Creating Sustainable Heritage Preservation Programs in Rural and Peri-Urban Communities: A Case Study from the Moche Valley, Peru

El Desarrollo de programas de conservación de patrimonial sostenible en comunidades rurales: un ejemplo del Valley Moche, Peru

By Brian Billman, Jesus Briceño Rosario, Alicia Boswell, Emma Freedman, Belsy Guiterrez Jave, and Kevin Kohler

Paper presented at El Tercer Congreso Internacional de Buenas Prácticas en Patrimonio Mundial: Acciones Integrales. Menorca, May, 2018

Abstract (175 words)
We review the major threats to archaeological heritage sites in Peru and methods used to protect those heritage sites. We present a new model for the implementation of sustainable community heritage programs, based on a decade of work by MOCHÉ, Inc. in rural and peri-urban communities the Moche Valley, Peru. To confront the intertwined problems of poverty and the destruction of archaeological sites in Peru, MOCHÉ forms partnerships with communities. We help these partner communities implement sustainable community development projects, such as the construction of potable water systems, kindergartens, community centers, ventilated kitchen, and VIP latrines. In exchange for this assistance, communities agree to protect specific local archaeological sites by creating community archaeological reserves. We follow up this emergency intervention with heritage education programs and small-scale heritage tourism projects in these partner communities. MOCHÉ funds the preservation preservation and community development projects by offering archaeological field schools, educational tours, and service-learning programs for university students and the general public. Through these programs we unite communities in Peru with socially committed people from the United States.

Introduction
Without a concerted, coordinated, and sustained effort by governmental and nongovernmental agencies to preserve Peru’s cultural heritage, most of the archaeological sites on the coast of Peru will be destroyed within a decade. The status of historic buildings and cultural landscapes is equally bleak. Heritage destruction is the result of this toxic mix of poverty and unregulated growth. Since the implementation of neo-liberal reforms in the early 1990s, tens of thousands of prehistoric and historic heritage sites have been destroyed, and the rate of destruction is accelerating.

We propose that the fate of heritage sites in Peru is linked to the fate of millions of impoverished families, who live adjacent to archaeological sites, in urban or peri-urban areas around Peru’s sprawling cities. Key factors hindering heritage preservation are (1) the exclusion of the rural poor from the economic benefits of heritage preservation and heritage tourism and (2) a public school system that largely ignores the PreColumbian heritage of Peru. Even though world-renowned archaeological sites (such as Machu Picchu, Inca Cuzco, the Nasca Lines, and Chan Chan) generate over a billion US dollars in
revenue each year, poor communities in Peru rarely receive any economic benefits from heritage sites, and often they do not feel a intangible tie to those sites.

**Heritage, Poverty, and Public Health**

In this paper we ask a question for discussion:

- How can poor communities on the coast of Peru, and elsewhere, use heritage preservation as an effective means of improving the lives of community members?

By improvement in the lives of community members, we mean tangible economic gains as well as intangible gains in pride, sense of empowerment, self-esteem, and identity. We have learned from many years of experience working in communities that the intangibles of heritage are an essential part of public health and family well being.

By heritage, we mean a sense of place and belonging, which can be manifested in parks, protected areas, historic buildings, archaeological sites, museums, monuments, and cultural landscapes, rich in culture meaning. Heritage is about livable communities with educational and economic opportunities. It is pride in one’s community. It is a common good that must be fostered and sustained through public actions. Heritage preservation is good community, city, and regional planning. It is about creating good jobs and business opportunities. But more than that, heritage preservation is about healthy communities. Community heritage provides a sense of self-esteem, place, and of belonging. Public and family health are tied to how people feel about themselves and their community. Consequently, community heritage preservation is a key part of good public health.

Alienation from one’s cultural heritage, sense of place, and shared identities is a public health problem. Alienation can induce significant psychosocial stress. Stress can be defined as a biocultural response to a disruption in the environment, be it the physical or the social environment (see Goodman et al. 1988:172–178). As Goldman and his colleagues note;

“...stress constitutes a pervasive force in our daily lives. Stress etches itself into our body and our behavior, usually initiates a series of biobehavioral counter responses, and ultimately bears consequences for our social relations, ideological constructs, and evolutionary trajectories (Goodman et al. 1988:169–170).”

In other words, heritage is crucial to the psychological and biological health of families and communities to the extent that alienation of one’s cultural heritage can have profound health consequence.
**The Forces Driving Heritage Destruction on the Coast of Peru**

The forces driving site destruction in Peru today are intertwined in larger social problems in complex manners. The implication of this is that the preservation of tangible and intangible heritage should be an integral part of public health and development projects in poor communities. Our experience has shown that we cannot address heritage preservation without addressing associated social problems.

One example serves to illustrate how heritage destruction part of larger social and public health problems in Peru. The Chavimochic Project is a massive reclamation project on the north coast of Peru. The project involves the construction of the Chavimochic Canal in order to move water north from the Santa River to four water-scarce valleys: Chao, Viru, Moche, and Chicama Valleys. The project was begun the early 1990s, and the canal has been constructed as far as the southside of the Moche Valley. The long-delayed final phase of the project has started and will bring water to the northern-most river valley, the Chicama. Eventually the main canal will be more than 170 km long.

In order to develop export agriculture, the Peruvian government granted the private Chavimochic Corporation rights to all “untitled state land” within reach of the canal. Because tenure laws are weak and land tenure records are poor, this means that Chavimochic can seize almost any “vacant lands” within its boundaries. In some cases, land is taken from individuals and communities that lack the resources to defend their titles in courts. In total, 1,100 sq km of land have been transferred to the Chavimochic Corporation, land that contains thousands of archaeological sites. The corporation periodically sells blocks of land to agricultural businesses, which develop the land for cash crops for the production of export crops, such as asparagus, artichokes, grapes, avocados, and other high-value fruits. Using GoogleEarth Pro, we calculate that to date, over 315 sq. km. (31,500 ha.) have been sold and developed into irrigated fields. This is equal to 45% the area of Menorca. Eventually an additional 785 sq km will be developed for industrial agriculture.

As part of the development of the Chavimochic project, the Ministry of Culture conducted rescue excavations at archaeology sites in the right of way of the Chavimochic Canal in the 1990s. Further, the Ministry has surveyed some of the blocks of land prior to sale. Within those blocks archaeological sites have been declared *zonas intangibles* or “intangible zones”, which in theory legally protects archaeological sites from destruction or sale. However, in practice, the Ministry lacks the resources to monitor the condition of *zonas intangibles* once the surrounding land has been sold and turned into fields and orchards. As a result, untold numbers of archaeology sites have been destroyed. Ascertaining the extent of the damage is daunting given the vast size of the 1,100-sq.-km, direct-impact area.

With the Chavimochic Project have come social problems that extend heritage destruction far beyond its project boundaries. One of the main social impacts of Chavimochic has been massive migration from poor communities from the highlands to the coast. High-value, export crops require a lot of cheap labor. Project supporters estimate that 150,000 new jobs will be created. However, nearly all of these are low wage jobs in fields. Tens of thousands of families have migrated to the north coast in search of those jobs and have settled on the margins of the Chavimochic project boundaries. The Chavimochic Corporation is not involved in regional planning, nor is it responsible for developing housing for agricultural workers. This has led to extensive land invasions by squatters, who seize vacant
land. Protected archaeological sites are often the victims of these land invasions, since they appear to be vacant, and because the limits of the Ministry of Culture’s power to evict squatters is well known.

Even when sites designated as zonas intangibles escape land invasion, they often become illegal dumps, because adjacent communities lack trash pickup. These squatter communities also lacking sewage disposal systems with the predictable result that zonas intangibles become open-air latrines.

The scale of the problem is illustrated by a recent case. Several thousand homeless families invaded land that Chavimochic had sold to agricultural developers in the Viru Valley. The ensuing conflict resulted in several deaths as thugs hired by developers attempted to evict squatters.

Community led land invasions now have been replaced by illegal land by criminal gangs, who are armed and dangerous. These traffickers openly sell land to which they do not have title, in some cases selling the same plot of land multiple times to different families. Zonas intangibles are specially targeted by the criminal gangs.

The impacts of the Chavimochic Project are not just detrimental to heritage preservation, but also to the health and well-being of members of these new squatter communities. These communities lack even the humblest of necessities. Economic opportunities are few, and heritage preservation is not considered a priority. This is a process in which people gain land but often in the end, abandon hope; the hope for clean water, schools, decent jobs, health care, and heritage. Dreams of livable communities are fleeting.

The Agency of Poor Communities
Although the causes of heritage destruction are many, poor communities are one of the agents of heritage destruction in Peru. Each month somewhere in Peru, communities invade archaeological sites and build homes and streets. Often they deliberately destroy archaeological sites, erasing evidence of prehistoric or historic occupations, in order to establish a stronger claim to the land. Unfortunately, over the last 50 years, the relationship between poor communities and the Ministry of Culture have become adversarial. Members of poor communities usually perceive the Ministry as an enemy and a treat to their tenuous land claims.

The taking of zonas intangibles and unregistered archaeological sites by adjacent, communities are often encouraged by local politicians, who promise land titles to squatters in exchange for votes. In 2010 in the middle Moche Valley, a local politician, who was running for re-election, ordered a government bulldozer to open a road across a zona intangible and then promised certificates of possession to the invading squatters. Encouraging the invasion of protected archaeological sites has become a common strategy in local elections on the north coast.

A key insight from this history of community-government confrontations is that communities have the power to destroy heritage sites; therefore, they also have the power to save heritage sites. Given the legal and political situation in Peru today, much of the archaeological heritage of Peru is doomed unless community organizations become active agents for preservation. However, they must have a compelling reason to preserve archaeological sites.
Gaining active support of communities can be an elusive goal. Communities are hotbeds of political intrigue. In the context of rapid population growth, access to land for family housing is one of the most politically charged issues in Peru (see De Soto 19??). This is especially true for newly formed communities of strangers, consisting of recent migrants from many different villages and towns in the sierra.

Although the odds are not in the favor of heritage preservation in Peru, there is hope for positive action and sustainable heritage preservation. The key is found in the poor communities living adjacent to heritage sites.

**The MOCHÉ, Inc Model**

In our view, many heritage preservation efforts in Peru have failed and are likely to continue to fail, unless heritage preservation is integrated into community-based poverty-reduction and public health programs. We do not regard the projects of heritage preservation, public health, and poverty reduction as contrary in goals. Nor are they parallel goals, but rather they share one goal: improvement in community well-being. Poor communities need heritage as much as middle-class and wealthy communities. *Heritage should be regard as a basic human right, not a privilege of wealth.*

The strategy that we have developed over the 20 years of community interventions—informally from 1998-2006 and after the incorporation of MOCHÉ in 2007 to present—involves integrating community development and heritage preservation. MOCHÉ, Inc. (http://savethemoche.org) is a non-governmental organization dedicated to protecting, teaching, and studying the rich cultural heritage of Peru. We pursue a three-phase approach. In Phase 1, MOCHÉ forms a partnership with rural or peri-urban community in the Moche Valley in order to protect specific, important archaeological sites that are threatened with imminent destruction. This is an emergency intervention; what we term “preservation at bulldozer’s edge.” In Phase 1, we provide financial and technical assistance for specific public health and education projects; in exchange, community members agree to recognize and protect a community archaeological reserve. Community members select development projects through an open and transparent process.

Once the destruction has stopped and threats have been reduced, in Phase 2, we invest in small-scale heritage development projects in partner communities. We have just begun this phase of work in two of partner communities.

The third phase involves investment in formal community-based heritage education programs. This includes, among other things, community-based, archaeological research projects in community reserves. In recent years, we have established an infrastructure for the implementation of heritage educations projects in three partner communities through the construction of kindergartens and community centers. The construction of these kindergartens and community centers were communally-selected development projects in Phase 1.

The ultimate goal of MOCHÉ and our partners is sustainable community archaeological reserves, controlled by local community organizations, recognized by the Ministry of Culture and local governments, which generate income, and which are a source of pride for community members. Many
elements of this three-phase approach are familiar to those of us who work in communities. Over the years, we have drawn upon widely used, best practices in community organizing and community heritage preservation.

What is unique about the MOCHE model, however, is that we fund these community projects through entrepreneurial activities. MOCHE is a non-profit business, not a charity. We offer archaeological field schools, educational tours, and service-learning programs for university students and other adults. Students, interns, and volunteers work on projects in partner communities and in community archaeological sites reserves, doing either archaeological research, heritage preservation, or community development projects. Fifteen percent of the fees paid by students and volunteers go into a community health and heritage fund, which is dedicated to projects in partner communities. In addition, program fees generate 100 percent of MOCHE’s overhead costs in the USA and Peru.

Since 2007, MOCHE has formed partnerships with six peri-urban communities in the Moche Valley. The result has been the creation of a series of informal community archaeological reserves, which protect more than more than 50 important archaeological sites, dating from 10,000 BC to the Inca period (ca. AD 1460-1535). Communities have benefited from the construction of three potable water systems, a medical clinic, and three community centers with kindergartens. In addition, with have sponsored the construction of VIP latrines and ventilated kitchens (cocinas mejoradas) in more than 100 households. We also conduct annual health clinics in partner communities, with the Physician Assistant program at Wagner College. These clinics have provided free medical services and health educations for thousands of families since 2009. After the devastating floods caused by El Nino rains in March and April of 2017, MOCHE provided immediate, emergency medical services, food, and water to families in partner communities.

We have started tourist development projects in community reserves, which involve building small community centers/museums, trails, and huts. Creating local, national and international advertising and social media connections will be an important part of these projects. Another integral part of our development plans will include micro-credit, training, and business mentoring to community members so that the economic benefits are captured at the local level. We helped establish the first women’s craft coop in the middle valley and are working with members on marketing goods. This group of women also has started a community bank with their own funds.

**Toward Best Practices**

MOCHE, Inc.’s model has worked on a small-scale in the Moche Valley, Peru. From our experiences we offer, tentatively, a few best practices in community-based preservation. These practices are provisional and subject to adaptation through continued engagement. We offer no magic bullet, no sociological formulae, but rather hard-won experience.

- Build from the bottom up, rather than the top down.
Because we recognize that communities are power-holders with significant stakes in heritage development, we start with community members and work from there up to the local district government and then regional and national government agencies.

- Impoverished communities must see immediate, tangible, positive results and these results most reach nearly all households in the community.

Households in the communities we work with are locked in a daily battle to feed their families, build their homes, defend their land rights, obtain health care, and provide education for their children. Projects that require several years of sustained effort, such as heritage development and community planning, are often beyond the daily imagination of people locked in a struggle for survival. Offering heritage education programs in poor communities in Peru right now is like offering fire prevention programs to someone whose house is on fire. Yes, long-term the family needs to learn about fire prevention, but, first, the fire must be put out. For this reason, we offer development projects that reach all or nearly all community members. Once the archaeological sites are secure, we begin tourist development and formal heritage educations programs.

- Know the community members; know the communities.

You cannot provide economic and heritage assistance without knowing the people in the community, how the community was formed, who are the leaders, what are the existing community organizations, and what are the community’s most urgent needs. This point may seem obvious, and yet many projects fail because the outside project planner, be they NGOs or governmental agencies, never asked what communities members wanted, and never involved the recipients in project planning.

- Participatory community surveys are crucial to project planning, successful project implementation, and post-project evaluation.

The standard practice in community organizing is the community meeting. Without question, every community project requires a succession of community meetings. However, successful implementation of heritage projects requires detailed knowledge about the community history, demographics, economic status of households, family health, and local power structure. One of the most important keys is understanding who the community leaders are and what community organizations are present. We design and implement household surveys to gather baseline information on the community. However, these surveys are designed and implemented by the community organizations with our assistance.
Results of the surveys are presented to the community in public meetings and in the form of a written report. Drone and GPS mapping is also used to produce maps and other graphic representations for community use. Such documents are essential in defending community lands. Surveys ultimately provide a baseline for post project assessments and monitoring.

- **Long-term commitments are essential, not development by “guerrilla raids”**.

Because heritage destruction is intertwined with complex social processes, there are not quick fixes, nor simple solution. Community preservation in peri-urban environments requires long-term commitments. Building trust with community members is essential process. Providing emergency disaster relief may not seem like heritage preservation; however, community heritage preservation is not a fair-weather project. Rather such crises are defining moments in community partnerships.

- **Be flexible; be prepared. Planning is not about implement the plan and schedule milestones; it’s about what you learn from the planning process.**

Planning is, of course, critical to the process. However, implementation of any planning document requires adaptation to on-the-ground circumstance. Working in poor communities on the edge of sprawling cities presents its own set of unique challenges. Coping with unpredictability and uncertainty are defining elements of this work. It is not like working in other preservation environments with well defining laws and regulations. The purpose of planning should not just be the production of a written document. Planning is about preparing and training staff to for a range of scenarios.

**Conclusions**

As we wrote this paper, part of the Cerro Leon Community Archaeological Reserve was invaded a criminal gang of illegal land traffickers. They employed armed thugs for protection and used a bulldozer to leveled MV 223, one of the most important Late Moche Phase town sites in the middle Moche Valley. Members of our partner community immediately reported this to local authorities and to the Ministry of Culture, but state interventions came too late. For a decade, community members had protected this site; however, they could not confront an armed and dangerous gang. The power of communities has its limits. If the archaeological heritage of the coast of Peru, the government, NGOs, and the community must unite.

The forces that are driving heritage destruction on the north coast of Peru are not unique to Peru. Other rapidly urbanizing countries across the world are facing similar challenges. Although difficult, community-based preservation and development in impoverished communities in Peru, and elsewhere, is achievable. Our 21 years of experience working with communities in the Moche Valley have demonstrated the power of communities. These communities are the key to heritage preservation.
However, for community-based preservation to succeed, we must integrate heritage planning into public health and education programs. Sustaining our model however is its the ultimate test.