

Integrating Community Cultural Values in the Conservation and Management of Archaeological Resources

NONOFHO MATHIBIDI NDOBOCHANI

ABSTRACT

The past two decades have been characterized by a growing interest in the involvement of non-scientists and non-professionals in scientific research and the reassessment of research methodologies. Of interest to this paper is the participation of non-professionals, especially communities, in the decision-making processes regarding conservation and management of archaeological resources. There are several reasons advanced for involving non-archaeologists in archaeological interpretation and management, and these revolve around issues of identity, history, national unity, ownership, power and control of resources. What this immediately brings to mind is that stakeholders have attachments to archaeological resources and place values on them, and this should be considered when formulating conservation management policies, principles and methodologies. Based on MPhil studies in Botswana, this paper presents the results of research that set out to demonstrate how communities can be involved in conservation management of archaeological resources, using impact assessment as a tool.

Introduction: community participation in archaeological conservation and management

The development of the Middle Range Theory and post-processual¹ archaeological theories paved the way for multivocality in interpreting and presenting the past to the world, and this has influenced archaeological research agendas in recent years. The twentieth century has seen an interest in understanding both the archaeological material and the meaning behind the creation of the material. Based on recent research in Botswana, and with reference to case studies from elsewhere, this paper argues that while involvement of local communities in archaeological research and heritage management is indisputable, it is what to incorporate, how much to incorporate and how to incorporate it that remains a challenge to professionals. Research undertaken in Botswana focused on four villages in proximity to archaeological resources, found that the communities attached diverse values to archaeological resources, and also had other cultural values attached to the landscapes which harbour archaeological sites. These findings indicate that such community values should be considered when formulating conservation and management strategies. The research also showed that communities consider archaeological resources to be part of cultural and historical landscapes that they interact with regularly, both at individual and community level. This interaction, which is evidence of human-environment relationships that have existed since time immemorial and continue to exist, should be considered in conservation decision-making processes.

Why community participation?

While some may argue that archaeological research does not necessarily need input from non-archaeologists, sustainable conservation and management of archaeological and cultural resources requires consideration of how local communities interact with such resources on a daily basis. Besides consideration of the values that communities may place on archaeological resources, communities often have information on site post-depositional processes and how the conservation status of sites has changed over time. As an example, when conducting surveys and condition reporting exercises for stone