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Remembering lost heritage on social media

Paper Abstract

The last five years have seen a rapid rise in the use of social media. Amongst the immensely popular groups that have sprung up on Facebook are those exclusively devoted to heritage places that have now disappeared as a result of demolition and redevelopment. Some of these Facebook groups are curated by individuals, others simply invite everyone to share photos and memories. Few of those who participate in these groups are trained heritage practitioners. They are simply people who enjoy looking at, remembering and discussing places from the past that are long gone.

The paper draws on a substantial analysis of several Facebook groups that focus on such lost places in major cities across the globe, including the old world city of Edinburgh and new world cities of Chicago and Perth. My focus is on the way individuals respond to 'loss of place' by posting photos, commenting on and discussing their memories of the place depicted.

Such social media groups raise a host of questions. Is this is an engagement with history or nostalgia? Are there differences in the response of individuals to images of places from the past in old world cities and new world cities? And, most importantly, what implications do these Facebook groups have for heritage? Do they sustain memory of place? In creating communities of interest do they encourage interest in heritage? And is this an interest that leads on to activism or does it simply signify acquiescence to the long history of destruction of heritage places?