Toward a co-construction of heritage, between theory and practice

Engaged, participative, shared : emerging heritagization

29-30 June 2016

In recent decades, heritage making processes have seemed to gain complexity in articulating ‘worlds’ (Becker) that have ignored themselves or benefited from unequal legitimacies in the definition of values and the constitution of the heritage corpus. In extending the categories of heritage and the global dissemination of the participatory paradigm, this conference aims to question ‘expertise’ in contemporary processes of heritage making and in the intersections between theory and practice. The multiple levels of selecting, conserving and valorising objects designated as heritage frequently incorporate diverse forms of expertise, configured as professionals, researchers, institutions or other actors in civil society (citizens, civic associations). Some initiatives, responding to multiple stakeholders, are both voluntary and compulsory (UNESCO, Faro Convention). In these cases, contemporary heritage making is designed, theorized and practiced as a co-construction involving actors expressing different types of knowledge, considered as complementary.

As we witness the rise of inequalities, an increase in population migrations, the emergence of "multicultural" societies, and the metropolization of territories, identities, sense of belonging and even the idea of nation are in question. Theories and practices of participatory heritage interrogate what makes heritage for marginalized social groups or minorities, groups that don’t share dominant, expert or elite representations and narratives. For example, participatory heritage includes sites that are not recognized as heritage quality (suburbs, urban peripheries, margins...). Above all, these approaches aim to make active, visible and involved 'invisible', 'voiceless' or 'delegitimatized' categories in heritage making. One can therefore question these processes of co-construction under the ambit of mobilization, commitment and activism. These mobilizations involve the shared and collective production of knowledge and the (re) integration of local, minority or obscured narratives in the "great narrative" of heritage. Co-constructive practices are based upon new cultural and social practices (‘alternative’ or ‘participatory’ tourism, urban strolls...) and the production of new spaces for exchange between social actors.
We aim to interrogate the methods, spaces and devices implemented to lead to heritage co-construction, that is, those which involve 'intercultural' exchanges, and a "disruption" of practices, cultural professionals or academic disciplinary traditions. Do researchers, professionals and specialists so easily agree about the integration of other discourses, skills or forms of expertise? Above all, how best can the exchanges between actors and the circulation of knowledge operate?

How should the scientific/professional/expert be repositioned within the partnerships, in interactions/negotiations/conflicts with other actors? How can authorized discourses on heritage (Smith) be challenged in participatory heritage making even when it means a loss of power, as for example in the current of the 'community archaeology', especially in the Anglo-Saxon world?

One may wonder how these theories of the co-construction of heritages and practices participate in a re-categorization of the world and how stakeholders can redefine the groups and territories involved: what kind of "imagined communities" are built through these participatory heritage-ization? What kind of reterritorializations of heritage can or should be imagined?

How do participatory heritage projects contribute to produce spatial categorizations ("inhabitants", "immigrants", "suburbs"...) yet also risk stigmatization and rejection? Do these participatory processes contribute to hide or on the contrary to re-inscribe certain inequalities or power relations? When and how do they enlighten irreconcilable or incompatible visions?

To question and contextualize the theories and practices of heritage co-construction is to reflect on the territorial, social and political stakes of the heritage-ization process: What do these processes reveal about the aspirations of stakeholders to justice, democracy, rights, integration, and a desire for recognition; what about their capacities for resistance and action, for fighting against inequalities; and how do these processes promote values of sharing and solidarity? At the same time, what do they tell us about the divisions, injustices, inequalities and spatial fragmentation that characterize our contemporary societies? Do they lead to a de-politicization of heritage issues or its re-politicization?

The variety of 'participatory cultures', the multiplicity of academic disciplinary traditions and the many definitions of « heritage », not to mention the complexity of contemporary identity constructions (national, local, personal...), all generate a wide variety of practices in Europe and within the world. This conference proposes to consider these issues in a comparative approach involving researchers and practitioners from different national contexts.

We welcome contributions integrating the following topics

- Established forms, norms, criteria, conventions and deviances in heritage making processes and/or elite heritage narratives
- Experts, professionals, scientists in heritage studies – stakeholders, intermediaries – « imagined communities » / minorities – multipartnership heritage-ization / democratic governance in heritage making – shared heritage
• Decolonization of disciplines/knowledge/practices in heritage making - From Community/public archaeology, public/engaged anthropology, public history to community heritage
• Engagement, activism, mobilisation and heritage-ization – heritage and legitimacy/recognition/integration – Heritage and power relations / subalterns - heritage justice/ rights to heritage
• Uses, misuses, counter-uses of the past in competition- conflicts of knowledge/memories/values – occultation/ incompatibilities/irreconcilability /divergences of interests in participatory heritage-ization
• Stakes and costs of co-construction/participation – sustainability/ development
• Devices, tools and practices of co-construction : participatory inventories /urban strolls / alternative tourism – networking- circulation and sharing of knowledge - enrichment/depletion of knowledge
• Heritage/ ordinary city / everyday life’s territories – participatory heritage and peripheries/ margins / surburbia spaces / re-categorization of spaces through participatory heritage-ization
• Critical approaches of participation — injunction/ideology of heritage co-construction

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Abstracts and contributions should be in English

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Acceptance of abstracts : 5 May, 2016

Date and conference venue :  29-30 June 2016 - University of Cergy-Pontoise, MIR

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