
Great expectations: reflections on the 20th anniversary of Poland's motorway construction rescue archaeology programme

Lech Czerniak*¹ and Aleksander Koško²

¹University of Gdańsk – Gdańsk, Pologne

²University of Poznań – Pologne

Résumé

Lech Czerniak and Aleksander Koško: Great expectations: reflections on the 20th anniversary of Poland's motorway construction rescue archaeology programme

Abstract

This paper examines the political, legal and organisational aspects of rescue excavations carried out in advance of motorway construction in Poland during the 20 years that have elapsed since this development-led archaeology programme was first implemented. This analysis, which is deliberately one-sided, tries to determine why this comprehensive and ambitious programme was downgraded ten years after its launch and now bears little resemblance to the original concept. Why, despite the existence of an appropriate legal framework and the supervision of the National Heritage Protection Service, was it possible to breach the basic provisions of the European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (La Valetta, 1992), which states that rescue excavations should be governed by the principles of scientific research? The authors believe that the successful implementation of complex, long-term and costly projects funded by the public purse does not depend solely on having legal and organisational structures in place as well as professionals with the relevant experience to call on. Critical factors, particularly in countries emerging from authoritarian rule, as was the case with Poland at the turn of the century, include the (often changeable) political will of government, a lack of public engagement with archaeology and the absence of widely accepted professional standards in archaeological practice.

Mots-Clés: rescue archaeology, rescue excavation

*Intervenant