ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES – HERITAGE @ RISK!

Threats to archaeological heritage resources on the international level are perceived as deriving from three primary sources: cultural tourism, international development programmes, and the degradation of the environment through natural process or by human-induced environmental change.

Cultural tourism

Tourism now constitutes 6% of world trade. Heritage, be it cultural or natural, is the major focus of much tourism. The shaping of archaeological resources to meet the demands of tourism has had a major impact which for the most part has been negative.

International development programs

Programmes focussing upon development, particularly in less developed international contexts, often do not have mechanisms in place to insure that cultural resources are managed in a sustainable fashion. Yet, these resources often provide the economic mainstay of small local communities.

Degradation of environments and human induced environmental change

Environmental change through over-grazing and destabilisation of soils, flooding caused by the destruction of forested catchments and the urban development of coastal and riverine habitats as foci of leisure activity have impacted upon those sectors of the terrain that are most likely to be the richest reservoirs of archaeological resources.

The inability of management to effectively counter these threats and the failure to develop self-correcting auditing systems exacerbate the impacts of these threats.

Ineffective management

Management of heritage resources seldom is undertaken in a well-administered fashion at the national level. There are numerous examples of under-funded and poorly staffed heritage organisations that out of necessity focus their activities on archaeological icons with little if any resources flowing on to other sectors of the heritage management system.

Failure of corrective systems

There is no internationally agreed upon standard for archaeological heritage management that takes into account the full dimension of archaeological significance. Often the social and the indigenous values are not adequately managed. Coupled with the hesitancy to apply performance indicators and frameworks for auditing, there is a general failure to detect good practice from bad before it is too late and the significance of the heritage resources is diminished. Charters, recommendations and guidelines such as the Australia ICOMOS *Burra Charter* (The Charter for Places of Cultural Significance www.icomos.org/australia) have made a tentative step in the correct direction but the focus has been on planning rather than on implementation, with almost no emphasis upon the development of self-correcting heritage management systems.

Charter on the Protection and Management of Archaeological Heritage 1990 www.icomos.org/e_charte.htm

ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on
Archaeological Heritage Management