Experts and Stakeholders

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Introduction

For long an arena of "expert" engagement and control, heritage in the past few decades has seen a growing concern to draw in "stakeholders." Experts are traditionally defined by their formal qualifications and knowledge, their expertise, and are very often paid professionals. Stakeholders are defined by their interests (whether place-based, community-centered, or thematic) and often by ownership in one sense or another. The relationship and difference between the two is a fraught area, and the drive for more engagement and participation in heritage is bringing underlying issues around experts and stakeholders to the foreground, which have major implications for both heritage practice and theory. This piece attempts to provide an international overview of theory and practice relating to experts and stakeholders in a heritage context, but is inevitably shaped by the author's more in-depth knowledge of developments in the United Kingdom and published literature in English.

Heritage professionals in many parts of the world are increasingly concerned with encouraging members of the public to interact with heritage. Innovative approaches to interpreting (see HERITAGE INTERPRETATION) and presenting heritage to the public utilize ever more diverse ranges of media, including social media and immersive visualization technologies such as augmented reality (see AUGMENTED REALITY). Concurrently, developments in heritage management (see HERITAGE MANAGEMENT) call for professionals to encourage public participation in identifying and looking after heritage.

In the modern history of heritage, issues of experts and stakeholders have largely been approached implicitly, but the questions of valid forms of knowledge about heritage that underpinned the discussions around the formation of the Nara Document on Authenticity in the 1990s (Larsen 1995) have become explicit in recent heritage charters. The Faro Convention (see FARO CONVENTION), for example, connects heritage and human rights (see HERITAGE AND HUMAN RIGHTS), giving rise to entire scholarly volumes on heritage expertise (Schofield 2014). Questions of expertise now sit at the center of the growing body of critical heritage studies, in which critical theory (see CRITICAL THEORY), and its foregrounding of politics, power, inequality, and exclusion are applied to heritage. Experts and stakeholders are therefore not simple distinctions between heritage professionals and the public, but contested value-laden terms that privilege selected interpretations of heritage, perpetuating existing power structures.

Defining experts and stakeholders

An expert is widely understood as an individual with superior knowledge or skill in a certain area; this superior skill or knowledge is referred to as expertise. Experts are often regarded as authorities on their subject and as such can hold considerable power. This power may be freely given in recognition of perceived expertise or imposed through legislation by authorities. A stakeholder is a person, group, or organization with a stake, understood as an interest or a claim to something. While experts are identified by virtue of their perceived expertise, stakeholders tend to be self-selecting and involve themselves in order to represent their interests. Stakeholders and their interests may or may not be recognized by decision makers, yet stakeholders are not employed or compelled, but choose to assert their interests.

With regard to heritage, the term "stakeholder" is almost exclusively used in the context of decision making in heritage management.

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Nevertheless, many of the functions performed by cultural organizations operating on behalf of the public, such as public museums, are based on an understanding of members of the public as stakeholders. The perceived duty to present and display collections and sites accompanied by the results of expert research, highlights the sense that heritage does not belong to experts, as further demonstrated by the growing pressure to repatriate (see REPATRIATION) collections, especially in postcolonial contexts. New modes of engagement that invite audiences to interact with heritage more directly, coupled with developments in heritage ethics (see HERITAGE ETHICS) that emphasize respecting cultural diversity and legitimize nonwestern understandings of heritage (see HERITAGE: NONWESTERN UNDERSTANDINGS), are blurring established distinctions between experts and stakeholders.

Stepping beyond the complex issues of ownership, current heritage management literature and practice predominantly follow values-based approaches. These approaches are based on the premise that heritage is conserved and used because it is valued, and that decisions about heritage should be made on the basis of as comprehensive an understanding as possible of its values and significance (see VALUE OR SIGNIFICANCE). As a result, stakeholder consultation is increasingly advocated due to the recognition that expert knowledge alone is insufficient to inform multicriteria decision making. The expanding range of what is considered heritage, from the monumental and aesthetically pleasing to include complex landscapes (see HERITAGE AND LANDSCAPES), the vernacular, and the intangible (see MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS), is also prompting the search for expertise beyond established expert circles. Despite this, traditional distinctions between experts and stakeholders, and the authority awarded to each, have remained largely unchanged in practice.

As heritage management continues to advocate plurality and multivocality, archaeologists are increasingly having to justify the primacy given to archaeological knowledge and expertise. Their perceived position of privilege is under pressure from critical heritage scholarship, which seeks a different balance between experts and stakeholders. While archaeologists engaging with these critiques have argued that archaeological experts working as heritage managers should consider themselves heritage managers first and archaeologists second, in an effort to treat fairly the various values attributed to heritage (Emerick 2014), others regard archaeologists as powerful stakeholders who have coopted heritage and doubt the extent to which archaeologists can divorce themselves from their disciplinary training and preference (Waterton and Smith 2009).

Reasons for engagement and participation

Heritage experts and institutions are increasingly required to demonstrate their relevance and value to society. As a result, boosting engagement metrics, such as visitor numbers, and diversifying visitor demographics are becoming more important. A growing number of scholars are conducting research to demonstrate the wider social significance of heritage (see HERITAGE AND SOCIETY) to pressing concerns such as sustainability (see HERITAGE AND SUSTAINABILITY) and wellbeing, and to develop more accurate metrics that capture the full range of ways in which people engage with heritage. Heritage practice and research is thus increasingly underpinned by a belief that active participation and engagement in heritage activities provides social and individual benefits.

Despite the potential benefits to participants, stakeholder participation in heritage is also promoted to raise the quality and capacity of professional practice. The management of heritage sites and collections in line with the standards of best practice promoted by monitoring institutions and policy is often not possible without the active support of local communities and volunteers. Most archaeological sites are not guarded when professional work is not ongoing and rely on the involvement of stakeholders for protection. Many smaller museums and remote heritage sites are similarly reliant on the voluntary initiatives of stakeholders. Larger institutions often also depend on volunteers to complete large survey, digitization, and simple conservation (see CONSERVATION) projects that would not be viable with paid professional

capacity alone. When budgets are stretched thin, discussions of appropriate distinctions between professional labor and voluntary contributions inevitably arise, relating to issues of both ethics and expertise.

Concerns with heritage ethics (see HERITAGE ETHICS) and the implications of their application to values-based approaches (see HERITAGE AND VALUE-BASED APPROACH) have highlighted the contested nature of heritage and contributed pressure to democratize and decolonize heritage, especially in postcolonial contexts. As a result, in countries like the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, decisions about how indigenous heritage is conserved, studied, and displayed are more often made in consultation with, or entirely by, Indigenous stakeholders, and the employment of Indigenous experts in cultural organizations is becoming more common. The conventions of the Council of Europe have spread these ideas of democratization and local knowledge to Europe by advocating for the legitimacy of stakeholders' memories (see MEMORY) and perspectives on place and identity as valid forms of knowledge about heritage. An example is the European Landscape Convention, which calls for the involvement of stakeholders in every stage of heritage identification and assessment to aid decision making and the formation of policies.

Alongside demonstrating the relevance of heritage to society and increasing the capacity and quality of professional work, public participation in heritage activities is advocated to facilitate connecting people to their heritage. By actively taking part in community archaeology (see HERITAGE AND COMMUNITY ARCHAEOLOGY) and community heritage (see COMMUNITY HERITAGE) projects, participants can gain a new appreciation for the heritage they have interacted with. Arguably, it is through interactions like these that new attachments to heritage can be formed, thereby increasing their significance within a values-based framework. It may be hypothesized, following hierarchies of learning developed in pedagogy, that deeper engagement or more involved participation will lead to greater attachment.

Methods for engagement and participation

The range of methods used by heritage professionals to provide more immersive and engaging heritage experiences is becoming broader. This enables heritage professionals to draw on and develop the expertise of stakeholders, simultaneously strengthening the attachments to heritage of existing stakeholders, and facilitating the formation of new stakeholder attachments. Traditionally behind the scenes processes, such as conservation in museums, are increasingly made visible through panels, temporary pop-up exhibits, purpose-built conservation studios that allow visitors to observe professionals at work, and participatory conservation projects where volunteers are allowed to perform conservation tasks with supervision. Similarly, some museums invite community curators, where stakeholders are given the opportunity to create displays. The most visible changes in traditional heritage environments are perhaps the continuing adaption of new technologies to provide more realistic and immersive experiences, as well as the use of the Internet to facilitate virtual visits from the comfort of one's home.

While volunteering has a long history in archaeology and heritage, the rise of Web 2.0 technologies and the social web have created new cultures of participation that extend to the heritage sector (Giaccardi 2012). These new technologies and cultures both facilitate and demand the development of new interactive modes of public engagement and participation. One of the most significant new approaches is crowdsourcing, which allows anyone on the Internet to become a digital volunteer. Crowdsourcing has the potential to allow institutions to perform tasks of a magnitude beyond their professional capacity, such as transcribing texts and tagging images or videos to create, and facilitate searches within, digital archives, but it is also increasingly employed as an engagement strategy (Ridge 2014). Crowdsourcing is not unproblematic however. There can be significant costs of developing and supporting crowdsourcing programs, and there are concerns relating to the ability of digital volunteers to perform expert tasks, with linked

issues of data validity. There can also be problematic ethics of crowdsourcing arising from its exploitative nature when commercialized.

As stakeholders continue to be recognized as valid sources of heritage knowledge, heritage professionals are beginning to utilize a wider range of ethnographic and qualitative research methodologies (see ETHNOGRAPHY AND QUALITATIVE METHODS IN THE FIELD) to access stakeholders' expertise. These methodologies are often utilized in conjunction with various forms of coproduction, such as countermapping (see COUNTERMAPPING), participatory GIS, and codesign (see CULTURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT), as well as research philosophies such as participatory action research, which deliberately further blur the traditional boundaries between experts and stakeholders by advocating research *with*, rather than *on*, participants. Crucially, these approaches do not only democratize research processes and produce new forms of research data, but they are also immersive engagement activities that can facilitate the development of skills and a sense of community ownership of heritage (Jones 2017), thereby providing an effective mechanism for stakeholder development and facilitating stakeholder agency in caring for heritage.

Critical perspectives on participation

As calls for participatory approaches to heritage practice have become more common, critical analysis is moving from the promotion of participation as a solution to an emphasis on participation itself. While power may be shared with stakeholders by inviting participation, it can also be retained through this invitation by controlling and managing the forms participation may take. A growing number of scholars are highlighting the mismatches between the promises and realities of participatory practice, especially those practices that employ supposedly democratizing digital technologies. It is becoming clear that while participatory approaches may have the potential to democratize heritage, participation can be as exploitative as it is emancipatory, and may in some cases be equally as likely to exacerbate issues of diversity and representation as to solve them.

A critical perspective on participation originates with the identification of power. While participatory approaches invite stakeholder involvement, stakeholders may have limited agency over the nature of their involvement and their contributions may not carry much weight. Tokenistic consultations where participant perspectives are not regarded highly enough to influence professional preference can breed distrust of professionals and disillusionment with participatory projects. Reports on more involved participation in museums from countries like the United Kingdom and Canada, such as projects where communities are invited to participate in curatorial activities involving collections from their own culture, may also build resentment, where controlled access reminds participants of the injustice of forced separation from their heritage and any participation on their part is felt to legitimize the institutions responsible.

Issues of power are also highlighted in less charged volunteering contexts because ethical concerns raised by digital approaches, such as crowdsourcing, are becoming more common in the heritage sector. Participatory projects tend to be more expensive and less efficient, and it is unclear whether projects can unproblematically be motivated by both a desire for inclusion and the need to balance budgets, especially at a time of declining budgets. In light of the belief that heritage is a public good and that heritage services should be for public benefit, the concern that participatory projects may be exploiting volunteers is especially acute.

This issue is compounded by the growing prevalence of volunteer positions requiring qualifications and of unpaid internships and of the lack of paid graduate employment opportunities in the United States, United Kingdom, and much of western Europe. It raises fears that paid employment in the sector is becoming available only to those who can financially afford to gain experience and exposure through unpaid activity, which also exacerbates the existing lack of diversity within heritage professions. There may be a danger of a salary becoming the most obvious distinction between an expert and a stakeholder.

Critical scholarship is also highlighting that while participatory approaches claim to be democratizing and diversifying heritage, stakeholders are self-selecting, and populistic democratization of heritage through open calls for participation may therefore reinforce existing power structures and produce less diverse narratives. This danger is especially acute in contexts where the boundaries between public engagement activities and participatory research projects are blurred; self-selection bias is insignificant in one but crucial in the other (Tourle 2017). Such blurring of boundaries between experts and stakeholders, and between different forms of engagement and participation, calls for the renegotiation of roles and responsibilities, as well as the knowledge and skills required of heritage professionals.

Future directions

Established expert and stakeholder roles, responsibilities, and perceptions of expertise are actively challenged in contexts where stakeholder groups initiate projects and bring professionals in as they see fit. In many of these projects, the nature of the stakeholder-expert relationship shifts; professionals become participants in, rather than the driving force behind, collaborative ventures. The distinctive dynamic of these projects arises from their origin among stakeholders, allowing volunteers to take leading roles and remain decision makers even when working alongside paid professionals. While researchers are noting that successful community-led projects can be powerful sources of social innovation, less attention has been paid to how such initiatives can be encouraged and supported without disturbing their dynamic. Similarly, while current research is beginning to address what makes public participation feasible and productive in different circumstances, less is known about how contexts initially less conducive to collaboration can become productive sites for participatory initiatives.

The changing dimensions of heritage engagement and participation are revealing the need for a wider range of forms of heritage expertise. While it is clear that heritage professionals are increasingly called on to function as facilitators of collaborative ventures, this does not mean that traditional forms of expertise are no longer relevant or that professionals should set their technical expertise aside in order to adopt the role of an impartial facilitator. Arguably, the legitimization of a wider range of forms of expertise is required, not the devaluing of established experts. It should not, however, necessarily be assumed that established experts are the only potential source of these new forms of expertise, nor that they are the best candidates to fill the role of facilitator. It is through the negotiation of changing roles and responsibilities that the future nature of "experts," "stakeholders," and their relationships will be determined; these negotiations are ongoing in heritage scholarship and in heritage practice.

SEE ALSO: Authorized Heritage Discourse; Countermapping; Plurality and Multivocality; Public Archaeology

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