



The Future of Heritage Management and Development in Africa

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In essays like these, it is tempting to write from a turning point: to describe how, going forward, things will be different from what came before. We study the past, so we know that is not how it works. The trajectory of heritage management in Africa illustrates this exceptionally well. The right to govern national patrimony has been affected by regime changes and structural adjustments that have transformed or eliminated huge swathes of state functions. I am not a pessimist, but I am familiar with the recalcitrant entanglements of heritage value, governance, and development. I am also always left wanting more historical evidence behind the claims that heritage is doing something novel in the world today. And I know that over the last few decades, our field has benefited from innovations in heritage management led by colleagues working at the interface of local needs, national and sub-national politics, and various commercial industries whose ebbs and flows affect the security of the heritage sector. With all this in mind, I take this opportunity to consider a future for heritage management, specifically as it relates to labor and knowledge-making, paying attention to areas where I believe we

are seeing the beginnings of real transformation—or at least opportunities to actualize changes that colleagues have been urging for some time. I will start by looking globally and then turn inward to archaeology as a discipline and its associated fieldwork.

For nearly four decades, the global institutions funding development required compliance with standards for safeguarding heritage affected by building, infrastructure, and resource extraction projects. These measures were ostensibly aimed at creating a more holistic and culturally aware approach after years of criticism for draconian (and ultimately failed) adjustment interventions. Writing a decade ago, heritage managers engaged in this work in Africa highlighted its pitfalls and opportunities (Arazi, 2011; MacEachern, 2001). As a condition of funding under a “polluter pays” scheme, mitigation fuelled the heritage industry to create jobs. Archaeological and, eventually, living heritage in jeopardy was salvaged or preserved by record. Pressure from international donors and activist movements contributed to the adoption of environmental protections by most African countries, which in turn enabled greater protections for cultural heritage where these could be aligned. At the same time, global consultants frequently crowd out African experts, and we have yet to see a systematic shift towards safeguarding strategies that prioritize the values and meanings of those most immediately affected. Meanwhile, the archaeological impacts of small-scale development projects (e.g., residential developments and road maintenance), and their position within

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networks of politics and financing remain under studied (Ichumbaki & Mjema, 2018).

The landscape of development is changing, however, with potentially major implications for the future of African heritage management. The rise of alternative development financing (and the declining influence of the World Bank and other Bretton Woods Institutions) brings new frameworks for addressing impacts on heritage. In 2014, the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) founded the New Development Bank (NDB) to offer aid that respected client countries' sovereignty. Where the World Bank requires compliance with their operational policies for environmental and social impact assessments, the NDB offers clients a menu of instruments to choose from, including an "indigenous peoples plan" aimed at ensuring affected communities receive appropriate benefits and do not suffer adversely. Further, the NDB's "country systems approach" to compliance means that client countries' legislation and regulatory protections are the primary mechanisms for ensuring appropriate mitigation measures. In 2015, the African Development Bank (ADB)—another alternative development institution—assessed regional member countries' systems (including legal and regulatory safeguards and their implementation success rates) for managing the effects of development, particularly concerning involuntary resettlement. The review found that no African country possessed the legal or practical capacity to carry out these tasks to the bank's standards, especially concerning social impacts.

As with most environmental and social impact frameworks, heritage is not mentioned specifically by either the NDB or ADB, but the direction of travel for funders and developers (including private enterprises) who rely on country systems approaches is clear: the strength, coverage, and functionality of in-country measures for protecting heritage in any form will matter more than ever for large-scale development. These systems vary widely. Legal requirements for carrying out heritage impact assessments and ensuring their quality are not universal or uniform. In some countries, such as Botswana, heritage protections are explicitly recognized as distinct from and complementary to environmental ones. Elsewhere, as in Uganda, there is no such distinction and legal instruments for environmental protection offer the best option for heritage. Administrative approaches

to different forms of heritage are also highly variable across countries. Few address intangible heritage specifically or incorporate indigenous knowledge and local communities in management policies and legislation, though Rwanda and Burundi are notable exceptions (Kiriamu, 2021).

Intangible heritage has received a boost from, among others, UNESCO standards (e.g., Article 15 of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage) stipulating community engagement in heritage management. However, the ability of these measures to shift domestic heritage governance towards greater recognition of indigenous heritage values is also variable. Moreover, as Sophia Labadi's (2022, p. 189–190) exhaustive analysis of "culture for development" demonstrates, heritage management values and guidelines specified by global organizations like UNESCO remain freighted with the problems of neoliberalized aid. Heritage values are imposed through top-down decision-making, although this can be obscured by emphasizing "local" initiatives that displace responsibility for success or failures onto aid recipients. Moreover, such initiatives remain steeped in colonial distinctions between natural-cultural and material-immaterial heritage.

In moving from these macro-level changes to consider the situation closer to the ground, I want to dwell on two related trends that I believe hold significant implications for heritage practice in the long term. The first concerns the future of heritage data, especially those recovered as part of preventive or rescue interventions. Given that much of this mitigation work has taken the form of preservation by recording, we are (inevitably) confronted with a tremendous number of records: reports, regulatory documents, and other textual and visual media. Archiving and curating this corpus of innovation, information, and (increasingly) indigenous knowledge is a massive and too-frequently under-resourced responsibility, resulting in often-patchy access to huge swathes of knowledge about the past. Housed in museums, consultants' offices, and government departments (among other locations), a relatively small proportion of these resources are published in peer-reviewed journals.

This is by no means an indication of value or quality. Despite charges that archaeological data generated within a commercial framework are hostage to developers' bottom line, a recent wave of scholarship has demonstrated that these data are useful because

they can say a great deal about the past *and* the industry they are a part of (Cooper & Green, 2016; Plets et al., 2021). Nevertheless, the relatively limited visibility of developer-led work in standard fora for disseminating archaeological information (e.g., research articles) indicates that these venues are perhaps not adequate to the reality of how commercial or regulatory data are constituted—in reports structured according to specific professional standards for clients who may restrict or prohibit the release of such materials.

It is therefore worth considering other means of disseminating our data—and their limitations. South Africa and Namibia have implemented open-access online repositories of heritage management materials, which go a long way to making developer-led data widely available. These endeavors require significant investment in human and technological infrastructure to maintain them and commitment by all users to rigorous data hygiene if materials deposited are to be truly FAIR (findable, accessible, interoperable, reusable) and CARE for indigenous data governance (focusing on collective benefit, authority to control, responsibility, and ethics). This speaks to a likely increase in demand for data management skills among heritage professionals, particularly as ever-more sophisticated spatial processing techniques are generating large quantities of digital data in need of appropriate archiving. Thinking broadly, we should also embrace an understanding of developer-led literature as a distinctive genre of archaeological scholarship—a site of knowledge production that exists in a complementary relationship with academic publications.

This takes me to the second trend I want to consider: the skills and capacities that are increasingly expected of heritage professionals as our labor sector continues to evolve. The last decade has seen numerous examples of heritage (particularly in its intangible mode) playing a distinctive and frequently ameliorative role in contexts where people are being relocated or otherwise impacted by transformations to their homes and livelihoods. Work by Kodzo Gavua, Wazi Apoh, and colleagues at Ghana’s Bui Dam remains an outstanding example of these processes (Gavua & Apoh, 2016). At the same time, we have seen how heritage can become weaponized when resources, territories, and rights are contested or valued in fundamentally different ways.

Those charged with caring for heritage resources are called to perform numerous roles: excavator, archivist, ethnographer, manager, documentarian, cartographer, educator, and community liaison. These are all distinctive professional skill sets—even if they are not always valued or identified as such—and transferable across several disciplines. As a result, it would be worth inventorying these roles to consider approaches for educating and training people for employability and participation in the heritage sector. Efforts in this direction, such as Landward’s “Discovering the Archaeologists of Africa,” mirror more detailed profiles of the sector in the UK and Europe, which are instrumental in establishing an active feedback relationship between industry and higher education. Degree programs like those led by colleagues at Sol Plaatje University (South Africa) are already built around the recognition of an expanded remit for archaeology and heritage. I am keen to see where similar revisions to heritage education are underway and (crucially) sustainably resourced.

In closing, despite my seeming cantankerousness at the outset of this essay, we can see a future for heritage management in Africa that looks different from the past. This is due to global change in the industries that fuel heritage management and to an accumulation of pressures for knowledge producers to achieve greater authority now and in the future. As ever, practical transformations take place at a different pace than systemic ones, making the discussions within this journal an essential arena for discussing, validating, and situating the former and laying the groundwork for the latter moving forward.

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