

in the number of salvage and contract archaeology companies, particularly in urban centres.

Decision-making in archaeological heritage management

Decision-making in the conservation of archaeological resources is a major issue. The choice of appropriate conservation interventions is not an easy process. The issue is to respect all the values of the site or object. It is more complex where the resource is still in use by communities. The issue of which values to respect, or which methods to use, is not a straightforward one. Throughout the world, there are competing interests and claims to archaeological remains, with many diverse interest groups all claiming some interest and values in the archaeological resource. Fundamental questions in considering decisions on what is to be done, in terms of conservation, exhibiting or management have to be considered. Some of the considerations are: What is an archaeological resource? Who should own and control archaeological assets? What methods of protection or conservation should be used, and why, and with what implications? How should archaeological heritage be presented to the public? These are just a few of the questions which need to be taken into consideration when making decisions about archaeological resources. As Robin Skeates (2000) puts it, there is need for greater communication and cooperation between archaeologists and other interest groups, to ensure that archaeological assets are protected for the benefit of all and not just for the experts at universities and museums. Archaeological sites have a range of cultural, informative, aesthetic, historical, social, spiritual and scientific values. Site conservation is about retaining those values. However these values can be very different from one community to another. They can also change over time. Thus the best way to conserve will also differ between and within cultures.

However the western view of heritage values is dominant in international heritage practice and discussion. This is largely reflected in the World Heritage Convention through its Operational Guidelines and in the international charters for heritage conservation. International organizations such as UNESCO, ICOMOS and ICCROM champion these international charters as setting the standards for all countries.

Conclusion

As noted by Matero:

The practices of archaeology and conservation appear by their very nature to be oppositional. Excavation, as one common method by which archaeologists study a site, is a subtractive process that is both destructive and irreversible. In the revealing of a site, structure, or object, excavation is not a benign reversal of site formational processes but rather a traumatic invasion of a site's physico-chemical equilibrium, resulting in the unavoidable deterioration of associated materials (Matero, 2008, p. 1).