

4 Defining, assessing and improving heritage management systems

A participatory approach to management

The Rock Paintings of the Sierra de San Francisco, Baja California (Mexico) are located in a very remote area illustrates the introduction of a participatory approach.

Moving away from conventional practices, the staff of INAH launched a participatory approach by bringing together local communities and other relevant stakeholders for the development of a management plan and its implementation. This exercise has proved that participatory management can be a sustainable way to manage sites, including those located in remote regions and over large areas such as those in the Sierra de San Francisco, but strong foundations for legal protection (and its enforcement) and for institutional support are required.



Rock Paintings of the Sierra de San Francisco (Mexico)

Realistic planning

Plans are also of value only if the means for implementation exist or can be obtained. Planning must delineate the actions to be taken, using a variety of parameters of which the following are common to most actions:

- Defining scope (how much will we do),
- Defining performance (how do we expect the finished result to perform),
- Defining quality (what specific standards need to be met),
- Defining cost,
- Defining timeframes for each action.

When setting targets for the above parameters, it is necessary to make preventive management assessments, decide the relative importance of the five parameters, and then deploy resources, implement and monitor accordingly. Unforeseeable factors mean it is rarely possible to reach set targets for all five parameters. These preventive assessments are also important to signal which strategies and actions to pursue if circumstances change during implementation (e.g. programming or resourcing difficulties) and what compromises need to be made. How the actions will be carried out and with whom also needs to be defined (including related procedures, roles and responsibilities, risk distribution and other management strategies), as will the process of monitoring, review and adjustment.

The desired outcomes and the outputs that will achieve them (and to which the action contributes, see Part 4.4, Results) will help guide re-planning when new issues arise during the implementation of the plan. Outputs will vary from specific operations (such as conservation works) to new organizational functions (perhaps online booking for school visits) to services (possibly new audio-guide facilities) and 'products' (site documentation, the plans themselves or feedback into them from participatory initiatives to encourage local community links, etc.).

Achieving balance in planning

A well-judged balance of long-term as well as short-term actions should emerge from an effective planning process. Regular work plans (i.e. annual work plan, tourism plan, business plans) should be complemented by longer-term strategic plans. Planning must also set aside resources as contingencies specifically to anticipate the need (staff time and cost) for continuous revision of plans during their lifetime.

Good planning, reinforced by feedback from within and outside the management system (see Part 4.4, Improvements to management systems), will reduce the amount of reactive planning that has to take place since more and more needs will be anticipated. This is desirable to optimize the use of resources. Even so, a capacity for reactive planning is necessary in order to deal with unforeseeable events.