci, I was born and raised in Canavaccio, and now I am graduating in Archaeology. I'm now asking for your help with this brief questionnaire, part of my Master graduation thesis project at the University of Bologna.
> The basic idea is to be able to integrate archaeology with sustainability, involving the people of Canavaccio and its surroundings.
> The survey you are about to fill out will help me to get a first feedback about my initial idea and identify common grounds and discrepancies. For this reason, I'm sharing the survey only with people who are already actively interested in the culture of our territory, so as to better develop the project at a later stage and listen to other local voices.»

As a reminder, the main research question of this preliminary engagement was twofold, as both checking on the perception of the key themes recurring in this dissertation and on the reception of my proposal. My aim could be summarised in having first a feedback on the premises of my thesis alone and then on the elaboration I made from these.

Therefore apart from the the starting page, the questionnaire was functionally divided in three more sections, accessible only after having completed the previous ones. Namely the first and more consistent block of questions is the "Key topics", where participants could express their

affinities to different definitions around central concepts, while only in the premise of the next section ("A proposal") my idea is explicitly presented as follows:

«If you look at the last two questions, you may find out that you listed local communities in a different order. Maybe we should ask ourselves why.
My idea is the following: try to look at sustainability as one of the main criteria to assess 'how advanced' an ancient –as well as a contemporary- community is.
Seen from this perspective, sustainability is not only about environment, but also about society, and represents the way we see both our territory and our culture. We cannot protect our heritage, nor build a new one without a supportive environment - a natural as well as a social environment.»

Regarding this shared knowledge base, I would have initially liked it to be provided during an in-presence meeting with the selected sample for the survey, so to better present the theoretical framework of my proposal and possibly give quick clarifications before people replied to the survey. Unfortunately, this was not made possible by a series of organisational and personal issues, due to the holiday break and also given the limited time at hand in this preliminary phase. A similar pedagogical care was nonetheless tried though, despite the online form, to encourage genuine answers and make participants feel at ease as well as building trust and lowering expectations. For instance the last sentence before the privacy policies, in the starting page, openly stated: "Please keep in mind that there are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers, but only answers that best reflect your personal opinion after a careful review of the questions".

This attention to how responses could be given can be noted also by disclosing the modality for the filling of the first block of questions, that is, ranking by reordering different options.
As premise to this section on the "Key topics" it was only written "To complete the following section, please drag and drop each answer to the desired position (the more significant at the top and the less significant at the bottom)". This instruction was more particularly repeated under the first question as "Sort the following definitions from the one you more agree with to the one you less agree with." and it should have been also possible to open it as a reminder by clicking on the 'help' (question mark) icon near each question. Additionally I decided to insert a smaller and greyed out line of text under each query, reading "*(Change the order from top to bottom or agree with the default order by clicking on 'Accept the initial order')*", due to the fact that the online tool – despite having been set to Italian as it was claimed to fully be- was not completely translated in its UI (User Interface) and presented untranslated in English the potentially misleading possibility to just click on the highlighted text "Accept the initial order".
This issue gives me the chance to contextualise the reason why I went for such a peculiar modality in this first set of question, also given the fact that the results of them are not quite so

easy to elaborate, as it will be seen below presenting them. In brief, the choice was driven by an attempt to avoid 'automatic' answers in the sense of simple clicking on a button for a multiple-replies question, and rather to encourage reflection on each query. Furthermore, other than being just a counter-measure for participants, I though it would have also possibly limit my own influence on the choices provided. Given the chance to just accept the initial order, I enabled the the option to display the different answers in a random order not following the one I first set, and moreover by providing a spectrum of diverse possibilities to rank I had to add definitions on the other side of my personal likings –although acknowledging possible influence in rephrasing them.

Now, on a closer look to the very questions posed, the idea was to understand which definitions were closer and farther to one's own perception of the key arguments for this dissertation. Hereafter are not the full translations yet, as all of them are more systematically listed in tables holding the results of the contributions to the survey, now more discursively presented.

Namely, the first 7 queries had 4 options each to be ranked, for which I took inspiration from different sources without strictly tracking them as part of varied elaborations made under some sort of 'poetic licence' as already stated. More precisely, this consisted in rephrasing the definitions from their original wording, in terms which sounded to me more approachable by the sample target. Shorter sentences and words which seemed less ambiguous, obscure or in need of further explanations were preferred. Although this could risk to twist those same definitions, I nevertheless maintain the ends of this section would have been accomplished anyway. In fact, the aim is for me to detect compatibility of my own elaboration of the various concepts with the perception of those within the affected community.

A clear example can be seen in the case of question number 3, where sustainability itself is the definition in focus and one of the possible replies, as back-translated from Italian to English, is: "Sustainability is the ability to... ...satisfy the current needs without compromising those of the future". Here one may recognise, given it was also mentioned before in this very text, how this is a shortened version not even of 'sustainability' alone but rather actually of the idea of "sustainable development" by the *Bruntland Report* (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987). The other three answers to rank for this question, as this one rates second in my personal spectrum of 'true' sustainability, goes from the almost impossible chance of leaving things unchanged indefinitely to illusions of green economic growth and finally to the possibility of rather encouraging diversities to address change.

This functional melting-pot of re-definitions is applied also for all other six questions, regarding in order (sustainability excluded going as 3): 1-"progress"; 2-"cultural heritage"; 4-"archaeology"; 5-"human history"; 6- "life quality in the past"; 7- "more sustainable living today". All of them

present a spectrum of different definitions to rank which are mostly drawn from those referenced in the chapters relevant to the topic in focus, from the one I critically demonstrated as more destructive to the one I deemed more constructive to deal with our current crisis.

Questions 8 and 9 served as a turning point to propose my own vision, according to the decisions exposed before. Namely, I introduced them with a very brief text reading:

> «Based on the few archaeological finds unearthed in the area, we can say that Canavaccio has seen a succession of the following communities (in chronological order and simplifying a lot): **Picene**, **Roman**, **Medieval**, **Renaissance**, **Rural/agricultural** and **Industrial/contemporary** (*us!*) ones.»

The two requests were to rank the six 'community grouping' first in order from the "most advanced" to the least and similarly from the "most sustainable" downwards. Indeed, as already anticipated, this gave the perspective of having a sort of narrative of evaluation for the course of human history and thus was instrumental to problematise the whole paradigm.

In the subsequent section of the survey, the modality of response changed, just like the overall purpose. This because at this point I had expressed my aims to the participants by presenting archaeology and sustainability together, as tools to look at progress and heritage to build a better idea of about the history of humanity, one which would support truly sustainable socio-environmental behaviours. Thus the new block of questions was more about how they felt about it, if in their opinion it would work as a narrative reflection alone or it needed activities of various genre to be properly assimilated, moreover if it would generate public engagement and if it could have the desired impact collectively on the rest of the local target community.

In practice, the possible reply this time was only one, though again on a roaster of four to choose between the extremes of strong agreement or disagreement with two further minor nuances in the middle. Questions were 6 in total from number 10 to 15, again fully translated later along with their results, in this case presented without resorting to tables due to their simpler structure.

Regarding the "Final remarks" section block I thought that, rather than just asking for feedback, I could address to the participants with some optional questions giving an open answer format. This was meant as a way to provide a chance to elaborate more on the questionnaire as well as expressing more articulate responses on there already, instead of eventually having to directly contact me on their own, as I nonetheless left my institutional email address.

By starting the section with the disclaimer "This last part includes open-ended answers and is completely optional for you to fill in" then both the 'pedagogic' approach and a genuine interest are expressed, humbly opening the project to constructive feedback as suggestions for concepts,

methods, and activities one would wish to develop in their context.

The questions were 3 only (*i.e.:* 16, 17, 18) therefore their translated text and few replies will be directly reported here. Respectively, the first asked "Do you have comments, remarks or advice you would like to provide about the survey you have just completed?" and was answered by three persons who also signed themselves (but will be here anonymised as "A-B-C"). The rough translations are served here below:

> Question 16
> A: «Far too much schematic, sometimes you don't know what to answer»
> B: «The past is important to understand where not to repeat the same mistakes and to improve. Our planet is our home and we must preserve it as we care for our bodies. Progress, with industrialisation and robotisation, are not always synonymous with freedom, but with veiled slavery.»
> C: «It is difficult to insert into a sequence civilisations from very different epochs as we do not know the lifestyles and struggles of the various periods»

These replies are particularly valuable, as providing two critical observations (A and C) respectively on the structure of the form and on one of the main required tasks, as well as (B) one expressing a broader reflections stemming from the chance of the topics dealt with.

The next question was "Among the various possible activities aiming to involve the local residents in this project, could you think of anything in particular that you would be interested in?" and has got two replies, one of which again from participant "B" and a new one ("D"), that are:

> Question 17
> B: «Start talking about it in schools, if there is time, in civic education classes»
> D: «Organising a small museum with local artefacts aimed especially at younger generations to maintain the historical identity of the place»

Again both result symptomatic, proposing public education as a start to raise awareness and a local museum to grant the permanence of values tied to the place, in a way trying to implement already familiar tools although evidently not yet exploited in this particular context.

The last box, simply left as a space where "You can add any other thoughts or comment you might have about the project, the idea, and everything else in the field below", had no further reply. Nonetheless given the responses to the previous targeted questions, this section proved to be crucial to leave the survey as open as possible, trying to get the best of it from an ethnographic point of view despite its preliminary shape, tools used, and resources available.

Before the last written paragraph, three different text-boxes where made available under the banner reading "If you want, you can enter your contact details here. Remember: this is not mandatory", to write name and/or surname, email address and phone number, in case the

participants wanted to be available for possible follow-ups or just mark their contribution.

For the record, 7 out of the 11 total persons who filled the questionnaire also wrote at least their name and email address, which of course are not to be disclosed here for privacy reasons.

The final text was left for thanking the participants, reminding them of the timeline for results and elaboration of the survey as well as the declaration of intents to publish the whole dissertation in Open-Access and to find other ways to disseminate outcomes to anyone interested, closed by providing email contact for any further communication:

> «The results of the survey will be processed by the end of February 2023 and presented for the discussion of my thesis during the month of March. My thesis will be published online in Open-Access as soon as possible.
> Depending on the opportunities that will arise, I would like to share the outcomes of the thesis with all the people who took part in the survey, as well as with anyone who expressed interest in the project.
> In the meantime, thank you for your availability and for your support!
>
> For any clarification, don't hesitate to contact me by email:
> matteo.bartolucci6@studio.unibo.it»

After the completion of the survey, by clicking the send button, the registration of the contribution was also confirmed by a thanking message for joining in the survey.

3.3.1. Questionnaire contributions and statistics

At the moment of writing, the amount of contributions collected were stopped at the seemingly limited total of 11, although a better premise on the ratio within the target sample would redefine this initial impression. In fact, the entirety of the hamlet counts around 1000 inhabitants, of which perhaps a 100 got directly involved in the initiatives of the Circolo culturale Pieve di Gaifa.
Among them I personally noticed less than 30 constantly active members, making the amount of the 11 persons who replied a decent sample of more than a third if not even an actual half of this group of people, precisely chosen as already said for being already interested in local valorisation.

Here below will systematically be presented the various questions and answers fully translated in English (*originals in appendix*), followed by the statistics displayed in re-elaborated tables and charts, while brief preliminary comments are provided after each reported result.
In tables are the ranking type of questions (1 to 9), their various replies listed by rows in the random order provided by the export feature of the platform, with the percentage consequent to the number of votes received for each rank position on the same line –with a final column dedicated to display how they have ranked in an average score.

Pie charts have been chosen for the single-choice replies, going from question number 10 to number 15, and will also be preliminarily commented in cumulative paragraphs.

Question 1: **What does 'progress' within a community mean to you?**

options to rank	percentage for number of votes per rank position				average ranking
	1°	2°	3°	4°	
The level of human well-being achieved	72.72%	9.09%	9.09%	9.09%	1°
	8 vote(s)	1 vote(s)	1 vote(s)	1 vote(s)	
The level of economic growth	0.00%	18.18%	36.36%	45.45%	4°
	0 vote(s)	2 vote(s)	4 vote(s)	5 vote(s)	
The level of scientific and technological development	0.00%	36.36%	36.36%	27.27%	3°
	0 vote(s)	4 vote(s)	4 vote(s)	3 vote(s)	
The level of complexity of social organisation	27.27%	36.36%	18.18%	18.18%	2°
	3 vote(s)	4 vote(s)	2 vote(s)	2 vote(s)	

Here the one reply more aligned with my vision won first place, although it was interestingly also assigned at least one time at each point of the spectrum, signalling at least three persons deemed it not the best definition for progress. On the other end, "economic growth" positioned last without anyone ranking it first and the majority putting it fourth, although not almost as voted in middle positions. Similarly went for the definition involving "scientific and technological development", never featured first but by four in second and other four on the third, possibly meaning it is still a relevant parameter. Ultimately, social complexity scored second, with an even distribution of votes which gained it at least four on the other end of the spectrum and thus relevant as I would be prone to say it was considered an overall neuter (or obvious?) parameter.

In general, this first question seems to have received pretty much the replies I would have considered best, therefore either denoting an unexpected affinity of the sample target with my idea of progress or potentially an unwanted influence by me as personal stance taken in meetings.

Question 2: **Which definition is closer to your idea of 'cultural heritage' and which is less? 'Cultural heritage' is a set of cultural assets that...**

options to rank	percentage for number of votes per rank position				average ranking
	1°	2°	3°	4°	
...are inherited from the past and build the national identity	27.27%	18.18%	27.27%	27.27%	3°
	3 vote(s)	2 vote(s)	3 vote(s)	3 vote(s)	
...have universally recognized historical and artistic value for all mankind	27.27%	36.36%	18.18%	18.18%	2°
	3 vote(s)	4 vote(s)	2 vote(s)	2 vote(s)	
...constitute the social prestige and economic wealth of a territory	45.45%	27.27%	0.00%	27.27%	1°
	5 vote(s)	3 vote(s)	0 vote(s)	3 vote(s)	
...are shared by a community in the present times to improve their well-being	0.00%	18.18%	54.54%	27.27%	4°
	0 vote(s)	2 vote(s)	6 vote(s)	3 vote(s)	

On the contrary from the previous result, the statistics of this question seem to call for a very different and almost opposed standpoint from mine, at least regarding heritage. Although the one universalistic and the other nationalist definitions were quite even in middle-range distribution of votes, they still got a hold over the one trying to propose heritage as a shared asset toward well-being, which scored last although mostly arranged third by 6 participants. The first spot was one by the idea involving "social prestige" and "economic wealth" of the local context, almost an entrepreneurial consideration, by force of five votes while also gaining three as second and curiously enough other three as forth. Other than diverging from my personal stance, the replies here also seems to outline a more nuanced background around heritage and its relation with other concepts, such as progress or as seen next with sustainability.

Question 3: **Which of the following definitions best fits your idea of 'sustainability'? Sustainability is the ability to...**

options to rank	*percentage for number of votes per rank position*				*average ranking*
	1°	*2°*	*3°*	*4°*	
...keep our current lifestyle unchanged for an indefinite period in the future	18.18%	0.00%	18.18%	63.63%	4°
	2 *vote(s)*	0 *vote(s)*	2 *vote(s)*	7 *vote(s)*	
...continue sustainable development through green economic growth	9.09%	63.63%	18.18%	9.09%	2°
	1 *vote(s)*	7 *vote(s)*	2 *vote(s)*	1 *vote(s)*	
...satisfy the current needs without compromising those of the future	54.54%	18.18%	9.09%	18.18%	1°
	6 *vote(s)*	2 *vote(s)*	1 *vote(s)*	2 *vote(s)*	
...support the diversity that better addresses the social and environmental crisis	18.18%	18.18%	54.54%	9.09%	3°
	2 *vote(s)*	2 *vote(s)*	6 *vote(s)*	1 *vote(s)*	

Votes in this case are quite harmonised with one another, potentially meaning an alignment in the perception of the topic by the participants, as −despite each definition was put at least once at the beginning and end of the ranking- the overall score is paralleled by a majority (either 6 or 7).

Now going to the discrepancy with my personal vision, it is only third the one mentioning "diversity" as a parameter and gaining 2 votes in first position but just as the average fourth – which luckily was the definition pretending to continue with current lifestyle unchanged.

Also here, economy features high as second in the average ranking, possibly mirror of the coupling of "green" and "sustainable" with development which is a long-standing adagio and moreover an inflated rhetoric nowadays making it a 'common sense' choice.

The *Bruntland*'s definition got the first position, I suppose also because of its clear-cut wording sounding very much 'academic', thus representing a perhaps safer candidate than others to express an opinion over such a confused term made so by greenwashing and poor dissemination.

Question 4: **What 'Archaeology' means to you?**

options to rank	percentage for number of votes per rank position				average ranking
	1°	2°	3°	4°	
The study of a community through the interpretation, in the present times, of the traces it has left behind	45.45%	27.27%	27.27%	0.00%	1°
	5 vote(s)	3 vote(s)	3 vote(s)	0 vote(s)	
The discovery of ancient civilisations through the unearthing and historical-artistic classification of the archaeological findings	27.27%	9.09%	45.45%	18.18%	3°
	3 vote(s)	1 vote(s)	5 vote(s)	2 vote(s)	
The construction of stories through the knowledge interpreted by people involved in archaeological activities	0.00%	9.09%	9.09%	81.81%	4°
	0 vote(s)	1 vote(s)	1 vote(s)	9 vote(s)	
Reconstruction of the past through archaeological excavations and laboratory analysis carried out with a scientific method	27.27%	54.54%	18.18%	0.00%	2°
	3 vote(s)	6 vote(s)	2 vote(s)	0 vote(s)	

For this question I admit a certain struggle in the wording, despite best attempts following Moshenska guidelines and critical consideration (or perhaps because of them?), a difficulty which might be again symptomatic of the way archaeologists themselves cannot pinpoint the discipline. Nevertheless, it was surprising to detect how the most constructive definition for me unambiguously scored last, as it tried to include "stories" and any people involved into the interpretation process through archaeological activities. This seems to indicate that most of the participants are either too influenced by dominant academic considerations and are actually diffident of community practices themselves, or were taking the questionnaire as way to test them rather than knowing what they would have liked things to be, this latter suggesting a further possible framing for further interactions with the affected community.

Similarly, a "discovery of ancient civilisation" overall ranked third, again too 'Indiana Jones' to be taken seriously or feeling less appropriate than others. On the other hand, the definition mentioning "scientific method" and "laboratory analysis" undoubtedly gained high score by 3 votes as first and 6 as clear second average, apparently confirming the hypothesis around academic influence here. With even votes spiking as first, the idea of an archaeology studying past communities from a present perspective was more appealing, I suspect also due to the recurrent use of the very word "community" as focus of previous queries as well.

Question 5: Let's talk about the 'History of Humanity'. Would you define it as...

options to rank	*percentage for number of votes per rank position*				*average ranking*
	1°	*2°*	*3°*	*4°*	
a story that has a different meaning for each person	18.18%	27.27%	27.27%	27.27%	3°
	2 *vote(s)*	3 *vote(s)*	3 *vote(s)*	3 *vote(s)*	
a progressively increasing line of which we are the highest point	0.00%	18.18%	27.27%	54.54%	4°
	0 *vote(s)*	2 *vote(s)*	3 *vote(s)*	6 *vote(s)*	
a 'teacher of life' from whom we can learn everything	63.63%	27.27%	9.09%	0.00%	1°
	7 *vote(s)*	3 *vote(s)*	1 *vote(s)*	0 *vote(s)*	
a universal cycle destined to repeat itself endlessly	18.18%	27.27%	36.36%	18.18%	2°
	2 *vote(s)*	3 *vote(s)*	4 *vote(s)*	2 *vote(s)*	

Now that a complex key topic was asked about, the responses went again curios as compared with my own stances. On one hand in fact, we can clearly see one of the narratives I deem more destructive as last (namely linear progress), while also quite as clear the almost romantic definition of 'historia magistra vitae' gained first place.

Another quite self-contained idea ultimately opposing human agency got an even quantity of votes, possibly reflecting the influence of religious takes on the cyclic nature of time or even its secular reshape as determinism, scoring second average only by a little. It was in fact closely followed by the definition once again trying to push for a less academic and more 'contextually' relative, that is the course of human history seen from the perspective of each person's set of values. Provided it also referred to diversity, while even the wording of "History of Humanity" tends to imply an amount of universal and absolute meaning, I can consider myself lucky it still gained 2 and 3 votes respectively for first and second position.

On a final consideration, the very framing of the question and its context may have influenced the responses, as well as the very lack of further contextualisation which nonetheless made some people wanting to expose a more relative opinion on how they see such a broad construct.

Question 6: **Would you say that in the past –from a century ago back until prehistoric times- human communities compared to today generally lived:**

options to rank	percentage for number of votes per rank position				average ranking
	1°	2°	3°	4°	
in the same way as today but with less technology and comfort	9.09%	36.36%	45.45%	9.09%	2°
	1 vote(s)	4 vote(s)	5 vote(s)	1 vote(s)	
better, even if in underdeveloped ways, but fairer and with fewer problems	36.36%	9.09%	9.09%	45.45%	3°
	4 vote(s)	1 vote(s)	1 vote(s)	5 vote(s)	
in different ways, neither better nor worse, with their joys and sorrows	36.36%	27.27%	27.27%	9.09%	1°
	4 vote(s)	3 vote(s)	3 vote(s)	1 vote(s)	
worse, in underdeveloped way, facing more hardships and violence	18.18%	27.27%	18.18%	36.36%	4°
	2 vote(s)	3 vote(s)	2 vote(s)	4 vote(s)	

My preferred choice won, though in average terms, also signalling a rather conflicted imaginary within the target. In fact, the acknowledgement of diversity for past communities was made, but received overall even votes, no less than those who thinks they lived in fairer conditions although such answer ranked third over the more neutral one.

On this regard technology played a relevant role in shaping the replies, more like a medium parameter though, as preferred for ranking 2° and 3° while non-coherently exposing extremes. In fact, for the option considering past ways of living "better, even if" underdeveloped, it got 4 votes as first and 5 as last, just as like technological advancement is a conflictual parameter to evaluate a preferable condition to live in. This could be connected with previous statistics about "progress", showing a similar perspective, as well as providing an interesting framework for next questions.

To end the commentary, although the most discarding definition of past ways of living as "worse" due to being "underdeveloped" and "facing more hardship and violence" scored average forth, it received 4 votes only having others evenly distributed on all other positions –thus potentially confirming again an diffused view of the past as somewhat brutish in a way or another.

Question 7: **Today, what would it mean for you to live in a 'more sustainable' way?**

options to rank	percentage for number of votes per rank position				average ranking
	1°	2°	3°	4°	
Having to go back to the Stone Age	9.09%	0.00%	0.00%	90.90%	4°
	1 vote(s)	0 vote(s)	0 vote(s)	10 vote(s)	
To go back to a time when people's life was better	9.09%	27.27%	63.63%	0.00%	3°
	1 vote(s)	3 vote(s)	7 vote(s)	0 vote(s)	
To find different ways of living that are better than the current ones	54.54%	45.45%	0.00%	0.00%	1°
	6 vote(s)	5 vote(s)	0 vote(s)	0 vote(s)	
To continue with the same lifestyle but with more efficient technologies	27.27%	27.27%	36.36%	9.09%	2°
	3 vote(s)	3 vote(s)	4 vote(s)	1 vote(s)	

As this question served as a junction with all the previous key topics to the next section of the questionnaire, it has a crucial value per se although actually summarising other queries.

Namely, we can see how the idea of "Having to go back to the Stone Age" was discarded by all participants but one, hopefully as a consequence of the framing so far though I do not exclude it may just be because of the very negative consideration of the pre-historic past itself. Nonetheless, just as clearly the constructive narrative of looking for better and "different ways" ranked overall first and second with 5 votes, with no arrangement in lower positions.

The curious result for me is held on the average third, making a case for going "back to a time when people's life was better", as this could have been a very inflated choice given previous considerations –while instead it gained solid 7 votes for its final ranking as 3°.

Not surprisingly on the other hand is the average score of the option wondering about the possibility to "continue with the same lifestyle" though with enhanced efficiency, exposing the common bias of the 'technological solution'. To be fair though, as also in previous questions the matter was not so clear cut towards the preference of this narrative, the statistics are tempered here by the distribution of votes leaning to the third with 4 (having 3 for both 1° and 2° though).

At this point, there were the two questions around the various 'community groupings' who inhabited the context during human history, re-enlisted in chronological order here for simplicity.

Question 8: **If you had to decide which is the 'most advanced' community among those who lived in Canavaccio, what would it be?**
Try to sort them all according to your idea of 'progress'.

| options to rank | percentage for number of votes per rank position | | | | | | average ranking |
	1°	2°	3°	4°	5°	6°	
Picene	27.27%	18.18%	9.09%	18.18%	18.18%	9.09%	3°
	3 vote(s)	2 vote(s)	1 vote(s)	2 vote(s)	2 vote(s)	1 vote(s)	
Roman	27.27%	36.36%	18.18%	9.09%	9.09%	0.00%	1°
	3 vote(s)	4 vote(s)	2 vote(s)	1 vote(s)	1 vote(s)	0 vote(s)	
Medieval	0.00%	18.18%	18.18%	36.36%	9.09%	18.18%	4°
	0 vote(s)	2 vote(s)	2 vote(s)	4 vote(s)	1 vote(s)	2 vote(s)	
Renaissance	36.36%	0.00%	45.45%	18.18%	0.00%	0.00%	2°
	4 vote(s)	0 vote(s)	5 vote(s)	2 vote(s)	0 vote(s)	0 vote(s)	
Rural/agricultural	0.00%	18.18%	0.00%	18.18%	63.63%	0.00%	5°
	0 vote(s)	2 vote(s)	0 vote(s)	2 vote(s)	7 vote(s)	0 vote(s)	
Industrial/contemporary	9.09%	9.09%	9.09%	0.00%	0.00%	72.72%	6°
	1 vote(s)	1 vote(s)	1 vote(s)	0 vote(s)	0 vote(s)	8 vote(s)	

The sorting here got even more complicated and of course needed a simplification of the different eras and communities by cultural and temporal grouping, as said before in a disclaimer. However, it still was probably one of the main reasons for confusion among the sample participants, reported before in the open comments by at at least two persons, and it also is a further difficulty for the statistics to be meaningfully interpreted. Such an inconvenient did not evidently prevent the actual filling from which I can as well attempt to detect patterns.

Main is the consideration of communities in the Roman and Renaissance times as the overall "most advanced" ones, while other votes see the latter as a medium in the spectrum along with the Medieval period, otherwise evenly ranked in all position but the first. On one chronological extreme we find the Picene at the average ranking of third, though with well distributed sorting, and quite surprisingly our very contemporary Industrial community, which only gained some lone votes in the first three positions –more than the previous Rural society scored second-last.

Question 9: **If you had to decide which is the 'most sustainable' community among those who lived in Canavaccio, what would it be?**
**Try to sort them all according to your idea of 'sustainability'.**

| options to rank | percentage for number of votes per rank position | | | | | | average ranking |
	1°	2°	3°	4°	5°	6°	
Picene	72.72%	27.27%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	1°
	8 vote(s)	3 vote(s)	0 vote(s)	0 vote(s)	0 vote(s)	0 vote(s)	
Roman	9.09%	63.63%	27.27%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	2°
	1 vote(s)	7 vote(s)	3 vote(s)	0 vote(s)	0 vote(s)	0 vote(s)	
Medieval	0.00%	0.00%	54.54%	45.45%	0.00%	0.00%	3°
	0 vote(s)	0 vote(s)	6 vote(s)	5 vote(s)	0 vote(s)	0 vote(s)	
Renaissance	18.18%	0.00%	0.00%	45.45%	36.36%	0.00%	4°
	2 vote(s)	0 vote(s)	0 vote(s)	5 vote(s)	4 vote(s)	0 vote(s)	
Rural/agricultural	0.00%	9.09%	18.18%	9.09%	63.63%	0.00%	5°
	0 vote(s)	1 vote(s)	2 vote(s)	1 vote(s)	7 vote(s)	0 vote(s)	
Industrial/contemporary	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.0%	6°
	0 vote(s)	0 vote(s)	0 vote(s)	0 vote(s)	0 vote(s)	11 votes	

With this last table and ranking request things get literally sorted in a way interestingly harmonising with observations made so far. In fact, if technological development seemed to prove a valid parameter to differentiate the very ordering of communities through time from the least to the most "advanced", against a "sustainable" paradigm the chronological order is actually reversed in the average ranking. To frame such a situation, given the few exceptions which are the Renaissance getting 2 votes as first and the Rural/agricultural period gaining some positioning in the middle, I would say idea of progress as 'increasing' complexity had here the confirmation through those destructive narratives having as ultimate consequence that of disjoining progress from sustainability –as the latter is not possible with the other. Although I should very much agree with such a sorting result and its interpolated assumption, my critical stance here is that despite holding the seed of a valid conclusion, it still does not makes a distinction with the fact

that *the current* idea of progress is unsustainable rather than *any* form of advancement is: otherwise it expose an essential inevitability I suspect to run implicitly here.

Hereafter, some simple graphical renditions of the results for the single-answer questions on the individual and collective reception of topics and the very queries asked, served as pie charts. As a reminder, here I had my full proposal just disclosed, in order for the participants to be aware of it and frame the previous blocks of questions –namely ranking ones- into the idea of putting the key topics together and try

Question 10: **Do you agree with the idea of using sustainability, meant as both social and environmental, as a parameter to evaluate the advancement of communities?**

3

8

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
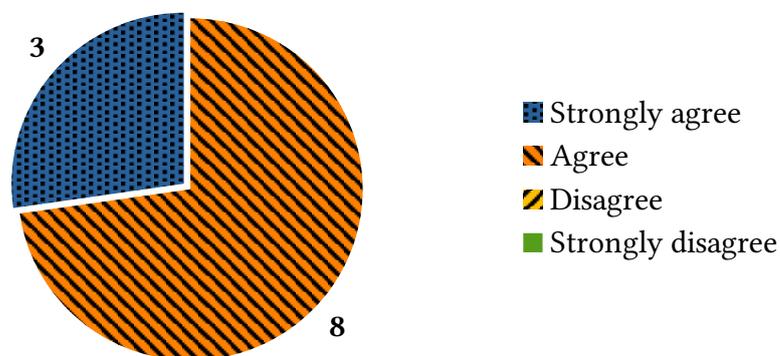
Question 11: **Would you say that the questions requiring to rank the various definitions of key topics made you reflect on the concepts underlying my proposal?**

2

4

5

- Yes, definitely
- Yes
- Not that much
- Not at all
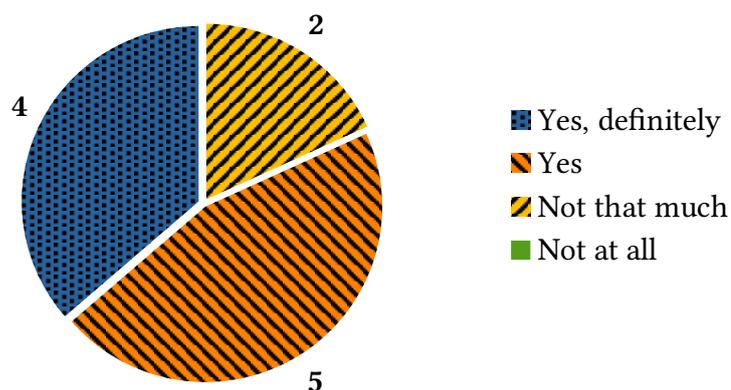
Question 12: **Apart from this survey, are there any other activities related to archaeology and sustainability (such as presentations, workshops, local events, etc.) which you could be/would like to be directly involved?**
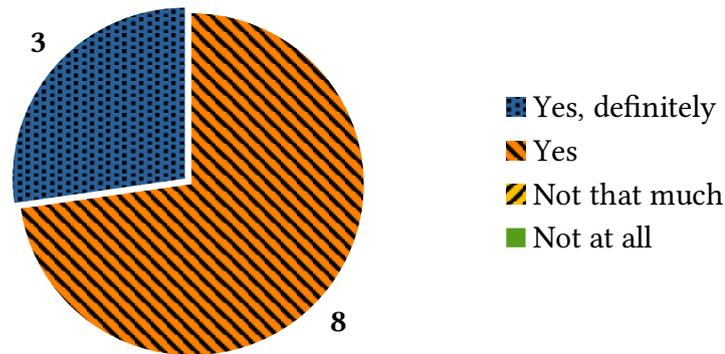

This first three questions were meant to probe the reception of the questionnaire so far, exclusively from a personal perspective. As an overall result, it seems most of the sample target would agree with my proposal of narrative shift towards sustainability, while the actual surveying method was perceived by 2 persons not efficient in making this point –while at the same time more participants were prone to consider it a very positive approach instead that simply a neutrally good one (as 4 replied "Yes, definitely" and 5 just with a neutral yes).

Looking at the last enquiry, again this trend is confirmed, highlighting a core of at least 3 people seemingly more enthusiast also regarding their possible personal engagement in the project.

Question 13: **How do you think such a project would be greeted by the local residents of Canavaccio, including those who are not already involved in the valorisation of the territory?**
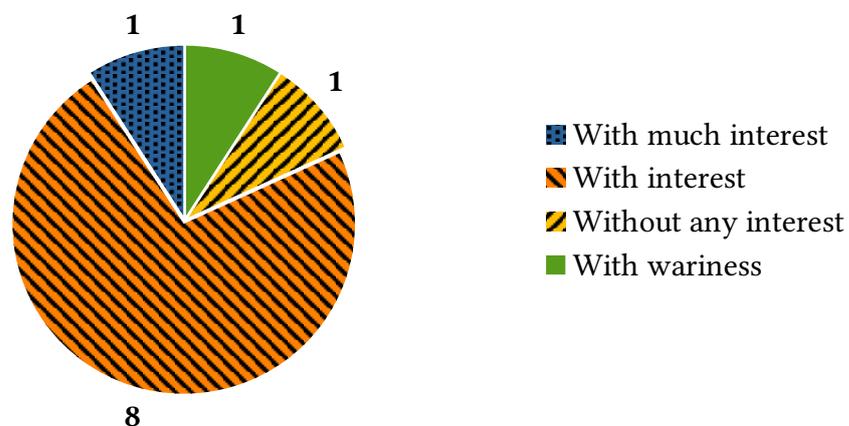
Question 14: **In your opinion, is rearranging definitions according to your own point of view (like you did in this survey) an action that could make our community reflect on these key issues?**

1   1

- ▦ Yes, definitely
- ▧ Yes
- ▨ Not that much
- ■ Not at all

9
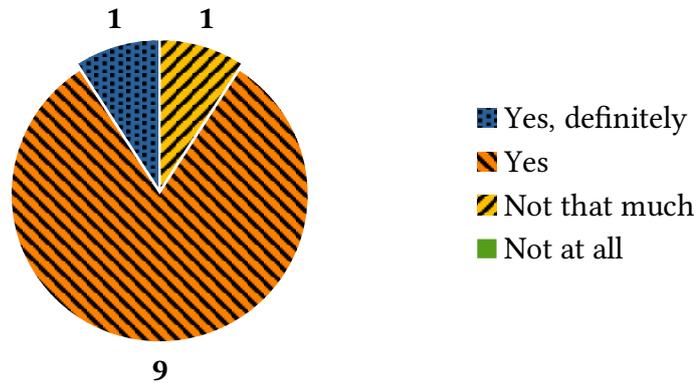
Question 15: **Do you think that other activities in the territory could intrigue and involve the people of Canavaccio in this project?**

1   1

- ▦ Yes, definitely
- ▧ Yes
- ▨ Not that much
- ■ Not at all

9
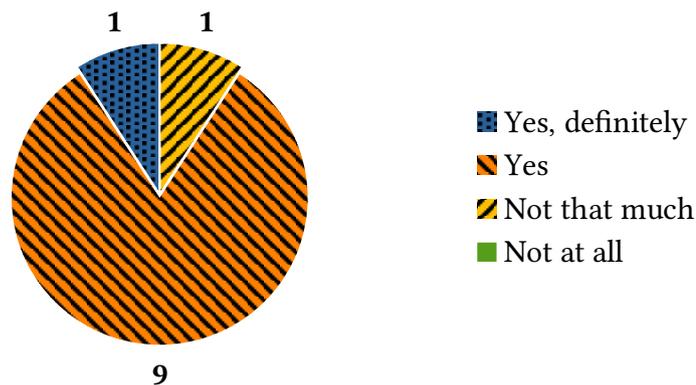
Here the response was slightly more cautious, as if the neutral approach some participants expressed for themselves –despite their overall welcoming of the project- could in fact not be shared by the whole of the community outside the target sample.

This brought one person to actually reply as the valorisation of the territory through my proposed paradigm could be greeted with wariness, as well as granting one vote for a "Not that much" efficient outlook to both the questionnaire ranking modality and even for any other activity.

On the other hand, probably within the core of the three seemingly 'enthusiast' people in the personal section, one person invariably replied at all these last questions with the best option.

The situation at hand could be a clue for a phenomenon of different identities between groups in the local context, a diffidence from the target sample of people already interested in cultural

valorisation as those in the Circolo culturale Pieve di Gaifa and those outside, as I suspected due to a personal communication during this initial probing of my proposed ideas.

Therefore I can only provide preliminary observations at this early step, a sum-up of general trends on how far or close to the project intentions the target participants felt to reply to the questionnaire, a more accurate wording as I recognise the replies were inevitably influenced by it. Mainly if fact the sample agreed while only sometimes disagreeing, with an somehow predictable response to conflictual key points, as well as unexpected distribution of votes on certain others. The most relevant pattern detected is perhaps their apparent evaluation of some of the topics (*e.g.*: progress, heritage and sustainability) through quite discordant parameters, as for instance the importance of economy in sustainability and heritage was seemingly detached from narratives of progress, rather associated with well-being and almost anti-status quo stances. Thus I would on a preliminary note conclude that exposing the interconnections between various key features, namely how one is strictly influenced by the other generating benefits or damages, is a valid path to explore within the approaches and aims of this project. Further developments could in fact try to confirm this initial impression, that is of these topics being apparently perceived as disconnected by the target context, whereas I mostly argued they are not quite so and the core of unsustainable practices could precisely lie in the disempowering consequences of dominant narratives based on severed knowledge and thus responsibilities.

At this point though I would like to reiterate how, also given its acknowledged negative lacks, my practical project was first and foremost aimed at opening a communication channel with an interested local community –to talk about the hegemonic paradigm while also exploiting for good the privilege of the academic position I hold some way. After this initial iteration, the approach should hopefully shape around the feedback and further reactions to my stances and the topics proposed. I envision this better towards some actually 'public' archaeology initiative including narratives, be them in a digital interactive reconstruction hosted on a hub in local-servers or preferably more accessible theatrical performances (involving climate role-playing perhaps?), keeping in mind the best ideas are up to collective imagination. Among the others, one I do consider worth all the efforts is ultimately to spread curiosity: to engage with different eyes at living and substantially involve our communities of care in new "games", to experiment alternative rules to play –arguably a basic cultural feature of our species self-reimagined as "Homo Ludens" (Huizinga [1938] 1980). Even a joyful perspective then, while grounded on the awareness that the gravity of the current crisis requires us to find radically and less toxic thus better ways to have fun and enjoy our lives together.

Conclusions?

If I am allowed to recycle my own previous play on words, rephrasing the adagio adopted as a propositional stance, what I did in the end was "to go big *by* going home". While finding out the best way to implement broader concepts of social and environmental justice, I in fact had to admit the relevance of a local context, and what could have been best than the very one I had at home?

It was not only a choice of convenience, as I was also presented the possibility to pick up a village abroad. Nonetheless, the very idea of carrying on my research as a complete stranger to the context of interest seemed to me yet another form of detachment, inhibiting deep involvement of and with the affected community as well as potentially re-proposing mechanisms of imposed academic epistemology. Rather, I stepped up my game and set the playground as seriously as possible, in between the urgent need to face such an all-encompassing crisis at hand while not forgetting the very people locally affected by it as well as the ones I care for. The choice was to stay true to personal and also most critical ethical conclusions of either trying something at the best of standards or squarely dropping the research project and study path as a whole.

I reiterate how such a seemingly radical standpoint further rendered valid for me, as deploying this project made me re-think my position both as a part of a scholarly and a local community, suggesting that essential dichotomies can be overcome in front of existential threats and open up to a variety of possibilities –if we truly are willing and aware to risk it all. Moreover I have learned this challenge must not be faced alone but rather collectively as, to solve even the biggest issue, asking for help and entrusting others does render the most honest and valuable approach.

As this is my take-home, I will continue to look for further engagement possibilities, given my current intention to give the support back also to the target community by disseminating the outcomes of my academic research as well as my personal and collective experience in Bologna.

In particular, following other steps on how deal with the ground covered by my proposal while facing a local context of care, I could present the ideas not from the standpoint of the ecoclimate activist I am but still making it clear within the framework of civic responsibilities. As I did for the evaluation paradigm still in place, duly criticised in the dedicated section, a fair start would be again giving the public what they more expect from a talk on archaeology –though adding a critical stance. That is, for instance, the fact archaeology itself is famously adventurous and scholarly accurate, but as seen in this dissertation it has been found guilty through time and thus

holds the responsibilities to the public sphere as well. One is the impression (and often evidence) archaeologists closed in themselves, leaving actual affected people or simply spontaneously interested ones wondering about their processes, but basically excluding those not scholarly kept involved. I personally noticed this resonating in small groups made of individuals who undertook an university degree too, as in the case of the cultural association, similarly perceived for many other academic disciplines in a twofold narrative of distrust –only somehow tempered with one-way reverence to academia as epistemological validation authority.

In contrast, I would like to propose my alternative narrative around progress as an empowering stance, one accurately framed as not only not fair for the rest of the public, but also for scholarly reasons. Basically, the current situation is at an old stalemate with a certain amount of elitist approach against those who did not have the resources to follow this career path, despite being very interested and willing to take part to this knowledge creation process. Given such an perspective actually revealed counterproductive for the advancement and sound application of the discipline itself, illustrated before as both the community of practice and its very practices better thrive in cross-boundary collaboration, thus the aim of similar projects can be presented as to reconnect archaeology with its interested and local communities, through a topic which is crucial nowadays for the best improvement of both contexts.

Another point of focus would be to propose all of this in the principle of an empathic attitude, rather than looking for destructive conflict in conceptual frameworks, thus with regard of the familiar imaginary and everyday life of people. For instance a basic preposition could be noticing how in the majority of the industrial narratives we are said to be the top civilisation, through all of the technology and knowledge accumulated so far, but the majority of us still live their lives using pretty simple stuff we do not fully know how they actually works. Nevertheless, this lack of distribution in collective knowledge does not mean we are ignorant or not part of the same civilised society, right? Indeed, a similar framing would hold true also when looking at communities in the past. Furthermore, by suggesting to think through this lens, we could elaborate a different image of ancient times where 'civilisation' never was as still is not in the sheer amount of cumulative knowledge or technological advancement. Rather it could better lie in how the more diffused and simply recognised as 'diverse' means of living are employed and eventually what the best level of shared awareness about these same tools is.

Another step could be asking: how to evaluate if the use-case of different devices is 'proper' or 'efficient', in order to say which civilisation is more advanced than another? Remaining in the outlined spectrum of non-belligerency, initially it could be just noticed how in fact parameters and paradigms applied today are revealing more and more inefficient in terms of effective

evaluation. Similar acknowledgements could open the debate on economic growth as meant by neo-liberal standards, which clearly does not match –and rather endangers- social well-being as well as actual physical safety. This would be done by a more in-depth and informed discussion over the truly disruptive consequences of human-induced climate and ecological changes. A junction and meeting point here is the statement, through the very mean of archaeology and physical anthropology, that our biology (and there's no clue from psychology or neurology that we did otherwise mentally) remained basically the same throughout all the course of our (*Homo Sapiens*) species' history. This acknowledgement comes despite what we have been used to think by a hegemonic narrative, which too often justifies disruptive changes as naturalised consequences of the status quo, while it is the actual relation with the environment rather changing as we modify our social structures and thus have responsibilities over reactions.

After having presented this whole set of possible pathways to cross, one last question might have been left unspoken, which is still worth addressing in my opinion.
Would this project, prosing an alternative narrative through the shift of parameters in favour of true sustainability against our current paradigm of progress, ultimately work or not?
I dare say: this is yet another ill-posed question, itself requiring a reframe according to the radical stances taken so far. Namely, I would ask if instead we archaeologists (stretching as far as comprehending all academics) can commit to narratives so different from the one we were used to support this far. Moreover, last but not least, I would once again ask whether we can really fool ourselves so much –critically not forgetting the rapidly closing window for meaningful action to mitigate the crisis- to sustain that there will still be a discipline to practice (and academia) at all in the case we do not radically shift our current models and substantially change trajectories.
Thus my answer to this final doubt better finds place in the firm standpoint that either we succeed or we fail for good –or, actually, *for bad*- while we nonetheless have the duty to match our responsibilities by trying it all at the best of our possibilities.

On a final note I would happily agree that "...I don't break the soil periodically to 'reaffirm my status'.", rather just "I do it because archeology is still the most fun you can have...", as some (Flannery 1982, 28) concluded decades ago. Although this would be true for most archaeologists, it may also serve an unaware justification not to take due political stances and acknowledge critical biases, those needed to address ethical issues in this discipline. Here in fact, whence we have recognised how its very practice and theory consolidated the dominant narrative and still supports the very status quo of the current destructive system, we can not afford to abide by complacency any more. I therefore feel the duty to do everything in my power, even if it means

stepping back from practising the discipline myself, not to erase the only chance present and future generations have to still enjoy doing archaeology –and ultimately anything else they would like. Otherwise, the most lucky ones would be the few having the possibility to still have fun with ruins yet, lucky enough only to turn a blind eye on everything else falling apart for a brief more while. This condition would painfully stretch until they will also be prevented from enjoying their ruins, eventually having to realise there is nothing else left.

Such is the situation we are in today, we knew it before and we did little to avert it, so it is all the more important to act now towards a better chance without any further delay.

Hence I reiterate that my critique is not end-in-itself nor it is a matter of blaming and opposing the discipline, since I would personally like to just care about enjoying it myself. Rather, I truly wish everyone else could be equally free to have the most fun they can with archaeology. In order to achieve this I think we have the responsibility to understand whether for us to "break the soil periodically" as collective and individual practitioners does not in fact only reaffirm our status and the current status quo to the damage of others. Ultimately, if caring about this takes away the fun, I choose it over closing our eyes two steps before the precipice, and I would better try to find other ways to have fun through different narratives.

Rephrasing Brightman and Lewis (2017b, 28) after all of the insights so far: ignorance was never actually an excuse, now it is too late to be pessimist and dwell in inaction any longer, so it is time for radical action and curiosity towards a critical and pragmatic optimisms.

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On similarly local scale I thank the community of Extinction Rebellion in Bologna, as well as on a more global scale the XR movement as a whole and the newly formed group of Scientist Rebellion which I helped to bring to life in Italy. I am grateful primarily for the hope the very existence of similar groups of people infused to me, passing to their active involvement in trying to build a critically better world. The personal and professional insights gained by going in action under these movements are invaluable, although I would give a shout out to each and every person who is actually keeping to do everything they can to bring any possible actual change, no matter under which name they go into action, as far as they do it genuinely as well as critically.

Furthermore, I have to thank each person who has got willingly or not involved in my journey, especially my flatmates and classmates whom I shared joys and sorrows with.

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On this note, I would like to acknowledge the crucial role of all the digital tools I have employed and thus be grateful to those who contributed to them, from the very Linux operative system to the whole pack of FLOSS software used –among all the LogSeq knowledge manager software and the LibreOffice suite without which I could had not possibly write and elaborate this dissertation.

Finally then, as a further critical stance I thank the *legit* Archive.org and *pirate* Sci-Hub and Library Genesis [use Tor browser by downloading it at https://www.torproject.org/ to reach the websites if your country limits access, visit Anna's Archive at https://annas-archive.org/ as a meta-search platform, look for alternative links at *e.g.* https://unblockit.name/#books in case old domains have been closed], for practically making this dissertation possible and reminding me how rotten the current academic (and underlying capitalist) system is to consider those services as 'criminal' (https://web.archive.org/web/20230517053457/https://custodians.online/) when they actually respect academia's own purpose better than any other 'official' knowledge repository.

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APPENDICES
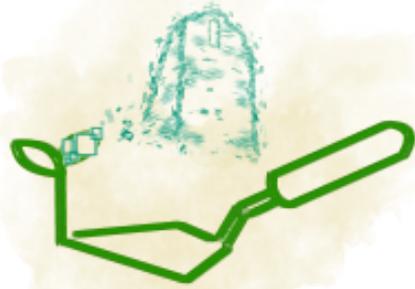
Canavaccio: Archeologia e Sostenibilità - questionario preliminare

I campi contrassegnati con un * sono obbligatori.

Questionario preliminare per il progetto su archeologia e sostenibilità a Canavaccio

Da compilare entro e non oltre il 15 Gennaio 2023

Mi chiamo Matteo Bartolucci, sono nato e cresciuto a Canavaccio, e ora mi sto laureando in archeologia. Oggi chiedo la tua collaborazione per questa breve indagine, parte del mio progetto di tesi magistrale all'Università di Bologna.

L'idea di fondo è riuscire a integrare l'archeologia con la sostenibilità, coinvolgendo le persone di Canavaccio e dintorni.

Il questionario che stai per compilare mi serve per avere un primo riscontro, capire i punti di incontro e di differenza su questa mia idea iniziale. Per questo ora l'ho condiviso solo tra persone già interessate alla cultura del nostro territorio, così da sviluppare al meglio il progetto in un secondo momento e ascoltare altre voci locali.

Tieni presente che non ci sono risposte "giuste" o "sbagliate" ma solo quelle che, leggendo la domanda con attenzione, rispecchiano al meglio la tua opinione personale.

Benché informale, il questionario è una parte fondamentale della mia tesi. Andrebbe compilato entro e non oltre il 15 Gennaio 2023.

Accettando di proseguire mi aiuterai a portare avanti questo progetto. Al termine del questionario potrai decidere se lasciare tuoi contatti oppure mantenere l'anonimato.

☐ Accetto

[Show](#)

Temi chiave

1

Per completare le seguenti domande, dovrai tenere premuta e trascinare ogni risposta nella posizione desiderata (in cima quella più significativa e andando in basso quelle gradualmente meno significative).

* 1 Cosa significa per te il "progresso" all'interno di una comunità?
Ordina le seguenti definizioni dalla più vicina alla più lontana al tuo modo di vedere questo concetto.
(ordina dall'alto al basso o lascia quello casuale cliccando su "accept the initial order")
Use drag&drop or the up/down buttons to change the order or accept the initial order.

- ⠿ Il livello di complessità di organizzazione sociale
- ⠿ Il livello di crescita economica
- ⠿ Il livello di benessere umano raggiunto
- ⠿ Il livello di sviluppo scientifico e tecnologico

* 2 Quale definizione è più vicina alla tua idea di "patrimonio culturale" e quale meno?
Il "patrimonio culturale" è un insieme di beni culturali che...
(ordina dall'alto al basso o lascia quello casuale cliccando su "accept the initial order")
Use drag&drop or the up/down buttons to change the order or accept the initial order.

- ⠿ ... sono condivisi da una comunità nel presente per migliorare il proprio benessere
- ⠿ ... vengono ereditati dal passato e che vanno a formare l'identità nazionale
- ⠿ ... costituiscono il prestigio sociale e la ricchezza economica di un territorio
- ⠿ ... hanno valore storico e artistico universalmente riconosciuto per tutta l'umanità

* 3 Quali delle seguenti definizioni si avvicinano di più al tuo modo di vedere il concetto di "sostenibilità"?
Sostenibilità è la possibilità di...
(ordina dall'alto al basso o lascia quello casuale cliccando su "accept the initial order")
Use drag&drop or the up/down buttons to change the order or accept the initial order.

- ⠿ ... supportare le diversità che meglio affrontano le crisi sociali e ambientali
- ⠿ ... mantenere il nostro attuale stile di vita invariato per un periodo indefinito nel futuro
- ⠿ ... soddisfare i bisogni del presente senza compromettere quelli del futuro
- ⠿ ... continuare uno sviluppo sostenibile tramite una crescita economica verde

* 4 Che cos'è per te l'"archeologia"?
(ordina dall'alto al basso o lascia quello casuale cliccando su "accept the initial order")
Use drag&drop or the up/down buttons to change the order or accept the initial order.

- ⠿ Lo studio di una comunità tramite l'interpretazione nel presente delle tracce che ha lasciato
- ⠿ La costruzione di storie tramite le conoscenze interpretate da partecipanti alle attività archeologiche

:::   Lo ricostruzione del passato tramite gli scavi e le analisi di laboratorio condotte con metodo scientifico

:::   La scoperta di civiltà antiche tramite il rinvenimento e la classificazione storico-artistica dei reperti

---

*5 Parlando di "storia dell'umanità", tu la ritieni...

(ordina dall'alto al basso o lascia quello casuale cliccando su "accept the initial order")

Use drag&drop or the up/down buttons to change the order or accept the initial order.

:::   una linea progressivamente crescente di cui siamo il punto più alto

:::   un racconto che ha un senso diverso per ogni persona

:::   un ciclo universale destinato a ripetersi all'infinito

:::   una "maestra di vita" dalla quale possiamo imparare tutto

*6 Diresti che in passato, da un secolo fa fino alla preistoria, le comunità umane rispetto ad oggi generalmente vivevano:

(ordina dall'alto al basso o lascia quello casuale cliccando su "accept the initial order")

Use drag&drop or the up/down buttons to change the order or accept the initial order.

:::   in modi diversi, né meglio né peggio, con le loro gioie e dolori

:::   allo stesso modo di oggi ma con meno tecnologie e comodità

:::   peggio, in modi arretrati, affrontando più difficoltà e violenze

:::   meglio, pur se in modi arretrati, ma più giusti e con meno problemi

*7 Vivere in modi "più sostenibili", al giorno d'oggi, secondo te significherebbe:

(ordina dall'alto al basso o lascia quello casuale cliccando su "accept the initial order")

Use drag&drop or the up/down buttons to change the order or accept the initial order.

:::   Trovare modi diversi di vivere che siano migliori di quelli attuali

:::   Continuare con lo stesso stile di vita ma con tecnologie più efficienti

:::   Tornare indietro a tempi in cui si viveva meglio

:::   Dover tornare indietro all'Età della Pietra

Già grazie a pochi ritrovamenti archeologici possiamo comunque dire che a Canavaccio, in *ordine cronologico*, si sono succedute (semplificando molto) comunità **Picene**, **Romane**, **Medievali**, **Rinascimentali**, **Rurali contadine** e **Contemporanee industriali** (la nostra!).

*

8 Se dovessi decidere qual è la comunità "più progredita" tra quelle che hanno vissuto a Canavaccio, quale sarebbe?

Prova a metterle *tutte* in ordine come ritieni più giusto secondo la tua idea di "progresso".

(ordina dall'alto al basso o lascia quello casuale cliccando su "accept the initial order")

Use drag&drop or the up/down buttons to change the order or accept the initial order.

⸬   Picene

⸬   Romane

⸬   Medievali

⸬   Rinascimentali

⸬   Rurali contadine

⸬   Industriali contemporanee

* 9 Se dovessi decidere qual è la comunità "più sostenibile" tra quelle che hanno vissuto a Canavaccio, quale sarebbe?

Prova a metterle *tutte* in ordine come ritieni più giusto secondo la tua idea di "sostenibilità".

(ordina dall'alto al basso o lascia quello casuale cliccando su "accept the initial order")

Use drag&drop or the up/down buttons to change the order or accept the initial order.

⸬   Picene

⸬   Romane

⸬   Medievali

⸬   Rinascimentali

⸬   Rurali contadine

⸬   Industriali contemporanee

Idea proposta

L'ordine che hai assegnato alle varie comunità del territorio nelle ultime due domande potrebbe non coincidere. E forse dovremmo chiederci perché.

La mia idea è quella di riuscire a guardare alla sostenibilità come una delle caratteristiche principali per valutare "quanto avanzata" sia una civiltà nel passato come anche una comunità nel presente.

La sostenibilità, in questo senso, non è solo ambientale ma anche sociale e passa attraverso il modo in cui vediamo tanto il nostro territorio quanto la nostra cultura. Non possiamo proteggere il nostro patrimonio, né crearne di nuovo, se non abbiamo un ambiente che ci supporta -un ambiente che è sia naturale che di comunità.

*

10 Cosa ne pensi dell'idea di impiegare la sostenibilità, sociale e ambientale, come parametro per l'avanzamento di una comunità?

Seleziona una sola delle risposte

- ○ Molto d'accordo
- ○ D'accordo
- ○ In disaccordo
- ○ Molto disaccordo

*11 Riordinare le varie definizioni ti ha fatto riflettere sui concetti alla base della mia proposta?

Seleziona una sola delle risposte

- ○ Sì, abbastanza
- ○ Sì
- ○ Non particolarmente
- ○ No, per niente

*12 A parte questo questionario, altre attività attorno all'idea di archeologia e sostenibilità (come presentazioni, laboratori, eventi nel territorio ecc...), potrebbero coinvolgerti personalmente?

Seleziona una sola delle risposte

- ○ Sì, abbastanza
- ○ Sì
- ○ Non particolarmente
- ○ No, per niente

*13 Come pensi che verrebbe accolto questo progetto dalle persone di Canavaccio, anche quelle non sono già coinvolte nella valorizzazione del territorio?

- ○ Con molto interesse
- ○ Con interesse
- ○ Senza alcun interesse
- ○ Con diffidenza

*14 Secondo te, riordinare le varie definizioni secondo il proprio punto di vista è un esercizio che potrebbe far riflettere la nostra comunità su questi temi chiave?

Seleziona una sola delle risposte

- ○ Sì, abbastanza
- ○ Sì
- ○ Non particolarmente
- ○ No, per niente

*15 Pensi che altre attività nel territorio potrebbero incuriosire e coinvolgere le persone di Canavaccio in questo progetto?

Seleziona una sola delle risposte

- ○ Sì, abbastanza
- ○ Sì
- ○ Non particolarmente
- ○ No, per niente

Commenti finali

Quest'ultima parte è del tutto facoltativa da compilare con risposte aperte.

16 Hai commenti, osservazioni, consigli da darmi riguardo il questionario che hai appena compilato?

17 Delle possibili attività per coinvolgere il paese in questo progetto, te ne viene in mente qualcuna che ti interessa in modo particolare?

18 Per qualunque altra riflessione (sul progetto, l'idea, e tutto il resto) puoi scrivere qua sotto!

Se vuoi, ma ricorda che non è assolutamente obbligatorio, puoi inserire qui i tuoi contatti.

19 Nome e/o cognome

20 Indirizzo email

21 Cellulare

I risultati del questionario saranno elaborati entro fine Febbraio 2023 e presentati per la discussione della mia tesi durante il mese di Marzo. La pubblicazione della stessa è prevista in Open-Access (accesso aperto) sul web il prima possibile.

A seconda delle occasioni che si presenteranno, vorrei riuscire a condividere l'esito della tesi con tutte le persone che hanno partecipato al questionario, assieme a chiunque abbia espresso interesse per il progetto.

Nel frattempo grazie per la disponibilità e per il tuo supporto!

Per qualsiasi chiarimento puoi contattarmi all'indirizzo email matteo.bartolucci6@studio.unibo.it

Statistics: Canavaccio: Archeologia e Sostenibilità - questionario preliminare

Cosa significa per te il "progresso" all'interno di una comunità? Ordina le seguenti definizioni dalla più vicina alla più lontana al tuo modo di vedere questo concetto. (ordina dall'alto al basso o lascia quello casuale cliccando su "accept the initial order")

	1	2	3	4	Score
Il livello di benessere umano raggiunto	72.72% 8	9.09% 1	9.09% 1	9.09% 1	3.45 11
Il livello di crescita economica	0.0% 0	18.18% 2	36.36% 4	45.45% 5	1.72 11
Il livello di sviluppo scientifico e tecnologico	0.0% 0	36.36% 4	36.36% 4	27.27% 3	2.09 11
Il livello di complessità di organizzazione sociale	27.27% 3	36.36% 4	18.18% 2	18.18% 2	2.72 11
No Answer	0 % 0				

Quale definizione è più vicina alla tua idea di "patrimonio culturale" e quale meno? Il "patrimonio culturale" è un insieme di beni culturali che... (ordina dall'alto al basso o lascia quello casuale cliccando su "accept the initial order")

	1	2	3	4	Score
... vengono ereditati dal passato e che vanno a formare l'identità nazionale	27.27% 3	18.18% 2	27.27% 3	27.27% 3	2.45 11
... hanno valore storico e artistico universalmente riconosciuto per tutta l'umanità	27.27% 3	36.36% 4	18.18% 2	18.18% 2	2.72 11
... costituiscono il prestigio sociale e la ricchezza economica di un territorio	45.45% 5	27.27% 3	0.0% 0	27.27% 3	2.9 11
... sono condivisi da una comunità nel presente per migliorare il proprio benessere	0.0% 0	18.18% 2	54.54% 6	27.27% 3	1.9 11
No Answer	0 % 0				

Quali delle seguenti definizioni si avvicinano di più al tuo modo di vedere il concetto di "sostenibilità"? Sostenibilità è la possibilità di... (ordina dall'alto al basso o lascia quello casuale cliccando su "accept the initial order")

	1	2	3	4	Score
... mantenere il nostro attuale stile di vita invariato per un periodo indefinito nel futuro	18.18% 2	0.0% 0	18.18% 2	63.63% 7	1.72 11

	1	2	3	4	Score
... continuare uno sviluppo sostenibile tramite una crescita economica verde	9.09% 1	63.63% 7	18.18% 2	9.09% 1	2.72 11
... soddisfare i bisogni del presente senza compromettere quelli del futuro	54.54% 6	18.18% 2	9.09% 1	18.18% 2	3.09 11
... supportare le diversità che meglio affrontano le crisi sociali e ambientali	18.18% 2	18.18% 2	54.54% 6	9.09% 1	2.45 11
No Answer	0 % 0				

Che cos'è per te l'"archeologia"? (ordina dall'alto al basso o lascia quello casuale cliccando su "accept the initial order")

	1	2	3	4	Score
Lo studio di una comunità tramite l'interpretazione nel presente delle tracce che ha lasciato	45.45% 5	27.27% 3	27.27% 3	0.0% 0	3.18 11
La scoperta di civiltà antiche tramite il rinvenimento e la classificazione storico-artistica dei reperti	27.27% 3	9.09% 1	45.45% 5	18.18% 2	2.45 11
La costruzione di storie tramite le conoscenze interpretate da partecipanti alle attività archeologiche	0.0% 0	9.09% 1	9.09% 1	81.81% 9	1.27 11
Lo ricostruzione del passato tramite gli scavi e le analisi di laboratorio condotte con metodo scientifico	27.27% 3	54.54% 6	18.18% 2	0.0% 0	3.09 11
No Answer	0 % 0				

Parlando di "storia dell'umanità", tu la ritieni... (ordina dall'alto al basso o lascia quello casuale cliccando su "accept the initial order")

	1	2	3	4	Score
un racconto che ha un senso diverso per ogni persona	18.18% 2	27.27% 3	27.27% 3	27.27% 3	2.36 11
una linea progressivamente crescente di cui siamo il punto più alto	0.0% 0	18.18% 2	27.27% 3	54.54% 6	1.63 11
una "maestra di vita" dalla quale possiamo imparare tutto	63.63% 7	27.27% 3	9.09% 1	0.0% 0	3.54 11
un ciclo universale destinato a ripetersi all'infinito	18.18% 2	27.27% 3	36.36% 4	18.18% 2	2.45 11
No Answer	0 % 0				

Diresti che in passato, da un secolo fa fino alla preistoria, le comunità umane rispetto ad oggi generalmente vivevano: (ordina dall'alto al basso o lascia quello casuale cliccando su "accept the initial order")

	1	2	3	4	Score

allo stesso modo di oggi ma con meno tecnologie e comodità	9.09% 1	36.36% 4	45.45% 5	9.09% 1	2.45 11
meglio, pur se in modi arretrati, ma più giusti e con meno problemi	36.36% 4	9.09% 1	9.09% 1	45.45% 5	2.36 11
in modi diversi, né meglio né peggio, con le loro gioie e dolori	36.36% 4	27.27% 3	27.27% 3	9.09% 1	2.9 11
peggio, in modi arretrati, affrontando più difficoltà e violenze	18.18% 2	27.27% 3	18.18% 2	36.36% 4	2.27 11
No Answer	0 % 0				

Vivere in modi "più sostenibili", al giorno d'oggi, secondo te significherebbe: (ordina dall'alto al basso o lascia quello casuale cliccando su "accept the initial order")

	1	2	3	4	Score
Dover tornare indietro all'Età della Pietra	9.09% 1	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	90.9% 10	1.27 11
Tornare indietro a tempi in cui si viveva meglio	9.09% 1	27.27% 3	63.63% 7	0.0% 0	2.45 11
Trovare modi diversi di vivere che siano migliori di quelli attuali	54.54% 6	45.45% 5	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	3.54 11
Continuare con lo stesso stile di vita ma con tecnologie più efficienti	27.27% 3	27.27% 3	36.36% 4	9.09% 1	2.72 11
No Answer	0 % 0				

Se dovessi decidere qual è la comunità "più progredita" tra quelle che hanno vissuto a Canavaccio, quale sarebbe? Prova a metterle tutte in ordine come ritieni più giusto secondo la tua idea di "progresso". (ordina dall'alto al basso o lascia quello casuale cliccando su "accept the initial order")

	1	2	3	4	5	6	Score
Picene	27.27% 3	18.18% 2	9.09% 1	18.18% 2	18.18% 2	9.09% 1	3.9 11
Romane	27.27% 3	36.36% 4	18.18% 2	9.09% 1	9.09% 1	0.0% 0	4.63 11
Medievali	0.0% 0	18.18% 2	18.18% 2	36.36% 4	9.09% 1	18.18% 2	3.09 11
Rinascimentali	36.36% 4	0.0% 0	45.45% 5	18.18% 2	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	4.54 11
Rurali contadine	0.0% 0	18.18% 2	0.0% 0	18.18% 2	63.63% 7	0.0% 0	2.72 11
Industriali contemporanee	9.09% 1	9.09% 1	9.09% 1	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	72.72% 8	2.09 11
No Answer	0 % 0						

Se dovessi decidere qual è la comunità "più sostenibile" tra quelle che hanno vissuto a Canavaccio, quale sarebbe? Prova a metterle tutte in ordine come ritieni più giusto secondo la tua idea di "sostenibilità". (ordina dall'alto al basso o lascia quello casuale cliccando su "accept the initial order")

	1	2	3	4	5	6	Score
Picene	**72.72%** 8	**27.27%** 3	**0.0%** 0	**0.0%** 0	**0.0%** 0	**0.0%** 0	**5.72** 11
Romane	**9.09%** 1	**63.63%** 7	**27.27%** 3	**0.0%** 0	**0.0%** 0	**0.0%** 0	**4.81** 11
Medievali	**0.0%** 0	**0.0%** 0	**54.54%** 6	**45.45%** 5	**0.0%** 0	**0.0%** 0	**3.54** 11
Rinascimentali	**18.18%** 2	**0.0%** 0	**0.0%** 0	**45.45%** 5	**36.36%** 4	**0.0%** 0	**3.18** 11
Rurali contadine	**0.0%** 0	**9.09%** 1	**18.18%** 2	**9.09%** 1	**63.63%** 7	**0.0%** 0	**2.72** 11
Industriali contemporanee	**0.0%** 0	**0.0%** 0	**0.0%** 0	**0.0%** 0	**0.0%** 0	**100.0%** 11	**1.0** 11
No Answer	0 % 0						

Cosa ne pensi dell'idea di impiegare la sostenibilità, sociale e ambientale, come parametro per l'avanzamento di una comunità?

		Answers	Ratio
Molto d'accordo		3	27.27 %
D'accordo		8	72.73 %
In disaccordo		0	0 %
Molto disaccordo		0	0 %
No Answer		0	0 %

Riordinare le varie definizioni ti ha fatto riflettere sui concetti alla base della mia proposta?

		Answers	Ratio
Sì, abbastanza		4	36.36 %
Sì		5	45.45 %
Non particolarmente		2	18.18 %
No, per niente		0	0 %
No Answer		0	0 %

A parte questo questionario, altre attività attorno all'idea di archeologia e sostenibilità (come presentazioni, laboratori, eventi nel territorio ecc...), potrebbero coinvolgerti personalmente?

		Answers	Ratio
Sì, abbastanza		3	27.27 %
Sì		8	72.73 %
Non particolarmente		0	0 %

No, per niente		0	0 %
No Answer		0	0 %

Come pensi che verrebbe accolto questo progetto dalle persone di Canavaccio, anche quelle non sono già coinvolte nella valorizzazione del territorio?

		Answers	Ratio
Con molto interesse		1	9.09 %
Con interesse		8	72.73 %
Senza alcun interesse		1	9.09 %
Con diffidenza		1	9.09 %
No Answer		0	0 %

Secondo te, riordinare le varie definizioni secondo il proprio punto di vista è un esercizio che potrebbe far riflettere la nostra comunità su questi temi chiave?

		Answers	Ratio
Sì, abbastanza		1	9.09 %
Sì		9	81.82 %
Non particolarmente		1	9.09 %
No, per niente		0	0 %
No Answer		0	0 %

Pensi che altre attività nel territorio potrebbero incuriosire e coinvolgere le persone di Canavaccio in questo progetto?

		Answers	Ratio
Sì, abbastanza		1	9.09 %
Sì		9	81.82 %
Non particolarmente		1	9.09 %
No, per niente		0	0 %
No Answer		0	0 %