

Cultural Heritage Management

Assignment 9

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1. Can Different Stakeholders Assign Different Values to the Same Heritage Attribute?

Yes, different stakeholders frequently assign conflicting values to the same heritage attribute, a concept known as ‘dissonant heritage’ (Smith, 2006). A heritage site is not a static relic but a ‘discourse’ whose meaning is constructed by different groups based on their needs, beliefs, and power (Smith, 2006). For instance, an ancient temple holds spiritual value for devotees, aesthetic value for artists, economic value as a tourism asset for the government, and identity value for local communities.

A practical example is the management of Paro Taktsang in Bhutan. The monastery’s dramatic cliffside setting is a shared attribute. For Buddhist pilgrims, it represents the sacred geography where Guru Rinpoche meditated (Ardussi, 2023). However, for the Bhutanese government, this same attribute is a ‘cultural icon’ driving tourism revenue (Department of Culture, 2022). The conflict becomes tangible when managing development, such as relocating handicraft vendors from the base camp to preserve the site’s ‘spiritual atmosphere’—a move that prioritizes religious and aesthetic values over the economic value held by local sellers (Wangchuk, 2024).

The implications for heritage management are profound. Ignoring diverse values can lead to stakeholder resistance and failure of conservation efforts. Therefore, managers must move beyond ‘Authorized Heritage Discourse’ (AHD)—which privileges experts—and adopt a ‘living heritage approach’ (Smith, 2006). This involves multi-stakeholder dialogues to negotiate trade-offs, ensuring that heritage management balances conservation with socio-economic needs.

2. Attribute Analysis: Paro Taktsang (Tiger’s Nest), Bhutan

Attribute	Heritage Value Conveyed	Significance Level	Potential Impacts from Development	Possible Mitigation Measures
The Sacred Cave (Pel Phuk)	Spiritual (8th-century meditation site of Guru Rinpoche) (Ardussi, 2023)	Exceptional (National pilgrimage nucleus)	Vibration damage from helicopter overflights or increased footfall	Enforce strict flight path bans; regulate daily visitor numbers to reduce physical stress on rock structure
Cliffside Architecture	Aesthetic & Technical (17th-century monastery built on a granite ledge) (Centre for Bhutan & GNH Studies, 2015)	Outstanding (Internationally recognized icon)	Visual intrusion from new commercial builds at the base camp	Enforce strict buffer zone planning controls prohibiting tall structures that impede the view
Ancient Murals	Artistic & Historical (17th-century artworks by Drakpa Gyatso) (Department of Culture, 2022)	Exceptional (Vulnerable post-1998 fire)	Micro-climate changes from increased body heat/humidity of visitors	Install climate control systems and replicas for viewing; restrict direct access to originals

Attribute	Heritage Value Conveyed	Significance Level	Potential Impacts from Development	Possible Mitigation Measures
The Tshechu Festival	Social & Intangible (Annual religious mask dances honoring Padmasambhava) (Centre for Bhutan & GNH Studies, 2015)	High (Community cohesion)	Commodification or loss of ritual meaning due to mass tourism	Implement community-led management; restrict tourist photography during sacred moments
Meditation Forest	Environmental (Sacred natural landscape) (Wangchuk, 2024)	Moderate (Ritual approach route)	Trail erosion and waste management issues	Use entry fee revenue for a 'green fee' funding trail maintenance and porter training

References

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