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Student Presentation

Integrating Rock Art Heritage Conservation with Eco-Tourism

Promotion: The Case of Iringa Region, Tanzania

Introduction

The rock art of the Iringa region in southern Tanzania is primarily prehistoric, painted in monochrome fashion and often displayed in Precambrian rock shelters and overhangs. Based on predominating color types, subject matters, and artistic style, two broad rock art traditions are recognized: The “Hunter-Forager” and “Bantu-language-speaker”, or “Late White”, styles. Most of the paintings of Iringa share some artistic traditions, such as stylistic motifs, techniques of execution, subject matter, and colour, with the rock art of Central and Southern Africa. The methodological approaches towards rock art classification, analysis, and interpretation has historically followed traditional systems that focus on stylistic motif placement and pigment overlay analysis. However, the methodologies that have been applied to rock art studies do not offer any scientific link between the painted animal figures, the environment, and prehistoric peoples’ dietary sources for the late Pleistocene.

Our ongoing research project in the area calls for the application of the new analytical techniques such as “phytolith analysis” study within the Zambezan ecoregion where rock art is common. This approach will allow us to discern meaningful assertions about human dietary behaviours and adaptation to the changing climate and environments of Central and Southern Africa during the late Pleistocene. It is for this reason that rock art should be considered as an important source of scientific information for human-environmental interactions, especially when emerging analytical methods in archaeology like phytolith, starch, chemical profiling, and geochemical fingerprinting analyses allow for higher resolution in studying rock shelter painted subject matters. By utilising these new methods, we shall be able to discuss and suggest ways in which archaeo-tourism could be linked with eco-tourism to boost overall cultural tourism in southern Tanzania. Recent investigations on Iringa’s cultural heritage assets raised a need to promote these cultural heritage resources by using eco-tourism as the vehicle of promotion.

Presently, the main problem is that there is no integration between researchers, stakeholders, government, and tourists in tourism practices. The responsible tourism authorities are interested in quantity and influx of tourists, with no efforts to increase the number of the days the tourists should stay in the country. The integration of both local people and foreign tourists in tourism, conservation and management of Iringa's heritage assets will make tourism a sustainable endeavour in the southern circuit. This will raise awareness that, apart from visiting the national parks; it is also possible to do mountain hikes at Udzungwa National Park and see rock paintings at a height of more than 1200m above sea level. Moreover, within Ruaha National park they can visit rock paintings at Nyanywa outcrops and at Kihesakilolo (Igeleke) on their way back. This will promote sustainable heritage management through tourism in the umbrella of both eco-tourism and cultural tourism. How this can be achieved will be addressed throughout this paper.

Linking eco-tourism with rock painting sites in Iringa

The Iringa region is among the most plentiful regions in Tanzania in terms of both natural and cultural heritage resources. Archaeologically, the area is renowned for the Early Stone Age sites (Acheulean site), at Isimila, and Middle Stone Age sites, at Magubike and Mlambalasi. Recently, rock shelters with prehistoric rock paintings have been documented in various sites such as Kihessakilolo, Ikula and Lutona. Also, the region has the largest National Park in Tanzania, Ruaha National Park; home to the largest population of elephants in any park in Africa. Other national parks in Iringa are the Mikumi and Udzungwa Mountains. These parks are the backbone of eco-tourism and they are all either encompassed, surrounded by or found along the Precambrian rock outcrops, which makes the landscape beautiful for both eco-tourism and cultural tourism.

Previous studies conducted in this area did not consider linking these compelling rock shelters, containing prehistoric art, with tourism activities that are taking place within the region. This paper suggests appropriate ways in which archaeo-tourism could be linked with eco-tourism, to boost cultural tourism. Presently in Iringa, research initiatives are dedicated to promoting these heritage resources under the umbrella eco-tourism. However, the main problem is that there is no integration between researchers, stakeholders, cultural and tourism officers, and tourists in the sustainable management of these assets. Since 2008, several heritage management promotion campaigns have been launched where the local people were fully involved.

On top of that, several brochures of rock art pictures have been produced, which will be placed in all National Parks main offices and in the nearby museums of Kalenga and Isimila. This could bring public attention and encourage tourists to visit, especially those who visited the parks without knowing that they can also do mountain hikes at Udzungwa National Park and see rock paintings at a height of more than 1200m above sea level.



Plate 1: Hunter-foragers art at Kihessakilolo (Igeleke rock shelter)



Plate 2: White Bantu-Speaker's art in Ikula village (at Tavimienda rock shelter)

Administrative challenges in management of rock art and their potential for sustainable conservation

For sustainable heritage management, researchers and stakeholders in heritage management should develop a common agenda of sustainable heritage management, which incorporates strategies for documentation, interpretation, legalization, and amendment of the current heritage legislation, as well as policies to fully involve more stakeholders, such as the local government authorities, education institutes, local communities and tourism practitioners. In the same vein, the public, conservators, and managers who deal with cultural-environmental and social factors in tourism are expected to jointly

establish the “Iringa Heritage Management Plan” for sustainable conservation, management and environmental protection. The proposed heritage management plan will benefit the Iringa region holistically and provide an integrated approach to archaeological resource identification and protection especially in helping the policy makers in the country. The integrated conservation strategies will advocate and advise on a clear direction or development proponents, cultural and natural heritage promotion strategies, and sustainable administration of heritage assets of this region (Itambu, 2015; Itambu 2016; Itambu and Hongoa 2016).

This paper is a wake-up call for the Iringa region authorities, locals, and the stakeholders that would encourage them to form heritage committees to preside over the conservation and protection of archaeological resources, natural landscapes, and their environments in general. Tourism and conservation activities will benefit the host community and the nation as well. The Iringa region contains substantial cultural and natural attractions, yet its contribution in regards to tourism activities in Tanzania is totally unrecognized and not acknowledged by the government authorities. Despite the beautiful natural landscapes, national parks, many Stone Age sites, and rock paintings, the region’s potential has not yet been recognised (see also Itambu and Hongoa 2016; Bushozi 2014; Mabulla 2005).

The proposed Iringa management plan will provide the cultural officers, tourist guides, stakeholders, and tourism officers in Iringa region with an effective tool for heritage site survey, identification, and conservation, which will eventually be used by Iringa municipal cultural officers for screening sustainable conservation approaches. This will ensure archaeological resources are assessed, identified and protected by village authorities, as they are the everyday custodians and stewards of the archaeological sites (Itambu 2015; 2016). Tourism promotion and outreach campaigns should be launched in Southern Tanzania highlands to offer protection that will enhance natural and cultural heritage preservation.

Further, heritage and tourism promotion campaigns will educate the local people in the development of a procedural framework for efficient land-use decision making that will ensure proper environmental management and protection. These endeavours will require frequent heritage management; promotion campaigns in Iringa. Linking the villages, wards, districts, and their municipalities in strategic initiatives, such as natural & cultural assets surveying and mapping, heritage management, documentation, and conservation plans, will raise awareness in heritage management and sustainability (Itambu 2015; 2016). This will help the responsible authorities to develop local policies, procedures and protocols for

development, and further help to identify appropriate conservation strategies early in the planning process.

Even though the archaeological sites in this locality are highly vandalized by the treasure hunters, some of the sites are suitable for archaeo-tourism and public display. The Kihessakilolo rock shelter has some well-preserved rock paintings that are invaluable assets of the country. This heritage needs to be publicized, promoted, and protected for sustainable utilization. If these heritage assets are properly managed, they have the potential to enhance and influence touristic activities in the Iringa region for many decades to come (Itambu 2013, Itambu and Bushozi 2015). Some of the rock art sites are in excellent preservation conditions, despite the numerous natural elements of deterioration. Vandalism is by far the most destructive threat as evidenced by the big trenches that were dug under the rock shelters by treasure hunters.



Plate 3: Vandalism of rock paintings at Lutona rock shelter in Magubike village (Graffiti on paintings).

This is a national problem; governmental authorities have done nothing to combat vandalism on heritage sites in Tanzania. This vandalism has continued unchecked and the sites' preservation conditions are worsening continuously. The reason for the vandalism is a persistent, and infamous, myth in Tanzania, which suggests that the colonialists buried treasure near these paintings, supposedly including German coins and gold. The myth spread so extensively in Tanzania that almost every painted rock shelter now has its floor excavated. This has negatively affected archaeological deposits. In greed and cupidity for immediate wealth, the treasure hunters set big fires on the base of the shelters or use dynamites to crack or exfoliate the bedrock, and, thus, easily excavate the shelters (Itambu and Hongoa 2016). Most of the paintings are faded because of the soot from those fires.

The myth that Germans hid their *rupees* (coins) and other precious gems in those sites spread the belief that the paintings were markings executed by the Germans, during and after the First World War, as identification symbols, landmarks, and/ or guide beacons to relocate their treasures (Itambu 2013, Itambu and Bushozi 2015).

Conclusion

In Tanzania, most of the government institutions responsible for cultural heritage management believe that local people, religious institutions, and their respective leaders have no role to play in the sustainable heritage management. A lack of heritage conservation education in most parts of Tanzania, including the Iringa region, has left many locals misinformed about their heritage. For example, many local people maintain a belief that rock paintings are signs left by German colonialists.

With an increasingly educated elite in Iringa, as well as modernization of socio-economic subsistence, and other means of livelihoods, we need to balance “Modernization pressures of the globalized community vs heritage resources conservation” (Itambu 2015). It is imperative that we should make deliberate efforts to protect the rock art of Iringa and Tanzania in general, from being lost (Itambu 2013; Itambu and Bushozi 2015). These factors must be managed and balanced, specifically by cultural and tourism managers in the region to offer rights and participation of local communities. The threat of vandalism requires serious mitigation measures; otherwise most of the paintings will disappear. It is advised that surveillance to be conducted in conjunction with the above recommendations. This would constitute the initial phase in the proper management of the archaeological resources in Iringa and its adjoining regions. Impacts on heritage resources can vary considerably from partial disturbance to destruction of heritage resources (Itambu and Hongoa 2016). All projects or activities will require an archaeological review to assess the level of threat to an archaeological resource and to determine the degree of mitigation, if any, required to remove or limit the effects of the threats (Bushozi 2014, Itambu 2015).

Many management and conservation efforts in Tanzania have been directed to the national parks, game reserves, built monuments, ruins, and other areas with wild games, but ecologically and geologically spectacular areas like Iringa have been completely neglected by the responsible authorities i.e. the Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism of Tanzania. If they are properly advertised, the national parks with rock art sites of Iringa can be of an outstanding contribution to the tourism industry.

Therefore, it is crucial to advocate for integrating archaeological sites e.g. rock painting sites and national parks for tourism endeavours in Iringa region.

Future directions

Currently, we have decided to expand the research avenue to study rock art sites and the surrounding landscapes of the region and more importantly our scientific research focuses on the stylistic connections between the rock art of the Iringa region in southern Tanzania and those in adjacent countries along the montane and sub-montane rims that link the moist woodlands from Kenya to Zimbabwe. Iringa's art features are shared with those seen at many other loci across Central and Southern Africa. Yet, there has been no attempt to explore the environmental value of style across this natural region. We are trying to investigate the available phytolith dataset for this region and overlay this information on to rock art along the montane Zambezian ecotone. Different rock art traditions in the region could have manifested themselves under different paleoenvironments, especially the White Bantu-Speakers rock art that was made by farmers which seems to be mostly depicted in geometric designs. Also, could suggest differences in choice of habitats, differences in resources exploitation and the subsistence mode (Itambu 2013).

Different art traditions can provide information about the changing climate and environments of Eastern, Central and Southern Africa during the Holocene epoch. Available environmental information from lake cores, caves and open air sites illustrate the prevailing ecosystems and climates since the late Pleistocene. Several environmental proxies also speak to the distribution of ecological resources over the landscape. This will shed lights to the understanding of the past environments in relation to the present day environmental settings, especially those ones which contains rock art and national parks.

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