

Towards an evolutionary heritage approach: fostering community-heritage engagement.

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Abstract

In a number of spatial domains there is an increased attention for the inclusion of various stakeholders, including citizens. Also in the domain of heritage management we can identify a paradigm-shift towards more participatory discourses. In fact, participation in heritage management is now increasingly being framed in the context of identity and social inclusiveness resulting in a quest for a more inclusive, locally rooted, and people-centred approach to heritage. Despite this quest for an inclusive heritage management approach, it appears difficult to actually achieve more citizens' involvement in heritage management practices. In this article it is argued that these attempts to achieve community-heritage engagement fail because time and again the focus remains to be on either the physical or representational side of heritage. Therefore, this paper introduces a third, more radically post-structuralist perspective on community-heritage engagement, which we call an 'evolutionary heritage approach'. Such an evolutionary approach enables us to see heritage as a manifestation of continuously processes of valuation and re-valuation; influenced by reconsiderations and therefore always moving. Applying this notion of evolutionary heritage will allow us to include various (changing) ideas of heritage and therewith allows us to foster community-heritage engagement.

Keywords: community-heritage engagement | evolutionary heritage approach | inclusiveness | heritage

Introduction

Within the field of critical heritage studies it has been widely acknowledged that heritage is inevitably part of the processes of social inclusion and exclusion (Waterton and Watson 2015; Graham, Ashworth, and Tunbridge 2000a). This observation has been picked up by, and is acknowledged in, various governance contexts around the world and the calls for a wider participation in heritage management are increasingly heard (Harvey 2001a; Parkinson, Scott, and Redmond 2016; Waterton and Smith 2010). In combination with the reality of increasingly multi-cultural societies in Europe, heritage sectors in different countries are putting more and more emphasis on opening up heritage conservation and management practices to wider participation, to enhance social inclusion (Pendlebury, Townshend, and Gilroy 2004). At the same time there is a strong impetus to demonstrate the socially progressive potential of heritage (Pendlebury et al. 2004) and this too endorses the quest for a more participatory heritage approach, one which is open to diverse interpretations of heritage. This desire for more social inclusiveness has arisen as a consequence of "the agitation by excluded groups for greater inclusion and consideration of their own needs, aspirations and values" (Smith 2006, 35).

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These calls for a wider participation in heritage management are in a quest for governance arrangements that foster multi-stakeholder involvement and stimulate citizens' and communities engagement. In fact, both at the national as well as international level there has been a notable growth in the interest of more participatory heritage approaches. National policies and international conventions such as the Dutch 'Belvedere Memorandum' (Feddes and Caspers 1999), the English 'Sustaining the Historic Environment' and 'Power of Place' (English Heritage 1997, 2000), and the international so called 'Faro Convention' (Council of the European Union 2011) have a particular emphasis on local participation in decision-making processes related to heritage as these documents implicitly link heritage to identity, beliefs, knowledge and traditions (Ludwig 2016). Also within the international heritage literature, community-heritage engagement has been drawing considerable attention for more than a decade. There is a broad range of papers on community engagement and the relationship between local and official authorities' understanding of heritage (for an overview of papers see for instance Waterton and Watson 2010). Although there is attention for community-heritage engagement across various European countries, it appears difficult to actually achieve more citizens' involvement in heritage management practices.

In this article we argue that attempts to achieve community-heritage engagement fail because time and again the focus remains to be on either the physical or representational side of heritage. This paper attempts to take this more fundamental level of criticism to its consequences. It then relocates analytical attention beyond a heritage-as-thing-approach or heritage-as-construction-approach and explores if and how a co-evolutionary notion of heritage can help overcome some of the limits inherent to the abovementioned approaches. By doing so this paper aims to show that this 'co-evolutionary heritage approach' can offer opportunities to not only address the heritage potential as a powerful economic, social and environmental catalyst, but also to foster community-heritage engagement. This paper links concepts and developments of planning theory to those from the field of heritage studies. The next section, for instance, elaborates on an object-oriented approach in the domain of heritage and planning followed by a section about a communicative-rational approach. Next, the emergence of complexity is discussed by focusing on individual affectivity with heritage. Finally, a co-evolutionary heritage approach is introduced which allows us to see heritage as being in and of life, as being subjective and always in the process of making.

An object-oriented heritage approach

In its original sense, the word heritage was used to describe an inheritance, such as properties, heirlooms, legacies and values which are handed on from parents to their children (Davison 2008; Harrison 2010). The emphasis on inheritance, and the focus on 'things' is important here, as heritage is conceived of as a physical object, already assumed valuable. Hence, heritage is seen as valuable features of the environment that are worth preserving from decay or development (Davison 2008). Besides, Davison (2008) notes that heritage "expresses the unspoken conviction that there is nothing that we have made or can hope to make, that is as valuable as what we have inherited from the past" (34). This sense of inheritance promotes the idea that the present has a particular 'duty' to the past and its monuments. Besides, this understanding of heritage strongly regards heritage as a property, site, object or structure "with identifiable boundaries that can be mapped, surveyed, and recorded" (Smith 2006, 31). Or in other words, heritage is seen as something that can be objectively observed, understood, recorded, and dealt with by an detached heritage expert either by means of classification, listing, maintaining, preserving, and promoting. Heritage management approaches based on this object-oriented understanding of heritage operate in the light of

threats to heritage; of destruction, loss or decay. What follows is a an operational practice approach mainly focussed on conservation of heritage. Indeed, historically, heritage management practices had a particular focus on protection and preservation - by means of classification, listing, maintaining, and promoting heritage sites. Heritage is protected in general, through the designation of important sites and objects, supported by planning controls over potentially damaging development (Fairclough 2006). Also at present, this object-oriented approach - with an emphasis on inheritances - is still a guiding principle for many heritage practitioners. Also the European Commission's definition of heritage used hitherto is for instance based on the notion that heritage is preserved for posterity; heritage belongs as much to the generations yet unborn, as to the past. They define heritage as: "a rich and diverse mosaic of cultural and creative expressions, our inheritance from previous generations of Europeans and our legacy for those to come" (European Commission 2018). Likewise, other (international) organisations on the protection and management of heritage site use definitions that illustrate this position towards heritage: "heritage is our legacy from the past, what we live with today, and what we pass on to future generations" (UNESCO 2006).

To sum up, an object-focused heritage management approach is implicitly linked with protection and preservation of inheritances. Such approaches can thus be characterized by a more defensive attitude to heritage. Such a defensive attitude is often accompanied by a strong tendency towards isolation of the heritage asset from its intangible aspects, from its wider spatial context and, more in general, from contemporary social, economic, and cultural developments (de Kleijn, Dias, and Burgers 2016). Hence, we argue that this object-oriented heritage management approach therefore time and again impedes the achievement of community-heritage engagement. Indeed, this object-focused approach to heritage distracts people from the contemporary and creative aspects of culture that could transform it (Harrison 2010). Next Smith (2006) argues that this approach has an overriding emphasis on materiality and the assumption around innate value. What follows is that the objectified heritage object becomes distanced from the real. Besides, a key premise of the object-oriented approach to heritage is that values are inherent and unchanging. Hence, there is a kind of fixed system of value attribution. Various scholars have argued that this poses challenges for the management of heritage sites, as this approach is difficult to read together with the more transitional character of heritage (e.g. Thorkildsen and Ekman 2013). Plans for, for example, the re-use of a heritage asset are therefore in many cases isolated or confined only to the realm of building or site protection, which may result in lack of integration into the general urban planning framework. Besides, this object-oriented approach is a rather top-down organized, more authoritarian approach to heritage which has only limited space for including community's heritage values. In fact, communities, and other recipients, are seen as passive audience, to whom communication is directed and whose heritage is already defined (Waterton and Watson 2013). In other words, heritage is prefigured by some, pre-determined, as ready-made objects and then made selectively available (Crouch 2010). Another central argument criticizing this approach is that the multiplicity of values and ideas, inherent to heritage, is not fully recognized. Communities and their understanding of heritage are not incorporated and as such an object-oriented approach to heritage does not capture heritage adequately and comprehensively. Critics have furthermore disapproved the idea of collecting heritage objects, by means of classification, listing and protection as this way of dealing with heritage is a selective, path-dependent, self-referential process based on homogeneous understandings of heritage which leads to a culture of loss (among others Harrison 2013; Waterton and Watson 2013; Smith 2006; Hewison 1987).

A communicative-rational heritage approach heritage

To overcome the aforementioned critics on this object-oriented approach, scholars started to put greater emphasis on social processes that relate to heritage. Indeed, in the 1970's and 1980's - as part of a wider

debate that runs through various academic disciplines, shifting the social sciences towards a greater emphasis on social processes - heritage scholars (such as Hewison 1987; Wright 1985; Lowenthal 1998, 1985; Samuel 1994) began to focus on the everyday use of heritage in contemporary society by arguing that an object-oriented heritage approach distracted people from engaging with their present and future. Hewison (1987) accordingly argues that heritage is not so much about the past, but about our relationship with it. In the mid-1980s to late 1980s, these scholars were among the first who undertook an attempt to explain heritage as a cultural phenomenon, with awareness of its ideological underpinnings. Drawing on these debates, several scholars (among others Graham, Ashworth, and Tunbridge 2000b; Hall 1999; Smith 1993; Harvey 2001b), begun to question what heritage actually is, and reconceptualised heritage as a social and cultural process. Smith (2006), who has written extensively in the field of critical heritage studies, makes a bold statement by arguing that "there is, really, no such thing as heritage" (11). This understanding of heritage departs from the idea that heritage is a "cultural practice" or "social process" (Smith 2006, 11) and does not conceptualizes heritage as a 'thing', 'site', building or other material object, rather heritage is "what goes on at these sites" (Smith 2006, 44). Ashworth (2008) adds to this by stating that heritage is not an object but "a process and outcome: it uses objects and sites as vehicles for the transmission of ideas in the service of a wider range of contemporary social needs" (24-5). In other words, heritage is not seen as something frozen in the past, but as something that can be appropriated and used by for example communities to construct a sense of identity. Attention thus shifted from a focus on objects, towards the modern-day socio-political and cultural process that transforms elements of the past into heritage (Ashworth and Graham 2005; Graham et al. 2000b; Harvey 2001b; Waterton and Watson 2013). Indeed, it is recognized that heritage - like objects, truths, facts, realities - does not pre-exist of observations but has to be experienced for it to be heritage (Smith 2006).

What follows is that heritage is no longer considered merely as an object that needs to be protected from external threats or isolated from its societal context (Smith 2006). Instead, heritage management approaches now focus increasingly on how heritage can be used and exploited as a vital resource for local communities as a catalyst of development (Thorkildsen and Ekman 2013). Indeed, from the late 1970s onwards, heritage practices in most western-European countries has shifted from the protection of objects towards becoming part of a broader movement for urban and regional regeneration and socio-economic development (Ashworth 1997; Bloemers et al. 2010). A number of European countries namely recognized the regenerative potential of historic environments to produce socially inclusive and economically vibrant cities and landscapes (Janssen et al. 2014). Thus heritage management approaches shifted towards a more integrated and inclusive heritage management approach which allows heritage to reposition itself in spatial developments. Hence, heritage is now more and more seen as an integral part of our cities and landscapes, rather than a world set apart (Fairclough 2008). Alongside this paradigm-shift towards a more integrated heritage management approaches, there is also a tendency to widen the scope and ambition of heritage definition hereby seeking for a more holistic idea of heritage, which also depicts immaterial aspects, and from expert-led authoritarian procedures towards more inclusive and participative community-led practices (Vecco 2010). As is the case in the domain of spatial planning, this new way of dealing with the heritage, not only represents a reconsideration of the traditional, professional understanding of heritage (Parkinson et al. 2016), but also has some implications for heritage practitioners and the processes of community-heritage engagement. This shift in perspective on heritage namely allows heritage practitioners to see that meaning and values are not intrinsic to heritage, but always dependent on the context. Seeing heritage as a normative concept is useful as the focus is on the way meaning is attributed. Meaning is thus received, for example from a community engaged with heritage, and therewith heritage comes to be understood as

someone's heritage. This approach thus put a greater emphasis on the representational side of heritage by representing certain people, stories, and ideas whilst neglecting other people, stories and ideas.

The abovementioned perspective on heritage - which convincingly decentres the object and focuses on the actual processes that transform things into heritage - offers points of departure for understanding community-heritage engagement. Yet, by putting a greater emphasis on the social and cultural-political aspects of heritage, differences are highlighted and this approach will therewith lead to selectivity. Time and again it appears that this focus on the representational side of heritage, does not foster community-heritage engagement. Putting the spotlight on this process of meaning transmission for instance, also means highlighting differences since only some understandings of heritage- as formulated by someone and for a certain purpose- are represented, and by doing other understandings of heritage are neglected. The focus is furthermore on highlighting differences and issues of representation as understandings of heritage are linked to some 'bigger' stories like feminism, colonialism, nationalism, and class differences. Besides, shifting attention to the socio-political and cultural process that transforms elements of the past into heritage, means that explaining heritage becomes more difficult as various stakeholders, and values now come into play. In fact, the way communities engage with heritage depends not only on the role that heritage plays in a particular society, but moreover on the meanings ascribed to heritage by a particular society (Waterton and Watson 2011). In other words, the motives, level of involvement, form and purpose of community-heritage engagement will differ according to the different context at stake. Or as Ludwig (2016) straightforwardly states: heritage means different things, to different people, at different times, and in different contexts.

Related to this it should be noted that heritage becomes a source of contestation and differentiation. Indeed, acknowledging that heritage exists because people attach values to it (Graham et al. 2000b) also means acknowledging that multiple and potentially competing representations of heritage can exist at the same time. Hence, from here, it becomes important "to address the implied questions - who decides what heritage is, and whose heritage it is?" (Graham et al. 2000b, 24). Indeed, seeing heritage as an ongoing process of practices and interaction which continuously shapes and reshapes the meaning of heritage means that heritage is therefore constituted and delineated differently in different discourses (Duineveld, Van Assche, and Beunen 2013). Or in other words, the process of attributing meaning to heritage is intrinsically embedded within power and that the rise and fall of heritage is thus defined by power relations. Seeing heritage as a discourse, bound up with power, allowed Smith (2006) to observed that not all understandings of heritage are equally represented as she argues that there is an authorised heritage discourse (AHD); a particular way of seeing heritage that privileges the cultural symbols of the white, middle-/upper-classes, and excludes a range of alternative ways of understanding heritage (Smith 2006). In fact, when it comes to community-heritage engagement, it appears that ideas and objectives initiated by the community are predominately excluded by public authorities as the communities' input diverges from the dominant heritage discourse (Pendlebury 2013). Besides, both Waterton and Smith (2010) and Perkin (2010) argue that community-based projects are often initiated to fulfil prescribed ideals for engagement (for example by governments or organisations) without addressing the needs and aspirations of the community itself. It is argued that these processes of engagement can therefore, without caution, result in tokenistic and unsustainable projects which erode the trust of communities and result in a lack of support for future initiatives.

Next to this, it should be noted that the 'constructed' values of heritage do in a way also lead to a fixed understanding of heritage as it is considered that heritage values are defined when there is an encounter

between a person and a heritage object. In fact, however, there are multiple encounters at the same time and meanings and values are in fact continuously defined and redefined in a much more heterogeneous way so that heritage constructions can change over time. Thus, the versatility of value-transmission is not fully addressed. Whereas the technical-rational approach provided single and proven solutions, the communicative rational approach would provide single, agreed upon solutions (Boonstra 2015). Hence, it is still a single, rather fixed solution in which only some values are incorporated rather than a solution that is flexible, adaptive and able to represent myriad and continuously changing values. Besides, it is argued that this way of explaining heritage removes attention from encompassing personal needs and aspirations of individuals engaging in heritage matters, or as Crouch (2015) argues; it restricts our understanding of individual affectivity with heritage. It is for this reason that this idea of focusing on the representational side of heritage, has increasingly been called into question over the last decade as theorists are now looking to answer questions that move beyond the political-economic, power, and cultural differences which are addressed by putting greater emphasis on the social aspects of heritage (Waterton and Watson 2013). Hence, various scholars (e.g. Crouch 2015) argue that heritage sites are linked to a deeper mixture of relations with (for instance) other heritage sites, previous experiences, and memories, feelings and emotions wrapped up in our encounters with heritage. By taking this perspective on heritage, Crouch and other post-structuralists thinkers in the field of heritage, link heritage back with being human and living, so that it emerges from the feelings of being, becoming and belonging in the flows and complexities that characterise life (Waterton and Watson 2013). However, until now, much theoretical attention has been paid to either the heritage-as-thing-approach or heritage-as-construction-approach. Less attention has been paid to heritage in relation to notions of post-representational theory which enables us to more closely understand the needs and aspirations of local communities. Therefore, we argue to embrace the multiplicity of ways of understanding heritage - as real and imagined at the same time - and to develop heritage approaches which address adaptability and flexibility in order to deal with an ongoing heritage valuation process by communities and other stakeholders in heritage re-use projects.

A co-evolutionary heritage approach

One way to capture these fluid and dynamic aspects of heritage is by looking at the way heritage is produced, performed and emerging in the embodied and creative uses of heritage generated by people (Haldrup and Børenholdt 2015). With regard to heritage, Crouch (2010) suggest the notion of 'heritagization'. Crouch (2000) argues that individuals engage, encounter and grasp the world through a process of embodiment. Whereby embodiment is defined as "a process of experiencing, making sense, knowing through practise as a sensual human subject in the world" (68). The focus is thus on what people 'do', how contexts and practices interact through human experience. Hence, heritage is more and more framed as something performed rather than as a thing in itself (see for instance Crouch 2010, 2012). It is important to note here that these performances are never fixed but depend on situational and relational circumstances. Or as Crouch (2010) argues: "If it is that we live space, not merely in relation to it, there would seem to be more going on than an evocation of metal cultural resonance. At the core of this dealing of incompleteness is a sense that heritage, representations and space need, therefore, to be conceptualized relationally" (79). Heritage is thus not a fixed thing, but depends on how it is dealt with; how it is performed. Heritage comes alive through the active and creative ways in which people use heritage, and this is situational and relational. Waterton and Watson (2013) state this as follow: "Different people will inevitably respond differently to a particular heritage site - some may feel pride, connected, pleasure, others exclusion and rejection, and others still boredom - but these feelings, their affects, may in part be framed by the way the site is conjured and evoked discursively, visually or popularly" (555). Yet, this

means that the meaning of heritage depends on specific contexts, combinations and connections and heritage has to be regarded as being subjective and always in the process of making (Haldrup and Bøerenholdt 2015). In other words this means that the meaning of heritage and heritage experiences can shift and modify through time and in relation to, for instance, other heritage objects or previous encounters with a particular object. Heritage is thus always performed in specific contexts, combinations and connections (Haldrup and Bøerenholdt 2015) and heritage might emerge much more informed and more complex (Crouch 2010). Meaning thus depends on the context and is received from other subjects, and influencing them in turn (Boelens and de Roo 2016). Meaning and values are not intrinsic to heritage or an object, but always relative and relational.

This means that meaning can proliferate: no longer is heritage (or objects, meaning) to be seen as a closed system in which elements are structurally locked together in a timeless sequence, rather, systems are seen as open, dynamic and fluid. This is the core feature of a post-structuralist approach on the world: deconstructing the single narrative and instead acknowledging diversity and multiplicity. Thus, meanings and actions cannot be seen as simple manifestations of underlying structures – they proliferate in complex and unexpected ways, depending on the relations established between subjects and objects within the system (Murdoch 2005). Other features of a post-structuralist approach are that relations between subjects and objects are subject to contestation, and that there is an interplay between systemic relations and struggles over meaning and identity (Murdoch 2005). Post-structuralism, then, describes social and cultural systems that are open and dynamic, constantly in the process of 'becoming' (Murdoch 2005). Besides, it is argued that meanings and modes of identification, depend on the various relationships with other meanings, and depending on a specific context. Meaning would therefore not be intrinsic, but always relative or, better still, relational while receiving meaning only from the context and from other subjects, and influencing them in turn (Boelens and de Roo 2016). Thus, according to post-structuralists, systems, are never closed, but open, dynamic, and constantly in a process of unpredictable becoming (Boelens and de Roo 2016). To address this open and dynamic process of unpredictable becoming, notions of complexity theory can help to understand the interrelatedness, interdependency, diversity, and multiplicity of contemporary society (De Roo 2010; Thrift 1999). Complexity theory can be seen as a way to acknowledge that reality is a combination of certainty and uncertainty. The starting point of complexity theory in heritage is that the socio-spatial environment is highly complex, i.e. there is a physical and social reality that is evolving from simple and straightforward entities and interactions between them, to highly complex situations, fuzzy entities and interactions that are best represented by informal networks (De Roo 2010). In a complex system, each parts influences the others reciprocally, hereby exchanging information mutually and in accordance with the specific circumstances or contexts (Boelens and de Roo 2016). Hence, complex systems are unpredictable, in disequilibrium and probably fundamental different at various moments (Bovaird 2008).

Especially spatial planning contexts involving heritage are surrounded by dynamism and uncertainty (Baarveld, Smit, and Dewulf 2013). Hence notions of complexity theory could also be suitable in the field of heritage to deal with changing circumstances. This complexity perspective also lines up with the abovementioned relational idea of heritage, in which heritage is seen as being performed in specific contexts, combinations and connections (Haldrup and Bøerenholdt 2015). In this article we call this a 'co-evolutionary heritage approach'. Yet, applying this 'co-evolutionary heritage approach' in the field of heritage has some major implications. Heritage, seen from a complexity perspective, is an open and responsive system in which many actors – as subsystems – act in parallel, and in a unforeseen, non-linear, and spontaneous ways due to changing circumstances. Using a 'co-evolutionary heritage approach' makes

us see that the value and meaning of heritage is continuously constructed and reconstructed in interaction between multiple actors. Heritage becomes enlivened in a more active process whereby people make their own sense of things and places. Or as Crouch and Parker (2003) state: it is contended that heritage is contingent and subject to constant renegotiation and reinterpretation (Crouch and Parker 2003). Hence, as a consequence, it should be noted that heritage, cannot be fully known as there is a much greater plurality of meanings, values and ideas about heritage. In fact, heritage is always in construction, dynamic, and open. Crouch (2015) adds to this that there is, perhaps, no closure in heritage: no full script, no controlled tour. Heritage is complex, fractured and variant; it is unpredictable and does not work according to a given script, in visual representation or otherwise (Crouch 2010). From here, it becomes clear that heritage is not deferential but in and of life. Heritage is constituted in being alive, in an ongoing process with openness to possibility, disruption, complexity, vibrancy and liveliness (Crouch 2010). Heritage becomes a manifestation of continuously processes of valuation and re-valuation; influenced by reconsiderations and therefore always moving. It is constituted in being alive and therefore always emergent; in process (Crouch 2010).

Conclusion

That brings us back to the initial question, which is the quest for a participatory, locally rooted and people-centred approach to heritage to achieve more citizens' involvement in heritage management practices. As argued in this paper, attempts to achieve community-heritage engagement fail because time and again one is hardly being able to think beyond the physical or representational side of heritage. As seen above, heritage is frequently much more physically and visually amorphous or nuanced and complex, than just object and/or representations. Going beyond a heritage-as-thing-approach or heritage-as-construction-approach, brought us a 'co-evolutionary heritage approach'. A notion of heritage that conceptualizes heritage as being in and of life, as being subjective and always in the process of making (Haldrup and Bøerenholdt 2015). Heritage than is not constrained, but open and full of interpretations and re-interpretations. It is multiple, a manifestation of continuously processes of valuation and re-valuation.

The implications of this way of seeing heritage is that it will become impossible to define heritage. Yet, when we take a look at the heritage-as-thing-approach or heritage-as-construction-approach, we also noticed that it was impossible to define heritage. In fact, as Thorkildsen and Ekman (2013) note, there exist no authoritative, universally valid definitions to provide definite answers to questions regarding 'what it is' (content/meaning) or how it can be used as a resource. Indeed, it remains unclear whose heritage is represented and in why heritage is defined in a particular way. However, this co-evolutionary heritage approach is not so much about providing a single, specific definition of heritage. The opposite is true in fact, as this approach does not focus on defining heritage but rather on expressing heritage. Heritage becomes a manifestation of continuously processes of valuation and re-valuation, as something that is always in the process of making. Adopting this co-evolutionary heritage approach enables us to understand various expressions of heritage, by looking at different performances and ongoing meaning giving processes of heritage. This, we argue, helps us to better and more precisely explain communities' and individual's ideas and values of heritage. As such this co-evolutionary heritage approach would be helpful in achieving the goal for a participatory, locally rooted and people-centred approach to heritage as it can encompass various expressions of heritage, and enables us to deal with an increasing complexity in the field of heritage.

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