

## Opening access to heritage resources: risk, opportunity or paradigm shift?

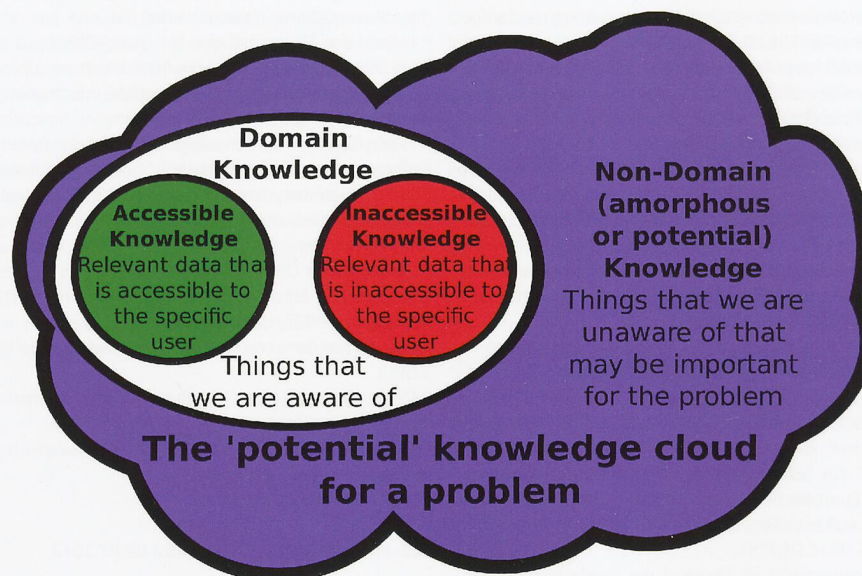
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### Abstract

'Open' has captured the zeitgeist. It is argued that by providing clear and transparent access to knowledge objects (data, theories and knowledge (open access, open data, open methods, open knowledge)) and enhancing collaborative and creative input 'open' approaches have the potential to revolutionise science, humanities and arts. Open approaches require active engagement and are as much a social and organisational issue as a technical one. This requires engagement from a broader societal base. For example, primary data creators need the appropriate incentives to provide access to Open Data – these incentives will vary between different groups: contract archaeologists, curatorial archaeologists and research archaeologists all have different drivers. Equally important is that open approaches raise a number of ethical issues. A UK focus has been taken: the author appreciates there are differences in application outside the UK. This is a shortened version of a paper that is published in the Journal of World Archaeology special issue on open Archaeology in Autumn 2012.

### Introduction

Heritage resources within landscapes are at risk from a variety of natural and anthropogenic forces. The loss of some of these resources is inevitable, but the decision making process is a delicate balancing act between different cultural, industrial and economic issues which can be enacted at different scales: from the local to the international. Data, and the subsequent information and knowledge that is derived from an integrated data corpus, should be used effectively to produce realistic policy (i. e. policy which can be enacted and produces the desired impact) and develop effective governance strategies (be they local, regional, national or global). The underlying ethos is that better decisions are made when users can access appropriate parts of the knowledge base in a manner which is relevant to the problem they are solving. The problem is that decisions, policy or research is not enacted with 'perfect' knowledge. Current approaches mean that research and decision making is undertaken on a sub-set of the corpus of data. This leads to a Rumsfeldian system of knowledge availability (see Figure 1):



<sup>1</sup> The 'potential' knowledge cloud for a problem (re-used under a CC-BY licence from Anthony Beck: [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The\\_%27potential%27\\_knowledge\\_cloud\\_for\\_a\\_problem.svg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_%27potential%27_knowledge_cloud_for_a_problem.svg)).