

## Epilogue: engaging global issues and local values – scales, culture, concepts and politics

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The economic, political and technological era of globalism is probably one of the most decisive factors in contemporary international policymaking – and for cultural heritage. The inherent tension between local, national and global scales of decision-making networks is not new; the massive tipping of the scales towards globalised contexts is. Until now, most “globalists” (especially economists) have argued that scaled-up production, increased efficiency and profitability are inherent qualities of globalism. Nearly everybody gains from globalism as it makes us richer, creates an interdependence that promotes peace, stimulates innovation and enriches us with cultural exchanges. Despite some casualties along the way, the ensuing cosmopolitanism is celebrated. At the other end of the political scale, Brexit-style populism and other nation-oriented or decentralisation politics have denounced the alienation and disempowerment inherent to globalisation, calling for a return to the political and economic control exercised by national states or more local communities. These polarised positions, either unconditional capitulation for globalisation’s capitalism-on-steroids or calls to return to a simpler national past, seem to share the underlying premise that globalism is immutable and inevitable. It becomes a proposition of take-it-or-leave-it.

I read the articles in this volume and wrote this outlook in March 2020, in the midst of the COVID-19 shutdown in Europe. The long-term impact of the pandemic is as yet unknown, but based on some of the tentative commentaries in European newspapers, it seems that the pandemic is a forewarning that polarised attitudes to globalisation might be giving way to more sophisticated understandings of the situation. There are significant issues with the broad

undermining of local values and contexts of governance, but the technological, economic and political forces that drive globalisation cannot be put back in the bottle – and there are valuable resources in the international community that can be mobilised in, and for, localised communities. Out of the present crisis, perhaps an appreciation of the position that communities and authorities can and should combine global and local resources to influence policies and practices to solve issues in our contemporary world and the near future. Issues of scale, perceptions of the dynamic nature and situated meaning of culture, terms in flux and the fundamental importance of politics and policy in heritage studies and management are accentuated through an appreciation of our recent history.

In light of super-power rivalry, trade wars and the COVID-19 pandemic, the articles in this volume seem more relevant now than when the original workshop was organised in 2018. This book demonstrates the fact that cultural heritage politics are concerned with a range of overlapping but discrete issues: management, protection, emergency aid, community building, identity, presentation, political goals or value production in order to improve quality of life and sustainable economics. These issues are addressed and handled by international organisations, NGOs and activists, professionals and management agencies but also by regional and local authorities, and community stakeholders. The international community is a stakeholder in its own right, but cultural heritage is managed, experienced and produced locally. Managing the balance between the level is a key issue.

Archaeology, culture and heritage studies have been influenced academically by the fundamental critique of “ethnicity” (that extends to other identity-bound groups) in social anthropology formulated in Fredrik Barth’s introduction to “Ethnic groups and boundaries” (Barth, 1969). Likewise, a critique of ideas promoting cultural authenticity, like that formulated by Sahlins

(1999), would be something most heritage people would theoretically embrace. Still, ideas of groups bound together by some primordial forces and some cultures being more authentic than others, often remain premises – if implicit – in approaches to heritage. “Old” tends to equal “authentic.” Ideas arising from this line of thought are at best romantic, naïve and inefficient platforms for positive action. At worst, they are dangerous rationales of exclusion, oppression and disempowerment. Though ideas of primordial culture are still frequently appealed to in public debate, the fallacy of linking primordialism and authenticity to cultural heritage becomes apparent in this age of global migration. “Heritage” is not static, not objectively given and is not “authentic.” Usually appealing to deep history or a mythical past while responding to the present, it is created, chosen and attributed, laden with values and meanings (or serves to validate propositions of such). It is dynamic, changes physical properties and content through time and in relation to events. As such, even material heritage (as opposed to material objects and sites) also has an inherently intangible component. Though not purely, or even mostly, a political, social or economic instrument, the construction, appropriation or dissemination of heritage will have implicit or explicit elements of contemporary agendas. This is probably a pre-requisite for some object or expression to be viewed as relevant, and therefore defined and perceived as heritage. Like so many commonly used and at first glance self-evident terms, “cultural heritage” and “community” are not readily defined and are subject to interpretation. Though agreeing on a strict definition of “community” might be difficult, it is still clear that people do not belong to a single community, multiple communities operate at the same time and in the same space. Communities can operate on multiple spatial scales, particularly in our contemporary world of migration and mobility. This challenges some of the more naïve conceptions of communities as traditional and localised. The management, preservation, documentation, mobilisation and use of

heritage plays out on multiple scales. A number of the articles discuss themes concerned with top-down and bottom-up approaches, local and global values and stakeholders, decentralised management and good governance. There are probably some real disagreements between the article authors as to priorities and policies concerning where the mandate to make choices and power to act should lie. However, all the authors have experience from policy implementation or on-the-ground engagement with communities and heritage. In all probability, variations of perspective are grounded in variable experience and engagement with issues, whether through NGO policy implementation, involvement with community members or the analysis of unintended outcomes of externally funded projects, that is important here. In the 40 years I have been involved with archaeology, heritage professionals who do not subscribe to involving local participants and incorporating local values are the exception. Still, actual practices probably more often are characterised by deciding over, providing for or speaking to communities, rather than listening, talking and working with them. The latter is organisationally difficult, and there are conflicting goals and ethics between academic study, management guidelines and cultural heritage managed by local communities. The experience-based views in this volume therefore represent a valuable point of departure for future practices. A challenge for a follow-up would perhaps be a volume filled with “local voices” – perhaps without mediation from the cosmopolitan academia?

All the papers emphasise community involvement as ethical or political issues, but mainly as a pragmatic necessity tied to efficacy and sustainability. You cannot maintain viable and credible management, preservation and use without involving local communities – indeed not drawing on local knowledge and experience potentially defeats the tenets of heritage agendas. At the same time, the regional, national and global actors and agencies have knowledge, resources and

sometimes power that impact decisions and actions locally – and they can assist local stakeholders to navigate the complex and daunting world of national and international funding and policy bodies. Balancing the interworking of actors from a local to global, crafting a creative and productive dialect in a situation of political stress, violent conflict or natural disaster is no simple task – and a recipe for all situations probably does not exist.

A few years ago, I attended a workshop concerned with the cultural history of a resource important to all human societies. After two days of anthropologically and archaeologically excellent papers, we reconvened to discuss how our historical and anthropological perspectives were relevant to the problems of our contemporary world. Largely referring to abstract political ideals or appealing to traditional management systems, I was wary of the fact that our discourse did not take into account a planet inhabited by 7.5 billion humans; the dominance of cities; large-scale migration driven by a global market for labour, conflict or poverty; and centralised governance systems. Predictably, we ignored the massive scale of a global, profit-oriented, specialised and complex economy as well as the impact of technology and the flow of capital, labour and technology, bound together by networks extending throughout the planet. In short, we discussed resurrecting a mythical world of the past, instead of looking at the present to have an impact on the future. This book reminded me of that experience. Perhaps the two experiences, the workshop and this book, led to three premises. Initially, it is necessary to have as realistic an appraisal as possible of the world we live in today. Second, successful engagement is dependent on realistic policies, politically situated between idealistic activism and bureaucratic “business as usual.” Finally, as Giddens (1982, p. 32) pointed out “history is an unintentional project” – engagement is a process.

## References

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