



# The Unethical Enterprise of the Past: Lessons from the Collapse of Archaeological Heritage Management in Spain

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## Abstract

This paper explores the underlying factors behind the collapse of commercial archaeology in Spain, with implications for other international contexts. It contributes to the current global debate about heritage ethics, adding nuance and conceptual depth to critical management studies and cultural heritage management in their approach to business ethics. Similar to other European contexts, Spanish archaeological management thrived during the 1990s and 2000s as a business model based on policies directed at safeguarding cultural heritage. The model had controversial ethical implications at academic, policy and business levels. However, the global financial crisis of 2008 had a huge impact on this sector, and more than 70% of the Spanish archaeological companies closed by 2017. Drawing on the concepts of abstract narratives, functional stupidity and corporatist neoliberalism, this paper illustrates the need to examine ethical issues from a pragmatic standpoint, beyond epistemological and moralistic critiques of profit-oriented businesses in the cultural realm. In doing so, it connects the fields of cultural heritage and management studies, opening up hitherto unexplored strands of research and debate.

**Keywords** Heritage ethics · Cultural heritage · Corporatist neoliberalism · Commercial archaeology · Crisis · Spain

## Introduction

Cultural heritage and archaeology have become a cornerstone of contemporary academic debate, European social policy integration and economic prosperity. The recently published Eurobarometer on Cultural Heritage (European Commission 2017) shows how cultural heritage is currently valued in relation to social and economic prosperity: 27,881 interviews show that more than eight out of ten European citizens think cultural heritage is important to them personally and also for the European Union (EU). The same

proportion agrees that Europe's cultural heritage creates jobs in the EU. The European Parliament declared 2018 as "The European Year of Cultural Heritage" under the slogan "Our heritage: where the past meets the future" (European Parliament 2017). However, given that both cultural heritage and -even more so- archaeological heritage are now matters of public concern as well as economic commodities, tensions have arisen surrounding their definition, management and policy implications.

In the archaeological field, recent debates have also focused on the ethics and implications of the transformation of archaeology from scholarly to commercial endeavour, in becoming a business sector in its own right (González-Ruibal 2018; Gnecco 2015; Haber and Shepherd 2015). These academic approaches generally criticise commercial archaeology (or cultural resource management, CRM) as an unethical, profit-driven enterprise, based on a regulatory body of expert knowledge that leaves far behind the prospect of a knowledge-oriented archaeological discipline. This debate highlights the ethical tension between archaeology as an academic endeavour with its own value system, and CRM as a relatively successful business model. This paper aims to go beyond the moralistic argument against CRM that criticises the fact it is part of a broader capitalist framework,

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to consider CRM as just another business sector within the state apparatuses of economic and cultural governance, aside from academia. It thus operates within its own normative framework and particular entrenchments with nation-states and global discourses on heritage protection.

We therefore open up a hitherto unexplored terrain by asking how CRM works in practice as a business model enmeshed in state and market logics from a critical management perspective. This involves displacing the emphasis towards intra-sector ethical issues between academics and practitioners, including questions seldom explored in academic archaeological critiques, such as labour matters, cost-driven vs. client-driven logics, or crony relations. Is CRM unethical *as such* in itself, or is its practical implementation, its real enactment, what is problematic? Do client-driven or cost-driven variables in demand influence the ethical legitimacy of different CRM models? What is the role played by the abstract narratives of global heritage protection that underpin CRM's normative framework? Do they serve to promote good practices or instead to legitimate and conceal unethical operations that occur outside the standards? These questions are intrinsically connected with daunting ethical dilemmas in the archaeological field. Those are explored by examining the growth of CRM in Spain and its particular interweaving with state and market logics under corporatist neoliberalism. In doing so, this paper proposes various theoretical avenues to connect critical management studies (CMS) with CRM, opening up a fresh perspective and new strands of debate in the field of heritage and business ethics.

Theoretical advancements in the field draw on empirical lessons learnt from the paradigmatic case study presented by the collapse of the Spanish commercial archaeology sector in a mere 4-year period (2014–2018). Original quantitative and qualitative data were obtained within the framework of three competitive European R&D projects between 2009 and 2017 and from various sources and methods that included 117 in-depth interviews, 417 surveys to companies ( $n=212$  in 2009;  $n=106$  in 2014, and  $n=97$  in 2017) and archival research. This case study is highly relevant to the topic because the same phenomenon currently affects other countries in Europe, Oceania and Latin America (Schlanger and Aitchison 2010). Archaeological heritage management prospered as a business model in Spain, based on the abstract narratives about safeguarding cultural heritage that thrived during the 1990s and 2000s. Spain can be considered as paradigmatic of the economic heterogeneity of capitalist systems within the Eurozone (Hancké 2010), as well as an exemplary case of a decentralised and outsourced CRM system (Beugelsdijk et al. 2006). In terms of critical management literature, this paper provides evidence of the downturn suffered by a business activity based on the technical paradigm of heritage management and policy, despite its strategic efforts to remain competitive. To do so, it employs

and develops the notion of abstract narratives set out by Ibarra-Colado (2006), secondarily drawing on the concept of functional stupidity (Alvesson and Spicer 2012), confirming their usefulness in a hitherto unexplored economic sector such as CRM. These concepts further the advancement of knowledge in CMS applied to real-life problems, connecting patterns of regional business interests with EU normative dynamics (Vidal et al. 2015). In particular, CMS presents a detailed critique of abstract narratives, that is, technical and political arguments decontextualised from specific social, economic and geographical environments. The normative framework of CRM is ultimately based on the abstract narratives provided by the global heritage and archaeology charters developed by international institutions, from UNESCO to ICOMOS and the World Bank.

Scholarly archaeological critique often targets these abstract narratives, presuming that they sanction how CRM operates in practice. However, a pragmatist account shows how abstract narratives are far from standard practice, stressing the need to develop contextual approaches to shed light on the actual operation of CRM. Specifically, we use the notion of functional stupidity (Alvesson and Spicer 2012) to explain the problems associated with the collapse of Spanish commercial archaeology, as well as the inability of human capital associated with this activity to use managerial and cognitive capacities to solve this significant challenge and/or anticipate its failure as a business model. In the case of Spain, we borrow from social anthropology to understand its governance system as a form of corporatist neoliberalism, 'halfway between traditional clientelist dynamics and neoliberal free market logics' in which 'communities of complicity distribute public resources without public accountability. In turn, citizens ignore, tolerate or participate—either actively or passively—in the process' (Alonso González and Macías Vázquez 2014, p. 224). For these authors, shortcomings in policy implementation 'are not due to wrong epistemological practices but rather to the internal dynamics operating in communities of complicity, which can do without knowledge and academia to reproduce themselves' (Alonso González and Macías Vázquez 2014, p. 224). This concept could easily apply to other southern European countries, from Italy to Greece, and serves to explore the development and collapse of Spanish commercial archaeology, which cannot be understood solely with the analytical tools of scholarly archaeology. Spanish commercial archaeology can be also considered as a paradigmatic case of a sound sector in an EU country with a buoyant economy and solid fiscal situation before 2010, with implications for other international contexts (van Hoorn 2015).

These critical perspectives, however, remain 'external' to the functioning and development of CRM, which continues to thrive on disregarding academic views, thus offering little analytical insight into its actual operation. They also take

for granted that capitalism *needs* archaeology, while recent dysregulation curtailing the need to carry out preventive archaeological assessment in countries like Brazil, Spain or Peru proves otherwise. These sorts of criticisms are charged with moralistic overtones, implying that CRM is morally *bad* just because it does not seek knowledge for its own sake, arguing that any profit-making endeavour is ultimately capitalist and consequently morally questionable. This highlights the ethical contradiction that surfaces in our work, namely the tension between archaeology as an academic endeavour with its own system of values, and CRM as a more or less successful business model. Related questions regarding the long-standing debate between ‘pure’ and applied science in general are beyond the scope of this paper. The argument unfolds as follows: it first provides a theoretical connection between the fields of CRM and CMS, by exploring heritage ethics debates and the workings of CRM in Spain. Then, it presents the three key phases of the development and fall of CRM in Spain. The conclusion proposes new avenues for research, and summarises the key advances in knowledge attained through the study, also exposing its limitations.

### Theoretical Approach: Heritage Ethics and Cultural Resource Management

During the last two decades, cultural heritage has become an important driver of national economies, creating value and employment (Greffé 2004). It represents a heterogeneous business activity, where all kinds of firms operate, from small and local to large multinationals, linked to the provision of archaeological and cultural management services (Martin-Rios and Parga-Dans 2016). Studies in the field of CRM draw on a wide array of theoretical and methodological approaches, mostly derived from the historical sciences (Alonso González 2016). Several academic works raise concerns about the critical situation of archaeological activity in Spain and beyond. Aitchison (2009) and Schlanger (2010) opened the debate in the European context, while later on Gnecco and Dias (2015) widened the discussion to different global settings. Recently, these debates have moved to the ethical terrain. Initial ethical debates in archaeology from the 1930s were deontological, practical and related to disciplinary behaviour and scientific practice regarding conservation and antiquity trade issues (González-Ruibal 2018). These concerns were expressed and responded to in the global charters and normative texts established throughout the twentieth century by a number of international institutions from UNESCO to ICOMOS, such as the Burra Charter (Icomos Australia 1999 [1979]). These abstract narratives are pervaded by positivist rhetoric and focus primarily on the preservation of material remains, disregarding academic archaeological concerns such as knowledge production, as

Critical Heritage Studies scholarship has denounced for years (Alonso González 2019). Because these abstract narratives underpin CRM practice, it is not surprising that CRM eventually turned into a business model based solely on the preservation of material remains and their technical documentation.

However, disciplinary shifts after the 1980s led archaeologists to deal with the sociocultural contexts of their work, expanding the scope of its ethics from intra-disciplinary concerns related to material culture to human beings both alive and dead (González-Ruibal 2018). The emergence of indigenist, decolonial, public or Marxist archaeologies posed new ethical questions beyond disciplinary codes, including issues of multiculturalism, participation, restitution, victimhood and colonialism. Despite the growing interest in ethics, there has been a concern about the disempowering potential of the concept, seen as a safer notion related to morals and virtuous behaviour. It has thus become less conflictive and tends to foreclose actual debate (Gnecco 2015). Critical archaeologists consider ethical discourse in archaeology as enshrining individualist, legalist and nationalist values based on expert knowledge (Meskell and Pels 2005). The most critical prefer to repoliticise the discipline and talk of political ethics (Hamilakis and Duke 2009) or even “after ethics” (Haber and Shepherd 2015).

Despite the emergence of CRM acting as a triggering factor in the development of ethical regulations in archaeology, an important absence in this debate is the role of business and corporate ethics in archaeology. Different authors highlight how the emergence of commercial archaeology or CRM poses new challenges as well as opportunities to the discipline. However, the ethical issues explored seldom go beyond intra-disciplinary concerns. Consequently, CRM is not analysed as a business activity whose ethical quarrels can also be discussed in terms of market and state operations, the implications of cost-driven vs. client-driven approaches, its relationship with governance and administrative structures, deviations from standard operation, as well as issues of labour, knowledge management and organisation. This is no trivial matter, given that almost 90% of archaeology was commercial rather than research-oriented by 2017 (Bonini Baraldi et al. 2017).

CRM can be defined as the provision of professional services by archaeological companies to development projects implemented by public or private entities, from housing to roads, dams, pipelines, or airports (Parga-Dans et al. 2016). Accordingly, developers are required to pay for professional archaeologists to assess whether there are significant archaeological remains or not, and to deal with them appropriately in such a case. After that, archaeological research shifted from a solely academic endeavour to become a technical business activity related to large excavations, carried out either by state agencies or private firms. According to

Gnecco and Dias (2015), advocates of CRM justify the ethics behind CRM on four grounds: it enlarges the labour market of archaeologists, expands knowledge of the past, saves endangered heritage from otherwise inevitable loss, and educates people in heritage protection and stewardship. However, critics argue that CRM produces uncritical workers forced to work outside the ethical framework of the discipline (González-Ruibal 2018), and that it lacks scientific rigour and simply becomes another capitalist enterprise based on decontextualised norms that legitimise a set of technical procedures (Gnecco 2015). Other critics describe CRM as part of ‘disaster capitalism’, a ‘state crime’ (Hutchings and La Salle 2015), or as collateral damage within the systematic application of neoliberal doxa (Zorzin 2015). These critiques require nuance, as they might apply to countries where liberal models of heritage management prevail, from Spain to Chile, but differ in countries with strong national heritage institutions such as France, where a state agency (INRAP) conducts CRM, or Hungary. Some local communities even demand interventions by commercial archaeologists, during which positive work has been carried out (Ferreira 2010).

Moreover, González-Ruibal et al. (2018a, b) argue that global capitalism no longer needs archaeologists to promote heritage as commodity. Thus, commercial archaeology appears as irrelevant in the quest to produce economic value through heritage, since this can be achieved by means of marketing or amateur archaeology (Alonso González 2016). Although nation-states created heritage legislation during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with the aim of preventing the loss of archaeological heritage, then seen both as a commodity and an identity marker (Alonso González 2019), there has been a tendency toward decentralisation and outsourcing of archaeological heritage management as a business activity. This process derives from the adoption of global regulations to safeguard heritage enacted since 1990. Specifically, the 1992 European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (or Valletta Treaty) led to an integration between archaeological monitoring of town planning and urban development. The Valetta Treaty introduced a palliative approach to heritage destruction denominated “the polluter pays”, previously established in the United States, the United Kingdom and some German states (Kristiansen 2009).

The 1990s witnessed the neoliberalisation, decentralisation and outsourcing of most archaeology work, previously in the hands of state agencies, whose cumbersome paradigm is represented by France (Demoule 2002). Since then, the international scene is dominated by competition between private organisations in a market supplying archaeological assistance and monitoring to building and development companies. Little research has addressed the practical consequences of these policy shifts, the adaptation of archaeological firms to changing market circumstances,

or the effectiveness of international cultural policies in promoting heritage management and conservation goals (Cleary et al. 2014).

In the Spanish case, CRM was part of the process of state modernisation, democratic re-establishment and economic expansion after the end of General Franco’s dictatorship between 1939 and 1975. CRM activity entailed adopting the EU institutional framework of heritage protection through the 1985 Law of Spanish Historic Heritage and the adoption of global policy guidelines on heritage safeguarding and “the polluter pays” logic since 1990 (Trotzig 1993). An administrative system with powers (“competences”) of heritage management decentralised or devolved into seventeen regions managed huge public investment in large-scale infrastructure and transport (high-speed trains, wind farms, highways and roads, etc.), and urban planning (transformation of rural into urban land, town planning projects, house building, etc.). As in other southern European countries, heritage has become a strategic resource in developing a country brand in order to promote exports and tourism. Moreover, Spain is a paradigmatic case for its history of greater investment in culture than other countries, combined with its greater degree of decentralisation (Rubio Arostegui and Rius-Ulldemolins 2018).

What makes Spain unique is the exceptional building boom between 1997 and 2008, unparalleled worldwide. According to data from the Spanish Statistical Office, the economic impact of the construction sector reached a striking 22% of the GDP in 2008, increasing 10% during this period. It showed the highest rate of growth in this sector among EU countries. This boom generated a huge demand for CRM, a sector that was almost non-existent before the 1990s. However, the economic crisis that hit the Spanish property market led to a rapid slump in activity, and the construction sector’s share in the GDP fell to 10.5% in 2014. The sudden rise and fall of the Spanish construction sector had its impact on commercial archaeology. The number of CRM archaeologists decreased from 2358 in 2009, to 711 in 2016 (Parga-Dans et al. 2016). This crisis ended in struggles led by trade unions and professional associations that opened a debate about the future of archaeology. This called into question “the polluter pays” logic, which currently underpins cultural heritage protection policies in both Spain and other EU contexts (Marín Suárez and Parga-Dans 2017).

A large body of scholarship in the field of CRM discusses the global economic crisis in heritage management, opening up a debate about the future possibilities of commercial archaeology in the EU (Schlanger and Aitchison 2010). Spain is a paradigmatic case of radical collapse, but similar situations are currently affecting several other countries in Oceania and Latin America (González-Ruibal et al. 2018a). This can only compare with Ireland, where the number of contract archaeologists increased from 650

in 2002 to 1709 in 2007, followed by a drastic 52% reduction in the workforce between 2008 and 2009. Countries like the Netherlands, Poland or France underwent cutbacks, as well as Japan (7111 archaeologists in 2000 to 6255 in 2008) and the US (11,350 in 2008, a 20% reduction in CRM expenditure), but their crisis was not comparable with Spain (Aitchison 2009). Further research strands tackle different national public policy approaches to managing archaeological heritage, from the centralised systems of France (Demoule 2002) to the more decentralised Italian administration (Bonini Baraldi 2014), with Spain being a case of radical decentralisation. These studies stress the need to reflect and discuss about how new CRM approaches to archaeological heritage could pave the way for practical instruments of sustainable heritage management and tourism (Parga-Dans and Alonso González 2019, 2017).

Addressing these issues requires understanding the underlying factors behind the collapse of commercial archaeology in Spain. It had been the exponent of a business model based on the technical principles of heritage safeguarding. A “business model” is here understood as the set of products and services that a company plans to sell to a target market to make a profit, together with a characterisation of firm assets (Gambardella and McGahan 2010), that is, the operational, financial and marketing elements describing the firm’s value proposition, its evolution and relationships with other institutions, organisations and representatives (Bucherer et al. 2012).

More importantly for us here, aside from some critical approaches (Martin-Rios and Parga-Dans 2016), archaeologists seldom explore the key ethical questions that underpin fundamental management, policy and market issues involved in large-scale rescue archaeology projects. As mentioned, these were common in Spain and the EU in general throughout the 1990s and 2000s (Bonini Baraldi et al. 2017). In turn, CRM studies and cultural policy debates have been largely overlooked in the field of business, organisation and management studies, despite their central economic role in the European economy. This constitutes a significant research gap, given that CRM as a commercial endeavour is predicated upon a series of narratives that make ethics external or irrelevant to everyday archaeological practice, in what Alison Wylie describes as a ‘fiction of universalism’ (cited in Meskell and Pels 2005, p. 7). Thus, despite CRM attempting to establish a static bureaucratic ethics based on ‘abstract principles of universal applicability’ (Hamilakis and Duke 2009, p. 22), there is a need to explore CRM from a situated, contextual and negotiated perspective, avoiding the fixed static ethics conveyed by global abstract narratives promoting heritage safeguarding.

## From Abstract Narratives to Neoliberal Corporatism

Management studies have paid little attention to the specifics of CRM policy, its market and practical administrative implementation. Nor have they addressed the question of how firms have implemented policy goals or failed to do so, not to mention the ethical issues involved in the sector. It is therefore necessary to initiate debate in this field by providing contextual and situated concepts to analyse ethical issues in CRM. Critical management studies (CMS) are useful for this, as they have already explored the controversies surrounding the technical paradigm of knowledge and policy, dissociated from real-life situations (Adler 2009). CMS have also questioned conventional approaches to management studies as new corporate versions of knowledge commodification under technocapitalism (Suarez-Villa 2009). They discuss the technical, i.e. neutral and non-problematic component of management studies, resulting in abstract narratives often dissociated from real-life situations (Ibarra-Colado 2006). Based on his extended experience in Latin American corporate contexts, Ibarra-Colado (2006) shows that the technical dimension of knowledge cannot be simply transferred to other cultural and geographical contexts. This applies to the Spanish case, where technical arguments based on abstract narratives dissociated from contextual realities have prevailed in management studies and policy (Parga-Dans et al. 2016), resulting in problems in the sector, as shown in the current situation of crisis in CRM.

If, as Ibarra-Colado (2006) suggests, the technical dimension of knowledge cannot be transferred without regard to specific historical and contextual factors, it is therefore necessary to develop empirically situated concepts. This means that no overall moral critique of CRM can be performed (it is either bad’ or ‘good’), but a proper understanding of it must be reached, based on empirical knowledge of its operation. It is essential to address the practical functioning of a sector beyond its claims to legitimacy provided by abstract narratives and empirical practice as such, so as to understand the factors underlying managerial problems and challenges to policy implementation, thus making a contribution to CMS.

Alvesson and Spicer’s (2012) notion of functional stupidity provides deeper understanding of these issues from a CMS perspective. Functional stupidity can be understood as an analytical category that explains the inability to use the cognitive capacities of human capital to solve significant problems affecting the whole organisation. Commercial archaeology as a business model was and remains oriented towards capturing value from the state and the construction sector in a free market, as a result of abstract narratives justifying heritage protection. Its collapse revealed the functional stupidity of the archaeological sector in Spain from a managerial perspective. However, deepening our understanding of such experiences of failure is paramount in bringing forward

new knowledge about real-life scenarios. Indeed, the exploration of the collapse of this business model highlights the need for using conceptually and empirically and situated concepts such as corporatist neoliberalism. This concept was developed by Alonso González and Macías Vázquez (2014) to analyse a case of failure in archaeological heritage management in Asturias, Spain. Their study stresses the need to address social processes based on “the realities enacted and constructed by social actors in practice” and to develop a clear understanding of corporatist neoliberalism, a governance structure “halfway between traditional clientelist dynamics and neoliberal free market logics” (2014, p. 224). For them, “this hybrid phenomenon is publicly criticized but largely unknown. In it, communities of complicity distribute public resources without public accountability” (2014, p. 224). In turn, citizens ignore, tolerate or participate in the process –either actively or passively. These authors also emphasise that cases of failure in heritage management in Spain “are not due to wrong epistemological practices but rather to the internal dynamics of communities of complicity, which can do without knowledge and academia to reproduce themselves” (2014, p. 224).

This paper builds on the notion of corporatist neoliberalism and takes it further, to show how abstract narratives of heritage protection and management legitimised a process of economic sectoral collapse, which concealed an underlying factor of functional stupidity. While it is important to understand the functional stupidity of organisations through a CMS perspective, this category falls short of explaining the collapse of a business model and sector that operates under logics that go beyond organisational business issues, such as corporatist neoliberalism. To advance our hypothesis here, when the dominant CRM model collapsed, archaeological companies developed new business strategies, providing specialised services in the area of tourism and cultural management in order to attract funding. However, the precedent logic of functional stupidity, based on the provision of such specialised services to public cultural institutions still prevailed, surviving thanks to dwindling public funds in a context of economic downturn. The new entrepreneurial strategies were once again oriented towards co-opting state institutions rather than generating value in the market through open competition. In this sense, the timid reorientation of the archaeological business model towards new relations with other institutions, organisations and representatives did not result in a strategy capable of confronting the current challenges of the sector. Similarly, the paradigm shifts of the sector did not permit the absorption of its workforce, revealing the failure of the technical dimension of archaeology as business model and the endurance of the underlying logic of corporatist neoliberalism. The collapse of Spanish commercial archaeology reveals the need to understand the geographical and socio-political

contexts of action, to avoid problems engendered by implementing abstract narratives dissociated from real-life situations. This converges with arguments pointed out by Ibarra-Colado (2006). Such a position also allows us to explore various ethical dilemmas in the field, beyond the moralistic claims prevailing among academic archaeological critiques of CRM, thus advancing knowledge in both CRM and CMS.

## Methods

This study presents data from a longitudinal investigation into the development, boom and decline of Spanish commercial archaeology from its beginnings during the 1990s to the present. Fieldwork was carried out between 2008 and 2017, based on a mixed-method approach combining qualitative and quantitative techniques. Data collection was organised along three main lines. Firstly, it consisted of the permanent compilation of archival material, i.e. technical reports and articles from companies, professional organisations, trade unions, and regional and national government administrations, as well as a bibliographical review of magazines, blogs and newspaper reports. Secondly, 117 in-depth interviews were conducted with sector representatives such as CEOs, ex-CEOs, academic, administrative and salaried staff, students and representatives of professional associations. A structured interview pattern was not implemented, as the objective was to build a scheme of critical events and key topics related to the development of commercial archaeology, the economic crisis and its consequences for the future of heritage management. The interviews ranged from 50 to 100 min and were digitally recorded with the interviewee’s permission. Transcriptions were made of all relevant portions.

Thirdly, given the lack of data sources and statistics on commercial archaeology in Spain, 417 surveys to companies were conducted. The design and implementation of these surveys followed a structure independent of the interview phase. The main objective of this technique was to obtain data or statistics on CRM and the number of professionals involved in this activity in Spain. This was carried out in three phases:

1. Compiling a directory of archaeological companies. The absence of any registry of archaeology companies in Spain required the creation of a directory or census of companies. To identify them, a search was made using multiple sources of information during the period 2008–2009 (business directories, advertisements and licenses granted by public administrations in 17 regions). This activity identified 273 organisations in 2009. The directory was updated in 2014, registering 158 companies, and then in 2017, with only 120 still in operation.

2. Questionnaire design. An original survey instrument was developed consisting of five interrelated sections to trace the Spanish archaeological business model and its evolution. Twenty specific questions were posed to cover issues involving the sociodemographic characteristics of the firm, its value proposition in the market, and operational, financial and marketing strategies.
3. Survey implementation. Three waves of telephone surveys addressed to companies were conducted. The first wave in 2009 obtained 212 valid responses out of 273 (78% response rate). The second was in 2014, with 106 valid responses out of 158 (67% response rate). The third was in 2017 and received 97 valid responses out of 120 (81% response rate).

Our strategy was to build pre-defined constructs based on the analytical categories previously described in the literature: abstract narratives, functional stupidity and corporatist neoliberalism. Such an approach provided a well-defined focus, facilitating the systematic collection of data and serving as a guide for data analysis. Data analysis incorporated a mixed-method approach (Gibson 2017). It used interviews, surveys and archival material to specifically analyse the case of CRM in Spain, lending consistency and convergence to the analytical categories underlying the study, and opening a debate on business ethics. Data from the interviews served to trace the course of CRM through a timeline of its major events in Spain. Secondary sources of information such as media reports were used to validate the details of the proposed deadlines and group topics. Later, categories were analysed using the data obtained in the surveys. Data from the surveys were analysed via the open coding procedure, grouped into secondary or axial codes representing broader analytical categories to understand the theoretical foundations. Statistics on company demographics, operational, financial and marketing elements were calculated from the survey data. Lastly, the inferences from general theoretical foundations were connected with the need to understand the organisational and institutional factors.

### CRM and the 'Boom' of Commercial Archaeology in Spain as a New Abstract Narrative (1990–2009)

Between 1997 and 2008, Spain witnessed an exceptional building boom that boasted the highest GDP growth rate among EU countries. From 1990 onwards, CRM grew significantly in Spain during only two decades of existence. The results of our first wave of surveys conducted in 2009 showed the creation of 273 archaeological companies and more than 2,500 jobs related to these organisations (excluding liberal professionals and unpaid personnel or

volunteers). These data are more striking given that previous to the period between 1990 and 2009, not one single archaeological company was in operation. Ninety-five percent of these firms relied mainly on the provision of specialised and technical services to the construction sector by conducting archaeological impact assessment studies. Abstract narratives of heritage protection were implemented after their promotion by international institutions and the UE. In many ways, this narrative contributed to functional stupidity, providing “a sense of certainty that allows organizations to function smoothly” (Alvesson and Spicer 2012, p. 1196). These justifications took on special importance in the creation of entrepreneurial opportunities for commercial archaeology in Spain. Similarly, the adoption of these norms posed new challenges, whether as decontextualised discourses on heritage management or as abstract narratives in the terms of Ibarra-Colado (2006). In one interview, a CEO of a large Spanish archaeological company explains this as follows:

Our company was created to fill the existing professional vacuum, as the application of the new heritage legislation demanded the delivery of archaeological reports. A new way to carry out archaeological fieldwork was born: the developer paid a professional company to conduct the required archaeological studies. Our company grew alongside the construction boom, and we employed more than 150 professionals. We were quickly overwhelmed with requests for archaeological digs, surveys, construction monitoring, etc.

The expansion of this business model drastically changed the way of understanding archaeology, as it moved from being education and research-oriented, to becoming a profitable business activity based on a niche of disciplinary and technical knowledge facing new ethical challenges (Hernando Álvarez and Tejerizo García 2011). Archaeological knowledge was transformed into business activity through the organisation of an archaeological market: it was necessary to define the typology and conditions of archaeological heritage at a national level (tangible, intangible, natural, etc.), following international and EU guidelines. Archaeological activity had to be categorised from an applied perspective to address its management (protocols, professional ethics and deontological codes, sequencing and timelines/deadlines, methodologies, tools, materials, etc.) regarding the differently structured administrative competences of seventeen Spanish regions, with their varying levels of autonomy or devolution. It also required standardising the exercise of archaeology as a liberal profession (analogous to architects or lawyers) with a set of diplomas, ethical codes, professional associations and salary agreements. These activities oriented towards the definition of commercial archaeology as an

entrepreneurial business activity involved a new version of CRM, moving towards the commodification of archaeological management.

Companies often started without organisational and management knowledge, or any clear understanding of the legislation (what to do with the remains after excavations, how to file reports, etc.), particularly among their professional or academic archaeologists. The firms were ill-equipped to deal with not only business issues but also ethical questions arising from the work. One of the CEOs interviewed in 2005 explains it as follows:

Things are going well and it is a great time for archaeologists. Our priorities in terms of funding are in construction and public works. Demand is at its highest. We need to work with specialists such as surveyors, designers, computer scientists, labourers, and even security guards to carry out our [urban] development plans. But in the long term, we need to collaborate with architects, restorers, academics, lawyers etc., and develop a profession.

A body of technical knowledge and a way of organising the archaeological enterprise emerged in relation to the legal protection of archaeological heritage derived from building projects, development and land-use planning. In turn, these tasks had to be conducted by professionally trained archaeologists with academic degrees and certified by public institutions, in order to carry out their activity. This legal requirement implied an increase in university enrolment and the number of degrees on offer (graduate and postgraduate studies in archaeology, history, humanities, fine arts, etc.), and also the consolidation of research groups, administrative services and archaeological museums (González Álvarez 2013). This training, however, did not include managerial expertise or even knowledge about the practical and legal aspects of CRM, nor a clear engagement with key ethical issues posed by indigenous, public and Marxist archaeologies, from multiculturalism to victimhood, participation, or restitution. Thus, a technical dimension of knowledge related to heritage protection became crucial in land rezoning processes within a high-revenue property market based on speculation, deregulation, and rapid development. Abstract narratives of heritage protection deriving from international institutions (such as UNESCO or ICOMOS) merely provided general guidelines and orientations, without explicitly tackling issues of how they should navigate national and regional legislation, or about their practical operation in the field. In Spain, corporatist neoliberalism and the decentralisation or devolution of heritage legislation powers to regional Autonomous Communities led to the creation of market niches that precluded market concurrence. Construction companies, as well as heritage officials in public institutions, tended to favour certain CRM companies over others,

already hinting at the main traits that CRM would adopt in Spain in the years to come.

### **The Collapse of Archaeology as Business Model (2009–2017): Functional Stupidity and Corporatist Neoliberalism**

The adoption of a technical knowledge paradigm based on global charters of heritage protection and management institutionalised a particular business model that presented traits of functional stupidity, partially due to its coupling with corporatist neoliberalism. Functional stupidity can be understood as the inability or unwillingness to use the cognitive capacities of human capital to avoid or solve significant problems that can impact the long-term sustainability of the whole organisation (Alvesson and Spicer 2012).

In managerial terms, archaeological companies established a homogeneous business model adapted to the decentralisation of Spanish heritage management. It was aimed at fulfilling the demand generated by the construction industry, an example of functional stupidity. In the case of Spanish commercial archaeology, the implementation of a homogeneous business model meant that most of the companies were oriented towards only one value proposition: conducting the archaeological impact assessment studies required before starting new development projects. This technical stance precluded engagement with ethical questions that would have been fundamental for the survival of the sector in the long run. The results of the survey show that the building sector was the main customer of 95% of the companies surveyed in 2009, demanding this single service. The data also reveal that this homogeneity prevailed in all organisational, operational, financial or marketing aspects, being also applicable to company assets and the archaeological business model itself. The organisational model adopted by these companies was characterised by their small size (86% of the companies had ten or fewer employees, with an average of 5.75 workers per company) and a strong part-time employment base (51% of the jobs were temporary), to respond rapidly once projects were approved.

Examining the figures on financial volume, 65% of companies do not reach €150,000 annual turnover, following a model of small-medium enterprises. Qualitative data from interviews show that most entrepreneurs were archaeologists without specific managerial training. Ultimately, the winners of the growth and collapse of CRM in Spain were those entrepreneurs who managed to establish solid networks with public institutions to ensure enough specific importance before the arrival of the crisis. Certainly, some companies failed and entrepreneurs made no money out of it, but many others either closed down with great profit gathered, or kept on business and took on the works and territories of companies that went out of business. There



was a component of functional stupidity in the archaeological companies created by archaeologists, as entrepreneurs disregarded calls for alternative ways of implementing commercial archaeology coming from critical professional archaeologists and academics. In this way, they promoted a “organizationally-supported lack of reflexivity, substantive reasoning, and justification” that entailed “a refusal to use intellectual resources outside a narrow and ‘safe’ terrain” (Alvesson and Spicer 2012, p. 1196). In relation to this, the results of the surveys and interpretation of the interviews reveal that the operational strategy of these companies was closely connected with the regional administrative protocol: 73% of the companies surveyed in 2009 had only worked in the region where they were located. The significant legal and administrative differences between the Spanish regions became a barrier to exercising the archaeological profession at a national level, to free market competition, and/or developing business strategies based on company growth expectations. Therefore, a particular business model associated with Spanish CRM emerges, based on small regionally-based companies that attract projects derived from the construction sector as a result of abstract heritage protection narratives.

In other words, CRM functioned as a service sector dependent upon the construction industry, a paramount example of a cyclical business, without anticipating the potential problems associated with this. The sector was collectively stupid in a managerial sense, because it was apparent that CRM’s expansion would be followed by a contraction if alternative service provision was not prepared for and developed. In fact, the only adaptation of the sector to cyclicity was in terms of establishing a precarious labour force adapted to demand, not dissimilar to the well-known tourism sector dynamics in Spain (Argandoña 2010).

Certainly, some companies attempted to implement marketing differentiation strategies with the aim of becoming competitive in a free-market context. Sixty-six percent of the companies surveyed in 2009 introduced technological improvements and innovations in their organisations, such as new equipment and specialised software. Furthermore, 60.4% of them combined technological innovation with organisational improvements and work management initiatives. This included dividing the company into departments, distributing functions and providing training activities for employees. The aim was to create dynamic organisational structures to foster collaboration among companies when large projects were commissioned, but differentiating the specific activities offered by each company into large projects. Indeed, 83% of the sample of companies had collaborated with other firms.

Nevertheless, these efforts did not have the expected positive effect. In theory, archaeological companies operated under a free-market model, yet they were intimately connected with the regional administrative institutions and

their supervision protocols, which is a key characteristic of corporatist neoliberalism in Spain. It would seem that this functionally stupid business model was founded on applying abstract narratives of technical knowledge as its differentiation strategy (e.g. knowledge networks, innovation, technology, etc.). However, the consumers of heritage services (building companies, self-employed workers and entrepreneurs, and public administrations) only demanded archaeological services to comply with the territorial and administrative requirements. They also generally opted for the lowest budgets and quicker companies, rather than for those providing higher scientific quality, better services or more detailed work, thus reverting the market logic as predicated under abstract neoliberal narratives. Thus, CRM was dominated by cost-driven clients, that is, those who rank costs above other elements when hiring a company, while value-driven clients who valued experience, quality and better results were lacking. This nuance is key, as the virtuous chain of knowledge production postulated by academic archaeology was broken here. Construction companies hired archaeological companies only to abide by impact assessment legislation, archaeological companies filed reports and delivered archaeological material culture to public institutions to comply with heritage legislation, and public institutions monitored the whole operation. However, cost-driven priorities meant that archaeological work was low quality and performed in a hasty manner. The reports delivered by CRM companies seldom served to produce academic knowledge in the form of dissertations, theses, research articles or books, while the actual archaeological heritage being rescued was often condemned to oblivion in boxes stored in public museum storerooms and basements. Despite all actors in the chain fulfilling their tasks, the system as a whole was functionally stupid as it did not deliver social benefits in terms of knowledge production, heritage protection, or raising citizen awareness about heritage. It remained legitimised only because of global abstract narratives about heritage. As one of the interviewees suggests regarding the disadvantages of adopting a client-driven market position:

Our company was both pioneering and faithful in its modus operandi; we incorporated innovative techniques to our systems of archaeological registry and documentation. This commitment, however, was a handicap from the standpoint of pure economic profitability. Other companies were not so respectful when carrying out their interventions or lowering their budgets. The enormous workload prevented administrations from guaranteeing the minimum professional standards and monitoring them, and in some cases, real atrocities were committed in archaeological interventions. The price wars [between companies] deeply affected our company.

However, functional stupidity “can also have negative consequences” that can “engender the conditions for individual and organizational dissonance” (Alvesson and Spicer 2012, p. 1196). Indeed, there were groups of archaeologists and institutions that called this model into question or deviated from the norm, but the extent to which they provided viable alternatives to the model remains doubtful. The most notorious examples were the anarchist group of archaeologists in Córdoba, the AMMTA (Association of Archaeology Workers of Madrid), the CRAS (Revolutionary Centre of Social Archaeology in Catalonia), and the public–private consortiums created by the city councils of Mérida and Córdoba, explored elsewhere (Parga-Dans 2019). In different ways, these groups and initiatives pointed to possible different business models that were less dependent on serving developers and faithful to the public interest of heritage preservation. Critical groups of archaeologists did raise key ethical questions, trying to put issues of public participation, social value or victimhood on the spotlight. In turn, the public–private consortiums of archaeologists called into question the role of business and corporate ethics in archaeology, aiming to provide fair labour conditions and public accountancy. Ultimately, however, they did not call into question the underlying structure of CRM or provided clues for the development of sustainable commercial models based on alternative strategies and practices. Rather, they criticised the inability of some developers and institutions to respect professional standards in terms of practices, outcomes and salaries, and instead demanded decent wages and the recognition of archaeology as a professional niche with its own labour status, that is, they defended their position within the established system.

For most archaeologists, however, the semblance of an organised and growing sector that provided huge revenues to archaeological companies, offered a prospect of stable work and salaries, illustrating a key element of functional stupidity, namely its potential to “motivate people, help them to cultivate their careers, and subordinate them to socially acceptable forms of management and leadership” (Alvesson and Spicer 2012, p. 1196). Many salaried archaeologists also engaged in the sector with the hope of starting their own business in the future after years of saving money with salaried jobs, encouraged by the success of CRM companies. As Alvesson and Spicer would argue, “such positive outcomes can further reinforce functional stupidity” (Alvesson and Spicer 2012, p. 1196). Thus, the prevailing logic of corporatist neoliberalism kept thriving, even more during the period of economic slowdown, to the point of threatening the survival of archaeological companies. The economic crisis of 2008 had devastating effects on the construction sector and consequently on commercial archaeology. To confront the crisis, the government promoted large infrastructures through investment in public works projects,

which helped minimise the immediate effects of the crisis in archaeological activity. However, this investment did not result in a structural solution to the problem, but rather deepened it. With the end of the huge public investment in the construction sector in 2011, the critical situation of commercial archaeology only worsened.

Our second wave of surveys in 2014 shows the collapse of this business activity, as almost 50% of the companies operating in 2009 had closed by 2014. Besides this, 66% of the jobs related to these organisations were lost during the period 2010–2014 and 52% of the remaining qualified archaeology jobs became part-time, below the average annual salary of €22,500. The ex-CEO of an archaeology company that closed down in 2014 explains it thus:

At the onset of the crisis period the situation became untenable. But not only for us. Most companies in the sector have closed down and numerous jobs were lost. The future of the sector is difficult to predict. It seems clear that the model of large archaeological companies dies with our company closing down. Perhaps it will move into a system of self-employed archaeologists that may occasionally get together for big surveys and studies. Public administrations will need to remain vigilant to prevent a price war in the supply of professional archaeological services, which may result in a drop in scientific quality.

The closure of nearly half the archaeological companies, and the drama associated with the redundancy of its workforce in a mere four-year period, illustrates the collapse of their business model and its functional stupidity. The contemporary situation of prolonged crisis and the stagnation of construction activity in Spain constantly threaten the Spanish CRM and archaeology professionals, who started an active union struggle in 2016. This highlights the need for appropriately situated concepts to explain complex social problems in every context.

In parallel, the response from the construction sector to their own financial problems has been to put pressure on public administrations to withdraw the legal requirement to carry out archaeological impact assessment studies. This has already happened in the Madrid autonomous region in Spain and is underway in countries such as the US, Brazil, Uruguay, Peru or Greece (González-Ruibal et al. 2018b). The suppression of this administrative requirement in the assignment system for construction projects paves the way for the end of CRM as we currently know it. Could this situation have been prevented through a better integration between academic archaeology and CRM, or by the promotion of a value-driven rather than cost-driven business model? The sector offered no clear answer to this question, and traditional networks based on corporatist neoliberalism did not suffice for companies to ensure their profitability in

times of crisis. Ethical questions remained out of the agenda and public debate. In the words of a representative of a professional association in 2017:

The new model has not arrived and the progressive precariousness continues to overwhelm the sector and its professionals. A special plan for the sector is needed to save so much heritage at risk and help revive archaeology. It is urgent to take steps for heritage management in other directions.

Some surviving companies have attempted to overcome the end of the contracts from the collapsed construction sector, and adapt to the new context by diversifying their services on offer and developing new economic uses for archaeological knowledge. Despite the continuance of construction-related services as their main activity, 20% of the companies decided to open up new market niches associated with cultural, touristic, museum and outreach services as strategic initiatives. New diversification initiatives marked a turning point in the search for alternative business models by commercial archaeology companies. To do so, 10% of them devoted part of their resources to acquire technology applicable to CRM (geographic and geophysical information systems and satellite technology, remote 3D and teledetection), while 15% have signed collaboration agreements with other organisations to diversify their technical services they offer (e.g. topography, refurbishments, environmental surveys).

Despite the adaptation efforts made by most companies, diversification strategies have been rather unsuccessful in the market. Our third and last wave of surveys (2017) revealed the closure of 24% companies operating in 2014, an 11% reduction in workforce, and an increase in temporary employment. Indeed, 86% of companies employed less than 10 workers, 65.5% of them temporary. The timid reorientation of the archaeological business model has not resulted in a strategy able to confront the current challenges faced by the sector, nor the recovery of its lost workforce, which shows the failure of archaeology as a business model. Meanwhile, academic archaeologists continued to produce knowledge based on their own archaeological projects (summer excavations and surveys, projects funded by competitive public grants, etc.), disregarding the large amounts of archaeological data and technical reports produced by CRM. Ultimately, this led to criticisms of CRM for being a form of antiquarianism, mostly concerned with the preservation of objects without further knowledge-building purposes (Haber and Shepherd 2015). Diversification was seen generally as a technical affair, rather than as a shift in outlook and business strategy that could tackle some ethical questions that would have been key for their survival, including issues of public participation and social value (Parga-Dans and Alonso González 2019). The whole system functioned smoothly thanks, first, to corporatist neoliberalism, which

provided archaeological companies a sense of being backed up and protected by public institutions and developers. And second, thanks to the abstract narrative of heritage protection, which offered public institutions and heritage workers a sense of legitimacy by showing that things were being done properly and according to international norms and standards developed by academic and professional archaeologists themselves. The coupling of corporatist neoliberalism, an abstract narrative, and functional stupidity, thus converged into a business model whose main traits remain still unchanged.

### The Malfunction of Abstract Narratives and the Underlying Logic of Corporatist Neoliberalism in Spanish Archaeological Management

The collapse of commercial archaeology as a business model exemplifies the malfunction of abstract narratives under free market conditions, as global discourse and charters promoting heritage protection do not perfectly fit all local and regional contexts. The failure of a substantial number of companies and the critical situation of these organisations struggling to survive was paralleled by the expansive economic cycle linked to the construction bubble in Spain, in turn associated with a framework of political and urban corruption, irrespective of political parties or regions (Jerez Darias et al. 2012). Spain recorded nearly 1700 new legal proceedings and more than 500 prosecutions for corruption in 2015. More precisely, the public administration mediated as a supervisory mechanism in adjudicating construction contracts under a free-market rhetoric. This concealed a framework of personal interests and power abuse by those managing and distributing public resources in a fraudulent manner (Parrado et al. 2018). This process illustrates the working of corporatist neoliberalism in Spanish CRM, which shows the need to include situated concepts to understand ethical debates and key concepts in CMS scholarship (Alonso González and Macías Vázquez 2014). This is a form of governmentality connected to practices halfway between traditional clientele structures and the free market. It accounts for a failure experience which makes Spain a somewhat radical case study in Europe, although not dissimilar from other Southern European countries (Rubio Arostegui and Rius-Ulldemolins 2018). Moreover, corporatist neoliberalism plays a role that coalesces with a rather underdeveloped element within Alvesson and Spicer's description of functional stupidity, namely its potential to "provide a sense of certainty that allows organizations to function smoothly" (Alvesson and Spicer 2012, p. 1196). This again emphasises the need to account for the manifold instantiations of different free-market models. Something similar

is currently happening in Latin America, where policies of economic promotion and modernisation have repeatedly failed, subjecting archaeological management to the oligarchic logic of the state (Fariás et al. 2010).

Certainly, there is no evidence of crass fraudulent practices in the results from our surveys with archaeology companies in Spain, a delicate topic and one that our questionnaires and recorded interviews did not explicitly touch upon. However, excerpts from the interviews succinctly illustrate the functioning of this underlying logic, based on a complex interaction between private companies and public institutions. Corporatist neoliberalism specifically thrived in Spain after adopting international abstract narratives and the EU institutional framework of heritage protection and management. This was then combined with the investment of huge sums of public money in large infrastructures and transport projects (high-speed trains, wind farms, highways and roads, etc.) and urban planning (transformation of rural into urban land, town planning projects, building housing estates, etc.), disregarding their practical or real necessity. As an ex-CEO explains:

Both the ministry and the city council initiated a previous process of land speculation. When there was nothing else to build, an excuse was found to keep business going as usual; roads were re-built even five times if necessary. Rural land was converted into urban land at will.

Corporatist neoliberalism thrived on the system of assigning projects to archaeology companies, and thus conditioned the economic profitability derived from this type of distribution of public resources. Within it, archaeological companies providing quicker results and positive assessment reports were prioritised over those offering value-added services, from publication to musealisation or 3D technologies, because stopping construction work for impact assessment was highly inconvenient and costly for developers. As the ex-CEO continues explaining:

When it came to the archaeological tenders or bids, they [institutions] themselves would design them to fit your company's profile; everything was done officially, but we all knew what was hiding underneath. The amount of money involved in an archaeological excavation was unbelievable, but we had plenty of work. At times, they called us and we delivered a very overpriced budget because we were not interested in taking on the job. If it was still assigned to us, we shared it with other colleagues, we reached agreements behind their backs. Money was pouring in, and some months we brought home up to €16,000, we could not cope with it. One could make a lot of money in archaeology and this was well known.

The phenomenon known as corporatist neoliberalism both explains and illustrates the functional stupidity associated with abstract narratives in Spanish commercial archaeology. Corporatist neoliberalism implied appropriation of public and private funds legitimised by the rhetoric of an abstract narrative, i.e. the need to preserve archaeological heritage derived from EU and international heritage charters through a private and technical business model such as commercial archaeology. However, this model depended on the structural logic of corporatist neoliberalism, only capturing resources locally or regionally from public institutions and private companies, without generating its own specific business style or market niche in a sustainable fashion. Indeed, new business structures were created to comply with institutional regulations and with the underlying context of corporatist neoliberalism. In the case of public institutions such as municipal councils, their interest in performing quick archaeological impact assessments was related to their main source of tax revenue in that period: speculative property operations and land rezoning. Therefore, the CRM business model not only had to adapt to the demands of private clients such as construction companies, but also to public institutions that both promoted and monitored the construction projects under way. According to another ex-CEO in our interview:

The modus operandi were always the same, the archaeological report is only a piece of paper to support the decision that makes the building project viable, and it is written depending on the applicant (...) sometimes the archaeological company is created ad hoc for a specific assessment study, the application is filed with the city council and everyone benefits from it.

While these discourses cannot be generalised, they portray the underlying structure of corporatist neoliberalism in which archaeological companies in Spain used to operate. Consequently, archaeological companies assumed this socio-economic and political structure and attempted to reproduce it. This involved endorsing and promoting a representation of the abstract narrative of heritage management as a form of technical knowledge rather than the academic endeavour of knowledge production, as well as a business model based on free-market competition. However, these abstract narratives about CRM developed internationally and in the EU, and then applied to the Spanish context, concealed the real modus operandi under the logic of corporate networks. These played a key role in the assignment of resources derived from property development speculation. This represents a paramount example of functional stupidity, which in turn illustrates how the adoption of abstract narratives, decontextualised from real-life contexts, can threaten business and organisational survival in the long run. Moreover, it shows how the unethical enterprise of the past has little to

do with the epistemological issues denounced by academic archaeologists, but rather with the corporatist neoliberalism prevailing in Spanish CRM and governmentality as a whole.

## Conclusions

The present investigation has provided valuable information regarding the European debate about the future possibilities of CRM based on original data, mapping the birth, growth and decline of Spanish commercial archaeology and its ethical implications. The aim has been to better understand the tensions within this extremely decentralised and outsourced business sector and connect the notion of corporatist neoliberalism with the ethical implications of archaeology. In responding to the research questions posed, this paper moves beyond previous ethical debates in archaeology, escaping dichotomous views and moralistic critiques of CRM to show how 'the unethical enterprise of the past' has to do with its enactment in specific practices. The adaptation of CRM to corporatist neoliberalism led to a cost-driven business model far away from academic archaeology and its quest for knowledge production. In turn, the legitimisation of CRM based on abstract narratives of heritage protection led to a positivist and antiquarian approach to preservation. This fitted well with the public and private system that dominated the construction market and land-zoning operations. Therefore, CRM was not unethical or problematic because it deviated from standards established by abstract narratives of heritage protection. Rather, these narratives legitimised the actual practice of CRM as a business model entrenched in cronyism and based on the exploitation of a precarious labour force. Thus, as various archaeologists have recently pointed out, it would be difficult to criticise CRM as such without a more comprehensive critical appraisal of archaeology and heritage management themselves as inherently capitalist, modern and colonial endeavours (González-Ruibal et al. 2018a; Alonso González 2019).

Shedding light on this process opens the door to addressing broader research questions about the role of cultural heritage in the European policy agenda and its related socioeconomic potential within the EU's different national heritage management systems and market economies. The approach also offers new insights into how explicit CRM policies can fail to attain their stated goals, due to other implicit or effective policies that shape other governmental fields. This perspective also allows us to propose various theoretical avenues to connect CMS with CRM, tackling an important research gap in CMS, namely the need to provide empirical grounds for conceptually situated notions relevant within the field. In particular, we have proved the usefulness of the concept of functional stupidity, as theorised by Alvesson and Spicer (2012) to analyse business models in

hitherto unexplored sectors such as CRM, but also found its limitations. Indeed, as critics have argued (Butler 2016; Ibarra-Colado 2006), functional stupidity is itself an abstract narrative that claims applicability without regard to spatial and temporal contextualisation. However, our analysis demonstrates the need to couple functional stupidity with empirically situated notions such as corporatist neoliberalism in order to shed light on the real functioning of specific sectors and practices.

In turn, the utility of CMS for CRM is to shed light on the role of firms in adapting and implementing the legal, administrative and managerial systems determined by broader EU public policy, in line with recent research on the implementation of heritage policies in Bulgaria (Dimitrova and Steunenberg, (2013). Regarding archaeological heritage, the contextually situated study of CRM advances theory in the sociology of organisations, heritage studies, cultural economics and law, particularly by questioning the technical assumptions of knowledge for business organisations (Iatridis and Kesidou 2018). In doing so, it identifies new avenues of research within CMS in the line of Ibarra-Colado (2006), challenging the orthodox organisational perspective focused on success factors and case studies. This orthodox perspective assumes, firstly, that companies can issue univocal answers to justify their sustainability based on abstract narratives. These are arguments decontextualised from specific socioeconomic, geographic and political environments, such as those provided by international legislative charters or technical guidelines. Secondly, it assumes that the technical functioning of knowledge is error free. The analysis presented here, however, challenges these two assumptions, given that the adoption of the international abstract narratives of heritage and EU CRM guidelines in Spain have generated multiple problems, challenging the sustainability of the commercial archaeology sector as a whole.

The lesson to be learnt from the failure of Spanish commercial archaeology during the period 2009–2017 is that the adoption of an abstract narrative, in the terms of Ibarra-Colado (2006), can become functionally stupid. Once public investments dried up and the construction sector collapsed, so did the whole commercial archaeology sector. This inability to anticipate cyclical market shifts or collectively transition from a cost-driven to a value-driven market evinced the problems deriving from the functional stupidity pervading commercial archaeology and leading to the collapse of the whole business. These findings are in line with similar research in Europe, such as the ethnographical work carried out by Paulsen (2017) about functional stupidity, organisational compliance and conflicts at the Swedish Public Employment Service, demonstrating the potential of this strand of analysis.

To avoid the aforementioned knowledge gaps, it is important to carry out context-specific research using

locally adapted analytical concepts. In Spain, the notion of corporatist neoliberalism aptly illustrates a geographically and socio-politically situated adaptation of an economic sector to the local Spanish context (Alonso González and Macías Vázquez 2014). This investigation has contributed to further the scope of this analytical notion by demonstrating its operation at the level of firms and broader economic sectors. Indeed, corporatist neoliberalism underlies archaeological heritage management practice through a system based on securing public funds and assigning them to cultural and archaeological projects in a period of abundant resources, but disregarding the practical need for these investments. Acknowledging alternative functionalities allows for their problematisation and for reflection on their practical implications (van Hoorn 2015). While the Spanish experience cannot be generalised, the breakdown of this promising business activity in a mere four-year period, and the threat to heritage protection this entails, stresses the need to rethink heritage management in alternative terms. This highlights the need to emphasise territorial complexity through the incorporation of other managerial realities and spaces of archaeological management (Haastrup 2013), which is the main limitation of this study. For instance, managerial studies in Spain lack a solid academic debate about the specific problems of the country, as happens in Latin America (Ibarra-Colado 2006). Similarly, further research should establish comparative frameworks to understand whether the “endeavour of the past” is also unethical or it can operate differently than in Spain, especially in countries with more liberal governmental traditions such as the UK, Chile or Australia. Future research should also explore alternative approaches for the resolution of specific ethical problems and also account for successful experiences in the field of archaeology and cultural heritage, emphasising the need for a new CRM paradigm in the twenty-first century, beyond the Spanish context.

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### Compliance with Ethical Standards

**Conflict of interest** The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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