

Putting the making in place-making: the role of traditional crafts skills and community-led conservation in the re-framing of historic environment services

Alexander Langlands

Abstract

As Europe confronts a polycrisis of transitioning energy supplies, food sovereignty, climate change, and threats to national securities, it would be easy to lose sight of heritage as an essential component within the cultural fabric of communities. Yet as both a tangible and intangible process heritage is indispensable in offering a forward-looking resilient future for communities at the local level. This paper explores the case of Wales in light of cuts to government funding for heritage and historic environment services. It examines what changing definitions of heritage mean for how it is delivered and interrogates how notions of ‘community’ can be critiqued to extract workable co-production solutions for the sustainable conservation of built heritage assets. The case is made for a re-framing of state-led heritage delivery to better address the ambitions of the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 with practical, participatory craft ‘hands-on’ heritage as a key element.

Keywords: heritage, resilience, communities, placemaking, Wales, participatory, co-production

Introduction

This study presents a view of the heritage sector in Wales with a focus on how the physical heritage landscape and its assets can be sustained through greater community engagement. Whilst its review of the economic and political context is primarily relative to Wales, the overview of an attitude shift towards how heritage is framed is applicable more widely, especially to smaller nations or regions of Europe and elsewhere who in the twentieth century have sought

to forge a sense of cohesive identity out of the shadow of exogenous political dominance in the nineteenth century. Globally, heritage assets form a vital component in how identity is constructed and as such their maintenance and relevance to communities remains an ongoing commitment for governmental structures at all levels. This paper ends by drawing attention to a case study from Craig Gwladus Country Park in the Vale of Neath, South Wales. This will highlight how vernacular traditional crafts, delivered through co-created programmes on heritage assets, can make a valuable contribution in lessons that can be shared across the place-making ambitions and development of community resilience in Europe and beyond.

With a population of just over 3.1m, Wales is a relatively small country, currently experiencing the lowest level of GDP growth across the United Kingdom (ONS 2023), and with many areas experiencing high levels of deep-rooted deprivation (StatsWales 2019). The closure of heavy industry has cast a long shadow over its communities and unemployment remains high (Fothergill 2008) amongst a people with a strong culture of both skilled and unskilled manual work. For a while, as Wales sought to wrestle an identity out of its imbalanced relationship with England, a methodological nationalism drove the agenda in its heritage provision with a recent emphasis placed on the role of its rich industrial heritage (Mason 2004, 2007; Dicks 2019).

This study focusses on heritage assets of industrial character because these, in the wake of a decline in industry, provide tangible connections to the past in areas that usually go on to experience high levels of deprivation. The study should therefore be set against a wider European tradition that has seen the 'national' eclipsed as the sole identity carrier by heritage discourses predicated on scales of memory at local and communal levels (McDowell 2016: 40). This shift is impacting how and where investments are being made in an environment where strategies of Adaptive Heritage Reuse (AHR) can offer opportunities in the post-pandemic world for building resilience, particularly through the mobilisation of participatory, self-organised and self-managed community action (Fava 2024). What emerges, in Wales at least, are opportunities to deliver directly on new innovative policy goals concerning the wellbeing and resilience of the future nation, whilst at the same time offering a framework for stabilising, conserving and celebrating its rich landscape of physical heritage assets.

Polycrisis, problems and policy

A recent study of public spending on culture across the European Union found that during the period 2007 to 2015 funding fell by just under 5%. Broadly seen as a response to the financial crisis of 2008, this figure masks disparities that reflect the emergence of a 'two-speed' Europe in terms of the

public promotion of culture, one where central and northern states have witnessed marginal rises in spending commitments whilst southern states have experienced cuts of around 30% (Almeda, Sagarra and Tataret 2024). The United Kingdom very much falls into the latter category with reductions in English local authority budgets resulting in cuts to libraries, culture, heritage and tourism of 30-34% since before 2010 (County Council Network 2024). Similar cuts across the arts, culture and heritage sector in Wales led to one of the most extreme reductions in funding in December 2023 which, despite revision upwards, continue to place national collections and statutory heritage services at risk (Welsh Parliament 2024). In Wales, the £3m cut to grant aid for the National Museum service questioned the viability of operating seven sites and the 10.5% cut to Historic Environment services (Cadw and Royal Commission On Ancient and Historic Monuments (RCHMW)) was seen not only to impact the viability of delivering statutory duties but to undermine the sustainability of small heritage organisations (Edwards 2024; Kendell Adams 2024). Historic Environment services consisting of the management, monitoring and maintenance of monuments, buildings or landscapes are delivered through four Welsh Archaeological Trusts (WATs) recently amalgamated in a bid to deliver the kinds of economies of scale identified in a 2016 Heritage Services Review (PWC 2016; Heneb 2024). For some time now, the heritage sector in Wales has been under scrutiny, with better integration, possible mergers, and a streamlining of its services an ongoing subject of discussion (Clark 2017: 12).

This scaling down of publicly funded support for heritage services and assets comes at a time when studies are beginning to highlight the positive outcomes they can have not just in terms of health, wellbeing and identity, but in their 'pull' factor and wealth generation through the net in-migration of businesses (Graves et al. 2016: 35; Heritage Alliance 2020; Historic England 2023). The danger is that through cuts to services both the heritage assets and the benefits they could be bringing to communities are placed in jeopardy. This 'double whammy' is especially germane in post-industrial regions, where higher levels of deprivation are most likely to be experienced (The Local Trust 2019). Here, the monuments of past industry are complex and costly to maintain with the resultant impact that communities are further denied the opportunity to employ them in narratives of belonging and civic pride. In areas where the market has failed to recognise the value of heritage there is, therefore, a requirement to give everywhere a fair chance to enjoy benefit (House of Commons 2022).

A crisis in the definition of 'heritage', long identified in the critical literature and reviewed here in brief, probably reflects the present situation

in government organisations across Europe where the broadest definition sits across numerous departments and agencies (Waterton, Watson 2011; Smith, Waterton 2013a). In Wales, understanding quite where ‘community’ and ‘archaeology’ sit in relation to theoretical, practical, and cultural frameworks of understanding is a long-standing issue (Belford, Foreman 2021). A broader emphasis on process-not-product in the critical literature has appropriately shifted the dial away from the dispassionate ‘management’ of heritage assets towards valuations based on experience, emotion, and the dynamics of engagement and performance. In the UK, some of these ideas are beginning to pervade through place-based and place-making agendas in structural fund provisions for local government as well as in research funding. These agendas in Wales acknowledge that it is people *and* buildings *and* policy and the interaction between all three that makes place (*Design Commission for Wales* 2020a; Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities 2024; Cadw).

There is also a need to move beyond ‘representation’ in how heritage sites are conveyed because as time passes, meanings change (Jaramillo, Tomann 2021). Wales has emerged as a nation with its own complex internal divisions in a process of making and re-making and, as such, its industrial heritage must move with the times (Johnes 2015; Belford 2018: 113; Dicks 2019: 72–74). The manikin, the parody, and the pastiche of our industrial past is beginning to wain in its impact as new generations seek to address new questions about their history. No longer can we offer over-simplistic visions of an unproblematic past underpinned by ‘prior acts of imagining’ (Dicks 1999).

To the financial constraints and the critical undermining of traditional heritage management practices comes a further issue in the form of changing climate and the recent thinking on ‘adaptive release’: of letting go and learning to forget (Climate Change Subgroup 2020; DeSilvey et al. 2021). In Wales, the Wellbeing of future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (WFG) brings all of this into sharp focus – especially regarding planning and place-making policy (Future Generations Commissioner for Wales 2021). As the primary legislation of Wales, all decisions relating to the historic environment must align with its seven wellbeing goals. However, this does not make decisions any easier. In a lesson of global applicability, we cannot allow the historic assets that tell the story of our contested pasts to go to wrack and ruin, but neither can we enter into renovations and enhancements that commit future generations to high maintenance costs without clear pathways for succession management in both government and third-sector organisations.

Critical contexts

Heritage ‘value’ in the public realm

A disjunction between different notions of heritage is emerging, from the authorised definitions in professional and institutional practice to those in the popular, community and commercial realms. The problem is that by predicating policy on the former, statutory heritage services have become ill-equipped to accommodate the social, cultural and political ‘work’ that heritage can do for wider society (Smith, Waterton 2013b). It has persuasively been argued that ‘knowing’ heritage has become reduced to an assumption that Archaeological Heritage Management (AHM) informs identity and yet increasingly apparent that what takes place at heritage sites is what is actually significant, rather than just the places themselves. It is the immaterial and intangible activities of remembering, performance, commemoration, emotion and experience that constitute the meaning making of heritage and that, as such, the physical structures become ‘places’ and ‘theatres of memory’ (Smith 2006; Smith, Waterton 2012, 2013b: 44). However, to state that “For archaeologists, heritage is data”, Laurajayne Smith and Emma Waterton (Smith, Waterton 2013b: 53) run the risk of creating a false dichotomy and ignoring a self-reflexive body of ‘post-procesual’ literature that has had as its focus the human condition, phenomenology, and the so-called ‘dwelling perspective’ (Hodder 2020; Ingold 2022). Many archaeologists dare to dream that their human-focussed framing of the material record and how it relates to planned interventions in community contexts might be considered and adopted by architects, regeneration teams, and town planners – the self-appointed place-makers who through implemented development schemes are the more likely suspects in reducing physical assets to static authorised narratives. Whilst the central tenet of the case made by Smith and Waterton is not disputed here, there are dangers in downplaying materiality – built structures – in the process of heritagisation and shifting too far towards meaning stemming from the mind alone. If performances of heritage require theatres of memory, then these need to be safe, maintained, and managed for non-exclusive access. Equally, whilst heritage sites are locations at which our sense of place becomes anchored and emotionally manageable (Smith, Waterton 2013b: 50) they may also serve as formative components in how heritage is constructed in the mind, delivering behavioural cues through structured space and influencing the very nature of identity reproduction. As such, they become less the *passive* recipients and more the *active* informants of identities, narratives and emotions.

The centring of memory, commemoration, and emotion in recent critical heritage discourse mediated through words and text may also reflect the ontology of critical-heritage studies speaking, as it does, to the intellectualised concerns of an academic community pre-occupied with its own anxieties and the stake it can claim on heritages. What of community members whose knowledge is embodied through physical engagement: making, crafting, manufacturing, repairing, assembling, etc.? In much the same way that we understand knowledge in the past, so too can knowledge in the present transcend logocentricity and be embodied through our relationship with material culture (Malafouris 2016). Cognition, defined as such, suggests that there are legitimate understandings of the past that could equally be bound up in the tacit dimension, where the touch, feel, manipulation, and alteration of its physical vestiges is given equal importance to how we talk and write about it (Polanyi 2009). This hermeneutic issue may be especially apposite to the inclusion and engagement of post-industrial communities that sit outside of the academy. Their reproduction of heritage in ‘theatres of memory’ may



Photo 1. Wellbeing greenwood activities working towards hard fixtures and fittings for managing access at Craig Gwladus Country Park. *Photo by Richard Manning.*

manifest itself in a series of vernacular craft activities such as keeping paths clear, erecting benches and bins, fixing things, and conserving the monument, all of which must be conducted through an AHM framework to ensure compliance with standards, safety, and equitable access.

This is not a defence of the present heritage management model because AHM alone can obscure the underpinning reasons for why this investment of public money is being made in the first place: people, stories, and the very things that make us human. To redress the balance, what is being proposed here is the delivery of AHM through a programme of meaningful engagement in traditional craft conservation and management practices, because engaged communities represent a resource that may hold the answer to how we sustain and make resilient a set of conservation principles devised in an age of plenty.

Heritage ‘value’ in economic regeneration

A further dynamic to heritage ‘value’ has opened up in more recent years through the emergence of ‘heritage-led’ regeneration (Deloitte Real Estate 2017: 6–7). Assets that were once seen as obstacles to development through being economically non-viable are now increasingly being seen as part of the solution to the enrichment of townscapes and the fostering of a sense of place for local communities. Authenticity and atmosphere are cited in the commercial success of businesses linked to historically characterful areas with statistics showing that extensive heritage townscapes nurture a vibrant retail environment (Colliers International 2018: 8; Historic England 2018). Such heritage-led regeneration falls within the planning framework and whilst it offers ‘best practice’ for looking after historic buildings, these approaches are often short on what that practice means in terms of the intangible, the storytelling and narratives of place. Very often delivered through traditional expert-driven modes of significance, assessments of historic character in these models can fail to consider the dynamic nature of people’s relationships with the historic environment (Jones 2017) and purposely avoid some of the more challenging narratives of which it serves as a tangible reminder (Kryder-Reid, May 2023). For vestiges of the Industrial Revolution in Wales, for example, there is now a requirement to acknowledge links to colonial and imperial ambitions (Evans 2010; Berg, Hudson 2023) as well as the environmental damage done by the latent toxicity of heavy industries (May 2023) if sites are to remain relevant and inclusive to wider audiences and new generations.

The economic benefits such regeneration schemes bring about may also not be shared as equitably as possible. Historic buildings can serve as vital

components in a heritage-led regeneration agenda by providing bijou work-places, cafes and bars, all drawing on the historic pedigree of the location and a sense of connectedness to a past (Clark 2019). But when the financial benefits for local communities amount predominantly to trickle-down zero-hours contracts in low-paid service industries, the full benefits of vital historic assets may not be being felt by those who most keenly need them. Especially where large tranches of public money – whether through structural funding or, in a British context, the National Lottery Heritage Fund – are being deployed in the leveraging of private capital, the appropriation of cultural assets for gain weighted in favour of the shareholder should be interrogated. What is more, in the UK, it is becoming apparent that even through the planning conditions placed on new developments that impact and incorporate the built and buried historic environment (Department for Communities and Local Government 1990), the full cultural benefits of that development and its co-opting of historic fabric are not being shared with local communities as fully as they might (Watson 2021; Fredheim, Watson 2023).

Some of these issues in Wales can be mitigated through the Place-making Charter for Wales and its Place-making Guide where communities are positioned at the beginning of the process, with commitments to ongoing involvement throughout (Design Commission for Wales 2020a: 11, 18–19). Yet, a glance at the list of signatories (Design Commission for Wales 2020b) indicates that architects, design associates, developers and urban planning consultancies are the essential drivers of this form of place-making. Cultural partners, museums, community groups and social-care charities are largely conspicuous by their absence and the language of the guide suggests very much that the ‘community’ is something that has things done to it. They are ‘engaged’, ‘involved’ and ‘considered’. Events are put on for them so that they can be ‘galvanised’, and they are ‘addressed’ before physical interventions are ‘proposed’. The passivity of the sociographically-defined community in this approach risks the kind of box-ticking institutionalized patterns of cultural participation that achieves its ends through the often-uncritical notion of ‘community’ itself (Watson, Waterton 2010: 1).

‘Community’ – a note of caution in the heritage sector

At the turn of the millennium a broader transition within British politics ushered in a greater desire for inclusivity and participation to be seen as measures of a successful democratic process (Watkins 2021). For Wales this trend manifested itself in a drive by the nascent devolved government to tackle health and wellbeing, and social and economic exclusion through the Communities First agenda focused on the 10% most deprived areas (National Assembly for

Wales 2009). Whilst the programme can be seen to have achieved marginal economic gains, the implementation of neo-liberal ‘regeneration solutions’ is thought to have curtailed the extent to which communities could actually guide the process with the concomitant effect that positive impacts on health, education and other social indicators were not achieved (Dicks 2014).

What appears to have happened here, at the level of inception, is that the notion of community was employed ideologically to frame what was essentially a top-down process. Often held with unhelpful reverence, serving as a simplistic and romantic cure for wider social ills, in the wider heritage and culture sector the term can be imposed nostalgically and rhetorically on to marginal groups both in the past and the present and used with impunity, in a non-consensual way (Waterton, Smith 2010: 5–6). This becomes a special problem in heritage discourses because it can serve to wash over disharmony, power and marginality, ignore motivating and disruptive energies, and help to reinforce the process of insubordination to the status of the expert (Waterton, Watson 2011). The essential project of Wales’s methodological nationalism has been underpinned by such simplistic and often romantic notions of ‘community’, whether it be the *gwerin* (folk/peasantry) or the industrialized (Berger et al. 2020: 327, 337–38). As constructs to counter a British national heritage founded on aristocratic and elite narratives, these earthy notions of community could be seen to be left-leaning, unproblematic, and largely benevolent. Yet equally, elsewhere in Britain, the term can acquire more conservative inflections and be enlisted as a guardian of a stable permanent moral order (Berger et al. 2020: 339). Nowhere are these diverse readings more evident in the UK than in a Northern Irish context where community and heritage are knitted together and readily visible, yoked to different politically charged agendas, ranging from those that would wish to maintain the status quo to those striving for emancipation (Croke 2010; Hargey 2019). What emerges is a central tension between community-driven projects delivered by those who have agency, affordance and advocacy and would wish to celebrate ‘their’ heritage through their medium of choice, and those in the critical literature who would see such activities as “politicized discourses of collective action” (Dicks 1999).

In sum, the present context in Wales for delivering community-led resilience through heritage would appear beset by a range of intractable problems. Chief amongst these is} a funding landscape that is both constrained by the requirement to invest in other socially responsive areas, such as health and social care, and a heritage services sector ill-equipped to channel funds beyond the contracted repair and maintenance of physical structures. Traditional definitions of heritage are also clearly not working and whilst the

market has identified the economic benefits of heritage assets, commercially driven regeneration strategies can run the risk of employing extractive definitions of community in agendas that ultimately fail to deliver tangible benefits for those of greatest need.

From risk to opportunity, from problem to solution

Described by Hillary Clinton as ‘exactly the kind of global thinking we need’ (@walesintheworld 2023), the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (WFG) enshrines in law the requirement to consider the impacts of decisions made today on the Wales of the future. Seen by its creators as a bold vote of confidence in the Welsh legislature, the WFG clearly has the potential for European impact, especially where small nations are concerned (Davidson 2023; Alemanno 2024). As the legislation evolves, the heritage sector in Wales is well-placed to capitalise on opportunities to radically rethink how it repackages its mission to place itself more centrally in the delivery of the social, cultural and environmental aims set out in the Act. It is proposed here that through physical ‘hands-on’ participation in heritage and the fostering of traditional conservation skills and vernacular site-related crafts amongst the wider community, the sector can engage directly with at least



Photo 2. Outdoor, inter-generational crafting at Craig Gwladus Country Park, building health and resilience amongst the park community. *Photo by Richard Manning.*

four of the stated seven wellbeing goals: a Resilient Wales; a Healthier Wales; a Wales of Cohesive Communities; and a Wales of Vibrant Culture.

Culture, health and community cohesion represent key areas where innovative approaches to heritage are already beginning to play a transformative role. In the wake of the global pandemic, just visiting heritage sites was seen to make a positive contribution to wellbeing to the extent that a greater awareness of these benefits can now inform modifications to sites in order to achieve these outcomes (Sofaer et al. 2021). Beyond the confines of the site, current thinking in the sector may provide a corollary through which greater cohesion, place-attachment, sense of being and belonging can be achieved through the enchanting properties of past material cultures and the cultural experiences derived from enhanced engagement with it (Perry 2019). An emerging body of literature is also pointing to the mental and physical health benefits that can be derived from physical and bodily engagement with the past, highlighting the restorative properties of collective engagement (Everill, Burnell 2022; Osgood 2023). Many of these findings have been derived from community archaeology programmes where excavation, recording, and the processing of artefactual evidence provide the essential thought-provoking physical components, but there is no reason why these frameworks should not be extended to AHM conservation practices on designated heritage sites, irrespective of how apparently significant they may be to authorised discourses. For some time now it has been acknowledged, globally, that conservation management can become a catalyst for social development (UNESCO 2011: 2), but especially in the most extreme environments, the relationship between the two must be given the required clarification (Ronchi 2020). In short, in its broadest sense, conservation of the historic environment can increase the local resource rather than being seen as an external transaction within deficit models of conservation management. Centring the public purse on first delivering tangible social and cultural benefits to communities through co-created craft-based conservation and management practices can therefore be one way to mitigate, in some of the most deprived parts of Wales and the UK, a cost-of-living crisis that is doing damage to the health and wellbeing of the public (Hill et al. 2023).

Craft has tended to sit at the margins of wellbeing studies that have explored the health benefits of creative, expressive, and artistic engagements (Fancourt, Warran and Aughterson, 2020; Clift et al. 2023; Dowlen 2023) and yet it is clear that contact with raw materials, an abiding sense of achievement, personal development, the regulation of body and mind, along with the associated social and cultural dimensions, can do much to enhance wellbeing and positively impact empowerment (Pöllänen, 2015; Kaimal, Gonzaga and Schwachter, 2017; Nevay et al. 2019). The definition of wellbeing provided



Photo 3. Supervised archaeological excavation at the ruins of the Craig Gwladus smithy provides an opportunity for students from disadvantaged communities to engage with local heritage in physical and thought-provoking activities. *Photo by Alex Langlands.*

by The New Economics Foundation (2009) could not provide a better case for involving community members in the conservation of heritage and its concomitant crafts:

a sense of individual vitality to undertake activities which are meaningful, engaging, and which make them feel competent and autonomous, a stock of inner resources to help them cope when things go wrong and be resilient to changes beyond their immediate control. It is also crucial that people feel a sense of relatedness to other people, so that in addition to the personal, internally focused elements, people's social experiences – the degree to which they have supportive relationships and a sense of connection with others – form a vital aspect of well-being (cited in Ander et al. 2013, with my emphasis in regular script).

And these benefits can be felt by all generations. As Wales embarks on a Connected Communities strategy governed by the WFG and The Social Service and Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014, the targeting of loneliness and social isolation amongst older generations represents an essential aim. Research shows that collective and communal engagement in physical outdoor

activities improves wellbeing amongst older people (Husk et al. 2018) and the number one priority of the Evaluability Assessment of the strategy was the increasing opportunities to connect through ‘*physical* (my italics) activities, volunteering, culture, heritage and the arts’ (Alma Economics 2023: 7). For younger generations, the innovative inclusion in the new Curriculum for Wales of the underpinning notion of *Cynefin* (belonging, place) provides opportunities for developing place-attachment, identity and greater local participation by wider community members through exploring the emotions and feelings attached to places and the people that dwell within them (Chapman et al. 2023). For Wales in particular, as immovable and unchanging features in communities, buildings and physical assets have been identified for the important roles they can play in bringing people together on account of their serving as the backdrop in the formation of family memories (Cribb et al. 2020: 38).

Implementing change: towards a framework for community-led heritage stewardship

The research background, the funding climate and innovative legislation suggest that the time is ripe for a radical re-framing of how heritage services are delivered in Wales. In particular, a rethink on the present levels of state-funding to the sector is required. A 2018 study found that when population numbers are indexed against devolved government funding for statutory heritage environment services, £15.67 was spent *per capita* in Scotland compared to £7.55 in Wales in 2013-2014 (Belford 2018: 117). As a first step, the cutting of Wales’s cultural sector, partly due to the rising costs and demands of statutory healthcare, will need to be arrested. If Wales has wider health problems that need addressing, dealing with them at source, in the interest of future generations, may represent better long-term value for money. However, in a heritage services sector that is legally predisposed to focus on the wellbeing of its assets, reinvention based on the existing skillset is unlikely to happen overnight. A longer-term shift in capacity will be required if state-agencies are to move from policing and monitoring to facilitating and enabling (Emerick 2009: 46, cited in; Waterton, Smith 2010: 11).

But as Paul Belford and Penelope Foreman have argued (2021: 58, 70), “radical change need not require narcissistic disruption and the creation of brash new enterprises”, but rather incremental changes to established structures that strengthen ongoing developmental partnership work. In this regard, in the Welsh Archaeological Trust (WAT) model, Wales benefits from having a relatively innovative framework for delivering heritage. Currently the remit of the WATs, now Heneb, includes monitoring and guidance on

the management of the archaeological resources along with, through its independent charitable status, the duty to educate the public in archaeology (Belford 2018; Belford, Foreman 2021). Unshackling their commercial archaeological services and removing the conflicts of interest this arm of their current operations poses, scaling up public engagement capacity, and broadening their remit to delivering community-led place-making services would improve the investability of the statutory heritage services in a redesign that has as its essential framework the WFG.

In the same way that money cannot just be thrown at the present heritage services sector, it cannot also be foisted on ‘communities’ in the hope that the desired outcomes will materialise. For all the theoretical issues with the critical framing of ‘community’ outlined above, come a host of practical problems. The risks associated with asset transfer concern not only capacity issues within organisations – management and fund raising – but the dangers of assets being taken over by an unaccountable minority, non-inclusive access and a loss of publicness (Quirk et al. 2007, Appendix; Rex 2023). There are cultural problems too in post-industrial communities across the UK. One of the main findings of the National Lottery Heritage Fund’s 2012 endowed Local Trust, a programme of investment designed to transform communities in England, was that establishing places to meet, better transport links and enhanced digital connectivity were obvious fixable physical and technical barriers. The main obstacle to making a genuine difference in the North East of England was considered to be a lack of an existing culture of self-organised community-led activity (The Local Trust 2019: 1).

Like other areas of the UK, Wales benefits however from a substantial volunteer resource with a pre-Covid mapping exercise identifying over 700 groups with a combined membership of over 102,000, and an annual income of around £17m (Wales Council for Voluntary Action 2014: 37). Assessing the current resource, harnessing that enthusiasm, and stimulating activity in this sector must represent an essential short-term goal. But this, and successful strategies of heritage asset transfer, will not be achieved in areas of high deprivation without greater state involvement in the process. The policy context is there in the Historic Environment Act 2016 where partnership and guardianship schemes offer potential for managed asset transfer to third party groups (Acts of Senedd Cymru 2023), but a more formalised approach to engaging with transferees at every stage will be required, including pre-engagement, the drawing up of policies, and staffing with dedicated officers (Coates *et al.* 2021: 76).

How the wider theoretical issues with notions of ‘community’ are circumvented could be achieved through partnership agreements where

compliance with Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity policies sits alongside obligations to ensure health and safety legislation, fire regulations and statutory monument protections are met with. One way of framing ‘community’ in the place-making agenda would be to geographically assert it, potentially avoiding the pitfalls of sociographically defined (top-down) or self-identified collectives of mutual/minority (bottom-up) interest. Despite the increasing trend towards popular and community-level heritage discourse being conducted and enacted through social media and other digital platforms (Bonacchi et al. 2019), there remains a strong sense of community attachment defined by place on such platforms (Liew et al. 2022).

From ‘theatres of memory’ to ‘theatres of heritage craft’:

Industrienatur at Craig Gwladus Country Park

Because of the threat posed to the safety of walkers, in 2012 Neath Port Talbot Council felled a phytophthora-invested plantation of pine trees in Craig Gwladus Country Park, a hillside greenspace overlooking the Neath Valley. The scene of devastation was to galvanise local people into forming a ‘Friends’ group self-charged with enhancing and maintaining the park’s biodiversity and network of pathways. A new era for Craig Gwladus Country Park was born in a steep wooded incline that was once the site of an extensive drift-mine colliery but is now a place that hosts a range of activities that enhance the natural environment and provide welcome opportunities for social engagements and collaborative endeavour through creatively practicing heritage crafts: including coppicing, basket-making, wood-carving, wattling, gate-making and charcoal production, amongst others. With minimal support from government and grant funding, the volunteer hours have quadrupled, and Craig Gwladus Country Park can be seen as testimony to what can be achieved when communities, local government, and third-sector organisations come together.

What has happened here is what elsewhere has been termed *Industrienatur*, a ‘new kind of nature’, where derelict post-Industrial sites are embraced as places for innovative biodiverse environments (Berger 2020). Emerging out of the Ruhr valley, the concept has been used to explore the specific ecological conditions in post-industrial, anthropogenic settings, and how our memories and perceptions of the industrial past are mediated through an apparent return to nature (Franz et al. 2008; Ehses 2010; Keil 2019). The examples in Germany have placed a strong emphasis on the active participation of residents and the potential for creative place-making that is presented through recreation and experiencing nature (Franz et al. 2008: 316–17). At

Craig Gwladus, however, some of the focus amongst participating community members has begun to shift from nature towards the remnants of the park's coal mining history: the incline railway, engine house, tram road and a ruined smithy building.

As part of this shift towards the heritage assets, an invitation from the park's manager was extended to Swansea University's Centre for Heritage Research and Training to explore AHR with a particular focus on the ruins of the colliery's smithy. What ensued was a programme of archaeological excavation and built heritage conservation co-created with local Further Education college students, community members and volunteers, and designed to deliver a series of interconnected outcomes relating directly to the WFG's goals (Langlands 2023, 2024a). The activities involved archaeological clearance of the site in advance of conservation work undertaken using heritage craft skills including stone masonry and traditional lime mortar work.

The project has not been without its problems. Funding cuts to education provision impacted the ratios of staff to students with the knock-on effect that the experience was impaired for those who required greater support. The non-designated nature of the heritage assets in Craig Gwladus Country Park also meant that various permissions and licenses were not required to carry out the work. This could limit the transferability of the approach to other sites where monuments have statutory protection but only if we retain the existing attitudes and principles relating to how monuments are conserved. What has happened at Craig Gwladus Country Park can serve as a model for how heritage in its broadest sense can be employed as a tool for delivering social, cultural and environmental benefits. The requirement

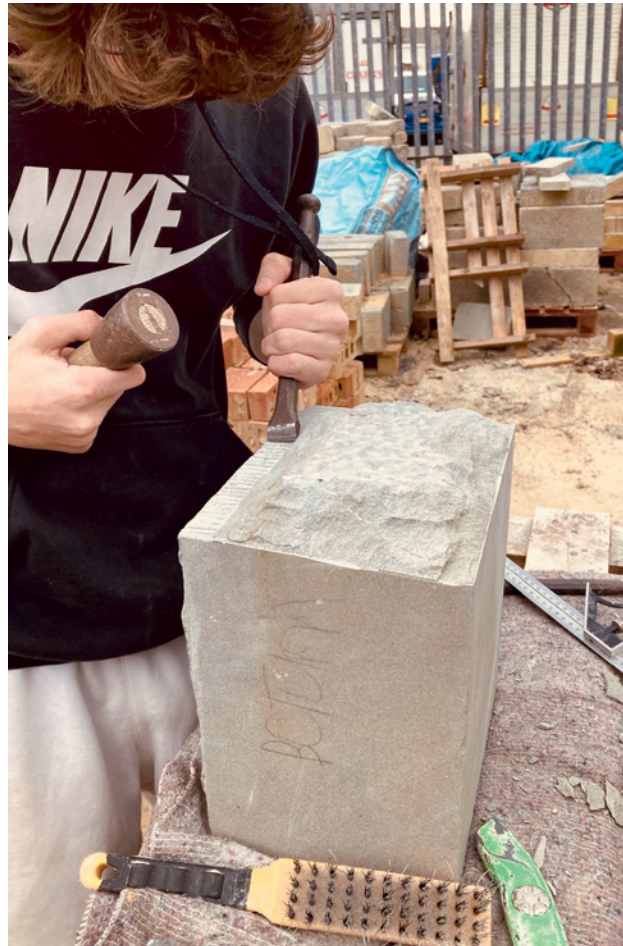


Photo 4. Training in dressing 'drafted margins' on quoin stones was one of the more skilled crafts delivered at the site. *Photo by Oliver Coe.*



Photo 5. The author with members of the park's volunteer community making charcoal using a traditional earth clamp. *Photo by Steve Chamberlain*

therefore now rests with statutory bodies to reconsider the constraints it places on using designated heritage assets for the delivery of similar socially aligned engagement activities. At Craig Gwladus Country Park a 'place' has been 'made', physically and manually by a community of practice using a range of traditional and vernacular heritage crafts skills. In the process, a connection to place and a version of the past has been engendered amongst a group of young people (itvX 2023, from 3:55; Langlands 2023). The participating students have come away with experience of vital skills training in complex craft methods and techniques, and this has enhanced their sense of self, and self-confidence. The activity is a step towards furnishing the region with the skills required to maintain and enhance the historic built environment, a vital component in the character and distinctiveness of place. People have been brought together and new people introduced to the park which now has another 'theatre', and a site that enriches the cultural story of the place and its connections to the colliery and the community that grew up around it in the late-nineteenth century.

The work carried out at the Craig Gwladus smithy site is ongoing with plans underway by community members to erect interpretation panels, install a sculpture crafted from the waste iron, and set up a temporary blacksmith's forge, powered by charcoal produced using traditional techniques (Langlands

2024b). Heritage continues to be made and remade in tangible, rewarding, hands-on ways as the park community, in their own incremental style, strive towards a resilient, healthier, cohesive and culturally vibrant Wales.

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Alex Langlands (b. 1977) is an Associate Professor in History and Heritage at Swansea University. He has a background in field archaeology and has spent over fifteen years working in prime-time broadcast media in the UK. His broadcast work has been awarded a prestigious Learning on Screen Award, he is a Sunday Times Bestselling author, and his book *Cræft* has won critical acclaim on both sides of the Atlantic.



Alex Langlands. Photo by Sue Martin.

Käed külge kohaloomes: pärandoskuste ja kogukonnapõhise muinsuskaitse kasutamine ajalooliste keskkondade alalhoiul

Resümee

Euroopa seisab silmitsi kompleksse kriisiga, mis hõlmab energiatarne, toidu- tootmise, kliima ning julgeoleku alaseid uusi ohtusid. Sel taustal võib kergesti ununeda, et kultuuripärand on tähtsaim löim kõigi kogukondade kultuuri- põimes. Pärand on nii käegakatsutav kui ka vaimne võtmeressurss, mis pakub kogukonna tasemel kestlikku, homsele keskenduvat tulevikku.

Artiklis uuritakse riikliku rahastuse kärpeme mõju Walesi kultuuripärandi ja ajalooliste paikadega seotud teenustele. Vaatluse all on küsimus, kuidas mõju- tavad pärandit muutuvad definitsioonid; analüüsitakse, kuidas kogukonnaga seotud mõisteid kriitiliselt käsitledes saaks leida taastootlikke toimivaid lahenu- duse arhitektuuripärandi jätkusuutlikuks säilitamiseks. Esitatakse argumente riikliku pärandikäsitlemise ümberkujundamiseks, et ellu viia Walesis 2015 aastal kehtestatud Tulevaste Põlvede Heaolu seadust. Viimase kaudu kombineeruvad erinevad ambitsioonikaid plaanid, kus esil praktiline, vahetu osalusega, “käed- külge” pärandivaade.

Võtmesõnad: pärand, jätkusuutlikkus, kogukonnad, kohaloomes, Wales, osalus, koosloomes