

How can heritage contribute to conservation

Key Issues

That ‘heritage’ as a discourse and discipline is evolving critically and reflexively (Harrison and Linkman, 2010; Gentry and Smith, 2019) posits central presuppositions in critical heritage discourse i.e. that heritage is not value-neutral (Erikson, 2011), emphasising one heritage perspective can sideline or silence others (Koch, 2015) and acknowledging that heritage is not necessarily about “truth or authenticity, but [...] about reinforcing social cohesion through the construction of myths of origin, identity and moral example” (Harrison, 2010, p.1). When this lens is applied in conjunction with its position as an “innovative, and highly collaborative field that crosses multiple disciplines”, heritage is well-placed to have “significant wider impacts and benefits both within the [...] sector and beyond” (Gilberto, 2021, p.2).

One such context is today’s critical and urgent issues of the climate and biodiversity crises. Indeed, given indigenous peoples and local communities “are recognised as the custodians of around 80% of the world’s biodiversity” (Swiderska et al, 2020, p.1), “collaborative partnerships” with indigenous peoples, practitioners and governments are essential to achieve more equitable and just outcomes (Garnett et al, 2018, p.369). As such, the emerging concept of ‘biocultural heritage’ (BCH) that proposes the use of “local knowledge, land-use practices and heritage values to define sustainability and resilience from the perspective of local inhabitants” (Ekblom et al, 2019, p.1) must be considered for its potential application.

This development is an effort to move past perceptions that the “natural landscape as an object of beauty” is “distinct from any human use or management” (West and Ndlovu, 2010, p. 204) and thus separate from ‘culture’. It acknowledges that “nature includes people (*Homo sapiens*)” (Bridgewater and Rotherham, 2019, p.301) who have been “engaged in extensive environmental modification through cultural practices” (Laland and O’Brien, 2012, p.191). Efforts to address these tensions between nature and culture in heritage discourse have been ongoing and are commonly exemplified by the introduction of the ‘cultural landscape’ concept enshrined in the 1992 introduction of the World Heritage Cultural Landscape by UNESCO (UNESCO, 1992). As such, it sought to address the forced dichotomy inherent in the original formats of the World Heritage processes. These revisions resulted from the endeavours of two indigenous peoples to obtain ‘formal’ recognition of their ‘cultural’ meanings of a ‘natural’ landscape. By petitioning to have existing World Heritage Sites reinscribed using both UNESCO’s natural and cultural criteria, the Maori peoples of Tongariro, New Zealand and the Anangu people of Uluru-Kata Tjuta, Australia significantly changed global heritage discourse (Harrison, 2010).

Selected Nations

The Anangu and Maori peoples' negotiations on the national and global stage provides a useful starting point to examine of the decolonisation process of the two postcolonial settler nations providing productive insights as to how heritage can be recontextualised. More specifically, focussing on the different entanglements of the indigenous communities and each state's "[struggle] to redefine heritage in a postcolonial age in a way that liberates alternative narratives and groups" demonstrates how these communities must devise "their own 'heritage' or [require] states to acknowledge and incorporate their own concerns" (Harrison and Hughes, 2010 p.266). In turn, this redefinition and reconstitution of 'heritage' could then be considered as an instrument that can be employed the face of urgent environmental and social challenges.

Aims

This essay aims to examine the development of 'heritage' in Australia and New Zealand to address the following questions:

1. What does the development of the Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD) of Australia and New Zealand tell us about the state's attempts to define and practice heritage more inclusively and how does this impact indigenous communities?
2. How does the concept of 'biocultural heritage' apply in these two national contexts and does it influence environmental conservation approaches and outcomes?

Approach

An overview of the national heritage contexts will be provided by:

- a) Identifying pertinent historical events within the postcolonial context to better understand the heritage discourses in Australia (for example, the absence of input by Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islanders to the Australian constitution, the National Apology) and New Zealand (for example, the 1860 Treaty of Waitangi and the ongoing related tribunal).
- b) Comparing key examples of 'heritage' publications as reflections of official and unofficial heritage discourses that illustrate how indigenous communities are situated (or not) in their development.

An introduction to the theoretical development of the BCH concept will be discussed by:

- c) Contrasting the recent theoretical perspectives of BCH and its intersection with environmental conservation paradigms. For example, the consensus is that BCH seeks to address the 'cultural severance' (Rotherham, 2008) inherent in conservation's 'retention versus loss' model (Cocks and Wiersum, 2014, p.727). And in acknowledging the "inextricable link between biodiversity and cultural diversity" (Posey, 1999 in Bridgewater and Rotherham, 2019) conservation initiatives must reach beyond the spatial and temporal borders of protected areas and national parks (Chazdon et al, 2009). However, a standardised definition for 'biocultural heritage' is so far eluding the academic literature which is essential if its practices are to be widely and successfully adopted (Bridgewater and Rotherham, 2019; Eriksson, 2019).

A detailed analysis of a selection of conservation practices that articulate BCH principles and their associated impacts. This evaluation will consider BCH's "potential for both positive and negative outcomes" (Moorcroft and Adams, 2014, p. 487) by:

- d) Carrying out a literature review to identify case studies relevant to the essay questions which, depending on the outputs of the review will broadly comprise papers focussing on either site-specific studies such as:
 - The assessment of an indigenous-led governance model for the maintenance of an Australian tropical forest which demonstrates that it could potentially "transform heritage practices to empower Indigenous peoples" however until these are better recognised and resourced, could, in fact, "further marginalise indigenous peoples" (Hill et al, 2011, p. 587).
 - The successful collaboration in the translocation of Snares Island snipe (*Coenocorypha huegeli*) that was both ecologically and culturally significant, restoring the tutukiwi (snipe) restored the hakawai (a nocturnal aerial display performed by snipe) valued by the muttonbirding community of Putauhinu I, New Zealand (Miskelly et al, 2012).

Or,

- The examination of 'rights-of-nature' cases put forward by the Wurundjeri people in the Yarra River Protection in Australia (O'Bryan, 2019) and Te Atihaunui-a-Paparangi people's role the transition of Whanganui River to legal entity: Te Awa Tupua in New Zealand (Charleix, 2018). Although these cases recognise rivers "intrinsic and human values" and as "living and integrated system[s]" whose well-being is interdependent with the indigenous communities surrounding it" (Muru-Lanning 2010, in Strang, 2020, p.2), the "multi-faceted dimensions of this ambivalent concept" potentially creates new tensions and dilemmas (Jackson, 2018, p.1).

Preliminary Conclusions:

- Australia and New Zealand have made some progress in repositioning their national AHD to better include and represent indigenous communities in recent years however the narratives present in unofficial heritage discourse, combined with ongoing needs by Maori peoples for the Treaty Tribunal and petitions for active input by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders into the Australian constitution demonstrate the persistence of inadequate representation.
- While indigenous peoples contributed successfully to the global AHD as recognised by UNESCO, the benefits and implications as perceived by both governments demonstrate potentially different motives and power dynamics. Australian government's heritage publications emphasise potential tourism and economic gains from its World Heritage listings, how do these motives and the potential impacts sit with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who initiated the recognition process? New Zealand's focus on its environmental conservation agenda presents conflict for the Maori peoples who are required to "contribute to a national conservation system" that is at odds with "their constitutional right to engage with the environment on their own terms which was guaranteed under the Treaty of Waitangi" (Lyver et al (2019) p.396).
- The use of BCH has potential to contribute usefully to the adaptation and resilience strategies required to deal with biodiversity crises and empower the indigenous communities however more standardisation of terms and methods will help challenging existing conservation paradigms and aid more successful adoption.

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