

Valuing Urban Heritage Through Participatory Heritage Websites: Citizen Perceptions of Historic Urban Landscapes

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Abstract

This study examines how people value their historic urban landscapes through participatory heritage websites. These websites are online places where citizens actively contribute to the conservation of urban heritage. Taking UNESCO's 2011 *Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape* as its theoretical starting point, this study understands urban landscapes as (1) dynamic, because they change over time; (2) multilayered, as different generations and communities contribute in diverse ways to the development of urban landscapes; and (3) mediated through digital technologies such as participatory heritage websites. Furthermore, this UNESCO recommendation is used to make a distinction between the kinds of heritage discussed on the websites (attributes) and the significance attached to it (values). Through a qualitative content analysis of 20 participatory heritage websites from various Dutch and English cities, the study examines what is valued by those who contribute in their urban environments. In so doing, the study demonstrates how online media can support a people-oriented form of urban heritage conservation. This analysis reveals that the following five categories of heritage attribute are remembered by citizens: (1) the built environment and public space, (2) the social fabric and identity, (3) culture and leisure, (4) business and industry, and (5) politics and public order. Moreover, it is found that these attributes are valued because of their social relevance (social value), their connection to the biographies of citizens (experiential value), and their contribution to our understanding of the urban past (historical value).

Keywords

urban heritage, historic urban landscapes, participatory heritage, heritage values, participatory heritage websites

Introduction

Traditional conservation focuses on the material substance of heritage, on the stone. But it's getting clearer that we don't have a way to preserve all the material substance, and we need to find ways to preserve the social and political values, the way people are attached to a place. (Architect Rem Koolhaas in Bandarin and Van Oers (2014, p. 314)).

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This quotation raises awareness of the ways in which people value their urban environment and identify with it. It feeds into the growing attention paid in heritage policy to the social values of heritage and the participation of citizens in heritage valuing (Jones, 2017; Sykes & Ludwig, 2015). However, although there are clear policies and methods for identifying material heritage (e.g., historic buildings), capturing the intangible sociocultural meanings that citizens ascribe to urban landscapes appears to be far more difficult and is often neglected (Jones, 2017; Pocock, Collett, & Baulch, 2015; Stephenson, 2008). Indeed, it is a challenge to preserve the character of a place, particularly in a context of urbanization and rapidly developing cities. This article, therefore, demonstrates how people use what I define as participatory heritage websites to keep the past of these changing urban landscapes alive.

This type of website is understood here as an online place where citizens actively contribute to the conservation of urban heritage (van der Hoeven, 2018). Examples are social networking websites dedicated to local heritage (Gregory, 2015) and memory websites where citizens post stories about cities or particular neighborhoods (De Kreek, 2017). Here, people participate in heritage practices through the sharing of memories, stories, and audiovisual material related to the past of particular cities. I argue that their analysis enables an understanding of the ways in which citizens value the heritage of urban landscapes. As heritage activities are increasingly extending to online spaces, these websites provide a window to nonexpert perceptions of heritage (Freeman, 2018; Lewi, Smith, Murray, & Cooke, 2016). Studying such participatory activities is relevant in a policy environment that encourages heritage professionals to actively involve citizens in heritage practices. Examples of these policies are UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and its *Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape* (hereafter the HUL recommendation; 2011), both of which emphasize community participation.¹

This article takes the latter—the historic urban landscape approach—as its theoretical starting point. The HUL recommendation, which was adopted by the UNESCO in 2011, helpfully distinguishes between heritage *attributes* and *values*. The attributes refer to the actual intangible and tangible heritage that is preserved, whereas the values concern the motivations for preservation (Veldpaus, 2015). The central research question of this article is this: Which attributes and values of urban heritage can be observed on participatory heritage websites? The study has an inductive approach to prevent the analysis from being limited to predefined heritage categories. Such an exploration of the content of participatory heritage websites enables the observation of attributes and values that go beyond those included in official heritage assessments.

The article is structured as follows. First, I further conceptualize the landscape approach used in this research and define participatory heritage websites. As I will explain based on a literature review, historic urban landscapes can be understood as multilayered, dynamic, and mediated. Second, I discuss my methodological approach of using a qualitative content analysis to analyze participatory heritage websites. This addresses Jones's (2017) call to employ qualitative methods derived from the social sciences to assess how people value heritage. Third, I discuss the research findings by distinguishing between attributes (what kind of heritage) and values (the significance attached to this heritage).

This article thus demonstrates that participatory heritage websites enable researchers and heritage professionals to get a grasp of the lived experiences of historic urban landscapes. In the digital age, the Internet can play a vital role in heritage valuing (Gregory, 2015; Giaccardi, 2012; Lewi et al., 2016). This includes the values connected to identity and the social life in cities, which are generally regarded as hard to observe because of their intangible and subjective nature (Sykes & Ludwig, 2015).

Theory: Dynamic, Multilayered, and Mediated Urban Landscapes

This article will use a landscape approach to understand how people value urban heritage through participatory heritage websites. This is an inclusive understanding of urban heritage, focusing not

only on isolated heritage sites and objects but also on the wider physical, cultural, and social context (Bandarin, 2015; Veldpaus, 2015). This means that I will consider the diverse meanings that people attach to urban landscapes. I will discuss how urban landscapes are dynamic, multi-layered, and mediated based on the principles set out in the UNESCO's (2011) HUL recommendation. As will be explained below, this recommendation presents a new approach to conservation, addressing the challenges of current urbanization trends. I will conclude this section with a definition of participatory heritage websites.

Dynamic Urban Landscapes

A vital characteristic of cities is that they are ever-changing (Zancheti & Jokilehto, 1997). Extensive urban developments or mass tourism, for example, can potentially alter the look and feel of cities when the number of large-scale offices and hotels increases. Many cities are thus changing significantly as they seek to compete and innovate within a global economy (Taylor, 2016). Indeed, the HUL recommendation (UNESCO, 2011) notes, “[R]apid and frequently uncontrolled development is transforming urban areas and their settings, which may cause fragmentation and deterioration to urban heritage with deep impacts on community values, throughout the world.”

Given the dynamic nature of cities, it is vital to find ways to manage urban development. This is precisely what the HUL recommendation does in its attempt to integrate heritage conservation and urban planning. Instead of understanding heritage as static, this approach seeks to preserve it through change. As Bandarin (2015) argues, it is an illusion to think that particular sections of a city can be conserved by shielding them from urban developments: “This was perhaps possible for monuments, individual buildings and archaeological areas. It proved impossible for a living open system like a city, no matter how historic and protected” (p. 2). In that sense, it is more fruitful to identify moderate forms of urban development that preserve the unique character and identity of a place; for example, change and conservation are integrated when new uses are found for older parts of a city, such as industrial areas.

To manage change in dynamic urban landscapes, the contemporary meanings of urban heritage for local communities need to be considered in urban planning (Taylor, 2016). The character of an urban landscape is largely shaped by the ways in which people use it and the social practices taking place in it (Angrisano et al., 2016). As cities host many different communities, this implies that the values attributed to the urban landscape are equally diverse and not static (Taylor, 2016).

Multilayered Urban Landscapes

The HUL recommendation addresses the dynamic nature of urban landscapes by regarding them as multilayered (UNESCO, 2011): “The historic urban landscape is the urban area understood as the result of a historic layering of cultural and natural values and attributes” (para. 8). These layers represent the traditions and experiences of the times in which they were formed. Successive generations and urban communities each contribute to the further development of urban landscapes by responding to their cultural, social, and physical environment. This implies that every new layer adds to the rich and diverse heritage of cities.

To assess this urban heritage, the HUL recommendation introduces a distinction between attributes and values. Attributes refer to what is preserved in urban landscapes, encompassing both intangible and tangible heritage (Veldpaus, 2015). Over the years, the scope of what is defined as heritage has broadened to include “living,” intangible heritage, such as traditions and rituals (Aikawa-Faure, 2009; Graham, 2002; Vecco, 2010). Furthermore, we can observe the growing attention paid to the contemporary meanings and the values attached to heritage (Bandarin, 2015). These values concern the reasons why people want to protect heritage attributes (e.g., aesthetic, historic, and social values). Instead of conflating *attributes* and *values*,

which often happens in the literature, Veldpaus (2015) succinctly clarifies the distinction between the two terms: “Attributes are what we value, or what creates values, and the values are the reason(s) why a resource is valuable” (p. 128). She goes on to explain (pp. 135-136) that the two concepts could offer a more neutral, open, and socially just way of assessing urban heritage, because a landscape may consist of diverse and conflicting attributes and values.

A growing concern with more democratic forms of heritage valuing can be observed, following on from the insight that what is defined as heritage is not intrinsic to the heritage artifact but, rather, is constructed through present-day decisions that are generally made by heritage experts (Rivero, 2017; Smith, 2006; Stephenson, 2008). These expert-driven decision-making processes have been criticized for being too top-down, thereby neglecting the views of citizens and communities (Schofield, 2014; Van der Auwera, Vandesande, & Van Balen, 2015). Jones (2017) observes that expert views can be biased toward specific types of value:

I argue that expert-driven modes of significance assessment tend to focus on historic and scientific values, and consequently often fail to capture the dynamic, iterative and embodied nature of people’s relationships with the historic environment in the present. (p. 22)

Similarly, it has been observed that the focus on famous buildings as isolated objects leads to an aesthetic bias (Smith, 2015; Taylor, 2016). This orientation privileges the perspective of professionals, such as architectural historians, instead of paying attention to the social meanings that heritage has for contemporary communities. Such concerns are acknowledged in the HUL recommendation as it explicitly addresses social values and seeks to let underrepresented groups participate in urban conservation.

To recognize the identifications that citizens have with cities, attention needs to be paid to the memories associated with urban landscapes (Hoelscher & Alderman, 2004). As Zancheti and Loretto (2015) argue, memories provide continuity in a context of change: “The meanings carried forward from the past are grasped by virtue of the memory of individuals, with the help of instruments that support social memory such as books, documents, photographs, buildings and so forth” (p. 85). In the digital age, the World Wide Web has emerged as a new place where the meanings of urban landscapes are discussed and remembered (Affleck & Kvan, 2008; Freeman, 2018; Gregory, 2015).

Mediated Urban Landscapes

Online media increasingly shape the ways in which people interact with each other and their urban environment (Couldry & Hepp, 2016; Silberman & Purser, 2012). The Internet is used through, for example, smartphones for instant communication and access to information such as maps and timetables. Social media in particular are places where online interactions and sharing user-generated content thrive (Giaccardi, 2012).

Online media are also vital tools for involving citizens in the conservation of urban heritage (Giaccardi, 2012; Van der Hoeven, 2016). Indeed, the HUL recommendation encourages “the use of information and communication technology to document, understand and present the complex layering of urban areas and their constituent components” (UNESCO, 2011, Article 27). It does not, however, consider how media and communication actually constitute our experience of urban landscapes. In fact, the emerging literature on the HUL approach also seems to largely ignore the fact that urban landscapes are increasingly mediated through mass and online media.²

Nevertheless, if we turn to the fields of media studies and urban branding, there is growing evidence that the media are actually fundamental to our engagement with cities. According to Georgiou (2011), the “media and ICTs provide the technological infrastructure to connect, communicate and exchange information within the city and beyond, consumed by its inhabitants,

prospective inhabitants, visitors and audiences” (p. 346). Local governments use the media to communicate a favorable image to attract tourists and investors (Graham, 2002; Oguztimur & Akturan, 2016; Paganoni, 2015) and to garner support for architectural projects in a city (Jensen, 2007). The ways in which the identities of cities are portrayed in the media narratives of, for example, movies and journalism, shape how these places are experienced (Milestone, 2008; Reijnders, 2016). Such media representations of cities (e.g., “a city of love,” “a modern city,” “a multicultural city”), in turn, affect urban policies. Arguably, a city that communicates an urban brand of being modern and forward looking is more likely to invest in urban development than protect its heritage. The media thus represent and shape the character of cities.

In the context of this article, it is particularly vital to consider how the heritage of a city is mediated through online media. The Internet has enriched the ways in which urban heritage is preserved and represented. Processes of digitization have rendered heritage collections more accessible, enabling people to explore archives from their home (Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt & Aljas, 2009). Furthermore, interactive social media enable users to become active participants in the conservation of urban heritage (Giaccardi, 2012; Roud-Cunliffe & Copeland, 2017). This feeds into the trend of a participatory culture, in which audiences have more communication tools at their disposal to produce and share content (Freeman, 2018). Heritage institutions such as archives and museums invite their audiences to participate in urban heritage practices; in crowdsourcing initiatives, for example, audiences contribute to tasks such as the tagging of heritage artifacts (Ridge, 2014). Furthermore, heritage institutions solicit neighborhood stories through local memory websites (De Kreek & Van Zoonen, 2013). In fact, Internet users can bypass established institutions by setting up their own initiatives, such as heritage-oriented city blogs, local Wikipedia pages, or Facebook groups dedicated to the heritage of a city (Giaccardi, 2012; Gregory, 2015; Lewi et al., 2016). These grassroots initiatives are often strongly embedded in the community and could raise awareness about heritage narratives such as the experiences of minority groups that are underrepresented in established heritage organizations (Caswell & Mallick, 2014). Furthermore, they can mobilize people around shared interests and bolster a sense of belonging among participants (Gregory, 2015; Silberman & Purser, 2012).

Participatory Heritage Websites and the HUL Approach

This literature review has discussed the shift in focus from isolated heritage objects to a more dynamic conceptualization of urban heritage (Zancheti & Jokilehto, 1997; Zancheti & Loretto, 2015). Furthermore, it has been argued that existing value typologies have neglected the perspectives of citizens and intangible aspects of heritage (Taylor, 2016). Despite these criticisms, statements of value are still widely used because conservation is impossible without first considering the significance of heritage. Instead of abandoning the values approach altogether, Fredheim and Khalaf (2016) argue for a broader conceptualization of value that addresses these challenges. Against this background, I seek to extend the assessment of value to the virtual domain. Participatory heritage websites offer an accessible means of studying how citizens attach meaning to the heritage of cities.

In this study, I use the term participatory heritage websites to describe all online platforms where people are actively involved in the conservation of urban heritage (Van der Hoeven, 2018). These websites present heritage content that is either contributed by citizens on their own terms or crowdsourced by cultural institutions. Websites that merely provide access to digital archives are excluded from my definition because they do not involve user participation. To be clear, participatory heritage websites can have physical components such as a museum or meetings in which stories are collected that are subsequently posted online.

In a comparison of digital heritage applications and social media, Lewi et al. (2016) helpfully distinguish websites with a low curatorial presence (e.g., heritage-oriented Facebook groups)

from highly curated sites, such as those established by institutions. Since I also included the latter group of institutional projects in this study, my definition of participatory heritage websites is broader than Roued-Cunliffe and Copeland's (2017) understanding of participatory heritage as "a space in which individuals engage in cultural activities *outside of formal institutions* [italics added] for the purpose of knowledge sharing and co-creating with others" (p. XV). Although I share their concern with bottom-up heritage, I do include formal institutions because many participatory heritage websites are initiated by established heritage organizations or actively support citizen initiatives. Even if participatory heritage websites originate in an institutional context, they can still be relevant platforms for citizen engagement.

As participatory heritage websites offer a rich resource to explore the understandings that citizens have of the urban past, I will examine what kind of heritage is preserved in these online spaces (attributes) and what meanings are ascribed to heritage (values). In so doing, my study addresses the challenges of developing participatory approaches to heritage conservation and including intangible values in heritage assessments. Furthermore, my study answers the call for more research on people's digital engagement with heritage within and outside institutional structures (King, Stark, & Cooke, 2016). This research objective ties into the existing literature that considers the everyday ways in which people engage with local heritage as meaningful constructions of heritage value (Atkinson, 2007; Taylor, 2016; Jones, 2017; Rivero, 2017).

Methodology

This study is part of the Online Urban Heritage project, which aims to examine how the Internet changes the public's engagement with the heritage of cities. I first conducted an exploration of online participatory heritage initiatives in the Netherlands. This produced a database of websites focusing on the following dimensions adapted from De Kreek's (2017) research on local memory websites: (1) the initiators of the website (e.g., a private/grassroots initiative or a museum); (2) its aims; (3) the methods of collecting and creating content (e.g., crowdsourcing or archival research); (4) the format used (e.g., photos, text, and maps); (5) the period (i.e., past, present, and/or future); (6) the framing of the content (e.g., history, heritage, or memories); (7) opportunities for interaction (e.g., comment sections or guest books); (8) navigation (i.e., the structure of the website); (9) how citizens participate in a project; (10) the thematic focus (e.g., a focus on a city in general or its music culture); (11) the level of institutionalization (i.e., the presence of a formal organizational structure); and (12) the physical presence (e.g., a museum).

I started this exploration with Dutch participatory heritage websites that focus on different parts of the country. This geographic spread of the sample is important because, for example, cities in what used to be mining regions could address different themes from the four largest cities in the Randstad city area. Subsequently, I added the English cities of Birmingham and Manchester to study a wider range of cases. This decision was made because I observed in these cities websites with a different thematic focus from that of the Dutch websites (e.g., LGBT [lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgenders] heritage). Given the theoretical starting point that urban landscapes have multiple layers of heritage attributes, I was particularly interested in multicultural cities in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. I expected that in these places I would be more likely to find projects addressing the heritage of different communities. Although I paid great attention to achieving a diverse sample, this explorative study is still limited to two countries in northwestern Europe. This means that generalizations to other places must be made with caution.

To conduct a detailed qualitative content analysis, I selected 20 websites from the database that are representative of the different dimensions mentioned above (see Appendix A). This maximum-variation sampling strategy fits the inductive orientation of this study, in which I seek to explore the different attributes and values. I thus aimed for a diverse range of websites in

Table 1. Overview of the Heritage Attributes.

Categories of heritage attribute	Heritage attributes discussed on the websites
Built environment and public space	The visual appearance of a city (e.g., its skyline), specific buildings, architects and architectural styles, urban forms of transport (e.g., trams), statues, public art, urban planning (e.g., changes to the built environment), the history of specific locations (e.g., different uses), street names, and parks
Social fabric and identity	Urban dialects, migration, religion, LGBT heritage, school life, traditional costumes, social contacts between people in the city, care, the character of a city or neighborhood, and community centers
Culture and leisure	Fairs, pubs, clubbing, local artists (e.g., musicians), cultural venues, sports clubs, cinema, zoos, festivals, and street artists
Business and industry	Manufacturing, economy, shopping, crafts, businesswomen and businessmen, companies, and occupations (e.g., mining)
Politics and public order	Local politicians, municipality, war, terrorism, crime, protests, and emergency services

terms of geographical setting, organizational context (i.e., professional and amateur initiatives), thematic focus, and the formats used. Appendix A describes the objectives of the chosen websites. Using the FireShot browser plugin, I made screenshots of the home page of every website, five randomly selected messages (e.g., specific memories or histories), and pages with background information about the project. I loaded the PDFs of these screenshots ($N = 183$) into the qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti. Subsequently, I conducted a qualitative content analysis, enabling the in-depth categorization of existing media content (Hijmans, 1996). As Jones (2017) argues, such qualitative research methods allow for a detailed understanding of the ways in which people value heritage.³ Another advantage of using a content analysis of participatory heritage websites is that these public data already exist, providing unobtrusive access to information about the lived experience of urban landscapes. Instead of the top-down application of abstract value categories, it enables the values and attributes that emerge from the data to be studied inductively.

I used a thematic analysis to identify the recurring patterns (i.e., themes) in the data. To this end, I coded the data for the kind of heritage preserved (attributes) and the significance and meanings attached to it (values). Coding is a way of describing the themes in content through labels that characterize the different segments of a text (Boeije, 2010). In the coding process in this study, attributes and values were my sensitizing concepts. This concerns concepts that are derived from the literature and guide the analysis (Boeije, 2010). Sensitizing concepts are, however, only a starting point, enabling concrete themes to follow on from the analysis itself.

I first coded the content of the websites in a very open manner to explore inductively the kinds of heritage topic that the users and initiators of the websites address. In this phase, I thus moved from the data to codes. In the next step, I developed a categorization of the attributes and values I identified by merging and exploring the relationships between codes. To this end, I compared the codes that addressed similar themes. That is, in this phase, I moved back from the codes to the data to check the relevance of the codes against the original texts. As an example, the initial different codes for trams and cars were merged into the code “transport.” Finally, I made use of Atlas.ti’s network view to categorize the codes. This tool enables the researcher to view the codes graphically, move them around, and draw connections.

This thematic analysis produced five different heritage values and 44 heritage attributes (see Table 1). These categories will be presented in the remainder of the article.

Attributes: What Is Valued in Historic Urban Landscapes?

In this section, I will discuss the different categories of heritage attribute that emerged from the analysis (see Table 1). These are the actual heritage topics that are discussed on participatory websites. A few clarifying remarks must, however, be made before turning to the descriptions of the categories. While some participatory heritage websites focus on a specific attribute (e.g., culture and leisure), others have a broader scope by including several categories. These attributes are presented through different formats, such as photos, personal memories, and factual descriptions. Furthermore, specific content can be related to different categories. A department store, for example, is part of the categories “business and industry” as well as “the built environment and public space.” Of course, the function of the same building can change over the years, thus spanning several categories. Finally, I do not make a distinction between tangible and intangible attributes because theoretically every category can include physical aspects such as buildings (e.g., a music venue) as well as intangible activities (e.g., concerts) and traditions (e.g., an annual performance).

Built Environment and Public Space

This first heritage attribute category is concerned with the visual appearance and architecture of cities, as well as the ways in which the built environment and public space are experienced. This includes how people navigate the city using urban forms of transport. The webpage titled “Memory of the Amsterdam Trams,” for example, presents the heritage of the different tramlines in this city.⁴ Furthermore, many websites are focused on specific buildings (e.g., churches), architectural styles, or architects.

These heritage attributes are presented through photos, maps, personal memories, and the histories of buildings or specific spaces. To illustrate, the website “Memory of East” presents memories and photos of a former nursing home in Amsterdam that later became a music venue and a hotel. As cities are dynamic, participatory heritage websites document the ways in which past urban planning decisions shape the contemporary built environment.

Rather than focusing on the built environment and the public space, the next categories of heritage attribute are dedicated to what is happening in these places.

Social Fabric and Identity

Many of the contributions by citizens address the social fabric and identity of cities or neighborhoods. This includes the social relationships between people, as these are formed in, for example, school, religious institutions, and community centers. Identity refers to the character of a place and its citizens. Among other things, urban dialects and traditional costumes are discussed on the websites as expressions of identity.

Some of the websites specifically raise awareness of the heritage of minority groups, such as migrants or those who are LGBT. The multilayered nature of urban landscapes implies that different groups contribute in diverse ways to the heritage of cities. In 2014, for example, the oral history project “Memories of the Hague” commemorated the arrival of Turkish guest workers 50 years earlier. The website shares the memories of first- and second-generation Turkish people in this city. Another example is the website “OUT!”—which is entirely dedicated to the spaces and events associated with LGBT communities in Manchester.

Culture and Leisure

Although “culture and leisure” are arguably also part of the social fabric of cities, they warrant a different category. In many cases, these attributes have a separate section on websites or even a dedicated project. Examples include websites focused on the popular music heritage of cities,

such as music venues and local bands from the past, and people sharing memories of particular football teams. This category also includes the nightlife of cities: pubs, clubs, and cinemas that have disappeared over the years. Of course, these attributes are strongly connected to the first category of the built environment, as culture always takes place in specific buildings or public spaces. The presence of culture and leisure on the websites underscores the finding from earlier research that former recreational spaces can be part of the collective memory of a neighborhood (Madgin, Bradley, & Hastings, 2016; Rivero, 2017). It has been observed in those studies that the disappearance of such spaces often evokes a sense of loss.

Business and Industry

The next category of attributes concerns urban businesses and industries. On the various websites, people often recall shops and companies that existed in the past or have a long local history. These companies can actually be part of the social fabric of cities, as they provided jobs to a large number of people. This is particularly the case when specific neighborhoods were built to house the employees of a company. An example is the website dedicated to what used to be the largest shipyard in Amsterdam (“Ndsm-werfmuseum.nl”). This website, which was set up by a former employee, provides historical photos and information about the ships that were built at this location and the people who worked there. It also provides an overview of how this urban area has changed over the years. As the shipyard was part of the cityscape because of its sheer size, it arguably also relates to the category “built environment and public space.”

Politics and Public Order

The final category focuses on the politicians and policy makers whose decisions have shaped urban developments. “WaalwijkWiki,” for example, discusses the biographies and accomplishments of every mayor in the city of Waalwijk. This category of heritage attributes also includes the maintenance of security and public order in cities. Tragic events such as terrorism, wars, natural disasters, and fires can have a huge impact on the look and feel of cities. These kinds of topic are remembered on many of the websites in my sample. The “Aston Brook Through Aston Manor” website, for instance, shares memories of a survivor of the 1974 Birmingham pub bombings carried out by the Irish Republican Army. This illustrates how the websites also pay attention to the ways in which unfortunate events affected the built environment and social life in cities.

Values: Why Are the Attributes Valued?

After having discussed what is remembered on the websites, I now turn to the ways in which this content is valued; this concerns the kinds of meaning that are attached to the heritage attributes. In this section, I will distinguish the categories of experiential, social, and historic values. It should be noted that these different categories are not exclusively tied to specific heritage attributes. The heritage attribute “built environment and public space,” for example, can have multiple values attached to it. I will provide quotations that give the reader a sense of how the content is actually valued for each of the categories to be discussed.⁵

Experiential Value

Because of the large-scale commemorations here in South-East Brabant, I was thinking of the war and the liberation of Tilburg—as far as I can remember that period as a kid of four or five years old at the time. . . . So this isn’t a historical account at all, but perhaps my peers also have some memories to write about. (Geheugenvantilburg.nl)

As a small kid, I went to the Heinze School in Amsterdam. This school was next to a block of houses designed by Piet Kramer. The teaching style of this school didn't work for me, so I went to another primary in Cornelis Dirksz Street. This school was also in an environment full of Amsterdam School architecture. Perhaps it's in those years that my love for the remarkable form language of this movement started. (Amsterdamse-school.nl)

Experiential value is a new category that, to my knowledge, is not a part of existing value typologies. This concerns the ways in which people relate urban heritage to their own lives. As the quotations illustrate, participatory heritage websites have a strong focus on contributions by citizens. Consequently, much of the content deals with how individuals experienced certain events and places. This value thus captures the personal significance attached to urban heritage, as expressed through memories, emotions, and opinions. Furthermore, it includes personal statements about the look and feel of urban heritage. Underscoring this personal engagement with heritage, the second quotation illustrates how a user relates biographical experiences (i.e., where he grew up) to architectural heritage (i.e., the architectural style of the Amsterdam School).

The emotions expressed on the website can involve a sense of nostalgia, as the content seems to make people aware of the passage of time. Furthermore, the personal perspective of this category implies that people use the websites to give their opinions in response to urban heritage. The images and stories from the past prompt people to reflect on how cities have changed for the better or worse. As one user laments in response to a blog post by the Bijlmer Museum website on past urban planning ideas for a neighborhood in Amsterdam, "There is so much that could have been different and better in our beautiful neighborhood!" Reflecting on the provocative plans that did not make it (e.g., a drive-in theater and a skate park), he conjectures how the urban planners and architects seem to have turned the area into an "ordinary and cozy place," attracting "somewhat boring and colorless people."

Social Value

By sharing the lost and forgotten parts of the city it reminds us to take stock of where we come from and what it is that gives this great city its unique identity. We aspire to grow as a modern, vibrant city that remains firmly connected to its heritage by celebrating the remaining tangible links to the past. (Hiddenbrum.com)

Above all we tell them of the Aston people, of hard-collaring and community-minded folk who'd never back down from a fight but would give you the world if they'd had it. I'm proud to have Aston in my blood. (Astonbrook-through-astonmanor.co.uk)

Jones (2017) defines social value as "a collective attachment to place that embodies meanings and values that are important to a community or communities" (p. 22). She goes on to explain that this encompasses "the ways in which the historic environment provides a basis for identity, distinctiveness, belonging and social interaction" (p. 22).

The presence of this value on the websites is reflected in the quotations above, which specifically discuss the unique identities of Birmingham and the ward of Aston, respectively. These websites demonstrate that people derive a sense of pride from heritage attributes. The dialect of a city and its cultural achievements, for example, provide people with a sense of belonging. Finally, the social value of the websites is also apparent in the ways in which they are used by people to find old neighbors and friends. This category is different from experiential value because social values concern collective meanings and the social relationships between people, instead of merely personal perspectives.

Historical Value

I aim for a historical reconstruction of these companies. However, I'm aware that the content of this website will never be complete. Over the years, the number of occupations, departments and technologies is too large in complexity and diversity for one person to describe. I aspire to again put a face to NSM, NDM and NDSM, but to achieve that I will always need more information, corrections and contributions in whatever form. (Ndsm-werfmuseum.nl)

The action group Zaanse pop history aims to create an overview of the complete history of popular music from the Zaan district in the period from the late fifties until the present day. (Zaansepophistorie.nl)

Historical value concerns the ways in which participatory heritage websites contribute to our understanding of how cities have evolved to the places we know today. Through the participation of, among others, volunteering citizens and “amateur experts” (Baym & Burnett, 2009), the websites aim to make urban histories more complete. As the quotations illustrate, the initiators seek to fill historical gaps by collecting as much information as possible about specific topics such as local culture and architecture. In so doing, they uncover the multiple layers of historical knowledge associated with urban landscapes.

This category of historical value is different from the first two categories as it largely focuses on factual information about the past. However, it would be wrong to assume that experiential and social values are entirely separate from this category. In fact, it can be useful for historians to learn more about how people experienced events in the past. As Caswell and Mallick (2014) argue about “participatory microhistory projects” in which communities share stories, “These projects can successfully contribute to archives by filling in historical gaps, by documenting emotion and affect, and by directly involving community members in the archival endeavour” (p. 83).

In many cases, participatory websites have particular aims in mind for these collections of historical data. The next two quotations demonstrate the focus on educational and research purposes:

One of the other intended uses of this map and the concept is to act as a resource for education and PhD research . . . or as a reference work for historical events. (Financieelerfgoedopdekaart.nl)

In 2012, the national archive reported that this website will be preserved for future research. This means that the “memory of Tilburg,” which exists thanks to the contributions by people from Tilburg themselves, is of national interest. (Geheugenvantilburg.nl)

Although a study of the actual applications of historical knowledge would require additional research, such as interviews with users, my content analysis does provide insight into the intended uses and some of the benefits that people derive from them. The website mentioned earlier about the shipyard in Amsterdam provides an overview of the different motivations that people had for contacting the initiator about the website's content. This includes the provision of information and photos for educational projects, publications such as history books, interviews for local and national media, heritage tours, and genealogy research. Furthermore, the descriptions in Appendix A show that the initiators of participatory heritage websites often collaborate with other organizations to host activities such as guided tours and workshops. These diverse uses of this particular project illustrate how participatory heritage websites can serve a wide range of contemporary purposes.

Conclusions and Discussion

The role of online media has thus far received relatively little attention in the literature on UNESCO's HUL recommendation. This study therefore explored the ways in which people

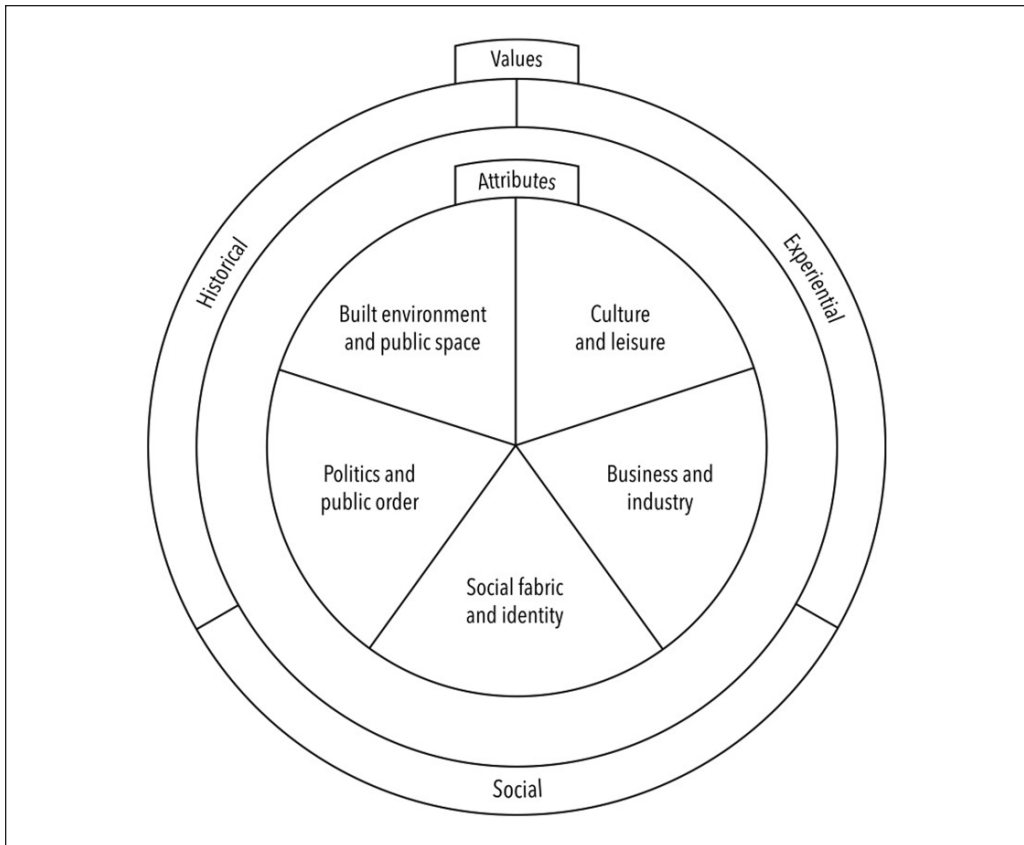


Figure 1. Model of attributes and values on participatory heritage websites.

engage with urban heritage through participatory heritage websites. Using the HUL approach as my theoretical starting point, I discussed how urban landscapes are (1) dynamic, because they change over time; (2) multilayered, as each generation and community contributes to the historic layering of urban landscapes; and (3) mediated through digital technologies. This perspective of the HUL recommendation made it possible to assess which heritage *attributes* are present on participatory heritage websites and how these are *valued*.

The findings of this study are summarized in a model (see Figure 1) that highlights the different categories of attribute observed on the participatory heritage websites examined herein: (1) built environment and public space, (2) social fabric and identity, (3) culture and leisure, (4) business and industry, and (5) politics and public order. The attributes are dynamically connected because, for example, a historic building can have social or cultural uses that change over the years. On the websites that were analyzed, these attributes are valued because of their social relevance (social value), their connection to the lives and experiences of citizens (experiential value), and their contribution to understanding the past (historical value). Of course, some websites have a stronger focus on historical value (e.g., wikis with factual information), whereas local memory websites particularly address the experiential value of urban heritage.

It should be remembered that this model is derived from a set of participatory heritage websites in a specific time and place. Generalizations on the basis of this analysis are difficult as the HUL approach reminds us that heritage values are dynamic and diverse. As this study is based on an analysis of participatory heritage websites from the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, more research is required to assess whether these same attributes and values are also present in

other geographical settings. Furthermore, participatory heritage websites might be biased in their content. Although they provide more opportunities for citizens to share their viewpoints, it is likely that neighborhoods and people with a lower socioeconomic status are underrepresented (Caswell & Mallick, 2014; De Kreek, 2017). With these cautions in mind, I do, however, offer some final reflections on what the findings imply for the HUL approach and the use of participatory heritage websites.

The findings from this study, which follow from a qualitative content analysis of existing online material, underscore Jones's (2017) observation that qualitative social research methods are useful for assessing social value. The attributes and values from the model demonstrate how the diverse meanings that citizens attach to the urban past are grounded in personal and collective memories. It thus shows that people's engagement with urban heritage goes far beyond just monuments and historic buildings. The model demonstrates the importance of including the social life of cities and the values held by inhabitants in decisions on heritage conservation. As Bandarin (2015) observes, a city is not just architecture or a monument but "a living space, where the meaning of the built environment has to be understood in relation to the living society" (p. 15). The analysis of participatory heritage websites could provide a corrective to the bias that experts have in valuing urban heritage. It is striking, for example, that economic values are largely absent on these websites. Local businesses and industries are remembered as heritage attributes, but attempts to commercially valorize the content of these websites are uncommon.⁶

Despite the focus on personal and collective memories on the websites studied, an analysis of them also demonstrates that the participation of citizens in heritage practices goes beyond social value. It is important to avoid misleading dichotomies that equate an aesthetic and scientific understanding of the past with professional expertise, and the social value of heritage with a citizen perspective. As this study shows, citizen initiatives are also concerned with the qualities of the built environment and with providing accurate and complete urban histories (i.e., historical value). Of course, participatory heritage websites do have a strong emphasis on personal identification with the urban past (i.e., experiential value), but factual information such as dates, names, and historic descriptions also forms a vital part of the content shared in online spaces. In any case, the perspective of citizens cannot be dismissed as mere nostalgia or personal reminiscence, because it includes a diverse range of heritage attributes and values. The input from volunteers and citizens with expertise on specific themes is valuable when it comes to exploring the rich diversity of urban histories. Participatory heritage websites add to and enrich the work of official heritage institutions, thus increasing our knowledge of the urban past.

On a similar note, it would also be wrong to conclude that professional expertise does not matter at all on these websites. In fact, many of the online participatory practices are actually initiated by established heritage institutions. In the networked structure of the Internet, new connections emerge between grassroots projects and established heritage organizations (Van der Hoeven, 2016). It has become easier to reuse digital content from archives and to further disseminate this through social media channels. Smaller initiatives might draw on the collections of established institutions, pass heritage artifacts on to them, or use their expertise on archival procedures and digital strategies (Van der Hoeven, 2016; Westberg Gabriel & Jensen, 2017). Once again, there is a risk of inadvertently reinforcing a dichotomous understanding of "experts" and "nonexperts." Earlier studies have found that grassroots initiatives tend to be driven by a strong passion for heritage objects (Baker & Huber, 2013), whereas people working at established institutions are more constrained by organizational policies and curatorial expectations (Lewi et al., 2016; Westberg Gabriel & Jensen, 2017). Of course, these differences should not be ignored, but an exaggerated dichotomy would obscure how these varying forms of engagement with heritage can actually coexist and complement each other, albeit with tensions.

Further research is required to examine the ways in which participatory heritage websites can be used in tools that address the objectives of the HUL approach. Furthermore, their effects on

urban conservation methodologies deserve additional research. While this article focused on the content of particular websites, it would be relevant to assess in future research how they can be integrated in heritage policy. The description of the research cases in Appendix A suggests that they lead to diverse uses and activities. The websites are often accompanied by a range of events in actual space, such as exhibitions and guided tours, which can potentially further enhance the public engagement with urban heritage. Furthermore, future studies could address how the content of participatory heritage websites can be used in applications that give heritage professionals, architects, and urban planners access to historic information about specific locations (De Kleijn, Dias, & Burgers, 2016). In the opening quotation of this article, architect Rem Koolhaas argued that we need to find ways to preserve the ways people are attached to a place, because it is no longer possible to preserve all the material substance. This study demonstrates that participatory heritage websites are places where the diverse heritage of cities is kept alive.

Appendix A

Overview of the Organizations Included in This Study's Analysis.⁷

Participatory heritage website	Aims and focus	Organizational context	Main content
Achter de Gevels van Delft [Behind the Facades of Delft] (the Netherlands [NL])	This website collects the histories associated with buildings in the city of Delft	A working group affiliated with the local historical association, with monthly meetings in the local city archives. People can contribute to the website and participate in a course on archival research	Photos, historic information, maps
Aston Brook Through Aston Manor (United Kingdom [UK])	Community website for Aston history and nostalgia	A grassroots initiative	Photos, stories, and memories
Birmingham's Hidden Spaces (UK)	This website aims to uncover some of the lost and undocumented traces of Birmingham's built heritage and to reveal the city's forgotten histories and untold stories	A project by Associated Architects in partnership with the Birmingham Post and Royal Institute of British Architects. They organize various events, such as guided tours	Photos and historic information
Buurtboeken [Neighborhood Books] (NL).	This project aims to collect stories about the neighborhood	A community initiative that started with physical books circulating in the neighborhood. Anyone can contribute stories to this project	Stories and memories
Doelengeheugen [Doelen Memory] (NL)	A website collecting memories of the Rotterdam-based concert venue De Doelen	The website was created by the venue to celebrate its 50th birthday. People are invited to contribute their own story	Photos, videos, and memories

(continued)

Appendix A. (continued)

Participatory heritage website	Aims and focus	Organizational context	Main content
Geheugen van Tilburg [Memory of Tilburg] (NL)	This website collects stories about the city of Tilburg	Anyone can contribute stories to this website, which is managed by the city museum. The website is connected to the photo collection of the regional archives	Memories and photos
BijlmerMuseum (NL)	A virtual museum dedicated to the Bijlmermeer neighborhood in Amsterdam	This is an initiative by the residents of this neighborhood. They also host exhibitions and organize guided tours	Memories, opinions, and historic information
Financieel Erfgoed op de Kaart [Financial Heritage on the Map] (NL).	A project that maps the financial history of the Netherlands, particularly focusing on Amsterdam	The project was initiated by someone working in the financial sector who also organizes guided tours and presentations about the website's content	Photos, historic information, and maps
Geheugen van Oost [Memory of East] (NL)	Local memory website dedicated to the eastern borough of Amsterdam	This website receives support from the Amsterdam Museum. Anyone can participate in this project or its physical meetings (e.g., workshops)	Memories and stories
Haagse Herinneringen [Memories of The Hague] (NL)	An oral history project in which elderly people make "digi-tales" about the history of The Hague	The project is a collaboration between the library, city archives, city museum, and educational organization ETV.nl Haaglanden	Memories, videos, and photos
Heerlen Vertelt [Heerlen Tells] (NL)	This website collects stories about the city of Heerlen, aiming to enhance the public's engagement with local history	This website is a private initiative to which anyone can contribute stories. Initially, the website was hosted by a communications agency; now it is a foundation. It contains 681 stories and 4,628 comments	Memories, stories, and photos
Made in Birmingham (UK)	A website dedicated to small manufacturing companies in Birmingham that are no longer in operation	This website was developed by a company that organizes guided bus and walking tours	Photos and historic information

(continued)

Appendix A. (continued)

Participatory heritage website	Aims and focus	Organizational context	Main content
NDSM-werf museum (NL)	A website about the history of the NDSM shipyard in Amsterdam	This website is an initiative by a former employee of the shipyard. The project is part of a foundation that aims to preserve the history of the shipyard	Photos and factual information
Oud Amsterdam [Old Amsterdam] (NL)	Facebook page where historical photos of Amsterdam are shared	A private initiative that collaborates with various archives to use their photos. The page is followed by 155,145 people	Photos and comments
Our Manchester (UK)	Collection of eight historical websites about the city of Manchester and the Greater Manchester area	This project is a private initiative	Photos, memories, and descriptions of places
OUT! (UK)	Celebrating the heritage of LGBT communities, enabling people to create their own journey through LGBT histories in Greater Manchester and beyond	This website is an initiative by Manchester Pride, inviting people to share personal stories	Maps, memories, and descriptions of key places
Rotterdam van Toen [Rotterdam Back Then] (NL)	Facebook page where historical photos of Rotterdam are shared	A private initiative without a formal institutional context. The page is followed by 9,560 people	Photos and comments
WaalwijkWiki (NL)	Online encyclopedia of the history of the city of Waalwijk	This encyclopedia is an initiative by a local history circle	Photos and factual information
Wendingen (NL)	Digital platform on the architecture of the Amsterdam School	This digital platform was set up by a museum on the Amsterdam School	Factual information, maps, and comments by users
Zaanse pophistorie [Popular Music History of the Zaan District] (NL)	This website provides an overview of the popular music history of the Zaan district	This is a private initiative to which anyone can contribute information and material	Photos, factual information, and newspaper articles

Appendix B

URLs of the Websites.

Participatory heritage website	URL
Achter de Gevels van Delft [Behind the Facades of Delft] (the Netherlands [NL])	Achterdegevelsvandelft.nl
Aston Brook Through Aston Manor (United Kingdom [UK])	Astonbrook-through-astonmanor.co.uk
Birmingham's Hidden Spaces (UK)	Hiddenbrum.com
Buurtboeken [Neighborhood Books] (NL)	Buurtboeken.nl
Doelengeheugen [Doelen Memory] (NL)	Doelengeheugen.nl
Geheugen van Tilburg [Memory of Tilburg] (NL)	Geheugenvantilburg.nl
Bijlmer Museum (NL)	Bijlmermuseum.com
Financieel Erfgoed op de Kaart [Financial Heritage on the Map] (NL)	Financieelerfgoedopdekaart.nl
Geheugen van Oost [Memory of East] (NL)	Geheugenvanoost.amsterdam
Haagse Herinneringen [Memories of The Hague] (NL)	Haagseherinneringen.nl
Heerlen Vertelt [Heerlen Tells] (NL)	Heerlenvertelt.nl
Made in Birmingham (UK)	Madeinbirmingham.net
NDSM-werf Museum (NL)	Ndsm-werfmuseum.nl
Oud Amsterdam [Old Amsterdam] (NL)	Facebook.com/oudamsterdam/
Our Manchester (UK)	Manchesterhistory.net
OUT! (UK)	Outmanchester.org
Rotterdam van Toen [Rotterdam Back Then] (NL)	Facebook.com/RotterdamVanToen/
WaalwijkWiki (NL)	Waalwijkwiki.nl
Wendingen (NL)	Amsterdamse-school.nl
Zaanse pophistorie [Popular Music History of the Zaan District] (NL)	Zaansepophistorie.nl

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Notes

1. Community participation is addressed in Article 15 of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and Articles 24 and 27 of the HUL recommendation.
2. However, Bandarin (2015) does mention that the Internet affects the development of cities worldwide.
3. However, the specific method of the qualitative content analysis is not mentioned by Jones (2017).
4. <http://www.amsterdamsetrams.nl/> (accessed March 28, 2017).
5. All the quotations used to illustrate the findings were posted on publicly accessible pages. The Dutch quotations have been translated by the author.

6. Although, of course, the companies that host the content (e.g., Facebook) earn money through advertising.
7. The descriptions remain as close as possible to the aims that are stated on the websites. The statistics that are mentioned in the table were last accessed on May 16, 2018.

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