



MANAGING ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERITAGE

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Management of Archaeological Heritage in minimisation and protection interventions

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Abstract

In recent decades, archaeological activity in Portugal has witnessed a significant increase, mainly as a result of economic development and the increase in public and private construction works. The growing number of archaeological excavations, motivated by minimisation and protection interventions, corresponded to a disinvestment in multi-annual archaeological research projects.

For safety reasons, it is not uncommon that archaeological excavations do not provide the ideal conditions for being open to the public, who are interested in knowing the work of archaeologists. In the same way, evidence shows that the knowledge acquired in this work, remains in the technical and scientific reports and is not suitable for dissemination among the interested public.

Another important issue is related to the management of the large volume of assets collected during archaeological interventions, which conflicts with the lack or shortage of museums and sites dedicated to their exhibition. These are kept in the possession of excavation directors or in government deposits, inaccessible to public enjoyment and knowledge.

Introduction

Archaeological practice in Portugal experienced an important development in the last years of the 20th century, which moved the majority of archaeological interventions away from the field of scientific research, carried out preferably in academia, towards the field of preventive and protective actions carried out in a liberal way.

Many of these actions are enhanced by the fulfilment of requirements resulting from the environmental impact assessment regulations adopted by Portuguese law during the early 1990s, through the publication of *Decree Law No. 186/90 of 6 June*, which reproduces the standards mentioned in *Council Directive 85/337/EEC of 27 June 1985*. Although these standards have undergone some changes since then, they are still the main European reference for environmental impact assessment.

This legislation represented an opportunity to generalise among the different Member States the practice of an environmental policy based on the technical and scientific assessment of the most economically important projects and to listen in advance, through public consultation, to the opinion of the population interested in the implementation of the proposals presented. This interaction is potentially beneficial for environmental protection and for the increase and dissemination of scientific knowledge.

By assuming the materiality of cultural events as part of the factors to be described in environmental impact assessment and referring specifically to material goods, in which the archaeological and architectural heritage is included, community legislation and its benefits for cultural heritage protection has indeed been very beneficial for archaeology. But, in fact, this is a premise that dates back to the origin of the environmental impact assessment procedure with the NEPA (1969: section 102) advocating the preservation of important historical, cultural and natural aspects of our national heritage existing in the environment and demonstrating the variety and diversity of timeless choices.

In this context, the necessary actions to identify, characterise and assess archaeological heritage must, in accordance with Portuguese law (Law No. 107/2001 of 8 September), be led by archaeologists and require authorisation to be granted by the competent authority of cultural heritage administration.

By referring to the data available in the Portuguese Archaeology Archive and based on the volume of authorisations granted to carry out archaeological work in the last two decades, we can see that the year 1997 marks the beginning of growth in national archaeology (figure 1), which increased strongly in 2003 and remained constant up to 2007. This increase is associated with the creation of bodies that control and supervise the projects presented.

Archaeological work in Portugal falls within four categories that are defined according to intervention goals:

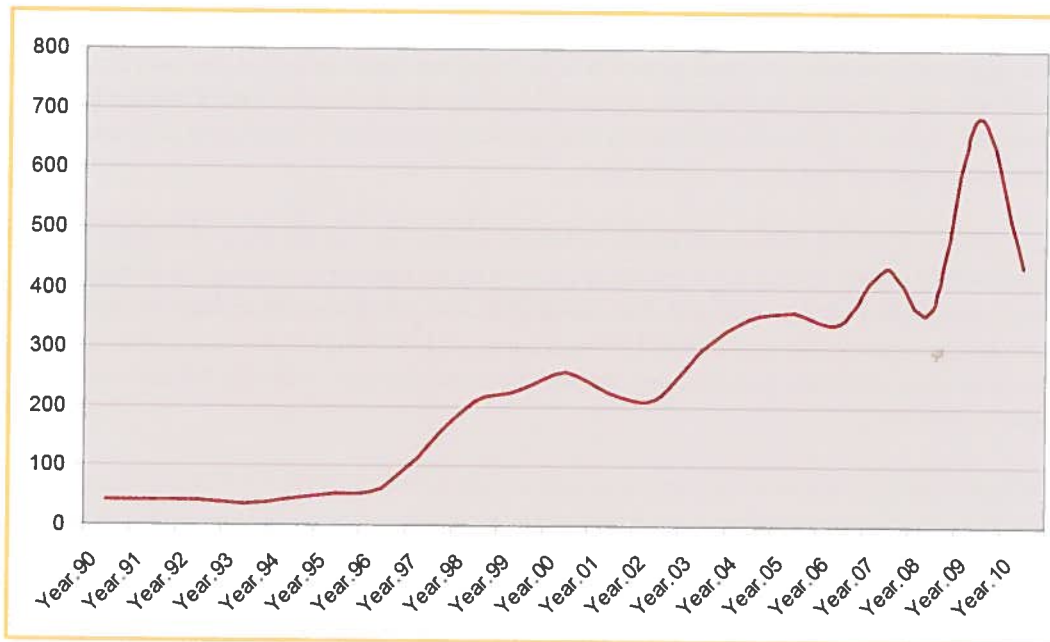


Figure 1: Archaeological excavations motivated by interventions of minimization and safeguard.

- a. Category A - multi-annual research actions with a maximum duration of four years. These are incorporated into « research projects»;
- b. Category B - study and valorisation projects for classified sites and monuments or sites and monuments that are in the process of being classified. These are incorporated into «valorisation projects»;
- c. Category C - preventive actions (archaeological prospection) to be carried out within the ambit of environmental impact minimisation work;
- d. Category D - emergency actions (surveys and excavations) to be carried out in archaeological sites which are in imminent danger of partial or total destruction due to human or natural actions.

It was noted that 199 archaeological works were carried out in the year 1990. Most of these works are part of research projects (Category A), whose number of granted authorisations decreased by 70% over 20 years.

In contrast with the decrease of works carried out within the ambit of research projects, there is an exponential increase of authorisations granted to carry out archaeological works included in Category C (prospection and monitoring) and Category D (surveys and excavations). These authorisations are associated with the development of preventive and protective actions, which are carried out after and as a result of environmental impact assessment work.

Along with the increase in prospection and excavation work (Categories C and D), there is an increase in the number of authorisations granted to carry out archaeological monitoring work. There were only 5 authorisations granted for this kind of work in 1991, but after 1998, these numbers begin to increase significantly and reached a significant majority in 2010, when this kind of work represented 42.5% of the authorisations granted to carry out archaeological work in the country.

In contrast to an exponential increase in authorised archaeological work concerning categories C and D (excavation, prospection and monitoring), there is a constant number of authorisations granted to carry out valorisation actions (Category B). Considering overall results, this constant number of authorisations corresponds to a decrease of 8% to 1.5% over the last two decades, which reveals a disinvestment in this sector as opposed to the increase in preventive and emergency actions.

These numbers are significant if we consider that valorisation actions have the ultimate goal of making sites available for public enjoyment. By comparing this 1.5% of authorisations granted in 2010 with the 31.3% of archaeological excavation actions (Categories A and D) authorised in the same year, we can see a huge gap between the investment made in archaeological interventions and consequent resource valorisation and availability.

Registered authorisations rise from 199 (year 1990) to 1,561 (year 2010), representing an 8-fold increase in the last two decades with an average of 6 authorisations granted per working day in 2010, of which only 5.5% fall within the ambit of research/valorisation projects.

Over the years, the momentum created by the binomial [development + protection] came to dominate the national archaeological panorama, resulting in a reversal in importance of the categories associated with the implementation of archaeological works (Category A < Category C and D). This paradigm was gradually strengthened by the adoption of community legislation, which consolidates the importance of archaeological knowledge, either in environmental impact assessment procedures or the preparation of land management and planning tools.

Discussion

Conducting an analysis of the integration of archaeological heritage in the environmental impact assessment procedure implies knowledge of practices documented in the past with the expectation that the compiled data will become useful for a disciplinary reflection that enhances the qualitative development of present and future archaeological practices.

One of the main difficulties encountered when protecting archaeological heritage under the environmental impact assessment procedure is not the result of legal constraints deriving from environmental legislation but the result of the inadequacy of archaeological practices and the inability to ensure its proactive management.

In 2008, an average of approximately 5 authorisations were granted per working day to carry out archaeological heritage protection work associated with preventive actions and impact minimisation, enhanced by the development of public and private projects in the country. This work, as opposed to most of the actions developed in the context of academic teaching and research, takes place mostly in the context of work, which does not fulfil the necessary safety conditions nor promote interaction with the public interested in knowing and following archaeological work.

The dissemination of the acquired knowledge to the interested public is not carried out through face-to-face interaction, as opposed to what happens in other countries such as Brazil, and depends on the scientific publication of results. Most of these results remain in technical and scientific reports which are inadequate in terms of reaching the interested population.

By referring to available data (Bugalhão 2010: 24) we found out that approximately 35% of the 8000 interventions carried out between 2003 and 2006 did not report the results obtained. We agree with the author when she says: "*not delivering archaeological reports means keeping what does not belong to us and not meeting the very minimum of our ethical and social obligations.*"

This reality makes it extremely difficult to determine the contribution of minimisation interventions to the production of knowledge, considering that when the reports are delivered they are fundamentally prepared in order to fulfil the technical requirements of the legislation in force, which are not dedicated to knowledge production and dissemination.

Preventive and emergency archaeology is based on the legal principle of "*conservation through scientific record*". It is the scientific record that supports the protection. Its absence represents the connivance between the archaeologist and authority, and an archaeologically assisted and paid destruction. Failure by archaeologists to fulfil this premise of conservation by record, and the authority's inability to demand the preparation and publication of reports, has serious consequences for archaeological activity and archaeological heritage protection.

Paradoxically, there is a lack of scientific production in the context of preventive and protective archaeology but this type of archaeology is essential to heritage characterisation studies included in environmental assessment studies. The data that we make available (Branco 2014) show us that bibliographical consultation, heritage inventories, archaeological charts and the consultation of institutional databases are the main source of information used by archaeologists when preparing characterisation reports. These publications are extremely important to the characterisation of the heritage baseline, especially if we compare the levels of efficiency accounted for. Only 20% of archaeological sites resulting from archaeological prospection and which are presented as unpublished excavations, revealed contexts of interest in excavation. This percentage rises to about 60% for sites previously referenced in the bibliography and other sources of information.

The investment in archaeological inventories made under research projects (Category A), or as a way of responding to specific requirements of authorities, proves to be an asset in terms of archaeological prevention and protection, revealing cost-benefit levels higher than those acquired within the ambit of environmental impact studies.

As mentioned above, in recent years, the national archaeological panorama has been marked by a disinvestment in research archaeology and an investment in protective archaeology. However, research archaeology, which is developed mostly in the academic context, is still one of the main sources of information and is essential to the sustainability and effectiveness of protective archaeology and to the public dissemination of knowledge.

Conclusion

The significant increase in the number of archaeological actions (prospection and excavation) resulted in an exponential increase in the number of archaeological remains that have been collected and stored. According to Portuguese law, "*assets arising from archaeological work [documents and archaeological material] are considered national heritage and the State and Autonomous Regions should file, preserve, manage, value and disseminate them through the relevant bodies and according to the law.*" (Law No. 107/2001 of 8 September).

The archaeologist is considered the trustee of the archaeological remains collected in the course of archaeological interventions and shall study and deliver these remains to archaeological deposits or accredited institutions after field work is completed.

Despite legal references, authorities never created an archaeological deposit network or a list of accredited institutions that are certified to receive archaeological remains. In a summary analysis of the authority's database concerning the inventory of archaeological sites known in the country, we found out that about 12,877 (42%) of the 30,582 registered sites had specific descriptions of archaeological remains. Only 5,050 (39%) of these registered the site of deposition of these remains, and approximately 50% of these sites were museums.

The collection of these data shows that there are significant deficiencies in the study and deposition of archaeological and in the preparation and publication of reports resulting from archaeological interventions, as there is no database containing these records. The real conditions and repositories for the majority of archaeological remains collected remain unknown, especially in preventive and protective interventions. This situation is aggravated by the fact that these remains are considered national heritage which is relevant to the historical knowledge of the different chrono-cultural periods recorded in Portugal.

When analysing the management of heritage in Portugal, we find that we are very far from achieving the ideal situation. If the ultimate goal of any archaeological work is to contribute to scientific knowledge, the data generated by any type of archaeological intervention, including the

environmental impact assessment and the planned intervention in the context of research projects, should lead to its dissemination to the general public (locally and regionally), as well as to its dissemination through scientific publications. Data, site and result dissemination must become a priority for the country. What is the point of listing and excavating archaeological sites if we do not end up studying, protecting, valuing and disseminating them?

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Endnotes

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