

Introduction

This study began as a research proposal generated by English Heritage and the Department of Independent Studies at Lancaster University. The proposal was accepted as a Case Studentship funded by the E.S.R.C., giving the author the following basic research outline:

‘To investigate the role of heritage in society and examine the positive contribution it can make to the ways in which present and future environment is perceived and managed. Drawing upon recent work in the social psychology, sociology and history of (national) identity, the project will focus on the sometimes ambivalent role of archaeological remains and other structures in forming a sense of national identity. It will also consider the ways in which these structures and remains impact upon the establishment of European collective memory.’

This was a necessarily wide research remit, which allowed the author to develop more specific research objectives. These objectives are set out below:

1. To investigate some of the ways in which people understand standing ‘heritage’ buildings and structures as symbols within the environment or landscape around them. In particular this research explores people’s visual understanding of ‘heritage’ structures in the landscape.
2. To gain insight into some of the roles that the understanding of ‘heritage’ structures in the landscape plays in the negotiation of identity. The objective in this case is to look specifically at local, national and European identities.
3. To contribute to the ‘value of heritage’ debate current amongst archaeologists and ‘heritage’ managers.

‘Heritage’ sites and monuments are all features of a broader landscape, with which people interact on a day-to-day basis. The connection made between landscape and ‘heritage’ is made, for most people, through the sense of vision. As Crawshaw and Urry put it:

“In the history of Western societies, sight has long been regarded as the noblest of the senses. It has been viewed as the most discriminating and reliable of the sensual mediators between people and their physical environment”

(Crawshaw and Urry 1997, 177)

Landscape as a whole is often considered to be ‘heritage’. This research however, concentrates upon particular features, ‘heritage’ sites and monuments as part of the landscape. Despite this particular emphasis the aim of the study was to consider ‘heritage’ sites and monuments in a wider social sense than as individual ‘heritage’ presentations, visitor centres, museums or tourist attractions.

The opening four chapters of the research present a literature review underpinning the research objectives. They do not seek to present a particular overarching social theory but draw on social psychology, sociology and history of (national) identity to generate a holistic view, of landscape, local,

national and European identity and the idea of 'heritage' as part of the landscape that can be 'valued' by people who view it.

Landscape sets the scene for this study, chapter one examines the concept of landscape and in particular its relationship with nationalism and national identity. The study draws inspiration from theories concerning visual perceptions of the landscape, to focus upon how people interact with 'heritage' in the world around them.

National identity and the idea of nationalism became a 'hot topic' amongst archaeologists and academics studying 'heritage' in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Kohl and Fawcett 1995, Díaz-Andreu and Champion 1996). Their interest lay in nationalist influences on the archaeological and historical interpretation of archaeological sites and 'heritage' presentations rather than in the actual way that 'the public' received these interpretations in a wider landscape. Chapter one emphasises both the landscape as visually perceived experience and one that is laden with visual symbolism. Such symbolism allows landscape to represent socially constructed concepts like nationalism, to underpin the national identity of people who live and work in it. The way in which nationalism may be symbolised in the landscape is suggested by the work of Billig (1995) on 'banal nationalism'.

As a socially constructed concept with many similarities to the nation state, Europe might also be found symbolised by some aspects of landscape. A review of the different meanings of Europe is necessary to allow the study to recognise how people may construct a sense of European identity. Chapter two looks critically at the various social constructions of Europe, including 'origin myths' and the Greek perception of a territory, bounded by threats to the east (Persia) and barbarians to the north (Scythia). The dual themes of threat and superiority are recurrent throughout the many constructions of Europe discussed in this chapter, finishing with the post-cold war condition of Europe.

How might a sense of Europe be represented through 'heritage'? The second part of chapter two considers some of the candidates for a European 'heritage' in the historic environment. The socially constructed nature of Europe and the variety of 'heritage' that is found in this 'old world' presents a number of possible historic landscapes that people may perceive as evocations of Europe.

Place-identity is a concept closely related to landscape, indeed place-identity is 'played out' or 'negotiated' in the landscape. In the third chapter the idea of place-identity is considered in depth and ways are suggested in which people may understand landscape in terms of local place-identity. Place-identity has important consequences for the negotiation of individual and communal senses of Europe or national identity. It also plays a key role in senses of local identity.

Considering the term 'heritage' completes the literature review. Chapter four deals with multiple definitions of the term 'heritage', a broad concept that has many detractors in the field of 'heritage studies' but is used in many contexts. As with many fields of work and study, 'heritage' practitioners

have felt the need to periodically review the 'value' of their work and the historic environment itself. This ongoing 'value debate' is currently to the fore in the 'heritage management' profession as English Heritage is presently carrying out a consultation exercise about the historic environment. One of the key issues raised by the 'value of heritage' debate is the difficult to measure issue of identity. It is to this debate and specifically those concerning local place-identity, national identity and identification with constructions of Europe, that this thesis seeks to make a contribution.

The working party set up by English Heritage as part of their current consultation exercise about the historic environment have identified a need to know 'more about contrasting views of cultural significance' and significantly; 'how they are formed' (English Heritage Consultation Working Group 2000, 9). To learn about how people interact with the historic environment ('heritage' in its broadest terms) this study employed qualitative research methods drawn from the social sciences.

There is a long tradition amongst museologists and academics interested in 'heritage studies' of research with visitors to museums and 'heritage' sites using questionnaire surveys. In recent years more in depth methods have been used to allow people 'to speak for themselves' by using open-ended questions and in depth interviews. Chapter five begins by describing some of the extensive research that has been used to study people visiting 'heritage' attractions. The rest of the chapter then describes and discusses 'family focus groups', the research method used in this study, which allowed people to discuss at length the landscape in which they lived (Worcester) in relation to Europe, Britain / England and as a their home. The use of 'family focus groups' to investigate this issue provided insight into how people interacted with the landscape around them, including 'heritage' sites and monuments. The detailed analysis of people's talk also allowed the study to derive insight about ways in which they interacted with cultural ideas like Europe and Britain / England in the landscape around them.

Chapters six presents the detailed analysis of the data generated by the 'family focus groups'. This extensive chapter reflects the large amount of data collected by the study, here in the analysis the key is in the detail as people are allowed to 'speak for themselves'. Chapter seven leads the discussion of the analysis presented in chapter six by confronting the question at the heart of the studies objectives; how do people form views about 'heritage' in the landscape around them? Chapter eight refers back to the 'value of heritage' debate to demonstrate the visual relationship that social understanding of landscape has with 'heritage' and many different senses of identity. All of which have important implications for those managing 'heritage', most especially the implications of multiple meanings for the 'value of heritage'.