


# Heritage sites as tourism attractions: Spiritual, psychological and emotional toll on communities

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The study, conducted within the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape (MCL), had two aims: (1) to establish the reasons why domestic tourists, in particular descendants, do not view World Heritage Sites as tourism attractions and (2) to advocate for the importance of engaging the descendants at a spiritual, psychological and emotional level. It adopted a qualitative method, whereby observations and interviews were conducted with traditional leaders of the six groups of the Mapungubwe descendants. Purposive sampling, also known as judgemental, selective or subjective sampling, was applied in the form of in-depth interviews and a group discussion with each leader of the six descendant groups. Only one group opted for a group discussion rather than an individual interview with their leader because they wanted a representation of their Tribal Council members since their Chief had passed away and their new leader was yet to be inaugurated. The study established that (1) descendants do not view MCL as a tourist attraction but rather as a solemn place where their ancestors are laid to rest and (2) descendants are in pain because they lost the land of their forefathers, which was demarcated into farms by the colonial government before being declared as protected areas. The stated findings suggest that losing their forefathers' land led to a sense of loss and disconnection from their cultural and spiritual heritage.

**Keywords:** attractions; culture; custodians; descendants; heritage; local communities; Mapungubwe World Heritage Site; tourism.

## Introduction

The words of a traditional leader and descendant of Mapungubwe's Indigenous people:

'We must understand Mapungubwe as a cultural landscape, and that there were people who lived there. They worshiped ancestors and performed rituals. Due to the forceful removal of our forefathers by the whites from our land and later demarcated it into farms, we lost the sense of touch and sense of being. The connection between us the descendant's communities, the shrine including the hill and the site itself has been lost. So today as we speak, some people just go there as they wish but for us is different. We as the descendants of Mapungubwe will never go there without performing our rituals to appease the ancestors. We do that because we know what it means to us.' (Traditional leader, Mapungubwe descendant leader, Indigenous community member)

Following isolation during the Apartheid era, South Africa re-joined the United Nations in 1994. This enabled the country to ratify the 1972 World Heritage Convention treaty – which was later domesticated as the *World Heritage Act* in 1999. Such ratification allowed South Africa to submit nominations for World Heritage Sites (WHSs). The country now has 12 declared WHSs, composed of cultural, natural and mixed sites that are primarily protecting the heritage inherited from past generations, while being enjoyed by the present generation, and preserved for the next generation (see Table 1). The last two WHSs from South Africa were added in 2024, during the World Heritage Committee meeting held in India. These are (1) The Emergence of Modern Humans (the Pleistocene occupation sites of South Africa – a serial nomination composed of Blombos Cave, Diepkloof, Klasies River, Pinnacle Point, and Sibudu Cave) and (2) Human Rights, Liberation Struggle and Reconciliation (Nelson Mandela Legacy Sites). Both these were serial nominations.

Among these 12 sites is Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape (MCL) in the Limpopo Province. Six traditional communities have collectively claimed descendance from the ancestors who lived at the Mapungubwe hill and its surroundings. These are the Vhangona Cultural Movement, the Tshivhula Royal Family, the Lesheba Royal Family, the Machete Royal Council, the Lemba

**Note:** Special Collection: Celebrating Cultural Heritage within National Parks.

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Cultural Association and the Sematla people. They all regard themselves as heirs of the land from where their forefathers were displaced because of established racialised policies of the colonial government. As a result of forced removals, the MCL has been subjected to land claims, even though only one has been settled. However, Sebola (2022) argues that the country's proclamation of MCL as a National Heritage Site and the publicity accorded to the wisdom of the pioneers of African civilisation in Mapungubwe graves resulted in

numerous South African societies claiming the graves as their ancestors'. The Sematla people have settled at Den Staat, 17 km away from the main entrance to the park, following a successful land claim. For the other descendants, their place of current residence is relatively far away from MCL (Figure 1), but they are still regarded as stakeholders because of the history that attaches them to the site, claiming the site as the land of their forefathers. DNA testing is perceived as the only method that can resolve the legitimacy of the claims about the Mapungubwe WHSs (see Sebola 2022:1744). The rest of the descendants presently resides in the following places:

**TABLE 1:** The 10 South African World Heritage Sites.

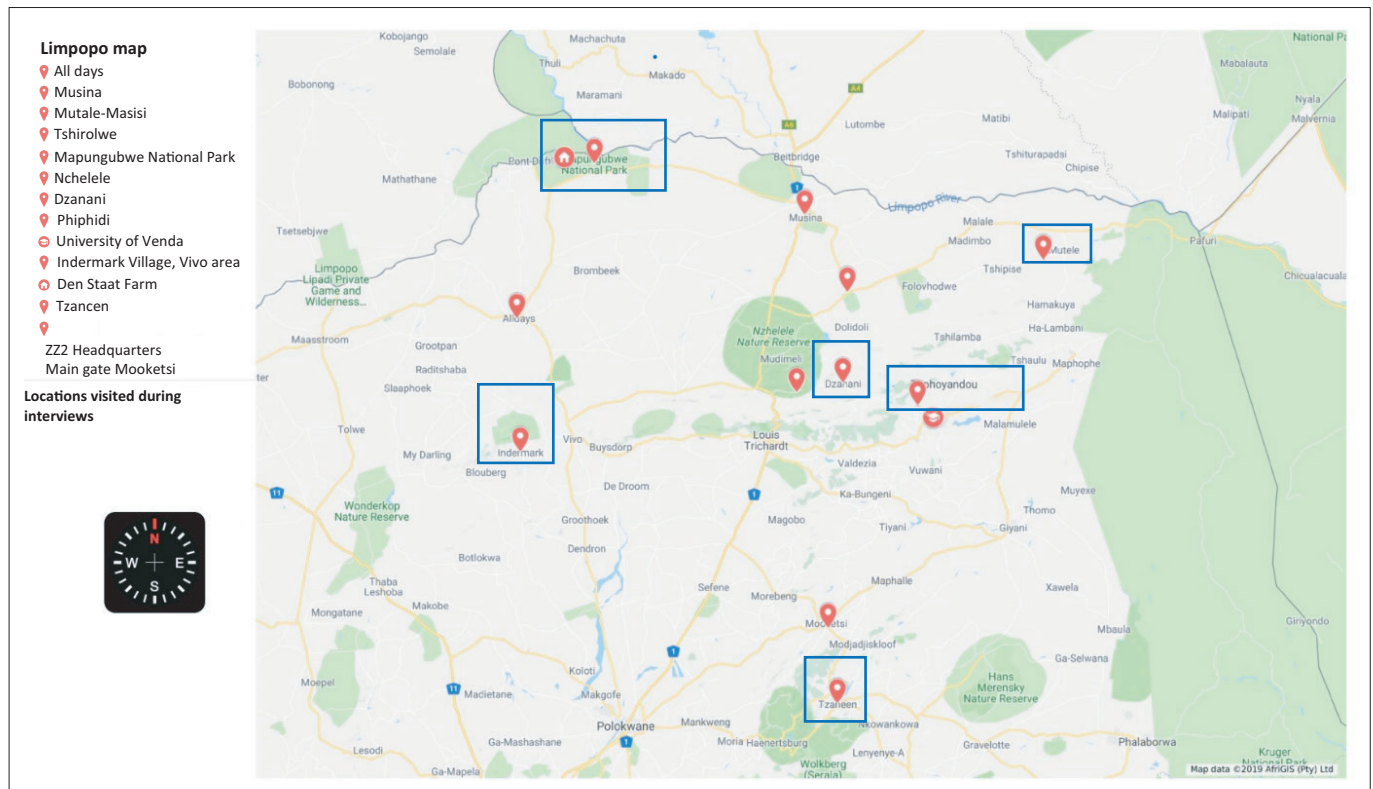
Name of the WHS	Year of inscription	Site type
Barberton Makhonjwa Mountains (Mpumalanga)	2018	Natural
ǀKhomani Cultural Landscape (Northern Cape)	2017	Cultural
Maloti-Drakensberg Park (KwaZulu-Natal and Lesotho)	2007	Natural and cultural
Richtersveld Cultural and Botanical Landscape (Northern Cape)	2007	Cultural
Vredefort Dome (Free State and North-West)	2005	Natural
Cape Floral Region Protected Areas (Eastern Cape and Western Cape)	2004	Natural
Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape (Limpopo)	2003	Cultural
Fossil Hominid Sites of South Africa (Gauteng, Limpopo, and North-West)	1999	Cultural
iSimangaliso Wetland Park (KwaZulu-Natal)	1999	Natural
Robben Island (Western Cape)	1999	Cultural
The Emergence of Modern Humans: The Pleistocene occupation sites of South Africa (KwaZulu-Natal and Western Cape)	2024	Cultural
Human Rights, Liberation Struggle and Reconciliation: Nelson Mandela Legacy Sites (Eastern Cape, Free State, Gauteng, and KwaZulu-Natal)	2024	Cultural

Source: UNESCO and World Heritage Convention, 2023, *State parties – South Africa*, viewed n.d., from <https://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/za> WHS, World Heritage Site.

- The Vhangona Cultural Movement: Mutale Village (Thohoyandou area).
- The Machete Royal Council: Andermark farm (All Days & Vivo area).
- The Tshivhula Royal Council: Chirolwe (Ndzhelele area).
- The Lesheba Royal family: Dzanani (Ndzhelele area).
- The Lemba Cultural Association (The Black Jews): Phiphidi (Thohoyandou area) and Tzaneen.

## Description of Mapungubwe

Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape is an open and expansive savannah landscape at the confluence of the Limpopo and Shashe rivers in South Africa, which serve to mark the border distinction between South Africa, Botswana and Zimbabwe. The hill itself lies southeast of the confluence, where the three countries (South Africa, Botswana and Zimbabwe) meet. Mapungubwe Hill (Figure 2) was inscribed into the World Heritage list in 2003 (see Claessens 2015 and Sinthumule



Source: Shabalala, L.P., 2022, 'Perspective of Mapungubwe descendants' traditional leaders concerning their traditional values and cultural heritage preservation', in *Cultural Sustainable Tourism*, pp. 123–134, Springer International Publishing, Cham

**FIGURE 1:** Current locations where the descendant communities are residing.



Source: Claessens, B., 2015, *The Mapungubwe golden rhinoceros. African art – Research*, viewed 05 April 2023, from <http://brunoclaessens.com/2015/12/the-mapungubwe-golden-rhinoceros/#.ZC28Q3ZbzIV>

**FIGURE 2:** The Mapungubwe Hill that was central in the inscription of the landscape as a World Heritage Site.

2015), illustrating its cultural significance in the history of southern Africa (see Sinthumule 2015).

The Mapungubwe Hill has become the major area of focus within this landscape, for it is where the elite resided, while Huffmann (2005:1) describes it as ‘a small flat-topped sandstone hill on a farm called Greefswald’. Scholars are of the view that Mapungubwe is the first state in southern Africa, challenging the notion that civilisation and social stratification were brought from outside the continent during colonisation. It became a major thriving international trading centre but was later abandoned. Mapungubwe is also considered to be the largest and most complex society that existed in sub-Saharan Africa during its time before it was abandoned in about 1300 AD (Calabrese 2000; Chirikure et al. 2010; Schoeman et al. 2011; Chirikure et al. 2013) argued that class distinction legitimised the ideology of sacred leadership – as sacred to the great ones among their ancestors had buried secret treasures there Huffman (2000:14–15, 21).

It has been argued by Du Cros and McKercher (2020) that inscription is used by site managers and destination marketers as a competitive tool to attract visitors and safeguard the long-term integrity of the site. According to Koufodontis and Gaki (2022), designation as a WHS has the power to attract tourists with interest in culture and enhances the experience for all tourists visiting the destination regardless of their visit motives. To capitalise on the WHS status, the management of Mapungubwe National Park offers several options for tourists to immerse themselves on the cultural significance of the area. Among others, tourists can book (1) a heritage tour to Mapungubwe Hill, (2) game drives, (3) a tour to rock art sites or (4) self-driven tours to destinations of interest within the park (i.e. confluence, Interpretation Centre, etc.).

Chauma and Ngwira (2022) have emphasised the importance of involving the local community and enhancing their economic benefits from tourism. They have claimed that there is a research deficit with regard to understanding the perceptions of local communities relating to the impact of



Source: Claessens, B., 2015, *The Mapungubwe golden rhinoceros. African art – Research*, viewed 05 April 2023, from <http://brunoclaessens.com/2015/12/the-mapungubwe-golden-rhinoceros/#.ZC28Q3ZbzIV>

**FIGURE 3:** The golden rhino that was excavated from a grave at the top of Mapungubwe Hill where the elite are thought to have lived.

inscription – an aspect addressed by research presented in this paper. It cannot be disputed that an inscription can have positive and negative effects for the communities living nearby. For instance, the site and the area of its location could gain national and international exposure that can potentially accelerate socio-economic development. On the other hand, excessive tourism could occur, causing damage to the site, thus affecting its integrity. Mapungubwe Hill, where the golden rhino (Figure 3) and other artefacts were excavated, is the main tourism destination within the Mapungubwe National Park. Some royal graves were discovered and unearthed from the hill but were later reburied following a public outcry.

The Mapungubwe graves were discovered and excavated in the 1930s, whereby three of the possibly 27 graves found on the hill were associated with gold (Steyn 2007:140). The valuable artefacts excavated from the graves in the Mapungubwe Hill were used to distinguish how the space was occupied and the practiced tradition. Among such artefacts are the golden rhino, gold collections and clay pots. The golden rhino (Figure 3) was excavated in 1933 from one of the royal graves on Mapungubwe Hill. These graves were excavated without any consent from the descendants and curated for many years at various institutions, until they were reburied in 2007 (Nienaber et al. 2008:164; see also Meskell 2011; Shabalala 2022).

## Contextualising the significance of World Heritage Sites

According to Maksimović and Čosović (2019), heritage and culture form part of an essential being for any nation, as it is known to represent its values and traditions. Heritage and cultural sites have become locations of interest to tourists, providing insights about certain traditions of the population responsible for their existence. The tourism sector is thus perceived to be the most powerful economic, social, cultural, ecological and political force in the world today (see

Dolezal & Novelli 2022; Hosseini, Stefaniec & Hosseini 2021; Murphy & Price 2005; Timothy 2006; Timothy & Boyd 2006). Van Der Merwe (2016) advocated for cultural and heritage tourism as an important niche within the South African economy. Tourism is also portrayed as crucial to the commercial strength of a community.

The tourism industry generally makes a significant contribution in the economic development of various countries around the world (Mkono 2019; Yang, Lin & Han 2010). It is an industry based on many different factors, such as the desire to travel to 'foreign' areas, thus having an opportunity to learn about other societies, understanding why they behave in certain ways, learning about their historical and cultural practices, customs or even partaking in some cultural activities (Nyawo & Mashau 2019). A significant number of tourists are attracted to their destinations through marketing, with the inscription as a WHS being one of the values used to increase visitor numbers.

South Africa is a destination of choice for approximately 15 million visitors annually and the government views tourism as an important niche market within the South African economy (Department of Tourism Republic of South Africa 2022). Tourism products range from beautiful landscapes, beaches and sites of historical and cultural significance, some of which have been inscribed as WHSs. Ndoro (2015) has argued that despite the rapid growth in global tourism in most African countries, local communities seem to not benefit from this sector. This has, therefore, limited the participation of these communities in the booming tourist market. It is within this context that we need to have a holistic understanding of how local communities engage with and view WHSs. South Africa has 12 WHSs inscribed because of their perceived significance.

According to Hosseini et al. (2021), the WHS brand positively impacts the tourism demand in developing countries and can be used as a promotional tool. Van Der Merwe (2016) argued that for South Africa to fully reap the benefits of WHSs, there is a need to improve the governance of heritage assets as well as their marketing.

World Heritage Sites have become major tourist attractions for many nations. The inscription by UNESCO thus makes tourism destinations increasingly visible in the international tourist market. For example, in Europe, there is an immense interest in WHSs, not only for international tourists but also for the domestic market. However, this trend is not evident in South Africa, with international tourists being the majority of those who visit these destinations. It is a reality that having fewer visitors translate to lower revenue for the sites – a factor that negatively impacts on the long-term sustainability. Anderson and Moipolai (2023) highlighted significant lessons acquired during the COVID-19 pandemic. The lockdown measures that were implemented by different countries meant that we had almost no international tourists travelling to the country. Such revealed the importance of domestic tourists, a phenomenon that increased during the pandemic.

Having more international tourists than local ones means that the possibility of increasing visitor numbers becomes limited.

Mapungubwe WHS is one of the sites that have a lower number of domestic tourists. Broadly, there is a critical need to investigate the extent to which domestic tourists visit WHSs in the country, compared to their international counterparts (Boswell et al. 2011:362; Duval & Smith 2014). What is also more prevalent is that there is a racial bias in that most of the people who are travelling locally are mostly white. Rather than visiting WHSs within their area for leisure, local communities act as service providers to tourists without being meaningful participants in the tourism sector as tourists. They also generally do not get involved in decision-making processes about the management of these sites.

According to Nzama (2008), most tourists travelling to iSimangaliso Wetland Park stop along the road to purchase art, crafts and other products (see Ndlovu 2016). Besides interacting with local communities through purchasing various materials, tourists can also visit a cultural village and family homes near iSimangaliso Wetland Park that can accommodate travellers who seek an up-close and personal experience with local communities (see Magi & Nzama 2009:94). These businesses have, however, not proved to be sustainable because of not attracting enough visitors for them to yield a healthy profit (see Ndlovu 2016; Rogerson & Van Der Merwe 2016).

In a study among the Nompondo community, a rural area adjacent to Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park (HiP), Nsukwini and Bob (2016) found that while the community is benefitting from tourism, this does not meet their expectation. The source of their benefits is also in the form of selling crafts and performing cultural activities for the tourists. However, there remains the need to improve benefaction given the high levels of poverty and unemployment rates in Nompondo (Nsukwini & Bob 2016:1; see Jimura 2011). It could be argued, therefore, that local communities have a negative view regarding WHSs because of the failure of the tourism sector to improve their lives. Consequently, not having a buy-in from the local communities could easily influence how they perceive the site and their willingness to visit or view it as a tourist attraction. Even when they have been employed at these WHSs, they usually get enlisted as unskilled or low-skilled labourers. It is highly uncommon for them to be employed as senior managers.

There are many potential impediments that are behind this scenario of having a much lower number of domestic tourists. Makhola and Proches (2017) flagged accommodation pricing and transportation as potential challenges for domestic tourists, which can be associated with lower affordability, particularly in the context of high levels of unemployment. Some visitors have often complained about overcrowding and highly expensive services compared to other historic sites (Poria, Reichel & Cohen 2013). In addition,

because of the attachment of spiritual significance to WHSs, as is the case with some areas within uKhahlamba Drakensberg, locals are inhibited from accessing these sites as a result of various legislative impediments (see Ndlovu 2009). The same disturbing trend was reported by Nsukwini and Bob (2016:9), who discovered that communities are unable to access HiP to practise cultural rituals but are allowed access for social reasons. Yet, accessibility is one of the important rights enshrined in Section 31(1) of the Bill of Rights. Therefore, communities or groups who affiliate themselves with a specific cultural, religious and linguistic community cannot be denied their right to follow their belief systems. Mbaiwa (2011) noted that some of the local communities have often argued against what they perceive to be a commodification of culture for touristic purposes. Commodification is understood as process to transform something into a product for commercial purposes, which can be bought or sold in the market (see Levesque 2015). On that note, Mokgachane, Basupi and Lenao (2021:153) argued that cultural commodification is a 'concept used to denote a process where aspects of a particular culture are packaged and availed for tourists to purchase'. It could be argued, therefore, that any form of commodification changes the meaning of cultural products and human relations, making them meaningless to the locals or the custodian of that particular culture (Mbaiwa 2016:103). For instance, findings by Mokgachane et al. (2021) observed changes in iKalanga music after commodification of the music and noted a significant bearing on the authenticity of the music. Therefore, the authors suggested a need for communities to tread carefully in their endeavour to commodify traditional music to avoid a complete loss of the music's authenticity.

Overall, it can be argued that an inscription of WHSs can bring about positive and negative changes for the communities residing within and closer to the attraction. A World Heritage status increases the value of a tourist site and is a marker of the authenticity of the site in terms of its cultural and natural heritage (Gumede & Ezeuduji 2021). It is understood that the inscription is a testimony to the universal recognition of such sites as an important source of tourism affluence (Arezki et al. 2009: 4), helping to increase visitor numbers. Such sites of universal significance give pride among the region's residents (Jimura 2011; see Bui et al. 2020:1022). Some scholars have argued that cultural heritage tourism (CHT) has the potential to enhance the quality of life of local communities through job creation (Chauhan 2022; McKercher 2002).

While the inscription into the list of WHSs has generally been positively considered, some studies have challenged this viewpoint. According to Landorf (2009a), world heritage status is not always directly linked to guaranteed growth in tourism. Maksimovic et al. (2019) agreed with this viewpoint held by Landorf (2009a) based on a study conducted at the Serbian enclave Sirinicka Zupa in Kosovo and Metohija. The findings confirmed that cultural heritage sites can contribute towards economic growth provided that good policies and preservation plans are properly implemented to ensure the

preservation of immovable cultural heritage assets (see Shabalala 2020).

Managing tourism activities in a sustainable manner is highly significant (Landorf 2009b:53). According to Goodwin (2002), inappropriate tourism development projects can potentially leave local communities much poorer, resulting in them losing access to water or land because of gentrification. This generally leads to the creation of tourist enclaves and social pollution. Given the fact that a majority of WHSs in South Africa are in rural areas, whose residents are largely poor, the use of cultural tourism towards sustainable community development becomes relevant and practical. It is thus important that those managing WHSs consider the voices of local communities when developing management plans and implementation strategies.

## Undertaking the study

The aim of this study was to establish the reasons why domestic tourists, in particular local communities, do not view WHSs as tourism attractions. The study further advocated for the importance of engaging the descendants at a spiritual, psychological and emotional level. To achieve these stated aims, the study adopted purposive sampling, also known as judgemental, selective or subjective sampling. It is a form of sampling used by researchers to rely on their own judgement when choosing representatives of the population to participate in their study. The sample is selected based on the characteristics of the population and the objective of the study. For the purpose of this study, the focus was representatives from the six groups that form the Mapungubwe Descendants Forum.

The qualitative method applied in the study combined structured and open-ended interviews, as well as a group discussion. A qualitative method approach is defined by Lune and Berg (2017:1415) as a pattern that provides means of accessing unquantifiable knowledge about the actual people represented by their personal traces. This allows access to the lived experiences of participants, and that reality is presented from their frame of reference. A total of 11 participants were interviewed (a male from the Vhangona cultural movement, two males from the Tshivhula Royal family, a male from the Leshiba Royal family, a male representative from Lemba Cultural Association and one male from the Sematla). There were five members (3 females and 2 males) interviewed from the Machete Royal Council members. Three languages were used – English, Sepedi and TshiVenda. The services of an interpreter assisted in ensuring that conversations could take place. Discussions took place at the homesteads of the different representatives – in Andermark Village (Vivo) Mutale, Tzaneen, Chirrolwe, Dzanani and Den Staat.

At a later stage, narrative analysis was adopted to analyse the collected data owing to interpretation of the personal traces and the stories the participants told during the data collection. Observation assisted the researcher to study the body language of the participants as they replied to questions or engaged during the discussion. Traditions and protocols

were followed – in terms of dress code before walking into the homestead. Appropriate ethical considerations were made in terms of seeking their permission to: (1) write down field notes, (2) use a voice recorder and (3) take photos during the interviews. Each participant signed a consent form before the interview, which outlined ethical issues such as anonymity, the overall purpose of the interview and study, usage of a voice recorder, notes during the interview and the use of a digital camera. All participants were above the age of 40 and are known to hold deep knowledge about the history of Mapungubwe. In addition, they are well informed about their family trees, traditional practices and customs.

## Findings

Four findings were made in this study. Firstly, the study established that the descendants do not view Mapungubwe as a tourist attraction or a site that has gained universal value to benefit them; instead, it is stolen land, a place of sorrow considering that it is where their ancestors are laid to rest. It is, therefore, a place that needs to be respected and treated as per their traditional practices and customs when one is visiting a sacred place or a burial site. One traditional leader stated that:

‘We must understand one thing, Mapungubwe as a cultural landscape, there were people who lived there, they had their own religious practices. They worshiped the ancestors; they performed their rituals there. So because of the whites came through forcefully removed our people or ancestors away and demarcated Mapungubwe into farms which resulted to the sense of touch and sense of being to be lost. The connection between the descendant’s communities, the shrine, the hill and the areas itself was lost. So today as we speak some people just go there as they wish but for us as the descendants of the area will never go there without performing our rituals to appease the ancestors, we do that because we know what it means to us.’ (Traditional leader, Mapungubwe descendant leader, Indigenous community member)

In addition, the reality of the gaping wound associated with revisiting the painfully traumatic events is viewed as part of the reasons that make the descendants reluctant to visit WHSs for leisure. This matter is further linked to the descendants’ pending land claims as they view themselves as the heirs to the area that is now a WHS. Significantly, they argue that their participation in activities within the WHS is ceremonial, and they do not actively participate in the management regime. They further feel neglected in the sense that their voice has not been given due recognition, because Mapungubwe management gives more credibility to researchers (see Figure 4).

According to the descendants, their active involvement will assist site management towards restoring, preserving and protecting the assets that exist in the landscape. The findings also indicated that descendants are of the view that the role of CHT towards community development in Mapungubwe should be a relevant platform to be used as a tool to reinstate the connection and dignity of the communities through community involvement and participation, which is currently seen as minimal, to some extent inexistant.



Source: Shabalala, L.P., 2022, 'Perspective of Mapungubwe descendants' traditional leaders concerning their traditional values and cultural heritage preservation', in *Cultural Sustainable Tourism*, pp. 123–134, Springer International Publishing, Cham

**FIGURE 4:** Emphasising the significance of involving communities in tourism development.

Secondly, the study further discovered that the Mapungubwe descendants are experiencing a sense of loss and a lack of belonging caused by the traumatic events associated with losing their forefathers’ land that was demarcated into farms by the colonial government, and later inscribed as a WHS. Losing their forefathers’ land led to a sense of loss and disconnection from their cultural and spiritual heritage. As their ancestors have been reburied within the Mapungubwe landscape, feelings of spiritual, psychological, and emotional toll, as well as a sense of loss of self, have gained momentum. There is a perception that descendants believe their ancestors are not at peace with the current spiritual and customary situation at the site.

Thirdly, the study found that in addition to past experiences with the loss suffered, domestic tourists do not visit WHSs because of poor levels of affordability considering high unemployment. More significantly, the descendants do not see the need to pay when visiting the WHS. They are not charged entrance fee when coming for rituals, whether this is during the Heritage Day celebrations (24 September) or any other day or for meetings convened by the Park management. Accommodation and meals are catered for by the Park management. Descendants still have an expectation for the Park management to do more regarding involving them in key activities taking place within the protected area. To capture such expectation, one informant said:

‘The issue of tourism towards community development is not going well or is not right because we only find invitations to come participate in ceremonial way. We don’t participate fully in key matters. For example, the Chief is being invited to come do a word of thanks, give words of support on their occasions, like ceremonial.’ (Traditional leader, Mapungubwe descendant leader, Indigenous community member)

Fourthly, descendants expressed concern with regard to researchers who interview them but provide no feedback after the completion of the research projects. This act demoralises these communities to participate in such activities because they are just being used as reservoirs. Tully (2007) is under the notion that community archaeology seeks to diversify the voices involved in the interpretation of the past. Therefore, a need to consider not only descendant and local communities but also those communities with political and economic power cannot be ignored (see Pyburn 2011). Social responsibility to give feedback by the researchers is being neglected. Consequently, the communities are being left without knowing the outcome of their contribution. One of the traditional leaders voiced out a concern that:

‘We also sick and tired of people wanting to front us in their events, but in actual business of Mapungubwe and what is happening they don’t involve us. They always depend on researchers, professors, scientist, ecologists. Whenever the researchers come to us, they conduct interviews and don’t come back to tell us the outcome. These are the people that they listen to more than us, hence we have knowledge and expertise that was passed down to us by our parents which could assist a great deal in the site.’ (Traditional leader, Mapungubwe descendant leader, Indigenous community member)

## Conclusion

The paper concludes by indicating the necessity to consider the bottom-up approach a useful tool, as it is a democratic and consultative style of decision-making, organisational change and leadership in which participation is promoted at all levels. It is understood that a decision-making process can be time-consuming because it is inclusive and gives every stakeholder a chance to voice their concerns. The advantages of this approach are that such activities might change the mindset of the custodians, as well as better communicate and promote the WHSs as tourist attractions. The efforts could result in the traditional leaders developing the desire to visit WHSs and start encouraging their respective local communities to do the same. Eventually, the sites will be appealing, and they will begin to view them as their own. Ultimately, they will be dedicated to uplifting and protecting the sites, which will translate for the significance of WHSs as tourist attractions.

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## Competing interests

The author declares that they have no financial or personal relationship that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

## Author’s contributions

L.P.S. declares that they are the sole author of this article.

## Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the University of the Witwatersrand Human Research Ethics Committee (H18/10/29).

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## Data availability

The raw data cannot be shared with any other party.

## Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

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