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“Can Community Projects Survive?”

Driven by ethical and practical considerations, archaeologists increasingly are interested in sponsoring community-based projects that promote support for archaeology and generate local economic benefits. Individual practitioners and several NGOs around the world are pursuing such projects. The track record, however, is problematic. Building on research into long-surviving community projects in disparate contexts—rural Ireland, Andean Peru, central Belize and Italy—this lecture considers the basis on which durable community-led initiatives can be constructed. Success, however, may require archaeologists to adhere to extreme forms of “bottom-up” project design and management, playing very different roles than in the past. Moreover, by applying economists’ theories of common pool resource management and methodological approaches appropriated from political science, this interdisciplinary research also suggests benefits that can accrue from careful cross-fertilization in seemingly incompatible social sciences.

Peter G. Gould is a consulting scholar at the Penn Cultural Heritage Center of the University of Pennsylvania and an adjunct professor at the American University of Rome. He received his Ph.D. from University College London’s Institute of Archaeology in 2014 based on research into the applicability of common pool resource theory to long-surviving heritage and economic development projects in Belize, Peru and Ireland. He is a founding director of the Sustainable Preservation Initiative and a member of the Board of Overseers of the Penn Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. Prior to his work in archaeology, he was an investment banker and corporate turnaround specialist, in which roles he has led over 30 companies and served several non-profits, including as chairman of the Zoological Society of Philadelphia. Early in his career, he served as Senior Economist and Special Assistant to the Chairman of the President’s Council of Economic Advisers and as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Export Development at the U.S. Department of Commerce.