MERC
Medieval Europe Research Community

Europe's Medieval Pasts: The Continental Perspective

Discussing the MERC Manifesto

Summary of Discussions on 30 June 2020 by Dr Megan Kasten

During the webinar, participants were encouraged to ask questions about the presentations and the Manifesto. Some of these were answered live, while others received written responses.

Question 1 was specific to Carenza Lewis's presentation on the CORS project: **If the drop in material remains from the 4th century is indicative of a pandemic, what correlation can be expected of the COVID crisis?** Carenza explained that there was a drop in pottery density in both the 14th century and the 4th century, and she suggested that pandemics during those time periods may have played a factor in the decrease. This emphasises the relevance of the medieval period to today's events – the medieval period is effectively bookended by plague pandemics and had huge impacts in the world. She has thought about how today's pandemic will be visible in the archaeological record, whether it is represented by a drop in the impact of plastic or an increase in PPE and masks in the archaeological record, defining artefacts of our era, is hard to tell.

What could be learnt from formal evaluation of the impact of projects - past, present and future - to inform how we go about 'making a difference' / effecting the changes that we want to see? In what ways does 'being medieval', however defined (Natascha!) add anything different to that question? We would want to do this on a large scale, which seems daunting, but perhaps if we want to have some policy weight behind what we're doing, we have to have some evidence to show what we do does make a difference. This is something for MERC and the wider archaeological world to think about.

Will the Manifesto be SMART i.e. Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound, which would mean that aims are stated in relation what exactly we want to achieve by when? The honest answer is we don't have the resources to do SMART objectives – they imply a big resource in terms of being able to go out and measure and support things. What we're trying to do here is largely get people excited and hope that they go out and do things. It would be very difficult to come up with SMART objectives across Europe across these different times – what we've done is a realistic compromise.

How are you planning some kind of democratic element in the acknowledgement of the Manifesto? Will there be a (virtual) convention of MERC members acknowledging the Manifesto or will it be open to signatures? We would have had another roundtable about that in Budapest, like we had in Bern (more than 100 attendees). So yes, in a certain way, but this will be decided in the near future.

How will you measure the success of the Manifesto? And over what timescale? We consider the Manifesto successful when it will influence policy makers or draw their attention to 21st century aspects of Medieval Archaeology. When new research will find a warm context in the Manifesto, when we no longer refer to Medieval a=Archaeology in its 1960's origins, but in the spirit of this 21st century Manifesto. So it is about influence, which is hard to measure.

These webinars are not the end of the development of the Manifesto. The next steps include approving the final text of the Manifesto, creating a publication-ready version, disseminating the Manifesto, and translating the document to widen its impact.

Questions and comments submitted to the Zoom Q&A by participants

1. That lets us think about the drop after the Roman period and the drop Corona will cause
2. I'm afraid I have to leave for another meeting. My question is what could be learnt from formal evaluation of the impact of projects - past, present and future - to inform how we go about 'making a difference' / effecting the changes that we want to see? In what ways does 'being medieval', however defined (Natascha!) add anything different to that question?
3. How are you planning some kind of democratic element in the acknowledgement of the manifesto? Will there be a (virtual) convention of MERC members acknowledging the manifesto or will it be open to signatures?
4. Could somebody explain Diane Scherzler's comment on Twitter yesterday who said she would expect the manifesto to be more SMART i.e. Specific, Measurable, Achievable,

Relevant and Time-bound which would mean that aims are stated in relation what exactly we want to achieve by when …

5. How will you measure the success of the Manifesto? And over what timescale?

6. So it is relatively easy to manage STEM career opportunities. But some of the other measures are more problematic. For instance, how will you identify 'misuse' of medieval archaeology, and count those instances and then measure the effectiveness of the challenges?

7. "I think if we do more formally acknowledge the later stories we surely do have to change the name? MALERC or M&LERC?

8. a great case study in this respect might be the ARCHiVe project - the centre for the Analysis and Recording of Cultural Heritage in Venice, which is recording all of Venice's buildings and repeatedly to chart change - https://www.cini.it/en/institutes-and-centres/archive-analysis-and-recording-of-cultural-heritage-in-venice

9. It could be raising the numbers of MERC members

10. My comment really reflected Sophie and Diane's remarks. Its all about measuring the impact of the very exciting manifesto. But hard work as you say Stephen. Thank you all!