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Changing Stakeholders and Community Attitudes in the Côa Valley World Heritage Site, Portugal

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Abstract: *Because of its responsibility for managing a World Heritage Site, the Côa Valley Archaeological Park (PAVC) has a specific policy with regard to its stakeholders. Most local stakeholders and a large segment of the community have not yet realized that the region's achievement of sustainable development will rest on general upgrading of the socioeconomic structure. The aim of this paper is to explain why the PAVC advocates that the ability of the region to provide high-quality products and services, which match the inestimable significance of the Côa Valley rock art, will determine the success of a development project for the region based on cultural tourism. After an introductory overview of global cultural heritage management guidelines, we examine the challenges the PAVC faces in trying to establish specific management, preservation, and development strategies in this area of Portugal. We also discuss how, in certain cases, following completely "politically correct stakeholder and community-friendly" guidelines can endanger the preservation of our common cultural heritage.*

Over the past few decades, the international archaeological community has paid increasing interest to conservation heritage management (CHM) problems, as one can see from the vast literature concerning this matter (for references on the subject, see Matero et al. 1998). This has occurred for two reasons. Initially archaeologists realized that every research project should take a holistic approach to the site or sites under investigation and that preservation and presentation matters should be viewed in the same manner. Later it was believed that if archaeologists or professionals from related disciplines did not manage (i.e., preserve and present) cultural heritage resources themselves, perhaps responsibility for them would be given to administrators who lacked a preservation perspective.

To fully appreciate and understand stakeholders, we need to know how to identify, assess, and establish the best methods of communication with them. A brief discussion aims to highlight the important role that stakeholders play in the implementation of CHM processes. To some extent it also provides a basis for questioning a "politically correct" view of the involvement of community and stakeholders that underlies some authors' approaches to this issue. These approaches sometimes overemphasize the importance of stakeholders when implementing cultural heritage conservation projects. The notion that everything in the management implementation process must be done in accordance with or respecting stakeholders' demands or needs is advocated by some authors. This line of thought has made its way, unquestioned, into the mainstream of CHM thinking.¹

The involvement of stakeholders is crucial to the success of any given CHM project. Nevertheless, we seek to demonstrate that in specific circumstances local stakeholders' and communities' ambitions should not jeopardize the higher aim: the preservation of cultural heritage resources.

Stakeholders can be located far from a particular region and still have an interest in the development or preservation of its resources. This concern may stem from their desire to preserve something valuable to them as members of the wider community. In this sense, all those who have proved themselves committed to the preservation of humankind's common legacy may have a legitimate stakeholder interest in the management or defense of the preservation of Côa Valley rock art. Local Côa stakeholders need to be aware that the significance of the valley's rock art makes it an invaluable testimony to all humankind. The fact that it is located in "their" region does not intrinsically make them the

sole or even the most decisive voices when discussing the management and tourism use of the rock art and overall development strategies.

Identification of Stakeholders

There are several different kinds of communities and stakeholders. The community can be local, national, international, or specific, such as the archaeological community. They all constitute different "stakeholders," the term being understood as individuals or groups of individuals who, whatever their location, have a specific interest in the way any given resource (in this case, cultural heritage) is managed. The number of stakeholders could be endless.² Because of their interest, stakeholders can either directly or indirectly affect CHM, in ways ranging from everyday decisions to long-term resolutions.

Open Attitudes and Wide-Ranging Discussion

The adoption of an open attitude by CHM organizations, what Hall and McArthur (1998) describe as "being the facilitators," will certainly foster their relationship with stakeholders. Naturally this does not mean that CHM managers should concede to every demand, as we discuss below. Nevertheless, a wide-ranging iterative process of discussion with the community and the many stakeholders on relevant matters (objectives, strategies, overall philosophical conservation and preservation approaches, etc.) must be established in order to secure the medium- and long-term success of a CHM project.

Assessing the socioeconomic and cultural status of the community can be a helpful tool in adjusting communication strategies so that the information CHM organizations transmit will be reasonably well understood. This will avoid time-consuming misinterpretations and will clarify positions so that all parties know what they can expect from one other.

Communication Processes

The local community needs feedback, whether it realizes it or not, from involved organizations in order to fully appreciate and judge the significance of its own cultural heritage. At the same time, even allowing for different communication strategies, the discourse of managers is often biased by their own beliefs, interests, or views and even, regrettably, is sometimes "bought by the highest bidder" (Hall and McArthur 1998:55), which is not very helpful when trying to gain the trust of communities. Managers must understand that CHM organi-

zations do not work in a void or for themselves. These organizations, as any others, are integrated in a given society and are, in fact, the most empowered of stakeholders. Nevertheless, they need to be aware that it is society that delegates to CHM organizations the authority and the obligation to protect something that possesses important values to that given society.

Suitable communication methods must be established to ensure that the message is delivered effectively to communities and stakeholders. This can be achieved by promoting innovative and extended educational programs or by well-targeted information and promotion campaigns. It can also be accomplished by engaging influential and popular individuals within the community, establishing them as proficient communication channels for reaching the population. CHM organizations have to be active rather than reactive, trying actively to reach stakeholders and communities since they must be involved in the planning process from the start.

The C  a Valley Case Study: Changing Roles of Stakeholders and Community

The C  a Valley Archaeological Park (PAVC) was created in 1997 and given the responsibility to "manage, protect and organize for public visits, including the setting up of museum facilities, the monuments included in the special protection zone of the C  a Valley" (Zilh  o 1998). A year later UNESCO classified the C  a Valley rock art as World Cultural Heritage. The roughly 1,200 engravings inscribed in schist, ranging in age from the Upper Palaeolithic to the present and located mostly along the banks of the final 17 kilometers of the C  a River, form the core of the cultural heritage management project in the C  a Valley (figs. 1-3).

The C  a Valley Archaeological Park was born of the need to preserve an invaluable assemblage of open-air rock art that was threatened by the construction of a dam. In this context, the creation of the park encountered fierce resistance from the supporters of the dam who believed that the dam was going to bring progress and development to the region (see Fernandes 2003). Therefore, from the beginning, a significant part of the local population did not endorse the implementation of an alternative project governed by wide-ranging conservationist, nature-friendly policies, which aimed to value heritage and to incorporate into regional development the concept of World Heritage.

For a majority of the local population and stakeholders, the creation of the park was considered a defeat, as they

FIGURE 1 Area of the Côa Valley. One of the most important port wine estates in the region, Quinta de Santa Maria de Ervamoira, can be seen in the background. Photo: CNART (Centro Nacional de Arte Rupestre). © IPA (Instituto Português de Arqueologia)



preferred the dam, the construction of which assured them a steady flow of income for at least two years. Local stakeholders felt that an urban elitist minority (stakeholders themselves, nevertheless) who had never paid any attention to that underdeveloped rural interior area of Portugal had imposed the creation of the park and subsequent halt in the dam construction (Gonçalves 2001a). Within the Portuguese administrative and political system, the creation of an archaeological park of roughly 200 square kilometers under the Ministry of Culture caused evident turmoil in the relationships between public institutions. Divergences occurred among the existing agriculture, land management, and environment agencies but mainly with the local administrations, who were heirs to a strong municipal tradition in Portugal.

Hence, it is no surprise that much of the regional population regarded the park with animosity. Adding to the situation, some important national government investment projects were postponed or delayed, an example of the latter being the construction of a museum devoted to the valley's rock art that would expand the region's capacity to receive visitors. But the chief complaint, especially on the part of the municipality, concerned the visitation system, which, in order to preserve the authenticity and integrity of the engravings and their surroundings, allows only a limited number of visitors per day (for a detailed consultation and review of this sys-

tem, see Fernandes 2003; Zilhão 1998). Nevertheless, in the seven years the park has been open, 130,000 individuals have already visited the engravings (information provided by the PAVC's accountant's office).

Influential local stakeholders fancied questionable thematic parks and wanted to offer completely free access to the engravings. Their concept of development for the area included the creation of low-investment Disneyland-esque tourist structures such as on-site souvenir shops, food outlets, parking facilities, and amusement attractions—as if more than the rock art was needed to provide a quality visitor experience appealing to a broad cross-section of the general public. The main concern was to try to capture huge visitor numbers that could generate “astronomic” income flows while bypassing large private investments and the upgrading of socioeconomic and cultural structures. It is plain to see that this development concept³ would endanger the preservation of the Côa Valley rock art in its full integrity and authenticity, especially if one considers the quite untouched context in which the engravings had survived hitherto. The most heeded local stakeholders and therefore an important part of the community give little value to the engravings—usually referred as “doodles done by the millers” who worked on the riverbanks until the 1950s. From their perspective, the only benefit would have been economic by taking the approach



FIGURE 2 View of Penascosa rock art site. One can imagine the negative impact that ill thought and intrusive mass tourism structures would have on this quite unspoiled and picturesque landscape. Photo: © Luís Luis, Parque Arqueológico do Vale do Côa

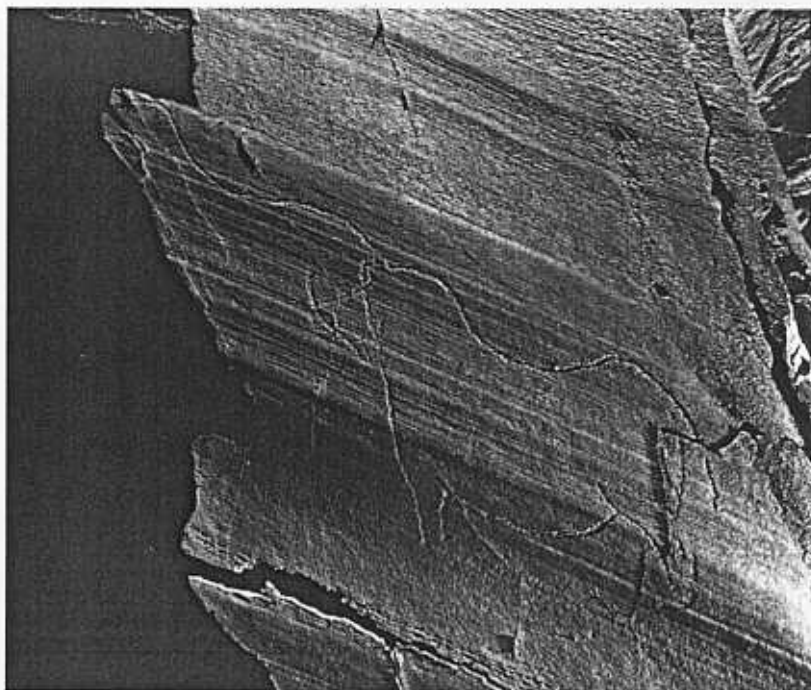


FIGURE 3 The entwined horses of the Ribeira de Piscos rock art site. Photo: CNART (Centro Nacional de Arte Rupestre). © IPA (Instituto Português de Arqueologia)



FIGURE 4 The garbage cans of Vila Nova de Foz Côa. Photo © António Pedro Batarda Fernandes, Parque Arqueológico do Vale do Côa

advocated above in which tourism development came first and only afterward preservation and holistic management of the Côa Valley rock art resource.

In the Côa Valley case, we believe it is important to clarify what is understood by the type of sustainable development that incorporates public presentation of the rock art. Our model, which determined the implementation of the “low-impact” visitation scheme (see Fernandes 2003), agrees with that of the World Commission on Environment and Development, which defines this concept as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, cited in Lélé 1991:611). In this sense, the rock art cultural resource must

be seen as a fundamental but nonrenewable element of a sustainable development vision for the region.

It was precisely the prominence and importance of all that the World Heritage concept encompasses that began to reverse the situation, causing a growing number of stakeholders to change their minds and start supporting the park and its policies. In fact, the prestige, visibility, and publicity associated with the “Côa Valley World Heritage brand” is finally being used by locals in the promotion of their products, as they seek to certify them as authentic quality items and services. Some cases are more successful than others (fig. 4).

Instrumental to the success of this slow but steady process of changing mentalities was the PAVC’s standpoint. Although seeking the active involvement of all stakeholders, the park strongly supports national, international, and especially regional or local stakeholders who maintain as a goal of their management philosophy the offer of quality products and services. In the long run only a culture of excellence (based either on already existing “products”—rock art, Port wine, olive oil, gastronomy, or landscape—or on new, genuine, and socioecologically sound products) will determine and maintain the success of sustainable development for the region. Among the examples of stakeholders using this approach are local and national government institutions, restaurants, cafés, teahouses, hostels, olive oil producers, tour operators, and Port wine farmyards, some with hosteling facilities or small on-site museums. The above-mentioned stakeholders are experiencing good results as a consequence of upgrading their offerings and also of their association with the Côa rock art World Heritage brand (fig. 5) (see Fernandes 2003:103–4).

FIGURE 5 Some of the local traditional agricultural products that the PAVC sells in its reception centers: port wine, honey, and olive oil. Photo © António Pedro Batarda Fernandes, Parque Arqueológico do Vale do Côa



In addition to promoting a first-rate overall cultural tourism offering in the area, beginning with a quality experience visiting the rock art sites (small groups of visitors viewing rock art in a relatively untouched environment located in a characteristic landscape), the PAVC aims through this policy to lead the way in improving most stakeholders' procedures by demonstrating the long-term benefits of such a change. Hall and McArthur (1998:54) believe that "stakeholders set definitions of quality that managers work towards." In the case of local stakeholders, this is what is taking place in the C  a, although here, conversely, it was the management principles established by the PAVC that established new definitions of quality for stakeholders.

As stated, the political and social circumstances of the C  a Valley created an environment that was somewhat hostile to the implementation of the park's management policies. This climate is being dissipated slowly but gradually as stakeholders begin to see and plan for the long-term, sustainable, culturally based development of an area where illiteracy levels are high, especially among the numerous aged population (see Fernandes 2003:96-97). Instead of opting for an entirely stakeholder-friendly approach, the PAVC deliberately chose to demonstrate the justness of its management and development policies. However, this is a slow process, and it will take time for stakeholders to fully understand that the future of this region lies in sustainable tourism that takes advantage of the region's invaluable heritage coupled with the provision of prime commodities and services.

Conclusion: Anti-Development Fundamentalism or Just Plain Good Sense?

We are aware that some may accuse the park of conducting a somewhat elitist or fundamentalist approach to the management of the C  a Valley in a socioeconomic context not fully prepared to understand the reach of most of the implemented conservation and development strategies. We do not believe that rock art or cultural heritage in general should be fully accessible to or appreciated by only a few chosen connoisseurs. Nor do we consider that it "belongs" only to a local community that descends more or less directly from the makers of a given cultural heritage feature. We do not feel that planning for or attempting to assure the sustainable future of the rock art and subsequently of the development of tourism and other economic avenues in the area is an elitist or fundamentalist approach. We believe it to be just plain good sense.

Another criticism sometimes heard is that archaeologists are preservation fundamentalists who turn up their noses at any development project. As the C  a Valley case study demonstrates, when most local stakeholders have an every-one-for-himself approach to CHM and when their proposals, needs, or development concepts endanger the preservation of cultural heritage, a line has to be drawn.

CHM bodies have a preservation pact with all humankind that must be kept. Rational and reasonable preservation policies—such as the ones implemented in the C  a Valley—"dictate" that some stakeholders' ambitions cannot be taken into account if we want to safeguard cultural heritage properties. As Jacobs and Gale (1994:1-8) point out, there is a profound difference of approach and management goals between what they define as "heritage industry" and "sustainable tourism." Although the involvement of stakeholders in cultural heritage management is essential, sometimes less conciliatory decisions have to be taken. These situations can arise when stakeholder interests are impossible to reconcile, when a specific stakeholder's demand is incompatible with the preservation of heritage, or when a substantial portion of local stakeholders favor the construction of dams over the preservation of significant cultural heritage sites. In the case of the C  a, if the most influential local stakeholders and the considerable part of the community that favored the dam had their way, the rock art sites would not have been saved from flooding. However, political decisions such as the one that stopped the construction of the dam as well as the implemented management strategies have to be clearly explained so that all parties understand why some demands, wishes, or ambitions cannot be met and to assure that the entire process is transparent.

The C  a Valley case study demonstrates the difficulties of the holistic, open, modern approach to cultural heritage management. Nevertheless, a well-integrated and productive set of organizations devoted to the preservation and public presentation of global cultural heritage must be aware that the conflict between development and preservation with all that it entails may force them, at times, to take a stand, to draw a line. Although the arguments presented in the introductory section and in the C  a case study may be somewhat contradictory, we believe that politically correct stakeholder and community-friendly guidelines might not sometimes serve long-term preservation needs or sustainable development options. In our opinion, the long-term preservation of the C  a Valley rock art is dependent on the success of the park's implemented management strategies. At the same time, the possibility for successful sustainable tourism development in the

area lies in the endurance of the rock art. Since the two are utterly entwined, it is clear that any disproportion in the tourism development/preservation equation would have a tremendous and perhaps irreversible impact. Even if we agree with Liwieratos's (2004) statement that "there is a greater chance of achieving sustainable conservation through development if responsibilities are shifted to the public," we also believe that, before such a change, it is vital to make sure that the public and the stakeholders, especially local ones, are truly prepared to deal wisely with the responsibility of contributing decisively to the management of a World Heritage Site.

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Notes

For a general approach on this, see, for instance, Hall and McArthur 1998: chaps. 3, 4; McManamon and Hatton 2000; Start 1999. For an example of a politically correct Portuguese approach, see Gonçalves 2001a, 2001b.

See Hall and McArthur 1998: 46 for a hypothetical but thorough list of stakeholders in any given situation.

- 3 For an assessment of the negative impacts that this kind of development triggered in the Algarve region after the creation of Portugal's number 1 mass tourism destination, see Tourtellot 2005:67.

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