Perceptions of heritage – a theoretical analysis

David Fisher
Senior Lecturer, Lincoln University, New Zealand

Social Science, Parks, Recreation and Tourism Group,
Society Environment and Design Division,
PO Box 84
Lincoln University
Canterbury
New Zealand
Tel. (64) 3 325 3820
Fax. (64) 3 325 3857
Fisherd@lincoln.ac.nz
www.lincoln.ac.nz/tourism

ABSTRACT

Heritage, as an attraction, is becoming increasingly common in the promotion of tourism. However, there is evidence that the ways in which heritage is conceptualised differs between cultures. Additionally, when cultures meet there is a possibility that values adapt and change. This paper examines the extent to which conceptualisations of heritage change as different cultures come into contact with one another through tourism.

A theoretical basis for this is developed using the concept of the demonstration effect and Mary Douglas’s notions of Cultural Bias or Grid Group theory.

The suggestion here is that tourism changes how local people value heritage but that the level of change is dependent on the original meaning attached to heritage objects, and that the original meanings are dependent on the cultural bias. First an analysis of the meaning of particular heritage items is suggested. It is hypothesised that within the range of meanings only some parts can accommodate change.

Second, that nature of the change that takes place is examined. Given the nature of tourism these changes tend towards commodification though other values and meanings can also come with commodification.

Third, the range of changes are identified. These include the micro effect of a positive demonstration effect where tourists give an intrinsic value to objects that are losing meaning in the host society, through to the macro effect where fundamental changes occur in the meaning and significance of heritage within a culture.

The arguments presented show that the extent and type of change that occurs depends on the way the particular aspect of cultural heritage is valued. At one end of the scale something of no cultural value can be commodified easily. At the other end something that is deeply embedded in the culture or has deeply embedded meaning for the individual can be fiercely protected from commodification, or can only be commodified within culturally specific boundaries.
Meanwhile, the overall meanings and values given to things of cultural and heritage importance change over time as a result of a range of external cultural forces on a society. This is true for both the hosts and guests. All cultures adapt, and as they do certain meanings change. Again the level of change is dependent on the embeddedness of the objects and practices in question, and how those objects and practices can adapt to more general cultural change.

**Keywords:** Heritage, cultural bias, demonstration effect

**INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this paper is to integrate different strands of theory to provide a better understanding of the processes involved in host guest interaction. The exemplar used is heritage tourism.

An analysis of host guest interaction requires answers to some basic questions. What occurs and how does it occur? Why does it happen? What processes are involved? This last point is the crux of the theoretical model to be presented. It will be shown that by combining two models variations that occur in the provision of heritage products can be explained. Currently, no theory uses the same methods to analyse both hosts and guests. Consequently, comparison between the behaviour of the hosts and guests is difficult. There is also a tendency to assume that there is an inevitable one way transfer of ideas from guests to hosts. This may not be the case. Similarly, difficulty exists in fully understanding the negotiation that takes place between sections of the host community and different types of tourists.

Some hypotheses have been suggested for the transfer of ideas and attitudes between hosts and guests, though there is little understanding of how this happens. In general more questions need to be asked. Can the interaction between hosts and guests be generalised or is it necessary to understand the individual? How broad is the copying behaviour or does it depend on discrete products and activities? Finally, can the behaviour of tourists and the influence of tourism result in paradigmatic shifts in culture?

To answer these questions this paper will utilise Fisher's (2004) analysis of the demonstration effect and Douglas's (1982) concept of 'Cultural Bias'. The concept of 'embeddedness' will be introduced to illustrate the degree of attachment that an individual has for a particular object, place or culturally defined behaviour. These ideas will then be combined to show how a better understanding of the provision of heritage tourism products can be attained.

**Host guest interaction**

Because tourist travel to the producer of the tourism product feedback on the product can be instantaneous. Local people can see the market and the reaction of the market to the product. (In most cases the tourist is only obtaining temporary use of the product.) The feedback, however, may not be accurately interpreted as the products can also have different meanings for the user and the producer. What is being observed is analysed through different cultural filters.

The early literature on the meeting of hosts and guests is somewhat simplistic. Both groups were seen as some sort of homogeneous lump with little variation between
the two (Doxey, 1975). Later more differentiation was introduced with a variety of tourist typologies (see Mehmetoglu, 2004, for a review of these). There have also been a number of papers on the different strategies taken by groups within the host population (Dogan, 1989). Commodification has been noted by both anthropologists and tourism scholars (Appadurai, 1986; Harrison, 1993; Smith 1989). Many of these studies are concerned with what the host population does (Greenwood, 1972; Turner and Ash 1975) rather than looking at underlying reasons as to why they behave in one way rather than another. Consequently different studies give conflicting results. What may happen at one destination may not occur somewhere else. In fact, contradictory results may occur. Models currently used are, therefore, deductive rather than predictive. Better understanding is needed to create a predictive model or, at the very least, to give a clearer deductive understanding of the processes involved.

More recently some theoretical analysis on the provision of heritage sites has conducted in this area, notably by Timothy and Boyd (2003), but this has been at a more macro level. Conflict can occur between hosts and guests, and between different members of the host community (Timothy and Boyd 2003). The reasons may be a result of different cultural groups occupying the same area, with world views that do not comprehend alternative understandings of the meaning of heritage (Fisher, 2003). Similarly, alternative political interpretations are often attached to heritage sites (Marschall, 2003). These explanations, however, do not consider the individual, or how the individual perceives heritage objects and sites. Nor is a person's sense of place within the community included. Only by doing this can the range of responses be fully understood.

**Theoretical approach**

Fisher's (2004) macro analysis of the demonstration effect illustrated the way information is passed from one group to another and how the information (whether it has been correctly interpreted or not) is assimilated within the context of the culture in which the individual is operating. Both tourists and hosts operate within their own cultural circle where behaviour is influenced by culture and experience. When observing someone who operates in a different cultural circle a decision making process is brought into operation (fig. 1).
The consequence of this was that four forms of demonstration are in operation: exact imitation; deliberate inexact imitation; accidental inexact imitation; and social learning. The positive aspects of this approach are that it can show a two-way demonstration, that is, it can be used for tourists and hosts demonstrating to each other; and that individual processes can be considered. It also explains how different changes in behaviour can occur. What it does not allow for is any explanation for why an individual will behave in a particular way. It suffers from being a deductive model rather than a predictive one. It is vague in the sense that different individuals within a group may react differently to the observations they make, nor does it allow for variables such as context. It is also difficult to understand how aggregate changes occur within the culture – or, more to the point, whether there are aggregate changes rather than power processes being played out.

Some of these problems can be overcome by overlaying a revised form of Douglas's (1982) Cultural Bias theory. Cultural Bias or Grid-Group analysis offers four alternatives to any mode of behaviour by combining two dualisms. The group is defined in terms of the claims it makes over its constituent members while the term grid refers to the "cross-hatch of rules to which individuals are subject" (Douglas 1982 p192) and is similar to Durkheim's social regulation (Thompson, Ellis, & Wildavsky, 1990). The individual is put in a social context.

When the grid and the group axes are combined four variables immediately become apparent (see fig 2).
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Fig 2 Grid-group structure

grid +

FATALISTS  HIERARCHISTS

+ group

INDIVIDUALISTS  EGALITARIANS

1) High grid/low group. This sector is inhabited by people Douglas (1982) called fatalists. These are people who feel isolated (low group) but at the same time are controlled by rules and regulations. Their lack of group cohesion prevents them from feeling that they have any control over what happens to them because they are not in a position to influence the rules that control their lives. They have little individual autonomy and no scope for gaining from their own efforts. Any advance would be due entirely to fate. They are just as likely to win Lotto as they are to get a pay rise even if they train more. In the context of heritage tourism this group also includes people who are indifferent to change. They may believe that they can alter the change that is taking place but see no need through lack of interest.

2) High grid/high group. This is the hierarchic sector. Following a strong grid there is a patchwork of strong rules in this sector. This, allied to a strong group, suggests a group of people who know their place within society and feel that they are an integral and valid part of that society. The groups will be larger than those of the egalitarians because there is more social cohesion and they will last longer. There will be internal specialisation and an unequal distribution of goods.

3) Low grid/high group. This is the sector occupied by egalitarians. They have strong group cohesion against a hostile world but with few formal internal divisions. While individual behaviour is subject to the controls of the group, relationships between individuals are ambiguous.

4) Low grid/low group. This is the individualist sector. In its most extreme form this is the position of a perfectly free market. The individual is totally autonomous with few rules (grid) or other people (group) restricting action. Success is due to ability and the best use of resources available.

In terms of tourism theory there are limitations to Cultural Bias. It is a static theory in that it doesn’t easily allow for change in the individual or the community. There is a
tendency to think in extremes, that is, an individual or culture are in an extreme quarter of the grid/group diagram, when they are more likely to be closer to the origin. There is no clear link between the individual and society. There is no link with external influences.

The major amendment to the theory that will be made for this paper is in the way an individual responds to a particular heritage object or activity. Grid-group theory will be used to show that an individual may show different forms of cultural bias towards different objects and activities. It will later be shown that this is because of the level of embeddedness that the individual attaches to each object. This is an important departure from the original theory as it allows for a variety of attitudes an individual can hold for a range of objects and activities.

Combining the two theories

A number of assumptions are useful at this stage. First, individuals will behave differently from others because of their own cultural bias. Second, different behaviours will affect the decision making process that they go through. Third, within the same group different demonstrations will be exhibited. Four, cultural bias may be different for individual objects and activities. By combining the two theories a range of reactions will occur as a consequence of what has been demonstrated, each a result of the individual’s sense of inclusion within the community.

Applying the theory to heritage

Heritage is a difficult concept to define because it can cover a large array of seemingly dissimilar objects and ideas (Herbert, 1989). These range from a strong attachment to land through specific styles in art and manifestations of cultural distinctiveness, to commercial products for which traditional production processes have been used in their manufacture. On a general level heritage is something that individuals emotively claim as their own (or see as being someone else’s) having been passed on by previous generations (Prentice, 1994). What is considered of importance to a culture’s heritage does not have to be genuine and authentic (Hobsbawm, 1983) but it must be symbolic of that culture (Barthes, 1973). Heritage, therefore, is a subjective concept that is evidenced in objects, places and ideas that are important to individuals and societies. This links with Hofstede’s (2001) concept of the stabilisation of cultural patterns. Work by Rokeach (1968) on value systems is also relevant. He based his ideas on three assumptions. Firstly, some beliefs and values are more important than others to an individual; a personal hierarchy of beliefs will be evident. Secondly, the more important a belief the more it will be resistant to change. Thirdly, the more important the belief the greater the consequences should it change. Schwartz (1992) developed the analysis by listing ten basic types of values and suggests that the weighting for these is dependent on the individual and the social structure in which s/he operates.

Attempts have been made to provide definitions that encompass the full range of heritage conceptualisations. Tunbridge & Ashworth (1996) offer five variations. First, old physical objects that have acquired some form of status because they are old and have survived. Second, a form of community memory. Third, artistic styles that are maintained in one particular place. Fourth, native flora and fauna that have barely survived the arrival of exotic predators. Finally, the economic activity of making profit from these things in what has come to be known as the heritage industry.
Hall and McArthur (1996) suggest a number of reasons why heritage and its preservation has come to be seen as important in recent years. These mirror Tunbridge and Ashworth (1996). The first suggests that in a rapidly changing society people have attempted to retain buildings, townscapes and objects in order to help them maintain a link with past and therefore build a sense of continuity in their lives. The second is that heritage preservation helps maintain a sense of community and belonging. The third that heritage has a value in its own right. The fourth, that there may be educational and scientific significance, the fifth is that heritage has developed an economic importance, as people want to visit and see places for their historic values. Hall and McArthur add one more, which is that heritage is “an integral component of sustainable development” (Hall & McArthur, 1996) though what they mean by this is not made clear.

Heritage has become inextricably linked with tourism in recent years. One reason suggested for this has been rural economic restructuring (Bessière 1998, Kneafsey 2001, Rey 1988). This has resulted in negotiation between various actors over the identification and availability of heritage products (Timothy & Boyd, 2003). Emerging from this has been a re-evaluation of the multi-layered meanings of the heritage product for both local people and visitors, which, in turn raises the question of whose values should prevail? The supply of heritage lacks clarity because there is no agreed meaning for heritage and the sometimes contradictory values place on heritage objects and sites by visitors and locals. In extreme cases the lack of understanding of other values is so great that either side may destroy what is of value to the other (Fisher and Perkins, 2004).

Embeddedness of heritage to culture

Representation of place is related to meaning of place for stakeholders, including visitors. Only those things that are considered significant are marked in some way, whether the marker is a physical sign, a personal memory, or part of the collective understanding of it (Timothy and Boyd 2003). Cultural identity with, and attachment to, an object or place are a result of association with the place. This identity can come from a number of sources including personal experience and public display. In an area that is promoted as unspoilt the attachment may be a result of a belief that other areas have been spoilt. In other words the place is more ‘authentic’ than somewhere else. In the case of tourism this links with the ideas of MacCannell (1973) and others that people are alienated from their place of origin and therefore search for the authentic somewhere else. What this interpretation does not allow for is that after visiting some tourists conclude that life today is much better than life in the past. It may be that they are attracted by the idea of a destination that is unspoilt but heritage objects can remove the ‘idyllic’ element of the past particularly when the realities of labour are displayed.

The relationship between the individual and space is also dynamic. It changes with experience. The feelings that a visitor to a tourist destination may have about a place can change as a result of visiting that place. At the same time the experiences a local has may also change as a result of people from outside visiting (Dogan, 1989). Not only does negotiation take place between hosts and guests but negotiation about what is important in a place also occurs (Fisher, 2003a). As a place becomes an object of the tourists’ gaze the meaning of things and attributes in that place can change. In an area that has become noted for its heritage a number of forces are in action. Amongst these are the desire to preserve for visitors, and the desire for locals to preserve what is important to them. Things that once had no economic value are imbued with monetary worth. The past can be, and is,
commodified (Thompson, 1979). Local people, however, may imbue relics with values other than those of financial return (Howard 2003). The questions that arise from this observation are how and why some things are allowed to develop economic value while others are not.

**Representations of heritage**

A study made of heritage sites and objects on the West Coast of New Zealand’s South Island (Fisher, 2003b) showed a number of different attitudes towards them (fig 3).

As heritage becomes more accessible to tourists and visitors it becomes less personal and has a much greater entertainment value. At one end of the extreme is Shantytown which is an extreme example of heritage as entertainment. It was developed as a West Coast, New Zealand, copy of Knott’s Berry Farm in California. The rationale for the attraction was to keep people in Greymouth for an extra day and boost tourism revenue. As a result it contains artefacts that do not fit with the gold mining era and some bogus historical entertainments, such as a set of stocks outside the gaol. This fits with Kneafsey’s (2003) argument about taking what is available and commodifying it.

At the other end is hidden heritage. This is heritage that is kept in private collections that are not open to outsiders or offered to museums. Hidden heritage is made up of things that have a deep personal meaning for the individual. An example is a private fire fighting collection held by a former fireman. He did not like the way his collection was displayed at a local museum and so withdrew everything to keep in his home. His heritage was not going to be used to make money.

The intervening stages show intermediate levels of connexion with local people and the place in question. Local museums can act as a repository for objects locals feel are important for their sense of identity, but for which they no longer have any use, whilst providing education and entertainment for visitors. Other objects can be a ‘signpost’ stating where local people feel that they come from, or at least where they would like to believe that they come from. On a more local level these can include memorials and relics that have been left untouched and so have a more direct link with a personal view of the past.
It is argued here that the more embedded heritage objects and activities become the greater the protection they receive. If they are not protected by institutional means the more private they become, for some people at least. Often it is only when these objects are threatened do people begin to realise how important they are to a sense of place.

**Heritage, the demonstration effect and cultural bias**

This section integrates the theory in a heritage setting. The decision making process in both hosts and guests is considered from the perspective of cultural bias on different levels of embeddedness of the heritage object. The same object may create different cultural biases in two people. For example someone from a family with a history in coal mining may feel an attachment to the detritus of old mining equipment whereas someone else from farming stock may see it as unsightly rubbish.

For a tourist with a fatalist attitude to a heritage site or object will accept what is given. Thompson et.al. (1990) suggest that a fatalist is a product taker. Fatalists accept what is offered to them as they have no power to change it. McIntosh, Smith and Ingram (2000) suggest, in the context of Maori heritage sites in New Zealand, that the fatalist may only visit heritage sites because they are taken there as part of their tour. The fatalist has limited expectations about whether the experience will be good or bad – that is down to luck.

Similarly the fatalists amongst the host population will believe that they have no control over what aspects of their heritage is presented to visitors, or whether they will receive any benefit, financial or otherwise, from the commodification of their heritage. Consequently, it is unlikely that changes in behaviour will occur as a result of observing tourists, unless it is forced on them by some other factor. The exception to this is if the seemingly fatalistic attitude is really one of indifference. It is possible that the demonstration effect could alter this (van den Berghe 1994).

The hierarchists’ expectation of heritage is dependent on where they believe themselves to be in the hierarchy, and the significance or embeddedness of the object or activity to the hierarchy. A hierarchist is likely to expect any interpretation of heritage to illustrate social position. The maintenance of the status quo should be emphasised. Similarly what one can do and where one can go should reflect social class. For example someone lower in the social order would be content with visiting Buckingham Palace, say, on a guided tour whereas someone in the upper end of the social scale may only be prepared to visit if they receive an invitation to a Garden Party.

From the host perspective, a hierarchist attitude to the supply of a heritage product will depend on where they believe they are on the social scale vis-à-vis the visitor. If a hierarchist believes that s/he is of a higher social standing than the tourist then what is offered to the tourist will be of less personal importance than if the tourist is of a higher class. This may affect the quality of the product.

The willingness to copy the behaviour of outsiders is dependent on one’s position in the hierarchy. The inhibiting factors of strong grid and group characteristics can still be evident for those higher up the social scale if the embeddedness of the object is due to its place in the social structure. Hierarchists are also more likely to copy the behaviour of those higher in their social scale rather than copy outsiders. This
phenomenon has been detailed by behavioural economists in the theory of informational cascades (Bikhchandani, Hirshleifer and Welch 1992; Hirshleifer 1995).

Some objects will be seen as integral to the community for egalitarians. An egalitarian tourist will want to feel a connexion with the hosts' heritage but may reject or feel uncomfortable with a host who is not egalitarian. An egalitarian may also gain a stronger sense of the 'correctness' of his or her lifestyle. Alternatively, if the egalitarian feels a deep sense of belonging to his or her social group evidence of a different world view may be threatening.

Egalitarian hosts may feel that the provision of heritage tourism offers the opportunity to provide propaganda for their lifestyle. This may have the consequence of visitors feeling that they have been lectured to or provided with what MacCannell (1973) calls a false back region. The willingness to copy the behaviour of outsiders will only occur if it does not put pressure on the egalitarian nature of society.

There are objects that some people will believe individuals should be left to decide how to use. These include aspects of the tourist product. Individualist tourists would not want to be part of a group but rather discover things for themselves, though they would expect good interpretation and quality in the heritage product. They are more likely to react negatively to non-individualist approaches. Consequently their behaviour may be acceptable to individualist hosts but hosts with other worldviews may consider this approach rude and boorish.

Within the host community an individualist is may be entrepreneurial and therefore see heritage as a product that can be exploited for personal financial gain. This can cause problems with other members of the host population, which, in turn, can reduce the quality of the product if the dissent is communicated to the visitors.

Alternatively, the individualist may become more secretive – that is become a private collector/enthusiast of heritage. Heritage becomes something that is very personal and not for the larger community, and certainly not for commodification. The propensity to imitate is higher for individualists because they are less bound by social convention (low group and grid). In the case of entrepreneurial activity the sort of change would be what Fisher (2004) referred to as social learning. By observing tourists an opportunity for personal advancement is developed. However, there is also the possibility that change will also be rejected, hence the development of 'secret' heritage.

It should be remembered that all the examples of cultural bias are likely to exist simultaneously at a destination and that, for an individual, there is a possibility, if not a probability that an individual's cultural bias is likely to change for any given object depending on the level of embeddedness that object holds for him or her. At the same time the cultural bias of the host is a result of the host society so, initially, any changes to the level of embeddedness that an object holds can only change within the restrictions that the mores of the culture allow. There is the possibility, however, that a change in the embeddedness of an object will affect the cultural bias that an individual holds for other objects. Change is initiated by guests whose perception of the hosts' heritage is affected by the guest's cultural bias and the way that interacts with the host's cultural bias, that is, the type of guest affects the demand, and therefore the embeddedness, of the heritage object through the decision making process. The interaction of host and guest, therefore, affects the cultural bias of the host with regard to the particular heritage object. This results in a realignment of the cultural bias of the host population – negotiation takes place. Renegotiation then
takes place between the hosts and guests, which can change the level of embeddedness of the object. If this results in large changes it can result in a paradigm shift in the interpretation of heritage.

To interpret the negotiation in terms of the demonstration effect a change in behaviour is restricted by experience and culture. Culture may oppose the change – something that is learnt through experience by the individual. Conversely the culture may allow the change to occur. What can prevent it is individual experience – or more properly the belief that the current experience is better than that which would be gained from a change in behaviour. This is embeddedness, which is also a sense of being that is transmitted by culture and cultural bias. When actors change their behaviour culture changes which, in turn, affects the experience. If enough behaviour changes this can lead to a paradigm shift in the way that culture and one’s place in it is understood.

The above analysis then requires researchers to ask a number of questions. They need to know the cultural bias of an individual towards a particular object/activity/belief in conjunction with the embeddedness of this particular object/activity/belief, the level of negotiation within the community, and the level of external negotiation.

If the embeddedness of a particular object/activity/belief is high and there is a high level of negotiation within the community there is likely to be a shift to the right in the group axis. It is here that a change needs to be made to Douglas’s (1982) definitions in the model. Someone may not have a fatalist attitude to an object but be indifferent. In either case they do nothing about any change – they either feel that they have no power or they don’t care. If there is a low level of negotiation within the community then there is more likely to be a shift down the y axis. An individualist may not become entrepreneurial, as Douglas (1982) and Thompson et. al (1990) suggest, but may instead become secretive, that is develop ‘hidden’ heritage.

Conversely if there is a low level of embeddedness for an object there is likely to be a shift to the left of the x axis. An individual is likely to be indifferent to what happens to an object or have no personal or find no cultural objection to the commodification of the object. In other words, entrepreneurship can take place.

Pressures from outside, however, will have different consequences. Tourists and tourism entrepreneurs from outside may push for change based on their own cultural bias. Local people may develop a false back region, if there is a high level of embeddedness in the object by creating inauthentic objects in which they can imbue low levels of embeddedness. If this is not possible or there are low levels of negotiation within the community and/or with outsiders then conflict or retreatism may occur.

Finally, all consequences will change if there is a paradigm shift in the cultural circle of culture, behaviour and experience. Behavioural changes may change the culture and therefore the consequences of change, which show in the experience of the individual. Cultural bias will then be re-aligned over a range of objects and activities.

CONCLUSION

By combining the two theories it is possible to hypothesise how the heritage value of different objects/places/activities changes. Value is provided by cultural bias and
changes occur when some outside agent requires a re-evaluation of that value. The level of change is dictated by the embeddedness of the object in the culture, for a group, and in the cultural bias, for an individual. The lower the level of embeddedness the greater the likelihood of change. Tourists provide the host population with a new insight in how an object can be valued. Similarly, the members of the host population can provide visitors with a different understanding of an object, though how great this is depends on the level of embeddedness the object has for vistors.

The level of embeddedness varies between cultures and between individuals within in those cultures. Hence the different responses that attempts to change the value of an object will receive in what, superficially, seem similar circumstances. By understanding the deeper meanings of heritage objects a better understanding of how the supply of heritage occurs will be obtained.

In the case of the West Coast of New Zealand’s South Island, those objects with low levels of embeddedness have become more public. Individualists feel that they can commodify an aspect of heritage. The objects become heritage as entertainment and education. Of course, it is possible that this process may embed the heritage objects in question more deeply into the local community, which may make future change more difficult. Objects with higher levels of embeddedness are kept in the back region as private heritage, emphasising a sense of identity to the region while other things change. If those objects have previously been commodified then the institutions that are involved in the commodification will find it harder to instigate more change.

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