Balancing Sacredness and Beauty: Exploring a Hybrid Management Model for Great Zimbabwe World Heritage Site

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Abstract

The cultural pride and historical significance of the Great Zimbabwe World Heritage Site make it a challenging place to reconcile with its aesthetic appeal. This paper delves into the potential for a hybrid management model that incorporates these frequently competitive dimensions. Great Zimbabwe's beauty and architectural opulence are both globally recognized, but the local people also hold it in high esteem as a sacred location. The study highlights the need to maintain the site's cultural and spiritual values while preserving its historical significance for future generations. The research scrutinizes management practices, revealing shortcomings in addressing both spiritual and aesthetic values. Through utilizing case studies and reviewing literature on heritage management, this research examines the effectiveness of hybrid management models in managing other historic sites. Based on these cases, the article proposes applying a customized hybrid model to Great Zimbabwe. This framework recommends inclusive governing, increased community engagement, and adaptive management that respects the site's sacredness and beauty. By blending traditional practices with modern principles, the hybrid model endeavors to address current challenges while ensuring sustainable conservation for this culturally complex site.

Key words

Great Zimbabwe, World Heritage, Sacredness, Hybrid management, Cultural heritage, Conservation, Community involvement

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1.1 Introduction

Prior to colonization of Africa, heritage places were managed primarily through indigenous knowledge systems and traditional cultural practices. The coming of the colonial regime in most parts of Africa continent saw a twist in the management practices to adopt western derived scientific systems that often deemed local communities and their traditional systems of management irrelevant (Pikirayi, 2011, p.5). However, local communities view western conservation and management approaches as restrictive, hindering the safeguarding of African cultural heritage, hence the need to combine these approaches. This paper presents the idea of combining the two systems of management to come up with a hybrid model that seeks to envelope all management aspects at cultural landscapes in general but with a special focus on Great Zimbabwe. The scope of the argument being that the two systems are based on two conflicting doctrines. Scientific management system emphasis is on preservation of aesthetic values of landscapes, which often label traditional practices as deterring effective preservation of these values. While traditional systems emphasize on preservation of the spiritual aspects of heritage resources or cultural landscape, the main object being preservation of heritage 'in situ' or as is. The research thus questions the practicality of a hybrid model in management of African heritage using Great Zimbabwe as a yard stick.

Over the last few decades, the indigenous populations world over have become engaged in theoretical aspects as well as practices of archaeology and increasingly becoming vocal about issues of cultural heritage (Pikirayi, 2011, p.18). Emerging approaches to cultural heritage management now prioritise community engagement in conservation and management efforts (Report of the Director General of UNESCO to the Secretary General of United Nations, 2013, p.3). This has led to extensive research and numerous publications focusing on community engagement, aimed at addressing and resolving the marginalization of local communities in the conservation and management of heritage within the African context. Emerging arguments have called for a redefinition of the parameters of

community engagement, as local communities have been systematically alienated from cultural heritage resources due to colonial-era legislation adopted by heritage agencies from the colonial system (Pikirayi 2011, p.21). According to Chirikure (2008, p.1), community engagement in heritage management has increasingly gained prominence, as archaeologists seek to enhance the social relevance of the discipline by actively involving local communities in the stewardship of heritage sites.

In Zimbabwe, the attainment of independence did not quickly led to the engagement of communities in issues to do with management of heritage resources as had been the expectation. This has culminated in ownership and management wrangles of heritage as the alienated local communities have become activists, demanding a stake in the conservation of their heritage (Chirikure, 2008, p.5). This issue of community engagement in heritage management is so important that it is even stressed in Article 11b of the 2003 UNESCO, Convention on the Safeguarding of Intangible Heritage. Article 11b expresses that a more viable approach to heritage management is for heritage institutions to create partnerships with local communities and other stakeholders. Worth noting is the fact that, conflicts in heritage management precipitated a policy change by National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ), which began an active community archaeology programme (Chirikure 2008, p.8). NMMZ has made efforts to engage communities in management of heritage over the years, as a stance to shift from the colonial system of managing heritage, thorough participatory management and co-management arrangements (Chauke, 2003, p.3). However, these co-management and participatory management arrangements have been deemed inadequate as communities are still challenging the heritage agency as owners and not stakeholders of heritage, through traditional chieftaincy (Mawere et-al, 2012, p.15). Chief Charumbira, then President of the Zimbabwe Council of Chiefs has been the protagonist in challenging the heritage agency (NMMZ) in issues to do with heritage management (Chirikure and Pwiti, 2008, p.475). In 2005, Chief Charumbira who had been invited to a stakeholder consultative workshop at Great Zimbabwe National Monument aimed at soliciting

views during the revision of Zimbabwe's cultural heritage legislation refused to be regarded as a stakeholder arguing that he and his subordinates were the primary owners of this heritage. Chief Charumbira seemed to be underscoring the need to outline the roles of traditional leaders and local communities in the management of cultural heritage. Most probably, he was calling for enhanced recognition of local communities in the protection and management of Zimbabwe's heritage resources. Chirikure and Pwiti (2008, p.475) state that in pre-colonial times, chiefs had custodial rights over important archaeological sites, hence giving back those powers would guarantee more meaningful involvement beyond the cosmetic. Heritage agencies among them NMMZ have been operating basing on formal heritage management approaches. Both local communities and various academies have criticised formal heritage management approaches as inadequate management approaches (Mawere et-al, 2012, p.15). Jopela, (2011, p.3) argue that the formal or scientific heritage management systems are unable of ensuring holistic management of heritage and are of no cultural significance.

In response to the concerns that have been consistently articulated over the years, this study assesses the viability of integrating traditional with formal heritage management systems at the Great Zimbabwe cultural landscape. The objective being, to develop a hybrid management model as the existing co-management and participatory frameworks have been perceived by local communities as inadequate.

1.2 Chronological progression of heritage management in Zimbabwe

Heritage management in Zimbabwe, from the pre-colonial to the post-colonial era, has been characterised by a shift in approaches, with early practices rooted in traditional systems and later ones reflecting colonial and post-colonial policies that often excluded local communities. Central to contemporary discourse is the need to revive and integrate indigenous or traditional management systems that were once central to the stewardship of heritage sites. Prior to colonisation, heritage sites such as Great Zimbabwe and Khami, which functioned as important rainmaking shrines, were governed by traditional management frameworks

grounded in myths, taboos, and spiritual beliefs (Chiwaura, 2011, p. 1). Chiefs and kings were traditionally charged with management of heritage resources. Chiwaura (2011); Pwiti and Mvenge (1996); Maradze (2004) and Ndoro (2001a) present management systems of heritage resources during the pre-colonial times. As put forward by Pwiti and Mvenge (1996, p. 6), heritage management during the pre-colonial era was primarily based on intangible heritage systems, regulated by cultural norms and transmitted through taboos that imposed restrictions based on age, sex, and gender. Maradze (2004, p. 1) explores management methods before colonialism as being traditional management systems, which were put in place to ensure respect and the survival of cultural sites. Maradze (2004, p. 3) further suggests the use of both traditional management and scientific methods as complimentary of each other as well as revision of heritage legislation to ensure revival of traditional management systems of heritage in Zimbabwe. Conferring to Ndoro (2001a, 1), during pre-colonial times, 'most places of cultural significance enjoyed protection', in the sense that, no one was allowed into them without the sanction of religious leaders. These places were deemed sacred and their protection was through a series of taboos and restrictions Colonialism significantly disrupted traditional systems of heritage management. A number of colonial legislative instruments, such as the Land Apportionment Act of 1930 and the Land Tenure Act of 1959, facilitated the forced displacement of African communities into reserves to make way for white-owned commercial farms. These laws effectively dispossessed local populations of their ancestral lands and denied them access to culturally significant heritage sites that became part of private or state-controlled property. Furthermore, the colonial agenda redefined heritage sites as spaces for scientific inquiry reserved for the colonial elite, while traditional spiritual and cultural practices associated with these sites were often prohibited. Ndoro (2001a, p. 3) is of the view that this led to the alienation of local communities from their cultural heritage, as colonial and postcolonial heritage management systems consistently neglected the role of indigenous custodianship. Jopela (2011, p. 3) reinforces this perspective, arguing that scientific approaches to heritage management alone are

insufficient to ensure the holistic safeguarding of heritage places and their associated cultural values.

In the postcolonial era, heritage management in Africa has largely remained rooted in frameworks introduced during colonial rule hence Munjeri's (2005, p 4) view that most African countries' legal instruments are like old wine in new skin. Ndoro (2005, p. 8) asserts that the attainment of independence by most African nations did not result in a substantive shift in either the theoretical or practical dimensions of heritage governance. Many African countries continue to adopt Western-oriented models of heritage preservation, often shaped by international conventions and technical standards that prioritise scientific and archaeological perspectives over indigenous knowledge systems and community involvement. Apart from South Africa and Botswana, most African nations' formal management systems remain Eurocentric in nature focusing more on aesthetics and tangible structures turning blind eye to traditional dimensions thus creating conflicts between the heritage agencies and local communities. Domboshava Rock Art site near Harare, Zimbabwe presents a case where local people of Chinhamhora community were barred from using the site for their traditional ceremonies (rain asking, thanks giving) the argument being that their activities fuelled deterioration of the rock art. Such a move was not well received by the community and they retaliated by defacing the rock art with black oil paint (Chiwaura 2005, p.20). Learning from this conflict, NMMZ embraced engagement of local communities through participatory management and co-management arrangements (Chauke, 2003). Unfortunately, communities still consider this as inadequate.

In response to these challenges, contemporary heritage practitioners have increasingly advocated for a paradigm shift that recognises the importance of integrating intangible cultural heritage and community-based approaches into heritage management. This includes granting local communities' meaningful access to heritage sites and fostering their active participation in decision-making processes. Such an inclusive model acknowledges the limitations of formal, technocratic management systems and embraces a more pluralistic and

contextually grounded approach to heritage stewardship. Maradze (2004, p.2) explores the possibility of reviving traditional heritage management systems in Zimbabwe as a cost-effective and complimentary measure to modern heritage management methods or systems. Munjeri 2005, p. 4) urges modern day heritage management to adopt a management system, which embraces both the scientific approach to management and traditional aspects *i.e.* a hybrid model of management. The shift from the traditional systems of management in the colonial times to the formal management systems that often alienated local communities, through adoption of scientific ways of management is no longer considered viable in light of the growing global issues that are pushing for sustainable heritage resource management. At the very least, reviving traditional heritage management systems is necessary to compliment formal management systems. Although academics and heritage practitioners are agreeable to co-management/ community participation, there is no consensus on the degree of involvement (Katsamudanga, 2003, p. 4).

In light of the historical trajectory of heritage management in Zimbabwe from traditional custodianship in the pre-colonial era to the imposition of exclusionary, colonial-era frameworks that persist in the postcolonial period, this paper proposes the development of a hybrid model of heritage management. Grounded in the sentiments and arguments presented, the paper explores the potential for integrating traditional management systems with formal institutional approaches at Great Zimbabwe cultural landscape. This approach responds to the widespread perception among local communities that current community engagement efforts by the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ) remain inadequate, and it aims to promote a more inclusive and context-sensitive model of heritage stewardship.

1.3 Community engagement in heritage management

In heritage management, engaging local communities is crucial as it ensures that heritage sites remain relevant, protected, and beneficial to the people most connected to them. It fosters a sense of ownership, ensures cultural values are

respected, and can boost local economies through tourism. UNESCO has developed several key conventions and frameworks that emphasize community involvement in heritage management, recognizing the vital role of local populations in safeguarding cultural and natural heritage. The 1995 Global Strategy for a Representative, Balanced and Credible World Heritage List is one of UNESCO's earliest efforts to call for the involvement and consultation of local communities in heritage related issues. The Nara Document on Authenticity recognised the importance of local communities in defining authenticity as it recognized that communities define authenticity based on their cultural context (ICOMOS, 1994). The 2011 UNESCO Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape advocates for inclusive urban heritage management, integrating community voices in city planning as well as encouraging participatory mapping and stakeholder consultations. Issues of community engagement are also stressed in the UNESCO 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions which calls for the promotion of community-based cultural policies and supports grassroots participation in cultural governance. The UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage places local communities at the centre of the nomination of intangible cultural heritage practices through Article 15 which explicitly mandates community participation in identifying, defining, and managing intangible heritage. The 2015 Policy on the Integration of a Sustainable Development Perspective and the 2021 Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention also encourages engagement with local communities in World Heritage management. Without doubt, the aforementioned conventions and frameworks increasingly recognize community involvement as a cornerstone of ethical and sustainable heritage management. However, their successful implementation rest upon a nation's policies.

Thomas and Middleton (2003) demonstrated five types of engagement of communities in the management process. These types of engagement can be viewed as some of the strategies that can be considered to engage communities in heritage management at Great Zimbabwe. As put forward by Thomas and

Middleton (2003:66), 'Informing' is one way of engaging local communities in heritage management. This form of engagement also known as the 'top-down approach' is considered as the lowest level of participation in the heritage management planning process since preparation and implementation of the management mechanisms is solely under the heritage agency. The main objective of this type of engagement is to persuade stakeholders to accept the leaders' viewpoint. However, implementation of the management mechanism is jeopardized, as there is no consensus amongst the key stakeholders and the heritage agency.

Thomas and Middleton (2003:66) suggest 'consulting' as another type of community engagement that presents a scenario where stakeholders, local communities and organizations are notified about a project or plan and their views are sought in the management process. These views are taken into account but not necessarily acted upon. It is the heritage agency's prerogative to choose what to take and what not to take onboard. The consulting model can be illustrated by the preparation of the Matobo cultural landscape management mechanism. In compliance with the terms of the 1972 Convention on Protection of the World's Cultural and Natural Heritage, the heritage agency provided for the establishment of the Matobo Management Committee comprising of key stakeholders among them NMMZ, Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority, Matobo and Umzingwane Rural District Councils, Forestry Commission of Zimbabwe and the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (Matobo Hills World Heritage Site Management Plan 2004-2009: 2). During formulation of the management mechanism stakeholder views and objectives were taken into consideration through a comprehensive, participatory and consultative process (Matobo Hills World Heritage Site Management Plan 2004-2009). Therefore, the consulting model of community engagement allows for a shared approach in implementing management initiatives, thus minimizing conflicts.

'Deciding together' in heritage management illustrates a scenario where stakeholders are involved and invited to learn about the management process and

be a part of the final decision making process (Thomas and Middleton 2003: 66). While there is shared approach in the process, those initiating the discussion set boundaries or limits on how much influence other stakeholders have in the final discussion (Thomas and Middleton 2003: 66). The Mijikenda Kaya Forests situated on the coastal plains and hills of Kenya is a good example of the 'deciding together' model in heritage management processes. The Kaya forests are botanically diverse and have a high conservation value, as determined by a number of surveys undertaken by the National Museums of Kenya (NMK). The Kayas owe their existence to the beliefs, culture, and history of the nine coastal Mijikenda ethnic groups (Githitho 2005). The NMK is the state authority responsible for the conservation and management of the landscape in collaboration with the community (Coastal Forest Conservation Unit 2010:3). According to Githitho (2005:5) the Kenyan Government has formed a department called Coastal Forests Conservation Unit (CFCU) that is within NMK, charged with the task of management and conservation of the Kayas in close consultation with local communities.

'Acting together' is a level of involving local communities in decision-making, where responsibility and implementation, is a shared or joint approach in the management process (Thomas and Middleton 2003: 66). Local communities and the heritage agency are at par in the preparation of management mechanisms. According to Wijesuriya *et-al* (2013:124) heritage management in the acting together model is a collective and participatory approach amongst all stakeholders, especially communities and managers. The stakeholders have 'a shared understanding of the property, leading to strong support for the plan' (Wijesuriya *et-al* 2013: 124). According to Thomas and Middleton (2003:66) Bwindi Impenetrable Forest in Uganda is an example that illustrates acting together in management mechanisms. Management planning of the natural heritage of Uganda demonstrates what is termed a 'collaborative management approach' as state agencies and local communities work together in the management of the forest through a process of negotiation, recognizing the contribution of each and attaining mutual agreements (Thomas and Middleton 2003:66).

According to Thomas and Middleton (2003:66), 'supporting independent community interests' is termed the highest level of community engagement in the management process. Local communities set their own agenda and implement decisions. Experts or the heritage agency supports the communities with information, skill as well as resources. It can also be termed a 'bottom-up approach' to the management planning process. A case that illustrates this type of community involvement is the Kasubi Tombs model in Uganda. The local *Baganda* community effect the management of the tombs, and the Department of Museums and Monuments of Uganda (DMMU) with the help of various other stakeholders provide information, skill as well as resources when needed, hence act as consultants (Kasubi Tombs Management Plan 2009-2015:38). The Tombs management mechanism illustrates community engagement at various levels in the management of the tombs, therefore reducing conflicts amongst the heritage agency and local communities.

In non- western societies including Africa, cultural heritage management mainly deals with the preservation and presentation of archaeological monuments primarily from a technical point of view. Local communities especially in Africa have for long challenged formal heritage management systems as alienating communities, hence the need for a shift in focus to a more inclusive approach in both theory and practice of contemporary heritage management. Research in issues to do with local community engagement in heritage management has followed several trends, with works by Ndoro (2003); Pikirayi (2011); Chauke (2003) having traced how local communities have been actively engaged in issues to do with heritage management through exploring various case studies. Pikirayi (2011) captures the voice of communities in matters to do with archaeological heritage conservation in the context of community archaeology in repartition of human remains in Limpopo province, South Africa. The focus is on matters relating to communities and their relationship with specific archaeological heritage sites and cultural landscapes in the Limpopo province of South Africa, and how communities interact with their past as well as the conflicts associated with cultural

heritage protection efforts. Contemporary conservation approaches must address human needs and practices and should not be done in isolation.

Chirikure et-al (2010:30) also provide an informed narrative on heritage management and community engagement at various African cultural heritage sites. Their main observations was that local communities continue to be engaged on an experimental basis because more often their interests coincide with professional interests. On this basis, there have been calls for independent heritage professionals to come up with ways of integrating local communities in management. Participatory management appears as an effective way of making heritage management appeal to communities. Chirikure et-al (2010) illustrates the community participation model and explores different angles of such through an array of case studies. Local community interests vary depending on the heritage place hence the need to carry out a study on how a traditional system can be implemented in the Zimbabwean scenario.

1.4 Great Zimbabwe management system

Great Zimbabwe cultural landscape has been at the centre of controversies in regards to its management and ownership thus making it one of the most challenging heritage places to manage. With regards to ownership, there are contests between NMMZ and the recognised local communities of Chiefs Charumbira, Mugabe, Nemanwa and Murinye. These contests aside, Great Zimbabwe is "owned" and managed exclusively by the primary management system, which entails protection of the site under national law, taken care of by the main institution in charge of heritage with its own resources (Wijesuriya *et- al.*, 2013: 57). The property and its buffer zone are managed under the provisions of the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe. The current situation simply entails that all major decisions are made under the formal management system with minimal contributions here and there from stakeholders. The aforementioned chiefs and their subjects are the most immediate stakeholders.

The Global Strategy meeting for a Representative, Balanced and Credible World Heritage List held in Zimbabwe in October 1995 set in motion discussions on the best ways to engage communities around the site with the view of reversing the trend of increased conflicts that had culminated in poaching, vandalism and other illegal activities created due to heavy reliance on primary management systems at Great Zimbabwe. The discussions resulted in the adoption of a co-management settlement that would permit undertaking of traditional practices within the site as long as these activities do not compromise the site. As put forward by Wijesuriya *et-al*. (2013:58) the co-management body was to be made up of representatives from both the site authorities as well as the local community (Charumbira, Nemanwa and Mugabe) led by the two chiefs, with the chiefs regulating the traditional ceremonies and getting involved in other activities that include management and conservation. However, this strategy received criticisms from the local chieftaincy as not enough. In 2005 at a monuments workshop at Great Zimbabwe where traditional leaders were invited as stakeholders to amend the legislation, local communities through Chief Charumbira challenged NMMZ as 'owners of heritage and not stakeholders' as they deemed these co-management efforts by NMMZ as inadequate (Chirikure and Pwiti, 2008: 475). Chief Mugabe went further to equate the black administrators at Great Zimbabwe to be 'worse than the colonial administrators' as they do not seriously consult them/ inform them of any developments at the site (Chauke, 2003). Further registering their disgruntlements, the chiefs have been appearing on national television 'yearning for the return to traditional values', among them rainmaking ceremonies. Chirikure and Pwiti (2008: 475) concluded that the chief was advocating that more power be given to local communities in protecting and managing their heritage, as in pre-colonial times, were chiefs had custodial rights over important archaeological sites.

Local communities and traditionalists across post-colonial Zimbabwe have aired out grievances against government over exclusion of traditional leaders in relation to representation and physical management of Great Zimbabwe. Commenting on NMMZ Fontein (2006:81) observed that in post-independent era, 'it has since recruited trained professional archaeologists from local universities that have

dominated management of Great Zimbabwe and ignored local communities by adopting a colonial management style.' Local and traditional chiefs are not seriously consulted on issues to do with management of Great Zimbabwe. Furthermore, local people's access to the site has been limited and controlled by the agency. For instance, before conducting a ceremony at Great Zimbabwe, local communities require permission from the Regional Director, who in turn refers to his superior in Harare. There is continuity in the management systems of Great Zimbabwe from pre-independence to post-independence as in some instances government have failed to consult with the '*masvikiro*' in issues to do with management of the site.

With regards to the management of Great Zimbabwe, the main issue arising is the fact that the NMMZ personnel are not able by themselves to run Great Zimbabwe. Scholars such Munjeri (2005); Wijesuriya *et-al.* (2013); Chirikure and Pwiti (2008); Fontein (2006) generally agree that Great Zimbabwe is a shrine which cannot be managed without community input, and this has been the dilemma for them as conflicts have often surfaced. Various academics more often than not focus on management of Great Zimbabwe and have emphasized on analysing failures under the current management mechanism at Great Zimbabwe without exploring avenues or opportunities to resolve the differences. There is need to bridge this gap by carrying out a situational analysis of the management needs of Great Zimbabwe as well as associated stakeholders and examine the viability of adopting a traditional/ hybrid management framework at the site.

1.5 Heritage management system/ mechanism

A management mechanism in the context of heritage resources is a tool, which controls and establishes appropriate strategies, objectives as well as actions and implementation structures to manage and develop cultural heritage in an effective way so that its values are retained for present, future use and appreciation (Wijesuriya *et-al.* 2013, p. 124). Management mechanisms are designed to organize the conservation and support development actions related to cultural property (Periodic Report Africa 2003, p. 39). These systems which could be both

formal and informal differ according to different cultural perspectives and existing urban or regional management mechanisms, (UNESCO 2011, Paragraph 110)., A heritage management system constitutes three central elements. As put forward by Wijesuriya *et-al*. (2013, p. 54), the first element is a legal framework, which outlines the reasons for its existence for example NMMZ Act 25/11 of 1972. The second element is an institution, which gives form to its organizational needs as well as decision making. Finally, there are resources in the form of human, financial and intellectual that are used to make it operational. Heritage management systems exist to achieve outcomes for the properties in their care and for their stakeholders. Wijesuriya *et-al*. (2013, p. 60) states that 'in the case of cultural heritage, the principal outcome is the effective protection of the heritage values of a cultural property or group of properties for present and future generations.' Management systems entail planning, implementation and monitoring in order to achieve management and conservation goals of heritage resources (Thomas and Middleton 2003: p. 33).

1.5.1 Types of management systems

Traditional management system

The word 'traditional' is difficult to define, as it is not easy to distinguish what is 'not' traditional from what 'is' in the African context (Jopela 2011: 4). Jopela (2011: 4) argues that the controversy over the term 'traditional' originates from the fact that some academics consider that the word implies backwardness, hence, they favour 'indigenous' or 'local'. Nonetheless, for this research, the term 'traditional' is presented as a useful concept to describe heritage management mechanisms, which are free from western influences. Pikirayi (2011, p. vi) defines traditional heritage conservation as a 'set of cumulative set of practices and procedures maintained and developed by peoples, for instance traditional knowledge systems.' Traditional conservation approaches are derived from traditional knowledge allowing for effective management and partnerships. In this research, the term traditional management system' is deliberately used to constitute indigenous knowledge systems, intangible cultural heritage (customs, beliefs and

practices perceived by African communities as indigenous) as well as community stewardship and describes the way in which heritage sites have been traditionally managed in southern Africa and beyond. Berkes *et-al* (2000, p.1252) contends that traditional management systems include the worldview or religious traditions of a society as well as an unwritten long-standing customs and laws. Perhaps, they can be termed as a by-product of religious codes, which are enforced through the distribution of responsibilities and resources through social hierarchy within a given community (Wijesuriya *et- al.* 2013, p. 55). From the above, the term traditional management system in the context of this research refers to all management mechanisms and actions informed by customs and belief systems, performed by the local communities, which are aimed at the continuous use and preservation of the place, its values, and its surrounding environment.

There are various models of where traditional management systems are being utilized in Africa, for instance the Kasubi Royal Tombs in Uganda. The tombs which are the spiritual center of the *Buganda* Kingdom were placed on the prestigious World Heritage list in 2001 basing on the spiritual value (Ndoro, 2003, p. 84; Kasubi Tombs Management Plan 2009-2015, p. 36). The site is associated with strong intangible values and (the tombs are a living heritage that holds the remains of the former Kings (*Kabakas)* of the Kingdom of Buganda and cover almost 30 hectares (Chirikure *et- al.,* 2010, p. 37). These are testimony to the long history of 6 million *Baganda* that make up 30% of the present day Ugandan masses (Munjeri 2002. p.136). The tombs of the four *Baganda* Kings are called the '*Mazibu Azaala Mapanga*' (MAM) are an icon as well as political statement of the power of the Kings (*Kabakas*) (Munjeri 2002, p. 136). In terms of management, the Government of Uganda took over managing of the kingdoms in 1967, which were being managed traditionally through use of customary laws (Ndoro 2003, p. 84). Under the government, the tombs became national monuments and statutory instruments where used to preserve as well as protect them while ritual practices were forbidden. In 1993 the tombs were placed under traditional management system, which witnessed a positive charge in their state of conservation. Traditional laws of the kingdoms were restored, and the tombs were returned to the *Buganda*

Kingdom (Ndoro, 2003, p. 84). The current management system at Kasubi is now traditional. Currently, local custodians from the local *Buganda* community are deployed on site and perform traditional management tasks at different levels. The *Nalinya* is the spiritual guardian and supervisor of the site, the *Lubunga* is 'the land-use coordinator' (Munjeri, 2003, p. 77). The physical wellbeing of the tombs is steeped in the traditional customs of the *Buganda* community as Munjeri (2003) notes. For example, the *Ngeye* Clan does thatching of the tombs; through an apprenticeship programme within their clan they keep the tradition knowledge of thatching and pass on to younger generations, while the *Ngo* clan does decorations (Kasubi Tombs Management Plan, 2009-2015, p. 36). The Uganda's Historic Monuments Act protects the Tombs. However, the "*Kabaka*" (King) is the private legal owner of the site under the Restitution of Assets and Properties Act Cap. 247 of Uganda (Kasubi Tombs Management Plan, 2009-2015, p. 45). It is without doubt that the reliance on traditional management systems has played a crucial role in the maintaining authenticity of the structures.

Basing on the Kasubi tombs model, a traditional management system implies observing traditional taboos, accepting traditional ceremonies at the site, permanent presence of traditional religious leaders (*Kabakas, Katikiro and Nalinnya*) at the tombs, as well as consultation with the heritage agency on management and conservation issues at the site. This scenario is what this study was testing, if it would be viable for the Great Zimbabwe cultural landscape considering it being a contested heritage place amongst the local Charumbira, Mugabe and Manwa communities. In the context of Great Zimbabwe, a traditional management system would entail placing the cultural landscape under management of the local Mugabe, Charumbira, Nemanwa communities. Ensuring rituals are done on the site, with the spiritual leaders' (*masvikiro*) at the site and NMMZ acting on consultative basis, as in the Kasubi Royal Tombs model, were the local Buganda Kingdom is charged with management of the tombs (Kasubi Tombs management plan (2009 - 2015: 38). The Kasubi tombs model will be explored later on in the discussion.

<u>Formal/ Scientific management system</u>

Formal management systems, often referred to as scientific or conventional heritage management frameworks, are predominantly grounded in state legislation and bureaucratic structures. As Jopela (2011, p. 7) articulates, these systems are constructed upon statutory frameworks and legal instruments established by national governments, and are enforced through administrative processes. Their philosophical orientation is informed by positivist approaches that privilege empirical science, technological assessments, and the authority of trained heritage professionals or "experts". Such systems emerged largely during the colonial and post-colonial eras, where the regulation of cultural heritage became synonymous with state control, professionalization, and the detachment of communities from decision-making processes (Smith, 2006; Ndoro & Wijesuriya, 2015). The core emphasis within formal heritage management paradigms lies in the identification, documentation, and preservation of immovable heritage monuments, archaeological sites, and built structures through a rigid legalistic lens. These systems prioritize safeguarding heritage from physical deterioration and unauthorized alteration, typically through listing procedures, zoning laws, and punitive measures. However, as highlighted by Jopela (2011), such models are often exclusionary, neglecting community-based or indigenous knowledge systems that have historically contributed to heritage preservation. The dominance of legal instruments over customary practices reflects a broader epistemological bias that favors Western scientific rationalism over pluralistic and culturally embedded approaches to heritage (Deacon et al., 2004; Munjeri, 2004).

In practice, the formal system tends to marginalize the values and meanings ascribed to heritage by local communities, treating heritage as static and universal rather than dynamic and context-specific. As Harrison (2013) argues, the expert-driven management model constructs heritage as an object to be managed rather than a process lived and negotiated by communities. This top-down approach has led to increasing tensions between national heritage authorities and local stakeholders, particularly in Africa where indigenous knowledge and spiritual

associations to sites are often overlooked (Ndoro, 2001; Chirikure et al., 2010). Moreover, the international heritage charters that inform many formal systems such as the Venice Charter and UNESCO Conventions emphasize material conservation and universal value, reinforcing technocratic governance over participatory or culturally sensitive models (Labadi, 2013). Critics of the formal management model have called for a paradigm shift toward more inclusive heritage governance, one that integrates local communities not only as stakeholders but as co-managers and knowledge holders. The formal system's failure to accommodate alternative ontologies of heritage, particularly those that center oral traditions, ritual practices, and communal ownership, demonstrates its limitations in pluralistic societies (Logan, 2012). Therefore, while formal management systems have played a critical role in institutionalizing heritage protection, their rigidity and epistemological exclusivity continue to provoke debate within critical heritage studies.

Great Zimbabwe, an iconic African archaeological sites, falls under formal heritage management as administered by the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe. This system is rooted in colonial-era heritage legislation and post-colonial statutory instruments, the National Museums and Monuments Act [Chapter 25:11], which provides a legal framework for the identification, documentation, protection, and management of heritage sites in Zimbabwe. The management of Great Zimbabwe exemplifies the application of a scientific or formal system, where decision-making processes are centralized, technocratic, and largely dependent on experts trained in archaeology, conservation, and heritage science. The formal management of the site involves periodic inspections, conservation of stone structures using materials and methods recommended by experts, and enforcement of access controls and zoning regulations. For instance, interventions at the site follow guidelines based on international conservation principles such as the Venice Charter (1964) and the Operational Guidelines of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention (1972), under which Great Zimbabwe is inscribed as a World Heritage Site. These protocols emphasize material authenticity, minimal intervention, and the use of scientific tools in site

documentation and monitoring (Chirikure & Pwiti, 2008). The management structure also includes formal reporting obligations to UNESCO, such as the preparation of Periodic Reports and State of Conservation Reports, which are compiled by NMMZ officials in consultation with technical experts.

Despite the strengths of this formal system such as standardized procedures, professional accountability, and alignment with international heritage standards it has also attracted criticism for its exclusionary nature. Local communities residing near Great Zimbabwe, particularly the Shona-speaking people, have historically maintained strong spiritual and ancestral connections to the site. However, under the formal system, their role is limited to that of passive observers or guided participants, rather than active decision-makers or custodians. As Jopela (2011) and Ndoro (2001) argue, this disconnect stems from the formal system's failure to recognize traditional custodianship and intangible heritage values, such as ritual practices and oral histories, which are central to local understandings of the site.

Efforts to bridge the gap between the formal management and community involvement have been slow and limited. While there have been some community outreach initiatives such as heritage education programs, employment of locals as guides or security personnel, and occasional consultation workshops these remain peripheral to the core decision-making process. The dominant paradigm continues to favor scientific conservation, expert knowledge, and government authority, thereby perpetuating a top-down approach to heritage governance (Munjeri, 2004; Ndoro & Wijesuriya, 2015). Consequently, Great Zimbabwe presents a clear example of a formal management system that, while effective in certain technical aspects, remains challenged in integrating indigenous knowledge systems and local participation.

This case study underscores the limitations of relying solely on formal/scientific heritage management systems in culturally diverse contexts. It also reinforces the emerging consensus in critical heritage discourse that hybrid models, which combine statutory protection with traditional custodianship and community-based management, are more sustainable and socially responsive alternatives for

managing heritage in post-colonial African settings (Smith, 2006; Chirikure et al., 2010).

<u>Hybrid management mechanism</u>

Hybrid management mechanisms in heritage governance refer to approaches that seek to integrate both formal (scientific, legalistic, and state-driven) and informal (community-based, customary, and indigenous) systems of heritage management. These models emerge as a response to the limitations of rigid formal frameworks, which often marginalize local stakeholders and fail to accommodate the cultural, spiritual, and socio-political dynamics inherent in many heritage landscapes, especially in Africa and other post-colonial contexts. As argued by Jopela (2011), hybrid mechanisms recognize the value of plural knowledge systems and promote a co-management approach where both state authorities and local communities share responsibilities, decision-making powers, and benefits derived from heritage resources. The rationale for hybrid management is grounded in the recognition that heritage is not solely a physical or aesthetic entity to be protected by law and experts, but also a living and contested cultural construct deeply embedded in local meanings, memories, and practices. Smith (2006) and Harrison (2013) argue that the so-called "Authorized Heritage Discourse" (AHD), which dominates formal systems, often excludes subaltern voices and undermines local agency. Hybrid models attempt to counter this by incorporating indigenous epistemologies, participatory planning processes, and traditional custodianship structures into national and international heritage regimes. This inclusive orientation has been increasingly supported by global frameworks such as the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which encourages community involvement in the identification and safeguarding of heritage.

In practical terms, hybrid systems can manifest through joint management committees, participatory mapping, shared conservation protocols, and the recognition of traditional leaders or custodians as co-managers of sites. For example, in Mozambique, the management of Manyikeni and Chibuene heritage

sites incorporates both statutory protection under national heritage law and traditional rituals overseen by local custodians, thereby ensuring cultural continuity alongside formal conservation (Jopela, 2010). Similarly, in South Africa, collaborative models have been piloted in areas such as Mapungubwe and Richtersveld, where communities are engaged in heritage tourism, site interpretation, and governance structures (Chirikure et al., 2010; Deacon et al., 2004). These cases illustrate that hybrid systems not only enhance heritage protection but also foster social cohesion, economic empowerment, and cultural resilience.

Nevertheless, the implementation of hybrid management systems is not without challenges. Power asymmetries between state institutions and marginalized communities can hinder genuine participation, and the integration of customary practices into bureaucratic frameworks often requires sensitive negotiation and legal innovation. Moreover, as Logan (2012) observes, there is a risk of romanticizing or instrumentalizing community knowledge, especially when participation is reduced to tokenism. Therefore, for hybrid mechanisms to be effective, they must be supported by enabling legislation, adequate capacity-building, and sustained dialogue between stakeholders. Ultimately, the success of hybrid models depends on a paradigm shift from a top-down, expert-led model to a dialogic and reflexive heritage governance framework that respects cultural diversity, local autonomy, and shared stewardship.

With regards to Great Zimbabwe, a hybrid management model would involve reconfiguring the current state-centric and expert-driven system to include traditional custodians and local communities as co-managers of the site. While the site is protected under the National Museums and Monuments Act [Chapter 25:11], this formal framework has historically marginalized community participation, limiting local actors to peripheral roles such as tourism labor or ritual facilitators. A hybrid model would seek to remedy this by institutionalizing inclusive governance structures, such as community heritage councils or joint management committees, where decisions on conservation, access, ritual use, and benefit-sharing are made

collectively by state authorities, heritage experts, and legitimate local representatives. As scholars such as Jopela (2011) and Ndoro (2001) argue, sustainable heritage governance in Africa requires the integration of customary custodianship and indigenous knowledge systems alongside professional conservation practices. This model would not only protect the tangible heritage of the site its stone architecture, spatial organization, and artifacts but also the intangible dimensions, such as spiritual beliefs, clan histories, and ritual practices that continue to give the site meaning among local populations.

However, implementing a hybrid system at Great Zimbabwe is complicated by the fact that the site itself is a deeply contested landscape among several local communities who all claim historical, spiritual, or genealogical connections to it. The Nemanwa, Mugabe, Charumbira, and Murinye chieftaincies each assert custodial authority over the site, often based on oral histories, ancestral lineage, or territorial proximity (Mataga, 2014). This intra-community contestation poses a challenge to hybrid governance, as it complicates the identification of legitimate community representatives and the equitable distribution of rights and responsibilities. Yet, as Logan (2012) and Chirikure et al. (2010) point out, acknowledging and managing such complexities is essential in hybrid models, which must move beyond idealized notions of "the community" as a homogenous entity. A meaningful hybrid system at Great Zimbabwe would therefore require facilitated dialogue among the contesting groups, supported by anthropological research, participatory mapping, and mechanisms for inclusive representation that respect diverse claims without privileging one group over others. Ultimately, the goal is not to dissolve the contestation which itself reflects the site's living significance but to build a governance model that is reflexive, pluralistic, and capable of balancing competing interests within a shared framework of stewardship and mutual respect.

1.6 Methodology

This research adopted a qualitative approach to investigate how a hybrid management model might balance the sacredness and aesthetic value of Great

Zimbabwe as both a spiritual landscape and a World Heritage Site. The qualitative design was chosen for its effectiveness in capturing subjective perceptions, cultural meanings, and spiritual relationships associated with heritage sites. By privileging lived experiences and local worldviews, the research aimed to explore how diverse stakeholders among them local communities, traditional leaders, heritage professionals, and state actors negotiate the tension between sacred obligations and international heritage tourism demands. Interviews and focus group discussions were carried out in the surrounding villages of Great Zimbabwe to gather primary data on local cosmologies, sacred practices, and heritage values attached to the site. Particular attention was paid to the Nemanwa, Mugabe, Charumbira, and Murinye communities who share historical and ancestral claims to the area. The study also involved interviews with traditional custodians, spirit mediums, NMMZ officials, and local tour guides. These tools allowed participants to freely express their understanding of sacredness, heritage beauty, and their aspirations for equitable heritage governance. Informed consent was sought from all participants, especially when engaging with sacred knowledge and ritual practice, and anonymity was ensured where requested. In addition, desktop research complemented the fieldwork through a comparative analysis of hybrid management efforts in other African contexts. These case studies were critically analyzed to identify strategies that balance community spiritual obligations and heritage aesthetics under formal protection frameworks (Joffroy, 2005; Ndoro, 2008).

Data collected were subjected to thematic analysis, which revealed recurring themes such as cultural disconnection, spiritual marginalization, contestations over authority, and economic anxieties. These themes informed the emerging conceptual framework for a hybrid model rooted in cultural sensitivity and participatory governance. The findings were triangulated with existing literature to enhance reliability and to inform culturally responsive heritage policy. Although the research is context-specific and may face limitations in generalizability, it significantly contributes to current debates on decolonizing heritage management

by demonstrating the potential of hybrid systems to honor both sacred values and aesthetic preservation in African heritage sites

1.7 Discussion of Major Findings

1.7.1 Documenting Community Voices: Towards a Hybrid Management Model for Great Zimbabwe

The study findings strongly suggest that community voices are central to developing a viable and inclusive heritage management model at Great Zimbabwe. Local communities, particularly the Charumbira, Nemanwa, and Mugabe clans, articulated a deep desire for greater involvement and recognition in the stewardship of the cultural landscape. Echoing Katsamudanga (2003), many respondents advocated for a return to traditional systems of management where communities and traditional leadership take the lead, with heritage professionals operating in a consultative or advisory capacity. As one respondent noted, "heritage sites are best left to traditional leadership as they are the most knowledgeable on what is important to them from the vast cultural past bequeathed to them by their ancestors". This call resonates with global heritage norms, such as Article 5 of the World Heritage Convention (1972), which emphasizes active participation of communities in the management of World Heritage Sites.

Despite this strong desire for traditional involvement, local communities remain concerned about limited access to economic benefits, particularly the distribution of revenue generated at the site. As expressed by Charumbira (pers. com 2015), the current system of directing gate takings into government coffers is seen as unjust, with community members proposing that such funds should instead support local development projects. These grievances highlight the economic dimension of heritage and the need to embed local empowerment and equity mechanisms in any proposed hybrid model.

The research also reveals significant challenges to implementing a purely traditional model. Chief among these is the contested nature of Great Zimbabwe's ownership, with multiple communities laying claim to the site, creating tensions and

complicating consensus-building. This was clearly reflected in the statement by Nemerai (pers. com 2015), who questioned the feasibility of community-led management due to the absence of a unified administrative structure and a potential lack of technical expertise. This complexity underlines the importance of designing a context-specific hybrid system, one that respects traditional authority and sacred knowledge while leveraging the technical and scientific expertise of National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe. A practical step towards hybrid governance has already been taken through the formation of the Local Community Management Committee in 2010, composed of representatives from the three main communities and NMMZ. The committee was envisioned as a platform for dialogue and co-management, yet evidence suggests that its impact has been limited. As Mushayi (pers. com, 2015) from the Nemanwa clan lamented,

"What is usually discussed in these meetings are minor issues like firewood and cattle grazing. Matters concerning our inclusion in the actual management of our heritage site are not discussed".

This quote demonstrates a disconnect between formal consultation mechanisms and substantive participation, suggesting that tokenistic engagement continues to undermine trust and shared responsibility. Moreover, respondents from NMMZ acknowledged the limitations of the committee, particularly its lack of representativeness given the estimated 20,000 community members in the surrounding areas (Sagiya, pers. com 2015). This highlights a need for more inclusive and scaled-up structures of engagement.

The research also showed that community participation must be grounded in law and supported by capacity-building. While community stakeholders expressed readiness to be involved, heritage professionals cautioned that traditional custodians may lack the legal authority and professional training to manage a site of such international importance. Chief Mugabe (pers. com 2015) noted that "communities are on the receiving end because they lack education on heritage management and legal authority to manage the site." Therefore, any proposed hybrid model must integrate training programmes, legal reforms, and sustained

capacity development, as also recommended in heritage policy frameworks (UNESCO 2003; Convention on Intangible Heritage, Article 11b).

In comparative terms, examples such as the Kasubi Tombs in Uganda, the Kaya Forests in Kenya, and the Osogbo Sacred Grove in Nigeria demonstrate that hybrid systems can be successful when built upon strong local custodianship supported by formal heritage agencies (Ndoro & Chirikure, 2009; Munjeri, 2002). These case studies provide valuable insights into how myths, taboos, and local systems of control can coexist with international conservation practices. Nevertheless, Great Zimbabwe presents a unique challenge due to its multi-community claims and contested sacredness, making a "one-size-fits-all" model unworkable (Sagiya, pers. com 2015).

The research therefore stresses that a hybrid management model is not only necessary but inevitable. It offers the most pragmatic solution for balancing sacredness and heritage aesthetics, while fostering a collaborative relationship between NMMZ and local communities. However, such a model must be carefully tailored to the cultural and political realities of the site. It should include clear protocols for decision-making, benefit-sharing, ritual access, and conflict resolution, and should be embedded within the legal framework of the NMMZ Act (25/11 of 1972).

In sum, the voices captured in this study clearly call for a recalibration of heritage governance at Great Zimbabwe. Communities do not want to be mere "stakeholders," but recognized as custodians and owners of the heritage. The current model has created imbalances in power, access, and benefit, which can only be resolved through the intentional co-creation of a hybrid system that honors both the spiritual and scientific significance of the site. This would mark a significant step forward in decolonizing heritage management and ensuring justice and sustainability in African heritage practices.

1.8 Recommendations and Conclusion: Towards an Ideal Hybrid Management Mechanism for Great Zimbabwe

This study has demonstrated that the most viable and contextually appropriate management mechanism for the Great Zimbabwe World Heritage Site is a hybrid model that blends traditional and scientific systems. This approach responds directly to the historical, spiritual, and social complexity of the site, which is both a cultural landscape imbued with deep spiritual meaning and an internationally recognized heritage monument requiring professional conservation. A hybrid system presents an inclusive framework that can honour sacred traditions while also ensuring scientific preservation, thus addressing both local and global expectations of heritage management.

There is a clear need for the formal recognition of traditional leadership structures in the heritage governance framework. Traditional leaders among them chiefs, elders, and spirit mediums should be entrusted with the stewardship of sacred zones within the site, particularly areas like the Hill Complex, which are central to local cosmology and ritual. Practices such as the removal of shoes before entering sacred spaces, a gesture of reverence deeply rooted in Shona culture, must be upheld and codified into visitor protocols. This mirrors similar respect-based traditions at heritage sites like the Taj Mahal, where spiritual values are embedded in tourist behavior. Such measures would legitimize and reinforce local beliefs and rituals, while also enhancing the site's cultural authenticity.

At the same time, the existing Local Community Management Committee, established in 2010, should be expanded and better resourced to become a truly representative body. This committee must go beyond discussing minor issues such as firewood collection and grazing, and be actively involved in broader heritage governance matters, including conservation priorities, benefit-sharing, and cultural programming. To support this, a dedicated Community Engagement Unit should be created within NMMZ, staffed by professionals with both heritage training and cultural sensitivity to manage the complex dynamics between state actors and local communities.

The success of a hybrid system also depends on investing in capacity building. Communities should be equipped with knowledge and skills in conservation, documentation, interpretation, and legal literacy to enable them to play a meaningful role in site management. Additionally, the legal framework governing heritage, especially the NMMZ Act (25/11 of 1972), must be revised to formally accommodate and support community co-management. This legal recognition would bridge the current power gap between communities and the heritage agency, allowing for more balanced negotiation and shared authority.

Crucially, a zoning model should be applied to Great Zimbabwe. This would involve designating certain areas particularly ritual and spiritual zones for management by traditional authorities, while other parts, such as visitor infrastructure and archaeological features, remain under NMMZ's scientific oversight. This spatial separation allows both systems to function effectively without undermining each other, and facilitates a practical application of the hybrid model.

Another important consideration is economic inclusion. The current arrangement, in which revenues from gate takings are directed to the central government, has been a source of contention. Local communities have expressed a strong desire for these funds to be reinvested in community development projects, including education, infrastructure, and youth employment. Embedding a revenue-sharing mechanism into the hybrid model would not only incentivize community participation, but also restore a sense of ownership and justice.

Given the contested nature of Great Zimbabwe among the Charumbira, Nemanwa, and Mugabe communities, any hybrid model must also include conflict resolution mechanisms. These mechanisms, possibly overseen by an independent heritage mediation board or facilitated through NMMZ, would ensure transparency in decision-making and help manage competing claims in a fair and constructive manner.

In conclusion, the hybrid management model presents the most suitable and context-sensitive option for the future of Great Zimbabwe. It acknowledges that the

site cannot be managed through a single lens neither purely traditional nor wholly scientific. Rather, it must be co-governed by those who hold ancestral, cultural, and spiritual ties to the land, as well as those with the professional and technical expertise to preserve its physical fabric. Such an approach not only meets the ethical imperatives of community participation and cultural rights, as outlined in international conventions, but also strengthens the sustainability and legitimacy of heritage management practices. By embracing a hybrid system, Zimbabwe has the opportunity to redefine heritage governance in a way that is rooted in local realities while remaining responsive to global conservation standards. Great Zimbabwe, long emblematic of African achievement and resilience, can thus become a leading example of decolonized and community-centered heritage management, ensuring its preservation for future generations not just as a monument, but as a living cultural landscape.

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