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Understanding Public Involvement with Australian Heritage: A Qualitative Study using Repertory Grid Analysis

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Abstract

Attempts to increase public participation in heritage related activities have had mixed success. Tourism to heritage sites remains an overt activity that many engage in, but other heritage related activities, such as nominating objects for formal heritage listing, are much rarer. Through a series of qualitative research activities, we examine the public perceptions of what constitutes “heritage” and “heritage-related” behaviours, in order to examine barriers to greater involvement. The findings are that heritage is important to many people, particularly on a personal level. Although initially uncertain about the validity of their views, our respondents defined heritage broadly, believing it to encompass a wide range of objects, places and experiences. Most respondents were undertaking the type of heritage-related behaviours that heritage managers would encourage, however the respondents did not recognise them as being heritage-related. Barriers to greater involvement include this uncertainty over the definition of heritage and a lack of confidence in their ability to effectively recognise and protect heritage. In addition to feeling uncertain about the heritage significance of their own actions and beliefs, the respondents felt even more uncertain about prescribing things of “national heritage value”. This uncertainty stifles discussion and action. The solution appears to lay in celebrations of both individual and national heritage, to foster discussions and understanding of communalities across different cultural groups within the nation.

Introduction

This project is a combination of different methods of qualitative research with the aim of addressing the most fundamental questions – what do people define as heritage, how do they value it, and how can the population be segmented based on their attitudes to heritage to allow more efficient marketing efforts?

It is recognised that there is wide variation in public interest and involvement in heritage within the population. It has also been found that different aspects of the heritage ‘product’ can appeal to different types of people (Sable and Kling 2001, Harrison 2002). That is, the same heritage-related behaviour can be undertaken by different people (e.g., visiting a listed location) for very different reasons, including nostalgia, personal connection or education (Elliot and Shanahan Research 1993).

Definitions of heritage exist at different intellectual and cultural levels, and for different audiences, heritage will have different meanings depending on factors such as class, education, ethnicity and lifecycle (Apostolakis, 2003, The Allen Consulting Group 2005). Heritage therefore needs to be defined in terms of the people or stakeholders who are interpreting it, rather than in the abstract, divorced from the people and their cultural references, values, institutions and norms (O’Reilly 2005). As such, heritage does not lend itself to sharp clarity of definition, as would normally be the case in typical marketing activities, such as consumer product categories or brands. This becomes problematic when heritage managers attempt to quantify public interest in heritage and heritage related activities.
Through this research, we sought to gain a greater understanding of how the public perceive heritage, and determine the role of heritage in the formation of national identity and values. The factors that lead people to develop an interest in heritage, and subsequently engage in heritage-related activities, are not well understood (Prentice 1993), even in the more heavily researched areas such as heritage tourism (Goulding 2000, Daengbuppha, Hemmington and Wilkes 2006). This project directly addresses these issues, where the antecedents of involvement are investigated and used to gain a deeper understanding of what people think about heritage and why they think that way. This knowledge should allow more efficient and effective promotion of heritage.

**Methodology**

Past research studies relating to heritage have tended to focus on behavioural dimensions and the profiling of values and attitudes. This work is useful in making many managerial decisions, but what remains unclear is the underlying belief structures people hold in relation to heritage and heritage-related activities.

Seven mini-groups were arranged to cover a cross-section of age groups and ethnicities. It had also been noted in past research that young people, indigenous groups and newer migrants were often excluded from heritage discussions. This design was therefore also a purposeful attempt to address this issue. Recruitment was handled by a specialist organisation that randomly choose the respondents from the published telephone directory for metropolitan Melbourne. Respondents were asked screening questions about their age, ethnicity and participation in heritage activities. The groups were a wide-ranging discussion on the meaning of heritage and its importance to individuals. The first three groups were divided along broad age lines (under 25, 25 to 45, and 46 years and older) to improve group cohesion and investigate any relationship between attitudes and age.

Incorporated into the discussion groups was a more structured Repertory Grid Analysis (RGA) exercise aimed at developing a more concrete view on how people define heritage and what procedures they use when determining what is, and what is not, a heritage item or related activity. RGA is a technique based on George Kelly's (1963) Personality Construct theory. The main application of RGA is to determine the underlying attitudes and belief structures people use to make sense of their world. By identifying an individual’s personal construct system we gain insight into how they view certain objects and situations and we can then understand why they act the way they do (Fransella, Bell and Bannister 2004). It is a means of moving from the abstract to the concrete.

By using RGA, researchers were able to determine different types of thinking about heritage, as well as understand why some people might include certain types of heritage (e.g., natural environment, colonial era buildings), whilst excluding other forms of heritage (e.g., their own property). This insight allows us to determine how many different views there are in relation to heritage (segments) and what can be done to increase community appreciation of, and participation in, heritage.

Twelve in-depth interviews were also conducted to further develop and clarify the findings of the initial RGA exercise. Later, four discussion groups with different ethnic groups were designed to test the ‘universality’ of the RGA findings and initial group results. The findings of this RGA work then formed the basis of the quantitative study reported here later.
Data collected through this research therefore totalled seven, two-hour focus group transcripts (totalling over 49,000 words) and 12, 60 minute in-depth interviews (totalling over 45,000 words). The data was not subjected to any reduction techniques such as coding or computer summarisation, as it was manageable as is. Instead, in keeping with the practice of past researchers (O’Guinn and Belk 1989, Marshall and Rossman 2006), an audit was performed by a professional qualitative researcher who scrutinised data collection, transcription and analysis methods. As an additional safeguard, each group was moderated by the same researcher, but groups were observed, live, by two other researchers who then interpreted the data in isolation. The results presented here are the outcome of combination of the three sets of analysis. This process enhanced both the quality and reliability of the analysis. Although largely in agreement, some modifications were made after discussion between the researchers.

Qualitative Results

The Meaning of Heritage to Australians

It was acknowledged by most participants that heritage is a broad concept, one which they had difficulty defining. This, of course, hampered discussion on the topic, and partially explains why respondents reported that they rarely discussed heritage issues amongst their peers. First responses to questions regarding how respondents defined “Australia’s heritage” included “no idea”, “old buildings” and uncomfortable silence. However, by pressing further, respondents started to make suggestions on what could be included in a definition, but they were hesitant and uncertain in doing so. It was suggested that heritage includes both tangible and intangible aspects. Intangible experiences, such as attending festivals or site tours were included just as readily in definitions of heritage as were tangible places and objects. The discussions quickly revealed that people recognise that heritage that operates on multiple levels. Specifically, examples were given of global, national, community and individual level heritage. The development of connections and involvement in heritage issues amongst participants usually started from an individual focus, broadening to a more aggregate national level over time. That is to say, a person most commonly needs to feel a personal connection with a given heritage element before they will support its protection and preservation at a ‘national’ level.

The agreed-upon definition of heritage across the groups was broad. Heritage denoted aspects that needed to be protected and preserved because they represent what we were/are as Australians.

“It means our past, our background. What we collectively think about the history we have....”

More importantly, it is those aspects that have made us uniquely Australian and that continue to make Australia unique. Key terms used in this discussion about Australia’s heritage included ‘democracy’, ‘freedom’, ‘opportunity’, ‘prosperity’, ‘geography’, ‘egalitarianism’.

“...predominantly Australian, which is very different from anything else in the world”

It is noteworthy that this did not always mean a focus on positives – that it was felt heritage should also include recognition of mistakes and negative events.
"Our heritage is basically where we’ve come from and some of the things we’ve done in our past haven’t been particularly pleasant."

This was part of the desire to learn and develop as a nation – a concrete way heritage can influence the future. It was expressed as a need to understand who, what and where we have come from for better or worse. The key being to learn from our mistakes when moving forward.

"You know, we’ve got this whole problem with Aborigines, how [are we] going to resolve any of our issues if we’re not educated ... if you’re not educated, you’re not going to make an informed decision ... there’s always going to be a rift."

Heritage is Important

Throughout the groups, a strong belief was expressed that heritage is both important and valuable to Australians. An attempt was made to get participants to think about the importance of heritage issues in comparison to other issues such as Health and Education, and whilst it was said to be important, most acknowledge that economic and social welfare issues took precedent.

"I guess it’s like a base for a lot of beliefs as well"

"I think it’s very important like to pass on tradition like language, custom, memories of my parents and grandparents, where they have come from”.

Most participants felt that not enough is being done on the heritage front, particularly educating Australians about heritage issues. There was a general feeling that we have been tardy in recognising and understanding our heritage. Australia’s history was acknowledged as being short compared with other countries, but that it was regrettable that it has taken time for Australians to value what is Australian and recognise what needs to be protected for the future.

Preservation and Education

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

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

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

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

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

"You can't replace it. You can go and build another terrace house. The Yarra river, once it's gone, it's gone."

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

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

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

Thus we see that participants were hesitant to discuss their own heritage, fearing it was not of interest to many, but even more reluctant to discuss the heritage of others, fearing they would be mistaken or seem ignorant. As a result, reluctance to endorse the recognition of some aspects of heritage can occur — simply because people do not understand why that aspect of heritage is significant and who it is significant to.

"I think it’s necessary for different nationalities to have their heritages listed and remembered in years to come because otherwise we’re nothing."

Personal vs. National Relevance
As discussed, participants recognised that their own interests would not be shared by all, but were tolerant of others interests. However, a lack of information about history in general, and other cultural groups specifically, means that people feel uncomfortable about discussing heritage that they are not personally involved in.
Whilst people are most passionate about the things that relate most closely to them, there is recognition that heritage should be for all people. Everyone should be able to seek to protect the things that matter to them. Added to this, it is recognised that there are some aspects of Australian heritage that are truly iconic. These are things that people may have no direct connection to (e.g., Sydney Harbour Bridge, Twelve Apostles), but are so well known that they would take visiting family or friends to see them. As further support of this notion, these aspects featured very prominently in the quantitative research (see Table 1).

"I mean whatever your view on it [Melbourne's Federation Square], as in what it looks is obviously - but it should be protected because obviously it's like - it's become a meeting place for a lot of people."

"I don't hold the Opera House as high in importance, but I do feel they're an extremely important part of our society"

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

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

The Importance of Experiences

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

"Some of them have even changed, like the MCG's a heritage site in a way. It keeps changing I mean they keep pulling stands down and building new ones every 20 years or so. So it doesn't always mean that things have to stay the same."

It was therefore argued that heritage actions should seek to protect the core value of the object rather than the object itself in a pristine way. In keeping with Peterson (2005), authenticity was socially constructed by our respondents. As an extreme example of this, Sovereign Hill (a recreation pioneer village in Victoria) was mentioned by many, and it was seen as being an 'authentic' experience that allowed understanding of the development of Australia. No contradiction between recreation and heritage value was therefore seen, confirming the
findings of Chhabra, Heakly and Sims (203) who examined events staged in different countries from their cultural origin.

"Because the first-hand experience is much more - it stays in you a lot more than just maybe reading about it".

"Well, it itself does nothing but it's just a building but it brings people together"

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

"I've visited Port Arthur in Tasmania when we went down there but to be honest like I wasn't actually interested in going ... but once I was there it was really interesting to find out you know all the different stories of different people. You could just imagine yourself almost being locked up and not knowing anyone."

It seems that some heritage aspects are less understood because less public exposure and/or attention has been given to them. Unless initial personal interest is developed towards these aspects, and personal experience and connections made, they do not become part of the heritage people value personally. An event held at or tourist visit to these places works well in building these personal links, especially if educational material is made available casually (Daengbuppha, Hemmington and Wilkes 2006).

What are Heritage-related Activities?
As noted, heritage was a difficult term to define, and thus defining heritage related activities was also difficult. Generally, people tend to use the terms 'heritage' and 'culture' synonymously and the focus here seemed to be predominantly on what might be called 'high-culture'. As a consequence, people do not initially consider themselves active participants in many heritage related activities. The exception would be the few people who engage in activities that fit the traditional 'cultural' domain i.e., attendance at art galleries, Museums, National Trust House visits etc.

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

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

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

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

The RGA procedure is easily applied and has been in similar areas (Cohsall 2000, Embacher and Buttle 1989, Hankinson 2004a and 2004b, Pike 2003). For this research, participants were asked to suggest some specific things they thought represented the broad topic of Australia’s National Heritage. This discussion was kept open and free from criticism or review until new ideas had ceased. Once a list had been developed these objects were grouped together by participants to become the elements of Australia’s heritage (see Table 1). To elicit the constructs, the elements were written on cards, and participants were shown three elements at a time. They were then asked to identify which was the most different from the other two, and list the various ways in which it differed (constructs).

Elements
A vast number of objects places and experiences were suggested as being part of Australia’s heritage. These were then compiled into 15 key elements, as shown in Table 1. The elements put forward by participants raise a number of points of interest. Firstly, in this particular case, it could be said that the elements (e.g., historic architecture) have little meaning to people as a broad category, but that each person has a specific example of that element, relevant to them. Whilst there was a good deal of consensus on the elements, the examples thought to best represent that category differed markedly from participant to participant, always based on their unique experiences and beliefs. This illustrates the importance of personal connection in being passionate about, and active in, the future of specific heritage examples.

The list in Table 1 also includes a large number of items that may not be typically thought of as part of the dominion of those charged with managing heritage. For example, ‘cultural festivals’, ‘flora’, ‘fauna’ and ‘waterways’ were all prominently mentioned. This is a far broader view of heritage than simply protection of ‘old things’.

The elements listed reinforce the idea that people have a broad and sophisticated understanding of heritage. Although, in practice, it seems people act largely out of their own interests when it comes to heritage participation and they acknowledge the value in everyone else doing so as well. Heritage is not viewed as a competitive thing - instead, protecting what is important to me should not conflict with the protection of what is important to you. Thus we see elements such as multiculturalism and indigenous culture included in this list, even by those who have no direct experience of it.

Also shown in Table 1 are the results of a question included in a nationally representative omnibus survey. All participants were asked “Imagine you were asked to show someone, who knew nothing about Australia, three things that you think best capture Australia’s heritage. What would you show them?” Answers were open-ended, but were coded here into the
element category they fitted best. Over 9,500 responses were received (three per participant), and roughly 5% of responses did not fit any element. These were primarily personal things or places unknown to the coder.

Table 1: Elements Generated Through RGA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Specific examples provided by participants</th>
<th>Percentage naming (n = 3,224)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Native animals</td>
<td>Kangaroo, platypus, koala, emu</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature reserves</td>
<td>Natural forest areas, the environment</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural icons/landmarks</td>
<td>Uluru/Ayers Rock, Great Barrier Reef, Kimberley Ranges, Daintree, Bondi Beach</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man-made landmarks/icons</td>
<td>Sydney Harbour Bridge, Opera House, MCG, Botanic Gardens</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historic architecture</td>
<td>Victoriana buildings – St Paul’s Cathedral, GPO, St Kilda Esplanade; Influence from other cultures – Anglo, European, Asian, Middle Eastern</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sporting traditions</td>
<td>Aussie Rules, Rugby League, cricket, surfing, swimming, tennis</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrations/festivals/events</td>
<td>Sporting, cultural, historical events (e.g. Moomba, Grand Prix, Commonwealth Games, Australia Day, Australian Open)</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian personalities</td>
<td>Steve Irwin, Don Bradman, Dame N Melba, Ned Kelly</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early white/Anglo Saxon settlement</td>
<td>Penal history, gold rush, beginnings of towns/cities/buildings, Port Arthur, Clunes, Captain Cook’s Cottage</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration/multiculturalism</td>
<td>Melting pot of different nationalities, food, restaurants, ethnic precincts (e.g. Lygon Street, Carlisle Street)</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous Aboriginal culture</td>
<td>History, sites, art, dancing, rock paintings</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian art and cultural works</td>
<td>Music, paintings, poetry (e.g. Banjo Patterson)</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian military history</td>
<td>The Shrine, Point Cook Airfield, Victoria Barracks, Point Nepean</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major waterways</td>
<td>Yarra River, Murray River, paddle steamers and irrigation</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian inventiveness</td>
<td>Royal Flying Doctors Service, Hills Hoist, motor mower, penicillin</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Constructs
To determine the personal constructs that underlie people’s decisions on what constitutes heritage, participants were presented with three elements, asked to choose the two most similar elements, and then list the ways in which those two differed from the third. Over 150 different constructs were elicited from these discussions and interviews.
Table 2: Summary of Constructs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Permanence</th>
<th>Represents our past</th>
<th>Represents our future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always existed</td>
<td>Part of development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unchanged</td>
<td>Changed over time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fleeting</td>
<td>Perpetual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transient</td>
<td>Persistent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Temporal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finite</td>
<td>Unlimited</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very old</td>
<td>Modern</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Locus Of Importance</th>
<th>Important to certain groups</th>
<th>Important to all Australians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Important only to Australia</td>
<td>Important to the world</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Built our national identity</td>
<td>Gives global recognition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can associate with it</td>
<td>I cannot associate with it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important to only a few</td>
<td>Important to all Australians</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relates to me directly</td>
<td>Has no personal relevance to me</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Unique to Australia</th>
<th>Found in other places</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>Non-indigenous</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Things</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People</td>
<td>Objects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man-made</td>
<td>Naturally occurring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can be directly experienced today</td>
<td>Cannot be directly experienced today</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vulnerability</th>
<th>Irreplaceable</th>
<th>Can be recreated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fragile</td>
<td>Robust</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rare</td>
<td>Common</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vulnerable</td>
<td>Protected</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs financial support</td>
<td>Can support itself</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valued by most</td>
<td>Neglected by most</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Those constructs were then subjected to content and factor analysis to identify the underlying similarities. This process resulted in five broad areas, with a varying number of constructs.
selected to best reflect each area (see Table 2). These broad areas also closely reflect the issues that came out of the general discussion. The broad areas identified were named Permanence, Locus of Importance, Origin, Type and Vulnerability. The next stage of this research involves a quantitative study testing this RGA structure to determine the importance of each construct.

Conclusions

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

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

a) Primarily involvement flows from close personal connections - obvious examples include family history (migration, achievements) or interests (bushwalking, architecture).
b) Attendance at an event or visitation to a site spurs a desire to learn more and builds a personal connection - for example, taking an overseas visitor to visit “the Twelve Apostles” can lead to both learning about the site and building a personal connection if a positive experience is had.

Once personally connected, people develop an on-going interest in protecting and preserving what is important to them. Many respondents could speak of actions they had undertaken at a local level to protect things near their homes or neighbourhoods. Most people actively preserve the heritage of their families by protecting important items (e.g., photos) and stories, and passing them on to future generations. One major impediment to greater public involvement in heritage is that many people do not feel that what is personally important to them will be important to many others. As a result, they do not seek to nominate these elements to National Heritage Lists or seek to be involved in other overt heritage activities. At the other end of the spectrum however, are heritage sites and themes that have become of such national significance that Australians almost universally acknowledge their importance. This can occur without any strong personal connection or even any first-hand experience. For instance, many respondents cited Uluru as being crucial to Australia’s national heritage, and yet few had visited it. The role such icons play in promoting Australia overseas (e.g., Sydney Opera House) means that most Australia’s value them highly, and see them as “representing” the best of the country.

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

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

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

References


