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CAN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES AFFORD
NATIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD?
THE POLISH ANSWER

In today's management of cultural heritage there is generally no doubt about the necessity of an all–country computer database on archaeological sites. Many operating examples have since longer time proven that such investment intensifies further archaeological research both in the field and in the study, simplifies organization of systematic, optimized protection of the sites and especially – rescue excavations, automatizes much of the editorial work when preparing source publications etc. However, acute financial shortages – a common obstacle in developing countries – often discourage representatives of the National Antiquity Service from starting such undertaking. Is this pessimism justified? In 1986 in Poland, we started – although having only a very limited budget – to build up an archaeological database called <u>SYSTEM AZP</u> which, thanks to the adopted prerequisites, appeared to be eventually both low–cost and efficient. Our main principles in creating this system were:

1/ system dedicated to the PC computers with standard configuration,
2/ model of 'dispersed database', i.e. of several local databases, managed by identical application software (database management program) and based on the same data structure which enables exchange of data.
3/ popular application development package: at first Clipper '87, then FoxPro, rel. 2.5, which both guarantee developing a management program with user friendly interface and a reasonable speed of data retrieval.
4/ building the system in several steps, according to financial possibilities; gathering experience and promoting the idea of it throughout the country.

A major advantage in developing and introducing the system was the fact that some years earlier Polish archaeology accepted a standardized method of documentation of the sites (Polish abbreviation: AZP), including the registration sheet as a pre-computer minimum data structure. Since 1975, this method has been adopted for a country-wide project of evidence and verification of all detectable archaeological traces.

The database structure contains 38 fields, divided into 11 groups, such as: localization, physiography, present use of the area, chrono-cultural classification, soil type, site area and finds distribution pattern, threats to the site, survey authors, museum collections and other data (research history of the site, archives, bibliography, map no. and coordinates, etc.). The first release of SYSTEM_AZP was launched by Archaeological Museum in Poznań in 1986; copyrights were later bought by Center of Monuments Documentation in Warsaw, which then distributed it among all local branches of Polish Archaeological Protection and Conservation Service. At the moment, the system is used – after several upgrades and with addition of some extra tools – by ca 60 users all over Poland who entered so far ca 200 000 site records.

The architecture of the system allows to accomplish the next step: a consolidation of numerous local databases as soon as larger hardware systems of minicomputer range become available.

Recently, the described system appeared to be a convenient starting point to a more powerful, integrated information system for Poznań Archaeological Museum, called MuzArP, which combines data on archaeological sites themselves with history of their research and basic description of the discovered finds.