

HERITAGE, MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

An Introductory Reader

Edited by
Gerard Corsane

FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY

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Heritage, Museums and Galleries

This volume provides a comprehensive introduction to the key issues that have faced heritage, museums and galleries in recent years. It presents a clear overview of the heritage sector and encourages a blurring of the artificial boundaries between heritage, museum and gallery studies.

Comprising twenty-eight thought-provoking articles, *Heritage, Museums and Galleries* introduces and discusses a range of important topics in detail. These include:

- Human remains, repatriation and illicit trade in antiquities
- Indigenous peoples, heritage management and museum action
- Representation, multiculturalism and globalization
- Memories and meaning-making
- Contestation and controversy
- Communication, interpretation and education
- Heritage tourism
- Public participation and working with different communities.

The book provides an ideal starting point for those coming to the study of museums and galleries for the first time, and brings the reader the very best of modern scholarship from the heritage community.

Gerard Corsane is a Lecturer in Heritage, Museum and Gallery Studies with the International Centre for Cultural and Heritage Studies at the University of Newcastle.

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An introductory reader

Edited by Gerard Corsane

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FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY

Preface

In my current and last two teaching positions I have been an admissions officer for applicants wishing to register for postgraduate qualifications in heritage, museum or gallery studies. During the six years in these posts, the most frequently asked question I have heard has been: 'Is there a book that I can start reading before beginning my programme?' This reader has been developed in response to that question.

The principal aim of this reader is to provide a starting point and introductory resource for anyone wishing to begin an engagement with certain key issues relating to the heritage, museums and galleries sector. This includes graduate students who have completed a first degree from a range of different disciplines and who are looking for a pre-sessional text to start their preparations to go into a postgraduate programme in the interdisciplinary – or postdisciplinary – fields of heritage, museum and gallery studies. However, as a reader, it will also be useful as a text for undergraduate students who, within a single discipline or combined first degree, are given the opportunity to begin to explore links between what they are studying and current issues in heritage, museums and galleries.

Apart from students participating in taught programmes, the selection in the reader will be of interest to research students and academics. In the main, the articles in the book have appeared elsewhere, yet there are four new ones (by Whitehead, Chapter 8; Mason, Chapter 16; Newman, Chapter 18; and Davis, Chapter 28) that have been especially commissioned for this volume. In addition, although the reprinted articles selected for the more general first part of the book may be fairly easily accessible in their original published forms, an attempt has been made in the rest of the book to source and bring together a collection of lesser known and/or more difficult items to access. For example, certain articles may originally have been included in volumes where heritage, museums or galleries were not the primary focus. Others may have first appeared in a volume that has been difficult to acquire because of a limited print run, or in a publication with high production costs and, consequently, a purchase price that placed them beyond the reach of many.

Another group of users that will find value in the book are heritage, museums and gallery professionals who face these issues on a day-to-day basis and who may like to use the volume as a platform for continuing professional development. Finally, general members of the public are increasingly being called on to be active participants in heritage, museum and gallery processes. If they are to be informed participants, they will find it useful to acquaint themselves with some of the current issues, challenges and ideas that are impacting on heritage, museums and galleries.

There are an increasing number of readers, anthologies and edited volumes relating to heritage, museums and galleries available in bookshops and on library shelves. With its stated prin-

cial aim, this reader is not intended to be in competition with them. Rather, it could be seen as a first primer and introduction that can provide a foundation and an entry point that the user can then build upon. The choice of articles in this volume will provide tasters that will draw readers in and stimulate them to begin an intellectual journey on which they can critically engage with the full range of available material. Users of this reader are encouraged to make note of the references and bibliographic entries and to follow up and develop their understanding on areas that attract their interest.

Regarding its content, this volume is a selection of articles on certain issues. The selection has mainly been influenced by the teaching and research approaches and interests of the International Centre for Cultural and Heritage Studies at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne. In the Centre an integrated vision is followed, which encourages thinking across the artificial boundaries often set up between heritage, museum and gallery studies. This has informed the framework of the book, and the choice and grouping of the articles. However, to some degree the selection has also been influenced by my personal experiences, both as a heritage practitioner and as an educator/trainer in South Africa, during the exciting period around that country's first democratic elections.

On a final note, for everyone who reads this volume, I am sure that we share the belief that heritage, museums and galleries are vital cultural, social and economic resources within society. They are immensely useful in lifelong learning and they can have the capacity to empower. They are important as sites for the construction and exchange of ideas, memories and identities, and for public engagement with issues. They have a place in society and, as long as they are prepared to change when the need arises, they will survive in one form or another. We need to look at the issues and challenges facing heritage, museums and galleries and decide whether or not they need to transform and reconfigure themselves as public institutions. This reader does not wish to impose answers, as there are no absolutes: rather it provides material that can be used by readers to stimulate questions and critical engagement. I hope that you find the particular selection of material in this volume different, useful and worthwhile.

Issues in heritage, museums and galleries

A brief introduction

Gerard Corsane

Introduction

Where does one start to introduce the myriad of issues that have been identified and brought to the fore in relation to heritage, museums and galleries over the past couple of decades? In a postmodern and postcolonial world, the range of issues has proliferated and spread, especially with the increased information flow and possibilities for exchange of ideas that have accompanied the development of new communication technologies and new media. Discourses on heritage, museums and galleries have become a massive, complex and organic network of often loosely articulated understandings, ideas, issues and ways of perceiving things; a network that is fluid, dynamic and constantly reconfiguring itself as individuals critically reflect on and engage with it. In addition, the way in which individuals reflect on the issues will depend on their starting points. Practitioners, academics, government officials, along with users and non-users of cultural and heritage institutions, will each have different approaches. However, although it is now accepted that no two people will share exactly the same list of perceived issues in the same order of priority, there are a number that appear to have currency in recent and present debates and discourses in heritage, museum and gallery studies. Many of these issues are associated with challenges to modernist Western principles and practices, along with calls for greater transparency and democratization. The selection of material in this volume has been informed by this, and by the range of material included in the suggested further reading list.

To assist in providing a framework for the reader to engage with some of the issues, this volume has been divided into four parts. Part 1 contains a selection of chapters relating to heritage, museums and galleries that present overviews and useful starting points for critical reflection. The items included in this part offer broad contributions that introduce the terminology and concepts relating to recent and current issues. The intention of Part 1 is to provide the reader with a general platform before certain key issues are introduced in more depth in the remaining three parts of the book. Lumley (Chapter 2) and Graham, Ashworth and Turnbridge (Chapter 3) provide a valuable background for understanding many of the issues relating to heritage more generally. Harrison (Chapter 4) and Stam (Chapter 5) identify and chart a number of the key challenges and trends in recent museological thinking that have influenced museum development over the past couple of decades, whilst Duncan (Chapter 7) and Whitehead (Chapter 8) bring useful perspectives on the relationships between people and art museums and galleries. Gurian (Chapter 6) makes an important contribution in showing how the boundaries between museums and other sites and media that store and shape memories are blurring, potentially leading to the reconfiguration of the heritage and cultural sector. The relationships

between these sites and individuals or social groups, in terms of memory-making and the sharing of memory, are covered in Crane (2000) and Kavanagh (2000), and relate to Davison (Chapter 14).

Part 2, which has the largest number of articles, aims to draw the reader's focus more specifically to a number of selected issues of significance. Parts 3 and 4 then go into further depth on issues in two particular areas: Part 3 concentrates on issues related to cultural heritage and tourism and Part 4 is dedicated to public participation in heritage, museum and gallery processes and activities.

In Part 3, the contribution from Prentice (Chapter 19) shows the range of attractions that can be considered in terms of heritage tourism. He makes some useful observations about the profile of visitors and suggests interpretative strategies that could be used to widen the visitor base. Richter (Chapter 20) follows with a discussion on issues surrounding the political dimensions currently associated with heritage tourism. Each of the final three chapters by Macdonald (Chapter 21), Hitchcock, Chung and Stanley (Chapter 22) and Witz, Rassool and Minkley (Chapter 23), discusses the construction and presentation of heritage products within different political, economic, social and cultural contexts. With each of these it is interesting to consider who drives the processes of construction and presentation and how the different types of visitors and users – with varying expectations – consume the heritage tourism products described.

Finally, the reason for placing the articles in Part 4 at the end of the volume is that issues relating to social exclusion (Newman, Chapter 24), the co-creation of the civic museum (Thelen, Chapter 25), the approaches of the neighbourhood museum (James, Chapter 26), the negotiated community-based museum (Gordon, Chapter 27) and the principles of ecomuseum models (Davis, Chapter 28) are concerned with democratization. These chapters complete a circle that will bring the reader back to a model, to be proposed below, as a way of developing an ideal democratic overall process for heritage, museum and gallery work.

Overall process of heritage/museum/gallery work: a proposed model

The proposed model (Figure 1.1) emphasizes the importance of public participation in all stages and activities of the overall process of heritage/museum/gallery work, from involvement in the activities themselves to the decision-making processes that both lie behind these activities and connect them. This model provides a framework that can be used to bring together many of the key issues that are raised in the chapters included in Part 2 and, after the model has been discussed, these issues will be considered in turn.

Although the process may appear very linear and rigid in the diagram, this is not the case in reality. The process should be viewed as being circulatory and dynamic in character. At any point during the process, one must be aware of the importance of allowing for feedback loops, which can further help to expand areas of the process already worked through.

The model takes as its starting point the notion that heritage, museum and gallery work is performed to provide vehicles for learning, inspiration and entertainment. Taking note that there would have been processes behind the original formation of cultural practices, material and expressions, the overall process in the model works from the *heritage resources* at one end through to the *heritage outputs* that are communicated at the other. This central line of activities performed in the model, and the acts of interpretation that follow, denote the *processes* of meaning-making in heritage, museums and galleries.

Ideally, throughout the process, practitioners work with representatives from different stakeholder groups and 'communities' in consultation and negotiation (see arrows down left-hand

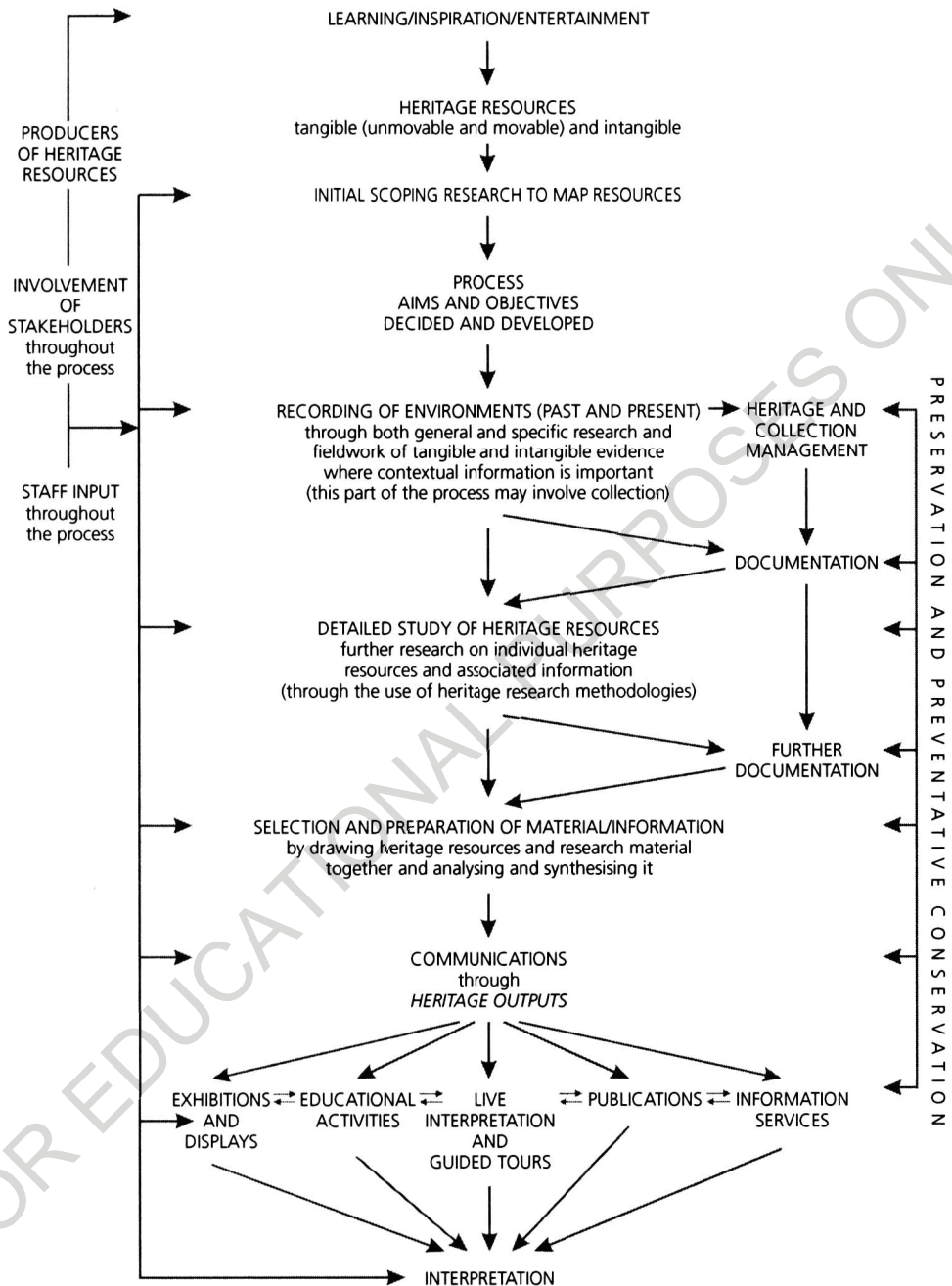


Fig. 1.1 Model of the overall process of heritage/museum/gallery work

side of model in Figure 1.1). Together, they identify appropriate heritage resources through initial scoping research. This initial research provides the basis for developing aims and objectives that guide the ongoing process, starting with activities where 'environments' are recorded and documented (see e.g. Kavanagh, 1990). The word 'environment' is used here in its broadest meaning and includes natural, social, cultural, creative and political contexts, and the relationships between them. This level of recording will require the use of a range of different research methodologies and techniques in order to gain both general and specific information. It will involve 'fieldwork', which again is used in its broadest sense to mean recording heritage resources wherever they may be found. This may involve documenting and studying anything from natural habitats and ecosystems, urban and rural landscapes, archaeological and heritage sites, the built environment, suites of material objects, archival material and artistic forms of expression – through to different knowledge systems, belief patterns, oral traditions, oral testimonies, song, dance, ritual, craft skills and everyday ways of doing things. The activities of recording and documentation at this level may involve the active collection of movable objects, as is the case with most museums, or it may require the relocation of larger items, such as buildings, for open-air museums. Wherever this takes place, the documentation activities are of even more importance, as associated contextual information is needed for material that is moved from its original location.

Following these first-level recording and documentation activities, the research can become more focused on the individual aspects and sources of evidence. For example, in museum research, material culture and artefact study approaches are employed to read meanings out of (and into) the material (see e.g. Pearce, 1992, 1994; Schlereth, 1982, 1990; Lubar and Kingery, 1993). In all of this documentation and research, information is produced and is fed into the second-level (or archival) documentation that becomes part of the heritage and collection management line of documentation, denoted by the arrows down the right side of Figure 1.1.

The results of all of this documentation and more detailed research then goes through a process of selection and preparation and become the communication outputs, which are communicated through a range of different, but interlinking, media. This final part of the meaning-making process involves a certain amount of mediation as decisions are made about:

- the selection of material and information;
- the construction of the messages to be communicated;
- the media to be used in the communication.

It is at this stage that the input from stakeholder groups (being all those that could have an invested interest) and communities may be most crucial, although they *must* be included throughout the overall process.

Traditionally, these last stages of the processes have been viewed as the activity of interpretation. However, as will be seen later, the acts of interpretation of the heritage, museum and gallery outputs involve the users of these products – the 'visitor' (see also Mason, Chapter 16).

Parallel to the central process of meaning-making runs the process of heritage and collections management, which involves taking care of the heritage resources through documentation, preservation and conservation of the material and associated information. What is undertaken in this parallel process should also be negotiated with stakeholders. In addition, it should be noted that whatever is done in this process will have some form of impact on meaning-making.

Finally, when considering the model, two further points need to be made. The first and most direct is that, ideally, the process should allow for feedback and evaluation loops. Second, it

needs to be understood that there are a range of external factors that will influence the process. These factors could be set by political, economic, social and cultural conditions and agendas.

Placing current concepts and issues against the overall process

Many of the concepts and issues that relate to current discussions in heritage, museums and galleries – and which are raised throughout the chapters in this volume – may appear to be more specifically connected to a particular component of this overall process. For example:

- some concepts and issues relate more clearly to the actual cultural property and *heritage resources* themselves;
- others are linked more closely to the *heritage outputs* as communicated through different media, products, public programmes and commodities, along with how they are used and consumed in a variety of ways;
- finally, there are those concepts and issues that are associated with the range of *sub-processes* associated with the overall process outlined above.

It should be noted here, however, that the sub-processes in the third component can be located at different points within the overall process. Certain sub-processes are more closely allied to the actual production of heritage resources, which can never really be seen as 'raw', as they have been invested with meanings during their original formation. In terms of heritage resources, there are also a wide range of issues associated with the sub-processes of selection of what is deemed worthy of preservation and conservation, along with the sub-processes allied to collecting activities and the documentation of associated information. These revolve around the questions of: who makes the decisions; how are they informed and what criteria are used when making the selection?

Other sub-processes can be positioned further along the system on either side of the heritage outputs. There are those that are part of the final mediation, construction and packaging of the outputs (e.g. label-writing processes, scripting of re-enactment live interpretations, or the design of educational activities) and others that relate more to how heritage outputs are consumed and utilized by the heritage visitor, or user. In addition, there are those that can lie in the overall process somewhere in between the resources and outputs, and are linked more to the methodologies used in recording, research, and heritage and collection care in different contexts. Although many of the concepts and issues relating to these aspects of the system are contingent and in actuality cannot be easily separated out, the three components of the overall process can be used for convenience as a basic framework for introducing the different concepts and issues explored in the chapters in this volume.

At this point, it can be noted that many of the concepts and issues, wherever they are placed within this system, share a common feature in that they relate to notions of 'ownership' – ownership of the cultural and heritage resources, ownership of the heritage outputs and ownership of the activities and sub-processes in between. With these notions of ownership come legal and ethical issues.

Intangible cultural heritage

Before going on to look at the more specific issues that relate to the ownership of heritage resources and cultural property covered in this volume, it may be useful to alert readers to a more general issue of current significance. Traditionally in Western models, heritage, museums and