




Participatory Management for Cultural Heritage: Social Media and Chinese Urban Landscape

Xiaoxu Liang^(✉) 

Polytechnic University of Turin, Viale Mattioli, 39, 10125 Turin, Italy
Xiaoxu.liang@polito.it

Abstract. Community participation plays a core role in sustainable urban development and inclusive cultural heritage management [1, 2]. Despite the broad attention on the World Heritage Property management in China, little research has been done on systematically reviewing the practices of community participation within Chinese cultural heritage, nor defining the role of social media played in it. To fill this research gap, this paper aims to explore how social media can contribute to community engagement and further influence sustainable cultural heritage management by providing a systematic literature review. Based on the evolving definition of community participation from the Historic Urban Landscape approach, this work starts with a review on the conceptualization of community participation. This article continues with a discussion on the role of the community played in participatory management. Following that, the argument is mainly concerning that social media is one of the vital tools to engage a wider range of audiences in conservation practices. To conclude, online urban heritage practices offer a platform for local citizens, especially grassroots, to collaborate with heritage institutions and professionals. Social media practices, such as mapping, may have a wider resonance when they combine broader communication and collaboration methods.

Keywords: Holistic urban heritage conservation · Digital community participate · Social media

1 Introduction

Along with the launching process of the Historic Urban Landscape Approach, the World Heritage Center is endeavoring to involve a variety of stakeholders in heritage identification, protection, and preservation as a worldwide strategic policy [3, 4]. Community engagement is identified as a bond which can contribute to rebuilding the relationship for the past, present, and future in the cultural heritage assets and socio-economic values [5].

Different regions have their own localized concepts of heritage conservation which are not supposed to be aligned with the globalized notion [6]. It is worth mentioning that the focus of heritage conservation in China during the last decades is gradually transiting from the materiality to sustainable development with greater emphasis on community participation [7, 8]. Indeed, China is undertaking effective actions to adhere

to wider international standards with better consideration of the notion of authenticity, collective memory, identity and the sense of place [9, 10]. Besides the traditional participatory management discussion, how the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) encourage and enable new forms of engagement with heritage in different cultural contexts have raised the interest of relevant scholars [11–13].

2 Conceptualization of Community Participation

2.1 Community Engagement as an Effective Tool of Historic Urban Landscape Approach

The HUL approach stands out as a “bottom-up” expression of social values and social choice [1], which can better recognize cultural diversity and the dynamic nature of urban heritage in the context of rapid globalization. Although the discussion¹ and approval² of HUL implementation in Chinese context occurred slightly laggard, it significantly evokes a wide discussion on the regional level and emphasized on a sustainable development of the local community by concerning the priority on the improvement of living conditions and sharing benefits from urban heritage conservation [8].

The ‘community engagement tools’ are listed as one of the expanded conservational instruments by the HUL approach [3] in the attempt to educate and empower diverse stakeholders to identify key values of their cultural heritage and promote sustainable urban development [14]. Aline with it, the role of local community played in urban regeneration in China is gradually shifting from a passive agent to an important character in obtaining alternative solutions [15]. Meanwhile, an extensive legislative and regulatory system related to urban heritage has been endowed for strengthening the soft power [16]. A well-known pioneer example in China is the restoration project in Tianzifang, Shanghai [8]. During the decision process of this project, the local government and developers effectively involved the local community and successfully avoided the massive relocation. As an extent, the 2015 international forum *City and Society*³ organized by UNESCO discussed on themes concerning “Community, Space, and Governance” aiming to enhance the effectiveness of engagement [17].

Nevertheless, how to apply the western born “doctrinal” approach to worldwide societies and how to define operational principles to ensure urban conservation models

¹ It refers to the International Conference in Shanghai on ‘Historic Urban Landscape’ on 9-10 December 2014, hosted by the World Heritage Institute of Training and Research for the Asia and the Pacific Region under the auspices of UNESCO, WHITRAP Shanghai.

² It refers to the ‘Shanghai Agenda’ for the Implementation of UNESCO Recommendation on Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) In China: First edition on 10 December 2014; revised on 10 January 2015.

³ The conference was hosted by Tongji University, organized by World Heritage Institute of Training and Research for the Asia and the Pacific Region under the auspices of UNESCO, WHITRAP Shanghai.

that respect the values, traditions, and environments of different cultural contexts still needs further examination in practice.

2.2 Discussion on Community Engagement

Modern approaches to urban conservation and heritage planning are promoting heritage as living, to be integrated into planning processes and contribute to the quality of life of their communities [5].

Following the supplement of “community” in *Global Strategy of World Heritage*⁴, a series of conference discussions and declarations started to focus on the role of community in heritage protection. Ten years later, the conference *World Heritage and Sustainable Development: The Role of Local Communities* highlighted the guarantee of local communities’ benefit. In 2015, *the Policy on the Integration of a Sustainable Development Perspective into the Processes of the World Heritage Convention*⁵, known as Kyoto Vision, further emphasizes sustainable that development of world heritage has to involve local communities and consider their benefit. Since then, the participation of community stakeholders has become one of the core measures of heritage protection. The “core community” that created living heritage and sustains the original function of heritage is seen as an inseparable part of heritage [18].

At the same time, in China, the top-down process has given rising to a range of new actors and stakeholders in heritage-making and negotiating the AHD. while “citizens and communities are experiencing, performing, and documenting heritage” in a more bottom-up way [7].

3 The Role of Community

Identifying the core community which should be admitted to engaging in local decision-making with first priority, is a common concern of both China and the West [5, 18]. This should be considered or defined precisely while partnering with authorities, experts and economic actors, as well as the question of the broader communities as facilitators are [5]. Furthermore, Poullos highlighted that the “core community” in the living heritage approach is a different concept from the “local community” of the values-based approach [18]. In China, community identification is directly linked with the institutional division which is known as the Hukou system⁶ [8]. In identifying actors, as well as their relationships, within the stakeholders’ map in heritage protection, Maags demonstrates in detail the competition among participants, including both the state and non-state ones, for the voices and power in Chinese cities [19].

Undoubtedly, citizens are attached to local history and cultural identity. Thus, various of active participatory methods are conducted aiming to raise awareness and building capacities of local communities and share both benefits and responsibilities

⁴ 31st session of the World Heritage Committee, Christchurch, New-Zealand, 23 June–2 July 2007.

⁵ 39th session of the World Heritage Committee, Bonn, Germany, 28 June–8 July 2015.

⁶ China’s Hukou system is a family registration program that serves as a domestic passport, in which the migrants are gully involved in both local decisions and welfare benefits.

from the heritage conservation process [20, 21]. Meanwhile, the “popular action” as a roman model has been introduced to China. Beyond this, multi-active participatory methods were utilized in this cultural revitalization so as to cultural heritage protection process [22]. In 2009, 22 sites in south-west of China were selected to take part in the World Bank Guizhou Cultural and Natural Heritage Protection and Development Project⁷. Cultural mapping was used in River County to involve ethnic minority communities. In Gate Tower old city, an eco-museum approach encouraged residents to create an exhibition of their ethnical culture with the help of the Chinese National Ethnology Museum [22].

Integrating heritage conservation in sustainable urban development through community collaboration and empowerment is essential [4, 8, 23]. As an inclusive and holistic approach, HUL is highly relevant to the arise awareness of civic engagement and its broad applicability in international practice [1]. However, an obvious challenge to address it in China is the indistinction between private and public which is clearly different from the western state-civil society relationships [8]. which means, the notion of civic engagement still needs to be particularly well distinguished in the Chinese context.

4 New Forms of Community Engagement in the Digital Era: Social Media and Heritage

4.1 Communities Online

In the recent few years, there is emerging attention on applying digital platforms to engaging the local communities in the urban renewal process to better protection and promotion of cultural heritage values [24]. On one hand, urban landscapes can epitomize the nexus between cultural and historic cities, recording human interaction with built environments beyond space, time and societies [3]. On the other hand, digital community participation can improve conservation and preservation techniques, enrich archives with interactive media, augment participatory experiences, and beyond [25, 26]. Harrison argued that the ways to catch up on the corporeal influence of the affective qualities of heritage in the daily practices need to be further explored [27]. While Svensson offers a great answer that social media can enable and strengthen people’s affective engagement with heritage [28].

The internet as a social media could be a key community-based platform for sustainable living heritage conservation [12]. New online communities have emerged, which is formed with specific cultural practices, or centered around affinities based on place and heritage [11, 12]. It fosters an open culture wherein anyone who is so motivated can become involved in the cultural heritage protection [13]. Although social

⁷ World Bank began to assist in cultural heritage conservation in China since 1990s. The investing approach shifted in 2000 from developing tourism to integrate cultural heritage in local economic development and sustainable tourism.

media cannot represent the opinion of the whole civic society, it offers an open-participatory platform to a broader range of agents to reach across scales and connect with mass audiences [12, 13], which is crucial for collaborative planning and conservation.

4.2 Digital Ways to Participate in Heritage Conservation

Digital technologies of communication have changed the ways of participating, interacting, and organizing in planning practices and facilitated the engagement of civic organizations [24, 29]. In this digital era, obviously, the power to represent the city is no longer concentrated in the elites controlling popular media but is distributed by common smartphone users [30]. Online information seeking and interactive civic messaging is influencing community engagement stronger than traditional printings, broadcast media and face-to-face communication [31]. In addition, it is not only established individuals and organizations that make use of the Internet and social media, but there have also emerged new online communities that are gathered on activities based on cultural heritage [32]. Besides enabling strangers to share experiences with places, historical events, and cultural practices, social media also strengthens the relation of existing communities by helping them ‘remember, experience, and perhaps re-imagine their own heritage’ [28]. Despite that, some researchers concern that the new media platform has mainly been used for dissemination of information, rendering it an elitist rather than a democratic tool [11, 13].

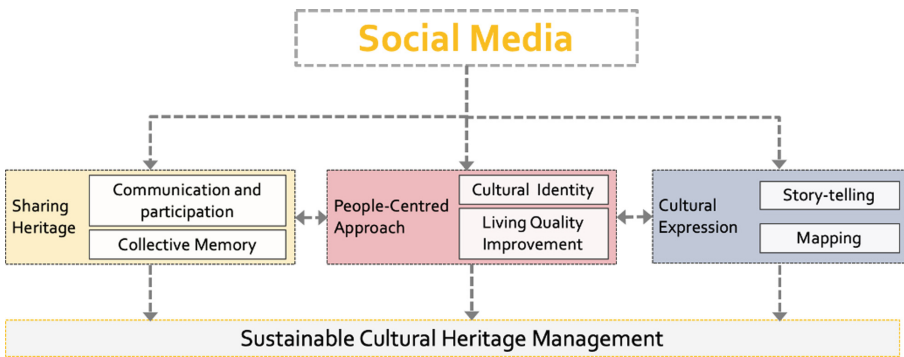


Fig. 1. The contribution of social media to sustainable cultural heritage management (Produced by the author).

At the aspect of application approaches, various digital products can improve our understandings of people-centered heritage and foster the public to take part in heritage conservation (see Fig. 1). Nowadays, people have the chance to create their own digital heritage landscapes, museums, and archives [33]. Furthermore, in the case of the Carpano museum, Spacca and her colleagues examined that Augmented Reality (AR) applications can promote industrial and other kinds of cultural heritage without space and time constraints [26]. Meanwhile, social media apps, such as Facebook, can

be used to contribute to making collective community memory visible by story-telling practices [34]. Location-based mobile games are utilized in Palazzo Madama Museum to foster young visitors to a larger extent motivation to explore museums and facilitate their meaning-making process [25].

To make cultural heritage conservation a far more inclusive process is immense. The challenges are complex and far different in most cultural contexts [35]. In the recent ten years, the incipient collaborative planning and public participation through the functions of the internet in China have had an increasingly vital influence [9, 10]. On one hand, the Chinese government has tried several times to employ the use of Information and Communication Technologies for provoking better citizen engagement with the aim of creating a positive impact on cultural heritage conservation. Digital application and online communication have gradually become an important method of public consultation and supervision during the construction phase of renewal planning in Dashilar [36]. On the other hand, experts and civic groups utilized social media spontaneously to criticize the large-scale relocation in the regeneration projects of Beijing's bell and drum tower neighborhood which is proposed by the local government [4]. By using social media, these groups of activists were able to contest official propositions for the area and, based on scientific arguments, suggest better ways to care for current everyday life and alternative forms of memories that matter to its inhabitants [4, 10].

5 Conclusion

UNESCO's Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape marks a brand-new integrated approach to the conservation of Chinese cultural heritage. It highlighted the importance of community engagement and offers a series of participatory tools at the international level, which required deep civic engagement to identify the key values of concerned heritage objects. Social media is one of the vital tools to engage a wider range of audience in conservation practices. It can not only promote in the educational level by rendering heritage and relevant information more accessible, but also involve citizens in further documentation by crowdsourcing. Storytelling and Mapping are the current main research practices of social media to enable a greater awareness of cultural diversity.

While in the Chinese context, online urban heritage practices are considered to have more impact considering the speed of broadcast and involved quantity. Social media offers a platform for local citizens to collaborate with heritage institutions and professionals. A wider utilization of social media in the decision-making process of Chinese heritage conservation can potentially contribute to a more effective on-line community engagement.

References

1. Pereira Roders, A., Bandarin, F. (eds.): Reshaping Urban Conservation. CHC, vol. 2. Springer, Singapore (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-8887-2>

2. Settis, S.: *We the Citizens*, English translation of chapter 7 of *Paesaggio, Costituzione, cemento: la battaglia per l'ambiente contro il degrado civile* (Einaudi, 2010). *Calif. Ital. Stud.* **2** (2011)
3. Bandarin, F., van Oers, R.: *The Historic Urban Landscape: Managing Heritage in an Urban Century*. Wiley, Chichester (2012)
4. Bideau, F.G., Yan, H.: Historic urban landscape in Beijing: the Gulou project and its contested memories. In: Maags, C., Svensson, M. (eds.) *Chinese Heritage in the Making*, pp. 93–118. Amsterdam University Press (2018)
5. Court, S., Wijesuriya, G.: People-centred approaches to the conservation of cultural heritage: living heritage. In: Chitty, G. (ed.) *Heritage, Conservation and Communities: Engagement, Participation and Capacity Building*, pp. 34–50. Routledge, Newyork (2017)
6. Harrison, R.: *Understanding the Politics of Heritage*. Manchester University Press, Manchester (2009)
7. Svensson, M., Maags, C.: Mapping the Chinese heritage regime: ruptures, governmentality, and agency. In: Svensson, M., Maags, C. (eds.) *Chinese Heritage in the Making: Experiences, Negotiations and Contestations*, pp. 11–38. Amsterdam University Press (2018)
8. Verdini, G., Frassoldati, F., Nolf, C.: Reframing China's heritage conservation discourse. Learning by testing civic engagement tools in a historic rural village. *Int. J. Heritage Stud.* **23**, 317–334 (2017)
9. Cheng, Y.: Collaborative planning in the network: Consensus seeking in urban planning issues on the Internet—the case of China. *Plann. Theory* **12**, 351–368 (2013)
10. Deng, Z., Lin, Y., Zhao, M., Wang, S.: Collaborative planning in the new media age: the Dafo Temple controversy. *China. Cities.* **45**, 41–50 (2015)
11. Giaccardi, E.: *Heritage and Social Media: Understanding Heritage in a Participatory Culture*. Routledge, London (2012)
12. Ginzarly, M., Pereira Roders, A., Teller, J.: Mapping historic urban landscape values through social media. *J. Cult. Heritage* **36**, 1–11 (2019)
13. Kitchin, R., Dodge, M.: *Code/Space: Software and Everyday Life*. MIT Press, Cambridge (2011)
14. van Oers, R., Roders, A.P.: Road map for application of the HUL approach in China. *J. Cult. Heritage Manage. Sustain. Dev.* **3**, 4–17 (2013)
15. Li, J., Krishnamurthy, S., Pereira Roders, A., van Wesemael, P.: Community participation in cultural heritage management: a systematic literature review comparing Chinese and international practices. *Cities* **96**, 102476 (2020)
16. Whitehand, J.W.R., Gu, K., Whitehand, S.M.: Fringe belts and socioeconomic change in China. *Environ. Plann. B Plann. Des.* **38**, 41–60 (2011)
17. WHITRAP: Report for the 39 Session of the World Heritage Committee. WHITRAP, Bonn, Germany (2015)
18. Poullos, I.: Discussing strategy in heritage conservation: living heritage approach as an example of strategic innovation. *J. Cult. Heritage Man Sust. Dev.* **4**, 16–34 (2014)
19. Maags, C.: Creating a race to the top: hierarchies and competition within the Chinese ICH transmitters system. In: Maags, C., Svensson, M. (eds.) *Chinese Heritage in the Making*, pp. 121–144. Amsterdam University Press (2018)
20. Borona, G., Ndiema, E.: Merging research, conservation and community engagement. *J. Cult. Heritage Manage. Sustain. Dev.* **4**, 184–195 (2014)
21. Ferreira, T.C.: Bridging planned conservation and community empowerment: Portuguese case studies. *J. Cult. Heritage Manage. Sustain. Dev.* **8**, 179–193 (2018)

22. Nitzky, W.: Community Empowerment at the periphery? Participatory approaches to heritage protection in Guizhou, China. In: Blumenfeld, T., Silverman, H. (eds.) *Cultural Heritage Politics in China*, pp. 205–235. Springer, New York (2013). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-6874-5_11
23. MacRae, G.: Universal heritage meets local livelihoods: ‘awkward engagements’ at the world cultural heritage listing in Bali. *Int. J. Heritage Stud.* **23**, 846–859 (2017)
24. De Filippi, F.D., Coscia, C., Guido, R.: from smart-cities to smart-communities: how can we evaluate the impacts of innovation and inclusive processes in urban context? *IJEPR* **8**, 24–44 (2019)
25. Rubino, I., Barberis, C., Xhembulla, J., Malnati, G.: Integrating a location-based mobile game in the museum visit: evaluating visitors’ behaviour and learning. *JOCCH* **8**, 1–18 (2015)
26. Spacca, S., Dellapiana, E., Sanna, A.: Promoting industrial cultural heritage by augmented reality: application and assessment. *Open Cybern. Syst. J.* **12**, 61–71 (2018)
27. Harrison, R.: *Heritage: Critical Approaches*. Routledge, New York (2012)
28. Svensson, M.: Heritage 2.0: maintaining affective engagements with the local heritage in Taishun. In: Svensson, M., Maags, C. (eds.) *Chinese Heritage in the Making*, pp. 269–292. Amsterdam University Press (2018)
29. Lin, Y., Zhang, X., Geertman, S.: Toward smart governance and social sustainability for Chinese migrant communities. *J. Clean. Prod.* **107**, 389–399 (2015)
30. Castells, M.: *Communication Power*. OUP, Oxford (2013)
31. Shah, D.V., Cho, J., Eveland, W.P., Kwak, N.: Information and expression in a digital age: modeling internet effects on civic participation. *Commun. Res.* **32**, 531–565 (2005)
32. Volland, N.M.: Taking urban conservation online: Chinese civic action groups and the internet. In: *Online Society in China: Creating, Celebrating, and Instrumentalising the Online Carnival*, pp. 184–199 (2011)
33. Aigner, A.: Heritage-making ‘from below’: the politics of exhibiting architectural heritage on the Internet – a case study. *Int. J. Heritage Stud.* **22**, 181–199 (2016)
34. van der Hoeven, A.: Historic urban landscapes on social media: the contributions of online narrative practices to urban heritage conservation. *City Cult. Soc.* **17**, 61–68 (2019)
35. Riva Sanseverino, E., Riva Sanseverino, R., Anello, E.: A cross-reading approach to smart city: a European perspective of Chinese smart cities. *Smart Cities* **1**, 26–52 (2018)
36. Fu, Z., Bu, Y.: Constructing the Research Model of Beijing Neighborhood Through the Living Lab Method. In: Rau, P.-L.P. (ed.) *CCD 2016. LNCS*, vol. 9741, pp. 527–539. Springer, Cham (2016). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-40093-8_52