

Towards a new Horizon: development-led large scale excavation policy in Hungary post-1990's

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Abstract

This paper gives a brief review of the changing national concept of large-scale excavations in Hungary during the last 25 years. After 1990 the upswing of motorway constructions and private industrial developments forced Hungarian archaeology to apply new approaches, develop or adopt new methodologies and management strategies for preventive excavations. A new, integrated cultural heritage legislative framework had been coined in the spirit of the La Valetta Convention 2001, which was later refined, modified and changed several times. Beyond a need for a uniform protocol for the archaeological process, one of the main issues for Hungarian archaeology is the function of the preventive archaeological system, which underwent on radical legislative, financial and institutional changes in the past five years. These turbulent central acts highlighted several other important questions: e.g. the role of market-based companies in archaeology, quality management, publication deficit and open access. We attempt to summarize the status and practice of preventive archaeology in Hungary emphasizing achievements (without hiding negative cases) and to reflect on actual challenges, which reverberate throughout European discussions in preventive archaeology.

Keywords: changing concepts, centralisation, sustainability, protocols, quality control, Hungary

Kivonat

A tanulmány a nagyfelületű feltárások magyarországi gyakorlatát tekinti át az elmúlt 25 év távlatából. 1990 után az autópálya építések és magánberuházások felfutása szemléletváltásra készítette a magyar régészetet, továbbá a megelőző feltárások elvégzéséhez új módszertan és irányítási stratégiák kifejlesztésére vagy átvételére ösztönözte. Az új, integrált örökségvédelmi törvény a La Valetta-i Egyezmény szellemében fogant 2001-ben, amit a későbbiekben többször finomítottak, módosítottak és megváltoztattak. Az egységes régészeti protokollokon túlmenően a magyar régészet egyik legfontosabb kérdése a megelőző feltárások rendszerének működése, ami az utóbbi öt évben radikális törvényi, pénzügyi és intézményi változásokon ment át. Ezek a mélyreható állami intézkedések sok egyéb

fontos kérdést is felszínre hoztak: pl. a magánvállalkozások szerepét a régészetben, minőségbiztosítás, publikációs deficit és nyílt hozzáférés. A megelőző feltárások magyarországi gyakorlatát az eddig elért eredmények kihangsúlyozásával (ám a negatív jelenségeket sem elfedve) kíséreltük meg összefoglalni, és igyekeztünk reflektálni az örökségvédelemről folytatott európai diskurzus során megfogalmazott új kihívásokra is.

Introduction

The early 1990s mark a milestone in the history of Hungarian archaeology. Following the collapse of the communism, the country took initial steps toward democratic legislation and a free-market based economy. Additionally, the Hungarian government set up a new, grandiose nationwide infrastructural programme, which required intensive continuous archaeological cooperation. Although the motorway programme aimed at a nationwide planning and construction process, Hungarian archaeology lacked this centralised approach after 1990'. Practically, the former centralised museum network was broken down into county level autonomous institutional units by this time, which posed managing difficulties (Szabó et al. 2006: 244–245; Raczky 2007: 6; Wollák 2007: 73–74). Public institutions, created in the old era, already had had some limited experiences in managing large-scale excavations, but as we have pointed out, many actions done by museums were performed by a relatively small number of experts and proceeded continuously for decades. New state funded construction resulted in excavation areas of an extent much greater than anything previously, which required new methodology, documentation processes and management approaches from county museums (and the Budapest Historic Museum), which had a monopoly on preventive excavations (Ernyey 2003: 420; Vékony 2003: 21; Wollák & Raczky 2012: 115–116).

Renewal of the Hungarian archaeology

The Hungarian archaeological approach to preventive archaeology is essentially based on two major principles: 1) archaeological artefacts found in the ground are state property; 2) it is of public interest to protect and excavate the archaeological heritage under threat. This 'socialist' or 'public' model (Willems & Dries 2007: 3) means, that everything has to be excavated and at a higher price (Wollák & Raczky 2012: 120).

The implementation of the European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (La Valetta Convention from 1992) was undertaken in

2001 in Hungary and revised several times. These regulations essentially transformed the existing legal background and forced it to accept that anthropogenic imprints in the natural environment are worth protecting. Moreover, with the introduction of cultural heritage impact assessment, as compulsory documentation prior to large developments, archaeology was integrated into the planning process. The 'polluter pays' principle was a fundamental element of the legislation. Practically, it meant that at least 0.9% of all investment costs were projected for archaeological works (Wollák 2007: 73–75; Raczky 2007: 6). The new system was a unique mixture of county museums with a monopoly over (contract) archaeology, supplemented by a centrally organized administrative system of quality control and fairly strong monitoring. The administrative authority (Cultural Heritage Directorate) was established following, but never fulfilling, the professional model of the English Heritage in 1997. Later it was trusted with additional tasks and functioned under a new name (National Office of Cultural Heritage) from 2001 (Nagy 2003; Bozóky-Ernyey 2007: 105–115; Wollák 2007: 75).

Parallel with large-scale excavations, museums and other public institutions, such as the Archaeological Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and universities with archaeological departments, interested in preventive archaeology, began the methodological modernisation of archaeological fieldwork and inventory systems, as well as the development of GIS-based databases. The Institute of Archaeological Sciences of the Eötvös Loránd University (Budapest) played a key role in this standardization process. Its well crafted integrated methodology consisted of six phases (Raczky et al. 1997; 2002; Raczky 2007: 7–8), which became a basic fundament for any later protocols. However, it only remained a recommendation due to the lack of a centralised archaeological strategy and the regionally scattered institutional background. It must be mentioned, that most of the museums developed their own coherent systems, but these parallel developments resulted in different, hardly comparable schemes and digitizing solutions (Raczky 2007: 10; Wollák & Raczky 2012: 123–124, 129).

Despite great achievements in legislation and fieldwork modernization by the mid-2000s, the problem of a lack of clearly defined excavation budgets, predictable time and financial consequences led to conflict with investors. Moreover, excavation budgets were used in other areas of museum development (or maintenance), rather than for proper financing of preventive archaeological fieldwork and post-excavation processing (Wollák & Raczky 2012: 119). Indeed, the Archaeological Committee of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences suggested a centralised project and financial control over excavation budget, related to the large-scale developments (Szabó et al. 2006).



*Fig. 1. Details of the preventive excavation at Perkáta: a medieval church with surrounding cemetery
(Photo: G. Rákóczi, © Hungarian National Museum)*

Peekaboo of centralisation

The answer to these challenges was the establishment of the Field Service for Cultural Heritage in 2007, as a state-run organization responsible for the protection of national cultural heritage (Bozóki-Ernyey 2007: 119; Raczky 2007: 12; Bánffy & Raczky 2010: 83–84). Although the Field Service was trusted with a wide range of cultural heritage works (such as monument and historic garden research etc.), it specifically performed large development-led archaeological excavations and excavated ca. 1.5 million metres² between 2007 and 2010 (Wollák & Raczky 2012: Fig. 9.11). Adopting and improving fieldwork and documentation protocol proposals of the Institute of Archaeological Sciences of the Eötvös Loránd University, the Field Service provided professional principles and standards which became nation-wide archaeological guidelines for contracted public institutions and private organizations. The Field Service had well developed scientific and conservation laboratory, collaborated

in planned excavations and international research projects, and fostered dissemination of research on international forums. Additionally, the Field Service frequently participated in cultural heritage events, museum exhibitions and organized open-days on archaeological excavations. The institution made a huge effort in publishing results of archaeological excavations, preliminary processing of data and interdisciplinary researches on large developments to the scholarly and wider public (through various publications such as annual work reports, specialists yearbooks, monographs and conference publications, which were fully accessible on the internet). Finally, the Field Service provided a transparent and itemized price list for archaeological services.

The introduction of a new centralised archaeological organization faced enormous protests from county museums, as it deprived them of the income from large developments projects (Bánffy & Raczky 2010: 86; Wollák & Raczky 2012: 132). The archaeological budget from such projects became an essential interest during the economic crisis, as it was gradually and totally integrated into museum budgets. Thus museums launched a full-scale offensive against the Field Service in the press and in professional forums, which was also politically supported by counties governments. Finally, the county museums' lobby also met the investors' interests and forced the Hungarian government to modify the fairly strong regulation system. This resulted in major shifts in the national concept and dozens of regulations at different levels since 2010.

First of all, the museum's 'traditional' archaeological privilege was partly restored in 2010, although some elements of the centralized system, such as coordination of archaeological works spanning over several counties, producing complex cultural heritage documentations prior to major developments and developing and publishing national archaeological standards, were preserved and ordered to the Hungarian National Museum. Practically, this meant that the Hungarian National Museum coordinated the preparation phases related to the large investments through one of its departments (called the Hungarian National Protection Centre), and provided a complex *Preliminary Archaeological Documentation (PAD = ERD in Hungarian)*, which contained the identified cultural heritage elements, suggested action plans and financial calculations for archaeological tasks. According to the PAD guidelines, it was county museums that conducted large-scale excavations.

In 2011 radical time and financial limitations were forced on preventive archaeology by Hungarian Parliament (effectively at the end of 2012). In the case of large investments, all preventive archaeological works were given 30 days for trial excavations, while rescue excavations were limited to a maximum of 30 workdays on the entire project. Moreover, the total costs of archaeological fieldworks could not exceed 1% of the project budgets, or even capped at 200 million Hungarian Forints (approximately 650.000 Euro). The law introduced recovering technique in case of sites which cannot be explored due to budgetary constraints. These changes evoked great

protest from the Hungarian archaeological community, and even the president of the EAA expressed his strongest concerns regarding the modifications (Gyucha & Bánffy 2011). The plan of these radical changes summoned Hungarian archaeological specialists, who elaborated and submitted an alternative legal concept through the Association of Hungarian Archaeologists. The Association together with museums also organized a special exhibition (called the 'Rescued Heritage – Treasures from the heart of Europe') to promote archaeological achievements related to motorway excavations in order to make a pressure on decision-makers. But these slightly delayed efforts did not reach their target. Waves of cultural-political changes reached the National Office of Cultural Heritage too: its regional units were merged down into the local administration system, which was a heavy loss for the cultural heritage policy.

Although these modifications largely echoed investor's interests, they moved Hungarian archaeology towards non-destructive, GIS-based site identification methods (Reményi & Stibrányi 2011; Mesterházy 2013). Additionally, the extending develop-friendly approach resulted in the appearance of predictive archaeological models, which offer a handful and cost-effective tools to estimate archaeological costs (Padányi-Gulyás et al. 2013). Following the high-scale application of remote sensing, a significantly large number of scientific forums emerged for promoting and consulting technological possibilities, however, geophysical survey instruments and Total Station or GPS equipment are beyond most museum budgets in Hungary.

These new (2012) rules also affected the appearance of a complex Preliminary Archaeological Documentation for large investments which contains the identified cultural heritage elements, suggested action plans and financial calculations.

Archaeological application of new regulations

Excavations related to the construction of the Motorway M4 were planned and conducted according to this new system except for two major modifications. The state-controlled National Infrastructure Development cPLc., the corresponding organization for planning and construction procedure, agreed to neglect budgetary constraints and accepted archaeological arguments to estimate excavation time on the basis of monthly progress of 5.000 square.

The *Preliminary Archaeological Documentation* for the motorway construction had been undertaken on the previously mentioned standardized protocol by the HNM National Heritage Protection Centre. The preliminary phase is aimed at creating a comprehensive spatial database, suited for integrating and evaluating general topographic data, historical maps, the parameters of the planned motorway section and various levels of archaeological information. Information from the archaeological

archive for the region affected by the motorway construction, combined with data from literary sources aimed 14 more or less known sites.

The results of intensive field survey were supported by aerial photography using special cameras with measuring equipment.¹ At the end, 30 sites were located as visible anomalies, and most of them could be interpreted as archaeological sites. Systematic field walking covered a 100 m wide band along the planned route of the motorway. During this field survey, all conventional methods of archaeological topographic work were applied in an effort to pinpoint sites as precisely as possible and identify particular archaeological periods (Reményi & Stibrányi 2011). The geophysical analysis was carried out on 453,588 m² including 15 archaeological sites, 2 sites discovered by aerial photography and 2 locations with possible archaeological relevance (chosen on the basis of their topographical position). Initially, the geophysical investigation was planned before the trial excavations, in order to select the best position for test trenches. Unfortunately, this logical order was mostly overruled by the tight schedule. Finally, trial excavations were carried at 19 locations on 22,641.5 m². The aim of the small-scale excavations was to verify the archaeological involvement of the selected locations, to refine their spatial extent and to clarify stratigraphic, cultural and (if possible) chronological position of the sites. Site No. 19 (Tiszapüspöki – Karancs-háromág-dűlő) was an already well known and partly excavated multi-period archaeological site, which made further testing unnecessary. Sites were subject to metal detector survey prior to mechanized topsoil removal. Collected information was channeled into single documentation (PAD), which contained GIS data of the sites, the area to be excavated, financial calculation and time estimate.²

The Hungarian government intended to foster and accelerate investments with all possible means by removing administrative obstacles and modifying legislation regulations. Archaeological experience of the previous two years (2012–2014) had been distilled into new cultural heritage regulations, which had four major impacts.

1 Aerial photography was undertaken by Zoltán Czajlik, associated professor of the Institute of Archaeological Sciences of the Eötvös Loránd University). The field survey was carried out by the HNM National Heritage Protection Centre in cooperation with the local János Damjanich Museum. Geophysical surveys were mainly performed by the HNM National Cultural Heritage Protection Centre (coordinated by Gábor Mesterházy), while 2 sites were surveyed by a commercial company (ArcheoData 1998 LP). Used equipments were Overhauser Type 19 and Sensis Magneto®MX. Metal detector research was conducted by Gábor Váczi, research fellow of the Institute of Archaeological Sciences of the Eötvös Loránd University).

2 Although archaeological preparation and fieldwork were undertaken according to the standardized protocols and maintained in several phases by the János Damjanich Museum and the Hungarian National Museum, the construction of the M4 motorway, as well as archaeological fieldwork (accomplished ca. 80% by that time) were halted due to financial problems in spring 2015. Following recommendations by the European Commission, the Hungarian government modified some elements of the project and partly redesigned the route plan and schedule.

1. Under investor pressure, the government finally realized that extremely low budgetary limit (200 million HUF) in archaeology was a misguided decision and this impractical regulation made it impossible to carry out preventive excavations especially in the case of infrastructural projects.
2. Recognizing possibilities of centralized network systems, a new national cultural heritage authority (Gyula Forster National Centre for Cultural Heritage Management) was established in 2012, which inherited main tasks of the HNM in the field of large-scale excavations from 2015. Supervision of the cultural heritage policy was moved to the Prime Minister's Office.
3. A third interesting element of the new regulation was the introduction of the Accreditation System, which affected 'opening up' the field of preventive archaeology to controlled commercial competition between licensed municipal and private organizations.
4. In the case of excavations related to infrastructural developments with national priority, several exceptions had been made to assure fast and continuous archaeological work: e.g. the possibility of involvement non-licensed organizations in archaeological works.

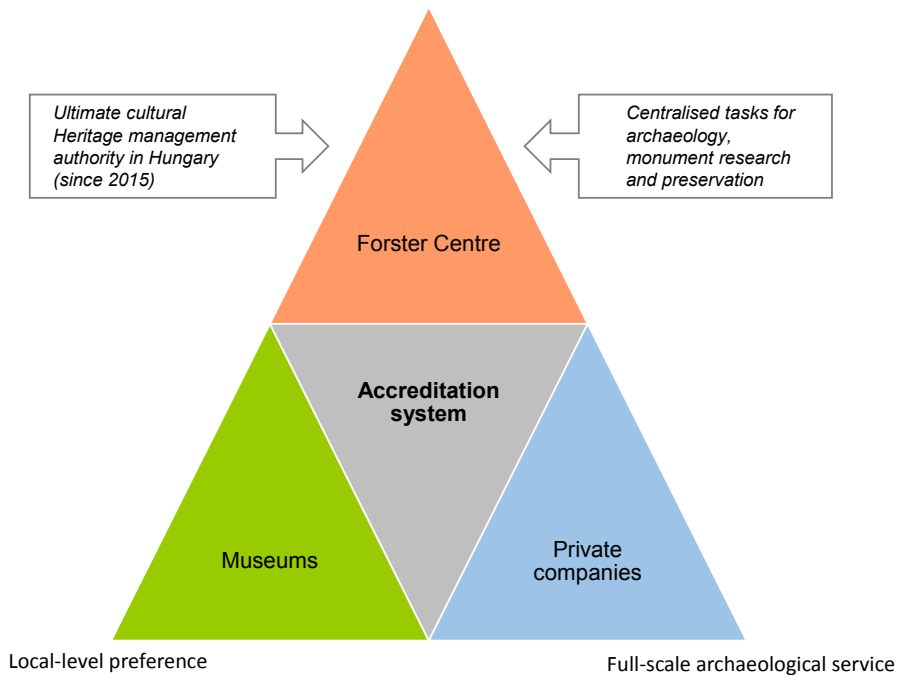


Fig. 2. Schematic diagram of the accreditation system.

Barely one year after launching the Accreditation System the cultural heritage regulation was modified again. The Forster Centre will cease to exist on 1st January 2017 and its tasks will be moved to other government-led organizations. Administrative functions will be incorporated into the Prime Minister's Office, while the future of the archaeological tasks and responsibilities is uncertain. The consequences of such rapid and deep changes adversely impact and threaten the entire cultural heritage system.

Summing up the events, it is clear, that the concept of the Hungarian national heritage policy displays regular repetition. According to the history of Hungarian archaeology and cultural heritage protection (Nagy 2003), ideas of principle approach have circled from the earliest times. Challenges post 1990's accelerated this process and affected the adoption of short-lived solutions without real debate, which had never enough time to fulfill expectations. Although this is probably an over-simplification, it has the virtue of focusing our attention on fundamental principles and their role in shaping the environment of Hungarian preventive archaeology. Modifications in cultural heritage mostly generated solutions benefiting developers, which was recently crowned by switching primary responsibility for the entire scope from the Ministry of Human Capacities to the Ministry of Interior, and then, in 2015, to the Prime Minister's Office (Inkei 2015). The modernisation of the Hungarian infrastructural network (especially the road network) imposed very difficult expectations on archaeology, which led to the appearance of a project management approach, standardization of protocols and rethinking of fieldwork practice. Nowadays, the Hungarian government is determined not only to preserve this dense traffic system, but also to enhance its infrastructural network. In addition, the number of private developments is also increasing. These facts resulted in a huge and continuously growing pressure on archaeology: approximately 10 million square meters have to be investigating annually. A possible solution to this issue would be the existing use of modern site diagnostic tools, which would be beneficial for both developers and for cultural heritage protection (Bánffy & Raczky 2010: 83–84). As the archaeological endeavors in the modernisation of current conventions and professional codes of conduct are acknowledged by investors (who want a stable legal background and predictable costs), there is a real opportunity to convince the government to undertake some legal modifications, which would result in a better working model and improve public acceptance of cultural heritage actions. Moreover, as the interest of society and question of 'user satisfaction' is already on the radar throughout Europe, 'governments need to re-think how they support culture to stimulate public participation and the potential of culture as an engine for jobs and growth' (Dries 2016).

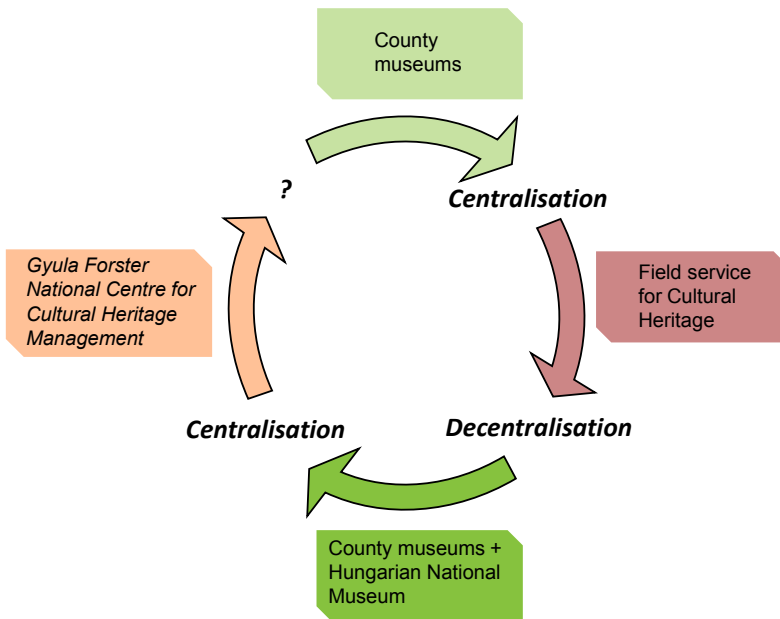


Fig. 3. Shifts in preventive archaeological policy in Hungary post 1990's.

Summary

The implementation of 'developer pays' principle of the La Valetta Convention ultimately changed Hungarian archaeology and led to a significant increase in research (summarized recently by Wollák & Raczky 2012). Fieldwork and post-excavations processes were initially organized through a network of licensed public institutions (museums, Archaeological Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and universities with archaeological departments). However, commercial companies were soon incorporated into the mechanism, but their work was largely limited to machine topsoil removal, organizing field assistants, non-professional employees, special expertise, and consultancy. Modifications of the cultural heritage legislation in 2015 changed this situation and resulted in controlled competition between licensed public institutions and private companies. Larger commercial organizations gained accreditation for the whole country and started to improve their infrastructure, build up professional project management and offer a wide range of research capacity. As this process has its parallels in several European countries (Aitchison 2009: 660–661; Kristiansen 2009: 646; Demoule 2012: 618–619), it is very probable, that this symptom is a direct consequence of rapid infrastructure expansion, which has hit traditional institutions. The economic crisis pointed out vulnerability of the commercial systems

in an European context (Aitchison 2009: 668; Willems 2009: 668–669; Schlanger & Aitchison 2010) which led to the assumption that sustainability is another important element in cultural heritage policy and that public institutions are more stable in the long run (Demoule 2012: 619; Ravn 2013: 648).

Knowledge production is another aspect of the existing models of preventive archaeology. Most of the researchers prefer public (previously defined as ‘socialist’) models and emphasize that only public involvement can guarantee research-based archaeology, which leads to new knowledge (Kristiansen 2009: 647; 2016: 10; Demoule 2012: 618–619; Ravn 2013: 649–650). Based on the experiences of English and Dutch archaeology, other scholars (Thomas 2007: 39–40; Dries 2011: 598–599) argue that a capitalist model is also a type of solution and that it does not by definition lead to fact-producing. Both parties stressed the importance of quality control, which makes results comparable beyond professional standards, ensures academic standards and provides knowledge production (Schlanger & Rossenbach 2010: 42–43; Dries 2011: 598–602; Kristiansen 2016: 11). These arguments are also found in Hungarian academic debates (Wollák & Raczky 2012), although everyday practice is not necessarily following ideas: e.g. even the results of large, scientifically based, long-term archaeological campaigns of the previous era are not fully published. Our personal viewpoint is that the majority of the publications related to preventive excavations were stimulated by the individual enthusiasm of archaeologists in Hungary, rather than following academic research agendas. The Hungarian National Museum, following ethics of open source archaeology (Lake 2012; Wilson & Edwards 2015), contributes to the AR-IADNE programme and disseminates project outcomes related to more than 1800 preventive excavations (<http://archeodatabase.hnm.hu/>). This project realizes the potential value of digital data and supports new synthesis through exploration of old data and multiple datasets. Finally, it aims to develop a national database. Thus the immense grey literature accumulated over the last 25 years in Hungary will be channeled into the international scientific network and ultimately will find its way to the public.

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