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# COMPENSATION IN ARCHITECTURE AND ARCHAEOLOGY

ON COMPENSATION AS A PROJECT,  
METHOD AND PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

Editors: Athanasios Kouzelis, Magnus Rönn and Helena Teräväinen

## **COMPENSATION IN ARCHITECTURE AND ARCHAEOLOGY**

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2022

### EDITORS

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### PUBLISHER

*Kulturlandskapet & Chalmers University of Technology*

### GRAPHIC DESIGN

*The Nordic Association of Architectural Research*

### LAYOUT

*Andreas Hansen, Omland Form och Fotografi*

### FINANCIAL SUPPORT

*The proceeding is funded by the Swedish National Heritage Board R&D grant.*

*The authors are responsible for stated opinions and factual information.*

*Cover: Lake Como outside Villa Carlotta. Photo: Magnus Rönn, 2022*

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ISBN 978-91-983911-3-8, Kulturlandskapet  
ISBN 978-91-88041-49-4, Chalmers University of Technology



# CONTENT

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- 5 INTRODUCTION**  
*Athanasios Kouzelis, Magnus Rönn and Helena Teräväinen*
- 21 DISCUSSIONS ON THE AUTHENTICITY AND THE IDENTITY OF A PLACE:**  
How to apply the compensatory method and resolve interpretations  
on cultural heritage in a case study  
*Helena Teräväinen*
- 52 ARCHITECTURE AND COMPENSATION:**  
Renewal and expansion of the City Library in Gothenburg  
*Magnus Rönn*
- 83 HERITAGE COMPENSATION IN CHANGING ENVIRONMENTS:**  
The case of the West Link infrastructure project, Gothenburg  
*Maitri Dore*
- 119 SAVE WHAT CAN BE SAVED AND TELL THE STORY:**  
Balancing damage of industrial heritage by architectural interpretation  
*Urban Nilsson*
- 150 HERITAGE VALUES AND CONTEMPORARY CULTURAL LANDSCAPE IN ADULIS**  
*Susanna Bortolotto, Nelly Cattaneo, Serena Massa*
- 179 THE OPEN-AIR ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM AS MODEL OF CULTURAL  
COMPENSATION**  
*Athanasios Kouzelis*
- 201 NARRATIVES OF FISH, TRADE AND COASTAL COMMUNITIES:**  
Use and resource management as a tool for heritage and environment compensation  
*Tom Davies, Anja Standal*
- 232 CONTRIBUTORS**

# HERITAGE VALUES AND CONTEMPORARY CULTURAL LANDSCAPE IN ADULIS

Susanna Bortolotto, Nelly Cattaneo, Serena Massa

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## ABSTRACT

Since 2011, an Eritrean-Italian research has been conducted on the Adulis archaeological site (Eritrea), the main emporium town of the Horn of Africa between the III century BC and the VII AD. The project is led by the Eritrean Ministry of Culture and Sports and by the Research Centre on the Eastern Desert, in collaboration with Italian universities; one of its aims is to create an archaeological park.

Adulis is of great interest for researchers worldwide, nevertheless, its current context is peripheral to the main Eritrean centres. The local inhabitants are committed to subsistence farming and goat breeding in a semiarid context; the unexcavated archaeological area itself has been a common grazing land. The balance between livelihood and local scarcity of resources represents an intangible heritage shaped over centuries, enhancing the diversification of activities and the community over the individual, thus ensuring a high level of resiliency.

What would happen to this local intangible heritage when the main trigger for economic development is an archaeological site of international interest? The socio-economic process promoted by the tourism industry may endanger an unacknowledged heritage whose loss might be considered an acceptable side-effect of development. To prevent this irreversible loss, the ongoing project has considered the understanding of local cultural values as part of the actions. The contribution aims at reflecting on the concept of compensation and mitigation when applied to intangible heritage and competing values.

## KEYWORDS

Heritage values, Public archaeology, Tourism industry, Mitigation/compensation

## INTRODUCTION

The site of Adulis is located on the south-western shore of the Red Sea, in the bay of Zula, about 50 km south of Massawa, Eritrea. The geographic position of the site, at the connection of ancient international maritime and regional terrestrial routes, was the key factor for the flourishing of Adulis, the preeminent port town of the Horn of Africa between the III century BC and the VII century AD. The international Eritrean-Italian “*Adulis Project*” has been active since 2011, following an initiative of the Eritrean Authorities, in collaboration with the Research Centre on Eastern Desert (Ce.R.D.O.) and Italian universities.<sup>1</sup> It is an archaeological research project, aimed at the rediscovery, study and valorisation of the archaeological remains of the ancient town of Adulis, with the intent to also create the first archaeological park in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The objectives have been designed together with decision makers and local communities to plan the fieldwork (excavation and conservation) in close relationship with the cultivated and natural environment, giving high attention to the study and valorisation of traditional hydrogeological and agronomic knowledge, as a strategic asset to planning the sustainable development of the area. Specific needs have been expressed by the inhabitants of the villages, neighbouring the ancient site, to the archaeological project: shedding light on their history and origins ensuring the conservation of archaeological remains, felt like “*ancestors*” but forgotten before the starting of the excavations supporting better opportunities of life through improved accessibility of road links and services creating economic development without threatening the cultural and natural heritage, part of which consists in the traditional knowledge of resource management.

The project in fact proposes, through the realization of the Archaeological and Natural Park of Adulis, a model of research and valorisation of the cultural landscape in the Horn of Africa, based on the study and enhancement of the ancient holistic approach as a key element to sustainability. The research is conducted with an interdisciplinary method that integrates the latest advanced techniques of remote sensing, geoarchaeology, bioarchaeology, archaeometry, 3D modelling and computational models.

Such objectives need long-term archaeological research and dedicated strategies to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the territorial context where the archaeological site is located. The creation of a sustainable park where

the evidence of the discovery can be publicly shared can be pivotal for the development of the local community, going along with the empowerment of specialized skills to manage the site, the artefacts and the future park.

The evidence brought to light at Adulis during the annual field surveys and excavation campaigns over the course of ten years<sup>2</sup>, enabled us to understand the ground-breaking research potential of the site in relation to the origin and development of African Horn civilization, its place in the construction of local identities and the strategic relationship between the Mediterranean, Africa, Arabia and Indian Ocean. In the common opinion, the development of the port town of Adulis is strictly connected with the flourishing of the Aksumite capital, Aksum, nowadays located on the Ethiopian Highlands, at an altitude of 2.200 meters and at a distance of about ten caravan days from Adulis, gate to the sea for the metropolis. Nevertheless, remains of an earlier settlement of huts have been excavated in the southwestern area of the site, with material culture dated to the II millennium BC<sup>3</sup>, when Adulis was part of the Land of Punt, the objective of expeditions by the Pharaohs to find precious and exotic items, such as ivory, ebony, aromatic resins and animals.<sup>4</sup> It is probable, by reaching deeper archaeological levels in future research, that earlier documents of human frequentation/settlement could be recovered, like those found in the coastal environment of the Bay of Zula, where artefacts datable to the Middle and Late Stone Age document the presence of human groups capable of exploiting the marine and coastal resources of an ideal habitat for living. Ten years of fieldwork have also enabled us to refine our understanding of the current social system and cultural landscape, which the archaeological site is part of. (S.M.)

#### ADULIS AND THE PLAIN OF ZULA: WHICH COMPENSATION FOR WHICH HERITAGE VALUES?

In this article a brief attempt is made to formalize some of the research questions raised – and still are being raised – during the ongoing activities of the annual fieldwork, started in 2011 in the Adulis archaeological area. As these activities are part of a project that is both research and site based, their theoretical frameworks will be outlined, along with the most meaningful aspects of the project itself.

Questioning the impact of an archaeological site of international interest and the values of the local communities living in the same area, necessarily means dealing with a multiple and multi-layered set of issues and with

uncertainty in foreseeing medium and long-term effects of our actions: which transformations will be triggered by the enhancement of Adulis' archaeological heritage? How will these transformations affect local tangible and intangible heritage? Which local, national and international values engage in the process activated by the ongoing project? Will local values have to compete with internationally acknowledged values? How is it possible to adopt a perspective that enables to detect, enhance and combine intercultural values? Which measures of mitigation or compensation should we deal with, in order to prevent the possible loss of cultural values triggered by a new cultural environment?<sup>5</sup>

Given the dynamic and living nature of any cultural process, the complexity of the issue already starts with the attempt of defining and sharing a common meaning for keywords like *heritage*, *values*, *compensation* and for the wider concepts they evoke in terms of identity, memory, community ties, sites and places, monuments, tangible and intangible aspects, knowledge, etc. Therefore, though they can hardly be separated one from the other and cannot be charged with ultimate definitions, each of these keywords will be addressed at first as tools, useful to address our research study. Although each of them condenses years of cultural and disciplinary debate, they will be addressed in their most codified and shared definitions, proving that even once they were reduced to their very general meaning, they are demonstrated to be determinant tools when dealing with the specific complexity offered by the Adulis case-study. Starting from the term *heritage*, the understanding of local cultural and heritage *values* will be a pivotal issue to approach *compensation*. The concept of *compensation* will be addressed mainly in the last section, starting from its definition as a process of restoring damages to values and loss of qualities in areas undergoing development processes, by trying to define the nature and the characteristics of the *development* we refer to in our case-study, the plan to create the Adulis Archaeological Park, which mainly focuses on the enhancement of a site acknowledged as heritage of international interest and attractive for worldwide researchers, as well as for tourists travelling in Eastern Africa. In a currently peripheral area like the Zula plain, where inhabitants are engaged in a delicate balance between farming and a semi-arid landscape affected by the increasing uncertainties of climatic conditions, cultural tourism would certainly produce important transformations in the short and long terms, triggering a wide range of socio-economic and cultural effects. (N.C.)

## LANDSCAPE AND PUBLIC ARCHAEOLOGY AS PREMISE AND METHOD FOR SUSTAINABILITY AND COMPENSATION

The theoretical premises of the scientific research underlying the Adulis project are those dictated by landscape archaeology, denoting the term *landscape* in its broad sense of cultural expression, i.e., the result of the interaction between man and the environment.<sup>6</sup> The interest of the research is therefore aimed at investigating all the phases of this historical landscape, in order to understand the context in which the ancient community found and managed the resources for its survival and prosperity in the long term, building a system of relationships and social identity of which archaeology reads the material traces that have been preserved up to our time. It is a dynamic system, which can be read with the method of archaeological stratigraphy, recognizing its environmental, productive and social elements<sup>7</sup>, within a systemic approach and a multidisciplinary methodology involving, alongside the archaeological and historic ones, natural sciences, mathematic and statistics.<sup>8</sup>

This holistic and systemic approach, as well as being central to knowledge, is the basis of a vision of public archaeology that places at its centre the economic and social values of the community that currently resides in the area surrounding the archaeological site. This is in fact the heir of a cultural tradition that is one of the key factors for a sustainable safeguard of the landscape.<sup>9</sup>

All the more so in contexts hard for survival, such as the case-study illustrated here, a semi-arid environment in which wisdom in water management is as vital today as two thousand years ago, at the time when the splendid urban civilization of Adulis flourished, in climatic conditions not dissimilar to the current ones.<sup>10</sup>

Traditional knowledge<sup>11</sup> is an elaborate and often multipurpose system, part of an integral approach between society, culture and economy and grounded on the idea of the world based on the careful management of local resources.<sup>12</sup> The close and intimate bond existing in traditional cultures between man, natural environment and the universe, permeates techniques, spaces of sacredness and defines the identity of the communities.<sup>13</sup> This is the intangible component of the heritage that runs the greatest risk of being lost if not properly investigated alongside its more easily recognizable material evidence.





Figure 1. Satellite image (©BingMap 2021) displaying the current surroundings of Adulis Archaeological site: the villages of Afia and Zula and the farmed fields.

In public archaeology<sup>14</sup>, the community plays a central role in the process of knowledge, protection and enhancement of cultural heritage, considered as a reflection and expression of its constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions.<sup>15</sup> It is a different way of doing archaeology in which *“the energies invested in research and in the growth of knowledge favour processes of participation, social cohesion, valorisation and sustainable economic development”*<sup>16</sup>, with the ultimate goal of proposing sustainable solutions to the current problems<sup>17</sup>, among which the scarcity of water resources is certainly one of the most serious.

As noted by several voices, there are no regulatory legal tools or codified guidelines for the implementation of participatory archaeology projects, but in the case of Eritrea there are two elements that have facilitated this approach. The first is the local culture itself, which is based on a vision of the world whose values are defined by relationships, not only between individuals who make up the community, but also between humans and nature, in its visible and non-visible aspects. From this derives a strong sense of cohesion and sharing of the community members, which also includes the process of knowledge and research and which must contribute, in the end, to the quality of life.<sup>18</sup>

The second facilitating factor in the Adulis Project is due to the methodology that has always characterized the ethnographic and archaeological research

work of the originators of the project, i.e., respectful, inclusive and participatory.<sup>19</sup> Local communities were therefore involved, together with the local authorities, in the phases of the project, from planning to development of research, training, processing and communication of results. Respect for the local assessment towards their past has proved to be all the more indispensable in a context, such as the Eritrean one, in which the ethical and emotional aspects of a heritage connected to a recent and painful period of war conflict – whose protagonists, however, share many traits of the common ancient culture – must be considered.

It is precisely in this regard that a further theoretical premise must be made explicit in relation to the history of studies in the region, which in several cases appears tainted by a vein of nationalism, sometimes using archaeological documentation to strengthen the national cultural identity of Eritrea, supporting its total autonomy and absence of contamination with the surrounding contemporary cultures<sup>20</sup>, as claimed in some contributions of the volume *“The Archaeology of Ancient Eritrea”*, a publication that collects an important summary of the archaeological research carried out in the country in the period between independence and the early 2000s.<sup>21</sup>

A further consideration must be made about the distance between the material culture unearthed by the excavations in Adulis and the current culture of the local communities residing in the villages of Zula and Afta, close to the archaeological site. Unique material memories of the past for current inhabitants, who mostly belong to the Saho and Afar ethnic groups of the Islamic religion, are the tombs of the ancestors.

More than ten centuries separate the Islamic graves from the monumental, early Christian churches that belong to the Byzantine phase of Adulis, a completely foreign architecture in the eyes of the local communities, but full of meaning from the point of view of knowledge of the past. It is therefore appropriate to ask ourselves whether our academic value of the past has the same meaning for those who now live in places where, from natural catastrophic causes and following the Islamic conquest, a drastic change in the cultural landscape took place.

*“The distance between the concept of cultural heritage held by the specialist and the concept held by lay people is unavoidable... Nevertheless, it is this reality that*



Figure 2. The tombs of the ancestors located in the archaeological area (credits Alfredo Castiglioni 2012).

*we need to come back to, in order to connect people with our idea of the value of the past and vice versa*".<sup>22</sup> This should be a further, fundamental dimension of the concept of *compensation* in the archaeological field, usually declined in the material aspects of structural consolidation, restoration, monetary payment for the loss of artifacts and / or areas planned for development or for criminal damage to the mobile and immobile heritage.<sup>23</sup>

After the past ten years of work in Eritrea, the Adulis project has to be acknowledged as an opportunity that has been offered to the Italian team of experts, not only from the scientific point of view but also for the possibility to develop a multidisciplinary, inclusive and dynamic research approach, within a context of valuable human relationships. In this context, we can consider Public Archaeology, both as a theoretical/methodological framework and a mitigation tool, as the design of any future activity that undertakes an evaluation of local needs. (S.M.)

### **Research teams and local communities creating new cultural environments**

The two main characteristics bringing complexity into the Adulis project, and which makes it a useful case-study to eventually broaden the understanding of the *compensation* issue, are interdisciplinarity and interculturality.

### **Interdisciplinarity and common lexicon**

The first characteristic is the multiple expertise of the Italian team involved in the activities, which makes the Adulis project interdisciplinary research; in its current configuration the team is composed by archaeologists, architects, anthropologists, geologists, cartographers, as well as engineers with various specializations.

The presence of specialists from different disciplinary sectors implies that keywords like *heritage* and *compensation* might have slightly or significantly different meanings. The terms would recall the various debates in the history of the respective disciplines, sometimes differing within the same country and even within the same discipline, leading the meanings far beyond any official definitions. Just to provide an example, the construction of meaning around the term *heritage* has developed for centuries and overwhelms national borders; in a Western country like Italy, it can currently be considered in its national and transnational senses, when switching from the Italian term *patrimonio culturale* to the English term *heritage*. For Italian architects engaged in preservation and conservation, it is not possible to avoid referring to ICOMOS and ICCROM's international documents<sup>24</sup>, but just going through the historical evolution of the definitions in the documents issued in the last century, it is clear that each of them captures a cultural moment within the discipline and in the broader sociocultural framework that, in order to be internationalized, must refer to an extremely general sense.

That is true for a culturally stratified and multifaceted term like *heritage*, but we can affirm the same for the word *compensation*, which in the Italian context is only apparently more technical and therefore easier to define. Italian architects and engineers mainly refer to it in territorial planning, addressing the concept of *environmental compensation*, in use since the 1980s<sup>25</sup>, which is defined based on an assessment of the impact of new infrastructures or built environment; specific expertise is required for this analysis that makes use both of quantitative and qualitative evaluations, aiming at defining in a consistent and scientific way the compensatory measures, in order to “*restore*” the natural environmental balance after the transformations carried out. The main cultural achievement of this concept of *compensation* is that the territory is a system that should safeguard a balance to maintain itself in a sustainable way; compensatory measures do not necessarily address the direct negative effect caused by a new element introduced in the system, but, due to the level of understanding of the relations within the system itself, they

might enhance other interacting aspects, helpful in achieving and maintaining a new *equilibrium*.

In Italy, architects specialized in heritage preservation would rarely deal with *compensation*, as they would rather resort to mitigation measures. Compensation in fact implies a “*loss*”, and efforts in conservation aim at preventing losing any material part of the artifact. From a conservation perspective, any tangible loss is also intangible, and compensation interventions would compromise authenticity, thus preventing heritage from fully witnessing and passing on its story. Any loss is therefore irreplaceable/irreversible (Brandi C. 1977).<sup>26</sup> While this is a clear and verifiable process when dealing with tangible heritage, it is not as linear when addressing intangible heritage.

In Italy, the term *compensation* is also in use in archaeology. When referring to the impact on archaeological remains by the construction of new infrastructures (a paradigmatic example is the construction of the underground in Rome<sup>27</sup>), the term might be intended in a very technical way, i.e., as a *structural compensation*, when the works might cause or accelerate the structural decay of archaeological remains. The same word, in the same discipline and in the same country, would take on a different meaning when adopting a public archaeology approach, as outlined above.

Sharing a lexicon and resorting to official definitions, though presenting evident limitations, is of great use in broad research to provide a common ground for the varied sets of expertise involved. In the Adulis project, a continuous collaboration, in particular between the Scientific Coordination of the archaeological excavation and the one of conservation activities, has promoted a sound reciprocal disciplinary understanding, which was then addressed to manage the entire team on sensitive issues. Every activity has been conducted by involving at least two different experts, in order to avoid sectorial approaches. Also, the archaeological excavation plan is discussed with architects in order to find a balance between the structural requirements of the buried artifacts and the research needs of archaeologists. In this framework, an interdisciplinary approach can be itself considered a mitigation strategy.

### ***Interculturality and the concept of Heritage***

The second characteristic of the Adulis research project, and much more susceptible to unexpected outcomes, is the different cultures that the stake-

holders engaged in the ongoing process belong to. The activities in fact directly involve the local community of the villages of Zula, Afta and Foro, a team of Eritrean archaeologists and anthropologists and the aforementioned team of Italian researchers. All of these communities create a new “*seasonal*” community during the yearly fieldwork on site. This obviously amplifies the multifaceted meaning that words like *heritage* have, as well as the level of understanding of the *values* on the field, and therefore the *compensatory measures* we ought to resort to.

In the Adulis case-study, there are therefore at least three different layers of *official* or *shared* meanings of the word *heritage* and, of course, many others not formalized in official definitions. As the eventual aim is to detect values, it is important here to refer to the concept of *heritage* as the most intertwined with issues like identity, memory, values and collective acknowledgement of the heritage itself. This also provides the base for a possible common ground when dealing with this issue within the entire group. We will only consider the official definition of *heritage*, in order not to address an issue too broad to be dealt with in this article, also if we fully acknowledge the multiple meanings attributed to the word *heritage*, as masterly outlined by Laurajane Smith when stressing its “*intangible*” nature, introducing manifold open definitions, like heritage as “*a process of engagement, an act of communication and an act of making meaning in and for the present*” and as a “*multi-layered performance – be this a performance of visiting, managing, interpretation or conservation*”<sup>28</sup>.

But as Smith claims, “*heritage is also a discourse*” and “*there is a dominant Western discourse about heritage, which [she] terms the ‘authorized heritage discourse’ that works to naturalize a range of assumptions about the nature and meaning of heritage. [...] This often self-referential discourse simultaneously draws on and naturalizes certain narratives and cultural and social experiences – often linked to ideas of nation and nationhood. Embedded in this discourse are a range of assumptions about the innate and immutable cultural values of heritage that are linked to and defined by the concepts of monumentality and aesthetics*”<sup>29</sup>.

While fully agreeing with a more complex definition of heritage outlined by Smith, nevertheless we can here use the terms and their general “*official*” definitions as tools to trace the ideas shared worldwide and their influence in different cultures. In particular we refer to the UNESCO Convention on Cultural Heritage, dated 1972, which stresses the tangible aspect of heritage and its universal values, and implemented in 1999 by Operational Guide-

lines that implicitly address intangible heritage in the definition of cultural landscape, and which “often reflect specific techniques of sustainable land-use, considering the characteristics and limits of the natural environment they are established in and a specific spiritual relation to nature”. The UNESCO Convention for the safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage is dated 2003.

But this must be framed in a proper cultural process that can be supported resorting to the concept of “decoloniality”<sup>30</sup> as an epistemic attitude that enables researchers to be more and more aware of the limits of western professional approaches and of their consequent biases when addressing other cultures. In this case, we prefer to refer to the concept of “decoloniality” in a very broad sense, not therefore strictly involving colonial, post-colonial and decolonization processes<sup>31</sup>, but rather as a cultural attitude and an ongoing process aiming at identifying “the ways in which Western modes of thought and systems of knowledge have been universalized, [seeking] to move away from this Eurocentrism by focusing on recovering ‘alternative’ or non-Eurocentric ways of knowing”<sup>32</sup>. Therefore, while referring legitimately to Eurocentric and universalized concepts, it is important not to pave the way for dogmatic approaches when addressing heritage in other continents and countries, adopting standard tools (sometimes inadequate) and supporting extremely biased lectures on different cultural environments.

One of the first steps in this *decolonial approach* in the Adulis project has been to be aware of the cultural process engaged by Eritreans in the field of *heritage*. In fact, the intermediate group of stakeholders actively taking part in it are the experts from the National Museum of Asmara and from the Regional Museum of the Northern Red Sea, coordinated by the Commission of Culture and Sports. It is therefore important to refer to the definition of *heritage* that Eritrea has shaped and formally defined in a national law of 2015. The “Cultural and Natural Heritage Proclamation” n. 177 affirms (art 2.1.g): “Cultural Heritage means any tangible or intangible resource, which is the product of human creativity and labour in the discernible historical times, describing and witnessing to such creativity and labour because of its scientific, archaeological, historical, cultural, artistic, architectural or aesthetic value or content ultimately bearing the identity and/or collective memory of peoples or communities” and further (art. 3 f): “the objectives of this Proclamation shall be to: [...] c) protect Cultural and Natural Heritage against all forms of damage; f) empower and encourage the general population to nurture and conserve heritage resources and their cultural and indigenous values”.

The Proclamation provides a broad and inclusive definition of heritage, which certainly recalls the internationalized western statements issued by ICOMOS; nevertheless, it is tailored on the Eritrean cultural environment, stressing explicitly the importance of communities. Even if recently issued, on the occasion of the candidacy of Asmara as World Heritage Site, the Proclamation is actually the achievement of a long process of cultural debate, started in the 1970s within the cultural committees, part of the Eritrean People Liberation Front, during the struggle for independence from Ethiopia. This debate was clearly structured in national cultural projects when Eritrea reached the status of independent nation (1993). For example, the CARP (Cultural Asset Rehabilitation Project), formalized in 2001, included the conservation and planning of historical sites (component A) and supporting living cultures (component C).<sup>33</sup> So, even if issued in the cultural frame related to UNESCO's training and capacity building programs, the 177/2015 law and its contents should not be intended at all as a "cosmetic" accomplishment of international requirements, or blind borrowing of Western standards, but as the outcome of a long-term active process, which puts the local traditions and languages at the same level as architectural heritage. Taking part in the International Conference on Eritrean Studies in 2016 and sharing the experience of the Adulis project with the Eritrean scientific community and international researchers working on similar issues has been another important step of the project.<sup>34</sup> Adulis is fully acknowledged as a national archaeological heritage site.

As Eritrea is a multicultural country, with nine ethnic groups speaking different languages and rich in specificities, a national definition of heritage, even when "decolonized", needs to be *localized*. We therefore resorted to the concept of "localization" when going from Eritrean national cultural frame to the local one, which is represented by the communities of Zula, Afta and Foro, also actively involved in the Adulis project. The concept of *localization* is transferred and adapted from the field of Translation Studies<sup>35</sup> to cultural environments in general. By *localization*, we refer to a communication/understanding process more complex than a translation, as it considers multiple and extremely specific cultural aspects involved in the exchange. At this level of understanding, all the definitions proposed by Smith should be born in mind, both by Italian as well as Eritrean researchers, in order not to apply biased and schematic approaches, but to detect and understand those local values at the base of any heritagization process.



*Localization*, as well as *decoloniality*, are intended as cultural attitudes to prevent “*epistemic injustice*” (i.e., “*discrimination against certain forms of knowing or knowledge [that] result in the exclusion of certain people from the process of knowledge production. It invalidates their ability to be seen as having knowledge or systems of knowledge of their own*”<sup>36</sup>). The main outcome of these considerations is that specialists engaged with heritage and in charge of managing the transformation of a place/site should keep on questioning themselves what “*heritage*” is, in the specific case they are working on, finding new ways to adapt their mindset and their research tools to that case-study. This does not prevent resorting to general definitions, but they should not be intended as static concepts, but rather as starting points.

The aim is therefore to understand what Adulis represents for the communities of Zula, Afta and Foro and if there are competing values in its acknowledgment as heritage by the local community. One of the peculiarities of the site is that, as already outlined, there is no evidence of historical continuity from Adulis to the current communities; the site has been buried for centuries after a probable destructive flood in the VII-VIII century AD. The villages are set in the smooth alluvial plain around the site, instead of the heights where Adulis was and which is now rippled by ruins. From an emporium town, hinge of important trade routes and probably equipped with an irrigation system for agricultural self-reliance, the plain, according to the reports by explorers of the XIX and early XX centuries, was in the last two to three centuries populated by semi-nomadic peoples engaged in breeding and rain-fed farming. Currently, the communities are active in spate-irrigated farming and in goat breeding.<sup>37</sup>

According to the definitions of cultural landscape, the Adulis archaeological area would be described as a relict (or fossil) landscape, which is “*one in which an evolutionary process came to an end at some time in the past, either abruptly or over a period*”<sup>38</sup>. Moreover, when considering part of the material evidence in Adulis, due to trade and cultural links with the Mediterranean and the Far East, it is even less likely to find links between current and ancient material culture of local communities. Nevertheless, the Adulis archaeological area, though not inhabited, has been used and is still in use for other purposes, thus being fully part of a living cultural landscape: the south-eastern area is an important cemetery for the local communities, where annual ceremonies take place and the site, more or less half-way from Zula to Afta, has been for decades a common grazing land (Figure 4), as well as a place to collect bushes



Figure 3. The landscape. From left: a general view of the site with the mounds from the past excavations (early 1900) and the remains of collapsed buildings; one of the excavated buildings; the result of the farming activities (credits Nelly Cattaneo 2012-18).



Figure 4. The archaeological area has also been used for its grazing spots among the mounds (credits Nelly Cattaneo 2014).

for domestic use. On very rare occasions, as on any other archaeological site, worked stones or regular slabs found on the surface have been reused for other purposes, providing useful materials for domestic needs (e.g. grinders) when strictly necessary. A general respect for the site seems to have been a general trait for centuries and, in fact outside the XIX and XX centuries archaeological excavations, the stratigraphic units are intact.

Useful hints to detect and understand local communities' values have been provided by researchers in the field of *evaluation*, dealing with the assess-

ment of development projects in Africa on the basis of African rather than Western values, to improve the effectiveness of the projects themselves.<sup>39</sup> In this field, the proposal from Chilisa and colleagues is to start approaching “*values from the perspective of an African-based relational paradigm*”<sup>40</sup>; yet, while “*African*” values imply quite a broad and generic field, as the authors themselves affirm, it is helpful in widening and revolutionizing Western and Westernized mindsets, by focusing on some pivotal concepts.

The authors deepen the meaning of “*relational*” as a key concept of the African approach, analysing it first at an ontological level, suggesting that the “*African way of perceiving reality comes out more clearly when addressing the nature of being. The common answer on what is being comes out in the adage, I am because we are, I am a person through other persons, I am we [...]. Relationships as opposed to individualism form an integral part of identity. [...] The community plays an essential part in defining one’s identity*”<sup>41</sup>. Following “*The I/We relationship, with its emphasis on a connection of human beings to non-living things, we are reminded that evaluation of projects from the African perspective should include a holistic approach that links the project to the sustainability of the environment*”. Connections are therefore as real and valuable as single beings; the total is more than the summation of single parts and more important than them.

At a “*relational epistemology*” level, knowledge is meant as “*something that is socially constructed by people who have relationships and connections with each other and with the environment, as well as the spirits of the ancestors, including the living and the non-living*”<sup>42</sup>. Somewhat opposed to Euro-Western ways of knowing that emphasize the single individual, knowledge is community-based and “*situationally located*” and might follow a logic of “*circularity as opposed to linear logic of traditional Western*”<sup>43</sup> interpretation scheme and narratives of reality.

Coming to the point of relational axiology (that is “*the nature of values*” focusing “*on the question of what we value*”), “*the emphasis is on values grounded on collective responsibilities, cooperation, interdependence and interpersonal relationships among people*”. “*From these principles, an ethical framework emerges that is focused on the responsibilities of researchers and evaluators and on the creation of respectful relationships between researchers, evaluators and participants and that takes into account the participants’ web of relationships with the living and the non-living*”<sup>44</sup>.

In such a framework, it is clear that no fully predetermined knowledge *iter*, methodological toolkit or planning theory can be automatically addressed, but can only be a starting point of an open system, which develops with the members of the “*seasonal community*” engaged in the fieldworks.

Scientific excavation, a broad bibliographical research and other activities are of paramount importance, as well as the territorial, contextual understanding availing itself of different technologies. Nevertheless, the fieldworks can be considered a very crucial action for insight and have to be managed and set in order to be as bias-aware and inclusive as possible: a place for mindful observation, to acquire and refine understanding not necessarily through specific apposite activities, but also along with the spontaneous cultural dynamics of this new community. The cultural environment that takes form seasonally around the fieldwork is already a new entity, different from the local, Eritrean and Italian communities, and richer in complexity than the summation of the three. This is already part of a cultural transformation and a trigger for future changes, which might have a positive or negative impact, but certainly would not generate a loss of authenticity of local values, but rather “*the blending of an imported discipline with the generation of new concepts and approaches from within a culture*”<sup>45</sup>, a process generally addressed in literature as “*indigenization*”.

The Adulis project at its current stage reflects in its tasks and goals the level of understanding reached in almost ten years of common work and shared achievements, as well as of research on the past and contemporary history and cultures of Eritrea. While formal and standard actions have been conducted to improve the understanding of the Adulis cultural landscape, it is possible to affirm that daily sharing of experience and a mindful approach have been and are determinant for providing meaning to the achievements of the research and for understanding local values.

The first of these values, as detectable even in the agricultural landscape, is of course the community: the farming activities, the layout of the irrigation system and of the fields and the use of natural resources, can be understood only when considered as a whole process involving and affecting everyone. The value of the archaeological area itself has been intended as a common shared spot, available for the surrounding villages, and its value relies on the support it can provide to the communities.



*Figure 5. Local techniques and materials are used for conservation purposes, taking advantage of local skills and knowledge (credits Paolo Visca 2018).*



*Figure 6. Blending traditional and contemporary techniques on the fieldwork is a key for a deeper cultural understanding (credits Alfredo Castiglioni 2012).*

The engagement of the local people and the collaboration of our Eritrean colleagues will shape it and refine it all along the development of the project. The challenge is now to design a masterplan for the archaeological park, which will be flexible enough to include changes and give value to process, as well as to achievements and to management instead of fulfilment, in a circular approach. (N.C.)

### THREATS TO LOCAL VALUES: TOOLS AND COMPENSATION STRATEGIES

The fulfilment of an archaeological park as an Eritrean requirement within the Adulis project is intended to promote the enhancement and preservation of the heritage of Adulis, economically supported by tourism. The socio-economic process promoted by the tourism industry, as suggested by many cases around the world<sup>46</sup>, can endanger particular, local tangible and intangible heritage, as well as local values.

The critical relation between the tourism industry and local contexts was internationally acknowledged already in the 1970s, as demonstrated in the Charter of Tourism issued in 1976 by ICOMOS, declaring itself *“directly concerned by the effects – both positive and negative – on said heritage due to the extremely strong development of tourist activities in the world”*. The same topic has been addressed by manifold international initiatives and research.<sup>47</sup> The general outcomes share the will to design new models and strategies for the development of territories and their tourism industries, safeguarding and enhancing cultural identities and local resources towards a sustainability of tourism in a cultural, economic, social and environmental perspective. The ten articles of the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism issued in 1999 by the World Tourism Organization<sup>48</sup>, remark that access to heritage around the world is a human right and tourism is a possible occasion of encounter among cultures. This perspective, which is a fully western perspective, admits that to achieve these results, tourist activities must respect local characteristics, and cultures, and communities should take equal advantage of them for an inclusive growth.

Also, the *Eritrean National Tourism Development Plan (2000-2020)*, issued in 1999, expresses the awareness that tourism must be controlled in order to derive benefits and counteract the harmful effects that this phenomenon can entail, like homologation of the territory, social degradation, exploitation

and commodification of heritage, loss of identity values, loss of authenticity, etc.<sup>49</sup> At the Eritrean national level, it is therefore clear that the general development of a country makes tourism a resource and not the other way around.

The Eritrean plan also outlines some activities related to touristic enhancement that can be considered general mitigation measures: *“Environmental protection measures that are integrated into the tourism planning, development and management process are to: not over develop or overuse tourism sites, that is, not exceed their carrying capacities; use well designed infrastructure systems, especially providing adequate waste management techniques, in tourism areas; develop adequate road and other transportation systems; apply environmentally suitable land use and site planning principles, development standards and architectural, landscaping and engineering design in tourism areas; [...] carefully manage visitor flows at tourist attraction features; apply specific controls on visitor use in protected land and marine areas and inform visitors about these controls.”*<sup>50</sup>

Moving from international and national statements, it has to be remarked that local tangible and intangible heritage is at risk on any occasion when it has not been acknowledged as such, or when its loss can be considered as an acceptable side effect of tourism development. In the case of the Zula plain, the differentiation of activities, conducted by the local communities to obtain enough resources to prosper from the surrounding semi-arid environment, might be some knowledge at risk when a new and easier form of economy suddenly occurs. At the same time, the maintenance of the territory as a result of farming activities is also necessary to guarantee food security and to preserve the archaeological site from being flooded. One of the activities addressed by the Adulis project is therefore the enhancement of the existing agriculture activities in a semi-arid context, along with measures to improve biodiversity in farmed and non-cultivated areas. In fact, the use value of the site as grazing area and for wild vegetation collection will be probably lost when the Archaeological Park is completed; therefore, the improvement of wild environments in other surrounding spots will be promoted as a compensatory measure. On the other side, the support of local farming can be considered a mitigation measure. The use value of the south-eastern portion of the site as a cemetery is culturally of paramount importance, and no limitation will be foreseen by a forthcoming masterplan. The masterplan will have to design actions and promote processes adopting

a holistic approach, able to include the touristic activity in the living cultural environment and landscape, supporting its intangible values. (S.B.)

## CONCLUSIONS

During the years of archaeological research in Adulis, it was clear that, when addressing a site through a project based both on academic and on-field activities, these two components have to fully inform each other and not only of archaeological contents. The development of the discipline in the field of Public Archaeology has clearly suggested over the last decades that broadening research from the archaeological site to a wider territorial, chronological and cultural scale, including necessarily the contemporary context and the community involved, is necessary for a meaningful and sustainable role of the site itself. The community is central in this process, which is not linear, nor can it be based on pre-defined standard steps. In this article, the focus was on how determinant this approach can be in understanding the community needs and values that archaeological activities might affect, also in negative ways, in order to design or co-design mitigation and compensatory measures, considering that the community values might be threatened by the presence of a noteworthy site, in the form of tourism-based economy.

The effort was therefore to understand how to support a bias-aware investigation of local values, by analysing the cultural attitudes and characteristics of the different “*communities*” involved in the archaeological project and the different meaning that the site has for them. Due to the complexity of any cultural environment, the tools for this understanding are situational rather than prescriptive, but nevertheless based on the awareness of the cultural features of each part involved. The Western “*authorised*” discourse on heritage values is actually a limit that needs to be overcome. In the case of the Adulis project, the long-term research activity (started in 2011 and conducted annually) and the collaboration with the local communities were the primary conditions to promote this process of understanding of values and compensatory/mitigation measures. (S.B.)



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## NOTES

1 Eritrean Commission of Culture and Sports, National Museum of Eritrea, Northern Red Sea Regional Museum of Massawa, Politecnico di Milano, Università Cattolica di Milano, Università degli Studi 'L'Orientale' di Napoli, Università degli Studi dell'Insubria di Varese. The research, financed by Eritrea, by Ce.R.D.O. and by Piccini Group, has received contributions from the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation since 2012, from AICS (Agenzia Italiana per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo) within the project VITAE in 2020 and is supported by ISMEO (Associazione Internazionale di Studi sul Mediterraneo e l'Oriente). The scientific research is directed by Serena Massa, in collaboration with the Eritrean Archaeological Heritage Research Branch, responsible dr. Tsegai Medin and the director of Massawa Museum, dr. Yohannes Gebreyesus. Our warmest thanks to the Commissioner of Culture and Sports, Arch. Zemedet Tekle, to Mr. Tedros Berhane and to all the Eritrean and Italian colleagues and workers.

2 Bortolotto et al. 2013; Massa 2017; Castiglioni et al. 2018a, 2018b.

3 Paribeni 1907, c. 448-450, 547-548, tav.III-VI ; Manzo 2010, p. 29-33.

4 Lastly Manzo 2017.

5 For the expression "cultural environment" see Kirkegaard 2020.

6 Massa 2014 with references.

7 Brogiolo 2015, p. 360.

8 Brogiolo, Chavarria Arnau 2019, pp. 104-105.

9 As recognized and ratified globally since the 1992 Rio Conference, also known as the 'Planet Earth Summit'. Following the Conference, world conventions, international organizations such as the United Nations, the FAO, Unesco, the European Union, promote projects for the protection of environmental resources and for the creation of a new ethical economy and a technology capable of considering the wisdom of ancient practices.

10 Beyn., Bar-Yosef Mayer 2018, p. 26.

11 As defined by the Science and Technology Committee set up by the Convention for the fight against desertification: [www.unccd.int](http://www.unccd.int);

12 [www.droughtmanagement.info/literature/UNCCD\\_promotion\\_of\\_traditional\\_knowledge\\_2003.pdf](http://www.droughtmanagement.info/literature/UNCCD_promotion_of_traditional_knowledge_2003.pdf)

13 Laureano 2001, p. 80

14 Participatory research in archaeology. Legal issues and good practises, "European Journal of Post-Classical Archaeologies", n. 9, 2019: Nucciotti, Bonacchi, Molducci 2019; Dragoni, Cerquetti 2019. In these texts a critical review of the multiple aspects connected with Public Archaeology is analysed, starting from the definition itself and of the key concept of community versus Public, experts, the "bottom up" and "top down approaches"; legal and ethical issues, social implications of the interpretation of the results, democratization of knowledge, collaboration, with the conclusion that both are necessary and an equilibrium between needs to be found.

15 Volpe 2017, p. 48.

16 Volpe 2019, p. 10.

17 In line with the more democratic and open approach to cultural heritage adopted by a series of international Conventions and Recommendations promoted by UNESCO and the Council

of Europe, which consider the population not only the recipient of research and projects to enhance the heritage but also an actor actively participant to its management, in the optics of an economic and social development: from the Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (Paris, 1972), to that for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (Valletta, 1992), up to that on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro, 2005). The latter convention is fundamental because it promotes the involvement of all actors in the research and conservation of heritage, closely linking cultural heritage to human rights. Brogiolo, Chavarria Arnau 2019, p. 104, with previous references.

18 See further about African Relational Evaluation Approaches.

19 As recognised also by the European Award Helena Vaz da Silva in 2019; among the publications: Castiglioni 1977, 1978, 1988, 1989, 1995, Castiglioni et al. 2016.

20 Fattovich 2008, p. 347.

21 Schmidt, Curtis, Teka 2007.

22 Castillo 2019, p. 63.

23 As example

<https://www.isprambiente.gov.it/files2021/eventi/studi-impatto-ambientale/nuove-nt-via-paesaggio-17-marzo-2021-revf.pdf>; [https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/atto/serie\\_generale/caricaArticolo?art.versione=1&art.idGruppo=0&art.flagTipoArticolo=1&art.codiceRedazionale=18A05332&art.idArticolo=1&art.idSottoArticolo=1&art.idSottoArticolo1=10&art.dataPubblicazioneGazzetta=2018-08-10&art.progressivo=0](https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/atto/serie_generale/caricaArticolo?art.versione=1&art.idGruppo=0&art.flagTipoArticolo=1&art.codiceRedazionale=18A05332&art.idArticolo=1&art.idSottoArticolo=1&art.idSottoArticolo1=10&art.dataPubblicazioneGazzetta=2018-08-10&art.progressivo=0)

24 For a synthesis of ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) and ICCROM (International Centre for the study of preservation and restoration of cultural property) documents, see Jokilhto 2005.

25 See for example the Italian legislation: Decreto del Presidente del Consiglio dei Ministri DPCM 27/12/1988 “Norme tecniche per la redazione degli studi di impatto ambientale e la formulazione del giudizio di compatibilità” art 4 comma 4.

26 Projects for new interventions to enhance the artifacts or the sites and to enable their current use, would not be considered as compensations, as a proper design would rather be a cultural plus, part of the palimpsest of the heritage.

27 See <https://www.romametropolitane.it/articolo.asp?CodMenu=10760&CodArt=10802>

28 Follows: – that embodies acts of remembrance and commemoration while negotiating and constructing a sense of place, belonging and understanding in the present. Simultaneously the heritage performance will also constitute and validate the very idea of ‘heritage’ that frames and defines these performances in the first place” in L. SMITH, *Uses of Heritage*, Routledge, New York, 2006, p.4.

29 Ibidem.

30 In Birdi et al. 2021: “The twinned concepts of coloniality and decoloniality have to be distinguished from colonialization and decolonization. The latter terms refer directly to the systemic exploitation of lands and resources and the subsequent process of liberation from this system. In a sense, we can see both colonization and decolonization as time-bounded and geographically defined. Coloniality and decoloniality, by contrast, are better understood as ongoing conditions. Coloniality and decoloniality, as terms, are often linked back to what is today called the Latin American school of thought and associated with scholars including Walter Mignolo, Aníbal Quijano, Arturo Escobar and many others”.

31 Eritrea was an Italian colony from 1890 to 1941, but the cultural outcome of the colonial entanglement is not strictly relevant in Adulis project.

32 Birdi et al. 2021.

33 See the World Bank report, 21138-ER dated May 29, 2001 and the interesting insight by the Eritrean urbanist Gabriel Tzegai in Barera et al. (2008).

34 See ICES proceedings:

35 See B. Heinisch, 2021 and the intertwined concepts of localization, translation and citizen science.

36 See A. Birdi et al. (2021)

37 See Cattaneo & Massa 2020.

38 See "Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention of 1972" art. 39 (ii).

39 Chilisa et al. 2016.

40 Ivi, p. 317.

41 Ivi, p. 318.

42 Ibidem.

43 Ivi, p. 323.

44 Ivi, p. 319.

45 See Adair et al., 1993, p. 155, quoted in Chilisa et al., 2016, p. 316.

46 See for example F. Vigotti 2020.

47 Among these contributions: "Chart for a Sustainable Tourism", known as "Carta di Lanzarote", adopted during the World Conference on Sustainable Tourism, Lanzarote, April 27/28, 1995; "Global Code of Ethics for Tourism", adopted in Santiago (Cile), October 1999; and the following.

48 Santiago del Cile General Assembly

49 Eritrean National Tourism Development Plan (2000-2020), p.102. About negative sociocultural impacts: "uncontrolled development of tourism may have negative sociocultural impacts. Overcrowding of local attractions [...], over-commercialization of traditional crafts may lead to loss of authenticity of dance, music and crafts...may generate social problems and loss of cultural identity"

50 Ivi, p.16.



Kulturlandskapet  
ISBN 978-91-983911-3-8

Chalmers University of Technology  
ISBN 978-91-88041-49-4

