

DOCUMENTATION AND MONITORING OF INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE A 21ST CENTURY APPROACH

Emma Jane Robinson

Institute of Education, University of London, 20 Bedford Way, LONDON WC1H 0AL, UK
(emma.ejrobinson@btinternet.com)

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ABSTRACT:

Domains in which intangible and tangible cultural heritage are manifested are explored and a rational practical place-based descriptive model is devised - drawing on desk research and field studies. The model is rehearsed and its versatility and robustness validated in practical studies. The model's design draws on the notion that places* are palimpsests, where vestiges of earlier uses of the land remain written on the face of the landscape and are also recorded in documents – manuscript and print. A scaled score card approach is adopted to record and assess the strength of the presence of selected illustrative characteristics which define the identity of places. It is considered that the model has potential for contributing an innovative approach for documentation and monitoring of intangible and tangible cultural heritage – and should also contribute new more empiric understandings of the phenomenon of *place*.

*Definition of place followed: A site, area, land, landscape, building or other work, group of buildings or other works, and may include components, contents, spaces and views (ICOMOS, website accessed April 2007 – citing revised Burra Charter, 1999).

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Origins and Aims

The idea for this approach to modelling emerged from my long standing interest in understanding how places function as a repository of knowledge of, and witness to, people's relationship with them over time. Methodological development is informed by my academic and professional background in library, archive and information management, and in cultural and natural heritage research. I argue that by applying principles of classification it should be possible to devise a practical descriptive approach to explore and analyse the broad domains in which intangible and tangible cultural heritage are manifested and to outline a rational practical place-based descriptive model. Potential applications identified include:

- heritage designation and monitoring
- heritage and environmental assessment
- formal and informal education.

1.2 Overview

The entry point for the research design is the observation that places are palimpsest. An early proponent of this approach was Hoskins who demonstrated that the English landscape is a palimpsest upon which the history of England is visibly engraved and that to fully appreciate the landscape it is necessary to go back to its history (Hoskins 1979 - first published 1955). But as Hawkes observed in her influential biography of Britain - past, present, nature, man and art appear all in one piece and places are as much affected by the creations of poets and painters as by the physical landscape (Hawkes, 1951).

A central challenge in this endeavour is that by its nature the essence of place is elusive and does not lend itself easily to analysis or conform to tight taxonomic classification

hierarchies. This is perhaps because "it lies in the largely unselfconscious intentionality that defines places as profound centres of human existence" (Relph, 1976, 43). I argue that the same challenges faced those who attempted to classify knowledge and form broad divisions to facilitate this.

The literature reflects a growing interest in notions of place from the mid-20th century - from many perspectives and with diverse purposes. In his influential study Relph effectively summarised what was known about place in the mid-1970s. Observing that place and sense of place do not lend themselves easily to empirical analysis "for they are inextricably bound up with all the hopes, frustrations, and confusions of life, and possibly because of this social scientists have avoided these topics" (Relph, 1976, preface). Relph considers the identity of places and identifies major reasons for attempting to explore the phenomenon of place. He concludes that the "real difficulty lies ... not in the justification of the study of place, but in the development of adequate concepts and approaches for this" (*Ibid*, 44). From this time a number of catalysts are identified which are stimulating interest in taking more analytical approaches to the study of place including:

- Rise of interest in global heritage matters generally, which brought with it an ever increasing workload for those who built up experience in the field of heritage designation and monitoring.
- Increasing awareness of heritage and environmental issues, reflected in the development of tools for the identification, protection and management of places with heritage or environmental value; for example, Landscape Character Assessment and Historic Landscape Characterisation (Bishop and Phillips, 2004).
- Growing recognition of the importance of raising people's awareness of their cultural heritage and identity – and, thus, of the characteristics which give the places where they live, or have their roots, their distinctiveness, identity and authenticity.

The approach taken in this study is based on the conceptual exploration of the complex and extensive literature pertaining to place in English from the mid-20th century - with a view to identifying and analysing how intangible and tangible cultural heritage are manifested. Much cited works which proved informative in developing this approach not otherwise cited below include: Baker & Billinge, 2004, Barrell, 1972; Bender & Winder, 2001; Daniels & Cosgrove, 1988; Eco *et al*, 1992; Foucault, 1972; Hines, 2004; Ingold 2000; Lowenthal, 1985; Meinig, 1979; Rodaway, 1994; Rowley, 2006; Tilley, 1994; Tuan, 1980; Ucko & Layton, 1999; Wright, 1985.

1.2 Heritage Charters

That the identification of domains in which intangible cultural heritage manifests itself is challenging is also witnessed by the lengthy quest led by UNESCO to gain better understandings of the function and values of cultural expressions and practices, and of monuments and sites. This led to the adoption by the General Conference of UNESCO of *The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* in 2003. In doing so the view was expressed that the Convention has the potential to develop into a counterpart of UNESCO's 1972 *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* "... which mainly deals with elements of the world's tangible man-made ("cultural") and / or natural heritage of outstanding universal value" (UNESCO website, accessed April 2007). The Convention put forward a description of intangible cultural heritage to which was added "... an explicitly non-exhaustive list of domains in which the Intangible Cultural Heritage manifests itself" (*ibid*).

2.0 METHODOLOGY

2.1 The 'Dwelling Theme Model' Described

This builds on my earlier tentative explorations of sense of place and place identity (Robinson, 2005 & 2006). Theoretically, the design draws on phenomenological traditions.

The idea of places as palimpsests is explored through conceptual analysis of much cited published works from the mid-20th century in English pertaining to experiential perspectives of people *dwelling* in the world – since people develop, maintain and transmit cultural identity. Concepts frequently applied in the titles, chapter headings and references of these works are mapped. Significantly, such concepts are relatively small in number.

Clusters of concepts are identified which most strongly reflect facets of people's place-based experiences. These are designated *dwelling themes* and form the organising framework (or main classification divisions) for the model. Nine *dwelling themes* are selected, since it is believed that they best reflect facets of people's place-based experiences (*see* Table 1 below). Characteristics are selected under each *dwelling theme* to best illustrate its inherent nature. Thirty two such characteristics are initially selected. All places to be analysed are first described in narrative following the *dwelling theme* framework – this is seen as being central to the analytical approach.

2.2 Rehearsing the Model on Salisbury Plain

The model was rehearsed on Salisbury Plain. This well defined landscape area lies in the south of the English County of Wiltshire and represents the hub of the great chalk framework

of Southern England – this also formed the skeleton of an important ancient communication network. To many it is best known as the place on maps where Stonehenge is – a World Heritage Site associated with the cultural identity of the English people. The Plain is selected as a symbolic cultural and natural landscape of outstanding international importance from prehistoric times to the present. Its identity draws strongly on its intangible and tangible cultural inheritances.

2.3 Validating the Model

The model's versatility and robustness was validated in Iceland - a remote volcanic island lying in the North Atlantic Ocean almost entirely south of the Arctic Circle. It is selected since the time depth of settlement is known (substantially from the 9th century AD) and because the cultural identity of the people draws heavily on their intangible cultural inheritances. The presence of the cultural and natural landscape of Thingvellir – a World Heritage Site - and the site of the Althing (the oldest parliament in Europe) is associated with the cultural identity of the Icelandic people. The versatility of the model was further explored in two other well defined landscape areas - whose identity is derived from their own unique mixes of intangible and tangible cultural inheritances (Robinson, 2006).

Dwelling Themes	Illustrative Characteristics
1. Landscape	1) Evidence of Peoples' Influence on Landscape
	2) Natural Landscape Flora / Fauna – Current Richness
2. Settlement	3) Settlement – Current Population Density
	4) Evidence of Time-Depth of Significant Settlement / Cultural Use
	5) Monuments – Presence
3. Regional / Local Distinctiveness	6) Population – Evidence of Continuous Successful Settlement Over Time
	7) Language / Dialect +
	8) Architectural Distinctiveness
	9) Folklore / Customs / Traditions / Legends / Myths +
	10) Food and Drink – Local Specialities +
	11) Traditional Crafts and Craftsmanship +
4. Intellectual / Creative Expression	12) Literacy of Population by the mid-19 th Century +
	13) Culture of Intellectual Expression Present Before World War I (1914--1918) +
	14) Informed / Learned Society Present by the late-19 th Century +
	15) Place as a Source of Wider Creative Imagination +
5. Communications / Transport Infrastructure	16) Evidence of Time-Depth of Significant Physical Communication Infrastructure
	17) Proximity to Main Routes of

	Communication – from the mid-19 th Century
	18) Access to Railway Network – from the mid-19 th Century
6. Economic / Political Influences	19) Economic Dependence on Travel / Tourism before World War I
	20) Economic Dependence on Travel / Tourism /Heritage and Leisure Industries in the 21 st Century
	21) Politics – Material Evidence of Historic Power Contestation
	22) Politics – Material Evidence of Dominant Historical Power Nexus
7. Religious Beliefs	23) Dominant Spiritual Observances – by the late19 th Century +
	24) Sacred Places / Landscapes (Historic and Contemporary) 21 st Century+
8. Perceptions of Places – Current	25) Atmosphere / Ambience Prevailing+
	26) Visual / Sensory Impact Prevailing +
	27) Perceived Time-Depth +
9. Visitor Destination (Travel / Tourism / Heritage / Leisure)	28) Importance of Place as 21 st Century Visitor Destination
	29) Interpretative Facilities Present
	30) Outdoor Pursuits / Sports and Games as Significant Feature of Place - 21 st Century
	31) Leisure and Cultural Facilities / Activities – 21 st Century
	32) Time-Depth of Place as Visitor Destination

Note: Illustrative characteristics most strongly associated with intangible cultural inheritance are indicated thus ‘+’,

Table 1 - The ‘Dwelling Theme’ Model Described

2.3 Data Collection, Analysis and Results

To develop a practical descriptive model a ranking scale is applied to assess the strength of presence of each illustrative characteristic. In practical use the assessor looks at a selected characteristic, consults the guidance notes for direction of thoughts to promote consistency of application (compiled whilst rehearsing the model in practical application) and applies the ranking scale. A seven point ranking scale is selected since it is found to be wide enough to distinguish effectively place from place.

In Table 2 the histograms for Salisbury Plain and Iceland are plotted and compared generically. For the purposes of this short paper I consider that this best demonstrates the potential of the model – although their capitals and representative samples of their towns, villages and heritage sites were also explored and compared to validate the methodology.

Two approaches are then selected in this paper for analysis of the score card data. In Table 3 the data is analysed by *dwelling theme* and in Table 4 by intangible and tangible characteristics and visitor destination characteristics. Visitor destination data is analysed separately since in rehearsing the model the scores achieved for places as visitor destinations were often found to correlate more strongly with economic and political drivers than with their innate heritage significance.

The analytic approach adopted for the data is to calculate the percentage achieved of the maximum score achievable. The percentages are then banded. Inspection of the percentages arising from analyses undertaken when rehearsing and validating the model suggested that the following banding is rational and can effectively distinguish place from place – although additional bands could be added if required by the application.

- Band 1 – 80% plus
- Band 2 – 70% plus to 80%
- Band 3 - 60% plus to 70%
- Band 4 – 50% plus to 60%
- Band 5 – Less than 50%

In Tables 3 and 4 below the **B** followed by a number in a table box stands for the **Band** into which the percentage falls as outlined above.

Dwelling Themes	Salisbury Plain	Iceland
1 T1	XXXXXXXX	XXX
2	XXXXXX	XXXXX
3 T2	XXXXXX	XXX
4	XXXXXXXX	XXXXX
5	XXXXXXXX	XXXX
6	XXXXXXXX	XXXXX
7 T3	OOOO	OOOOOO O
8	XXXXXX	XXXX
9	OOOOOO	OOOOOO O
10	OOOOO	OOOOOO O
11	OOOOO	OOOOOO
12 T4	OOOOO	OOOOOO O
13	OOOOOO	OOOOO
14	OOOOOO	OOOOO
15	OOOOOO O	OOOOOO O
16 T5	XXXXXXXX	XX
17	XXXXXXXX	XX
18	XXXXXX	X
19 T6	XXXXXXXX	XXX
20	XXXXXX	XXXXX
21	XXXXXXXX	XXXXXX
22	XXXXXX	XXXXXX
23 T7	OOOOOO	OOOOOO O
24	OOOOOO	OOOOOO O
25 T8	OOOOOO O	OOOOOO O
26	OOOOOO	OOOOOO

	O	O
27	OOOOOO	OOOOOO
	O	
28 T9	XXXXXXXX	XXXXXX
29	XXXXXX	XXXXXX
30	XXXXXX	XXXXXX
31	XXXXXX	XXXXXX
32	XXXXXXXX	XXX

Note: Illustrative characteristics strongly associated with intangible characteristics are indicated 'O',

Table 2 – Histograms Compared

Observations - Salisbury Plain and Iceland's histograms demonstrate distinctive generic shapes - which reflect their identity and distinctiveness. Iceland's identity is observed to draw more strongly on its intangible cultural inheritances. Salisbury Plain scores particularly highly for its communications / transport infrastructure (T5) – reflecting its fine strategic location at the hub of an ancient communications network.

Dwelling Theme	Salisbury Plain	Iceland
T1 Landscape	13 / 14 92.6% B1	8 / 14 57.1% B4
T2 Settlement	26 / 28 92.9% B1	17 / 28 60.7% B3
T3 Regional / Local Distinctiveness	26 / 35 74.3% B2	31 / 35 88.6% B1
T4 Intellectual / Creative Expression	24 / 28 85.7% B1	24 / 28 85.7% B1
T5 Communications / Transport Infrastructure	20 / 21 95.2% B1	5 / 21 23.8% B5
T6 Economic / Political Influences	26 / 28 92.9% B1	20 / 28 71.4% B2
T7 Religious Beliefs	12 / 14 85.7% B1	14 / 14 100% B1
T8 Perceptions of Places - Current	21 / 21 100% B1	20 / 21 95.2% B1
T9 Visitor Destination	31 / 35 88.6% B1	25 / 35 71.4% B2
Total	199/224	164 / 224
% of Maximum Score Achieved	88.8%	73.2%
Overall Band	B1	B2

Table 3 – Histogram Data Compared by Dwelling Themes

Observations - Salisbury Plain scores very strongly overall – scoring over 90% for five dwelling themes:

- Landscape (T1)
- Settlement (T2)
- Communications / Transport Infrastructure (T5)
- Economic / Political Influences (T6)

- Perceptions of Places (T8)

Although Iceland does not score as strongly overall, it achieves Band One for four dwelling themes – with T7 and T8 scoring over 90%

- Regional / Local Distinctiveness (T3)
- Intellectual / Creative Expression (T4)
- Religious Beliefs (T7)
- Perceptions of Places (Current) (T8)

These observations give some support for the view that in analysing two such well defined and distinctive landscape areas there may be some benefit in adding a **Band 1*** to indicate the outstandingly strong presence of particular dwelling themes.

Intangible, Tangible and Visitor Destination Characteristics Compared	Salisbury Plain	Iceland
Total Dwelling Themes % of Maximum Score Achieved	199 / 224 89.3% B1	164 / 224 73.2% B2
Predominately Intangible Characteristics - % of Maximum Score Achieved	77 / 91 84.6% B1	85 / 91 93.4% B1
Predominantly Tangible Characteristics - % of Maximum Score Achieved	93 / 98 94.9% B1	54 / 98 55.1% B4
Visitor Destination Characteristics % of Maximum Score Achieved	29 / 35 82.9% B1	25 / 35 71.4% B2

Table 4 – Illustrative Characteristics Profiled by Intangible, Tangible and Visitor Destination Characteristics

Observations - The purpose of this table is to condense the data to reveal the proportions of the total achieved which are attributable to predominantly intangible, tangible or visitor destination characteristics. This data could be presented in a number of formats; for example, as a stacked bar chart. Condensing the data in this way demonstrates, for example, that Iceland's identity draws particularly strongly on its intangible cultural inheritances. By condensing the data in this way I argue that it summarises very clearly the generic attributes of each place which give rise to their place identity. I consider that this approach represents a potentially powerful tool for heritage management and conservation and environmental assessment professionals - and for place-based study generally.

3.0 CONCLUSIONS

3.1 Assessment of Research Value

Central to the design of this model is the conceptual exploration of the complex and extensive literature pertaining to *place* from the mid-20th century in English – when a rise of interest in *place* is first observed - with a view to analysing how the identity of places is manifested. The research findings provide support for the observation that although the experiential nature of place does not lend itself easily to scientific analysis that the “real difficulty lies ... not in the justification of the study of place, but in the development of adequate concepts and approaches for this” (Relph, 1976, 44).

The notion of places as palimpsest proved a helpful metaphor for exploring the experiential perspectives of people *dwelling* in the world – since people develop, maintain and transmit cultural identity. By applying principles of classification used in knowledge management to the conceptual data - and ordering concept clusters into *dwelling themes* - a conceptual framework was contributed to facilitate subsequent analysis. An advantage identified for the approaches selected is that they are hospitable to the addition of fewer or more illustrative characteristics to suit the requirements of particular applications.

Since first outlining the idea for this empiric approach to modelling the illustrative characteristics of places (Robinson, 2006) it is pleasing to have received much helpful feedback from presenting and discussing my research formally and informally in university and heritage fora.

To summarise I consider that the potential value of the research lies substantially in:

- 1) Contributing a conceptual framework and approach to explore the essential experiential nature of place - or how and why places are meaningful to people - and in doing so to gain further understandings as to how place-based phenomena are manifested.
- 2) Contributing a robust, versatile and practical analytic approach for modelling the intangible and tangible illustrative characteristics of places and their significance as visitor destinations - for which potential applications are identified.
- 3) Contributing new understandings as to how intangible and tangible characteristics of places are manifested generically and with particular reference to Salisbury Plain and Iceland.
- 4) Demonstrating empirically how the importance of *places* as 21st century visitor destinations does not necessarily correlate with their heritage significance – but rather with economic and political agendas.

In conclusion, I consider that the model has potential for contributing a new documentation and monitoring tool for exploring how cultural heritage is experienced and manifested - further, the approach may also contribute new advances to empiric understandings of the phenomenon of place.

3.2 Recommendations for Further Research

The literature charts a rising interest in heritage characterisation from the late 20th century and further stimulated by the adoption of *The Convention for the Protection of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (which entered into force in 2006). It is generally acknowledged, however, that much further work remains to be done in identifying ways in which intangible cultural heritage, in particular, is manifested.

I consider that the approach and descriptive model outlined in this paper represents a potentially useful tool for such purposes. By design it is also hospitable to the addition of further illustrative characteristic for discrete applications. Indeed, I argue that use of the model by others could help to refine it further. Any application, however, will pose its own specific challenges; for example, exploring the heritage characteristics of the homelands of indigenous peoples.

In the course of rehearsing and validating the approach described in this paper other potential intangible and tangible illustrative characteristics were indeed identified. Although not

included in the initial model I consider that they may have potential in other applications, such as the one described above.

A number of additional analytical approaches to the ranked score card data were also explored – with the intention of further validating the theory using the data and, thus, illuminating the performance of the model. These include: factor analysis, latent class analysis and similarity matrices. The initial results of preliminary investigations proved encouraging; but I have not yet had time to pursue these approaches further.

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