

**Engaging Heritage, Engaging Communities**, edited by Bryony Onciul, Michelle L. Stefano and Stephanie Hawke, Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 2017, 246pp., GBP £60.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-1-78327-165-8

'Engaging Heritage, Engaging Communities' is one of the latest additions to the 'Heritage Matters' series by Newcastle University International Centre for Cultural and Heritage Studies (ICCH). The book deals with community engagement and participation which is undeniably a very topical issue in heritage and museums theory and practice. It does so by compiling a rich collection of theoretical perspectives from different disciplines and practice-based experiences from around the globe, which together illustrate the variety of heritage settings and specialities engaging in the subject. The volume consists of three distinct sections, entitled 'Engaging Concepts', 'Engaging Creatively', and 'Engaging Challenges', respectively, which account for a total of seventeen chapters.

As reflected by its name, the first section of the book (Engaging Concepts) focuses on the definition of fundamental conceptual elements, such as heritage, community and engagement, their ideological origins and intuitive effects on the field. It opens-up powerfully with a piece by Bernadette Lynch, which locates engagement in terms of the broader socio-economic and political framework that shapes public policy and community-based institutional practice. It continues with two chapters that problematize the notion of community as a static homogeneous entity and heritage as a mono-dimensional expert-driven conception. Helen Graham's contribution at the end of this section is also a strong addition to the volume, raising issues of power and deconstructing the idea of engagement to discuss instead about a horizontal model of collectivism inspired by the political principles of anarchism. The two intercepting interviews with John Tunbridge and Gregory Ashworth serve to further highlight how different values, stakes and mind-sets create implications when collaborating with communities.

The second section of the volume (Engaging Creatively) draws upon some practical approaches to community engagement through 'co-production' processes. Gemma

Tully presents an interesting case-study that shows how community input can enrich museum narratives and representation whereas Michelle Stefano and Nicole King use their experiences in Baltimore, US to argue for the importance of methodological designs that place community at their heart. Admittedly, co-production approaches are particularly interesting and it is thus somewhat unfortunate that this section is quite short compared to the rest of the book. An extended discussion based on more related studies would have been truly valuable here. Instead, to compensate readers, the section features a set of interviews discussing 'co-production' through the lenses of museum practice, academia and community. These accounts are quite revealing in exposing the fine line between community involvement as an instrumental process for informing experts' interest into material and as a process of meaningful negotiation with the dominant narratives invested into fabric (where the main interest shifts to the social dimension of heritage).

The third and final section (Engaging Challenges) raises some further issues that emerge as we move across the less 'conventional' types of the heritage spectrum, such as historic battlefields, intangible traditions or sports, and as we enter into less familiar territories of engagement, such as the social and digital media. Justin Sikora discusses how community engagement can be challenged by the disparity of values attached to heritage by different stakeholders, such as experts and users, leading to a clash over whose agenda will eventually prevail. Michelle Stefano employs the example of Rapper Dance to stress that 'old-style' management can be proven insufficient when it comes to the safeguarding of heritage practices, whereas Gregory Ramshaw underlines the interplay between the legitimisation of emerging heritage and power dynamics at place. In essence, these cases exhibit how community engagement even when taking place in 'alternative' contexts, where one might expect higher flexibility, still remains immune to conflict over power and valuation judgements. In the two chapters that follow the focus moves to the digital milieu. There, it is argued that museum virtual spaces tend to reproduce the social elitism of their physical spaces and thus, a new approach is required to harness web possibilities and engage with online communities effectively. In addition, it is emphasized that engagement through digital platforms still presupposes the

cultivation of interpersonal and relational systems before virtual exchanges can become operational. Finally, an interview piece which highlights the importance of community engagement for the future of heritage institutions concludes the book. Although the discussion on challenges is interesting, it would have been useful if the analysis went at times deeper to propose specific solutions to these rather common problems of participatory endeavours.

Overall, a key quality of this volume is that it interrogates the assumptions permeating the discussion and application of community involvement. Its rich collection of chapters exposes the complexity of community engagement in heritage, which is often rooted in the heterogeneity of context- and discipline-dependent translations of the idea that in turn pose barriers to its realisation despite good intentions. It also illustrates quite eloquently that there is still a long way to go until we can firmly argue that community participation has been truly and fully embraced in the field. Until then, there is an immanent need for on-going critical analysis of and reflection on the topic at both theoretical and practical levels to which the book makes a clear contribution. However, as it presents a high variety across different heritage settings, levels of participation and institutional arrangements, it might be difficult for those less familiar with the topic to draw direct comparisons and comprehensive conclusions on the drivers to success and the causes of failures in engaging with communities. In this light, a concluding chapter composing the most significant inferences and suggesting avenues for further research would have been really meaningful.

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