RETHINKING HERITAGE AND TOURISM IN AUSTRALIA

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INTRODUCTION

In 1974, Victoria was the first Australian government (and one of the first in the world) to establish a specific heritage agency. In 2000 it was the first Australian government to produce a heritage strategy and it followed this with a second strategy in 2006 (DSE, 2006). Primarily considering heritage in terms of conservation and community identity, it plots a role for tourism in developing heritage tours and re-using historic buildings (DSE, 2006: 22).

However, apart from nominating government agencies to work with the private sector, the strategy contains no plan for how greater tourism use of heritage might be achieved. This is consistent with the widely held view that as heritage is of interest to tourists, then successful heritage tourism operations will just happen. While there are success stories, a growing number of studies of Australian heritage projects indicate confusion over their objectives and problems with their business viability. A number of developments are recorded as closed, for sale, under threat, causing dissension, having conflicting objectives or requiring rescue packages (Bramley, 2001; Davidson and Spearritt, 2000; Frost, 2003; Leader-Elliott, 2005; McKercher, 2001; Young, 2006). Furthermore, there is little research into the economic benefits of heritage tourism in Australia. The Tourism Satellite Accounts, developed specifically to provide hard data on the scale and importance of tourism and its sectors, provided no detail on heritage tourism or attractions (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2000). Overseas studies which argue that heritage tourists are high-spenders (see for example Silberberg, 1995) have not been extended to Australia.

It is time to rethink heritage and tourism in Australia. There is a need to balance the emphais on conservation and community with detailed research into visitors. Tourism projects and marketing needs to take account of the special characteristics (and difficulties) of heritage. The purpose of this article is to raise some of these specific heritage issues and how they relate to tourism. The focus is on Australia, but the discussion is informed by new directions in research overseas.

TANGIBLE AND INTANGIBLE HERITAGE

Howard defines heritage as 'anything that someone wishes to conserve or collect, and to pass on to future generations' (2003: 6). Timothy and Boyd argue that it 'represents some sort of inheritance to be passed down to current and future generations' (2003: 2). They divide heritage into three categories: *tangible immovable* (eg buildings), *tangible movable* (eg artefacts) and *intangible* (eg customs) (2003: 3). The emphasis of governments on listing heritage buildings and sites has often focussed popular attention on the tangible. However, there is an increasing trend for regarding intangible heritage equally with tangible heritage (Ahmad, 2006). Furthermore, there is a growing tendency to see heritage as having *both* tangible and intangible dimensions.

In the colonial period in Australia discussions of heritage focussed on English culture and national characteristics. Technological advances in printing and a high rate of literacy stimulated interest in our English heritage. As Bennett argued, 'the great history paintings, reproduced in an array of books and magazines, may have been far more mesmerising and potent for image-starved Anglo-Australians than film and television are today' (2006: 88). When the first English cricket team toured in 1861-2, an extensive newspaper discussion focussed explicitly on Australia's English heritage, what it meant and the importance of preserving it (Frost, 2002).

In contrast, for a long period there was little interest in preserving buildings and sites as heritage. The rationale simply was that Australia was too young a country to have structures of historical merit. There were exceptions, such as the move in the 1930s to preserve Fremantle's Round House. However, in this case the rationale was that it was unique, being perceived as Western

Australia's oldest surviving European building (Sassoon, 2006). It was not until well after World War Two that growing nationalism, a booming economy and a sufficient span of years combined to generate widespread interest in the preservation of buildings. Even then, much of the heritage focus was on grand architecture, particularly country mansions, which reminded people of English traditions and gentility (Davidson and Spearritt, 2000).

Over time this interest in heritage extended from the grand to the vernacular. Day-to-day life in the nineteenth century was recreated in a series of outdoor museums, termed *pioneer settlements* (Young, 2006). A recent trend has been towards symbolic sites, recalling past events but with no actual preserved components. In Melbourne, recent examples of this include the renaming of ACDC Lane (after the rock band) and Madame Brussels Lane (after a brothel-keeper). Both instances illustrate a trend towards celebrating heritage which would have been regarded as not worth preserving in the past.

COMMUNITY AND IDENTITY

Heritage may consist of things, but it is people who choose to preserve, collect and promote these things. This human dimension is often overlooked (Howard, 2003: 6-7). Who, then, are the people making these decisions? The answer is generally given as 'society' or 'the community', particularly 'the local community'. Planners are told that:

> Local communities should be consulted about the planning, development and operation of tourism projects based on heritage places. Their active involvement in all planning processes will help ensure that the tourism operation is not only sensitive to community aims and aspirations, but will be able to capture and reflect the essence of the place and its people (Australian Heritage Commission, 2001: 8).

However, the link between a place and a community is not solely defined by residency. People living elsewhere may also be part of a community with a strong linkage – a *community of interest*. This could include frequent visitors, second home-owners, members of state or national organisations (for example, the National Trust), members of 'friends' groups, people with strong special interests (for example enthusiasts for steam trains or old tools), ethnic diasporas and people with family connections. Indeed in some cases, they may have a stronger interest than the local community.

There is a substantial international literature on communities and tourism. However, many of these examine traditional homogeneous communities. In contrast, Australian communities are significantly different in being more modern, dynamic and heterogeneous. Focussing on one point in time, studies of communities may miss long term changes. For example, Griffiths (1987) examined community attitudes to heritage and tourism in Beechworth. He found a great deal of negativity and ambivalence. However, at that time Beechworth enjoyed a very high rate of government employment through forestry, a prison and hospitals. The local community, could in effect, afford not to embrace the growing influence of tourism. In the intervening years, public employment has declined significantly, whereas tourism has matured. It is likely that such changes will have affected community attitudes, but no work has been done on this.

A related concept is that of *identity*. Identity is the sense that heritage provides for a group. As argued by Howard:

> Whether we are discussing the family photograph album or the national park, a major outcome of conserving and interpreting heritage, whether intended or not, is to provide identity to that family or nation … the common purpose is to make some people feel better, more rooted and more secure (2003: 147).

HERITAGE DISSONANCE

People, perhaps through communities, decide on what heritage to preserve, value and incorporate into their identity. But what if they disagree? Tunbridge and Ashworth coined the term *heritage dissonance* to describe situations where cultural heritage provoked a 'discordance or a lack of agreement and consistency' amongst the community (1996: 20). The term dissonance originally denoted music played in contrasting and jarring styles. Tunbridge and Ashworth argued that this was an apt analogy for the differences we hear from the community in relation to cultural heritage.

Such disagreements may be seen as unsettling and disruptive, calling for action to resolve or cover them up. However, Tunbridge and Ashworth argued that dissonance 'is intrinsic to the nature of heritage … It is not an unforseen and unfortunate by-product of the heritage assembly process' (1996: 21). In music, dissonance is often used to create a pleasing effect, a technique extending from singing in rounds to *mash-ups*. Similarly, dissonance adds to the appeal of cultural heritage. Indeed, it may be argued that cultural heritage which does not provoke different feelings and perspectives would be rather dull.

A major example of heritage dissonance is the Eureka Stockade in Ballarat. While there is some dispute over its exact location (Harvey, 1994), its basic details are not contested. Instead, the dissonance is attached to the meaning of Eureka. As shown in Figure 1, there are five main schools of historical thought as to what Eureka signifies. Which school of thought is adopted affects the interpretation provided at heritage attractions and events and the entire visitor experience.

Figure 1: Schools of historical thought as to the meaning of Eureka

Liberal	Birthplace of Australian Democracy. A fight for freedom against oppressive government.
Radical Nationalist	Fight for Australian Nationalism and independence from Britain.
Sceptical Left	Pessimistic view, little long term benefit for workers.
Conservative Revisionist	Democratic reforms were not caused by Eureka, they would have happened anyway.
Capitalist Triumph	The miners were independent small capitalists protesting against bureaucratic government interference.

Source: Goodman, 1998.

Heritage dissonance is closely linked with ideas of heterogeneous community and identity. Under such circumstances, it means that while, 'heritage benefits someone … [it also] disadvantages someone else' (Howard, 2003: 4). While making, 'some people feel better, more rooted and more secure … [it] simultaneously makes another group feel less important, less welcome and less secure' (Howard, 2003: 147). Accordingly, 'heritage battles are not just against vandals, but also those who would also claim the same heritage' (Lowenthal, 1998: 230). This leads to the development of guardians of heritage, committed to presenting their version of history as true and excluding or suppressing the claims of rivals (Fawcett and Cormack, 2001: 687).

It is not difficult to identify examples of such exclusions in Australia. For the 1988 Bicentenary, organisers attempted to exclude both Aboriginal groups and descendants seeking an old-fashioned recreation (Bennett, Buckridge, Carter and Mercer, 1992). For the 2001 Sesquicentenary of the Gold Rushes, the Victorian Government chose Clunes as the official site where gold was first discovered, while refusing funding to Warrandyte, the rival claimant for that honour.

AUTHENTICITY

Dissonance may be seen as akin to *authenticity*. The latter concept ascribes truth, reality or accuracy to heritage. Concerns with authenticity first arose with collections in museums and art galleries. Curators needed to ascertain whether new additions were authentic or not. High prices for acquisitions encouraged this focus, after all, if an institution or collector was paying top dollar they needed to be absolutely certain that they were getting what they had paid for. An instructive example of this issue is the 2006 sale of a water bottle which may have been used on the Burke and Wills Expedition. The bottle is from the right time period, but there are doubts about whether or not it was actually carried by the explorers. Establishing this authenticity will significantly affect interest in this artefact and its price.

McCannell (1976) extended the concept of authenticity to the experiences of tourists. He argued that tourists were nostalgic for a simpler past due to 'the modern disruption of real life and the simultaneous emergence of a fascination for the "real life" of others' (1976: 91). Accordingly:

> Sightseers are motivated by the desire to see life as it is really lived …[creating] a new kind of social space that is opening up everywhere in our society. It is a space for outsiders who are permitted to view details of the inner operation of a commercial, domestic, industrial or public institution (1976: 99).

MacCannell argued that tourists were seeking authenticity by being allowed 'backstage' at attractions. By going behind the scenes they were able to have a more satisfying experience, though of course, they could never truly experience any more than just being tourists (1976: 99-102). The concept of authenticity was further extended to issues such as the restoration of historic buildings (Howard, 2003: 224-7) and the accuracy of interpretation at heritage attractions (Timothy and Boyd, 2003).

In Australia, outdoor museums have attracted much discussion in regards to authenticity. Sovereign Hill, a recreation of the Gold Rushes at Ballarat, is the largest and most successful. However, it has been criticised for encouraging 'a sense that interest in the gold rush was mostly for children and tourists' (Goodman, 1994: x). Furthermore, there was 'an inevitable fixation upon the outward trappings of the gold era – the equipment, 'the look' of the buildings, and the clothing of the miners'(Goodman, 1994: x). Similar sentiments have been expressed about authenticity at outdoor museums in the USA (DeLyser, 2003; Gable and Handler, 1993; Lowenthal, 1998: 102). In the UK there has been spirited debate over heritage recreations. Criticisms have included 'inconsistent standards of conservation and curatorship', 'taking buildings out of their local setting' through relocations and interpretation which has been described as 'edutainment' and 'fakelore' (Stratton, 1996: 156).

The focus on authenticity has in itself attracted criticism. Cohen argued that the term was being taken out of its original museums context (1988: 374-7). In its new usage, he argued, it should not be seen as absolute, but rather as 'negotiable' (1988: 374). Tourists, depending on their level of interest and concern, would have different criteria for authenticity (1988: 376). Furthermore, as authenticity was negotiable, then attitudes might change over time. Cultural heritage which was once regarded as inauthentic, might in time be accepted as authentic. Cohen termed this *emergent authenticity* (1988: 379-80) and linked it to the concept of the *invention of tradition* (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983).

TOURIST MOTIVATIONS

The interests and characteristics of tourists at heritage attractions are much under-researched. Generally, it is argued that they are strongly interested in history and may be older and better educated than other tourists in the general region (Howard, 2003). In some cases, it may be held

that they are highly committed and passionate. The term *pilgrimage*, more generally used overseas, may be applied to those who have very strong spiritual interests. Examples include New-Agers at Uluru (Digance, 2003) and young Australians at Gallipolli (Slade, 2003). Some tourists are interested in sites of death and misery, characterised as *Thanatourism* (Slade, 2003), *Dark Tourism* (Lennon and Foley, 2000) or *Traumascapes* (Tumarkin, 2005).

However, there are difficulties in broadly using the term *heritage tourists*. That implies that visitors to heritage attractions and sites are solely or primarily motivated by heritage. Though, this is an area which requires much greater research, there is some evidence that visiting a heritage attraction is just one of a number of motivations for tourists choosing a destination. For example, tourists to Broome in Western Australia may be attracted by its beach or as a gateway to the outback. In visiting that destination, they may take in a heritage attraction as just one of the mix of attractions and activities on offer. Indeed, it may be that many tourists at heritage attractions are very casual in their interests and motivation.

One overseas concept which seems to fit the Australian situation is that of *Tourist Shopping Villages*. Based on research in Canada, Getz coined this term for:

> small towns and villages that base their tourist appeal on retailing, often in a pleasant setting marked by historical or natural amenities. They are found along touring routes, in destination areas and near urban centres, but are markedly different from urban business and shopping districts in terms of their small scale, speciality retailing and distinct ambience (Getz, 1993: 15).

Such villages abound in Australia, particularly within short distances of the capital cities. Examples include Kuranda (Queensland), Bellingen (NSW), Maldon (Victoria), Hahndorf (SA) and New Norcia (WA). In these villages, tourists may be primarily attracted by the shopping in a heritage ambience rather than specific historic sites and attractions (Cegielski, Janeczko, Mules and Wells, 2001). Furthermore, tourists may spend the bulk of their money in cafes and shops rather than on admission to museums and attractions (Frost, 2006). Nonetheless, heritage is integral to tourism as a whole in such a destination.

INTERPRETATION

Interpretation provides visitors with meaning and understanding. Common methods of interpretation include guides, displays and signage. Interpretative design allows managers to effectively communicate key messages to visitors (Ham and Weiler, 2004). In circumstances of heritage dissonance, interpretation may be a powerful tool to communicate either one story as the 'authentic' or 'true' story. On the other hand, it may be used to convey a sense of multiple or changing perspectives (Frost, 2005).

Moscardo (1996) argued that much interpretation could be dull, uninspiring and repetitive, encouraging 'mindless' reactions, where visitors took little in. Instead, heritage attractions needed to encourage 'mindfulness' amongst visitors. Mindful visitors, she argued, were 'active, interested, questioning and capable of reassessing the way they viewed the world' (Moscardo, 1996: 382). To achieve this effective interpretation needed to be 'multisensory … personally relevant, vivid or affectively charged … unexpected or surprising; [and] questions are used to create conflict or ambiguity' (Moscardo, 1996: 384).

Rather than interpretation being constructed or produced for consumption, it is often a 'co-construction' between visitors and interpreters. A study of guided tours at the Gettysburg Battlefield in the USA concluded that:

The resulting narratives are contested by tourists and become subject to negotiation. During the performance of the story, tourists are not passive readers of the text. Rather, they are actively engaged by using their prior background, negotiating, filling gaps, and imagining. Hence, service providers do not simply teach history and tourists do not only learn about the past (Chronis, 2005: 400).

Such a concept is certainly applicable to Australian heritage and tourism. Visitors come fully armed with a wide variety of beliefs, expectations and prior knowledge. For example, tourists to Glenrowan in Victoria are likely to already know a great deal about Ned Kelly from school, films, books, art and museum exhibitions. They are also likely to hold strong opinions as to whether he was a villain or hero. In such a case, interpretation may be simply reinforcing already held views. Indeed, it is likely that interpretation which conflicts with these views will be ignored or dismissed.

CONCLUSION

Heritage is a simple concept with complex implications. The existence of heritage, its protection and its connection with the community does not guarantee that it will attract tourists. Indeed, the view that tourism will happen because the heritage is protected is flawed and is a recipe for disappointment. The complexity of heritage, particularly issues of dissonance, authenticity and identity, may add greatly to its appeal. Accordingly these issues are central to the planning, marketing and interpretation of heritage. Nor can such issues be ignored. A sanitised heritage presenting a safe interpretation of history and culture holds little appeal and will not generate interest amongst tourists. To have successful tourism, it is necessary to rethink heritage, to give equal importance to the tourists, their motivations and experiences.

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