



PREHISTORY AND WORLD HERITAGE

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Abstract

In recent decades, the concept of cultural heritage has evolved into one that encompasses an understanding of history of humanity together with scientific knowledge and intellectual attitudes. This changing concept has prompted the subsequent reevaluation of what constitutes outstanding universal value of World Heritage and the operational methodology for implementing the World Heritage Convention; a definition that broadens from studying a single monument in isolation to one that values a multidimensional, multiregional approach encapsulating vast diasporas of human history. 'Prehistory' reports the origins of human life and social development. The related processes can be traced back to the earliest ancestors of human lineages, and include toolmaking at least 2.6 million years ago. We find the record increasingly precious as our inherited storehouse of knowledge about the foundations and diversity of human life, experience, and social behaviour. Between August 2008 and May 2009 activities at the World Heritage Centre were focused on the scientific study of the World Heritage List and the Tentative List to identify priorities for conservation and management of the prehistoric sites, as well as to generate a twinning system for collaboration among sites. The World Heritage Committee approved a World Heritage Programme on Prehistory in July 2009. The World Heritage Centre, in close cooperation with the Advisory Bodies of the Convention, will develop a medium-term Action Plan on Prehistory (2009-2013).

RIASSUNTO

Negli ultimi decenni, il concetto di patrimonio culturale si è evoluto in modo da includere una comprensione della storia dell'umanità insieme alla conoscenza scientifica e agli atteggiamenti intellettuali. Questo concetto in mutazione ha suggerito la conseguente rivalutazione di ciò che costituisce l'eccezionale valore universale del Patrimonio Mondiale e la metodologia per implementare la Convenzione Mondiale sul Patrimonio; una definizione che si allarga dallo studio di un singolo monumento isolato ad uno che valorizza un approccio multidimensionale, multiregionale che include vaste diaspore della storia umana. La "Preistoria" riporta le origini della vita umana e dello sviluppo sociale. I processi relazionati possono essere fatti risalire ai primi antenati dei lignaggi umani, e includono la produzione di utensili, almeno 2,6 milioni di anni fa. Troviamo il dato sempre più prezioso, se lo consideriamo come il nostro magazzino di conoscenza sulle fondamenta e diversità della vita umana, dell'esperienza e del comportamento sociale. Tra l'agosto del 2008 e il maggio 2009 le attività del Centro per il Patrimonio Mondiale erano focalizzate sullo studio scientifico della Lista del Patrimonio Mondiale e della Lista Provvisoria per identificare priorità per la conservazione e la gestione dei siti preistorici, così come per generare un sistema di gemellaggio per la collaborazione tra i siti. La Commissione per il Patrimonio Mondiale ha approvato un Programma del Patrimonio Mondiale sulla Preistoria nel luglio del 2009. La Commissione per il Patrimonio Mondiale, in stretta collaborazione con gli Organi Consultivi della Convenzione, svilupperà un programma di azione a medio termine sulla Preistoria (2009-2013).

RESUME

Dans les dernières décennies, le concept de patrimoine culturel a évolué de sorte d'inclure une compréhension de l'histoire humaine avec la connaissance scientifique et aux attitudes intellectuelles. Ce concept mutant a suscité la conséquente réévaluation de ce qui constitue l'exceptionnelle valeur universelle du Patrimoine Mondial et la méthodologie pour implémenter la Convention Mondiale sur le Patrimoine ; une définition qui s'étend d'une étude sur un seul monument isolé à une étude qui valorise une approche multidimensionnelle, multirégionale qui inclut vastes diasporas de l'histoire humaine. La « Préhistoire » rapporte les origines de la vie humaine et du développement social. Les processus liés peuvent être faits remonter aux premier ancêtres des lignages humains, et ils incluent la production des outils, au moins il y a 2.6 millions d'années. Nous trouvons ce donné de plus en plus précieux, si nous le considérons comme notre dépôt de connaissance sur les fondations et variétés de la vie humaine, de l'expérience et de la conduite sociale. Entre août 2008 et mai 2009 les activités du Centre du Patrimoine Mondial étaient focalisées sur l'étude scientifique de la Liste du Patrimoine Mondial et de la Liste Provisoire pour identifier les priorités pour la conservation et la gestion des sites préhistoriques, ainsi que pour générer un système de jumelage pour la collaboration parmi les sites. La Commission pour le Patrimoine Mondial a approuvé un programme du Patrimoine Mondial sur la Préhistoire au juillet 2009. La Commission pour le Patrimoine Mondial, en étroite collaboration avec les Organes Consultatifs de la Convention, développera un programme d'action à moyen terme sur la Préhistoire (2009-2013)

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OBJECTIVES

The key objectives of the special programme, the Action Plan on Prehistory and World Heritage, are:

- Establishing links between scientific research and conservation by recognizing the scientific values of properties related to Prehistory;
- Operating within the framework of the Global Strategy, launched by the World Heritage Committee in 1994, to broaden the definition of World Heritage to better reflect the full spectrum of the world's cultural and natural richness;
- Recognizing sites that demonstrate outstanding evidence for traces of the earliest interaction between humankind and the land, early cultural behaviour, cognitive steps and creative expressions;
- Preserving the identified properties from progressive deterioration due to their ancient chronology and vulnerable fabric.

The properties that can be associated with Prehistory were grouped into the following operating classification:

- I. Human Evolution properties;
- II. Rock Art properties;
- III. Prehistoric properties associated with major cultural phenomena.

PROCESSES AND OUTCOMES

Close cooperation with scientific institutions of interdisciplinary research and applied research for conservation has been started, including: Origins Centre/ University of Witwatersrand (South Africa), University of Dar Es Salaam (Tanzania), College de France, Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, Musée de l'Homme (France), University of Tübingen (Germany), Università degli studi di Roma la Sapienza (Italy), Altamira National Museum and Research Centre (Spain), University of Cambridge (UK), Harvard University (USA), Berkeley University (USA), Universidad de Buenos Aires (Argentina), Georgian State Museum (Georgia), Kyoto University (Japan), Hanyang University Museum (Korea), the National Museum of the Philippines (Philippines) and the Institute of Vertebrate Paleontology and Paleoanthropology (China), among others.

A database of documentation and discussion forum within the website of the World Heritage Centre is in preparation to provide a knowledge resource and to reinforce the established international cooperation and further developments of the Programme.

The Programme was designed to achieve the following key results through the implementation of the Action Plan on Prehistory in the period of the Medium Term Strategy 2009 – 2013:

- I. Conservation. Create twinning initiatives between World Heritage properties to share information on conservation issues and best practices, and develop applied research;
- II. Capacity-building. Foster close cooperation between experts, universities, research institutions, Advisory Bodies and the World Heritage Centre to develop international capacity-building programmes on management and conservation for prehistoric sites;
- III. Credibility. Revise national and regional Tentative Lists based on thematic studies undertaken by the Advisory Bodies;
- IV. Communication. Launch a webpage on Prehistory on the World Heritage Centre website to establish a resource database, a global network of information exchange, an online forum and to provide a monographic publication of the World Heritage Papers series on Prehistory in the framework of the World Heritage Convention;
- V. Communities. Develop cooperation through the creation of a roster of experts, site managers, Advisory Bodies and the World Heritage Centre.

The Action Plan will include the following priorities:

1. Identify and prioritize three Prehistoric sites that will add to the credibility, representivity and balance of the World Heritage List.

Considerable emphasis was placed during discussions on the desirability of serial nominations for Prehistoric sites. This encourages local authorities and States Parties to collaborate and spread the responsibilities of nomination, conservation, research, documentation and management. In addition to formal serial nomination, informal interaction can be encouraged by 'twinning' similar sites and exchanging information and skills.

It has been recommended that at least one serial nomination in each of the three categories (Human Evolution, Rock Art and Prehistoric Sites) be selected by States Parties for nomination before 2013. At least one of these serial nominations could include hunter-gatherer cave sites; at least one could be a transfrontier group of Rock Art sites, and the third could include sites that have contributed to a better understanding of Human Evolution.

It was further recommended that the criteria in the Operational Guidelines considered for the nominations should not be limited to (i) to (vi) but could explore criteria (viii).

2. Develop programmes to improve the conservation and management of Prehistoric World Heritage sites and ensure their long-term safety.

It was generally agreed that one of the most effective ways in which the World Heritage movement can make a significant difference to the long-term protection of Prehistoric sites is to develop guidelines and best practice manuals for conservation, documentation, management and the impact of tourism. These will be directly beneficial to listed sites. They are also of great value to heritage conservation practitioners world-wide because Prehistoric sites are especially vulnerable. A priority is the development of guidelines and best practice for conservation of Prehistoric sites.

It was recommended that the Action Plan could be in place by 2010 and promote the following activities:

- An international multidisciplinary conference on the conservation of Prehistoric sites;
- An analysis of best practice conservation methods at Prehistoric sites in the World Heritage List and elsewhere;
- Compilation of guidelines for the development of a Conservation Plan. The Conservation Plan should at least include a condition report for the site/s, an assessment of the natural and human dynamics and threats affecting the site/s, and a plan to monitor and prevent or minimize further deterioration;
- A Conservation Plan should be submitted with every new nomination of a Prehistoric site, and sites already listed should be encouraged to submit one too.

Other international multidisciplinary conferences and best practice guidelines can be organized along similar lines for documentation, management and the impact of tourism at Prehistoric sites.



3. Develop opportunities using existing international networks to assist site managers and promote collaboration between States Parties for research, capacity-building, training courses, field schools, exhibitions and exchange programmes at Prehistoric sites.

Participants in the meetings felt a strong need for an accessible networking system where they could obtain information required for preparing a nomination file or management plan, for comparing one site with another, to attend training courses or to apply for funding. They were also keen to share their experiences with other people involved in Prehistoric sites with outstanding universal value and to get guidance on how to involve and interact with stakeholders, especially those descended from the people who lived at the sites in prehistoric times.

The International Meeting, Rock Art and the World Heritage Convention, uKhahlamba/ Drakensburg Park, South Africa, 3 to 8 April 2009 involved the participation of 44 governmental delegates, representatives of the Advisory Bodies, international experts and site managers. The meeting aimed to identify key values, issues and priorities in the area of Rock Art, particularly concerning its management, conservation and documentation in relation to World Heritage status.

Rock Art and the World Heritage Convention, uKhahlamba/ Drakensburg Park, South Africa, 3 to 8 April 2009

Rock Art, the manifestation of human conceptual thought and beliefs by traditional societies, has endured for longer than any other global artistic tradition with the time range extending back more than 30,000 years on the walls of caves, and as much as 75,000 years on portable rocks. Rock Art is present on every continent except Antarctica and was created in one or other form by almost every cultural tradition on earth. It is found on small islands as well as large land masses, and from the Arctic Circle to the tropical forests of Africa and South America. As Professor Emmanuel Anati from Italy said on the opening day of the meeting, "Rock Art is fundamental to World Heritage as the major archive of the history of humankind. It concerns ourselves as thinking people in a personal way that is nevertheless universal. Rock Art is a vulnerable patrimony; what remains today is just a fraction of what existed."

The World Heritage List should therefore reflect its importance and diversity worldwide in a representative, balanced and credible list. UNESCO in turn could exercise its mandate to recommend best practice management by all States Parties. Transfrontier nominations and serial nominations within countries are favored.

Criteria for evaluating outstanding universal value

The generic criteria identified as important for the evaluation of outstanding universal value of Rock Art sites for World Heritage listing are similar to those listed for Human Evolution and Prehistoric sites. Those with more particular emphasis on Rock Art included the state of preservation of the physical environmental setting in which the Rock Art is found which becomes an important aspect of the ambience and spiritual value for many cultures. While aesthetic quality and state of preservation of the Rock Art has value, so does the interpretation of the meaning of the art.

In evaluating the distribution, quantity, quality and rarity of Rock Art themes and traditions, it was strongly recommended that Rock Art sites be assessed in the context of the ideology and history of the people who created the Rock Art, the fabric of the site, its archaeological history and its link with the landscape. An essential step in this process is the development of a database for each site. When compared with information from other sites, World Heritage nominations should be valued in terms of the global perception of what is OUV. Research and documentation are essential requirements for inter-site comparison of OUV and to start and finalize the conservation and Management Plans.

Assessment of authenticity and integrity of narratives and themes in Rock Art highlighted the difference in values between Rock Art sites with and without ethnographic records, oral histories or sustained significance of the place. All sites should be evaluated in relation to content of the Rock Art, the archaeological context, recording and documentation that demonstrates repeated use of particular images and themes (a tradition) and evidence for development of the painting tradition/s (e.g. monochrome to polychrome or changes in content of the art). Sites with ethnographic information, or oral history, or sustained significance of the place can include additional documentation such as the continuity of beliefs and practices through time in descendant communities, continuity in spiritual significance of the place, knowledge about the motivation and/or belief or ideological system that inspired it, the socio-economic context of the Rock Art, and involvement of the descendant communities and/or artists in management.

THEMATIC STUDIES

The following Thematic Studies were proposed:

- Rock Art in North America;
- Horn of Africa. Ethiopia, Somalia, Somaliland and Eritrea: There is a gap in knowledge of the Rock Art in these countries around the Horn of Africa. It was recommended that they be addressed in an ICOMOS thematic study;
- Rock Art and pastoralist/farmer traditions;
- The origins of Rock Art; and
- Interaction between contemporary traditional people and Rock Art.

Other recommended studies:

- Ethics of management of Rock Art in relation to indigenous communities (sacred sites, contemporary hunter-gatherer societies, etc.);
- Re-evaluation of documents of inscribed World Heritage natural sites with good examples of Rock Art manifestations not well recorded at the time of inscription, and provide case studies to improve integrated management for the site;
- Minimum standards for conservation of Rock Art (monitoring systems, low-cost tools);
- Register of threatened World Heritage Rock Art sites;
- Comparative analysis of thematic studies.

Recommendations to Advisory Bodies and the World Heritage Centre:

- Involvement of ICOMOS Scientific Committees in future Rock Art research;
- Pre-nomination guideline document with special focus on comparative analysis of Rock Art sites and related standards for documentation, including authenticity;
- Scientific Committee(s) for thematic subjects should work closely with Advisory Bodies and the World Heritage Centre within the framework of the Action Plan;
- Revitalization of the work of the World Archive of Rock Art (WARA) for the purpose of adaptation to the work of the World Heritage Convention.

Recommendations for good practice

The presentations on good practice highlighted a number of important issues:

- Conservation and training

The importance of conservation is clear, but we need a proper strategy for conservation that considers both the Rock Art and the rock on which it is placed in order to preserve the physical properties of both. One method is to control access to sites or close them to the public. Examples that show the value of controlled access were cited in Spain, Portugal and in Malawi (Chongoni Rock-Art Area) where different angles had to be considered. Lower visitor numbers can mean less income for management. Visitors have to be persuaded to buy into the protocol for behavior at Rock Art sites. Implementation needs more Rock Art specialists and cooperation is required to train the new generation and to pass technical skills on to custodians, especially people in local communities. This will raise awareness so they can teach others, but even people who have been in positions for a long time need capacity-building and re-training. It was recommended that robust guidelines for excavations in Rock Art sites be developed to ensure conservation of the art. Site should be kept as 'virgin' as possible by using recyclable and reversible materials with wind or solar power, as at Twyfelfontein in Namibia. It was agreed that although boardwalks can be helpful, on-site infrastructure must be carefully planned. Protected areas need to have a policy for the use of natural resources by stakeholders and local communities.

- Documentation and interpretation

On-going research is essential to keep the information at World Heritage sites fresh and interesting for public use. Experiences in Rock Art conservation, management and preservation can also be documented and shared. Holistic interpretation of Rock Art is required to understand the interaction between the past and the present and to communicate the value of the site to the public. Loss of spirituality and sense of place reduces authenticity at Rock Art sites and the placement and type of information provided should be carefully considered to place Rock Art in the context of the archaeology and the park as a whole. Interpretation is site-specific and this should be documented and explained to visitors.



- Management and tourism

The World Heritage Operational Guidelines make management plans essential in the short and long term, but are they enough? Does the generic system for management plans need rethinking? We need generic and site-specific management plans for Rock Art, and management plans came under intense scrutiny during discussion. Many management plans are written according to a formula and are often not fully implemented. Some delegates thought that insufficient attention was paid to clarifying who is responsible for whom, and how the individual management partners are coordinated. Proper communication and synergy are needed, especially where different departments for nature and culture are involved. Managers should therefore think positively and constructively about how to overcome the legacy of a wilderness area in the management of the uKhahlamba/Drakensberg Park so that the cultural heritage is managed on an equal basis with the natural values. Management plans must help managers to face daily problems, including issues such as solid and liquid waste and pollution. Local communities must be involved in management and decision-making and the same applies to descendant indigenous communities whose views on management of Rock Art should be considered. While the participation of local communities is good, we should also help local people to be independent entrepreneurs so they can 'own' the site/s. Land ownership disputes with communities do occur and should be solved with buffer zones in management plans. They must include tourism master plans, and managers often need training in tourism management. Many site managers are frustrated that heritage is not properly resourced, even at World Heritage level. Perhaps strategists and fundraisers for World Heritage sites also need training. Consider ways in which people with disabilities can enjoy the sites – websites and interpretation centres are useful in this regard. In general, we need better quality control mechanisms to critique the work being done and managers can help the World Heritage Committee to identify how difficult their task is on a daily basis. There is no doubt that there is need for a management system that follows a broader approach with fresh theory and methodology.

In terms of methodologies and guidelines, site managers would benefit from techniques for rapid assessment of impacts on the cultural and physical condition of Rock Art sites, as well as guidance on the ways of gauging social, cultural and economic impacts. It seems to help management if the intention to intervene in the landscape is explained by understanding the territory as a socio-cultural space described in terms of past and present geology, geography, geomorphology and bioclimate, and how topographic and geomorphological links have been taken into account in defining the limits of the site.

It will be beneficial if management plans for World Heritage Rock Art sites indicate precisely how the Rock Art sites are to be protected to maintain their integrity and avoid vandalism; regulate the use of the sites, whether or not they are open for public use; and specify limitations or prohibitions related to responsibilities of institutional staff with regard to research, protection and conservation, together with the means of regulating such prohibitions.