



Project of “Methodology” Liaison Group

ARWA association aims to bring together scholars involved in the archaeological research of the ancient Western and Central Asia. The “Methodology” Liaison group aspires to discuss and promote best practices and guidelines in the investigation and reconstruction of the past in the geographic and chronological fields covered by the ARWA mandate. The Liaison Group is composed of 7 elected members (1 coordinator/ARWA vice-president and 6 members) and will be involved in constant interaction with the other Liaison Groups.

ARWA includes scholars from different disciplines (Field Archaeology, Art History, History, Philology, Social Sciences, Exact Sciences, etc.). All of these disciplines investigate and reconstruct the past but defining a common and unique methodological approach is impossible and, above all, undesirable. Moreover, among the disciplines involved in the multi-disciplinary research related to the reconstruction of the past, there is a fundamental difference that is in opposition with the Exact Sciences: archaeological data by itself is not objective. Indeed, not only is excavation a non-repeatable experiment (excavation means destruction), but the information coming from archaeological field research is unavoidably the production of the interpretation and selection of the data made by an archaeologist. It is thus impossible to deny the existence of biases, not only in the archaeological field, but also in the numerous steps of the investigation process and of the disciplines involved in the research (see above).

A. From Data Collection to Presentation (Fig. 1)

The rigorous process of gathering and measuring information involved in the Exact Sciences can be adapted, pending the above-mentioned limits, to all the branches and disciplines included in archaeological research, as exemplified by the subdivisions of ARWA into Liaison Groups. In the data collection phase, best practices and guidelines, in association to up-to-date documentation tools and instruments, are fundamental. These elements allow for the reliable collection of information and a better dialogue with all the other scientific fields, including those based on the reproducibility of the data.

Differences between Exact Sciences and Humanities and Social Sciences become more pronounced in data analysis. In archaeological research, data analysis is indeed influenced by the different approaches and theoretical perspectives of the scholars involved. Although all theoretical approaches can be questioned, and considered outdated or fashionable, no a-theoretical archaeological research is possible, as the use of theory provides the only way to produce an account of the past from the collected data.

Presentation and publication of data is not the last step in the process but is a fundamental step in sharing newly acquired knowledge. In accordance with the policies and the laws of the country in which the research is carried out, access to the data should be as barrier-free as possible. Open Access should include the free availability not only of scientific and scholarly texts but also of research data (Open Data). In this way further research and different critical evaluations on the same data are possible. Furthermore, the research process can hasten and create new sets of data from different sources that can be analysed under innovative perspectives.

B. Aims and actions

The “Methodology” Liaison Group is intended to:

1. Define and promote best practices in the Exact Sciences, Humanities and Social Sciences involved in archaeological research, which can be disseminated through the proposal of specific guidelines;
2. Promote the implementation of up-to-date tools (technologies, software, etc.) that will make data collection, analysis, and presentation as reliable as possible;
3. Encourage the investigation and interpretation of data by scholars across the Humanities and Social Sciences that are involved in archaeological research using different theoretical frames;
4. Promote Open Access and Open Data, including the publication of raw data, in order to allow free, easier and faster accessibility, and the dissemination and the critical verification of research results; Open Access and Open Data should be pursued in accordance with the policies and the laws of the country in which the research is carried out and respecting copyright regulations. Standards, guidelines and recommendations from international organizations (e.g. EU; W3C; etc.) will also be considered in the promotion activities of the “Methodology” Liaison Group.
5. Organize specific workshops in cooperation with the “Archaeology” and the other Liaison Groups, for the definition and elaboration of best practices and guidelines, and the discussion on fundamental methodological issues in the research of the ancient Western and Central Asia (e.g. excavation methodology; possibility of shared terminology and multilingual lexicon, reproducibility of the interpretation process; etc.).

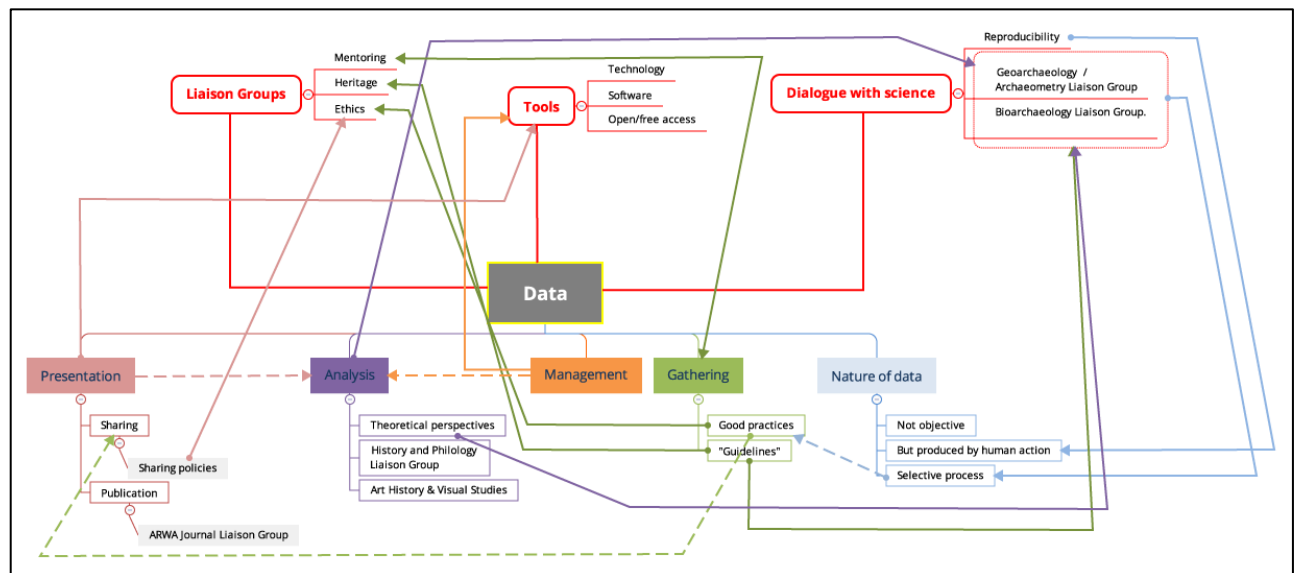


Fig. 1. Diagram showing the different aspects object of the interest of the “Methodology” Liaison Group.