

Abstract

Formal heritage management systems have failed to protect rock art sites and their associated sacred values in many parts of southern Africa. Local communities living in close proximity to heritage places usually have, since historical times, a large role in ensuring the survival of places of cultural significance through their traditional custodianship systems. However, often these systems are ignored or not fully recognized by the State heritage management organizations. This study investigates whether an intimate understanding of traditional custodianship systems can provide direction towards a more effective and sustainable method of managing rock art sites imbued with sacred values. The work analyses the nature of the southern African traditional custodianship systems and, more specifically, their relation to rock art sites. It focuses on the Vumba Cultural Landscape in Central Mozambique and the traditional custodianship system here is compared to those at Matobo Hills in Zimbabwe and Chongoni Hills in Malawi. In an attempt to harness the positive parts of the traditional and formal systems, the work recommends the adoption of a framework enriched by a philosophy of rooted cosmopolitanism that embraces legal pluralism in heritage legislation and cultural policies.