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The Present Role and Future Perspectives of Urban Archaeology in Finland

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Summary

Since the late 19th century, practitioners of archaeology have uncovered a wealth of evidence from past centuries, significantly enhancing our knowledge and understanding of various cities and towns in Finland. While urban archaeology is often associated with excavations related to construction and development projects in urban settings, the field encompasses a much broader array of topics, methodologies and research practices related to urban life and environments, both past and present.

Adopting this broader perspective, the aim of urban archaeology is to document and elucidate the multilayered history and multifaceted structure of cities, as well as elements of urbanism and urban life, in a comprehensive and holistic manner. This includes the historical development of towns and cities up to the present day, as well as analyses of urban features and fabrics from different periods. Consequently, urban archaeology is not confined to the study of material remains and evidence found underground, but also includes extant structures aboveground, such as standing buildings, visible constructions, spatial layouts and urban landscapes, as well as the functions and populations of cities. In this paper, I discuss the definitions and preconceptions of urban archaeology and its role, with a particular focus on Finland. In addition to presenting ideas for a more holistic approach to urban archaeology, I reflect on the limitations of prevailing definitions and the implications of restricting urban archaeological heritage to specific historical periods. When considering the role, importance and relevance of urban archaeology in the future, it is crucial to ask who determines the scope of urban archaeology, and on what basis and why. What actions can and should be taken to alter current perceptions and conditions, if change is deemed necessary and desirable, in order to affirm the role of urban archaeology in future society, including academic research and urban development?

1. Prevailing situation and excavation-based approach

In Finland, urban archaeology has been characterised predominantly by development-led archaeology, with a tradition of excavations and surveys for over 120 years (Figure 1). Research-based urban excavations have been exceptionally rare. To my knowledge, urban excavations unconnected with land use and development projects have only been carried out in Turku, as part of research projects and museum activities, at the end of the 19th century and in the 2000s (see e.g. Drake [1984](#); Söderström [2010](#); Lehtonen and Aalto [2012](#), [2015](#); Seppänen [2015](#)).



Figure 1: Among the first urban excavations carried out in Finland were the large excavations conducted in Turku as the result of the construction of a library in 1901–1903 in the centre of the city. Photo: Turun Museokeskus

Although urban archaeology is often considered a specific subfield within archaeology, in Finland it is generally understood as excavations conducted in urban environments focusing on sites, layers and materials from historical periods, as opposed to those in rural settings. This perspective is understandable from a historical viewpoint, given the establishment of the concept of urban archaeology in relation to excavations in towns. This general and traditional understanding of urban archaeology is deeply ingrained among practitioners and educators in the field, and it has laid the foundation for the official definitions of urban archaeology.

When searching for an official definition of urban archaeology by the Finnish authorities responsible for urban heritage and organisations practising urban archaeology, I was only able to find two. In a 2004 publication, the Finnish Heritage Agency defined urban archaeology activities as excavations and surveys in urban environments (Niukkanen [2004](#)). However, it is important to note that this publication reflects the prevailing views of the Finnish Heritage Agency 20 years ago, which may have evolved since then. A similar definition can be found on the webpages of Turku City Museum, which is responsible for urban archaeology and urban archaeological heritage management in the city of Turku (City of Turku [2024](#)). According to that current definition, urban archaeology is the study of cultural layers consisting of constructions, finds, and soil deposits in old towns and cities.

This excavation-based approach to urban archaeology is firmly established and dominant in Finland, and recognised and supported by various parties involved in heritage management, for example museums, universities and consulting companies. It has influenced how urban archaeology is taught at universities and how urban archaeological research is understood, mainly as the study of excavated materials and remains from urban environments, complemented by other sources that support the interpretation of materiality. This excavation-based approach is also acknowledged and understood by stakeholders and the public. Hence, it has fundamentally defined and shaped the role of urban archaeology in society at large. In turn, the role of the field affects its identity and impacts its education, expertise, research, funding, collaboration and overall development, as well as its significance and position in society.

The excavation-based approach, whether in the context of fieldwork, research or heritage management, is influenced significantly by laws, acts, official guidelines and policies. In Finland, the current law governing archaeological heritage, known as the Antiquities Act, has been in effect since 1963. This Act does not specify an age limit for archaeological heritage.



An age limit of 100 years applies to stray finds and shipwrecks, but not to protected archaeological layers and remains, which are described simply as 'ancient'. Another primary criterion for the protection and investigation of archaeological heritage is its significance (Finlex [1963](#)).

In practice, however, the terms 'ancient' and 'significant' have been subjected to time-bound limits, established by those responsible for heritage management and archaeological practice. Until the 1990s, the focus of urban archaeology was primarily on the medieval and early modern periods. This focus was not officially defined by the national authorities responsible for archaeological heritage, but rather by established practices that had been in place since the inception of archaeological activities in urban environments.

In 2000, the Finnish Heritage Agency outlined that, in urban contexts, the Antiquities Act is primarily concerned with towns established prior to the 18th century and protects urban layers and remains deposited before 1713–1721. This interpretation of the Act was made despite the Act itself remaining unchanged, with no mention of this cut-off date nor any reference to this regardless of the concepts of 'ancient' and 'significant'. However, the cut-off date as defined by the Finnish Heritage Agency was not absolute, as it was highlighted that archaeological excavations, documentation and research could also be applied and extended to layers up to the early 19th century (in towns established either before or after 1713–1721), if the site and archaeological evidence were of significant for research (Niukkanen [2004](#), 7–9, 12, 39; [2009](#), 23). In rural settings, sites dating from the prehistoric period, Middle Ages and early modern period were regarded as worthy of protection and study, while remains from the 19th century were deemed of less significance and, consequently, could be excluded from the scope of archaeological heritage as defined by the Antiquities Act. However, rural settlement sites abandoned more than a century ago were also considered as ancient remains, thereby qualifying for legal protection and archaeological investigation (Niukkanen [2009](#), 29). Additionally, fortifications and defences from the 18th and 19th centuries, as well as remnants from the First World War, were acknowledged as significant archaeological heritage, and thus incorporated within the legal framework of the Antiquities Act (Niukkanen [2009](#), 13, 86).

The cut-off point of 1713–1721 was based on the dates of the Great Northern War, indicating that this conflict between Sweden and Russia was considered a watershed moment when assessing the significance of archaeological heritage in urban environments in Finland. Consequently, the protection and research of urban archaeological heritage were primarily limited to the period when Finland was part of Sweden (excluding the time after temporary Russian occupation and Swedish rule thereafter) unless the significance of evidence from later periods was deemed justifiable. However, as an archaeologist who has conducted fieldwork in urban environments, I must note that in practice the 1720s do not present as distinct markers in the archaeological record and materiality. Detecting this exact timeframe in stratified layers is difficult, and hence it is challenging to determine which layers should be excavated and documented, and which should be excluded from archaeological research.

In 2013, with updates in 2020, the Finnish Heritage Agency developed guidelines for archaeological fieldwork (Museovirasto [2020](#)). These guidelines did not suggest any specific timeframes but emphasised the information value and significance of the evidence from a site. This means that each group practising archaeology should evaluate the significance of the archaeological record from various perspectives. Naturally, defining criteria for what is significant and evaluating significance can be difficult, and are heavily influenced by subjective views of the past, knowledge of the archaeological record and associated information, and other factors, including previous practices and prevailing preconceptions about the importance of archaeological information from different periods and types of evidence.



The majority of museums and other parties responsible for excavations continue to follow, albeit loosely, the 1720s cut-off suggested by the Finnish Heritage Agency in 2000. However, some, such as two museums in Turku, have set their own parameters. Currently, the cut-off date for archaeological urban heritage set by Turku City Museum is 1827 (Seppänen *et al.* [2022](#), 76–78), which is when a great fire destroyed approximately 70% of the town, leading to the creation of a new layout (e.g. Dahlström [1929](#), 299–405; Seppänen [2022](#), 40–41). In contrast, a private archaeological–historical museum in Turku, Aboa Vetus, which conducts excavations in the museum's area, has defined its cut-off for archaeological fieldwork as the early 20th century, more than a hundred years after the fire (Seppänen *et al.* [2022](#), 76). Hence the practices and definitions for archaeological heritage and interest can vary between different organisations, even within the same town.

Since 2020, the Ministry of Culture and Education has been preparing proposals for a new law for archaeological heritage in Finland. According to the proposals published in October 2023, there will be clear timeframes defining archaeological heritage, for example the remains from urban and rural settlement sites would be considered as archaeological heritage under protection (or to be excavated in connection with development work) if they are dated to 1721 or before. Hence, this year would be officially established as a cut-off date defining what constitutes archaeological heritage in urban settings and what does not, irrespective of the evaluated significance of the evidence from the town or place in question. However, another date, 1860, can be applied to other remains, such as cemeteries, memorials and places of worship. According to the proposals, shipwrecks, ship parts, and remains located within the Sámi region, would also be protected under the law if they date from 1917 or earlier. For the remains of fortifications and defence structures, the date for protection extends from 1912 to 1918 (Opetus ja kulttuuriministeriö [2023](#), 289–290, 297). However, it would be possible to petition for special protection of remains postdating these dates if a site held significant value or compelling reasons existed to justify its protection.

The tendency to subject the evaluation of significance within defined timeframes is simultaneously interesting and problematic. It implicitly infers that time and archaeological significance are unquestionably correlated. Furthermore, it also implies that archaeologists working in the field cannot be trusted to estimate and evaluate the significance of heritage without clear timeframes. However, I would argue that all urban archaeologists and historians with even just a little experience know that what is significant varies greatly depending on the town or city in question, and the source material, finds and remains that have been preserved. Consequently, by setting time limits, this fact is ignored. Furthermore, it provides a clear indication of the attitudes and views of those making the proposals, suggesting that only time periods before 1721 are of archaeological interest, regardless of the town, its location, environment and background, and the history it represents.

2. Definitions of urban archaeology

When trying to analyse and compare the role of urban archaeology in Finland and elsewhere, I sought other official and existing definitions of urban archaeology. In the *Encyclopedia of Global Archaeology* published in 2014, O'Keeffe ([2014](#), 7520–7522) defines urban archaeology in three different ways. According to his narrowest definition, urban archaeology is the study of archaeology in towns or cities, or of towns and cities. It is archaeology practised in and around either existing and living, or abandoned and ruined, urban environments. This includes studies of rural sites and environments, when they exist in urban environments today.

This definition corresponds more or less with the excavation-based and praxis-orientated approach described above, which dominates in Finland, and seemingly in other Nordic countries too, as demonstrated by presentations at the Conference of Nordic Urban Archaeology in 2023 (NUA [2023](#)). However, the definitions of urban archaeology in Finland



(Niukkanen [2004](#), 7–9, 12, 39; 2009, 23; City of Turku [2024](#)) seem to exclude studies of urban layers existing in today's rural environments, and the rural layers existing in younger cities that preceded the establishment of towns after the 1720s.

According to O'Keeffe's ([2014](#), 7520) definition provided ten years ago: 'The importance of archaeology of pre-1800 date is uncontested everywhere, but the protection afforded to nineteenth- and (especially) twentieth-century archaeologies is rather more hit and miss, although the development of archaeological research into the contemporary world is currently changing attitudes to the most recent past'. This statement highlights the broader international perspective on urban archaeology, recognising the uncontested importance of pre-1800 archaeology while noting the variable protection and recognition of more recent archaeological periods. This evolving attitude towards archaeological research of modern and contemporary times contrasts with the more rigid timeframes proposed in Finland. While it is acknowledged that archaeology and urban studies benefit from a more flexible and inclusive approach - one that recognises the significance of archaeological evidence from all periods - it becomes challenging to put this understanding into practice when laws and policies contradict such an approach.

The development of urban archaeology in Finland since 2000 has favoured the expansion of its scope closer to 1800 and beyond, pioneered by the excavations conducted in the city of Lahti in 2013 (Figure 2). The excavations were carried out in a central part of this very young city, established at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, with the aim of revealing the pre-urban (rural) history of the site before the town was established on the ruins of a densely populated village. The excavations extended from the oldest history of the village, dating back to the 14th century, to events belonging to the urban phase of the site at the end of the 19th century and early 20th century (e.g. Seppänen [2016](#), 11–13; [2018](#), 37–38; Seppänen and Takala [2022](#)). Following these excavations, the scope of urban archaeology in Turku, for example, was extended from the early 18th century to 1827 and beyond.



Figure 2: Excavations in the city of Lahti, Finland, in 2013 included the documentation and study of the long history of the site, from the Middle Ages to the early 20th century. Photo: Lahti museums/Lahden museot.

In contrast to this progressive development, the proposals for a new law for archaeological heritage in Finland represent a step backwards by decreasing the scope of urban archaeology, not only in terms of timeframes but also in terms of approach, shrinking the role of archaeologists to excavating layers based solely on their accumulation time, rather than their significance or research value. This implies that archaeologists are not capable of evaluating the significance of layers and features, and need more straightforward and simple frameworks for their work as excavators of the past. Such a time-based framing, disconnected from more research-based criteria, including information value and significance, reduces archaeologists to mere excavators rather than researchers of the past.



This shift undermines the role of urban archaeologists as evaluators and interpreters of the past, limiting their ability to make nuanced decisions about the significance of archaeological layers and features. It disregards the complexity and variability of urban archaeological sites, where the significance of any evidence can vary greatly depending on the specific context of the town or city in question. By imposing rigid time limits, the proposal overlooks the importance of a more flexible and inclusive approach that considers the research value and significance of archaeological evidence from all periods.

Consequently, the proposals for a new law for archaeological heritage with defined time limits is not aligned with the second, broader definition of urban archaeology presented in the *Encyclopedia of Global Archaeology* (O'Keefe [2014](#), 7520). This definition equates urban archaeology with the archaeological understanding of urban spaces and urban lives, regardless of their location or date. According to this definition, urban archaeology is the study of urbanism as a phenomenon. It involves examining the formation and transformation of urban environments, and patterns and processes of urban development, functions, living, and lifestyle, changes and connections, across different time periods, not artificially separating the periods to be studied or ignored by archaeologists. Most research in urban archaeology has traditionally focused on early urbanism, the establishment of towns and medieval development, as a result of strong traditions in the field, as well as prevailing perceptions about the role of (urban) archaeology. However, we may question why archaeologists should not also study younger urbanisation similarly, and analyse deeper processes of urbanisation when that is possible.

According to the third definition provided by O'Keefe ([2014](#), 7521), urban archaeology is the study of socio-topography, socio-spatiality, hierarchies and power structures, identities, ethnicities, wealth, and class as expressed in planning, architecture, infrastructure, materiality and consumption. Hence, urban archaeology encompasses social analyses of urban spaces and materialities, again regardless of place and time. This approach is not new, considering the archaeology practised in academia and the number of studies published about materiality and urban space, including social analysis. However, such publications have often focused on older periods from the medieval to early modern eras, mainly restricted to the mid-1700s. This focus is primarily the result of how urban archaeology has been traditionally understood and dominated by materials unearthed in excavations and included in collections. Conversely, similar questions for post-1700 have been studied by historians and art historians, and post-2000 by geographers, ethnographers and social scientists, often leaving out the material evidence that archaeologists could analyse similarly to how they approach older materials. As the definition suggests, urban archaeology can serve as a descriptor of society and social relations in younger periods too, and equally within other disciplines alongside urban historians and geographers working on these topics.

There is a risk that needs to be highlighted when suggestions that shrink the scope of urban archaeology are presented by authorities and organisations preparing the laws and providing the guidelines that set the frameworks for archaeological practice and, in turn, for academic studies. As O'Keefe has highlighted ([2014](#), 7521), social analysis of urban spaces and materiality in urban archaeology has often been spearheaded by studies on modern sites and materials (18th century and later) rather than on medieval and early modern towns, cities and phases. By limiting the scope, we risk constraining the theoretical, methodological and analytical scope as well, potentially affecting research in the field negatively in the long run.

In summary, the proposals for the new law, with its rigid time limits, are not only inconsistent with broader definitions of urban archaeology but also risk undermining the field's potential to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of urbanism across all periods. It is essential that the value of a more inclusive approach, that allows archaeologists to evaluate the significance of archaeological layers and features based on their research value, rather



than imposing arbitrary time constraints, is recognised. Such an approach would ensure that urban archaeology continues to evolve and contribute meaningfully to our understanding of urban spaces and societies, both past and present.

3. Towards a more holistic approach to urban archaeology - any chance?

Although the excavation-based approach seems to be very firmly established and popular, even unquestionable, in Finland, we can ask whether the time is ripe to reconsider the definition, identity and role of urban archaeology. Is it enough to limit the scope of urban archaeology to excavations and the study of excavated materials and evidence only, or should we adopt a broader perspective?

The reasons for re-evaluating urban archaeology are related to the idea that archaeology can contribute to the study of all periods, potentially providing interesting and valuable material for future archaeological studies, including academic research. If historical studies cover periods from the Middle Ages to contemporary times, why should the same scope not be applied to urban archaeology as well?

A more holistic approach to urban archaeology would not exclude any specific time periods, but embrace the entire deep history of urban life, from medieval to modern and contemporary times. It would aim for a more comprehensive understanding of the multilayered history and multifaceted structure of cities, focusing on the development and transformation of cityscapes, processes and patterns of change, the formation of contemporary cityscapes, and connections between the past and present, without segmenting the history and study of towns into years that belong to urban archaeological heritage and years that do not.

According to this more holistic and inclusive approach, urban archaeology is not restricted to studying the material remains and evidence found underground but also includes those existing aboveground, such as standing buildings, visible constructions, space layout, urban landscapes, and the functions and uses of the city. It strives for the inclusion of the past in the present, fostering coexistence between past, present and future (Figure 3; see also e.g. Guttormsen [2020](#); Seppänen [2020](#)).



Figure 3: The preserved cellars of masonry houses from the early modern period on the premises of the Tårget restaurant, Turku, Finland. If discovered as ruins during an excavation, they would have been considered archaeological heritage and documented accordingly. In this condition and location, they have been considered built heritage without archaeological interest. Applying a holistic approach to urban archaeology, these would have



been documented and studied as archaeological features still standing and functioning as part of today's urban environment. Photo: Liisa Seppänen.

This approach offers several advantages. First of all, it allows for a more complete understanding of urban development by considering all periods of a city's history, not just those deemed 'ancient' by arbitrary time limits. Second, it encourages interdisciplinary collaboration between archaeologists, historians, geographers and other social scientists, integrating different perspectives and methodologies to enrich the study of urban environments. By including more recent periods and visible structures, this approach can make urban archaeology more relevant and accessible to the public, fostering greater interest and appreciation for the field. A holistic approach can inform urban planning and heritage management more effectively by providing a deeper understanding of the historical layers and transformations that shape contemporary urban landscapes.

Although an excavation-focused approach has its merits, it may be time to reconsider the definition, identity, purpose and role of urban archaeology in Finland. Adopting a more holistic and inclusive approach can enrich our understanding of urban history and make the field more dynamic and relevant to contemporary society, and strengthen the role and status of urban archaeology.

When comparing the two approaches to urban archaeology, excavation-based and holistic, we can detect notable differences, even though excavations are included in both (Table 1). The first clear difference is the approach to time, manifested in the exclusion and inclusion of periods, evidence and topics. The excavation-based approach positions urban archaeology as a performative act, focusing on the execution of excavations subjected to urban development and construction, framed by laws and guidelines. The practices included in this approach detach the selected archaeological heritage from its urban setting and remove the evidence and data of the past into collections and archives. In contrast, the holistic approach aims to give urban archaeology a more interactive and conversational role, which can be integrated and capitalised on in urban planning and development in a more inclusive way. This approach highlights the presence and inclusion of archaeology and archaeologists in urban planning policies and promotes public awareness of archaeology. Such an approach was presented by the Council of Europe more than 20 years ago (Council of Europe [2002](#)).

Table 1: Differences between excavation-based and holistic approaches in urban archaeology

Application	Excavation-based approach	Holistic approach
Timeframe	Focuses on specific time periods deemed significant by laws and guidelines, often excluding more recent historical periods. It tends to segment history into periods to be studied and those to be ignored.	Embraces all periods of urban history, from medieval to contemporary times, aiming for a comprehensive understanding of the multi-layered history and structure of cities.
Role and function	Positions urban archaeology as a performative act, primarily concerned with the execution of excavations in response to urban development. It often results in the removal of archaeological evidence from its context, and its relocation to collections and archives studied by	Seeks to integrate urban archaeology into urban planning and development, promoting an interactive and conversational role. It emphasises the inclusion of archaeological insights into contemporary urban policies and public awareness.



archaeologists specialising in urban archaeological material.

Research potential	Focuses on excavated (often quite recently) material and questions of limited and closely defined chronological and spatial frames within the particular town or city.	Opens up new research questions and collaborative opportunities, allowing for innovative studies that bridge the gap between past and present.
Integration with urban planning	Often operates in connection with clearly defined projects, but in isolation from broader urban planning processes, focusing on compliance with legal requirements and guidelines.	Advocates for the inclusion of archaeology and archaeologists in urban planning policies, fostering a more inclusive and informed approach to urban development.
Public engagement	Tends to limit public engagement to the presentation of excavations and findings during and after the excavations.	Promotes continuous public awareness and engagement, highlighting the relevance of archaeology to contemporary urban life and fostering a sense of connection between past and present.
Heritage management	Maintains a clear division between archaeological heritage and built heritage, often treating them as separate entities.	Encourages a more integrated view of heritage, recognising the interconnectedness of archaeological and built heritage in understanding urban history and development.

While the excavation-based approach has its merits, there is a compelling case for adopting a more holistic approach to urban archaeology. This approach not only enriches our understanding of urban history but also fosters greater integration with urban planning and public engagement. Moving towards a more inclusive and interactive role for urban archaeology can help bridge the gap between theory and practice, ultimately benefiting both heritage management and contemporary urban development.

4. Who defines the role and scope?

Since the role of urban archaeology is important for positioning the field within heritage management, academia and society, it is essential we understand who defines the role and scope of the field and on what grounds. National and local institutions and organisations responsible for heritage management obviously play a significant role, as they frame the scope of the field through laws, acts, guidelines and policies. Their decisions on what periods and types of evidence are protected and studied, shape the field's scope and focus. Likewise, these entities have the power to include and exclude certain aspects, create connections, and build bridges within the field of heritage and in society. National and local government agencies involved in urban planning and development also play a role, by integrating archaeological considerations into their frameworks and policies.



Practitioners and researchers in the field play another significant part in shaping the role and scope of urban archaeology, through their actions, discussions, presentations, publications and collaboration, and by challenging preconceptions. In particular, the role of professors, lecturers and teachers is crucial, as they provide understanding, education and expertise in urban archaeology, thus developing the views of future archaeologists and professionals in heritage management. By imparting knowledge and fostering critical thinking, they help to redefine the field's boundaries and its potential. Furthermore, through their research agendas, they can shape the theoretical and methodological approaches of future urban archaeologists.

As archaeologists have themselves defined the scope of urban archaeology, they are in a key position to determine the role of urban archaeology within the broader fields of archaeology, urban studies and society at large. The prospects of urban archaeology are dependent on the concepts, understanding and experiences that stakeholders, funders and the public have about the field. If the prevailing preconceptions align with the idea that urban archaeology is limited to carrying out excavations as part of construction works and as framed by law, this delimits the role of urban archaeology in society and urban studies as well. By contrast, if the developers, urban planners and other stakeholders involved in urban development projects are presented with a more holistic approach to urban archaeology, it can promote wider collaboration and inclusion of archaeological expertise at various levels.

The role and scope of urban archaeology are defined by a complex interplay of institutional, academic, professional and public influences. To ensure that urban archaeology reaches its full potential, it is crucial we foster a more holistic and inclusive approach that goes beyond mere excavation. By doing so, urban archaeology can contribute more significantly to our understanding of urban history and development, and play a more integral role in contemporary society.

5. Challenges and prospects of urban archaeology

Urban archaeology faces several significant challenges that should be addressed and resolved to promote progress in the field. The first challenge is very practical and concerns the management, use and availability of accumulated materials. What can we do with the material that has accumulated since the 19th century, some of which has remained untouched and unprocessed since it was unearthed? Responsibility for this material, and decisions about its future, needs to be clearly defined instead of being ignored for a few more decades. This includes determining who will process and analyse the collections, and how they will be made accessible for research and public engagement. A second practical challenge concerns the archiving of digital data, which is ever-increasing and evolving, and exists in an array of formats. With constantly decreasing resources, there is little prospect that the situation will improve, as wished for by those concerned with collections, documentation and improved strategies for data management. Addressing these challenges requires a long-term perspective and provision of the necessary resources and expertise. Effective digital archiving strategies must be developed to ensure that valuable data is preserved and accessible for future research.

Another challenge I would like to highlight is the scope of urban archaeology as discussed in this paper. The scope of urban archaeology is of crucial importance, because it concerns heritage management, praxis and research, as well as the identity and role of the field in society. The scope is subject to how urban archaeological heritage is defined and understood in heritage management and by the parties involved in making guidelines, statutes and laws. The way urban archaeology is understood and comprehended by stakeholders, politicians, decision-makers and scholars from different fields defines its role in society and academia. If urban archaeological heritage in Finland is limited to time periods pre-1720, as framed by the new law proposals, it would shrink the scope of urban



archaeology back to the situation in the last century. This development would hinder the field's progress and endanger its inclusion as a broader part of urban studies.

The way we define urban archaeology is intimately connected with the last challenge to be highlighted, and which I consider to be the most crucial when considering the future role of urban archaeology: the relationship of the field with society. The social dimensions of (urban) archaeology are related to the protection, preservation, presentation and dissemination of archaeological heritage. These dimensions include education and research for the benefit, utilisation, enjoyment, and even entertainment, of society. If urban archaeology is promoted as a development-led performative act that accumulates material in archives and collections, it is justified to ask: what is the significance of urban archaeology for society?

When considering the role of urban archaeology in contemporary cities and society, we should focus on addressing these questions: How can the significance of urban archaeology and urban (archaeological) heritage to society be justified, especially in the context of the sustainability of urban environments and societies? How can the significance of the field as practised be increased to promote its viability and progress in the future?

There are possible strategies for addressing these challenges. Some are highly dependent on money, especially those concerning already existing collections and archives. We cannot solve the challenges related to the processing, analysis and curation of accumulated material and archives (whether analogue or digital) without sufficient funding. Therefore, we need to find funding and resources to develop reasonable strategies for collections, and invest in the development of a digital archiving infrastructure and the expertise to manage and preserve digital data effectively.

The challenge related to the scope of urban archaeology needs constructive discussions between all parties involved. To promote the field, researchers and heritage management organisations should gain mutual and shared understanding of a holistic approach to urban archaeology, which would enable the development of guidelines that reflect a wider and more inclusive approach. The heritage organisations and other parties involved in legislation should advocate for policies and laws that recognise the full scope of urban archaeology, including more recent historical periods. We should actively aim to strengthen collaboration between archaeologists, urban planners, policymakers and other stakeholders, to ensure that urban archaeology is integrated into broader urban development and planning processes. Archaeologists and heritage specialists should also advocate for the values of cultural heritage within the social, economic and biophysical facets of the environment, enabling very practical advances (e.g. Fleming [2009](#)). Showcasing and sharing case studies and examples where urban archaeology has contributed to urban planning, heritage tourism and community development between professionals and researchers is important, because they can be used as examples of good practice when trying to create and establish collaboration with stakeholders at the local level. Such case studies have been shared, for example, at meetings of the network Architecture, Archaeology and Contemporary City Planning established in 2014 (e.g. Verdiani *et al.* [2015](#); Dixon *et al.* [2016](#); Seppänen *et al.* [2018](#)).

We should emphasise the role of urban archaeology in understanding and addressing contemporary urban challenges, such as sustainability, circulation and waste management, social cohesion and cultural identity. We need to apply the holistic approach to the education of urban archaeology at universities, and incorporate urban archaeology into the educational curricula of urban studies and at other levels to raise awareness and appreciation among students and colleagues representing different fields. In academia, we should create and develop interdisciplinary research projects that highlight the relevance of urban archaeology to urban studies and contemporary urban issues. Developing public engagement programmes can increase the visibility of urban archaeology and make urban archaeology more accessible and relevant to the general public. This can include community archaeology projects, public lectures, exhibitions and digital media initiatives.



Addressing the challenges facing urban archaeology requires a multifaceted approach that involves collaboration, public engagement, advocacy, resource allocation, and a clear articulation of its societal relevance. By doing so, we can ensure that urban archaeology remains a vital and dynamic field that contributes to our understanding of urban history and participates in the sustainable development of contemporary urban environments.

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