



Threads of Conservation

Social fabric • Fabric and place • Conserving fabric

Australia ICOMOS Conference
5-8 November 2015
Adelaide Australia



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Some implications of digital social media for heritage practice

Paper Abstract

There is a growing array of digital and social media that promise to enhance people's connections to and experience of heritage. Through increased access to information, new experiences created at historical sites, and new forms of participation, these technologies range from simple web based archives to mobile applications and Facebook nostalgia generating sites. They offer significant innovations for traditional interpretation techniques, and opportunities to both reinforce and to challenge perceptions of tangible and intangible heritage values and archival relevance. Through their emphasis on connectivity and online participation, many of these new tools seek to provide a both a repository and digital communities through which memories, stories and experiences can be shared.

Arising from a larger project investigating digital tools for heritage application¹, this paper examines a selection of current digital applications and web-sites that use place as the primary generator for locating and displaying collective memories, including 'City of Memory'; 'History Pin'; 'Adelaidia'; 'StreetMuseum'; 'Know Your Place'; 'Sepia Town'; and selected Facebook sites. An analysis of these projects will be presented as a typology of attributes that have assisted us in asking key questions around the potential contributions that these digital technologies are making to broader understandings of heritage, its interpretation and management. Emerging issues that are explored in our analysis include institutional vs individual contributions and ownership; content moderation and social interactions within digital communities; levels of ongoing engagement that have been sustained; and, types of curatorial strategies and stewardship. The paper concludes with a discussion of whether, and in what ways, these new digital and social media open up new forms of the consumption and production of heritage.

¹ Australian Research Council, Discovery Project 'Citizen Heritage', 2014-2016, Chief Investigators from University of Melbourne, Deakin University, Kings College UK.