Australian National University

The tautology of 'Intangible values'

Laurajane Smith & Gary Campbell
Centre for Heritage and Museum Studies
Australian National University (15 May 2015)

Intangible

- “unable to be touched; not having physical presence”
- “difficult or impossible to define or understand; vague and abstract”
- “(Of an asset or benefit) not constituting or represented by a physical object and of a value not precisely measurable”

Value

- The regard that something is held to deserve; the importance, worth, or usefulness of something.

Tangible

- ‘perceptible by touch’

Intangible Value – a short history and meaning

Intangible cultural values embodied in tangible heritage sites were increasingly recognized as an integral component of world heritage values. During my chairmanship [sic] of the World Heritage Committee, I had endeavoured to broaden the scope of ‘heritage’ to include intangible cultural values, be they spiritual or social, but there is an intrinsic limitation to the World Heritage Convention, which does not deal with intangible heritage as such. In practice, however, all tangible heritage embodies intangible components such as spiritual values, symbols, meanings, knowledge, or the know-how of craftsmanship [sic] and construction.

(Matsura 2004: 4-5)

Burra Charter

‘Cultural significance is embodied in the place itself, its fabric, setting…’

(Article 1.2)

‘Tangible Values’

When it comes to the church I think the mere ‘stoniness’, age and the relative anomaly and beauty of the building make it self-evident for everyone that this is a treasure to be cherished…[it] *constitute[s] something tangible, durable, an essential heritage.*

(Solli 2011: 47, my emphasis)

Intangible Values

- Maintains the status-quo in terms of:
  - heritage definitions
  - Hierarchy of values

Table summarises interviewee responses to the question 'What is heritage?' It shows the dominance of non-material values (shown in red).

	Australia %	USA %	UK %
Don't know	4	1	0
History/the past	29	16	21
Background/identity	33	35	12
Intangible references	5	4	20
family	7	33	1
Material things (AHD)	9	1	12
Act of preservation	7	1.2	29
Nationalism/patriotism	3	3	0
Critical of idea/term	0.2	0.4	2
What Indigenous or other people have	1	0.1	0
Emotional response	0.3	0.7	0
Nominates Origin myth	0.8	0.3	0
Ethnic identity	0.3	5	0
My religion	0	0.2	0
Royalty/aristocracy	0	0	1
education	0.7	0.4	1
Total	**911**	**1008**	**713**