Heritage, Governance and Marketization: a Case-study from Wales

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Introduction

This paper seeks to uncover what the marketization of heritage means in practice. Ironically, both the sponsors and the critics of heritage may over-estimate how amenable it is to the 'spirit of enterprise' (whether loved or loathed). This is particularly the case with heritage visitor-sites which have been set up with regeneration-targeted funding. Their planners and sponsors like to think of them as seed-beds for growing the green shoots of enterprise and economic development in the local sphere. This is in accordance with latter-day political doctrines of entrepreneurial governance and the selling of place (for both place-promotion and tourism). On the other side of the fence, their critics accuse them of selling out to the market, shoe-horning history into a standardized industry and turning local culture into a commodity. I shall argue that this picture is caricatured on both sides.

I want to show how heritage production is embedded in social relations, and particularly in relations of local political governance and ownership. Accordingly, I want to argue that heritage cannot be thought of as a commodity in the conventional sense. Like other visitor-sites which deal in cultural meanings, heritage has to present visitors with something they will consider authentic. Indeed, the pursuit of (an admittedly always elusive) authenticity has been seen as the defining feature of modern tourism (MacCannell, 1999). And it is not only to visitors that heritage has to convey authenticity. Like traditional museums, heritage visitor sites have three key interest-groups to whom they theoretically owe a duty of responsibility: their visitors, their planners and sponsors, and the subject-bearers of their history - the people whose pasts are on display (Ames, 1992). As Ames (1992) points out, museums are finding that they can no longer ignore the increasingly insistent voices of the latter group – people wanting some say over how their own history is displayed. They have forced museums to recognise more fully that the 'dead' history they display has living representatives, who may well have questions of self-identity at stake in the museum's exhibits.

If museums must increasingly heed these voices, heritage has them instated in its very production. Heritage is made – often – out of stories located in particular places (as in 'the heritage of place x'). As a phenomenon located quite overtly at the interface between public display and 'popular' place-histories, this means that, more overtly than in traditional museums, heritage is in many ways dependent upon its subject-community. The stories it tells have to 'make sense' to this community; otherwise, its authenticating claims will be unsupported and, possibly, contested. In fact, where this locally-authenticated dimension is missing, heritage sites are unlikely to thrive, nor to gain the necessary local support that is ultimately essential both for increasing visitors-numbers and gaining public recognition. In the context of locally-matched public funding for heritage, the local sphere and its complex social and political relations is of considerable importance. This in-built dependence on the local context is not something which heritage planners often fully come to terms with. In seeking to deploy heritage as an economic asset, they often – like the critics standing 'outside' – overestimate the capacity of market forces and underestimate their embeddedness in local realities.

In seeking to explore these questions, this paper discusses how marketization works to define local identity within its own terms and how the category of 'local people' (necessarily a construct) in turn finds its way 'into' the market – robbing it of any pretensions to pure and unfettered 'free enterprise'. This leads to the second focus of the paper, in which I describe the mechanisms through which marketization operates on the ground. Here, I show how the local economic and political contexts of heritage ventures turn heritage into a struggle over resources. Marketization seeks to deploy heritage as a resource that can be claimed by one

locality at the expense of another. In the process, the issues of commemoration and identity which are often the initial spurs for heritage initiatives at a grassroots level are rearticulated as questions of political and commercial ownership and control. This, I suggest, offers a more telling critique of marketization than the attempt to define its effects in ideological terms, or in terms of a supposed loss of History.

The paper is based on research carried out by the author at the Rhondda Heritage Park, an old Victorian colliery in south Wales that ceased production in 1983 and which was subsequently developed into a 'living history' heritage visitor site. In 1998, Wales (alongside Scotland and Northern Ireland) gained its first taste of independence from the London-based British Government; however, in the 1980s the region was still administered directly by an arm of the then Conservative controlled UK Government – the Welsh Office. Since Wales had a largely Labour Party dominated political map, Conservative control from London was widely resented – particularly as the government favoured non-elected quangos (such as the Welsh Development Agency) as a means of administering the region. As a result, the eventual move to devolution was preceded by a long period of concern within Wales about an endemic 'democratic deficit' in the region. Such a context is germane to the development of heritage, since, as we shall see, the ideological imprint given to the Rhondda project by the Welsh Office sat uneasily alongside the entrenched political culture of this particular area of Wales – namely the ex-coalmining south Wales Valleys. It helped to encourage a defensiveness and competitiveness among the local councils involved in developing and managing the museum, as well as instituting a feeling of alienation among interested local residents and enthusiasts. This made it a project that became intensely contested in the local community.

The initial impetus for the heritage museum came from a local, grass-roots initiative by ex-miners and mining history enthusiasts to save the Lewis Merthyr colliery from demolition. However, as its potential to become a resource for much-needed economic regeneration was apprehended by the Welsh Development Agency (WDA) and the Welsh Office, it was taken over by a consortium of councils and quangos and projected into a vast commercial and multiplex heritage leisure development. Yet, by 1990, the Rhondda Heritage Park had emerged as a small, local, loss-making and publicly-funded heritage museum, and never became the flagship entrepreneurial and wealth-generating project that was originally intended. As such it offers an opportunity to interrogate the political project of heritage marketization during the 1980s, and to trace its embroilment in the messy relations of the local public sphere.

Certain dissonances were built into the heritage project from the beginning. The Park was initially projected by the Welsh Office as a grand, combined heritage and leisure development that would trumpet the success of public-private partnerships and instil the spirit of entrepreneurship in the Valleys. This goal – to awaken an entrepreneurial culture in the Valleys - was to be achieved through commemorating an industry known for its rootedness in strong local communities and long-established traditions of collectivism and trade unionism. The heritage park itself sits in an area that had for long suffered persistently high levels of unemployment as the coal, steel and manufacturing industries slowly disintegrated; yet it involved replacing a colliery that employed hundreds in industrial production with a heritage museum that offered only a few low-paid service jobs in return. In addition it shackled together two borough councils, Rhondda and Taff Ely, that were very different in social and political complexion -the Rhondda being synonymous with the coalmining Valleys, and virtually the poorest district in Wales; Taff Ely having been less dependent on the collieries and thus identifying itself less with Valleys-led political culture, as well as being a wealthier district with lower levels of unemployment (see Dicks, 1996).

In this sense, the heritage project was about much more than preserving the material culture of the coalmining past; it was also entangled in the attempts of different power-blocs to claim particular identities for the area in the present day. It was thus very much about place and place-identity. As such, the Rhondda Heritage Park provides an interesting example of the attempt to marry industrial, working-class heritage to the market within the context of particular local social conditions. It tapped into local structures of feeling – to use Raymond Williams' phrase – which in the 1980s required a fitting public tribute to the area's coalmining industry. Yet it was also deployed as an economic and political commodity by regional and

local government in Wales. It thus allows us to explore both the inter-connections and the contradictions between the spaces of popular heritage and those of political and economic governance.

The research underpinning this paper comprised three linked studies: first, an account of the museum's founding and development, arrived at through a combination of interviews with key local government officers, councillors and consultants involved in the project and scrutiny of local government documents; secondly, a textual analysis of the audio-visual shows; thirdly, a visitor study conducted through in-depth post-visit interviews with 20 visitor groups. In addition, I interviewed the guides currently working at the museum, who are all ex-miners from the Valleys, and conducted focus groups with local residents who came from mining families. The intention was to understand heritage as a domain that brings together questions of production (how local projects come into existence) and consumption (how visitors and local people make sense of them), a conjunction which, following Hall (1980), can be understood as the relation between the encoding and decoding of cultural texts (see Dicks 2000a).

Heritage and Market

The 1980s heritage boom, for many critics, epitomised the free market's tightening grip over the sphere of public culture, and bequeathed to the twenty-first-century a climate in which the values of marketing, enterprise, financial management and cost-effectiveness became accepted wisdom. Bianchini (1993) describes how the role of culture in local urban planning policy has changed over the last three decades. The 1970s were dominated by an increase in cultural planning in most European cities, spurred by left programmes of community participation, widening access to the arts, the democratization of public space and the revitalisation of urban cityscapes. Heritage projects in the UK such as Beamish Hall reflected these ideals of public access (Johnson and Thomas, 1992). In the 1980s and 1990s, however, Bianchini argues that 'the language of subsidy was replaced by the language of investment' (1993: 13).

The 1980s was the decade of increasing urban entrepreneurialism, competitiveness and privatization in local economic development (cf. Harvey, 1989; Sadler, 1993), and it was also the decade when the UK heritage boom began. Numerous heritage projects, set up and often subsidised by local government, were inserted into local economic development strategies for urban regeneration, place promotion and tourism (Corner and Harvey, 1991; Ward, 1994). Although heritage projects are rarely free market enterprises, in that they are funded – initially at least - through public sector grants and subsidies, the rhetoric, priorities and stratgies of the market increasingly provide their rationale and managerial direction. Their funding is intended to help them achieve success in the market by increasing visitor numbers and spend, so they can contribute to the local provision of employment, wealth generation and environmental improvement.

As heritage ventures multiplied in the 1980s, revealing the store-house of cultural resources that local government could draw on to attract funding for tourism, historians voiced increasing concern about the commodification of public historical representation. Contrasting heritage centres with the traditional museum ideal of public service, critics found heritage irretrievably wedded to commercial values (Walsh, 1992; West, 1988). As Robert Lumley notes in his 1988 overview of the field, 'it is not just that the market is at the turnstiles, but that its values and methods (marketing, advertising, retailing) are seen to be taking over, so that an educational function is displaced by an entertainment orientation.' (1988: 11). It seemed that history was being appropriated for economic goals, and that heritage epitomised the final sacrifice of historical authenticity to market forces. Such a conclusion was bolstered by several well-known analyses of the heritage phenomenon, which saw these visitor sites as deficient historiography, peddling a simplistic nationalism and conservative nostalgia (e.g. Wright, 1985; Hewison, 1987). These in turn received robust rebuttals from critics concerned to rescue heritage as the domain of authentic popular culture – most notably by Raphael Samuel (1994). By the mid 1990s, due to the exhaustion of these entrenched positions, the UK 'heritage debate' had rather run out of steam.

Heritage Controversies and the Marketization of Place

During the 1990s, critical concern over heritage was taken up by geographers and sociologists, but here the focus turned to production rather than consumption. With the 'cultural turn' in geography and the parallel 'turn to place' in sociology, writers began to map the local social relations through which heritage projects were planned and constructed. This has reflected a growing interest in the connections between heritage, the market and place identity. For example, there have been several noteworthy attempts to document the ways in which heritage ventures become embroiled in local controversies over economic regeneration strategies, entrepreneurial development and the marketization of local space (Bagguley et al., 1990; Jacobs, 1994; Massey, 1995; Jess and Massey, 1995). These controversies have centred, for instance, on rural tourism ventures, the redevelopment of industrial wasteland and the gentrification of inner-city neighbourhoods. In these situations, local conflict has emerged over the articulation of distinct place-identities through heritage initiatives seen by some as desirable and by others as alien. Bagguley *et al.*'s account, in particular, shows how class difference is germane to the contestation of heritage.

There are several factors, however, which problematize discussions of heritage as a straightforward confrontation between the market and the people. First, there are many different kinds of heritage venture, and, as Samuel (1994) points out, it is not very useful to lump them all together as one 'expressive totality'. In particular, the level of local controversy they excite is likely to vary according to their historical content, their location, their funding structure, the previous history of the space they occupy, and so on. Some heritage centres are fairly distant, in space, time and social significance, from local placed identities - the Castle Museum in York, for example, or – on a different scale – a restored ex-derelict seventeenth-century manor house such as Llancaiach Fawr in South Wales. Heritage does not always generate the local interest or controversy that some theorists of place would perhaps like to imagine.

Secondly, there is the question of how popular opinion is registered in cases of heritage contestation. It is not always clear how the theoretical construct of 'place' relates to people and social groups, forms of social and political organisation and the channels through which public opinions are mediated. We need to beware of romanticizing a notion of popular protest, since the question of how to access and interpret people's opinions is so fraught with difficulty. It is necessary, for instance, to examine how the local press is implicated in particular political discursive relations, caught up in the system of local news-gathering and local gatekeepers. It is also tempting to fetishize the distinctiveness of the local sphere: many of the cultural categorisations and social relations pertaining to local heritage projects may more profitably be seen as part of much wider formations. Notions of 'the local community' may turn out to be imaginary constructs rather than empirical realities. Accordingly, it is rather difficult, as Massey (1995) warns, to identify an authentic 'voice of the people' that can straightforwardly be contrasted with the vested interests of 'the market'.

Thirdly, and most importantly for the purposes of this paper, there is a need to define quite carefully what the 'marketization' of heritage actually means. In the context of urban policy in the UK, it is not a simple matter of the substitution of public sector with private sector funding and control. By and large, there has continued to be substantial public funding for heritage projects, but the funding system itself has been transformed into a competitive bidding system in which the values of entrepreneurialism are enshrined. As McGuigan (1999) points out, the 1980s and 1990s Conservative Governments did not privatize cultural funding; rather, they instituted a powerful discourse of the market which was used to instil an increasingly orthodox concern with 'value for money'. In many ways, the annexing of publicly funded culture to goals of urban renewal amounted to a form of 'cultural Keynesianism', against which right-wing free-market think-tanks such as the Adam Smith Institute railed unsuccessfully (1999: 67). Marketization, then, is not the same as privatization. Rather, it operates through the coupling together of private-sector and public-sector interests through the much-vaunted rhetoric of 'partnership' and 'enterprise' (Hall and Hubbard, 1998). Indeed, it is at the level of taken-for-granted rhetoric and ideology that marketization operates most visibly. At a less visible level, it is embedded in the complex inter-relations among

different agencies of governance, systems of funding and interest groups at local, regional, national and international levels.

The marketization of culture also, importantly, involves making dual claims in the public sphere: firstly to the ideals of cost-effectiveness, partnership and enterprise, and secondly to the values of local public provision, cultural representation and popular access to informal education. If public money is to be used, politicians have to be persuaded that the proposed project will gain sufficient popular acceptance to justify commitment. In the sphere of local heritage, this will often mean making quite overt appeals to notions of local identity, authenticity, representativeness and tradition. In other words, heritage has to be 'marketed' to local residents, too. This can only be successful where the history displayed 'rings true' for local structures of feeling. If heritage projects make appeals that are hotly contested, alien or simply irrelevant to the established canon of local images, then heritage can easily become a political burden to its local sponsors. It can also become a political football, deployed in the various agendas of different groups seeking to make political and cultural capital in the local sphere. In this way, the fact of public funding will inevitably return to haunt developers and planners. And it may serve only to expose the glaring absence – and impossibility – of any spirit of 'rational free enterprise' in real social contexts.

In order to gain a critical purchase on the marketization of heritage, it is necessary to understand the various combined cultural and economic appeals that heritage planners need to make. Jane Jacobs sees heritage as the 'paradigmatic example' of the inter-dependence of culture and capital in urban economic development projects (1994: 753). A concern to document the intertwining of symbols and markets has been central to the analysis of heritage-led urban regeneration in the 1990s (Zukin, 1991; Urry, 1990). But, as Jacobs further argues, the analysis of symbolic economies has tended to operate with a narrow definition of culture as limited to representational and artefactual forms – images, objects, landscapes and buildings, for example. It is then relatively easy to show how these are appropriated by markets and turned into economic value. What this paper will explore, instead, is how the attempt to marketize heritage and turn it into a visitor site takes place within a production context defined more broadly than this, which includes social groups, institutions and agencies of governance, and where various political and economic interests are entangled in quite complex inter-relations.

The South Wales Valleys, Marketization and Regional Economic Governance

It was as the 1970s gave way to the 1980s that the seeds of a major new heritage project were being sown in the Rhondda. Although some economic diversification had been achieved in the 1970s, the rapid contraction of coalmining meant that the Valleys entered the 1980s with considerable problems of high unemployment, out-migration, and a growing economically-inactive section of the population (Rees and Rees, 1980). The increasing sense of crisis was represented in a widespread perception that something 'had to be done' in the Valleys (Ballard and Jones, 1975). However, a question remained over what route the Valleys should take: a renewed effort to re-industrialize through manufacturing, or an alternative, service sector-oriented solution which would accept the relocation of manufacturing along the M4 motorway corridor and develop a more leisure-oriented economic base for the ex-mining Valleys. In the end, it became clear that local councils had neither the power nor the resources to shore up local industry. Inevitably, then, it was the latter route which won out over the course of the 1980s.

What is distinctive about the Welsh experience of economic governance during the 1980s is that regional government, in the form of the Welsh Office, pursued a relatively interventionist policy approach to economic development, and yet did so by mobilizing a rhetoric of free-market values and 'enterprise culture'. Whilst the UK Government in England was dominated by Thatcherite free-market approaches to urban renewal, characterised by a generalized hostility to centrally-funded regional policy and aid, the Welsh Office retained a considerable hold, via various state quangos, over the economic management of the region (Rees and Morgan, 1991). This resulted in several high-profile urban policy initiatives – albeit ones which, in Rees' (1997) analysis, consisted of skilful packaging rather than real

investment. In 1988, the Secretary of State for Wales, Peter Walker, announced his Programme for the Valleys, which – among other things - sought to encourage the turn to leisure and tourism solutions for the economic regeneration of the South Wales Valleys. It was this programme which allowed development of the Rhondda Heritage Park to go ahead.

However, it was the rhetoric of the market and enterprise which governed the Welsh Office's management of development funds in the programme. What the Welsh Office wanted was to target funding at new initiatives in the Valleys that would foster partnerships with the private-sector in tourism projects. Within the framework of this policy, local authorities were expected to provide a major slice of funding for the development of tourism in their areas (Prentice, 1993). Tourism was promoted during the 1980s as a business enterprise to be managed along private sector lines, but local authorities were expected to help fund it. The plan was to create 'flagship' local attractions which the Wales Tourist Board and the Welsh Office would 'enable', as part of a market-led strategy which pretended to eschew central planning. This meant that the county councils, in particular, became particularly proactive in seeking to initiate and support tourism projects, and indeed, it was the county council of Mid Glamorgan which took the lead in promoting the Rhondda project.

The era of Conservative Party privatism and increasing marketization, therefore, took place in Wales against a background of continuing reliance on the co-operation of Labour-led local authorities. Instead of managing and distributing centrally-administered regional aid as in the past, they were charged with bidding competitively for Welsh-Office administered funds, aggressively promoting the cultural and material assets of their local areas and producing 'flexible' land use planning policies. The rhetoric of enterprise culture in Wales significantly depended on the promotion of partnerships between local authorities, the quangos and – supposedly – the private sector. The idea for a new heritage project in the Valleys, then, was quickly seen as a prime contender for support under the Programme for the Valleys, as it could claim to bring environmental enhancement to severely disadvantaged urban areas, as well as a new, leisure-oriented direction that seemed to hold out significant potential for private sector involvement.

Historical Knowledge and Insider/Outsider Relations

In many ways, the Rhondda Heritage Park appears to be the commercialized venture par excellence, alienated from local structures of feeling. Ivor England, an ex-miner and union lodge branch secretary from Maerdy colliery, further up the Rhondda, describes how the initial idea to save the nearby Lewis Merthyr colliery from demolition and to transform it into a mining museum, was soon taken over by the local councils and Welsh Office quangos. In 1983, Ivor was interviewed by Vincent Kane from the BBC for a programme to mark the decline of mining in the Rhondda. At the end of the interview, Ivor expressed his hope of conserving Lewis Merthyr:

> I said it should be kept as a memorial, if you like. Or perhaps that doesn't go far enough, it should tell the story of the Rhondda people. As a result of that programme, John Cornwell, who's a mining photographer and who liked the South Wales coal field a lot … kept coming over on his own account by train, coming up to talk to me, we'd talk, he'd bring photographs over, we'd talk and talk and get things going. And then another two people came in. […] So it started as a small committee of people. Then we went to see the Rhondda borough council and the Rhondda borough council took it on straight away. The officers of the Rhondda borough council ... took it on as an official organisation. They were very slow. And Mid Glamorgan got interested - we went out and did a series of meeting with Mid Glamorgan officers. I did a meeting in Trehafod, about what their intentions were - are they going to save the pit? Are they going to build it into something that didn't already exist? […] I simply didn't know the procedure, I mean I still worked in the colliery. So I didn't know. […] Then the official organisation took over and then it became slow and ponderous. They had people down here - site officers and things like that. Now me and all my ideas and John and all his ideas - we were finding it difficult to get through the

bloody bureaucracy that always builds up around everything. As a matter of fact, [a man from the BBC] told me in a pub up the road, he said 'I'll tell you what will happen, Ivor. Your ideas of saving this colliery', he said, 'you'd better watch them bloody pinstripe wallahs don't come in with fancy accents or fancy bloody brief cases saying they're consultants, and then they'll be engaged by the local authorities at an enormous cost, and then they'll say yes this is the direction we should go'. And to some extent it was true. (extracted from personal interview)

When the Rhondda Borough Council first took on the idea, it had initially expected to go it alone, envisioning the suggested heritage project as a traditional small-scale mining museum located in the colliery buildings alone. An initial Rhondda Borough Council report drawing up details of the scheme claims the idea for its own, and takes pains to stress the values of partnership with local people:

Many local residents and men from both the Lewis Merthyr and Maerdy pits have expressed their delight that the borough council are capitalising on the unique opportunity which the Lewis Merthyr colliery presents to create a lasting tribute to Rhondda's 'coal age'. Miners from both Lewis Merthyr and Maerdy pits have offered whatever assistance they can give in this. [...] There is tremendous local interest and enthusiasm amongst voluntary groups and individuals who have expressed a willingness to assist in whatever way possible, and it is anticipated that much use will be made of bodies such as local miners' lodges, the Rhondda Museum, the Manpower Services Commission, the Prince of Wales Committee. It is vital that the enthusiasm of such groups is sustained by ensuring that they have early involvement in the project.. (Rhondda Borough Council, 1983: paras. 4.1. - 4.5.).

Here we can see how the claiming of local support (as opposed to ownership) becomes crucial once the project becomes a subject within local government planning discourse. Rhondda Borough Council claim the initiative as their own, present themselves as the 'voice of the people', and allot local people the role of willing helpers.

This contrasts with a letter written to Rhondda Borough Council from John Cornwell, the mining expert and photographer who, along with Ivor, was an originator of the museum idea from the outset. He indicates the contemporary field of expectation among grass-roots enthusiasts:

I feel that I must write to you, to draw your attention to the enormous amount of local interest and support for the proposed Lewis Merthyr Mining Museum; I have been interested in mining museums for many years but I have never ever seen so much enthusiasm in any community before. If and when the project gets off the ground, there are men from Lewis Merthyr colliery and Maerdy colliery who will offer their services to help you set up the museum; in fact, we will not only acquire material for the museum, we will arrange and display all artefacts and photographs to a very high standard.

This letter makes it clear that in the minds of the local group at least, with which Cornwell was closely involved, the same miners and ex-miners who had worked the Rhondda collieries would themselves construct the displays and design the historical interpretation. This time, the borough council is allotted the mere role of funder and enabler to 'set up' the museum; local people are seen as the proper driving force behind it.

Already, then, as the project entered the framework of competitive economic governance, the heritage idea had become a project whose provenance and ownership were contested. For the Borough Council, it had become an asset over which it would claim control, but which it recognised provoked strong feelings of identification amongst local people. Hence, at this district level of local governance, it was important to make quite explicit appeals to local support and involvement. However, once the Rhondda Borough Council applied to the Welsh Development Agency for land reclamation funds to purchase the colliery area, the heritage idea came to the attention of a wider layer of regional governance, who were more

distanced from the local sphere. They were all acutely aware of the need to find solutions to the wider regional social-economic problem of 'what was to be done with the South Wales Valleys'. For the Wales Tourist Board, the heritage idea presented itself as a means of evening out the unequal distribution of resources which favoured tourist-friendly areas of Wales, and of fulfilling its mission to 'enable' cultural tourism in ex-industrial areas. For the Welsh Development Agency, it seemed to offer a solution to their problem of what to try next to alleviate the entrenched economic dependency of the Valleys. For Mid Glamorgan County Council, it offered a tourism strategy for the Valleys as a whole, which promised to rival the big development projects (notably at Cardiff Bay) materializing in the domain of its more prosperous neighbour, South Glamorgan. For the two borough councils (Rhondda and Taff Ely), joining forces with this consortium offered the means of gaining a slice of the considerable central funding that only a large, overarching and multi-agency project could attract.

As Ivor's BBC friend had predicted, the first step taken by the consortium was to commission a series of consultancy reports, in order to persuade the Welsh Office to fund an ambitious new heritage project which would form the 'gateway to the Rhondda'. Thus, by the appearance of the feasibility study in 1984, which spelt out the large-scale vision of a multiplex leisure development, the 'ownership' of the project had effectively been transferred from both the local enthusiast group and Rhondda Borough Council to a consortium led by the Welsh Development Agency and the County Council. Thenceforth, the accepted model of development became that of commissioning outside consultants, from commercial interpretative and design companies that represent the so-called 'heritage industry', to carry out the work. At this point, we are already far from the originating vision of Ivor and the local community-managed museum.

The consultancy model was a fairly new one: in the early 1980s in local government, internal markets and competitive tendering were still in their infancy. A county council officer interviewed sees the consultancy model as originating with the Welsh Development Agency:

> It was under [the WDA's] professional management with [their] experience of new town corporation and the development process, that schooled us all into how to actually procure designs and forward planning in terms of this kind of project. I think we were all learning; I certainly learned a lot from [them]. So the method of approach professionally from then on was in a sense led by the expertise and background of the Welsh Development Agency. It was a studied approach: let's commission consultants to give us an appraisal based on a brief, and so on. That methodology became quite clear - rather than doing it in-house, or sort of plucking ideas out of the air' (personal interview, Mid Glamorgan county council senior planning officer).

This account positions the consultancy model as a new managerial philosophy, into which the more experienced WDA had schooled the less enlightened local councils. The home-grown design option is seen as careless and unstructured ('plucking ideas out of the air'), whereas the consultancy option is positioned as 'studied' and 'professional'. This market approach – led by the WDA and enthusiastically supported by the county council - in fact came to predominate throughout the development process.

The heritage project had thus entered the professional funding market, and this in itself further closed off the possibility of grassroots input from local people. In fact, the abandonment of local involvement soon became a major underlying tension that haunted the development period. Another county council planning officer said with hindsight:

> Although its seed started very much a little weakly seedling from within the community, all the manure and all of the water has come from outside. And it may be too that a lot of the fruit has been plucked from outside because all of the consultancy teams [are people from England]. But it had to be. If you are going to develop a proper project, you've got to have the best. It just so happens that the best doesn't grow, in that particular industry, in South Wales. You've got to import it. (personal interview with tourism officer, Mid Glamorgan county council).

The distinction between a 'proper' project and a 'local' one clearly points to the perceived demands of the large-scale commercial model: in order to be 'professionally' designed and managed, expertise has to be sought outside the local area. The gardening metaphor sets up a clear distinction between the seedling (the local area) and its means of survival (outside). The heritage project thus becomes embroiled in entrenched centre/ periphery relations, in which the chasing of central funding directs attention away from the specific, embedded knowledge of the local sphere and onto a commercially-dependable, standardised model of heritage interpretation.

The business of doing local heritage is reserved, then, for an army of outside consultants, who are specifically not specialists in the local area. Indeed, the consultants were chosen because of their track records in other local heritage projects, such as the White Cliffs of Dover Experience, the Jorvik Viking Centre and the Wigan Pier Inheritance Centre. What is valued is the geographically-varied knowledge of general 'interpretation' rather than the specialised and particular knowledge of place and local history. In the meantime, the original local enthusiasts became a marginalized and often disaffected group waiting on the sidelines and watching as development switched decisively to market-led priorities. They remained a significant presence around the project's edges, however, during the years of development - particularly since several of their number subsequently became Guides.

With the aid of its battery of consultancy studies, the Rhondda Heritage Museum was turned into the Rhondda Heritage Park. By 1986, plans hinged on a massive three-site development integrating the original mining museum idea with a garden-festival-style development including country parks, a ski slope, chairlift, forest walk and camp, a retail development, a railway museum and a steam train to connect all parts of the proposed development together. It took its cue from the high-profile Garden Festival developments planned and overseen by professional landscape architects who managed the developments in 'partnership' with local authorities. William Gillespie and Partners had been key consultants in the Glasgow Garden Festival, and brought similar plans for a multiplex leisure and business site to the Rhondda. The Park was to offer everything that the Rhondda previously had not: a diversified and leisure based economy that incorporated its coal-mining heritage only as one aspect of a much wider commercial plan. It was to forge a new set of place-myths for the Rhondda, replacing the images of industry with those of post-industrial leisure and enterprise.

Heritage and Relations of Social-Political Governance

The problem that haunted the Park's development through the 1980s was that the place-based entrepreneurialism that gave it its ideological direction was out of synch with the realities of its local funding structure and political culture. As Ivor says, development of the heritage site became 'slow and ponderous', as the grant application process ran into a quagmire of delays. Whilst private investment was vigorously pursued, it singularly refused to materialize: venture capital could see little evidence of a thriving and securely funded investment opportunity. Public funding was not committed until 1988, almost 5 years after the original group had taken their idea to Rhondda Borough Council. In the meantime, serious cracks began to show in the management consortium, principally as a result of competition between the two borough councils, and between the boroughs and the county.

Long-standing conflicts of interest between counties and boroughs/districts and between districts themselves were exacerbated by the locally-focused, entrepreneurial and competitive economic policy developed in Wales in the 1980s (Prentice 1993). In the present case-study, it was clear that Mid Glamorgan County Council was much happier with the Gillespie proposals than the borough councils. At the Rhondda end of the proposed heritage development stood the imposing, stone-built Victorian Lewis Merthyr colliery buildings. At the Taff Ely end, there was merely a large expanse of ex-industrial land, cleared when the Lewis Merthyr's sister colliery, Ty Mawr, had been closed down and demolished. Since the heritage project had become thoroughly embedded in the marketized relations of the grants system and defined as an economic asset for competing with the next local area, it was crucial to the continuing support of both boroughs that development was seen to be progressing evenly

at both ends of the Park. Each borough council was thus eyeing the other end nervously, alert for signs of unequal advantage and jealously guarding its 'own' interests. Thus, Rhondda and Taff Ely were set against each other, in competition for ownership of the resources that heritage was supposed to bring.

However, local government does not act in the market only as a player for economic resources. It is also a forum for (supposedly) democratic representation, which has traditionally operated in Wales through well-developed and powerful committee structures composed of local councillors. As the councils were required to match the Urban Programme funding from their own coffers, there was a good deal of public scrutiny of the RHP exercised by councillors in both authorities. This was translated into a critical and ongoing commentary in the local press. As the Rhondda had managed to get its name inscribed on the heritage park itself (on the basis of its greater 'fame' and recognisability), Taff Ely councillors were sensitive from the start about securing the project's equal benefit to their own area. Most importantly, whereas the Rhondda at the time was dominated by the Labour Group's vast and entrenched majority, Taff Ely – where the labourist mining community identity was less hegemonic – was more politically mixed. In fact, Taff Ely had a growing Plaid Cymru presence on the council – a factor of considerable significance, as we shall see.

In 1987, uncertainty over the outcome of the imminent UK general election meant that all major funding decisions at the Welsh Office were suspended. This indecision allowed Plaid Cymru to capitalise on the project's obvious lack of progress and to campaign vigorously against the heritage park, which was branded a white elephant in numerous local newspaper articles. Unfortunately, the project was all too vulnerable to such public contestation: if any council were to withdraw its funding, the project would collapse. When Urban Programme funding was eventually announced in 1988, to the tune of £2.075 million, it came with certain conditions attached. These required that market values be prioritized in the development process, which – as we shall see - indirectly confirmed the apparent marginalization of Taff Ely.

The Welsh Office conditions insisted that the private sector should have a greater involvement in the project before further funding would be committed, and that the aim of the project should be to transfer its control from public to private hands as soon as break-even was achieved. This had two implications. Firstly, the Welsh Office rejected the proposals for publicly-funded countryside interpretation at the Taff Ely end in favour of small business and enterprise development to be set up by the private sector. Accordingly, Taff Ely were to lose 'their' fair share of the visitor spend. Secondly, it meant that the generation of visitor revenue became an all-consuming preoccupation. The necessary increases in visitor numbers were to be achieved by concentrating resources at the improvement of the visitor experience at Lewis Merthyr, down at the Rhondda 'end'. Thus, the demands of marketization for greater involvement from the private sector and freedom from regulation further marginalised Taff Ely by pushing development even more visibly in the Rhondda's direction.

To generate revenue, consortium officers decided to proceed to the opening of a bounded attraction as soon as possible. The only buildings already in existence, however, were those of the colliery itself, so in 1989, the refurbished Lewis Merthyr colliery buildings were opened to the public. Since there were few interpretative facilities, however, only a disappointing 11,000 visitors attended that year. This commercial pressure only catapulted the Park further towards the Rhondda end. With only the vague prospect of eventual private sector investment at their end, Taff Ely began threatening publicly to withdraw. Plaid Cymru's influence was a central factor here. In terms of local political culture, the project's focus on Lewis Merthyr was simultaneously a focus on the Rhondda and a focus on a heritage tradition strongly associated with the Labour Party. The coalfield culture of the Valleys has historically been closely tied to labourism, and the opportunity for opposition political parties to make a local impact has meant making cultural appeals that are distinct from the historical associations of coalmining traditions. Since the heritage project was to be a public celebration of those traditions, the opponents of labourism had a powerful reason not to support it.

Thus, the ambivalence which had haunted the heritage project from the beginning began to sharpen into open contestation. When local elections delivered a Plaid Cymru majority at Taff Ely Borough Council in 1991, councillors moved quickly to fulfil their election

pledge: the 'white elephant' was to go. The consequences were catastrophic for the market ideal. Taff Ely withdrew its funding, the other councils could not make up the shortfall, the funding package collapsed, and the RHP shrank from a large-scale regenerative leisure park to a small and bounded museum based entirely on the Lewis Merthyr colliery buildings. In this sense, marketization failed because it forced the borough councils to treat their local heritage as if it were a commodity, which - since it was unequally distributed among those who were paying for it - threw them into competition with each other. The partnerships envisaged for the large-scale entrepreneurial project dissolved because of the uneasy articulation between market ideals and the realities of the local political sphere. In particular, marketization forced the borough councils to compete over the ownership of heritage, defined very much as a resource for economic gain. What was Rhondda's gain seemed to be Taff Ely's loss. The County Council, meanwhile, lost a major flagship project through its own and the agencies' failure to recognise in time the insecurities of the partnerships they had set up.

Marketization also further weakened local public support for the project in another way. The commercial principle requires that the planned attraction appeal to as wide a number of people as possible. This involved providing something for everyone: a 'thrill' element underground, a 'play' element for young children, sophisticated multi-media technology, and a documentary and educational element as well. Whilst the RHP management had their sights set on fulfilling these goals, the local memorial aspect was rather forgotten. For example, instead of carefully and rigorously archiving the documents and artefacts donated by local residents, or pursuing imaginative, long-term oral history research, the RHP was spending its budget on marketing - to attract as many visitors as possible. Instead of spending money on curators or conservation, the RHP was spending its money on consultants and high-tech attractions. There is no doubt that the project's reliance on outside consultants whose knowledge of local history appeared a complete mystery, and whose modus operandi included trying to collect colourful stories from the very group of mining enthusiasts that had originally been pushed aside, only added to ammunition available to the heritage park's opponents. It was because heritage was being deployed as a resource for (a failed) entrepreneurialism that this gap between local groups and the Park itself was allowed to open and fester.

There was one other consequence of the embrace and failure of marketization. With the single focus on the colliery now clearly visible, the local heritage aspect of the Park became its sole interpretative rationale. This meant that it was the historiographical aspects of the Park which were exposed to the light of local scrutiny, as the other leisure elements fell away. As a result, local councillors, who retained ultimate control over the project, also scrutinised the interpretative designs, and became increasingly aware of the need to ensure that these reflected versions of history that could claim local authenticity. Consultants were thus instructed to meet with local people and draw upon local sources for their historical material. This was an artificial rebuilding of bridges over a gap that remained all too visible. Nevertheless, the solution alighted upon, that the consultants employ as scriptwriter an eminent and well-respected local historian, himself born and bred in the Rhondda, resulted in the production of texts that were not out of line with the labourist community-activist discourse of heritage mentioned earlier. What the texts finally celebrate is an activist Rhondda community, which has struggled over generations to gain improved conditions and to fashion a vibrant local identity and culture. Whilst romanticized, it is a vision that is, at least, locally recognisable in its invocations of the Rhondda as a place of continuing collective energy (see Dicks, 1997 and 2000b).

Cynically, one could argue that the attempt to build bridges back into the locality was motivated by the simple economic necessity of finding a local market for what was now a small-scale attraction. Certainly, there was too little too late, and placing a bridge over a gap does not close it. Yet the Rhondda Heritage Park now appears to have settled into some kind of comfortable position in the locality. It hosts regular 'fun days' for local people and popular outdoor evening events in the summer. Visitor statistics show that local people do not visit as much as they could, but that when they do, they are bringing relatives from the far flung Rhondda diaspora (Prentice et al. 1993). 'The Park' appears to be accepted by local

residents, who do seem to appreciate the fact that a public and highly visible memorial to the area's industrial heritage has been erected and maintained (Dicks, 2000b). In terms of the potential for a creative and inclusive expression of the various popular heritage interests and enthusiasms that were clearly present in the Rhondda at the beginning of the 1980s, however, one has to conclude that the RHP represents a missed opportunity. Ivor, who is now a Guide at the RHP, says:

> I had reservations, of course I did. I didn't want to see the place sanitised. I didn't want to see the place cheapened or made to look romantic or made to look How Green Was My Valley kind of thing - all miners naturally becoming colliery managers and marrying the rich people and all moving to the United States of America you know…. and walking up hill to their own pit. […] But it's a place that I feel will outlast me, you know, and I hope that miners' children will know that it's here, and it's now recognised by the people as a place that tells their story. […] And when people come out they say 'that's marvellous Ivor, that's marvellous'. There's a visitors' book over there, you know, you have a look at the visitors book and what they say, you know, excellent, not just that it's fun, but that it tells a story – it's informative.' (extracted from personal interview)

Conclusion

The heritage project discussed in the case-study did succeed eventually in placing local knowledge at the centre of its historiography. However, this was professional historical knowledge rather than the knowledge of Ivor and his friends, neighbours and co-residents. It was easy to engage the services of a local historian, as this fitted into the project's professional consultative system. What the system did not allow was the accessing and activating of multiple voices 'on the ground', as the case study has tried to show. This possibility, enshrined in public claims that heritage tells the 'people's story', was closed off by its sponsors' allegiance to the values of enterprise and place-marketing. At first glance, then, the irreconcilability of 'the people's interests' and 'market forces' appears to be confirmed.

However, marketization did not operate in a social vacuum. The project only managed - and perhaps needed - to 'succeed' in its (albeit limited) local representational terms, because it actually failed in terms of the rational market ideal. The pursuit of this ideal ensured its own failure, as it cast the local political sphere as competitors – attempting to deploy heritage as a resource to own and from which to extract capital advantage. In this sense, the local social sphere 'bit back': the market's necessary and inevitably embroilment in relations of political and economic governance as well as local culture ensured that the rhetoric of enterprise and partnership were exposed as mirages. In trying to make heritage into an asset, marketization had to fan the flames of political competition in the local sphere. It attempted to operate through denying the entrepreneurial competition that it itself engendered, by setting up a consortium of agencies who were supposed to work 'rationally' together in 'partnership'. However, this rational ideal succumbed to the problems of securing local community support, from which, as a publicly-funded project, it could not escape.

Heritage claims to be different from museums in that it is closer to 'the people' and more vernacular in its appeal. Heritage allows planners to make this dual appeal to both sponsors and to local tax-payers: it can be presented simultaneously as a cultural resource to be commercially exploited, as well as a public space for local community representation. But the marketized relations of heritage, in which it is funded publicly for local economic gain, mean that each of these two projects can easily fail. Where history attracts entrenched local cultural allegiances, it cannot be detached from the community and deployed 'rationally' as a market commodity. Since heritage remains, on the whole, regulated and controlled through public channels of governance, it is necessarily subjected to the dynamics and complexities of the local political sphere. Yet heritage is regularly proffered as the glue that can magically stick together the values of the market and the public sphere. In this sense, heritage exposes the impossibility of bending social realities to an imagined spirit of free enterprise.

As for economic regeneration, the impact of the RHP has to be assessed as minimal.

Only around 60,000 visitors come each year, and little employment or local spend is being generated. The vision of turning round the economic fortunes of the Rhondda by heritage and leisure alone has turned out to be a mirage. On the other hand, what the area does now 'possess' is a heavily-capitalised, popular and informative showcase for local mining history, and this, in the end, is more than Ivor had originally expected.

Notes

1 I use the term heritage-visitor-site to denote the new type of 'living history' heritage centre which uses a mixture of open-air reconstructed buildings, multi-media and artefactual display to tell the story of local places, lifestyles and industries. These centres usually employ costumed demonstrators, who may –as in the case-study– be ex-workers from the industries on display. Other, more famous, examples of similar heritage museums include the Black Country Living History Museum, Ironbridge Gorge, the Museum of Welsh Life in Cardiff, Beamish, the Wigan Pier Inheritance Centre, and many others.

2 The Welsh Office was that wing of the British civil service that administered many areas of public policy in Wales before the establishment of the National Assembly in 1998. It has been widely criticised for helping to institute 'quango Wales', and for pursuing economic regeneration strategies that lacked real democratic purchase (see Rees, 1997).

3 In what follows, I limit my analysis to a discussion of production - questions of text and consumption are dealt with elsewhere (Dicks, 1997; 1999; 2000)

4 Letter from J. Cornwell to Rhondda borough council secretary, dated 14 October 1983, lodged at Rhondda Borough Council planning archives, also archived at the RHP.

5 Up until 1996, local government in Wales was two-tier: smaller borough council areas – based on administrative districts - were in turn part of larger county council areas. Both layers of governance had particular responsibilities. When local government was reorganised, the borough level disappeared to create one tier of new, amalgamated councils.

6 This majority had seemed so historically entrenched and taken for granted, that when Labour lost the Rhondda to Plaid Cymru in the National Assembly elections of 1998, it sent shockwaves through the whole of the Welsh political establishment.

7 This was Professor Dai Smith, co-author of the acclaimed The Fed, about the early south Wales mining union.

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