

Introduction

RESEARCH QUESTION

Research carried out in the course of producing this dissertation was based on the question: How can maritime and underwater cultural heritage (MUCH) in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly South Africa and Mozambique, be better managed?

To answer this question, this study proposes engagement and management structures, tests their efficacy, analyses the outcomes and makes conclusions surrounding approaches to the field.

RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

Maritime and underwater cultural heritage has struggled to find its place in the sub-Saharan African heritage context. It has been associated primarily with the location and salvage of treasure ships (see for example SAHRA 9/2/700, 9/2/701/*, 14/K/*, and PER/8/*). Management of MUCH resources has, as a result, focused on managing wreck sites. Management strategies have been implemented either to stop treasure hunting or to limit the damage caused by salvage activities. In some instances, such as South Africa prior to 1999, strategies were even established to facilitate salvage, as will be elaborated in Chapter 2. In sub-Saharan Africa, legitimate maritime archaeological excavation has *also* largely emphasised shipwrecks and South Africa already has an extensive shipwreck database³, and Kenyan and Mozambican archaeologists are currently building their own national maritime archaeological archives (Duarte and Bitu, *pers. comm.*). Because management strategies and approaches to MUCH engagement aimed at underwater cultural heritage in the region

have had a shipwreck focus, they have been able to follow tested Western legal systems in which historical European maritime powers have been predominantly interested in the management of their own vessels either at home or in foreign waters. The application of internationally accepted MUCH management practices has, however, failed to engage many nations in the developing world as illustrated by the lack of attention provided to maritime heritage from national governmental to local levels. This, exacerbated by an absence of the capacity and infrastructure frameworks enjoyed by the developed world, has meant that the application of current regulatory strategies has been a challenging task which has ultimately failed to successfully manage MUCH resources in the region or engage sub-Saharan communities in maritime history and resource preservation.

The relevance of this research is, therefore, the proposal, application and assessment of management and engagement models applicable to the African context; and a contribution towards establishing an approach to MUCH that is specifically applicable to sub-Saharan Africa. The approach examines the context in which the heritage resource exists, including the socio-political and economic environments, as well as the available mechanisms in place, and available, for research and management. It considers the scope of MUCH in the developing world context and seeks to establish some preliminary guidelines for management strategies that are built on local relevance and local buy-in. Finally, it offers a management approach that is beneficial to both professional practitioners and community leaders. This dissertation analyses approaches applied in South Africa and Mozambique, but proposes that similar methodologies can be applied elsewhere in the sub-Saharan region.

³ [http://www.sahra.org.za/sahris/search/site/?f\[0\]=bundle%3Ashipwreck_site_recordings](http://www.sahra.org.za/sahris/search/site/?f[0]=bundle%3Ashipwreck_site_recordings)

The study breaks new ground for MUCH in sub-Saharan Africa. Management approaches have previously not been analysed or tested in the African context. For the first time, this research assesses the *status quo* of field in southern Africa. As such, it has the potential to contribute towards several key MUCH management goals: it makes MUCH broadly relevant. This has the potential to ensure deeper engagement and a willingness on the part of heritage communities to contribute towards management objectives within developing world constraints; it provides a model for developing strengthened management strategies at the official level, and; encourages practitioners tasked with managing MUCH in sub-Saharan Africa to learn from the experiences gained in the course of this work and to apply them to their thinking and practices related to conservation, protection, and access.

Because research surrounding management of underwater cultural heritage has not previously been undertaken in the African context, there was little available data at the start of this study on which to premise the proposal of alternative strategies. This study required the production of entirely new data sets for advancing and testing new models. As such, this work is focused on praxis rather than theory.

STRUCTURE

While researching, analysing and writing up this research, my colleagues and I began referring to our work as a *heritage laboratory*. The image of chemists poring over test tubes identifying, isolating and extracting elements was constantly in our minds. We believed that we too were examining what we understood to be the building blocks of heritage. The vision upon which our research was built involved us testing our assumptions then remixing elements in different combinations to see what would happen. In this spirit, the structure of this thesis follows the steps applied during the scientific method.

In this introduction, I posed the question of how it might be possible to manage underwater cultural heritage more effectively than current administration practices allow.

Chapter 1 of this book outlines the critical realist theoretical position I have taken and that runs through the book. The chapter explains the reasons for choosing this framework and its applicability to the research context of the study. It is followed by a description of research methods. Here, the methodology for identifying the overarching elements that determine *what* is managed and *how* it is managed is laid out. This section explains how data was gathered and how an analytical tool was designed and applied.

Chapter 2 and the first part of Chapter 3 set the context in which MUCH management practices are carried out. Chapter 2 summarises the rise of maritime archaeology as an archaeological sub-discipline and then examines the international legal frameworks that have evolved as a reaction to increased research and exploitation of submerged cultural sites as a result of intensifying access. Chapter 2 continues to assess legislation and management processes applied at the national level in sub-Saharan Africa as well as the ontological climate in which MUCH research developed and exists in the region. Finally, Chapter 2 goes on to investigate the challenges of the traditional approach to MUCH management and engagement by analysing the legal *status quo*.

Chapter 3 starts by exploring the application of hypotheses for improving management structures within the developing world context. It does this by examining two underwater cultural heritage training interventions implemented in Sri Lanka and Tanzania respectively, and by looking more closely at South Africa's management milieu. Chapter 3 begins to refine an hypothesis for improving MUCH management and proposes a maritime cultural landscape theoretical framework in which testing of the hypothesis can take place.

In Chapter 4, a new hypothesis for improved underwater cultural heritage is presented. An analysis of how the elements introduced in Chapter 1 exist in relation to each other is undertaken followed by the suggestion that MUCH management in sub-Saharan Africa can be improved by applying an approach to heritage management that supports balancing the

western⁴ and “alternative” heritage management values of each element. The chapter outlines how the hypothesis was tested, assessed, adapted and then retested in three additional case study examples in the southern African context following an initial developmental phase.

Chapter 5 turns to the analysis of results from the case study sites and confirms whether they align with the hypothesis proposed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 6 outlines the challenges and deficits of the hypothesis and indicates how it began to evolve even as it was being tested at the case study sites. It then suggests an alternative approach to MUCH management that will address the shortcomings of the hypothesis and that can be used as a platform for the development of new hypotheses for MUCH practice.

A Conclusion summarises results and, finally, an Afterword highlights and suggests directions for future research.

ASSUMPTIONS

The purpose of this research is not to argue *what* heritage is, *why* heritage is important, or *how* people perceive and produce their heritage. There are many theoretical works that explore the field and address these issues including the influential oeuvres of Lowenthal (1998), Graham, Ashworth and Turnbridge (2000) and Smith (2006). Neither is the purpose of this dissertation to argue the *role* of heritage in forming an identity, creating social equality, or driving economies. This research is focused on *heritage management*. It is written from the perspective of the heritage manager who must safeguard the past to the best of his or her abilities. As such it assumes that heritage *is* important and that heritage *does* play a role in identity, equality, and economy. It assumes that heritage is all these things. At its core, this dissertation is about finding a framework and developing a practical approach to

MUCH that engages with communities at all levels and engenders sustainable heritage management.

⁴ I have chosen to use the terms “western” and “alternative” after some reflection. I had considered using the term “conventional”, but felt that “western” better revealed the deep roots of MUCH management in Eurocentric heritage practice and contexts.