Managing Intangible Cultural Heritage: competing global and local values

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Abstract
The competition between global and local values is one that is faced on a daily basis by many of us working in heritage management. It is commonly manifest in the potential conflict between professionally ascribed heritage values – based as they are on internationally accepted standards and guidelines – and the values that arise out of community ascriptions that are grounded in local voices, knowledge and uses. This paper considers intangible heritage in the context of such ongoing uses and narratives and the way in which community values are addressed in places that have been formally ‘caught up’ in the World Heritage system. This is addressed in the first instance through the way in which the environment, community and practice remain an important part of the Port Arthur Historic Site in Australia, followed by a discussion of community attachments at Avebury in England.

Introduction
One of the more commonly accepted principles we now embrace is that heritage is not just the material ‘things’ around us, but is inclusive of aspects that are intangible. This intangible heritage includes language, myth, ritual, custom, dance, arts and crafts, oral traditions, practices, dissemination of knowledge, food and festivals. It embraces processes and cultural activities that transmit ideas, beliefs, values and emotions. Intangible heritage can represent the general values and world view of a society, and enshrine a community’s character and identity. It is about what we do and what we experience. Cultural heritage, therefore, not only comprises places, landscapes, monuments and objects, but also meanings, associations, values, world views and ways of life. Indeed, it is the latter aspects that give context and meaning to the former and we are coming to realise that what people do and feel may be far more significant than a place itself. There has been a refocus on ‘community’ heritage, implicit in the understanding that the intangible aspects of heritage found in attachments, world views and ways of life are enmeshed with local expressions, experiences and practices.

Local ways of ‘being in the world’ are implicated in and enmeshed with broader global processes. Global forces are primarily articulated and experienced in local situations (Henry 1999: 233) in a relationship that is a complex interplay between the global and the local. In the heritage sense, the potential for conflict between global and local values most clearly arises in the context of heritage listing under the UNESCO World Heritage Convention (the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage), and more recently under the Convention for the Protection of Intangible Heritage. Reliant as these are on the involvement and sanction of ‘States Parties’ – being the government of each member nation – these listing processes reinforce national values and memories and accentuate the tensions that may already exist around discourses of identity and the symbolic meanings attached to places. They are often accompanied by impacts from tourism, gentrification and site demarcation that can serve to disenfranchise local communities and deny ‘the local’ an adequate voice and representation (Bianchi & Boniface 2002: 80).

Community interests may identify issues including ownership, the identification of heritage as non-static and living, the need to recognise both expert and community knowledge and to include communities in management programs and decisions. The ability to ‘do’, to experience, to feel and to observe are as important as material manifestations. It is through such practices and experiences that people, memory, identity and place interact. An understanding of practices also reveals the ways that life is learned and passed on through processes of socialisation. The processes involved are integral to the creation and maintenance of identity and belonging, and of ‘being in place’.

This paper considers two specific examples that illustrate the divergence between global and local values, and the ways in which these have – or have not been – managed. These are not necessarily good news or bad news stories but serve to illustrate that the day to day activities and engagements involved in heritage management embrace a myriad of complexities, and that these continue to bring challenges.

Port Arthur
The Port Arthur Historic Site in Tasmania is one of eleven sites included in the Australian Convict Sites World Heritage Nomination. The site has cultural heritage values at an international level, it is on the National Heritage List, the Tasmanian State Heritage List and is the most visited tourist historic environment volume 22 number 3 2009

Figure 1 Port Arthur Penal Settlement. (PAHSM A collection)
site in Tasmania. It is also the home of a small, idiosyncratic and – at times – highly vocal local community. As a very brief background, European settlement of Port Arthur commenced in 1830 when the colonial government established a penal station for the purposes of timber getting. Three years later, this was expanded to become a major penal site for secondary offenders, and remained so until its closure in 1877.

Following the sale of land blocks, the settlement became a small residential town, acting as the administrative hub of the Tasman Peninsula until the late 1970s. During this latter period, the government of the day compulsorily acquired land and structures within the 250 hectare area that is today the Port Arthur Historic Site. For many members of today’s local community, the historic site was once the place they called home, worked in, went to school, farmed, socialised, relaxed, had children and simply lived.

Not long after I took up my current role with the Port Arthur Historic Site Management Authority (PAHSM A), I participated in an organised walk-around as part of the Tasman Council’s project to improve the scenic amenity of the main street of Port Arthur. The discussion was frank and quite critical when it came to the Authority. I was left with a number of impressions: the first was the large size of the group for a small community – up to 30 or so attendees; the second was the belief by some that the Authority had control over the look and feel of the main street, the third was that whether the Authority did or did not have that control, PAHSM A should be paying for the works anyway, and the last was the desire to reinforce that the historic site was not Port Arthur, and that Port Arthur was a larger township within which the historic site was located. This fact is one that confounds many visitors who often have no prior knowledge of the region and do not realise that Port Arthur is a small town in its own right. The township has some 200 permanent inhabitants, many of whom have a multi-generational connection to the area, and to each other.

More recently PAHSM A finalised a new statutory management plan for the two sites it manages (as well as the Port Arthur Historic Site, the Authority has responsibility for the Coal Mines Historic Site). The draft document was placed on public display and received a very small number of submissions (eleven only), of which several were standard responses from government agencies. The rest were from local residents, primarily expressing concern at the small section in the plan relating to areas of land outside the historic sites, which were clearly identified as being also outside the statutory control of the Authority. The tone of the submissions ranged from moderate concern to outrage. All expressed a belief that there would be a potential impact on the way they (and other locals) lived their lives, and on their right to do so, as this was their heritage – it included aspects such as the potential abrogation of the rights and authority of the local council; what land owners could or could not do on their own properties; restriction of logging, farming, mooring and fishing activities; and it would be fair to say a very misplaced belief that the Authority was embarking on a plan to take control and ownership not only of their properties but of the entire Tasman Peninsula. The submissions made minimal reference to the content of the other 200 or so pages of the draft plan, which detailed the way in which the Authority would be managing the heritage values and operations of two significant historic sites – in other words, the way in which protection would be given to the values for which the sites were considered to be of international, national and state heritage significance. One interpretation of this is that the day to day management and protection of the site is deemed to be handled professionally and appropriately. It is only the external interests and areas that appear to have been of concern to some members of the local community.

It would be fair to say that the Authority has a recent history of working in harmony with the community – but it must be acknowledged that this has not always been the case and that there is always room for improvement. It is imperative that management organisations such as PAHSM A remain open to the voices of the local people, and include in their focus an understanding of their areas of interest, which in the case of Port Arthur incorporates a far wider range of heritage values than those of the convict era. Many of these relate to ongoing practices interlinked with the land and the environment: timber getting, fishing, farming, gardening, family relationships, all of which incorporate the processes of learning that are both practical and social – including how to negotiate, challenge and co-operate with those around us. These are all part of the panoply of engagements that contribute to a sense of identity and belonging, and of place. In a rural environment they include place specific environmental information, are related to ways of using the land, of climate, soil use, agricultural practices, the better places to fish, and the best times to do so. The community creates and reinforces meanings and relationships through such practices and processes and they remain a significant component of identity construction. In addition, both belonging and notions of stewardship are reinforced in the transfer of knowledge between generations. These engagements and exchanges take place in contexts that are simultaneously practical, empirical, spiritual and emotional (Crumley 2002: 41).

One of the enduring local traditions that today is an integral part of the heritage of the Port Arthur community is the Boxing Day wood-chops, an event which is held in the grounds of the site. The chops sees competitors pitted against each other in various timber-cutting activities and are the remaining event of the Port Arthur sports day. This festival commenced in 1863 and is believed to be the longest running sporting event in
Australia. Held annually, it attracts competitors and spectators from across Tasmania. More importantly though its history is one of generational continuity, forging links across time and reinforcing a practice that remains an integral part of day to day activities and ways of life.

The meanings, experiences and local stories of many such communities are reinforced in places of community meeting, interaction and exchange. Cultural and social activities – whether organised festivals, events or just day-to-day recreational experiences and practices – not only enhance community identity, but reinforce the closely intertwined relationship of the community with the broader environment, both natural and constructed. They more than strengthen the ‘attachment of the local story to the environment’ (Hull et al. 2001: 337), they create a mutually interactive engagement between people, place and landscape and reinforce the knowledge, experience and understandings through which community and home are conceptualised and understood.

**Avebury**

Since the 1986 inscription of the Avebury henge and its associated Neolithic monuments on the World Heritage List, a large part of the area surrounding Avebury has been incorporated into what is today described as the Avebury World Heritage Site, a third of which is owned and managed by the National Trust. Avebury itself is a small rural village in the County of Wiltshire in England. However, unlike most other villages in Britain, you can walk along the main street and view massive stones, the megaliths of the stone circles of Avebury that form part of an extraordinary Neolithic landscape.

The various heritage interests and values that emerge at Avebury lead to divergent – often conflicting – experiences and understandings of the landscape. In particular, the special attachments, belongings and embodied understanding of place expressed by the Avebury village community collide with otherwise prioritised heritage values, notably the recognition of Neolithic Avebury as an archaeological landscape of national and World Heritage significance. One result has been the transformation of Avebury from a village with a stone circle to a stone circle with a village (Harrington 2004: 98–103). Echoing the conflation of Port Arthur and the Port Arthur Historic Site, for many who encounter Avebury the name is synonymous with the massive Neolithic henge and its stone circles, rather than the small rural village. The need to assert a more specific and local identity and name is shared by both places.

It is generally accepted that the Neolithic creators of the Avebury monuments attached ritual significance to the landscape and its features. More recently the monuments and landscape have again become a focal point for groups and individuals for their religious and spiritual values. Over the last several hundred years, the monuments have been a site of special interest for antiquarians, authors, artists and archaeologists – not to mention the Avebury residents. The aesthetics and ambience of the area in which the monuments are found are appreciated by residents and local and other visitors, many of whom are international tourists.

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However, it is notable that over one quarter of visitors are resident within a short distance of Avebury, suggesting that the place has special significance for members of various local communities. The local visitors are often repeat visitors – Avebury has been and continues to be a popular destination for family outings, and a favoured spot to simply walk the dog or stretch one’s legs.

Inclusion on the World Heritage list has minimal relevance to the villagers’ lived experiences and constructions of place. The villagers believe that people who choose to visit Avebury do so for reasons other than its international heritage status. The values and meanings that various villagers attribute to the Avebury landscape are more extensive than the significance and values accrued through the heritage listing of its monuments. Rather, the villagers’ notions of being and place are integral to a more local story in which they ‘know’ their village and its landscape.
Through its management plan, the National Trust reiterates its commitment to the present community and its intent, wherever possible, to protect their interests. However, it has other obligations that are potentially conflicting: first, as asset manager to protect the interests of the National Trust; second, as heritage manager to protect the archaeological heritage values of the site. As a result, balancing village needs, asset responsibilities and heritage management is not a simple task. The challenges are similar to those faced by PAHMSA.

The majority of the farmland owned by the National Trust is under lease as full agricultural tenancies of arable land. The community has expressed a general concern that there is a ‘plot’ by the Trust to return the surrounding agricultural landscape to one of natural grasslands – ‘a giant lawn’ in one resident’s description (Harrington 2004: 123). This is perhaps a valid concern, given that the National Trust has documented its intent ‘to halt the degradation of the prehistoric field systems and other buried sites currently under arable cropping’ with a defined strategy: ‘To restore to a stable regime of grassland management of archaeological features at present subjected to ploughing or other avoidable erosion’ (National Trust 1997: 9–10).

From the point of view of some residents, this is a ‘false’ action as there has always been agriculture on the place. The villagers have argued strongly against the introduction of extensive areas of grassland, concerned that this will involve a significant change in farming practice. The Avebury community have indicated that they do not want to be surrounded by a ‘fossilised’ landscape that has been sculpted as an appropriate setting for the monuments. This concern to protect the rural landscape is expressed by a number of residents and farmers who legitimate their interests and concerns for the Avebury environment through ‘use and practice’ responsibilities to the community and the land and more general notions of guardianship (Fielden 1996: 4).

The long-term villagers express a strong feeling of commitment to the village landscape and the community, with a more intimate relationship with the stones, one that involves the stones as part of childhood memory, of the henge as place to slide down, and as part of community life and of home. However, for some ‘the problem today is that it is presented in a ‘National Trust’ way – you can’t actually ‘use’ the place or slide any more’ (Harrington 2004: 129). This separation of modes of experience has been imposed in the life times of the older villagers and different spatial orders (including prohibitions of access) have been introduced that create a greater segregation between the village and the henge and stone circles. The implication is that the children of the older villagers are unlikely to enjoy the same embodied experiences that imbue the stones with local meanings.

Although ‘free’ access continues to be available, the stones and other monuments have been subject to a process of ‘heritagisation’. In accruing significance as artefacts they have become dislocated from the web of more social meanings and understandings. The playgrounds, slides and seats of the past generation are now formally labelled as ‘Neolithic megaliths’, and in being so named and understood – and moved from tactile experience – they have become objectified and ‘made solid’, symbolising an appropriation of parts of the village landscape by heritage interests. The consequence is a muting of the multiple local stories that have surrounded the stones and one effect has been to create a challenge to local notions of ownership and stewardship. A similar situation can be said to exist at Port Arthur: while members of the local community continue to have free-of-charge access to the site, the differentiation between the residential landscape and the heritage site has created a similar dislocation of experiences.

Conclusion

The communities at Port Arthur and Avebury reinforce that people create place in a way that is intrinsically local, particular and personal. Belonging to a locale and to a ‘local’ community is a greater cultural reality than is the association with nation, tied as it is to basic social processes that mediate the experience of collectivity and the creation of community (Cohen 1982: 10; Lovell 1998: 6). World Heritage has lessened relevance in such constructions of place, community and belonging, arising as they do from a process that is contextualised by people’s immediate conditions and everyday existences. Yet it is argued that the way in which place, community and belonging are created and reinforced remain linked with national, international and globalising processes.

It is important that we do our best to dispel perceptions that those who contribute outside of the prevailing ‘scientific’ discourse, and cannot speak with the ‘authentic’ voice of heritage professionals, cannot make a significant contribution. However, while criticisms are made of management bodies and of the proprietary activities of heritage professionals and scientists, it is clear that communities can and do retain a warm relationship with and respect for the heritage values that are necessarily form an important component of their own suite of values, even when applied to the same places and objects.

The Avebury villagers, for example, in explaining their attachments to the megaliths can readily accept they have scientific significance as unique Neolithic objects. But it is their emplacement in the local village landscape that accrues significance for the village community. Stories of playing hide and seek are more vividly expressed than are ponderings on the Neolithic origins of the stone circle. The significance of place to a local community does not necessarily preclude other levels of significance, but clearly the experiences that people have at levels other than the local are necessarily different. The creation and reinforcement of ‘local’ identity and meaning is
irrespective of the place’s significance to other groups, and these communities and their attachments to places can be affected and potentially compromised when their associations and values are not heard, not understood or are ignored.

One of our challenges as the managers of heritage places is to engage with the conceptual, imagined dimension of the community, and to ensure a capacity for empathy and affinity for people and place that takes account of social relations and practices. At the same time it must be acknowledged that this has to also be balanced by the obligations that arise out of the responsibility to protect the more comprehensive suite of heritage values that are attached to those places and sites.

The question remains as to how to best protect intangible aspects that are properly ‘heritage’, such as ethical values, social customs, traditions and practices, stories, memories, beliefs and myths. Certainly tools such as the World Heritage and Intangible Heritage conventions can help us with this task, but the impetus is one that must be maintained and actioned at the local level.

References
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