

PRESERVING AND MANAGING COMPLEX HERITAGE AS A TOURIST PRODUCT

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INTRODUCTION

As tourism becomes one of the fastest growing industries in the world, there is a great need for managers of tourist attractions to understand both their tangible and intangible heritage values. In most cases, we are more knowledgeable and concerned with the attraction's tangible values, those values that we can use to market the resource and to which we are able to put immediate economic value so as to justify our salaries.

Again, even funding towards heritage conservation in many countries, particularly in the developing world, has for a long time been linked to the economic returns through tourism. This needn't be so, because heritage resources, together with the environment surrounding them, provide more than just economic returns. Complete heritage environments provide a setting where the present generation can imagine the behaviour and feelings of generations that passed before us. Pearce and Moscardo (1985:9) in fact suggested that a heritage environment is a stage where the actors have left but we can still use our social perception processes to think about and imagine the social life of past inhabitants.

This paper, therefore, intends to examine how best could we as conservational professionals integrate both tangible and intangible values in the preservation for posterity and presentation for tourism of our heritage.

DEFINITIONS

For the purpose of this paper, native community shall mean the aboriginal people who live in a traditional village set-up. Tourism shall mean the aspect of life that makes people go and see places or lifestyles that are different from those they see every day. Tourism product shall mean both physical and non-physical cultural or natural heritage resources managed and presented for tourism purposes.

PRESERVING AND MANAGING HERITAGE TODAY

The conservation and management of heritage resources, particularly in Africa today, depends to a very large extent upon information generated by non-African social science researchers who worked many decades ago. Therefore, our understanding of the conservation needs of these resources is influenced by the available information.

Why is this so? This is so primarily because of the cooperation that has been promoted among conservation professionals throughout the world. Secondly, and probably most importantly, due to the high cost of conducting field research most African governments consider it of less priority compared to direct economic necessities. As a result, the tangible value identified and interpreted by early social science researchers still influences our judgment.

From the above it is clear that until African countries are able to allocate sufficient resources towards heritage research by local professionals, we shall not be able to portray the intangible value as part of our conservation and management priorities.

PRESENTING AND INTERPRETING HERITAGE FOR TOURISM

Tourism, particularly that culturally based, should never be developed and promoted in isolation from native communities. These communities have had an inter-generational relationship with the cultural resources now offered as a tourist product for many countries.

In Zambia, as is the case in many African countries, the role that our native communities can play in the presentation and interpretation of cultural heritage is yet to be recognized by many. This includes even professionals from the tourism industry. This is so because in most African countries, and probably elsewhere in the world, cultural and natural resources have primarily been conserved and packaged as a tourist product for their tangible values, those that could easily be captured on camera and described in the international tourism market. Often this is done without consideration for the intangible values attached to such resources by native communities.

Most of these heritage resources have been preserved this long by the natives not for profit, but strictly for the intrinsic and intangible value they attach to them. For them this is a moral responsibility passed on through tradition, from one generation to the next.

In other countries, such as Australia, the aborigines, who are the natives of that country, have been recognised as important in the promotion of tourism. This is so because the aboriginal people wish to interpret heritage sites for the wider Australian community and overseas visitors within the broadest traditional framework.

On the other hand, tourists also want to gain an understanding of aboriginal culture in its broadest sense (Munyima, 1993:86).

However, there are contentious issues of ethics in cultural tourism development that center on ownership of traditional heritage sites. Who owns them? And who should profit from them? The answer is certainly not straightforward. For example, Zambia's National Heritage Conservation Commission is legally responsible for the protection, management, presentation and interpretation of traditional heritage sites. It is, however, the native communities who are the rightful custodians and who in fact know how much it truly means to them. It would therefore be a wise idea to allow them to play an important part in the presentation and interpretation of such heritage.

INTEGRATING THE TANGIBLE AND INTANGIBLE

By recommendation of various studies, the tangible value of our heritage has in the past decade or so began to be appreciated as an integral part that is in fact today being actively used in the presentation and interpretation of heritage to tourists.

It is, however, important to note that the full accomplishment of this crusade will depend on how much money our governments are prepared to spare on research, through which the intangible value of our heritage will be revealed and integrated in our presentation to tourists.

Most of us here would agree that our own research should be able to present the circumcision of boys not only as a hygienic measure, but also as marking the attainment of puberty. We shall present a beautiful landscape not only as of scenic beauty but also as a residence for our ancestral spirits or as a shrine. Neither shall we present Great Zimbabwe only as a wonderful piece of architecture, but also as a significant spiritual site for local natives. The list of examples is endless.

There is another example from a personal experience that is worth sharing here. Most of us, particularly those from African countries, are aware of the belief that active witchcraft objects or ancestral spiritual objects cannot be photographed. I have with me here some photographs of various museum objects taken on the same day by a professional photographer for the National Heritage Conservation Commission, the late Mildus Simpasa. It is quite clear that some of them came out rather in a unique manner. All the pictures of witchcraft objects were partially obscured. By what? Nobody knows. However, from the natives' point of view this is a result of the potency of the magic associated with these objects. In other words, the intangible magic performed on these objects is quite significant in interpreting how they were neutralized and surrendered to the museum.

CONCLUSION

From what is discussed above, it is quite obvious that we professionals in conservation have a great challenge to manage and package heritage for tourism without compromising the authenticity of the relationship between native communities and heritage resources.

Furthermore, an integrated presentation and interpretation of heritage does not only provide more visitor satisfaction, but may also raise more questions that may encourage even further research.

REFERENCES

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ABSTRACT

In Africa, and probably the world over, cultural and natural heritage resources have primarily been conserved and packaged as a tourist product for their tangible values, those values that could easily be captured on camera and described on the tourism market. Often, this is done without consideration for the intangible values attached to such resources by the native communities that have lived side by side with them and have preserved them for many centuries.

Most of these heritage resources have been preserved by the natives for so many centuries not for profit, but strictly for the intangible value they attach to them. For them it is a moral responsibility passed on through tradition from one generation to the next.

By recommendation of various studies, the intangible value of our heritage has in the past decade or so began to be appreciated as an integral part that is in fact today being used in the presentation and interpretation of these heritage resources to tourists.

The challenge for us professionals in conservation is, therefore, to manage and package heritage for tourism while avoiding compromising the authenticity of the relationship between the native community and the heritage resource.

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