Endangerment-driven heritage volunteering: democratisation or ‘Changeless Change’

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ABSTRACT
This article is the product of prolonged wrestling with the question of how heritage professionals and researchers can facilitate and sustain public agency in caring for heritage in the UK during austerity without exploiting volunteers or devaluing professionals. It offers critical perspectives on efforts made to democratise heritage in the UK by increasing public participation through a critique of neoliberalism and the rise of neoliberal approaches in the heritage sector. It argues that the adoption of neoliberal approaches, such as crowdsourcing, that profess to democratise yet reinforce existing power structures, is the inevitable result of insisting on protecting material culture from harm, despite the continuing accumulation of more ‘heritage’. Drawing on critical perspectives on participation from a number of disciplines, it is suggested that efforts to increase public participation in heritage cannot hope to avoid exploiting volunteers, devaluing professionals and marginalising traditionally underrepresented demographics unless they also let go of the perceived need to protect the materiality of the past. Drawing on Sarah May’s archaeology of contemporary tigers, this article argues that the application of endangerment narratives to heritage reinforces uncritical understandings of both heritage and volunteering that preclude heritage from fulfilling its potential function as a contemporary social process.

Introduction

The coining of ‘critical heritage studies’ (Harrison 2010) and establishment of the international Association for Critical Heritage Studies are emblematic of the rise of a more socially aware heritage studies with its focus on questions of power, authority, ethics and the wider socio-economic and political consequences of heritage and heritage practices. Calls for democratisation, power-sharing, participation and the negotiation of traditional roles of ‘experts’ and ‘stakeholders’ now proliferate in response to the identification and criticism of established approaches as being part of a hegemonic ‘authorised heritage discourse’ (Smith 2006; cf. Council of Europe 2000, 2005; Hall 2005; Schofield 2014; Emerick 2014). In the UK, however, efforts to implement principles from these discussions in practice inevitably take place in a political and economic context shaped by neoliberalism. For the purposes of this discussion, neoliberalism is understood as an ideology that promotes the deregulation of markets and advocates for dismantling the welfare state through austerity measures, arguing that
society’s needs are best entrusted to free markets. Due to neoliberalism’s penchant for masking its
capitalistic and deregulatory intensions in a rhetoric of freedom, democratisation and innovation, and
its incredible success in doing so through domineering economic disruptions like the ‘sharing econ-
omy’, heritage professionals, scholars and volunteers would do well to be wary of new ‘democratising’
initiatives intended to double as relief for pressurised institutional budgets.

Suspicion of democratising efforts is timely due to the unprecedented success of Smith’s argument,
which has prompted a ubiquitous distancing from the authorised heritage discourse by scholars and
professionals alike. The danger is that in its perceived specificity, and especially when misunderstood,
the presence of the authorised heritage discourse becomes a reassuring reminder of all we are not,
instead of an unshakeable truth about the systems within which we all operate. While it has been
demonstrated that deliberate distancing from the authorised heritage discourse can be one of rheto-
ric and not reality (cf. Waterton and Smith 2008; Waterton 2010), the perhaps greater danger is that
the authorised heritage discourse is in fact inadvertently and unwittingly reinforced by the very acts
intended to undermine it. Coupled with a review of critical perspectives on participation, from a range
of disciplines, and the recognition of the neoliberal innovation agenda as one of ‘changeless change’
(Olma 2016), this discussion aims to arrest the indiscriminate adoption of neoliberal business and
governance strategies in the UK heritage sector during austerity and emphasise that this adoption is
only perceived to be necessary due to an underlying unsustainable heritage ideology. This ideology,
which forms a central part of Smith’s authorised heritage discourse, stands firm despite growing aca-
demic critique and the professed distancing from the authorised heritage discourse. It is suggested
that this resilience is due to prevailing uncritically positive, quasi-religious sentiments toward both
heritage and volunteering and a pervading sense of endangerment.

This article is the product of prolonged wrestling with the question of how heritage professionals and
researchers can facilitate and sustain public agency in caring for heritage in the UK during austerity with-
out exploiting volunteers or devaluing professionals. It approaches this question by connecting emerging
critiques of the uncritical adoption of neoliberal approaches, like crowdsourcing, in the heritage sector
(Walker 2014, 2015; Perry and Beale 2015; Tourle 2017; Richardson 2017) with scholarship closer to the
core of critical heritage studies that questions the inherent value of heritage, critiques the endangerment
narratives that surround its loss and highlights the imperative also to forget (and deaccession or delist)
in order to more effectively and meaningfully remember (Smith 2006; May 2009; Harrison 2013; Holtorf
2015). Together, these perspectives offer bespoke lenses through which to consider calls for increased public
participation and volunteering in heritage and what projects that encourage non-professional involvement
might look like if they were freed from the supposedly dispassionate and apolitical duty of caring for the
material remains of the past and instead unleashed to address how to best mediate the past in the present and
into the future. The article begins with a critique of the exclusively positive popular discourses about heritage
and volunteering in the UK, followed by a brief overview of neoliberalism and neoliberal approaches, such
as crowdsourcing, before concluding with an invitation to consider how critical approaches to heritage
challenge heritage to realise its potential as a contemporarily relevant social practice.

Against exclusively positive discourses of heritage and volunteering

Unpicking uncritical heritage

Despite growing academic recognition that heritage is multivalent and contested, the popular public
discourse around heritage in the UK remains simplistic and positive. Arguably, there is often a lack
of willingness of organisations and professionals to engage seriously with academic critiques, on the
one hand, and of critics, to consider the specificities and realities of practice, on the other, resulting in
an ever-widening gap between theory and practice (cf. Onciul, Stefano, and Hawke 2017, 52). It is not
the intention of this article to exacerbate this divide, though it will, no doubt, be dismissed as negative
‘heritage atheism’ by some (Brumann 2014). To be clear then, the discussion that follows is not an
attempt to paint heritage in a negative light, but to emphasise that exclusively positive discourses of
heritage are inaccurate and that these inaccuracies are damaging in that they restrict heritage from performing its potential social function.

In the UK, voluntary contributions of time and money to museums, heritage organisations and local historical or archaeological societies are common. The scale of voluntary activity is illustrated by the Heritage Alliance responding to a recent call for ‘full-time social action’ to be compensated at the minimum wage, by stating that ‘the sector simply could not function without the support of volunteers’ and estimating that if heritage volunteers in the UK were paid the national minimum wage, this would have amounted to over 500 million pounds in 2015/16 (Heritage Alliance 2017). Despite the scale of voluntary support, the sector is in a period of self-proclaimed crisis due to continued austerity cuts and the amount of heritage that must be protected according to the popular heritage discourse in the UK. This discourse is built on the belief that heritage is an objective and neutral representation of the past that is bound up in finite and irreplaceable, usually tangible, resources that are under threat and must be protected and preserved as part of a duty of stewardship for the benefit of future generations (Smith 2006; Fairclough 2009; May 2009; Holtorf 2015).

This conception of heritage is reflected in, and promoted through, documents like Historic England’s annual ‘Heritage Counts’ series. The ‘Heritage and Society’ section of this series provides ‘bite sized facts and figures that demonstrate the importance of heritage to society’ (Historic England 2017, 1). Closer investigation reveals that some of these ‘facts’ are at best less meaningful than they appear and at worst deliberately misleading. Most of the statistics on wellbeing and public perceptions of heritage are drawn from the annual national ‘Taking Part’ survey. The survey follows a detailed sampling strategy to ensure representative selection of households but in 2016 it had a response rate of only 49.3% for fresh addresses, adjusted to 54.4% to account for invalid addresses (DCMS 2016, 27). Clearly, if only half of a representative sample is represented in responses, this raises serious questions about the impact of nonresponse bias, common forms of survey response bias, such as leading questions and social desirability, aside. Nevertheless, the resulting data is used to make claims such as that ‘people who visit heritage sites are happier than those who do not’ (Historic England 2017, 2), supplying the slogan with which the report has been promoted since 2014 that heritage and heritage volunteering ‘makes you happy’. Estimated wellbeing values are pulled from a report that stresses these are upward limits of the value of the average number of heritage visits per year, given as 3.4 visits (Fujiwara, Cornwall, and Dolan 2014, 6), and presented as the value of a single visit. Even if taking the higher levels of wellbeing reported by current heritage participants at face value, this does not prove that heritage participation causes wellbeing; participating may instead be an effect. This possibility of reverse causality is repeatedly discussed in the cited report but not in ‘Heritage and Society’ (Fujiwara, Cornwall, and Dolan 2014, 5, 13, 29, 31).

Arguably, this is what the second cited wellbeing study, conducted by AgeUK, demonstrates. While ‘Heritage and Society’ reports that ‘engagement with creative and cultural activities including heritage, makes the highest contribution of 5.75% to one’s overall well-being’ (Historic England 2017, 2), the AgeUK report also provides more striking statistics that fail to receive a mention. This includes statistics demonstrating that respondents reporting wellbeing levels in the top 20% have an average financial wealth in excess of 50,000, 85% are outright home owners and 86% have a GCSE or higher qualification, while of respondents ranking in the bottom 20% for reported wellbeing 27% receive means-tested benefits, 72% rent or have an outstanding mortgage and 80% have less than GCSE qualification (Age UK 2017, 11). This picture is further confirmed by research conducted for the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). ‘Heritage and Society’ extracts a single sentence from a 144 page document to claim that HLF volunteers report ‘levels of mental health and well-being that are far higher than for the general population, or for the general volunteering population’ (Historic England 2017, 3). This quote is drawn from the report summary, which clarifies that the social impacts of HLF volunteering are not distinct to a ‘heritage-based experience’ (BOP Consulting 2011, 4). Instead the report emphasises that HLF volunteers are on average white, exceptionally well educated, from affluent neighbourhoods, from highly skilled occupations and are already active participants in social and civic life (BOP Consulting 2011, 1–4). This reinforces that while HLF volunteers may report remarkably high levels of wellbeing,
these high levels are unlikely to be caused by participating in heritage alone. In summary, a closer look at the reports cited by ‘Heritage and Society’ highlights that heritage and heritage volunteering is something that largely attracts the white middle- and upper-classes who also, not surprisingly report higher levels of wellbeing. There is compelling evidence to suggest that heritage can usefully be used to increase wellbeing in certain contexts (cf. Thomson and Chatterjee 2016) and the progress made in the area of Creative Health is encouraging (APPG 2017), as a result the above critique is not intended to argue that heritage cannot provide rewarding and valuable experiences. However, it does paint a more realistic picture of the value of heritage, as understood by these studies, to society.

**Emerging alternative approaches**

To understand how the exclusively positive discourse of heritage promoted by documents such as ‘Heritage and Society’ is damaging, not merely embellishing, it is necessary to recognise how it normalises certain experiences and thereby silences and excludes others. This phenomenon is discussed widely in critical heritage studies and is central to Laurajane Smith’s authorised heritage discourse (2006). The reality is that for some, in stark contrast to the promoted ‘fact’ that ‘heritage makes you happy’, museums or heritage sites have also been shown to elicit sadness and anger (Lynch and Alberti 2010; McSweeney and Kavanagh 2016). The insistence on the continued promotion of that ‘heritage makes you happy’ as fact, thereby denotes the deliberate exclusion of such experiences. If heritage is recognised as a mechanism for institutionalising memory (Courtney 2011, 71), it becomes clear how any calls for inclusion and diversity, unaccompanied by new understandings of heritage and its meanings, may be considered mere rhetoric masking a reality of assimilation (cf. Waterton and Smith 2008, Waterton 2010). It is worth noting that there is a long history of using heritage as a vehicle for assimilatory ‘inclusion’ of minorities and the working classes through educational institutions such as museums (Walsh 1992, 31–33 cf. Hall 2005; Smith 2006, 18). Any attempt to move inclusion beyond mere assimilation must take alternative and contrary conceptions and experiences of heritage seriously and consider what or whom ‘inclusion’ would change.

It is worth recognising that the imperative for organisations like Historic England to produce ‘facts’ about the value of heritage to society is driven by the stark budgetary realities Historic England and other institutions are facing, currently exacerbated by continuing austerity measures. However, these realities are far from exclusive to the heritage sector. A critical review of how the sector spends its resources and discussion about the ‘necessity’ of protecting heritage, in a traditional sense, could arguably produce a more compelling case for funding. The widening of the heritage concept and the continuous accumulation of more heritage in international, national and local lists and archives highlights that while anything may be considered ‘heritage’, it is neither possible, nor desirable to keep everything, whether preserved or recorded (Harrison 2013). For over a century, archaeologists have made decisions about what to keep and what to discard, both physically and through documentation, all too aware that in the future others might lament that ‘the points which would have been most valuable [were often] passed over from being thought uninteresting at the time’ (Pitt-Rivers 1887, 33), yet recognising that indiscriminately keeping everything is no better, as illustrated by that emptying ‘the contents of note-books on a reader’s head is not publishing’ (Petrie 1904, 50).

Deciding what to keep, and how, have always been difficult processes of paramount importance. In an age where digital technologies afford the creation of larger data sets and ‘the act of recording has become more urgent than experiencing that which is being recorded’ (Hoskins 2017, 2; cf. de Lusenet 2007, 173), the answer can no longer simply be ‘as much as possible’ if calls for increased financing are to be taken seriously. Yet as lists and archives grow while funding is withdrawn, ‘as much as possible’ becomes the position of default as we cling to the past for the supposed benefit of the future. Simultaneously, the prospects of real discussions about the futures such attitudes are creating are damaged by the simplistic and exclusively positive heritage discourse that promotes the preservation of the material past as a righteous cause to be championed for the good of society. While it is encouraging that some conversations are ongoing and, are at times refreshingly candid (CIfA 2017a,
Any productive discussion about caring for heritage in the present must begin with the realisation that it is not possible, nor desirable, to keep everything we might consider heritage in its present state. This should absolutely include the recognition of the importance of forgetting (Harrison 2013), as well as the value of generative approaches to letting things go, as exemplified by DeSilvey’s aptly titled Curated Decay (2017). It should also consider how emphasising endangerment ‘domesticates dangerous things’ and can neutralise contested and troubling narratives ‘so that learning from the past becomes less important than “saving the past for our future”’ (May 2009, 76, 77; cf. Fairclough 2009). Alternative heritage practices should therefore not only be about forgetting or curating decay, but also include creative renewal and addressing toxic pasts that will not be neutered by silence. The aim of such a discussion is to explore how alternatives to arresting material change can be better and render heritage more useful and sustainable in the present and the future. Crucially, this moves heritage beyond the exclusive remit of historical and archaeological logic that regard time and change as inherently destructive to the integrity of their archives, while simultaneously bringing it back to their original purpose: to learn from the past for the benefit of the present. If we take seriously the notion that heritage practice is for the good of society, such a step should not be out of the question, especially as it merely expands the scope of the established conservation principle of ‘managing change’ (English Heritage 2008). It is worth re-emphasising that the alternative approaches intended by such a shift do not emerge from a disdain for heritage or a ‘heritage atheism’ (Brumann 2014), but from the belief that heritage has more to offer and that it should be possible to demonstrate this without embellishing statistics.

Balancing the volunteering equation

The benefits of moving heritage beyond endangerment narratives should also drive a critical discussion of volunteering. Again, the intention of highlighting that volunteering can have negative, as well as positive, consequences is not to paint volunteering in a negative light, but to frame how it could be better. Like heritage, volunteering has a positive sheen to it that disconnects it from its more problematic consequences, leading to celebrations of the accomplishments and increased relevance of the voluntary sector without the corresponding consideration of whether voluntary efforts are being leveraged to cover services that should be delivered professionally. The fact that labour laws established to protect workers’ rights restrict the tasks that can be performed by volunteers should demonstrate that the virtues of volunteering must not be decoupled from its potential for devaluing professional labour. In his discussion of the general increase of volunteering in public service provision in the UK, Buddery argues that the voluntary sector risks ‘being manoeuvred into a role written for it by government’ (2015, 8), proceeding to note that although volunteer organisations insist that volunteers will not replace public service staff, this appears inevitable during austerity. It is worth noting that volunteers have always performed professional roles in the heritage sector, sometimes running entire museums without paid staff, a phenomenon that is becoming more common during austerity as a growing number of local authority museums are taken on by local community groups (Rex 2015). Illustratively, the annual UK Museums Survey conducted by the Museums Association noted, with concern, ‘a correlation between loss of public funding and paid staff, and a rise in volunteers’ this year (2017, 24).

Both the professional and voluntary workforce in the UK heritage sector have an alarming lack of diversity, demonstrating that despite processes of professionalisation, heritage has not successfully left its middle and upper-class roots behind. Research conducted in 2013 showed the professional archaeological workforce in the UK to be 99% white (Aitchison and Rocks-Macqueen 2013), with conservation faring marginally better at 97% of professionals and 98% of volunteers (Aitchison 2013). Research conducted for the HLF from 2008 to 2011 showed 95% of HLF volunteers to be white and
74.4% to live in areas more affluent than the national average (BOP Consulting 2011, 29, 30). The significance of these statistics for this discussion are twofold, that a willingness to perform unpaid work as part of professional development restricts access to paid employment for those who cannot first work for free and that contributing to the sector is disproportionately considered attractive or feasible by certain demographics. Richardson has recently highlighted that there is nothing democratising, or ‘punk’, about replacing paid jobs with volunteer positions and that such actions only exacerbate issues of access to heritage professions for less privileged demographics (2017, 8). One should therefore be careful of celebrating the rise to prominence of the voluntary sector and participatory methodologies during austerity, alongside the increased prominence of un- or under-paid internships and jobs in the heritage sector. It is in this semi-professionalised, highly pressurised and idealised context, that ‘democratising’ participatory heritage projects operate, and in which approaches steeped in the same neoliberal ideology that introduced the added pressures of austerity are beginning to thrive.

**Neoliberalism and crowdsourcing**

**Unmasking neoliberal approaches**

So-called neoliberal politics emphasises deregulation and smaller government. However, in this instance, smaller refers to a leaner rather than a less powerful or influential government. Political scientists describe this shift as one from government to governance, whereby the boundaries between the public, private and third sectors are blurred and the government attempts to become more influential and powerful, while simultaneously leaner, by delegating responsibility yet retaining control (Levi-Faur 2012; Griggs, Norval, and Wagenaar 2014). This involves governing though governance networks that are established by inviting powerful parties with aligning interests to govern collaboratively. The rationale is that no single party is powerful enough to govern effectively in isolation and that the networked parties, while potentially having different interests, have enough in common to work together (Torfing 2012). While the shift to governance networks may appear democratising, it is merely a new form of control enacted through processes of collaboration (Levi-Faur 2012), by which power-imbalances are masked by a discourse of ‘community participation’ and ‘stakeholder dialogue’ (Griggs, Norval, and Wagenaar 2014, 6).

This form of democratisation can be understood as what Ricardo Blaug terms ‘incumbent democracy’ (2002). Blaug argues that while democratisation, or ‘making more democracy’ (2002, 102), invariably involves increasing participation, democratisation should be understood as two distinctly different objects, one ‘incumbent’ and one ‘critical,’ rather than a single object with different parts. Incumbent democracy manages participation in order to improve and strengthen existing institutions, for example through voting in elections, while critical democracy operates outside, and in resistance to, elite governance, exemplified by civil protest (Blaug 2002, 106). Blaug’s dichotomy between incumbent and critical democracies has been criticised as being false and overly simplistic (Smith 2009, 3, 199), nevertheless, it highlights the fact that controlled participation is radically different to the more direct notion of devolving power traditionally associated with the idea of democratisation. Particularly significant here is Blaug’s observation that ‘often, those genuinely seeking to increase participation only discover their ambivalence toward popular input at the point where their own power is directly threatened’ (2002, 109). What this highlights is that while intentions behind efforts to democratising may be genuine, this does not preclude the enacted process of democratisation to be one of exclusion and control.

Participatory approaches have long been promoted as a means for democratisation and social justice, but scholars in disciplines ranging from participatory development (Cooke and Kothari 2001; Hickey and Mohan 2004), participatory planning (Innes and Booher 2004; Haklay 2013; Beebeejaun 2016) and participatory design (Pedersen 2016), to participation in citizen science or heritage crowdsourcing (Walker 2014, 2015; Perry and Beale 2015; Tourle 2017; Richardson 2017) and more traditional participation in museums (Lynch and Alberti 2010; Fouseki and Smith 2013; Onciul 2015; McSweeney...
and Kavanagh 2016) have questioned the extent to which participation realises these goals in practice. Critiques range from analyses of how the mechanics of participation may amount to tokenism or exploitative value-extraction through to overarching discussions of the intentions behind participatory initiatives and their foundational logic of circumnavigating politics and established power-structures through deliberative democracy. Henkel and Stirrat fix their critique on the nature of ‘empowerment’, emphasising that what they are interested in is ‘not so much ‘how much’ are people empowered but rather ‘for what’ are they empowered’ in order to explain how in some cases ‘empowerment’ is tantamount to what Foucault calls subjection (2001, 182). This neatly illustrates how participation may mask ‘continued centralization in the name of decentralization’ (Cooke and Kothari 2001, 7), and how governance networks exclude through inclusion by meta-governance, or the ‘regulation of self-regulation’ (Torfing 2012, 107). As the notion of ‘capacity building’ becomes more popular in the heritage sector (UNESCO 2011; ICCROM, ICOMOS and IUCN 2014), it is worth similarly asking whose capacity is being built to do what. This is perhaps most obvious in cases involving local volunteers in former colonies and colonial architecture (cf. Jokilehto 2017, 25), but is pertinent also elsewhere. It should be clear, then, how efforts to increase public participation in heritage that operate within the authorised heritage discourse of what heritage is, what it means and how it should be cared for, can reinforce authorised structures and appeal only to those who share incumbent ideals.

Governance networks and incumbent forms of democracy that invite, yet control, participation are not unique to political institutions. In light of the infinite resources required to care for heritage and the pervasively positive rhetoric around volunteering, it is not surprising that heritage institutions subjected to austerity measures are attracted to approaches that are designed to do more with less. At first glance it also appears perfectly reasonable that the resulting initiatives to engage likeminded organisations and individuals are associated with efforts to counter the authorised heritage discourse that portrays heritage as an exclusive expert domain. A more nuanced reading of Smith and Waterton’s work, however, highlights that efforts to democratise often operate within the broader reaches of their authorised heritage discourse, characterised by the naturalisation of certain conceptions of heritage and how it is identified, studied, used and cared for (Taylor and Gibson 2016). In this context, Rosol’s identification of community gardens in Berlin as both a form of bottom-up ‘grassroots urbanism’ and as the ‘neo-liberalisation of urban governance’ is instructive (2016, 86, 87). She notes that while liberalism regards volunteers as a resource, ‘residents are not willing to take on the role of providing unpaid labour for what they still see as municipal tasks’ and ‘do not accept their prescribed role as stop-gap’ (Rosol 2016, 90). Coupled with an appreciation for how participation can be mobilised to maintain, rather than upend, existing power structures through the control of acceptable forms of, and locations for, participation, it becomes clear that efforts to increase public participation in heritage must be seen in a more critical light.

It is worth stressing that this critical light need not necessarily paint all participatory initiatives negatively, but it absolutely should raise uncomfortable questions. As highlighted by Waterton, it must begin with thinking ‘seriously about the risks of becoming exploitative’ (2015, 58). It should also be stressed that critical perspectives on participation should extend beyond how participatory projects should be designed and performed, to include questions of whether or not participatory initiatives based on utopian deliberative ideals are the right solution for the tasks at hand (Cooke and Kothari 2001). Similar to that of social innovation (Olma 2016), part of the appeal of participatory approaches is the promise of circumnavigating politics and existing power structures. It should, however, be clear that this is not possible; participation merely creates new arenas for power to be negotiated. While critical perspectives on participation should lead to the development of more reflexively self-aware participatory initiatives, they should also facilitate a more informed discussion of the relative strengths and weaknesses of a full range of approaches.
Crowdsourcing, community-sourcing or citizen humanities

The success of digital platforms for citizen science has prompted the adoption of crowdsourcing in the heritage sector. The idea of crowdsourcing was fashioned by Jeff Howe as an approach to accessing the ‘wisdom of crowds’, made possible by digital connectivity, in order to provide a cheaper and more effective means of outsourcing labour (Howe 2006a, 2006b; cf. Surowiecki 2004). Crowdsourcing, or crowd employment, aligns itself with the neoliberal economic agenda of deregulating labour and maximising profit by leveraging the capacity of digital crowds that operate outside established labour laws and regulations (Bergvall-Kåreborn and Howcroft 2014). In commercial contexts, like Amazon’s Mechanical Turk, workers are awarded micro-payments for each completed task, while in digital art and design markets, sometimes only the winning designer is paid. Often, crowdsourcing is used to source labour without offering any payment. While most readers may rightly be outraged at LinkedIn’s attempt to crowdsource free translations for its website from website users (Graham 2010), the positive sheen of heritage volunteering protects most heritage crowdsourcing projects from such criticism.

Heritage professionals and academics have made deliberate steps to distance themselves from the exploitative neoliberal roots of crowdsourcing by rebranding it as ‘community-sourcing’ or ‘citizen humanities’ (Phillips 2014; Tanner 2015). These efforts highlight how the adoption of crowdsourcing approaches in heritage contexts emphasise engagement, community-building and the participant-led elements of projects to demonstrate that they are not as exclusively task-oriented as their commercial forebears. Another line of rationalisation is that crowdsourcing in heritage contexts merely represents the natural evolution of heritage volunteering made possible by digital technology (Ridge 2014). Most fundamentally, people are choosing to offer their time and skills to contribute to a good cause and, unlike other forms of volunteering, there is no evidence to suggest that emerging professionals are participating in heritage crowdsourcing projects as a route to paid employment. There are, however, reasons to be wary of how academics and heritage organisations employing these approaches may be inadvertently exploiting volunteers and devaluing professional labour (Perry and Beale 2015; cf. Walker 2014, 2015).

Despite the deliberate distancing of heritage crowdsourcing from its commercial roots, the tasks participants are asked to perform are remarkably similar, be they transcription or tagging (Marselis and Schütze 2013; Raimond et al. 2014; Ridge 2014), though there are examples of projects that ask users to perform more complex tasks (Ross 2012; Bonacchi et al. 2014). Like commercial applications, projects are broken down into repetitive micro-tasks that are often performed repeatedly by a number of different users in order to increase data reliability. As in citizen science, heritage crowdsourcing attracts participants with specialised knowledge, skills and interests, through processes of ‘crowd-sifting’, by which small numbers of ‘super-users’ self-select to perform the vast majority of the work (Dunn and Hedges 2012; Causer and Terras 2014; Eccles and Greg 2014; cf. Haklay 2016a), at a scale not deemed possible through paid professional labour. Fed by the belief in the good and necessary nature of heritage work and the virtues of volunteering, crowdsourcing methodologies are applied to heritage projects in a remarkably similar fashion to their commercial forebears, without critically considering the extent to which cost-reduction and public engagement can unproblematically co-exist as paired project drivers. The fact that project managers regard these projects as community engagement activities that are democratising heritage does not change the fact that they rely on the willingness of people to contribute their knowledge and skills for free to complete tasks that align with institutional agendas, operated through automated interfaces that minimise interactions with specialists. In this regard, the emphasis often placed on increasing levels of user retention through mechanisms such as automated reminder messages, as opposed to efforts designed to improve the user experience, is telling. This is not to say that digital volunteering interfaces cannot be designed to prioritise benefits to participants, but one would imagine these would look quite different. In fact, one might rightly ask whether an impersonal digital interface designed to facilitate the completion of simple repetitive tasks is the best place to start.
To move heritage community-sourcing or citizen humanities further away from its roots in crowdsourcing, critiques levelled against so-called platform capitalism that highlight how benefits predominantly accrue to platform managers must be taken seriously (Olma 2016; cf. Walker 2015; Haklay 2016b). This is especially true of researchers and practitioners who believe in the ideals of participatory, non-extractive research that ‘gives back’ (Waterton 2015). Otherwise, the democratisation offered by heritage crowdsourcing projects will inevitably appear in its incumbent form, functioning as governance networks where participation is controlled to benefit organisers. As identified by Taylor and Gibson, ‘it is not the extent of interaction, but the kind of interaction that is problematic here’ (2016, 413, emphasis in original). This is equally true of efforts to promote public participation in heritage offline, where the means and scope of the participation permitted are carefully managed despite the enduring popularity of participatory rhetoric and growing prominence of so-called participant or community-led initiatives. It should be clear that efforts to support participant-led initiatives also have the potential to exclude and exploit by offering necessary support only in certain forms or circumstances. Governance networks exclude by delineating inclusion.

Toward heritage beyond endangerment

A critique of public participation in heritage through the lens of network governance and incumbent democratisation is uncomfortable for heritage, given the educational role often assigned to heritage organisations and professionals. Like environmental scientists who attempt to raise awareness of the importance of under-appreciated natural formations like salt marshes, heritage organisations in the UK are often registered as educational charities that leverage their expertise to champion, and raise awareness of, the importance of heritage. While there undeniably is a place for professionals’ championing of the significance of their work and the resources that make that work possible, given that heritage values are widely regarded as mutable, generated for instance by archaeological or social processes or lost through a lack of use or social relevance (Fredheim and Khalaf 2016; Petroncelli and Stanganelli 2016), the relevance of environmental analogies for heritage have their limits. Heritage practice that is wary of being extractive would do well to question the equation of professional research materials with objects of social value and adopt principles of critical pedagogy that identify learning as a collaborative process of knowledge generation rather than one of unidirectional deposition (Freire 1998, 45, 46, 2005, 72). The framework of critical pedagogy similarly facilitates shifting ‘empowerment’ from a process that conditions participants to participate effectively within incumbent structures (Henkel and Stirrat 2001), to one of facilitating critical consciousness and the attainment of self-appointed goals, but the nature of the change required by such a shift should not be downplayed.

The heritage sector may not be interested in this form of democratisation, which moves heritage from the memorialisation of past achievements and horrors to a vehicle for social critique and change. Indeed, it is hard to see how heritage organisations can appropriately address the most pressing social issues of the day, given the scope of their established mandates of protecting and promoting predefined heritage assemblages (Schofield 2017). This article argues that it is this very scope, and the ideology that underpins it, that drives the adoption of neoliberal approaches in the heritage sector. As recently highlighted by Richardson (2017), one would do well to be suspicious of alternative approaches that propose the marriage of democratising efforts to alter existing structures of power, access and authority in the heritage sector with exploitative neoliberal strategies. Richardson identifies that ‘the volunteer sector may seem to be our only hope of sustaining many forms of archaeological activity’ while recognising that volunteering may be the ‘location of the performance of unpaid, value-generating digital labour’ that may ‘impact on the value of paid work in the sector’ (Richardson 2017, 6). Like Buddery, who notes the apparent inevitability of volunteers displacing paid public service staff during austerity (2015), Richardson is unable to offer a solution to this neoliberal dilemma because her critique of neoliberalism is offered from a position of believing in the necessity of protecting archaeology. While I support calls to resist the neoliberal deregulation of professional archaeological labour and for
archaeological work to be financed properly, I would argue that the challenge of neoliberalism must also drive the heritage sector to more concerted critical introspection.

If Smith’s authorised heritage discourse is taken seriously, heritage sites, understood as ‘anything that embodies what is valued as heritage’ (Taylor 2015, 66), and archaeological data are not inherently ‘good’ and worthy of protection. This does not mean that nothing should be kept, but that discussions about what should be kept, and how, should not be pre-empted by assumptions of inherent value. Only by letting go of the necessity to preserve all that has previously been understood as heritage, can heritage institutions truly democratise any part of heritage and encourage public participation without exploiting volunteers or devaluing professionals. Only then can participatory heritage projects move beyond functioning as incumbent governance networks and instead empower participants to critical consciousness and the attainment of self-appointed goals. This would not preclude volunteers from participating in professional projects, but such opportunities would be designed for the expressed purpose of benefiting the volunteer. Freed from their duty to protect the material past for the benefit of future generations, professionals would not need to prioritise the extraction of value from volunteer contributions. Rather than attempting to convince ‘diverse’ audiences that they should care about a pre-defined heritage, letting go could allow heritage to begin from a position of relevance, representing and addressing what already matters. Clearly not all specialist archives should be managed according to popular interests and current societal concerns. The amicable divorce of misguided marriages such as that between archaeology and heritage (Waterton and Smith 2009), or heritage and history (Fairclough 2009), while depriving archaeology of some of its accrued social relevance, might free archaeological archives of bulk deposits from masquerading as anything other than specialist research material. By decoupling the study of the past and the study of how the past is used in the present, archaeology, history and heritage could be performed and judged on their own merits.

Freire’s critical pedagogy rejects the deposition model for education, arguing that it portrays knowledge as ‘a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing’, thus ‘projecting an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression’ (2005, 72). If heritage is understood as a socio-cultural practice of mediating pasts in the present, traditional forms of heritage expertise become one of many forms of legitimate heritage knowledge (Smith 2006; Sully 2007; Schofield 2014), allowing participatory projects to truly become processes of collaborative knowledge generation. However, if protecting and promoting the contents of pre-determined lists and archives must be the starting point for heritage practice, heritage will remain trapped in its assimilatory agenda. Acclaimed journalist and author Naomi Klein has criticised the neoliberal innovation agenda as being one of ‘changeless change’, expounded by Olma as ‘the kind of innovation that simultaneously upends current practices and studiously protects existing wealth and power inequalities’ (Olma 2016, 77). Innovations in heritage practice that reinforce normalised conceptions of what heritage is, what it means and how it should be cared for, can aptly be understood in the same way, as ‘changeless change.’ In this regard, all possible futures for heritage are highly political, as a vehicle to celebrate the accomplishments of colonialism and modernism or a source of critical consciousness and a bastion for social justice. Of significance here, is the realisation that the perceived duty to valorise and protect what has been identified as heritage in the past is not neutral in any sense.

This discussion, however, does not simply boil down to a dichotomous choice between keeping and discarding everything. Instead, it invites a holistic consideration of how we ‘manage change’ in the present and the futures these practices create (Harrison et al. 2016). While ‘loss aversion’ may be inevitable (Holtorf 2015), the recognition that interventions can be generative should provide room for more flexible approaches (Sully and Cardoso 2014; Cutajar et al. 2016). However, moving beyond endangerment narratives for heritage must prompt interventions to go beyond merely treating authorised heritage in slightly different ways, to encompass a range of creative practices including ways of recognising and addressing the dangerous heritages that endangerment has downplayed by insisting that ‘heritage makes you happy’ (cf. May 2009). Such interventions may not always be welcomed, as they alter the equation of ‘inclusion’ to one where change is required of all parties, yet this is exactly
what is required for heritage to ever break free of the authorised heritage discourse, and truly be for everyone.

**Conclusion**

The amorphous meaning of heritage and the generalising belief in the value of heritage and established heritage practices to society, portrays all authorised heritage and heritage practices as necessary, and any participation, professional or unpaid, a privilege. This view devalues professionals, exploits volunteers and privileges certain demographics, independent of the added pressures of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism merely accentuates these consequences by deregulating the structures that protect professionalism. Calls to democratise heritage emphasise that ‘we are all heritage experts’ capable of doing heritage work (Schofield 2014, 2); unsurprisingly, deregulation and critical democratisation are easily mistaken for a match made in heaven. This article argues that the only way to avoid an incumbent neoliberal form of heritage democratisation that causes participatory initiatives to empower heritage volunteers to perform professional work without pay, is to let go of the perceived necessity to protect heritage in a traditional sense. This is no small change for heritage practice, or for heritage institutions whose expressed purpose is to protect and promote inherited heritage assemblages. As identified by Hall in 1999, there is ‘deep institutional investment … in going on doing things in the ways in which they have always been done’, and ‘operational inertia militating against key professionals re-examining their criteria of judgement and gate-keeping practices from scratch and trying to shift habits of a professional lifetime’ (2005, 29, 30). Nevertheless, such change is necessary if heritage practice is to more meaningfully address how pasts are used in the present and the futures these uses are creating.

There is an urgent need to rationalise heritage assemblages and heritage practices that represent a naturalised understanding of heritage that has been described as characteristic to twentieth century Britain (Fairclough 2009). ‘Neutral’ approaches to heritage that advocate promoting and protecting the tastes and accomplishments of past generations are only neutral in that they refuse to question the intentions of those who were powerful in the past. As such, established heritage practices, including innovations that ask non-professional participants to perform professional responsibilities, can be understood as approaches to ‘manage [changeless] change’. Conversely, moving beyond endangerment narratives and recognising heritage as wild, multifaceted and potentially dangerous (May 2009), causes a myriad of possibilities for heritage to present themselves. Understood in this way, and freed from the duty to valorise existing assemblages, calls to participate in heritage can move changeless invitations for assimilatory inclusion to collaborative ventures for critical consciousness and knowledge generation. Adopting neoliberal approaches cannot save the heritage sector from neoliberal austerity measures; however, recognising neoliberalism for what it is, paints the beginnings of a picture for how heritage must change.

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