

Chapter 17

The Nature and Scope of Cultural Heritage Resources Management in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of this chapter is to provide assistance to institutions and individuals involved in cultural heritage management (for example, contract work), especially entry level. An overview of important aspects to take note of are given and some are discussed in detail. The concept of protection as indicated in the National Heritage Resources Act, the methodology of heritage resources management (also known as CRM), the concept of cultural significance, and the way of dealing with graves are all defined. This is placed in a global perspective by including applicable international conventions related to the protection of heritage. Information on the cultural context within South Africa is given to provide an understanding of possible issues to be dealt with. The result is a reference guide for the management of the cultural heritage of South Africa.

INTRODUCTION

Heritage legislation in South Africa is amongst the most progressive in the world (Van Vollenhoven, 2003a). The lack of knowledge about the NHRA and the capacity problems experienced within heritage agencies unfortunately creates a situation where the act is not as effective as it should be.

The main objective of this chapter is therefore to assist South African institutions and individuals involved in cultural heritage management (for instance, contract work). It gives an overview of important aspects to take note of and discuss in detail, such as definitions, the concept of protection as indicated in the National Heritage Resources Act (NHRA), the methodology of heritage resources management (also known as cultural resources management [CRM]), the concept of cultural significance, and the way of dealing with graves.

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Apart from the NHRA, other applicable legislation will also be noted. A brief overview of institutions dealing with heritage in South Africa will be given, and the role of the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) will be discussed. The complex three-tier system of heritage management will also receive attention.

Heritage management in South Africa is placed into an international context with a short discussion of the most important international charters related to preservation and conservation. Finally, the South African cultural context is briefly referred to in order to facilitate an understanding of the potential heritage sites to be dealt with.

BACKGROUND

The creation of infrastructure during development projects is increasingly threatening cultural resources all over the world. It is no different in South Africa. During these development activities, which may include mining, infrastructure development, housing, among others, the cultural heritage resources are affected and are in danger of being destroyed or damaged.

It is, however, not possible to preserve all cultural resources, as it may not be economically viable or because there may be a number of similar heritage sites. It therefore is of the utmost importance that a balance needs to be struck between progress (development) and the conservation of cultural resources.

Cultural heritage resource management, sometimes called cultural resources management (CRM), deals with the minimisation of impact on the fragile heritage. This gave rise to the concept of heritage management, mainly (but not exclusively) dealt with by private heritage practitioners.

The aims of CRM involves inter alia that an economically viable solution is being found where the human (cultural) environment can coexist with modern-day developments. One such option is the possible tourism value that can be derived from properly managed heritage sites.

Before continuing, it is necessary to define a few principal concepts related to heritage management.

- **Culture:** The concept of culture has been defined many times before. A basic definition is that it includes everything made by humans (Coertze, 1977). This includes physical objects such as furniture and consumer goods, but also intangible creations such as music, language, and religion (Burden, 2000).
- **Heritage:** Heritage refers to the legacy from the past (Meyer, 1995).
- **Conservation:** All the processes used to maintain a place or object in order to keep its cultural significance. The process includes preservation, restoration, reconstruction, and adaptation (ICOMOS, 2013).
- **Preservation:** This is the action of ensuring that something is not neglected or lost (protection) and includes maintenance of the fabric of such a site in its existing state (ICOMOS, 2013).
- **Restoration:** To bring a place or object back as close as possible to a known state, without using any new materials (ICOMOS, 2013).
- **Reconstruction:** To bring a place or object as close as possible to a specific known state by using old and new materials (ICOMOS, 2013).

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