
IN STAKEHOLDERS WE TRUST: CHANGING THE ONTOLOGICAL AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL ORIENTATION OF BUILT HERITAGE ASSESSMENT THROUGH PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

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Abstract: In the twenty-first century, the relevance of the positivistic, orthodox heritage paradigm is increasingly being called into question in terms of its ability to provide an appropriate ontological and epistemological foundation for the assessment of built heritage. Heterodox heritage theory, largely represented by heritage studies, now presents the alternative paradigms of constructivism, critical theory, and postcolonial theory that are more suited to understanding the multiple truths and the pluralistic socio-cultural values of a wider range of stakeholders' values. Heritage is also seen as a tool for social justice and to empower communities. In this environment, existing, orthodox tools to assess the value of built heritage are inadequate. Heterodox theory is largely based on a foundation of the social sciences and Participatory Action Research (PAR) may offer a way to provide a useful tool for practitioners that encompasses both heterodox theory and the goals of social justice and community empowerment. Ultimately, PAR may offer a theoretical basis under which heritage researchers can provide empirical evidence to the claim that the valuation of historic fabric is a fundamental human value that transcends cultures.

Keywords: built heritage, assessment, ontology, epistemology, participatory action research

1. INTRODUCTION

In the twenty-first century, the understanding and assessment of heritage is increasingly an ontological and epistemological battleground. As the gulf between orthodox and heterodox theory [1] becomes increasingly wider, there appears to be little progress in terms of reconciling their disparate worldviews. Orthodox theory still dominates practice, largely because of orthodox doctrine that is promulgated via regulatory frameworks, but, at the same time, there is a rising call to modify this top-down system driven by expert rule into a bottom-up approach that recognizes a wider array of stakeholder values. This paper will explore how to address this change in ontological and epistemological orientations through the lens of Participatory Action Research (PAR) – a social science research methodology that emphasizes social justice and community empowerment and changes the role of heritage experts into expert “facilitators”.

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PAR not only represents a shift into a constructivist paradigm in the assessment of heritage, but it is also emblematic of the change in how heritage is viewed as a basic human right [2]. Cultural heritage is also increasingly seen as a tool for social justice and community empowerment [3]. In this environment, PAR presents a tantalizing answer to William Logan's question about what "heritage conservation as human rights-based cultural practice" would look like? [4] Keeping this question in mind, this exploration will provide an overview of orthodox and heterodox heritage paradigms, the role of experts, and a theoretical description of PAR with applied examples.

2. MOVING FROM POSITIVISM TO CONSTRUCTIVISM IN BUILT HERITAGE CONSERVATION

Unique among the built environment disciplines is how the practice of heritage conservation has largely retained its mid-twentieth century rationalistic, positivistic paradigm, which has been reinforced and promulgated by doctrine and by law [5]. Other built environment disciplines, such as urban planning, long ago underwent the "communicative turn" and embraced stakeholder engagement and multivalent, pluralistic value systems in decision-making processes [6]. Architecture, in its shift to post-modernism in the 1960s, dispensed with the scientific, style-less, machine living espoused by Le Corbusier, and moved toward "complexity and contradiction" in order to seek a "richness of meaning rather than a clarity of meaning" outlined by Robert Venturi [7]. In the early 1970s, the environmental design and behavior movement introduced the seminal idea that design could, in part, be driven by social science research. By understanding how people are affected by design, in theory, the architectural and urban design process could be led by stakeholder's values. At a minimum, "post-occupancy evaluations" could be used to determine what worked and did not work after a building was constructed. Architects could then learn from this process in order to design better buildings [8].

These examples of paradigm shifts in the built environment disciplines are important because they are a precedent for understanding complexity, depth of meaning, and pluralistic values and de-emphasize the expert's role as decision maker. The built environment disciplines are not alone in this regard: sociology, anthropology, history, political science, and many other disciplines made the "post-modern" turn at the latter quarter of the twentieth century, in part based on the work of post-structuralist and critical theorists such as Foucault, Baudrillard and Lyotard [9]. The foundation of "heritage studies" – a contemporary heterodox foil to orthodox practice that has risen in prominence recently – is based on post-modern, post-colonial, and critical theory.

Orthodox heritage has a well-developed rationalistic theory based on the retention of existing fabric and minimal physical interventions with an emphasis on readability and aesthetic unity, where appropriate. These concepts originated in the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries from authors such as John Ruskin, Alois Riegl, Camillo Boito, Giovanni Carbonara, Paul Philippot, Cesare Brandi, Paolo Mora, Umberto Baldini, and others. Of utmost importance is the presence of tangible fabric from the past; in the absence of such fabric, the object has impaired or no historical value. The authenticity of this fabric is related to whether or not it was present in context with significant historical events or if it embodies values related to material culture. Lastly, informed

by the world of art conservation, there is a tension between material authenticity and the need for the historical object to be readable and communicate its significance. For Cesare Brandi, writing in the mid-twentieth century, respect for existing fabric should not overwhelm the ability of a heritage object to present a readable form, especially if it is deemed important for the intent of the designer to be communicated. An example of this conflict is the face of a bronze statute that is so obscured by corrosion that its expression can no longer be discerned; in this case, it would be deemed appropriate to destroy the authentic material patina of the object in order to restore its readability. Another example is the "Italian school" of conservation developed in the nineteenth century, which was epitomized by Raffaele Stern's work on the Coliseum and the Arch of Titus, which sought both aesthetic unity and the need to differentiate new from old fabric in repair and restoration work [10].

Orthodox theory uses science and positivism to convey its aims; Muñoz Viñas explains that this "scientific conservation"

is guided by the unspoken material theory of conservation which is, in turn, based upon the need to preserve the object's material "truth", and the belief in scientifically grounded knowledge. The first assumption (the need to preserve the object's material truth) can be divided into two different principles: first, it emphasizes that scientific conservation has a fundamental need to preserve the integrity of the object, and, therefore, that it is a truth-enforcement operation; second, it stresses that for scientific conservation, the integrity of the object fundamentally lies in its physical features and constituents. [11]

Muñoz Viñas further elaborates that there has never really been an attempt to justify scientism in conservation because no justification was warranted because a "scientific approach" is always assumed to be proper [12].

While some readers may be familiar with positivism, some explanation of its meaning is warranted, especially because of its role as the foundational paradigm for orthodox conservation theory. Prior to the 1960s, there was a widespread belief that a singular truth could be uncovered for a problem as long as a rigorous "scientific" method was employed. Moreover, researchers assumed that it was possible to find the real "truth" with only observation and measurement and little or no interpretation. Methodological rigor consisted of separating the researcher from the phenomenon being studied to the highest degree possible. Any research design that blurred the lines between the researcher and subject was to be avoided at all costs. Positivism, therefore, is often synonymous with the scientific method, objectivity, quantification, remote observation, and prediction.

Starting in the 1960s and into the early 1970s, historians, philosophers, and social scientists began to question the assumption that singular truths existed and that detached objectivity was always appropriate in collecting and analyzing data. In particular, many researchers directly questioned the concept of truth, calling its very existence into question. In the most extreme example, known as relativism, there is no truth at all, only multiple interpretations. More moderate paradigms viewed reality as being constructed from experiences and truth, as such, was defined by triangulation and consensus. A prominent ethnographer, Clifford Geertz, famously questioned the ability of positivistic research designs to understand cultural phenomena. In his paper,

he analyzed a wink from a positivistic and constructivist (or post-modern) perspective. In the former case, he described how the timing of a wink could be measured and objectively analyzed, yet it utterly failed to reveal the real meaning behind a wink. In order to understand the meaning of the wink, the researcher must adopt an emic or inside perspective – the same as the person being studied – and in the process destroy the barrier between researcher and subject. The wink, in fact, conveyed a “thick” set of meanings that a “thin” positivistic research design completely missed [13]. This is the perspective of ethnography today: to properly understand a phenomenon, the researcher must become part of the culture being studied and be accepted, as much as possible, as one of its members.

Today, while it is realized that positivistic methods have their place, for subjective phenomena, such as the value of heritage, their usefulness can be quite limited and may lead to results that make little sense in relation to the research question. This is especially true when the object of the research is to understand qualitative meanings rather than to generate and analyze numerical data. Most disciplines, including history, anthropology, and sociology, have accepted post-modern approaches to research designs that incorporate multiple interpretive paradigms. Built heritage conservation, however, often relies on the type of positivistic research employed by historians prior to the post-modernism movement, and in doing so assumes that “facts” or truth can indeed exist independently of interpretation [14]. The orthodox practice of assessing historical significance and authenticity is also positivistic in its approach, as Tainter and Lucas elaborate, and assumes that “empirical reality must be either direct reports of experience or observation, or statements that can be derived from such reports” [15]. In other words, if a phenomenon cannot be directly experienced with the senses, then it is treated as if it does not exist.

In the past couple of decades, there has been an increasing call to change the ontological perspective of built heritage conservation so that it can incorporate a wider range of sociocultural and experiential values; the aim is not to supplant the dominant positivist paradigm, but rather compliment it with a more holistic, integrative, constructivist paradigm. Researchers who have been advocating for this kind of change include Randall Mason, Setha Low, Laurajane Smith, and John Pendlebury, among many others [16]. While these individuals have readily exposed the problems with the positivist paradigm, there is still a lack of pragmatic frameworks to assess these social, cultural, and experiential values associated with the historic environment. A far greater task is to create a reliable method to integrate these community values with the traditional positivistic values of heritage experts.

As opposed to positivism, the constructivist paradigm assumes that “truth” is constructed from various meanings and reality can never be directly accessed, much less understood in its totality [17]. From an epistemological standpoint, there is little, if any, distance from the researcher and the phenomenon; in fact, in many constructivist methodologies, the researcher *is* the phenomenon being studied. The constructivist realm is one of shades of meanings from multiple perspectives with no attempt to quantify phenomena; research methodologies that spring from constructivism are therefore qualitative in nature. Guba and Lincoln describe the ontological perspective in this paradigm as “apprehendable in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based,

local and specific in nature (although elements are often shared among many individuals and even across cultures), and dependent for their form and content on the individual persons or groups holding the constructions. Constructions are not more or less 'true,' in any absolute sense, but simply more or less informed and/or sophisticated" [18].

Critical and post-colonial theory have also played an important role in the development of heterodox heritage theory. Postcolonial theory is based on Marxism, post-modernism, and poststructuralism, framing debates through the dichotomies of "maturity/immaturity, civilization/barbarism, developed/developing, and progressive/primitive" [19]. As applied to heritage studies, postcolonial theory looks at how the history of colonialism affects people's relationship with heritage, power, and identity. Examples of this form of inquiry include investigations into the marginalized heritage of indigenous peoples (e.g., Indigenous Australians, Native Americans) and minorities. It also includes investigations into the valuation and treatment of the dominant heritage of the "oppressors" (the colonizers) [20]. Critical theory is a thread through most of heterodox heritage, especially because of its emphasis on the "social construction of experience" and the analysis of discourses of power [21]. This is perhaps best shown through Laurajane Smith's work on the "authorized heritage discourse", in which "the proper care of heritage, and its associated values, lies with the experts, as it is only they who have the abilities, knowledge and understanding to identify the innate value and knowledge contained at and within historically important sites and places" [22].

In heterodox theory, as Gustavo Araoz indicates, conservation "is about preserving a message, and not a place" [23] and focuses on the continuity of meanings rather than fabric [24]. This meaning-focused, communicate nature of conservation is why the social sciences are assuming an increasingly central role in determining questions of significance and authenticity. With environmental psychology we can better understand the person/place relationship between the historical object, age value, and the retention of authenticity. Anthropology offers insights into cultural values associated with historical objects while sociology can reveal systems of behavior that relate to the recognition and treatment of heritage. Through the social sciences, it is possible to reframe the goal of heritage conservation as conserving the ability of the historical object to convey its authenticity. But because authenticity is ultimately a sociocultural and personal experience, we cannot properly "conserve" without understanding people and their relationship to the heritage object. Ultimately, what this means is that heritage experts need to trust most stakeholders – not only those in power or with economic, but everyday people – and the possibility that a reverence for intact historical fabric may indeed be a universal human value.

While there is obviously a precedent for how orthodox heritage theory has been employed, the implementation of heterodox heritage theory in terms of practice is an open book. While orthodox theory has a clear scope of its aims and means, heterodox theory can be described as pluralistic at best and relativistic at its most problematic. In the former sense, it offers great promise of recognizing a wide range of tangible and intangible heritage for the benefit of humankind; in the latter sense it presents the impossibility of decision-making.

3. WHO IS THE “EXPERT”? A LESSON FROM PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

A post-positivistic heritage conservation paradigm represents a challenge to the traditional authority of heritage experts by positing that anyone can be a heritage expert. In heterodox theory “everyone has a view, and everyone has expertise ... and [non-experts will] no longer simply accept the official view” [25]. What role, therefore, does the heritage expert play in this brave new world of heterodox theory? The planning and environmental conservation fields offer possible answers to this question.

In the 1960s, a debate arose in the planning field as to the nature of “expertise” and to what extent the planning professional was expected and entitled to exercise judgment and authority. Nigel Taylor explains that the root of this debate centered on the nature of value:

[I]n the 1960s it was also acknowledged that town planning judgements were at root judgements of value (as distinct from purely technical judgements) about the kinds of environments it is desirable to create or conserve. The question therefore arose as to whether town planners had any greater “specialist” ability to make these judgements than the ordinary person in the street. The experience of much 1960s planning – such as comprehensive housing redevelopment or urban road planning – seemed to indicate not. The view that town planning was a value-laden, political process therefore raised not so much the question of what the town planner’s area of specialist expertise should be but, more fundamentally, the question of whether there was any such expertise at all. [26]

Contemporary planning processes acknowledge that in some cases, the planning expert is not necessarily more qualified to make a decision because “[w]hat is ‘better’ is a matter of value, and planners have no superior expertise in making value-judgements about environmental options” [27]. In this perspective, the planner’s skill lies in the ability to facilitate the process of engaging stakeholders and mediating between disparate viewpoints in an attempt to achieve either an understanding or a consensus. This process is often messy, political, and filled with gray areas where no clear “right” or “wrong” decision is evident. As Patsy Healey acknowledges, “the planner’s role [has shifted] from that of ‘designer’ and ‘analyst’ to ‘facilitator’ and ‘mediator’” [28].

In a similar sense, the environmental conservation field has also made a shift from experts (e.g., biologists and ecologists) making top-down policy recommendations toward becoming facilitators of a community-driven process in partnership with social scientists. This change has been, in part, due to the recognition that “most of the problems of conservation are to do with people” and less with questions that are solely the domain of the hard sciences [29]. For instance, in its implementation of “place-based planning”, the United States Forest Service emphasizes the central role that facilitators working with communities have in “identifying which [natural] elements to retain, which ones to adapt, and which ones to discard” [30]. Functionally, like heritage conservation, environmental conservation theory is undergoing a positivistic to constructivist paradigm shift in seeking multiple truths to singular problems by recognizing the sociocultural complexity of formerly “scientific” problems. It has done so by acknowledging the central role that human needs play in conservation theory and policy while

emphasizing the primary goal of social well-being [31]. In other words, good conservation policy is beneficial not only for the object of focus (the natural environment), but also for the people who benefit from healthy ecosystems.

4. PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH AND BUILT HERITAGE

A persistent thread in heterodox theory addresses hegemonic discourses, which is perhaps best addressed by Laurajane Smith's AHD [32]. In the AHD, conservation doctrine and its emphasis on objective art/historical values is the basis of a "self-referential authority of conservation and management philosophy of practice" used by heritage experts to "sideline" the "values and meanings that are situated outside the dominant [expert-driven] discourse" [33]. While social science research methodologies, such as ethnographies, offer ways to balance the dominance of experts' values with an understanding of the values of non-experts, these methods still enforce the role of the expert in controlling meanings. In order to better address the problems inherent in the AHD, Participatory Action Research (PAR) offers the unique ability to assess heritage while empowering communities. Moreover, within its framework, PAR assigns the expert to the specific role of facilitator in helping communities to control the gathering and presentation of their own built heritage meanings and values.

The key characteristic of participatory research that differentiates it from other social science research methodologies is the way in which the participants are co-researchers. In other words, the participants are both subjects *and* researchers; in effect, the community is researching itself. In traditional social science methodologies the researcher and the subject are clearly and permanently delineated, even in those methodologies (such as ethnographies) that try to blur the lines between the two. In participatory research, it is not possible to make this distinction because of the fluidity of the roles that community members play in the process. Louise Fortman refers to participatory research as "interdependent science" because some "questions are best answered in collaboration" [34].

Interdependent science is defined by "local knowledge" or "situated knowledge" by "civil" experts as opposed to "conventional" experts who are defined, in part, by their use of scientific knowledge [35]. PAR therefore embodies a kind of epistemological agnosticism, readily accepting any form of knowledge as long as it is defined and accepted by community participants. Jeffrey Bendremer and Elaine Thomas emphasize respect for this epistemological flexibility, directing conventional experts to "stop privileging academic inquiry and assign equal standing to Indigenous belief systems, decision-making bodies, and sensibilities" [36]. Fortman refers to the academy's preference for conventional experts' scientific knowledge as an "epistemic injustice" because all people have the potential to be "credible knowers" regardless of their education or social status [37].

Conventional experts, however, can be full participants in PAR, performing as equals with their community members. The conventional expert, however, does not control the process and seeks to equalize any power structures. In this frame, the expert serves as a facilitator of the overall process, providing input and suggestions, when appropriate, but deferring to the community members in terms of decision-making endeavors. In addition, sometimes experts train community members on how to perform

certain research methodologies. Bergelin et al. offer the advice that conventional experts should listen carefully and not be “controlling” and strive to be “open and humble, persistent and strong” [38]. This hands-off approach, as Arora-Jonsson et al. emphasize, manifests as “local people [being] treated, not as data sources, but as colleagues in producing new knowledge” [39].

While there are a number of different flavors of PAR, they all focus on issues of social justice and social action. The premise is that through research, communities are empowered to identify problems and create and implement possible solutions, hence the word “action” in PAR. In this sense, PAR has much in common with participatory democracy by maximizing the opportunity for a community to make its own decisions. This process, as Timothy Pynch advocates, “opens up the world of knowledge-making to people long silenced by forces intent on controlling knowledge for the educated elite” [40]. This characteristic is one reason why PAR researchers typically work with disempowered communities in developing countries, but it can and has been applied to a wide variety of cultures in Western as well as non-Western contexts.

John Heron and Peter Reason argue that PAR’s paradigm is essentially constructivist (based Guba and Lincoln’s definition [41]), but fails to account for “experiential knowing”, the fluid nature of “subjects” and “researchers” reversing roles, and the way in which the participants engage in epistemological definitions [42]. Regardless, PAR shares many of the ontological and epistemological orientations found in heterodox heritage theory, especially in terms of the multiple constructions of reality, the possibility of multiple truths, and empowering communities through control of the meanings of their own heritage. In this latter aspect, PAR also shares some characteristics with poststructuralism and postcolonialism in terms of exposing and remedying disparities of power and issues of subjugation. For the purposes of this exploration, the assumption is that PAR has sufficient characteristics that are associated with the constructivist paradigm to assign it to this category.

5. THE PAR PROCESS

The process of PAR is iterative and informal and begins with participants observing the effects of certain actions in their community and reflecting on these effects in order to begin a planning process. The participants prepare a plan of action and then act on the plan. The cycle repeats with observations on the actions that were taken to implement the plan. The community participants continue this process until they are satisfied with the results [43]. Stephen Kemmis and Robin McTaggart offer a variation of this process as

1. Planning a change
2. Acting and observing the process and consequences of the change
3. Reflecting on these processes and consequences
4. Replanning
5. Acting and observing again
6. Reflecting again, and [repeating the process]. [44]

The model proposed by John Elliot is similar to the first two and also iterative in design:

1. Identifying initial idea
2. Reconnaissance (fact-finding and analysis)
3. General plan and action steps
4. Implement action steps
5. Monitor implementation and effects
6. Reconnaissance (fact-finding and analysis)
7. Revise general idea
8. [Repeat]. [45]

Koshy et al. warn, however, against the “excessive reliance on a particular model” because it “could adversely affect the unique opportunity offered by the emerging nature and flexibility that are the hallmarks of action research” [46]. The key takeaway is that the PAR process should be, above all else, flexible in adapting to the needs of the participants.

In terms of how PAR should specifically be implemented in communities, two influential theorists are Paulo Freire, who worked to empower adults in Brazil to read [47], and Orlando Fals-Borda, who helped address issues of social and power inequity of Latin Americans [48]. While Paulo Freire is credited with some of the foundational ideas of PAR, Fals-Borda created one of the most widely used PAR methods, which holds much promise as a framework for assessing built heritage. Two of his ideas, the “critical recovery of history” and valuing and applying folk culture in the research process relate well to heterodox heritage concepts.

Fals-Borda's description of how the critical recovery of history is conducted in PAR is particularly relevant to heritage because of its emphasis on memory, intangible heritage, and discovering hidden narratives. He describes the process as

an effort to discover selectively, through collective memory, those elements of the past which have proved useful in the defense of the interests of exploited classes and which may be applied to the present struggles to increase conscientization. Use is thus made of popular stories and oral tradition in the form of interviews and witness accounts by older members of the community possessing good analytical memories; the search for concrete information on given periods of the past hidden in family coffers; core data “columns” and their “fleshing out”; and ideological projections, imputation, personification and other techniques designed to stimulate the collective memory. In this way, folk heroes, data and facts are discovered which correct, complement or clarify official or academic accounts written with other class interests or biases in mind. Sometimes completely new and fresh information is discovered which is of major importance to regional and national history. [49]

Fals-Borda's technique shares some elements with both oral history and folklore methodologies, but what makes it distinct is that the flow of information is bi-directional between the co-researchers, rather than one-way from the subject to the researcher. In addition, this process “provides a social validation of objective knowledge which cannot be achieved through other individual methods based on surveys or fieldwork”

[50]. In this way, Fals-Borda's technique relates well to Ned Kaufman's description of the historic environment as a "storyscape", or narratives that communities embed in "story sites" [51]. Moreover, Fals-Borda's method offers a more direct way to access this storyscape.

In his emphasis on "valuing and applying folk culture", Fals-Borda is respecting the ability of the civil experts participating in the PAR process to identify and define knowledge on their own terms. This process "recognize[es] ... essential or core values among the people in each region. Account is taken of cultural and ethnic elements frequently ignored in regular political practice, such as art, music, drama, sports, beliefs, myths, storytelling and other expressions related to human sentiment, imagination and ludic or recreational tendencies" [52]. Because of the open nature of what counts as knowledge, a wide variety of novel methods can be used include storytelling, talking circles, journaling, dance, art, games, and photo elicitation (e.g., Photovoice) in addition to methods formally recognized by conventional experts.

Lastly, Fals-Borda's methodology recognizes that the outcome of the PAR process need not always be the written word and can consist of any type of material that can communicate meanings [53]. In practical terms, the result of PAR can therefore be a dramatic play, a musical performance, dance, or a collection of art. Conventional experts can then interpret these non-written materials in written form for distribution to others.

6. EXAMPLES OF PAR APPLIED TO BUILT HERITAGE

The use of PAR for the assessment of built heritage is rare and very little material has been published on this topic. One example describes the ongoing use of PAR by the University of Florida's Preservation Institute:Nantucket program in work that may result in nominating the island of Nantucket (Massachusetts, USA) to the World Heritage list [54]. In a study focusing on the conservation of the building traditions of Egyptian vernacular architecture, Maria Dabai used PAR to help a community to save this intangible heritage. She accomplished this endeavor by helping the community to construct a model house that combined vernacular traditions with necessary, modern conveniences [55]. Most examples of PAR that relate to conservation, however, address natural or environmental conservation in developing countries and are focused on changing people's behavior through what is called a "Participatory Rural Appraisal" (PRA) [56]. While these environmental conservation case studies are informative, they do not focus on issues of the assessment of heritage and will therefore not be covered in depth.

In terms of a broader definition of heritage beyond connotations of buildings, the field of archaeology offers a few case studies that focus on the tangible and intangible heritage of indigenous peoples. Commonly referred to as "community archaeology", the use of PAR by archaeologists is an attempt to remedy past ills of the discipline as indigenous communities have traditionally perceived the archaeologist as an exploiter of their heritage. In the era of "postprocessual archaeology" (archaeology's post-modern turn), PAR has become a symbol of a kind of healing process between these experts and community members [57]. The goal is for archaeologists – the conventional experts – to relinquish control of the archaeological process to community members. In doing so, these experts also honor the values and decisions of these communities in terms of how their heritage should be evaluated and treated. According to Stephen Silliman,

examples of this more inclusive process are “involving Native communities in archaeological research, working on repatriation efforts, decolonizing methodologies and interpretations, developing and using Indigenous epistemologies, protecting sacred sites, remedying historical and contemporary erasures, developing historic preservation and stewardship efforts, rethinking the sharing and production of knowledge, and confronting discipline- and society-wide equity issues” [58].

A particularly useful example of PAR in an archaeological context is Hollowell and Nicholas’ description of research that empowered the Moriori (Chatham Islands) and Hul’qumi’num (Canada) indigenous groups to recognize and manage their own heritage. In the first case, the goal was to gather data for the Moriori Cultural Database project “to preserve, revive and promote Moriori identity, culture, language, and heritage” in a way that respected elder knowledge and heritage landscapes [59]. Through this database, the goal is for the community to be empowered to control the destiny of its own heritage. The study’s authors explain that “By using an indigenous framework in which the research design, philosophy and participants all come from Moriori, the research process develops as a dialogue, a dynamic and intergenerational ‘research conversation’, that actually encourages collective memory and transfers culturally appropriate knowledge as the research unfolds” [60].

With the Hul’qumi’num community, the goal of PAR was to “assist in documenting customary laws and practices related to the protection and care of archaeological heritage ... to bring greater public awareness to their interpretations of archaeological heritage and strategically recommend reforms to Canadian heritage law” [61]. In order to show the difference between conventional expertise and civil expertise, Hollowell and Nicholas compare the Society for American Archaeology’s Principles of Archaeological Ethics against a similar statement created by the Hul’qumi’num people (Table 1). While there is a great deal of similarity, what is readily evident in the latter case is that cultural meanings and practices are represented in a way that conventional experts would have been likely to have missed.

SAA Principles of Archaeological Ethics (conventional experts)	Statement prepared by the Hul’qumi’num people through the PAR process (civil experts)
“The archaeological record, that is, in situ archaeological material and sites, archaeological collections, records and reports, is irreplaceable. It is the responsibility of all archaeologists to work for the long-term conservation and protection of the archaeological record by practicing and promoting stewardship of the archaeological record. Stewards are both caretakers of and advocates for the archaeological record for the benefit of all people; as they investigate and interpret the record, they should use the specialized knowledge they gain to promote public understanding and support for its long-term preservation.” [62]	‘Hul’qumi’num people’s archaeological heritage is integral to their distinctive cultural identity. Archaeological heritage is valued for its relation to ‘people’, rather than as ‘objects’ of material value. Archaeological sites are perceived not as abstract scientific resources, but as the “cemeteries” of family Ancestors. From a Hul’qumi’num perspective, the Living have obligations to the continuity of relations between the Living and the Ancestors. The deceased remains and belongings are believed to possess powers dangerous to the Living, thus Hul’qumi’num culture maintains strict customary laws associated with the treatment of the deceased Ancestors and their belongings.” [63]

Table 1. Comparison of the differences in meanings between conventional and civil experts.

7. A THEORETICAL MODEL FOR IMPLEMENTING PAR IN ASSESSING BUILT HERITAGE

In examining the literature on PAR, there is much focus on non-Western contexts, especially in developing countries. In these contexts, there is the potential for a large discrepancy in the worldviews of the conventional and civil experts, which necessitates the need to respect local epistemological traditions. In other contexts, however, such as North America, Europe, Australia, and parts of Latin America, there will be more potential for shared cultural meanings and a common epistemological frame. In this latter situation, the question begs as to whether or not the expert facilitator should attempt to “train” the civil expert participants in orthodox heritage methods. Examples include cultural resource surveys, archival research, and the understanding the significance of architectural history. In a similar sense, in Western contexts, should civil experts be trained in certain social science methodologies and methods, such as case studies, interviews, surveys or phenomenologies? To what extent would these interventions create an undesirable power differential between the facilitator and the civil experts? Because there is little precedent for the use of PAR in assessing built heritage, there is no clear answer to these questions.

Karen Hacker provides a possible direction, however, in relying on the community’s ability to make it own decisions as equals, together with the expert facilitator: “The acceptability of ... methods – that is, whether the community considers methods appropriate for its context – must be ... assessed. ... Thus, determining the best research methods for the project often requires a give and take between the researcher, who possesses knowledge of scientific inquiry and its design and methods, and the community members, who possess knowledge of community context and what is possible for political, historical, and practical reasons” [64]. It is therefore up to both the expert facilitator in partnership with the civil experts to make a decision in terms of what methods are appropriate and acceptable for a given heritage issue.

The expert facilitator should therefore approach the use of PAR to assess built heritage with an open mind in terms of whether or not orthodox, fabric-based and social science assessment methods should be employed by the civil experts. Where the community agrees that such methods should be used, they promise to complement local knowledge and enrich the experience and nature of the meanings that are collected. This situation will be especially true if some of the participants are, in fact “experts” in the conventional sense, which is more likely to happen in Western, developed contexts.

Regardless of the specific methods used by civil experts in the PAR process, the role of the facilitator should be to encourage the co-researchers to experience the historic environment in-person as well as recall it from memory. Methods should therefore focus on situating people in context with the environment, such as walks, photo elicitation techniques, and gathering in outdoor spaces so that the historic environment is a constant backdrop to the storytelling process.

8. CONCLUSION

Is it time for built heritage conservation to completely make the post-modern turn as most other disciplines have already done many decades ago? Or, is there something unique about how tangible heritage should be approached that demands a positivistic paradigm? Clearly, those involved in the heritage studies movement want to see the positivistic paradigm replaced with alternate paradigms that better recognize alternate truths and pluralistic meanings. On the other hand, conventional experts hold to the tradition espoused in orthodox heritage theory, rightfully pointing out that its development over nearly two centuries surely helps to validate its continued dominance in practice. Orthodox theorists and practitioners have a genuine concern that the future is one in which there is little or no value for historic fabric. Adopting a constructivist paradigm for heritage assessment has the potential to invalidate, in one fell swoop, the entire platform upon which orthodox theory stands.

Or would it? One maxim that holds true in this situation is that we need to trust most stakeholders. Perhaps the value for Ruskin's "golden stain of time" is somehow a universal human value. We lack the empirical evidence to make this claim, however, but social science research methodologies, including PAR, offer tantalizing clues that perhaps, indeed, the world would not be as bleak in terms of protection of fabric as is feared.

What PAR offers is the potential to make built heritage conservation more relevant to a wider array of people by democratizing the process for identifying and conserving the authenticity of heritage. It may, indeed, even offer the tantalizing promise to protect more historic fabric than the existing system in which conservation relies too much on extrinsic motivation (e.g., laws) than intrinsic motivation. Some early examples of this change in perspective are already happening in the United Kingdom where conventional experts are being advised to "no longer to act solely as 'heritage police' and [instead] think of themselves as 'facilitators' and 'enablers'" [65].

We may look back at the twentieth century as a failed model for heritage protection that relied too much on forcing people to do the "right thing" when, in reality, it may be the case that most people actually want to engage in the conservation of historic fabric, but choose not to do so because of socioeconomic reasons and not intrinsic ones. For Hollowell and Nicholas, the brave new world is one in which "context-specific local negotiations based on mutual respect among different standpoints are far more appropriate and effective for working through issues related to intellectual or cultural 'property' and heritage management than legal mechanisms, which, typically, require bounded and static definitions of cultural affiliation and culture as property" [66]. And, as Kim Dovey contends, "Educating communities to research and defend their places of value is easier to justify than the determination that such places are to be protected by law against development. [This process] empowers and enables people to define themselves and places as part of the general development of democratic social life" [67]. The only way to know if there is something better for heritage protection than orthodox theory enforced through legal mechanisms is to try something different, trust most stakeholders, and explore the implications of actualizing heterodox heritage theory through a methodology such as PAR.

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