

The Portal of Amateur Collaborators and Register of Individual Finds (AMCR-PAS)

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Citizen science has become an integral part of research in many different fields. Since cultural heritage is a collective property shared by the whole society, the active participation of the public in its discovery, preservation, and knowledge is an entirely accepted phenomenon. In archaeology, the most common form of public engagement is currently a metal detector survey (for a general overview of the topic in the Czech Republic, see Komoróczy 2022; Mařík 2013). Nevertheless, metal detecting is a highly controversial public activity. The stimulus for its establishment did not come from the scientific community but was formed through a bottom-up process. Although the legal conditions are restrictive, metal detecting has become very popular in the Czech Republic. Since the regime change in 1989, the metal detecting scene has evolved slowly. For a long time, the extent of the impact of metal detecting was unclear to most of the archaeological community. Only later, to reduce the loss of archaeological data, the archaeological community began to create regionally limited platforms for cooperation. In 2017, a questionnaire survey targeting professional archaeologists and metal-detectorists showed that a substantial part of the metal-detecting community consists of enthusiastic people interested in history and archaeology (see in detail Komoróczy 2022). Most professional archaeologist participants in the survey considered metal detecting finds to be scientifically significant. They also feel the cooperation with metal detectorists to be necessary, beneficial, or acceptable. This survey confirmed an increasingly strong tendency toward mutual convergence between the archaeological and a part of the metal detecting communities in the country.

A long-term collaboration project called “*Joint Forces to Discover the Common Archaeological Heritage*” was launched in 2018 in the South Moravia Region (Komoróczy and Fedor

2020). It aims to create conditions for citizen science amongst metal detectorists in the region. Its main ideas are to approach detectorists positively and to motivate the public to become interested and involved in rescuing archaeological heritage. Using numerous tools, such as expert workshops for the employees of professional institutions, information meetings, educational seminars and field activities with interested members of the public, schooling of local authorities and the police, production and distribution of printed and digital information materials, etc., the partners in the programme have long endeavoured to improve the knowledge of all public components and public administration.

As part of this project, civil cooperation's legal frameworks and methodological parameters were gradually specified and tested. A model of the cooperative approach in a way that is beneficial for the rescue and research of archaeological finds was created, which is also applied in various versions in some other European countries (cf. Dobat et al. 2020). A common aspect of the cooperative approach addressed insufficiently or not in most countries (with a few exceptions) is the systematic recording of its results. At the same time, the binding, clear and user-friendly registration system is a tool for formalizing the transparent conditions of citizen participation in archaeological knowledge.

In the Czech Republic, metal detector surveys conducted to search for archaeological objects are, in terms of legislation, considered archaeological fieldwork and can only be carried out by an archaeological organisation officially authorised to do so. Therefore, the practice of metal detecting by amateurs can only take place in cooperation with archaeologists from authorised archaeological organisations. These organisations include various types of institutions from the Institutes of Archaeology of the Czech Academy of Sciences in Prague and Brno, institutions specialising in rescue excavations, national, regional and local museums, the National Heritage Institute and universities. The Institutes of Archaeology of the Czech Academy of Sciences in Prague and Brno are legally designated professional and methodological guarantors for conducting archaeological research. At the same time, these institutes, through their archives and based on a legal obligation, have been systematically collecting, recording and making accessible the results of archaeological fieldwork from the territory of the Czech Republic for more than a century. Currently, this is done in a unified and centralised manner within the large research infrastructure Archaeological Information System of the Czech Republic (AIS CR¹), which is jointly operated by both institutes (Novák et al. 2021). The long-term efforts of the Institutes of Archaeology of the Czech Academy of Sciences in Prague and Brno to cultivate and legally formalise amateur archaeological fieldwork in the Czech Republic and the systematic recording and data management activities have synergistically resulted in the idea of creating a tool that would provide a formal framework for this type of citizen science and systematically record the results of this cooperation (Fig. 1). In 2020, the Portal of Amateur

¹ For more, see <https://www.aiscr.cz/en/>.

Collaborators and Register of Individual Finds (AMCR-PAS²) was established. This web portal is linked to the Archaeological Map of the Czech Republic information system (AMCR), which supports the administrative agenda related to archaeological fieldwork and serves as the backbone tool of the entire AIS CR infrastructure.

The AMCR-PAS scheme is based on the collaboration of amateurs with archaeologists from organisations authorised to carry out archaeological fieldwork. The prerequisite for its use is that the archaeologist is contacted by a potential collaborator first. The collaboration is established and confirmed directly in the AMCR-PAS module. After the confirmation, it is possible to record the finds under the existing (previously registered) project. The archaeologist has to register a new project in the AMCR, which is always done before the survey starts. A unique identifier is then generated for each project and shared with the collaborators who will participate in the project and who will record their finds under that code. Metal detector surveys can be carried out either at a particular site investigated in the long term or for the wider region (e.g., a district) while respecting the territorial licence of the authorised organisation. It is recommended that surveys conducted over a larger area should not take longer than one year, whereas surveys focused on a single site may run for several seasons. The research strategy of the project and its basic principles should be specified and summarised in a document attached as part of the project documentation in the AMCR system. Each project has a supervisor and goes through several process stages: recording, registering, starting and ending the fieldwork, closing and archiving.

The AMCR-PAS module is a web-based application consisting of several views. It is responsive and can be used on smartphones or tablets in the field. While accessing the system as an archaeologist, the options are as follows: Record (record a new find), My finds (list of finds recorded for my institution), Select (select and filter records based on defined criteria), Collaboration (administration of collaboration with amateurs) and Confirm (list of finds recorded by amateurs waiting for validation). If accessing the module as a collaborator, the options are: Record (record a new find), My finds (list of finds recorded by me), Select (select and filter records based on defined criteria) and Collaboration (administration of collaboration with archaeologists). Each record includes a photograph, discovery circumstances and context, spatial data, chronology, and further details about the transfer and deposition of the find.

All archaeological finds and the circumstances of their discovery must be recorded. The basic recording should ideally take place directly at the find spot. In case of technical problems (no internet connection, detectorist does not have a smartphone, etc.), the find should be recorded without undue delay right after the prospection. After entering all the mandatory fields and uploading the photograph to the system, the record is saved and forwarded to the archaeologist with whom they have established collaboration. The record will be shown to the archaeologist under the relevant project number. The finds are then physically handed over to archaeologist who acknowledges their receipt

² See <https://amcr-info.aiscr.cz/pas>.

and makes necessary edits of various details, chronology, type of object, etc. in the system. He/she also determines to what degree the information about the find will be accessible to the public (e.g. in the case of rare finds or endangered sites, it may be decided to hide the find spot details). Once the record has been validated, it is confirmed by the archivist of detector finds in the AMCR-PAS. The record is then published in the Digital Archive of the AMCR under the Individual Finds category (Fig. 2).³ All archived finds recorded in the AMCR-PAS module are published here openly, however, their openly published location may be restricted just to the general district for the sake of protection of the archaeological heritage.

The authorised organisation managing a particular project is responsible for the way it is carried out and administered. Each authorised organisation is obliged by the State Monument Care Act to submit a report on the results of all their fieldwork. Therefore, if the survey results, which took place during the collaboration between an archaeologist and a detectorist, are reported in AMCR-PAS, the legal obligations are met. To establish the collaborator's relationship with the organisation, a written agreement should be concluded between the two parties. It should specify the conditions of participation in the research, including in particular a communication plan with the head of the research and the obligation to follow the research methodology (documentation of the archaeological context; use of GPS for locating the find; not removing the finds from the place of discovery in case of finds in the original contexts, especially hoards or graves; bagging, labelling and storing finds individually; following the photograph documentation guide; obtaining permission from the landowners; liability for damage caused, etc.). Since archaeological finds recorded in the AMCR-PAS are made during archaeological fieldwork, the collaborators are not entitled to any financial compensation (compared to the stray finds that were not made during archaeological fieldwork where the finder is entitled to remuneration according to the State Monument Care Act).

From the perspective of archaeology, the primary limit and weakness of the entire system is the lack of capacities. The described model of moderated cooperation within official survey projects brings a more significant workload on archaeologists than the current practice of passively taking over finds or the complete absence of contact with detectorists. It brings increased administration and the need for individual communication with all collaborators. We must realize that archaeologists assume a considerable part of the responsibility for the activities of their civil collaborators. Such involvement requires a certain degree of mutual personal experience and trust even when approached in good faith. It can hardly be built without regular contact. Repeated rejection of their interest due to missing archaeologists' capacity is also reflected on the part of the detectorists. Most institutions of regional museum type cannot strengthen their already heavily overloaded professional staff for the coordination and management of civic collaborators.

Insufficient capacities are not only at the personnel level. An extraordinary load is continuously created on conservation and documentation capacities. However, approximately 25%

³ See https://digiarchiv.aiscr.cz/results?entity=samostatny_nalez.

of these artefacts do not require an immediate conservation treatment (for example, slags and indifferent metal plates). Amateur metal detecting works with a significant degree of separation of iron artefacts. If this were not the case, the conservation labs would undoubtedly be completely overloaded. The lack of conservation capacities is also one of the archaeologists' most common arguments for why they do not want to become more involved in creating a community of detectorist collaborators.

It is still too early to evaluate AMCR-PAS, and it is evident that not all archaeological institutions, which have been cooperating with detectorists for a long time, are involved in it. Many detectorists have not done so either. However, for them, participation in it is not compulsory and depends on the decision of an archaeologist. Presumably, reflecting responses to a questionnaire conducted recently on the most visited metal detecting website in the country, this also lies in the background of a certain degree of reticence on the part of the detectorists.⁴ Detectorists who have been working with archaeologists for a long time do not feel a fundamental change due to AMCR-PAS. Many have not yet been motivated to get involved. Although we have produced several informational materials for AMCR-PAS, we may not have yet been able to reach the metal detecting community sufficiently. So far, it seems, a couple of media reports from this summer about the state police checking the legality of the activities of detectorists in South Moravian fields have worked as the best promotional material. Since then, we have recorded an increased interest in information about AMCR-PAS from the metal detecting community. We believe this situation will improve with further education of detectorists and archaeologists and with the help of media promotion.

The AMCR-PAS is codifying the only model of cooperation with detectorists that corresponds to all valid legislative requirements in the Czech Republic. It does not create the legal framework for metal detecting. It only gives it a uniform system of registration. AMCR-PAS is just a web platform, not a mobile app, at the moment. Therefore, it is perceived as less user-friendly for many detectorists. However, we believe these negatives in terms of access will only improve with the gradual development of the scheme. The professionally and legally acceptable principles of responsible metal detecting in the Czech Republic are defined within the cooperative approach represented by the AMCR-PAS scheme. Essential tools and examples of good practice are set up and tested here. It makes it possible to break the generalizing image of treasure hunters and distinguish those whom archaeology must support from those engaging in illegal and destructive activities. It also prevents information loss and ensures the traceability of each find. Cooperation between amateur and professional archaeologists brings an opportunity where the public can actively participate in the preservation of heritage and where different levels of cultural identities are shaped. Using the AMCR-PAS recording scheme, this can be done within a formal framework transparently, and the results of this cooperation can be shared with all cultural heritage stakeholders.

⁴ <https://www.lovecpokladu.cz/home/spoluprace-s-archeology-a-aplikace-portal-amaterskych-spolupracovniku-9214>

Figures



Fig. 1. One of the detector surveys carried out in collaboration between archaeologists from the Institute of Archaeology of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Brno and amateurs. Both Institutes of Archaeology of the Czech Academy of Sciences in Brno and Prague have strived to cultivate and legally formalise amateur archaeological fieldwork in the Czech Republic for many years. (Photo by Pavla Růžičková).



Fig. 2. Photo of a find made through the collaboration between an amateur and archaeologist published in Digital archive of the AMCR. AMCR: Record C-202109132-N00040 [cit. 2022-07-15]. Archaeological Map of the Czech Republic. Available at: <https://digiarchiv.aiscr.cz/id/C-202109132-N00040>. (CC BY-NC 4.0 Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International).

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Conflict of Interests Disclosure

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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