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Why Do Old Places Matter?



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Making a Case for Historic Place Conservation Based on People's Values

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Imagine that you have arranged to meet an old friend that you haven't seen for many years at a downtown coffee shop. After a few minutes of catching up, she hears that you now work as a "historic preservationist" and becomes intrigued. "Why do you like old buildings?" she asks. You respond, "Because saving old buildings is environmentally responsible and gives people a sense of identity." "No," she replies, "why do you like old buildings?" You pause, and think back to when you were a child and how you felt about old places and the times you visited historic sites. You remember standing in a building from 1818 that was so intact your mind spontaneously filled with images from the past, which made your spine tingle. Feeling a bit unfocused and flustered, you blurt out, "Um, I guess I just like the way these places feel. I like being there." Your friend immediately perks up and says, "Yes, I know what you mean. I feel the same way. It's the reason why I bought my 1920s house, because it makes me imagine living in the Jazz Age, like I bought a time machine or something."

While this conversation is hypothetical, it expresses the disconnect between the way we (that is, professionals who work with old or historic buildings, places and landscapes) make an objective case for conserving historic places and the emotional way in which most people actually talk about places with cultural value. Each side tends to talk past each other, which may help to explain why most people support conserving old or historic places but don't view themselves as historic preservationists, and therefore fail to support organizations that advocate for historic place conservation. In other words, we aren't communicating effectively with most stakeholders in their own language and its familiar meanings. We are operating as if we expect most people to adopt our language, perspective and objective descriptions, which is an improbable outcome.



Studies show that people are most drawn to those urban landscapes that have mature trees, lots of vegetation, evidence of upkeep, and many layers of elements, enticing them to explore. This inviting garden is in Alexandria, Virginia.

While a large body of literature addresses the disconnect between most stakeholders and experts,¹ for brevity's sake I will reduce this information to a succinct list that describes a layperson's perspective on the historic environment (that is, historic buildings, structures, places and landscapes):^{2*}

- Heritage can be found everywhere, not just in special buildings or districts.
- Everyone is a heritage expert.
- Natural heritage and cultural heritage exist as a continuum and not as discrete entities.
- Historical significance is multidimensional and consists of cultural practices, person-place relationships, and emotional bonds with place.
- Significance lies in the present, not the past.
- Authenticity is pluralistic, not controlled by any one entity; is defined by social, cultural or personal values; and may have no direct relationship to physical fabric. Ideas can be "authentic."
- Heritage must be experienced to feel real.
- Heritage values constantly change.

It is easy to see that the ideas on this list conflict with the way professionals conserve the historic environment today, largely because the use of heritage conservation doctrine—such as the National Register of Historic Places criteria and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation—are legally mandated by

* In this article, I have specifically stayed away from using the increasingly archaic phrase "historic preservation." Rather than describe what we do using a grammatically and epistemologically challenged term, I much prefer to call it conservation of the "historic environment," which is commonly used in the United Kingdom because it describes where we do our work using language that is more congruent with human experience. This terminology also brings heritage conservation closer to natural resource conservation in terms of a common "place" of practice—the environment.

federal, state and local statutes, administrative law, and ordinances. Even if a professional wanted to apply an alternative definition of heritage in his/her work, in many cases, doing so would actually be inconsistent with their legal standards. But making arguments to the public based on conservation doctrine is almost certainly doomed to failure. So how can we make a better case for historic place conservation? The answer is to make a better effort to understand how the public values, perceives and behaves in historic environments.

UNDERSTANDING THE PERSPECTIVE OF MOST STAKEHOLDERS

It's not as if organizations that conserve the historic environment haven't tried to understand the public. The National Trust for Historic Preservation has, for many years, contracted with marketing firms to conduct surveys of the public. Other built heritage organizations have made similar efforts. Surveys are a great tool if generalization is the goal; in other words, if you want to know if a certain percentage of a population answers a question in a certain way, you obtain a random sample of that population and then, based on the results of the survey, generalize back to the larger population through a statistical inference. For instance, you could determine how many people in the United States agree with the statement "I like historic buildings" by taking a random sample of 384 people from the general US population of 316 million. If the result was that 72.2 percent of the people polled agreed with the statement, then you would know, with a 95 percent level of confidence,³ that somewhere between 67.2 percent and 77.2 percent of the general US population also agrees that they like historic buildings.

But what does this result actually tell us? We don't know if the word "historic" means the same thing to everyone. What does "like" mean in this context? What if we want to understand the degree of "liking"? Maybe some people really, really love old places while others think they're just kind of neat or maybe just OK. The strength of surveys is generalizing to a larger population, but they

are especially poor tools for understanding people because they produce exceedingly thin depths of meaning. As with any tool, surveys can be quite useful and effective in the right context, but they are a poor choice for trying to discern the reasons for people's values, perceptions and behavior.

Because exploring the sociocultural issues involved in the conservation of historic places relies on understanding people's behaviors and perceptions, depth of meaning is essential, which means that other methods ought to be considered. The validity of surveys can be dramatically improved, for instance, when paired with other methodologies. Going back to the question about historic buildings, what if we were to understand how stakeholders actually perceive what "historic" means and then write the survey questions from this perspective? Then the quantitative results could be better interpreted. These mixed-method approaches can be very powerful because they offer both generalization and understanding.⁴

An example of this mixed-method approach is a comparative case study in which I was trying to understand the nature of age value from the perspective of residents living in a "new" and an "old" area that shared extremely similar urban design characteristics. In the qualitative interviews that I did with residents, they shared the fact that the most important elements of a landscape were trees; buildings; gardens; walls, fences, or gates; the sidewalk; the road; and fountains. I then used these categories in the wording of a survey question to determine which landscape elements people favored more than others. (In other words, I wished to generalize from my sample that a certain percentage of people thought that fountains were the most important part of a landscape.) Had I undertaken the wording of this question using categories that I, rather than my informants, thought were important, I may have not been measuring anything particularly meaningful from the population I was trying to understand. In another case, I created whole categories of questions based on the meanings that came from interviews, including understanding the layering of the landscape, mystery, and a term my informants repeatedly used, "unseen effort."

The combination of legally mandated conservation doctrine and the over-reliance on surveys leaves the false impression that



People tend to prefer the historic cores of cities to suburban areas, according to some studies. Shown here: Fredericksburg, Virginia.

we actually understand how most stakeholders value the historic environment; we have, as the historian Daniel J. Boorstin warns, “the illusion of knowledge”⁵ and operate from that principle with a false sense of confidence. And the heritage conservation field is awash in many unsupported claims as to its value, especially in terms of

“squishy” statements such as “historic places have a unique sense of place,” “historic places foster community identity” and “historic places enrich our lives.” While all of these statements may indeed be true on some level, we lack sufficient evidence to understand, much less support them.

THE NEED FOR RESEARCH AND EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

There are a limited number of research studies on human/historic environment interactions and practice, but before reviewing this research, it is important to differentiate anecdotal evidence from empirical evidence and define what is meant by “research.” Anecdotal evidence is a claim, based on a small number of observations or a single case, derived from personal experience. Most claims that we make in daily life are of this nature, but can be of dubious reliability. Just because, in my personal experience, I find that people named “Joe” prefer Swiss cheese over cheddar does not mean that all people named Joe prefer Swiss cheese, yet these kinds of claims are rife in built heritage conservation practice. For instance, Standard 9 of the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards is based on the anecdotal claim that people are unable to distinguish “real” historic architecture from “fake.”

Empirical evidence, by contrast, relies on many reproducible or verifiable observations to produce data and is associated with the scientific method.⁶ As used in this article, the term “research”

means a process that produces empirical evidence by gathering data, using a rigorous research methodology, to answer a research question. The data are then interpreted to answer the question. Research methodologies include surveys, ethnographies, visual preference studies, and content analysis. These methods can be used to gather both quantitative data and also qualitative information regarding respondents' perceptions, feelings and meanings. The purpose of historic environment research is to generate evidence to substantiate, support, disprove, refute or explore a particular element of practice that affects the environment and/or to understand person-historic environment interactions and valuations.

Most articles published on the historic environment do not fall into this category of research, including examples from academic journals. Most of these articles are theoretical or descriptive in nature (such as case studies) and are not the result of gathering and interpreting data through observations to produce evidence. As a result, research that addresses the historic environment is a rather rare topic among the social sciences (such as psychology, anthropology, sociology). A plausible reason for this is that it is difficult to find funding for social science research specifically on the historic environment; in fact, I'm fairly confident that there has never been a funding source of this exact nature from any granting foundation or governmental entity. Anecdotally, I've found that most social scientists consider historic preservation/built heritage conservation to be mainly guided by aesthetic considerations (the presumed realms of art, interior design, and architecture) or only the domain of historians, and so have never considered the unique influences that historic environments have on people's behaviors and perceptions.⁷

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT PEOPLE, BEHAVIOR, VALUES AND THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT?

Most research that explores people's interactions with the historic environment is based on anthropological (ethnographic) methods, visual preference studies used in environmental psychology, or survey research. These studies broadly address aesthetics, building age preference, place attachment, sociocultural aspects of practice and place, and authenticity. Research that looks at how people

perceive the aesthetic qualities of old versus new buildings indicates that people clearly tend to favor traditional design characteristics that predate Modernism. From this work we know that people seem to prefer neotraditional architectural styles over Modernist styles⁸ and designs that feature more ornamentation (for example, shingles, cornices, decorative door and window trim), gabled roofs instead of flat, and the presence of iron balcony rails and fences.⁹ Similar studies regarding urban landscapes suggest people prefer landscapes that have mature trees (especially those with a spreading canopy), lots of vegetation, evidence of upkeep/maintenance, and many layered elements.¹⁰ This latter characteristic adds to a sense of mystery and discovery in the landscape and entices people to want to explore their environment; it tends to be present in greater abundance in older environments.

In studies that have tried to determine if people have preferences about building age, the conclusions are mixed. Some research suggests that people are actually favoring design complexity, which tends to be more common in older buildings, but that they are not necessarily concerned about the physical age of a building.¹¹ Other studies indicate that when building maintenance is equal, there is a clear preference for older buildings; otherwise, new buildings are favored.¹² In terms of places and landscape, people tend to prefer the historic cores of cities to suburban areas.¹³ My own research supports these conclusions, especially the desire for neotraditional design elements in new construction; but when given a choice, people prefer authentically old buildings provided that they have a very specific degree and quality of patina.¹⁴

In fact, I've found that the presence of patina seems to be essential not only for enabling people to determine the authentic age of a place but also for evoking an emotional attachment to historic places. For those who perceive this patina, the result is the spontaneous appearance of fantasies (or vignettes) about the past in the mind's eye; because the experience is emotional, it results in an increased attachment to historic places. This "spontaneous fantasy" is not premeditated and happens unselfconsciously. Moreover, the experienced fantasy is not necessarily related to known historical facts.¹⁵ This phenomenon might be related to the



Research has shown that when given a choice, people prefer authentic old buildings showing a degree of patina.

way owners of historic houses anthropomorphize their homes into living entities that have the ability to “think” and “feel,” as Melinda Milligan, a sociologist from Sonoma State University, has revealed.¹⁶

From a cultural perspective, we know that “heritage” has many meanings that are different, depending on the association that groups of people have with particular historic places. For instance, ethnographic case studies from Lisa Breglia, an anthropologist at George Mason University, of archeological sites in the Yucatán Peninsula in Mexico describe how a traditional Mayan culture is disassociated and dispossessed from its own cultural heritage by the dominant cultural group; while an ethnography by Setha Low, an anthropologist at the City University of New York, of traditional plazas in Latin America helps us understand how attachment to historic places happen from a cultural perspective.¹⁷ In addition, I’ve discovered that the research done to establish Main Street programs provides a rich source for understanding a community’s heritage values—values that are then applied in revitalization planning. These values can reveal much about sociocultural definitions of authenticity that drive those design decisions that experts lament create a “false sense of history.”¹⁸

A significant stream of anthropological work associated with heritage studies addresses the split between “orthodox” (associated with conservation doctrine and experts) and “heterodox” approaches (associated with most stakeholders) to heritage. Laurajane Smith, an anthropologist and heritage studies researcher at Australian National University, describes the orthodox half of

this dichotomy as the “Authorized Heritage Discourse” (AHD) 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.”¹⁹ Emma Waterton, a heritage studies researcher at the University of Western Sydney, Laurajane Smith and Gary Campbell, a heritage studies researcher at the University of York, provide the additional nuance of cultural relativism to the AHD, claiming that the “conservation values of experts might be just another set of cultural values,” further deprecating the overall importance of experts in the decision-making process of caring for heritage.²⁰

Lastly, there are a few studies that address the “realness” or historical authenticity of various aspects of the historic environment. A study by Daniel Levi, an environmental psychologist at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, stands out for its conclusion that people do actually have the ability to differentiate “fake” (that is, neotraditional) historic architecture from the real thing, which could lead to some interesting reinterpretations of Standard 9 of the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards.²¹ Authenticity is also related to experiences; the ability of visitors to historic sites to engage in “performances” of the past may increase the overall sense of historical authenticity.²² Reinforcing the relationship between patina and place attachment, Dydia DeLyser, a geographer at Louisiana State University, found that the patina of ghost towns is very much related to their perceived authenticity.²³ And finally, a study of the facades of older buildings in urban areas in Malaysia concludes that the addition of “non-standardized advertisement boards” impairs the perception of historical authenticity, which would certainly help substantiate the regulations against them found in a number of design guidelines.²⁴

I should also mention the theses of students whom I have advised or served as a reader that use social science methods to address questions related to the historic environment. The historic preservation program in which I teach at Roger Williams University is unique in that it stresses the pragmatic application of social science research methods in planning practice, giving these students opportunities to explore novel research questions that have the

potential to influence built heritage conservation practice. These students have used social science methods to research users' perceptions of the visual harmony between historic buildings and the natural environment, the ineffectiveness of aspects of Section 106 review, policies related to the abandonment of historic schools, how design professionals interpret the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, and attitudes people have toward historic preservation and new and old buildings.²⁵

HOW TO ADDRESS WHAT WE DON'T KNOW

Unfortunately, even with some of the research that has already been conducted, there is much that is unknown about the human/historic environment relationship and its sociocultural manifestations. Many questions remain unanswered, especially in terms of ways to more effectively communicate using stakeholders' own meanings. Some of the larger questions include:

- What makes a place "historic" to most stakeholders?
- How do everyday people perceive and value historic places?
- How does the historic environment affect people psychologically and physically?
- How do most stakeholders describe historic places and why they are important?
- What should/can we do with a wider range of values from stakeholders?
- Can/should community values be used in regulatory processes?
- How can conflicting values be addressed? Whose values are more important?

The obvious solution to this gap in knowledge is to conduct additional research, but academic studies alone can't change or influence historic environment practice nor help us to more effectively communicate with the public. We aren't alone in considering these kinds of problems, however, as others have already devised ways to bridge the academic/policy divide.

CONSERVATION SOCIAL SCIENCE

In the past 10 years, environmental conservation advocates have been having similar discussions about how to influence natural

resource conservation practice and policies, but have been more proactive in using the results of social science research to influence these areas. The [Social Science Working Group at the Society for Conservation Biology](#), which was created in 2003, has played a leading role in “strengthening conservation social science and its application to conservation practice.”²⁶ Largely due to the efforts of members of this group, “Conservation Social Science” (CSS) is now recognized as a field of study and increasingly used to understand the complicated relationship between humans and their natural environment. Advocacy organizations are now using CSS studies to influence policy and change people’s behavior.

The primary focus of CSS is to understand people’s behavior, attitudes and beliefs using a wide range of empirical qualitative and quantitative social science research methodologies from anthropology, economics, human geography, political science, and psychology. These studies help to open “‘policy windows’ for conservation action” in order to improve the overall effectiveness of environmental conservation strategies.²⁷ The need for CSS research is driven, in part, by the recognition that “conservation interventions are the product of human decision-making processes and require changes in human behavior to succeed,” as Michael B. Mascia, who is one of the originators of the CSS movement in the Society for Conservation Biology, observes.²⁸ Mascia’s characterization of the environmental conservation field assumes that “conservation policies and practices are inherently social phenomena,”²⁹ which means that CSS research can also be used to understand how conservation policies positively and negatively affect people. Conservation advocacy organizations can then use this information to influence how policies are made and administered in order to improve human well-being while achieving conservation goals.

As with built heritage conservation, regulations and financial incentives play an important role in environmental conservation policy. The effectiveness of these measures is limited, however, because they are not linked to how people are intrinsically motivated in their behaviors and decision-making processes. One line of CSS research focuses on how people make decisions, which can therefore help in understanding these intrinsic motivations so that “soft



An example of how conservation social science attempts to change human behavior. The poster reads, “5 Rules of hunting: right weapons; right species; right area; right time of year; and for eating” (from Nam Et-phou Louey, Laos).

GRAPHIC COURTESY OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION SOCIETY—LAO PDR, NAM ET-PHOU LOUEY NATIONAL PARK AND RARE

policy” approaches can be more effective in changing people’s behavior.³⁰

Many environmental conservation advocacy organizations create and/or utilize the results of CSS. The Nature Conservancy, the World Wildlife Fund and

Conservation International employ

social scientists in house or contract their labor and then use the resulting studies to influence policy and advocacy. Other organizations, such as Rare, focus more on using the results of existing CSS studies in the implementation of their mission rather than conducting new CSS research. The USDA National Forest Service uses CSS in its efforts to promote “place-based conservation,” with an emphasis on understanding people’s emotional connection with place.

The Nature Conservancy’s “People and Conservation” program uses a “human-rights approach to conservation [that] incorporates traditional knowledge and cultural values.” An example of applied CSS is the Nature Conservancy’s effort to help the Pumé, an indigenous group, conserve their natural and intangible heritage, which consists of the Llanos (tropical grass plains) in Venezuela and cultural relationships with this land. This work, largely led by anthropologists Eduardo Ariza and Gabriela Croes, has resulted in the designation of 1.2 million acres of land as an ecological and cultural conservation zone. What makes this effort unique is that it was a bottom-up, grassroots effort rather than the typical, government dominated top-down approach. The Nature Conservancy has also used social science methods to help create a permit banking system for fishermen in Maine and to help farmers in Georgia use less water.³¹

The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) has used CSS to understand the performance of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). An example is a study on the social impact of MPAs in the Bird's Head Seascape of Papua, Indonesia. Social indicators of MPA users that were analyzed included economic well-being, health, political empowerment, education, and culture. A key finding, which was particularly relevant to understanding how place is valued, is that the people who actively used the Bird's Head Seascape had a higher level of emotional attachment to the MPA, which was then used to inform the management of the resource.³² The WWF developed several social science research protocols for these MPA studies in order to better assess social impacts, including a key informant interview protocol, focus group instrument, and survey instrument.³³

Rare, which proclaims "conservation is about people," has a mission that "empowers local communities ... to shift from being resource users to environmental stewards."³⁴ The organization relies on the premise that "conservationists must become as skilled in social change as in science" and therefore uses CSS studies to implement its "theory of change," which comprises the following six elements:

1. **Knowledge:** Increase people's awareness of the nature around them and how their behavior affects it.
2. **Attitude:** Speak to people on an emotional level about the personal, cultural and economic benefits of protecting nature.
3. **Interpersonal communications:** Get people talking to each other about the issues. Research correlates community dialog with increased likelihood of change.
4. **Barrier removal:** Identify barriers—social, economic, political or technological—that are prohibiting the behavior change. Provide alternatives or solutions.
5. **Behavior change:** Promote sustainable alternatives or solutions to key target audiences through the Pride campaign.
6. **Threat reduction:** Measure the reduction in human-created threats to biodiversity, such as overfishing or illegal logging.

Rare's "Pride" campaign then uses this theory to "[inspire] people to take pride in the species and habitats that make their communities unique" by focusing on:

- Determining human behaviors causing threats to biodiversity, such as overfishing, illegal logging or unsustainable agriculture
- Conducting an ongoing search for innovative community-based, conservation solutions proven to change these behaviors
- Launching Pride campaigns to increase adoption of the most effective solutions in the world's highest priority areas for conservation

As of 2014, Rare has launched 205 Pride campaigns in 57 countries to reach an audience of 10 million people.³⁵

At the USDA National Forest Service, research social scientists Daniel Williams, Linda Kruger and Jennifer Farnum have been leading efforts on “place-based conservation,” in which “place meanings and place values...guide planning processes”³⁶ to change “largely top-down, expert-driven decision-making structures [into] polycentric governance emphasizing inclusiveness and collaboration.”³⁷ The goal of place-based conservation is the incorporation of local knowledge and understanding of the cultural and symbolic significance that people have for places, including how emotionally attached people are to their environments. The planning efforts for the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest is an example of a place-based planning effort that “prioritized people’s relationships to the land by determining the public’s ideas of what constitutes ‘place’ and defining management areas accordingly.”³⁸ The study’s authors concluded that the overall process resulted in better communication and the ability of the public to make more informed decisions, but resulted in increased conflicts between the differing values of experts and the public resulting in a lack of “buy-in” from all participants.

ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN AND BEHAVIOR RESEARCH

The environmental design and behavior research (EDBR) movement, which architects and psychologists began in the early 1970s, has long been using social science research methods to understand person-place interactions and shares values that are similar to CSS. Its use is most widely known through “evidence based design,” which employs social science research to influence how buildings, landscapes and places are designed, such as with hospital design

to increase efficiency and reduce patient recovery times. EDBR assumes that “designers [should] address real human needs and create designs that are socially and culturally relevant [using] research to back up what designers then propose.”³⁹ The vast majority of EDBR studies, with the exception of a few that I have discussed previously, address new construction—either buildings or landscapes—and not existing or older buildings, landscapes or places. The general principles employed in these studies, however, can be adapted to a wide variety of environments, including historic environments. EDBR principles are used by a number of place-based advocacy organizations, including Project for Public Spaces (PPS), whose mission is to create better urban design that can “[facilitate] creative patterns of activities and connections (cultural, economic, social, ecological) that define a place and support its ongoing evolution.” In addition to design and planning professionals, PPS’s staff includes experts in environmental design and environmental psychology.

The Environmental Design Research Association is a nonprofit organization dedicated to fostering EDBR, which is why I created the [Historic Environment Network](#) there in 2008. In 2011 this Network held a special symposium and created “Principles for Integrating Environmental Design and Behavior Research into Built Heritage Conservation Practice,” which is a guide for how social science research can be integrated into practice.⁴⁰ Areas of built heritage conservation practice in which EDBR principles can be applied include:

- The embodied relationship between the physical age of place and an individual’s experience and attachment.
- Multicultural and extra-Western perspectives on the conservation of the historic environment.
- An understanding of significance that incorporates stakeholders’ values.
- Informing intervention frameworks from a more holistic perspective.
- Empirically based design review standards.
- Providing better arguments for built heritage conservation based on quality of life and sense of place.

Before these areas of research can be addressed, however, it is necessary to make the following philosophical assumptions in terms of how EDBR should affect practice:

- Built heritage conservation should primarily benefit people.
- Existing legal and doctrinal frameworks make it very difficult to change built heritage conservation practice in order to focus more on people's social, cultural and experiential value of heritage.
- Built heritage conservation should focus on the conservation of the spirit of place, sense of place, and place attachment and the relationship of these concepts to authenticity.
- Social science research, as embodied by EDBR, has an important role to play in helping understand how the historic environment should be valued and conserved in order to maximize benefits to people while retaining historical authenticity.
- EDBR can help to seek a better balance between expert/objective values and the values of the stakeholders of historic environments.

One possibility for integrating CSS and EDBR approaches into the conservation of the historic environment is to create a forum to encourage increased cross-disciplinary discussions, which could be hosted by an existing organization or through some other vehicle. In my research on these topics, there seems to be very little awareness of what other disciplines are doing, especially in terms of community engagement and social science methods. In addition, no organization has ever attempted to bring the perspectives of heritage conservation, natural resource conservation, and environmental design under one roof. This is a potentially lost opportunity as heritage conservation professionals and academics interested in better understanding the values of stakeholders share many similarities with their colleagues who participate in CSS and EDBR.

CONCLUSION

The social sciences have much to offer built heritage conservation practice, especially in terms of better understanding stakeholders and measuring the overall performance of conservation. To date, historic environment practitioners have not been particularly

effective in communicating using the language of most stakeholders because we don't really understand how everyday people perceive and value the historic environment. Similarly, there have been few, if any, efforts to measure or assess the overall performance of built heritage conservation efforts.⁴¹ We therefore need to be more aware of these issues and open to potential solutions, including using existing frameworks from conservation social science and environment design and behavior research.

The goals we share with the conservation and environmental design movements are a recognition that conservation needs to have a social solution, which includes changing people's behavior, and that the physical characteristics of the environment—broadly construed as cultural and natural—affect people's behavior, perception and values. While social science research that addresses the historic environment is represented through the field of heritage studies, a challenge will be to overcome the academic/policy divide that separates this area of study from practice. It will be interesting to see, in the coming years, if built heritage conservation advocacy organizations will adopt social science research to influence their policy and advocacy efforts. The promise in this endeavor is to make built heritage conservation more relevant and meaningful to a wider array of stakeholders by focusing on reinforcing and influencing people's intrinsic behaviors. **FJ**

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VIDEO

To watch a video of "Why Do Old Places Matter?" with presenters Tom Mayes, Max Page and Jeremy Wells at the 2014 Past Forward conference in Savannah, Georgia, [click here](#).

¹ For instance, see Thomas F. King, *Our Unprotected Heritage: Whitewashing the Destruction of Our Cultural and Natural Resources* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2009); Rodney Harrison, *Heritage: Critical Approaches* (New York: Routledge, 2013); Jeremy C. Wells, "The Plurality of Truth in Culture, Context, and Heritage: A (mostly) Post-structuralist Analysis of Urban Conservation Charters," *City and Time* 3, no. 2:1 (2007): 1-13; Jeremy C. Wells, "Our History Is Not False: Perspectives from the Revitalisation Culture," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 16, no. 6 (2010): 464-485; Emma Waterton, Laurajane Smith and Gary Campbell, "The Utility of Discourse Analysis to Heritage Studies: The Burra Charter and Social Inclusion," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 12, no. 4 (2006): 339-355; John Pendlebury, *Conservation in the Age of Consensus* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009); Randall Mason, "Theoretical and Practical Arguments for Values-centered

Preservation," *CRM: The Journal of Heritage Stewardship* 3, no. 2 (2006): 21-48; Boguslaw Szmygin, "Classification of Historical Monuments," in *Values and Criteria in Heritage Conservation*, ed. Andrzej Tomaszewski (Firenze: Edizioni Polistampa, 2008); Kate Clark, "Values in Cultural Resource Management," in *Heritage Values in Contemporary Society*, eds. George S. Smith, Phyllis Mauch Messenger and Hilary A. Soderland (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2010); Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

- ² I am indebted to Lucas Lixinski for inspiring me to create a list of orthodox and heterodox approaches to heritage, upon which this particular list is based.
- ³ A 95 percent level of confidence means that 5 percent of the time your results are not actually correctly representing the population.
- ⁴ John W. Creswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2007); James Farmer and Doug Knapp, "Interpretation Programs at a Historic Preservation Site: A Mixed Methods Study of Long-term Impact," *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* 2, no. 4 (2008): 340-361; Alan Bryman, "Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Research: How Is It Done?" in *The Mixed Methods Reader*, eds. Vicki L. Plano Clark and John W. Creswell (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2008).
- ⁵ Daniel J. Boorstin, *Cleopatra's Nose: Essays on the Unexpected* (New York: Random House), 7.
- ⁶ The author readily acknowledges the postmodern turn in the break with positivism in the social sciences, but this article lacks sufficient space to explore this history in depth here.
- ⁷ Indeed, here is a research question that begs to be answered with empirical evidence!
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