

ESSAY: WHAT ARE COMMUNITY EXPECTATIONS FOR HERITAGE PROTECTION?

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INTRODUCTION

Although a key stakeholder in heritage management, the 'general public' is rarely consulted systematically on heritage issues. Attempts to gauge public awareness of, and interest in, heritage related issues has been limited to a handful of studies worldwide. In 2007, the Australian Government made an attempt to correct this with a large scale, nationally representative survey of over 3,000 Australians. This survey work was repeated and expanded in 2010 to track any change in attitudes over time. This work, along with the in-depth qualitative research work that led to the survey development, forms the basis of this discussion about the public attitudes to heritage, what they want in the way of heritage protection what their expectations are of government in heritage management. It remains one of the most comprehensive examinations of public attitudes to heritage undertaken worldwide.

Heritage management is a multi-disciplinary field, but one that only recently had begun to explore broad public opinions in a systematic way. Typically heritage management was a field discussed and undertaken by experts, with little consultation with the public (Smith 2006). Government interest in heritage as a method of developing tourism and promoting national pride and unity has led to the commissioning on public opinion studies to understand more about what people want and expect in the way of heritage management.

The cause and effect relationship is difficult to determine, but international studies conducted into public engagement in heritage have often reported that the public has only low levels of interest and behavioural engagement (Grimwade & Carter, 2000). In that public research, respondents have found it difficult to place a monetary value on heritage protection (e.g. determining how much should be spent by governments), and when asked to rank the relative importance of heritage against other government priorities such as health and education, short term needs prevail (Heritage Council Report (Ireland), 2007).

Findings such as these have led to a conclusion that the public was only passively interested in heritage issues and management, and that while nice to have, heritage protection was a low priority against economic demands and other more basic human needs. The results could be summarised as saying that the public is interested in heritage, but not concerned.

In order to address this lack of primary data, the Australian Government commissioned a series of research studies between 2006 and 2010. The results of that research are summarised here under the following key questions:

1. What does 'heritage' mean to Australians?

2. Are people actively participating in heritage?
3. What aspects of heritage do they care most about?
4. Why do they care about those things?
5. What is the expected role of government in heritage protection and conservation?
6. Are community expectations being met?
7. What can be done by government to foster greater involvement in heritage?

METHODOLOGY

It was noted in past 'public' research that young people, indigenous groups and newer migrants were often excluded from heritage discussions. This is despite ethnicity and age being found to be determinants in heritage participation in studies conducted overseas (e.g., CEBR, 2007). Our design was therefore also a purposeful attempt to address this issue. Respondents were asked screening questions about their age, ethnicity and participation in heritage activities. The initial focus groups were a wide-ranging discussion on the meaning of heritage and its importance to individuals. The first three groups were divided along broad age lines (under 25, 25 to 45, and 46 years and older) to improve group cohesion and investigate any relationship between attitudes and age. Later, four discussion groups with different ethnic groups (first or second generation Italian, Vietnamese, Arabic and Indigenous Australians) were designed to test the 'universality' of the findings.

Incorporated into the discussion groups was a more structured Repertory Grid Analysis (RGA) exercise aimed at developing a more concrete view on how people define heritage and what procedures they use when determining what is, and what is not, a heritage item or related activity. RGA is a technique based on George Kelly's (1963) Personality Construct theory. The main application of RGA is to determine the underlying attitudes and belief structures people use to make sense of their world. By using RGA, we were able to determine different types of thinking about heritage, as well as understand why some people might include certain types of heritage (e.g. natural environment, colonial era buildings), whilst excluding other forms of heritage (e.g. their own property). Twelve in-depth interviews were also conducted to further develop and clarify the findings of the initial RGA exercise. The findings of this RGA work then formed the basis of the quantitative study.

For that quantitative study, waves of data were collected in 2007 and 2010. 3,224 responses (43%) were received in 2007 from the 7,500 invites sent to members of an on-line panel (TNS Global *Emailcash* panel). This panel is the largest of its type in Australia, and with over 350,000 members, it is broadly representative of the Australian population. The average interview length of 20 minutes.

In 2010, 2,100 responses were received to a similar survey sourced from the same online panel, and surveyed in the same manner. The response rate was 39%.

The demographic profile of respondents of both waves shows a wide cross-section of Australians by matching with population demographics. In particular, groups that were often not included in past heritage research, such as indigenous Australians and recent migrants, are represented here in numbers that reflect the national average.

1. The Meaning of Heritage to Australians

First responses to questions regarding how respondents defined “Australia’s heritage” included “no idea”, “old buildings” and uncomfortable silence. Figure 1 is a visual representation of the things that first came to mind of our survey participants when they were asked to think of ‘heritage’. The size of the words is relative to how often they were mentioned. It is clear that ‘top of mind’ heritage associations are still dominated by the classical ‘old buildings’ and history view.



Figure 1: What comes to mind when you first think of 'heritage'? ¹

However, in both the survey research and the in-depth discussions we conducted, when pushed beyond these immediate associations, a richer, broader view of heritage was revealed. It was suggested that heritage includes both tangible and intangible aspects. Intangible experiences, such as attending festivals or site tours were included just as readily in definitions of heritage as were tangible places and objects. This can be seen in the survey responses shown in Figure 1, with words

¹ Based on 2,100 survey responses collected in 2010. Size of words is relative to the number of times mentioned.

like 'culture' and 'traditions' appearing. Experiences were a very strong part of the discussion on what heritage is, to the point where respondents acknowledged that:

- Far from being static, many of the favoured aspects of Heritage were “experiential”
- Heritage is not so much about the objects, but what they mean to people
- Emphasis is placed not only on knowledge of and interest in, but also the celebration of Heritage
- Heritage objects can therefore change, and be developed or re-created, without losing value (e.g. the MCG redevelopment) if they retain core meaning
- Heritage should seek to protect the core value of the object rather than the object itself in a pristine way.

The discussions quickly revealed that people recognise that heritage that operates on multiple levels. Specifically, examples were given of global, national, community and individual level heritage. The development of connections and involvement in heritage issues among participants usually started from an individual focus, broadening to a more aggregate national level over time. That is to say, a person most commonly needs to feel a personal connection with a given heritage element before they will support its protection and preservation at a 'national' level.

Most importantly, heritage was seen as those aspects that have made us uniquely Australian and that continue to make Australia unique. Key terms used in this discussion about Australia's heritage included 'democracy', 'freedom', 'opportunity', 'prosperity', 'geography', 'egalitarianism'.

Aside from including both tangible and intangible elements, and being strongly focused on what made Australia unique, the respondents were accepting that heritage did not need to be universal. There was wide recognition that heritage is a highly personal thing, and that when defining what Australia's heritage is, it was not important that all aspects relate to all people. In basic terms, people wanted to know that what they valued personally could be protected, and acknowledged and that meant that sometimes things that had no personal meaning to them might also be protected.

Whilst most participants had a personal bias in what they wished to see protected (e.g. their own culture and history), there was recognition of the diversity in Australian culture, and the right for various groups to preserve the components important to them. This has two important implications. Firstly, heritage does not need to be universal. There is a strong notion of “fairness” here. Participants recognised the rights of others to preserve and protect things important to them – as long as they were not prevented or hindered from doing the same.

Secondly, there is a growing realisation that heritage is not just 'White Anglo Saxon' history and there appears to be a desire to better understand and respect indigenous and other cultures. One significant barrier to greater public involvement in this area, however, is that people feel they do not know enough about their own culture, and even less about other cultures, to suggest or support their heritage protection. Obviously, people are reluctant to discuss matters where they feel insecure about their knowledge or beliefs.

Thus we see that participants were hesitant to discuss their own heritage, fearing it was not of interest to many, but even more reluctant to discuss the heritage of others, fearing they would be mistaken or seem ignorant. This finding is supported by work from the U.K. that showed Caucasians were far more likely to engage in heritage activities than other ethnic groups (CEBR, 2007). As a result, a reluctance to endorse the recognition of some aspects of heritage can occur – simply because people do not understand why that aspect of heritage is significant and who it is significant to. This would be another clear role for government agencies, helping with the heritage education process and building personal links between items deemed ‘nationally significant’ and the personal heritages of the population.

In summary, the agreed-upon definition of heritage across respondents was broad;

Heritage denotes aspects that need to be protected and preserved because they have made us uniquely Australian and, continue to make Australia unique.

2. Are people actively participating in heritage?

Past research might easily lead to the conclusion that the general public has a low level of interest in, and engagement with, heritage. In our research, however, we found a strong interest in heritage, particularly on a personal level (i.e. learning about, and protecting, things immediately related to one’s own heritage).

However, many studies have suggested that heritage engagement is impacted by factors like the age (as one ages, interest in heritage grows), ethnicity (e.g. indigenous Australians have particular interests) and country of origin (migrant experiences and views differ from those locally born) (Thorley 2002, Chronis & Hampton 2008).

There is a widely reported profile of those most engaged with heritage as being middle aged and well-off, despite the growing ‘commodification’ of heritage and attempts to involve a wider audience. For example, Graham (2001) profiled those who volunteered in heritage activities as being predominantly from professional households, female and over 54 years of age. Heritage tourists were most likely to be married, around 50 years old, with moderate incomes (many retired) and well educated (Wolfe, Hodur & Leistritz 2009). This can lead to the perception that heritage is of interest to only a few, and that few represent a particular segment of society only. Volunteers and visitors, however, represent only a narrow band of those potentially interest in heritage, and does not cover a full spectrum of heritage related behaviours. Our initial discussion revealed that a broad range of Australians (in terms of age, ethnicity, gender and location) were deeply interested in heritage, although they did not always recognise themselves as such. For example, many were interested in their family tree or taking visitors to see famous landmarks, but did not consider those to be a ‘heritage’ activity.

The questions remain, what are heritage-related behaviours and what distinguishes those heavily engaged in heritage-related behaviours from those who are not?

What are Heritage-related Activities?

As noted, heritage was a difficult term to define, and thus defining heritage related activities was also difficult. Generally, people tend to use the terms ‘heritage’ and ‘culture’ synonymously and the

focus here seemed to be predominantly on what might be called 'high-culture'. As a consequence, people do not initially consider themselves active participants in many heritage related activities. The exception would be the few people who engage in activities that fit the traditional 'cultural' domain i.e. attendance at art galleries, Museums, National Trust House visits etc.

Most participants, therefore, could not immediately think of any heritage-related activities they have engaged in. This means that when collecting information on participation in heritage, the discussion can be stifled unless a broad view of heritage is encouraged.

Leisure activities such as holidays (which often included visits to Australian landmarks and icons), walks through National Parks and participating in Cultural Festivals were not initially viewed as heritage-related participation.

In deeper discussion though, many respondents spoke of how attending events such as the ANZAC Day Football game, going to Chinese New Year festivities or visiting Uluru had made them think of Australia's heritage. They often asked "does this count?" when recalling how events like attending a Chinese new year celebration led them to a greater appreciation of the contribution of Chinese migrants to Australia. Heritage may not have been their initial motivation for attending, but if it had a positive outcome, that experience spurs interest and enthusiasm. Again, the results indicate a high degree of actual participation in 'heritage-related activities' when broadly defined and this fits with the interest and passion for heritage spoken about in the focus groups.

To examine that question, we asked our survey respondents to report the extent to which they were involved in a wide range of heritage-related behaviours. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: What Heritage-related behaviours are undertaken? ²

	Not at all in the past year	Once in the past year	2 - 5 times in the past year	6 - 12 times in the past year	More than 12 times in the past year
Visited an Australian Heritage Site	52.7%	28.4%	15.1%	1.8%	2.0%
Watched a TV show related to Australia's Heritage	40.0%	23.7%	28.4%	5.1%	2.7%
Read a Book or Article related to Australia's Heritage	60.2%	19.6%	15.4%	3.3%	1.5%
Attended a Cultural Festival or Event	59.0%	23.6%	15.2%	1.5%	0.7%
Taken a tourist holiday within Australia	51.8%	27.8%	18.4%	0.9%	1.1%
Played an active role in the heritage protection or preservation of something	90.3%	4.9%	2.7%	0.9%	1.1%
Volunteered at a heritage place or event	92.9%	3.0%	2.2%	0.9%	1.0%
Donated money to a heritage-related cause	75.3%	17.0%	6.6%	0.6%	0.5%

Table 1 reveals that a wide range of behaviours are being undertaken, often frequently. Over 80% of people were involved in at least one heritage-related behaviour, and the majority undertook two or more in the course of a year. Whilst regular participation is uncommon in activities like volunteering

² Data from nationally representative sample of 2,011 Australians conducted in 2010

and active preservation (those most commonly researched), visitation of sites and consumption of heritage related media is far more widespread. The data also suggests that there is a wide array of behaviours being undertaken, and that people connect with heritage in a myriad of ways. In order to get a true measure of the involvement of Australians in heritage, this data suggests that a broader perspective of relevant activities must be taken than has been traditionally adopted.

All of this suggests that participation in heritage is far more widespread than typically reported, and from that, a high level of importance can be inferred. However, levels of active participation reported here, notably visitation are lower than those seen in the U.K., where various reports put the percentage of people visiting between 70% (CEBR, 2007) and 86% (MORI, 2000). In 2010, the percentage of adults in England who had attended two or more heritage sites in the last 12 months was estimated at 59% (MORI 2010). Proximity to heritage sites was found to be a strong factor in encouraging attendance, but clearly visitation in Australia can be increased.

3. What aspects of heritage do they care about?

Recognising from our initial in-depth discussions that people had a very broad view of what constituted heritage, we set out to determine the kind of things included in that view. This was an issue of some importance to them, but a complicated one that they had some difficulty discussing. Therefore, in order to gain a clearer insight into what people consider “heritage” to be and how they arrived at that opinion, a technique called Repertory Grid Analysis (RGA) was employed. The typical RGA process involves elements and constructs. Elements are the objects under investigation – in this case, things that are seen as being part of Australia's National Heritage. Constructs are the attributes that people associate with these elements. A construct is basically the way in which some things are alike and yet different from others.

The RGA procedure is easily applied and has been in similar areas (e.g. museum studies, tourism, local heritage). For this research, participants were asked to suggest some specific things they thought represented the broad topic of Australia's National Heritage. This discussion was kept open and free from criticism or review until new ideas had ceased. Once a list had been developed these objects were grouped together by participants to become the elements of Australia's heritage (see Table 1). To elicit the constructs, the elements were written on cards, and participants were shown three elements at a time. They were then asked to identify which was the most different from the other two, and list the various ways in which it differed (constructs).

The elements elicited from survey respondents are shown in Table 2. The constructs that distinguish them are discussed in the following section.

Table 2: What do you think best reflects Australia's heritage?

Element	Specific examples provided by participants	2007 % naming (n = 3,224)	2010 % naming (n =1,872)	Change 2007 - 2010
Native animals	Kangaroo, platypus, koala, emu	11.3%	5.7%	-5.6%
Nature reserves	Natural forest areas, National Parks (e.g. Kakadu)	4.7%	4.5%	-0.2%
Natural icons/landmarks	Uluru/Ayers Rock, Great Barrier Reef, Kimberley Ranges, Daintree Forest, Bondi Beach, Great Ocean Road	30.3%	35.7%	5.4%
Man-made landmarks/icons	Sydney Harbour Bridge, Opera House, MCG, Cities, Parliament House	20.4%	24.6%	4.2%
Historic architecture/building	Victoriana buildings – St Paul's Cathedral, GPO, St. Kilda Esplanade Old Melbourne Gaol, Captain Cook's Cottage	2.8%	4.3%	1.5%
Sporting traditions	Australian Rules Football, Rugby League, cricket, surfing, swimming, tennis	2.3%	0.9%	-1.4%
Celebrations/festivals/events	Sporting, cultural, historical events (e.g. Australia Day).	1.1%	0.2%	-0.9%
Australian personalities	Cathy Freeman, Don Bradman, Dame Nelly Melba, Ned Kelly, The Stockman's Hall of Fame	1.3%	0.9%	-0.4%
Early white/Anglo Saxon settlement	Penal history, gold rush, beginnings of towns/cities/buildings, (e.g. Port Arthur, Ballarat, Sovereign Hill, The Rocks),	6.2%	8.5%	2.3%
Immigration/multiculturalism	Melting pot of different nationalities, food, restaurants, ethnic precincts (e.g. Lygon Street)	1.4%	1.2%	-0.2%
Indigenous Aboriginal culture	History, sites, art, dancing, rock paintings	5.5%	5.0%	-0.5%
Australian art and cultural works	Music, paintings, poetry (e.g. Banjo Patterson), museums	2.5%	3.6%	1.1%
Australian military history	The Shrine, Point Cook Airfield, Australian War Memorial,	3.9%	3.4%	-0.5%
Major waterways	Yarra River, Murray River, paddle steamers and irrigation	0.4%	0.7%	0.3%
Australian inventiveness	Royal Flying Doctors Service, Hills Hoist	1.1%	0.6%	-0.5%

What is immediately apparent from Table 2 is the large number of things mentioned as part of heritage. We also note that it covers the intangible and tangible, culture and objects, new and old.

Aspects of culture such as songs and dancing appear in the public view of heritage, but cultural heritage was only very recently recognized formally by UNESCO. Such broad views have also been noted in international public research (MORI, 2000)

In both the 2007 and 2010 surveys, respondents were asked to rank these elements in terms of their relative importance (i.e., the degree to which they should be preserved and protected). These rankings are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Importance Ranking of Heritage Elements, 2007 vs. 2010

Heritage Element	Importance Rating 2010 (1-7)	Relative Rank 2010	Importance Rating 2007 (1-7)	Relative Rank 2007	Change in Ranking 2007 - 2010	Change in Importance rating 2007 - 2010
Native animals.	6.39	1	6.48	4	-3	-0.09
Natural icons/landmarks.	6.32	2	6.6	1	1	-0.28
Nature reserves.	6.26	3	6.57	2	1	-0.31
Historic architecture.	5.9	4	5.72	7	-3	0.18
Major waterways.	5.72	5	6.55	3	2	-0.83
Australian military history.	5.66	6	5.57	10	-4	0.09
Indigenous Aboriginal culture.	5.57	7	5.47	12	-5	0.1
Australian inventiveness.	5.49	8	5.75	5	3	-0.26
Australian art and cultural works.	5.48	9	5.37	13	-4	0.11
Man-made landmarks/icons.	5.28	10	5.73	6	4	-0.45
Celebrations/festivals/events.	5.19	11	5.71	8	3	-0.52
Early white/Anglo Saxon settlement.	5.15	12	5.61	9	3	-0.46
Sporting traditions.	4.86	13	5.19	14	-1	-0.33
Australian personalities.	4.72	14	5.48	11	3	-0.76
Immigration/multiculturalism.	4.69	15	4.89	15	0	-0.2

Two things are noteworthy about these rankings. Firstly, the dominance of 'natural' elements at the top of the rankings with four of the top five in both years being natural features like animals or waterways. Australians do not appear to distinguish 'environmental' issues (such as water) from 'heritage' issues in the same way that the government, academics, or even the media, might.

Secondly, all items ranked over the mid point of '4.0', which is to say that all elements were seen as being important to protect. This finding confirms the earlier qualitative results, where participants spoke with passion and a high degree of involvement about heritage issues. It would therefore seem that the protection and preservation of heritage is highly important to respondents.

These ratings were relatively consistent across years, and highly consistent across ages, ethnicity, country of origin and degree of involvement in heritage activities.

4. Why do they care about those things?

The focus of most participants was on both the way heritage represents the past and on how it can contribute to the present / future. The two key phrases used to justify the interest in heritage were:

- To preserve for future generations, components held to be important to 'who we are'
- To allow education about how and why things are the way they are (both for good and bad).

The two concepts are seen as being intrinsically linked, that is, preservation was important in order to facilitate education. Preserving places and objects allowed people the opportunity to visit and learn about it in a formal sense. It also allows them to take their families and friends, using what has been preserved as a conduit for their own storytelling and memories.

There is growing appreciation that not all heritage is old nor necessarily 'beautiful' (e.g. Melbourne's controversial Federation Square design, which was mentioned often). It is these aspects of our present or recent past that help shape our future. For example, among younger participants, Federation Square had already been the site of some important events for them (e.g. Commonwealth Games celebrations) and they were already acknowledging that they would like to take their (as yet unborn) children back to such places as a way of involving them in important aspects of their lives. Poria, Butler and Airey (2004) also found that reasons for visiting heritage sites related to the desire for an emotional experience often connected to the individuals own heritage.

Some heritage items are considered to be more vulnerable than others in that they are being destroyed or could be permanently lost if not preserved. This is particularly true of nature-related elements including natural icons, native flora and fauna, natural resources (e.g. rivers) as they are seen as being irreplaceable. Things that were viewed in this way were seen as being more important, and pressing, to protect.

A strong focus on the future of the country was also noted. There is a desire to go beyond the acknowledgement of the value of heritage in preserving the past, towards the celebration of how that heritage shapes our present and future. Immigration, for example, was celebrated not only because it was significant to past members of the family, but also because of the opportunities it offers the future members of that family.

It is clear that some aspects of heritage (e.g. native fauna) were seen to be more important to protect and preserve than others (e.g. immigration / multiculturalism). In attempting to explain why some elements were ranked more highly than others, the ratings of these elements on the various construct scales were examined. Regression analysis techniques were used to investigate the relationship between variables. For example, does viewing an element as being vulnerable and important to all Australians impact upon its perceived importance?

Through regression analysis a model was built that shows the partial contribution of each variable to the overall importance rating. The variable we are seeking to explain is the overall ranking of the importance of preserving and protecting each element (the 'importance' rating shown in Table 3). All of the 13 rated constructs were included in the initial stepwise analysis, but only six of the constructs were found to have a significant impact on the overall importance ranking. These constructs and

their relative importance are shown in Table 4, along with the regression results for each individual element as some differences exist.

The percentage refers to the average contribution of that item to the overall rating of the importance of that element. For example, for the average person, 38% of their overall rating of the importance of a particular aspect of heritage (e.g. *Waterways*) came from their rating of how irreplaceable they believed it was. Another 19% came from how much they felt it related to them personally.

Table 4: Factors that influence the degree to which a heritage item is seen as being important to protect and preserve

Irreplaceable	38%
Relates To Me	19%
Represents the Future	17%
Important To All Australians	15%
Unique to Australia	4%
Vulnerable	4%

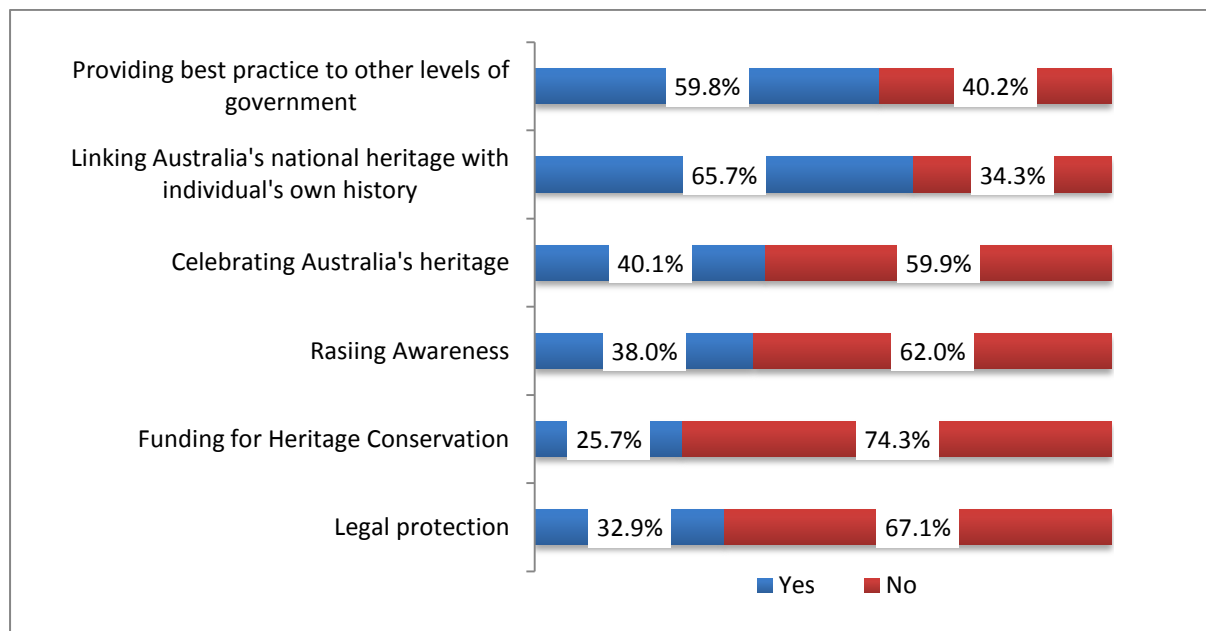
* R = 0.660, Adjusted R Square = 0.44, Std. Error of the Estimate = 1.11

In summary, the factors that impact upon whether something is seen as being important to protect and preserve are; the degree to which it can be replaced, how personally relevant it is to the observer, the extent to which it represents the future of Australia and how widespread its importance is perceived to be.

5. What is the expected role of governments in heritage protection and conservation?

In the 2010 survey, we specifically addressed the role that people would like to see the government play in heritage management. The results (shown in Figure 2), suggest that people do want the Federal Government involved in activities including providing guidance to other levels of government and assisting individuals to connect with their own history. More functional, direct actions such as providing funding and legal protection were not supported by the majority. This suggests the role of government may be in facilitating others to act on heritage matters, rather than acting directly itself.

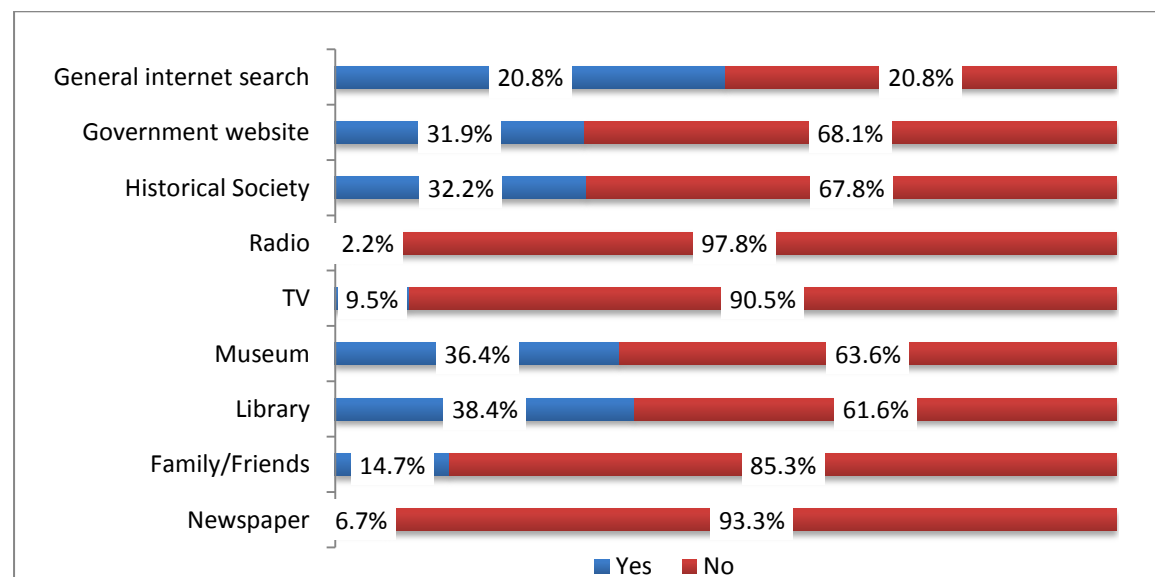
Figure 2: Public preferences for government involvement in heritage



These results fit well with findings of other components of the research. We noted earlier that most Australians are engaged with heritage, and active in its preservation at least on a personal level. Clearly, what they seek from government is support for their activities and guidance on high level issues where required. The low level of agreement with the government role in providing legal protection mirrored discussions in the focus groups. Heritage laws and restrictions were seen as being counter productive to people preserving heritage in a manner that allowed them to retain the core value of the item, but still keep its functionality. Private dwellings were the most commonly cited example.

As show in Figure 3, however, the Government remains an important source of heritage information, especially through the internet.

Figure 3: Preferred sources of heritage related information

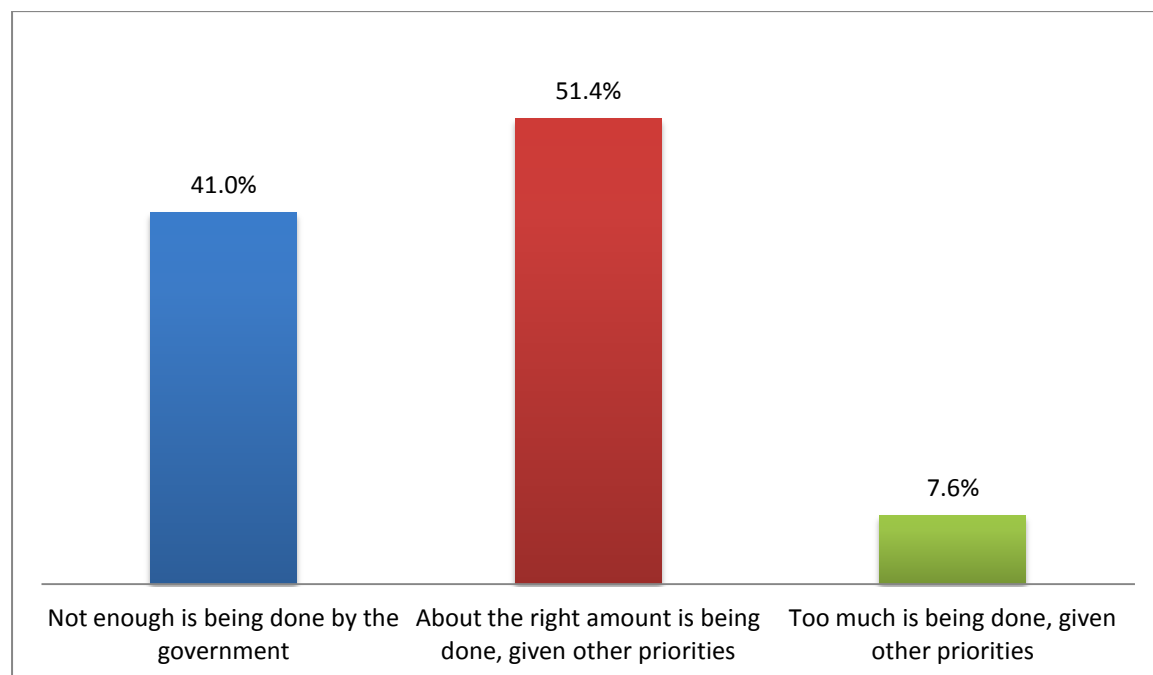


6. Are community expectations being met?

Most participants in the research felt that not enough is being done on the heritage front, particularly educating Australians about heritage issues. There was a general feeling that we have been tardy in recognising and understanding our heritage. Australia's history was acknowledged as being short compared with other countries, but that it was regrettable that it has taken time for Australians to value what is Australian and recognise what needs to be protected for the future. However, the responsibility for this was not typically laid on governments. People accepted that it was largely up to individuals to drive heritage protection, especially at the local, personal level.

That said, it was clear through the discussion groups held, that the public is largely unaware of the roles that different tiers of government play in heritage protection. Perhaps surprisingly then, the majority of people believe the government is doing enough, or too much, in the way of heritage management given other priorities (figure 4). In context, however, this may reflect the recognition of shared obligation between the people and official agencies for heritage management.

Figure 4: Attitudes towards Government involvement in Heritage



7. What can be done by government to drive greater involvement in heritage?

The government's role in heritage management is seen by most as being a 'shared obligation' with the people. Further, there is a preference for governments playing a supporting role in the fostering of heritage behaviours of Australians, as opposed to a direct intervening role.

As discussed, participants recognised that their own interests would not be shared by all, but were tolerant of others interests. However, a lack of information about history in general, and other cultural groups specifically, means that people feel uncomfortable about discussing heritage that they are not personally involved in.

Whilst people are most passionate about the things that relate most closely to them, there is recognition that heritage should be for all people. Everyone should be able to seek to protect the things that matter to them. Added to this, it is recognised that there are some aspects of Australian heritage that are truly iconic. These are things that people may have no direct connection to (e.g. Sydney Harbour Bridge, Twelve Apostles), but are so well known that they would take visiting family or friends to see them. As further support of this notion, these aspects featured very prominently in the quantitative research (see Table 1).

There appears to be two main routes people take to becoming involved with a particular heritage item. It can build from the 'bottom-up', through a strong personal connection or interest leading someone to seek out heritage that reflects their interests or history. An example of this could be a keen sportsperson getting involved in protecting sporting heritage.

Alternatively, a visit to a nationally significant heritage place can lead to 'top-down' involvement, where without prior interest in the place, an enjoyable visit can foster personal connections and higher involvement. Examples of this include the frequently told stories of tourism visits with friends or family to a WHL site. The visits had no initial heritage agenda, but they often had both a good time and learnt something about the place whilst there. This led to people developing both fond memories and an interest in the history and protection of that place, as it now had personal significance for them.

Far from being static, many of the favoured aspects of heritage were 'experiential'. To our participants, heritage was not so much about the objects, but what they mean to people. Emphasis was placed not only on knowledge of and interest in, but also the celebration of, heritage. Heritage objects can therefore change and be developed or re-created without losing value if they retain their core meaning. The redevelopment of the Melbourne Cricket Ground (M.C.G.) is an interesting case in point, paralleling Friedman and Silks' (2005) analysis of Fenway Park in the U.S.A. Historic stands were knocked down in favour of modern facilities, but the fact that the stadium was now viewed as being a better place to watch sport meant that its importance and heritage value had been enhanced.

It was therefore argued that heritage actions should seek to protect the core value of the object rather than the object itself in a pristine way. In keeping with Peterson (2005), authenticity was socially constructed by our respondents. As an extreme example of this, Sovereign Hill (a recreation pioneer village in Victoria) was mentioned by many, and it was seen as being an 'authentic' experience that allowed understanding of the development of Australia. No contradiction between recreation and heritage value was therefore seen, confirming the findings of Chhabra, Heakly and Sims (2003) who examined events staged in different countries from their cultural origin.

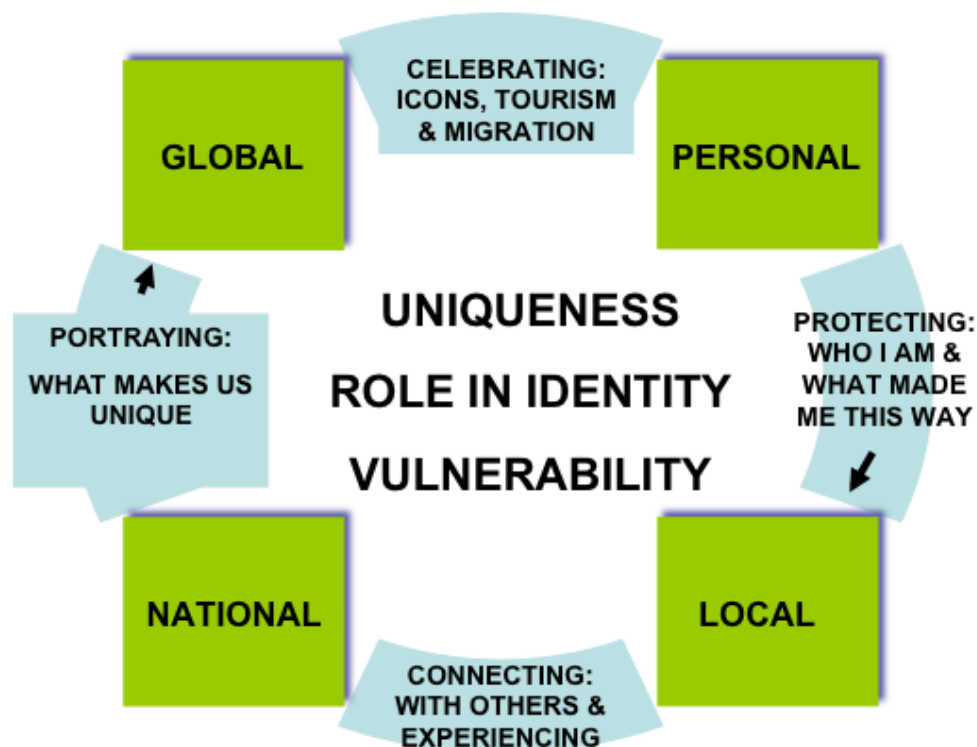
The clear preference was for 'living history' and interaction, sparking the sort of beneficial consumption mediated by imagination that Chronis (2005) discussed. This was especially true amongst younger participants, perhaps reflecting the trend towards 'interactivity' in all facets of modern life.

It seems that some heritage aspects are less understood because less public exposure and/or attention has been given to them. Unless initial personal interest is developed towards these aspects, and personal experience and connections made, they do not become part of the heritage

people value personally. An event held at or tourist visit to these places works well in building these personal links, especially if educational material is made available casually (Daengbuppha, Hemmington and Wilkes 2006).

Most believe the Government is doing enough for heritage, given other priorities, but should do more to link individual's heritages with the nation's history and provide best practice management to other levels of government. Understanding the past and linking it with the future is the statement that best reflects most peoples' view of heritage.

Figure 5: A cycle of heritage engagement



CONCLUSIONS

As was noted in both the qualitative and quantitative work undertaken here, heritage has meaning for people on a number of different levels. The importance of any particular heritage element, however, was determined by perceptions about its uniqueness, its role in personal and national identity and its vulnerability. People are most passionate about protecting things that have personal meaning to them. As we seek to aggregate personal meanings and protect elements that best reflect them on a national level, the personal passion can be diluted. A cycle forms though (figure 5), where through celebration of certain national heritage elements, more individuals can have personal experiences and develop meanings related to that element, thus increasing overall interest in it.

Participants/Respondents told us that their initial interest or involvement in heritage issues stems from one of two sources:

- a) Primarily involvement flows from close personal connections – obvious examples include family history (migration, achievements) or interests (bushwalking, architecture).
- b) Attendance at an event or visitation to a site spurs a desire to learn more and builds a personal connection – for example, taking an overseas visitor to visit “the Twelve Apostles” can lead to both learning about the site and building a personal connection if a positive experience is had. U.K. data shows a strong link between visitation as a child and adult interest in heritage activities (CEBR 2007).

Once personally connected, people develop an on-going interest in protecting and preserving what is important to them. Many respondents could speak of actions they had undertaken at a local level to protect things near their homes or neighbourhoods. Most people actively preserve the heritage of their families by protecting important items (e.g. photos) and stories, and passing them on to future generations. One major impediment to greater public involvement in heritage is that many people do not feel that what is personally important to them will be important to many others. As a result, they do not seek to nominate these elements to National Heritage Lists or seek to be involved in other overt heritage activities.

At the other end of the spectrum however, are heritage sites and themes that have become of such national significance that Australians almost universally acknowledge their importance. This can occur without any strong personal connection or even any first-hand experience. For instance, many respondents cited Uluru as being crucial to Australia’s national heritage, and yet few had visited it. The role such icons play in promoting Australia overseas (e.g. Sydney Opera House) means that most Australia’s value them highly, and see them as “representing” the best of the country.

Again, when events, celebrations or tourism bring people into contact with these national icons, personal links develop – strengthening their heritage importance. An interesting example of this effect was the farewell concert held by band Crowded House, outside the Sydney Opera House. For many of the 100,000-odd younger Australians there, attendance at this event means that the Opera House now has a special personal connection for them. As borne out in the discussions, it is a sense of uniqueness, vulnerability and the role in personal and national identity that determines how important the protection of any given heritage element is.

The overall view that heritage is important to Australians can be seen in every aspect of the research. The key focus group findings were that heritage is most involving when it is either personally relevant or nationally iconic (preferably both) and that it is most valued when it can be experienced directly and act as a trigger for the sharing of stories.

The respondents were divided on variables such as age and ethnicity, and yet the results were notable for their similarity across these groups rather than their differences. The clear, positive responses to heritage issues raised here, suggest that co-ordinated efforts to promote heritage will be well-received. In particular, assisting people to connect with their own heritages and each other, educating them about others and then helping them celebrate that heritage seems likely to be both popular and effective in increasing involvement.

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