

## Development-led Archaeology in Serbia: the case of Corridor X

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### ***Abstract***

*La Valletta Convention of the Council of Europe (1992) prompted a major change within the discipline by integrating archaeology into the development planning process. Much like the shifts in theoretical perspectives within archaeology proper, these pragmatic changes also prompted numerous debates on various levels of discipline. Conferences were organised highlighting the variations across Europe in systems for delivering development-led archaeology (e.g. Bozóki-Ernyey 2007; Demoule 2007; Willems & van den Dries 2007; Kristiansen 2009). Depending on the political discourse, archaeological tradition, history and the perception of heritage, different countries adopted the Convention in different ways. Especially remarkable was the introduction of development-led archaeology in countries with a former communist/socialist regime. This paper uses the Corridor X Project in Serbia as a case study to address some problems in the effective deployment of development-led archaeology in former communist/socialist countries.*

*Serbia is a country with an archaeological history stemming from the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; it has conventionally good archaeological practice and an exceptional academic tradition in national and regional terms in SE Europe. The modern state of Serbia has maintained its good archaeological practice despite a significant decrease in state funded projects. However, a key factor that significantly hampers development-led archaeology in Serbia is the resistance of public sector institutions to privatise or commercialise archaeology and accompanying aspects of heritage protection. This continues to affect the development of the discipline of archaeology and heritage protection within Serbia. This study aims to offer a potential model for development-led archaeology in Serbia that is designed to minimise the negative effects on the discipline discussed above.*

**Keywords:** *Serbia, development-led archaeology, heritage protection*

## Introduction: Institutions and Heritage in Serbia

Serbia has a turbulent history, rich heritage, complex political circumstances and is in a challenging economic situation. Regardless of all of these, it has maintained a relatively solid network of heritage protection institutes and regional museums, with a strong history of academic achievements, and a respectable regional school of archaeology. Despite these, Serbian archaeology is still heavily reliant on tradition and appears unable to move forward as quickly as, for instance, Slovenia, amongst the ex-Yugoslav countries, has, despite their similar origins in the post-WW 2 period. Given this heritage, and a rapid increase in infrastructural development, it is highly important to ensure an effective system of archaeological exploration in advance of development projects.

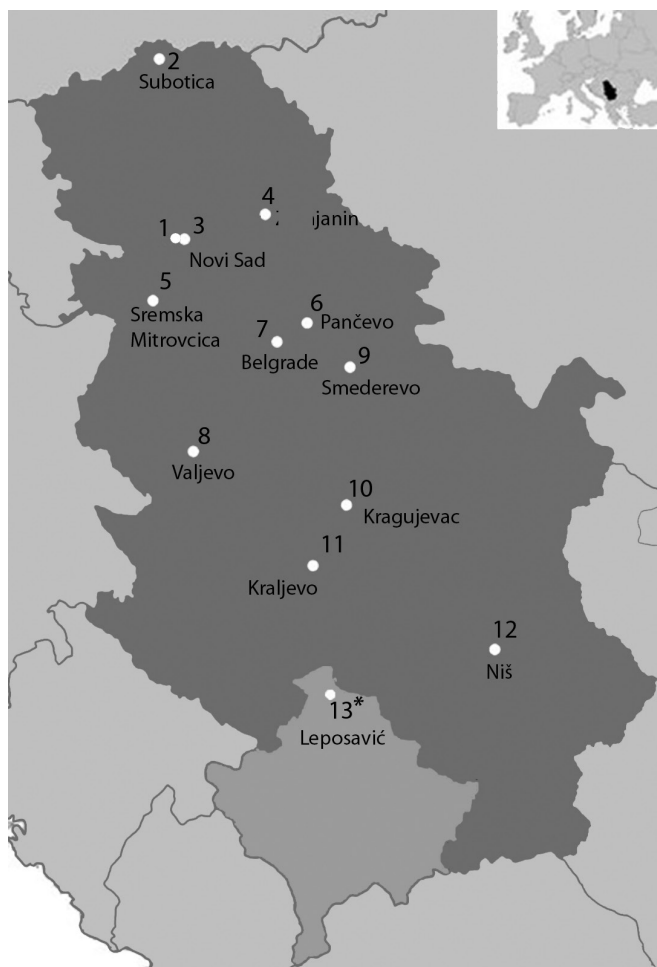
The Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage was opened in 1947 in Belgrade (Zavod za Zaštitu i naučno proučavanje spomenika kulture Narodne Republike Srbije / Institute for the Protection and Scientific Research of Cultural Monuments of the People's Republic of Serbia). The institution changed its name in 1960 to The State Heritage Office for the Protection of Monuments of Culture (Republički Zavod za zaštitu spomenika kulture) and merged with the Yugoslav Institute for the Protection of Monuments of Culture (founded in 1950).

One of the main responsibilities of major institutions based in the capital is to provide support in the establishment of a network of regional offices or museums within Serbia's heartland, a more difficult task than it appears. The public authorities for the protection and management of monuments are the Ministry of Culture and Media, the Ministry for Religion and some other religious authorities. Institutes are responsible for the protection of heritage and immovable cultural properties, including the Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments of the Republic of Serbia (central body) and 11 Regional Institutes with territorial jurisdiction over funds for monuments located in their own territory.<sup>1</sup> Currently, the above institutes employ 348 people, out of which 207 are qualified with bachelor or other higher educational degrees. The expert staff has degrees in history, architecture, art history, archaeology, ethnology, engineering...

To illustrate how active Serbian heritage protection has been, let us look at the numbers. Since 1947, these institutes have conducted research on some 194 archaeological heritage-sites, 37 monumental heritage items and 2 cultural-historical areas. In the same period, 1214 research projects on archaeological heritage-sites were conducted by museums and 117 research projects by academic institutions (e.g. the

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1 With the exception of Kosovo, where three institutes used to work, this network covers the entire territory of the Republic of Serbia.



*Fig. 1. Map of provincial, regional and municipal Institutes for the Protection of Cultural Monuments in Serbia: 1. Provincial institute of Vojvodina, Novi Sad (since 1951); 2. Municipal institute, Subotica (since 1980); 3. Municipal institute, Novi Sad (since 1983), Novi Sad; 4. Regional institute, Zrenjanin (since 2004); 5. Regional institute, Sremska Mitrovica (since 1961); 6. Regional institute, Pančevo (since 1993); 7. Municipal institute, Belgrade (since 1960); 8. Regional institute, Valjevo (since 1986); 9. Regional institute, Smederevo (since 1979); 10. Regional institute, Kragujevac (since 1966); 11. Regional institute, Kraljevo (since 1965); 12. Regional institute, Niš (since 1966).*

*13\* Provincial institute in Priština (with seat in Leposavić). State of Serbia still recognizes some institutions from its former autonomous province of Kosovo. However, the institute in Leposavić is not part of the Serbian state network of the institutes for the protection of cultural monuments.*

Department of Archaeology, University of Belgrade, the Archaeological Institute of the Serbian Academy of Science and Arts, both based in Belgrade).<sup>2</sup>

In addition to the central bodies based in Belgrade, such as the Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments of the Republic of Serbia, Institute of Archaeology and the National Museum, there is a network of regional heritage offices as well as a network of museums. The institutions listed in Figure 1 include regional offices as well as city institutes, like Belgrade and Novi Sad. Two regional institutes, Kraljevo and Niš, cover especially large areas – some have argued too large to manage – and these may be subject to revision.

While the necessary institutions are in place, the missing link necessary for the implementation of development-led archaeology is proper inclusion of archaeology in the planning-process. Current Act on Cultural Goods which legally defines tasks and responsibilities in heritage protection was adopted in 1994.<sup>3</sup> The La Valleta Convention was ratified in 2009. The existing relationship between heritage protection institutions and those in the spatial planning sector could be described at the level of consultation, rather than of active and regular cooperation, which would adequately achieve a level of inter-related activities between the different sectors necessary for the protection of cultural heritage and archaeology.

## **Recent changes in development-led archaeology in Serbia: Corridor X excavations**

This section will discuss one of the most recent development-led projects in Serbia and the issues arising from it. This case study aims to illustrate how prepared Serbian archaeology is for the introduction of development-led archaeology. The case study is also a useful indicator for the potential issues, which may stem from future commercial projects.

Perhaps the most famous large-scale rescue excavations undertaken in the history of Yugoslavia were carried out in the Iron Gates, or Đerdap National Park, in eastern Serbia, on the Romanian border. The excavations were undertaken during 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s as part of the large rescue operation to investigate, record, excavate and preserve sites affected (flooded) by the construction of two dams and accompanying power plants on the Danube, a project undertaken in partnership with Romania. These employed great numbers of professional archaeologists and students, with phenomenal results, which have significantly enriched not just our

2 See: <http://www.culturalpolicies.net/web/serbia.php?aid=422>.

3 Закон о културним добрима, *Службени гласник РС*, бр. 71/94.

understanding of the region's past, but also national and world heritage. Since then, with the exception of a few quarry sites and coal extraction plants, there have not been many development projects, requiring archaeological investigations of that scale. With the lack of developments, or in fact risks to the heritage, Serbian archaeology has been heavily focused on research-led investigations. This all changed in 2011 with the Corridor X motorway project.

The construction of two main motorway routes (Corridor X) at the south of Serbia (E75 and E80), as a continuation of the Belgrade - Niš motorway and connecting Niš to Macedonia to the south and Bulgaria to the east, prompted large-scale investigations of vast swathes of land lying in the proposed motorway route. Though the Iron Gates excavations were labeled as rescue excavations and Corridor X excavations are identified as development-led excavations, the projects are very similar, with the main difference being terminology. It is important to note that development-led excavations used to be referred to as 'rescue excavations', indicating that archaeologists have one last chance to save what is left of archaeology under threat. This also points to the heightened speed of such investigations. There are not many differences between rescue excavations from five decades ago and those undertaken in development-led archaeology.

The daily conditions in which development-led archaeology is conducted could not be more dissimilar to those existing in academic research-based excavations. To ensure the best possible quality of archaeological work, the author believes that good methodology and understanding of what makes good archaeological practice should lie at the heart of development-led archaeology. Time constraints also mean those working in this sector should have an in-depth knowledge of the discipline, to be able to make informed decisions on what to sample and how to sample, all this with the goal of gaining a better understanding of the site, but also to ensure the results are available to be used by future generations. In addition to time pressures, those working in development-led archaeology have often found themselves needing to justify their work to developers and the public, given the amount of money it consumes. Because of these considerable constraints, and the potential for work quality to suffer, a development control officer should be appointed to cross-check quality.

## Archaeology on Corridor X

Corridor X is one of the most important pan-European transport corridors. It connects Austria, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Macedonia and Greece, while also running through Serbia along the N-S axis. The motorway construction is ongoing and it aims to create a transport system of the Republic of Serbia that



*Fig. 2. Motorway network in Serbia.<sup>4</sup>*

will be compatible with those within the European Union, with a view to be further improved, in order for the Republic of Serbia to fully adhere to the standards of the European Union regarding transport. Once the project is complete, it will result in an increase of speed of the traffic in transit and in an improvement of the level of service. The motorway route will also facilitate easier flow of international trade and passenger transport. It will have a positive influence on the commercial and trade activities in the region and would contribute to the regional development and cohesion of the broader area of the Balkans. Given the Project's sheer size, it is divided into sections, our focus being on southern Serbia (E75 and E80).

Pursuant to the Loan Agreements between the Republic of Serbia and the World Bank, the European Investment Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and

<sup>4</sup> Map based on image [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roads\\_in\\_Serbia#/media/File:New\\_map\\_of\\_motorways\\_in\\_Serbia.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roads_in_Serbia#/media/File:New_map_of_motorways_in_Serbia.svg)

Development and the Hellenic Plan for the Economic Reconstruction of the Balkans, the Government of the RS is constructing the southern sections of the Corridor 10 highway. Construction of both highways is the part of the Corridor 10 Highway Project and is implemented by the Koridori Srbije d.o.o. of Belgrade, acting as the Contracting Authority (the client). The approximate value of the financing agreements for the project is 1.3 billion euros.

ARUP, an independent firm of consultants, was contracted to carry out supervision of the Environmental Management Plan, monitoring and auditing of construction activities as well as maintenance of procedures throughout the project. This is incredibly important as sections of the motorway pass close to settlements, river systems and environmentally-sensitive areas. ARUP is responsible for inspecting the construction activities, ensuring that mitigation measures adopted are properly implemented and that the negative environmental impacts of the project are minimised. The study will focus on safeguarding the heritage and mitigating the damage on underlying archaeology.

In accordance with the operative policies for environmental protection prescribed by the banks participating in the financing of these projects (the World Bank, European investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development), prior to the commencement of construction works on the Corridor X sections, appropriate Environmental management plans have been drafted. Koridori Srbije are dedicated to protect the environment and heritage during the construction of the highway on Corridor X. For the last four years, the author has worked for ARUP, as a Consultant Archaeologist on archaeological investigations carried out in advance of the motorway construction along these two routes (E75 and E80).

National institutions responsible for the protection of cultural heritage have thus found themselves able to carry out extensive archaeological excavations in advance of the motorway construction enabling Serbia to preserve its archaeological heritage; some of the findings have proved to have international significance.

## Project Organisation

The prospect of archaeological investigations of such vast expanses of land meant that there would be sufficient funds and vacancies to keep a great proportion of archaeologists within the country employed for a long period of time. Despite this, some conflict of interest situations were also taking place. Thus, the exclusive right to apply for tender to run excavations was primarily given to the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage (IPCM) in Belgrade, while this institution should also have been the one overseeing the works and the one responsible for setting the conditions

on the planning licence. Nevertheless, the project went on as normal. Given that the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage did not have teams large enough to carry out all excavations independently, they had to sub-contract or employ field teams from other institutions, such as the Institute for Archaeology and Department of Archaeology. In addition to these, other unemployed archaeologists were hired on a short-term contract basis.

This is when the first issues started to arise. For the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage to be the archaeological contractors and the development-control or inspectors on the same project is controversial as it implies a conflict of interest. The other issue is the sub-contracting of other organisations or outside field teams to run excavations on behalf of the Institute. This would not have been problematic in itself, had the Institute put in place the sampling and quality control of work which had been carried out in their name.

It became clear that although Serbia has a solid network of archaeological organisations and professionals with a great deal of expertise and experience, archaeologists have never had to apply or tender to carry out excavations. The lack of understanding of the process and the overall experience led to many oversights.

After a number of problematic situations which proved difficult to resolve as the responsibility was being thrown back and forth, it was realised that the Institute of Archaeology is probably the only institution with enough capacity to carry out excavations and post-excavation assessments in extreme financial and time constraints. Once the Institute of Archaeology has taken charge of the excavations, some of the issues have disappeared, yet other problems have started to arise in the field, especially oversights of costs of archiving the excavated material, which should have been costed in during the tendering process. Even though archaeology was included at the very early (planning) stage of the project, the project did not run as smoothly as anticipated. The list of flaws ranged from legal, organisational, logistical and finally, methodological. These issues are best illustrated on a site by site basis.

### **Early Christian basilica at Kladenčište, Bela Palanka**

Undoubtedly one of the most significant discoveries made during the project was the Early Christian (6<sup>th</sup> century AD) Basilica found at Kladenčište, on the outskirts of Bela Palanka.

Though there was mention of a villa in the area in the literature, the fact that this site was not previously known, recorded or noted during the early stages of investigations is unusual and emphasises the importance of carrying out test archaeological evaluations prior to any open area excavations. Here, we do not insist on the full-scale



evaluation trenches of 2m in width and over 50m in length. The evaluation could have been adjusted to the landscape. Had the site been evaluated in any way, the motorway route could either have been relocated to avoid the excavation of such an internationally important discovery thus preserving it *in situ*. Alternatively, the costs of preserving it by record, or excavating, conserving or relocating the entire structure would have been taken into account at early stages of the project.

At the watching brief stage, the team of archaeologists present during the stripping of the topsoil recognised the presence of a structure, though it was believed the building was the mentioned villa (*villa rustica* of Roman date) or an associated structure. As soon as the discovery was made, construction was halted and the regional Office for the Protection of Cultural Heritage and Monuments of Culture in Niš was informed. The Office responded quickly, visited the site and put together a document, which should have served as a useful source of information during the tendering process. Archaeologists from Niš Heritage Office compiled a bid for tender, and unfortunately, which was rejected because of the project's high cost. The developer had then given an exclusive opportunity to the Institute for the Protection of Heritage in Belgrade to excavate the site, which is surprising as the priority should usually be given to regional offices of heritage protection. The reason behind this is somewhat complex: as the Institute for the Protection of Heritage was the main institution in charge of the fieldwork, according to the signed contract, the developer was only able to legally 'recognise' this organisation as the only archaeological contractor, completely disregarding the other potential contractors.

The IPCM proceeded to fully excavate the site. Open area excavations resulted in the recovery of a remarkable basilica, found immediately under the proposed motorway route (Figure 3.). It soon became clear that such a site cannot simply be excavated and backfilled and that a solution more fitting to the importance of this discovery has to be found.

The importance of this remarkable object is enormous, not just for the region but for much wider audience as it is securely linked to the development of the earliest Christianity. The preliminary results of the material date from the 4th century AD and that it continued to be used well into the 5th and 6th centuries AD. With Constantine I the Great being born locally, in Niš (*Naissus*) and originating from the area, and his association with the Edict of Milan in 313 AD when Christianity became an officially recognised religion, make the discovery even more outstanding and important to preserve and show to the public.

Based on the events from the last two years, and following a series of recent developments, including the excavation results from 2014 (directed by Mirjana Blagojević from IPCM), two potential scenarios were proposed to resolve the issues surrounding this site:



*Fig. 3. Kladenčište, the site situated in the middle of the motorway route. Excavations lead by Mirjana Blagojević (Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of Serbia).*

1. Leaving the object *in situ*. The site is not backfilled and it is turned into an open air attraction or monument with a visitors centre. This would involve significant changes in the current motorway design, either by moving the route to one side in order to avoid the object (extremely costly and problematic from the logistical point of view at such late stage of the construction) or constructing a flyover (or overpass, less costly and more feasible).
2. Relocation of parts of the object and building a 1:1 replica of the object in an alternative location. This option could also include fragments/ segments of the original object, if these could be taken apart and transferred to this new location. Parts of the object important to move would be the baptismal font, parts of the basilica floor and the apse, as well as other elements of importance. Before any of the work on relocation takes place, the object would need to be photographed and recorded using a laser scanner, as well as other traditional and modern methods which could help in reconstruction.

It was also recommended, regardless of which preservation scenario is selected, that a small visitor centre is constructed, which could contain an exhibition describing the history of the site, and Early Christianity in general. The centre could also contain the accompanying finds. In case of relocation, it is extremely important that the reasons for this are discussed and the entire process fully illustrated and described in text. The suitable road signs could be set up in the vicinity, as well as along the new motorway route, guiding visitors to this new attraction. That way, people using this new corridor of communication would be able to fully appreciate the area's rich archaeological past.

The final decision was made in the summer 2015 and the object was sadly back-filled and the motorway built over it. The convoluted processes of heritage protection laws and complex political situation all played their part in this poorly managed process. Despite an abundance of expert advice, strong criticisms and protests from the people and Niš, the regional heritage office, under whose jurisdiction the monument remains, as well as the expertise, guidance and support from the team of consultants from ARUP, the IPCM (the Institute for Heritage Protection, Belgrade) the central heritage institution in Serbia, made an executive decision to backfill the structure, cover it in gravel and allow for the motorway to be constructed over it.

Though it must be appreciated that any additional costs to preserve, protect and conserve the monument by relocating the motorway route or constructing the flyover would add an incredible amount of financial pressure on the already expensive project, we remain adamant that not enough was done to preserve this unique object *in situ* and make it available for future generations to visit and learn about origins of Christianity. The move by the IPCM, Belgrade, has been incredibly unpopular with the public and the professionals, with social media movements and organized on-site protests, as well as petitions to stop the site from being built on. Despite arguments made by the ministers and authorities that the structure will be 'protected' under gravel, it is necessary to say that over 2m overburden of gravel, with heavy machinery and further weight of countless vehicles driving over it will undoubtedly cause the irreversible damage to the structure.

## Conclusions

First, it is evident that prior to any open-area excavations take place, more funds should be invested in methods of; literature research ("desk top"), prospection and evaluation, as that could prove to be more cost and time-effective in the long term, while also ensuring the effective protection of heritage.

Secondly, effective communication on projects of this scale are key, between the developer and archaeological contractors on the one hand, and amongst archaeological contractors themselves. On Corridor X, the developer has often had an issue with the

responsible archaeologist never being present on site. This is especially characteristic of archaeologists in Serbia, not necessarily anywhere else. In addition to that, some archaeologists in charge of the watching brief have started acting independently without any prior consultations with their team leader, thus creating a number of on-site problems.

Thirdly, it is evident no quality control had been put in place. Quality control should be made an intrinsic part of every archaeological excavation, and not only those in the development-led sector. From the point of being granted an excavation permit until the end of the excavation, a system of quality control should be put in place and an officer ensuring that conditions are met and that the excavations are done to standards. While emphasizing the extreme pressures of the commercial sector, it is in the hands of the development control officer to ensure the maximum gain of knowledge and information for the minimum amount of funds in the shortest possible time.

Additionally, there are a few other points to note. Watching brief should have been used more widely in the project, as a good method to use on projects of this character, where vast expanses of land have to be investigated, and where heavy machinery operates in areas where we have little knowledge of underlying archaeology, but only when lines of communications are in order. After not being used at all for the first part of the project, it is now being widely used to inform future heritage protection decisions.

The author's involvement in Corridor X excavations has greatly improved the understanding of how the Serbian archaeological community is placed to accept the new challenges brought by the development-led archaeology and whether the state in general is ready to introduce the development-led archaeological sector. Despite having a reliable network of institutions and a strong academia, the Corridor X project has demonstrated the range of problems, which could arise from development-led excavations. It has proven that the transformation of archaeology from an academic discipline into a public or commercial service does not represent a small step. Deeply entrenched habits from Serbia's long archaeological tradition could not have been transformed in such a short time. It is clear that the process of learning and adaptation has to be much longer.

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