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World Heritage and the Local Community: The Case of Atapuerca (Burgos, Spain)

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As social constructions, heritage properties require the participation of all their stakeholders, especially in the case of UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The Atapuerca (Burgos, Spain) World Heritage Site is used as a test case for assessing the fulfilment of the local community's development expectations, perceptions, and values. This paper is the first formal attempt to ascertain the opinions of residents in the surrounding villages — Ibeas de Juarros and Atapuerca — regarding the initiatives taken by the authorities, and the changes produced, since the site was included in the World Heritage List. The results show that many improvements can be made with the aim of democratizing the decision-making process, ensuring the involvement of the local community and improving their quality of life, in order to fulfil the spirit and recommendations of UNESCO.

KEYWORDS heritage management, UNESCO, World Heritage, local community, participation, Atapuerca, Spain

Introduction

Cultural heritage is formed by all manifestations of the existence and lifestyles of human groups over time. It implies a historical process by which certain items acquire meaning and significance as part of a cultural system and thus shapes people's identity as well as differentiates them from others (Sanoja Obediente, 1982).

Among the large variety of cultural and natural heritage sites, only some of them are considered to embody a significance that transcends the national or local scale to be part of the common global heritage. In 1972, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defined these properties as part of the *World Heritage* with a view to their recognition, safeguarding, cataloguing, and promotion. The quality considered to be definitive for UNESCO listing is precisely '*outstanding universal value*'.

As with all types of heritage, this consideration has political, economic, social, cultural, scientific, educational, tourist, ecological, and aesthetic dimensions. It therefore brings into play interactions between the desires, perceptions, values, and expectations of different stakeholders. Countries and regions with declared World Heritage Sites have become major tourist hubs, which poses new challenges for their managers to promote respect for heritage values and the interests of the host community.

Despite the emergence of new approaches to the social construction of heritage and the importance of dialogue with society, some government sectors are still reticent to encourage community participation in the heritage management process. This influences the way heritage management and conservation is now approached, requiring a prior identification of the stakeholders and the values that are involved (see the Burra Charter, Marquis-Kyle & Walker, 1996 and the Nara Document on Authenticity, Larsen, 1995) as well as the use of participatory mechanisms for consensus-based decision-making on policies to be applied (Pearson & Sullivan, 1995; Hall & McArthur, 1996; Avrami, et al., 2000), set out in the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* (UNESCO, 2008).

This paper presents the practical case of Atapuerca (Burgos, Spain), an archaeological site with a history of nearly forty years of continuous research, declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 2000. The Sierra de Atapuerca caves contain a large volume of fossilised vestiges of the first humans who settled in Europe more than a million years ago. The site is a unique data source, and its scientific analysis is revealing valuable information about the aspects and styles of life of the various species that have been part of our evolution as humans. However, in all this time, the local communities have never been consulted about their opinions and assessments about the consequences of listing Atapuerca as a World Heritage Site. This study is thus the first formal attempt to engage the local residents with a view to profiling their range of views and perceptions about a *World Heritage* property that has become part of their everyday life. Interviews and questionnaires with semi-structured questions were designed not only to give voice to these stakeholders, but also to gain a significant and unprecedented insight into their opinions. Finally, the collated data and their utility for a heritage management style more sensitive to the social environment are discussed.

Theoretical framework

This research is carried out in the framework of the so-called *public archaeology*, a subdiscipline that identifies and addresses a wide range of social and political implications of archaeological research and heritage (Ascherson, 2000; Angelo, 2014). The notion of *public archaeology* is thus linked to the idea that its activities are a matter of public interest (Merriman, 1991; Carman, 1996; Jameson, 1997; Funari, 1999; Shadla-Hall, 1999; Moshenska, 2009). In this context, it is important not only to identify the agents involved with archaeology and archaeological heritage (Lowenthal, 1985; Preucel & Hodder, 1996; Merriman, 2004; Endere, 2007, inter alia) but also to know their views and perceptions (Stone, 1989; Merriman, 1991; McManus, 1998, 2000; Avrami, et al., 2000; Endere, 2007; Atalay, 2012, etc.).

Archaeological heritage has been defined by Gonzalez Méndez (2000: 135) as, ‘the historical and social legacy of foregoing generations that has survived over time and must be preserved for future generations’. In other words, our heritage consists of a number of items that a community — or at least certain parts of it — has chosen to protect as evidence of its past and wishes to transmit to future generations (ICOMOS, 1990). In this sense, different views about heritage can therefore be expected, as well as divergent and conflicting social appreciations of it (García Canclini, 1999; Larsen, 1995).

Community involvement has been promoted by nongovernmental organizations responsible for recommending action on cultural heritage. The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) International Charter for the Protection of Archaeological Heritage (1990) stated heritage preservation is a collective public responsibility and, therefore, the active participation by the public must form part of policies for the protection of the archaeological heritage (see Art. 2). The International Charter on Cultural Tourism, focused on the management of significant heritage sites (ICOMOS, 1999), recommends that tourism should generate benefits for the host community, and respect their interests.

In this sense, it is important to point out that it is not possible to assess what is not known, and therefore it is the responsibility of the heritage management to ascertain the interests and opinions held by the local host communities. The Charter on the Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Heritage Sites also recommends social participation and inclusion in the interpretation of cultural heritage. This requires the involvement and commitment of the agents and the associated communities in the development process, and opening up the interpretation programmes to public comment and involvement. It is also worth noting that all of these processes must be based on respect for the right and the responsibility of each person to express his or her views and perspectives (ICOMOS, 2008).

The present paper thus analyses the public interest in this heritage site and the complex nature of its cultural significance in the context of the heritage declaration process. It also addresses the relationship with the local communities as a necessary condition in order to strengthen the public and social dimension of declared World Heritage Sites.

Atapuerca

Sierra de Atapuerca is a modest limestone range located between two municipalities — Ibeas de Juarros and Atapuerca — 14 km away from Burgos, northern Spain. It is

surrounded by several watercourses (Arlanzón, Pico, and Vena Rivers), many springs, and straddles two of the Iberian Peninsula's main river basins, the Douro and the Ebro (Figure 1). It has a Mediterranean climate with cold winters and long frost periods. Low Holm and Pyrenean oak forests predominate in the highlands and form open woodlands on the river terraces and valleys, with many riparian trees along the riverbanks (Díez, et al., 2014).

Ibeas de Juarros, on the southern flank of the Sierra, has 954 inhabitants¹ and Atapuerca, on the northern slope, has a population of 191 people. Both have traditionally been dryland farming villages, but now much of the Ibeas populace works in the tertiary sector, including manufacturing, education, military, and other activities,² thanks to its good connection with Burgos city. In Atapuerca, the primary sector is still predominant, although in recent years the tourist industry has also gained weight because of St James's Way and the Atapuerca sites. Sierra de Atapuerca contains many archaeo-palaeontological sites, under ongoing excavation since 1978, which cover more than a million years of almost uninterrupted prehistoric occupations. It has yielded many human remains from of 1.2 and 0.8 M BP, assigned to the species *Homo antecessor*, more than thirty complete *H. heidelbergensis* individuals (0.4 M BP) and abundant archaeological

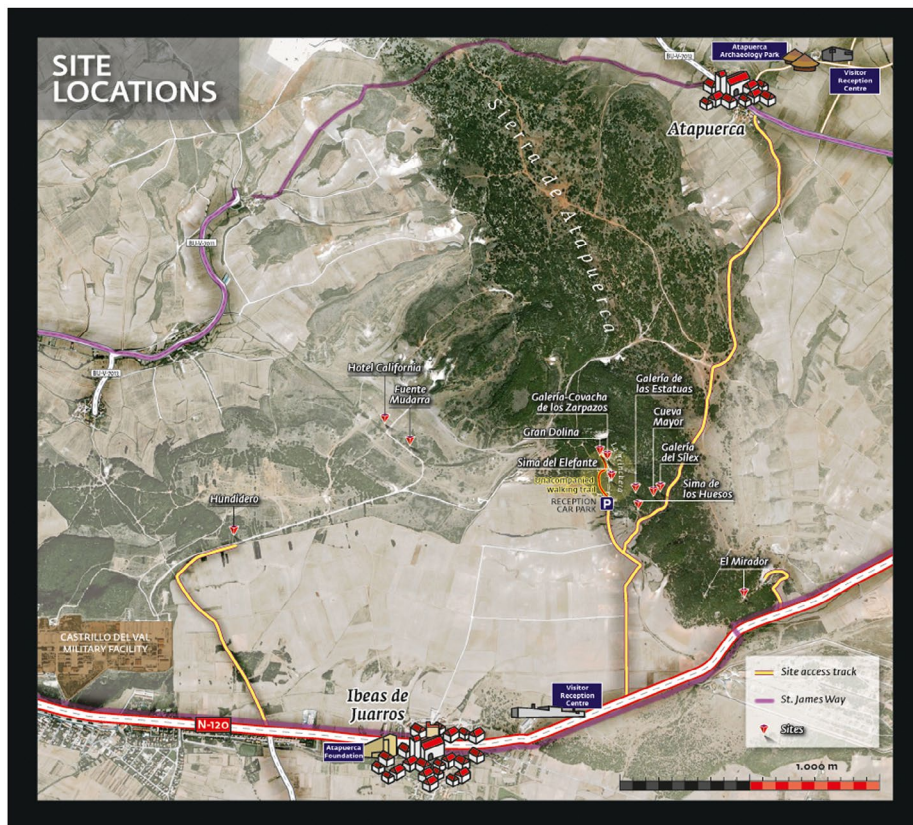


FIGURE 1 Sierra de Atapuerca and surrounding villages.

and palaeontological remains that provide insights into the climate, environment, and culture of the oldest period of humanity, the Lower Palaeolithic (Díez, et al., 2009). The world-famous discoveries and research led its listing as a Site of Cultural Importance by the Castilla-León Regional Government in 1991 and then as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 2000 in Category III ('a unique or at least exceptional testimony of a cultural tradition or a living or extinct civilization') and Category V ('an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement [...], representative of a culture...').

Since then, the regional government has invested large amounts of money in the excavations themselves and in tourism, including the construction of the visitor reception centres in Ibeas de Juarros and Atapuerca, roofing for the cave sites, road improvements, the site entrance building, the Atapuerca Archaeological Park, and the Museum of Human Evolution in Burgos. In 2009, the Atapuerca Evolution Culture System (SACE) was set up. Run by the Castilla-León Regional Government through the Siglo Foundation, it is responsible for the management of tourism and infrastructure related to Atapuerca (i.e. facilities, centres, services, and departments).

Part of our research was aimed at ascertaining whether these developments and changes have affected the local community in relation to mass tourism and visitors' attitudes, particularly due to the growth and international reputation of the site. We therefore asked local people about the impact of the UNESCO listing on their community, if they have been affected negatively during any part of this process, if they feel part of the everyday dynamics of the site and whether they have participated in the decision-making processes. Finally, we also wanted to know how these transformations have influenced the social relations amongst all the stakeholders.

Methodology

This research is based on a qualitative–quantitative approach in the framework of the methodological strategies used in social research (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975). In order to bring to light the diversity of opinions and provide a coherent representation of the perceptions and assessments of these communities concerning the Atapuerca site, a voluntary, anonymous survey was conducted, along with personal interviews with each respondent (Cohen, et al., 2007). The questionnaire included both closed and open questions in order to go beyond a purely quantitative analysis of the data (Oppenheim, 1998; Cohen, et al., 2007; González, et al., 2010). The open questions were aimed at generating a broader, more flexible, margin for significant variables and statements by the interviewees, and thus avoid biased answers.

The survey was carried out in two villages, Ibeas de Juarros and Atapuerca (Burgos, Spain) in November and December 2014. A different strategy was used in each one to select respondents. In Ibeas de Juarros, the main contact was the city council, which provided contacts with other sectors and intermediary institutions. This facilitated the definition of different interest groups. In all, 132 surveys were undertaken, which represent 14% of the total population. In Atapuerca, the local employment and development agent facilitated the residents' identification and contacts, although the city council was also consulted. Due to the small number of residents in the latter municipality, it was decided to contact as many individuals as possible (89 surveys, 65% of the population).

The total sample consisted of 221 surveys, 48% men and 52% women. The age distribution was 11% 18- to 30-year-olds, 29% 31- to 40-year-olds, 29% 41- to 50-year-olds, 13% 51- to 60-year-olds, 10% 61- to 70-year olds, and 5% over 70 years.

Results: profiling the voice of the local community

The following results permit an initial interpretation of the local community's perceptions, opinions, and assessments of the UNESCO World Heritage listing.

Many responses mention the need for more dialogue with the government bodies, companies and authorities that manage the site, and a desire for their views to be taken into account, at least at the same level as tourists and scientists, especially on issues affecting the municipalities and their inhabitants. This is considered a key result, given the lack of precedents for public consultation with the local/host community. However, it reveals a contradiction with the UNESCO principles, which give a key importance to the participation of different interest groups (UNESCO, 2014), mainly in the case of Atapuerca, where there is a clear link between the site and the neighbours (including officially registered residents and those with long-term labour or leisure connections to the town). The vast majority of them claim to be familiar with the Sierra (95%), visit it often (62%), and agree with the World Heritage listing (76%). Moreover, even without knowing the reasons and justification used for the UNESCO declaration, 41% express their support and confirm the merits stated in the proposal.

There is thus a strong emphasis on the site's scientific value as the main attribute for its consideration as heritage (49%). In general, they do not express doubts that the listing has been beneficial for research (72%) and given it international prominence (37%). There is clearly a sense of pride and prestige in its declaration as World Heritage, along with some improvements to income in the community (Figure 1). It is also interesting to note that the representatives of the local community regard the prehistoric inhabitants of these mountains as their ancestors, and thus consider themselves descendants of the various hominid species who lived in the Atapuerca caves in Palaeolithic times (65%).

Questions about changes as a result of the listing reveal that a quarter of the respondents (25%) have not perceived many changes in their villages, or at least not as many as

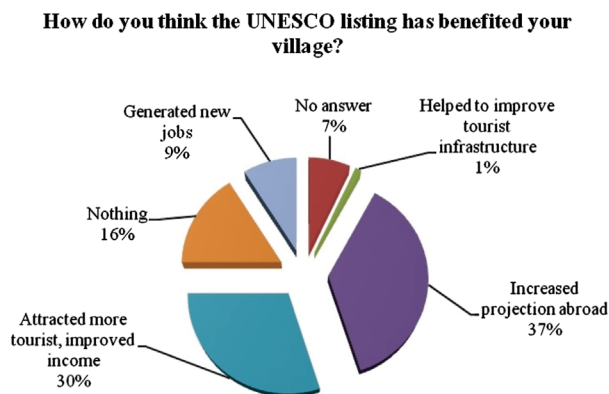


FIGURE 2 Benefits of the UNESCO listing for the village.

those expected by the site manager (Dirección de Yacimientos) and the political and economic authorities (Bernal, 2009). The survey shows an acknowledgement of the increase of tourist numbers (30%, see Figure 2), although a significant proportion of the people surveyed (19.5%) consider the massive growth in visits to be a negative factor, along with the greater regulation or control of construction stated by the government (6.3%), in addition to some critiques to the visitor reception centre (VRC), mainly on account of its location outside the town and its lack of an activity programme (5.9%) (Table 1).

When asked about their memories on pre-listing times, respondents show a clear longing for their childhood, when they played in the Sierra and entered the caves uninhibitedly (23%). They also mention the time when the first scientists arrived and had direct contact with the locals, organising talks, etc. (10%) (Table 2). In order to ask about these issues, open-ended questions were employed, which allowed participants to reflect more accurately the affinity of their perceptions.

Residents were enthusiastic during this period, and were excited about the initial discoveries, the scientific repercussions, and the media cover. Afterwards, however, the growth of the phenomenon changed the hitherto close and familiar relationship between

Table 1
WHAT FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES HAVE HAPPENED TO THE VILLAGE SINCE THE UNESCO LISTING?

What fundamental changes have happened to the village since the UINESCO listing?	Total %
None	25.3
Increased visits and tourism	19.5
Control over constructions	6.3
CRV negative connotations	5.9
Pride and prestige	5.4
Business opportunities	3.2
More visitors, more tourism	3.2
Positive connotations of VRC	2.7
Others	2.3
Improvements	2.3
Residents appreciate what they have	1.8
Got worse	1.4
Atapuerca Foundation	0.5
Don't know/No answer	20.4

Notes: The Atapuerca Foundation is a nonprofit body established to support and publicize the Atapuerca Project. The Castilla-León Regional Government has now also given it responsibility for tourist management.

Table 2
MEMORIES OF THE SITES BEFORE THE UNESCO LISTING.

What memories do you have of the site before the UNESCO listing?	Answers in %
None	28.5
Uninhibited visits as a child or adolescent	22.6
The first digs, fieldworks, talks, and close relationship with the team	9.5
Less infrastructure, less visits. UNESCO promoted it	4.9
Lack of recognition and efforts to get it	3.6
The same	2.7
Few	2.3
Other answers	2.3
It was less protected	1.4
Good	1.4
Don't know/No answer	18.6

the local community and the Atapuerca team. Mediation by many institutions and the diversification of the scientific activities as much as the involvement of many more team members ended up in the depersonalization of their relationships with the local community. It is not surprising that the early period is recalled fondly as a time of a bonding that seemed to involve them directly with the site.

In all, 72% consider that the listing has been beneficial for environment conservation, while 28% think the opposite. The aspects identified as potential threats include the presence in the Sierra of military activities (27%), quarries (13%), and heavy traffic (private cars, buses, and visitors) which affect the ecosystem (11%). They also identify certain economic activities that have been affected, along with the inevitable inconvenience of more vehicle traffic, visitors, and resource exploitation of the Sierra (firewood, crops, etc.). However, in a diachronic perspective, they see more advantages than disadvantages and find it hard to (re)imagine life in their villages without the World Heritage declaration of Atapuerca (58%). A desire to return to a pre-listing state was not found amongst respondents. It is worth noting that not all aspects considered as negative for the environment are linked to cultural tourism, as some refer to the industrial exploitation of the area. This deserves further analysis with regard to the permitted uses in the site's buffer zone; however it clearly lies beyond the scope of this paper.

Overall, residents appreciate the landscape (47%) (Table 3) more than the excavations, or the fact that it has been considered World Heritage. They have a comprehensive perception of their environment, which for them includes not only the Sierra but also the surrounding hills, rivers and lakes, monuments (churches, mills, etc.) and even intangible aspects such as the local cuisine. It is interesting to note that they believe that tourism

Table 3
MAIN ATTRACTION OF SIERRA DE ATAPUERCA ACCORDING TO RESIDENTS.

What is the main attraction of Sierra de Atapuerca?	Answers in %
The landscape	46.6
The excavations and their scientific results	34.8
To be a World Heritage Site	11.3
Infrastructure (cave roofing, parks, visitor reception centres, etc.)	3.2
No answer	4.1

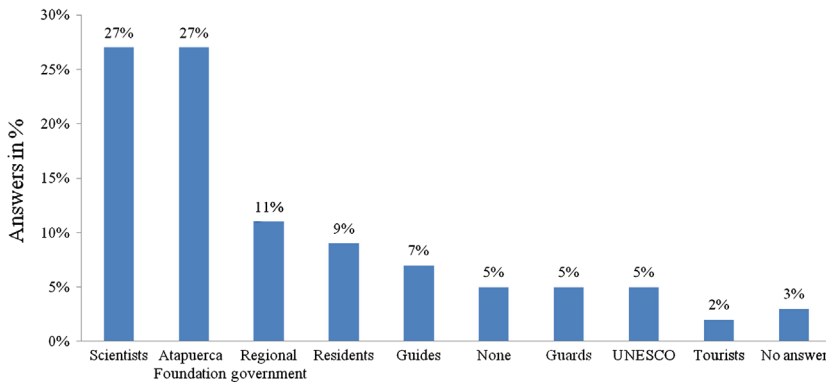


FIGURE 3 Who can best protect this heritage according to local residents.

should also draw on the local traditional culture in its many manifestations. Examples mentioned include the Camino de Santiago (St James's Way), the Atapuerca Wetlands, red bean fields, the Museum of Traditions, and Esperanza Mine, amongst others.

Residents largely feel that all new infrastructure has been brought to serve tourists and researchers, not the local people. They seem to approve the investment in science, and consider that the site is a major local asset (30%, Figure 1), that its scientific importance is fundamental, and that the researchers were the main driving force behind the declaration as World Heritage Site and the major protectors (27%), even above UNESCO and the local population (Figure 3).

Discussion and final comments

The 1999 ICOMOS Charter points out that 'heritage is a broad concept' which 'encompasses landscapes, historic places, sites and built environments, as well as biodiversity, collections, past and continuing cultural practices, knowledge and living experiences'. In this sense, 'it is a dynamic reference point and positive instrument for growth and change'. Its management and preservation is a veritable challenge for any community anywhere in the world. The case of Atapuerca is therefore an example of an archaeological site of international importance which can be analysed from a perspective that brings to the fore dynamic social relations and also the disputes and interests of the local communities.

One of the main aims of the management of archaeological heritage is to communicate its significance and the need for its conservation to different audiences. The local communities in Atapuerca and Ibeas de Juarros are thus key stakeholders who live alongside the site and have a positive attitude towards it, although they do not feel they have been part of the heritage declaration and safeguarding process. Moreover, there seems to be some ignorance about the reasons for the World Heritage listing, which may point to a communication problem: the scientific knowledge that underpinned the declaration was not shared at the time with the local community with a view to the democratization of this information. There are now many varied and ongoing outreach initiatives (Alonso & Martin, 2013) promoted by the research and management team. This has facilitated acknowledgement of the declaration as a positive and highly valued event, although it does not seem to have been enough to achieve an understanding of the true foundations, or to identify the real implications of the listing for the site.

The survey also brought to light another closely related weakness of the communication and participation processes undertaken to date. According to the management recommendations made by UNESCO (2008, 2014) each community should feel that it is responsible for the safeguarding of its heritage, even when it is declared to be part of the World Heritage. Point 8 of the Nara Document on Authenticity states that 'the cultural heritage of each is the cultural heritage of all. Responsibility for its cultural heritage and management of it belongs, in the first place, to the cultural community that has generated it, and subsequently to that which cares for it' (Larsen, 1995).

Likewise, the European Landscape Convention, ratified by Spain (Council of Europe, 2000), states that 'Each Party undertakes to recognise landscapes in law as an essential component of people's surroundings, an expression of the diversity of their shared cultural and natural heritage, and a foundation of their identity [...] to establish procedures for the participation of the general public, local and regional authorities, and other

parties with an interest in the definition and implementation of the landscape policies' (Art. 5 a and c).

This does not seem to have happened in the case of Atapuerca. When asked who is responsible for safeguarding the site (Figure 2), residents considered themselves to have little importance — less than the individual researchers, the Atapuerca Foundation or the Castilla-León Regional Government. This shows that although they feel that the site belongs to them, they do not take responsibility for it and are unaware of the role that they could play.

In this regard, the massive increase in international tourist visits to the site in recent years is highly noteworthy.³ This is a key factor in the development of many local and regional economies. It can have a huge impact on the community if it is managed properly. In fact, tourism is increasingly appreciated as a positive force for nature and cultural preservation, which can channel the economic aspects of a heritage site for use in conservation, generating funding, educating the community, and influencing policies (ICOMOS, 1999). In Atapuerca, however, this seems to have been affected negatively by resource management decisions: the benefits of the new visitor reception centre built on the outskirts of the village, and the Museum of Human Evolution in Burgos city do not seem to have reached the community. Residents are highly critical of the current tourist management structure. They claim that no infrastructure that might involve the villages has been built, nor are the cultural managers striving to offset the loss of population or dynamise opportunities in the affected municipalities. They complain that tourists pass through their village without stopping and spend their money in the provincial capital, despite the widely known precept that tourism should bring benefits to the host community and provide important resources and motivations to care for and maintain its heritage.

ICOMOS (1999) states that well-managed physical, intellectual and/or emotional access is both a right and a privilege of the local communities. This requires commitment and cooperation amongst the local representatives, tour operators, scientists, policy-makers, designers of development plans, and the site managers. Heritage management is therefore normally entrusted to experts whose institutional backgrounds often differ from, and clash with, local interests and social situations. Participation by local stakeholders in the identification process and the design of different management strategies and policies is thus considered to be crucial (Leal & Leal, 2012). The implementation of participatory mechanisms (Greenwood, 2000; Prats, 2005; Caraballo Perichi, 2012; Turner & Tomer, 2013) should therefore be the starting point for effective management of this heritage site in its broadest sense.

In conclusion, if we consider our heritage to be an intentional social construction (Prats, 2005, see also Bond & Gilliam, 1997) which can only be created and maintained by the determined will of society, its strength inevitably depends on the degree of satisfaction and improvement sensed by the direct agents of the heritage sites, the local residents. This survey of more than 200 such agents has been the first collation of local opinions about the site, its management, their satisfaction, and their expectations of change. The results clearly reflect a demand for greater citizen participation and a broader and more democratized approach to the management of a heritage resource of major cultural and tourist importance which has great potential for integrated community development.

It should also be pointed out that this research can be extrapolated to other heritage sites, given that more democratized decision-making processes are without a doubt a key aspect of participatory management of cultural resources all over the world.

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Notes

¹ The hamlets belonging to the Ibeas de Juarros municipality are not included in the census as none of them have land in the Sierra. We have included the hamlet of Olmos with Atapuerca as it does include terrain in the Sierra area. Data source: National Statistics Institute.

² A military base, Castrillo del Val, lies west of Ibeas de Juarros. It has jurisdiction over a large part of Sierra de Atapuerca that is property of the Defence Ministry.

³ Numbers of tourists to the Atapuerca System (sites, visitor reception centres and Museum of Human Evolution): 374,107 in 2011, 254,775 in 2012, 257,691 in 2013, and 283,076 in 2014. Source: Burgos Tourist Observatory Bulletin.

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