

ICOMOS-SPAIN CHARTER FOR THE INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT OF PREHISTORIC ROCK ART AND ITS LANDSCAPES

- ALICANTE CHARTER -

Adopted by the General Assembly of ICOMOS-Spain, 2023.

The purpose of this Charter is to establish, in the context of Spain, the basic objectives and strategies of action required to promote the integrated management of prehistoric rock art and its landscapes as the way to ensure their preservation and social recognition and, consequently, their transmission to future generations in the best possible condition.

Prehistoric rock art is an exceptional document within human evolution. It connects us directly with societies that existed before writing. It represents the first communication system based on images and a vehicle of cultural transmission of the greatest importance. Those graphic images constitute the origin of art and as such they continue to move us many millennia after they were depicted on the rocks. Their profound cultural value and great historical significance determine their enormous heritage importance and enable them to be singled out as unique elements in need of urgent protection.

Possibly because its heterogeneity, the testimonial and cultural value of rock art of historical chronology often differs from that of prehistoric art. Until criteria for the appraisal of each of these forms of rock art are developed, we propose that the principles and suggestions of this charter should be extended to rock art of all chronologies, especially when it appears at archaeological sites or is located in their proximity, thus permitting the development of unified management systems.



CHARACTER

In this document, prehistoric rock art is understood as all the different graphic productions created with diverse techniques on rock or clay surfaces, either on cave or rock-shelter walls or on rocks in the open-air. It therefore refers to motifs on unmoveable objects and is inseparably linked to the place in which it was produced. This definition can therefore be extended to graphic images inside megalithic constructions or similar.

Prehistoric rock art possesses an important discursive element because it illustrates graphically the advances that took place in the ways of life and symbolic and ideological universes of different human groups over time, from Palaeolithic hunter-fisher-gatherer communities to the first farming societies and even the complex societies that reached protohistory. It is thus a characteristic graphic expression of mostly pre-literate groups and societies that acquires the dimension of an archaeological document that is essential to understand human change temporally and spatially.

Prehistoric rock art, one of the main treasures of humankind, demonstrates the creative genius of men and women who went before us, thousands of years ago, and is therefore a fragile cultural testimony of past ways of life that have now disappeared. This graphic system and the practices associated with it allowed those who preceded us to represent and comprehend the world in which they lived and, at the same time, to transmit between generations aspects related to their ways of life, traditions, myths and beliefs.



SINGULARITY

This heritage is widely represented in the whole Iberian Peninsula and island territories. The thousands of caves, rock-shelters, rocks and megalithic monuments with graphic expressions that have been preserved make it one of the richest regions in the world in this kind of cultural manifestation; not only because of the numerous figurative and symbolic representations but also because of their wide chronological range. Through a long process of appraisal and the growth in their appreciation, these ancient paintings and engravings have become heritage items of extraordinary value in the shaping of our identity that we must pass on to coming generations. Clear proof of this is that four of these rock art groups and their extensions have been acknowledged in their value and exceptional importance by being included in UNESCO's World Heritage List, and a large proportion of them form part of a Cultural Route of the Council of Europe. As a consequence of the cultural singularity of these sites, their preservation is safeguarded by the maximum figures of protection in national and autonomous heritage legislation.



LANDSCAPES WITH ROCK ART, CULTURAL LANDSCAPES

The vast majority of sites with prehistoric rock art are located in the rural world, in landscapes that are generally well conserved and which allow the sites to be seen in their original setting. Those images, records of past social action, are inseparable from the geological formations on which they were created and they form large groups that are integrated in cultural landscapes together with other forms of archaeological evidence. In this regard, the landscapes containing rock art are undoubtedly determining factors in the attribution of its meaning and significance, both in the past and in the present. In these cultural landscapes, rock art is today the most conspicuous element and its meaning is revealed to us, at least in part, through its presence in the landscape.

This circumstance leads us to make a proposal that goes beyond the individualised management of the rock art sites to approach the management of cultural landscapes distinguished by their high density of sites with prehistoric motifs. This management should be harmonised with the traditional activities carried out by local populations. It should also be compatible with new uses provided that they do not endanger the environmental integrity of the landscapes or of the rock art itself.



VULNERABLE HERITAGE

Prehistoric rock art and its landscapes are today extremely fragile and vulnerable and their preservation is threatened by multiple factors. In general, many of the processes of alteration are related to environmental conditions, which are very different in each of the territories and contexts with rock art. They have caused a slow but inexorable process of natural degradation that, even so, has allowed the preservation of the images for thousands of years. However, in recent decades, anthropic agents, acting directly or indirectly, have grown in importance and have become the main risk factor for their conservation. This aspect is the essential starting point to understand the purpose of the present charter, which has been motivated by the growing challenges threatening the preservation of prehistoric rock art.



INTEGRATED AND INTEGRATING MANAGEMENT

The vulnerability and complexity of the different forms of rock art mean that integrated management must be included in the political agenda as a formula of efficient, sustainable and responsible administration. Integrated management is understood as a set of planned actions

that together address the inter-connected processes. These are able to guarantee the conservation of rock art and, at the same time, allow rock art to be enjoyed and accessed by the public in the best possible conditions. In this regard, integrated management is conceived to be a continuous series of actions in which the success of each phase helps the rest as they support each other reciprocally. These phases include initial stages of identification and appraisal, which form the basis for the later development of protection mechanisms and public dissemination policies. The success of a model of this kind requires the active co-participation of all the stakeholders involved as they can all contribute on different levels to the protection of rock art. It is understood that this integrated management cannot be developed solely through top-down models or approaches but should seek the recognition of prehistoric rock art as an irreplaceable legacy by society as a whole. The integrated management of these cultural landscapes produces benefits in terms of the conservation of heritage, the enjoyment of the environment, the understanding of the rock art phenomenon itself and, very especially, social identification with the cultural legacy; that is to say, of the creation of links and positive feelings between the public and rock art.

PRINCIPLES



Principle 1. The various public administrations have the obligation of firmly supporting the **integrated management** of rock art to guarantee its preservation and to promote models that envision community co-responsibility.



Principle 2. The **quantification of heritage value and the analysis of the vulnerability** of rock art are the tools that should guide the decision-making of authorities and site managers in the preservation and presentation of rock art.



Principle 3. An **exhaustive register** should urgently be made of rock art and its landscapes using standardised documentation and recording methods and tools for the comprehensive management of the information.



Principle 4. The most effective protection of rock art is achieved through the **preventive management** of landscapes containing rock art.



Principle 5. To preserve the materiality and significance of rock art it is necessary to develop an exhaustive **conservation programme** capable of confronting the risks that endanger its survival.



Principle 6. The integrated management of rock art heritage, its values and sensibilities require a decided **stimulus of scientific research** and public funding in accordance with its importance.



Principle 7. In order to encourage co-participation, **society should be made aware** of the significance and value of rock art heritage, and all the knowledge and information generated by public administrations and research.

STRATEGIES



Strategy 1. Integrated and participative management.

The conservation of rock art is a challenge that concerns all society: the various public administrations, the heterogeneous social agents, and the general public. The development of integrated and participative management models is a strategy that requires the co-responsibility of all the stakeholders in order to generate favourable dynamics for a public sense of identification with cultural heritage.

The following actions are relevant in connection with Strategy 1:

- Efficient, sustainable and responsible administration of sites and landscapes with rock art needs the integrated management of rock art to be added to the political agenda.
- This management must include planned actions on several inter-connected levels regarding: a) for the identification of the volume and knowledge of the value of rock art; b) for the design and implementation of strategies that guarantee its preservation; and c) for an improvement in its appreciation by the public through active dissemination policies.
- Integrated management is also participative and, therefore, public collaboration, the participation of the owners, different social groups and local public administrations should be stimulated
- Models of integrated and participative management should be based on decisions agreed consensually that encourage co-responsibility structures and mechanisms of cooperation between the different public administrations involved and the various stakeholders based in the territory.
- The interests of local communities should be considered in the management models so that they are able to participate proactively and perceive as beneficial the investment of resources in defence of rock art heritage. The perception of benefit should not be hidden any longer but given priority.
- Owing to its permanent presence in the territory, the active and committed collaboration of society should be encouraged in the management and conservation of rock art through the social groups that represent it.
- All the above must be compatible with the appropriately regulated design and coordination of actions taken by specialised technical staff with the training and ability to act on such extremely sensitive heritage.
- The basic pillars of this strategy and the other lines of action in this charter should be inspired by a participative and pedagogical spirit that helps to make the public appreciate the exceptional cultural values of prehistoric rock art.

Strategy 2. Heritage appraisal and analysis of the vulnerability of rock art.

Heritage appraisal applied to rock art is the process of research and comprehension of the value and significance accumulated by a rock art site over time. In turn, vulnerability analysis provides a complementary assessment of the sensitive and irreplaceable nature of this heritage. The use of heritage appraisal and vulnerability analysis tools facilitates decision-making aimed at preventive management and enables preferences to be established to determine which sites are suitable for their presentation to the public.

The following actions are relevant in connection with Strategy 2:

- The management of rock art heritage must consider the results of the heritage appraisal and vulnerability analysis.
- The attribution of values should be carried out in a standardised and objective manner, taking into account all the sensibilities and social agents involved so as to avoid biases that affect decision-making.
- Heritage appraisal criteria should be a topic of study and discussion in order to advance in the definition of analytical assessment matrixes that can be used efficaciously for their function (management, presentation, etc.).
- Vulnerability analysis should be derived from a complex study process that includes both the material characterisation and the exposure to the different agents of deterioration, so that both the present situation and future risks are considered.

Strategy 3. Recording of rock art and management of the information.

The localisation, documentation and recording of the rock walls, the images and their setting in the landscape require urgent action at the different sites. The integrated management of rock art is not possible without precise and exhaustive quantification and documentation of the different elements that form the rock art system. The use of digital information management systems helps its long-term conservation and facilitates its dissemination.

The following actions are relevant in connection with Strategy 3:

- The creation of an exhaustive catalogue of rock art heritage and its conversion into an open and updateable record, based on open standards that are interoperable between the different public administrations.
- The inclusion of heritage appraisal and vulnerability data in the catalogue.
- The production of exhaustive graphic documentation of rock art sites in accordance with recognised and updated protocols and standards.
- The use of digital technologies in the documentation of rock art so as to record with the greatest possible precision at least the iconography, size and colourimetry of the sites.
- The development of protocols for digital conservation on different levels, from the research itself to the autonomous and state administrations so as to ensure the survival of the digital

documentation.

- The management of this information should be based on forms of geographic information (GIS, data models) that include texts, tracings, photographs and 3D models, of historical character and accumulative over time.
- The initiation of an ambitious outreach strategy using digital repositories with public access that allow searches for updated information about each site.
- All the above should allow the permanent updating of knowledge regarding the state of the rock art sites. The active participation of the public will be encouraged in that task.



Strategy 4. Preventive management of landscapes containing rock art.

The efficient conservation of rock art sites requires going beyond the individualised management of each heritage property and its most immediate surroundings to address the preventive management of cultural landscapes marked by a high density of sites with rock art images. As far as possible, this management must be carried out in harmony with the traditional activities of the local communities provided that they do not imply a risk for the environmental integrity of the landscape or the rock art itself.

The same primacy will be given to the conservation of rock art as to other present and future sporting or social uses of the landscapes.

The preventive management of landscapes containing rock art represents an operative strategy allowing the identification and assessment of the risks that endanger this heritage. From there, the necessary actions to prevent, eliminate or mitigate them can be programmed.

The following actions are relevant in connection with Strategy 4:

- The application of the provisions in heritage legislation, by the assignation of a higher category of protection to all the catalogued rock art sites, and also the application of sanctions that set an example in the case of vandalism or antisocial behaviour that damages rock art.
- Improvement in heritage legislation to regulate uses and changes in use in landscapes with rock art, expressly mentioning new risk factors and promoting figures for effective management, such as Cultural Parks and Special Protection Plans.
- Development of new legal figures and new territorial strategies (environmental, etc.) that attend to the link of rock art with the landscape. Encouragement of a critical analysis of other sectorial norms that influence rock art and its landscapes, so that they are coherent with one another while always giving priority to heritage.
- Drafts of management plans with common characteristics for each of the prehistoric rock art heritage groups.
- Analysis of the risks that endanger prehistoric rock art and its landscapes by drawing territorial risk maps that, based on the information in the GIS, facilitate the proposal of necessary corrective measures.

- Change in the management of the ownership of sites with prehistoric rock art, either through their acquisition by public administrations or by agreements with the proprietors, so as to stimulate their collaboration in the care and maintenance of the sites.
- Development of collaboration systems that are able to act in coordination to detect damage and risks, acting with security forces, environmental agents and other public agents, municipalities and more widely with civil society.
- To achieve all the above, it is necessary to support local institutions and interest groups, cooperation and coordination channels between administrations, and the inclusion of specialised technical staff in the administration of the autonomous communities.



Strategy 5. Preventive conservation as a long-term mechanism for the protection of rock art.

Actions aimed at guaranteeing the conservation of the sites should give priority to preventive conservation and act upon the agents of deterioration to attenuate both known issues and especially future risks. Conservation requires the implementation of permanent diagnostic systems for the quantification of damage, the monitoring of alteration factors and the maintenance of the sites, for which the participation of many different agents is needed.

The following actions are relevant in connection with Strategy 5:

- Conservation demands an inter-disciplinary approach that brings together expert knowledge from different disciplines in order to certify the appropriateness of the actions being proposed.
- The implementation of conservation actions should consider the specific sensibilities of their object and the dominant deterioration agents, so as to anticipate as far as possible any damage to the rock art.
- Any conservation and protection action will be based on strict criteria that respect the original significance and relationship with the surrounding landscape. In this regard, a minimal impact, its reversibility, compatibility with the environment and use of appropriate materials will be essential aspects.
- Actions and treatments applied to rock art and the rock surfaces do not end with their application but require permanent maintenance and constant monitoring over years in order to assess their suitability.
- Preventive conservation of rock art landscapes in woodland should contemplate management of the vegetation that reduces the risks inherent to those environments, such as those derived from their economic use or fires.
- Risks derived from climate change make vital the development of research to provide answers to the complex present and future issues it will cause to the conservation of the different rock art systems.
- Development of intervention protocols based on this sequence of conservation steps (diagnosis, action, monitoring, maintenance) in order to respond to the results of a vulnerability analysis. These protocols must include measures to attend to emergencies. For

this, administrations should provide appropriate human and economic means.



Strategy 6. Management of knowledge of rock art.

Prehistoric rock art is the product of the social action of human groups who lived thousands of years ago and its comprehension is closely linked to the cultural landscape in which it is found. Its study should be based on inter-disciplinary working methodologies that bring together information from different disciplines and fields of knowledge. The transfer of this scientific knowledge to practical action will result in improved models of preventive management of rock art and its landscapes.

The following actions are relevant in connection with Strategy 6:

- Stimulus of the study of the processes involved in the material production of rock art, and its link to the territory and to the archaeological contexts in which it is found.
- Promotion of multi-disciplinary studies that contribute towards a better understanding of the different dimensions associated with rock art and its conservation.
- It is especially necessary to carry out research applied to the diagnosis of alterations and methods to treat them, since it is vital for the design of direct conservation methods.
- Encouragement of cooperation networks between universities, museums, interpretation centres and any organisation whose aims and activities include scientific research on any aspect of the rock art phenomenon, so as to find synergies that contribute to its study, management, conservation and presentation.
- The promotion of scientific outreach and the transfer of knowledge is a priority, as also critical debate and exchange of experiences between the research community and other agents involved.
- Development of specific educational programmes at different levels about the knowledge, conservation and management of rock art.



Strategy 7. Communication of the meaning and value of rock art heritage.

The cultural value of rock art is not intrinsic to itself but is given by society. The criteria on which the cultural value is based should reach the public through suitable means of communication in accordance with the importance attributed to it as a key element in human cultural evolution. Communication is made mainly in the different places in which the heritage is presented, through devices that facilitate its understanding and enjoyment by the public.

Moreover, the development of mechanisms of heritage education focused on rock art is one of the most important aspects in this strategy. Heritage education is regarded as essential for a gradual increase in the social appreciation of rock art and the commitment of society to its preservation.

The following actions are relevant in connection with Strategy 7:

- Design of planned strategies for the dissemination of rock art at different scales, starting with the state plans. These will be especially detailed at sites with facilities for public visits, whatever their size or characteristics.
- Development of specific plans for the promotion of information packs about rock art and archaeological heritage, both in formal education and in sociocultural contexts in places with rock art.
- Development of spaces for the presentation of rock art heritage, with functions related to the reception of visitors, contextualisation of the heritage property, cultural mediation, and preparation for the visit, within the possibilities of each place. Despite the difficulties, the criteria of universal accessibility should be fulfilled as far as possible.
- Promotion of collaboration networks between the rock art sites open to the public, through which successful experiences and good practices in the presentation of this heritage can be shared.
- Development of designs and equipment that respect and are adapted to the significance and heritage value of the places with prehistoric rock art, so that they can become true centres for the dissemination of knowledge.
- The basic functions of the presentation of rock art sites should be carried out by teams of an appropriate size, including professionals with specialised profiles in the relevant fields of knowledge, such as interpreters of heritage or educational teams.
- Creation of websites that facilitate the dissemination of non-sensitive data of rock art inventories. These digital databases could include such aspects as virtual visits, 3D models, digital tracings, etc. in order to put the enormous complexity of rock art heritage at the reach of the general public and promote social awareness.
- The communication of the significance and value of rock art should consider the potential of heritage education as a tool to promote the sense of belonging. This communication will also generate links and positive feelings of the public as regards rock art that will ultimately favour the development of constructive attitudes towards its preservation.

IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation of the strategies suggested in this document is legally the responsibility of the owners and public administrations, and particularly the Autonomous Communities because they are competent in the preservation and management of cultural heritage.

However, it is understood that this responsibility also reaches the State, very specifically in the case of sites on the World Heritage List. The complexity involved in the integrated management of prehistoric rock art and its landscapes makes it necessary to develop a national coordinated and collaborative strategy for identification, protection and management. This would be done ideally through a National Plan.

In any case, the achievement of true integrated management of rock art heritage requires a search for channels that allow cooperation between the different levels of public administrations. These channels should be open to the active collaboration of multiple stakeholders. To achieve this, a firm economic commitment is required to fund and carry out the wide range of proposals in this document.

The implementation of this Charter requires technical documents to develop particular aspects on which the principles and proposed strategies can be based. The National Rock Art Scientific Committee (NRASC) of ICOMOS-Spain will collaborate in the drafting of documents in order to provide public administrations with information enabling the design of the mechanisms needed to protect and manage this permanently endangered heritage.